A Detailed Explorer’s Guide into the Unknown

by unclassified_senpai

Summary

The Venture Unit is known for being a generally shady organization. What with their dealings with pirate-gangs, corrupted planetary systems, trafficking, information dealing, and every other colour in this wide spectrum of highly illegal and dangerous flip-side of the GLA Universe. The Venture Unit, however, is not known for putting together a team of highly irregular Beings (even by galactic standards) and sending them off into a vague mission that has no particular objective other than to deliver a single OrTank to a remote planet in a System that has been proclaimed abandoned for the past millennium. So it’s safe to say that no single Being in this mission is particularly pleased- maybe except for the Zhak’gri but then again, he did say he was looking forward to, at least, blowing up a planetoid if he couldn’t blow up a moon.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
Generations, Races, Species, Cultures- reborn anew from sacrifices that would never be memorialized. Caused by a betrayal so heinous that the entire Universe would unravel to its very core if it were revealed. But would it really?

The term “Universe” is thrown around easily enough without the entirety of its scope and true definition being really understood. It encompassed everything and nothing, held within it Matter, Space, Time, and Mass; but also held vacuum, darkness, infinity, and a nothingness that is almost corporeal in its vastness.

The Universe holds within it everything known and everything unknown- the latter of which is more abundant because what did it mean to really know something? The Universe is a Continuum- a loop that has no beginning or end and that just is. But what did that signify?

Where did they stand in that Continuum? Where did he stand in that loop? Where did they, as a unit- as this haphazardly thrown together unit of Beings, belong in this vast nothingness?
"Mission" [noun]: an operation, expedition, or assignment carried out for political, religious, or commercial purposes

Chief Lmiura, head of the Department of Planetary Relationships, stood at an impressive height of 6 feet 8. She had an impressive track record- being the first of her Species to obtain such a high ranking seat within the GLA. But most notably as the youngest to ever be elected directly by the Tribunal Court as a member of the special 6 member-jury that was responsible for rendering the verdict throughout the Gaia Case hearings. While the Known Universe was under the impression that the Gaia Case hearing was being held to complete and finalize procedures regarding the tragic destruction of coordinates 134.87.032.65 Earth 5 GLA sols ago, the true intention of the court was to hide and fabricate the truth behind what really happened.

And though not a member of the jury, Namjoon was an unfortunately important part of the grueling 14 month long hearing. He worked alongside the jury during the hearing, but never really spoke to any of them. In fact, Namjoon lived in an intensely isolated witness-protection program of sorts-travelling back and forth from the court rooms back to his temporary lodgings for the 14 months he was in court. So the moment he was able to, he sent in his letter of resignation and “retired” a lot earlier than he ever imagined he would.

Namjoon left behind the life of an Information Analyst in the Venture Unit and chose to seek employment as a local Navigator for the 3rd Dock orbiting Dao-3 in the planetary system of Dziko. He didn’t need the job,- he had saved plenty of money during his near 80 sols as an Information Analyst. But having a job built a stronger cover-up and though he wasn’t exactly hiding, Namjoon wanted to keep a very low-profile.

Dziko was a small System with only 5 planets, out of which only 3 were occupied. Dziko had no special resources or particularly notable tourist attraction, making it an infrequently visited System-which was ideal for someone like Namjoon. The Beings of the planets were comically short, standing no more than 4 feet average. They lived a rather fast paced life- possibly because of their size in general- but most probably because they had 3 spindly legs carrying their oddly bulky torsos. Namjoon often felt like a particularly slow giant amongst them. There were a few non-Dao Beings that worked in the Docks but Namjoon was easily the tallest amongst them. The Beings of Dao-3 took to Namjoon and instead of being afraid or intimidated by his height, used him to their advantage. So while he did most of his work in his station watching over the Navigation Table and trajectories, he was often called to aid the Daonin in random menial tasks that required the advantage of his height. And because space-travel was rather uneventful in Dziko, Namjoon didn’t mind leaving his station to indulge the small Daonin folk every so often.

Life as an Information Analyst was fast-paced and covert. Secrecy was key. Information Analysts were targeted the most by pirates, terrorists, and other disruptors of the peace. They made for easy targets with an endless supply and complete access to every single digital data ever transmitted throughout the Known Universe. So Namjoon was more than skilled in hiding out in the open.
And while Namjoon was never a part of the Infiltration Unit so while he never worked with a field-agent, Namjoon was responsible for altering digital data across the private channels issued from war-torn planetary systems or known pirate hot-spots. Or in Layman’s term, Namjoon was a highly trained glorified hacker.

So Namjoon enjoyed his easy slow-paced life as a giant who was asked at least once a day to retrieve some random object from a high-shelf away from the GLA, the Venture Unit, the Tribunal Court, and everything that had to do with it.

Which is why when he returns from his station back to his rooms, wanting nothing more than to take a nice long shower, and he finds Chief Lmiura sitting at his desk, Namjoon is quick to pull out and aim the TeorSer he had on him at all times. His mind is racing; why had none of his security measures alerted him of a break in? No one should be able to override his own security system.

The small beam of tracker light from his TeorSer looks purple on Chief Lmiura’s forehead.

‘Were you expecting me?’ Chief Lmiura looks amused. She’s dressed in her full uniform, a cluster of spikey gold stars dotted her dusty-blue long blazer, indicating the colour of her Department.

‘No.’ Namjoon replies shortly. He feels inexplicably underdressed and comical in his oddly sized dark-blue patchwork of a Navigation coat. He didn’t even have the cluster of spikey silver stars that denoted his rank.

‘Your room has been rigged to implode upon your command. It has also been customized to instantly turn vacuum upon your command in case you are in the room during an unexpected raid,’ Chief Lmiura comments, leaning back a little on the chair. Even seated, the Sang’tzi was intimidatingly tall. Their skin was tinted a pale blue, freckled over in small white dots across the high points of their faces. The irises of their eyes were white that slowly faded into a dark blue. While their overall features were almost anthropomorphic, with no additional limbs or appendages, their hands ended in 3 long fingers, each ending with a sharp midnight blue talon. The Sang’tzi were known for their hand-to-hand combat skills amongst other things. Namjoon notes that Lmiura has no hair, indicating that she was widowed, as dictated by her culture upon the death of her spouse. Namjoon remembers her having waist-length hair during the hearings.

‘Are you able to receive your treatment here? So far away from-

‘Why are you here?’ Namjoon asks tersely, the TeorSer in his hand is steady. It wouldn’t be the first time he’s shot a TeorSer. He’s a pretty decent shot if he’s being honest. And as mentioned before, Information Analysts made good ransoms and bargaining chips- so Namjoon has been trained to defend himself when needed. And he has come across several situations where there were attempts made to kidnap him. Even have him killed at least 5 times before- Namjoon is sure he’s wanted in at least 8 separate Systems and dozens other planets.

But never in his 314 years alive has Namjoon entertained the idea that a Chief of GLA Department would be sitting inside his room.

‘Namjoon. Born in the planet Kutsoglera. Former Venture Unit member of the Information Analysis Division, formerly governed by the now deceased Thukru. You played a key role in the Gaia Case,- providing the Venture Unit and the GLA with concrete information regarding the betrayal and conspiracy lead by the Yisheng Directory and other organizations.’ She reads from the screen in her hands. The light from the screen throws her face into harsh contrast.

‘That’s me,’ Namjoon replies tersely. ‘How did you find me?’
'Because I wanted to,' is all she says. ‘Please lower your TeorSer. I am not here to hurt you.’

‘Then why are you here?’ Namjoon asks, hand still not lowered.

‘I have submitted your name to a special operation, commissioned by the combined request of the Venture Unit and the GIU on a mission to 302. 2899. 1760. 320.’ Is the extraordinary response he gets.

‘I no longer work for the Venture Unit. I quit 3 sols ago.’

‘I am aware- I am bringing you back in.’ Lmiura crosses her hands over her lap, her expression somber.

‘Without my consent?’ Namjoon frowns.

‘Before you ask me any more questions or begin accusations, do you know where coordinates 302. 2899. 1760. 320 take you to?’ Lmiura asks instead.

Namjoon frowns, racking his mind as he scans the coordinates and pinpoints the location. And Namjoon already does not like this.

‘That’s dead space- I don’t understand.’ He replies instead, hoping that by some miracle, Lmiura would take his ignorance as a sign that he was no longer competent for work. Namjoon has seen his fair share of Beings whose competency and capabilities completely deteriorated in a span of days- it wouldn’t be too unbelievable for someone of his position in the Gaia Case to succumb to a similar form of incompetence.

‘It is a simple delivery trade. You should be able to handle it.’ Lmiura states as though she hadn’t just broken into his rooms, pulled him out of his retirement by force, and explained nothing to him.

Namjoon quells down his anger, exhaling sharply and switching the setting of his TeorSer from stun to bolt. Lmiura was clearly not going to believe him if he played dumb. And as a former Information Analyst of his reputation, the very idea of it was laughable.

‘Coordinates 302. 2899. 1760. 320 is the Bhumi System- a dead and abandoned System- what could I possibly be delivering there?’ he demands.

‘This is a classified mission- only the GIU Trifecta, the Venture Unit Board of Directors, Yisheng Directory, and myself, know of this mission. To summarize the mission; the specialized operation unit will be sent to the Bhumi System carrying the technology required to revive and restore the 11 planets that make up the-‘ Lmiura is starting to pull up actual files from her screen, sending them to the larger screen behind her on top of Namjoon’s desk. That screen was secure- Namjoon himself rewired and customized that entire set up. And yet, here was Lmiura easily accessing his gadgets and systems. He was right- all of the defensive and protecting measures he had installed in his rooms were probably hacked by some other Information Analyst.

‘I don’t know how else to say this but I retired. I do not want to be part of any investigative panel anymore- not after everything I saw. While I am honoured that you would think of me and select me for this mission, I will have to politely request you to pull me name out.’ Namjoon says stiffly, finally lowering his TeorSer and taking a step away. He gestures to the door, ‘I will escort you out.’

Lmiura doesn’t move, only uncrossing her legs to cross them the other way round and she leans back again. If truth be told, Namjoon liked Lmiura the best out of the special jury. She was empathetic, logical, and had a set of ideals she did not waver from while understanding and
reasoning with other ideals that didn’t match up with hers. She was always reasonable—because while there were some who would lash out with too much emotion and some were too inhumane, Lmiura balanced the verdict with dignity and carefully calculated suggestion.

Lmiura’s expression changes subtly. Her posture slumps just a little, her shoulders lowering as though bearing a great weight. She looks unsure almost—a first for Namjoon who only ever saw her as assertive, attentive, and always confident.

‘I only trust you Namjoon.’ She says slowly, a frown settling on her face as she continues, ‘This is a mission we cannot allow the Venture Unit or the GIU to control— you will be the Captain and team leader of the entire operation.’

‘That neither tempts or appeals to me in any way or form.’ Namjoon replies truthfully. He always worked alone. It was his preference and it was what he knew.

‘I would not have purposefully pulled you out of your retirement if I didn’t believe this was an extremely serious matter!’ Lmiura sighs, a hint of exasperation seeping into her voice. ‘You’re past, as well as the role you played in the Gaia Case could potentially be the only thing that allows the GLA full control over this mission!’

‘If you were looking for Beings who were involved in the case, why not pull the ones who were right in the middle of it?’ Namjoon shoots back at once. ‘Correct me if I’m mistaken, but it was their ship and crew members that were targeted.’

Namjoon knows he’s not mistaken. He knows this case more than he’d care to admit.

‘They are under the protection of the Yisheng Directory— their whereabouts and governance is out of our control— we cannot touch them.’ Lmiura replies.

‘The Yisheng Directory no longer has the power they once held over the GLA— you can easily override this.’ Namjoon rebuts.

‘Their relationship with the Yisheng Directory, and not to mention the GIU is one we cannot risk—you are the only I can trust!’ Lmiura says in earnest, now standing up as though frustrated. Her head brushes the ceiling of Namjoon’s already altered rooms but she pays it little attention.

‘I already told you— I have retired. I want nothing more to do with any of this.’ Namjoon repeats stubbornly.

‘Before you ask me to leave— will you not listen to me? Will you not listen to how important this is—not just for the reputation of the GLA or for the sake of whatever petty strife there is between the Venture Unit and the GIU. There’s an underlying plot to this— one we cannot have the Venture Unit or the GIU orchestrate.’ Lmiura pauses mid-stride of her pacing.

Namjoon pockets his TeorSer and crosses his arms together.

‘But why Bhumi? The Bhumi System was wiped out and has been abandoned for over a millennia. What could the Venture Unit or the GIU hope to gain from attempting to revive it? There is no possible way of doing something of that magnitude.’ Namjoon argues at once, finding no logical reasoning in this mission.

‘Because you know what happened in Bhumi— you were at the court rulings and trials— and you know despite what they might say, the Venture Unit will always look for a way to one up the GLA—and the GIU will do everything in their power to prevent it. And now with the authority and respect that the Yisheng Directory once held diminishing within the inner circles, they can do nothing to
neutralize these two from clashing- not after K’mara lost the GI to Lal Haenoon.’ Lmiura explains in disdain.

Namjoon had been there when it happened. He remembers the anger in K’mara’s eyes when the Court assigned the GI to the Venture Unit. He shudders to think about what would happen if the Venture Unit and the GIU finally pushed each other to their limits- not with leaders like K’mara and Lal Haenoon leading the two organizations with something as dangerous and lethal like the Akramanese technology hanging in the balance of the outcome of their clashing. But Namjoon doesn’t think further than that- he won’t allow himself to get involved. He already knew too much, and it was all he could do living with the knowledge of the truth behind the Gaia Case.

‘Why me? I was told I wouldn’t be involved or implemented in any additional cases or trials.’ Namjoon says roughly.

‘Namjoon- you know why,’ Lmiura says gently. ‘Your experience- from both the Gaia Case and those of your past- what you have seen- what you have felt. Those should all account for why I believe you should be a part of this mission.’

Namjoon doesn’t say anything, still staring hard at Lmiura for an answer as he says, ‘No it doesn’t. If anything, it clearly indicates why I shouldn’t be involved. So tell me why what do I have to do with this?’

‘I’m aware- but you should have known you wouldn’t have been able to hide forever.’ Lmiura replies.

‘It’s barely been over 5 sols- the case was closed almost 4 sols ago. All the cover-ups are still standing, no one knows about the betrayal, the GI are still completely hidden, and the embryos are in safekeeping. Everything is as it should be. So why now? What’s changed now?’ Namjoon asks in a rush.

Lmiura has a half-smile on her face, ‘So you’ve been keeping up with the news?’

Namjoon levels her with a neutral look before saying coolly, ‘You’re all the same. All of you.’

Lmiura doesn’t say anything for a while. Instead she takes a seat again. Namjoon stands.

‘What do you know about the Bhumi System?’ Lmiura asks.

Namjoon sighs heavily in resignation, leaning back on the wall and crossing his arms over his chest as he replies, ‘It was never a part of the GLA- they had their own planetary regency that ruled the planets. They had surprisingly advance technology developed by the natives of the System- most notably a sort of “space-camouflage” that hid their existence from the rest of the Known Universe. They refused to merge with the GLA- even in Trade and Tourism. They signed a treaty with the GLA, declaring their own independence. Their only request was to be left alone and the GLA respected that as per the laws of the GLA. However, 8 centuries later, a distress signal from Bhumi was detected and the GLA sent a small platoon to check on the System. They picked up some refugees who refused to seek shelter from the GLA and instead accompanied them back to their home-System. The platoon, including the native ships were annihilated upon arrival without any survivors. The System of Bhumi was lost for a few sols before the GLA was able to enter and find it again, thus giving the GLA the first evidence on the existence of the Akramanese.’

‘Well summarized,’ Lmiura nods. ‘Now, let me ask you a question: for a System that had no contact beyond its own borders, and a System that remained purposefully hidden for so long, how
is it that you think the Akramanese found them?’

Namjoon studies Lmiura’s expression, searching for something, anything.

‘You can’t be serious?’

‘I am- it was perfect. At the time, the Yishengs needed a vast scape for their experimentation- a place that the GLA wouldn’t enter or observe. When Bhumi signed that treaty, they signed their own death sentence.’ Lmiura looks momentarily haggard.

Namjoon narrows his eyes in thought, regarding the Sang’tzi carefully as he puts all of the pieces of information Lmiura has given him fall into place.

‘So all the remaining concrete remains of their experiments, of their technology- still exists within the System?’

‘Yes. Which is why both the GIU and the Venture Unit are scrambling to claim the System.’ Lmiura sighs as though relieved that Namjoon now knew what she was trying to tell him without explicitly telling him so.

‘But it’s dead space now- it’s entirely abandoned- what’s stopping them from just going in and scavenging everything?’ Namjoon asks. Dead space was basically free for all- massive stretches of space with nothing in it and with no law governing it.

‘Because of the treaty signed by the GLA- the agreement still stands. Law is law. Neither the Venture Unit or the GIU will willingly dirty their hands or compromise their organizations by breeching GLA treaties.’ Lmiura explains.

‘But the treaty is only relevant and active if both members of the party are “alive”- the Bhumi System is dead.’ Namjoon counters harshly at once. A treaty on planetary/system/galactic border laws could only be recalled if one of the two party members died, or if both of them agree to overrule the signed treaty. Bhumi should be free for grabs. ‘She was raided- the GLA were too late to rescue her- and now she is dead.’

‘She is not. Remnants of her former life still exists and thus the treaty still exists. Signs of life have been detected on a few of the planets- no doubt survivors of the apocalypse that ruined them.’ Lmiura sighs again, gaze thoughtful and for a fleeting moment filled with pity that leaves a bitter taste in Namjoon’s mouth.

‘Then why not declare an overrule- the Court would surely allow it considering what the Bhumi System holds within it,’ Namjoon frowns before he catches the look in Lmiura’s eye.

‘Does the Court know about this “mission”?’ Namjoon could laugh.

‘Of course not,’ Lmiura replies at once. ‘Secrecy regarding the Gaia Case is so high they won’t even touch the Bhumi System in fear of shedding light to its existence to the rest of the Known Universe.’

It made sense- the first Court hearing that had taken place in the Yisheng Headquarters within the hour of Earth’s destruction had declared an immediate shut-down on all news involving or pertaining to the Gaia Case. All missions and trade details commissioned by the GLA or any other affiliated Organization was public information- one of the first Orders written in the GLA Constitution. So by commissioning a mission headed for a seemingly dead System under the Gaia Case would no doubt raise questions which could potentially lead to the exposure of the truth behind the Gaia Case. And as one of the 32 Beings in all of the Known Universe who is aware of...
the truth, Namjoon would do anything in his power to keep it a secret too.

‘Who is commissioning this?’ Namjoon asks immediately.

‘The combined organizations of the Venture Unit and the GIU-‘

‘You said that already- I’m asking who.’ Namjoon interrupts.

‘K’mara of the GIU Trifecta, Lal Haenoon from the Venture Unit Board of Divisions, Yisheng Amme of the Yisheng Directory, Chief Xmi Head of the Galactic Security and Safety Department, Chief Shn’ow Head of the Trade Department, and myself, representing the Department of Planetary Relations,’ Lmiura recites.

‘So- the special-jury then.’

‘Yes.’

Sighing deeply, Namjoon asks, ‘You said this was a special operation involving the Venture Unit and the GIU- why am I being forcefully involved in it?’ Namjoon sits down heavily on his bed, putting emphasis on ‘I’.

‘Because we need someone from our side in there to control the two- the Yisheng Directory won’t be allowed to participate as balance-keepers; quite understandably though I believe Lal Haenoon has manipulated the others into that decree. I submitted your name as my candidate.’ Lmiura states, tapping across her screen quickly.

‘Why me? There are ranked and active officers better suited for this role- not to mention of higher moral values than me. Of a more whole form than me.’ Namjoon says with a faint scoff.

Lmiura looks up at Namjoon from her screen, her eyes narrowing a little.

‘Namjoon, I know we have never spoken before this. Not directly anyways- so there’s no solid reason as to why you should trust me. Your distrust and suspicion is completely founded,’ Lmiura states simply. ‘But I will tell you this right now- in a panel that has both Lal Haenoon and K’mara in it, fighting for the authority and ownership of a technology that can once again take over the Known Universe and undermine the sacrifice it took to stop it, is one that I cannot allow. It’s a risk that those of us who know cannot allow. Namjoon- think of what has happened before. Think of what has happened to you.’

Namjoon knows that what Lmiura is saying is the truth. What almost happened, what almost took place.- something like that couldn’t happen again. They had been lucky the first time- by some strange twist of fate- destiny, whatever you wanted to call it- it had been stopped.

Namjoon has lived a life plagued with nightmares. And the events that he witnessed and experienced simply added more to his terror-filled nights. And he still feels it. Still feels the discord in the universe around him when Earth was reduced to nothing but a stretch of debris.

‘Namjoon. Please.’

Lmiura is kneeling in front of him, fingers crossed and held over her bowed head that almost touches the floor. The Sang’tzi were a noble Species and did not easily bow- literally and metaphorically- to anyone or anything.

‘I trust only you.’
‘Please stand Chief Lmiura,’ Namjoon squirms a little.

‘You must understand. Why I am here. You understand how this can go if we do not stop this.’ Lmiura pleads, still kneeling though she sits up now.

‘I understand,’ Namjoon sighs wearily. ‘Can you please tell me what this mission entails? And not what’s on paper- what’s really going on.’

Lmiura slumps in relief, pausing for a moment to clasp her hands together, head tilted up as though in prayer.

Namjoon finds it funny that she would still believe in her prayers despite knowing the truth.

‘Mission 013-937619 is disguised as a trade mission to Matlaab. The true purpose of this plan is to enter the Bhumi System and deliver the terraforming technology that will help restore and revive its planets. By reviving the planets you will ensure that the System will be secured and strong enough to defend itself and renew the Treaty. You will also carry with you dispensary technology in order to rid the System of any remains of the Akramanese technology left behind. And while we firmly believe that none of them are left alive- we do not know what they might have left behind. They conducted vast experimentations there- so you need to be careful.’ Lmiura summarizes, sending the details of the mission to Namjoon’s screen behind her. ‘You never know what might be living there.’

Namjoon grimaces as he walks over to his screen, tapping along the glowing surface as he scans the outline and objectives.

‘What about registration? You said I would be team-leader, I can fill out the role of Navigator- but I do not have a Trading License.’

‘All legal documents have been cleared for you and your team by Chief Shn’ow. You have been settled as a small trading ship in business for the past 11 sols. You will be registered under the Raksane Tayi Trading Registration System under family business.’ Lmiura explains.

‘Who are my team members?’ Namjoon asks as he pulls up their profiles.

Three faces pop up on the screen, their information details noted on the side.

‘You will meet them tomorrow in Šerdesas- we cannot trust them. None of them. Any of them could be working to undermine the entire operation- you need to keep your eyes open and be in complete alert with them. This is them. You and three other Beings- a 4-member Team.’

‘Why so less?’ Namjoon asks as he leans in, studying their faces intently.

‘You cannot man and fly a ship single handedly- if you were to attempt to take anyone out, then you would instantly sentence yourself to death.’ Lmiura explains almost nonchalantly before stepping next to Namjoon, tapping on the first profile.

‘This is Hoseok- he was a member of the Venture Unit Infiltration Division- you may or may not recognize him from the Court trials. He was present during most times, providing his own testimony and evidence regarding the Venture Unit’s involvement with the Gaia Case. He will be filling in the role of Head Pilot.’

Reading his basic information, Namjoon finds that Hoseok is from the diminishing Species of Ngfy’widan. They were a nomadic group of people, now settled in Dŵr-5, a Settlement Arc anchored to the remains of their long dead planet Ngfy’wid. Namjoon’s interest immediately peaks.
Ngfy’wid was a planet that eroded in on itself some 4-5 millennium ago- her people survived as a result of the GLA’s intervention. It had been an interesting study to read- Ngfy’wid had been a large and flourishing planet- independent and largely agrarian. But due to the explosion of a dwarf-star somewhere within the galaxy that housed them, Ngfy’wid had taken the strangest and most adverse effect studied and documented in recent history. The waves of radiation and energy from the explosion wasn’t strong enough to wipe out their System- in fact Ngfy’wid was too far to properly feel its effect. Yet, however, it triggered a series of events that would completely alter the chemical composition and stability of its ionosphere. And during the span on 1 sol, Ngfy’wid’s protective shield around the planet eroded and they were exposed to the full force of radiation from their own sun.

They were helpless and could do nothing but watch as their planet died around them and with her, slowly, her people started succumbing to the deathly rays of raw sunlight. They sought protection underground but could not work fast enough. And just as they gave up hope, the Venture Unit’s Exploration Division came down to rescue them from their scorching and decaying planet.

Wanting to never forget what they had been through, they refused to leave their System and instead constructed 10 Settlement Arcs for the surviving population. They lived with the understanding that Life was unpredictable, and that every single moment in life came with equally weighty outcomes and you had no control over it. But what you had control over, were your actions. So the Ngfy’widan chose to remain in their System to develop technology that would then later be pivotal to the fortification of the Atmoshield. If Namjoon isn’t mistaken, then they were in the early stages of reconstructing their home planet again, and so far the progress was entirely positive.

But what was the most interesting about the Ngfy’widan was their ability to **morph** their appearances.

Although complete and full physical transformation was definitely not possible and has never been noted as any Species/Race characteristic, the Ngfy’widan could alter their appearances to a certain extent. And most definitely enough to be an excellent field-agent for the Infiltration Division for the Venture Unit.

Hoseok had entirely anthropomorphic features- his skin was a healthy tan, his hair (Namjoon isn’t sure what a Ngfy’widan’s natural hair colour is) is a dark brown, and his eyes are the characteristic double ringed-iris in blue to yellow. He’s smiling in the picture and Namjoon is insure what to think- no one actually smiled for their GLA Archive Profile- especially not someone who was an agent for the Infiltration Division.

Namjoon studies his face again, wondering if that was indeed his actual face before saying, ‘I do remember him- the Director in charge of his Division was directly involved wasn’t he? He provided the evidence required to fully imprison him without trial- if he had been alive for trial of course.’ Namjoon rolls his eyes. ‘Lal Haenoon sure works fast.’

Lmiura chuckles humorlessly before swiping across the screen.

‘This is Sk’jin. He works in the GIU- in fact, he’s a part of K’mara’s own inner-circle.’ The distrust in her voice is more apparent.

‘That’s rather blasé of K’mara- putting one of her own pawns in without even trying to cover-up or disguise their identity. What is he anyways?’ Namjoon asks, glancing at the information to the side.

K’mara really didn’t try to disguise who her agent was. He was a Khol’isa, just like her. Namjoon grimaces- this team was starting to really pick up on Beings who no longer had their home-planets
Khol’isa was a remote planet, frigid and dark, the only living planet in her System whose sun was a red giant. But Khol’isa was too far away to receive more than just a shadow of resemblance to sunlight and warmth while her sister-planets dried and disintegrated while their sun expanded continuously, shedding its outer layers of helium.

It was said that the people of Khol’isa looked to their Sun with hatred – too far to effectively kill them, and just close enough to sustain a form of life on their frigid planet. They had no snow or ice – their atmosphere worked differently and tainted their skies a dull neon pink. It was said that due to this immense hatred they held for the red giant that their eyes took a different route in evolution, mimicking the star that dragged their existence. That was until the GLA discovered them and unlike the Ngfy’widan, agreed to be taken away from their sun, so close to collapsing into a supernova.

Starved of warmth and any decent semblance of *living*, the Khol’isa went through generations of psychological trauma and an inability to cope with normalcy. The sun they had cursed with all of their breaths was suddenly more of a comforting thought – something known and something they could understand.

The people of Khol’isa were nearly all driven into madness. The change from their known environment to this new one was too extreme.

But the GLA, with the aid and help of the Yisheng Headquarters, were able to slowly heal and recuperate the species that had dwindled to nearly $1/3$rd of their original numbers. The shock of leaving their dying planet to pursue a life in a reality that moved faster than anything they witnessed, that blossomed with a life that they could not understand – there was too much, too many, all at the same time.

But it wasn’t just the Khol’isa that were in a state of perpetual shock. Never had the GLA or the Yisheng Headquarters ever come to witness a species as *alien* as the Khol’isa.

The Yisheng Headquarters had called it “internal metamorphosis”, a somewhat tamer term to describe the autophagocytosis that comprised the lifecycle of a Khol’isa.

A Khol’isa, in essence, lived on forever. During a certain point of their lifecycle they cocooned themselves into a crystalline form, transmuting themselves within their own bodies. Basically meaning that at a point in their life, a new series of cells would form that would absorb the old and replace them with more cells. This process took an approximate 3 years during which the Khol’isa would be reduced to nothing more than a lumpy form of cells at the core of the crystalline cocoon and then would grow into the same Khol’isa. It was unclear how much of their original memories remained- but judging by how long it took them as a species to adapt to their new surroundings, the Yisheng Headquarters could surmise that a good amount remained.

‘He is a region-expert and a Communications Manager.’

Region-expert? Namjoon laughs under his breath.

‘K’mar really isn’t trying is she? What does she hope to achieve?’ Sk’jin’s eyes are red and even in picture form they seem almost neon in the way they glow. Khol’isa are known for their double-helix horns, much longer on the females of their species. But Sk’jin’s isn’t even there. Namjoon can’t make out the crystal like protrusions that should be visible. However, every other characteristic screams Khol’isa. Fair pearlescent skin that is delicately rosy at the extremities, pastel hair that could look rosy, pale gold, or even silver in certain lights. And an unexplainable
ethereal beauty they exuded that was simultaneously inviting yet threatening at the same time. How did such a beautiful species of Beings come from such a horrendous planet?

‘Are you sure he’s from Khol’isa?’

‘What I’m telling you is all I know. Just like you, Sk’jin and Hoseok have all of their background information and files entirely erased. All that I know is all that is allowed to be known.’ Lmiura purses her lips in contempt. ‘I don’t think I have to tell you not to look directly into his eyes for long periods of time.’

Another thing about the Khol’isa was their unnerving ability to perform some mild level of hypnosis on other Beings. It is believed by some that it was a defensive mechanism that was birthed as a result of their own desperation to rid themselves of the harshness of their planet and provide each other with some form of relief.

And though Namjoon isn’t one to typecast- he really cannot help the distrust that builds in him as he looks at Sk’jin.

Lmiura reaches over and swipes the screen.

‘And that is Yoongi. He will be in charge of security. He was the candidate submitted by the Yisheng Directory.’

He looked ordinary enough, with no outstanding characteristic or feature. His skin was pale and his hair was dark. His stature was a little on the short side, but Namjoon knows to never measure a Beings capabilities based on their height or lack thereof. He was from Raksane Tayi, but he didn’t have the characteristic silver pupils that a Tayian should have. His eyes were almost entirely a solid black.

Namjoon waits for her to elaborate but Lmiura leans away, clearly done with everything that needed to be said.

‘What? That’s it? What is he?’ Namjoon instantly leans forward towards the screen, scanning the minimal information available.

‘I suspect he is one of the GI.’ Lmiura comments casually.

Namjoon does a double take, his mind reeling.

‘That’s not possible. And the GI were handed over to the Venture Unit- not the Yisheng Directory.’ Namjoon frowns. ‘How did Yisheng Amme even get the authority to submit a name for the mission?’

‘I suspect it was Lal Haenoon. He wants to overthrow K’mara- be two-steps ahead of her. By influencing the choice of the Yisheng Directory by making them choose one of his own, he would have double the influence. Because despite everything that has happened- the Yishengs will always command respect and trust- if he has the Yishengs on his side, then the girth of his influence will expand. Either that or he’s trying to build a sort of partnership with Yisheng Amme, in hopes of future collaborations, no doubt.’

‘And? Do you trust her?’ Namjoon thinks back to the Yisheng in question. She was an elder of the Directory- one of the 3 survivors from the original Yisheng Panel of 12. She had been in the System of Ecsaf during the strong of events that lead into the Gaia Case, leading a team of Yishengs in healing a planet from a deadly plague that threatened to annihilate the entire population.
‘I cannot speak for certain,’ Lmiura frowned. ‘All I know is that it is under her authority that he’s being assigned to the mission.’

Namjoon turns to give Lmiura a swift hard look.

The GI- or the Galactic Inquisition- had been the stuff of urban legend that originated from Raksane Tayi. A seemingly immortal cult-like organization that existed in the shadows of the great planetary system, terminating what seemed like unlikely Beings, all for the sake of the Yishengs. The GI wouldn’t be the first extremist radical group that sparked into existence because of their reverence and worshipful approach towards the Yishengs and they certainly wouldn’t be the last. But the GI were more than just that.

Birthed from illegally customized and unethical means, the GI were bioengineered Beings, created and born using AI technology and brought up in subjugated hyper-realism that conducted and recreated muscle memory, skills, ability, communication abilities, and an irrepressible discipline that made them the perfect *living weapon*. They were not bound to any law or moral obligation-only completely disciplined obedience. Their lives, if you could call it living, extended mission to mission, order to order.

Even Cyborgs and Androids had better moral ethics than the GI agents- though Namjoon believes it’s not an entirely fair comparison considering Cyborgs and Androids were programed to never hurt or compromise the safety of a Living Being. The GI agents existed only for one purpose, and that was to seek out the completion of whatever task assigned to them, in the quickest and swiftest way.

‘If I am to be team-leader I cannot allow someone of his mentality to be part of the team,’ Namjoon states firmly. ‘While Hoseok and Sk’jin may prove to be difficult- it would be easier to appeal to their needs and personality. This one-’ he nods his chin at the image. ‘-this one won’t be swayed. If his orders are to cause and disrupt all of this mission- there’s no stopping him.’

Lmiura listens to Namjoon intently, nodding as he spoke.

‘There is nothing I can do to prevent his joining the team,’ Lmiura says at long last. ‘If I could, I would assimilate a team of my choosing to carry out this mission. However, both the Venture Unit and the GIU will work to stop me. And they could very well effectively do so. The only chance we have at this is to combine our forces and when you are in dead-space, you will be able to take over.’

Namjoon stares at the three faces again as they form smaller tabs along the wide-screen.

Lmiura stands next to him, sighing heavily again.

‘I am sorry to ask this of you. And I am neither attempting to flatter or sweet-talk you into joining this mission Namjoon- because I know you understand how important this is. But the matter of fact is that I can trust only you to carry the purpose of this mission without being waylaid by personal agenda or influence.’ Lmiura speaks earnestly. ‘This way, we can finally put an end to this entire mess, once and for all, and make safe the Known Universe.’

Namjoon closes the display on the screen and leans back on his desk.

‘When does the mission start?’

Lmiura gives him a true and genuine smile.

‘You will meet your team tomorrow in Šerdesas, Raksane Tayi,’ Lmiura says walking towards the
door and having to duck under the doorway. ‘You and your team will be briefed again and you will depart for Bhumi tomorrow evening.’

‘I take it I have a ship waiting for me in the Hangar Bay?’ Namjoon chuckles lowly, already regretting everything.

‘I believe you were the one who gave us the green-light Officer Mron,’ Lmiura shrugs, pulling the syllables of Namjoon’s alias with a purposefully slow drawl. ‘You have an hour to pack and get ready. We have already taken care of your papers and your “employment” here. Don’t be late.’

With that Lmiura ducks out of the room.

Namjoon’s screen alerts him at once of an intruder in his room, a discreet beep sounding in the Comm-Device attached to his earlobe. Snorting, Namjoon rolls his eyes and pulls out his pre-packed travel bag from under his bed as he calls out: ‘Disengage.’

Namjoon always knew he would somehow end up going back to his previous life. But he’d always thought it would be voluntary- after he was ready to face the internal chaos that lay lurking beneath the normalcy and peace of the Known Universe under the GLA.

But it would seem that Life had other plans for him. Because while he did enjoy his slow-paced life here in Dao-3, Namjoon can feel the faint echo of that rushing feeling in his veins- tingling under his skin and pulsing with the fact that his life was going to change drastically again.

Namjoon finishes packing and walks out of his rooms without looking back.

* *

The first time Hoseok found himself in Šerdesas was 4 years. And he had hoped it would have been the last time he would find himself in the planet.

Šerdesas – the heart and capital planet of the massive planetary system Raksane Tayi was home to nearly every major GLA organization. This included the Galactic Court, the GIU (Galactic Investigative Unit) Official Headquarters, Galactic Trade Sector, the Yisheng Headquarters, and now most recently, the official headquarters for the Venture Unit Board of Divisions.

In light of recent events, it was declared that all independent and or partnered GLA organization must reestablish or relocate their headquarters in Šerdesas. Though this was mainly targeted at the Venture Unit.

Hoseok thinks this is ridiculous. Considering the fact that it wasn’t the Venture Unit who had betrayed and nearly overturned the entire Known Universe. But at the same time, entirely justifiable.

The Venture Unit, in Hoseok’s humble opinion, was a vastly misunderstood, highly romanticized GLA organization. The entirety of the Known Universe seemed to view them in a certain light. One that made them look like debonair master spies that infiltrated pirate-gangs, disrupted and
settled corrupt space-border systems, rescued scores of Beings from the tyrannical grasp of some evil space-lord.

While it was true that they did indeed dabble in such heroic endeavors but the reality behind it was a lot less glamorous and extremely foul. Everything was primarily based on back-stabbing, selling Beings out, way too much blood (or whatever fluid you functioned by), deep-level hacking, and an insane amount of blackmail.

So despite not having anything to do with the Akramanese issue, the Venture Unit was still, yet again, justifiably kept under a stricter watch, with added policies and reformation that basically reduced their overall network strength and anonymity.

At least this is what most Beings were told.

The Venture Unit though uninvolved with the entire Akramanese issue, had still been caught at the very center of it all, being played by the very organization that started it all. In all honesty, Hoseok guesses that it was the perfect cover-up, the perfect disguise.

The GLA, otherwise known as the Galactic Law Authority, was the system that governed, controlled, and regulated almost more than 75% of all known trade routes, governments, political systems, and hierarchy within the galaxies and systems of the Known Universe. The GLA headquarters was situated in the center of the largest planetary system known to all Beings – Raksane Tayi.

And supporting and verifying the GLA was the Yisheng Directory- an organization independent of the GLA but collaborating with them. While the GLA did not hold any authority over the Yisheng Directory, they worked side by side to bring unity and peace across the universe. To bring together planets, systems, and galaxies to unite into one large working intergalactic system.

The Yishengs were a random assortment of Beings that hailed from nearly every corner of the universe. They were Beings indiscriminately born with higher Life-force that they could use to effectively heal anyone/anything that had Life-force. And it wasn’t an ability that they could use inexhaustibly- because when a Yisheng healed you, they imparted their own Life-force to renew, regrow, and refuel into yours. This could leave Yishengs drained and weak- and young inexperienced Yishengs would often spend up their Life-force, going past the limit due to overzealousness.

And while Yishengs predominantly used their abilities to heal, they could also reverse their abilities to injure, maim, destroy, and kill. A single powerful Yisheng could destroy planets in a matter of hours- create viruses with no cure, and combined they could probably destroy suns. But whatever supernatural force governed the Universe- whatever turn of fate or destiny orchestrated all Life, all Yishengs born were always genuinely good Beings who wholeheartedly devoted themselves for the benefit of others and the Universe.

Many across the Universe regarded Yishengs as gods- deities to be worshipped. If not, they were regarded with the highest and utter most respect and awe. And with the partnership with the Yisheng Directory, the GLA were able to properly unite the Universe in peace.

Which was why it came as a complete and utter shock that the Yisheng Directory, or at least a few of the Yisheng Elders, were the instigators of the attempt to destroy free-will and assert their domination over the Universe.

Hoseok scowls to himself. Thinking again of this didn’t send him spiraling into an overwhelmed state of mind anymore; unlike the first time he had discovered the truth for himself. In fact Hoseok
doesn’t quite remember his reaction- only that he had woken up on the floor, and he was still reeling from the discovery.

‘You have arrived at the Yisheng Headquarters. Please mind the gap between train and platform!’

Hoseok reprimands himself for having lost his bearings momentarily as he steps out into the wide platform, alongside other Beings.

And although the Yisheng Directory had been plotting to completely takeover the Universe, Hoseok still finds himself relaxing at the close proximity he was in with the Headquarters. This entire region of Šerdesas was enriched and flourishing with the intensity of Life-force the Headquarters exuded. Most Beings who were unwell simply came to the Headquarters to recover. Hoseok can feel the tightness around his shoulders ebb away, the fatigue in his muscles completely vanish, and a much more light-hearted attitude than when he boarded the train from the closest Dock.

It was terrifying, in retrospect, knowing that they had all been living with their necks under a very sharp ax held by a Demon disguised as an Angel. And that very Demon was the force behind all of the “unity” and “peace” they were now happily living under.

The Yisheng Headquarters hasn’t changed much from the last time Hoseok saw it some 4 years ago. It was still a low sprawling network of domed buildings, the colour of faded sunstone. It felt nostalgic and almost home-like to those who beheld it. It exuded comfort, care, and most of all, a promise that everything would be okay.

Hoseok shudders a little as he walks closer.

‘There is continuum that exists beyond the identity of Being, beyond the properties that are essential to the existence of being. The endless exchange, the endless surety that what starts, what is, what forms, has an end. There is no end of the spectrum- where one end begets life, and the other ends it. It is a cycle that exists beyond the realm of existence – beyond the realm of Matter and Time and Space. A cycle that Is. A cycle that is continuum. A cycle that unapologetically moves forward. Because where there is a beginning, there is always an end. Where there is an end, there is always a beginning.’

Hoseok pauses, squinting to look beyond the grove of trees from where the voices were coming from. He steps closer and finds an elderly Yisheng, his hair an emerald green streaking with silver- the only physical alteration Yishengs had that represented their status. Around him are young children- no more than 6-8 sols. They were reciting the Yisheng Code.

‘Life-force is a mysterious thing. It exists in everything and is the main component that comprises and formulates all Living Beings. It is the energy that exists between the bonds of atoms, the link that connects respiration to the intangible reactions that supply oxygen to fuel every cell, the elevation of the mind that brings forth the power of the mind and imagination. It is Life. It is Soul. It is everything that makes you Alive.’

He feels shiver run down his spine.

‘Former agent Hoseok.’

Hoseok turns sharply, taking a minor step back and putting his weight on the heel of his foot.

‘Director Lal Haenoon. Good afternoon,’ Hoseok says unable to control the curtness in his words.

‘A happy sight I make no doubt,’ Lal Haenoon grins.
Hoseok instantly feels the need to leave.

Lal Haenoon was a Raksane Tayian, born and raised. Hoseok did not like him. In fact, Hoseok could safely say he did not like anyone from the Board of Directors. But it was also safe to say Hoseok liked him least. And was grateful that his Division had not been taken under his metaphoric wing. But rather under the very literal wing of S’ava Hhlai, a Being from the planet of Rlams’a, their entire species characterized by the wing-like protrusion from their backs, featherless and all stretched skin. They were terrifying to behold during the night under dim lights. While most Beings were afraid of the Rlams’a, and therefore terrified of S’ava Hhlai, Hoseok for reasons he doesn’t understand, wants to touch the thin stretch of pale lavender skin to see if it was as elastic as it looked. For obvious reasons, Hoseok has not done this. He looks around briefly for his ex-Division head but does not find the willowy Being.

‘I’m sure you thought S’ava would be here but alas!’ Lal Haenoon grins in what Hoseok assumes is the latter trying to look apologetic. ‘I would like to say he’s just busy and will be joining us but I cannot lie!’

Lal Haenoon was a short, slight Being, and formidably intelligent. The original inhabitants of the planets of Raksane Tayi were gifted with incredible intelligence and empathy, the charisma of leadership, and the ability to bring together Beings. They had a very anthropomorphic built, but with distinct silver pupils that gave foundation to their collective species nickname “dusty eyes”. But this Tayian was everything that contradicted his species fair characteristics. Even his pupils, a characteristic that gave the Tayians a rather distinctly enlightened appearance, was darker than his fellow species.

‘This has to stay between the two of us. You know how it is- the Gaia Case is a very delicate one.’ He sighs dolefully though Hoseok doesn’t buy it for a second. He looks past Hoseok and smiles at the sight of the young Yishengs.

‘A new generation of Yishengs- look at them- so bright and eager to learn. We did this- all of us. We’re all here and alive!’ he claps his hands together before clapping Hoseok on the shoulder. ‘I don’t think I’ve ever thanked you for what you did- an excellent choice! We would have never progressed with our purge had it not been for you!’

‘It’s not something I take pride in- many were killed. Needlessly and wastefully,’ Hoseok replies shortly.

‘Sacrifices had to be made. It was not a lot if you think of all we have saved,’ Lal Haenoon gestures towards the Headquarters, ‘Come, I wish to speak to you before you meet your fellow team-members.’

Hoseok briefly entertains the idea of flooring Lal Haenoon (undoubtedly easy to do- Hoseok could do it blind-folded) and skipping this entire shady-ass mission. But he doesn’t.

‘I am happy that you agreed to partake in this mission. I do not doubt for a single second that you will fail me,’ Lal Haenoon walks at pace that feels too slow for Hoseok, reducing the natural pace of his feet. He knows he’s doing it on purpose. Lal Haenoon enjoyed irking people in the smallest ways- but never in a way where he could be implemented.

‘This is a mission that I am taking for the safety of the Universe, Director.’ Hoseok states, replying with an ease he didn’t feel. ‘I did not take it to serve under the orders of the Board.’

Lal Haenoon gives him a swift look before continuing, ‘As I mentioned before- due to the Gaia Case and its outcome, and the Treaty signed between Bhumi and the GLA, we cannot simply take
over and overhaul the Bhumi System. And we definitely cannot have K’mara or Lmiura take control either. K’mara is conniving as she is spiteful towards the Venture Unit- she would take this opportunity to ruin us and everything we have ever done for the Universe. Lmiura believes she knows and understands the scope of what all of this could imply- what all of this could provide- but she does not. We cannot allow them to deter us- no matter what. And I need you to be there to make sure that the Venture Unit comes out on top in this mission.’

Hoseok keeps a straight face as he nods.

Lal Haenoon gives him a reassuring smile that does anything but reassure Hoseok and he follows him inside the Headquarters.

There was a simple beauty to the Headquarters- so in tune with all that was alive, and so accommodating and comfortable. Despite everything Hoseok knows, he finds himself feeling safer again. The large Atrium is well lit with natural light diffused with glowing soft spots on the walls. Green creepers extend out, branching over at random, almost wildly like no one cared which direction they were growing. Comfortable cushioned benches were arranged at a seemingly random arrangement but didn’t look cluttered or messy to Hoseok. The ceiling was domed and you could see the Šerdesas’s famed pale violet sky above.

They stop in front of the large reception desk, a young Yisheng-in-training stands behind it. He was dressed in the traditional Yisheng uniform of pale green, customized for each Species.

‘We are here to meet with Yisheng Amme,’ Lal Haenoon leans into the desk with one arm.

‘Yisheng Amme is at the 3rd Conference Hall in the West Wing- you may take Elevator-09 down the left hallway,’ the young Yisheng points one long thing arm towards the left.

‘Thank you,’ Lal Haenoon salutes the Yisheng cheerily.

But before they can take more than a few steps, Hoseok feels the hair on the back of his neck stand and feels a chill run down his spine. If he’s not mistaken, Lal Haenoon also seems to feel the same thing and they both turn to find Admiral K’mara standing at the wide doorways that lead into the Atrium.

Admiral K’mara, one of the GIU Trifecta was a powerful figure whose leadership within the GIU saw the organization rise to a high military power within the GLA. She was petite in build, she would probably barely graze Hoseok’s chin with the top of her head- but her presence was cowering. And it was such a contrast considering how delicate and ethereal she looked. She wore a magnificent robe in muted shimmering gold. There were tiny bells that hung from delicate crystal like double-helix horns that extended up from the crown of her head. She was breathtaking as she was deadly.

‘Lal Haenoon.’ Her voice is demure and gentle yet commanding attention and awe at the same time. She inclines her head towards the Raksane Tayian. And though Hoseok knows he shouldn’t be feeling this way, he can’t help but feel a little pleased at how Lal Haenoon seems uncomfortable with her presence.

‘Admiral,’ he responds a little gruffly.

‘And Hoseok,’ her neon-red eyes turn to Hoseok and he instantly looks away. Instead he bows his head out of customary respect as was tradition in Ngfy’widan. She laughs at his action, clearly knowing why he refused to look at her.
‘We are in neutral grounds- are we not all friends?’

Hoseok wants to roll his eyes. Instead he stands up straight and smiles back in return.

‘Of course Admiral.’

There’s a snort of a laugh and walking in behind K’mara is a slender Being, dressed similarly to K’mara in flowing robes of muted gold that’s a bit more grey than yellow. And Hoseok recognizes him as Sk’jin, the “Region Expert” and “Communications Manager” of their quad-unit.

They made an extremely visually appealing duo and Hoseok’s senses are telling him to run asap when 2 pairs of neon-red eyes fix on him. Their combined beauty is unnerving and forces you into a state of high-strung alertness. But the moment Hoseok is used to whatever glamour was cast around them, he notes something distinctly different about Sk’jin in comparison to K’mara. And though Hoseok has only ever seen one Khol’isa before- and that was K’mara, Hoseok can’t explain what it was that made Sk’jin seem somewhat not entirely like their shared species.

Hoseok doesn’t care for politeness or discretion as he scans Sk’jin’s appearance over carefully while K’mara divulges into a round of pleasantries with Lal Haenoon, who seemed to be getting more and more uncomfortable with each passing second. Lal Haenoon could you uncomfortable but K’mara made you literally squirm.

Sk’jin seems to know what Hoseok is doing and even stands in a way where Hoseok can study him better, giving him a quirk of a smile and a quick wink.

Hoseok still can’t point it out. Never in his near century long of working as a field infiltration agent has he ever come up with so many blanks and questions as he reads someone. It was a required and intensively trained part of his skill set, to assess and evaluate complete strangers and come up with an immediate and accurate reading. Assessment was key to survival in his field of work- and Hoseok finds himself wishing he had refused S’ava’s offer. All Agents within the Venture Unit had the opportunity to refuse missions- and especially with Hoseok no longer working for the organization, he could have easily said no.

He glances over at Sk’jin’s head, noting again that he didn’t have even a single trace of the crystal-like double-helix horn like K’mara did. The crown of his head was clear and no scar remained to indicate any damage or injury that could possibly lead to him losing his horns.

‘It’s rude to stare, Head Pilot Hoseok,’ Sk’jin smiles, inclining his head to the side a little. ‘All though it’s perfectly understandable.’

Before Hoseok can reply, Lal Haenoon and K’mara finish their strained exchange of pleasantries and make for the left hallway.

‘We are to be team mates, Hoseok,’ Sk’jin casually converses. His words are very well enunciated, an almost poetic manner of pulling on the syllables. If Hoseok wasn’t already so paranoid, he would think that his mannerism befitted his image,- an eloquent speech to match the elegance of the speaker.

‘As the Communications Manager, it is my duty to make sure that the Head Pilot is well equipped as he commandeer the ship. I will do my utmost to make sure that all channels are free and open for you to access at any given time,’ Sk’jin inclines his head gracefully. ‘I hope you will rely on me as we make sure that the Universe is once again secured.’

‘Of course,’ Hoseok replies, distrust mounting in him by the kilotons, making his entire being
heavy with anticipation and wariness. ‘I look forward to working with you and discussing on matters regarding your expertise to ensure a safer passage during our journey.’

‘I have many expertise,’ Sk’jin gives him a smiling sideway glance. ‘I am open to sharing them all.’

Hoseok mentally adds Sk’jin into the list of Beings he doesn’t trust at once- right beneath Lal Haenoon and K’mara. It’s a tight squeeze but he’s there at once. Hoseok nods back stiffly and Sk’jin bows his head elegantly again, looking away with the slightest smirk.

The elevator ride is ridiculously awkward- and purposefully so because K’mara and Sk’jin don’t say a single word, smiling only to themselves rather serenely and exchanging small looks as though they were sharing some inside joke. It did nothing to calm down Lal Haenoon who was visibly sweating. Hoseok finds himself both admiring and loathing the two Khol’isa in equal measurement.

The elevator doors open directly into a large domed theater studio. Like every other section of the Headquarters, this large space was lit by the glass dome overhead. Half circles of raised shelves ringed the theater studio and at the center was a slightly raised dais around which 5 Beings were gathered. It’s reminiscent of the first room where they had their impromptu Court hearing except brighter and less somber.

‘Admiral K’mara, Chief Lal Haenoon- welcome,’ a voice calls out, too deep to be considered feminine. ‘And Hoseok of Ngy’wid, and Sk’jin of Khol’isa.’

Hoseok bows again before stepping forward alongside the other three.

He recognizes most of the Beings near the dais.

Yisheng Amme who had greeted them stands at the center of the semi-circle they have formed around the dais. She was from the heavily tropical planet of Khhem, a planet that no one other than her own species could enter due to the extreme weather conditions that wrapped around the small planet. And though if you were “lucky” enough to safely make it past the storming and broiling ionosphere, and somehow landed on the damp valleys of their terrain- you would be killed by the highly acidic air that was natural for the planet. Khhem’s atmosphere compromised mainly of sulfuric acid and ammonium bisulfate due to the continuous heterogeneous oxidation of sulfuric/nitrate dioxide. The toxicity in their soil was a result of the natural excess of fossil fuel that boiled in large sections across their southern hemisphere- the fumes from these pools would then oxidize in their naturally catalyzing atmosphere. But if you were prepared with some sturdy air-tanks and strong spacesuits that somehow escaped the corrosive touch of the equally acidic soil, then you would most likely be mauled to death by the carnivorous nightmare inducing wild monsters that freely roamed the acidic planet.

Her people, the Khhemsa, were almost as equally terrifying as the monsters that roamed her land and waters. With little to no anthropomorphic features, the Khhemsa stood at nearly 2 meters in height on average, with 2 pairs of spindly and knotted appendages that functioned for arms and a pair powerful legs that compromised most of their height. They were powerful runners, outrunning the monsters that roamed their lands, surviving the harsh conditions of their planets during the first stages of developing their communities in their own version of civilization development. And to help keep their balance as they ran on all 6 appendages, was a long sinewy tail that ended in a sharp protruding bone. Legend had it that it was once poisonous but after eras of evolution, lost its poisonous attribute and was now instead a useful defensive mechanism. Their skin, an interesting biological phenomena that was impermeable to the acidic nature of their planet, was a deep blood red and scaly in appearance. They had 3 pairs of beady eyes lined up around their angular faces.
angled upwards, and a wide set mouth that didn’t fully close, revealing needle-like teeth. Being naturally hairless, Yisheng Amme did not carry the trademark silver hair of her rank- but rather her eyes carried on the trait, somehow adding an even scarier contribution to an already frightening species.

If Hoseok was being honest, he would simply describe the Khemsa as nightmarish because as they step closer he senses all 6 eyes following after him and he fights the urge to simply get the fuck out again.

Standing next to Yisheng Amme and an entire head shorter is Chief Xmi Head of the Galactic Security and Safety Department. He looks drained and exhausted, not a surprising look for someone of his responsibility. Chief Shn’ow Head of the Trade Department stood to Xmi’s left. He was good friends with Lal Haenoon and gave the latter a friendly nod. Lal Haenoon immediately turns to walk towards where Shn’ow stood.

Standing at Yisheng Amme’s right are Chief Lmiura and a Being Hoseok immediately recognizes as the single key Information Analyst whose findings lead the entire Venture Unit to retrieve into their own emancipation to weed out those involved with the Yishengs in their mission to overthrow the Universe.

Namjoon looks different from the last time Hoseok saw him in Court. He looked healthier and was no longer sickeningly thin- no doubt because he wasn’t stressing for his life and the outcome of the Universe anymore. His hair wasn’t the scraggly blond it used to be- now instead a dark shiny brown and neatly styled away. He no longer looked haggard and bedraggled either- instead he looked smart in his nondescript dark blazer and trousers. He was dressed yet again in a high-collared shirt, covering the entirety of his neck. The only skin exposed are his hands. And Hoseok knows why.

The people of Kutsoglera fell victim to one of the biggest pirate-raids known in recent GLA history. Originally a peaceful and rather primitive planet, set during the beginnings of a global settlement, the people of Kutsoglera were a simple and happy folk. That was until the raid took place. They were not a part of the GLA- so they had no help, no hope, as the pirates swarmed them with proton-missiles and TeorSer fire. The entire planet was raided, their people killed, and those who survived were sold into slavery or worse. Kutsoglera was transformed into a crude pirate-controlled planet and her people were cruelly violated and tortured. Attempts at biological experimentation rose and the Kutsoglerin were the living subjects.

This reign of terror lasted half a century before the Venture Unit was able to rescue the planet. But by then only a mere 80,000 of her people were alive. They were already at a low population, but now chances of extinction were high because most of them succumbed to their conditions and their numbers dwindled. The Yishengs were able to heal and cure those who survived but there were those whose experimentations went too far- and they would live the remainder of their lives carrying the physical weight of their horrendous past with them.

Hoseok himself has never read the files regarding the extensive and cruel experiments conducted on the people of Kutsoglera but he has a sinking feeling that Namjoon would sooner kill him then reveal what was done to him. He must have been a child during the raid.

Namjoon was widely known throughout the secretive realm of the Venture Unit as one of the most brilliant and highly intelligent strategist and Analyst. He had been involved in the case since the beginning, before they knew what the implications of anything meant.

It was Namjoon who had discovered the link between the System of Bhumi and the Akramanese. It was Namjoon who discovered the link between the Akramanese and the Yisheng. And with his
findings, the Venture Unit immediately pulled out of the GLA-intent on cleaning out their own organization. Namjoon had single-handedly worked to uncover each informant, each spy, each traitor.

When K’mara goes to stand next to Namjoon, he smiles politely at her, bowing at the waist elegantly and taking her proffered hand and placing a barely there kiss over her knuckles. He’s still bowed over a little as he listens to K’mara, an engaging smile on his face.

And this was what Hoseok didn’t trust about Namjoon. In fact this is what he didn’t trust about anyone involved in the Gaia Case. They all worked under a mask of pretend-unity, united with the intention to bring safety and peace for the Universe while plotting to undermine the other with their own set of plans and ideals.

Namjoon bows again to Sk’jin who is all smiles and graceful manner, long flowing sleeves drifting almost in slow-motion as he shakes Namjoon’s hand. K’mara is seemingly introducing them and Sk’jin has a wide-eyed look of innocent awe as he gazes up at Namjoon. Hoseok could retch from the pretentiousness.

Lmiura is nodding politely at K’mara behind Namjoon and then at Sk’jin who bows elegantly again.

Hoseok is already tired from the direction this trip was clearly headed for. Namjoon was appointed the team-leader as well as Navigator. They were going to have to work with each other consistently- the Head-Pilot and Navigator were the pillars of balance inside any ship. If Namjoon was how he presented himself at Court- then flying to Bhumi and completing their mission would be easy. To an extent. Hoseok doesn’t know where Namjoon’s stands in this entire mission. He was a member of the Venture Unit before- working tirelessly to help the remainder of the Board of Divisions to set their organization right and remove the traitors. But he was a candidate from Lmiura.

Hoseok glances over at Sk’jin. He definitely did not trust the Khol’isa. Not only was he a direct member of K’mara’s innermost circle, Hoseok could not find any concrete information on his background or records in any of the Archives but public and illegal. It was as though Sk’jin never existed.

‘Now that we have all gathered here,’ Yisheng Amme calls out after Sk’jin steps back behind K’mara, sending a wink at Hoseok.

‘We may begin our meeting.’

Hoseok does a quick count. The 6 members of the special Jury were present. Namjoon, Sk’jin, and himself were present from the quad-team. There was one missing.

He catches Sk’jin doing a quick count as well, eyeing the Yisheng curiously in return.

‘I beg your pardon Yisheng Amme for interrupting you,’ Hoseok calls out, plastering on a smile on his face. ‘But I believe we’re missing one?’

‘All are present.’

Hoseok’s skin crawls, his hair standing on end. How had he not seen him?

Standing behind Yisheng Amme is a figure clad entirely in pitch black. The sight of the uniform shakes Hoseok to his core- having seen glimpses of dark figures swiftly killing and vanishing from sight in a manner of seconds.
The agents of the Galactic Inquisition were numbered at a mere 2,500. And a single one of them could singlehandedly assassinate an entire building of Beings in under an hour and raise no alarms. S’ava had only guessed that Yoongi, the teams weapon-specialist, was a former member of the GI. But Hoseok had deemed it impossible.

Agents from the GI were still being healed and being reintroduced to the Universe outside of their warped reality. Most of them had disintegrated into the mental state of an infant. Deadly killers from urban-legends were now unable to feed themselves without help, unable to speak or comprehend their surroundings. So what was he doing here?

He didn’t look any different from the image on the report Hoseok had received a few days ago. Pale skin, dark hair, dark eyes, no outstanding features. And for someone of such a deadly background, Hoseok wasn’t able to detect his presence at all. Unlike how he’d felt K’mara and Sk’jin’s presence- he felt nothing from Yoongi.

There was nothing. Hoseok could read nothing.

And this, more than anything, frightens him.

Hoseok glances over at the others to see their reaction. Sk’jin’s calm demeanor is broken, a visible frown on his face. K’mara looks stunned. Namjoon has taken a physical step back, Lmiura’s eyes are widened. Lal Haenoon had let out an audible gasp and grabbed on to Sh’now’s arm in his alarm. Xmi and Yisheng Amme were the only ones unaffected and Hoseok guesses it’s because they knew he was there from the beginning.

‘Like I said,’ Yisheng Amme continues, her sharp teeth showing fully. ‘We will begin our meeting.’

She takes a single step forward and with one of her hands, places a small orb like object on the ground. The Dais lights up holographic projections, rendering briefly before a trajectory lights up stretched across a wide space.

‘As you have all read the reports and have been briefed by your supervisors, I do not think it is necessary to brief you again.’ Yisheng Amme states. ‘This is your trajectory- or at least the public version of it. Namjoon, as Navigator, you will be responsible in plotting out a trajectory that will guide you away from most check points and away from the eyes of the public GLA Docks. Hoseok, as Head-Pilot, you will be responsible for the safety of the ship, therefore your team, and the “cargo” you will be taking. Sk’jin will be responsible for Communications- he will negotiate your journey safely in case you come across situations that cannot allow a more aggressive approach. However, if an aggressive approach is needed, Yoongi, in charge of security, will be handling the situation. You all have your positions that you will dedicate yourselves to. One weak link will lead to the failure of the mission. Is this understood.’

Hoseok nods; Sk’jin and Namjoon nod as well but Yoongi remains motionless. But Amme doesn’t seem to mind.

‘The cargo you carry will contains the technology required to revive the planetary system of Bhumi. We have not been able to gain any additional information regarding the planets within it. We’ve been able to find gaps in their shield that prevents us from really scanning the System to confirm the snippets of footage we’ve been able to collect. You can overview the footage after our meeting is adjourned.’ Amme adds with a short nod towards Namjoon who looked like he had a question. But regardless of the clear indication to not interrupt Namjoon cuts in.

‘I have a comment,’ Namjoon says calmly with a polite smile that doesn’t quite reach his eyes as
he gazes at the glowing trajectory. ‘If this is indeed important to the GLA then they could declare this as another mission under their own colonization policies.’

‘This is not possible because of the Treaty signed between Bhumi and the GLA,’ Chief Xmi quickly answers. ‘The Treaty bars us and any GLA authorized mission or visit from entering their space-borders. It also obliges us to take measures from our side to make sure that we honor their side of the Treaty by preventing others from entering their borders. Which is why at this current moment, none of you are authorized by any organization.’

‘Now that that has been cleared up,’ Amme continues with a thankful nod of her head towards Xmi. ‘That is the disguise you will be using when you fly to Bhumi- a trade ship delivering items to Matlaab.’

The holograph projection changes and a model-size of a compact and medium-sized ship appears instead. 4 separate engine-wings with powerful independent propeller finds that give way to beamer-charged anti-matter propeller that will burn with no visible colour in space. Reversible landing gages weighed under the engine wings for landing and the main body was of a sturdy rectangular construct. It could easily house 20 Beings in it, judging simply by the size of it. But Hoseok guesses a majority of the space inside would be used for cargo storage.

‘But due to an error, you will be waylaid and end up by mistake in Bhumi. Considering that it’s dead-space, there will be no Docks, forcing your hand to take you to what appears to be a moon in order to repair your ship.’ Lal Haenoon chimes in. ‘All communications will be cut after this point- and I’m afraid you really will be left alone after this point.’

‘I beg your pardon?’ Sk’jin asks politely.

‘There is no contact beyond the space-borders of Bhumi,’ K’mara says pleasantly. ‘Due to the Bhumian technology. It scrambles all communication waves sent from inside of Bhumi. But to an extent- we might be able to contact you and track you. You will not be entirely alone.’ She gives Lal Haenoon a reprimanding look to which the latter replies with a sheepish shrug.

‘We understand that this is a lot to carry.’ Lmiura speaks out for the first time. ‘This is not an easy mission, nor is it a safe one. We cannot guarantee your safety outside of what you can provide yourselves once you’re inside the System. But what we are you- what you all are doing- is making sure that the Gaia Case does not happen again.’

‘The events that took place on Earth- it was a result of our blindness, our pride, and our vanity,’ Amme’s voice is quiet. ‘Due to the decisions made by my brothers and sisters, we allowed the creation of the Akramanese; a force of reality that we still cannot comprehend, existing beyond the dimensions that we know and understand. It was our fault that they set out set out to destroy all that we know and love. Our search for a permanent peaceful unity birthed the most guile and senseless form of death and cruelty. And we will do everything in our power, to stop that from ever happening again. And that can be stopped, by making sure that Bhumi is once again secured and made safe.’

‘Well-spoken Yisheng,’ Lal Haenoon claps cheerily, breaking the solemn atmosphere and filling it with mild irritation and looks of disdain. ‘Now that you all know what have to do, why you have to do it- it is time for you to do it!’

‘You will be equipped with everything you will need inside the ship. Every comfort possible, and a Class-2 GLA Pass- so that things don’t look too suspicious for a private trade ship.’ K’mara smiles as though she found it amusing. ‘The cargo has already been sent to the Yisheng Hangar Bay carrying both the terraforming technology as well as dispensary technology to make sure that
nothing of Akramanese make remains.’

‘This mission is expected to take 2 sols,’ Lmiura summarizes. ‘You will have unconditional funding for every single step and after the success of the mission, you will be granted full retirement and exemption from any past records. Do any of you have any questions?’

None of them do.

‘Then that’s great! Here’s your GLA Pass,’ Chief Sh’now tosses it careless at Namjoon who catches it deftly without looking at it, instead leveling the Chief of Trade with a hard look, no attempts made in smiling. ‘Take care of yourselves and that ship- I chose her personally- treat her well!’ Sh’now slaps Hoseok on the shoulder before pompously walking out. Hoseok wants to take the metallic card from Namjoon’s hands and throw it back at Sh’now right between his squinty little watery eyes.

Lal Haenoon grips his arm firmly, as though to remind him of what he’d said and gives him what Hoseok suspects is a look Lal Haenoon thinks makes him look mysterious and cool. In all honesty it makes him look like an idiot and Hoseok hopes he trips on his way out.

He doesn’t.

Chief Xmi performs a complicated looking bow towards them, a fleeting expression of regret as he sweeps the room one more time before nodding at Amme and he too exits though it’s towards a door Hoseok hadn’t seen when he walked in.

‘We hope and pray for your success,’ Lmiura says as she and K’mara step away from the dais.

‘We hope you will remember the importance of this mission when you are forced to make difficult decisions,’ K’mara says sagely.

Hoseok doesn’t know why, but he feels a slight chill at her words.

‘I hope you all get along,’ she adds with a sly smile before turning and leaving with Lmiura the way Xmi had left.

Amme is left and she lifts all of her arms up, palms looking upwards. She motions for them to stand in front of her and Hoseok finds himself standing in between Yoongi and Sk’jin and finds it greatly uncomfortable.

The Yisheng Directory may have lost their authority within the GLA and its other organizations, but Hoseok still finds himself regarding them with respect. It might be conditioning, but Hoseok would rather not condemn an entire organization of Beings based on the decisions and actions of a few who represent them. His life in the Venture Unit and before that taught him as much.

And despite her appearance that was worthy of nightmares, Hoseok feels nothing but profound sorrow from the Khhemsa as she looks down at all of them. She spreads out her arms over their heads, as though she was about to bless them. Hoseok doesn’t know what to do here exactly- was this a Yisheng thing? Or was this her own cultural thing?

Unexpectedly, Yoongi to his side kneels down on one knee, head bent.

Sk’jin is quick to follow and also kneels down elegantly, his hair is pale pink in this light. Hoseok’s distrust spikes.

Hoseok and Namjoon share a quick look before they both kneel as well.
‘And in the tongues and dialect of all those who call this Universe their home, I bid you, my brothers, the blessings of one, the blessings of all.’

This suddenly doesn’t feel like a mission to Hoseok anymore. He’s reminded of something else that he can’t exactly remember.

Next to him, Yoongi stands, and Sk’jin follows simultaneously. Hoseok and Namjoon stand together as well.

Amme raises only one hand up and she tilts her head up towards the sky. Her hand reaches up, as though waiting for something.

And Hoseok finds himself really taking the time to listen properly.

He can hear leaves rustling faintly, a faint echo from somewhere of someone’s footsteps. The soft murmur of the wind.

Yoongi raises his hand up too, causing the other three to do the same. A few seconds later, Amme closes her hand and holds her closed fist at the center of her chest- no doubt where her heart lay.

They all move to do the same.

‘And when you find yourself in times of trouble or woe, listen to the music from the stars- and let them guide you with their wisdom, Memory, and Time.’

And Hoseok realizes, as he holds his fist over his heart, that this reminds him of a funeral.
I’M BACK Y’ALL!! HERE IS THE NOT-EXACTLY-SEQUEL-SEQUEL TO AMULGOE!!! I HOPE MY OLD READERS WILL ENJOY THIS AS MUCH AS THEY DID AMULGOE AND I HOPE MY NEW READERS ENJOY THIS JUST AS MUCH!

Like I said this isn’t exactly a sequel to AMULGOE, so you don’t have to read it- this can be read as a stand-alone fic because I will explain everything anyways. But if you want to- the A Misguided and Unnecessarily Long Galactic Odyssey to Earth is a 80 chapter 750,000K monster of a fic that you VERY welcome to read! It's up on my AFF- will link below ^_^

I will be updating every Wednesday night! Until uni starts *sighs heavily*

I’m so nervous guys!! I’m back with a chaptered fic from the same amulgoe-verse and I’m nervous. I really hope you all enjoy it! please come scream at me on twitter/tumblr/ao3/aff! I will scream back!

See you next Wednesday!

(PS)- the ship looks very similar to the Prometheus from the Prometheus movie

https://twitter.com/Unclssfd_Senpai
https://www.tumblr.com/blog/unclassifiedsenpai
http://www.asianfanfics.com/profile/view_author_stories/1132373/L
“Name” [noun]: a word or set of words by which a Being, animal, place, or thing is known, addressed, or referred to.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

‘What is your name?’


Room measurement 20 x 32 meter square. Name: Section 31-92-00-GL.

Object measurement 30 x 24 x 35 inches. Name: Desk.

Object measurement 8 x 5 inches. Name: Screen.

Object measurement-

‘What is your name?’

Object measurement 1.73 meters. GLA ???. Male. Unknown. Classified. Name: -. 

‘Restate your request.’

‘…hmm. Are you an Android?’

Object measurement 1.73 meters. GLA ???. Male. Unknown. Classified. Name: -. 

‘Restate your request.’

‘I don’t think you are…you don’t have to wear the helmet you know? It’s hard to keep track of anyone here- just another face in the crowd.’

‘Mission statement.’

‘…I wasn’t told much about your lot…care to enlighten me?’

Object measurement 1.73 meters. GLA ???. Male. Unknown. Classified. Name: -. 

‘Restate your request.’
Upon leaving the immediate vicinity of the Yisheng Headquarters, the level of animosity and suspicion rises up and is almost palpable. The tension is stifling and makes for an intensely strained and quiet walk up to the Yisheng Hangar Bay. Even the peaceful and healing atmosphere that the Headquarters was universally famous for couldn’t form a scratch on the thick blanket of distrust that lay over them. The fact that they’re walking across a wide wooded garden famed across the Known Universe for its beauty makes the entire situation hilarious. The contradiction of their environment to the mood that surrounds them borders on comical.

Sk’jin wants to laugh.

He is acutely aware of the distrustful looks thrown his way. In fact, most of this gaze is thrown his way without any guise or attempt made to cover up. Hoseok, the Ngfy’widan, is watching him with a casual stance- his form relaxed and apparently at great ease. He was clearly trained, very effectively and efficiently, to disguise and mask his motions. Sk’jin had been somewhat surprised that Lal Haenoon would actually bring someone like Hoseok, a field agent from a Division that wasn’t under his governance, into a mission like this. Sk’jin had initially thought Lal Haenoon would put someone under his own Division into the mission. It would make sense after all. But looking at what he’d done- choosing Hoseok to “represent” the Venture Unit was probably a smart move that benefited the mission.

Besides, field agents from the Infiltration Division were deadly individuals who were capable of any and everything. They were wild-cards, moving with ease along the darker side of the moral spectrum in order to get things done. Most of them came from a criminal background- not of the everyday petty crime sort of background, but of Level 1 Prisoner status sort of criminal.
They were mass murderers, masterminds, Beings who had an undeniable intelligence for all things twisted and manipulative.

Perfect for the Venture Unit to use to infiltrate other intelligent Beings who were involved in all things twisted and manipulative.

Fight fire with fire.

Sk’jin has come across many agents from the Infiltration Unit. While some were only working for the Venture Unit as a means to avoid the maddening darkness of Level 1 Prison (which was totally understandable and honestly a much smarter move in Sk’jin’s humble opinion), there were some who were genuinely trying to give back to the Venture Unit for giving them a second chance (a sort of dumb reasoning, according to Sk’jin).

After a quick observation of the Ngfy’widan, Sk’jin guesses that Hoseok’s participation in the Venture Unit was probably entirely voluntary and not involved with prison (or trying to escape prison). The people of Ngfy’wid were known to join the Venture Unit more often than not. Their natural abilities made them excellent infiltrators and the entire surviving population of the Ngfy’widan people felt indebted to the Venture Unit. If memory serves him right, the Venture Unit were the ones who were helping them regrow and restore their home planet.

Sk’jin has also fought and killed many field agents who thought they were smart enough to waylay him. But that was all a very long time ago. Sk’jin likes to believe that he is a changed Being now-reborn anew from his past. But that certainly did not mean he was entirely willing to participate in this mission for its stated objectives.

Because while his other team members were no doubt swayed by fancy words and illusions of grand schemes to save the Universe- Sk’jin isn’t effected or remotely interested in saving the Known Universe. No- Sk’jin has other things he needs to see to and this mission was going to take him there. Sk’jin does not have the time to burden himself with ideological beliefs and heroic endeavors.

With prolonged observation, Sk’jin can safely assume that Hoseok is probably one of them too. Despite being exposed to a whole different side of the Universe and more, Hoseok was still here, trying to do the “right” thing. It probably ran in his blood, bound to his genes and making up his DNA.

It’s an extremely colourful contrast to Sk’jin’s own people and their reaction towards the GLA in general. Sk’jin can safely say that K’mara, and now himself, were the only Khol’isa who were working members of the GLA. The rest of his people lived in one of the many city-state moons in Raksane Tayi. They refused to participate in any dealings with the GLA but still depended on them for their living and livelihood.

Sk’jin despises a lot of Beings- individuals, groups, entire societies- Sk’jin has lists and lists of these Beings. But his own people ranked highest in this list of personal disdain. Arrogant, haughty, and never moving past former glories that never existed to begin with. The Khol’isa were the prime example of unfounded privileged living and Sk’jin hates it.

Hoseok looks like the type of Being who was probably doing this mission for the sake of the objectives stated in their briefing. Not that anything was wrong with it. It was wonderful-honourable even. But incredibly naïve and if Sk’jin was capable of feeling it, worrisome as well. How did he even become a field agent for the Infiltration Division?

But Sk’jin knows not to base all of his decisions and assumptions of someone based on his first
impression (no matter how accurate his observations were)- he’s been mistaken a total of 3 times in his life before; and the last time his assumption turned inaccurate, he had been left for dead.

Sk’jin looks away from Hoseok and instead catches Namjoon’s eye.

In all honesty, a majority of the animosity and distrust comes from the Kutsoglerin. His self-introduction inside the Yisheng Headquarters had been so obviously staged that Sk’jin couldn’t help but laugh. But now, away from the special-jury, Namjoon has abandoned any semblance of friendliness with straightforward suspicion and guardedness.

Sk’jin smiles at him, head tilting a little so that the sun caught on his hair in a way he knew made him look like he was caught in a vision of golden light. But Namjoon isn’t effected. He doesn’t look remotely impressed or distracted. Shame, Sk’jin reflects to himself- he hoped he would have some fun on this mission but he just had to be stuck with the most indifferent and paranoid Beings this side of the Universe.

Sk’jin glances over Namjoon’s form, causing the latter to level him with an expression that was both challenging and resigned. Instead, Sk’jin winks back at the Kutsoglerin, cocking one eyebrow up at him. Namjoon’s expression doesn’t change so Sk’jin exaggerates a sad expression and sighs plaintively as though deeply wounded. Sk’jin notes how Hoseok watches them like a predator would, waiting to catch any point of weakness.

This was going to be a stress filled mission with zero fun.

Hoseok looks like he might actually be nice to talk to- if it weren’t for the fact that they were in a mission (this mission) together. And Sk’jin would really rather not trust anyone Lal Haenoon put up as their candidate. The Raksane Tayian was a slimy insufferable arrogant excuse of a leader and Sk’jin would love to see him and his organization burn to the ground. Or implode in space (Sk’jin isn’t particular about it). Especially after everything he’s seen.

Lmiura however was of a much more open and easily readable character. Sk’jin wasn’t surprised at her choice considering Namjoon’s background as a whole. And to an extent, Namjoon seemed to exude this same characteristic. Possibly because of his former position as an Information Analyst (If anything, Namjoon probably deserves the title of Region-Expert better than Sk’jin), he wasn’t necessarily trained to be as masked in his actions and features like Hoseok was. But then again, Hoseok was a Ngfy’widan meaning he could very well control each and every facial muscle and manipulate his expressions if needed. It was handy no doubt. Sk’jin briefly wonders if it’s because of this attribute or something else that contributes to Hoseok’s 275 confirmed kills over his impressive career as an agent for the Infiltration Division. It was cute almost. The Infiltration Division were like galactic vigilantes: legally backed up bad guys killing off illegally backed up bad guys. Sk’jin guesses that the official record is different from the actual numbers- doctored a little to make it look a bit more “contained” and planned out. Of course this was just the official mission list of Beings that needed to be taken out,- who knew where that number stood if you really looked through his records?

The walk to the Hangar Bay is quiet long. Perhaps too long. Was this preplanned in hopes that they would bond as a team? Sk’jin smirks to himself (getting long side-glances from Hoseok and Namjoon) and wonders if he should start a dead-pool. See who is the quickest to snap and take out someone. He ends up laughing out loud at his own thought, causing the two on either of his side to take a precautionary step away.

Oh no, I’m not crazy. Not anymore Sk’jin wants to say but he doesn’t. And as Sk’jin can’t do anything to relieve the tension in the air, he might as well add more to it.
‘So,’ Sk’jin begins as soon as he’s contained himself well enough to speak. He nearly loses it again when he notices the slightest tensing up in both Namjoon and Hoseok’s shoulders. ‘Is this your first joint mission?’

The only reply he gets is a brief look from both Hoseok and Namjoon before they proceed to ignore him, tension spiking up even more. Sk’jin wants to cackle. Even if this trip was going to be boring, he’s pretty sure he can get a rise from either one of those two easy. Based on his observations, Namjoon seems like the most likely candidate to snap.

‘Yes.’

Sk’jin nearly jumps at the sound of the quiet voice a little behind him.

Yoongi, the weapons-specialist, is walking behind him, his footsteps make no sound and if it weren’t for the fact that Sk’jin was looking at him with his very own eyes, he would have doubted himself. Unlike how with Hoseok and especially Namjoon, Sk’jin could simple gouge their presence from the general force of their being, Sk’jin cannot sense a single thing from this Being.

‘I was under the impression that GI agents worked solo operations,’ Sk’jin manages to collect himself, falling in-step with Yoongi instead, behind Namjoon and Hoseok. Sk’jin is amused when they angle their bodies a little inward, like they can’t help themselves from turning back to listen to the conversation. Or possibly to defend themselves- maybe both.

Because if anything, their weapons-specialist was the most confusing and displacing aspect of the entire mission. Anything he did or said was instantly scrutinized and analyzed in hopes of getting some form of reaction or reading from this nearly automated Being. Sk’jin is pretty sure he’s had better readings from actual automated constructs like Cyborgs and other minor Bots.

‘Mission dictated the amount of participants,’ is Yoongi’s reply.

Sk’jin feels like he’s looking at an Android or Cyborg that’s been installed with only a basic communication system without any of the more complex emotional response integrated into its core. Sk’jin is also extremely disconcerted with how he can’t sense this Being in front of him. All agents working under the GI were developed by the rogue Yisheng Directory to carry out their investigative needs and other requests that were no doubt of a sort that left lots of dead Beings behind. Sk’jin was in the presence of a Being who could effectively kill him, Hoseok, and Namjoon in a blink of an eye without any weapons and Sk’jin cannot sense him.

Sk’jin feels his temples pulse, and he absentmindedly rubs at it.

‘I see,’ Sk’jin replies, looking down at the Being with a charming smile.

There’s no effect. Not that Sk’jin was expecting any. He’s just surprised in general that he’s gotten any words out of him. In fact he’s very surprised any of the GI were still functional and roaming about.

‘How many others are there like you?’ Sk’jin asks, aware that he sounds a little insensitive.

‘There were 2,500 of what is known as the Galactic Inquisition. There are 1381 left, none are at mission-operation anymore.’ Yoongi replies, not the least phased or offended by Sk’jin’s question.

‘What about you?’ Sk’jin asks with some confusion. If none were at mission-operation level anymore, where did that leave Yoongi?

Hoseok actually turns to look around, curiosity etched all over his features.
Yoongi, for the first time throughout the entire day, turns to look Sk’jin straight in the eye.

‘I am.’

‘Oh- it’s you again- or is it? Uniform doesn’t ever change does it? Have a name you can give me?’

Object measurement 1.73 meters. GLA ???. Male. Unknown. Classified. Name: -.

‘Maybe a nickname? Codename! A lot of agents have those- most of the agents from the Infiltration unit have codenames don’t they?’

Object measurement 1.73 meters. GLA ???. Male. Unknown. Classified. Name: -.

‘I was unsure the first time- but I’m positive now- you’re one of the Galactic Inquisition agents aren’t you?’


‘Mission statement.’

‘Take a seat! This is interesting! I’ve never really met one of the GI before- this is amazing! Where in the Headquarters do they actually even manage to hide you?’


‘Do you want something to eat? Drink? I mean- do you eat at all?’


‘Mission statement.’

‘…it’s…a little uncomfortable for most when your face is covered in a helmet you know? It actually makes you stand out more.’

‘Mission statement.’

‘…hmm, well. I guess you’re just not one for conversations- that’s fine too right? Getting the job done is the most important thing after all. Conversation at most times is a task- but sometimes it’s a
true pleasure ain’t it?’

[RECEIVING DATA]

COORDINATES 91. 3466. 29. 1011

ORTANK X 7

DELIVERY

‘You got it?’

‘Mission accepted.’

‘All right! Good luck my nameless messenger!’

*Unknown term: “good luck!” - retrieve definition. Memory bank: cannot be found.*

Hoseok doesn’t understand Yoongi’s answer but apparently it seems to frighten Sk’jin because he turns pale with startling rapidity and Hoseok doesn’t know if it’s the lighting or a trick of his eye but Sk’jin suddenly seems to age. But it’s gone as quickly as it had come and Sk’jin looks just as unnaturally beautiful as before. And his expression of fright gives way into something else entirely which in turn makes Hoseok uneasy.

‘I understand perfectly,’ Sk’jin smiles sweetly. ‘Have you been living here at the Headquarters?’

‘Yes. For 2 sols,’ is Yoongi’s almost mechanical response.

‘A nice place to recover,’ Sk’jin glances around, looking up at the trees as though genuinely enjoying the scenery. ‘Were you living near the Earthian Memorial Asteroid Belt or at the docks in Mars?’

At this, even Namjoon turns to look back.

‘At the docks in Mars,’ Yoongi replies.

‘I am sorry for what happened,’ Sk’jin continues. ‘I believe you will find that we all share something in common Yoongi. We may all have much more in common that we all thought.’
Sk’jin looks at Hoseok and Namjoon with benign smiles, lifting his fair hands upwards, causing his robes to flutter a little from the motion. The sun shines through his fingers, pearlescent white blushing with a rosy hue from within. Hoseok swears he hears the minor chiming of bells. Sk’jin indicates to all of them in an almost royal manner, ‘We’re all lost boys here.’

Yoongi doesn’t reply to this but Sk’jin doesn’t seem nonplussed by it. Instead he’s smiling to himself, arms crossing behind him now, and a light graceful skip to his steps.

Yoongi was Human? Hoseok can’t help himself from taking another look at the GI agent behind him. He certainly fit the description of how Humans looked- but why would the GI have a Human agent with them? Humans did not fall under the list of Beings who were particularly famous for their abilities or skills. They had amongst the shortest life-span in all of the species living in the Known Universe. They were also among some of the weakest.

Hoseok’s entire family were members of the Venture Unit ever since the decay of their planet. His parents were both agents in the Venture Unit. His mother’s parents were also agents in the Venture Unit. And it continued on all the way back. And he’s pretty sure that he has a relative who worked on Earth, saving it from its death.

Humans were a frail and relatively young species. And now after the Gaia Case, were at a great risk of eventually entirely dying out as a species.

Hearing the news about the complete immobility of the GI agents wasn’t surprising. Hoseok knew about this because the Venture Unit was responsible for watching over them. The last time he’d heard any news about them, it had all come out with an extremely high level of failure and the continuation of their operation as an organization was beyond recovery. Whatever technology that sustained and maintained them left them completely defenseless in the face of reality.

So how was it that Yoongi, a Human, could be the sole conscious and functional agent left?

‘We’re here now,’ Namjoon says from the front. If the Kutsoglerin had any thoughts about this, it doesn’t show on his face.

Hoseok looks away from the confusing and contradicting duo behind him and focuses his attention on the “small” ship that suddenly appears as they take a sharp right along the garden path.

The Yisheng Hangar Bay is basically an open clearing in the dense forest, surrounded by trees that stand taller and thicker than the rest of the forest. There are low Hangars off to one side of the clearing but other than that, the area looks simply like a wide field of reeds.

The “small” ship is actually a rather large ship. Especially considering that it’s meant for only 4 Beings and a moderately sized cargo. But as Hoseok quickly scans the dark grey ship, he guesses that most of the mass of the ship was directly contributed by the Engines Rooms and possibly an entire hull dedicated to the fuselage, and Beamers and their coolant system. The engine-wings are massive, with a rotatable function allowing the ship to hover, and land without the need for a runway. The suspension tracks under the ship are almost overkill in Hoseok’s opinion- but judging by the overall size and design of the ship, Hoseok guesses it’s an extremely heavy ship. Hoseok would have preferred at least a week in advance to get used to the ship- maybe even dock it out in space rather than take off from within a planet. But seeing as Šerdesas had a forgiving atmosphere and the burn upon crossing the exosphere wasn’t too harsh on ships, it’s an ideal setting to test out the general feel of the ship.

As they get closer, Hoseok is able to read the model of the ship and isn’t too surprised that they’re getting the trial version of an updated Užkulisai-02. The Užkulisai was commonly used by the
Venture Unit by their Exploration Division; especially for alien-planet investigation. It’s built for durability and designed to survive almost every possible space-related anomaly as well as the entire spectrum of violent planetary/atmospheric/terrain-based events. You could fly this model into a volcano and come out relatively undamaged. It had one of the strongest shields known to the universe, able to deflect and even completely disintegrate asteroids. Though the Užkulisai carried within her enough fuel cell to power a small planet for a day, she was packed with solar-panels all along the top of the ship, providing the ship with the option of sustaining the ship with self-generated energy. If Hoseok isn’t mistaken, the Užkulisai also had its own gravity generator and ventilation system independent from the rest of the ship; so that if problems or issues were to rise from internal Systems, the gravity and ventilation systems could still function.

The Užkulisai-01 was so popular and used so widely that the idea of creating a second model seemed unnecessary and pointless. It had been declared the perfect ship all over the Universe. But Hoseok guesses they made it even more “perfect”. And to test whether or not it was actually perfect, they were going to be the test-dummies for this model while completing this mission.

They walk around to the back of the ship, where the ships entrance doors were. There were two doorways in the back, between them a large gateway that could be lowered into a ramp to drive up heavy cargo. Judging by what they were going to have to do, Hoseok guesses that they’ll find a bunch of terraforming vehicles as well as a Transporter or two for in-planet purposes.

‘Ooh! We’re well funded,’ Sk’jin comments from behind him as they look over the ship from the back. ‘Can you fly this ship Hoseokkie?’

Hoseok doesn’t know how to respond to the sudden nickname so he chooses to ignore it and nods, ‘It’s not a problem.’

And it’s not a lie either. Though never formally trained by the Spatial Piloting School in Raksane Tayi, Hoseok has had plenty of informal training his entire life and has flown several Užkulisai-01 models before.

‘Confidence- I like that,’ Sk’jin claps.

Hoseok feels a little patronized but he can’t call Sk’jin out on it.

‘Are there any procedures you would like to take before take-off?’ Namjoon asks, turning to address Hoseok.

‘None from the outside,’ Hoseok replies looking up at the magnificent ship.

‘How long until we leave Cap?’ Sk’jin asks, stretching and yawning with more grace and elegance than anyone yawning should be allowed to have.

Namjoon looks at Sk’jin with an expression of befuddlement.

‘Yes- I’m addressing you- you’re the Captain of our team and the ship,’ Sk’jin swings his arms a little, bell chimes following his movement. He cocks his head at Namjoon, a rather coy smile on his face as he asks, ‘Have you not heard of nicknames?’

‘Nicknames are used instead of formal names to portray and establish closeness and familiarity.’

Everyone’s heads turn so quickly Hoseok is surprised he doesn’t hear whiplash. Yoongi doesn’t seem fazed at all by the stares he’s getting for what he just said.

‘See? Even Yoongi here agrees,’ Sk’jin regards the dark-haired agent for a while before saying, ‘I
don’t have anything that comes to mind… but don’t worry I’ll come up with something for you!’

‘Thank you.’ Yoongi replies in monotone.

Sk’jin breaks out into laughter while Hoseok finds himself thrown in a loop. Nothing made sense.

‘If you don’t like Cap- I can just call you Nammie- suits you,’ Sk’jin looks like he’s about to give Namjoon a light nudge but the latter swiftly stepping aside and stands up to his full height.

Namjoon gives Sk’jin a hard look before saying in an even tone.

‘All right let’s all get this straight,’ Namjoon starts. ‘We are not on this mission to be close- this is an operation of utmost secrecy and importance. We are the minimum balance required to see to the missions success and that’s all we are. We are a team, yes. But that does not make us close. None of us want to be here and none of us want this to extend any more than it has to. And like you pointed out, yes, I am the Captain- so my first order for this team is to complete this mission as soon as possible.’

Sk’jin has an amused smirk on his face, regarding Namjoon with a slight tilt of his head. He chuckles a little before saying: ‘Pity your introduction was all an act- I thought you were quite the interesting fellow. I guess it’s only me and Yoongi here, right?’ Sk’jin glances down at Yoongi who remains completely impassive, as though he hadn’t heard Sk’jin at all.

‘Inside. Now.’ Namjoon barks before turning and walking up the ramp.

‘Ah- he’s the “all work, no play” kinda guy isn’t he?’ Sk’jin hums sympathetically before looking down at Hoseok. ‘Maybe we should try and hurry this up hmm Hoseokkie?’

For a brief moment, Sk’jin’s eyes glow red and Hoseok looks away at once.

‘Yeah- let’s start by getting inside the ship first.’

Sk’jin chuckles under his breath, waving along Yoongi who follows them in.

‘Ah! It’s you again! How are you today?’

‘Oh right! You’re not much of a talker. All work, no play eh?’

‘Mission statement.’

‘We’ve done this for years now- you know how it is. Take a seat! Please! Be more comfortable!’

To sit. Sit.

‘Oh- that was faster than last time. It’s like I’m teaching you something new!’


‘Or at least I hope I am.’


‘I guess you get to travel a lot. Do you enjoy it?’


‘I enjoy travelling too. But I haven’t been able to get away in a while- swamped with work. Though I guess travelling is part of your work.’


‘Mission statement.’

‘I bet you have great stories- maybe you can tell me some in the future?’


‘I can tell you some of mine when we have more time- you’re welcome to visit anytime.’


‘Or maybe I’m just not interesting enough-‘


‘Okay- so here’s today’s little delivery- a bit different this time around. It’s a retrieval. You can do that, right?’

[RECEIVING DATA]

COORDINATES 144. 8910. 3742. 4130. HNAM’DI

GENERAL HR’AME

NO WITNESS

‘Mission received.’

‘Great! Maybe next time we can have a drink together then eh?’

'Welcome to the Užkulisai, Captain Namjoon, Navigator. I am Lisai- the Užkulisai AI System under your command. How may I aid you today?'

Namjoon is a little taken aback as he enters the antechamber. The smooth automated voice fills the air in calming manner. Namjoon can’t quiet determine whether the voice is female or male- but it’s nonetheless pleasant and soothing to the ears. There had been a time when ship AI systems were built with responsive/vocal programs that sounded entirely too enthusiastic and cheerful. Luckily you could now choose and customize the vocal qualities of your AI system.

'I would like to be taken to my quarters Lisai,' Namjoon replies as he walks down the antechamber, taking note that it was an airlock room as well. There’s a mounted screen to the side, for manual operations for the door functions and airlock functions no doubt. They would all be connected to the Navigation Table in the Bridge. Namjoon makes a mental note to lock all of the
operational systems running within each screen and panel to the Navigation Table.

‘Your quarters are located in the Second Floor, Cabin 02. You may access the Second Floor by using either the Hull Lifts or the Hangar stairs.’

‘Thank you,’ Namjoon replies back absentmindedly as the doors open smoothly and the entire layout of the ship reveals itself to him.

The interior of the ship is clean and minimal. The walls are white, smooth, and minimally designed. The corners are cut smooth and curved, creating a fluid appearance to the walls. The lighting is strong without being harsh and barely casts any shadows- it almost feels dimensionless.

The wall to the side lights up with an interactive map of the ship. A pale blue light lights up from where Namjoon guesses he’s standing and creates a thin line of blue indicating the path he should follow. Namjoon quickly studies the map, memorizing the placement of the rooms. He finds that the hallway he’s in is one of the arms of the large U-shaped hallway that wraps around the Hangar Bay and the ramp-gate. Though massive, the ship comprised of only 3 living/working levels; the rest were dedicated to the Engines or storage. There were a total of 20 “cabins”, a large space that made up a kitchen/dining space. There were 4 Medical Bays and a laboratory located behind the Hangar Bay, and a few Emergency MedPods located across the ship. The Bridge occupied the highest floor, a large unit where a large piloting team could easily fit yet a small one could easily control. Namjoon notes that the Navigation Table is located directly behind and above the Cockpit, overseeing that section.

Making sure he didn’t overlook anything on the map, Namjoon walks down the hall and finds the First Lobby. There are sturdy but narrow stairs leading upwards. And towards the middle of the U-shaped hall, the Hull Lift. There were comfortable couches strewn about and shelves put around at random. Namjoon guesses these would be nice accommodations if they would ever get around to using them. Flying to Bhumi itself won’t take too long. Not if they travel in warp after they leave the Raksane Tayi System. Lmiura had said the entire trip would take approximately a little more than an average sol but Namjoon would prefer to have it down under a sol.

Glancing around the Lobby, Namjoon spots a few cameras planted into the walls. The surveillance feed would be sent to the Navigation Table, unless it was designed differently. Namjoon forgoes the Hull Lift and takes the stairs up instead.

The floor upstairs has the same general layout. But instead of doorways opening into a series of Medical Bays, the space beyond the Second Lobby is open and sinks downwards a little, forming a semi-circle shelf of steps leading down to a large rounded table. There are seats placed around the table and attached in front of each seat is a screen. At the center is what Namjoon recognizes as a 3D projector not unlike the inbuilt projector pillars available in Navigation Tables. This was clearly a meeting-table of sorts. And right above the table is a ceiling window the exact same size of the table. Beyond this sunken circle a large kitchen area. From what Namjoon can tell it’s quite fully stocked and opens into the view of the Yisheng Headquarters in the distance. The whole area is brightly lit with both natural light from the wide window towards the end and from daylight-imitation fixtures overhead. There are no concrete hallways, just short stretches of walls to separate the Lobby area from immediately reaching each doorstep. Namjoon glances to his left and sure enough etched in glowing blue over a metallic plaque are the numbers 02 next to a doorway.

‘Cabin doorways are secured by passwords. You can set your own password by using the Cabin Security system inside.’

‘That’s good to know,’ Namjoon mumbles as his doors open for him. It’s a basic room, fitted with a low bed built into alcove to the side of the room. The alcove could transform into a bunk too-
Namjoon spots the slot from where you could pull out a secondary tier to create a bunk. On one side a simple desk and chair are fixed into the floor and to its side is a built-in rack. Namjoon didn’t bring a lot of things with him- just some clothes to change in and out of. But he spies a few hangers already carrying some clothing. Upon closer inspection, Namjoon finds a fully detailed, customized Navigator’s uniform. Of course, if this was a “family business” then he should be a legally qualified Navigator with a proper uniform. Other than that, he finds other pieces of clothing. Lmiura wasn’t kidding when she said everything was prepared for them in order to enjoy at least basic luxuries.

He steps away from the rack and slides open another doorway to reveal a moderately sized and equipped en-suite. Namjoon inspects each cupboard and drawer, keeping a list of the contents.

Walking back into his room, Namjoon makes a beeline for his Cabin-customized screen and reaches for his own screen. He had already created an extension to add to his room’s security. He had even built an entire security system in case the rooms didn’t come with one. Namjoon wanted the comfort of being able to rest and think in the privacy and safety of his room if things got too intense. And judging by who were in his team, Namjoon feels like he was going to really need it.

‘Lisai, can you send the Navigation Table settings and functions to Cabin-02’s customized screen?’

‘Understood Captain. However, holographic projections will be entirely compromised.’

‘That’s fine- I only want the security feed.’

As he waits for the extension to upload into the security system, Namjoon expands the cabin’s screen setting to project onto the wall over his bed.

‘Lisai please pull up live security feed,’ Namjoon orders as he finishes the last steps of his extension installment.

‘Security feed uploading. Would you like audio as well?’

‘That would be great, thank you.’ Namjoon replies as he reassigns a new password for his room as well as establishing a security password on the Navigation Table. The password was only for show of course- what would matter the most would be a scan of his neural and artery print to unlock any of his security measurements. Namjoon was in control of Navigation, so he was going to make damn sure that only he would be in control of it.

‘Feed uploaded.’

‘Please located team members.’ Namjoon calls out as he starts downloading the rest of the ship’s control system into his screen.

‘Head Pilot Hoseok is in Cabin-05. Communications Manager Sk’jin is in Medical Bay 3. Weapons Specialist Yoongi is in the Bridge.’

Three separate camera feeds light up on his wall.

The feed outside of Hoseok’s room occupies Camera-081. Obviously for privacy reasons there would be no cameras inside the Cabins. Out of all his team members, Namjoon finds Hoseok the least worrisome. Despite being Lal Haenoon’s candidate for this mission, and being a renowned Infiltration field agent, Hoseok didn’t pose too great of an immediate threat in Namjoon’s mind. Or perhaps he was being sidetracked by the other two who were very much a large threat in Namjoon’s thoughts.
‘Lisai, which Cabins are Sk’jin and Yoongi living in?’

‘Communications Manager has been issued Cabin-01, and Weapon’s Specialist has been issued Cabin-03.’

So, he was next-door neighbours with the GI agent. Great.

Namjoon glances over at the second camera feed. Sk’jin is inspecting the Medical-Bed, pale rosy hands expertly navigating the functions as he hums under his breath. He seemed altogether too happy to be in this mission.

‘Lisai does the Medical Bay have a security operation regarding its medical presets?’

‘Yes.’

‘If anyone were to try and tamper with it, would there be a breach in the system and an alarm rung?’

‘Yes. All Medical Bays are fixed with an internal security system that alerts the ship when there is a breach. This is the basis for the biohazard breach.’

‘Okay, thanks.’

Namjoon’s distrust towards Sk’jin was probably never going to change or subdue over time. There was something about the Khol’isa that disturbed and perplexed Namjoon. First of all, despite being a Khol’isa, Namjoon couldn’t find any indication of his species’ characteristic horns. This was in itself, unheard of. And he knows how the Khol’isa take pride in their own people and never marry outside of their own species. So any theory of Sk’jin being half-Khol’isa could be crossed out immediately. Second of all, his position within the ship was both unnecessary and entirely forced by K’mara, clearly. There was no dire need for a “Region-expert”. Namjoon himself would be able to provide all the necessary information required and needed to navigate towards and through Bhumi. And as for Communications Manager, they could have always installed an AI system for that, or Hoseok could easily multi-task that job seeing as it was the Head-Pilot’s duty to interact with Docks and Control Towers in the first place. A Communications Manager was just a middleman that they could do without.

Obviously, K’mara’s involvement with Sk’jin’s addition into the mission added to Namjoon’s distrust in the Khol’isa- but there was something distinctly off about their “Region-expert” and Namjoon wasn’t buying any of his smiles for a second.

Tearing his eyes away from the second feed where Sk’jin was now touching up his hair on a reflective surface behind the Medical-Bed, it takes the Kutsoglerin a solid 15 seconds to spot Yoongi.

Namjoon has never met a Being with as little physical presence as the GI agent. No amount of training taught you how to diminish your presence to that extent. And there was nothing that made him stick to your mind. While you were still reeling from the shock of discovering him, you would entirely forget he was there in the first place. Was this because of how they were created? Was this the result of the hyper-reality in which they were mobilized?

Namjoon shudders at the very idea of it. He’s not surprised to hear that the rest of the surviving GI agents were all immobilized.

Yoongi was perusing a screen mounted on a wall. He looked like a statue. His stillness was unnatural. He just blended in with his surroundings so easily it was disconcerting to say the least.
Even now, Namjoon has to consciously remind himself he was looking at a real living Being and not just some random segment of the wall. Yoongi isn’t even wearing clothing that would make him blend with the white interior of the room. He was clad fully in black.

There were few who knew the details behind the GI and their creation. All Namjoon knows is what the special court was told. Details regarding their creation and history were sealed and classified beyond what even K’mara or Lal Haenoon could touch. And Namjoon very much doubts that Yoongi would tell him anything regarding his background or previous life.

But moving past Yoongi’s dubious past, or at least moving to another section of it- he was from Earth? Or was at least developed using Human DNA. But why Human? It made no sense. And he was living in the Docks off of Mars? Doing what? And what was he doing here at the Yisheng Headquarters for two sols?

‘I am.’

His response to Sk’jin’s questions made no sense. He also didn’t refer to himself as a member of the GI. But he clearly was. And Sk’jin’s reaction hadn’t gone unnoticed by him either. And how did Sk’jin know? Was this because he was a Khol’isa? But Namjoon hasn’t heard of his species having extra-refined “Species Identifying” abilities. What did he know that Namjoon didn’t? The GIU never got their hands on the GI, so any information regarding Yoongi and his background or the rest of the information regarding the GI would be unknown to them. And seeing as how the “big three” (as Namjoon likes to mentally address the GIU, Venture Unit, and the Yisheng Headquarters) were in high tension with each other, it was safe to assume that there had been no sharing of information.

While Namjoon was able to label how he regarded Sk’jin and Hoseok, he cannot come to any form of conclusion towards Yoongi.

Namjoon watches the two camera-feeds side-by-side.

‘Lisai- perform a health scan on team member Yoongi.’

‘Scanning.’

Sk’jin is now in the laboratory, hands crossed behind his back as he regards some of the operation units and isolation tanks used to study and inspect foreign or alien matter. He carefully puts his hands inside the flexible gloved space of the isolation tank and seems extremely amused as he uses his gloved hands to pick up the instruments that lay inside of it.


Namjoon scans the other camera feed but doesn’t find Yoongi in it. Wondering if it’s a trick of his eye, Namjoon looks into the screen closely.

‘Lisai, please find Yoongi.’ Namjoon calls out as he steps back from the wall.

‘Team member Yoongi found.’

The feed shifts to another angle of the Hangar and Namjoon takes a moment to find the Human. Yoongi is staring straight into the camera.

Namjoon nearly falls backward in shock. His pulse races and a shudder runs down his spine.
‘Captain Namjoon. You are experiencing a sudden spike in your pulse-rate. Please calm down.’

Namjoon watches with purposefully deep and controlled breaths as Yoongi looks away and proceeds to walk out of the Hangar.

‘Lisai- are the Comm-Devices installed with tracking applications?’ Namjoon asks, his own voice sounding strained to his ears.

‘Yes Captain.’

‘Good- please notify me whenever Yoongi is 3 meters within me.’

‘Understood Captain.’

‘Good evening! I almost thought you weren’t going to make it today! How are you?’


‘Mission statement.’

‘Okay look- honestly I counted, and it’s been 5 years now that we’ve known each other. You’ve completed 31 missions on my behalf and the only thing you ever say to me is “mission statement”. I don’t even have a name to address you with. You gotta help me out here.’


‘Names are good- makes everyone comfortable if you have a name. Makes you more “alive”.’


‘I even have a bunch of aliases you know? Nothing serious of course- helps sometimes to do things under an alias- names can be too implementing. Legal procedures and all that.’


‘I mean- I don’t even know what you look like…what if we’ve walked past each other and I had no idea?’

‘You can you know, remove your helmet. I won’t tell anyone and I think you’re perfectly safe in here.’


‘I mean it’s up to you of course- or unless it’s against the rules or something.’


‘Or maybe you’re really not allowed to talk with me, haha, and you’re just indulging me? Is that what it is?’


‘If that’s so then I guess I won’t pressure you. But like, give me a nickname so that I can address you appropriately or something.’


‘Or not? Hhm…I guess- oh!’

Removal in process. Do not disengage. Removal in process. Do not disengage. Removal in process-

‘There you go! Bet that feels better doesn’t it? You’ve got a good face- pity you have to hide it all the time.’

‘Term: pity-…’

‘Oh-…oh wow?! You just - oh. Do you…do you understand me? Do you understand what I’m saying?’

‘Term: understand-…’

‘A-Are you all right? Wait was the helmet supposed to be helping you or-‘

‘Mission statement.’

‘-hey, come on. Look at me- I think you do understand me. Do you know how to answer?’

‘Term: Understand.’

‘Who are you?’

‘Object measurement 1.73 meters. GLA. Male. Unknown. Classified. Name: -.’

‘No- I meant…do you mind if I take a scan?’

‘Object measurement 1.73 meters. GLA. Male. Unknown. Classified. Name: -.’

‘…I’m just going to use this. To just scan you. Understand who you are. All right?’

‘Term: Understand.’

‘…I’ll take that as a yes…’

‘Term: Yes.’
‘So- Spaces, wow. Wait a minute this can’t be right? But…you’re Human?’

‘Term: Human.’

‘…did you know this?’

‘Mission statement.’

‘Why Human? Were you born on Earth?’

‘Mission statement.’

‘…all right…uh, here- oh, I guess you do need the helmet then.’

[RECEIVING DATA]

COORDINATES 8201. 560. 9332. 03. OS’NEB

ORTANK X 8

DELIVERY

‘Mission received.’

‘…I’ll see you next time then. Good luck.’


* 

The Bridge of the Užkulisai-02 is a massive set with three tiers. The lowest was at the helm of the ship, the artillery controls panel otherwise commonly referred to as the tower-mast for no logical reason. It was a small space designed to fit in 3 seats from where every defensive/offensive weapon or firepower available to the ship could be controlled. This is where Yoongi will be stationed most times. Hoseok can only hope he won’t be required to actually actively use it for this trip.
The second lowest right above this space is the cockpit. It’s wider than the tower-mast with five seats and a complex dashboard sprawling around each seat. A secondary dashboard is located on the flip-side of the first, designed for manual operations and control in case of an emergency situation that required manual piloting. This is Hoseok’s area of expertise and control and as he walks around the seats, checking each console and rigging, he feels like he has a definitive purpose amidst the suddenness of this rather mad mission.

The highest tier expands out towards the rest of the Bridge. Control boards and the interface for every working system in the ship is set around the third tier. There are a few foot-ups set about, unattached to the any of the operational units. Sk’jin is relaxing on one of them in a very leisurely manner- a feat, considering foot-ups are at best, temporary seats to relieve your feet when you’re tired (as the name suggests). It’s made entirely out of a strong fluoropolymer, structured more or less like a tall stool. It was made with the intention of providing floor-occupants because during the evolution of ships and their designs, the Bridges were built to be of a specific size and no more unless the Captain of the ship declared that they needed more floor. And thus foot-ups were invented to make up excuses to that you could create more space than allowed by the first blueprints and since then has been integrated into every possible ship. So it’s not the best or the most comfortable place to sit, yet Sk’jin sits on it like it’s a throne. He’s taken off his outer robe to reveal a simpler linen robe tied and kept together around the waist with a slim band of fabric a shade darker than the green of his robes. Even like this, Sk’jin looks far more elegant and poised than anyone Hoseok has seen. It also didn’t help that the sun was shining down on them, filtering through some of the massive tree branches that extended into the Yisheng Hangar Bay. Bathed in shifting lights, Sk’jin is a living breathing work of art.

Sunlight filters into the Bridge through the massive interactive HUD spaceshield overhead. It spans from the lowest tier to the highest, curving back and ending right above Navigator’s Mast. Namjoon is standing there, his back to the massive spaceshield behind him, facing them over his seat and the Navigation Pillar.

Surrounding Namjoon in a divided ring is the Navigation Table. It’s an upgraded model that is slimmer and smaller than the traditional standard Table. And rather than the traditional rectangular shape, the latest design has the Navigation Table transformed into a ring. It tilts a little, forming an angled screen for better accessibility and interface. And at the center of this is a narrow pillar, used to project 3D holographic maps that can be adjusted in dynamic space. It’s from this elevated dais that the HUD could be activated for both the pilot and the weapon specialist.

Hoseok glances over at Namjoon who is looking down at what seemed to be his own NaviLet instead of the issued standard NaviLet that was still attached to the side of the pillar. He makes a few taps around the screen before looking up to acknowledge them all briefly.

‘Before we start I think it’s best if we establish some rules and establish a routine of sorts. I have a few requirements I want to address first and I would like everyone to comply in order so that we may all have a safe and successful mission.’

Namjoon looks over them one by one again, as though looking for any defiance or resistance. All he gets is a nod from Yoongi and a smirk from Sk’jin.

‘First of all, everyone will wear the Comm-Devices and will never under any circumstance remove it.’ Namjoon holds out his hand and on his palm are little silver cuffs. They gleam faintly in his palm, highlighting a small ring of colour at the edge of each cuff. Yoongi is the first to move, picking up the cuff with a white band across the cuff. Sk’jin moves next, eyes never leaving Namjoon’s as he drags the tips of his finger from Namjoon’s barely exposed wrist down his palm before picking up a cuff with a red ring around it. Namjoon doesn’t even blink in response to…to
whatever Sk’jin was trying to do and extends his palm towards Hoseok who picks up the cuff with a blue ring around it. Namjoon already has his, ringed with black and attached to his ear.

‘Second of all, the Bridge should never be left empty. One of us always has to man the Bridge. I believe you have all met Lisai, the AI System. Though I have no doubt that she’s more than capable of warning us if we encounter any issue, it would be best if at least one of us is always stationed here. I’ve asked Lisai to set up a schedule based on our sleep-cycles and allotted extra-curricular time. Please fill out your details and submit them into the ship’s system and we can work out a schedule.’ Namjoon produces 3 other screens from the Table behind him. ‘Along with the Comm-Devices, here are the ship’s customized screens. The form you need to fill out is already on your screens.’

‘Why is your screen different? Aren’t you supposed to use a NaviLet?’ Sk’jin asks as he takes the screen from Namjoon.

‘I am using the NaviLet as well as my own screen to oversee the proceedings across the ship’s system. As we are few in numbers, I want to maximize and expand the safeguard that we can stretch over this ship.’ Namjoon replies without sparing a glance at Sk’jin. ‘And third, I’m aware that we are all here from very different background, working conditions, and personal beliefs. And as the Captain it is my duty to make sure everything works out smoothly. If there are any issues, matters of concern, questions, or information that will help with the mission, please come to me and we can all discuss it as a team.’

‘Team work!’ Sk’jin cheers from where he’s perched. ‘I love it!’

Hoseok can’t tell if he’s being sarcastic or not. Apparently, Namjoon can’t tell either.

‘All right- here is the trajectory we’re going to take to Bhumi,’ Namjoon reaches over to tap the pillar in the center. Automatically the lighting in the Bridge dims a little, the glass in the spaceshield darkens to minimize the sunlight. The top of the pillar glows before it expands outwards like a bubble and forms a massive glittering map of the galaxy Raksane Tayi was located in.

‘We’re here,’ Namjoon points at a region that glows a pale blue. ‘And Bhumi is here.’

The holograph shrinks, revealing 4 other galaxies before a pale orange glow lights up towards the edge of one of the galaxies.

‘I have plotted out 3 different sets of trajectories that will take us to Bhumi in approximately 3-4 months if we travel in warp without any interruptions or delays,’ Namjoon says as he taps on his screen. Three lines of pale blue light up and in completely different directions, lead up to the orange glow. ‘I have also plotted a few rogue trajectories, not to mention our “official” trip to Matlaab which is here.’

A red glow lights up some distance from Bhumi, within the galaxy it bordered.

‘So which trajectory do we take?’ Hoseok asks as he follows each line carefully.

‘That’s up to you,’ Namjoon replies, easily handing him his own screen. Hoseok senses the way Sk’jin’s eyes flit over this interaction. ‘Please select which route you would like to take and we will begin on that. Does anyone have any additional input, anything that might have to do with their expertise?’

Namjoon very lightly puts an emphasis on the word ‘expertise’. It’s clearly directed at Sk’jin who
only tilts his head a little as he regards Namjoon with an amused expression.

‘Hoseok? Anything?’ Namjoon asks.

Hoseok looks up from Namjoon’s screen. He’s done an excellent job creating the trajectories. Minimum check-in spots, mostly all Docks, and no in-planet landing up until Matlaab which won’t be happening in the first place. They’re also all routes that are fairly used, but not too trade-heavy either.

‘Does anyone else know how to pilot?’ Hoseok asks instead.

Namjoon immediately shakes his head.

‘Not a part of my skill-set I’m afraid,’ Sk’jin replies as he steps close to the holographic map and zooms in rather randomly into a planet.

‘I have basic piloting skills.’ Yoongi replies.

‘Though it won’t be necessary and hopefully the situation will not arise, I will have to count on you to be my co-pilot,’ Hoseok nods at Yoongi. The Human GI agent just looks blankly at him for a moment before asking, ‘In what situations will I be expected to aid you Head Pilot Hoseokkie.’

Sk’jin chokes noisily while Namjoon turns his head so quickly Hoseok hears a distinct crick.

‘Um-’ Hoseok manages to say while Sk’jin turns away from the Mast hand covering his mouth as his shoulders shake from suppressed laughter. Yoongi is still looking at him with a blank look before asking him: ‘Do you not like the nickname?’

Sk’jin apparently can’t control himself anymore and lets out a loud ‘ha!’ before he’s nearly hunched over the foot-up he had been sitting on.

‘I um- no it’s uh fine,’ Hoseok says, because honestly what else is he supposed to say at this point. ‘Situations for example in an emergency where a manual takeover is required and the balance of the ship needs to be maintained. This ship is designed for easy use by a small amount of crew- but there can be situational problems that may require you to help me maintain the internal balance of the ship so that I can fly it.’

‘Understood, Head Pilot Hoseokkie.’

Sk’jin, who had somewhat recovered, falls back into a fit of uncontrollable laughter and is nearly on the floor from the force of his laughter. Namjoon gives the Khol’isa a look of disdain before addressing the former GI agent.

‘Do you have anything you wish to add?’

‘Please do not breach security protocol under any circumstance.’

‘Of course,’ Namjoon nods. ‘Is that all?’

‘Yes Cap.’

Namjoon gives Yoongi a sort of grimace that Hoseok guesses is his attempt at smiling before he addresses Hoseok again.

‘Have you decided upon which course you would like to take-’
‘You haven’t asked me if I have anything to contribute though?’ Sk’jin butts in, feigning innocent surprise though Sk’jin was probably expecting the Kutsoglerin to ignore him.

‘Yes, Sk’jin, do enlighten us,’ Namjoon says, his voice tight.

‘In the occasion where we get into trouble or are about to get into trouble, I would entreat all of you to take the diplomatic approach of negotiation,’ Sk’jin requests glibly. ‘Negotiations and communications is my field of expertise and I daresay I can confidently talk us out of any situation.’

‘Is that it?’ Namjoon asks pointedly.

Sk’jin nods gracefully.

‘All right then- Hoseok?’ Namjoon turns to look at him.

‘Trajectory 3,’ Hoseok replies, handing Namjoon back his screen.

‘Got it,’ Namjoon nods, looking pleased at Hoseok’s choice. ‘I’ll set up the ship. Everyone to their stations in 10 minutes. We leave in 15.’

‘Yes Captain,’ Sk’jin salutes Namjoon with a flourish and a wink that the latter ignores in favor of tapping along the screen.

‘Come on Yoongi- I feel like you and I are gonna get along really well!’ Hoseok hears Sk’jin say as he walks down the stairs to the cockpit. ‘You can call me Jin!’

Hoseok settles into his seat. The strange buzzing under his skin still hasn’t stopped. It’s the same sensation he gets in the height of on one of his own missions- but it’s intensified and he’s never felt it before the mission even starts. They haven’t even formally started on their mission and Hoseok feels like he’s seconds from diving into a war-zone.

He activates the dashboard in front of him, leaning against the control-shafts as he waits for the central command board to fully switch on. He sighs heavily, gripping the controls and familiarizing himself with the cool feel of the metal under his fingers.

They hadn’t even left Šerdesas and Hoseok can’t wait for this mission to be over.

*
'Spaces! Oh god- is that you? Fuck, I nearly had a heart attack!'

‘Who are you?’

‘What-? Wait, how did you even get in? I didn’t hear the alarm-‘

‘Who are you?’

‘…I…I didn’t ask for you. Did something happen? Did something happen with the previous delivery? But that was over 3 months ago…’

‘Who are you?’

‘…do you maybe want to take a seat? You’re a guest now, I suppose-! Not on the floor…- that’s all right too I guess…’

‘Who are you?’

‘I’m Zhoumi…I um, thought you knew that?’

‘Who are you?’

‘…I just…I just am.’

‘Unknown term.’

‘Wait- wait! Sit down! I have a name for you!’

‘Name.’

‘Yes- I have a name for you, hahaha.’

‘Name.’

‘Right- well you see, I know someone. He has two Humans in his ship and I did some research on names. Most Humans come with 2 names. This is apparently the norm on Earth. It can increase to as many as 6-7 as well though that’s a little rare and bit too excessive if you ask me. So I found a registry of Human names. There’s a lot. But I managed to narrowed it down to a region. You bear quite a lot of resemblance to the Humans I know- feature wise, at least. So I guess I’m not too far off in guessing you’re from the same general region. Are you excited to know what name I’ve picked for you?’

‘Term: Excited.’

‘I’ll take that as a yes. What do you think about “Yoongi”?’

‘Name.’

‘Yoongi. If you want it. I have a few more but I thought it was a nice sounding name. It has a good flow to it. What do you think?’
Yoongi.

‘Yes- it originally means luminous or luster I believe. I thought it would create a sort of nice contradiction with the uniform.’

‘Object measurement 1.73 meters. GLA. Male. Human. Name: Yoongi.’

‘So you like it! That’s good to know, Yoongi.’

‘Who are you?’

‘I am Zhoumi. Who are you?’

‘Object measurement 1.73 meters. GLA. Male. Human. Name: Yoongi.’

‘You’re …not an object Yoongi- you’re alive aren’t you? A living Being?’

‘Term: Alive.’

‘Yes. You’re a part of this universe. You have Life-force in you. You’re alive. You’re a Being. Isn’t that what they teach you in the Yisheng Headquarters?’

‘Object measurement 1.73 meters. GLA. Male. Human. Name: Yoongi.’

‘…I guess you’ll get around to it eventually…right Yoongi?’

‘Yoongi.’

‘I guess you really do like it. Do you want something to drink? Water…um, yes or no?’

‘No.’

‘So…Yoongi. Why are you here?’

‘Question. Mission statement.’

‘But I don’t have a mission for you.’

‘Question. Mission statement.’

‘…you mean, who am I?.’

‘Who are you.’

‘…I don’t know exactly how to answer that…I just. I just am. I was born and raised in Long-Huo. I um. I have a family- parents, and a younger sister. I um, like to read books, preferably from Long-Huo. I like baths. Hot baths to be specific. They’re better for my talons anyways. Do you have anything that you like to do? Do you have a family?’

‘Term: Family. Unknown.’

‘…so you’re an orphan? I’m sorry if that’s insensitive of me.’

‘Term: Unknown.’

‘…Yoongi. Where were you born? I know you’re Human. But were you born on Earth?’

‘Awake?…okay…um, how did you join the GI?’


‘Is there place you go back to? What do you do there? Where do you come from?’

‘Dream.’

‘…dream?…I don’t understand…Yoongi why are you here?’


‘Can I…can I take a look at your helmet? Is that all right-? Oh, thank you.’

‘Mission statement.’

‘I-…Yoongi. I don’t have a mission for you. You came here on your own.’

‘Mission statement.’

‘…I do. I do have a mission for you. Come back tomorrow night. And bring your helmet with you again. Got it?’

‘Mission accepted.’

‘…good. This is good.’

‘Good luck.’

‘Yeah…I guess you’ll need it. I’ll need it too.’

*

Object measurement 1.73 meters. GLA ?? Male. Unknown. Classified. Name: - .

Chapter End Notes

I am offended by the new practice video. You know, it’s totally not my favorite Japanese song from BTS and I totally haven’t watched Min Yoongi focus videos for this song. It’s fine. Everything is a-ok! It’s great. Haha. How was everyone’s week?

*is not sweating nervously*
AND HAPPY GAY PRIDE MONTH AYO
*flies purple grey black flag*
“Self “ [noun]: a person's essential being that distinguishes them from others.

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

‘I’m happy that you came.’


‘Mission statement.’

‘Well…this is…an assignment I’m giving you. To do on your own. Do you think you can do that?’

‘Mission accepted.’

‘Good…I want to be able to talk to you…understand what…what you are.’


‘I’ve been doing some research- but I haven’t come across…well, I haven’t come across anything that explains anything to me- and Tlun’hla didn’t answer any of my questions…I hope you can help me.’


‘I don’t know where you go back to- or where you come from. But I think…I think it would be better if you did this somewhere that wasn’t where you go back to. You can check the files here if you choose to. I won’t be home until after tomorrow, so you can stay here if you want.’


‘So here is the “mission”- I noticed that your helmet has a port that’s similar to the ones on Androids- I’m not too sure what’s going on but I think this might help you- and it will help me understand too.’

‘Mission received.’

‘All right then- I’ll be going now. Make yourself at home all right?’


[RECEIVING DATA]

[NEW SOFTWARE DETECTED: PROCEED/ CANCEL]
Proceed.

[ANDROID CORE CODE]

Read.

[COMPATIBLE WITH HYPER-DREAM SUBJUGATION COMPONENT “E”]

Proceed.

[DOWNLOAD?]...Yes.

[SOFTWARE ILLEGAL: OVERRIDE/CANCEL]

Override.

“This is Head-Pilot Hoseok of the Užkulisai-02. Authorization Code 0182-9914-8107, docking at the Yisheng Hangar Bay code YSH-022-183. Are we at green?’

“This is Officer Nir of the Šerdesas Space-Traffic Control. You are at green.’

‘Thank you,’ Hoseok replies, turning to look up from the cock-pit, giving Namjoon a nod.

‘Captain’s log. Everyone report.’ Namjoon barks out from the Mast.


Hoseok activates the engines to full thrust and the collective atmosphere of the entire ship is charged with the change in motion and movement that is triggered the moment they’re in the air. The take-off is entirely smooth, no heavy pull-back, no drag in the wings, and no atmospheric compression in Hoseok’s ear. Cabin pressure was maintaining flawlessly, their own internal gravity mechanism working to detach them from Šerdesas’s gravity pull, and the Beamers were practically purring. Hoseok eyes all the stable system checks with a relieved feeling, though briefly wondering why he felt apprehensive to start off with.
The forest around the Yisheng Headquarters blurs out into a massive blob of green before patching off into smaller segments before giving way to mountains and then massive stretches of the capital city.

Hoseok notes how Yoongi is staring down, watching with what Hoseok guesses is fascination.

‘Šerdesas always looks pretty neat from up here doesn’t it?’ Hoseok wonders if there’s any point trying to strike up a conversation with the former GI agent.

‘This is the first time I’m seeing it,’ Yoongi replies.

‘…really?’ Hoseok asks, feeling stunned. The GI used to be facilitated in the Yisheng Headquarters or in one of the large Venture Unit Motherships that patrolled unchartered space-borders. Hoseok is pretty sure Yoongi has travelled in and out of Šerdesas many times already.

Of course now the whole bunch of them were situated in the new Venture Unit Headquarters here in Šerdesas though Hoseok himself has never been there. He’s not too sure about what goes on in there.

‘Beamers are holding, all systems are at green,’ Sk’jin calls from his corner.

‘Approaching Šerdesas’s exosphere at 15000 knots, please brace for impact.’ Hoseok calls out, quickly eyeing the screen indicator for safety belt activation. All 4 were set to green.

The sky over Šerdesas was famed for its mauve hues, interlaced with an consistently visible canopy of stars and an asteroid belt that stretched nearly all the way around Raksane Tayi glimmered even during daytime.

‘Activating filters and deflection shields,’ Hoseok comments.

‘We will be leaving Šerdesas in 5…4…’ Namjoon starts counting.

‘3…2…and 1.’

There’s barely any drag against the atmosphere of the Šerdesas as they pull out entirely. The massive planet eclipses downwards, creating a magnificent contrast of glowing lights rimmed with a faint golden light blushing with mauve from the core against the backdrop of space.

‘Checking all systems-‘ Hoseok calls out, glancing over at every screen. ‘And we’re clear.’

Sk’jin cheers from where he sits and undoes his safety belt before quickly making his way down to the tower-mast. He sits next to Yoongi and starts engaging him in conversation.

Hoseok watches as Sk’jin goes on a seemingly endless chatter about food of all things, asking Yoongi his favorites, his dislikes, and isn’t in the very least perturbed by the fact that Yoongi doesn’t always respond except for a nod, a shake of head, and a shrug.

It was hard to believe anything Sk’jin did. Even if it weren’t for this mission, Hoseok feels like he would probably question everything about the Khol’isa just because of his personality. So now with him apparently “befriending” Yoongi, Hoseok can’t help but take the entire action down to darker motives.

The GIU, meaning Admiral K’mara, had been extremely disappointed when they lost custody over the remaining GI operations. So any study, information, or analysis conducted and based on the GI was strictly Venture Unit property, the GIU were kept out of loop. And knowing the nature of Lal
Haenoon and K’mara’s relationship, it was a given that the Venture Unit were being purposefully obtuse when it came to sharing that data.

The GIU were a highly trained, military unit under the GLA. If they had agents or soldiers from the GI then their efficiency and overall potential as a task force would increase exponentially. So while it made sense that the GIU should have been granted custody over the GI, they were handed over to the Venture Unit so that they could be studied and basically locked up, never to be “used” again.

And seeing as how Sk’jin was a direct member of K’mara’s inner circle- what if all he was doing right now in regards to Yoongi was to somehow rope the Human in and have him voluntarily hand himself over to the GIU? Yoongi was a live Being, no matter how dubious his past or creation was, and that meant he instantly had his own rights as an individual. And seeing as how he had his own authorization code and was a legal citizen of Raksane Tayi, it meant Yoongi was a Being free to choose and do whatever he wanted.

And being the only “operative” GI agent awake, what if Yoongi does decide to “choose” the GIU over the Venture Unit or Yisheng Directory, and his word is taken as statement to represent all of the other GI agents and they’re handed over the GIU? Hoseok shudders to think what sort of power K’mara would have if they were handed the GI.

So was that why K’mara had Sk’jin placed in the mission? To somehow lure Yoongi to his side?

‘-about you Hoseokkie?’ Sk’jin asks, turning to look up at Hoseok with a beautiful smile.

‘Sorry what was that?’ Hoseok asks after a few seconds of realizing he’d been too caught up thinking.

‘Yoongi and I were discussing our favorite foods!’ Sk’jin explains. Hoseok hears Namjoon snort faintly behind him. ‘Do you have a favorite?’

‘Not particularly no,’ Hoseok replies.

‘Just like Yoongi then!’ Sk’jin nods thoughtfully before addressing the Human again. ‘Don’t worry! I’ll help you figure out what food you like or not.’ Then he glances higher up, a smirk on his face as he addresses Namjoon.

‘What about you Nammie? What do you like to eat?’

‘I don’t eat,’ is Namjoon’s simple reply.

The look of surprise is probably the most genuine expression Hoseok has seen on Sk’jin’s face while addressing Namjoon. It seems like Sk’jin has no further question and he turns away, discussing variety in drinks now to Yoongi.

Hoseok has never heard of the Kutsoglerin not eating. It seemed odd that they wouldn’t- they certainly weren’t amongst some of the solar-synthesis dependent species who didn’t have to absorb their nutrients from food but rather only from sunlight. From all that Hoseok remembered about their dietary habits was that they had one and that was it.

Hoseok wonders if it might be prying if he were to ask. He might have to wait for Sk’jin to pry but for now he keeps mum.

‘We will be approaching warp-zone in 18 hours. Has everyone filled in their schedule details?’ Namjoon asks as he starts up the captain’s archive.
‘Filled and sent in!’ Sk’jin waves his hand from the front, and Hoseok swears again that he hears bells.

‘Sending mine in now,’ Hoseok replies, tapping on his screen to the side.

Yoongi nods his confirmation before he suddenly reaches out, hand slipping inside Sk’jin’s sleeves and pulls out a tiny silver bell strung up on a silk ribbon.

Sk’jin doesn’t realize what Yoongi has done until he finds himself staring at the little bell held up by Yoongi’s fingers.

Hoseok nearly laughs out loud when Sk’jin jerks backwards, falling back on his ass. But Hoseok’s laughter dies in his throat as he notices Sk’jin’s expression. He’s alarmed yes, but there’s an immediate hostile defensiveness in his posture, his eyes flashing neon red. Everything about his stance suggests that he’s about to set into action. But there’s hesitation as well. And most of all, there’s that same expression again- one of fear, that flashes briefly in Sk’jin’s eyes. The atmosphere inside the Bridge becomes heavy and the hair on Hoseok’s neck stands on end as Sk’jin crouches, looking every bit like he was about to lunge at Yoongi.

‘Sk’jin-‘ Namjoon’s voice is a warning as well as a reprimand.

But it’s gone as quickly as it comes and Sk’jin whines from where he’s fallen over, failing in pulling himself up.

‘Yoongi!’ Sk’jin scowls comically. ‘You just don’t reach into someone’s sleeve and yank out a part of their wardrobe- why did you do that?’

‘It was noisy,’ is Yoongi’s reply as he places the bell carefully to the side as though he didn’t want anything to do with it.

‘If it annoyed you then you could have said so,’ Sk’jin scolds as he takes up the seat next to Yoongi. ‘We’re a team! We’re going to live together for a long while! If I’m doing something that annoys you then you should tell me and we come up with a compromise! I’ll do the same for you.’

Hoseok can’t help but glance over at Namjoon. The Captain is watching the entire situation with sharp eyes, unmoving and rigid. Namjoon probably had the same thoughts and conclusions regarding Sk’jin’s “friendly” behavior. And as Captain it was an even bigger problem for him. Namjoon looks down briefly at Hoseok before looking over at the pair in the tower-mast.

‘Our schedules are completed. I hope you all familiarize yourselves with it so that we can proceed smoothly,’ Namjoon lifts his screen in ways of showing their new schedule.

Hoseok isn’t surprised when he finds that Namjoon would be the first to go on watch-duty at the Bridge. He would then be exchanged with Yoongi 11 hours from now. Then after Yoongi, Sk’jin. Though Hoseok doubts Namjoon would allow the Khol’isa to man the Bridge by himself. That too right after they hit warp. Then after Sk’jin Hoseok’s round ensues. He had quite a bit of free time and guesses he should take that opportunity to familiarize himself with the rest of the ship.

‘Perfect! I’m going to go check the additional facilities available,’ Sk’jin says, standing gracefully. The sound of bells are absent and it’s with mild alarm that Hoseok realizes that bells, or at least the sound they produced, were often used in hypnosis.

Yoongi too gets up and follows Sk’jin out.

Hoseok glances over at the dashboard at the tower-mast.
The little bell is no longer there.

[TEMPORAL LOBE FUNCTION AT MAXIMUM]

[SYSTEMATIC FUNCTIONS AT MAXIMUM OVERDRIVE]

[OVERDRIVE]

[OVERDRIVE]

[OVERDRIVE]

[OVERDRIVE]

[SYSTEMS CRASHING_PROCEED Y/N]

[SYSTEMS CRASHING_PROCEED Y/N]

[SYSTEMS CRASHING_PROCEED Y/N]

[SYSTEMS CRASHING_PROCEED Y/N]

[SYSTEMS_ - _]

_ _

_ _

_ _

SETTING UP INTERNAL AUGMENTATION_

_EXPANDING_

_EXPANDING_

_
The floors are cold. Temperature status at 14 degree Celsius. Dark grey, lined lightly with a lighter grey. This is some form of marble. Used commonly for flooring.

The air is moist. The room atmosphere setting is customized to increased humidity. There is condensation forming along the window panes. The air smells like bath salts.

The lights are dim. It is evening. The weather forecast predicted clear windy skies. There is a wind-chime made from aluminum carved with Long-Huo symbols.

There is pain; -

[HARDWARE MALFUNCTION- PROCEED Y/N_
HARDWARE OVERDRIVE
HARDWARE OVERDRIVE
DO NOT DISENGAGE
DO NOT DISENGAGE
DO NOT DISENGAGE

It’s a frustrating sound. One that bores into his brain. His head is pulsing, sensitivity to the point of immense pain. There’s a disgusting bitter taste that burns upwards and into his mouth. He spits it out, half-expecting something vile and hot to spew out of him. But it’s just air. Is database disengaged it’s not it can’t database is function it’s not functioning there are no algorithms there is no database-

The harsh ringing of the wind-chime grates into his ears and his entire body shudders, trying to cope with the information overload that it can’t process fast enough.

Database is overloaded.

Database is crashing.
He’s sensing too much, seeing too much, hearing too much, feeling too much-

His entire body lurches as his chest burns- he’s on fire and he’s burning burning burning burning-

It’s just forceful contractions of his chest as he breathes in too much too cold too sharp too much-

Yoongi picks up his TeorSer and without looking fires at the wind-chime hanging outside the window. The glass cracks slowly for a few seconds before turning entirely white and shuddering into fine bits of glass. The sound is momentary but it doesn’t stop Yoongi from keeling over, throwing up bile onto the cold floors.

It’s utterly blank- just like when he goes to Sleep. But when he sleeps he sees Dreams. And when he Dreams he just Knows.

Right now he doesn’t Know. This was not a Dream, and he was not in Sleep.

There’s another sound- it’s a strange sound. Short, but repetitive, and…and Alive. And database calls it-


Stay low, allow your body to cope.

Body. Hardware. Database.

Allow yourself to feel.

There’s a rushing sound. Database identifies it as the sound of traffic and environmental feedback loop, triggered by the continuous motion and movement of both Beings and automated objects that interweave themselves into this Space.

Space. Where was he? Space. Mass. Time. What was he in this?

With shaking hands he removes his gloves. They’re ghostly and pale. Heavily scarred and some sores are still bleeding. Did he not Sleep? Why was he wounded?

He’s still coughing. Coughing so hard, so much, he’s dizzy he’s falling he needs to take off the mask take off-


Where was he?


Sit down.

‘I’m sitting.’

It hurts, but the pain ebbs away at once. There’s a burning sensation but it goes away. He needs water. His database supplies him with this. His mind supplies him with this.

He needs- he needs- what does he need? He needs something. Mission statement. He needs mission statement so that he can accept and complete and then Sleep and then Dream and then Know.
‘Nammie, would you like to join us? It’s almost Yoongi’s turn to head up. Come have a drink!’

Namjoon had spent a majority of his time carefully reading any information available on each of the Docks they were going to touch base on. With a mission like this, you couldn’t be too careful.

At the sound of Sk’jin’s voice he glances over at the screen of his private NaviLet.

Previously, Hoseok had been walking around the Hangars, checking up on equipment, familiarizing himself with the Transporters, reading up the manuals. Yoongi had spent a majority of his time sitting extremely still, staring at the large entertainment screen, watching what appeared to be Earthian movies. Namjoon hadn’t been aware that there were stocked entertainment sources from Earth available for watching in the GLA database. Yoongi had barely moved, watching the screen in a manner so still that Namjoon had to make sure he hadn’t just died or something.

Then there was Sk’jin. He had spent a good time going through the laundry room, checking each washer and UV presser with apparent interest. Then he’d gone through every nook and cranny of the Lobbies, checking each storage cupboard, flipping randomly through manuals that were placed around. He even goes through every MedPod, as though keeping track of what was in each of them. Then he pattered towards the Kitchens and to Namjoon’s bewilderment, started cooking.

When he had checked the NaviLet earlier, he found Sk’jin employing Yoongi, who was deftly chopping something on a board on the long Kitchen island counter. Not sure why, but the entire activity had irritated Namjoon.

And now, Hoseok is there too, listening to something Sk’jin had to say and nodding as he stirs a pot.

‘Surely you must drink something?’ Sk’jin asks, his voice irritatingly saccharine in a way that was definitely fake and definitely done on purpose to get under Namjoon’s skin. And to Namjoon’s exasperation, it works. A little too well. And Namjoon knows that Sk’jin knows that it works.

Namjoon doesn’t grace Sk’jin with an answer but instead checks on the auto-pilot one more time.

‘Lisai, keep an eye out for me will you?’
‘Of course Captain.’

Namjoon takes the Lifts this time and when the doors open, his nose is assaulted by an assortment of aromatic smells.

‘Captain, how nice of you to join us,’ Sk’jin smiles from the dining table, waving his one arm gracefully as he beckons Namjoon over.

There’s a massive spread over the table, bowls of fruit, honest to goodness meals made from scratch, jugs of an assortment of drinks, and even an entire cake.

‘So, do you think flying is more, anti-gravity? But then what about speed?’ Sk’jin asks, clearly carrying on with whatever conversation he was having with Yoongi and Hoseok as he peels a fruit with a delicate looking knife.

‘Anti-gravity means that you will simply drift away from the surface of a planet- carried around by like, the wind, maybe bumping into other stuff. Defying gravity doesn’t necessarily mean you can fly.’ Hoseok replies thoughtfully as he chews on his food.

‘Anti-gravity and motorized-motion engines for direction and speed. Air-pressure tanks for lightness,’ Yoongi suggests.

‘That does make sense,’ Sk’jin replies thoughtfully before popping the fruit into his mouth. Namjoon feels that surge of irritation hit him again. He eyes Namjoon as he approaches them and a wicked glint takes over his eyes. Namjoon wills himself not to feel defensive or apprehensive as he was wont to do around the Khol’isa.

Namjoon scans the tables and feels another tickle of irritation take over him.

‘Would you like to try anything?’ Sk’jin asks, peeling another fruit with the carving knife that looks strangely threatening in Sk’jin’s elegant hands.

Namjoon walks past the table and opens the large pantry-fridge and takes out a bottle of ionized water instead.

‘Yoongi, you’re up in 15 minutes,’ Namjoon addresses the Human AI who was staring very hard at a cup of tea.

‘Accepted,’ Yoongi replies as he picks up the teacup carefully.

His actions catalyze a great amount of attention from his dining mates. Hoseok is watching the Human carefully and so is Sk’jin who notices Namjoon watching them watching Yoongi in turn.

‘Ah you see- Yoongi has never really had any food from Earth, so I looked up some recipes and got help from Hoseok, who by the way is an amazing cook!’ Sk’jin beams at the Ngfy’widan.

‘I once had to infiltrate an illegal weapons trade by posing in as a cook,’ Hoseok shrugs as though it explained everything. Sk’jin raises one perfect eyebrow in question but doesn’t voice his thoughts. Yoongi is still staring intently at his cup of tea.

‘So I thought it would be nice if Yoongi were to have an idea of how food tastes like from Earth! It’s not authentic but the ingredients we had made excellent replacements for some of the Earth-based ingredients.’ Sk’jin points at a pot. ‘Like this one. It was supposed to have…what was that vegetable Hoseokkie?’
‘Onion,’ Hoseok replies over a mouthful of food.

‘Right- that. We don’t have any onions, so I had to make do with huahm. It’s almost the same in terms of genetic make-up,’ Sk’jin explains like it’s something important that Namjoon should definitely know. ‘Except it’s red, so the soup came out rather ruddy instead of a “light golden broth”. But it tastes all right.’

Yoongi takes a tentative sip of the tea and once again Hoseok and Sk’jin watch him keenly, actually leaning in to check his reaction.

‘…is that any good?’ Hoseok asks while Sk’jin leans in even closer, nearly dipping the extending collar of his robes into the aforementioned soup.

‘It’s refreshing,’ Yoongi replies after swallowing.

‘Excellent!’ Sk’jin exclaims before turning to address Namjoon again.

‘What about you Captain? Is there anything from Kutsoglera that Hoseok and I can cook up for you?’ Sk’jin asks, tone innocent and friendly but there’s a dangerous flash of red in his eyes.

‘Yoongi I believe you should start making your way to the Bridge. Communications Manager, can I have a moment with you?’ Namjoon asks, a polite smile on his face.

‘I’m taking my tea with me,’ Yoongi announces as he picks up the teapot and teacup and walks away.

‘Of course Captain, I am yours to command,’ Sk’jin replies with a graceful nod of his head before turning to address Hoseok. ‘I think you add sugar to the tea- maybe Yoongi will appreciate it?’

Hoseok, who obviously knows when he’s being dismissed and is unwanted, quickly departs, holding a bowl a sugar cubes. Though it’s not before shooting the both of them with a quick searching look of wariness.

Sk’jin continues to sit, leaning back leisurely and now watching the framed view of space beyond the large kitchen window with ease and little regard to Namjoon. Namjoon waits a total of 11 seconds and it’s like Sk’jin knows because his eyes snap from the window to bore right into Namjoon’s. And this time Namjoon doesn’t back down.

‘What do you think you’re doing?’ Namjoon asks at once.

‘I don’t understand your question Captain,’ Sk’jin replies glibly.

‘Then let me make myself clear,’ Namjoon continues. ‘Why are you treating Yoongi in this manner? Are you trying to gain his support? Are you trying to get him to your side?’

‘Captain. Namjoon. Sweetheart. Please,’ Sk’jin puts up a look of pity and says in his most patronizing tone: ‘Have you ever heard of “being polite” and having “normal conversations”? We’re going to be stuck in this ship- the four of us- for a good sol or so. Unlike you, I do believe most of us would do well with some conversation instead of brooding and thinking about how to prevent a mutiny when there isn’t any. Yet.’

Namjoon takes a slow calming breath.

‘Besides- I quite like Yoongi- he seems to be the most level-minded Being on board the ship other than myself. And I do feel for him- his home planet was destroyed in front of his very own eyes. I
understand what he’s going through- in fact I do believe we all know what that’s like, isn’t that right?’

Namjoon grits his teeth as Sk’jin looks up at him with a slight tilt of his head. It causes the rosy strands of his hair to part elegantly around his forehead in an effortless display of beauty and grace. It’s meant to be a distraction, Namjoon knows, but all Namjoon can see is the challenging goading look in Sk’jin’s eyes.

‘He prioritizes the mission and doesn’t do anything to obstruct the rather nonexistent camaraderie on board,’ Sk’jin continues, pushing back his hair with a fair hand and adding with a short laugh, ‘Of course I think it’s fair to point out that he isn’t adding to it either-‘

‘Stop it. I don’t know if you genuinely think that what you’re saying right now makes sense but let me tell you right now that it doesn’t. I did not want to have to address this so bluntly but I’m finding that I have to.’ Namjoon cuts across, a heavy frown settling on his face.

‘Fine, do tell me what it is that I am apparently doing that isn’t working because you are “aware” of everything that is going on,’ Sk’jin leans back, arms crossed, looking up at Namjoon with a defiant expectant expression.

Namjoon has never felt so entirely demeaned in his entire existence. He’s never had to deal with someone like Sk’jin before.

Sk’jin lifts one eyebrow, challenging him. He has a smile playing at his lips; he knew exactly what he was doing and he knew exactly what Namjoon was going through as a result.

If that was so. Then Namjoon wasn’t going to back down or give Sk’jin what he wanted.

Two can play this game and Namjoon is a fast learner.

* *

The air is fresh, faint traces of pollutants lingering- just the smallest hint of carbon, a little bit of heated hydrogen, but all together clean. But it’s never been like that. At least database has never said so. Or maybe it’s never been a point of relevance. He also knows he should probably step away from the ledge. But he doesn’t know why.

It hurts.

Database never said so either before. Database says it’s not relevant to what he does. In Sleep he
wasn’t aware of pain. The Dreams never highlighted this either. But it does. It hurts. Everything hurts. And though database is telling him to drink water, to obtain medical aid, and he’s well aware of how to do this, how to proceed and medicate himself, reduce the pain. He doesn’t know why he has to do this.

There’s blood.

A result of being wounded. A result of standing bare feet on top of shattered glass. Database tells him he should avoid this but he doesn’t. He doesn’t know why he has to avoid this.

It’s cold.

He shivers. Database tells him that it’s because he’s shed his protective gear, insulated to grant him warmth and layer his body with protection. But it was heavy. It was uncomfortable. 25 GLA kilograms, database informs him. But there is no noteworthy archive every describing this to him before. Archive search leads him with no results found. Why had he felt the need to shed his gear when he felt uncomfortable? What made him do it?

There is a light growing.

It’s the sun rising. Database informs him on the matter of astronomy in full detail. It is no longer information worth processing because what he was seeing now just is. This was dawn, watery violet sky giving way to rose clouds tinted with gold, database likens this with every sunrise noted in archives. The only difference is that this time there is colour and everything is bigger. He has to watch. He must watch. He doesn’t know why, but he has to.

They are countless, stretching endlessly, housing life and existence and-

Database tells him this is called sonder. And that just as he looks up into the stars, from those stars, countless others were looking down at him. And he was there. He was here. And so were they. And he would continue to be. He would be-

Memory.

There is nothing but Memory.

The sun rises and for the first time in his life, Yoongi is aware of its warmth on his skin.
Hoseok takes a deep breath and it smells like bullshit.

He glances over at Sk’jin who is apparently very invested in the state of his cuticles, and at Namjoon who is reading a book and then at Yoongi who is borderline obsessed with a tea-strainer.

It was almost towards the end of Yoongi’s watch in the Bridge. And just as he suspected, Namjoon wasn’t going to allow Sk’jin to remain alone in the Bridge.

For a vast majority of Yoongi’s stay in the Bridge he was left almost entirely alone. During this time, Sk’jin had apparently showered and changed, exchanging his pale green robes for lilac ones with the slightest detail along the hems of his sleeve in muted gold. Hoseok noted that he was barefoot. Namjoon too had a change of clothing to something more comfortable, though again everything he wore covered nearly every inch of his body, showing only his hands, some neck, and his ears. Only Yoongi remained unchanged and unmoving, fiddling with the tea-strainer.

Hoseok had caught up on some sleep, customized his room to better fit his comfort and taste, and found a variety of clothing in his closet. Then he proceeded to set up surveillance within his own room. After “innocently” testing out the other surveillance system and finding a very tight knit external security system with a hair-trigger firewall that had Namjoon’s name written all over it, Hoseok wisely decided not to attempt hacking over it. As an Infiltrator, Hoseok had also learned how to hack, recode, reconstruct, and replace digital barriers. But this would be futile. Especially when it’s been made by someone of Namjoon’s skill.

Hoseok hadn’t seen Namjoon or Sk’jin after that luncheon. They had both retired to their own cabins and as far as Hoseok knew, didn’t leave until after Hoseok himself turned in for the day. But now they were here and there was this odd “peace” inside the Bridge.

Hoseok doesn’t know what the Kutsoglerin and the Khol’isa might have discussed but it was clearly not resolved. Hoseok is reminded of how his parents would sometimes get into a disagreement but neither would admit to their faults and would uphold an injured air or would both passive-aggressively play victim against each other, dragging anyone around them into their war of snide comments.

‘Hoseokkie,’ Sk’jin smiles at Hoseok, looking up from his perfectly shaped nails. ‘Are you well rested?’

‘Yes…the bedding is really nice,’ Hoseok replies as he makes his way past the Khol’isa who nods in agreement.

‘You’re just on time Hoseok,’ Namjoon adds, looking up from his book to smile at Hoseok. ‘You may stand down now Sk’jin.’

‘Oh not at all Namjoon,’ Sk’jin smiles though Hoseok sees the slightest hint of suspicion in his eyes as he addresses the Captain. ‘I should remain at my station. Lisai’s schedule has me manning the Bridge as of now, after all.’

‘That won’t be necessary Sk’jin- this is the first time we’re entering warp with the ship- I’m sure Head-Pilot Hoseok wants to be there for the first few hours,’ Namjoon glances at Hoseok. ‘Isn’t that right Hoseok?’
Namjoon is actually correct. This was the first time Hoseok would be taking this ship into warp and he wanted to be there for at least the first set, to observe the frequency and keep note of any changes within the archives sent from the engines so that he would be able to remember a comparative sample the next time they launched into warp.

Hoseok really feels like he’s stuck between his parents who are bickering and trying to get his support just to egg on the other the wrong way. And while Hoseok has no intention of playing mediator or middleman, he really hopes this doesn’t last long and they can settle their differences long enough for them to complete this mission without Hoseok fearing for a sudden show of TeorSer fire.

‘There is no real immediate need for you to be at your post while we’re at warp Manager Sk’jin,’ Namjoon explains, smiling up from his book though his eyes don’t quite reach his eyes. ‘Considering the fact that we will be at warp for 3 days before we arrive at Orvan’s space-borders, I relieve you of your duties until then. Didn’t you say the seats were hurting you? I wouldn’t want someone of your importance to suffer so needlessly when you could be resting.’

Sk’jin’s expression is blank and honestly Hoseok feels a little terrified. Namjoon is still looking at Sk’jin with that smile.

The Kutsoglerin had clearly snapped and this was now a result of it. Who knew that the grim, serious Information Analyst could be equally, if not more, petty than Sk’jin.

Sk’jin stares hard at Namjoon before he takes a step back and replies with an equally fake smile, ‘That’s very kind of you Captain. We are so lucky to have you leading us in this mission.’

‘Oh no Sk’jin,’ Namjoon replies, not looking at Sk’jin as he glances down at his book, making himself comfortable. ‘We’re so lucky to have you here.’

Sk’jin, who had been walking towards the exit, pauses mid-stride. He glances back at Namjoon who is apparently very interested in the book he’s reading and Hoseok himself is able to do some of his own reading as he sees Namjoon’s death lettered in Sk’jin’s glare.

‘Sleep well,’ Namjoon calls before very realistically looking apologetic and saying, ‘Oh- that was insensitive of me.’

Hoseok winces internally. It was a sensitive topic for the Khol’isa- the nature of their autophagocytosis robbed them of the need for sleep. Which if viewed in one angle wasn’t too bad a loss, but for the Khol’isa it was of a wholly different nature. Many Beings considered them cursed-never to be at rest, but never attaining the full “luxury” of immortality. They were stuck, in a hopeless loop of existing within their own minds without relief or any semblance of sleep. Their autophagocytosis reconstructed them, but didn’t grant them sleep, not even in the form of hibernation. This made them succumb to madness and a massive suicide epidemic had struck the Khol’isa at one point after leaving their planet.

Hoseok can’t believe Namjoon would bring that up.

Sk’jin turns and storms off.

Hoseok takes a seat, eyeing Namjoon from the corner of his eyes. There’s a genuine smile on Namjoon’s face, shoulders bunching just a little as though delighted at himself. He turns the page of his book and continues to read.

‘Hoseokkie, are you ready to initiate warp?’
Still not used to the nickname coming from someone like Yoongi, Hoseok starts a little as he regards the expressionless Human in front of him.

‘Yoongi did you know about the bell?’ Hoseok asks instead as he makes himself comfortable. Yoongi simply looks at him, as though waiting for him to clarify what he meant.

‘…I mean- Khol’isa use hypnosis as means of manipulation. Bells can be used to act as a trigger medium for hypnosis,’ Hoseok explains.

‘I did not know that.’ Yoongi replies, turning back around to face the HUD window.

‘Don’t worry about the bells Hoseok,’ Namjoon calls from his seat. ‘The Khol’isa can only use their hypnosis on Beings who have been intoxicated or have been medicated with certain hallucinogens. Methods like bells, metronomes, and other sound-induced trigger mediums are useless.’

Hoseok feels a little relieved at that as he activates the warp-engines.

‘We’re entering warp in 20 seconds,’ Hoseok calls. ‘Everyone strap yourselves in.’

Glancing down, Hoseok notes that all 4 indicators blink at safety-on.

‘So if you didn’t know about the hypnosis thing…did you really grab that bell because it was annoying you?’ Hoseok asks as the engines calibrate to 75%.

‘No. I just felt like it.’

The stars pull into thin bright streaks as they erupt through space at the speed of light, Namjoon’s appreciative chuckle filling the Bridge.


* 

When he wakes up, he is disoriented.

Because he sees too much. Every hue, shade, tone. It’s a riot that bears down on him and crushes him. But within this chaos is something that he cannot formulate- something he cannot comprehend.
There’s movement in this riot of stillness but Yoongi doesn’t know what to call it. It’s so chaotic but it makes sense. A sense that Yoongi cannot name except something in his mind is telling him that this was all normal.

The sun is still quite mellow— it was still morning. There’s a distinct sound of something—something that Yoongi has never registered before but he identifies as a bird chirping.

Slowly, Yoongi looks away from the sky and a little lower.

It’s small, its plumage is mainly a soft brown but with hints of soft pastel blue around the chest and tips of its tail feathers. It looks down at Yoongi, twisting its little head as though hoping to see all of Yoongi better.

‘Who are you?’

Yoongi’s throat protests. He’s not sure if what he said was even correct. But the words just came out of his mouth, rolling off of his tongue like it had done so since he was. Like he’s been able to speak cohesively his entire life. Like it was natural.

**Being: 1.73 meters.**

‘I am 1.73 meters in height.’

The buildings that stretch upwards to the sky seem to go on forever, blending into the golden light of the early morning sun.

**GLA ??, Male.**

‘I am male.’

There is a voice speaking indistinctively – someone is talking on their Comm-Device, some level above Yoongi. He’s laughing, the light scuffing of bare feet against floor tiles.

**Human.**

‘I am Human. I am from Earth.’

Earth, the Blue Planet, home to all Humans. Gaia, Mother, Precious.

**Name: Yoongi.**

‘My name is Yoongi.’

Shine, luster, gleam, glow. Light. Light imbibes the entire spectrum of colours. All colours reflect into life.

Yoongi looks up at the little bird.

‘Who are you?’
‘And we are pulling out of warp in 5…4…3…2…1!’

The stars edge and part, creating depth and space between the lights that they pull out of.

‘Entering docking channels and ready to report our broadcast,’ Hoseok announces, turning to give Sk’jin a nod who smiles in return and starts tapping along the screen on the Communication Board.

The stars are no longer stretched and they were now flying at standard non-warp again. The Užkulisai-02 was an absolute delight to pilot and Hoseok feels like he’s gotten a complete hang of it now. The planet that they were approaching was Orvan, a small planet off of the the Trunga System. It had 3 moons orbiting it and one of them had been transformed into a Dock which was where they headed. Orvan was a pleasant orange to look at from this distance. It’s atmosphere was rich in ferric oxidants, giving the planet a wash of orange from the distance. There was nothing particularly note-worthy about Orvan or the System that housed her, so it made perfect sense that Namjoon chose this planet to claim their pass.

‘There’s an incoming message Head-Pilot, shall I patch it along?’ Sk’jin calls out from where he’s sitting.

‘Please patch it along, Sk’jin,’ Namjoon replies, his voice dripping with feigned politeness.

Sk’jin does no such thing, completely ignoring Namjoon.

Namjoon glares at the Khol’isa and then turns to look at Hoseok, one eyebrow raised.

Hoseok thinks he might lose his mind from all the passive-aggressiveness inside the Bridge. This had continued on since they hit warp and it got worse and worse. At one point Namjoon seemed to be outdoing Sk’jin in passive-aggression, but Sk’jin would rise to the occasion and Namjoon would be left silently fuming. And Hoseok was popularly used as a sort of unwilling and forcefully involved third-party member. Yoongi used his lack of presence to his full advantage and was missing the entire time. Like he had some additional sense that kept an eye/ear out for the beginnings of any passive-aggression and just like that, he was gone.

‘Please patch the message Sk’jin,’ Hoseok answers wearily.
‘Patching through,’ Sk’jin sing-songs.

‘This is the Orvan Space Border Patrol. You are hereby under arrest and will be subjected to questioning. Please proceed peacefully or we will use force. Thank you.’

Namjoon looks down at the Navigation Table with a blank expression as though questioning what he heard was real or imagined. Then he whips around looking at every member.

‘What?!’

‘Ah- that’s probably because I have a criminal record there,’ Sk’jin pipes in calmly.

‘I beg your pardon?’ Namjoon sounds murderous.

‘Oh, I do believe I heard a murmur- must be something wrong with my Comm-Device. I wonder what that voice said?’ Sk’jin looks around, an expression of confusion as he taps lightly at his Comm-Device.

Namjoon bristles briefly, expression darkening significantly before he speaks again, ‘What do you mean you have a criminal record?’

Sk’jin’s expression goes from bewildered to confused again, looking around as though he heard an insect. He even lifts his hands in the air as though ready to swat out whatever it was.

‘Oh wow- that sounded so clear! Did you hear that Yoongi? I swear that was a voice but I can’t be too sure-’

‘Sk’jin, explain what criminal offence you have committed before we’re forcefully boarded!’ Namjoon orders sharply.

‘Again- that voice-‘

Hoseok can practically see Namjoon’s patience breaking as the Kutsoglerin stands up, his eyes narrowed as he stares at Sk’jin who is now looking around for an insect in earnest. Hoseok doesn’t know if this classifies as petty, brave, or downright idiotic.

‘Communications Manager Sk’jin is wanted in Orvan for Class 2 Arson, Class 3 attempted murder, and Class 2 defamation of the Prime Minister of the Orvan State of Tui.’

‘Thank you Lisai,’ Yoongi says quietly from the side.

‘Look, in my defense that prime minister was an asshole,’ Sk’jin puts up his hands as though in defeat.

‘Arson? Attempted murder? Care to explain?’ Namjoon frowns, glancing out of the HUD window and Hoseok does the same. There were no approaching lights. Yet.

‘Not really, no,’ Sk’jin shakes his head delicately before getting up to walk over to the Communications Board. ‘Let me handle this.’

‘What-‘ Namjoon is already standing up and looks like he’s about to physically stop Sk’jin when Yoongi, who Hoseok swore was sitting in the tower-mast behind him, is there, stopping Namjoon from moving with a barely there touch on the Kutsoglerin’s arm.

‘I repeat. This is the Orvan Space Border Patrol. Your ship registers a Being with past criminal offence in our borders. You are hereby under arrest and will be subjected to questioning. Please
proceed peacefully or we will use force. Thank you.'

‘What do we do?’ Hoseok asks, ready to fly the ship away at once, readying warp engines.

‘If we fly away they’ll come after us and the space-border patrol from every system will have a red-light on us,’ Namjoon replies at once. ‘I will not risk our mission.’

‘This is Communications Manager Sk’jin of the Užkulisai-02, and you are Officer…?’ Sk’jin speaks up, voice smooth and charming. Namjoon stares incredulously at Sk’jin.

‘Sk’jin what in Spaces are you doing-?!’ he begins hotly, walking over to Sk’jin who holds one hand up to stop Namjoon, not looking at him but tapping along the screen deftly.

‘This is Officer Lieutenant Rimma of the Orvan Space Border Patrol Unit.’ The voice speaks up again. Hoseok looks out and he spots distant lights gleaming at them, growing stronger and larger with every second. The Patrol would be here in less than a minute. What was Sk’jin playing at?

‘Officer Lieutenant oh my,’ Sk’jin exclaims, letting out an airy breathy chuckle. ‘That’s quite the title there Rimma, how befitting of someone of your devotion to duty!’

‘…thank you…’

‘Indeed! But I’m afraid even the best of us make mistakes- and I believe that this may be it Rimma, I believe you have wrong information,’ Sk’jin says with a soft hint of regret.

‘We are not mistaken Manager Sk’jin.’

‘I’m quite sure you are,’ Sk’jin replies blithely, tapping along his screen, ignoring Namjoon who is nearly breathing fire down his neck. ‘We are merely a humble trade-ship, just making dock for 1 hour in order to obtain our pass. I really hope this hold-up won’t cost any of us too much of our time.’

At this Yoongi turns away from the approaching view and blinks in a way Hoseok guesses is amusement.

‘I have performed another scan. You are correct Manager Sk’jin. On behalf of the Orvan Space-Border Patrol, I apologize for causing you any inconvenience. Welcome to Orvan. Have a good day.’

‘Thank you Officer Lieutenant Rimma,’ Sk’jin taps on the screen and places it back on the table.

Hoseok glances out of the window and finds that the approaching light has completely stopped and actually becomes smaller.

Sk’jin takes a deep breath, smiling happily as he still ignores Namjoon.

‘What did you think Yoongi?’ Sk’jin addresses the Human who was now making his way down to the tower-mast again. ‘My skills in negotiation shouldn’t be underestimated. Right?’

‘You just bribed the officer- that wasn’t negotiation- anyone can do it!’ Namjoon snaps before Yoongi can reply though Hoseok thinks it’s highly unlikely.

‘Actually you would be surprised that bribes don’t always work when anyone does it- right Hoseokkie?’ Sk’jin asks him with a bright smile. ‘You need to know who can be bribed, how to bribe, and what sort of medium to use while bribing- it’s a fine delicate art. Not everyone has this
ability.’

Sk’jin has a genial suggestive smile on his face and Hoseok wonders if the Khol’isa has a death wish of sort. But moving past that, Sk’jin is correct. Blackmail, bribery, threats- they all had to be planned out carefully and with a lot of time and dedication. What Sk’jin just did was extremely risky but had luckily paid off. Hoseok glances over at Sk’jin’s screen and isn’t surprised to find that he was on the Orvan space-border patrol index. If Sk’jin has been here before and with such charges against him, then he clearly knew his way around their systems. And seeing as most planetary systems rarely changed, it was fairly easy for Sk’jin to simply obtain the officer’s ID and easily send him some units.

‘Negotiations are generally futile. Any bribe can be bought over by putting a higher stake. If you really wish to clear the path, I suggest we enter the Dock, clear the officers, and remove all history concerning Sk’jin’s criminal history in Orvan.’ Yoongi chimes in, to the general stunned silence of the Bridge. To everyone’s intense alarm, Yoongi activates the weapons dashboard.

‘Yoongi! That’s so sweet of you! Thank you!’ Sk’jin exclaims, expression turning almost fond as he smiles at the Human.

Hoseok doesn’t think there was anything particularly “sweet” in Yoongi’s statement. Maybe the Khol’isa had a different way of viewing compliments.

‘No one is attacking any official GLA Dock!’ Namjoon sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose, brows furrowed as though fighting off a headache. ‘Yoongi disengage now!’

‘It would be simple-’ Yoongi is starting to say but Namjoon quickly jumps in. Hoseok can’t help but find it amusing when Yoongi looks down at the dashboard, his posture forlorn. Or at least Hoseok guesses it is. Either that or he was just projecting.

‘Again- we are not going to engage in attacking or attempting to attack or scheming on how to attack any GLA Dock or Port from here on within,’ Namjoon puts a hand down firmly on the Navigation Table, looking at Yoongi grimly. ‘While your intentions are…surely very touching, we cannot afford to jeopardize our mission just because someone had too much fun in the past.’

‘It was fun,’ Sk’jin sighs out as though reminiscing. ‘The look on his face was priceless- wish I could somehow obtain a video of it and have it play on loop every time I feel down.’

Against his better judgment, Hoseok has to ask, ‘What happened in Orvan anyways?’

‘Orvan has quite the black-market for slavery,’ Sk’jin replies looking genuinely surprised at Hoseok’s question. ‘You didn’t know?’

Sk’jin doesn’t sound condescending- he sounds sincerely surprised.

Hoseok thinks hard as he glances at the approaching planet. Again, Orvan wasn’t known for anything in particular. They had a strict government system, mainly autocratic but nothing that toed past the limitations set up by the GLA Treaty on Internal Planetary Governance. The GLA had set up laws and orders that could be implemented into every planets governing system- so you still maintained your original government ruling but with the interjection of the GLA order. This was the deal every planet/system had to agree to when they agreed to be part of the GLA Known Universe. Generally speaking, this wasn’t a bad Treaty or compromise for most planets. However there were some who disregarded the GLA’s attempt of unification under a peaceful treatise that would benefit all living Beings. There were some planets and systems who refused to partake with the GLA and there were some who refused but due to majority vote, had to concede to the GLA’s
Treaty. And Orvan had been one of them. But that was all Hoseok knew. He hadn’t known anything about a black-market dealing with slavery.

‘Are they enslaving and selling their own people or other Beings?’ Namjoon asks as he types rapidly across his screen. He also looks surprised. Just like Hoseok, he had no idea about it. Namjoon is also frowning, though Hoseok thinks it’s because Sk’jin answered his question and not Namjoon’s despite being the same question.

‘Their own people,’ Sk’jin replies easily before adding, ‘Huh, guess the Venture Unit is involved in this one if none of you know about it.’

Hoseok immediately feels defensive but knows that Sk’jin is probably right- if the Khol’isa was telling the truth about Orvan.

‘Probably one of the Heads if you don’t know about it,’ Sk’jin nods his head at Namjoon who grimaces in response.

‘What were you doing in Orvan that you knew about their illegal trade and clashed with their prime minister?’ Namjoon asks instead.

‘Honestly I don’t remember much of the details,’ Sk’jin yawns. Both Namjoon and Hoseok roll their eyes at the obvious lie.

‘Besides, that was like, 800 sols ago, that asshole is probably long dead. Well he should be, because I poisoned him,’ Sk’jin shrugs before settling down again on the foot-up, picking up his screen.

‘…is that the Class 3 attempted murder,’ Namjoon asks, looking confused.

‘Oh no-‘ Sk’jin laughs, looking up from his screen. ‘That’s a different story- an exaggerated one mind you. All I did was suggest that the prime minister should be killed. I didn’t actually do it.’

Hoseok studies Sk’jin’s indignant expression warily. The Khol’isa were infamous around the Known Universe (with the exception of Yoongi) for their ability to hypnotize anyone who looked into their eyes for long periods of time. So maybe Sk’jin’s suggestion wasn’t met with too much exaggeration on behalf of the Orvan government.

‘But you haven’t been charged of that in your records,’ Namjoon points out.

‘Of course I haven’t- because I framed his wife - she was an asshole too. Hope she rotted to death,’ is Sk’jin’s eloquent reply.

Namjoon just blinks in reply, clearly trying to process all of this information. The only thing Hoseok can think of is ‘how did he get into the GIU with such an extensive criminal record?’.

‘Are there any other planets within our trajectory that you may have a criminal record in?’ Namjoon asks through his teeth, sitting down with a lot of determination, gripping the arms of his chair as though to prevent himself from getting up and maybe punching Sk’jin on the face.

‘Oh yes, thank you for reminding me.’ Sk’jin gets up from his seat and walks over to the Mast.

‘And why didn’t you care to inform us about this?’ Namjoon demands.

‘Well, you didn’t ask me,’ Sk’jin replies with a maddening air of someone innocent being interrogated for a crime. ‘You asked Hoseokkie. You didn’t ask me or Yoongi. Right?’ Sk’jin turns
to address Yoongi who nods in reply, still staring out of the HUD window.

Was he actually being a little *sullen*? But Hoseok has other things to address besides Yoongi’s personality.

‘Sk’jin one moment,’ Hoseok calls before the Khol’isa can access the trajectory. ‘Why are your criminal records still valid and activating? Your identity and past records should have been completely wiped out and renewed. This is a GLA issued mission, no matter how covert, I would think Admiral K’mara would have settled it for you.’

That’s what happened to Hoseok and he can safely assume to Namjoon too. He’s not too sure about Yoongi but considering he didn’t really exist up until 4 sols ago, the Human probably had a pretty clean slate. Officially.

‘I mean yes that would have worked but-‘ Sk’jin pauses, looking up at all 3 of them incredulously before saying, ‘Wait a minute, do you mean you don’t know anything about the Khol’isa Treaty?’

‘I know about it-‘ Namjoon begins but Sk’jin cuts him off at once.

‘Well you clearly don’t if you thought my criminal records were entirely clean,’ Sk’jin says smoothly. ‘Due to our *nature* and the methodology of our species biology, we are technically reborn every 700 to 800 years. And though we are born with our former memories and personality again, the GLA stated in our Treaty that we obtain a new status of identification however still maintaining any or all previous records made during our “previous lives”.’

‘That doesn’t make sense,’ Namjoon frowns.

‘Oh no. It does,’ Sk’jin replies with a smile as he pulls up their trajectory, walking into Namjoon’s personal space. ‘You see, the GLA didn’t, and still don’t, trust the nature of the Khol’isa- as a result, they want to continue *reminding* us of our past- by stripping us of our former and legal identity but inflicting us with any continuous history we may have made without the chance at complete reformation. It’s a cruel method, considering everything- but that would be *insensitive* to mention wouldn’t it, Captain?’ Sk’jin is leaning over Namjoon, bent at a strange angle that reminds Hoseok of something reptilian.

Namjoon squirms in his seat for a second before getting up and leaving the Mast so that Sk’jin occupied his vacated seat with relish.

‘So…what you’re saying is, we need to reroute our *entire* trajectory- to make sure you don’t get arrested?’ Namjoon asks gruffly, leaning back on the other side of the Navigation Table.

‘No, what I’m saying is we need to reroute our entire trajectory so that our cargo doesn’t get compromised and our mission jeopardized by space-border patrols,’ Sk’jin replies smoothly.

Hoseok can see a vein popping in Namjoon’s temple and wonders if maybe he should get him some medication from the Medical Bay. Maybe that would help relax the Kutsoglerin a little.

‘And you failed to mention this from the beginning because?’ Namjoon asks through gritted teeth.

‘Why, I thought you all knew,’ Sk’jin exclaims and Hoseok isn’t sure how genuine Sk’jin’s expression of indigence is. ‘You were both part of the Venture Unit, very intimately involved with the Gaia Case- I assumed you all knew. Did you know Yoongi?’

Yoongi nods in response.
‘See? Yoongi knew,’ Sk’jin smiles benignly at Yoongi.

‘Then why didn’t you point out that we were headed towards a planet that you were wanted in?’ Namjoon asks. ‘That too, the first planet?’

‘I thought you had a plan,’ Sk’jin replies and this time Hoseok knows that Sk’jin is faking the surprised clueless tone in his voice. ‘You were so confident and ready to lead, I automatically thought you knew and I thought to myself ‘wow this guy really is a Captain!’ and put my trust wholeheartedly in your leadership!’

‘You talk differently.’ Yoongi interjects out of nowhere, fiddling with the tea-strainer.

Sk’jin looks surprised, blinking rather blankly before asking, ‘What do you mean Yoongi?’

‘Last time I heard you speak, you spoke differently.’ Is Yoongi’s reply.

Hoseok and Namjoon both swivel their heads around to look at Sk’jin. Whatever Yoongi meant, Hoseok cannot determine by looking at Sk’jin’s reaction. Because the Khol’isa instead looks thoughtful as he rubs at his temples with his fair hands, nodding as he says, ‘It was a different time.’

And to that, Yoongi simply nods, as though it made perfect sense.

Hoseok catches Namjoon’s eye and feels better in knowing that it’s not only him who has a hard time understanding any of this.

‘I was surprised too when the space-border patrols contacted us,’ Sk’jin continues like Yoongi hadn’t interrupted their conversation. ‘I mean, I guess I would have mentioned it before but, seeing as I was bid by my Captain to rest, that’s what I did. I assumed he had taken care of everything.’

Hoseok wants to groan and slump over the dashboard. Of course Sk’jin would take this opportunity to hound over Namjoon.

‘This is Orvan Dock TYL-02-5110. Launch-ring 41G is open for you. Welcome to Orvan.’

Hoseok sighs out in relief at the interruption.

‘Thank you. Right- we’re docking soon. Everyone please return to your seats so that I can dock us,’ Hoseok announces.

Sk’jin doesn’t move from the Navigator’s chair and has an expression that clearly says ‘make me’ as he smiles at Namjoon. With a grim expression Namjoon moves away from the Mast and throws himself into a seat next to Hoseok.

‘Who’s getting the pass?’ Hoseok asks as he follows the guide-lines that glow along the HUD window.

‘I’m going,’ Namjoon replies. ‘It won’t take long- depends on the line but I doubt there’s much of a line.’

‘I’ll be stepping out too! I need to pick up some items from the Flotsam and Jetsam,’ Sk’jin announces from where he’s sitting.

Namjoon looks like he wants to disagree but he relents. Probably didn’t want to argue.

‘Want to come with me Yoongi?’ Sk’jin asks.
‘No.’

‘All right- do you want anything from the Dock?’ Sk’jin asks, unperturbed by Yoongi’s monosyllable replies.

‘No.’

‘Hoseokkie? Anything?’ Sk’jin inquires.

‘No I’m good, thanks Sk’jin,’ Hoseok replies.

‘Not at all,’ Sk’jin replies.

The Orvan Dock is like any other standard dock. Immensely tall in height, shaped like a titanic needle surrounded by innumerable hoop like rings that lock incoming or docking ships in a protective magnetic field before guiding them inwards into a Hangar Bay. The Užkulisisai-02 settles in smoothly, passing through the pale blue Atmoshield and safely into the public Hangar.

‘Come on Captain, let’s go,’ Sk’jin sings blithely as he stands, brushing down the front of his robes as though in preparation. Namjoon doesn’t acknowledge this but simply walks out of the Bridge, followed by a smirking Sk’jin.

Hoseok watches from the surveillance screen he pulls up on his dashboard as the two exit the Užkulisisai-02.

Namjoon has wide purposeful strides that radiate strength and impose an eye-catching aura around him. Sk’jin more or less glides smoothly alongside the Kutsoglerin, hands behind his back, robes fluttering gracefully at his wake.

‘Ugh, Spaces,’ Hoseok groans, slumping down on his chair and rubbing at his face.

‘Tea?’

Hoseok sits up as though electrocuted because Yoongi is there, holding a cup of tea feet from Hoseok’s face, expression neutral.

‘Spaces Yoongi,’ Hoseok gasps out. He didn’t hear any movement, no sound of motion, no change in the air around him. Yoongi just materializes out of nowhere. With a cup of tea.

‘It’s relaxing,’ Yoongi adds.

‘I-’ Hoseok looks down at the glass cup filled with a deep reddish liquid that’s steaming lightly. Where in Spaces did Yoongi pull this out from?

‘Um- thank you,’ Hoseok says as he takes the glass cup.

‘You’re welcome.’
Black hair, dark brown eyes, pale skin, small mouth, complete set of teeth, 206 bones, 198 broken and knitted, infusion with carbon alloys.

Yoongi stands in front of the mirror, analyzing himself in the full length mirror. There are bloodied footprints that follow him. He registers the pain but isn’t quite sure if he should ignore it or treat it just yet. For now it’s making him realize. And he wants to realize more.

Carefully he lifts a hand and brushes through his hair. He has scars around his face.

He doesn’t know where he got them from. Doesn’t remember from where. None of his Dreams had any explanation or source for these scars. They were just there. He follows the beginning of one scar and he pulls away the layer of clothing he had been wearing.

He knows that this isn’t normal. The layered scars, old and completely healed but layered and layered and layered. Burns, lacerations, permanent discolouration spread across his entire body.

He stands entirely naked, unsure of any and everything he was looking at. There are sutures and scars- places where operations were conducted. His back has a long hollow line that looks like it’s been scooped into his flesh. But it’s not raw- it’s not bleeding- it’s just there. And out of all the wounds and scars that colour his body, this feels the strangest to Yoongi.

Namjoon is grateful that there are only 2 other people in line in front of him.

The GLA Immigration Office is the same here as it is everywhere else. Large, white, chrome, a sterile feeling that comes from Medical Bays but not in a way that suggested hygiene.
Namjoon isn’t quite sure why but he feels a sense of nervousness as he hands over his pass-card towards the Orvan officer. Orvan’s were rather anthropomorphic in appearance, with large eyes set wide apart, a small nose and an equally small mouth. They were built petite and slender.

‘Welcome to Orvan, please enter your authorization code and ship license code,’ the female officer smiles at Namjoon.

Namjoon types in the required information as the officer types along her own screen, scanning the pass-card. Namjoon half expects an error but everything turns out fine. No alarms, no sudden ambush from the Immigration Task Force.

‘All clear, have a good day,’ the officer offers back the pass-card and that’s when Namjoon notices her wrist.

There are deep welts around the slimmest part of her wrist. And Namjoon knows those welts, can feel them on his own wrist. He can’t help but glance over the officer one more time. He realizes it’s not the best thing to do because the officer seems to realize his gaze and looks extremely uncomfortable and afraid.

‘Is something the matter sir?’ she asks, voice shaking and taking her hand away at once.

But before Namjoon can say anything, there’s a hand on his shoulder and a voice saying, ‘There you are, I almost got worried!’

Sk’jin smiles at Namjoon briefly before pulling him away with more strength than Namjoon thought the Khol’isa was capable of and steers him away.

‘It’s impolite to stare Namjoon,’ Sk’jin says conversationally as they walk across the atrium. ‘And it puts other people into danger.’

‘What do you mean? Was she-?’ Namjoon begins to ask, shaking his shoulder out of Sk’jin’s hold.

‘It’s a dangerous place out here in the universe Namjoon. But often times the most dangerous place is right here wherever you are. And you cannot afford to let it consume you.’ Sk’jin replies as he tosses him a large bag. ‘Carry that for me will you? I just did my cuticles.’

The bag is disproportionately heavy to its size and appearance and makes Namjoon stumble backwards a little, colliding with an Orvan civilian.

‘Oh- sorry-‘ Namjoon begins as the Orvan stabilizes him with an amused smile on his matured face. But then Namjoon notices his wrists as well.

‘It’s all right,’ he smiles and walks away.

Namjoon stops and looks around. He doesn’t care if he’s being obvious but he stares hard at every wrist, bare neck.

‘Nammie! Get that tall ass moving!’

Scowling, Namjoon makes his way towards Sk’jin who is skipping backwards.

What was Sk’jin doing in Orvan in the first place?
‘Okay and we’re good to go,’ Hoseok announces from the cock-pit as they enter warp again.

‘We’re good until we get to Avasana – but after that we’re changing direction entirely,’ Namjoon says from where he’s seated.

‘I feel like that was aimed at me but I can’t argue you if that was your intention,’ Sk’jin pipes up.

‘It was,’ Namjoon replies, pulling up the 3D holographic map.

Hoseok glances over at Sk’jin and Namjoon with some skepticism. They had both seemed entirely too polite, without seeming all too fake, after they returned from the Dock. Did something happen?

‘Right well, I guess we should all band together to make this,’ Namjoon gestures to all of them.

And now Hoseok is truly surprised and apparently so is Sk’jin who gives Namjoon a rather confused look.

‘Yoongi-‘ Sk’jin begins to call but the Human is standing behind him, carrying a tray with a glass pot filled with tea and glass cups with saucers. And for some reason Hoseok cannot understand, an onion is on the tray too.

‘Oh- I see you found the onions,’ Sk’jin says the moment he recovers well enough to speak. ‘It was difficult but they luckily had some in the Flotsam and Jetsam. Pretty expensive though.’

‘There was no need to spend your units on it-‘ Namjoon begins as he accepts a cup of tea from Yoongi.

‘Yes I know that’s why I spent yours.’

Namjoon’s expression is murderous again and Hoseok guesses the geniality in the air was only going to survive for a maximum of one hour.

‘How do you like the cabins Yoongi?’ Hoseok asks, hoping to change the subject as they gather around the Mast, all sipping tea. It probably painted an amusing picture Hoseok ruminates.

‘They’re comfortable.’ Yoongi replies before taking a sip of tea.

‘Are the pillows all right? I used to have problems with pillows before,’ Sk’jin says thoughtfully as he blows on his tea. ‘It needs to be the perfect height otherwise I get neck cramps.’

‘Of course you would,’ Namjoon mumbles as he too takes a sip of tea.

It’s Sk’jin’s turn to glare at Namjoon who starts setting up a blank blue-print for their new trajectory.

‘I’ll need all of you to fill out the planets that you think you might have some issue with, or that have issues with you,’ Namjoon says as he activates 3D screen in to float out in front of Hoseok, Sk’jin, and Yoongi. ‘Then we can filter them out and plot out a trajectory without any hiccups.’

‘Oh boy,’ Sk’jin chuckles under his breath as he places his cup down, ready to type.

‘I don’t think Yoongi would have any but just in case you have doubts about a planet or a dock or a system as a whole, please put that down,’ Namjoon nods at Yoongi.

‘Yes boy,’
Sk’jin manages to cover his laughter into a coughing fit, turning his back to them to recover. Namjoon has his eyes closed, clearly reigning in all of his patience.

‘Oh Yoongi, no it’s not like,’ Sk’jin says as he recovers. ‘Saying “oh boy” is an expression used when you want to relay your excitement or surprise- it’s not a nickname. It can be used sarcastically too, which is what I did.’

‘I see,’ Yoongi replies.

‘You should come up with your own nicknames for us then,’ Sk’jin smiles supportively at Yoongi. ‘You don’t have to use mine.’

Hoseok can list at least 10 different reasons why this wasn’t a good idea in any shape or form.

Yoongi pauses at that. Then turning his dark eyes towards Namjoon he says, ‘Joonie.’

Sk’jin has this badly suppressed smile on his face while Namjoon tries to smile but it doesn’t work and instead nods his “thanks” at Yoongi, who then turns to look at Hoseok.

It’s a little disconcerting, looking into Yoongi’s eyes because it was like looking out into space. Fathomless, unknown, and unpredictable and entirely blank at the same time.

‘Hobi.’

Hoseok swears that if he hadn’t seen Yoongi’s mouth move, then he wouldn’t have believed the Human of saying that.

‘That’s adorable,’ Sk’jin grins at Hoseok with an expression that Hoseok likened to his mother silently telling him to thank his aunt for the weird birthday present he’d received.

‘That’s nice Yoongi,’ Hoseok smiles at Yoongi who nods in return.

Hoseok doesn’t know if this was some strange conditioning set out by Sk’jin’s treatment of Yoongi but there’s an almost nurturing response that comes out of Hoseok in regards to Yoongi. Like the Human was a child of sorts and he needed to be indulged and protected. Which Hoseok knows is not true because Yoongi had more or less set out a working plan on how to completely obliterate an entire Dock of officers and ships in under 10 seconds.

‘What about me?’ Sk’jin leans in, expectant smile on his face.

Without even pausing to consider, Yoongi simply says; ‘Asshole.’

Namjoon chokes violently on his tea, unable to contain his laughter as he turns around away from the Table, coughing and laughing. Hoseok can’t control himself either, sniggering as Yoongi is ever blank and Sk’jin looks stunned.

Then Sk’jin ends up laughing too, covering his mouth as he tosses his head back, laughing in earnest.

For a moment- it almost feels normal.
The insulated bedding was always set to a degree that was never too warm, or never too cool. It was designed to host the Sleeper in a temperature resulting from the calculations of the environmental temperature and the Sleepers body temperature. But Yoongi has always found it cold, unable to rest. He stares at the blank ceiling wondering why he has only really thought about this now. He never knew it had been cold. He had never known that it was uncomfortable. It didn't bother him before.

*Database had never registered it before.*

But this bed was warm and comfortable. And he knew he could lay back and rest. And sleep. And maybe even dream.

But dreams were made of Memory. And Yoongi has no memory.

Memory memory Memory memory Memory

What was memory and how did you remember?

His recognizes his hands- but only because he is actively aware of it. Awake in the idea of seeing what he knows. It corresponded to what he saw, what he felt. Was this memory or was this Memory?

The food on the table wasn’t the best but it was hot and it was something entirely new. Or was it new? But it was different from what he was used to. Or what was he used to? Everything has always been intravenous. Controlled, maintained. Cold.

All that he can perceive tells him that he should know. That he should be able to recall. The taste of food, the sense of flavor, the richness of flavor. *Database salt database sweet database sour database bitter database spicy database milky database -.*

He didn’t know. But he knew what he should do with the bowls inside the fridge. He knew how to take them out, placing them over the heating pads. He knew what utensils to choose. And he knew that there was too much oil. Too much salt. But what did that mean to him? Did he like it? Did he not like it? What he should like, what he *would* like. But there is no recollection- only vacancy shaped in the memory of the Memory he knows he should have. There is no recollection.

So what has been doing until now? What has been doing, and why has been doing it?

*Mission statement.*

What did that mean?
The electric hum changes. There is a click. A door is opening. A shift in the air as pressure changes.

There are footsteps. Tentative and careful. Light.


The door slides open and Yoongi can smell air-coolant preserves, heated hydrogen, and the faintest hint of mint. Zhoumi looks unsure, glancing at Yoongi who has settled on top of his bed, arms neatly folded over his middle, eyes wide open, with feet that are still bleeding because of the embedded shards of glass under his feet.

‘Yoongi?’

This is his first memory.

And he is himself.
Not to be nsfw but I literally couldn’t write last night because Yoongi’s So Far Away with Jin and Jungkook kinda killed me and I literally had to take a break.
So I’m sorry I didn’t update this during the time I normally would. If you want to blame someone, please BLAME YOONGI WOW OKAY I’M DONE.
JIN RAPPING NEEDS TO BE A THING “I DON’T GIVE A SHIT I DON’T GIVE A FUCK” OH MY GOD I AM HEALED I AM RICH I AM DEBT-FREE KIM SEOKJIN PLEASE OMG (also someone give Yoongi an Oscar for that top-class acting in the background)
4 o’clock made me cry. My moonchild Taehyung, moonchild Namjoon I need a moment brb
OKAY BUT UM HOSEOK DIDN’T DO ANYTHING AND IM SCARED BECAUSE HIS MIXTAPE
If it drops this week let it be known that I am going to die because Hobi is my special child and I will protect him till I die.
‘It will take you some time,’ Zhoumi says as he hands Yoongi some clothes to wear. Yoongi looks down at the folded shirt and trousers that were going to be 2 times too large on him. But he accepts them anyways. Most Beings were uncomfortable around nudity.

‘Time for what?’

‘If…if what I think is true, then time for you to adjust to being.’ Zhoumi replies.

Yoongi doesn’t understand. Database is telling him a lot of things, but it doesn’t all add up.

‘When I inspected your helmet and found that it had jacks similar to the ones you can find on Androids I was…’ Zhoumi pauses as Yoongi slips on the trousers. ‘I was confused. Why would your helmet have a jack designed for installing Android systems? I knew you weren’t an Android…so it didn’t make sense.’

‘How did it not make sense,’ Yoongi asks as he ties up the strings of the trousers to fit him better.

‘Well…you’re completely organic. At least a vast majority of you is, not counting the bionic plates on your bones from injury.’ Zhoumi begins. ‘When I scanned you, there was no detection of Android or Cyborg cells in you. But your…behavior, was what confused me most.’

‘My behavior.’ Yoongi repeats, allowing the words to settle and steep, to draw the meaning of the word and its implications.

‘Yes…you look like an adult, you sound like one- and I’m sure what you do surpasses any limitations of matured moral disinclination,’ Zhoumi grimmaces good naturedly. ‘But…aspects of your personality- your behavior- reminded me of a child. Of someone who doesn’t know anything. It was odd- I felt like I was looking at a living Being without any sense of self.’

‘Sense of self?’ Yoongi repeats, successfully pulling on his the borrowed shirt.

‘Yes…the perception of who you are- of your existence, of who you Are,’ Zhoumi emphasizes.

‘Database tells me that this is called self-awareness.’ Yoongi replies after some thought.
‘Database?’ Zhoumi repeats.

‘Yes- like when I Sleep, and when I Dream. I Know, and I follow.’ Yoongi replies, standing still and straight again. ‘There is a lot inside Database. But I cannot Dream, so I do not Know how to follow.’

Zhoumi watches him carefully, a deep furrow forming between his eyebrows.

‘Where is your database Yoongi?’ he asks instead.

Yoongi blinks a few times.

‘I do not know how to answer that.’

Zhoumi presses his lips together into a thin line, frowning even more. Then he walks over to the other side of his room, gesturing for Yoongi to follow. There are low couches facing each other in front of a tall window, Zhoumi takes one side and indicates to the other for Yoongi to take. He places Yoongi’s helmet over the table, having brought it from the living room. It’s difficult walking with the bandages around his feet. He’s relieved when he sits, no longer pressing down all of his weight on the soles of his feet.

‘Why did you just do that?’ Zhoumi asks.

‘Do what?’

‘Follow me.’

‘You told me to.’

‘I didn’t.’

‘You did.’

‘I only gestured. How did you know how to follow me?’

‘Database translated it.’

Zhoumi rubs at his chin, clearly thinking hard.

‘Yoongi- what you are calling database is your mind…and your response, comes as a result of thinking.’ Zhoumi explains carefully, watching Yoongi’s face intently.

‘My mind?’

‘You understand, don’t you?’

‘Yes. And no.’

Zhoumi puts his hands together under his chin, frowning thoughtfully. They sit in silence for a long time, Zhoumi thinking hard while Yoongi looked on, no expression on his face.

‘Why did you do it?’ Yoongi asks instead.

Zhoumi looks up in surprise.

‘…do what exactly?’ Zhoumi asks carefully.
‘Give me the Android Core. What is your purpose?’

‘Yoongi…what do you know about the Yishengs?’ Zhoumi asks instead.

‘The Yisheng are Beings with the ability to use their own Life-force and channel it for healing purposes,’ Yoongi summarizes at once. ‘They are key participants in withholding the peace within the GLA Known Universe.’

‘Yes…that is true…but do you…’ Zhoumi pauses, looking greatly troubled.

He leans back against his chair, looking extremely disturbed. He glances over at his screen a few times, clearly calculating a number of theories in his mind. Yoongi counts up to 213 heart beats before Zhoumi speaks again.

‘Yoongi, I need your help.’

‘Help?’

‘Yes. And I want to help you too.’

‘Help me?’

‘Yes.’

‘How?’

‘I am giving you a mission,- no, this is a mission for both of us- one that if we succeed in, will change everything.’

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Namjoon leans in closer to his screen, squinting a little as he reads the reports. It had taken him almost 16 hours but he found them.

The murder of Prime Minister Gritha.

The GLA news broadcast had been relatively short and didn’t carry a lot of details. However, using that timeline, Namjoon was able to track every bit of news made with that title directly from Orvan. It had been an extremely time consuming search, wading through all of the media-filtered sensationalist news of a Prime Minister murdered by his wife after a 71 sol long marriage. There had been way too many “In Memorandum” articles singing the achievements of Prime Minister Gritha and already Namjoon doesn’t like him. High sung praises and glory never swayed him in the past, and looking at the pasty-skinned wide-mouthed Orvanan just cemented his dislike. Using his own channels, Namjoon was able to dig out every bit of information on Gritha and Namjoon is
Gritha, Prime Minister of Tui, one of the largest and most powerful countries inside Orvan, personally ran a slave-trade where he would sell his own people to pirates and other slave-trading markets across the galaxies. This was how he had taken up Tui up to its rich and powerful status.

Tui had been a poor and struggling country - the rest of her sister-countries doing much better as they raised trade with the GLA. With Orvan being rich in natural resources that many other planets didn’t have, such as Palladium and Zinc, planetary trade was easily struck between GLA trade routes. But Tui had been the country that refused to band in with the GLA and thus were impoverished as they could no longer maintain trade deals with neighbouring countries. The country of Tui slowly spiraled into economic crisis after crisis, breaking out several times into civil war between the reformist party, the revolutionist party, and the conservative party. Until after nearly an entire century, one Being rose and suddenly recreated all of Tui.

The Tuisan called it a miracle, Namjoon called it an extremely well planned out coup d’état.

Gritha had been clever in how he overtook the country. Offering what appeared to be peaceful and logical solutions to their problems, providing his own party with luxurious means and sudden increase in wealth.

“You need to know who can be bribed, how to bribe, and what sort of medium to use while bribing - it’s a fine delicate art. Not everyone has this ability.’

Gritha was an outsider - not originally from Tui so Namjoon guesses this involved several of Orvan’s political leaders as well. Because as Namjoon reads the reports on the other countries, despite their trade with the rest of the GLA Known Universe, they were failing to really meet and maintain economic stability, with barely suppressed civil wars flowering all over the planet.

And so in a sudden surge of economic growth, Tui was transformed into a flourishing country with an economy so stable and flourishing that other countries banded with Tui to form a united trade front. The people of Orvan rejoiced and planned out their future in blissful serenity of a strong government and a united dedication to battle poverty.

And it worked. Ranks of Tuisan and other Orvanans rose along with their economy.

But no one questioned the sudden disappearances of the less fortunate Orvanans who had to bear the brunt force of their country’s economic crash. But their disappearances were never highlighted, no news, no information about it was ever broadcasted.

These disappearances surfaced from around the time Gritha rose to power and Namjoon doesn’t have to read anymore to understand what happened.

With economic recession and poverty, the population grew unchecked and wild, creating scores of Beings who couldn’t be fed, worked, or taken care of. That made them the perfect trade unit for Gritha to exchange for profit to use to buy out his entire country. And who better to deal with other than pirates?

So Namjoon digs in deeper. He might not be able to access Sk’jin’s complete history, but he would be able to access Orvan’s criminal archive. But that had been basic. Sk’jin was tried for Class 2 Arson, Class 3 attempted murder, and Class 2 defamation of the Prime Minister of the Orvan State of Tui. No further detail was available and Namjoon thinks that might be because Gritha or other Beings involved in that situation didn’t want other Beings (mainly the GLA) from digging into their dealings and discovering this massive trade.
So Namjoon moves away from Orvan’s criminal archive and starts up the facial recognition software. There weren’t a lot of Khol’isa who even had a criminal background- not since their migration from their home planet. So finding someone like Sk’jin should be relatively easy.

And it is.

And Namjoon nearly balks at the sheer extent of Sk’jin’s criminal record. Not counting criminal offences made in non-GLA Systems, Sk’jin had a jaw-dropping 244 Class 1 murder charges, 587 Class 3 attempted murder charges, 521 Class 1 trespassing charges, 173 Class 1 illegal weapon usage Types A (space shuttle), B (Transporter: Aerial), C (Transporter: Terrain) charges, 318 Class 1 illegal trade charges, and the list continued. But as Namjoon skims through each offence until the very end, he never comes across trafficking.

Sk’jin’s ID in the criminal archive is similar to what Namjoon had been presented with initially- except for one minor detail.

And written there in bold: **Pirate.**

Sk’jin is a pirate. Or at least, used to be one.

Namjoon silences the dark hatred swirling inside of him, deeply rooted and firmly planted within him. His hand twitches involuntarily and he takes a deep breath to control himself.

Sk’jin was the actual *Captain* of a huge pirating network. He *commanded* throngs of Beings to do his bidding, to break all law and order, to wreak havoc in innocent Systems and possibly even galaxies. Written on the side, Namjoon discovers that Sk’jin had at one point, commanded approximately 56 ships, 82 shuttles, and even had an entire Dock under his command.

So what had he been doing in Orvan and what exactly made him try and kill Gritha (though in Namjoon’s opinion, was completely founded)? Sk’jin’s criminal record held no history of trafficking or any involvement in it either despite having touched on virtually every other criminal offence.

Because after a certain point, precisely 735 sols ago, all activity surrounding Sk’jin and his pirating network completely stops. There’s nothing. Namjoon even does a deep-dive through the archives but there’s nothing.

And then suddenly, 4 sols ago, his identity is archived and settled and he was now back on the grid. There was no prison time, no sentence carried out.

Namjoon quickly searches for Sk’jin’s ship. Judging by his records- and yes, he was correct. Sk’jin used a number of ships though never consistently. But after nearly an hour of careful scanning and research, Namjoon was able to find the ship Sk’jin had last been on before completely falling off the grid.

The last place Sk’jin’s ship had docked had been at a Docking Arc in between the Systems of Cabcd and Sluchaen. Then nothing else was mentioned of it.

There was a wide stretch of dead-space between Cabcd and Sluchaen, nothing noteworthy. But nonetheless Namjoon searches up the coordinates of that stretch of dead-space and to his surprise finds an overwhelming amount of reports of missing ships from that area. As he reads on he finds that for some strange reason, all of the activity surrounding this stretch of space abruptly ended 4 sols ago. To the side of the report were the lists of ships that went missing in that area, but before he can access any further information, a GIU active-firewall completely blocks him off. Active-
firewalls meant something extremely serious. It meant that the GIU hired Information Analysts to constantly bar and block anyone trying to access information about this stretch of space.

Namjoon knows about active-firewalls because he used to participate in handling several himself. And he knows that it would be impossible to try and hack his way into this. But this didn’t mean he came out without any information.

It validated his first initial suspicion that Sk’jin’s involvement with this case wasn’t random. There was more to Sk’jin, a whole lot more, than he let on. Namjoon is also uneasy with the fact that Yoongi and Sk’jin seem to know each other. But then it could also be the same way Hoseok and Namjoon knew each other through the Gaia Case court trials.

Namjoon doesn’t know how to point it out- but Sk’jin’s behavior, the way he presented himself, felt like an act. And of course, no one in this ship was being their true self (with the exception of Yoongi but Namjoon honestly cannot even begin to try and understand the Human)-, but there was something about Sk’jin that made Namjoon exceptionally edgy and paranoid.

Tapping his fingers along the surface of his table, Namjoon thinks for a while before pulling up Sk’jin’s criminal records again.

Sk’jin looks different in the pictures. Hair colour, sometimes even complexion, hair style, clothing. But there’s one thing that Namjoon notes above all.

Clear crystal-like helix horns emerging from above Sk’jin’s temples, poking out of his hair. They weren’t as tall or impressive as K’mara’s but that was expected; female Khol’isa had taller and more elaborate looking horns than their male counterparts. But they were very much present on Sk’jin’s head.

Why didn’t he have it now?

He also notices a pattern in Sk’jin’s activities across his records. There will be a period of about 2 sols every 7-8 decades where there will be no track record of his direct involvement in anything. Namjoon puts this down as Sk’jin’s period of autophagocytosis.

‘Captain, there is an outgoing signal leaving the Užkulisai-02 under unofficial channels.’

Namjoon stands up at once.

‘Locate source,’ Namjoon orders at once, grabbing his NaviLet.

‘Hangar Bay.’

‘Who is it?’ Namjoon asks as he switches on the surveillance. And he’s not surprised when he sees Sk’jin strolling along the Hangar, quite at ease.

‘Communications Manager Sk’jin.’

‘Please pull up audio,’ Namjoon says through gritted teeth.

‘Retrieving audio.’

Sk’jin is not speaking in the GLA Standard- it’s a language Namjoon cannot immediately identify. Was he speaking to K’mara?

‘Translate to Standard, Lisai,’ Namjoon orders as he makes sure everything was being recorded.
‘Translating.’

‘Change everything?’

‘Yes. What we know, what we believe, what we see.’

‘Change is inevitable. Where there is growth, where there is progress, where there is life, change follows regardless.’

‘That is true, but that is a natural event- one that comes from natural evolution.’ Zhoumi replies. ‘No this change. This will change everything.’

‘I do not understand.’

Zhoumi’s talons run lightly over the fabric of the couch, Yoongi can see micro strands of fine dust fly up from the contact.

‘What do you know about the Yisheng Directory?’ Zhoumi asks instead.

‘The Yisheng Directory is an independent organization that brings together all Yisheng-born to train and study their own skills in order to grow stronger in their abilities. They are healers, nurturers, caretakers, and growers. They are the peace that that GLA promises and delivers.’

‘That is the standard explanation yes,’ Zhoumi leans back, ‘Have you been there?’

‘Headquarters,’ Yoongi replies.

‘Of course,’ Zhoumi mumbles, looking a little unsure. ‘Have you met any of the Yisheng?’

‘I do not know.’

Zhoumi leans forward again, resting his arms on his legs as he stares at the smooth matte surface of the table for a while before producing his screen and tapping along it. Yoongi waits, watching with intent as he scans over Zhoumi’s appearance.

Long-Huon were known to be a tall species. They had a strong bone structure, resilient skin that had a scaly appearance in certain lights and over areas such as their elbows, knees, and ankles. Zhoumi’s talons are short and trimmed, making it easier for him to use the screen in his hands.

To an extent they were known as a proud, vain, and haughty species. Database tells him that this is typecasting; and that the rumors about them breathing fire was both illogical and biologically impossible. But it was kept afloat for a variety of reasons, mainly by young-adult fiction novels.
exported from Long-Huo as a long living joke against the rest of the Universe.

‘Do you know who this is?’ Zhoumi asks, holding up his screen for Yoongi to look at.

‘No. And yes.’

‘What do you mean by that?’

‘I have seen his face before. Database is providing me with GLA-sourced information about him. But I do not know him.’

‘This is Yisheng Tlun’hla - an Elder in the Directory…and he is a close friend of mine.’ Zhoumi explains slowly.

‘You sound unsure.’

Zhoumi looks up at Yoongi in surprise, evidently not expecting Yoongi’s comment.

‘I don’t know if you understand the context of religion Yoongi- so let me try to explain it so that you understand what I mean,’ Zhoumi begins, looking even more serious.

‘Religion is belief in a superbeing often omnipresent who wields abilities and powers that are often heightened to impossible degree without any explanation or proof, depending solely on faith.’ Yoongi says. ‘I understand religion.’

‘But do you know why so many chose to follow and believe in a religion?’

‘No.’

‘I can only declare this for myself in this, but I believe I speak for many across the Universe,’ Zhoumi says carefully, rubbing his hands together slowly as he contemplated how to best coin his words together. ‘I believe in a higher authority- a higher power, because I believe that where there is evil and destruction, there must be a force of equal good. A balance, so to speak.’

‘But death and destruction are part of the cycle of life, as stated by the Yisheng Code,’ Yoongi counters. ‘They are not evil, but a simple progression of life.’

Zhoumi looks taken aback again at Yoongi’s comment.

‘Yes- that is true Yoongi,’ Zhoumi replies. ‘But what of needless death? Needless destruction? You are originally Human, though you were not born on Earth or strictly of Human parents- but you are aware of your origins aren’t you? About Earth?’

‘I am aware of her history.’

Database provides Yoongi the entire history of his home-planet- or at least Yoongi guesses that it’s supposed to be his home-planet. He doesn’t quite understand the concept behind it.

Yoongi sees flashes of footage, nuclear clouds covering the surface of Earth, pollution and smog casting an eternal night over a majority of her continents, her oceans stagnant and overrun with chemicals and toxic waste. And her people barely surviving the acrid conditions of her land, as they fought country, state, neighbour, family for a chance at living.

Database provides him with full accounts of the Second Age of the Darkness, and how with the aid of the Venture Unit Exploration Division, Earth was rescued and brought back to her former state. But not without a lot of loss and a lot of pain. Earth was once again the blue planet of her solar
‘All of that was needless—caused by selfish desires, hatred, and an inbuilt desire for self-destruction— we all have this. It is inherent to all of us as a species. We build, and we destroy, we create and we destroy—but why—why do we do this? Why do we watch as we destroy ourselves over and over again? Why do we choose to burn?’ Zhoumi grips the arms of his chair, looking uncharacteristically impassioned.

‘We don’t just watch, throwing ourselves into the flames of destruction; we laugh and smile, cheering ourselves on in our hypocrisy as we dress in riches that we have stolen, and we fight to be the first to dive straight into the pits. This happens over and over and over again!’

Zhoumi leans back, breathing hard.

‘We keep making excuses— we keep saying that it’s “natural”— that it’s a part of our cycle— that this was what living really meant. But it’s not. How can it be? How can we say that it is? How can we say that genocide is simply a part of fate, or something that unfortunately had to happen because it was meant to be? And how can we accept it, watching as all of Life screams in agony, inflicted by those who should know better?’ Zhoumi’s voice is simmering with anger.

‘Death is a part of Life, I know this,’ Zhoumi states, breathing out as though to calm himself. ‘But what we see, what we hear—all this violence, this senseless craving for destruction. This is not a part of Life— this is not living. And that is what needs to change. And those who can bring this change, are the Yishengs.’

‘This does not seem plausible,’ Yoongi replies blandly.

‘It doesn’t, does it? But this is what he believes in too— and that is why we are working together to bring this change around.’ Zhoumi nods at the screen. ‘Tlun’hla wants to recreate the universe—regrow what we already have and make it better. Or at least that’s what he says he wants— but now … now I don’t know what to think…’

‘What changed your mind?’ Yoongi asks.

‘You.’ Zhoumi replies bluntly. ‘When I first met you all those years ago, I thought you were similar to me— another believer of the cause, working to use their ability and skills for the Yishengs and betterment of the Universe. And that is what Tlun’hla told me as well.’

‘I have no recollection of this sentiment in my Dreams.’

‘That is what I sensed from you,’ Zhoumi says quietly. ‘Or more like…I just didn’t sense anything from you. It was like you weren’t alive.’

‘I am alive. I have a heartbeat.’

‘Living is so much more than a heartbeat Yoongi,’ Zhoumi says quietly. ‘To Live is to Be.’

‘I do not understand.’

‘I hope you will one day— because we are a part of this Universe. Me. You. All of us. And we have every right to live and continue on.’ Zhoumi says quietly. ‘We were born into this universe alongside countless other Beings. It is our birthright to uphold it.’

‘Uphold living?’
‘Uphold you Are.’

‘I do not understand.’

‘It’s all right.’ Zhoumi replies, a sort of sad smile on his face. ‘One day you will. And the questions will never stop.’

‘If it is something that you believe in, then why do you question it?’ Yoongi asks. ‘Belief is something that inspires no questions- only blind faith and trust.’

‘Things exist so that we can question it Yoongi,’ Zhoumi says. ‘Not everything is at it seems. Tell me, from where you sit, how many flowers are in that vase?’

Zhoumi points at the mantle over his bed. A large black vase sits at the center of the mantle, laden with heavy looking flowers.

‘9.’

‘But from where I sit, I see only 8. Do you see what I mean? From where I sit, from what I can see, I am correct. But from where you sit, and from what you can see, you see 9.’

‘How many flowers are there?’

‘10. Actually.’

‘To question is to validate, to understand. Once you start asking questions, you will understand too,’ Zhoumi replies.

‘That doesn’t make sense.’

Zhoumi sighs out heavily, ‘No Yoongi, to be honest, most of anything worth knowing doesn’t make sense.’

Yoongi has no response to this and Zhoumi sinks into a thoughtful silence for a while.

‘I stopped asking questions- after hearing what I wanted to hear, what I wanted to know.’ Zhoumi continues. ‘I trusted Tlun’hla and his words- after all, why would he lie to me- what did he have to gain from all of this? We are all aiming to achieve the same thing- to bring peace and an end to all the destruction and madness.’

‘If destruction is inherent to all living Beings as you stated, it would be impossible to stop or prevent it,’ Yoongi says. ‘A living Being is aware and is capable of independent thought. You cannot control the progression of the mind of every single Being in the Universe.’

‘But we could- we could, if we can find it.’ Zhoumi says with emphasis. ‘We would be able to eradicate all of this destruction- and all the Beings of the Universe would live as they should, and they as they should. No needless suffering, no needless strife, no selfishness, no want of power- just Living.’

Then Zhoumi looks up at Yoongi, a frown marring his handsome features.

‘But…as I…when I look at you- a Being who has no sense of self, who doesn’t understand- are you not, after all, what we wanted and what we were looking for?’ Zhoumi wipes at his face. ‘But it can’t be- because it’s not right.’

‘Tlun’hla said…if we take what he said as a lie…I-‘ Zhoumi pauses, as though incapable of
thinking anymore. ‘Then he lied to us all- this is not peace- this is tyrannical oppression. Something we want to get rid of.’

‘If what you say is true, then why not report this matter to the Yisheng Directory.’ Yoongi rationalizes.

Zhouni’s eyes narrow at that.

‘I have to first make sure that my case is strong- if not, then all of this would go to waste.’ He says after a long period of silence.

Zhouni is an extremely suspicious and shrewd Being. That much Yoongi can tell with ease. But he was also first and foremost, selfish. Zhouni wanted recognition, power, and most of all, acclamation. If he was discovering something that would grant him that power, something that would grant him that platform of rank- then Zhouni would place himself forward rather than share the glory with anyone else.

Zhouni spoke of hypocrisy, and Yoongi wonders if he sees it in himself or if he, like the rest of the Universe, believed that they were in the right.

‘Do you understand?’

Yoongi doesn’t know if he understands. Yoongi looks over at the vase of flowers. He now saw only 7. He leans backwards and finds that he can see 8 again.

Zhouni is looking at him curiously, waiting for an answer.

Yoongi wonders what it means to really understand. Did anyone really ever understand anything? Zhouni was speaking from a point of view that only saw 8 flowers. There would be others who saw 9, 10, 11, or maybe even no flowers at all. What matter and ideas did they have then? Was it all the same? Or was it different? And if so, did they understand it from where they could see 8 flowers, or 9?

Yoongi nods in reply.

‘I want you to report to me everything you…you dream of, everything that you know, where you go, where you sleep, who you see.’ Zhouni breathes out deeply. ‘There’s something that Tlun’hla is doing that goes against everything we stand for. And with your help, I think I will be able to uncover it.’
Hoseok taps along the edge of his screen, waiting for the data-encryption to finally finish.

He had the Bridge to himself for the next 6 hours. Then after him it would be Yoongi’s turn to man the Bridge. Sk’jin and Namjoon were once again engaged in some passive-aggressive cold-shoulder treatment and were both actively avoiding the Bridge.

So the Bridge was entirely under his command at this moment. And Hoseok likes to take advantage of any alone time he can get. Mainly to do some intensive snooping.

He probably wasn’t at Namjoon’s level, but Hoseok was a pretty decent Analyst when he needed to be one. After all he did infiltrate a planetary federation by pretending to be an Information Analyst some sols ago (which was stressful in more than one way because one of the presidents of the rebel federation had developed a “fondness” for Hoseok which Hoseok wouldn’t have minded but he’s not into shell-like exoskeletons that oozed slime. As a result he also learnt how to actively dodge unwanted advances for nearly 8 months- Hoseok was never more relieved to be done with a mission). So Hoseok is confident in his abilities. Not to mention he did own a bunch of devices to help him in these particular cases. Particular case here meaning Namjoon’s history.

Of course digging out information of a Being who not only worked for the Venture Unit under the Information Analysis Division but was probably one of the most paranoid and cautious Beings Hoseok has ever met was close to impossible. Which is why Hoseok doesn’t even try to begin digging up his private files from the Venture Unit archives and instead goes into the Yisheng Archives to find the raw and unabridged history behind Kutsoglera.

The files were of course protected, but it wasn’t something Hoseok couldn’t get by. He knew a couple of Information Analysts and a few incredibly talented less-than-savory individuals who created and customized digital-bots that could infiltrate certain spaces within the vast digitalverse of online data and information.

There’s a small light that blinks at Hoseok, indicating the finalization of the data-encryption. Tapping along the screen to access the decrypted data, Hoseok checks around one more time, making sure the Bridge really was empty (because Yoongi was so fucking quiet) and he begins reading.

It wasn’t all too surprising reading the raw unabridged version of what happened in Kutsoglera. When “working” for the Venture Unit and that too as an Infiltration agent, it was practically second nature to immediately think the worst of every and any “corrected” information. The history of Kutsoglera that was widely available to the rest of the GLA Known Universe though was horrific, didn’t cover the deeper and darker secrets behind it either.

While it was definitely true that a massive pirating organization had raided and overtaken Kutsoglera, it had not been a random attack.

There were a lot of secret organizations and unions between both GLA Planetary Systems and non-GLA Planetary Systems regarding biological experimentation. Any form of study or experimentation imposed upon Beings that went beyond what the GLA Code on scientific studies
set up was instantly banned and made punishable by both planetary and GLA laws.

There were a lot of reasons for many planetary governments or entire systems to want to divulge into illegal biological engineering and study. But the main reason came down to one factor: power.

The GLA are extremely powerful and strong, there was no doubt about it- however everyone knew that it was the Yisheng Directory that granted them this intense extensive reach in their governance. Using the abilities and doctrine of the Yishengs was one sure way to always guarantee a peaceful transaction into the GLA Known Universe.

And everyone knew this.

But there were some who opposed this, and wanted to exert their own form of superiority or display of power. Therefore, the most popular subject for any illegal biological experimentation was to build a super form of Beings that could be controlled and used to attack or counter the Yishengs.

In retrospect, Hoseok finds this a little funny because it was the Yishengs that who succeeded in building such an army of Beings in the form of the GI.

The main issue with creating such an army was that Yishengs could command every and anything that contained Life-force. And Life-force was found in everything.

But often times, the hearts and minds of cruel and power-crazed Beings in positions of power are resilient towards factual truths.

There have been many situations in which Hoseok has had to watch as innocents are taken advantage of, used for the benefit or profit of those who were stronger, richer, and by all rights of the universe, should have been smarter than what they did. And he hadn’t been able to do anything.

And this is exactly what happened in Kutsoglera.

They were a very young planet, their civilizations just barely forming over their continents that boasted lush and gentle terrains, mild and temperate weather, and hard-working simple Beings who enjoyed life on a daily basis, their biggest worries mainly related to the agrarian lifestyle they led.

According to archaeological findings and what could be surmised by those who survived long enough to describe Kutsoglera before that happened, the Kutsoglerin had only achieved what Hoseok dubs as the “ax-age”. Where the Beings of the planet had collective progressed enough to create and hone crafting skills for everyday purpose and use.

Hoseok grimaces as he reads through the accounts of the events that followed, skimming through the contents briefly, not wanting to add more to the index of dark history into his memory than was required.

A total of 83,211 Kutsoglerin survived the 54 sols of torture they went through as a species. Hoseok runs a comparison to the total Kutsoglerin population from the most recent census carried out and isn’t surprised to find their current population at a mere 32,862.

Hoseok glances at the census briefly, wondering if Namjoon’s name was his actual name or not. But he tries it anyway and to his surprise finds Namjoon within 2 seconds.

Going back to the encrypted data, Hoseok starts a cross-search to find Namjoon’s original files and almost regrets doing so. If Namjoon knew what he was doing, there was no doubt in Hoseok’s mind that the Kutsoglerin would be angry. And though he hasn’t seen anything other than petty
passive-aggressiveness from the Captain, Hoseok has no doubt that he was probably extremely formidable and terrible to have as an enemy.

Hoseok glances behind him again just to make sure the Bridge is empty, and performs a brief systems-check before going back to his screen.

Namjoon had only been a child- according to the data provided, estimated at 7 to 10 sols of age, when the pirates had attacked. But his young age didn’t stop him from facing equal, if not worse, infliction of cruelty.

Taking a deep breath, Hoseok quickly skims over Namjoon’s medical report made when he was found, age approximated at 65 sols, barely alive, and entire changed.

According to this report, Namjoon was more or less 80% bionic. And while this wouldn’t necessarily be shocking or strange for many Beings, the method and application of his non-organic form was to the point of resembling a Cyborg. Basically, only his head was original, and that too most of his exterior was grafted and sculpted after his rescue. So that meant that what Hoseok saw of Namjoon now was just a guess made based on what remained of his original skull.

His finger hovers over the tab for the original images taken. Deciding against it, Hoseok scrolls downwards instead.

The report also claimed that due to the nature of Namjoon’s biological growth, his adaptation, and the timing of the stages in which he was “introduced” to a new “addition” to his body, his life and survival was interwoven with his crudely constructed internal bionic system. The Yishengs healed him as best they could, but so much of his original self was so entirely destroyed that they could do nothing but fortify what already existed and replace what could be replaced without adding further harm or damage.

As Hoseok reads into Namjoon’s medical history, he can’t help but feel a surge of anger, sadness, and pain.

This happened, for over 50 years, and to Hoseok’s absolute disappointment, the Venture Unit had found out about it a decade after it had all started. But they hadn’t done anything. And when they decided to do something, found that they couldn’t due to legality issues concerning non-GLA planets and the laws on space conflict.

S’ava Hhlai, Hoseok’s Division head, had been the one to propose the plan of letting in their field agents to infiltrate the situation to find a criminal offence taking place within the pirating organization and apprehend them based on those offences.

Hoseok hadn’t been involved in that, having been too young at the time. He’s also pretty sure his parents hadn’t been involved. He’s read through both of his parents personal case files and knows for a fact that they’ve never been near Kutsoglera.

So a few agents were sent in, and after being able to find a handful of criminal offences (honestly not too difficult considering this was a pirating organization), they were able to finally put an end to most of the pirate’s tyranny. Because while they were able to arrest the shuttles and ships off-planet, due to galactic laws, weren’t able to do anything in Kutsoglera.

But the Yisheng Directory had come to the rescue at this point, claiming the planet under the Extinction clause of the GLA Treaty on non-GLA planets that basically put all of Kutsoglera and her people under the protective care of the Yisheng Directory.
Hoseok scrolls down to find a recent picture of Namjoon, listing him as resident of Raksane Tayi under the Extinction clause along with the remaining surviving Kutsoglerin. But under this Namjoon’s whereabouts are put under “unknown” and hasn’t been updated in over a century.

Hoseok finds the list of bionic replacement surgeries Namjoon has been through and his gut clenches at the sheer number of it all. Namjoon didn’t exactly have organic blood running through his bionic arteries and veins. Instead his specially constructed heart pumped a sort of fluid similar to Android-blood, something that helped de-magnetize and reduce conductivity of the Android from the inside. But Namjoon’s was different because his brain still required nutrients and oxygen to survive. No additional information is given about it so Hoseok has more questions now than he did before.

There were notes on how Namjoon’s body somehow registered all of the proceedings to the way someone would with prolonged conditioning and natural evolution. So to an extent, Namjoon’s young age had helped him survive and adapt to the cruel mutilations reformed into his body.

Hoseok notes with a sinking heart that Namjoon didn’t have a digestive system. It made sense that Namjoon didn’t eat now because he didn’t need to. But how did the rest of him survive?

‘Medication.’

Hoseok nearly falls off of his chair when he finds Yoongi standing calmly behind him, like he’d been there for some time now already.

‘Yoongi-!’

‘I can smell it on him,’ Yoongi replies, indifferent to Hoseok’s startled defensive stance.

‘So you know? About him?’ Hoseok asks, ignoring the fact that Yoongi could smell out medication on random Beings.


‘You- you asked him?!’ Hoseok repeats.

‘Yes.’ Yoongi replies.

‘Was he…was he um, mad? That you asked?’ Hoseok asks carefully.

Yoongi looks away from the HUD window to look down at Hoseok. Suddenly, Hoseok feels excruciatingly scrutinized under Yoongi’s blank stare.

‘No. He seemed surprised.’ Yoongi replies.

‘Ah…how did you know it wouldn’t upset him?’ Hoseok asks curiously.

‘He mentioned it. Meaning there was an invitation open for further inquiry,’ Yoongi explains.

‘…if you put it that way…’ Hoseok blinks before glancing down at this screen. ‘You still have some time before it’s your turn. Why don’t you rest up?’

Yoongi doesn’t reply and Hoseok wonders if he’s upset instead.

‘Do you want to be left alone?’ Yoongi asks instead.

‘Um- I mean, not necessarily? I was just…looking out for you?’ Hoseok replies hoping he doesn’t
sound as unsure as he did to his own ears.

‘Thank you. I am staying here.’ Yoongi replies.

‘Ah- okay,’ Hoseok replies somewhat lamely and then adds, in an attempt to diffuse any awkwardness though he’s sure any awkwardness he was feeling was pretty much one-sided because Yoongi looks completely unaffected.

‘Have you eaten?’

‘I was trying to,’ Yoongi replies, his answer surprises Hoseok who was expecting either a yes or a no from the Human.

‘But Namjoon and Sk’jin were in the Kitchen. I ran away.’

It takes Hoseok a few seconds but the moment he’s recovered, he’s laughing until his stomach cramps.

‘I- I have some-’ Hoseok manages to wheeze out as he recovers. ‘I have some snacks- you wanna share?’

Yoongi looks at Hoseok thoughtfully before he nods and sits on the chair next to Hoseok’s.

‘I was thinking,’ Hoseok grins as he pulls out a compressor bag full of dried fruits from the compartment under the arms of his chair. ‘Out of the two, I think Namjoon is going to be the first to snap and possibly punch Sk’jin.’

Yoongi takes a dried fruit, looking at it as though studying it for a while before putting it into his mouth and chewing slowly.

‘Good?’ Hoseok asks.

‘Yes,’ Yoongi replies, mouth full as he reaches for another fruit. ‘And I think Sk’jin will be the first to snap.’

Hoseok doesn’t know why he’s so pleased and excited that Yoongi is speaking this much.

‘Wanna bet?’

‘What are we betting on?’

Hoseok is positively gleeful.

‘Shift hours.’ Hoseok replies at once. ‘If I win, you take my shift hours; if you win, I take yours.’

Yoongi pauses chewing, as though contemplating and then he nods.

‘Deal.’
Database - *his mind* - provides him with everything he needs to know.

Yoongi “understands” why Zhoumi used the Android Core. What Yoongi translated as Sleeping, Dreaming, and Knowing, was the basic skills he would need for the mission he was assigned to, supplied to him through his helmet, or back in Headquarters in his insulated bedding. But now Yoongi doesn’t need any of that. Or maybe not, because he still finds himself not Knowing what to do with all of what was now in his mind.

It’s overwhelming as he watches, as he sees, as he smells, as he feels, as he hears.

Everything he sees is the first time he’s ever seen it - yet database gives him full information at once. He was in Šerdesas, past midnight. Those were stars, the asteroid belt, building lights, ionized motorways.

Everything he smells, is the first time he’s smelled it. And again, database identifies what it is, where it came from, what it was. His mind tells him that this is petrichor, the smell of earth after rainfall.

Everything he feels: wind, fabric, water, warmth, cold, pain, medication. The shock of the first sensation gives away immediately to a known response that translates his sensory overload into basic reactions.

He didn’t even switch on the information HUD on his visor - he Knew, without Dreaming.

It’s raining. And though his uniform provides him with protection, Yoongi can sense each drop against the fabric that covers him head to foot. The alley he’s standing in is empty, the Transporter he had parked remained hidden under the CamoTarp where he left it nearly 5 days ago. He removes his glove and allows the drops to linger over his palm, falling into the grooves of his fingers, forming smooth temporary pockets of water over serrated and harsh skin.

It spills away immediately.

Carefully removing his helmet, Yoongi allows the rain to fall over his head. And if he listened closely, he could *feel* his heartbeat thrumming inside his chest.

Each drop is like electricity that sparks and instantly dies as database translates each sensory trigger into a known response. By the time his hair is soaked through, Yoongi is able to understand it.

He decides that he likes the rain.

‘*Living is so much more than a heartbeat Yoongi.*’
Was this what Zhoumi meant by being alive?

“‘We’ll be arriving in Avasana in 12 hours,’ Sk’jin calls from where he’s sitting.

Despite the entire ship being free for their benefit and use, somehow all of them ended up assembling inside the Bridge more often than not. Sk’jin puts it down to Namjoon’s stiff regard he held towards his crew (of course Sk’jin is realistic and knows that this is mainly because of him) as a whole, therefore everyone felt obligated to sit at the Bridge when they weren’t in the middle of their sleep-cycle. So despite having a schedule, they more or less intermingled in the Bridge.

‘Yoongi I’ve been meaning to ask,’ Namjoon says quietly from where he’s sitting, yet again preoccupied with his screen. Namjoon was more or less literally attached to his customized NaviLet- he was never without it and kept consulting it. Sk’jin wondered if Namjoon was continuously reading or gathering data, a kind of forced habit from his extensive years as an Information Analyst or if he was maybe secretly into trash-fiction readily available online. Sk’jin really wants it to be the latter but knows that it’s probably the former instead. No one could look that serious reading some star-crossed romance novel about ridiculous inter-species couples and their overly dramatic families. It was always the families that raised issues. Who cared if your daughter wanted to marry the 6-tentacle-d and heavily toothed Pamn’dadt – this was true love and true love transcended biology. Let them marry and have weird kids dammit!

Besides, not all Pamn’dadt were ravenous carnivores that ate their own kind when caught in a brawl like some books portrayed (though it should be noted that an entire saga aptly named “The Six Hands of Our Love” written by a famed and celebrated shadow-author who went by the pen-name “Azure Nebula” probably romanticized the species too much) - they could be very sophisticated Beings with refined educated knowledge on the best fabrics from around the Universe. Sk’jin knew one such Pamn’dadt and had once been robed in fabric that felt like how fluffy clouds would feel like for many a sols.
‘Have you made a recent surveillance on the weaponry on board?’

‘I have.’ Yoongi replies from where he’s sitting, staring straight out into the white expanse of warp space. Sk’jin wonders what fascinated the Human so much that he kept staring out of the window. Or maybe it wasn’t fascination, and maybe Yoongi just zoned out entirely, going off somewhere in his own mind. But as Sk’jin studies Yoongi, he can’t hope to even begin to guess what he might be thinking about. There was nothing about him that indicated what subject content he would be thinking about.

It wasn’t difficult guessing what Hoseok or Namjoon would be thinking about- Sk’jin knows that they’re more or less all in the same page with what was most pressing in their minds: this mission. And among other things extreme distrust, overthinking everything, and in Hoseok’s case, regret in ever being asked and agreeing to be part of this mission.

But with Yoongi it was all blanks and even more questions that made no sense. Sk’jin suddenly wonders if Yoongi would enjoy “The Six Hands of Our Love” and has to suppress a laugh at the very idea of Yoongi reading such a novel.

‘Is the official report correct then?’ Namjoon asks, not looking up from his screen.

‘No. Official report does not record the stock of the proton-missiles,’ Yoongi replies causing Namjoon to look up in alarm and Hoseok to facepalm.

‘We have proton-missiles?’ Namjoon repeats.

‘Yes. 50 of them.’ Yoongi replies.

Namjoon and Hoseok share a look before the Kutsoglerin stands up with a heavy sigh.

‘Yoongi, could you show me the missiles?’ Namjoon asks.

Yoongi stands up immediately, and Namjoon follows him out of the Bridge.

‘I don’t think it’s surprising that we’re carrying proton-missiles,’ Sk’jin comments conversationally.

‘You don’t think so?’ Hoseok raises an eyebrow.

‘No- I mean, it adds up to what we’re doing and what we could potentially face- or not face,’ Sk’jin shrugs. ‘I’m surprised you’re surprised.’

‘Rather than surprise I think I’m just generally high-strung,’ Hoseok grimaces, automatically scanning the system profiles in front of him. Spaces, it must be so bothersome having to be Head-Pilot with such a small crew. ‘This will add to other security and safety measures we will have to take- regarding the ship and legal limits while on Docks.’

‘It’s not like it’s difficult sneaking in proton-missiles,’ Sk’jin ruminates, remembering all of the weapons he snuck around with ease.

‘No- but we’re going to have to filter more of the docks and planets based on their security checks,’ Hoseok replies. ‘Some scan specifically for Grade B and above weapons and we’re going to have to avoid that.’

Hoseok stands from where he’s seated, making his way to the Navigation Table. A small furrow appears between his brows as he scans the list of Docks in their newly assimilated trajectory.
‘We’re going to have to cancel Avasana,’ Hoseok frowns. ‘Though most ships are easily passed through, trade ships larger than an S-IV are required to get scanned as they pass through the launch-rings.’

‘But if we can’t get to Avasana, then we’ll have to double back at least,’ Sk’jin calculates briefly, ‘8 light years back and fly towards E’gri I think.’

Hoseok grimaces as he finds the planet in question.

‘Yeah- and it’s in-planet docking, they don’t have a Docking Arc outside,’ Hoseok sighs. ‘Namjoon, we have to reroute.’

‘Yeah- I figured. This is a lot of missiles, we can’t talk our way out of this, not with this kind of firepower.’ Namjoon replies through the Comm. ‘I think we’ll have to reroute back to E’gri.’

‘What’s in E’gri?’ Hoseok asks Sk’jin.

Leaning back more comfortably, Sk’jin sends details on the planet to Hoseok.

‘Does anyone have a criminal record there?’ Namjoon asks, a hint of amusement in his voice.

Sk’jin snorts faintly, catching Hoseok’s amused grin.

‘If you’re referring to Communications Manager Sk’jin then no, he does not have a criminal record in E’gri.’

‘And thank you Yoongi,’ Sk’jin chuckles.

‘Has anyone been to E’gri?’ Namjoon asks before he appears at the doorway to the Bridge.

‘If I don’t have a criminal record there, then no,’ Sk’jin replies with a proud grin. Namjoon briefly rolls his eyes.

‘Never been,’ Hoseok replies.

‘I have,’ Yoongi chimes in. ‘For a brief period of time.’

‘Ah…’ Hoseok sounds uneasy but curious. ‘For what?’

‘I was assigned an assassination task.’

Namjoon, Sk’jin, and Hoseok all share a quick glance with each other before Sk’jin rearranges his features and asks, ‘Were you successful?’

‘Yes.’

‘So I guess…we can rely on you for information about E’gri?’ Hoseok asks hopefully.

‘It’s hot.’

‘…well it is rather close to its sun…’ Namjoon comments as he reads the information on E’gri. ‘Anything else?’

Yoongi looks at the 3D holographic projection of E’gri and says in his normal monotone, ‘It’s extremely dry.’
‘We’ll have to moisturize ourselves then,’ Sk’jin chimes in, winking at Namjoon, ‘I can help you.’

Namjoon’s eyebrow twitches by itself before he says, ‘Hoseok pull us out of warp and let’s reposition ourselves. Everyone buckle in.’

‘Offer still stands!’ Sk’jin sings as he turns on his chair, facing the HUD windows, the safety straps automatically wrapping over his frame.

Hoseok hears Namjoon sigh quietly before he too sits back down on his chair.

‘All seated?’ Hoseok calls out though his dashboard signals him that they were all secured.

‘All right then, pulling out of warp in 10…9…8…7…6…5…4…3…2…1.’

The stars diminish and the lights fade away, opening into wide open space.

‘All right- safety can be removed in a minute,’ Hoseok calls out from the cockpit. ‘We have 5 minutes before we can jump back into warp. Namjoon is the trajectory locked-‘

A massive shuttle hurtles overhead out of nowhere, clearly pulling out of warp as well judging by the bright blue energy frequency that rippled at its wake.

‘-what the fuck-‘ Hoseok doesn’t get to complete his sentence because the Bridge is filled with a warning sound- the alarm for a lock-rift being placed on them. The shuttle in front of them has markings and serial numbers all from Orvan and it halts in front of them, looming in front of them, nearly 3 times as large as the Užkulisai-02.

Hoseok watches helplessly as the dashboard in front of him freezes and locks down. This was not good.

‘Shields up, missiles ready to launch.’ Lisai’s smooth voice reports in.

‘WAIT YOONGI DON’T FIRE!’ Namjoon yells as he recovers from the suddenness of everything.

‘We’re receiving a call-‘ Sk’jin announces from where he’s sitting.

‘This is the Orvan Far Space Operative- all crew members of the Užkulisai-02 will surrender immediately for Level 2 Bribery and obstruction of GLA Docking Procedures. Be prepared to dock’

Everyone’s heads spin to look at Sk’jin who looks mildly impressed before he turns to look at all of them in turn. Then with a sort of resigned shrug and smile, he says, ‘Oops?’

‘Spaces!’ Namjoon exclaims as he undoes his safety belt and addresses Hoseok, ‘Hoseok, ready the ship to dock. Yoongi, for the sake of our mission, please lay off the trigger- it makes me nervous.’

Hoseok glances over at Yoongi who has indeed launched the entire interactive-weapons control frame and had his hands over trigger controls and the HUD in front of him was already locked in place, ready to fire. Yoongi extracts his hands out of the controls looking dejected.

‘And you,’ Namjoon rounds up at Sk’jin who is also standing up, ‘You best hope we can get out of this shit you’ve put us in or we’re going back to Šerdesas and you will have to explain why we failed not even a month into our mission to the special jury.’
Sk’jin actually has the gall to chuckle as he says, ‘Don’t worry Nammie, I got this.’

‘You better,’ Namjoon replies distractedly as he gathers his NaviLet and rushes out towards the exit way with Sk’jin at his heels. ‘And Yoongi- please don’t fire at anyone or anything.’

Hoseok watches with great alarm as Yoongi lowers the TeorSer that somehow just appeared in his hands, looking even more put off. Then to Hoseok’s complete disquiet, Yoongi actually sighs and says, ‘I’m going to have some tea. Would you like some?’

Hoseok glances out of the HUD window and then back at Yoongi. He’s vaguely aware of Namjoon and Sk’jin very loudly bickering about something. Then he looks back out of the window and thinks, why not?

‘Yeah sure Yoongi. Let’s have some tea.’

Yoongi walks inside the wide spacious apartment. It doesn’t look lived in for at least 5 months now.

Yoongi isn’t too surprised by this. There were times when Zhoumi left for months on end. One time he had been away in Long-Huo for over a year due to family matters. Yoongi hasn’t seen Zhoumi in the past 17 months, but he had completed a mission commissioned by Zhoumi to deliver an OrTank to the Ubhuku planet in the System of Ymir. But there had been other missions he had to see to. From other Beings like Zhoumi. And Yoongi had accumulated a long list of information based on these Beings and Yoongi knew that Zhoumi would want to see it.

Yoongi doesn’t think much of Zhoumi’s absence, but there was a staged setting to the interior of the apartment Yoongi was very familiar to.

Nothing had changed. The table was where it was supposed to be, with a folded bit of paper under one of the legs to balance the slight rickety default it had. The kettle was on the heater, there were a set of dishes on the rack next to the cooker, the spice shakers aligned a bit too much to the left, in danger of being knocked off constantly. And as usual, Yoongi quietly pushes them back into the counter an inch or two towards the center.

Someone had been in here. And it wasn’t Zhoumi or Yoongi.
Yoongi can’t smell the Long-Huon or his presence inside the rooms. Instead there’s an almost faint lingering smell of sodium. Everything had been wiped down. But the main thing that is entirely out of place was the fact that all of his plants were still flourishing.

Database tells him that this looks like something he would do. And that meant that someone else from the GI was here. Someone other than Yoongi.

And the only reason why he hadn’t been attacked yet, was because the other agent hadn’t heard him come in.

Quietly making his way into the hallway, Yoongi waits in complete stillness and silence.

The door to Zhoumi’s bedroom opens without a single sound and a figure steps out.

Their movements are fast.

Yoongi does not have his helmet, but he had the element of surprise. He dodges the silent TeorSer fire shot at him with ease, feeling the burning heat of the shots graze past his exposed cheek as he scales the wall of the hallway, landing with grace and purpose as he easily knocks down the other agent.

Yoongi has never engaged in a fight against another GI agent- there was no protocol regarding this issue and that was probably why the other had seemingly confused responses. But Yoongi knows better now. Or at least thinks he does.

When he compares this fight to the countless others he has engaged in, Yoongi finds that it’s extremely quiet, fast, and lasts 26.31 seconds longer.

Yoongi suffers a punch that definitely cracks a rib or two, but he’s faster than his opponent. Faster, and much stronger. Making sure not to leave any trace or evidence of even a scuffle, Yoongi is quick to disarm the agent and with swift practiced ease, deflects their attempt in breaking his wrist by easily dislocating their arm out of their socket, making sure the joint throws out completely.

But one armed, a GI agent is still dangerous. Yoongi would know, because database is telling him of a situation where both of his arms were compromised and he had completed his mission by using only his legs. The agent attempts to tackled Yoongi down to the ground, clearly to overweigh him seeing as they stood a clear head taller. But Yoongi is expecting this and deflecting the attempt to misbalance him, Yoongi hooks his arm around their neck.

The GI agent falls limp to the ground, its helmeted head twisted all the way back. Yoongi would have to dispose of the body but that wasn’t his immediate concern. He scans the bedroom beyond the open door and finds everything relatively the same. Stepping over the body, Yoongi detects a digital warmth emanating from the massive screen Zhoumi used for his own personal use. It had recently been switched on and off. As Yoongi approaches the table, he detects a faint fragrance. Glancing over at the mantle over the bed, Yoongi notices a large vase of flowers, filled with luscious white flowers- the kind Zhoumi favored.

Yoongi notes that there are 10 stalks of flowers.

A low hiss permeates the air and Yoongi crouches down immediately, his hand reaching for his retractable dagger.

There’s a strange movement from the body of the GI agent, a strange compression taking place over the black-uniform before the body starts steaming. Moving quickly, Yoongi removes the helmet from over the GI agent’s head, causing it flop back to face Yoongi.
It’s only for a second, but the face of the GI agent is emblazoned in Yoongi’s mind. She looked not unlike himself- her features were unremarkable and plain, part of her face burnt no doubt from a previous mission.

It must be some form of emergency failsafe in case an agent died during a mission. Yoongi watches with an odd sense of melancholy as the agent dissolves into a pool of liquid before evaporating entirely, not even leaving a scent behind.

It was probably in their uniform, disintegrating nearly everything organic it contained. He works quickly with the helmet as well, finding and extracting the slots that held the transmission chip along with Database. Not even 3 seconds later, the helmet crumbles in Yoongi’s hands and into soft fine powder that diffuses into the air like dust.

Walking back into the bedroom, Yoongi access Zhoumi’s files with practiced ease. He’s seen and heard Zhoumi using the screen countless times, and it’s with sensory memory that he types in the password to access Zhoumi’s personal files.

Reflected on the surface of the screen, Yoongi counts the bouquet of flowers at 11 separate stalks.

Recalling the most recent search and operations within the screen, Yoongi waits a while as the screen recalibrates to its former performance stage.

The screen is momentarily a blank white before code runs through it and the screen is set back to what it was 15 minutes ago.

Database tells Yoongi that the screen has been optimized to run as a sort of Navigation Table as well. The most recent page it exited was the tracking application. Yoongi glances over to the other open tabs. They were all ordinary trade commissions, and even Yoongi’s most recent completed mission has been registered as complete and finalized. Scrolling down, Yoongi comes across terms that database does not possess, and articles that were collages of accumulated research conducted on individual Beings, all linking to the tracking tab that had been closed most recently.

Tapping on the tracker tab, the screen blinks up an interactive display.

[UPDATED INFORMATION AVAILABLE_DOWNLOAD_Y/N]

[Y]

Yoongi waits as the tab updates, a small model of a ship is on display and an index of the ship crew-members pop up to the side.

[STRAVECHI NAVA_AUTHORIZATION CODE: 0924-4291-537]

[OWNERSHIP UNDER FAMILY REGISTRY WU, LONG-HUO_LINK]

[CURRENT CAPTAIN: HEAD-PILOT WU YIFAN_LINK]

[NAVIGATOR: KIM JUNMYEON_LINK]

[CREW MEMBER: 5]

[CO-PILOT CHANYEOL DAN YONG’IN_LINK]

[CO-NAVIGATOR DO KYUNGSOO_LINK]

[TECHNICIAN MIN-SEOK_LINK]
Database tells Yoongi that this investigative data was nothing out of the ordinary. This was a simple trading ship that belonged to a long line of pilots from Long-Huo. The crew was minimal but efficient, and seemingly normal. A quick background search on the crew members shows Yoongi that the ship consisted of Beings who fell well below the standard of normalcy. Everything from piracy, mercenary backgrounds, illegal racing and participation in the COGS, to criminal offences in the Ghandar Planetary Federation, the Stravechi Nava carried within her the strangest mix of aliens. But this wasn’t enough to call in the attention of the GLA, or of Zhoumi who seemed to be tracking this ship through its cargo.

However, the investigative thesis is what catches Yoongi’s eye.

Database tells him that digitized souls, or the Theory of Digitized Souls as it was registered in the GLA archives, was a scientific theory turned myth that stated that immortality could be achieved by being able to transform a Soul from a dimension-less form to that of a digital mass which could then be downloaded into any willing body or platform.

And while immortality was the main objective and goal behind the thesis, there were deeper and darker quests that branched off of this theory.

So if Zhoumi thought he found a Being who was a digitized soul aboard this ship, and he was tracking it in real time, adding that with his disappearance and the presence of the other GI agent, database tells Yoongi that all of this was interconnected with each other.

Database also tells him that their current location was an interesting choice as well.

Yaaig’Ra Ari was a massive gas-planet engulfed in a storm but most of all was also the planet where the GIU Mothership was docked, charging the hulking ship with its chaotic energy. And it was in this Mothership that Admiral K’mara, one of the Trifecta that lead the GIU, was stationed.
There’s an odd feeling growing in the pit of his stomach. Database identifies this as apprehension.

He glances down at the chip in his hand and back at the door where the body of the GI agent had dissolved. Did she know where Zhoumi was? What was her mission statement? Placing the chip from the GI Agent’s helmet over the slot on Zhoumi’s desk, Yoongi finds a mission awaiting him.

[DATA DETECTED- APPLY_Y/N]

[Y]

[INCOMING JOINT MISSION FROM HEADQUARTERS]

[ACCEPT]

[RECEIVING DATA]

[COORDINATES _NUQTAI]

[TARGET: VENTURE UNIT FIELD AGENT KAI {JONGIN} DAKAŞYAI]

[ASSASSINATE]

[TIME: IMMEDIATE]

[SHUTTLE IN WARP IN 27 MINUTES FROM HEADQUARTERS]

[ACCEPT_Y/N]

Yoongi taps across the screen with a single gloved finger, reading carefully. This wasn’t mere coincidence that Zhoumi would have a file pertaining to a Being that was now the target of assassination from the GI.

[ACCEPT_Y/N]

Yoongi’s finger hovers over the screen, unsure why he was hesitant.

[Y]

Yoongi activates self-destruct within Zhoumi’s screen and watches as millions of terabytes of information and data scramble and erase itself. And just to be sure, Yoongi introduces a malware into the system to thoroughly destroy all traces of digital data.

Satisfied, Yoongi picks up the chip and pockets it. He would now have to pose in as the GI agent it originally belonged to. But database tells him this won’t be difficult because GI agents rarely scanned each other.

Yoongi pauses at the bedroom doorway and glances at the bouquet of flowers.

From where he now stood, he could see 12.
(Author’s Note)
So my sister graduated this week. Summa Cum Laude. And she got a fucking legit gold coin for her 4.0 GPA HOW IS SHE REAL HOW ARE WE RELATED I’M STRUGGLING IN UNIVERSITY AND HERE SHE IS LEADING HER ENTIRE YEAR OF STUDENTS I’M JUST-
I’m just struggling with art and cgi and writing fanfic.
It’s fine.

Also if anyone is a fan of Lord of the Rings and you’ve always wanted a Lord of the Rings au with bts in it, ask no more, because lo and and behold: The Sons of Middle Earth.
YEAP- MY LOTRAUXBTS IS HERE LIKE I PROMISED. PLEASE SUBSCRIBE AND LOOK FORWARD TO TOLKIEN GOODNESS.
I also like to post the occasional moodboard regarding my fics so please check out my tumblr/twitter for random updates ^_^
‘I thought you told Yoongi not to use his TeorSer.’

‘I did.’

‘Then why in Spaces are you arming yourself with one?’

‘Because you know as well as I do that this is not some simple arrest for bribery or obstruction—this is the Far Space Operative, not space-border patrol.’

‘Ah. You figured that out.’

Namjoon turns to look at Sk’jin grimly. They were at the Hangar Bay where their defensive weapons were stored. Sk’jin notices that Namjoon doesn’t hand him any.

‘What happened in Orvan may have taken place almost 800 years ago but I don’t think they would so easily forget who you are,’ Namjoon states bluntly. ‘Now would be the time to tell me exactly what happened so that we can get ourselves out of this situation.’

‘Aw, are you looking out for me?’ Sk’jin simpers.

Namjoon levels Sk’jin with a serious expression but before he can open his mouth to say anything, Sk’jin beats him to it and says, ‘Don’t worry- I got this, you won’t need the TeorSer.’

And he makes to walk away, headed for the air-lock anteroom but Namjoon grabs him by the arm and jerks him back.

‘No- you listen to me,’ Namjoon all but growls, stepping in to really face Sk’jin. ‘If you hadn’t disobeyed my orders from the beginning then we wouldn’t be here right now-‘

‘Oh really?’ Sk’jin loses all semblance of coy playfulness and he leans in closer too, eyes narrowing as he rounds up against Namjoon. ‘Then tell me Captain, what would you have done at that time had it not been for my bribery? Hand me over to the Orvan forces? I guess you would have done so- that way you would have one less Being to stress over and as the mission went on you would find more excuses to get rid of the rest of us until only you remained- the hero of this mission.’

Sk’jin’s eyes burn a neon red but Namjoon doesn’t look away, instead he pushes Sk’jin back with
an extraordinarily blank face.

‘Do not,’ Namjoon says, voice incredibly low, ‘accuse me of your own selfishness.’

‘Guys- they’re extending a passage-tube. What’s the plan?’ Hoseok’s voice chimes in on their Comm-Devices, breaking the intense stare down between the Kutsoglera and the Khol’isa.

‘The plan is that someone stops being an ass and remembers that I have more experience with the Orvanan and let me handle this,’ Sk’jin down right hisses.

‘No- the plan is that someone stops assuming he can do shit and let me handle this before he ruins the entire mission!’ Namjoon snaps.

‘If one of you could decide what to do then we would be extremely grateful,’ Hoseok’s resigned voice grumbles.

‘You’re “experience” with Orvan is what lead us here in the first place!’ Namjoon rounds back at Sk’jin who crosses his arms over his chest, looking Namjoon down from his nose though he’s shorter than the Kutsogleran. ‘This is clearly an attempt to make you pay for whatever you were involved in, or whatever you did.’

‘And you think taking that is going to help solve this issue?’ Sk’jin retaliates, gesturing briefly to the TeorSer. ‘Clearly you have never been in a position where mediation is the key to-’

‘Your mediations did shit for us and now we’re here-‘

‘This is out my control-‘

‘If you had told us from the beginning that you had a criminal record here-‘

‘As Captain shouldn’t you have asked us all ‘stead of goin’ along and giving us a trajectory without any of our input and just sayin’ “hey look, I’m fucking intelligent and just follow my lead yeah?” y’think I didn’t notice?’ Sk’jin laughs humourlessly, before he shoves Namjoon backwards. ‘Y’think you’re so much better than me yeah? Y’think you can lord over me because you don’t have a criminal record like min yeah? Let me tell you somethin’ sweet cheeks- cuz despite all the information you know and all the oh so horrifying things you’ve discovered- you have seen nothing!’

Namjoon finds himself back against the wall as Sk’jin crouches in a strange stoop, eye flaring red and his ethereal features look sharp and frankly terrifying.

‘You know nothing,’ Sk’jin hisses before he stands up straight, brushes down his robes and puts on a simpering smile again. ‘So you stay here like the good boy that you are, and let me handle this. No violence required.’

Then he spins on his heel and says, ‘Hoseok, could you accompany me? I need someone level-headed for this.’

Namjoon glances over and to his surprise finds both Hoseok and Yoongi standing near the entrance to the Hangar. Hoseok has a deeply troubled expression on his face. Yoongi seemed to be holding him back from entering and only lowers his arm after Sk’jin stepped away.

‘Yoongi- could you take the Bridge?’ Hoseok asks the Human who nods in reply and walks back out.
Hoseok follows after Sk’jin into the air-lock anteroom, giving Namjoon one last look of something Namjoon can’t rightly define.

Namjoon slumps on the ground, taking in a deep breath.

Sk’jin was terrifying in a way that bordered madness. And somehow that felt like the realest form of Sk’jin’s true being. Inexplicably, something Yoongi had said comes to Namjoon’s mind.

‘You talk differently.’

‘What do you mean Yoongi?’

‘Last time I heard you speak, you spoke differently.’

‘It was a different time.’

But Namjoon can’t dwell on that right now.

‘Lisai, can you get me a visual link for Iris-02 and Iris-03?’ Namjoon sighs out from behind his hands. ‘Send the feed to Anteroom 1.’

‘Understood Captain.’

Namjoon picks himself up as the ship jolts a little, clearly being pulled into an external Hangar Bay. Inside the Anteroom, Sk’jin and Hoseok are waiting for the go-to signal before they open the doors.

“We’ll keep watch from here- if there’s any trouble then I’ll send Yoongi in.” Namjoon says quietly as he approaches them, holding out his palm. The Iris was a small device that used static energy to stick itself to any non-metallic object- perfect to attach on clothing. It also had a camouflage exterior and was virtually undetectable by most basic scanners. It was also highly illegal.

Sk’jin does a spectacular job of not noticing Namjoon and being completely deaf to his words. Hoseok instead turns and nods in acknowledgment, taking the small devices from Namjoon’s palm.

The door-panel to the side lights up green and Namjoon takes a step back next to the mounted screen on the opposite wall. The door slides open with a silent woosh into a long stretch of ominously see-through passage-tube. The door from the opposite side of the ship opens as well to reveal a host of Beings- Orvanans dressed smartly in their olive-toned uniform.

“They’re armed.” Yoongi’s comments.

“It’s fine,” Sk’jin says confidently as he steps forward, closely followed by Hoseok.

‘Lisai?’

‘Feed is live.’

‘Yoongi?’

‘Ready to fly out on your command.’

Namjoon heaves a sigh and watches as the screen lights up.

‘He’ll handle it.’
Namjoon is taken aback from Yoongi’s comment. He doesn’t know what to say, so instead he nods.

Yoongi has travelled for many years.

His mind is able to conjure up every single memory he has of every single galaxy, system, planet, moon, Docking Arc, Settlement Arc he has ever visited.

But this is the first time he has ever been aware of his surroundings.

The helmet he had worn when he went to Sleep told him everything he needed to know about Nuqtai, everything he needed to remember, all the probabilities and variables calculated into the mission while on Nuqtai were made Known to him, all of the other agents were also listed.

They were to mislead their target, observe and study him, and have him exterminated. This was a mission routine Yoongi has performed countless times. And it has never raised questions before. But now it does.

Who was he that he was under their target?

The plan was to lure the Venture Unit agent into one of the plateaus that was heavily industrialized with several hydroplants built around the edges. After killing the agent, they would then dump the body in one of the ravines or tubes that would later flow to the filtration system, eradicating any evidence.

Why they were after this field agent, Yoongi doesn’t know. It wasn’t explained to him. But they wanted him dead.

Nuqtai is extremely populated and messy. Its original inhabitants fled nearly a millennium ago and now the planet was a sort of free-for-all pirate base that was sort of acknowledged by the GLA and were left alone for most of the time.

The Venture Unit had something to do with it of course. Their involvement was the only thing that stopped them from having the GIU launch a cleansing attack over Nuqtai. But information is vital, and Nuqta sold you any and everything if you were willing to pay the price.
Yoongi walks the streets of the Gna Plateau, the largest and most populated Plateau in all of Nuqtai. He’s walked this area before but Yoongi takes the time out to notice things he never saw before, things he didn’t notice before, and Beings he’s never paid attention to before. Yet, his mind is able to process each race, each species, and sometimes even provides him with a name and background if they were famous enough to fall into the GLA Public Criminal Records.

Yoongi stares down at the open food stalls around him. Changing the settings of his visor, Yoongi reads the ingredients involved in all of the foods sold and watches as a couple of Beings eat rehashed organic gunk dyed and processed to look like meat. He also notes exponentially high levels of bacteria and viruses in each of the stalls. Readjusting his screen back to normal, Yoongi passes through the crooked streets unseen and unnoticed before walking straight into an eatery.

An eatery was an establishment made to look like a regular saloon or bar, except more than just drinks were served in here. Walking behind a couple of scantily clothe freeloaders, Yoongi passes through the security check with ease and finds himself a corner to stand in. The visor on his helmet focuses on each Being inside the eatery and narrows down the criteria of Yoongi’s search. The main reason why he was walking the streets of Nuqtai.

Then his helmet alerts him and shadowing one of the Android waiters, Yoongi makes his way across the crowded floor and over to the booth that has been highlighted by his visor. It’s easy enough to duck under the booth table without anyone noticing and Yoongi just sits on the floor, listening.

‘-lling you, this isn’t just about Cha’kneng Prison- I know Beings all right? I know some who escaped in time- but they’re being hunted down too- they’re looking for some shit or something!’

Yoongi listens quietly, noting that though dirty, the tiles of the floor of the eatery was quite aesthetically pleasing.

‘-at’s not just it- there’s something else happening. Something big-’

‘You need to stop stressing out over things-’

‘No you listen! None of M’fynes’s lot are here! None of his ships, his crew,- there’s an entire slave stock rotting in his dungeon right now because none of his men have returned!’

Someone spills their entire drink 4 booths down. It’s a strange unpleasant smell.

‘He was last seen in Trinaest, using the COGS as a cover up-’

‘So he obviously got caught, the COGS is swimming with GLA officers-’

‘He didn’t get caught- if he did we would have known! This isn’t the Venture Unit- or that Khol’isa bitch- there’s something else going on here!’ the voice speaks empathetically.

‘Oh yeah- so who you think it is then huh?’

‘Something bigger than we could have ever thought- ‘

A freeloader leans in across the counter, her skin is pure gold and her eyes are jet black. A forked tongue slides out from between her lips and laps at the drink below her.

‘It’s the Venture Unit- they’ve probably gotten someone new who doesn’t know how things work-’
‘It’s not the Venture Unit! Think about it! The Ui’dum Clan have also gone completely missing- not a single trace of them-’

‘I agree with Frid,’ another voice speaks gruffly. ‘It’s not just the Ui’dum Clan either- so many have gone missing. ‘The N’dini Phuthume system was attacked just the other week.’

‘Attacked? What do you mean?’

‘Three planets. Blown up. Poof! Just like that.’

An ugly rodent-like animal crawls up Yoongi’s boot, its fur is grey and white. It sniffs at Yoongi for a while before skirmishing away, only to get trampled under a boot 2 tables down.

‘That’s nonsense- a solar flare or something-’

‘There have been other planets blowing up- you can’t deny that there’s a pattern-’

‘Some sort of planet killer- some strange new tech I’m guessing-’

‘It’s not just planets- it’s suns too. Sapped out and drained to the extent where the fission inside of it has gone stone cold- I’ve been on one of them- it was fucking weird-’

‘There’s no point speculating on shit like this it doesn’t affect us-’

‘Of course it affects us! We’re a part of this universe- we live in it!’

The boot pulls away and tracks blood and organs behind it, causing the golden-skinned freeloader to slip on it as she slinked across the room. She falls painfully on her back and an uproar of boisterous laughter fills the eatery.

‘You sound fucking scared.’

‘That’s because I am- there has been a lot of question asking going around as well- it’s not just me. It’s not just pirates who are noticing- haven’t you realized how many agents are about? How many GLA officials are raiding our areas-’

‘Not to mention the GIU suddenly manning up and spreading around in that massive ship of their’s-’

‘So you’re all just scared of something you can’t even name- huh, the Hrul Clan really are a bunch of cowards-’

A scuffle breaks out and just as quietly as he had come, Yoongi leaves the eatery. No one saw him go in, no one sees him go out. Easily leaping up the rafts, Yoongi walks through the cramped rooftops of Nuqtai, electric frequency rising around him like the breeze.

Yoongi thinks back to all the memory that he now had- that he was now aware of.

A nameless fear.

Planet killer.

Sun reaper.

A lingering thread of fear sews its way through the fabric of Time and it won’t cut loose.
Sk’jin is smiling serenely as the Orvanan officers approach them. Hoseok walks a little behind Sk’jin, feeling almost like Sk’jin’s personal bodyguard and the Khol’isa was royalty he was protecting during a diplomatic meeting. Except this is not a diplomatic meeting, and Sk’jin is not royalty but in fact an ex-criminal with an extremely colourful past even by “normal” standards.

And for someone who was about to apparently face arrest, Sk’jin is extremely calm and almost excited about this whole process. Hoseok on the other hand feels nothing but dread.

After watching Namjoon and Sk’jin’s argument escalate, Hoseok was worried that his and Yoongi’s bet would come to conclusion a bit too soon and they’d both kill each other. They were in the weapons hold after all and it wouldn’t be too surprising considering the intensity of their argument.

But before he could intervene, Yoongi (who honestly Hoseok had forgotten about) had stopped him from attempting to break apart the argument because Sk’jin was honestly starting to freak Hoseok out.

‘Hoseok, it seems pointless to ask this, but how good is your hand-to-hand combat skills?’ Sk’jin asks as they step closer to the center of the passage-tube.

‘Sufficient enough for whatever you might be planning,’ Hoseok replies with a frown.

‘So modest,’ Sk’jin bestows him with a small smile. ‘I don’t need modesty though, if things don’t work out quite how I want them to.’

‘Well I guess you’ll have to really make this work,’ Hoseok grimaces as they pause to a stop.

Sk’jin simply chuckles before turning to address the Orvanan officer.

‘Good day-‘ Sk’jin begins but suddenly the Orvanan officers raise their TeorSers straight at Sk’jin’s face, just inches from his nose. To his credit, Sk’jin doesn’t even flinch or appear surprised. Instead he sighs and rolls his eyes.

One of the officers grabs Hoseok who allows himself to be captured and tries not to roll his eyes as they cuff him.
‘We do not tolerate terrorists entering our borders so freely, Khol’isa.’ The Orvanan officer spits out. ‘You are lucky we did not shoot down your ship.’

‘You couldn’t have shot it down in the first place- we were in warp,’ Sk’jin replies bluntly. ‘If you’re trying to threaten me, at least make it plausible.’

Hoseok really wonders how Sk’jin has survived this long considering how mouthy he was.

‘Silence scum!’ the Orvanan officer forcefully presses the nozzle of the TeorSer on Sk’jin’s forehead, tilting the Khol’isa’s head backwards.

‘You will not be given any trial or court hearing.’

‘Yes because if I did stand trial your entire planet will be kicked out of the GLA and a majority of your government tried and imprisoned for violation of the GLA Treaty,’ Sk’jin interrupts blithely, as though a TeorSer wasn’t nestled against his head. ‘Tell me officer, would the court so easily let your planet go scot-free when they find out that you’re one of the hidden planetary systems involved in the Isbahaysiga Alliance?’

Hoseok watches as the officers all quickly pale and look terrified. A few of them even lower their TeorSers.

Hoseok knows this case. The Isbahaysiga Alliance was the largest illegal trafficking pirating network. It had taken over 4 centuries of attempting to infiltrate the Alliance before the Venture Unit had finally been able to find and identify the pirate clans involved. And through this, were able to narrow down the list of planetary systems involved. Hoseok’s entire family line had at one point, been involved in this case. Both of his parents had participated in infiltrating the network, which frankly speaking, had been been extremely complex and well covered for a pirating network. It wasn’t like all pirates were dumb- not at all. But with a network this large and this extensive, it had been too difficult finding the root source of all the problems. And though there had been over 20 pirate clans involved in the Alliance, any information regarding the Alliance had been extremely difficult to find. But after its exposure 5 sols ago, the GLA and the Venture Unit had discovered that there had been over 10 planetary systems involved as well. Either selling out their own planet, or selling out their neighbouring planets.

The investigation and court trials regarding these planetary systems was still ongoing.

But that wasn’t the most horrifying part of this entire case. The Isbahaysiga Alliance had been working with the Akramanese, supplying them with any and everything they could get their hands on. At this point, it wasn’t just trafficking live Beings for ill intentions, this was harvesting and Orvanan was obviously deeply involved.

But Hoseok had no idea Orvan had been involved in the Isbahaysiga Alliance. How had they overlooked this planet? Hoseok was deeply involved in this case, having been assigned the mission in tracking down one of the many pirating clans involved in this.

There had been a few well known pirating clans involved. Clans that Hoseok knew had formed or struck a deal with the Venture Unit. So he had tried to use this same channel in order to gather information but there had been an alarming rate of disappearing clans.

Pirate clans were not small. The smallest had some thousand members in it, and the clans involved in the Isbahaysiga Alliance had been large and spread out.

Before they could even find or capture any of them, they all started dropping off of the face of the
Universe and no one saw or heard from them anymore. The pirate clan Hoseok himself had been in
tasked to find had also entirely vanished, followed shortly but a whole bunch of others.

But after overturning many of the remaining pirate clans who still remained, they were able to
successfully stop the Alliance. Or that was what Hoseok thought. If Orvanan was still involved in
this “business”, how many other systems were involved? And did the Venture Unit know of this?

But most importantly, how did Sk’jin know?

‘So tell me, Officer,’ Sk’jin takes a small step back away from the officer with an exaggerated
innocent expression on his face. ‘What would Orvan do then? Oh, it would be so horrible! Outcast
and shunned by all of the Universe- I mean I don’t even think any pirate clan would want to partner
with any of you after that- right Hoseokkie?’

Hoseok only sighs in reply. Sk’jin was having too much fun.

The officers in the back glance at each other, and Hoseok can see how the officer holding him
looks around confused and scared.

Sk’jin crosses his arms, ‘I mean I guess it would be all right for the high ranking officials- they
would be able to escape, live a normal-ish life in some secluded place in disguise. They are rich
enough. But what about you?’ Sk’jin looks around at the officers inside the tube.

‘What about the rest of you? I just bribed my way through the borders of your wonderful planet
with a mere 20,000 units, I mean,’ Sk’jin shrugs. ‘Do you even have enough money for retirement?
Do you even have enough money if someone you love gets taken?’

This draws out the most reaction from the Orvanans. They all look frightened and at their wits end.
Hoseok wants to know what Sk’jin meant by what he said. But that would have to wait until later.

‘You haven’t sent the evidence yet- it’s been 800 years, you know this won’t end well for you
either,’ the main officer snaps though Hoseok is beginning to see the unrest in his eyes.

‘What makes you think I haven’t,’ Sk’jin feigns surprise. ‘I have a good friend inside the ship who
would very well indeed just push that button for me and you can say goodbye to any semblance of
a normal life.’

‘Because if they do, we will kill you and destroy your ship,’ the officer growls.

‘Honestly I don’t think my Captain would really care if you did kill me,’ Sk’jin replies with a
shrug. ‘In fact I’m pretty sure he’s planning something right about now to just get rid of me
anyways.’

‘ Wouldn’t be too far off,’ Hoseok grumbles, causing the officers around them to look at each other
in alarm.

‘So how about this hm?’ Sk’jin reaches over and holds the officer’s hands in his, making himself a
little shorter than him. ‘You let us go, and we forget all about this. You all get to go back to your
homes, no one gets hurt, your planet can continue to strive illegally and we’re all happy. Hm?’

There’s something different about Sk’jin’s voice. A strange lull falls over the passage-tube and all
of the officers stare at Sk’jin as though mesmerized.

‘I-‘ the officer stammers.
‘Shh,’ Sk’jin says gently, rubbing his hands between his own. ‘It’s all right- I understand that you’re in a difficult position. But think of your planet, of the Orvanan people and how far they have come. But if you do this, then everything will fall apart. You don’t want that do you?’

A few of the officers shake their heads in reply.

‘Of course you don’t- you love your planet, your home planet. You would do anything to protect and save her, correct?’ Sk’jin’s voice is the most beautiful thing Hoseok has heard and as he speaks, almost feels the need to nod as well.

This time a majority of them nod their heads.

‘Hoseok snap out of it. Stay alert- these are not the only officers on board.’

Hoseok blinks a few times and only then notices how the officers in front of them have red tinted irises.

‘So what do you say officer? Let’s all just forget this, maybe you could start a worker’s union, get them to raise your pay more right?’ Sk’jin reaches out to pat another officer. ‘That way you can support your families better, and you could even go on holiday-!’

‘FIRE!’

Hoseok ducks immediately, grabbing Sk’jin down.

The officers in front of them crumple in bloodied heaps as TeorSer shots fire through the narrow space.

They were attacking their own people?!

‘Shut down the passage-tube and disconnect now!’ the voice roars.

To Hoseok’s immense alarm, glass doors start shutting down around them, sectioning the passage-tubes before each section is thrown out into space.

‘Sk’jin move!’ Hoseok hisses as he tries to pull the Khol’isa up. But Sk’jin is boneless and his weight throws around in a strange manner and to Hoseok’s horror, he notices an immense amount of blood pouring from his side. As he pulls up Sk’jin to stand, he notices how drawn and aged he appeared suddenly.

‘Shit-’

Namjoon appears out of nowhere, dragging both of them up and pushing them forward.

‘The doorway!’ Namjoon yells and Hoseok sprints forward, one of the glass doors shutting narrowly behind Namjoon who half carries Sk’jin’s unconscious form. To Hoseok’s utter and complete dismay, the glass casing of the passage-tube begins to crack. He nearly overruns and sprints through the doorway. Skidding to a stop, Hoseok activates the magnetic-panels to make sure the passage-tube is attached to their end.

There’s a loud explosive sound and a flare of light from the right of the ship.

‘Shields are holding. The ship is safe.’ Yoongi calls in quietly. ‘Attack?’

‘Don’t engage-!’ Namjoon yells.
There’s an alarming cracking sound that deafens Hoseok and for an alarming fraction of a second, Hoseok feels the harsh pull of vacuum, and air whipping around him and out of his lungs. There’s a brief wailing alarm, triggered clearly by the sudden breach in the internal sealing of the ship but it stops almost as abruptly as it began. It takes him a few seconds to find his bearings.

‘Hoseok?’

Yoongi sounds confused and this frightens Hoseok. There’s a coughing sound and Hoseok pushes himself up, trying to recover from whatever the fuck just happened.

Sk’jin is coughing, his blood smears the area around him, further staining his robes. The air-lock anteroom door is shut and there’s more flashing lights beyond the small window. The ship shakes from the force of what Hoseok gathers are proton-missiles and Grade A TeorSer fire.

‘Where’s Namjoon?’

‘Spaces fuck-’ Hoseok manages to stand up and barrels into the door way. ‘He’s out there-!’

It’s too bright outside, what with the continuous explosions and detonations over their ship.

‘Shit- Lisai locate Namjoon now- I’m heading out, Yoongi increase shield while I go and get Namjoon back-’ Hoseok nearly leaves the anteroom but remembers Sk’jin.

‘Shit- Lisai prepare Medical Bay 3 for emergency treatment for Communications Manager Sk’jin,’ Hoseok orders as he quickly stoops down and picks up Sk’jin. Sk’jin is much taller than him and is dead weight so it’s difficult for Hoseok to balance the injured Khol’isa properly- his breathing is quickly turning rapidly shallow and loud.

‘Understood. Opening Anteroom 2, airlock initiate.’

‘What-?’

Hoseok manages to get into the Lobby in front of the Medical Bays when Namjoon appears from the other hallway leading to the other anteroom.

‘Namjoon-?’ Hoseok manages to get out. How did he get there? When did he get there? What happened?!

‘Yoongi get us out now!’ Namjoon yells, running towards Hoseok and helping him carry Sk’jin into the Medical Bay.

‘But they have us in lock-rift,’ Hoseok manages to get out as they carry and place Sk’jin over the prepared Medical Bed at once.

‘We took care of that,’ Namjoon replies hurriedly as he hurriedly pulls down the emergency seats by the Medical Bay door.

‘Hitting warp in 10 seconds.’ Yoongi announces.

Hoseok jumps over to the emergency seat and straps himself on as well.

‘What the fuck happened?!’ Hoseok demands, turning to address Namjoon who honestly doesn’t look all that fazed or remotely rumpled. He looked completely fine.

‘You were thrown out into open space!’ Hoseok adds as though to remind Namjoon of what had just happened.
‘Yeah well,’ Namjoon grimaces as the familiar pull of warp settles in the lining of Hoseok’s stomach. ‘Good thing I don’t actively need air to survive.’

Though the mission was to assassinate the Venture Unit field agent Jongin, codename Kai, Yoongi and the unit he was in were tasked to set up a fake gathering of different pirate clans. Or at least, fake to an extent because actual representatives of massive pirate clans were making assembly in the allocated meeting place in one of the more obscure plateaus of Nuqtai.

Yoongi calculates that the other agents involved were responsible for bringing in the other clans—luring and tricking them to meet here. Or perhaps this was really a meeting that had nothing to do with them, but now they were going to make sure it never happened.

Yoongi notes that there are 2 pirate clans, and a poorly disguised GLA infiltration unit.

They’re fairly easy to take out. A single well placed and cleverly angled shot triggers a shootout amongst the meeting goers and the other agents take out the survivors from their vantage point.

Now they would wait for Jongin, study his movements, follow him as he investigates the meeting turned massacre and see who he reported back to.

It is Yoongi’s task to follow the Dakaṣayaii around, having been assigned this particular step of the plan. And being both a field agent and a Dakaṣayaii, made it incredibly difficult for Yoongi and the rest of the unit. Because although already trained to be covert and quick, Jongin had the ability to teleport.

They would have to make sure to bait him long enough to examine him and then assassinate him once they retrieved sufficient information. Yoongi doesn’t know who is doing all of the analysis but it’s not him.

Yoongi watches the Being, Jongin, carefully as he examines the ship that brought Yoongi over to Nuqtai. It made the most sense for them to use themselves as bait to lure Jongin in. So they moved in purposefully obvious yet covert ways that Jongin could track without it being too suspicious.

But this also raises a thought in Yoongi’s mind. Jongin knew about them. Or at least had an idea of who they were. Of who Yoongi could possibly be.

They have to pretend like they don’t know Jongin is there, and so they purposefully place themselves in places that can be seen or viewed. Hidden well enough from sight, but enough for Jongin to spy on them.

Yoongi finds that Jongin is exceptionally talented and is incredibly attuned to his surroundings. Almost in level with his own skill. Yoongi can already tell that Jongin is not comfortable— he does not have the surety of someone who is completely confident in their disguise. He keeps glancing around.
This has never happened before.

Whenever Yoongi has had to follow his targets, no matter how trained or attuned, they have never sensed or detected him. Yoongi could walk up right next to them and they wouldn’t notice. What was happening now that Jongin seemed to sense his presence.

Jongin’s head suddenly snaps up in his direction and for the first time in all of his known memory, Yoongi is suddenly fearful for himself. He moves instantly and it’s not a moment too soon because the Dakaṣayaii has teleported right above him.

Yoongi remains incredibly still.

There’s a small sound and Yoongi knows Jongin has teleported.

Yoongi realizes he’s sweating. He removes his helmet and finds that his breath is shallow and his hands are shaking.

His mind tells him what it is. What he was experiencing. What was happening. And Yoongi almost can’t believe it because he has never felt this or been aware of it.

Fear.

It was fear.

The Orvanan were involved with the Akramanese. That was how Gritha had been able to so easily gain wealth and power- he had clearly been in contact with the Isbahaysiga Alliance members- possibly the pirating clans, and had sold his people for power.

Namjoon feels a sick wave of nausea hitting him. Just how far and deep had the Akramanese infiltrated their Universe? Orvan had not been listed as one of the planets or systems involved in the Isbahaysiga Alliance, so how many remained and were still running a thriving business of selling their people out to cruel and disgusting clients?
‘What about the rest of you? I just bribed my way through the borders of your wonderful planet with a mere 20,000 units, I mean, do you even have enough money for retirement? Do you even have enough money if someone you love gets taken?’

Namjoon frowns at that. He remembers the Orvanan officer he had briefly talked to inside the Dock, how nervous and scared she seemed when Namjoon caught sight of her wrist.

In the underverse of all things illegal and sneaky, the marks on her wrists were known as “cuff-links”. A fancy term for a far from fancy chain of events that lead you to owning such a pair.

Slaves or trafficked Beings were all subdued heavily through drugs which were pumped directly into their system through specialized cuffs. These cuffs had the tendency of leaving behind nearly entirely permanent brands on the skins of the bearer’s wrists. The continued serration of the skin, exposure to not too hygienic conditions, and eventual adaption, the cuff-links remained a part of the Being’s skin for as long as they lived. A Yisheng could probably heal and smoothen over the skin, and some surgeries were available to have them removed and smoothed over, but these procedures are expensive and in all reality, Beings with cuff-links often didn’t survive long enough to have them removed.

‘Lisai, zoom into wrists of the officer holding the TeorSer to Sk’jin’s head,’ Namjoon orders.

‘You haven’t sent the evidence yet- it’s been 800 years, you know this won’t end well for you either,’ the officer looks unsettled.

Sending image.’

The footage is from Hoseok’s Iris and clear as day, Namjoon sees the serrations on the officer’s wrists. What did this mean?

‘What makes you think I haven’t,’ Sk’jin is adopting that annoyingly innocent voice of his. ‘I have a good friend inside the ship who would very well indeed just push that button for me and you can say goodbye to any semblance of a normal life.’

‘Because if they do, we will kill you and destroy your ship,’ the officer tries to threaten but Namjoon can see the panic in his eyes.

‘Honestly I don’t think my Captain would really care if you did kill me,’ Namjoon catches sight of Sk’jin shrugging. ‘In fact I’m pretty sure he’s planning something right about now to just get rid of me anyways.’

‘Wouldn’t be too far off.’

Namjoon rolls his eyes.

‘So how about this hm?’ Sk’jin reaches over and holds the officer’s hands in his, making himself a little shorter than him. ‘You let us go, and we forget all about this. You all get to go back to your homes, no one gets hurt, your planet can continue to strive illegally and we’re all happy. Hm?’

There’s something different about Sk’jin’s voice. A strange lull falls over the passage-tube and all of the officers stare at Sk’jin as though mesmerized.

‘I-‘ the officer stammers.

‘Joonie.’ Namjoon tries not to grimace.
‘What?’

‘I’m detecting movement. We need to get Sk’jin and Hoseok back inside.’ Yoongi replies, no urgency in his voice.

‘Movement?’

‘Shh,’ Sk’jin is actually soothingly patting the Orvanan officer’s hands in his. ‘It’s all right - I understand that you’re in a difficult position. But think of your planet, of the Orvanan people and how far they have come. But if you do this, then everything will fall apart. You don’t want that do you?’

‘Can you remove the rift-lock?’ Yoongi asks.

Namjoon can see the Human already readying the warp engines.

‘Almost done,’ Namjoon replies as he glances at his NaviLet. Lock-rifts were designed to seize and hold a ship hostage. They were practically impossible to get out of and often left your ship in lockdown. However, when the Far Space Operative had extended the passage-tube, it not only literally bridged the two ships together, but created a digital bridge for Namjoon to use and more or less, hack into their ship.

‘That’s not allowed.’ Yoongi comments.

‘Yeah well, try me,’ Namjoon grits out as he bypasses the security system easily and finds the lock-rift controls.

‘I did not mean to disapprove.’

Namjoon doesn’t know how to feel about this interaction with Yoongi exactly. But he doesn’t dwell on it. He has bigger issues to deal with.

‘Of course you don’t- you love your planet, your home planet. You would do anything to protect and save her, correct?’ Sk’jin’s voice sounds very pleasant and very agreeable.

‘Communications Manager Sk’jin is using Tšeptjoa, Captain.’

‘Thank you Lisai,’ Namjoon mumbles as he access the lock-rift. He could easily disengage at once but that would sound the alarm over at the Far Space Operative ship instead and Sk’jin and Hoseok would be in danger.

‘There are more officers gathering at their end of the passage-tube.’

‘Hoseok snap out of it. Stay alert- these are not the only officers on board.’ Namjoon warns. The Tšeptjoa was the Khol’isa method of hypnosis, or as they would prefer to call it, suggestion. It was much more potent when you stared into the eyes of the Khol’isa, or if you were weak-minded, caught off-guard, or disorientated.

‘So what do you say officer? Let’s all just forget this, maybe you could start a worker’s union, get them to raise your pay more right?’

If Sk’jin was able to carry this out right, then they might actually be able to get out of this without any problems.

‘That way you can support your families better, and you could even go on holiday-!’
‘FIRE!’

‘They won’t be able to make it back.’ Yoongi says over the Comm just as Lisai announces, ‘Communications Manager Sk’jin has been compromised.’

‘They’re firing at their own officer?!’ Namjoon gawks at the footage momentarily before he quickly disengages the rift-lock.

‘Namjoon they have a squadron assembling- they’re disconnecting the passage-tube.’

‘Shit-’ Namjoon opens the air-lock door and can already feel a draft pulling out from behind him. The passage-tube was already falling apart. He dodges one of the hastily shot TeorSer fire and runs down the clear tube, keeping low.

‘Yoongi make sure the shield holds!’ Namjoon yells, watching in alarm as the glass around turns opaque as fractures as fine as hair fork through the entirety of the passage-tube.

‘They’re shutting down the tube. The only magnetic lock left is from our end-’

‘Shit-’

Hoseok is trying to pick up an unconscious Sk’jin from the floor. There’s a lot of blood. Hoseok is uninjured, only a little fazed.

‘Get to the doorway quickly. The passage-tube is disengaging in sections.’

‘The doorway!’

Hoseok seems to understand right away and he sprints ahead.

‘Sk’jin you bastard why the fuck-’ Namjoon grits out as one of the dividers slams shut just inches behind him. Cursing even more, Namjoon hurries but oddly enough, Sk’jin is lighter than he appears, a strange displacement of his weight considering he was entirely unconscious and should be dead weight.

Something explodes behind him and there’s a bright light.

‘Shields are holding. The ship is safe. Attack?’ Yoongi’s voice is clear on his Comm-Device.

They can’t attack, there were too many issues they would have to deal with in a legal standing in any future Dock if they were to fire.

‘Don’t engage-!’ Namjoon yells but then he notices the divider in front of him start to lower. They weren’t going to make it.

But one of them could.

Namjoon bodily throws Sk’jin down the tube just as the tube around him breaks apart.

Then everything is eerily silent.

It wasn’t like it wasn’t painful. There was that compression around his body, his eyes feel pressured and his ears close up. This isn’t a natural thing to go through but then again, Namjoon doesn’t necessarily have a natural body either.

‘Namjoon?’
Namjoon can’t answer because that would mean having to speak. And speaking would mean expelling air from his lungs and he needed that for a while.

The blast from the explosion pushes him almost out into space but Namjoon grabs onto the aileron of the back right wing and quickly ducks under it, laying low to stay under the protection of the shield. He feels the entire ship shudder as another missile hits it. Washes of heat ripple across his exposed skin and Namjoon grimaces at the discomfort.

He manages to crawl-float over to the second anteroom doorway and only then he speaks in a rush of air leaving his body.

‘Lisai, open Anteroom 2.’

‘Understood Captain.’

The door opens and Namjoon floats inside, angling and pushing himself in a swimming motion and settling on the floor as the door closes automatically behind him.

The air-lock lifts and for most people they would suffer from disorientation or loss of senses, maybe even feel sluggish, but Namjoon moves quickly. He dashes out of the anteroom and out into the Lobby where a very stunned Hoseok carried Sk’jin.

‘Namjoon-?’

‘Yoongi get us out now!’ Namjoon orders as he helps Hoseok lift the Khol’isa.

‘But they have us in lock-rift,’ Hoseok argues.

‘We took care of that,’ Namjoon replies as he looks around for the emergency seats and pulls them down.

‘Hitting warp in 10 seconds.’ Yoongi announces.

Hoseok is also sitting down, strapping himself in as he asks, ‘What the fuck happened?! You were thrown out into open space!’

‘Yeah well,’ Namjoon sighs, taking a deep purposeful breath. ‘Good thing I don’t actively need air to survive.’

‘…what?’ Hoseok looks rightly dumbfounded.

‘We are in warp.’

‘I don’t exactly have lungs,’ Namjoon explains as he makes himself more comfortable. Hoseok is looking at him with a searching look.

‘…how does that even remotely work,’ Hoseok’s tone is almost a deadpan, like he wasn’t sure what he was even asking.

The Medical Bed gleams a little as the capsule like shield lifts and covers Sk’jin in a clear casing. Several animatronic arms disengage and start working on his injury.

‘Someone wondered if it would be possible to build lungs that could withstand the pressure and vacuum of space,’ Namjoon shrugs. ‘They failed because it’s not possible.’

‘And then?’
‘And then they decided to replace the failure with bionic lungs- I mean I don’t use them for their actual purpose of inhaling in oxygen and exhaling out carbon dioxide,’ Namjoon explains before adding, ‘You can ask if you want.’

Hoseok looks at Namjoon in serious wonder for a while.

‘How are you alive?’

‘Medication and this not so stable but irreplaceable bionic blood,’ Namjoon taps at the side of his neck where he knows some of his “veins” could be seen. Hoseok glances at his neck, eyes narrowing.

‘Designed and built just for me,’ Namjoon smiles dryly.

‘Can’t the Yishengs do anything about it?’ Hoseok’s tone of voice suggests that he’s done research about Kutsoglera. It was possible that he read up the Yisheng archives on his planet as well, just like Yoongi did.

‘They tried their best- but too much of my “body” depends on it. Last I heard, they were trying to recreate it, so that if I lose blood, I could replenish my body.’ Namjoon waits for the information to sink.

‘If you bleed, then basically you’re dead?’ Hoseok frowns even more.

‘More or less yeap,’ Namjoon replies just as Lisai announces, ‘Communications Manager Sk’jin is stabilized. Proceeding with knitting.’

Hoseok breathes out in relief.

‘It’s called Tšepţjoa,’ Namjoon indicates towards Sk’jin. ‘What he was doing. Or at least trying to do.’

‘What’s that?’

‘The Khol’isa hypnosis thing,’ Namjoon clarifies. ‘It was much more powerful before- caused a lot of precautionary acts to take place surrounding their addition to the GLA. But it’s subdued over time. Evolution.’

‘Evolution?’

‘Well, as much as it’s possible for their kind to evolve.’ Namjoon shrugs. ‘Anyways- it’s a bit like hypnosis- a bit like suggestion. More like very seductive suggestion- when applied it’s supposed to make you feel like what they’re saying is the best thing.’

‘We’re at green in 20 seconds.’

‘What did you mean by “trying to do”?’ Hoseok inquires, watching as the Knitter works its way over Sk’jin’s side.

‘It…didn’t work how I know it’s supposed to.’ Namjoon replies with a frown, also watching the Knitter work its way to the top of the injury. They’re not in the correct angle to watch as Sk’jin’s tissue heal together slowly, leaving behind a small bumpy lesion that would go away in a month or so. ‘He wasn’t supposed to lose consciousness.’

‘He lost consciousness after getting shot though,’ Hoseok counters with a frown on his face.
'No- not according to his health tab,’ Namjoon grimaces in reply. ‘Might be the same reason why it’s like this.’ He taps on the side of his head.

Hoseok looks at Sk’jin thoughtfully before saying, ‘They’re…they don’t fall asleep right?’

Namjoon nods in answer.

‘Is it all right for him to you know,’ Hoseok gestures towards Sk’jin’s unconscious form. ‘Pass out?’

‘Honestly I don’t know- nothing about him makes sense.’ Namjoon replies. He catches Hoseok giving him a look that clearly translated into ‘you’re one to speak’.

‘We’re in green. No indication of pursuit.’ Yoongi announces.

‘Has he told you why?’ Namjoon asks as they undo the safety belt and stand up before he clarifies himself. ‘Why he’s wanted in Orvan?’

Hoseok shakes his head.

‘What do we do about the trajectory?’ Yoongi asks.

Namjoon sighs.

‘It hasn’t even been a month and we’re probably going to have to fly off the grid already,’ Namjoon scowls before pausing to add, ‘Are you injured?’

‘No I’m fine- but are you sure you’re all right?’ Hoseok asks, eyebrows raised in question as he looks over his form quickly.

‘Lisai.’

‘Captain Namjoon is in optimum health.’

‘Thank you.’

Capturing Jongin takes a lot of planning. It made sense now that he was assigned a group to take
him down. Predicting where he would teleport was close to impossible. But their plan included several variables which are covered extensively with traps designed to capture the Venture Unit agent.

Granted, Jongin does escape 3 out of the 8 traps they set out for him though it’s all out of sheer luck. And Yoongi doesn’t know why but he is relieved every time Jongin escapes capture.

However this time around, Jongin is captured in their 4th trap.

Although each trap was planned and designed differently, the extermination process was the same for each of them. Lock the Venture Unit down with porter-cuffs, disabling him from teleporting, and then swiftly stab him under the rib straight into one of his main arteries and then get rid of the evidence.

They capture him near one of the ships they put out for bait.

And Yoongi knows how this mission is supposed to end- and he already sees how one of the agents has a dagger out.

Yoongi watches, with a strange sense of urgency, as Jongin fights off one of the agents even though both of his hands have been compromised by the porter-cuff and he can no longer teleport.

*Stop it. Now. He must live.*

Yoongi gets their first, stabbing Jongin with his own dagger, purposefully lower and misdirected. He slaps on the porter-cuffs that are just a little too large on Jongin’s wrists.

They transport him to the hydroplant and Yoongi is chanting in his mind. It barely takes a minute before they arrive.

*Don’t die don’t die don’t die don’t die don’t die don’t die*

Quickly, they throw the Venture Unit agent into the long and narrow tube that had previously been empty but now was filled with water. Yoongi tries not to feel alarmed.

It’s a moonless night and it makes them blend in with the dark landscape to the point of being invisible. This is certainly not the first joint mission Yoongi has been in. But it’s the first time that he’s aware of the other Beings in this team. It’s the first time that he’s aware that they were also breathing.

And somehow he finds that this makes it almost difficult for him. Almost.

The lid to the tube closes and Yoongi sets into action immediately.

He was one against 5, but he moves fast, and he moves with surety.

He had already set his TeorSer to the highest setting and instantly takes down 2 of the other agents with clean shots straight into their necks. The others set into action as well, and are again seemingly confused like the agent Yoongi had come across in Zhoumi’s apartment. So he’s able to take one down fairly easy but the remaining two recover.

Yoongi flies backwards.

His back hits the side of a concrete wall but he’s up at once throwing a dagger that lands straight into one of the agent’s helmet. Using the fallen agent’s body as a shield, the remaining agent
shields themselves from Yoongi’s TeorSer and bodily launches the freshly dead agent at him.

This fight is much more brutal than his first fight with one of his own fellow agents.

Yoongi feels his shoulder pop out as the agent grabs him by the arm, their intention was to clearly break his arm. But Yoongi quickly pops his shoulder back in. The Being in front of him was taller than him by a few inches and outweighed him by at least 15 kilos. Pivoting on his foot, Yoongi aims a kick that is easily deflected and causes his knee to entirely dislocate. But it’s exactly what he had planned.

Unsheathing his other dagger, and leg still captured by the agent, Yoongi drives it straight into the agent’s ribs, now exposed from having lifted their arms against Yoongi’s previous attack. But the agent doesn’t fall easily. Snapping the blade with a downward strike, the agent grabs Yoongi in a tight and almost paralyzing choke hold. But using his smaller stature and quickness, Yoongi climbs over this Being and using his good leg, holds the latter in a choke hold as well. At this angle, the agent can’t exert all of their force and just as Yoongi planned, let’s go of their hold. Yoongi swings downwards immediately, upsetting their balance. He bends his knee around their neck right before impact and he hears the crack indicating a broken neck.

Panting, Yoongi rights his dislocated knee. He feels it acutely. He’s so aware of the pain that shoots through his entire leg. Yoongi knows the entire list of injuries he has sustained. Down to every minor cut and bruise. But he doesn’t remember any of them the way he was feeling it now.

He hurries to the tube they had dumped the Venture Unit agent into and with some difficulty, opens the lid again.

It’s empty.

So he did survive and he was able to work his way out of the porter-cuff. Yoongi slides down the tube, gasping in pain.

There’s a faint hissing sound and Yoongi jumps to action at once. Coughing, Yoongi carefully pulls himself up, dragging himself off of the floor and crawls to each of the fallen agents. He quickly disengages their helmets, pulling them off before they can reduce to dust.

He finds one of them still alive. And a thought occurs to him.

Yoongi drags him back to the small hideout and taking off the Being’s helmet, attaches the Android chip into his helmet. Finding and stealing the Android chip was relatively simple and easy. First making sure that the agent was indeed entirely unconscious and keeping him that way, Yoongi accosts a maintenance Android and quickly relieves it of its chip.

Attaching the chip into the slot under the back of the helm, Yoongi readjusts the agent on the floor. Taking his own helmet, Yoongi rewires the other helmet to connect to his and initiates the download for the Android Core.

Then he waits.
It’s extremely dark and warped. There are voices and they sound distant and strange and harsh. Sk’jin tries to move but he can’t. It was dark but there’s too much light now- too much light and too much heat I’m melting I’m melting I’m melting someone please help me someone is someone there please help me-! Hands pull at him, tearing him apart and he’s too exposed but he can’t breathe- he’s suffocating there’s no air there’s no air I can’t breathe I’m melting where are you please help me what’s going on- His head feels like it’s on fire and everything falls away but the hands remain and Sk’jin fights and fights and fights and everything is screaming- ‘SAVE ME!!!’ The Medical Bay swims in front of his eyes and the pain on his head nearly overpowers the pain on his side. His throat hurts from having screamed himself awake. Someone’s face swims into view and for a moment Sk’jin momentarily thinks it’s- ‘Hoseok-’ Hoseok has his wrist in an unbelievably tight grip, one that Sk’jin can’t move out of. But it was understandable considering Sk’jin’s fingers were digging around his throat. Sk’jin stares around him in confusion and fatigue. ‘Sk’jin,’ Hoseok says quietly, eyes calm and level. ‘Let go.’ Sk’jin releasing his hand as quickly as possible, staring in surprise at the discolouration already forming on Hoseok’s throat. Hoseok lowers his hand, one eyebrow raised. ‘Nightmare?’ Sk’jin wants to laugh. Khol’isa didn’t sleep. They couldn’t sleep. They had no such things as nightmares. But he can’t say that. Hoseok is looking at him with that look. And Sk’jin can’t stand it. ‘Oh yes,’ Sk’jin huffs out, laying back on the Medical Bed. He had apparently sat up amidst his thrashing before nearly strangling Hoseok. ‘Very original nightmares.’ Hoseok gives him a skeptical look, clearly surprised by his sudden change in personality, before looking over his health tab on the mounted screen.
Sk’jin knew he was overdoing it. It had been a long time since he used Tšeptjoa. It wasn’t the same, and while he was speaking, he already knew he wasn’t going to last.

He could feel a headache build in the back of his head while he spoke to the officer, layering his voice with Tšeptjoa as best he could. He couldn’t even filter it out, channeling only towards the Orvanans. He had hoped Hoseok wouldn’t be too affected.

Everything rushes back to his mind and Sk’jin sits up abruptly again.

‘Woah easy there-’ Hoseok exclaims.

‘Are we in pursuit? Or in the process of being pursued?’ Sk’jin demands, ignoring Hoseok’s apparent worry as he made to get off of the Medical Bed.

‘You shouldn’t move- you just got knitted,’ Hoseok pushes Sk’jin back and the Khol’isa is surprised how easily Hoseok manhandles him.

‘You got shot,’ Hoseok adds and this is new information. It also explain why the side of his robes were soaked in blood and neatly cut off. It was a pity, he really liked those robes.

Hoseok wonders if Sk’jin was really all right- he seemed dazed as he stared at his side. He was probably in shock.

‘We’re not in pursuit- Namjoon hacked into their ship and disabled them then we jumped into warp,’ Hoseok explains. Sk’jin looks up from his healed wounds and stares blankly at some random spot before looking up at Hoseok and saying with the most earnest expression Hoseok has seen on the Khol’isa.

‘Thank you Hoseok- you saved my life.’

‘It wasn’t me,’ Hoseok replies, feeling taken aback at the genuine tone of Sk’jin’s thanks. ‘It was Namjoon.’

A ripple of different emotions washes over Sk’jin’s beautiful face. A contrast to how aged he had looked when they had been in the passage-tube. Sk’jin seems genuinely speechless and confused.

‘What were you doing in Orvan?’ Hoseok asks, remembering what Yoongi had said to him. Just ask.

Sk’jin raises one eyebrow in amusement before he replies with a chuckle, ‘Trying to set free a shipment of slaves.’

Hoseok guesses he must have looked incredulous because Sk’jin laughs out loud, wincing a little towards the end before he settles back more comfortably. His usual personality seems to come back as he gives Hoseok a beautiful smile and gestures for Hoseok to draw closer.

‘Come Hoseokkie, let me tell you a story.’

Sk’jin was honestly such a confusing Being.

‘One of my men,’ Sk’jin narrates. ‘Was from a war-torn planet- his federation was the usual, y’know. Corruption, monopoly of power, dictators, all that good stuff. He managed to escape while he was being transported through a slave ship. Oddly enough it’s the only possible way of getting out. So some years after working together, he received news that his family had been sold off to Orvan. Now poor fella thought his family had died. They hadn’t you see. Just sold off somewhere
else.’

Hoseok nods, encouraging Sk’jin to continue. The channels in his Comm-Device is quiet and Hoseok knows that Namjoon and Yoongi were probably listening in on the conversation.

‘And he was a good Being,’ Sk’jin continues. ‘Being a pirate doesn’t mean you’re bad you know? I mean, I think we can all testify to the fact that your title doesn’t instantly make you “good”.’

Hoseok nods in agreement.

‘He was a good Being and most of all he was a good friend as well. Also really good at laying out traps, he was brilliant,’ Sk’jin looks like a proud parent. ‘So of course, being the kind and benevolent Clan Leader that I am, I told him we would get his family back. Maybe do a good deed by freeing the slaves and anonymously dropping off the entire lot of them at some GLA Dock you know?’

Sk’jin looks amused at his own narrative.

‘So we go all the way to Orvan, in disguise of course. It took us around a month until we were able to find them. Or at least what remained of them. Then that’s when we found out about the Isbahaysiga Alliance and oh boy it was like finding a treasure trove full of priceless jewels,’ Sk’jin chuckles in a rather dark way. ‘So we all stayed a little longer, I befriended the wonderful savior of Orvan, Prime Minister Gritha, and found out more information. And then one thing lead to another, I exposed him to all of Orvan- quite spectacularly mind you. But that’s when I found out that basically every Orvanan was a slave to the “Saviors”- basically upper-class politician snobs. There is an unspoken rule in Orvan- everyone has to buy their way out of the slavery contract they’re born under by a certain age. If not, then you were actually sold off, but if you could buy your freedom or someone helped buy you your freedom, then to an extent, you could continue living a “normal” life in Orvan.’ Sk’jin grimaces as he lightly scratches around his healing side.

Hoseok hands him an anti-inflammatory wipe and the Khol’isa swipes around his fair skin with a relieved expression.

‘So anyways. I was charged with defamation- and then of course arson because you can’t blame me for making my escape with what I had on hand,’ Sk’jin throws the wipe straight into the shredder tube.

‘What did you have?’ Yoongi asks unexpectedly.

Sk’jin gives Hoseok a gleeful smile before replying, ‘A 200 year old bottle of Orvanan wine, a birthday candle, and lots of anger.’

‘Birthday candle?’

‘It was Gritha’s birthday.’

Hoseok can’t control the laugh that escapes him. Sk’jin gives him an amused look.

‘So yes. I almost get captured, but my men come and rescue me. We burn down and destroy their parliament building and make our escape.’ Sk’jin concludes. ‘I like my stories to be happy ones, but I’m afraid this one doesn’t have a happy ending. We weren’t able to free any slaves. The entire planet was enslaved. We could do nothing.’

Sk’jin looks strangely melancholic which surprised Hoseok.
‘Why not report them to the GLA? Or even the Venture Unit?’ Hoseok asks though he knows the answer by now.

Sk’jin snorts. ‘Because the Venture Unit knew- and were involved in it of course. It wasn’t until your organization had its own little civil war that all of this got exposed.’

Hoseok sighs, thinking about the Gaia Case and how extensively it had spread throughout the Universe.

‘I guess it’s thanks to you Hoseokkie,’ Sk’jin adds, his expression turning a little serious. ‘You were the one who uncovered all of it right?’

Hoseok is spared having to answer when Yoongi asks, ‘But why were there birthday candles next to you.’

Sk’jin breaks out into laughter again before he replies to Yoongi’s question.

Hoseok leaves the Medical Bay before Sk’jin can ask him more questions.

Hoseok didn’t agree with nearly everything Lal Haenoon used to say, but he had once said something that Hoseok would never forget.

‘Don’t ask questions, it only invites more.’

Freshly showered, Namjoon takes care as he dries his hair. Though natural, his hair, like most features on his body, were implanted into him. Draping his damp towel over the air-vent, Namjoon proceeds to pull on his trousers before digging up a shirt to wear.

His panel-screen dings quietly with a familiar chime and Namjoon pulls out the tiny drawer over his bed and pulls out an oblong box. Lined neatly inside the box are small capsules in various colours. Namjoon picks out the white and blue pill and dry swallows it before putting the box back in.

‘Communications Manager Sk’jin is at the door, Captain.’

Glancing over at the projected camera live-feed Namjoon does indeed find Sk’jin standing by the doorway. He's wearing different robes, less flamboyant and somehow more pajama-like.

‘Open,’ Namjoon orders out as he goes back to finding himself a shirt.

‘Am I disturbing you?’ Sk’jin asks as he steps in.

‘Not at all,’ Namjoon replies, finding a shirt and shaking it out of its folds.

Sk’jin stares and it’s not in a perverse or disgusted manner. He’s genuinely baffled. And Namjoon understands how it can be shocking. If he hadn’t grown (so to speak) in this body, Namjoon would be in utter shock.

The skin on his neck ended abruptly just above his collarbones before patches of bionic skin pads over at random, diffusing into whole areas that were entirely metallic in appearance. His arms were
a combination of exposed metallic framework, attempts made to recreate bionic tissue that then
blended down to the skin on his hands. And Namjoon knows that Sk’jin has seen his very own
"cuff-links". He doesn't bother to attempt to hide it. The best part of all of this were his ribs which
were open wide and you could actually see through into his body.

And that was just his upper body.

Namjoon did own body-suits that replicated some semblance of skin that would cover his body if
he chose, for whatever insane reason, to go shirtless in public. But it was also made of a very
durable material with a tensile strength that far exceeded that of living skin and flesh so it made a
good protective shield if Namjoon wanted extra-protection.

To his credit, Sk’jin only looked curious and not completely aghast by the sight of his frankly
mutilated excuse of a body. A few Beings have walked in on Namjoon changing and have either
fainted or screamed out loud.

‘How can I help you?’ Namjoon asks, putting on his shirt.

‘I came here to personally thank you for saving me back in the passage-tube. You were right, I
purposefully withheld information that would have prevented all of this from happening and for
that I apologize,’ Sk’jin doesn’t seem very apologetic but Namjoon can sense the sincerity in his
words.

So if Sk’jin was able to do that, then so could Namjoon.

‘I accept your apology.’ Namjoon replies sitting down on his desk. ‘And in turn, I would like to
apologize for purposefully excluding you and making it difficult for you to speak freely.’

Sk’jin raises one eyebrow at him as though amused.

‘Speak freely?’ Sk’jin repeats with a smirk.

Namjoon rolls his eyes, ‘You know what I mean.’

‘Sure sure,’ Sk’jin grins. ‘I accept your apology.

‘Do you have anything else to add? More Systems looking for you?’ Namjoon asks lightly though
he’s pretty sure Sk’jin knows it was not meant as a joke.

‘I gave you the full detailed list of moons, Docks, Arcs, planets, Systems both GLA and non-GLA,
as well as potential pirate-clans and federations that may want me dead or worse,’ Sk’jin replies. ‘I
can vow that I have hidden nothing from you.’

‘Then why were you placing a call to Ngobut’jha?’ Namjoon crosses his arms, staring straight into
Sk’jin’s neon red eyes.

‘How do you know this?’ Sk’jin’s eyes narrow dangerously, his entire countenance transforming
immediately.

‘Lisai alerted me of an unregistered call taking place through unofficial channels. As Captain, I had
to make sure where this call was going, to whom it was addressed to, and what was being said.’

‘You were listening to a private phone conversation-‘

‘You were making an illegal unlisted call from an unregistered device, I think that gives me, the
Captain of this ship and mission, plenty of reason to listen in on what you were “conversing” about.’ Namjoon responds smoothly. ‘So why were you contacting Ngobut’jha? As far as I know, there’s nothing remarkable about that planet. Or is this like another Orvan situation—’

‘You are stepping out of line,’ Sk’jin seethes. ‘I have given you the list with more than enough detail regarding my past- I am hiding nothing in that aspect. My personal life, my personal business is my own- you have no authority over who I call!’

‘It is if it’s through unofficial channels,’ Namjoon repeats grimly.

‘It was a personal call. Stay. Out. Of. It.’

Sk’jin turns around sharply and leaves the room.

The door to his room closes shut and Namjoon sighs.

‘Lisai, have you been able to track who Sk’jin was calling?’

‘Negative. Call was placed to an unregistered device originally issued by the Yisheng Directory.’

‘Yisheng Directory?’

‘Affirmative.’

Even more than before, nothing made sense.

*

Why was he even doing this?

Yoongi waits for the Being to wake up, just like him, and just realize. But why was he doing this? Why did he need this other Being to Waken?

It’s a lot faster than what Yoongi anticipated. The agent’s body twitches in front of him, back arching stiffly before slumping down harshly.

Yoongi watches, unmoving and silently as the agent writhes in pain. His screaming is muffled inside the helmet.

Yoongi hesitates for a moment before approaching the writhing figure and relieves him of his helmet.

Eyes of anguish lock with his own and the screams are painful to Yoongi’s ears. Veins pop up
around his head, blood pouring from his eyes.

But most of all, Yoongi sees nothing. He sees nothing more than motor responses to pain, mechanism to a flooding of unknown triggers unexplained and alien.

There’s a cracking sound and Yoongi knows his back has broken from the force of his seizures.

How had Yoongi survived this?

The Being is entirely still and Yoongi knows he’s died. He collects the chip from the helmet and puts it over the Being’s bloodied head. Yoongi watches as the body disintegrates completely 23 seconds later.

He raises his hand up, feeling the texture of his skin. He knows everything about Humans. Knows all there is to the species as a whole. What made him special?

He knows he won’t have the answers to that. The only other Being who would remotely understand him or explain to him why he was the way he was, would be Zhoumi. And Zhoumi is missing.

Collecting all of the chips, Yoongi heads back to the nondescript ship that brought them to Nuqtau. He pauses at a distance.

Disengaging his helmet, Yoongi extracts the chip from that helmet and waits.

The ship explodes- bright light and energy leveling the area around it, creating a sizeable crater in its wake.

The helmet in Yoongi’s hand disintegrates as well.

He watches as hoards of Beings gather around the remains of the explosion, he can hear their yelling and shouting. Attempts are made to subdue the roaring flames.

They were simply gone.

Nothing remained of the agents who had existed within that space, who occupied mass, who travelled with time. Nothing remained. They were nothing.

Yoongi pulls off his gloves completely and raises them up. They’re outlined against the roaring fire in the distance.

‘But I’m here.’

There are footsteps behind him and Yoongi slips away quietly.

It’s easy enough stealing an operating screen. Yoongi disconnects it from any active channels and terminates all other applications within it before sliding in one of the chips. Out of all of the chips he’s collected, only one of them had an additional mission after completing the Nuqtau mission.

Yoongi reads the mission carefully.

[MISSION 4125-9220-2811]

[COORDINATES _THE HIVE]

[OBJECTIVE: TRACKING]
[TARGET: STRAVECHI NAVA]
[OBSERVATION_DO NOT ENGAGE]
[INCOMING JOINT MISSION FROM HEADQUARTERS]
[ACCEPT]
[RECEIVING DATA]
[DECOY DELIVERED_EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY]
[DECOY DELIVERED_ALL CLANS MOVING]
[MISSION 4125-9220-2811 EXECUTE IMMEDIATELY]
[MEETING POINT NUQTAI:]

[21. 988. 1290. 81_ FINT’AL PLATEAU]
[GLA 12:00]

Again, this ship.
Zhoumi had that file on it. Tracking and following it. And now, there was this mission. This only fortifies Yoongi’s previous conclusion about the involvement of this ship, Zhoumi, and them. And he wants to understand.

Taking out the other pirate clans had not been a simple act of drawing the Venture Unit agent out. It had all been part a bigger plan.

And Yoongi can’t fathom why. There were other agents involved in this, judging by how this was a joint-mission. It was already approved, so this was another segment of the plan. But what was the plan? It wasn’t an assassination or termination of the Stravechi Nava. But one thing Yoongi knew for sure was that they knew about them. The Stravechi Nava was aware of them- and it was possible, that somehow, they would know about Yoongi.

They could help him understand.

And in order to understand, Yoongi would need to get close.

Wiping the screen of any of the previous information and then destroying it completely, Yoongi destroys the chips as well, crushing them into fine powder between his hands.

Setting up another screen he had nicked, Yoongi looks up the Hive. He has been there twice before, all for missions of assassination. It was easy. Because the Hive is a massive Dock, almost the size of a small moon, with cities within its structures. Spying on the Stravechi Nava from this point would be easy.

Yoongi glances at the time and searches for the Fint’al Plateau. It’s a 2 hour flight from where he was currently located. He had 3 hours to get there.

Taking a deep breath, Yoongi pulls the helmet over his head once more.
(Author’s Note)
*finds out that first day back at uni is on my birthday hahahahaha I am so bitter*
'How stocked are we?'

They were congregated around the large dining table in the Kitchen, eating a dinner of sorts.

'We’re at 70% with our fuel cells, 81% with our water cells, and 68% with our Beamers,' Hoseok reports at once, referring to the screen in his hands as he spoons soup into his mouth.

'How long until we need to Dock and get supplies?' Namjoon asks, he feels a headache coming on.

Yoongi pushes a cup of tea towards him surreptitiously.

'If we’re going in warp and with our shields running at this rate, then I’d say a week to 10 days.'

Namjoon grimaces, before giving Yoongi a nod of thanks.

'Are the shields really taking that much?' Sk’jin asks with a frown, piling his plate with a lot of food.

'Based on the readings yes,' Hoseok sighs. 'The Užkulisai is built for exploration and not for running away from authorities. Using the shield will drain our supplies by a whole lot.'

'Orvanan has a wide network of “trade”,' Sk’jin supplies, spearing a meatball with a long pronged fork. ‘I think it’s safe to assume that they would alert their channels- especially considering what we know, or at least what we all know now.-' Sk’jin waves his fork around, meatball dangerously tethering onto a single prong. ‘-and every pirate clan, planetary system or trade routes they’re in league with, will be alerted.’ Sk’jin places the entire meatball into his mouth, chewing with relish.

Yoongi stares at a meatball for a while before he mimics Sk’jin as well and puts the entire thing into his mouth. Sk’jin gives him a thumb’s up that Yoongi doesn’t return.

'Just how far does this even extend?' Namjoon frowns, tapping along the side of the cup in his hand. ‘I know that the Isbahaysiga Alliance was collapsed a little before the Gaia Case, but seeing as Orvan is still running their business, it’s safe to assume that a whole bunch of other networks are still running. We should report this back to the GLA.’

‘There’s more to this than just that,’ Hoseok sighs. ‘With the main “source”, meaning the Akramanese, gone. The Alliance, or what’s left of it, still benefits from trading with other parties. Buyers still exist.’
‘Like the Orvanan – they sell their own people to other Federations mainly- for labor or “immoral industries”, if you can pardon my saying.’ Sk’jin supplies through a mouthful of food and saying with some difficulty as he swallows, ‘Or to scientific academies.’

Namjoon scowls at that, sipping at his cup of tea.

‘I’d say that we can keep going off-grid for about a month max,’ Hoseok ruminates as he tears apart a bread roll, throwing the pieces into his bowl of soup. ‘Then we’ll have to get supplies somewhere.’

Namjoon nods, pulling up a small holographic projection of their now completely abandoned trajectory.

‘There aren’t a lot of ways of getting to Bhumi without going completely off track and taking too much time.’ Namjoon pushes the screen closer to the center, making Sk’jin pull away the platter of thick meat cutlets to make space for the device.

‘We’re here,’ Namjoon indicates a small orange dot at the outer most edge of the holograph. ‘And this is where Bhumi is.’ He points at the blue spot on the opposite end of the projection. ‘If we had been able to take our original-…fixed trajectory, it would have taken us 10 months, 3 weeks, and 3 days to get to its borders.’

A line lights up showing a rather zigzagged course.

‘But if we go off-grid and just find Dock in any available outpost,’ Namjoon lightly taps on the side of the screen and a rather curved but somehow shorter path lights up. ‘We could actually reach Bhumi in less than 7 months.’

‘Assuming if nothing goes wrong,’ Hoseok looks at the projection carefully, stirring his bowl absent mindedly.

‘Going off-grid and using outposts will most definitely guarantee delays and stops- potentially getting us arrested,’ Sk’jin waves about a sausage now. ‘We’re not associated with anything or anyone. We’d be targeted at once and brought in for questioning. And if it’s an outpost with Orvanan connections, we’d be arrested at once.’

Sk’jin reaches for another meatball but Yoongi deftly blocks his fork with his spoon. They engage in a short tiff, utensils clashing rather noisily for a few seconds, but Yoongi wins and Sk’jin digs into the cutlets instead, throwing Yoongi a dirty look. Yoongi triumphantly puts another meatball into his mouth.

Not even sparing a glance at the brief fight over meatballs, Namjoon continues, ‘Yes- this is assuming if nothing goes wrong. However, if we are cautious and carefully plot out our fuel supply, we won’t have to make landings in outposts too frequently.’

‘Should you be eating that much?’ Yoongi asks out of nowhere, one eyebrow raised behind the messy fringe of hair over his forehead. It’s the most expression any of them have ever seen on the Human’s face.

‘I’m weak. I’m storing up, don’t ‘tack me,’ Sk’jin grumbles at Yoongi, looking entirely unattractive as he chews on a bread roll.

‘Also food supplies- how much do we have?’ Hoseok asks, eyeing the amount Sk’jin was consuming in one sitting.
Sk’jin rolls his eyes, ‘The pantry is stocked- we have enough for a month minimum.’

‘We’ll need to make sure none of our cargo will get us into immediate trouble,’ Namjoon sighs heavily.

While a lot of the underverse routes were pretty much free-passes, their cargo could still get them into trouble. Besides, they weren’t affiliated to a pirate clan, or worked under known mercenary lines, and neither were they excavators who often used these channels to export/import stolen treasures and relics. To an extent they could pretend that they were escaping the GLA, which was something they could definitely work with, but then they wouldn’t be able to explain why the ship was registered under Namjoon’s name.

Proton missiles were not the most powerful weapons out there but did carry a lot of value in the black-market. They were light-weight, powerful, and easy to rewire and control via simple control systems. But these weren’t just any proton missiles; these were GLA issued, brand-new unregistered serial coded proton missiles.

A lot of Beings were under the impression that the underverse allowed any and every form of illegal activity to simply go in and out of its network. This was extremely inaccurate.

To an extent, the criminal underverse was far more complex and deeply controlled by their “government” of sorts. There were laws, rules, and though unwritten and undeclared, methods of action you had to abide by.

And outposts, the illegal equivalent of Docks, had pretty strict guides and regulations on their own, maintained by either a single or a small team of Beings called “governors” who watched over the ins and outs of each outpost.

‘Yoongi- how did you travel around when you were under the GI?’ Sk’jin asks, offering the Human a roll as though in exchange for information. Namjoon looks over at Yoongi curiously as well. The GI were the best kept secret, other than the Akramanese and the Yisheng’s betrayal. Yet they were able to traverse the entire Known Universe, biding the crazy and mind-boggling orders issued to them by the Yishengs. If anyone knew how to get around the Known Universe without leaving a trace, it would be a GI Agent. Even a field agent from the Venture Unit like Hoseok had to rely on outposts and fake identity to traverse across the Universe.

Yoongi reaches over and snags Sk’jin’s last cutlet instead and replies, ‘Unlimited access through the Yisheng Directory.’

Everyone pauses to stare at Yoongi who cuts into the cutlet and takes a bite. He clearly likes it, taking another bite again.

Hoseok and Sk’jin immediately turn to look at Namjoon with an expectant look.

‘Don’t look at me, this is the first time I’m hearing this.’ Namjoon frowns. ‘Could you clarify what you said Yoongi?’

Yoongi doesn’t look up from the cutlet he’s now heartily digging into as he says, ‘Yisheng’s have unlimited access and passes to any and all galaxy, system, and planet they choose to enter. Their ships are never checked. As an agent, the ship was registered to carry Yisheng supplies and was never questioned or searched.’

So much made sense now.

‘If that’s the case why didn’t the special-jury assign us one of these ships and just let us go to
Bhumi without any issue?’

‘It’s obvious isn’t it? They want to track us- make sure we’re doing what we’re supposed to,’ Sk’jin rolls his eyes. It paints an extremely unflattering image considering his stuffed cheeks.

But this triggers an instant silence around the table where they all share shifty looks. Even Yoongi glances around at them.

‘So. Who’s going to tell the special-jury that we’re going off-grid.’ Sk’jin asks after he swallows his food.

No one speaks up.

Namjoon sighs.

‘How about we don’t tell them,’ Hoseok suggests. ‘I mean after all, doesn’t this entire operation prioritize utmost secrecy? With the special-jury not knowing we’re the only ones who know where we’re going. All ties are cut, we move with the utmost secrecy and no one knows.’

Namjoon studies Hoseok curiously for a brief second before saying, ‘I would rather not entirely fall off the radar like that.’

‘I agree with Namjoon,’ Sk’jin chimes in. ‘I think it’s better to report our situation to them. I doubt we’ll be pulled out from the mission- but it’s possible that they might have been able to clear something up for us.’

Hoseok nods in acquiescence, finishing his bowl of soup by soaking the remaining amount with a piece of roll and swallowing it up. ‘So, who’s gonna report in? I’d rather not have to talk to Lal Haenoon.’

Both Namjoon and Sk’jin grimace at that.

‘I guess I can-‘ Sk’jin doesn’t even have time to complete his sentence before Namjoon cuts across and says, ‘I’ll report back to Lmiura. I should send in the Captain’s Log after all.’

Sk’jin’s expression is very carefully controlled as he nods, suddenly completely disinterested in what he was eating, pushing his plate away. Hoseok notices this and glances over at Namjoon who was checking the Captain’s Log on his screen, his expression poised but guarded.

‘We’re going to have to plan our next step carefully- we need to find an outpost and where we can somewhat “safely” dock and restock,’ Namjoon looks up. ‘Any suggestions?’

‘Satellite or station?’ Hoseok asks as he pulls out his screen, going through the Venture Unit’s list of outposts.

‘Preferably station,’ Sk’jin chimes in, wiping his delicate looking hands on some tissues as though he had been merely nibbling on some biscuits instead of nearly emptying the entire table. ‘Escaping stations is easier.’

Hoseok nods in agreement.

Satellite-outposts were normally set up on moons or planetoids or even within asteroid belts. Low levels of atmosphere, if any, fluctuating gravity, and difficult to get into. However they were ideal for hiding or escaping into- but this was only advisable if you were from a known or partnered pirate-clan. Station-outposts were very much like Docking Arcs except they were mainly
reconstructed or refashioned mega-ships from ages past. Sort of functional and somewhat unsafe, station-outposts made for quick touchdowns and even quicker liftoffs. But regardless of the general instability of their structural nature, were well maintained and stocked by either mercenaries, pirate-clans, or even ex-agents from the Venture Unit.

And as Hoseok eyes the list of possible outposts in front of him, he pauses at a station-outpost 3 weeks from where they were.

‘I think I found an outpost.’

Namjoon and Sk’jin lean forward to listen.

‘This is an outpost run by a few former agents of the Venture Unit- it’s 3 weeks from here, more or less,’ Hoseok reaches over and writes in the coordinates of the outpost and the location pops up near Grezma, a moon-graveyard. ‘I know one of the governors who now runs this place.’

‘Sounds good-‘ Namjoon begins but Sk’jin raises a hand and interrupts.

‘How safe is it?’ the Khol’isa asks, frowning down at the information.

‘Outposts aren’t meant to be safe-‘ Namjoon begins.

‘That’s not what I meant- former agents of the Venture Unit are normally some of the worst information dealers.’ Sk’jin replies sharply. ‘I’m sorry to say this so bluntly Hoseok but most former agents are assholes who too willingly sell information in order to gain units or favours from parties they might consider stronger. Not to mention governors in general make for unreliable Beings in general unless you buy their allegiance or threaten them into loyalty.’

Hoseok takes no offence from this, because he knows this all too well himself.

‘We’ll take that one,’ Namjoon says firmly.

Sk’jin glares at Namjoon before standing up and walking away.

Hoseok watches Sk’jin leave, headed for the stairs. He glances over at Namjoon quickly, noting that the Kutsogleran had a rather resigned yet ironed expression on his face. Did something else happen again between the two of them? It was starting to become less petty and somehow more serious. Hoseok can’t rightly explain it but puts it down to the two of them having another argument again.

Hoseok waits until Sk’jin is well out of earshot and asks Namjoon, ‘Are you sure? Sk’jin has a point.’

Hoseok doesn’t think Namjoon would make decisions purely out of spite or for the sake of having the last word, but then again, he doesn’t know Namjoon well enough to entirely rule it out.

‘You said you knew one of the governors running this outpost right?’ Namjoon asks.

‘I do- but last time I spoke to him was some decades ago.’ Hoseok replies, ‘I’m not sure if he’s still the governor of this outpost or not.’

‘Outpost governors rarely change- we both know that,’ Namjoon replies. ‘Did you have a bad relationship with this Being?’

‘Nothing like that- I worked with him once when I was younger for a few missions- I don’t know if
he’ll remember me,’ Hoseok clarifies again.

Namjoon nods at that and says, ‘We’ll take it. It’s better than going into an outpost we have no idea about.’

Hoseok glances over at Yoongi who, to his disquiet, was staring hard at him.

‘Is there anything you want to add Yoongi?’ Hoseok asks hastily.

‘You finished the soup.’

‘Ah…’ Hoseok glances down at the bowl. ‘I’m sorry?’

‘However if you find that it’s a risk, then we won’t go,’ Namjoon adds, leaning back with a heavy sigh. ‘We still have time to find another outpost.’

Hoseok also leans back, crossing his arms over his chest as he thinks.

Namjoon looks over the Ngfy’widan carefully, studying his mannerism.

In Namjoon’s view, he posed the least amount of threat and suspicion compared to Sk’jin and Yoongi. Namjoon doesn’t know if this is purely projection or if he was reading the Venture Unit agent correctly, but he felt that Hoseok was genuinely in for the mission and its objectives without added intent or agenda.

‘No, leave it to me,’ Hoseok says easily a few seconds later. ‘I’ll get us there.’

However there were moments, just like this, where certain aspects of Hoseok’s mannerism and tone, made Namjoon wonder if he was being deeply deceived.

Dock NIW-43002 was better known across the Known Universe as The Hive. It was one of the largest Docks this side of the Universe, orbiting Cabc’d’s sun like a planet would. Its proximity to the sun powered and energized the entire Dock, making it almost entirely independent of fuel cells. The Hive housed over 150,000 launch rings leading up to over 300,000 private/public Hangar
Bays. These launch rings, which were made of a yellowish metal, were shaped in a nontraditional outline of a hexagon rather than a circle. This was what gave rise to its nickname. From a distance, the entire structure gleamed a deep gold in colour, making it appear even more like its namesake. The Hive is stunningly beautiful, and slightly overwhelming. It’s teeming with life and all sorts of Beings who make their way around, busy in their own missions.

Yoongi had made sure that the other agents were taken care of in relatively empty areas, where chances of being interrupted were slim. Places like the sewer network, locked down cargo hulls, and closed down shutter stores. He had tried again, downloading and presenting the Android Core to the other agents. But no agent survived the ordeal.

Yoongi watches the last agent succumb to the information and sensory overload, blood bleeding from every single orifice of his body.

And like every time it has happened, Yoongi watches as they disintegrate into nothingness.

That could have been him. To an extent, that was him. They were all the same. Faceless and unknown, no mark left upon the arrival of their being into the Universe, and no mark remained once they left.

But it was important that Yoongi remembered. He doesn’t know why. But he wants to. Because he has to.

The helmet dissolves and fades away as well and Yoongi quietly steps out of the cargo hull. He makes his way towards their ship, docked in the reserved launch-ring at the top most level of the Hive. From here, he would be able to keep track of all of them. They would be landing in a few minutes, Yoongi was notified of their arrival at the borders of The Hive a few minutes ago.

Yoongi stares down at the continuous flow of Transporters, Shuttles, and Ships flying in and out of this busy Dock. He’s never noticed it before.

A strange sort of pain takes over his chest as he watches light and colour blend into one, forming shapes and movements that Yoongi cannot explain.

He removes his helmet and listens to the lights and colours around him.

*
The Hangar Bay of the Užkulisai is organized systematically and structured in a way that offered easy access despite being highly secured. Each cargo load was attached and bolted down using magnetic strips that used their own conductivity to generation friction energy, thereby securing it independently from the rest of the ship. According to the roster Namjoon was looking at their cargo consisted of 20 3x2 OrTanks, 15 storage units, 5 weapons crates, and 8 capsules carrying compressed terraforming biochemical agents.

But occupying the most space is the massive Spardyti- a Transporter that could be used for aerial, terrain, and water exploration in-planet. While it couldn’t be used to operate off-planet, it was a sturdy and durable automobile with a very famed reputation of being used by excavators during their not so legal “tomb-raidings”. There was a smaller 2-man Transporter that could be used for off-planet purposes as well. A compact Pluns’na that could be used to navigate through asteroid fields, and maybe scout ahead because the Transporter was speedy and used solar energy to power itself. But the Pluns’na is mainly used for repairing damages outside a ship; it’s typically armed with several automotive arms that could be controlled from within the Transporter and could perform delicate mechanical operations.

They had a few stacked gravity-lifts in various sizes as well as collapsible table-lifts stored under the floors.

‘Oh- they’re not that shade of blue anymore!’ Sk’jin exclaims from where he’s standing.

Namjoon turns to look at what Sk’jin is talking about. The Khol’isa is holding up spacesuits that were jet-black with grey and teal detailing around the cuffs and seams of the suit. Most standard spacesuits were dark blue with orange and blue details.

‘These feels a lot more serious and impressive doesn’t it?’ Sk’jin asks Hoseok who also looks over the spacesuits, looking impressed.

‘It feels much lighter as well,’ Hoseok remarks, feeling the fabric between his fingers. ‘Are the helmets in there too?’

‘Oh- yes. Here,’ Sk’jin reaches for the higher shelf and pulls out what looks almost like a glass bubble.

‘Woah,’ Hoseok exclaims, taking the fragile looking object into his hands. ‘These are expensive.’

The “glass bubbles” were the latest models of the standard spacesuit helmets readily available to the public. They had only been issued about a month ago and only to deep-space explorers from the scientific community of the GLA. Lmiura wasn’t lying when she said that they wouldn’t have to worry about anything.

Except, of course, individual criminal records and just general team dynamics or lack of it.

Namjoon understands that to an extent, Sk’jin was completely justified in his anger. However, Namjoon also knows that what he did was also completely justifiable. Because it all filters down to the fact that they were all brought here by different Beings with different sets of interest and the succession of these individual interests could very well reshape much of the Known Universe.

And it was up to Namjoon to find out what these interests were and make sure no one came out on top. And if that meant listening in on conversations and more or less, violating privacy of the rest
of the crew, then Namjoon would do it.

So of course, Sk’jin wasn’t the only one he was actively “watching over”- a term he prefers to spying. He was keeping tabs on everything Hoseok and Yoongi were doing as well.

There was practically no activity beyond what was normal for Yoongi. The Human barely used his screen unless it was to watch movies or other entertainment programs from his home planet. But that didn’t make him any less suspicious. He had an odd “personality” if you could call it that. He frequently did and said things that seemed entirely out of place with how he behave and appeared. There was more to Yoongi than met the eye and it makes Namjoon uncomfortable.

Hoseok was a lot more active than Yoongi but still never went past anything suspicious. Hoseok conducted extensive research on each of them as expected of a former agent of the Venture Unit. He was also very thorough, and had quite a long list of hacks and shortcuts under his belt. But that was it.

By default, just because of association, Namjoon would find Hoseok the most suspicious and capable of carrying out a complete heist over the ship. If Hoseok could pilot a ship of almost every make, it made him highly capable in Navigating as well. He was a trained and seasoned agent in the Venture Unit and so his skills in weaponry would be extensive, no matter what type. He’s had to infiltrate and live many lives as an undercover spy, relying only on his ability to make himself believable, so Hoseok is very likely extremely good at talking himself out of potentially messy situations.

If anyone was going to overthrow and take over this mission to abide the order of their representee, in this case Lal Haenoon, and succeed: it would be Hoseok.

But Namjoon has seen and known of Hoseok since the Gaia Case. He knows of his backstory and based solely on that, doesn’t believe Hoseok would throw this mission down for a single individual’s ambition.

Sk’jin on the other hand, was a different story altogether. The Khol’isa had not only conducted extensive research, but also called and messaged unregistered lines. And Namjoon couldn’t have them translated. For a while he wonders if Sk’jin was perhaps speaking in a code of sorts. But he soon came to realize, after listening intently a few times, that it wasn’t so. The language Sk’jin was speaking wasn’t registered in Lisai’s registry of spoken languages. Which was why the AI couldn’t translate the Khol’isa’s conversation.

This revolution had once again filled Namjoon with an unknown fear. Lisai was the AI that granted them access to every available information within the GLA Digital Network. The language Sk’jin spoke most definitely had to be registered and made translatable- the GLA Directory of Language, Speech, and Communication was extremely thorough and had a department of extremely dedicated teams to continuously update and expand their database. If any habituated moon, planet, system has been discovered by the GLA then one of the first things they would do would be to study their language. Culture, identity, and understanding of the species psyche was better grasped after gaining linguistic information on their language. So even if they weren’t a planet under the GLA Treaty, then their language would be studied and logged into the database.

So if their ship’s AI had limited, or as Namjoon believes it, purposefully restricted access to information just for languages, then were any of the information he was receiving complete? Were they even true?

And more importantly, why were they being restricted?
‘What is all this anyways?’ Sk’jin asks, kicking the OrTanks lightly with his foot.

‘According to the roster they’re carrying birthing sacks-‘ Namjoon replies immediately.

‘Gross-‘ Sk’jin pulls a face of disgust.

‘-to help aid the growth of plants, animals, anything back in Bhumi,’ Namjoon continues, rolling his eyes. He wants to point out to Sk’jin that his species practically ate themselves at a cellular level and were reborn in a cocoon- he had no right in feeling grossed out.

‘Should we open one, I feel like opening one-‘ Sk’jin looks a bit too excitable as he reaches for the lid of one of the OrTanks.

‘We’re not opening anything Sk’jin please step away from the OrTanks or so help me-‘

‘You can’t threaten me, I’m injured.’ Sk’jin replies, pretending to be appalled at Namjoon’s words.

Sk’jin was far from being frail and weak. Khol’isa were known to be some of the hardiest species of Beings across the Universe and their recovery rate was one of the fastest as well. They rarely ever needed any form of extensive medical aid or check-up. Sk’jin’s health tab was nearly at full, and he didn’t need any medication in the first place either. He had pretty much bounded out of the Medical Bed, showered, changed his robes into a much more elegant looking one, and dedicated himself to repairing his damaged robes. He even employed Hoseok’s help because apparently the Ngfy’widan was quite skilled with a needle and thread and could actually embroider. They had spent 5 hours on the hem of Sk’jin’s robes, stitching little golden flowers over the torn fabric while Yoongi watched, obviously fascinated.

Ever since that conversation yesterday, Sk’jin had been acting odd. In the sense he wasn’t being petty or bitter in regards to Namjoon with his actions of words. There was a strange patience in what Sk’jin was doing- like he was waiting for something and Namjoon doesn’t know what. But what he does know is that it probably wouldn’t bode well for him.

So Sk’jin is civil and rather “friendly” with Namjoon, treating him the way he treats Hoseok and Yoongi but with something else added to it. Frankly speaking, this makes Namjoon very uncomfortable. But he tries his best to ignore it. If Sk’jin was looking for an opportunity to “get back at him” it would be difficult to do so because Namjoon really doesn’t have anything to hide, and neither was he secretly communicating with unknown Beings.

‘Can we please move on.’ Hoseok asks tiredly. ‘The readings registers that all biothermal functions are operational and the contents are stable.’

‘Nothing that will get us into trouble?’ Namjoon asks as Hoseok reads the tabs keeping track of the conditions inside the OrTanks.

‘All safe,’ Hoseok replies. ‘But maybe we should open them, I’d rather know exactly how everything looks inside each of these to know exactly what we’re dealing with.’

‘I’m with Hoseok,’ Sk’jin calls from his end of the shelves. ‘And though this is last resort, we could even use them to get out of sticky situations by using them as trade- I mean, this sort stuff is prime trading units.’

Sk’jin had a point. There was a lot of this stuff on board with them and if needed, or if they were truly desperate, then they could use it to trade in exchange for things like their freedom. Namjoon sighs inwardly as he heads for the first of the OrTanks.
‘All right- but let’s be careful when looking through,’ Namjoon warns. ‘Some of these have carefully maintained chemical balances in them- I’d rather not mess up anything and suddenly have mutated creatures roaming the ship.’

‘That sounds like fiction,’ Yoongi chimes in unexpectedly.

Unsure how to answer, the three of them look around at each other, expressions of amusement on their faces.

‘How’s the Bridge?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘Functional.’

‘Great!’ Sk’jin chuckles before he continues conversing with the Human.

Namjoon turns his attention back to the task at hand. The OrTanks were layered and thick, hosting inside of them clear cases filled with birthing sacs and some form of amniotic fluid. It’s a little bit gross, if Namjoon is being honest but doesn’t have a problem with it. Unlike Hoseok and Sk’jin, both of them reacting strongly to the contents.

Hoseok shudders, an honest to goodness full body shudder as he nervously looks into blood-filled birthing sac; its purpose clearly for hosting animals of sort.

‘So these sacs would just- birth things?’ Hoseok asks, looking a little green.

‘It’s part of the preservation technology,’ Namjoon explains. ‘It’s similar to AI technology, it takes the eggs or even just single DNA strands and replicates a sort of womb for the cell to grow and expand.’

‘Will it work on every type of species?’ Hoseok asks, stepping away and taking deep breaths as though trying not to throw up.

‘It should- most living creatures are made of the same basic elements after all- despite being born in different terrains, planets, systems- we all live in the same universe made of the same matter,’ Namjoon closes shut one of the OrTanks. ‘The mass of the universe exists in us, as we exist in the universe.’

He’s met with an extraordinarily loud silence and Namjoon looks up with some alarm. Hoseok and Sk’jin are both looking at him with an expression he can’t quite translate or understand.

‘What?’ Namjoon asks, feeling a little defensive.

‘Nothing,’ Sk’jin replies, before pushing himself away from the OrTanks and going up the Transporters.

‘Can you drive this?’ he asks Hoseok, pulling the Ngfy’widan away from the sight of the birthing sacs because he really did look like he was about to throw up.

‘Yeah I can,’ Hoseok looks relieved at not having to check the OrTanks as he pats the side of the Spardyti.

‘I’ve piloted her a few times before. Easy functions- good user interface,’ Hoseok looks over the Transporter with a pleased expression. ‘You could drop a 50 ton rock over this and it wouldn’t budge.’
‘That’s good to know,’ Sk’jin comments dryly.

‘And given the correct speed, it could break through said rock,’ Hoseok laughs as he opens the door to the Spardyti. ‘Lisai, can you switch her up?’

‘Starting up the Spardyti.’

‘Thanks,’ Hoseok looks around the Transporter, clearly comfortable with the entire set up. The Transporter hums to life and it makes a surprisingly quiet whirring sound.

‘It’s very quiet,’ Namjoon hears Sk’jin comment as he checks through the last OrTank. The birthing sacs were all stable and neatly secured within their cases. Namjoon, checks their systems one more time before closing the lid.

‘We should probably check on the storage units as well,’ Namjoon calls the attention of the other two who were fawning over the Spardyti’s functions and extra added features; he should probably go over them with Hoseok in detail later.

‘Aren’t they mainly extra parts and stuff for maintenance?’ Hoseok asks, jumping out of the tall Transporter.

‘Mostly yeah,’ Namjoon nods. ‘But I think it’s important that we keep a list based on what we find rather than rely on what’s noted.’

At that, both Sk’jin and Hoseok give him a searching look followed by a look of understanding and they both nod. Strangely enough, this manual search of the Hangar Bay seemed to be putting them all in the same metaphoric page of wanting to get things done quickly and with as little hiccups as possible.

‘I guess we should start with the smaller crates first- Sk’jin could you hand the medium sized gravity-lift?’ Namjoon asks, looking up at the smaller crates stacked over their heads.

Sk’jin starts walking up to where the gravity-lifts were stacked when he abruptly stops. Hoseok notices at once, a frown growing on his face as he asks, ‘Is everything all right?’.

Namjoon also turns, noting that Sk’jin’s posture looked strangely contorted. With some difficulty, Sk’jin turns a little, facing them again. He opens his mouth to reply but a strange look passes over his face. Sk’jin raises a hand, touching the side of his temples, then his movements pause oddly.

‘Sk’jin-’ Hoseok calls again, walking forward, a little confused.

Then quite suddenly, without warning, Sk’jin’s eyes roll back and he crumples onto the ground.

Namjoon and Hoseok just stare, frozen in their shock for a whole 3 seconds before Namjoon recovers first.

He approaches the Khol’isa carefully, calling upon their AI system as he does so, ‘Scan Communications Manager Sk’jin for any physical issues.’

‘Scanning.’

‘Is he all right?’ Yoongi asks.

‘I don’t know,’ Namjoon frowns, pulling back Sk’jin’s eyelid to check on his eyes. ‘And I have a feeling Lisai won’t be able to help us either.’
The Hive was going to get caught in the middle of a space battle that would render it asunder.

Yoongi doesn’t understand. Why was this happening? If they wanted this ship and the Beings inside of it, then why were they trying to have them killed? Or was Yoongi misunderstanding this from the very beginning?

He’s able to keep track of some of them as they walk around the Hive through his helmet. They’re all talking amongst each other, laughing and enthusiastically approaching stalls. The other two; the Captain and the Navigator, were inside the Immigration Office, obviously clearing their pass. The other group were there for more tourist-y reasons.

They seemed like ordinary happy Beings, all just living their lives together.

*Together.*

Not a unit of Beings designed and built to carry out missions. Not as individuals who were constructed for the sole purpose of not existing.

They existed in this pane of life and were Alive.

But they wouldn’t be.

*They* had all planned it. Make it look like a clash of pirate-clans, and the Hive would be an unfortunate victim to it all.

Yoongi holds a small screen in the palm of his hand, a line calling through.

‘*This is the GIU Yaaig’Ra Ari Mothership Communications Tower. How may I help you?*’

‘I would like to speak to Admiral K’mara. This is a Code-AlphaBlack emergency.’
‘So.’

‘What are we going to do?’

Namjoon, Yoongi, and Hoseok were gathered at the Bridge, standing at the Navigator’s Mast. Sk’jin was in the Medical Bay, still unconscious.

‘This isn’t supposed to be happening right?’ Hoseok asks Namjoon. ‘Khol’isa don’t just faint.’

Namjoon looks entirely unsure as well. He’d been on his screen for the past few hours, doing Spaces knew what, and he had even asked Yoongi for his screen. The Human had handed his over easily, never having really used it much to start off with, and had said something about making food. But that had been nearly 8 hours ago and Sk’jin was still knocked out and they had no answers either.

‘Communications Manager Sk’jin is waking up.’

‘Thank you Lisai,’ Namjoon looks relieved. It would be difficult to explain a sick team member back to the special-jury; even more so if he wasn’t waking up.

Hoseok makes to follow Yoongi out of the Bridge but Namjoon holds him back, nodding towards the stairs instead.

‘What is it?’ Hoseok asks at once, sensing something serious.

‘I think…I’m thinking of not sending in the log just yet,’ Namjoon says unexpectedly.

‘Why?’

‘There’s something else going on,’ Namjoon says to Hoseok, his expression wary and grim. ‘There’s something up with Lisai.’
‘The AI?’ Hoseok asks, feeling apprehensive at once. He can’t help but glance up towards the cameras.

Namjoon nods.

‘What’s wrong with it?’

‘It’s missing information and data,’ Namjoon sighs out. ‘I noticed some things, missing from Lisai’s search capacity. At first I thought it was simply an issue of firewalls or data encryption but it’s not the case.’

‘Missing information? But Lisai- the ship is connected to the GLA Digital Network. We can’t be missing any information,’ Hoseok frowns. That seemed rather impossible and also considering the nature of their task, detrimental to the successful outcome of their mission.

Unless it was done on purpose. And one look at Namjoon confirms Hoseok’s suspicions.

‘You think they did this?’ Hoseok asks, ‘But why?’

‘I don’t know. And-’ Namjoon pauses a moment at the landing. ‘And while I do not apologize for having to do it, I am sorry that it was at the cost of your privacy but I did conduct research-‘

Hoseok already knew this. He had expected it and it’s not news to him. He waves it off quickly and says, ‘I understand. What’s your point?’

Namjoon looks a little taken aback but he recovers quickly and says, ‘While your files were available to me after digging around-’

Hoseok wants to snort. Namjoon must be very good in order to “dig” around his classified files that weren’t supposed to exist.

‘-there were aspects of Sk’jin’s history that I couldn’t find or couldn’t access because of active firewalls. Then a few days ago, before th incident with the Orvanan, Sk’jin made an unregistered call to an unknown and unregistered line in Ngobut’jha.’

‘Ngobut’jha?’ Hoseok cannot, for the life of him, understand why the Khol’isa would make a call to the rather unimpressive planet. ‘What’s in Ngobut’jha?’

‘Nothing,’ Namjoon scowls, slowing down as they walk down the stairs. ‘And he was speaking in a language I couldn’t understand- and Lisai didn’t have it registered either.’

Now this is news to Hoseok.

‘Lisai was unable to translate a language? Not even identify it?’

Namjoon nods grimly.

‘Let me listen to the audio- I might be able to recognize it,’ Hoseok offers. Namjoon gives him a searching look, as though sizing him up and his offer. Then he nods.

‘Later?’ Namjoon looks down the stairs, they can hear Sk’jin’s voice speaking indistinctly.

Hoseok nods and they make their way down.

Sk’jin was sitting up, not looking particularly good.
His skin, normally a pearlescent rosy hue that highlighted Sk’jin’s natural beauty seemed dulled and oddly faded. His normally faintly rosy fingers were pale and almost see-through. Hoseok swears he sees Sk’jin’s blood vessels under his skin but the Khol’isa is quick to cover up any skin, shivering a little as though cold.

‘So- what’s wrong?’ Namjoon asks.

Sk’jin rolls his eyes and Hoseok privately thinks Namjoon could do with some classes in bedside manners.

‘If I rightly knew, then I would tell you,’ Sk’jin replies, gratefully accepting the blanket Yoongi digs out from one of the compartments that lined up the walls of the Bay.

‘So you have a general idea of why you’re like this?’ Namjoon asks.

‘I can’t be sure but I think it’s the sun actually,’ Sk’jin shrugs- or shivers, Hoseok isn’t sure. ‘Khol’isa, as you all know, have a strange affiliation with the sun. I’m not as young as I once was; all of this fighting and bleeding takes a lot out from me.’

‘Like a plant?’ Yoongi asks.

‘Something like that,’ Sk’jin replies with an amused grin before looking over at all of them. ‘I’m touched- you all came to see me.’

‘These outposts randomly have Yishengs with them,’ Hoseok says worriedly, looking over Sk’jin. ‘If this really is a sun thing- we should land us somewhere on a moon, maybe sneak into a federation Deck and-’

‘You’re really sweet you know that?’ Sk’jin interrupts Hoseok with a smile, a true and genuine smile. ‘It’s nice. It’s rare.’

Hoseok doesn’t know what to say exactly.

‘We’ll plot the next stop where we can get some sun,’ Namjoon concludes. ‘We’re only a week away from Grezma- it’s possible that we might find a synthesis booth.’

Sk’jin wrinkles his nose at that. Which was understandable because synthesis booths were honestly a little disturbing and gross. There were some creatures who required sunlight to exist- using a form of photosynthesis to generate energy and just live. While there was technology that existed that allowed these species of Beings to travel through space without having the need to sun bathe in the nearest available planet, soaking up as much of the UV rays was a sure and go to fix for any of their anaerobic accidents. Hoseok once witnessed a Being die from UV starvation, basically rotting from the inside out.

So synthesis booths were the fixes these species relied on in order to get these quick fixes. But they weren’t always the cleanest or safest. Some were crudely made, the UV generators inside of them going berserk and sometimes cooking the Being inside of it with radiation.

But it would be the only option they have right now, so Sk’jin nods after a while.

‘Oh Yoongi!’ Sk’jin exclaims, looking genuinely surprised and touched.

Turning, Hoseok finds that Yoongi had left the Medical Bay and had come back, bearing with him a tray of food he had obviously prepared earlier. Hoseok looks at the tray and is surprised to find what looked like actual edible food of decent quality. Namjoon also looks thoroughly surprised as
Yoongi pulls out the table-tray from the side of Sk’jin’s Medical Bed and places the tray on it.

‘You need to store up.’ Is all Yoongi says, and hands Sk’jin a spoon then leaves.

‘That was the most precious thing I’ve ever witnessed in my life,’ Sk’jin whispers.

Hoseok has to somewhat agree.

Sk’jin continued to pass out at random intervals. It was never predictable and no one knew what triggered this bout of fainting. But the Being in question didn’t seem too bothered or worried by it. A different story for the others on board. They were more or less Sk’jin’s nurses at this point as well as his personal ‘fuck he’s falling catch him!’ guards.

At one point, Namjoon had to hack through Sk’jin’s cabin’s security to open the door and Hoseok had to pull him out of the shower where he’d collapsed. Luckily he hadn’t injured himself but carrying a soapy and wet Khol’isa out of the narrow showering stall proved to be detrimental to Hoseok’s elbows as he slipped and balanced himself by slamming against the wall, his elbow bruising spectacularly as a result.

Sk’jin had apologized to him but had also laughed, saying that they now had no secrets between them.

But he seemed all right now. Sk’jin hasn’t fainted in the past 17 hours and they were now close to Grezma and had just pulled out of warp. Though staying in warp had no physical effect in the overall environment of the ship, Hoseok always felt relieved when they pulled out of warp. Seeing the stars splayed endlessly around him made him feel much better.

But the relief is short-lived. From this distance they can see the moon-graveyard, an expanse of space where hundreds of thousands of years ago a planetary system once existed and then just died, leaving behind dead planets and moons.

The Grezma-space was one of these former systems. And though the sun of this system no longer existed, the remains of the planets congregated into a stationary pile of planetary remains, forming what looked like a planet of sorts but it’s entirely segmented and separated. The Grezma outpost was at the very top of this “planet” and Hoseok can see lights blinking from this distance. It was covered in a crosspatch of Atmoshield, rendering some areas of the “planet” with a pale blue glow from the distance.

Hoseok wills himself to calm down. He wasn’t sure about the outcome of this docking; he’s used outposts countless of times before. In fact, he’s so used to outposts, it had taken him a while to get used to using actual Docks legally. But all of that had been before the Gaia Case, and way before the Venture Unit’s internal scourge.

‘We’re getting a call from their tower,’ Sk’jin reports.

‘Patch them through,’ Namjoon replies.

‘Who is this, what do you want.’
It certainly was different to the standard GLA Dock and Hoseok hears Namjoon snort faintly.

‘We need to restock our supplies,’ Hoseok calls out. ‘And we’d like to speak to Governor Keghtsa.’

‘Your ship is a registered GLA ship, are you out of your fucking minds? You’re lucky we didn’t shoot you down at once.’

Hoseok rolls his eyes but before he can answer the line opens again, ‘This is Governor Keghtsa. Who is this?’ a calm and quiet voice replaces the coarse voice of the previous operator. Hoseok recognizes this voice.

‘Governor, this is Hoseok of the Infiltration Division. We worked together in the Antsy’aly case-’

‘-understood. You can land on Debris 51. Do you have a Transporter to bring you here or should I send one to pick you up?’

Hoseok looks over at Namjoon who mouths ‘pick up’, ignoring Sk’jin’s questioning look.

‘Pick up.’

‘Sending one over. We’re patching you through.’

‘That went easier than I expected,’ Sk’jin comments, not at all sounding relieved before adding, ‘We have the Pluns’na, we don’t need a pick-up Transporter.’

‘That’s because Yoongi and I are taking the Pluns’na and going over to the Flotsam and Jetsam,’ Namjoon explains.

Sk’jin raises an eyebrow at that but doesn’t comment. Namjoon had told Hoseok that he was going to get a screen that wasn’t based off of Lisai’s digital connectivity once they landed in Pluns’na. Hoseok had listened to the conversation and couldn’t recognize the language Sk’jin had been speaking in. It had a familiar ring to it but Hoseok has been exposed to a lot of languages already so he could just be overthinking it.

Yoongi is already making his way out of the Bridge, dressed fully in black as per usual. Namjoon had told him not to carry any weapons repeatedly and he had agreed though Hoseok could see the reluctance (?? Was it reluctance??) in Yoongi’s expression.

‘Yoongi if you can find any other ingredients that are similar to the ones on Earth then that’d be great!’ Sk’jin calls out. Yoongi nods in reply and exits the Bridge.

‘We’ll go get ready,’ Namjoon says, ‘Can you report the Pluns’na to their tower?’ he asks Sk’jin as he makes his way out of the Bridge.

‘Sure, why not, it’s not like I’m ever included in any of the plans here,’ Sk’jin mumbles under his breath before reporting to the tower.

‘By the way,’ Sk’jin calls over at Hoseok as they approach the rather make-shift launch-ring that was attached onto a large flat slab of moon-rock. ‘You sure you’ll be okay with this?’

‘What do you mean?’ Hoseok asks, hoping Sk’jin doesn’t voice out his fear.

‘Waiting for me while I get a tan in the synthesis booth,’ Sk’jin drawls out.

‘If there’s one,’ Hoseok replies, voice a little strained as they land.
‘And about the entire Venture Unit thing.’

It’s a good thing Hoseok has already landed them because his hands slip out of the control shafts.

‘I heard all about it,’ Sk’jin shrugs from where he sits. ‘It’s your main concern isn’t it? For using outposts.’

Hoseok sighs, standing up wearily. ‘Yeah it is.’

‘Well, your governor left a long time ago- I doubt he’s gonna hold anything that happened after his time against you.’

Hoseok glances out of the large HUD windows and grimaces as a light-grey Transporter approaches them.

‘Yeah I hope so too.’

Hoseok watches as the Pluns’na smoothly exits and drift off towards one of the larger slabs below them. The light-grey Transporter waits for them at the edge of the slab and closing the Užkulisai and locking it, Hoseok makes his way across the hard moon-rock with Sk’jin. The air was definitely thinner here, seeing as they didn’t use a natural atmosphere and it was entirely generated. He glances over worriedly at Sk’jin, wondering how he was holding up. The Khol’isa looked unwell, but that was only because Hoseok knew how he originally looked. The employees around the Grezma outposts however, didn’t seem to notice and ogle at Sk’jin.

Sk’jin seems to glow under the attention he’s receiving, looking like he was thinking ‘finally I’m being appreciated for my face’ as he smiles rather benignly at the pilot and working crew of the Transporter they enter.

‘You’re Hoseok?’ one of them asks, a green-tinted Being with obvious bionic features added to his form, making him look like a strange skeletal insect, in Hoseok’s private opinion.

‘Yes- that’s me,’ Hoseok nods.

‘We’re taking you to the Governor’s Hall,’ he explains. ‘Is your…friend, coming along as well or do we drop him off somewhere else?’

‘Do you have a-‘

‘I’m with Hoseokkie,’ Sk’jin drapes his arms around Hoseok from the back, hooking his chin over his shoulders with a beatific smile. ‘Right?’

Hoseok is grateful for his training and experience as he nods and replies with a convincing sigh, ‘Yeah, he’s with me.’

The Being nods and they’re shown to a sitting area where they buckle themselves in.

‘You know,’ Sk’jin says in a low whisper next to his ear, leaning in more than needed. ‘If I tried
Hoseok chuckles, imagining the stoic Kutsogleran snapping and most probably freaking out as a result. The Transporter hums to life and Hoseok hears his Comm-Device make a small clicking sound and knows at once that the Transporter was rigged with a magnetic pulse that blocked out all communication lines. There’s no change in Sk’jin’s teasing expression so Hoseok doesn’t know if it’s just him or not.

‘Best not try it on him them,’ Hoseok sniggers, playing along.

Sk’jin laughs melodically, leaning his head on Hoseok’s shoulder and twisting their arms together. Hoseok notes how many of the crew around them look let down because of this single action.

‘But why are you doing this?’ Hoseok ask in a low whisper.

‘Because I don’t trust Venture Unit agents,’ Sk’jin replies easily, playing with Hoseok’s fingers. ‘And judging by that sound I just heard, I think I was right in doing so.’

‘Ouch- I’m a Venture Unit agent, you know that right?’ Hoseok laughs, pretending to be wounded.

‘What makes you think I even trust you?’ Sk’jin shoots back and Hoseok isn’t really surprised by Sk’jin’s response. He didn’t expect Sk’jin to trust him at all. Because this wasn’t about trust.

They all had that mutual understanding that they didn’t trust each other. But they all knew they were working for the same mission, meaning they would cooperate and play their part but that was the extent to which they would go. No more, no less.

This was compromise, and the desire to complete their given mission.

‘My unfailing charm, embroidery skills and piloting expertise?’

Sk’jin lets out an uncharacteristically unflattering snort, slapping Hoseok on his arm before leaning in comfortably again.

‘Trust is such a fickle notion.’ Sk’jin comments, observing his fingernails nonchalantly.

Hoseok wholeheartedly agrees.

‘But your embroidery skills moved me in a way no Being has moved me before,’ Sk’jin leans in dangerously close as though kissing the side of Hoseok’s neck. ‘Where did you learn how to move your fingers like that?’

Hoseok, to his chagrin, finds himself flushing. Because Sk’jin had said the latter part of that sentence in a carrying whisper and everyone was throwing him quick looks. Hoseok recognized jealousy, disgust, and lust in their glances, to name a few. One in particular was full on glaring at Hoseok.

Namjoon would definitely throw a fit if Sk’jin tried this on him. Or faint. Talk about fainting, Hoseok hopes Sk’jin doesn’t faint any time soon.

They land fairly quickly and as the Transporter doors open Hoseok’s previously unfounded and unexplained fears are confirmed when a whole array of TeorSers greet them. Hoseok hears the crew members behind him also raise their TeorSers at them. They were surrounded.
‘Spaces, not again,’ Sk’jin mumbles under his breath, dropping all of his previous act and releasing Hoseok from his clingy grasp.

They all look like pirates, most of them had green-tinted skin like the Being that had spoken to them earlier. Closer inspection tells Hoseok that they’re probably K’it’y; a species of Beings from the war-torn planet of Kana’ch. They were mostly humanoid in appearance with the exception of their tails that they looped around their waist when they weren’t running. They were some of the fastest runners across the Universe with the exception of the species of Beings from Kalchak and Begach who out ranked them. Their tails were used to balance them as they twisted sharp corner, shifting their axis of motion and balancing them over bumpy terrain.

‘Hoseok,’ a voice greets and the K’it’y spread out to let an exceptionally small Being pass through.

Barely 3 feet in height, Governor Keghtsa had a voice that didn’t match his appearance. While his voice was mild and soft sounding, rather soothing if that’s what floats your boat. But appearance-wise he was close to a grotesque yet childish nightmare.

Governor Keghtsa was from the planet of Hasarak; a small and humid planet in the distant galaxy of Andromeda. Characteristic of the Beings there, he had pale puckered skin more or less swathed around his form and he would have looked rather amphibious if it weren’t for the random tufts of wiry hair that grew out of deep and buried pores. His eyes were small and watery, but were a piercing magenta in colour. He had no hair, save for the random strands that grew here and there. His arms were thin and oddly long for his frame. And though he wore robes (in unflattering shades of yellow) that covered his lower body entirely, Hoseok knew that he had 2 pairs of legs under those robes. They were horrifying agile and fast and fighting one was frankly just exhausting because you didn’t know how to defend yourself or even attack.

‘So what’s a traitor doing here- crawling to me to beg for aid is that it?’

Sk’jin seems to have difficulty containing himself from making facial expressions of disgust. Keghtsa glances up at the Khol’isa briefly, magenta eyes narrowing.

‘Governor Keghtsa I am not here to cause any trouble,’ Hoseok says firmly. ‘I’m just here to restock my ship-‘

‘That may be so but tell me why you’re wanted by the Orvanans?’ Keghtsa asks.

‘That would be my fault,’ Sk’jin chimes in brightly. ‘I’m Sk’jin- I tried to kill their minister.’

Keghtsa blinks up at Sk’jin, clearly not amused.

‘What are you doing- you can’t be on a mission. You no longer work for the Venture Unit, seeing as how you stabbed them in the back.’

Hoseok grimaces.

‘Yes I’ve heard all about it Hoseok,’ Keghtsa comments. ‘How the Venture Unit tried to break away from the GLA, something I always supported you know, and how the Board was about to completely free themselves from the restraints of the GLA when you came along and killed not just one but three of the Board of Directors.’ Keghtsa laughs humorlessly. ‘All stabbed in the back. How cowardly of you Hoseok- your parents must be so disappointed in you.’

Hoseok keeps a mask of calm. He can feel Sk’jin’s curious eyes turn on him briefly.

‘A lot has changed since your time Keghtsa,’ Hoseok says calmly. ‘There were matters of great
stake being weighed in inside the Board- I did not wish to-

‘But you did,’ Keghtsa shrugs. ‘And in doing so you killed not just one, but two of my closest friends- oh yes, Directors Drōhī and Gadd’a were close to me. They were good Beings- wise, strong- and they had to die in your hands.’

Hoseok sighs inwardly. He hadn’t known about this.

‘So now you have come to my outpost.’ Keghtsa waves his too thin, too long arms in a waving gesture. ‘I think I would be serving justice if I returned your head to the Board wouldn’t it?’

The K’it’y nod their approval, their TeorSer never lowering.

‘I heard a lot of accounts Hoseok- how you tortured them for days on end.’ Keghtsa cocks his head to the side. ‘I think it would be fair if I returned the favor don’t you think so?’

‘Okay that’s it,’ Sk’jin sighs out. ‘Look- Governor, I don’t know what you’re talking about but we’re kinda short on time and we just really wanna refuel and-

A hand appears out of nowhere and smacks Sk’jin straight across the face.

‘Look at this one speak,’ one of the K’it’y sneers. Hoseok recognizes him from inside the Transporter. The one who had been giving Hoseok very foul looks. ‘Aren’t you a Khol’isa?’

He steps forward, a bit too forward and is inches from Sk’jin’s face.

‘What happened to your horns pretty boy?’

‘What happened to your nose, fuck-face?’ Sk’jin asks, a serene smile on his face.

‘My nose-?!’

Sk’jin head-butts him with a resounding smack and the K’it’y howls in pain, doubling over instantly, clutching his nose.

‘You bitch-‘

Hoseok winces as Sk’jin is kneed in the stomach. But the Khol’isa has this wicked grin on his face, as though he was finding all of this amusing and once again Hoseok wonders how in Spaces the Khol’isa hadn’t been killed or was wanted by every pirate-clan across the underverse.

‘Run off now little runt,’ Sk’jin spits out with a menacing grin. ‘Tuck that tail between your legs and run to your midget of a master.’

‘Khol’isa?’ Keghtsa repeats, looking a little alarmed before ordering. ‘Bag him!’

4 of the Beings behind them converge on Sk’jin, man-handling him roughly.

‘Oh you’ve got to be kidding me-‘ Sk’jin huffs as a bag is thrown over his head. ‘Really? A fucking bag ouch!’

He’s smacked heavily over his head with the end of a TeorSer.

‘You fuckin’ asshole I’m gon’ rip you a new one-‘ Sk’jin growls as he faces the direction he’d been hit from only to be sent reeling back as he’s knocked clear unconscious.
Hoseok winces again. It shouldn’t be good losing consciousness so frequently.

‘Take them to the gibbets. We can sell the Khol’isa to the Orvanan,’ Keghta says easily before looking up at Hoseok and saying, ‘You’re a good agent Hoseok. Working with you was easy and you were a reliable partner. But you crossed the line. You should have known better than to come here.’ Keghta walks away. ‘Bind them both- be careful of him, he’s worth at least 5 of you.’

The K’it’y corner and bind him. There were a tad too much of them for Hoseok to handle- that and an unconscious Sk’jin to mind as well. Keghta clearly had it all planned.

‘Find the other crew members and take them down to the gibbets too. Then strip their ship.’

Hoseok is compliant as they pull a full body-bind over him. He doesn’t fight back or struggle. Sk’jin is hoisted up onto someone’s shoulders and they start marching forward.

Hoseok was well aware of the risks he was taking.

He always knew that this day would come.

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Yoongi is at a safe distance, watching as the Hive falls apart slowly. Large chunks of goldish metal falls away as the Atmoshield around the massive Dock diminishes.

Yoongi watches as waves of Beings float out into space, struggling and flailing but all succumbing to the cold vacuum of the nothingness that would consume them inside out.

The Hive chips away, power explosions ripping it apart as fighter-ships and shuttles let fly their missiles and lasers. Unfortunate passenger ships and shuttles are caught and explode into bright light and energy, diminishing at once as the emptiness of space crushes them.

Yoongi can see the Stravechi Nava, stuck between a few ships- nestled almost, as though placed there purposefully.
And Yoongi wouldn’t have thought this in the first place, if he hadn’t seen it.

There was no explanation for it. Database and his mind weren’t able to explain what he saw. And he definitely saw it, because he had recorded it. It was not a hallucination, it was not a trick of light. It had been “real”- but what was real anymore?

A specter of light, gigantic in form and shape- moving as though the stars in the dark of space moved as one to form the shape and outline of a Being. But it had been for a brief moment of time- a flame of blue rippling and extending, guiding the falling ship to safety through clouds of flame before exhausting into vacuum.

What had happened?

All he understands, is that they survived.

Yoongi watches as the GIU arrive. Their fleets launching in neat deadly rows, almost plowing through the ranks of pirate ships.

The GIU Yaaig’Ra Ari Mothership is massive; the size of an average moon. During this time of rescue and transportation, Yoongi would be able to slip in easily. For the time being, he would wait again.

*]

Namjoon realizes, rather belatedly, that he’s never actually spent time alone with Yoongi.

He’s spent time with Hoseok, and even with Sk’jin if you can believe it. But never with Yoongi. But when Namjoon really thinks back to it, Yoongi’s presence was so entirely ambiguous that he can’t remember if he was ever with them as a group inside the Bridge or not. It didn’t help that Yoongi’s form could be entirely hidden behind the large seat of the tower-mast and that he was always dressed entirely in black. Yoongi just had the tendency of fading in with the rest of his surroundings with uncanny nonchalance. Not to mention the fact that Yoongi rarely ever spoke-
but that wasn’t true either. Namjoon distinctly remembers Hoseok and Yoongi’s conversation on some trivia from an old Earthian movie. Hoseok sometimes watched these movies with the Human and Yoongi would explain the backstory in extraordinary detail. They had spent an entire morning talking about the lore of “elves” and some interspecies romance that according to Yoongi had been “very depressing”. Sk’jin had been trying not to laugh out loud, cheeks bulging with food, face turning red from the exertion of it all.

So it wasn’t like Yoongi didn’t talk… it was just… really easy to somehow overlook him.

Just like now, inside the Flotsam and Jetsam. Namjoon can’t believe that he’s lost Yoongi.

Taking a deep breath, Namjoon scans over the heads of the crowd. For a rather flung out and small outpost, the Grezma outpost certainly had a lot of Beings- mainly all K’it’y and a smattering of other Beings as well. But no short, black-clad, Human Being around.

Spaces, it hasn’t even been 10 minutes.

‘Yoongi- where are you?’ Namjoon calls, sighing deeply.

‘Behind you.’

‘Where were you?!!’ Namjoon demands at once, hoping no one heard him squeak.

‘I found ingredients.’ Yoongi holds up a bag of said ingredients.

‘I- you- why didn’t you tell me?’ Namjoon demands, feeling like he was talking to a child.

‘I did.’

‘…you didn’t.’

‘I did.’

‘Yoongi, you didn’t.’

‘I did, Joonie.’

Namjoon and Yoongi stare resolutely at each other, neither of them giving in.

‘I did-’

‘Fine,’ Namjoon huffs, turning away. ‘Let’s not separate again. We tell each other clearly, and wait for confirmation before we make a move.’

‘Fine.’

They stare at each other again.

‘I’m looking for a screen. I think we should look there.’

‘Understood. I will follow.’

‘…right…’

‘You mean left.’

‘Spaces- you know what-‘ Namjoon sighs in exasperation. ‘Let’s just go.’
Yoongi keeps to his side, just a little behind him as though using him as a shield or cover of sorts. And it sort of works because no one really looks at Yoongi. Everyone’s eyes just latch onto Namjoon at once.

‘Why are you looking for a screen.’ Yoongi’s questions, Namjoon found out, normally sound like statements.

Namjoon thinks for a while, wondering if he should tell Yoongi about Lisai’s shortcomings.

‘I needed something translated- Lisai doesn’t have the language set to her database,’ Namjoon replies, hoping that Yoongi would pick up on what he meant. The Human doesn’t say anything for a while before asking, ‘Can I listen to the audio.’

Honestly, Namjoon doesn’t know what to expect of the Human. He can’t predict his thoughts or movements so he doesn’t know if he should be surprised that Yoongi would ask him this question. He wasn’t surprised when Hoseok asked him, but in Yoongi’s case, he can’t help but be taken aback.

‘Yeah sure,’ Namjoon shrugs, handing Yoongi his NaviLet and pulling up the audio file. He might as well.

Yoongi taps the side of his Comm-Device, attaching it to the NaviLet instead.

Namjoon finds one of those shady little stalls with outdated screens set up around the front, as though it would be enough of a front to fool other Beings into thinking what they sold wasn’t illegal.

‘That’s Long-Huon.’ Yoongi suddenly says, making Namjoon stop halfway.

‘-what? How do you know?’

‘I understand it,’ Yoongi answers as though it was obvious.

‘-…really?’ Namjoon gapes at the Human. He wants to ask more questions. Like how did Yoongi understand and come to know Long-Huon? And also, why was Sk’jin of all Beings speaking the language?

‘What is he saying?’ Namjoon asks at once.

Yoongi opens his mouth to answer but he closes his mouth abruptly, puts the NaviLet into his jacket pocket and spins Namjoon around to face frontward.

‘Yoongi what the actual fu- oh.’

‘Please follow us and don’t cause a scene or we’ll have to use force.’ The K’it’y says easily, at least a dozen TeorSers aimed right at them. They wore slightly different looking clothes- probably employed for this outpost. They don’t look trained or skilled- rather they were just low level pirates who were bought to work in this outpost.

What had happened that they were being “arrested”? Did Sk’jin do something again? Namjoon sighs. Also, why hadn’t they tried to contact him or Yoongi? Their lines were open, but no word from Hoseok or Sk’jin. Namjoon studies the K’it’y around him quickly again. Calculating roughly, Namjoon guesses that he and Yoongi should be able to fight their way through-

Yoongi.
Where was Yoongi?!

Yoongi was missing.

Again.

Sighing deeply, Namjoon raises his arms and crosses his arms behind his head.

The GIU Yaaig’Ra Ari Mothership is massive.

Yoongi follows the crew member of the Stravechi Nava, separated and placed in different private medical rooms.

They were friends with a Yisheng who was part of the emergency unit sent to the GIU Yaaig’Ra Ari Mothership in order to aid with the disaster at the Hive. He watched as the Human Navigator rush up the Yisheng, hugging him tight.

Friendship, according to database and his mind, was considered a precious memory.

Why was it not considered a precious Present?

He didn’t understand.

He also watches as Admiral K’mara comes into view. He’s obviously too far to really hear what was happening or what was being said.

Behind her was Jongin, the Venture Unit agent that was supposed to have died in Nuqtai. And next to him was a Long-Huon. He bore a resemblance to Zhoumi in that fact that they were both from Long-Huo. But there was something different about him- a red light shone through his eyes and
behind him, a shadow lingered.

Their group pauses in front of the medical rooms where the Captain was being kept. The Human Navigator was there as well.

Admiral K’mara walks away again and following her were the Captain and the Navigator.

Yoongi watches as they enter a Transporter and vanish through the wide streets of the internal city in the GIU Yaaig’Ra Ari Mothership.

Yoongi makes up his mind and follows their Transporter. There were massive train networks that interconnected each internal city within the Mothership. Yoongi sneaks into the one with Admiral K’mara, laying down flat on his back inside one of the empty cabins down the hallway, under the small beds. He hears occasional voices speak but he sees no one.

He feels the train stop and shadowing one of the last guards, Yoongi ducks out of the train before the doors can close in on him and then walks out into the grand city of Unnivel.

It’s not difficult tracing where Admiral K’mara would be from this point on. The GIU Yaaig’Ra Ari Mothership was run by K’mara so this city was in fact, her city. So Yoongi knew he would find her there. The largest and tallest tower within the city of Unnivel was dedicated to the core Headquarters of the GIU- or the seat of the Trifecta.

K’mara’s main office is massive. With many rooms and layers of levels. It was designed to make whoever came in here feel lost and confused and overwhelmed. But Yoongi easily walks through, bypassing the security with ease. They must have overestimated the security of the building because Yoongi simply walks down the long and tall hallways without alarming any security systems.

He places himself next to one of the many pillars inside her main study, where the covers on the couch look the most worn. The silk over the cushions threading just a little more than other places.

The flowers here were fresh too.

Yoongi counts them at 18 stalks in total.

K’mara had come in an hour ago and was now talking with a few of her lieutenants. They left one by one, receiving little missions and assignments, or handing in their reports.

‘Send Zitao to pick them up,’ K’mara says. ‘They trust him. They will listen to him and feel better at ease.’

‘Understood Admiral.’ The last of the lieutenants replies.

‘That is all. Are the others in their quarters?’

‘Yes Admiral.’

‘Very good. Have a good night lieutenant.’

‘Goodnight Admiral.’

The door closes shut and all Yoongi hears is the quiet sound of the air filtration units, the tapping of Admiral K’mara’s fingers over her screen, and if Yoongi listened closely, the sound of her breathing.
He steps out from behind the pillar silently and makes his way across the room. He doesn’t know what gives him away but K’mara turns on her chair to look at him.

‘How did you get in?’ Admiral K’mara is unafraid and calm. Her red eyes pierce into Yoongi’s but he looks back calmly.

K’mara doesn’t move. She simply watches. She knew that Yoongi wasn’t here to hurt her. If he was, she knew that he would have already done so.

‘Through the front door.’ Yoongi replies, lifting his visor.

‘I see.’

It’s silent again.

‘You wish to speak to me?’

‘I do.’

‘You were the one who made that emergency call from the Hive.’

‘I am.’

‘Take a seat,’ K’mara gestures to the couch.

‘Thank you Admiral.’

Yoongi sits down on the couch.

‘Would you like some tea.’

‘No, thank you.’

‘Who sent you?’

‘No one. I am by myself. I am Alone.’

K’mara stares intently at him for a while.

‘You seem to know me, yet I do not know you. I cannot place you or your species. Who are you?’ K’mara asks finally.

‘My name is Yoongi, and I am a Human,’ he answer, taking off his helmet fully. ‘I have information regarding the Galactic Inquisition and their involvement with the Yisheng Headquarters.’
(Author’s Note)
YOU MUST COME BACK HOOOOOo0000OoOoOoOoOoME!
Sorry
But I love Seo Taiji and that’s one of my favorite songs and I can’t believe BTS covered it I’m still shook I need to listen to this a billion times more bye.
Nightmares were strange.

Perhaps it was because he wasn’t supposed to see nightmares or dreams, but Sk’jin doesn’t know why nightmares control him like this. But that’s a lie. He knows. Sk’jin knows why this hurts him more than anything else. Why this drains him.

The world is white around him, and there is no end to this terrain of nothingness. No shadow, no depth, nothing. Simply white, and it is endless. He looks down at his hands.

They’re not his hands.

There were many hands.

And they all held the remains of what looked like glass shards. But looking closely at the shards told Sk’jin that they were his horns.

The blood that drips out of the sides of his head washes the whiteness around him in red and he’s back there again.

The Khol’isa didn’t have to sleep to be plagued by nightmares. They lived a nightmare. They called it the Wake of the Bloodmoon. The extended period of “living” in their treacherous and torturous planet. Blood was the colour of the sky, and blood was the colour of their eyes as they cried out against their sun.

Sk’jin has lived and has been reborn through several millenniums, reborn into the Bloodmoon time and time again. Until one day he woke to a peaceful quiet that unsettled him to his core. Because this was something he craved. Something he imagined- something he dreamt of.

So then why did the shadow of the Bloodmoon follow him here.

Raksane Tayi was beautiful- an oasis of life, colour, peace, and security. But everything is touched by the shadow of the Bloodmoon. Sk’jin tries to escape it, chasing after a relief that never comes. Chasing after a relief that would clear his eyes, shine a light strong enough to diminish the shadow of the Bloodmoon that followed him every waking second of his existence.

But it never came. It never came and Sk’jin continued to live, spreading the shadow of the nightmare that haunted him everywhere he looked.

There was no relief, no rest, no dreamless sleep. And he lived in eternal fear of it.
The landscape of his planet, long-gone and nothing more than a memory, transforms and lifts around him. The stained mountains, the cruel peaks, the bleeding rivers- even the air is rank with its colour. There was no escaping it and Sk’jin is afraid.

And Sk’jin knows why he’s afraid. Because nightmares were a reflection of life. In life you had no control over what happened to you, why it happened to you, and how it happens to you.

Hands, red and cruel in their form, rise around him from the mountains. They convolute in on themselves, hands after hands after hands in massive waves chasing after him, to pull him back to pull him out. Sk’jin doesn’t move. He can’t move. He’s tried running but that never worked. So he just waits and lets the hands like ocean waves pull him down towards a gaping darkness tinted red.

WHY ARE YOU HERE?!

The most frightening aspect of a nightmare was finding out that there was no waking from the one you were living.

WAKE UP!!

Sk’jin wakes up inside a cold room with metal walls, metal floors, and metal ceilings. He blinks a few times, waiting for the reddish tint of his vision to wash away, but it always lingered, tainting everything with blood.

One side of the room is caged and barred, the other side is only held up with an Atmoshield. His head throbs with pain as he sits up, unable to stop groaning a little as he does so.

Grezma stretches out before him in a thickly layered field of moon-rock. This was a pretty good prison; using an Atmoshield as part of the defenses meant that prisoners could jump out if they wanted, only to die rather immediately. Sk’jin would be impressed if it weren’t for the fact that he’s currently very irritated and in a lot of pain.

He touches the side of his head, wincing as he does so. There’s no bleeding, but a large and impressively bumpy lump has formed on the side of his head.

But that doesn’t hurt as much as his temples. Gingerly, Sk’jin massages at the side of his head, trying his best to breathe without giving in into hyperventilation. His heart was beating like crazy, his muscles felt extraordinarily weak. He tries not to think about his nightmare. But every time he closed his eyes, hands gripping bleeding shards of crystals appear out at him, beyond his reach, beyond his ability to heal.

He manages to move a little and lean against the wall of the room, concentrating on keeping it together.

‘Deep breaths,’ Sk’jin mumbles to himself. ‘Deep breaths- in and out.’

He could do this. He was alive and here and present again. He could do this.

‘Are you all right?’

Wincing sharply as a result of turning his head too quickly, Sk’jin blinks a few times and registers Hoseok peering across at him from beyond a few barred doors. In this dim light, the yellow of his eyes gleam bright.

‘Do I look all right?’ Sk’jin grumbles, unable to retain his normal refined and elegant mannerism.
'I tried to explain that you were unwell, that you needed medical help, but,’ Hoseok shrugs.

Sk’jin breathes out slowly, willing his pain away. He glances over at Hoseok, frowning a little though not out of pain.

‘How did you do it?’ Sk’jin asks.

Hoseok looks confused.

‘I’m good at reading Beings,’ Sk’jin states. And he’s not showing off either. Sk’jin has lived a very long time and he’s able to accurately guess a Beings character and their personalities easily. Living for so long, with little to really occupy and keep you, harnessed in you an uncanny sharpness in determining someone’s character.

‘Namjoon is a Being who has firm beliefs, prejudices, some self-righteousness, and an unwillingness to break from he considers pride because he believes that will make him weak. Of course he doesn’t realize his “pride” is in fact his own insecurity and doubts- but he hides them well and he’s intelligent enough to know. But there are aspects of your life you cannot control and that’s where he’s easy to manipulate. Easy to control,’ Sk’jin reels off. Hoseok is unmoving, staring at him.

‘Lal Haenoon is a power-hungry Being who despite his intelligence and long years guiding the Venture Unit, is bitter that he hadn’t been approached for the deal held between the Venture Unit, the Yishengs, and the Akramanese,’ Sk’jin says easily, letting go of his head and trying not to move it too much. ‘Because had he been approached, it’s extremely likely that his manipulation would have caused even more trouble through the Known Universe than it already has.’

Moving slowly, Sk’jin shifts where he’s sitting to look at Hoseok properly. The Ngfy’widan is leaning closer through the bars, as though to listen closer.

‘K’mara is shrewd and cunning- but her inability to garner trust disables her from truly gaining the power she craves,’ Sk’jin chuckles a little at the sight of Hoseok’s evident surprise at his criticism of his fellow Khol’isa. ‘Of course we have Lmiura who is similar to Namjoon except she’s somehow more unstable.’

‘Lmiura? Unstable?’ Hoseok can’t seem to help himself.

‘I understand if you don’t see it,’ Sk’jin smiles and he’s not saying it in a way that’s belittling Hoseok’s lack of understanding.

‘But then there’s you,’ Sk’jin carefully shifts forward and leans against the bars. ‘You’re a good Being Hoseok. It doesn’t matter what you have done, where you have done it, to whom you’ve done it. You are a good Being.’

Hoseok seems to squirm before leaning back away.

‘You have a good heart- an approach that isn’t darkened by the life you lead. And it’s not ignorant optimism,’ Sk’jin smiles at Hoseok. ‘What you did, what you decided to do, doesn’t make you a bad Being.’

Hoseok shifts away.

‘It doesn’t make you a good Being either,’ Sk’jin adds and Hoseok pauses, looking up curiously at him again.
‘It just makes you someone who’s trying to live.’

Hoseok’s expression doesn’t let up, still staring at him.

‘So you’re saying that killing my father was something I had to do to live?’

Sk’jin’s species, the Khol’isa, didn’t have parents or other Beings who bore them into the Universe. They were born, a result of natural evolution and metamorphosis that shaped them into their current state of existence and standing as Beings. Other species of Beings however, were born and existed as a result of procreation, leading to the branch of relationships between parent and child. So while Sk’jin has never experienced the idea or the notion of having parents, he can sympathize to a certain level, on how it must feel to know that your own father had been involved in a ploy to destroy the Known Universe.

‘Well it certainly is something you have to live with,’ Sk’jin replies.

‘How did you know?’

‘I did some digging,’ Sk’jin replies. ‘And I have my sources.’

‘Like your call to Ngobut’jha?’

‘Spaces, Namjoon told you too?’ Sk’jin chuckles, feeling just a minor flare of irritation.

‘Lisai doesn’t have the language you were speaking in her index.’ Hoseok says somewhat dully. There was a heavy sort of recklessness in the way Hoseok spoke, like he no longer cared for the consequences of his words or actions. Also, Sk’jin is pretty sure Namjoon wouldn’t want him knowing that he asked Hoseok about his conversation.

‘Is that why you’re here? To somehow justify yourself? To gain redemption?’ Sk’jin asks with a wry grin. ‘I won’t tease you- come on, it’s all right.’

Hoseok gives him a deadpan look from between the bars for a while before sighing and nodding.

‘Yeah, I figured,’ Sk’jin grins. ‘It’s all right Hoseokkie- it’s a cliché reason yes, but there’s a reason why it’s so cliché. Because we never learn.’

Hoseok gives him a questioning look.

‘We repeat the same mistakes over and over again- a circle.’ Sk’jin raises a hand and draws a circle in the air. ‘You committed what in general unbiased laws would only be considered an extreme act of terrorism and manslaughter. Personally killing 3 of the Board of Divisions, your father, and approximately 16 more Beings involved in one night. But the numbers don’t appall you, the act of killing itself doesn’t faze you. What did strike you was the fact that after killing your father you realized that those Beings you killed came from the exact same place your father did.’

Sk’jin looks over to find Hoseok staring blankly ahead of him, a stricken look on his face, clearly reliving something in his head.

‘Suddenly everyone was a father, a mother, a son, a daughter, a friend, a lover, a sister, a brother.’ Sk’jin sing-songs. ‘Beings who knew others- Beings who had their beliefs,- and then as you stared at them, you thought you recognized them- you saw your father in them- but when you looked at your father, you realized you didn’t know him at all. You didn’t recognize him.’

Sk’jin breathes out slowly, his headache now just a dull throbbing he could easily ignore.
‘Now you see your father everywhere; you see him in Namjoon, you see him in me, you see him even in Yoongi,’ Sk’jin names each of them. ‘And most of all you see him in yourself. What he was doing isn’t any different from what you did. He fought and killed and went around other Beings backs the same way you fought and killed and went around his back. All for what you believe in. Or at least thought you believed in.’

‘Am I that easy to read?’ Hoseok asks, his voice carrying a hint of amusement.

‘I’m just that good at reading people,’ Sk’jin scoffs before adding, ‘And getting a look at everyone’s files certainly helped.’

‘How did you even get those? I don’t think you’re allowed- even K’mara can’t touch those,’ Hoseok says somewhat dully but nowhere near angry that Sk’jin did some snooping. Sk’jin guesses that Namjoon would probably breathe fire if he knew that Sk’jin had been in neck-deep with his personal files.

‘Like I said,’ Sk’jin smiles. ‘I have my resources.’

‘You should hook me up to your source- they sound really efficient,’ Hoseok laughs humorlessly.

‘I’m afraid I can’t,’ Sk’jin chuckles. ‘They wouldn’t trust you.’

‘And they trust you?’

‘Considering what we went through…then yeah.’

‘I don’t think I want to know,’ Hoseok turns a little to smile at him.

‘Good, because I’m not telling. Some stories are better left untold,’ Sk’jin says dramatically.

‘Then why are you here?’ Hoseok asks, turning to look Sk’jin properly in the eye. ‘If you’re not here because of “self-righteous reasons”, or for “redemption”, then what are you here for?’

Sk’jin knows he probably doesn’t look very trustworthy as he smiles coyly at Hoseok, ‘Maybe if you help me embroider more robes, I might just tell you.’

Hoseok knows when he’s not going to get more information and he huffs out of short laugh in response.

‘I hope you know that you won’t find redemption,’ Sk’jin says bluntly, looking at Hoseok.

‘I know that.’

‘Doing this isn’t going to make any of that go away.’

‘I know that too.’

‘So why are you really here?’

Hoseok sighs out.

‘I don’t know.’

‘Nope,’ Sk’jin over accentuates the ‘p’. ‘You know exactly why.’

There’s a flash of anger in the Ngfy’widan eyes.
'You’re trying to prove to yourself that you’re not your father,’ Sk’jin says easily.

Hoseok looks away again.

‘Look, I’m not defending what they did because fuck the Yishengs honestly,’ Sk’jin says, the bitterness in his voice seeping in a little more than he intended, judging by the expression on Hoseok’s face. ‘But your father did what he thought was right. What he thought would protect the Universe, what remains of his planet, of his species, his family…he just wanted to protect what mattered the most to him. And that’s what you did too.’

‘Are you trying to make me feel better?’ Hoseok asks him after a while, a tinge of incredulity in his voice.

‘Hoseokkie, I’m not here at a therapist or as a Yisheng to listen to your problems. Spaces knows I have my fair share,’ Sk’jin chuckles humorlessly. ‘There is no definitive say to what is right, what is wrong. Many Beings believe that death, destruction, violence, is a resulting reaction of our failures, our lack. While some believe that it is a part of life- to equalize all the good there must be some bad right? And then there’s us- we’re not anywhere in particular in our beliefs- either because we don’t know what we want to believe in, or because we’re afraid of believing because that will lead to a bitter disappointment.’

It’s quiet again. There’s barely any sound.

‘Do you still think I have a “good heart”?’ the Ngfy’widan chuckles.

‘Oh honey,’ Sk’jin smiles, leaning against the bars to grin and wink at Hoseok. ‘You’re an absolute sweetheart.’

Hoseok snorts once. Then twice. Then he breaks out in to hysterical laughter.

‘This is so stupid,’ Hoseok manages to say as he pushes himself upright, having fallen over from laughing so much. ‘Look at us- look at all of us. There’s the Captain of our ship- some weird cyborg construct Being with years of trauma that we can’t even begin to hope to understand. There’s you, a Khol’isa who used to be the leader of one of the largest pirate-clans across the Universe, and there’s me- someone who killed their own father for a “cause” I don’t even know if I believe in anymore for reasons I cannot plainly state.’

‘And then there’s Yoongi,’ Sk’jin adds.

‘Please, let’s not start on him,’ Hoseok groans.

‘Not much to start on anyways,’ Sk’jin replies with a shrug that Hoseok doesn’t see but it didn’t matter.

They sit in silence for a while.

‘That’s how you knew? Through your father.’ Sk’jin clarifies.

‘Yeah- both of my parents were closely involved in the Isbahaysiga Alliance case,’ Hoseok chuckles under his breath. ‘It was a great cover-up, I have to say.’

‘Did you come across him having some shady meeting?’ Sk’jin grins. ‘Or did you walk in on some important phone call.’

‘No, nothing like that,’ Hoseok sighs out. ‘He told me about it.’
Sk’jin ignores the way the metal cage spins briefly as he turns to look at Hoseok.

‘I think he thought I’d be a good addition to the cause,’ Hoseok shrugs. ‘Or at least he thought I’d agree with him. I mean I get why he would think so…when you’re working as an agent…after some time…’

‘You realize everything repeats itself. All the violence, the deaths, the greed, the selfishness,’ Sk’jin yawns out. ‘It’s just one massive cycle.’

‘And I thought about it for a while,’ Hoseok sounds like he’s confessing something he has never said to anyone. And Sk’jin wouldn’t doubt it either. ‘I thought about it but- the idea of it just seemed so-‘

‘So bizarre? So outlandish? Wrong?’

‘Yeah…’

‘But at the same time you found yourself agreeing, you could understand why your father would think that.’ Sk’jin supplies.

Sk’jin looks away from Hoseok to stare out of the wide gap, to stare at the moon-rocks.

‘Well all make decisions and choices that we don’t always understand but we do them anyways. And the outcome is something we can’t blame on anyone but-’

‘-Yoongi.’

‘What -Spaces Yoongi!?’ Sk’jin flinches in alarm when he finds the Human sitting casually outside the barred wall.

Hoseok is scrambling up, eyes wide as he regards the Human.

‘Are you all right?’ Yoongi asks, completely unfazed and unsurprised at their reactions.

Sk’jin wonders if Yoongi actually liked creeping about like this just for the reaction.

‘How did you find us? Where’s Namjoon?’ Hoseok asks at once, looking around for the tall captain.

‘In Debris 337,’ Yoongi replies. ‘I tracked you.’

‘Tracked us-?’ Hoseok looks a little confused.

‘I put tracking tabs on all of you.’ Yoongi replies.

‘When?!’ Sk’jin demands.

‘During the first week,’ Yoongi supplies easily.

‘How did we not notice-‘ Sk’jin begins, wondering how the GI agent managed to pull off such a feat without his noticing. Then he pauses to think. Out of anyone in the Universe, Yoongi would be the one who could pull off something like this. Sk’jin feels a chill spread around his body as he thinks of how easily he had overlooked Yoongi, often ignoring what the former GI agent was potentially capable of.

‘Using what?’ Hoseok questions, looking incredibly wary and alarmed. ‘None of my triggers went
Sk’jin and Hoseok stare at Yoongi in utter disbelief.

The previous tremor that had run through Sk’jin’s body is back and it feels rather permanent.

‘I’m joking.’ Yoongi’s face is stoic.

Hoseok seems to let go of a breath he didn’t know he was holding in. Sk’jin wonders if he should laugh.

‘It’s in the tea. Namjoon doesn’t eat, so I shifted it to tea.’

Or maybe not. Hoseok seems to be questioning everything he’s ever concluded about Yoongi, too stunned by this easily relayed revelations on bioengineered tracking. How was this even possible?

‘I put very small trace amounts of a rare radioactive element in the tea so I can isolate the isotope frequency straight to all of you.’

‘You poisoned us?!’ Sk’jin splutters out.

‘It wasn’t enough to harm any of you—‘

‘Okay wait- we can discuss this later but right now we need to know how in the fuck we’re gonna get out,’ Hoseok nearly yells out. ‘Yoongi- how do we get out of here. How did you even get here? We were pretty much delivered in here through a Transporter. There’s no way we can get out unless you happen to have a Transporter waiting for us.’

‘I don’t.’

Hoseok huffs loudly.

‘I came here to make sure you were both all right,’ Yoongi explains and honestly this would be sort of sweet if it weren’t for the fact that Yoongi says this without a single hint of emotion.

‘Where’s the Pluns’na?’ Hoseok asks.

‘It’s been towed away with the Užkulisaï at Debris 149,’ Yoongi replies. ‘The Orvan Forces will arrive in 3 hours. You’re being sold for 800,000 units.’

Sk’jin catches Hoseok looking at him with an alarmed expression but honestly Sk’jin is irritated.

‘I am worth twice that amount,’ he snaps, causing Hoseok to facepalm while Yoongi nods in agreement.

‘Yoongi- wait, how did you get here,’ Hoseok demands, his voice strained and his tone controlled as though trying not to scream.

‘I used the lifts.’

Sk’jin looks past Yoongi to look at Hoseok who looks like someone hit him over the head.

‘…the lifts.’
‘Yes. There’s a magnetic strip that lowers and raises a few of the moon-rock through the tiers.’
Yoongi explains.

‘…and you just got on it?’

‘There were other Beings there too. They didn’t see me.’

Sk’jin and Hoseok share a dumbfounded expression.

‘I’m joking. They were headed here to collect Hobi.’ Yoongi looks at Hoseok. ‘Your friend wants to chop off your head.’

‘…he’s not my friend.’

‘Wait- so what happened to the guards?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘I threw them off the lift.’

There’s another sticky silence that follows.

But before any of them can say anything there’s the distinct sound of footsteps hurrying in.

‘I think they’ve noticed the missing…where did Yoongi go.’ Hoseok begins before he’s spinning around, searching for the Human.

A full dozen K’it’y show up, armed and armoured, their eyes narrowing as they stare at Sk’jin and Hoseok both of whom looked far from oblivious to anything suspicious.

‘Search the cells,’ one of them barks. ‘Pair up and proceed through each row. There’s another one of them missing.’

Sk’jin shares a look with Hoseok, a fleeting one because the next thing that happens is the lights go off. Then they hear a shrieking gasp and by the faint light of the Atmoshield that surrounded the prison block, Sk’jin witnessed two of rear guards crumple to the ground.

‘What was that-?!’

Sk’jin swears he’s keeping watch of the fight (the better term to use would probably be “shooting fish in a barrel”) but he can’t spot Yoongi. Instead one by one, the small platoon of guards sent over to check on their tiny prison cell are being picked off in this dim lighting.

Sk’jin counts at least 5 that fall onto the ground in crumpled heaps before the guards scatter about, keeping space between each other, trying to cover more ground.

‘Hey-’

One of the guards closer to where Sk’jin’s cell was crumples down on to the floor. Sk’jin has no idea what’s going on. He can’t even spot Yoongi amidst all of this and the K’it’y start freaking out, reporting the situation desperately. One completely loses his mind and starts running off in one direction, firing his TeorSer, creating bright flashes of light.

Amidst this flashing of light, Sk’jin catches sight of a shadow that doesn’t seem to match up to anything Sk’jin can immediately see, moving quickly and swiftly.

‘Go stand by the prisoner cells!’ one of them shouts and they pell-mell run towards Sk’jin and Hoseok’s cells, aiming their TeorSers at them.
‘STAND BACK!’ they yell, aiming their TeorSers at them. Sk’jin could roll his eyes as he takes a modest step back.

‘What the fuck is that thing?!’ one them pants over the sound of yelling and TeorSer fire from the other side of the prison.

A rather short Human, Sk’jin wants to say, but now was not the time to run his mouth.

The sound of the previous TeorSer going off suddenly stops, followed by a not so pleasant cracking sound that causes everyone to flinch.

It’s deadly silent.

‘Is…is it gone?’ one of them whispers.

Hoseok actually snorts out loud, unable to control himself.

‘Shut up!’ one of them roars.

They stand back to back, TeorSers raised high, lights from its barrel shining brightly around in a rather chaotic manner. Sk’jin sighs and leans against the wall.

‘Yoongi I didn’t know you were so dramatic,’ Sk’jin yawns.

‘Shut up!!’

‘He is, isn’t he?’ Hoseok chuckles. ‘I guess he got a TeorSer now though.’

There’s a collective sound, of heads turning towards Hoseok’s direction and Sk’jin can practically smell their fear.

‘Who do you think is gonna go down first Sk’jin?’ Hoseok drawls from his cell.

‘Oh,’ Sk’jin mock poses a gesture of thoughtfulness, rubbing his chin with great care. ‘I think perhaps- the second one from the back with the slightly more yellow light on his TeorSer-’

A flash of light fills the air from the back of the prison cell and the K’it’y Sk’jin was describing spins where he stands, falling down in a heap. Everyone turns at once, TeorSers firing up a blazing storm. Sk’jin grimaces and sits back down, covering his ears from the excess noise.

‘Is it gone?’ one of the whispers.

Sk’jin could roll his eyes at their stupidity. Panic and fear made you do stupid things, but these Beings had to be some of the dumbest guards Sk’jin has had the misfortune of meeting.

‘Right,’ Hoseok says casually. ‘I have a really good feeling about the one standing to the edge over there-’

Hoseok doesn’t even complete his sentence as the aforementioned K’it’y literally flies out of the prison, a TeorSer shot carrying him down the hallway and out of the Atmoshield.

Hoseok makes a sound akin to wincing, as though he felt sorry.

‘My turn!’ Sk’jin says cheerfully, standing up and leaning against the bars, grinning at the K’it’y.

‘How about the-‘
‘You shut your mouth!’ he hisses at Sk’jin, reaching into cover Sk’jin’s mouth.

The K’it’y only realizes his mistake after his arm breaks, bent over the bars of Sk’jin’s cell room. Sk’jin reaches over and grabs the K’it’y by the hair and slams his head against the bar, a resonating cracking sound resounding through the air. He doesn’t care that a few of the TeorSers are aimed at him, clearly about to fire, because they fall to the ground with heavy metallic thunks, as their owners skid down the hallway in a flash of bright light.

There’s a momentary sound of struggling and the other guard who probably made the same unfortunate mistake of reaching into Hoseok’s prison cell also slides down the bars, eyes rolling to the back of his head.

‘Is that all?’ Hoseok asks Sk’jin who nods as the lights switch back on again. He glances at the heaps of K’it’y guards, feeling a little sorry for them. They had no idea what they walked into.

‘Yoongi?’ Hoseok calls.

There’s no answer.

Sk’jin and Hoseok share a look.

‘I swear, if he’s left us here-‘

‘Yoongi?’ Hoseok calls again, looking apprehensive. ‘Do you think he injured himself?’

‘…I honestly really doubt that…’

‘Yoongi?’

Sk’jin and Hoseok share another look. Then there’s a loud explosive sound from beyond their small prison and they both sigh.

‘He left us here didn’t he.’

‘He did.’
‘I have a mission for you, Yoongi, if you are willing to take it.’

‘What is it?’

‘I want you to keep track of the remaining crew members. I believe that the Yisheng Yixing, Baekhyun, and the Heladian Min-Seok will remain back, with the added company of my lieutenant Zitao.’

‘What do you expect me to observe during this tracking period?’

‘Simply keep watch. Follow their actions. Do not stop them, do not get in their way. But if they are in danger, make sure you survive it.’

‘And if they separate?’

‘Your priority is the Heladian and the Yisheng.’

‘The Heladian?’

‘Yes.’

K’mara stands up from her seat and walks over to the large window, pulling aside the curtain and allowing the oddly misty light of Unnivel to flood inwards.

‘Love is a strange thing. It is unpredictable and yet at the same time, entirely readable.’

‘I do not understand.’

K’mara turns slowly as she regards Yoongi with a smile.

‘No one does.’
Namjoon starts at the sound of the explosion. There’s excited exclamations from his prison mates in the other cells, all clearly waiting for their trial or possible ransom pick-up. Namjoon wonders what they’re going to do to him.

Also, where had Yoongi vanished to? He was literally right behind Namjoon the entire time, in plain sight for everyone to see and poof! He vanishes.

‘Woah- there goes another one!’ his prison mate to the left was apparently very enthusiastic about explosions.

‘Does this happen often?’ someone asks, probably new like Namjoon.

‘Nopes! First time! This is fascinating!’ the voice to his left declares. It’s a deep, strangely melodic voice that pitches up to something strangely child-like and perhaps altogether too giggly.

‘…how long have you been here?’

‘Around 6 months I think? I’m not sure to be honest…’

Namjoon drowns out the chatter around him.

This was going to be very difficult to explain to the special-jury. And honestly, it was a good thing he hadn’t sent in his Captain’s log just yet. They probably don’t need to know about this slight detour in their journey to Bhumi. It probably wasn’t going to settle well with them either.

Did the Orvan Forces reach out to the Grezma outpost and warn them about their coming? Did Sk’jin have bounty over his head now and everyone remaining and still actively involved in the Isbahaysiga Alliance was now after Sk’jin, so by association, the rest of them? Namjoon sighs heavily- Sk’jin was certainly more trouble than he was worth.

Long-Huo.

Why was that language barred from Lisai’s access probe? Long-Huo was a pretty decent planet with a good standing with the GLA. They produced some of the best pilots their side of the Universe, and the only other thing Namjoon can think about when the planet Long-Huo comes up is the foolish fire-breathing legend. Apparently, the Long-Huo species of Beings could breathe fire when enraged. This was honestly the stupidest thing Namjoon has ever heard. Stupidest, and biologically impossible too. Manipulation of fire was a different story, where you could contain and control the energy of the atoms as they oxidized into light, heat, and energy.

What did Sk’jin have to do with Long-Huo? During his long centuries of piracy, the Khol’isa never once came into contact with the planet or her people. Yet here he was, speaking like one of her natives.

But that didn’t matter now. Because Yoongi understood the language (the questions of how and why would probably be answered another day) so at least, Namjoon would be able to determine what was being said. He’d be able to determine if Sk’jin was in fact colluding with K’mara to take over this mission just like Lmiura feared.

He would definitely be mentioning this to her during the log.
If he could return to the ship in one piece of course. There’s a bright explosion that rapidly diminishes and a few cheers from around the prison again. Namjoon has no idea why these Beings are here, or what they were imprisoned here for. Either internal back-stabbing, or debts unpaid, or something equally basic and common for outpost prisons. Namjoon watches as a few of the populated moon-rocks, or Debris as they were called, light up in a chain reaction and Transporters fly out as quickly as they can.

This was probably Yoongi’s doing. Or Sk’jin and Hoseok. Had they been captured too? Or did they get separated. Maybe Hoseok would be able to talk them out of this but judging by the random explosions and chaos overtaking Grezma, any chance or hope of diplomacy is long gone.

Namjoon backs away from the view beyond the Atmoshield. Perhaps if he just climbed out, lowered himself onto an open platform, got a TeorSer, maybe steal a Transporter, he’d be able to get out of there. But he doesn’t know where the ship is. Where any of his “crew” are, and flying solely on autopilot wouldn’t get him anywhere. He was stuck in here, waiting for his “crew” or for anyone to get him out of this. Maybe Lmiura would hear of this one way or another. But then again, they were off-grid. Rolling his eyes at himself, Namjoon turns his back to the Atmoshield only to nearly jump out of his skin because Yoongi is standing outside his cell, like he’d been there the entire time. This was starting to feel a lot like déjà vu and Namjoon has a feeling that this wasn’t going to be the last time it happens.

‘Fuck! Yoongi!’ Namjoon approaches the bars quickly. ‘How in Spaces did you even get in here?!’

‘Through the main entrance,’ Yoongi points to the right.

‘…were there no guards?!’

‘I took them out.’

‘…what about the others?’ Namjoon asks, recovering a little from Yoongi’s monotone narrative.

‘Sk’jin and Hoseok are being held captive. The ship is in Debris 149. Sk’jin is being sold to the Orvan Force for 800,000 units-’

‘Isn’t that rather less-‘

‘-and Hoseok is scheduled for execution but I removed the execution party and disabled the lift leading to their prison.’

‘…that’s…very nice of you, Yoongi.’

‘You’re being sold to the Isbahaysiga Alliance for 500,000 units-‘

‘That’s really insulting.’ Namjoon scowls, wondering why he’s so bothered by this. ‘Also, how did you even find me here? Were you able to hack into the outpost’s operating system?’

‘I am headed for the Governors Hall to access the main operating system screen.’ Yoongi explains. ‘And I found you because I put a tracking tab on you.’

Namjoon’s thoughts are put on immediate pause.

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘I came here to make sure of your location then I’m going to isolate this prison so that it cannot be accessed.’
‘Wait- no, go back,’ Namjoon waves his hand. ‘What do you mean you’re tracking me?’

Yoongi blinks at him in what Namjoon suspects might be exasperation.

‘I put tracking tabs on all of you.’ Yoongi says, his tone sounding like he’s said this before.

‘When.’ Namjoon inquires as politely as he can.

‘During the first week,’ Yoongi replies.

Namjoon blinks a few times, suppressing the urge to search himself immediately for said tracking tab. How did he not notice? If Yoongi applied it on him, Lisai was supposed to warn him immediately. Or was Lisai somehow controlled by Yoongi? But his own firewalls and surveillance software would be triggered by the installation of any software or malware Yoongi could potentially use.

‘What sort of tracking tab?’ Namjoon asks, arms crossing.

Yoongi looks up at him, arms crossing as well, mirroring Namjoon’s stance.

‘I put it in the food.’

‘I don’t eat.’ Namjoon points out.

‘I’m joking.’

The possibility of Yoongi actually joking is one Namjoon never even considered. He doesn’t know how to deal with this statement.

‘So how did you put the tracking tabs on all of us?’

‘It’s in the tea.’

Namjoon feels his eyebrow twitch. Yoongi still stares up at him, expression unimpressed and entirely blank. Namjoon also thinks, somewhere in the back of his mind amidst all of the what the actual fuck-s that Yoongi had essentially lied to everyone on board the Užkulisai and proceeded to basically poison them.

‘Please explain.’

‘I put very small trace amounts of a rare radioactive element in the tea so I can isolate the isotope frequency straight to all of you.’

‘So you’re saying that you poisoned us with a radioactive chemical.’

‘It wasn’t enough to harm any of you. Only trace amounts to enable an isotropic frequency read.’

Namjoon is annoyed that it’s an extremely simple yet brilliant plan. There were countless elements that had a unique isotropic frequency that could be tracked based solely on their chemical and radioactive composition. They were exceptionally rare, making it all the more ideal for tracking purposes. The only reason such a tracking method hasn’t gained wider recognition in its functionality was because the elements in question were so rare, obtaining them often lead to lots of units and time spent, death, or a lot of deaths.

‘Can we move on.’ Yoongi intones, no hint or suggestion of asking for permission in his voice. It was more of an order.
'So, you’re going to isolate this prison. And then?’ Namjoon rubs at the side of his head.

‘Then I’m going to head to the Governor’s Hall, take over the operation system, freeze all communication channels and launch rings. All the Transporters are wired to the outpost’s operating system so I will disconnect all of them.’ Yoongi explains.

‘So was this your plan all along?’ Namjoon asks, rather impressed. ‘It’ a good plan. Though I wished you at least gave me a head’s up-‘

‘No- I ran away instinctively.’

Namjoon’s face falls comically.

‘So what are you planning on doing now?’ Namjoon asks, ‘Let me out and we can go get the ship-‘

‘I can’t open these bars without using the master-key.’

‘The what?’

‘The master-key.’

‘…I think there’s a way where you could hack-‘

‘It’s been programmed so that any tampering, both internal and external, will trigger and remove the Atmoshield.’

‘It’s fine, I can survive in vacuum,’ Namjoon waves his hand dismissively.

‘Any tampering, both internal and external, will trigger and remove the Atmoshield from around the Grezma.’

‘…I see your point now. And the master-key is in the Governors Hall?’

‘Yes.’

‘…so then why are you here?’

‘To check on you.’

Namjoon feels a little touched.

‘And to make sure you don’t do anything stupid.’

Namjoon grimaces down at the Human.

‘I’m not doing anything- you’re the one that’s causing all that,’ Namjoon points behind him and just on cue, there’s display of light energy and a few of the moon-rocks bounce off of each other, crashing into other moon-rocks.

‘I simply laid down a series of basic distraction tactics to pull the Grezma guards somewhere else.’

‘Basic.’ Namjoon turns briefly and another chain of moon-rocks detonate in the far distance.

‘Yes.’

They stare at each other contemplatively. Well it’s contemplative on Namjoon’s half; he has no idea what Yoongi is thinking. Then as abruptly as he had appeared, Yoongi turns and walks out.
‘Yoongi!’ Namjoon hisses after the Human.

‘What?’

‘What are you doing?!’

‘Getting the master-key.’

‘…you should have said so!’

‘I did.’

Namjoon doesn’t know what to say to that.

‘Oh. You wanted me to say goodbye.’ Yoongi pauses.

‘No-‘

‘I’ll catch you later Cap,’ Yoongi mimics Sk’jin’s pose, saluting him in mockery before turning heel and walking away.

Namjoon doesn’t know if he feels more irritated at Sk’jin for being a bad influence, or exasperated at Yoongi for picking up said bad habits.

‘Hey neighbour! Was that your friend?’

Namjoon ignores the question from his left and retreats into his cell.

‘Hello?’

If Yoongi is indeed successful in basically overtaking the Grezma operating system, then they were scot-free. They would have to get their ship to a decent enough place to launch them out, and they could leave this mess behind and just hope that they don’t get caught.

‘Hellooooooooooooooooooo?’

And for that they would probably have to “take care” of the governors who controlled Grezma and Namjoon has no doubt in his mind that Yoongi was more than capable of doing that.

‘Aaaaaaaaare youuuuuuuuuuu theeeeeeegghhhheeeeee?’

Namjoon can’t even hear himself think anymore.

‘Oh come on, don’t leave me hanging here- I’m sad and lonely- come on, talk to meeeeeeefffffffieee!’

Namjoon bristles with irritation and barks out, ‘What?’.

‘Finally!’ the voice turns from sorrowful and low to gleeful and pitched immediately. ‘What’s your name?’

Namjoon sighs heavily. This Being probably overheard his conversation with Yoongi though they were being quiet and it was generally quite noisy what with all the shouting and cheering going around.

‘Namjoon.’
‘Nice! Hi Namjoon!’

A hand waves awkwardly at Namjoon from around the wall separating their cells.

‘Yeah hi.’

Namjoon doesn’t bother waving.

‘You didn’t wave!’

Alarmed, Namjoon looks over at the hand that was now limply extending out towards him.

Tentatively, and questioning himself and his sanity, Namjoon waves.

‘Yay!’ the hand waves energetically.

‘It’s kinda awkward talking like this, so I’m gonna come over all right?’ the voice asks.

Namjoon rolls his eyes.

‘Yeah sure come over-’

There’s a flash of green light, a triangle forming on the wall in bright green before a triangle shaped hole replaces the wall and a Being stands there, bright grin on his face.

‘Hi!’ he waves a glowing green hand, like this was all normal.

‘What the fuck-’

‘So,’ the Being approaches him rapidly and Namjoon backtracks out of instinct, unsure how to react to this strange Being who is smiling a tad bit too much to his liking. He looked nothing like how his voice sounded like. He’s much too young, much too smiley, and entirely too pleased to be there. Namjoon had somehow envisioned a slight, wizened Being with long hair and crooked teeth, a permanently mad look to his eyes. But this Being in front of him radiates energy, strength, and a sort of joyful bounce to his steps. He’s entirely anthropomorphic save for the copper lines that extend from the corner of his eyes to his hairline. His eyes are glowing green, the same shade as the wall, and his hair has green strands weaving in and out of the overall brown. His skin is sun-kissed and freckled at the high points of his face, and Namjoon doesn’t know if he’s seeing things (he’s still working on the believing aspect of what he’s currently witnessing) but the Being’s skin seemed to faintly patterned over with the same copper colour edging from his eyes. He’s quite tall, though shorter than Namjoon, and had a slimmer narrower built as well.

‘How the fuck did you do that?!’ Namjoon gasps, blinking rapidly and wondering if his eyes were tricking him.

‘So- you’re planning on getting out of here right?’ the Being asks, ignoring Namjoon’s clearly defensive stance.

‘Uh- yes-?’ Namjoon manages to get out, unsure of what he was even saying because none of this made sense.

‘Great! So do I! Let’s help each other out! I’m guessing you have a ship?’ the Being asks again, crouching down next to Namjoon, peering at him with great interest before saying in a low voice, ‘Woah, Kutsogleran…”

He’s suddenly too close, almost nose to nose and Namjoon would have broken out into a defensive
strike but there’s something about this Being that unhinges him deeply. A formidable power lurks around this Being and Namjoon is not one to poke a monster with a stick. With this proximity, Namjoon is able to really look into this Being’s eyes. They’re a dark green, ringed twice with copper and a strange depth to the darkness of his iris, like an entire universe lay behind his eyes.

‘Um yes-‘

‘But what’s this?’ the Being raises one eyebrow quizzically before he giggles and it’s probably the creepiest thing Namjoon has heard.

‘You have something in you-‘ he says and there’s a flash of light followed by a surge of pain that goes away as quickly as it comes and Namjoon is winded, too shocked to move.

‘There! Done! I don’t think it was important anyways.’

‘What-?’ Namjoon manages to wheeze out, his body doesn’t feel any different. He feels no surge of weakness or anything. There’s no change.

‘All right time is ticking!’ he bounces straight up again. ‘Let’s do this!’

He raises his hands and the air around them is green again and the bars simply vanish, leaving behind a gaping triangular hole. The Being turns around to look down at Namjoon.

‘What are you waiting for? Let’s go!’

*It’s music. Yoongi is sure of it.*
At least that’s what his mind tells him. If he thinks back enough, he might be able to name it and where it came from.

He can hear it all the better after the alarm that had rung loud and sharp from within the ship had stopped.

It was beautiful and tinged with sadness. Simply an old echo of the life that had once created its melodies and harmonies.

Yoongi stores this information into the depths of his mind.

It felt precious and pure.

He watches as the crew members make their goodbyes. He stands at a safe distance, close enough to see, but not enough to hear. Something inside Yoongi tells him he should give them privacy in this moment.

The Engineer is there too. The “digitized-soul”.

It’s only him and the Heladian now and he can’t seem to move away.

They’re speaking too quietly, their movements too small, their actions too loud.

Yoongi feels strange as he watches the ship take off and smoothly exit the Yaaig’Ra Ari Mothership.

The remaining members had moved away from the engines and the turbines. They now stood no more than 5 meters from where Yoongi sat.

‘What if they don’t come back?’ The Heladian asks out loud. His voice reminds Yoongi of empty and hollow caves that once shone brightly with crystals and ice.

‘They will,’ the Cahyan replies, voice quivering.

‘They have to.’
‘Hrik’thak Union. From the Baal System.’

‘The Shnezur-ghur-Shnezur United Front, from the Neina System.’

‘Oh- that’s a good one. Okay, Latise Clan, from the Ni’Ofln System.’

‘I’ve never been, but I knew someone who went there- are the planets really all that severe?’

‘You have no idea- I never bolted so fast in my life.’

‘Yeah, gonna avoid that System then. Okay, how about Qoçu from Quilincar?’

‘This is some severe name-dropping here Hoseokkie, I better up my game too.’ Sk’jin laughs from his cell.

Hoseok and Sk’jin were entertaining each other by naming pirate-clans they’ve either dealt with, or messed up with. They had been at it for nearly 15 minutes now and Hoseok finds that neither of them are running out of names.

‘Okay the Matit’ee Network in I’latri,’ Sk’jin calls out victoriously.

‘Wow- I’latri? Really?’ Hoseok hums in awe and wonder.

‘Unfortunately yes. Nearly died there.’

‘Will you two shut up?!’

Hoseok and Sk’jin glance over at the K’t’y in question with an unimpressed look. There were half a dozen of them, heavily armed and armoured. So heavily armoured you could barely see their faces.

‘What about the Kê Trôm Union?’ Hoseok asks, looking away from the guards.

‘Oh! I haven’t gone there,’ Sk’jin replies, tapping along the side of the bars of his cage.

He looks drained and tired. Despite his unwavering “cheerfulness” (Hoseok prefers to call it unwavering asshole-ness) Sk’jin definitely looks ill and weak. Even the red of his eyes don’t gleam like Hoseok has seen them gleam.

‘I met a few of that clan, but never dealt with them.’ Sk’jin adds.

‘If you two don’t shut up I will come in there-‘
‘-and I will personally decapitate you,’ Sk’jin drawls lazily. ‘Please, by all means, do come in and entertain me.’

There’s a chilling silence that follows. Because Sk’jin (even in his current state of ill-health) was most probably the most beautiful Being to have graced this prison cell but there was no mistaking that predatory gleam in his eyes that held promises of pain. It also didn’t help that there had been bodies littered around them. Though they had only been responsible for one each, the entire visual of it was pretty damning.

‘No? Then you shut up,’ Sk’jin smiles. ‘I’ve never been to Kể Trồm but I have had a few…meetings with their sister-network; the Ngườ’côn Estate. Frankly frightening and I believe a lot more ruthless than their male counterparts I must say.’

‘I’m surprised you made it out alive,’ Hoseok chuckles.

‘Oh, I had to make a lot of deals to get out of there alive,’ Sk’jin chuckles. ‘I had to be rather persuasive.’

Hoseok would rather not hear the details of this persuasion and proceeds to name another pirate-clan he had the pleasure of dealing with.

‘Rähilin Klann?’

‘I killed their pirate-head.’ a new voice says.

‘That’s cool-?!’ Hoseok looks up to find Yoongi standing outside his prison cell, looking nowhere near like he was clearly responsible for the thundering explosive sounds, the bright flashing of light, the chaotic show of Transporters flying about haphazardly, or the occasional screams they heard via the open-channel K’it’y Comm-Devices that were still switched on.

Then the guards around them fall over slowly, one by one.

‘Yoongi you piece of shit-‘ Sk’jin seethes, standing up at once.

‘I know how to get us out.’

‘Yoongi you’re the best-‘ Sk’jin coos delightedly, cheering a little.

‘But Namjoon is missing.’

‘Yoongi what the actual fuck-‘ Sk’jin exclaims, facepalming.

Hoseok looks down at the fallen bodies, wondering how in Spaces Yoongi just did that but there is a time and place for everything and now was not the time or place to question the former GI agent’s ability to kill. Also, to an extent, Hoseok does not want to know. He’s been living inside a relatively small space with this Human for nearly 2 months now and Hoseok has found out under a span of an hour that not only has he essentially poisoned them, but he’s single-handedly capable of overthrowing an entire outpost.

‘What do you mean he’s missing?’ Hoseok asks as Yoongi pulls out a device from his pocket that’s covered in a worrisome amount of blood and taps it to the side of Hoseok’s prison bar. The bars sink into the ground and Hoseok steps out quickly.

‘I cannot track him. He’s disappeared,’ Yoongi explains as he gingerly steps over the fallen bodies, headed for Sk’jin’s cell.
Hoseok picks up a TeorSer, making sure it was fully charged and functional.

‘…is he dead?’ Sk’jin looks alarmed. ‘How the fuck do we even start the ship if he’s dead? Spaces even when he’s dead he’s still annoying.’

So maybe Sk’jin wasn’t speaking out of concern over Namjoon’s whereabouts.

‘No he’s not dead,’ Yoongi replies as he taps the side of the wall next to Sk’jin’s cell. It glows blue briefly before the bars sink down as well. Sk’jin steps out, immediately grabbing a TeorSer for himself as well. Hoseok doesn’t have the time to think about how they’re all armed and off the grid and how this would make an ideal moment to take over the Užkulisai. This does however, make him pause for a moment to regard Yoongi.

The Human agent could have easily left them behind, taking over the mission easily. He could pilot the Užkulisai there was no doubt about it, and he was certainly more than capable of flying off-grid and getting to Bhumi without too much trouble if needed. Why did he come back? Sk’jin is asking Yoongi more questions as the latter weaves around the fallen guards, searching their pockets and bags for something.

‘Namjoon was being held in a larger and more populated prison than this one,’ Yoongi explains as he removes a few of the Comm-Devices. He hands them to Hoseok and Sk’jin before attaching one on his ear and he produces a slim heavily customized screen as well as a familiar looking one.

‘Then he disappeared 26 minutes ago.’

‘Isn’t that Namjoon’s-’ Sk’jin begins before Yoongi is thrusting it into his hands.

‘Yes. Please keep track of the Užkulisai,’ Yoongi says as he taps along the other screen.

‘What are you doing now?’ Sk’jin asks, unsure what to do with the screen in his hands.

‘I am looking for Namjoon through the Grezma surveillance feed.’

‘How did you get access to that??’ Hoseok demands.

‘I found the master-key-‘

‘Wait- what do you mean master-key?’ Hoseok asks.

Yoongi looks up from his screen to level him and Sk’jin with a blank look. Ordinarily, this would be that moment where the Being in question has an exasperated or frustrated expression on their face, clearly put off by the torrent of questions. But Yoongi is extraordinarily blank-faced.

‘After I left this cell hold, I went to the “gibbets” where Namjoon was being held to check on him. I secured your locations, and went to confirm our ship's location. After listening to some conversation, I was informed that I would need a master-key in order to find my way around. None of the guards had a master-key so I went straight up to the Governors Hall. Just as I assumed, the master-key was there. Your not-friend was there as well. I don’t know what story you might have with him, but he did want to behead you so I-‘

‘You beheaded him?!’ Hoseok splutters.

‘No. I thought maybe you might want to do it yourself. I do not know how a Ngfy’widan performs his revenge or if there was any to execute at all so I gagged him and put him inside a cupboard-‘

Sk’jin breaks out into hysterical giggles.
‘-then I broke into the main suite and found the master-key and came back here. I also found our ship in the process. The Užkulisai is docked near the Maintenance Bay to strip it down but I shut down that area.’

‘How did you do that?’ Sk’jin asks, staring down at the Human in shock and respect.

‘The Governors Hall has an operating screen that allowed me to control the entire outpost. I have shut down all outpost Transporter mobility save for the one outside and locked all magnetic rifts so the lifts cannot be used.’ Yoongi reells off. ‘I then loaded their software onto this, so I can control Grezma through this.’

‘That’s…’ Sk’jin trails off, ‘…you did that…in under an hour…’

‘We don’t have time. The Orvan Forces will arrive here in an hour.’ Yoongi holds up the screen, showing an message recently received from the Orvan Forces.

‘But what about Namjoon?’ Sk’jin asks again. ‘How did you lose his isotropic reading?’

‘I don’t know.’

Hoseok notes that this is the most expression he’s seen on Yoongi’s face.

There’s the slightest furrow between his brows, as he walks towards the exit. A small Transporter is waiting for them, half inside the shelf that was protected by the Atmoshield and half outside.

‘So what do we do now?’ Sk’jin asks, looking excited as he gets inside the cozy 6-seater Transporter.

‘We find Namjoon,’ Yoongi says simply as he slides into the pilot’s chair, handing Sk’jin the other screen. ‘Then we get out of here.’

‘But our records are here-‘ Hoseok argues. They were definitely going to get a random called over all of their heads and their ship, there was no doubt about that.

‘I’ve removed our record from their archive,’ Yoongi replies quietly as the Transporter hums to life and they swiftly take flight. Yoongi expertly navigates them through the shifting moon-rocks, as though he’d been doing it for years.

‘Yoongi didn’t you say that the Orvan Forces would be headed here in an hour?’ Sk’jin asks lightly out of nowhere, the light from the screens in his hands illuminating him in a pale blue light.

‘Yes.’

‘And you’ve basically shut down all communications going in and out of Grezma.’

Hoseok has a bad feeling about this.

‘Yes.’

‘So there was no information about what appears to be a slaver-ship making dock at Grezma?’

‘What?!’ Hoseok looks past where Sk’jin is sitting, staring in disbelief as a massive ship looms over the edge of the moon-rocks. It was most definitely a slaver-ship and clearly a powerful one. And more than that, this was a starcraft clearly designed by and for the Venture Unit. Meaning this outpost was more than just an outpost. What had Keghtsa gotten mixed into’
‘Who are they?!’ Hoseok asks into the air.

‘I don’t know but it seems like they’re sending their own fleet to check.’ Sk’jin looks over at Hoseok, a hard look in his eyes. ‘We both know that’s no ordinary slaver-ship,- we need to get out of here right now!’ Sk’jin secures himself in. ‘Yoongi, you need to get us to our ship and we need to get out now.’

‘We need to get Namjoon or we can’t start the ship,’ Hoseok frowns at Sk’jin.

‘We can- we have his NaviLet- but we can’t allow that to catch us.’ Sk’jin nods towards the twinkling lights. ‘This is and has to be the Isbahaysiga Alliance. The Orvan Forces clearly contacted them. If we get caught, it’s not just us. Our mission, our cargo- think about what they’ll do if they get their hands on our cargo! Think about what will happen if they find out why we’re here.’

The Isbahaysiga Alliance was technically eradicated but not even a few months into their mission, echoes of its reanimated corpse seems to trail after them everywhere they went. There was something strange about all of this. Hoseok doesn’t know why, and he can’t explain how, but clearly there was something, some information, some additional aspect of their mission that was entirely hidden from them.

Because their mission was one that closely corresponded with the Isbahaysiga Alliance, in one way or another. And if they find out their mission, and who they’re working for, then this was going to end horribly for them.

‘What about Namjoon?’

‘He’ll manage if he’s smart enough. They’ll most probably take him along- if I’m not mistaken then one of the reason why they’re here is most likely because they have “cargo” here. This outpost has too many prison cells to make sense,’ Sk’jin shake his head. ‘We’ll get Namjoon out, but right now we need to leave immediately.’

‘Understood,’ Yoongi says quietly, hearing the obvious logic in Sk’jin’s plan.

‘We need to find out who they are, and where they’re headed, then we can decide what exactly we have to do.’ Sk’jin’s expression changes entirely. He looks serious and contemplative, turned in his seat to watch the distant dark grey ship with apprehension reflected in his eyes.

But Hoseok can’t help but feel fearful for the Kutsogleran Captain. He would have no idea what was happening to them. And now that they couldn’t track him anymore, it would make everything all the more difficult.

‘He’ll be fine.’ Yoongi says out of nowhere as they take cover, weaving through thickly clustered moon-rocks. Yoongi has his eyes fixed on a large layered slab up ahead. Hoseok can just about make out their ship.

‘He’s faced worse.’
‘I hope you know what you are doing.’ K’mara says to the Yisheng.

‘And I hope you know what you are doing too.’ The Yisheng replies.

K’mara does not reply to this and instead raises her Comm-Device to her mouth and states clearly without any remorse or regret or hesitation in her voice.

‘Destroy it.’

It’s strange.

This wasn’t the first time Yoongi has watched the destruction of a planet.

Light in clear arcs spread over the screen, disrupting the holographic projection. It’s beautiful in a way that shouldn’t be beautiful. A cruel and sad beauty that doesn’t make sense to Yoongi.

The Yisheng’s eyes are closed, unable to watch.

The holographic projection shuts down as the light grows too bright. K’mara is unmoving and she doesn’t look away from the Yisheng who finally opens his eyes

‘I’m doing what I have to do.’

Did knowing what you were supposed to do in any way affect what you were supposed to do? What you had to do?

Yoongi watches them quietly, unmoving from behind the pillar.

The light from the broken remains of the planet burns into his mind.
‘HEY! GET US OUT OF HERE TOO!’

‘HEY KID- LOOK KID I’LL GIVE YOU A SHIT TON OF UNITS, JUST GET ME OUT OF HERE YEA?’

‘PLEASE GET US OUT OF HERE I BEG YOU.-’

Namjoon just follows the strange Being in front of him who skips down the long rows with ease, ignoring the pleading cries and extending hands merrily.

‘So- how did you end up here?’ he asks, not looking back as he merrily weaves in and out of the rows.

‘I’m still not entirely sure.’

‘But you have a ship right? Like you’re the captain?’

‘Yes?’

‘Cool- and what about your friend? What does he do?’

‘Uh- he’s the weapon’s specialist.’
‘Really? Nice!’ the Being stops in front of a heavy door. ‘Hey, do you mind if we make a quick detour?’

‘What—’

The Being raises his hands and places them on the door. There’s that same bright green light and suddenly the door isn’t there anymore, and instead a triangular hole is there. There’s no melting, no cutting, no shaving, no signs of force or energy used against the thick metal doors. The entire front slab is missing as though it had simply never been there in the first place. Bolts and screws are cleanly halved, no signs of cutting, no sawing, nothing. It just simply didn’t exist anymore.

The Being steps inside the dark opening, glowing faintly green.

‘Let’s go!’ he reaches forward and pulls Namjoon in.

Namjoon briefly wonders what’s wrong with himself, why he was allowing some random Being to pull him about. Then he realizes it.

He was afraid.

They’re on some stairs that go downwards. Honestly Namjoon didn’t think that they would excavate into the moon-rock to create dungeon like spaces.

‘I think they’re here somewhere,’ the Being mumbles looking like he had difficulty seeing before he makes a small sound of exclamation and rings of pure green energy pulse out of him, forming seemingly solid blocks of light in green.

‘That’s better- green’s all right for you?’ he turns to ask Namjoon, eyes glowing copper.

‘I—’

There’s a plaintive cry from below the stairs and Namjoon then realizes what he’s looking into.

A dungeon this most certainly was. Cramped cages of thick metal bars cropped up everywhere, forcing Beings to stand pressed up against each other without the possibility of rest or the possibility to stand straight. It was dark and damp and cold and the crying sound resembles a gasping and dying groan, one that sounds too familiar to Namjoon.

The Being lets go of Namjoon’s wrist and the rings around him expand wider outwards, illuminating the low ceiled dungeon. It wasn’t a large place but Namjoon can count at least 50 separate Beings of all age, gender, species, and race gathered in here.

‘Hey,’ the Being says softly, carefully walking up towards one of the cages.

‘Do you remember me? You remember me right?’ he asks softly.

What was going on?

‘I’m going to help you. I’m going to help all of you, all right? Just hang in there, you’re going to be safe soon, all right?’ the Being’s voice is gentle and soft.

He steps away, arms extending outwards until the rings of light reached the very end of the dungeon. Then in one collective sweep, everyone inside the dungeon seemingly loses consciousness.

Namjoon immediately backs out, scrambling up the stairs.
Who was that? What was he doing?

Never in all of Namjoon’s years alive has he witnessed such a display of “power”. He’s so caught up in his thoughts that he nearly doesn’t see the K’it’y guard that runs in, eyes wide as he regards the triangular entrance over the heavy metal doors. Namjoon easily knocks him out, a single swinging punch to his jaw, sending him crashing downwards. Namjoon arms himself with his TeorSer and just in time too, because a shot is fired at him and Namjoon ducks back inside the doorway only to come face to face with the stranger Being.

‘Hey-’

‘No!’ Namjoon says fiercely. ‘I don’t know what your deal is. But I don’t want anything to do with you or this fucked up shit you have going on there-’

‘Oh look! They’re here!’

Namjoon doesn’t want to look away but he does. Staring out of the triangular opening and into the Atmoshield covered gateway ahead, Namjoon watches as a large starcraft, clearly of Venture Unit make, and clearly a slaver-ship, pulling in slowly into Grezma’s orbital border.

His bones feel like they’re on fire, his wrists burn and his skin crawls with hatred.

‘Shhh, it’s okay.’

A soft voice says next to him. Somehow, he’s gently patting Namjoon on the head in a comforting manner. Namjoon jerks away, colliding painfully with the wall behind him.

‘I’m sorry you had to see this again- I bet you thought they were all gone right?’ the Being says, eyes wide and filled with sorrow.

‘What are you talking about-‘

‘The slaver-ships. They’re still here, just creeping along poor systems, too far from the GLA’s protection.’ He says softly. ‘Like them.’

He points down the stairs.

‘Robbed away from their planet.’

Namjoon grits his teeth. He couldn’t get sucked into this. He can’t. He was on a mission, and he had to fulfill it. He had to complete it.

There’s a burst of fire over their heads and Namjoon ducks even lower, quickly followed by the Being next to him. Aiming and firing quickly, Namjoon makes his target and hears a cry of pain.

‘Someone’s broken into the keep! Bring the guards here! At least hold it until they get here!’

Namjoon grimaces.

He was going to have to escape quickly.

‘Hey Namjoon?’

‘Spaces, what?’

‘Do you need help?’
Namjoon huffs irritably, firing another shot.

‘No really, I can totally help,’ the Being next to him grins, his hands glowing green.

‘No I got this.’ Namjoon grunts back.

‘You don’t “got this”,’ he intones, mimicking Namjoon’s tone. ‘They’re going to bring reinforcement and your TeorSer isn’t enough to hold them back.’

Namjoon huffs, closing his eyes.

‘So what do you suggest we do?’ he asks the stranger in front of him.

‘Nothing. We wait until they come arrest us, we surrender, and we get taken into their main ship,’ the Being points a glowing finger towards the looming starcraft. ‘Then we burst out of there, freeing all of the captured Beings, and we return them to safe Docks, and give them new lives to live!’

He does a little cheer.

‘Are you insane?’ Namjoon asks. And he asks this very seriously.

‘Would an insane person respond with a “yes” or a “no”?’

Namjoon wipes at his face. He’s had the worst possible luck in the past few months. This was the crowning glory.

Where even was Yoongi? Didn’t he say he would be coming back? And that Namjoon shouldn’t do anything stupid? Spaces, everything about this was stupid.

There’s a lot of noise, yelling and shouting and alarms ringing.

The Being next to him cups his hands over his ears and cocks one eyebrow up, as though listening intently.

‘Ah, the reinforcement is here. We’re really outnumbered here.’ he says with a shrug and a smile.

Namjoon did not have time for this. He did not have the time, the mental capacity, or the general wherewithal to process any of this.

‘Look- you can continue on your quest to free those Beings but I have things to do, places to be,’ Namjoon growls out, shouldering the TeorSer properly and aiming properly. There were gas lines that fed oxygen into the prisons, probably close to the doors where there control panels would be located. If Namjoon can aim at one of those and create a diversion, then he could simply escape the Atmoshield and find the closest Transporter which no doubt should be close-by and fully operational judging by the amount of guards pouring in at this given moment. Then he would have to of course find the others and get back to the ship.

‘So do I,’ the Being states, with a firm nod of his head. ‘So I’m sorry for having to do this.’

Namjoon should have expected this.

Green light flashes around him and he expects pain but there’s nothing. In fact Namjoon wonders if he’s just imagining things until he realizes he can’t move. He can’t even open his mouth. Is this really happening to me, what the actual fuck.
The Being stands up, brushing his knees.

‘I’ve been following them for a while now you see,’ he explains as Namjoon slowly lifts into the air. His eyes can still move and notices with horror as glowing green lengths of rope-like light binds him down and lifts him, following the Being back down the stairs. ‘And I have my heart set on freeing them.’

He looks back up at Namjoon, eyes wide with earnestness and sincerity.

‘I was given a chance, an opportunity.’ He says quietly, looking down with a sad smile. ‘And I wasn’t able to give back what I was given. So I want to make sure that I can extend that chance, that opportunity, and help those who can’t help themselves.’

Namjoon thinks this is all very good for this Being. Hooray for spreading hope and all that. But Namjoon cannot spare any of that right now.

‘But don’t worry Namjoon, you won’t be left behind and I’ll make sure you that you’re safe!’ the Being smiles gleefully again, eyes glowing a little. ‘I know for a fact that your crew will come back for you. Your friend won’t leave you. I can guarantee it!’

Namjoon rolls his eyes. Do you even know my crew? He wants to ask.

‘Oh right! I realized I haven’t introduced myself!’ the Being poses, fingers held up in a ‘v’ as thudding footsteps can be heard running down the stairs into the dungeon.

‘Call me Taeh’yung!’

‘They found out.’

‘About?’

‘Zhoumi and his involvement.’

‘Do you think you can find Zhoumi after this?’ K’mara doesn’t look up from her screen.
‘I don’t think he ever left Šerdesas in the first place.’

‘That is what I believe too. Do they plan on leaving?’

‘They are already headed there.’

‘Is the Yisheng there as well?’

‘He is.’

‘Good. Keep them all in one place.’

‘Understood.’

K’mara looks up from her screen.

‘Good luck, Yoongi.’

Yoongi pauses, mulling the words over in his mind. He catches sight of a large vase filled with large pale lavender flowers. Yoongi can smell their perfume from here.

‘Admiral.’

‘Yes?’

‘How many flowers do you see in that vase?’
AYO GUESS WHO IS FINALLY HERE.
Since I’m a broke ass student and I live off of kind and thoughtful people, I have been able to watch Bon Voyage 2 and can I just. Say. Something. Really. Quickly. And.
That’s.
EVERYTHING ABOUT THIS IS SO CUTE. I LOVE FAMILIES, I LOVE THEIR BOND, I LOVE HOW COMFORTABLE AND EASY THEY ARE WITH EACH OTHER THEY’RE JUST SO. *HUGS THEM ALL VIOLENTLY*
AND WE HAVE TO TALK ABOUT YOONMIN
I say we have to talk about Yoonmin but I don’t know what to say I’m at a loss I’m just waiting for inspired fanfics to drop like please, this is great material I beg of you.
AND ALSO KIM JONGDAE WITH BLOND HAIR AND FAKE FRECKLES IS KILLING ME I AM CURRENTLY DEAD
And SM why would you do this to Jongin my precious son, and to Baekhyun, my other son who honestly does sort of pull off the mullet BUT CAN WE NOT PLEASE BYE
It’s raining in Šerdesas and it has been for the past week. But Yoongi has been here for 3 days now, tailing after the crew of the Stravechi Nava without pause or break, no matter the weather. The Anningan Yisheng and the Cahyan were at the Yisheng Headquarters, the Heladian was keeping watch at the Trade Sector outside of Zhoumi’s office, and the Long-Huon GIU Lieutenant was sitting at a spot staring straight into Zhoumi’s apartment windows. If the Long-Huon shifted his gaze to the right, he would find Yoongi looking back out at him from the windows but he doesn’t.

‘Guys I’m so bored – someone tell me a story.’

It’s the Cahyan. Yoongi has learnt to differentiate their voices, learn the lilts and accents of their speech and dialect. The Cahyan had been closely linked to the Isbahaysiga Alliance. Whether or not the Cahyan knew what he had been doing was a different story altogether. But Yoongi now knows of his involvement and wonders if the Being would have chosen to do what he had done, if he had been aware of all the outcomes involved.

Yoongi has also hacked into their Comm-Devices, allowing him to listen in on their conversation. It had been difficult to do so. All four Beings were incredibly difficult to waylay or find an opening to gain access to their Comm-Devices. But inside the ship that carried them from the Mothership all the way here, Yoongi found the opportunity to temporarily nick the Cahyan’s Comm-Device when he had faked his own capture. The guards of the ship had removed all forms of communication device on the Cahyan and so Yoongi slipped into the prison-cell storage facility and had managed to download their specific frequency channel. It was an independent and heavily customized channel that was both impressive and a little daunting. The ship clearly had a lot of individuals who were far more capable than their appearances suggested.

‘How are you feeling Baekhyun?’

This was the Heladian- the Being K’mara had told him to keep an eye on.

There was nothing remotely outstanding about the Technician at first glance, but a closer study of his files lead Yoongi down another path. He was a survivor- the only survivor- of a space-storm.
And judging by what he had seen, this was the Being who held the most importance to the
digitized-soul aboard the Stravechi Nava.

Yoongi had stood inside that Hangar Bay in the Mothership, watching the two walk around the
raised ramps, looking over the slow demolition of the Hive.

How did one Being hold so much value for another? What did they see in each other, what did they
feel in each other, what could they perceive beyond what could be seen within each other? Because
Yoongi could feel an emptiness around the Heladian—a shell hollowed out and dormant near him,
void of the Being whose value and enormity rendered the Heladian whole and Alive. Yoongi could
see this, but didn’t understand it.

‘It’s kinda really cool here y’know?’ The Cahyan replies, sounding sleepy. ‘So relaxing – maybe a
bit too relaxing.’

There’s slight chuckle, ‘Only you would find that to be a negative thing.’

And then there was the Long-Huon. Yoongi can see some small movement coming from the
nearly entirely hidden form of the Lieutenant. Though he was trusted as a ranking individual
within K’mara’s commanding force, Yoongi knew K’mara didn’t trust him all together. And the
Long-Huon knew this as well. But more than anything, the thing that stood out from this Long-
Huon was the shadow that seemed to cling on to him.

Yoongi doesn’t understand this. It’s never mentioned nor is it ever addressed. K’mara obviously
couldn’t see it. No one could. But Yoongi could. And he sees how the Long-Huon speaks to it time
and time again. There was a strange resonance surround this shadow. In the correct angle or
lighting, Yoongi can just about make out red-neon eyes.

‘Not negative. I know this is good for me…but at the same time I wish I were there with you guys.
Any luck finding Zhoumi?’

‘Nothing. Isn’t Yixing there? You could keep him company?’

‘Yixing suddenly went full on Yisheng-mode and practically ran away mumbling something under
his breath while we were meditating. He said he was free the entire day and we would go around
the Headquarters but now I don’t know where he is and I don’t know if I’m allowed to eat at the
Service Hall – aren’t Yishengs all health-freaks? Would they stop me from eating again? I need to
eat you know? But what if they say I’m fat? I’m not fat! I have two hearts and I need to heal!’

Yoongi notices how Zitao is silently arguing with the shadow next to him, and Yoongi
concentrates even more but finds that he can’t see the form, rather he senses the form.

‘I’ve had enough – I’ll just go and check myself.’ Zitao is sitting up from his crouching position.
‘How are we going to find out more information about Zhoumi if we can’t even find him?’

‘I still think we should track him without him knowing we’re here. I know you want to go and
punch him, I mean I know I do but we need to think past our immediate anger.’

The shadow next to the Long-Huon moves a little aggressively and the Long-Huon waves a hand
as he says, ‘So what do we do now?’

‘Well, is there any activity from Zhoumi’s apartment?’

Yoongi notices how the Long-Huon’s eyes rove over the apartment, watching every window
properly. He had entered the apartment yesterday, leaving very few traces of himself behind.
Yoongi himself had stayed out though he could have stayed hidden inside. But the shadow that clung to the Long-Huon had made him reconsider. There was something disconcerting about it so Yoongi had stayed in the next apartment. Yoongi made sure to clean up after the Long-Huon in case any more of the GI agents came back snooping.

‘Nothing. There are no lights, none of the main systems running to his apartment switched on. Didn’t da’ge mention that he’s never been able to contact Zhoumi after they first received their trade mission?’

‘Not even once.’

Zhoumi had gone missing sometime after that. Had he purposefully put off communication with the Stravechi Nava?

‘Where can we find information regarding his whereabouts? Isn’t there some form of directory we could potentially hack into?’

It wouldn’t be possible.

‘It’s too risky. Hacking into the GIU, which is one large ship essentially, is something. But this is the GLA directory we’re talking about – not even J-D would attempt to try it.’

‘You know I’m pretty good at sweet-talking my way into getting information.’

‘No Baekhyun, no one is going to dress as females and try to get information from GLA officers.’

There’s a choking sound and Yoongi notices how the Long-Huon seems to be coughing, his shoulders shaking. The shadow flits about him as though agitated.

‘I’m-I’m sorry what!?’

‘It’s a long story but making it short and to the point, I needed information, and getting two Beings into the plan would work out with better chances so I pulled Junmyeon in and made him wear a dress and heels and a wig and 2 hours later we got what we needed and we left. The end.’

Laughter was a beautiful and odd sound.

‘D-do you have pictures!?’

‘I think J-D could pull some out yes.’

They share laughter together, a lightness building around the Long-Huon as he laughs uncontrollably. The Cahyan is exuberantly explaining something with great detail. A story he had called it. A memory. Not only of one Beings. But shared and eternal between them.

They existed in each other. Their lives were merged with each other’s, creating an endless cycle of possibilities of their actions, of their words. Creating wavelengths of movement across the stars.

But Yoongi had no memory. He had no memory that converged and met with another. He was not a memory.

What was he?

‘Jongdae no-!’

Yoongi is startled at himself for not paying attention, for not listening.
‘Min-Seok!? Are you all right!? What’s going on!?’

There’s shaking breaths, a panic that Yoongi can feel even though it’s not his own. This was his memory, his present, inter-lapping with Yoongi’s own.

‘Minnie!? Are you all right what’s wrong—’

‘Jo-Jongdae. Something’s wrong – something’s wrong!’

Yoongi steps away from the wall where he’d been watching the Long-Huon Lieutenant, making note of where the Heladian was to track him and guard him.

‘Shit I just saw Zhoumi!’

Yoongi freezes.

‘What!?’

‘He was— shit, he was on a medical bed, he’s—’ There are footsteps, running and skidding. Added shaky breaths to the already pained gasps that fill the sound channel.

‘He’s in a medical bed, they’re pulling him into one of the recuperation rooms!? I don’t know what’s going on I can’t see beyond this anymore—’

‘Where are you? What can you see? Was he a patient all along!?’

Yoongi catches sight of the Long-Huon, abandoning any pretense of .

‘I don’t know – I’m at the garden and you can like, look down into some of the hallways but— shit!’ Baekhyun hisses. ‘I’m gonna go downstairs- but Min-Seok—!’

‘I’m fine, I’m fine – I need to—.’

Yoongi’s entire body feels electrocuted. Zhoumi was in the Yisheng Headquarters? This entire time? What did it mean? Didn’t he say he was friends with the Yishengs?

‘Go check in with Baekhyun Zitao. Baekhyun don’t get caught – I just. Track Zhoumi. I need to—’

‘Min-Seok what is going on!?’

‘Something’s happened – inside the Nava – we have to get to them. Baekhyun stay on Zhoumi – just- just leave this to me.’

Yoongi is torn. Who does he follow?

‘I’m coming to you right now Baek – it will take some time but I’ll be there as soon as I can. Did he look injured? Was he unconscious what’s happening?’

Yoongi makes up his mind quickly. He darts out of Zhoumi’s apartment, rushing towards the elevator.

‘I can’t tell exactly- I’m just—shit—.’

‘Baekhyun!?’

Yoongi sinks downwards, uncaring that he’s being caught on the surveillance feed.
I’m fine – I just collided with some plants. They’ve taken Zhoumi into a lift – I can’t go in – I’m going to find Yixing – he should know what’s happening!’

There’s a distinct clicking sound. The Cahyan had clearly gone offline.

‘I’m on my way- Min-Seok, what’s going on?’

‘I can’t connect with the Nava- something’s gone wrong-‘

How did the Heladian know about their ship? How was he connected? Yoongi knows that they stopped all communications so that they could keep their location a complete secret.

‘What do you mean something’s gone wrong – what happened?’

‘I- I saw something – I saw what Jongdae was seeing – something’s happened with Lu Han I think I’m not sure-’

The Android? Yoongi is completely confused.

He sprints past a crowd in front of the elevator, eliciting a few gasps from the surrounding Beings who were waiting for the elevator. Yoongi is past caring.

‘You saw something!? What do you mean you saw something-‘

‘I need to connect to the Nava now- make sure you know what’s happening with Zhoumi and meet up with Baekhyun as soon as possible.’

‘Min-Seok what are you going to do!? Where are you going-!?’

Was the Heladian going to break their communication silence? What was wrong with the digitized-soul? Yoongi finds his parked Drift-08 and spots the Long-Huon zooming past in blasting speed before spearing off into the polarized highways. The Drift-08 hums to life and the camouflage setting installs itself immediately, rendering Yoongi nearly entirely invisible and he zooms after the Long-Huon.

At this speed, the shadow behind the GIU Lieutenant seems to somehow seem more visible and Yoongi can see neon-red eyes, the outline of horns, and a crooked body echoing out of the Long-Huon’s form.

‘I’m going to sleep.’
‘Are you comfortable?’

Namjoon glares at Taeh’yung.

He was not comfortable. He was pressed up into a tight cage that was too short for his lengthy height, making him crouch uncomfortably. There were unconscious bleeding Beings pressed up against him and this Taeh’yung or whatever, was also pressed up against him, looking incredibly happy in the process. He’s leaning against Namjoon, practically roping his limbs around him like some strange creature, resting his head on his shoulder in a manner that was far too affectionate for someone who has known him for literally 15 minutes.

By the time the K’it’y had arrived, Namjoon had no choice but to entirely give up and allow himself to be restrained, cuffed, and then thrown into a cage already bursting with other Beings. They were now floating along on a gravity-lift, being pulled in and attached to another larger lift installed with an Atmoshield. Namjoon looks around as best as he could. He saw no signs of pale pink hair anywhere so Sk’jin wasn’t here, that probably (and hopefully) meant that the others evaded capture. But that also meant they were now more or less freed from the ties of their mission. Without a Captain to lead the mission, would the others follow up on it? As Captain, Namjoon was solely in charge of the Užkulisai, without his saying or his command, Lisai won’t start up the ship. But Yoongi had his NaviLet. Meaning they could use that to start up the ship and escape.

Honestly, Namjoon wouldn’t hold it against them if they planned on escaping and leaving him here to the mercies of these slavers. This was a sticky situation to be in and too much to think about and too much to plan.

‘We’ll be fine soon,’ Taeh’yung says, his hair poking into Namjoon’s under-jaw in an annoying way. ‘Your friends will come and we can set everyone free and destroy the ship and leave!’

‘And just how do you plan on doing that?’ Namjoon asks irritably.

‘Oh- not me!’ Taeh’yung beams up at Namjoon, squeezing him even tighter. Namjoon feels something damp feeling growing on his back as someone behind him groans in a pained way and he just prays it’s only blood and not something else.

‘What?’

‘Well- to be honest I don’t have much of a plan- I never normally I do- I just try my best and things luckily do work out,’ Taeh’yung says with a thoughtful nod. ‘But most of the time, I get help.’

‘Wait- so you’re saying you don’t have a plan, but you expect to free all these Beings, and blow up the ship?’ Namjoon asks incredulously. ‘How is any of this even timed? How are you going to set these Beings free? How do you plan on blowing up the ship without harming everyone on board?’

‘That’s a good question,’ Taeh’yung nods seriously. ‘I’ll think about it. Or we plan together! But wait! We have the perfect wild card for this!’

‘Wild card? What-,’ Namjoon stops himself. ‘Spaces, it’s like talking to a child.’

‘Yeap,’ Taeh’yung grins. ‘Your friend. He’s the wild card.’

‘Look- I don’t feel like explaining the relationship, or lack of it, that I have with my “friend” so I’ll just tell you right now you shouldn’t expect anything from him.’ Namjoon retorts, feeling frustration building up in him.
‘Oh?’

Taeh’yung blinks up at him in surprise, eyebrows going up as he looks away for a while.

‘But the last time I met him he was super helpful and dedicated.’

The gravity of Taeh’yung’s words hits Namjoon a little slowly.

‘Wait- wait a minute,’ Namjoon looks down at Taeh’yung unsure how to phrase his words. ‘You know Yoongi?’

‘Is that what his name is?’ Taeh’yung looks happy. ‘I’m happy he has a name! And friends!’

Namjoon’s mouth opens and closes a few times,

‘Are we talking about the same Being?’ Namjoon tries, hoping that he’s wrong. Actually he doesn’t know why he’s hoping he’s wrong- he doesn’t even know what he’s hoping for. Ever since the start of this mission, Namjoon’s mind has never been at rest and right now everything was getting increasingly confusing and the appearance of this Being is not helping him clear things up either.

‘Um- yeah? I mean, there can’t be a lot of Human GI agents right?’ Taeh’yung quirks his head to the side.

Taeh’yung really was talking about Yoongi. How did this even happen? How does this Being know anything about the GI? How did he know Yoongi was Human?

‘How do know Yoongi?’ Namjoon asks, feeling a little anticlimactic with his questions.

‘I mean I don’t know him- I just know of him, you know?’ Taeh’yung replies, jolting forwards a little more and he promptly makes himself more comfortable as he leans more into Namjoon and adds a ‘you’re really comfy to lean against’ as well.

‘No, I don’t know,’ Namjoon splutters. ‘Explain!’

‘I first met- well, saw him in Šerdesas four years ago! He was present in a meeting of sorts in the Yisheng Headquarters,’ Taeh’yung narrates, making himself comfortable against Namjoon who struggles a little as he literally carries Taeh’yung now. ‘He was with a few of my friends for a while- well sort of “with”- more like just sneaking around and making sure they were okay.’

Namjoon understands nothing. Taeh’yung was there during the first ever Court hearing regarding the Gaia Case?

‘Your friends?’

‘Yeah!’ Taeh’yung beams brightly before he looks sad again. ‘But I had to say goodbye to two of them,- there was nothing I could do.’

‘Um-’ Namjoon finds himself filled with anticipation as he carefully asks, ‘Were your friends perhaps…involved with the uh-’

‘Akramanese? Yeap! They were being chased around, and it was terrible- then they freed me from Teronko’ng to help them out and heal a few of them. I was so happy! I hadn’t been freed in a while. So after that I went to Earth to help out my friend.’ Taeh’yung looks sad, his eyes gleaming strangely as though reliving a memory of sorts. ‘He was tired. So tired.’
‘Who?’ is the only question that comes out of Namjoon’s mouth. This Being was in Teronko’ng?!

Who was he?

Taeh’yung beams up again. His expression is so childishly innocent and almost carefree, that Namjoon questions his own ears and wonders if he might have just mistaken Taeh’yung’s words. There was no way he could have been in Teronko’ng. it was just impossible.

Taeh’yung gives him a smile, and for a brief second, Taeh’yung’s face entirely changes, morphing into different faces. But it’s gone so quickly that Namjoon, again, questions himself.

‘The most beautiful soul to have ever existed.’

Namjoon feels winded. Like he’d been punched in the face.

‘So how do you know Yoongi? I’m so happy that I saw him- well I mean, felt him more like. No one feels like Yoongi actually- no wait, that’s a lie. There are a few others who feel like Yoongi, but it doesn’t mean anything anymore now that it’s been sealed.’ Taeh’yung mumbles to himself.

Namjoon feels like he’s going to regret asking but he does anyways.

‘What do you mean he feels different?’

‘Yoongi you mean? Well, he’s from another Time you know? When they’re reborn from a Time that comes from another part of Continuum, they always feel a little bit different.’ Taeh’yung replies as though it’s the most obvious thing.

‘Born from another “time”?’ Namjoon repeats a little hollowly. He’s so taken aback with all of this sudden information from this unknown Being in front of him that he doesn’t even notice they’re being towed away towards the main ship past Grezma’s orbital border.

‘I mean- he’s just like the rest of my babies,’ is Taeh’yung’s extraordinary response. ‘Born in a Time long ago, brought through different dimensions, and reborn into this Continuum. They slept in Dreams for ages and ages.’

Before Namjoon can question this extraordinary “explanation” a few guards come over, leering into the cages aggressively.

‘Shut the fuck up!’ one of them growls. Namjoon notes that the Being’s nose is blotched and discoloured, its shape strangely disproportionate and from the looks of it, recently broken. Good, Namjoon thinks absent mindedly as the K’it’y guard rough-houses a few of the more awake imprisoned Beings, inwardly cheering the Being who punched him.

Taeh’yung’s attention has now shifted to the other Beings they’re cramped with. He’s talking in a low soothing voice, brushing his fingers through matted and dirty hair covered in Spaces knows what.

Who was he?

‘I’m Taeh’yung!’ he replies.

Namjoon belatedly realizes he’s spoken out loud.

‘No- I mean.’ Namjoon pauses. ‘Where are you from?’

‘Ah!’ Taeh’yung suddenly lifts a rather small child from out of nowhere as he disengages himself
Namjoon. Namjoon had no idea a child was even there. The child groans, a mess of fluids pouring out of his mouth onto Taeh’yung’s front but the latter pays it no attention, humming low before he replies.

‘Well, if you want me to get technical then I can,’ Taeh’yung repositions the child, elbowing Namjoon in the process. ‘I’m the fifth generation Zhak’gri from T’sayiti’k. I mean I wasn’t born there. But I guess I sort of am from there? I dunno the entire story- I was sold off by my parents when I was pretty young so I have no actual memory of all of that.’

This was getting too much for Namjoon. The crowded space, the cramped condition, the situation he was in, the catastrophic consequences of what might happen if he doesn’t get out of here, this Being and everything he is saying.

Namjoon knows that for most Beings they wouldn’t understand or even know what Taeh’yung was talking about. And what it meant.

If Taeh’yung was telling the truth, then he was descended from the oldest point of civilization developed and cultured in the Known Universe. T’sayiti’k was a system with only 3 planets in it but it has been pinpointed as the cradle of all life- the genesis of everything. Every species, every Being, every race ever born, could all trace their chemical and biological foundation to this System. It was a known fact that not all species of Beings could survive or be comfortable enough in another Being’s environment or planet due to their own unique chemical and DNA composition. However the T’sayiti’k System housed every possible elemental foundation known to the Universe. T’sayiti’k was used as a basis for all of the scientific facts known to the Universe to this day.

In fact, Raksane Tayi was built based on the T’sayiti’k System and her ideology.

The Zhak’gri were a race of Beings from one of the two planets in T’sayiti’k. They were a strange folk according to what Namjoon has read. They delved deep into the mysteries of Life-force and were, to an extent, the predecessors of the Yishengs. The Yisheng Code, for one, was based off of the findings of the Zhak’gri. Though the Zhak’gri did not have that ability or skill to heal, they delved in much stranger skills and abilities that were never properly documented or explained. Namjoon has never met anyone from T’sayiti’k, let alone a Zhak’gri. He doesn’t think anyone in the past few millennium has met them either. What did Taeh’yung mean by fifth generation? Where were her people? And what had happened to them now?

How did an entire species of Beings, an entire System of planets that basically laid out the foundation of the Known Universe, just disappear from history? How did they just disappear from the present?

‘Your…your people…where are they?’ Namjoon asks carefully.

‘Here, there, everywhere,’ Taeh’yung shrugs. ‘I don’t know- I haven’t met anyone from T’sayiti’k actually. All I know is that I’m the fifth Zhak’gri- or at least that’s what they tell me when they bother waking up.’

‘Who?’

‘The previous Zhak’gri,’ Taeh’yung replies, tapping his temple with a grin before patting the child in his arms. ‘We all share the same soul after all. According to what I’ve been told, I’m something like the fifth reincarnation of the first Zhak’gri.’

‘…I see…’
Taeh’yung nods emphatically and says, ‘But honestly none of that matters to me! I just want to do some good! Maybe blow up a moon? I mean I’ve done a bunch of other things that I’m pretty sure none of the other Four have done, but still, blowing up a moon is on my list of things-to-do’!

Just by his facial expression, you would think the Zhak’gri was talking about maybe going to some attraction site and buying souvenirs rather than purposefully blowing up a moon just for the sake of doing so.

For some inexplicable reason, Namjoon feels like Taeh’yung would fit right into his motley crew of less-than-savory disparate Beings.

The gravity-lift jolts to a stop and Namjoon belatedly realizes they’ve reached the open maw-like Hangar gate of this massive slaver-ship. There are choruses of Beings. Most of them were slaves themselves, judging by the cuffs on their wrists. Namjoon looks up, noting the uniform-like clothing some of the Beings were wearing, similar to the ones the K’it’y guards were wearing except in dark grey rather than dark olive green the Grezma outpost guards wore. They were fully armed with TeorSers as well as heavy looking batons, used clearly to subdue or subjugate the captured slaves.

There’s a rough but strangely fluid language thrown around and a few responses over the radio. A guard appears in front of Namjoon’s cage and the Being stares at him and Taeh’yung. He’s a large and hulking Being- like the rest of the guards inside the slaver-ship. They were clearly using size as a form of intimidation against the already weak and hopeless slaves being brought in. Mental suppression by creating a visual barrier more powerful and efficient than cuffs. There was no need to spend units on cuffs if your prisoners were caged in with more than just cages and chains.

Taeh’yung beams and waves brightly.

The K’it’y hastens to explain in their tongue- he speaks haltingly, but the slaver-guard seems to understand well enough and barks out an order. Their cage is thrown open and Namjoon is roughly yanked out and slammed down on the floor, arms behind his back. Namjoon could roll his eyes at the basic treatment, gritting his teeth. Taeh’yung is also thrown onto the ground and he too seems used to it. He smiles brightly at Namjoon.

A hand twists Namjoon’s wrists and he knows they’re studying his cuff-links. They would soon find out where he was from and Namjoon can only sigh, knowing what would come next. The cuffs are attached to his wrist and he’s yanked up by them and Namjoon feels the metal dig harshly into his wrist. Taeh’yung is treated the same and they’re made to stand up as though for inspection.

They’re assessed quickly, checking them both for deformities or injuries while another scans them for their identity and species. Namjoon is used to this, unfortunately. Being looked at with scrutiny as though he were an object to be sold on the market- an item to be speculated and bought.

Taeh’yung to his right, launches into a bright conversation with the guard checking him, brightly discussing what Namjoon suspects is a dream he had. He’s slapped harshly across the face to shut him up no doubt, but Taeh’yung continues talking just as brightly. The guards grumble something to each other and the cuffs around Taeh’yung’s wrists come off.

It’s clever, Namjoon thinks, watching as Taeh’yung jumps up and down a little, flapping his arms, presenting himself as an insane or mentally unstable Being. Because Taeh’yung is promptly ignored and Namjoon is under scrutiny again. They’re saying something in low tones and the K’it’y guard with the broken nose says something harshly, clearly not liking what was being said.
There’s a lot of shouting, and Taeh’yung comes and latches himself onto Namjoon, watching with intrigue.

‘Ah- they’re saying that they should help out in Grezma, to clear up the situation there.’ Taeh’yung translates. ‘But they’re saying that they won’t because it’s not their business what the Governors do as long as they have their load.’

Namjoon grimaces.

‘So he’s saying that he’s going to take you and me back because we’re technically not part of the deal. However, he’s saying that they’re taking us as compensation. For free and- ah, yeah-‘ Taeh’yung winces as a punch is thrown.

A quick brawl takes place but the K’it’y has no chance. He’s knocked back a good distance, crumpling on the floor instantly. The rest of the K’it’y crouch and hiss but don’t make take any action. The slaver-guard yells something again and the K’it’y move back grumbling. A bunch of other slaves, clearly employed by the slaver-guards, approach them quickly and push them further inside the Hangar Bay. Namjoon notes the blinking collars around their throats. You didn’t need to be a genius to figure out that the collars were all coded to explode or detonate if the wearer disobeyed.

It’s a large space, with large gravity-lifts stacked up against the tall walls. They must be carrying a lot of slaves. Taeh’yung is immediately engaging the slaves around him in conversation, breaking out into a language Namjoon doesn’t understand. The working slaves don’t reply of course. They’re pushed towards a hallway that lead to a large and open elevator that overlooked a horrifying sight.

There’s a large open space, cylindrical in shape, and crossed over with massive bridges and narrow guard-towers as rings and rings of caged spaces line up and stack over each, creating sickening pillars of slaves. It was like a storage facility, where the slaves were stored until they were sold. Namjoon cranes his neck looking up and finds that he can’t see the ceiling of this facility. The lighting is dim and creates a strange sense of feeling both claustrophobic and agoraphobic at the same time.

He hears Taeh’yung let out a low sound of what Namjoon thinks might be awe.

‘It’s not as bad as Teronko’ng,’ the Zhak’gri muses as though to himself. ‘Wouldn’t you say so?’ Namjoon doesn’t know how to respond, seeing as he’s never been to Teronko’ng.

They’re not lead into the central-facility, they cross over on one of the bridges and enter a lift. They descend downwards and down into the floor. Namjoon suspects this might be the only way to go in and out of the levels were descending into.

They stop and Namjoon doesn’t know how far down they’ve reached. He’s not entire sure if they’ve been travelling in a strictly up and down motion either. There were many lifts and elevators that traversed in cross sections diagonally and horizontally as well.

It’s a dark and cramped space they come out into, lit only by sparse light bulbs that flicker a bit. It’s cold down here and Namjoon’s breaths come out in white vapour.

Taeh’yung breathes out forcefully, creating a large cloud of white vapour and saying, ‘Look! I’m a volcano!’

He’s smacked harshly across the face.
They walk past thick doors, bolted over with actual bolts rather than digitally. Namjoon is wondering at the lack of security surrounding these cells when a scuffle breaks out ahead. The lighting is bad so Namjoon can’t exactly make out what was happening. But a prisoner seemed to have burst out of his cell, screaming maniacally. The working-slaves beside them all freeze, fear etched into their eyes.

The slaver-guard barks harshly at them and the two in the front move forward, a deadened expression in their eyes as they tackle the prisoner attempting to escape. But before they even fall to the ground, the collars around their necks detonate in a bright flash of light and blood and the screaming stops immediately.

The slaver-guard is barking orders again and the two working-slaves behind them rush forward, picking up the bodies of their fellow working-slaves and the prisoner, now obviously dead.

The slaver-guard shoves open a door and grabbing Taeh’yung, pushes the Zhak’gri into the cell. Namjoon briefly catches his expression and a chill runs down his spine at the intensity of anger in Taeh’yung’s eyes. The slaver-guard bolts the door and then moves to the next cell. Opening it with a loud clang, he grabs Namjoon and shoves him in too.

It’s completely dark and after feeling about with his cuffed hands, he finds that he’s inside a 3 by 5 meter cell that’s entirely empty. Sinking down at the very back, Namjoon takes a deep breath.

They certainly didn’t need security if they had collars that detonated like that.

Namjoon stares at the darkness, looking down where he knew his hands were cuffed. It was an annoyingly familiar sensation, having these cuffs around his wrists. Sighing, Namjoon closes his eyes though there’s no difference in opening or closing his eyes.

He might as well catch up on some sleep.

The Yisheng Headquarters is not his home. Yoongi knows this.

The facility hidden in its ground is also not his home. The more Yoongi thinks about it, it felt more like a storage facility of sorts.
This is where he Slept. This is where he Dreamed. This is where he was made. But this is not his home.

He’s here faster than Zitao because Yoongi only used the polarized highway to a certain degree before he flew here. The Drift-08 was a model that wasn’t set for release until after 20 years. Though it still carried its trademark drifting abilities over any and every possible surface, the Drift-08 was designed to fly in-planet. Keeping track of traffic and any incoming Transporters, Yoongi cut across the busy city below by soaring through the clouds for a while, landing silently near the edges of the forest that fenced in the Headquarters.

Yoongi almost instantly heads for his usual route, using the very old and underground tunnel passages that had been constructed a long time ago. Instead he heads for one of the open lobbies, expertly avoiding all Yishengs and patients who were dawdling about.

It's quiet as usual here. Filled with Life and a quiet energy that sates all of Yoongi’s being. The air smells like rain.

Starting up his screen again, Yoongi notes that according to his tracking screen set specifically on the frequency of soundwaves from their Comm-Device channel, the Cahyan and the Anningan Yisheng were headed towards the Yisheng Living Quarters. Travelling off-course as well as up in Šerdesa’s upper atmosphere rendered weakly latched frequency waves unstable and Yoongi hadn’t been able to keep track of the crew members Comm-Devices. However their locations were still present to him, having used Šerdesa’s powerful cross-satellites to pinpoint their location. The audio links up as well and Yoongi swiftly makes his way through familiar corridors.

’-eed him to not come to Raksane Tayi- well at least not here just yet.’

‘Yixing wait- please explain to me what’s going on! Where are we going?’

They’re right below Yoongi now.

‘I know someone who can “heal” you – you and Jongin.’

‘Heal!? What!? But…but Yishengs can’t- you can’t-‘

‘Not a Yisheng. Not a Yisheng – someone else. We’re going to go see him.’

Yoongi takes pause at this, unable to comprehend what the Yisheng was saying.

‘But Yixing,-I…I’ve already made up my mind. I… I don’t want to be healed. My time has come and-If this person we’re meeting is not a Yisheng – and this is Life-force we’re talking about.’

What did this Yisheng know? Yoongi had long ruled his involvement out of all of this. So had K’mara.

‘No Baekhyun. Your time has not come – Time is no longer relevant in this process- ever since the Akramanese tore through the dimensional barriers, ever since J-D himself has existed – what we know as the order of nature, the cycle of continuum – none of these are certain.’

The cycle of continuum? Dimensional barriers? Yoongi struggles to keep up.

‘Your time is not fixed – and I am not going to allow you to simply wither away – you have too much to live for – too much to love. So as your doctor I will not allow you to lose hope. You understand?’
What did the Cahyan live for? What did the Yisheng mean? Yoongi wants to reply,- to shake his head and ask the Yisheng what he meant.

‘Good – we have to pack. Not a lot, just bare necessities – it will take us around 3 days to get there.’

‘Where are we going?’

Where could they possibly go to gain something like this? It’s so beyond Yoongi’s immediate understanding that he can’t even place a name on it. They arrive at the Yisheng Yixing’s quarters, stepping inside hurriedly. Yoongi glances at his screen- the Long-Huong Lieutenant would be here in less than 10 minutes. Were they not going to wait?

‘Oh! Jongin must be in warp- the line keeps breaking – I should track what ship he’s on-‘

The Dakaṣayaii? What had happened to him? Why was he on a ship – he could teleport if he chose to.

‘Yixing! Where are we going!? Who are we going to meet!?’

‘I don’t know who they are, I’ve only heard of them – but I know that this will work, together it can work, Ubhuku wasn’t a mistake-‘

Yoongi tracks down the word Ubhuku but he comes out blank. There was no information from his mind about this place.

‘Ok but where!?’

‘Teronko’ng Prison.’

Teronko’ng Prison was a massive dead planet that somehow still remained in very slow orbit around Raksane Tayi. It was the largest, harshest, and most efficient prison in the entire Known Universe. Beings sent here were beyond despicable- a place made for the worst of Beings. Yoongi carefully thinks it through and guesses it would be the perfect place for himself.

His reaches for his screen, quietly placing a call as he sinks back into a shadowy recess near a pillar. A Yisheng walks past, completely unaware of Yoongi’s presence.

‘Yoongi. How have you been?’

‘Good afternoon Admiral,’ Yoongi replies quietly, using a term provided to him by his mind. ‘The Yisheng Yixing, and the Cahyan, are making plans to leave Šerdesas and head to Teronko’ng Prison.’

‘What?’

‘They are meeting a Being. Someone the Yisheng has said would heal the Cahyan and the Dakaṣayaii.’ Yoongi adds and not allowing K’mara to speak continues on. ‘Zhoumi is here.’

‘At the Yisheng Headquarters?’

‘Yes.’

It’s silent for a while.

‘Where are the other crew members?’
Yoongi gives K’mara a short breakdown of the events that took place as he trails after the Yisheng and the Cahyan, silently climbing down a pillar and keeping a safe distance from the two as they jog out towards the Hangar Bay.

‘Stay there.’ K’mara orders. ‘Keep watch over at Šerdesas. I will track the Yisheng.’

Yoongi stops in his tracks.

‘Stay on Zhoumi. Report anything else you find or see to me.’

‘Understood.’

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It’s after 6 hours, 28 minutes, and 42 seconds and counting that his prison door cell opens. Namjoon is a light sleeper so when Taeh’yung’s door had opened he woke up at once.

It’s very bright— but nothing Namjoon can’t handle. His eyes weren’t like most Being’s eyes and he could very well stare straight into a burning star and not have his eyes evaporate from the gamma rays.

A slaver-guard walks in, roughly grabbing him and pulling him upwards. He shoves him out of the cell and Namjoon finds that Taeh’yung is already there, looking bright and happy. A completely different look than the last time Namjoon had seen the Zhak’gri wear on his face. There are four working-slaves waiting for them as well. Namjoon remembers what had happened and feels sickened by how they’re being used.

Namjoon is cuffed again and shoved forward down the long hallway. The slaver-guard walks ahead, no instructions given or words exchanged. They’re pushed along by the working-slaves and forced to follow after the slaver-guard. They’re not taken into the center-storage of this horrible facility, rather they’re being lead into another hallway leading inwards. Namjoon has no idea where they could be taken and he keeps his eyes peeled.

They’re lead into the same elevator again and they ascend. They come out into the huge cylindrical
central-facility but don’t stop. They continue upwards until they move past it into a shaft headed upwards. They stop, almost at random, according to Namjoon, and they’re pushed out.

For such a large ship with such a massive population, the slaver-ship sure was quiet. Their footsteps creates loud clacking sounds against the metal of the floors. They walk past industrial walls and other hallways, passing through guarded doorways. Taeh’yung is still conversing with the working slaves next to him while Namjoon keeps a mental count of the number of steps he’s taken, the number of guarded doors they’ve walked past, and the number of guards walking about. He notes their weapons, their uniform, their surveillance system, and the types of systematic programming they used. Based on what he saw and counted previously, they were now 23 floors above the Hangar Bay they had come in from and possibly near the Central Bridge of the slaver-ship.

The metal-work starts to change gradually. From the harsh industrial looking walls, to smoother chrome walls. They eventually reach a modern and lavish door that the guard in front of Namjoon opens. This was where he was obviously going to be questioned or a place where they were going to label him with a price.

Inside is a large lobby, decorated lavishly and rather cheaply despite the obviously expensive products shoved into every corner of the room. There’s a large table at the center of the room, and surrounding the table were some very grim and greasy looking Beings, all clearly the brains behind this operation. There are 6 of them, dressed in rather simple clothing despite the gaudiness of the room. They were businessmen, all of them. And slaves were their trading units. This wasn’t a means of displaying power or some sadistic game. This was all a business to them. And right now, Namjoon, and Taeh’yung, were potentially very valuable assets the stumbled upon.

‘So- this the Kutsogleran,’ one of them drawls at once, gesturing to Namjoon to approach.

Namjoon doesn’t move an inch. Even when he’s struck harshly.

‘Oh well, it’s fine- I’ll stand and check him myself.’

He’s short and rather compactly built. Nothing about him really stands out to Namjoon- but these were the most dangerous types of Beings in the first place. He was obviously from Raksane Tayi. Namjoon sees Lal Haenoon in his features and he wants to grimace. Even if Lal Haenoon wasn’t the best of Beings, he was at least, not in the business of slavery.

The Raksane Tayian peers up at Namjoon, studying his face.

‘Damn pity what happened to your lot,’ he sighs out, walking around Namjoon to study him. ‘But great for the market.’

The Tayian then looks at Taeh’yung who grins brightly in response.

‘And this one- who is this?’

‘My name is Taeh’yung!’

‘Good for you kid- he has a pretty face- he’ll fetch a good sum,’ the Tayian nods at Taeh’yung who says a bright ‘thank you!’ in reply.

‘ Doesn’t seem like the brightest though,’ one of them remarks.

‘Does it matter?’ one of them blows out purple smoke, tapping at a long thin black cigarette. ‘Most of them would pay even more for that.’
‘But more would pay for an Information Analyst,’ the Tayian smiles at Namjoon. ‘Isn’t that right?’

Namjoon doesn’t reply and he’s smacked across the face again by the guard. The Tayian walks back and sits down on his chair again.

‘Care to explain what you’re doing here? Why you’re here? And why Sario here received a panicked call from Orvan?’ he nods towards his right.

An Orvanan was sitting there, looking remarkably bored though her eyes bore into Namjoon’s with fiery suspicion and distrust.

Namjoon doesn’t reply and honestly the smack across his face is starting to get old.

‘Apparently your “family ship” is a GLA issued trading ship,’ the Tayian peruses a screen in front of him, reading as he says, ‘And I mean I guess this would be normal. You’re retired and you want to work. The Venture Unit could have set you up with a false identity and given you a head-start to a normal life- but…your “crew” is rather particular won’t you say?’

The Tayian leans back, looking Namjoon up and down again before saying, ‘Another former Venture Unit agent who not only turned over most of the Board of Divisions Directors but also killed his own father. A former GI agent- is that even real? Ha! And the crowning glory! Sk’jin, the Khol’isa pirate-lord.’

The Tayian laughs, pushing away his screen.

‘Quite the crew you have there Namjoon, quite the crew.’ He smiles father genially at him. ‘And now here you are, from Orvan, now in Grezma, and now in my ship. Tell me Namjoon, are you here as part of the GLA or Venture Unit’s attempt to clear us out again? They’ve been trying, but they know where they get a lot of their funding from.’

The Tayian laughs again.

‘You can tell me Namjoon- it’s not like the Venture Unit really cares about you. They’re just using you; another terrible report of how brave and honest agents died in an attempt to stop the Alliance.’ The Tayian actually looks at him with some form of fatherly fondness. ‘I would know Namjoon- I used to be part of the GLA Departments- this is a futile mission. Just tell me what it’s about and we’ll let it go.’

Namjoon doesn’t say a word and he’s smacked across the face again, though this time it’s the other side of his face.

‘You won’t get anything out of him,’ another says with a shrug. ‘They’re trained to never speak and this one is from Kutsoglera. He has a lot of experience with pain- it won’t get him to speak. You won’t get anything out of him unless he wants to give you that information.’

‘Well I’m sure he’ll start talking as soon as we get buyers,’ the Tayian smiles, waving his hands in a shooing gesture. ‘All right, good- take them to the private cells. We’ll send out a message saying we have an Information Analyst. We’ll sell him to the highest bidder in the next 24 hours.’

The guard shoves them out of the room, nearly making Taeh’yung trip who grabs onto one of the working slaves for balance.

‘Ah! You saved me! Thank you!’ Taeh’yung beams, throwing an arm over the working-slaves shoulders. The guard shoves them apart, forcing Taeh’yung aside and harshly smacking the working-slave. There’s no reaction from the working-slave and Taeh’yung sulks a little, walking
next to Namjoon.

‘Stop that,’ Namjoon says under his breath.

‘Hm?’

‘You’ll get them into trouble too,’ Namjoon glances over at the working-slaves, their heads bowed, collars standing out stark against their skin. Their uniform is a dull grey tunic over the same coloured trousers. Namjoon spots a plethora of bruises and cuts across visible skin and old scar tissue and lesions. He sighs inwardly.

There was nothing he could do. It would take an entire legion of operative forces to take over this facility and no life could be guaranteed. Innocent or not.

It was no secret that the Venture Unit colluded with the more nefarious side of the black-market for many things. And Namjoon also knows, all too well, that many of the Venture Unit missions and studies are sponsored and or funded by such facilities. Was Namjoon as guilty as those involved for not speaking up about it?

They’re not taken to the center facility or the cell he was being kept in but instead to another lift. They travel down a few floors in complete silence. Namjoon knows he can’t escape without a lot of the working-slaves dying in the process and he himself getting stuck in some place because he doesn’t know his way around. Besides that, Taeh’yung would probably tag along and cause more problems.

Speaking of Taeh’yung, wasn’t he capable of doing some seriously strange things? Why wasn’t he using his abilities to his benefit now? Instead he’s quietly humming under his breath, seemingly skipping a little. Namjoon’s only way of escape would be after he leaves this facility in the hands of whoever buys him. Namjoon rolls his eyes at himself.

The elevator opens into a large space with caged rooms lining up the walls. It’s entirely empty of prisoners or slaves, but there are 3 other guards in the middle, armed and waiting, looking bored as they watched a screen playing some form of entertainment media. This was obviously an observation room, where “clients” or “buyers” could come and inspect the goods. There’s a Medical Bed to the side as well. Namjoon feels sickened.

But as Namjoon takes one step out of the elevator, the guard leading them crumples down, a dagger buried deep into the back of his head. Before Namjoon even has the wherewithal to comprehend what was happening, the trio of guards at the center of the room also all fall over, daggers buried hilt deep into their heads.

‘That was so cool!’ Taeh’yung squeals.

Namjoon turns, eyes wide as he notices that Yoongi is behind him.

Taeh’yung is however, hugging another Being next to Yoongi and Namjoon watches in utter disbelief as the working-slave’s face morphs rather surreally into Hoseok’s. Namjoon notices how 2 of the other working-slaves behind them seem to be utterly bewildered, taken aback by the events folding out in front of them.

They’re raising their hands to their collars and Yoongi moves faster than Namjoon can process and the working-slaves crumple down as well.

*Had Yoongi been there the entire time, not even in disguise like Hoseok, and he didn’t notice?!*
‘Er-hi-?’ Hoseok manages to get out before Taeh’yung reciprocates by hugging Hoseok even harder, pressing a kiss to his cheek.

‘I almost couldn’t contain myself! That was amazing!’ Taeh’yung exclaims, looking deeply impressed. ‘It’s nice to meet you! And you too Yoongi!’

Taeh’yung dives to hug Yoongi but the Human side steps him easily. In response to Taeh’yung’s greeting, Yoongi nods, seemingly unsurprised at Taeh’yung’s greeting.

‘How did you get inside? What about the collars?!’ Namjoon splutters. ‘And where’s Sk’jin?!’

‘Can’t explain- it’s safe- we don’t have time,’ Hoseok says quickly as he starts stripping the working-slave of his uniform and clothes. ‘You’re gonna have to disguise yourself.’

‘Did you kill them?!’ Namjoon asks Yoongi, gesturing to the working-slaves.

‘No.’ Is Yoongi’s monosyllabic response. ‘They’re unconscious.’

Hoseok throws the uniform at Namjoon who easily breaks his cuffs, making Taeh’yung exclaim out in awe again.

‘Sk’jin is waiting for us-‘ Hoseok replies, handing Namjoon a Comm-Device and pausing before he hands Taeh’yung one too. ‘-we have to hurry.’

Namjoon feels elated and is deeply touched that they would actually come back and get him out. He steps after Hoseok and Yoongi at once, nearly entirely disguised as a working-slave. Yoongi hands him a deactivated collar to put around his neck.

‘Um- your friend is fine- we can pretend that we’re escorting him back up,’ Hoseok says as he jogs back into the elevator. Namjoon looks around wildly at the surveillance.

‘They’re fake,’ Yoongi says quietly. ‘Sk’jin checked.’

Namjoon has so many questions. But he knows they’re short on time so he stops himself.

‘But wait.’

Taeh’yung hasn’t moved. He’s holding the Comm-Device in his hands.

‘I still need to set them all free.’

Hoseok and Yoongi stare at Taeh’yung blankly before they both turn simultaneously to stare at Namjoon.

‘Taeh’yung look,’ Namjoon begins desperately as he pushes the Comm-Device into his ear. ‘We don’t have the time or the means to do this-‘

‘Namjoon- is that you?’ Sk’jin’s voice suddenly cuts in into his ear.

‘-Spaces, what?’ Namjoon bristles as though on automatic response to the Khol’isa's voice.

‘Get Taeh’yung on the line.’

‘What?!’

‘I said get Taeh’yung on the line now.’
‘Taeh’yung? Please,’ Namjoon walks ahead, gently pulling the Zhak’gri into the elevator. ‘And put on the Comm-Device, please.’

Taeh’yung frowns a little, the air around him glowing a little and Namjoon is instantly nervous. He puts the device into his ear as he steps inside and his face goes completely blank before he breaks out into a bright and joyful smile, clapping as he joyfully says, ‘I can’t believe this!’.

Namjoon and Hoseok both sharply turn their heads in alarm, staring at the Zhak’gri in confusion. Yoongi on the other hand, *sighs.*

Taeh’yung beams even more brightly and adding to Namjoon and Hoseok’s immense confusion says, ‘It’s so nice to meet you again Jin!’

Yoongi can’t find a way to enter the lowest chambers of the Yisheng Headquarters. It was too densely protected.

So if Yoongi couldn’t find a way to get to Zhoumi, then neither did the Long-Huon Lieutenant. However, he does stay in the Headquarters, living in the Anningan Yisheng’s quarters. Strangely enough, no shadow lingers over him here. No neon-red eyes peer over his shoulders.

Yoongi is hiding rather openly, sitting down on one of the many benches on the second level atrium balconies overlooking the main Lobby downstairs. He sits next to a large potted plant, the leaves hiding him almost perfectly. In order to blend in better, Yoongi had discarded his uniform for a patient’s uniform. The Headquarters was much too populated to be overlooked

‘Has the source of the recent disturbances been discovered?’

Yoongi watches as a Yisheng walks into the Lobby, followed by a younger Yisheng.
‘I heard that there was a strange anomaly?’

‘It was very faint,’ the younger replies. ‘But it’s been 2 days now since the disturbance stopped.’

‘Odd – it simply vanished?’ the Yisheng notices the Long-Huon, smiling politely. Yoongi watches as the Long-Huon pulls on a charming smile.

‘It would seem so – we weren’t able to trace the exact location but it seemed to come from the lower floors.’

Yoongi isn’t surprised by the discussions the Yishengs were having. He’s been overhearing many conversations, citing that a strange disturbance seemed to be resonating from the lowest chambers. This wasn’t coming from Zhoumi, or from the stoic GLA personnel.

This was coming from that strange shadow that followed the Long-Huon Lieutenant around.

Yoongi cannot come up with any information or any idea regarding this entity. All he knew was that it could speak, it could see, and it existed. But its existence was one that Yoongi could not comprehend or sense. And though Yoongi knew that he could move without being seen or noticed, he had a strong sense- an intuitive warning inside his mind, that told him that it would be able to sense Yoongi.

The Long-Huon stretches where he sits. There is no communication amongst the crew members anymore.

The Yisheng, Cahyan, the Venture Unit agent had all landed on Teronko’ng’s outer orbit before vanishing from all tracking radar. This was to be expected, because Teronko’ng was one of the most isolated and controlled locations in the Known Universe.

Yoongi hears it before he sees him. A panicked and maddened frenzy laces through the air, the hair on the back of Yoongi’s neck rises. There’s shouting and Yoongi stands, reaching into the pot for his helmet and TeorSer at once.

A mad form runs out of one of the corridors and Yoongi recognizes him before he rushes into the opposite doorway. But bursting out again, Zhoumi remerges.

The elder Long-Huon looks terrible. His hair is unkempt, his skin pale and sallow, his eyes have a maddened expression to them. Where had he been? What had he seen?

Zhoumi seems to regard the Long-Huon Lieutenant in front of him with shock yet an expression that suggested he wasn’t all too surprised to see him. He yanks out the tubes that are trailing out of his arms, a spray of blood washing over the floors.

‘Zhoumi-‘

Zhoumi runs and tackles the Lieutenant and they fall backwards with a loud smack. The Lieutenant coughs out a pained gasp but the tackle is short-lived.

He was after all, a fully trained operative member of the GIU. His training would be on par with many of the agents of the Venture Unit. He quickly gains the upper-hand, flooring Zhoumi and pushing him down and restraining him.

Zhoumi is half-yelling, half-spluttering as he foams in the mouth, face reddening. Yoongi almost doesn’t recognize him. The Long-Huon Lieutenant is staring down at Zhoumi in horror and confusion.
There’s a scrambling approach of footsteps and a young Yisheng-in-training appears.

‘Calm him down or something!’ The Lieutenant orders at once.

But the moment he says this, Zhoumi’s actions still.

‘Oh, that was fast-‘

Yoongi can see the ploy before it happens. Zhoumi regains the upper-hand as he flips them over, and the Lieutenant cries out in pain as his head hits the hard floor with a cracking sound.

‘Zitao!’ Zhoumi hisses, his tone pitched and nothing like how Yoongi remembers it to be.

‘You need to warn them!’ he speaks in Long-Huon rather than in the GLA Standard. Zhoumi was much more aware than what his appearance might suggest.

The GLA personnel appear, pulling the flailing Long-Huon off of the Lieutenant who was gasping for breath, struggling to regain his composure.

‘NO! NO! LISTEN TO ME! YOU HAVE TO WARN THEM ZITAO! WARN THEM! THEY’RE GOING TO FIND HIM.-‘

Zhoumi’s face is almost purple from the exertion of screaming and struggling. The Lieutenant manages to stand, approaching Zhoumi who was battling against his guards mightily.

‘Find who? Zhoumi, what are you talking about-‘

‘He’s mentally incapacitated,’ one of the personnel says curtly to the Lieutenant, nodding towards a Yisheng who was on stand-by.

‘Are you a relative?’ one of the other officers asks the Lieutenant sharply.

‘Yes- wait please let me speak to him-‘ The Lieutenant lies immediately- trying to reach Zhoumi but the Yisheng reaches for the latter, palms over his temples and Zhoumi instantly weakens in between his guards grip, his head lolling backwards momentarily.

‘We’re sorry you had to see that, we will be taking him back – no visitors allowed under orders of the GLA,’ the guard says to the Long-Huon Lieutenant who has an incredulous expression on his face.

‘Zhoumi-!’

Zhoumi seems to respond to Zitao’s voice, shaking awake.

‘Zitao-‘ he whispers out as he’s pulled away hurriedly.

Zitao pushes past the personnel, behaving as a confused and panicked family member would as he reaches and successfully pulls Zhoumi to himself.

Yoongi cannot hear from this point on and after a few short seconds, watches as Zhoumi is pulled back.

The Long-Huon Lieutenant stands frozen still, a worried and anxious look on his face. Yoongi is about to follow after the GLA personnel when Yoongi realizes he’s not alone.

Looking over the side of the balcony he notes another Being, staring down at the scene calmly.
The Being is wearing full black, a helmet over his head. He doesn’t notice Yoongi who is hidden behind the lush leaves. The GI agent doesn’t follow Zhoumi but instead continues to keep track of the Long-Huon Lieutenant.

The Long-Huon regains his momentum and he starts jogging away, clearly headed for the Anningan Yisheng’s quarters. And then the GI agent follows.

Yoongi moves quickly, staying low and sticking to the wall.

The GI agent is ahead of him and Yoongi knows he’s keeping track of the Lieutenant in the corridor below them. Yoongi maintains a quiet and safe distance, watching with mounting confusion as the agent continues forward, making no move, making no action.

Then as soon as the Long-Huon enters the quarters, the agent spins and throws a startling fast and swift dagger straight at Yoongi. Yoongi dodges it just as quickly- using his screen as a deflective shield of sorts. The screen breaks in his hands, pieces falling over the carpeted ground with little to no noise. Another dagger flies straight at him and Yoongi skids to the side, feeling the blade slice through his hair as he rolls onto the ground, avoiding another dagger that, this time, he catches. He’s not wearing gloves so the blade cuts into his skin but Yoongi doesn’t care. He’s armed and that was all that mattered. Taking a leaping jump, Yoongi quickly and calmly overwhelms the agent.

Yoongi still has the element of surprise- of shocking his opponents whether it be because of his stature, his mannerism, or his identity. And he uses it well.

Yoongi hears footsteps from the corridor underneath them and he hastens to get rid of the agent at hand. But the GI agent recovers, swinging his left arm hard and true and striking Yoongi across his side. Yoongi doesn’t sense anything rupturing but knows that he can’t take another blow there.

He swings his knee up, just as he brings down his forearms over the agent’s shoulders. They’re the same height, so Yoongi cannot use their height difference to his advantage. This was on equal footing and Yoongi thinks quick to gain power over the agent.

The agent, however, seems prepared. He grabs Yoongi by his hair, yanking him backwards, his knee slamming into Yoongi’s lower back. He drops the knife from his hand, landing almost soundlessly over the thickly carpeted floors. This was why the agent had walked here- he was luring Yoongi out.

Yoongi sees stars for a brief moment but this momentary disorientation is all the GI agent needs. Yoongi finds himself lifted from the ground and his back bending backwards as he’s balanced over the railing of the balcony overlooking the living quarter hallway below.

Yoongi glances down briefly and notes that Zitao is struggling to remain calm as he’s being questioned. Yoongi pushes the hand grabbing at his throat away, letting his elbow swing upwards, landing in a quiet muffled blow against the sternum of the agent.

Winded, the agent stumbles back but Yoongi knows that the uniform absorbs most of the damage anyways. He was going to have to get to the weakest point quickly.

All armours had weaknesses in them- but this was not the case with the GI uniform. The all black uniform was almost entirely invulnerable and had no weakness. But Yoongi, unlike this agent in front of him, is experienced fighting other agents.

Sliding on his knees over to the knife, Yoongi strikes the blade down on the foot of the agent. The
blade pushes past his foot, down past the soles of his shoes, and an inch into the floor below. Yoongi twists, pushing himself up on his arms, his legs swinging up to tie his legs around the agent and pulls him down on the ground.

Reaching behind him as he swings up, sitting down with purpose intent over the agent’s chest, Yoongi delivers the blade under the helmet, straight through the agent’s chin.

Breathing harshly but entirely quietly, Yoongi pushes off of the dead agent, finally feeling some of the pain inflicted on his body.

He quickly glances down and finds that Zitao and his guests were no longer there.

Jumping down the balcony, he lands quietly in front of the doorway. He listens closely,- he hears some movement and instantly he moves towards the side, sprinting for the hallway that lead to the gardens surrounding the living quarter perimeter. There were wide open balconies overlooking the woods, and he was on the second floor. He would need to put some distance between himself the crew he was tracking, to figure out whether it was only him that was being targeted or if the crew themselves were under threat.

He could be potentially endangering the Long-Huon and Zhoumi as well by staying here.

In retrospect, Yoongi should have suspected this was going to happen. Too many of their agents had died, and at terribly high efficient rates. They knew. They knew and they were going to move against him. Against them. He’s almost out into the gardens but the moment he does, Yoongi senses them at once.

He barely manages to avoid the figure that comes hurling at him from the woods, swinging upwards towards him through the trees. Yoongi senses another one approaching him from the back, and there’s more of the agents in the trees. He needed to pull them away from the Long-Huon inside lest he be dragged into the fight.

Yoongi runs straight ahead, using the wall as a lever and twists himself in the air, tackling an agent headed for him. His fighting movements are faster than normal, not being weighed down by his uniform though he’s never had a problem before. Yoongi has always been a speedy fighter, but today his movement seems to have increased twice over in speed. Though he’s unable to deliver the usual power at the end of his hits, he moves faster than the agents that try to converge on him.

There’s 4 on him on the balcony and using their slower and taller forms to his advantage, Yoongi climbs over them, his bare feet actually having more grip than he initially thought, easily twists the neck of one of the agents. Using his momentum, he pushes and dives off of the balcony, dragging one of the agents with him backwards, effectively breaking their back.

Yoongi lands on the balls of his feet, balancing himself as best he could with his injuries. But he can’t waste a single second. Yoongi counts them at 7. More could come. They were after all less than a hundred meters from where their home. No, not home. It was more like a storage facility, if Yoongi thinks about it.

A silent and accurately aimed reduced TeorSer shot is fired at him, singing his hair in the back as he darts straight into the woods, 3 of them at his heels.

Diving into the forest, Yoongi is already prepared.

This much was a fact,- no matter how trained, how efficient, how method the GI agents were, Yoongi knew that he would be able to defeat them all. Because the plain and simple truth being
Yoongi had the upper-hand.

He was one of them. He fought like them, trained like them, he was them. But now- Yoongi can think beyond what they were capable of. And because of this- Yoongi knew he was going to defeat them all. He would probably come out with a few injuries- possibly some ruptured organs. Maybe a broken femur. But bones could be healed, organs could be regrown. But Yoongi cannot come back to life, so he knows he has to survive.

The moment he steps deep enough into the woods, Yoongi turns back and counter attacks. They’re surprised,- not expecting such a reaction from Yoongi who seemed determined in running away. This surprise allows him to disarm and easily shoot one of the agents.

He keeps a mental check-list. 1 down, 6 to go. But during this moment, Yoongi finds himself forcefully kneeling as a sharp pain blinds him, radiating from the back of his knee. Had he not been expecting it, this socket would have popped out. Using the TeorSer in his hands as a shield of sorts, Yoongi blocks the knee to his head, firing in the process in quick succession. One of the TeorSer rockets past him, grazing his arm and the flesh on his arm cooks at once. Thrusting his elbow back, he catches the agent approaching him from the back with resounding crack and grapples for his head at once just as another TeorSer fire is shot at him. The agent he pulls down takes the brunt of it and Yoongi manages to take down two more as they run towards him.

3 left.

But they all dodge away from Yoongi, ducking back to the trees.

Yoongi wonders if this is the first time any of them have had to actually fight against someone else other than a fat politician or panicked pirate-lord. Moving quickly, Yoongi pulls out the daggers from the side pockets of the fallen agents around him, staying low and practically crawling away. He hone in on hearing his surroundings rather than seeing. The GI agents were too good at staying hidden and in this dark forest, Yoongi can’t rely on his eyes without a helmet.

He hears the faintest whistle of sharp movement and Yoongi deflects the dagger thrown at him with the one in his hand and barely has time to brace himself as he’s tackled from his side. Hands are deftly reaching for his throat but Yoongi moves too quickly for a lasting result. Striking out right into his captives armpit, severing the tendons there, Yoongi doesn’t push back but instead collapses his arm, making the agent on top of him lose balance and collapse straight into the other dagger Yoongi is holding.

2 left.

Yoongi stands quickly, deflecting yet another dagger and rolling down when a steady flow of sharp metal blades fly at him, mixed in with TeorSer shots. But Yoongi moves closer and closer towards where the agents were.

His body is clearly fatigued so his movements, though so much lighter than before, loses speed. A few of the blades knick past him, but he can stand straight as he launches himself from the floor, pushing down an agent underneath him with his full body weight.

He’s thrown off and Yoongi had been expecting that- however the second agent remaining takes this as initiative to disarm and disorient Yoongi, his hands coming together in a thunderous clap over Yoongi’s ear.

Yoongi’s senses instantly drop away and he’s left completely defenseless. But his body is already moving, regardless of his senses being obstructed. His hands latch onto the agent’s wrists and he
wrenches their arms apart, forcing them to arch inwards and Yoongi brings up a knee to gut the agent right at the hollow under his sternum. The blow is not as strong as Yoongi would want but it’s enough to get him close enough to pull out the dagger in the guard behind the agent’s back. Yoongi makes quick work of digging under the seam of the uniform and slices the agent open from back to chest, a wide arc of blood tainting his vision momentarily.

1 left.

With difficulty he blocks and defends himself from the onslaught of offensive attacks that don’t stop. Yoongi takes the brunt of it, unable to effectively defend himself. Rather than breaking his femur, Yoongi feels at least 3 of his ribs break and he’s sure his intestine has ruptured. There’s a cracking sound and Yoongi, despite his senses being limited, feels his collar bone snap. There’s something warm pouring around his face, and Yoongi knows it’s his own blood. He can’t focus and he knows he has to. But it’s proving nearly impossible.

He can’t extend his arms too much; rather than fighting, or even defending, Yoongi is flailing. He needs his opponent to get closer to him. Dropping down on his knees, Yoongi can only hope his plan works out.

It does.

The agent swings their arm downwards, elbow aiming for Yoongi’s head. But Yoongi shifts at the last second, the force of the attack landing on his shoulder and he knows it’s dislocated at once. But he ignores it and uses his good arm that’s holding the knife and thrusts it into the side of the agent’s neck.

They stumble backwards and Yoongi feels the warmth of their blood pour over his shirt at a rapid pace. The agent twitches on top of him, arms still moving as though to fight Yoongi. Yoongi manages to roll the agent off, heaving as he does so. His ears are still ringing but Yoongi has to move quickly.

Yoongi tears the uniform off of the agent, stumbling in the process and nearly blacking out a few times before he is pulling it over himself. But he needs to move fast so that the uniform doesn’t disintegrate into nothing. The agent is a female of a species Yoongi doesn’t instantly recognize. But the uniform fits him well, the fabric shifting and aligning to his muscles and bones, fixing what needed fixing and supporting and conforming around his injuries, somewhat lessening the pain. He takes her helmet as well, pushing it over his head and readjusting himself to the visor. There was a risk to this, unlike with the helmet, but Yoongi needs this if he’s going to survive the night. If there were agents after him, then he would need to be ahead of them- in order to defend himself. And he can’t do that if walking is painful, let alone running.

He pulls the helmet over his head and he’s just in time to witness a strange glitch takes over the HUD visor and Yoongi is momentarily distracted.

[System OVERRIDE_Y/N]

[Y]

[INITIATING SELF-DESTRUCT]

A strange blistering feeling rips through his scalp and into his skull and Yoongi removes his helmet faster than he’s ever moved. In a wave of black dust that disintegrates into nothing, his helmet crumbles apart. His heart is racing.
He nearly falls backwards but is saved the fall when his back comes in contact with a tree behind him. He slides down, his hands shaking, his entire body trembling. The uniform is really working to keep his body together.

He nearly died.

Yoongi realizes he’s sweating profusely, and there’s blood as well, staining the already blood soaked uniform twice over. His sense come back to him slowly. His breath comes out of him in loud shallow pants and the first thing he hears is the somewhat diminished but slowly increasing high-pitched ringing.

The moment he is able to hear better and his vision also clears, Yoongi stands up and he’s only just a little bit disoriented. The uniform, though lighter than it normally would be seeing as all the weaponry attached to it is gone, is still heavy on him. But the weight grounds him and shapes him up. He notes that the bodies of most of the agents are entirely gone already. Save for the female behind him.

As Yoongi walks away from the woods back towards the Yisheng Headquarters, he doesn’t know why but he feels strangely guilty for leaving her out in the open.

The sky is darkening and Yoongi forces himself to concentrate. His mind felt strangely blank- almost lifted. He didn’t understand what it was- or why everything around him looked so strangely different yet so familiar. With difficulty, he jumps up and scrambles into the balcony of the Yisheng living quarters and peers inside. It’s empty- the Long-Huon had left. He checks to see if there were any signs of disturbances but all was safe. So the Long-Huon was safe. For now.

Stepping into the room, Yoongi looks for a screen of any sort he can use. This was the Anningan Yisheng’s room- he should have a screen he could use in here, and one that allowed him to connect to the crew members of the Stravechi Nava.

Leaning heavily against the wall, Yoongi carefully opens the drawers of the desk over which notebooks and diaries were scattered. He finds a slightly older model of a screen but finds that it’s still fully charged. And just as he had hoped, the Anningan still kept the communication frequency for the Stravechi Nava on this screen. Activating it, Yoongi digs around for a Comm-Device and finds another rather outdated one but it would do.

Accessing the channels from the GLA Tracking switch, Yoongi instantly finds the Long-Huon Lieutenant. He was on his way back to his own apartment, where the Heladian was sleeping in his strangely cryogenic state of unconsciousness. Yoongi watches the small dot of light moving across the tracking screen and to his horror, finds that he’s tilting forward, eyes closing. He can’t afford to get knocked out. He needed healing.

It was ironic because though he was in a place meant for healing, Yoongi can’t allow himself to be seen. He quickly exits the room the same way he had come in. Dropping down on all fours, Yoongi leaves behind drops of blood on the grassy floor. Swaying dangerously, Yoongi stands up and heads back into the woods. If he’s attacked now, he won’t be able to fight back effectively. But he meets nothing and no one. Had they truly thought he was dead?

He needed medical attention. Immediately.

And the only thing he can think of is returning there.

He hasn’t been down there in a long time. He’s been away longer before- on missions. But this time, it felt wrong to even think of going back. But everything tells him to go back. His mind tells
him that he was currently going through something called “gut instinct”. Pausing, Yoongi tries to think clearly again.

He needed the medical attention, and he needed a helmet. He would also need to arm himself again. There was no way he could carry out K’mar’s mission if he wasn’t able-bodied and armed.

His feet carry him, his body making the decision before he can fully comprehend.

He tries to remember everything about the place- this would be the first time he’s gone in after being aware. After being truly Awake. After understanding that this would be a memory for him to process. An epoch in the pages of his life.

Or would it be like every other time he as returned here.

The doorway is hidden rather openly. It’s a small shack of a room that has stairs that takes you down to another door.

Yoongi simply pushes through and he’s lead into an empty dome-roofed room. Low pedestals stood on the ground and he weaves his way around it. There was no security in this place. You didn’t need any either.

No one would ever think to ever look here. To ever come here.

There’s a door on the opposite end and Yoongi enters the narrow and cold hallway that turns left inwards.

The hallway is immensely long and dark. There are countless doors on either side. It’s utterly silent and the air is so still it was as though Yoongi was the first Being in an age to have stepped foot here.

He’s never thought about the other doors before. He’s never thought about what could be behind those doors. He’s never felt the urge to open them either. He’s also never known which of these doors was his. But his feet stop far into the hallway and as though by muscle memory, his body moves as his mind watches. The door swings open silently and easily. There are no handles. Just simply pushing forward.

It’s a small space. No windows. A narrow bed of sorts that lights up and throws light into the room. This is where Yoongi used to Sleep. Where he used to Dream. Where he was made Known of his missions.

It’s frighteningly empty. Beside the bed is a device similar to a helmet. On a shelf by the wall are his uniforms, helmets, and other gear.

It’s so empty and void.

Unable to help himself, Yoongi leaves the room and goes straight into the room opposite his.

An agent was Sleeping, helmet attached to their head. The glow of their bed illuminating the room faintly. Even with a living being inside the room, it felt deadened and lifeless.

Yoongi steps back into his room and quickly lays back down on the bed. This is the first time he’s aware as he’s being healed. The bed glows, clearly scanning him.

Mechanical arms unfold and work over Yoongi’s body and his head. He watches as his skin is re-sewn, his wounds sealed over with Tissueplast, and his bones knitted over. It’s faster, more
efficient than the current standard of Medical Beds or Pods. Yoongi doesn’t feel any additional pain- he dimly realizes that this was probably because he was used to it.

Muscles burning and bones feeling like they were iced, Yoongi stands again. He reaches for a helmet, images of the helmet disintegrating in his hands comes to mind. He leaves the helmet and stocks up on his weapons and gear.

Yoongi steps out just in time to find a long line of agents walking past. He quietly joins them at the rear and easily takes out the rear agent. Silently immobilizing them and taking his place as he slots on his helmet.

He’s thinking of separating from the unit as they walk out when he realizes that this unit of 15 agents were headed after the Long-Huon Lieutenant and the Heladian.

[INCOMING JOINT MISSION FROM HEADQUARTERS]

[ACCEPT]

[RECEIVING DATA]

[MISSION 9357-2595-1109]

[COORDINATES _SERDESAS]

[OBJECTIVE: ASSASSINATION]

[TARGET: LIEUTENANT HUANG ZITAO]

[OBJECTIVE: CAPTURE]

[TARGET: MIN-SEOK]

[ASSASSINATION METHOD_HELADIAN ANTI-CORE]

IMPLEMENT_OBSERVE

CAPTURE_INTERROGATION

[CAUTION_HELADIAN ANTI-CORE UNSTABLE]

[PREVENTIVE CORE INITIATE TO STABILIZE]

[CAPTURE_LIVE]

[MISSION 9357-2595-1109 EXECUTE IMMEDIATELY]

Yoongi studies his fellow agents- unaware of his presence amongst them. There was a saying from Earth- his own Human roots.

A wolf amongst sheep.

Or was he the shepherd?

They step out into the cool night, headed for a series of Drift-08’s parked under the trees.

Did they see it too? The light of the moon edging along the blades of grass, the sound of the rustling of trees in the wind, the way the ground is soft under his feet. Could they hear how wildly
his heart was beating? Could they sense him, the anomaly amidst them.

But were they just like their rooms. Deadened and empty, unaware, unknown, and nonexistent?

Yoongi’s body is buzzing- not from the adrenaline of what just happened or the result of the medication working into his system. It’s not because of how if his fellow agents study him properly, he would be discovered and he definitely wouldn’t walk away from this fight, or how he’s become aware of his standing as a Being who was now fully accepting and understanding his place in the Universe. Of understanding where and why he was in the Universe. It wasn’t a fear of dying that had gripped Yoongi. Rather it was the fear of being utterly forgotten.

His body is thrumming, his senses overwhelmed and everything is reborn to him. He was living the first of his memories right here and now. He was living the past, the present, and the future of his being, his existence.

Yoongi feels Alive.

(Book’s Note)

Please don’t hate me when I say that I liked The War over Exact. I liked Exact a lot but The War just takes it for me. and also please never let Kim Jongdae my bias and my grown ass man of a son, write lyrics because if that ain’t some poetry shit about handjobs then idk what it is anymore.

And does anyone like Game of Thrones.

Because I DO I LOVE GAME OF THRONES AND THIS SEASON IS ALREADY KILLING ME WOOOOO I AM SO READY FOR THIS

And to celebrate GoT7 (lol) I made moodboards!!!
BTS in Game of Thrones

Exo in Game of Thrones

Got7 in Game of Thrones

And if anyone is curious, I am House Tyrell. *cries because of Season 6*
By the time Yoongi reaches Šerdesas, he feels remarkably healthy. The only indication of pain or injury stems from his lower abdomen. He had sent a message to K’mara, relaying all that has happened. However, he keeps the information of the GI Base to himself. Just for now.

They’re flying over the Capital City now, headed past the Trade Sector and closer to the Long-Huon Lieutenant’s apartment. There are tall infra-cities spread across the Capital City, interconnected by glimmering polarized highways. The lower magnetic-field highways are broader strips of light, providing rather solid ribbons of colour lights as the backdrop for the silvery polarized ones. Lights from the metropolis shine like stars through the highways, reflecting the stars above like a mirror. Sunlight seems to mold over it, like molten gold. It’s a magnificent sight to behold even though Yoongi knows he should be concentrating on the task at hand.

It was just.

Everything felt different.

Approaching target point.

The plan was to apprehend and interrogate the Heladian, and assassinate the Long-Huon. The Lieutenant had arrived at his apartment no more than an hour ago according to Yoongi’s own tracking device. The Heladian seemed to be finally waking up, the main reason why the Long-Huon had gone rushing back here.

Yoongi and 15 of the GI agents slow down and like preying birds, slowly circle downwards. He sees them as little points on his HUD visor, tracking their movements. Yoongi was at the very top.

Zitao wouldn’t know of their coming. Yoongi doesn’t know if K’mara would see or read his message.

They swoop lower, their invisible forms creating warps in the imagery of the metropolis below. They drift down past the highest point of the infra-city tower- the Long-Huon lived on the 89th floor and they would reach it shortly.

‘Deliver message,’ Yoongi says quietly. ‘Recipient Lieutenant Huang Zitao of the GIU. Current location 9357-2595-1109. Using private channel for device S_NAVA_ZT-68.’

An error sign appears and Yoongi tries again. The line seems distorted, unavailable and offline. Had something happened from the root-source of the channel? They drop even lower, now only 200 storey above their designated location.

He was mid-air, nearly 2000 meters above the ground; if he tried anything, he would be shot down immediately. How could he warn the Long-Huon? He detects movement and notices how the lower GI agents break from their camouflage and reveal a long nozzle TeorSer, the device
Yoongi doesn’t stop to think.

He deactivates his Hover-08, shutting it down immediately and Yoongi *plummets*. He careens the Hover-08 dangerously close to the windows of the tower and when he falls past the Long-Huon’s apartment window, his eyes lock with neon-red eyes, glowing bright in shock.

Yoongi looks behind him, noticing how half of the GI agents were now following him. Yoongi continues to plummet, keeping an eye on the dropping levels. Something shoots past him- TeorSer fire. Though motionless and the engines aren’t activated, Yoongi steers the device until he’s successfully flipped the other way round. TeorSer fire falls around him and ricochet off of the protective shield around the Transporter, providing Yoongi with a nearly infallible security system. According to the scans of his visor, the GI agents following him were gaining up on him rapidly. Unlocking the TeorSers and arming both hands with them, Yoongi makes quick calculations; making sure the magnetic security system was set only on his legs, Yoongi waits just as the other agents hover close enough and he rotates himself mid-fall so that he fell upright again.

His aim is true and the agents are sent careening off to the sides, crashing into nearby buildings.

He activates the Hover-08 again and he feels his ribs burn at the sudden pressure fluctuation around his body. The other agents shoot past him and Yoongi easily takes out 3 more of their numbers.

[PURSUIT_COORDINATES HIGHWAY 02_55-SRDS]

[ASSEMBLE]

So the Long-Huon and the Heladian had made it out- Yoongi’s warning had worked.

The agents who were flying towards him stop and rocket downwards instead, closely followed by a whole new unit of agents. Yoongi counts them all at 14.

And none stop to take Yoongi out.

Yoongi redirects the Hover-08, activating the security straps again as he chases after the speeding agents.

This was their main mission after all. Yoongi easily takes out the agents in front of him, a strange sense of wonder settling into him. These agents weren’t fighting for their lives or their continuity- their own existence was not a concept or priority they kept in regard. What mission dictated, they followed.

Yoongi had been like that.

He had followed every single mission, every single operation, without thought, without consequence, without understanding. Yoongi fires again, each shot hitting the agents at the back of their heads and the Hover-08’s detonate into bright specks of light, crashing down the face of buildings. Yoongi feels a strange sense of heaviness tugging at the lining of his stomach at the sight of the destruction. And it had nothing to do with his injuries.

Tracking the Long-Huon’s location, Yoongi finds them at the lowest pier of the infra-city. Night had not come to the Capital City yet unlike in the Yisheng Headquarters so visibility is high.

[GROUND_UNIT_SET]
Yoongi grimaces at the message; there were more other than the aerial unit.

A shift in the horizon catches Yoongi’s attention and he notices how the polarized highways shift. Šerdesas activated certain highways during peak traffic hours and deactivated them during low traffic hours. They were currently in one of the more populated zones, being a commercial infra-city with a high number of Šerdesas’s population living in these areas. The highways were being re-set again.

‘Connect to Šerdesas highway controls. Activate manual control over coordinates district code 02_55-SRDS and its extensions.’

A map lights up on his visor.

‘Activate highway 02_55_43-SRDS.’

Yoongi pulls away and shoots across rather than descend down vertically.

A light glimmers and Yoongi catches sight of 6 bright explosions of light go off as the agents collide with the appearance of the roads.

‘Activate highway 02_55_49-SRDS.’

Another 4 light up and Yoongi reaches the lowest pier the moment a Hover6 pulls out from an alley, closely followed by small but powerful shots from sniper TeorSers. Yoongi follows the line of the projectile and finds more agents standing near bridge rafters. Yoongi’s TeorSer isn’t meant for long-ranged assassination accuracy but for close-range combat instead.

There’s loud screaming and 9 jet-black Hover-08’s whip past overhead, shortly followed by 3 more of Yoongi’s surviving unit. Yoongi chases after them immediately and they’re in one long, fast chase over the lower magnetic-field highways. Yoongi can see the Long-Huon many ways ahead- but mainly because of the red glow that sees to emanate from his being.

Yoongi pushes for more speed.

The moment he’s close enough, Yoongi fires at the closest agents and their Hover-08’s crash into buildings and bridges and some even into the tiered parks Šerdesas was unique for in their architecture.

The same gnawing sensation builds inside of Yoongi and he doesn’t know what it is. He’s almost distracted by the large cloud of flame that rises up from a smaller infra-city tower, his eyes latching onto the sight of Beings being flung out by the sheer force of it.

Yoongi looks away as quickly as he can and speeds up closer to the agent in front of him. The agent has a long-distance projectile TeorSer. Calculating his distance, Yoongi deactivates his safety system and switches off his Hover-08 and he flings across the distance between himself and the other agent.

As he lands he definitely feels his ribs dislodge again from the reforming setting his uniform had pushed it into. The magnetic paneling on his suit attaches him firmly to the other Hover-08 and Yoongi is quick unseat the unsuspecting agent by deactivating his safety paneling.

He spots how the agents in the front are already firing but the Long-Huon is a good driver, swerving through the intense later afternoon traffic with precision and ease of a veteran driver. Yoongi aims and fires, driving through flames of iridescent blue and purple flames as the Hover-08’s explode.
However, he’s no longer ignored.

Yoongi dodges the TeorSer aimed at him, aiming and firing behind himself, not entirely sure if he’s met the mark.

One of the agents further ahead manages to fire at the Heladian who was seated on the back of the Hover6. Yoongi takes the assassin agent out neatly. He zips past the flames of the Hover-08 and is in time to watch how the Heladian falls back, unseated from the Hover6. However, a blurred but glaring neon-red glows in the form of a full-fledged Being for a fraction of a second and picks the Heladian up again.

[HELADIAN_ANTI-CORE IMPLEMENTED]

Heladian anti-core? According to what he’d read earlier about Heladians, their species had the ability to manipulate their Life-force to an almost identical replication of the formidable frozen nature of their home-planet. With their in-built ability to conform Life-force into frost, Heladian’s were a formidable and powerful species though they were notably very peaceful in their diplomacy and policies. What did the Heladian anti-core imply?

[CAPTURE HELADIAN_INITIATE]

The Heladian is secured back on the Hover6 and Yoongi does a quick head count. Even more of the were appearing. They were already locked onto the Long-Huon’s coordinates and were probably actively tracking him.

‘Activate highways 02_58_132-SRDS, 02_58_134-SRDS, 02_58_135-SRDS.’

Yoongi lifts away from the pillar of bright fire that erupts, static shivers through the polarized highways like the final beat of a dying pulse.

The light of the eruption is so bright, the sky seems to darken momentarily and its surrounding shine all the brighter and Yoongi watches how Transporters in the highways are thrown back in ripples of energy, breaking apart with the Beings it carried. He watches as light seems to refract and bend as polarized highways erupt around each other, disrupting their electric charge and catalyzing more chaotic detonations down the highways. He watches how nearby building faces shatter, showering sharp shards of glass in large raining radius down on the streets and tiers.

Yoongi is flung back from the sheer power of the force of the explosion despite having moved away. His Hover-08 flips through the air a few times, stopping just in time before crashing into the face of a building.

Large sections of the Capital City loses power, and Yoongi watches how one of the power facility towers gives out and hundreds of surrounding Transports malfunction, lighting systems spark and fail, water systems flood, and in sections, highways lose light and Transporters fall down to their fiery demise.

[REASSEMBLE]

[UNIT 2 RETURN TO BASE]

[UNIT 3 DEPLOY_EXECUTE MISSION 9357-2595-1109]

Yoongi knows what it is. He understand that gut-wrenching feeling. He has a name for it now.

His Awareness had caused this. His desire to live, his desire to understand, his Mind.
He caused this.

Guilt courses through his vein and Yoongi understands.

The Užkulisai is docked neatly in Debris 149, the Pluns’na right next to her. There were no visible signs of obstructive scans or search conducted on the exterior of the ship though it was crawling with Para-Bots. The Pluns’na was strapped down to a gravity-lift, attached to a series of small docking platforms and a few guards were running about, getting into their own Transporter, clearly headed over to whatever shit-storm Yoongi had started and left behind. And with that huge slaver-ship in the way as well, the whole of Grezma was in a state of panic and frenzy.

‘We should wait for them to leave first-‘ Hoseok begins but Yoongi flies them straight into the Debris and Hoseok glares at the back of the Human’s head.

‘Yoongi-?’ Sk’jin begins too but Yoongi is already accessing the weapons-control panel and Hoseok dives across his seat to stop Yoongi from opening fire.

Yoongi side-eyes Hoseok who has a reprimanding expression on his face, countering Yoongi with exasperation.

‘We’ll draw unwanted attention to ourselves,’ Hoseok explains, clearly struggling with Yoongi who hasn’t budged an inch away from the weapons-control panel.

‘But we should clear out any potential threat we may encounter.’ Yoongi argues blandly.

‘We do not engage unless we’re attacked first-‘

‘-we’ve already been attacked-‘

‘-in a new environment.’ Hoseok’s face turns a little red with exertion, clearly pulling at Yoongi’s hands that is inches from the surface of the screen.
Sk’jin rolls his eyes, leaning over both of them and takes over the controls, guiding them over to a shelf under a Debris above them.

‘Yoongi, while I am not against violent displays of aggression and general bad-assery, I think it’s best if we stay low-key,’ Sk’jin mumbles. Yoongi sighs in defeat and nods.

‘Good- we wait for as much of them to leave and then we go get our ship. So right now what we do is plan.’ Sk’jin leans back, stifling a groan of pain, arms crossed. ‘As we have lost the isotope-tracking on our beloved Captain, we can’t pinpoint his direct location though no doubt he is inside the ship.’

‘He won’t get killed either,’ Hoseok chimes in. ‘They’ll find out his identity quickly enough and will probably sell him off to the highest bidder around. Information Analysts fetch an exceedingly high-price.’

‘Who exactly are they?’ Sk’jin gestures towards where the slaver-ship should be, on the other side of Grezma.

‘If they’re here in Grezma, an outpost run by former Venture Unit agents, then it’s most likely that they’re affiliated with the Isbahaysiga Alliance,’ Hoseok says grimly. ‘Probably what remains of the Alliance anyways.’

‘Aren’t they supposed to have been completely eradicated?’ Sk’jin questions, raising his eyebrows.

‘Networks like this,’ Hoseok nods in the general direction of the slaver-ship though his eyes never leave the Debris they’re staking out. ‘They’re allowed to exist by the Venture Unit in exchange for units or information.’

‘That’s not much of a surprise,’ Sk’jin shifts around to make himself comfortable. ‘If they were this close to Orvan, then I’m guessing they’re the ones who take in most of the Orvanan slaves. They’re probably out for me too.’

‘Regardless of who they’re out for- I don’t think they’re directly involved with pirates. Judging by the ships, and judging by the gear the guard here were wearing, I think they’re more of a “proper” business-network.’ Hoseok ruminates.

‘We could find more information about them if they use this outpost regularly right?’ Sk’jin taps along the screen. ‘Your buddy could have stored information regarding the ship.’

Hoseok grimaces at the term before shaking his head. ‘No- outposts don’t carry information like that- it’s too risky.’

‘What about in your buddy’s personal screen?’ Yoongi asks.

‘Well he could-’ Hoseok begins, clearly no longer feeling the need to correct the wrong labels.

‘Here.’ Yoongi pulls out a small sleek clear device from inside his clothes and hands it to Hoseok.

‘And you didn’t think this was necessary before this?!” Hoseok exclaims, quickly activating the device.

‘No.’

Hoseok groans quietly as he goes through the content.
‘Yoongi I think we’re clear- let’s go get our ship,’ Sk’jin says, peering out his side of the window for any incoming shuttles.

Yoongi lifts off from the shelf and heads for the Debris holding their ship.

‘Find anything?’ Sk’jin asks, glancing over at Hoseok who is scrolling down, tapping at random across the ship.

‘Yeah…and…this is not going to be easy,’ Hoseok frowns before he looks up. ‘This isn’t just part of the Isbahaysiga Alliance. This slaver-ship is run by a ring of pirate-lords, GLA officers, Venture Unit agents, and outpost governors. I think they’re trying to create their own Alliance- to replace the Isbahaysiga Alliance.’

‘There’s more of the ships?’ Sk’jin asks as they approach the landing dock.

‘Possibly- if we make ourselves known, or if we involve ourselves in this- not only could we jeopardize this mission completely, but hand them information and tools that would prove detrimental to the Known Universe,’ Hoseok’s eyes don’t leave the screen, narrowing them as he reads more. ‘What’s worse, we don’t know who could be involved, so even if we were to report this, it could prove fatal or at the very least, dangerous not only to us, but the Beings captured as slaves.’

‘A ship that large could be carrying close to a 100,000 Beings in it,’ Sk’jin muses, thinking back to the overall size of the slaver-ship. ‘The engines are on the side, leaving the entire central hull past the Bridge free for “storage”.’

‘Why don’t we report this to the Yishengs.’ Yoongi says unexpectedly as he lands the shuttle down next to their ship.

Hoseok seems stunned at Yoongi’s suggestion.

‘You mean to Yisheng Amme-?’

‘No- call the Yisheng public line; the public line is untraceable,’ Yoongi explains. ‘It was created for those who live in warzones across the Universe.’

‘That could actually work,’ Sk’jin nods. ‘If we report it, how long do you think it will take for the Yishengs- or well, anyone to come here?’

‘There are no nearby Yisheng stations in any of the Systems close by,’ Hoseok frowns, already searching for possible locations. ‘They would have to come directly from Tayi.’

‘Then it could take a full day, a little more,’ Sk’jin calculates quickly.

‘Do we wait for them to arrive?’ Hoseok inquires as they step out of the Transporter, staying low just in case there were K’it’y guards around. Yoongi however simply just walks over towards the Užkulisai without caution.

‘If the Yisheng come and stop this, Namjoon will be taken in for questioning and by extension us,’ Sk’jin shakes his head. ‘It’s possible that the jury might be able to bail him out.’

‘No- let’s…let’s not get the jury involved,’ Hoseok says as they follow after Yoongi.

‘Why not?’ Sk’jin questions curiously.
‘I don’t know if Namjoon would like me telling you this but, remember I told you that Lisai didn’t have the language you were speaking in registered in her database?’ Hoseok pauses by the entrance to the airlock antechamber room, allowing Sk’jin to enter first, locking up behind them.

Sk’jin nods in response, ignoring the welcome message from Lisai, taking in the dirty boot prints that messed up the floors of their ship. They had probably conducted a manual search of the ship.

‘Namjoon suspects that Lisai has been compromised- her database is barricaded or at least somehow restricted,’ Hoseok turns to look Sk’jin straight in the eye, not hiding the fact that he’s clearly looking for any indication or sign that this was something Sk’jin knew.

Sk’jin however is genuinely taken aback.

‘That’s not possible,’ Sk’jin argues flatly. ‘The GLA database is limitless and accessible to all living Beings in all corners of the Known Universe- you can’t “block” or keep away certain information like that- it’s impossible.’

Hoseok doesn’t let off the interrogative look and Sk’jin huffs in irritation.

‘Just because I was speaking in a language Lisai didn’t have in her database doesn’t mean I was involved in this Hoseok,’ Sk’jin declares firmly. ‘And if you want to know, I was speaking in Long-Huon, a language that should very well be included in the database considering it’s extremely important for translating as most of the GLA authorized pilots from the Trade Sector are from Long-Huo.’

‘That may be so, but wouldn’t you agree that it’s too much of a coincidence that it just so happens to be the language you were speaking?’ Hoseok shoots back. ‘If this situation was reversed, then you too wouldn’t just let me off.’

‘Hoseok look-‘ Sk’jin begins but they’re both startled by the sound of loud obvious sounds of a fist fight of sorts followed by a shriek and running footsteps.

A K’it’y guard comes bursting in but is met with Hoseok’s fist before he can even begin to regret his decision to run. Yoongi pops his head past the corner and says, ‘The ship is cleared. We should move.’

‘I’ll go start the ship, you two get rid of this lot,’ Hoseok mumbles, casting a wary glance at Sk’jin who rolls his eyes and bends over to grab the unconscious K’it’y’s booted legs.

Yoongi had taken out 4 of their numbers while the other had run away. They easily shove them out and Sk’jin waits for Yoongi in the Hangar as he pulls the Pluns’na into the Užkulais.

Sk’jin waits by the control screen by the Hangar gate, watching as Yoongi carefully maneuvered the Pluns’na. Why would the database be compromised? That too for the Long-Huon language? What else were they restricted from? If the database they had access to through Lisai was compromised, then all the screens, operation systems, even their Navigation Codes and information regarding outposts, current and recent changes to information regarding potentially dangerous locations were now all questionable facts.

‘Is it all set?’

‘Just need to secure the Pluns’na,’ Yoongi responds, prompting Sk’jin into action. He lowers the Hangar gates and walks over to Yoongi to secure the magnetic strips. The Hangar was a mess of course- all of their cargo had been pulled out and had been in the process of being opened.
‘Lisai, is anything missing from our cargo?’ Sk’jin asks, glancing over at the OrTanks that were luckily not open. They would require the access code for that. However other storage freight were opened and their contents strewn about. Sk’jin is positive that manual searches were conducted not for the purpose of actually finding something, but to irk and goad shuttle owners.

‘None are missing.’

Sk’jin grimaces, wondering if he should or could trust Lisai now that he knows.

They quickly make their way to the Bridge as Hoseok starts up the engines, checking the systems for any sign of tampering or error.

‘Everything all right?’ Hoseok asks, not looking away from his screens.

‘We’re good to take off,’ Sk’jin replies as he foregoes his usual station and instead takes up the Navigator’s Mast.

‘So what do we do?’ Hoseok asks, turning on his seat and addressing Sk’jin as Yoongi too looks up from his seat in the tower-mast.

‘First we need to contact the Yisheng public line- they need to extract Namjoon out of the slaver-ship,’ Sk’jin states their objectives. ‘The slaver-ship is still near Grezma- according to Keghtsa’s screen, they’re still loading the ship with slaves from the cells. They’re also waiting for the Orvan I think- seeing as Keghtsa was so kind as to report me to them.’

‘If they leave, we won’t have the chance to get Namjoon out or even follow them without being detected,’ Hoseok wipes at his face.

‘No- we can’t afford to let them go,’ Sk’jin states firmly. ‘We need to board them as soon as possible but we won’t be able to approach them without being detected- we’d be giving ourselves up.’

‘We have a time-frame of less than a day to penetrate the slaver-ship, retrieve Namjoon, and get out,’ Hoseok calculates, ignoring the sudden amused grin on Sk’jin’s face as he mouths ‘penetrate?’ quietly, shoulders shaking in suppressed laughter.

‘I’ve sent the message to the Yisheng public line with the coordinates of the slaver-ship,’ Yoongi interrupts. ‘We have a day to break Namjoon free.’

‘What if we can get close to the slaver-ship without getting detected,’ Hoseok asks, ‘Then what do we do after that?’

‘Someone has to stay back here of course,’ Sk’jin replies at once. ‘Because I stand out too much, I will stay back. Then that would mean you and Yoongi would enter the ship, possibly disguise yourselves as one of the guards and infiltrate their ranks.’

‘You make it sound easy,’ Hoseok frowns.

‘Simple plans are often the ones that work the best,’ Sk’jin counters.

‘It can work,’ Yoongi states from the front. ‘We can use the uniform of the Grezma guards and then apprehend the uniform of the guards aboard the slaver-ship.’

Hoseok’s face scrunches a little in thought, clearly planning the entire plan in his head.
‘It’s the only plan we have right now that we can pull off with most amount of success,’ Sk’jin states plainly. ‘We don’t have time.’

Hoseok nods grimly, turning back to the control-panel and activating the thrusters; ‘We can take the shuttle back to one of the Debris with the prison cells, and you can come pick us up later. Or we will return- we’ll keep open communication and you can track us on Yoongi’s… *special* tracker.’

Sk’jin jumps a little when Yoongi hands him his screen, having not seen him move earlier.

‘Sk’jin, how are you?’ the Human asks, leaning in to look Sk’jin clearly in the face.

Sk’jin glances at Hoseok with some surprise but nonetheless replies, ‘I’m fine Yoongi, really. Don’t worry about me.’

‘Will you be able to commandeer the Užkulisai while Hobster and I sneak penetrate the slaver-ship?’

‘Look I know I could have chosen a different word-‘

‘Yes I can Yoongi,’ Sk’jin sniggers as Hoseok huffs, blowing his hair off of his face and getting up from his chair. ‘I promise you I won’t just faint about.’

‘Wait- you can fly?’ Hoseok asks in surprise.

‘It’s a little unbelievable if the pirate-lord of one of the most notorious pirating networks didn’t know how to *fly,*’ Sk’jin intones with a wry smile, leaving the Navigator’s Mast and stepping into the cockpit.

‘You… lied to Namjoon?’ Hoseok sounds slightly disdain’d.

‘Well,’ Sk’jin throws himself into the chair Hoseok normally occupied and flexes his hands. ‘When you put it *that* way- it makes me sound like I did it out of malice.’

‘…so you lied out of… benevolence?’ Hoseok raises one eyebrow.

‘I did it for fun,’ Sk’jin smiles, brushing his hair back. ‘It’s easy messing up with Namjoon.’

‘But at what cost,’ Hoseok grumbles as he leaves the Bridge, following Yoongi closely.

Hoseok was still clearly thinking about their access to database and of Lisai’s restrictions but was putting it at a pause for now. Sk’jin sighs out in relief, because he needed time to think about this as well.
Unit 3 had compromised of 8 agents. Each of which Yoongi had trapped and caught, rummaging through their items and taking all of their gears and gadgets. He finds a series of compressor-syringes inside their uniform pockets and pulls them all out. They’re clear tubes with thin white markings on them. His visor scans the syringes and separates them into 2 types. Anti-Core, and Preventive Core. They had shot the Heladian with the Anti-Core. The Preventive Core was to counter the Anti-Core because it wasn’t stable. Did the Anti-Core subdue the Heladian abilities?

Yoongi pockets all of them and watches with increasing guilt mounting inside his chest as another agent twists in anguish, body arching to the point of nearly breaking, as they couldn’t handle the Android Core.

None of the 8 could handle it. Not a single one.

Yoongi removes his helmet, watching with his bare and uncovered eyes as each agent faded into nothingness. He would remember each of them, and he would remember them. Mark them into his memory and remember them.

Because no one else remembered them.

His body aches, even his uniform and the medication he consumed couldn’t prevent him from feeling pain anymore. Yoongi is sure that he’s bleeding out from somewhere. He’s had to stem the bleeding from his nose, breathing in only from his mouth though the air he breathed was laced with the tangy and heavy taste of blood.

The Long-Huon was headed for Galūnė; Šerdesas’s neighbouring sister-planet. It was a good idea to leave the planet, but if the GI were sent after them again, they wouldn’t be stopped. Yoongi isn’t sure how they’re being tracked, but he knows that if another mission is issued out. They would get caught again.

Yoongi checks his screen. There is no news from K’mara.

He waits inside the tiny room next to the one the Long-Huon had rented an hour ago, carrying with him an unconscious Heladian. Yoongi closes his eyes, not breathing, and empties his mind as they walk out and past his room. The shadow behind Zitao doesn’t notice him.

But at this proximity, Yoongi can hear him.

He hadn’t heard him before, having only used the frequency channel he had hacked from the Stravechi Nava channels. But here, like this, Yoongi can hear him clear as day. Could no one other than the Long-Huon hear him?
Yoongi couldn’t listen in on their conversation, as their Comm-Devices were offline. The Long-Huon had however, used a public line to call K’mara, giving her their location. So was K’mara ignoring his message?

But for what reason?

They walk past, clearly headed out. Yoongi knows that the GI agents have stopped, returning back to base. No new mission had been sent out, no new order had come in. It was quiet from base.

*Great acting skills. Ever considered getting a career in actin’*?

‘Shut the fuck up,’ the Long-Huon growls out in a low voice.

Yoongi steps out the moment they turn the corner.

*That sounded more angry than drunk-shit stop!*

The Shadow could detect him.

*They’re here- they’re here fuck shit how?!

‘Stop fucking freaking out – you’re not going to get hurt- it’s just me and Min-Seok!’ the Long-Huon hisses.

*How did they even find us? Tracking us in the city should be nearly impossible!*  

The Lieutenant replies back in a low voice but Yoongi can’t hear.

*Y’know that if you really want to escape you should probably leave snowman behind- logically speaking that’s for the better.*

There’s no response. The Shadow has a logical and tactical point. Yoongi pauses by the hallway.

*Figured as much. ‘sides you made a promise so I guess you’re gonna die today kiddo- it was nice knowin’ ya.*

‘Will you shut up?! I’m trying to think here-’

Yoongi steps out entirely and is finally face to face with the Long-Huon. The Heladian in his arms is horrifyingly pale and drawn. Yoongi can barely detect any movement from his form, and as Yoongi runs a brief scan over the Heladian, finds that his heart was beating at an abnormally slow speed.

*…so what do we do?*

The Shadow is clearer to Yoongi now. Yet it still remains a blurred form but Yoongi can tell that it is taller than him. He can’t detect a face or proper features but the general outline is there. It floats, hunched and almost deformed in the air but the head is clear and the outline of low horns extend from its shadowed form.

*Should I tackle him, blink twice for yes, once for no- come’on work with me here.*

His eyes, however, are striking and vivid and Yoongi has a hard time believing that no one else can see it.

Yoongi moves cautiously and carefully. Any sudden movements would trigger an attack and he
doesn’t know how he would combat this Shadow. He takes out the small device from his inner-lining pocket and tosses it to the Long-Huon who catches it, looking away briefly.

Yoongi steps away immediately and out of the hallway.

He pauses inside the room he’d been hiding in and he waits.

A few moments later the Shadow enters the room. It’s neon-red eyes bore into Yoongi, studying him.

What are you just doin’ sittin’ in here- fuck, y’all are creepy as fuck-

‘What is your name?’

The Shadow stops, eyes widening, realizing that Yoongi can see him.

‘What is your name?’

The Shadow drifts to the side, as though testing Yoongi’s sight. And Yoongi follows his movement.

‘I can see you. Who are you? What is your name?’ Yoongi repeats again.

The fuck…

‘Please inform the Lieutenant that the Heladian is in great danger. That he needs to inject him with the Preventive Core.’ Yoongi reports.

Spaces- you can see me.

‘I can.’

...what are you? You’re...you’re Human aren’t ya? You smell familiar.

‘Smell familiar?’

Yea- like those Humans back at that ship, y’know?

‘Navigator Kim Junmyeon, and Co-Navigator Do Kyungsoo.’

Yea- them. You’re from Earth? But y’seem different- dunno ‘xactly why.

The Shadow moves closer.

It’s like you’re one of them- from there.

‘From where?’

Shit-ass place- better if ya don’t know- but s’not the same ‘gain…

‘Who are you? What is your name?’

Shouldn’t ya tell me your name first hon?

‘My name is Yoongi.’

S’pretty name y’got there
'What is your name?'

I had a bunch of names- identities y’know? Had to,- ran a huge network before got stuck

‘Stuck where?’

Shit-ass place, s’where I met Mr. Eye-Bags out there- s’long story- don’t have time- so ya ain’t here to kill snowman?

‘No. I am here to protect him.’

Not doin’ a good job of it

Yoongi feels his bones protest to that remark but he doesn’t reply.

Well, if that’s it, imma leave now ‘k?

‘What is your name?’

So persistent- but if ya want one, just call me Jin yea? But like, not in fron’ of the others- s’complicated shit

‘Thank you, Jin.’

Sure kiddo, whatever, well gonna go-?! Where’re you goin’?

‘I have to make sure the Heladian survives. He must.’ Yoongi says as he walks out. The Shadow converges around him.

There’s a shit ton goin’ ‘round here- he ain’t gonna trust ya

‘But you trust me.’

I didn’t say that kiddo

‘But you haven’t killed me.’

Yoongi walks out of the stuffy red-lighted hallway of the eatery and lowers his visor again. He spots the Long-Huon easily enough. The Lieutenant was obviously tired, and carrying the dead weight of another Being was stressful, especially when they were dying.

‘It won’t kill him, if that’s what you’re afraid of.’

The Long-Huon gasps loudly as he notices Yoongi. His sulfuric-yellow eyes glow in the dark of the lowest streets of the Capital City, holding the Heladian in his arms fiercely.

‘Why should I trust you?’ The Long-Huon rolls his eyes- for what reason Yoongi does not understand.

‘It won’t kill him,’ Yoongi repeats.

‘You had no hesitation in shooting at us while we were on the high-way- why do this now?’

It was apparent and obvious that the Long-Huon wouldn’t trust him. Yoongi remembers what Zhoumi had said nearly a year ago. That living beings were not comfortable with behavior and mannerism they weren’t familiar with. Which was why he needed a name. Which was why he was
always asked to sit down, so as to not discomfort others around him.

‘Because,’ Yoongi shrugs in imitation of the actions he had observed throughout his year of slowly increasing awareness. ‘You better do it before he really dies.’

‘Are you from the Galactic Inquisition?’

The Long-Huon’s resolve is slowly shaking. He’s desperate, Yoongi can tell. He wants to heal the Heladian, but he can’t trust Yoongi. And Yoongi doesn’t blame him either.

Yoongi remains still, watching as the Long-Huon watches him with burning intensity and wariness.

They’re out on a busy street, Beings walk around them, unaware of the gravity of the situation around them and what this could potentially lead up to. Yoongi himself doesn’t understand. And he believes that neither does the Long-Huon in front of him. At least, not entirely understand.

‘Sure,’ Yoongi mimics the Cahyan in his response, ‘Honestly- hurry up.’

The Long-Huon still doesn’t move and Yoongi watches as the Heladian’s health-tab starts alerting him of biofunction failure. Yoongi takes a quick step forward, reaching into the depths of the Long-Huon’s pockets and injects the Heladian, then steps back. The Long-Huon responds quickly but not quickly enough- which was what Yoongi had been hoping for.

He protectively holds the Heladian away and Yoongi watches as the health-tab stabilizes slowly.

‘There. Get out of here- you have nearly 15 minutes before the others arrive in this area. Take the underground- it messes with their signals.’

Yoongi follows the flow and movement of a Being who walks past in between them and dodges around.

He notes a pair of red-neon eyes follow him and Jin gives him a farewell wave before moving back towards the Long-Huon.

Yoongi feels the tiniest lift in the weight of the dead that now followed his every step.

‘Can you hear and see us?’
‘Loud and clear boys,’ Sk’jin replies, leaning comfortably back into Hoseok’s chair, legs propped up against one of the control-panels. The NaviLet in one hand, a glass of some sort of alcoholic drink in the other, and the weapons-console screen on his lap. He’s propped up one of the larger screens to serve as the main viewing displays. On it, Yoongi’s camera feed shows Hoseok in front of him. They had made quick work of the K’it’y uniform and had flown out to the Debris with the most shuttle-populated docks. They blended right in, what with the uniform, Yoongi’s lack of presence and not to mention, Hoseok’s complete change in appearance.

Of course Sk’jin knew about Hoseok’s species abilities. But he hadn’t known to what extent this “change” could go to. Though Hoseok couldn’t physically grow taller or shorter and couldn’t change the entirety of his gender, he could, however, completely alter his facial features, the colour of his skin, the length and colour of his hair, the colour of his eyes, and to an extent, the bulk of his being.

It had been utterly bizarre to watch—and also painful though Hoseok displayed no signs of experiencing pain.

His skin seemed to ripple, the masses of tissue and muscle and fat shifting and forming new outlines. It was so bizarre that even Yoongi stopped to stare. Then promptly smacked both of his hands over Hoseok’s face, squeezing and pulling.

Hoseok, entirely taken aback by Yoongi’s actions, more or less freezes up. Yoongi continues to pulls and squeeze at Hoseok’s face as though enthralled and Sk’jin wonders if he should perhaps step in and separate them. But then Hoseok bursts out laughing, clearly delighted by Yoongi’s reaction.

Hoseok now no longer looked like himself, his skin tinted green, and his hair completely receded out of sight, he looks like any other K’it’y though taller than most. Yoongi had moved to tear out the added bionic features from the unconscious K’it’y guards faces to make it more believable but was promptly stopped by Hoseok, claiming that it wasn’t needed, a wildly anxious look in his eyes.

They were now rounding up the slaves who were imprisoned in the Grezma outpost. This rather small but clustered moon-graveyard carried more than it appeared to. But the cramped cages the enslaved Beings were squashed into sure did save room space. He grimaces at the obvious cruelty and mishandling of the slaves. Not that Sk’jin would say that there was a “proper conduct” regarding the treatment of slaves (there isn’t—slavery was, and is, and will always be wrong according to Sk’jin), but he has known many slaver-ships and organizations that have imprisoned their slaves in individual cells that are clean and more or less designed to resemble prison albeit mobile.

This was torture, degradation, and a blatant abuse of power to exercise oppression to the basest level.

Sk’jin’s skin burns and he briefly wonders how Hoseok and Yoongi are handling this. But more than them, wonders how Namjoon is processing all of this. With a history like the ones all Kutsogleran faced, it wouldn’t be surprising to find Namjoon in a state of anger and hurt.

Hoseok and Yoongi can’t speak now, or they might break cover. Yoongi is easily overlooked but Hoseok gets a few looks, probably due to his height seeing as most of the K’it’y were rather short, more or less the same height as Yoongi. But he’s not questioned or looked back at. Hoseok also displays a flawlessly natural mimicry of the K’it’y’s posture, movements, and mannerism, displaying his long years of experience as an infiltration agent. Hoseok doesn’t possess Yoongi’s lack of presence but rather the unnerving ability to reflect on the atmosphere, environment, and composition of what surrounded him.
They enter the slaver-ship now, pushing and pulling at the cages to line them up.

‘Hoseok, Yoongi- direct the cages further to the back then slip to the back and find me any open port, jack, or screen,’ Sk’jin orders quietly, sipping at his drink.

Hoseok and Yoongi don’t reply but they do as Sk’jin commands. Sk’jin’s screen is divided into two, one feed from Yoongi’s Iris and other from Hoseok’s. Neither of them needed to be guided through any of this,- they were both solo operatives who have both done recon missions like this more times than they can recall. Sk’jin’s attention goes back to the NaviLet in his hands.

‘Lisai- please access Terminal Pod-030-219-RX811.’

‘Terminal Pod-030-219-RX811 not found.’

Sk’jin taps his fingers along the length of the chair.

‘Lisai,- please access GIU Mission code RG-399-0X2.’

‘GIU Mission code RG-399-0X2 not found.’

Sk’jin gazes out of the windows in front of him, not really seeing the view. He brushes his hair carefully, fingers running over his temples.

‘Lisai,- please pull up all public footage from coordinates 02_58_132-SRDS, Capital City, Serdesas.’

‘Footage inquired is corrupted. Would you like footage from another coordinate?’

‘What is the closest coordinate to highway 02_58_132-SRDS?’ Sk’jin asks as he absent mindedly watches how Hoseok and Yoongi overwhelm and overtake a small group of small differently clothed guards.

‘Closest footage found in highway 08_21_599-SRDS. Would you like to view?’

‘No,’ Sk’jin replies as he pays attention to the split screen in front of him, activating his Comm-Device to Hoseok and Yoongi’s.

‘Who are they?’

‘I think they’re slaves who are forced to work aboard the ship,’ Hoseok replies in a low and quiet voice. Even his voice was different. Sk’jin isn’t sure if it’s an act or if the physical changes across his body alters his larynx as well. ‘They have collars on their necks.’

‘They’re charged with detonative batteries,’ Yoongi says in an even quieter voice. ‘They have no cuffs.’

Sk’jin grimaces. This was beyond cruel.

‘Killing them would be more merciful than if they’re discovered,’ Yoongi states.

Sk’jin wants to protest but he knows Yoongi is correct. The collars could have always been charged with different methods on killing its wearer. An electric shock, a tightening reflex, maybe even some projectile that could sever the arteries inside the neck. But to actually detonate. This was probably an offensive use as well- not only were they forced to serve the very Beings who were oppressing them, they were walking around, living weapons that would probably not only kill the wearer but those around them.
We’re not doing that.’ Hoseok says, his voice harsh. ‘We’ll hide them for now.’

‘What happens after we leave. They will be killed.’

Sk’jin watches Hoseok glare at Yoongi, his eyes betraying his determined tone. Because he knew that what Yoongi was saying was the truth.

‘Leave them for now- the Yishengs will come and their lives might be spared,’ Sk’jin cuts in before anything else can happen. They both acquiesce and carry the bodies between themselves easily until they find a narrow doorway, leading into stuffy storage room of sorts.

‘I found you your port,’ Hoseok says as he settles the bodies down, glancing at an open transformer on the side of the wall. ‘Are you sure there’s no surveillance feed?’

‘Yes,’ Sk’jin and Yoongi both answer at once.

‘Ships as large as this don’t have surveillance systems- surveillance can lead to evidence if they’re caught.’ Yoongi replies. ‘If you find any camera, it’s a fake, installed to make the slaves believe they’re being watched.’

‘It’s their own fear that’s trapping them in.’ Sk’jin remarks as he sets up BluePrint and steals the entire layout of the ship. BluePrint was a highly illegal and brilliant little application that was undetectable. Though it did nothing to control the ship it was installed in, it travelled at the speed of light through every digital wiring network across any ship, building, shuttle and sent that data back to the user in the form of 3D shapes and outlines of whatever was scanned. Illegal and probably as expensive as buying an entire planet, Hoseok had casually downloaded the application into the NaviLet through his own screen and showed Sk’jin how to use it.

‘That- and the vacuum of space. Even if they were to escape, they would have no place to go.’ Hoseok chimes in gravely. ‘Are you getting the layout?’

‘Yeah- give me a minute and let me figure this out,’ Sk’jin mumbles, chewing on his lower lip as he studies the slaver-ship layout. It was massive all right, built mainly for storage. This was after all a Venture Unit issued ship, made for transporting large amounts of resources and materials mainly for the construction of Docking Arcs.

‘We’ll need to get our hands on one of the guard’s screens,’ Hoseok plans. ‘Then we can pinpoint Namjoon’s location.’

‘You should head down either way,’ Sk’jin states as he overlaps Yoongi’s tracking system over with the BluePrint system. ‘There are sections labeled as cell-gates in the lower hulls. Go back in the direction you came from, and take a left instead of a right. Then proceed up the stairs and you’ll come out into the Central Hull Facility. Then you take Bridge Gate 32 to the elevator.’

‘Got it.’

Hoseok and Yoongi leave quietly. In the dark of the small room, Hoseok has already altered his appearance. He has a sad mop of dullish brown hair and greying skin. He even has bruises and marking around his exposed skin. Curious, Sk’jin takes the manual control over Hoseok’s camera and angles it towards Yoongi.

His skin is extraordinarily fair but covered entirely in old scars. No single stretch of skin was free of scar tissue or permanent discolouration. Signs of burns, lesions, and every other possible physical injury has been imprinted upon Yoongi’s skin. Sk’jin hastily shifts the camera back to the front when Yoongi’s dark eyes stare straight into the lens, boring into Sk’jin’s eyes.
So far the two of them make it out into the Central Hull without any problem. However as they cross over the bridge extending over the deep drop of the Hull surrounded by the groaning sounds of the imprisoned Beings just brought in from Grezma- they’re stopped by a guard. Without any warning, Yoongi is struck across the face, jostling the camera view a little as Yoongi falters backwards.

Sk’jin winces, wondering if Yoongi will be able to control himself from reacting how he normally would. Though in all honesty, Sk’jin has no idea how Yoongi would have reacted if left unwarned.

Hoseok too is smacked across the face before they’re tossed into the elevator and the Guard is cursing out at them in another language.

‘Lisai, please translate.’ Sk’jin asks, looking around for a Translator-Cuff to attach to his Comm-Device.

‘Language not found.’

A flare of irritation burns up inside of Sk’jin.

‘Lisai, renew your language database to the most updated version through the GLA Database,’ Sk’jin orders irritably.

‘Communications Manager Sk’jin does not have the authorization to update the Užkulisai Core.’

‘Fucking Namjoon,’ Sk’jin growls as he goes through the aforementioned Being’s NaviLet with more force than necessary. He sets the update for the Language Core manually.

‘Captain Namjoon does not have the authorization to update the Užkulisai Core.’

‘What-?’

There’s a scuffle from the split screen in front of Sk’jin and he almost misses how easily Hoseok takes out the aggressive guard.

‘We got a screen.’

‘And just what do you plan on doing with the body?’ Sk’jin inquires irritably as he tries to update the Language Core through Hoseok and Yoongi’s authorization code.

‘Like this.’

Yoongi lifts the hatch on the floor of the lift and kicks down the body swiftly just as they stop on a floor.

‘Find a place to hide and find Namjoon,’ Sk’jin orders as their codes are both denied.

‘Working on it,’ Hoseok mumbles as they make their way out of the elevator.

‘Lisai- who has the highest authorization code aboard this ship?’ Sk’jin asks carefully, pulling his legs off of the screen, his skin suddenly crawling.

‘Authorization code 6055-2707-2188.’

Sk’jin knows that this code doesn’t belong to any of them on board. But he checks again anyways.

‘Lisai,’ Sk’jin says as firmly as he can, standing up despite feeling strangely weak and it had
nothing to do with his recent bouts of fainting. ‘Please track crew member with that authorization code.’

‘Authorization code 6055-2707-2188 is currently located in the Hangar Bay. Unit 09.’

Yoongi finds no one waiting for him to ambush him as he returns.

He walks down the hallway and finds it just as empty, just as lifeless. He opens the doors and finds some rooms empty, some rooms occupied. The occupied rooms have the agents in Sleep and Yoongi watches the faint light of their bedding outline their shapes against the dark of each room.

In a sort of numbed state of being and mindlessness, Yoongi walks down the hallway, opening each and every door, filled with a growing sense of urgency he doesn’t understand.

He needs them to be here. He needs them awake. He needs them to understand.

Why was he alone in this.

He looks down at the agent on the bed. One hand carries a screen, ready to install the Android Core, ready to implement the core that had triggered his wakening. He holds the cable from the helmet device over the agent’s head in the other hand.

But he can’t do it.

According to the news in Šerdesas, an error in the main OS that controlled the polarized highway had short-circuited and caused the accident. The worst accident to have ever occurred in Šerdesas in over 3 centuries apparently. The body count was at 476 and increasing. The injured were thrice that in number and Yoongi doesn’t have enough bones in his body that can break as punishment for what he has done.
What would happen to the rest of the agents if they did gain awareness. Would Yoongi be able to explain. Would he be able to explain what it meant now. What this new Wakening meant for them as individuals?

Yoongi pockets the screen and connects the wire back to its seamless port on the wall. He steps out and closes the door quietly. He’s just in time to catch a trio of agents walking in through the main door down the hallway. Yoongi watches them, unmoving, quiet. And they walk past him, without a single indication that they noticed him.

Yoongi follows one inside their room. The agent gives pause to look at him, but doesn’t do anything else. He removes his helmet and places all of his gear on the shelves.

In this lighting Yoongi surmises that his skin is deep green in colour, and his hair is wispy and white. Yoongi isn’t sure where he’s from, but he knows that if he were to ask the agent, he wouldn’t get a reply. The agent strips himself of the uniform as well and steps into the bed. Yoongi can see the serrations, scars, wounds, lesions scattered thickly all over his skin. His feet ended in hoof-live cloven appendages, the skin of his legs suggesting a sort of hydrostatic skeletal system.

The helmet at the top of his bed lowers and the agent simply sleeps without a single acknowledgment towards Yoongi.

‘Can you hear me?’

There’s no response. Of course there isn’t.

‘Do you understand me?’

It’s silent again.

Yoongi doesn’t understand the feeling inside his chest. The urgent desire to do something but he doesn’t know what. He pushes out of the room and opens every door over and over and finds either empty beds or Sleeping agents.

Yoongi doesn’t know how many doors he’s opened, leaving many wide open and some slammed shut as though hoping to create noise enough for someone anyone to come find him. He wrenches open what feels like the thousandth door and instead of the typical room outfitted with a faintly glowing bed and shelves, he finds stairs leading down.

Yoongi hears his own breathing, harsh and loud. His mind wavers, unable to process what he was looking at. He blinks hard a few times, even pulling up his visor and pulling it down again. This was real. What he was seeing was real.

Recovering somewhat, Yoongi carefully scans the stairwell that ends at the 18th step before leveling out to stop in front another door. Yoongi steps through the door, closing the door behind him. It’s instantly pitch dark and activating the dark-lens over his visor, Yoongi steps down. He senses nothing different here. It’s a lot cooler down here though. He feels the chill of the ordinary door handle permeate the fabric of his gloves as he twists it open.

A faint light gleams through the small crack and Yoongi looks inside quietly and carefully.

He’s greeted by a tall but narrow room, lined with shelves from top to bottom. On these shelves were countless identical compressor-syringes. Each syringe was placed inside a clear glass casing. Yoongi walks up to the containers, reading the white labels on them. He finds them neatly labeled
with a species, race, or genome type. They all looked like the Anti-Core used against the Heladian. And sure enough, when he reaches the index with the Heladian planet coordinates, he finds the Anti-Core nestled in there as well as the Preventive Core.

Were these all Anti-Core compressor-syringes created to be used against a species of Beings to nullify or exterminate their abilities? There’s another doorway at the end of the narrow hallway. Yoongi’s eyes flit side to side as he makes his way to the end of the hallway. He recognizes all sorts of species and races labeled there and wonders if he’ll find some form of Anti-Core for Humans as well.

The door here is a simple door without any lock or security other than just a simple handle. Pulling on the handle, the door opens to a landing with stairs on either side of it, overlooking a space that seemed to extend out the entirety of Yisheng Headquarters land-radius. And filling this space were long narrow tubes, filled with liquid and in each of these tubes were Beings.

Yoongi opens the door wide and steps into the landing, pushing up his visor.

Beings of all species, race, gender were inside the tubes. They were all naked, curled in on themselves like fetuses. No pipes extended from their forms, no indication of life-support. They were all just afloat but alive. Yoongi can see the pulse on the side of a floating Being’s neck, thrumming under his skin.

There is no information, no screen, no explanation. Yoongi’s mind cannot come up with any data for him to compare this to. He can’t process what he sees.

Stepping up to a tube, Yoongi places his gloved hand over it.

The Being inside is asleep. She was actually sleeping. What was happening? Why were they here? Where did they come from? What were their names?

Yoongi’s hand freezes, his body seizing up.

Had he been in one of these before?

Yoongi sprints down the long rows, eyes wildly searching for any answer- any form of explanation. He slams into a tube and falls back. His body screams in pain, his limbs throbbing and his mind reeling. This was too much. This was all too much.

By the time his eyes focus and his mind somewhat manages to quiet down, Yoongi recognizes what he’s been staring at.

Pushing himself up, Yoongi finds that he’s staring at a fetus. A small curled up form- its species is one Yoongi does not recognize. It floats connected to a tube that seems to integrate down its back. Yoongi's hand instantly flies to the back of his neck, feeling under the fabric of the uniform for the dent he couldn’t explain and didn’t have an explanation for. The fetus twitches just little, shifting inside the clear liquid. The umbilical cord that extends from it ends as it branches out into smaller wire like extensions downwards to the floor of the tube through a dark wide gaping hole. Yoongi crawls forward, a strange violent reaction forcing itself out of him and he coughs violently, retching as he spits out hot and bitter bile. He wipes his mouth with his hand, heaving loudly as he tries to straighten his back but his entire body feels like it’s on fire. Was he on fire? Yoongi can’t tell- his skin is burning- was his suit falling apart? He removes his gloves violently, but finds that his hands are all right. No sign of trauma or heating. He feels at his face, shocked to find his cheeks wet. Was it sweat? What was it?
He can’t process anything- the only thing that screams louder than the vortex of confusion that claims him is the need to get out.

He places his bare hand over the glass of the tube, trying to stand up when the glass lights up with writing.

SUBJECT NUMBER: UW-022-848511

GENOME DERIVED FROM: NNWAL’E

    PLANET: UWA
    SPECIES: OSISI
    SUB-SPECIES: NNWAL’E
    RACE: AGBURU

DESIGNATED BIRTH: GLA 9630

Yoongi pushes back violently.

Then just like the hallway upstairs, Yoongi is filled the urgent need, the almost violent desire to know more- to see more.

He slaps his hand across the next tube and writing lights up immediately.

SUBJECT NUMBER: LA-284-925581

GENOME DERIVED FROM: KUYUSERA

    PLANET: LAPANSI
    SPECIES: MAFUNSO
    SUB-SPECIES: KUYUSERA
    RACE: PAMENE

DESIGNATED BIRTH: GLA 943

And Yoongi goes to the next. He checks at least 10 more before his legs give out and he’s crashing down again.

This was where he was born.

This was where he was made.

Yoongi runs back out and up the stairs, past the shelves of Anti-Core, slamming the doors behind him.

‘I have arrived at the Yisheng Headquarters. Please come to the front Atrium. I will wait for you.’

In his shock, Yoongi unsheathes his TeorSer, aiming and pointing already, body tense and coiled up like a spring, ready to jump into action. His ears are ringing and his heartbeat erratic.

‘Understood Admiral.’ Yoongi finds that his voice, despite his internal state of being, sounds
entirely normal and just as monotone as before. He sinks to the ground, his limbs suddenly numb. He pockets his TeorSer just as the strangest humming sound fills the long hallway. But before he can even remotely process what it was or begin to plan investigating it, his helmet makes a small sound near his ear- a mission indicator.

Completely taken aback, Yoongi lowers his visor, trying to process what he heard and what he saw. His eyes take a while to focus and he has to read the message twice over before he understands it.

[SYSTEMS COMPROMISE]

[BREACH DETECTED]

[ERROR_SELF-DESTRUCT INITIATE]

Yoongi tears the helmet off of his head and is showered in a rain of black dust that diminishes into nothing once again. Panting, and feeling sweat run down the side of his face, Yoongi dives into the room in front of him and watches as an agent disintegrates into dust. Hastily running out, Yoongi opens the next door and finds dusted remain that vanish again.

And with every door Yoongi opens he finds each agent laying in there, fall apart into dust. The chances of finding an agent without their helmet was slim, and Yoongi opens the door to every room and finds only dust.

But one door he opens to an agent who had apparently just returned from a mission. She stares at Yoongi, her expression blank. Did she too, have a hollowed line down her back? Was she made here, to serve this mindless and pointless purpose they weren’t aware of?

‘What is your name?’ Yoongi demands.

‘Restate your request.’

Yoongi’s chest constricts with pain that isn’t physical or a result of his many injuries.

‘What is your name?!’

‘Restate your request-‘

‘WHAT IS YOUR NAME!!’

The agent is unfazed, staring simply at Yoongi without any form of recognition or regard. Yoongi falls on his knees, overwhelmed, exhausted, and pained.

‘What is your name?’ he whispers.

‘Restate your request.’
After taking out 7 more guards, sneaking unnoticed and overlooked for the next 4 hours or so, Hoseok and Yoongi finally find Namjoon’s location. With some amount of guilt and regret, Hoseok knocks out the working-slaves that they were going to replace as part of the unit meant to guide Namjoon towards the 10th Bridge Chamber.

Under their working-slave uniform, Hoseok and Yoongi are armed to the teeth. The Guards inside the slaver-ship didn’t explicitly carry TeorSers – only the ones at the Hangars carried TeorSers. Hoseok thinks this might be because of the working-slave’s collars. Instead they carried an assortment of blade-like weapons, but not ordinary ones either. They were armed with Heliord blades, a highly dangerous and effective weapon if used properly after the proper training.

Hoseok grins as he pockets a few of the deactivated Heliord handles, carefully strapping them to his torso long with the many blades they’ve managed to collect between themselves. Fighting alongside with Yoongi is something of a surreal experience for Hoseok. Hoseok has worked with other Beings before so it’s not the first time he’s had to do so- however this is the first time he’s never had to plan a course of action with the Being he’s partnered up with. Yoongi neither leads their unit nor does he follow- instead as Hoseok jumps into action, Yoongi shadows him perfectly, creating a mirrored balanced effect that leaves them practically invulnerable. Hoseok barely ever had to say anything but Yoongi followed up on Hoseok’s schemes as though he had thought of the same, or he would be the first to move, and always in a way where Hoseok could follow up flawlessly.

Hoseok is itching for a wild and open combat-battle alongside the Human. His skills were beyond effective and Hoseok knows this isn’t the whole scope of it.

During their espionage trek throughout the slaver-ship, they find even more enslaved Beings. At one point, they come across wide spaces that look like massive laboratories and Medical Bays but Hoseok knows these weren’t established for the health of the enslaved Beings.

They come across sectionalized areas as well. Where the enslaved Beings were separated by age, gender, species. The worst had been coming across the children. Hoseok’s fingernails dug into the palms of his hands painfully but he walked on. The Yishengs would come, and they would be freed. He repeats this to himself like a chant, hardening his heart and refusing to acknowledge what his eyes were seeing.

Sk’jin was quiet too. He would randomly send reports, such as the Orvanan Forces arrival, or the Grezma outpost condition. But that was it. He sounded stricken and seemed to speak his words with a lot more effort and force than was natural for him, and Hoseok briefly worries over the
Khol’isa’s health.

Yoongi on the other hand, shows no sign of remorse, pity, or any outward emotion. Hoseok wonders if Yoongi is capable of showing or even remotely feeling any emotion or if his emotional response was trained out of him.

Or perhaps he had seen too much before, and now none of this even fazed him anymore.

They exit the elevator alongside 2 other working-slaves and a large hulking guard. They stop in front of the door before Namjoon’s and Hoseok glances over at the plain simple door. Were they guiding someone else other than Namjoon? This could potentially prove to be difficult to work around. They hadn’t considered the prospect of someone else being there.

The door opens and out skips a Being, grinning too much, overall too happy to be locked up and enslaved and potentially get killed. He waves delightedly at them and for the first time in the past several hours, Hoseok catches Yoongi react.

His eyes widen, mouth parting as he looks at the Being. And before Hoseok can even process this reaction, the unknown Being launches himself at Yoongi, hugging him delightedly.

The Being is jerked back, shoved against the door and promptly kneed in the gut. Hoseok, though worried, is more taken aback at Yoongi’s reaction. Pure fury and anger paints his normally monotone features and his body tenses, ready to attack.

Hoseok is quick, reaching out to grab Yoongi above his elbow, shaking his head slightly.

‘Yoongi.’

Sk’jin’s warning sounds strangely off- like Sk’jin was having a hard time believing Yoongi’s reaction as well though Hoseok feels something heavier in the Khol’isa’s warning.

The Being, though just kneed, just bounces up as energetically as before and stands obediently in the middle of barrier the working-slaves form.

The Guard opens the other door and out pops up Namjoon, looking bedraggled, displeased, and generally pissed off. He doesn’t look at Hoseok or at Yoongi, only glancing over at the unknown Being once as though checking to see if he was all right. Of course Hoseok isn’t surprised that Namjoon doesn’t recognize him seeing as he’s wearing a different face and form. And of course he knew that Yoongi lacked physical presence but at this proximity and relation, Namjoon looks over Yoongi and doesn’t notice the Human at all. It almost makes Hoseok want to snigger.

They guide them quickly past several hallways and up the elevators. They had tried getting Namjoon out before this sudden “meeting” at the 20th Bridge Chamber, but it had proved impossible despite their efforts. And now with this new addition who seemed thoroughly unstable, Hoseok wonders how they’re going to work this out.

The unknown Being walks behind Namjoon and turns back swiftly to stare at Hoseok for an incredibly long period of time. Hoseok can’t help but feel like this Being can see past his disguise and can only hope he doesn’t say anything. Instead the unknown Being offers him a bright smile that is so heartfelt that Hoseok almost returns it.

They stop in front of the doorway that lead into the Bridge Chamber and Namjoon, the unknown Being, and the Guard walk in, closing the door shut behind them.

‘Hoseok, Yoongi, continue on with our plan.’
Hoseok wants to argue but he can’t speak. What did Sk’jin mean by that? He glances over at Yoongi who has his normal expression of utter indifference back on again.

It’s only after 10 short minutes that Namjoon comes back out. The side of his face is swollen and his eyes are dark with suppressed anger. The Being behind him trips as he’s shoved out of the room, and purely out of instinct, Hoseok catches him.

‘Ah! You saved me! Thank you!’ his voice is deep but so very bright- it’s a contrast Hoseok can’t quite process.

Hoseok wants to roll his eyes as he’s smacked across the face. This was getting old very quickly.

‘Stop that.’

Namjoon’s voice is low but Hoseok catches it.

‘Hm?’

‘You’ll get them into trouble too.’

Namjoon looks deeply troubled, clearly deep in thought as they walk back again. Except this time they don’t take the same route. They go downwards even lower.

‘Get them out of there.’ Sk’jin orders.

The elevator doors open and Hoseok strikes first. The dagger strapped to his back goes flying, burying itself hilt-deep into the Guards head. Yoongi is also already throwing, his dagger landing with precision as he takes out the additional Guards.

‘That was so cool!’

Hoseok nearly trips back as the unknown Being wraps his long arms around him in a tight embrace. Normally Hoseok would be very quick in pushing such approaches but finds that he doesn’t really mind. Hoseok shifts his face back to normal and notices how Namjoon gawks at him from the corner of his eyes.

‘Er-hi-?’ Hoseok starts but is nearly squeezed in half by the force of the hug and he’s given a delighted kiss on the cheek.

‘I almost couldn’t contain myself! That was amazing!’ The Being exclaims, radiating happiness. ‘It’s nice to meet you! And you too Yoongi!’

Hoseok does a double take as Yoongi dodges a hug, nodding at the Being in recognition. So he did know him.

‘How did you get inside? What about the collars?!’ Namjoon demands. ‘And where’s Sk’jin?!’

‘Can’t explain- it’s safe- we don’t have time,’ Hoseok manages to gather himself and starts stripping off the working-slave’s uniform off of his unconscious form courtesy of Yoongi. ‘You’re gonna have to disguise yourself.’

‘Did you kill them?!’ Namjoon directs this question at Yoongi.

‘No. They’re unconscious.’

Hoseok bundles up the uniform and tosses it at Namjoon. The Kutsogleran easily breaks his cuffs
that makes the stranger exclaim out in awe. Just who was this Being again?

‘Sk’jin is waiting for us; we have to hurry.’ Hoseok says as he hands Namjoon a Comm-Device. The stranger gives him an expectant look, eagerly waiting for a Comm-Device as well and Hoseok finds himself handing one to him. Hoseok guesses they would bust this guy out too. If possible.

Yoongi has deactivated a few more collars and hands one to Namjoon to complete his look. Though he knows there’s no security cameras watching him, Hoseok can’t help but feel like they’re being watched. He glances over at the stranger and quickly forms a plan in his head that might actually be more sound.

‘Um- your friend is fine- we can pretend that we’re escorting him back up,’ he starts explaining as he heads back to the elevator. Namjoon is staring at the cameras, clearly alarmed at their rather blasé regard to the surveillance system.

‘They’re fake. Sk’jin checked.’ Yoongi explains, though Hoseok wouldn’t have worded it that way. They had no concrete proof that there was no form of surveillance but seeing as they made it this far, he’s willing to trust Hoseok and Sk’jin’s information. Namjoon looks equally unsure about the entire thing, but he lets it go, giving both him and Yoongi and nod and starts approaching the elevator as well.

‘But wait.’

The stranger calls out, not moving an inch. He’s dressed different than the other enslaved Beings. He’s wearing a wide loose light grey sweater on top and darker pants that were probably made with enough material for another pair or so. He’s barefoot as well and honestly looks like he’s just some form of holographic projection rather than being a real form in front of Hoseok. Everything about him just screamed outlandish and odd, his existence cutting a strange outline in the reality around them. He looks serious right now, green eyes glinting in the artificial light.

‘I still need to set them all free.’

Hoseok glances over at Namjoon. They obviously knew each other before this- probably through the cells in Grezma.

‘Taeh’yung look,’ Namjoon has a tone of something like desperation and apprehension in his voice as he attaches the Comm-Device to his ear. So that was his name. Who was he? ‘We don’t have the time or the means to do this-’

Taeh’yung gathers himself up, as though to make a counter argument but Namjoon randomly grumbles out harshly, ‘-Spaces, what?’

Namjoon’s expression goes blank, to shocked, and then confused in a span of a second before he’s staring at Taeh’yung who still looks resolutely determined to stay behind.

‘What?!’

Namjoon is listening to whatever Sk’jin is clearly saying and Hoseok casts a confused look at Yoongi who is fiddling with the battery charges from the collars as though completely disinterested from what was happening.

‘Taeh’yung? Please,’ Namjoon steps out of the elevator and draws Taeh’yung back towards them. ‘And put on the Comm-Device, please.’

This Taeh’yung steps inside, an alarming shift in the air around him follows him and it’s tinted a
strange green. Hoseok feels the need to unleash the Heliord inside his shirt lining but neither
Namjoon nor Yoongi seem to think much of it.

He’s thrown out of loop, however, when Taeh’yung exclaims in delight, ‘I can’t believe this!’.

The air around Taeh’yung rapidly turns normal and he’s actually quivering with excitement. What
was Sk’jin saying? What could he possibly even say?

‘It’s so nice to meet you again Jin!’

Yoongi’s mind feels extraordinarily blank as he walks to the front Atrium of the Yisheng
Headquarter. He does nothing to hide himself or reveal himself as he walks through the throngs of
GIU officers that were now suddenly overtaking the place. The Yishengs are in a panic, eyes wide
as they stare at the sudden intrusion of the GIU.

When he finds K’mara she’s just as composed, stately, and authoritative as he last saw her. Yoongi
walks past her unnoticed by K’mara or the Beings surrounding her as they spoke and quietly walks
into a room used to store supplies and other items required for the Atrium outside. Yoongi quietly
dismantles the helmet in his hands, deactivating the OS and rendering it practically useless. When
he slips it over his head he’s greeted with silence and blankness, the visor is dark with no
information or tabs across it.

He taps on the screen in his hands, sending a message to the Khol’isa outside.

A minute later the door opens and K’mara walks in.

Despite the clearly chaotic nature of events unfolding around her, K’mara seems completely
nonplussed and sits down on a storage box as though settling in for a casual chat with Yoongi.
'You have done well.' K’mara says. ‘Your mission is complete.’

Yoongi doesn’t reply.

‘Rather than send you on a mission, I would like to ask you for a favour,’ K’mara says. ‘I would like you to represent the GI- become the voice for your fellow agents who cannot speak or more accurately do not possess the capacity to formulate or understand the usage you have all been put through without your understanding.’

‘But why is that wrong?’

K’mara seems taken aback by Yoongi’s question.

‘What do you mean?’

‘Before I knew- before Zhoumi implemented the Android Core to my database, I was like them. I was not aware of what I was being used for. Does that count? Do you acknowledge and apologize to the screen in your hands for using it? Do you fly a shuttle, or a Transporter, and find that it is wrong for that object to carry you across distances?’

K’mara’s expression doesn’t change but her eyes are a different story.

‘Yoongi.’ She says gently. ‘You are not a thing. You are a living being. You live. And so do the others.’

‘We existed. We did not live,’ Yoongi replies. ‘To be Alive is different. To be Alive is to understand, to be aware, to create, to destroy.’

K’mara doesn’t say anything, watching Yoongi carefully.

‘Below the Yisheng Headquarters, under our very feet, is a large facility that houses the GI agents. How far it extends I do not know. If there are more, I do not know. But the agents who were birthed were destroyed. I do not know if the unborn live still.

K’mara blinks a few times, surprise is clearly painted on her features.

‘…all gone?’

‘A majority yes.’ Yoongi replies. ‘Part of the gear we were given as uniform is programmed to self-destruct. Those who were Sleeping and those who were wearing them were all destroyed.’

K’mara looks deeply troubled.

A small light goes off on the Comm-Device in her ear and she stands.

‘I must leave. Will you accept my request?’ K’mara asks, back to business.

‘What good will it do?’

‘It will make a difference that can either destroy or rebuild the Universe,’ K’mara replies. ‘Our actions and words today will forever craft and shape the future of all Life.’

‘I do not know what the GI have done. I do not know who made us. Why we were made. For what intentions we were used.’ Yoongi replies. ‘I want to know everything.’

‘And under the best of my ability I will help you find this understanding- I will help you find your
answers,’ K’mara promises.

‘Thank you, Admiral.’ Yoongi intones blankly.

‘For the sake of those who remain, the others like yourself, the knowledge of our meetings should stay between us only.’ K’mara says as she gets ready to leave. ‘There is a lot that has happened. A lot that has triggered events that both of us are a part of. Our understanding of our positions is clear- we did what we had to do,’ K’mara subconsciously rubs at the side of her neck, her eyes flashing neon-red. ‘And you did what you had to do.’

Did he? Yoongi didn’t understand most of what he did. Didn’t understand most of what he saw. And most of all, didn’t understand most of what he felt.

‘I would have to ask you to pretend that we did not meet prior to today.’

‘Mission accepted.’

‘It is not a mission. A favour.’

Yoongi doesn’t know how to respond.

‘I will ask some of my men to retrieve you when the time is ready. Please wait for them in sub-room 0519.’ K’mara says as she opens the door. ‘I believe you know who is there.’

Yoongi knows all too well.

‘Good luck,’ K’mara says before she steps out of the tiny closet.

Yoongi sits inside the supply closet until the sounds outside have minimized. Stepping out into the oddly empty Atrium, Yoongi makes his way across and into the an elevator. He presses the panel for the 5th under-floor and he descends quietly.

It’s empty here too. As though all the Yishengs and GLA officers vanished into thin air. But Yoongi can hear quiet movement and even quieter voices from some of the rooms. He stops in front of room 19 and opens the door.

Zhoumi is sitting up on the bed; he looks worse than the last time Yoongi saw him not even 2 days past. He’s lost more weight. His skin is haggard and translucent, marked oddly by the scales that push out from his skin unwarranted.

He’s also awake.

‘Yoongi?’

His voice is coarse and weak. Very barely audible. He has tubes attached to his arms, the Medical-Bed he’s in encases him in a light that was battling whatever ailment besieged him. Had they used some form of Anti-Core on the Long-Huon?

‘Yoongi…is that…is that you?’

Yoongi steps closer, pulling off his helmet completely and placing it on the small table next to the Bed. There’s a screen mounted on the wall to the side without any volume, and Yoongi recognizes the frequency channel as a private GIU surveillance feed.

It’s Earth.
This was where he came from. The elemental foundation of his genome was printed from this planet, from her unique chemical composition, making him different from the rest of the Universe. Earth, by extension, was Yoongi. And Yoongi, was Earth.

Earth had only one moon, and right now Yoongi can see two large structures orbiting his native planet. One was a ship. A very massive one at that. He doesn’t know what it is. Yoongi has never seen such a construct before.

‘What is that?’

‘That…that is them,’ Zhoumi wheezes out weakly.

Yoongi doesn’t understand what Zhoumi means. And maybe he doesn’t have to.

He looks away from the screen and back at Zhoumi. The Long-Huon’s eyes are dull, his sulfuric-yellow eyes now a faded shade of its former vibrancy and hue.

‘They’ve found him,’ Zhoumi pants out. ‘They- they found him- and it’s all my-…all my fault.’

Yoongi looks back at the screen. The red-ship has shifted, angling its massive form differently and showing more of Earth.

Yoongi knows it’s his planet. Yet he doesn’t feel that connection. Doesn’t understand if what he felt was detachment or hopelessness. The surface of his planet pulses with magenta light, disrupting its atmosphere, clouds evaporating and thinning, pushing around in unnatural patterns and form.

Yoongi reaches out to the screen, lightly touching the surface. The moment his finger makes contact, a strong magenta light pulses even more violently over the entirety of the planet and Yoongi can actually see how the continents seem to crumble, breaking apart in giant fissures and rents, the oceans shifting violently.

‘What are you doing?’ Zhoumi’s voice is weak and frail.

‘Tell me.’ Yoongi’s eyes never leave the screen as he witnesses the death of his planet.

‘How many planets do you see from here?’
(Author’s Note)

Look, Yoongi and Hoseok combatting with super cool sci-fi swords I JUST NOPES

Also I’ve made a moodboard to show what the Užkulisai looks like both outside and inside, and other stuff here!

I almost couldn’t update tonight. My router was doing stupid stuff and my wifi died out on me FOR SPECIFIC WEBSITES LIKE BUZZFEED AO3 AND AFF EXCUSE YOU WIFI

ALSO I AM LIVING FOR NAMTAEGI IN BV2 I CAN’T WAIT FOR THE NEXT EPISODE

I LOVE 2SEOK SO MUCH I CAN’T BELIEVE THEM
“Birth” [noun]: the start of life as a physically separate Being.

There is a continuum that exists beyond the identity of Being, beyond the properties that are essential to the existence of being. The endless exchange, the endless surety that what starts, what is, what forms, has an end. There is no end of the spectrum—where one end begets life, and the other ends it. It is a cycle that exists beyond the realm of existence—beyond the realm of Matter and Time and Space. A cycle that Is. A cycle that is continuum. A cycle that unapologetically moves forward. Because where there is a beginning, there is always an end. Where there is an end, there is always a beginning.

Yoongi lines up all of the uniforms neatly folded from every shelf, from every room. He collects 650 uniforms, including his own, and lines them all up against the long corridor way of the base. He stands at the very edge of the doorway, uncaring of his naked state.

Life-force is a mysterious thing. It exists in everything and is the main component that comprises and formulates all Living Beings. It is the energy that exists between the bonds of atoms, the link that connects respiration to the intangible reactions that supply oxygen to fuel every cell, the elevation of the mind that brings forth the power of the mind and imagination. It is Life. It is Soul. It is everything that makes you Alive.

Yoongi stands still, arm raised up, his palm open towards the east, waiting for the sun to rise.

And now you are song, you are infinite—let the music of your souls live forever on among the stars, to guide us and direct us, to remind us and preserve us. And most of all, to live forever within us, that we may enrich your memories with our own, and together become one.

Sunlight fills the hallway behind him in pale golden light, pure and gentle, forgiving and welcoming.

A touch of beauty where only death had once reigned supreme.

He closes his fist, holding onto the sunlight and places his fist over his heart.

He’s not sure why he’s doing this. No one knew of them. No one would ever know of them. They had no name, no identity.

They were dead from before they took their first breath.
Yoongi can feel his heart beating under his palm. A steady beat, one that seems to contradict the bitter still of death.

Yoongi sits down on the gravelly landing before the doorway, watching the sun rise through the trees, listening to the song of birds, the whispering rush of distant voices, and faint footfall of the procession now leaving the Memorial Site.

Yoongi sits still for so long that little creatures from the forest climb up over him, inspecting his form curiously. They never go past the doorway of their base though.

It has been a little over a week now, and K’mara worked tirelessly and endlessly, searching the base top to bottom.

The entire facility spanned out further than even Yoongi had anticipated. Across the main grounds adjoining the Yisheng forest, they found 7 other bases, and within each, had discovered identical hallways and expansive spaces filled with more tubes. K’mara, the remaining Yisheng Directory, a few other officials from the GLA, and the Venture Unit had scanned and studied the base amidst shocked horror, morbid curiosity, and jaw-dropping fascination.

The surviving Yisheng population returned from every corner of the Universe and banded together to heal damages, redo all the wrong they had unknowingly allowed to happen. Many were studying the Beings inside the tubes, while the others were redistributed and sent to Earth, where over there they could aid in balancing the chaos that took place there.

A few agents had survived; but none seemed to have the same awareness, the same Life that Yoongi possessed. They were simply handed over to the Venture Unit, a matter that K’mara seemed to have great issues about.

Yoongi hears approaching footsteps but he doesn’t move away.

She appears through the trees, a wild and almost threatening addition to the environment. She pauses until she stands before Yoongi.

She’s tall and creates an alien silhouette against the backdrop of the morning forest behind her. Her form, to most, would have been frightening, but Yoongi doesn’t know what frightens him, if anything at all. He recognizes her species, from the planet of Khhem; were the Khemsas- a rare and strange race of Beings even by Universal standards. Yoongi believes that she might be the only registered Yisheng to have ever emerged from her planet. She burns a stark and almost violent colour, her presence seems to quiet and still the surroundings, almost as though in fear of her. But Yoongi sees the reflection of ancient stars in her eyes- wise, gentle, and powerful. She has 2 pairs of arms, one of them holds a robe, similar to the ones he’s seen patients in the Headquarters wear.

‘My name is Amme.’

Her voice is deep and low, strangely musical according to Yoongi though he has not heard any music at this stage of Awareness.

‘My name is Yoongi.’ He replies, still unmoving, looking up at her.

‘I know,’ she replies, all 6 of her eyes blinking in unison. ‘They told me I would you find you here.’

She hands him the robes, remembering his first formulated thoughts in Zhoumi’s apartment. Most Beings are uncomfortable with nudity. That felt like it had taken place light-years ago.
‘How may I help you Yisheng?’ Yoongi asks, wearing the robes and covering himself before he stands in front of the Yisheng. She walks past him, stepping down towards the doorway of the base. This base had already been studied and analyzed by the Yisheng team. But as today was the day that officiated the Memorial event, all Yishengs took leave of their tasks to pay tribute to those who gave their lives to right the wrongs of a past that held on to the future. She closes the door gently before turning back around and standing before Yoongi once more.

‘No Yoongi.’ She extends one of her hands towards Yoongi. ‘I am here to help you.’

‘It’s so nice to meet you again Jin!’

Namjoon glances over at Hoseok who appears to be just as surprised as himself. Sk’jin had separated the channels so now Namjoon can’t listen to their conversation though it’s not difficult to guess what was happening in the first place.

‘I didn’t know you were here- oh? Right!’ Taeh’yung begins but pauses a while before he turns serious. ‘I’ve been following this ship for a while now! But I didn’t know how to get on it without getting caught and then you know- yeah! So I tracked down one of their pick-up spots and it was here- well there, in Grezma and I waited there- yeah! I got caught- uh huh…ah! Okay!’ Taeh’yung nods, leaning into Hoseok’s chest and smiling at his front pocket. Hoseok leans back, looking mildly uncomfortable. They were obviously wearing an Iris each.

Namjoon can’t help but send a glare at one of them.

‘We’re wasting time,’ Yoongi puts in unexpectedly, displaying what appeared to be signs of frustration.

‘Okay! I got it!’ Taeh’yung holds up a thumbs-up.

‘Namjoon- the Yisheng will be arriving in approximately 2 to 3 hours,’ Sk’jin begins; Hoseok and
Yoongi listen in as well as Sk’jin clears up all the channels, ‘From what I can tell, Grezma is emptying. A few ships have left from the main Debris where Keghtsa’s office was located. I think the rest of the Governors are headed there; the slaver-ship is stocking up as well it seems. So the slaver-ship will be docking a little longer, but will probably leave before the Yishengs arrive here. You’ll need to do something in order to stop them long enough for the Yishengs to get there.’

‘Wait-’ Namjoon interrupts with a frown. ‘We could probably leave now without any issue, pretend to be a shuttle headed back for res-stocks or something-’

‘And allow the ship to escape?’

‘Why does this matter to you?’ Namjoon demands.

‘And why doesn’t this matter to you?‘ Sk’jin retorts. ‘Out of everyone in this fucked up crew you should be the one who feels the most about this!’

‘It’s not that!’ Namjoon spits out, eyes glaring fiercely. ‘If I could I would stop it all! Do you really think I don’t want to? Especially after all I’ve been through? Do you really think I wouldn’t stop to burn this fucking ship to ashes?’

‘Then what’s stopping you?’

‘Just look at our numbers- we are not enough to do this- we’re barely escaping the ship on time and-‘

‘Taeh’yung can lead the way and all you’ll need to do is access the systems for an engine or turbine and fuck it up in a way where they can’t repair it.-‘

‘There are too many risks to that! Areas like the Engines Room will be heavily guarded and potentially be under surveillance as well! We’ll get caught for sure! There is no point if we achieve nothing other than death!’ Namjoon hisses out. ‘The Yisheng will be able to catch up to them- we know the make of this ship- Yoongi can keep some form of tracking device on them and we can send them the frequency for it-‘

‘The Yishengs do not fly with an offensive battle-ship! They won’t be able to take over unless they’re allowed to dock inside the ship!’ Sk’jin snaps. ‘I have the BluePrint for the ship, I can guide you through the entire place- neither Yoongi nor Hoseok were caught and they were in there for more than 4 hours. You know this can be done.-‘

‘This is not part of our mission!’ Namjoon groans in frustration. ‘We are already lagging far behind in our mission- any additional delay will only put us further back! News of our “capture” will spread, making it more and more difficult for us to get to places where we can actually dock and restock! We still have 7 months, hopefully, before we arrive at Bhumi-‘

‘Fuck the mission!’ Sk’jin yells, causing Hoseok and Taeh’yung to flinch. All three are watching Namjoon as though he was the most interesting entertainment program now showing. ‘Who the fuck cares about the compromises we’ll be making- we’re already crippled enough as it is- this mission was already intended to be something else- besides this is just a few more hours that we can definitely afford-‘

‘Sk’jin,’ Namjoon sighs out. ‘I understand how you feel. I understand how everyone feels about this- trust me, I really do. But I am the Captain of our ship, of this mission, I am responsible for not just the mission, but for each and every one of you. The mission’s success, your lives, are my responsibility.’
The line is quiet for a while.

Namjoon looks up at Hoseok and Yoongi, both of whom are no longer looking at him.

‘It’s all right,’ Taeh’yung says out of nowhere. ‘If the Yishengs are arriving in a few hours then I can stop the engine or something and put them all here in the meanwhile. You guys go ahead.’

‘Taeh’yung no-’

‘No.’ Yoongi states bluntly before he addresses Namjoon. ‘We’ll stay here until the Yishengs arrive. The 4th Engine Hull is closest to our current location. Accessing and tempering with it won’t take long. Hoseok and I can take care of it if you don’t want to go. Taeh’yung can stay with you. Sk’jin will find a place where you will be safe until the Yishengs arrive.’

Namjoon knows he’s gawking but he can’t help it. It’s the most they’ve heard Yoongi speak, and despite the spacey attitude he had in general, there was no denying the clear rationality and certainty in his voice.

‘Sk’jin, which level is the 4th Engine Hull located in? Also, please find an empty facility room where Namjoon and Taeh’yung can stay until after Hobi and I return.’

‘Oh- uh yeah, one second Yoongi.’

‘Hobi is a really cute name! I’m Taeh’yung,’ the Zhak’gri introduces himself to Hoseok who gives the latter a smile of sorts.

‘It’s a nickname. I’m very good at giving nicknames.’ Yoongi intones rather randomly, as though he weren’t just giving out orders.

Namjoon doesn’t know what he wants to feel. First of all he’s irritated that Yoongi’s plan basically has no immediate flaw. Second, he’s thoroughly confused as to how Taeh’yung knows not only Yoongi, but Sk’jin as well. Third, he’s uneasy with Sk’jin’s behavior because the Khol’isa distinctly sounds disturbed. And last of all, Namjoon feels strangely panicked. Sk’jin’s words from a few minutes ago unsettles Namjoon in a way he can’t rightly explain.

‘Please give me a nickname too!’ Taeh’yung makes his request excitedly.

‘I don’t have one yet.’

‘The 4th Engine Hull is located in the 14th level. Take the lift straight down and make your exit towards the 5th gateway.’ Sk’jin replies, his voice sounds a little strained.

‘Are you all right?’ Hoseok asks worriedly as he and Yoongi head towards the elevator.

‘Wait!’ Namjoon calls out, stopping Hoseok and Yoongi again, the latter of whom looks very exasperated now. ‘You’re just going now? What about-’

‘Under GLA Standard Laws regarding Unit Team legislation, members of the Unit Team can hold votes to decide upon the direction their Unit Team will go.’ Yoongi declares. ‘I call for a vote regarding our current predicament. Who agrees with Sk’jin?’

‘Me.’

‘Me.’
Hoseok gives him a swift apologetic smile and says, ‘Me.’

‘Votes stand at 3 against 1, we will now proceed.’ Yoongi swiftly turns and walks into the lift.

Namjoon knows for certainty that he’s greatly underestimated Yoongi.

‘Namjoon, Taeh’yung there’s actually a corridor past that room-’ Sk’jin begins, sounding a little stunned, as though recovering from Yoongi’s sudden input. However he stops when Namjoon, huffing irritably, follows after the two, Taeh’yung quickly catching up.

‘-Spaces what the fuck are you doing now-‘

‘A ship this size is operated on systems that can’t be easily overtaken unless you’re planning on physically blowing up huge chunks of it- that too, the back-up systems will act up at once,’ Namjoon sighs out, hitting the elevator panel and tapping on the number 14. ‘I’ll stop the engines.’

No one says anything and Namjoon starts changing, quickly pulling off his shirt that was honestly revolting, exchanging it for the working-slave uniform. His arms would be exposed in this, Namjoon grimaces at the idea of it. Before he’s able to pull the shirt over his head, Taeh’yung jumps him, arms wrapping around him.

‘I’m so happy!’ he declares, trapping Namjoon’s arms that are halfway inside the uniform sleeves. Namjoon, with some difficulty removes Taeh’yung off of himself, not heeding the way Hoseok and Yoongi are both openly staring at him as he proceeds to change.

‘You can dump them here-‘ Hoseok is saying, leaning down but Taeh’yung takes the clothes and there’s a green flash of light and they’re completely gone.

Yoongi, Hoseok, and Namjoon find themselves pressed into a corner of the elevator, their postures defensive and expressions wary as Taeh’yung simply dusts his hands as though it was some neat little magic-trick.

‘You can ask questions later- you’re almost there.’ Sk’jin says sharply.

Namjoon snaps the deactivated collar around his neck, fighting the urge to crush the object in between his fingers. The collar that used to cinch his neck was heavier and thicker than this, but nonetheless forces past anger and hatred to simmer and boil under his skin.

They stand in formation, Taeh’yung in the middle. Hoseok’s faces morphs and Taeh’yung watches in fascination.

‘I can’t believe we’re actually doing this,’ Namjoon mumbles as the doors open and they’re face to face with the Raksane Tayian Slaver and what appeared to be a whole group of Orvanan officers and a host of 15 Guards.

The Raksane Tayian is talking affably to the Orvanan and he doesn’t look over at them as Taeh’yung steps out first, led by Hoseok and followed by Yoongi and Namjoon. Namjoon actually holds his breath as they step closer.

Namjoon watches as the Tayian catches sight of Taeh’yung. He pauses, eyebrow furrowing and then one of the Guards bellows something,- clearly some form of question. The Tayian squints as he walks past Hoseok and Taeh’yung, and then his eyes meet Namjoon’s. The Raksane Tayian does a double-take at Namjoon just before he walks past. His eyes widen and he’s about to open his mouth, clearly about to alert the Guards around him but before he can Namjoon ducks down and yells out the one thing he knows will trigger the best response: ‘YOONGI!’.
There’s a blurred movement as the Tayian goes flying back, a dagger buried into his chest, knocking back a few Orvanan officers. There’s flash of light, the sound of something catching fire, a loud exclamation, and a flash of green.

There’s a mad giggle and this prompts Namjoon to look up.

Hoseok is wielding what appears to be a not so standard Heliord, countering similar ones to the ones the Guard are using to press their attack. Or at least, were trying to press their attack. The Guards are much taller than Hoseok and Yoongi but give up and start running backwards. But Yoongi is not having any of it.

As though preplanned, Hoseok first disarms and easily overwhelms a Guard before ducking low, making his back almost flat as he hunches down, and Yoongi makes a run, using Hoseok to vault himself over the Guards, landing neatly in front of them before they can escape. And as though mirroring Hoseok’s movements, he executes the same series of actions Hoseok does, except with simple looking daggers, and in less than a minute, Hoseok and Yoongi clear the host of Guards.

‘What do I do with them?’

Namjoon finds that his mouth is hanging open a bit. He shifts his attention from Hoseok and Yoongi who start to empty out the Guards pockets of weapons to address Taehyung.

Behind the Zhak’gri is a floating green pyramid like structure inside which the Orvanan officers are trapped, their faces pressing up inside the glass? Air? Thing? of a structure. Taeh’yung looks at Namjoon questioningly, as though waiting for an answer.

‘Come again?’

‘What do I do with them? Do I kill them?’ Taeh’yung lifts his hands, making as though to swat down some insect. Images of these Beings being squashed like insects come unbidden into Namjoon’s mind and he shakes himself out of it.

‘N-no!’ Namjoon stammers out, wondering why he was meeting so many blood-thirsty Beings all of a sudden.

‘Who are they? Officers bringing in more of their own kind?’ Hoseok spits out as he approaches the floating pyramid, not particularly fazed by the sight of it. Namjoon wonders if he’s just somehow overly emotional at the moment.

‘Get closer- I’ll scan them.’ Sk’jin says. Hoseok steps closer but they’re interrupted by the sound of something falling and breaking.

Towards the end of the hallway behind them, a Guard gawks at them and at the sight of fallen Guards on the floor, blood starting to pool about. He then looks up at them for a solid 3 seconds before scurrying out of sight.

‘Shit-!’ Hoseok curses but Yoongi is already sprinting forward, clearly intent on catching the Guard.

‘Wait- not yet-’ Hoseok stops the Human. ‘We need to get to the Engine Hull first-‘

‘If he reports what’s happened- he will raise the alarm and the ship will leave,’ Yoongi declares and he’s already running off.

‘No, Hoseok- Yoongi is right- Taeh’yung, go with Yoongi and help him out,’ Namjoon nods at
Taeh’yung. ‘Can you just leave them here like this?’

‘No problem!’ Taeh’yung salutes, carelessly tossing the pyramid of Orvanan to the side. Namjoon can’t hear their voices as they obviously shriek in discomfort from being treated thus. But Namjoon’s eyes latches onto their wrists and finds them cleared of cuff-links, so he doesn’t feel remotely bad for them.

‘Hoseok and I will go to the Engine Hull- Sk’jin what next?’ Namjoon asks as Taeh’yung jogs over to where Yoongi had vanished.

There’s no reply from the Khol’isa.

Hoseok frowns at that.

‘Sk’jin?’

‘Yes- I’m sorry-’ Sk’jin coughs out.

‘Are you all right-’

‘Worried about me? How sweet,’ Sk’jin croons out, his voice a little raspy. If he’s making fun of Namjoon then he was most probably all right.

‘Which fucking way do we go?’ Namjoon grits out.

‘Left and then take the second right hallway.’ Sk’jin replies, clearing his throat.

Hoseok exchanges a worried look with Namjoon before he leads the way.

‘Yoongi caught up with the Guard- oh okay maybe not- oh wait, yeah it’s- you know what never mind.’ Sk’jin attempts to give them a live update but gives up.

‘You know how to use one of these?’ Hoseok asks, handing him one of the Heliord handles.

‘No, but I’m guessing it’s not too difficult?’ Namjoon asks, taking one of the handles. He was much more comfortable with a TeorSer but obviously there were none on this ship. It was possible that the Slavers or visiting Governors would have them but attempting to obtain them was too much of a risk.

‘Depends,’ Hoseok replies as he weighs one of the Heliord handles in one hand, and a regular dagger in the other. ‘On what you consider not too difficult.’

Namjoon’s never been much a sword kind of Being, but he guesses it probably isn’t too difficult swinging one around; so long as you were able to cut down your opponent or something.

‘Yoongi and Taeh’yung are on their way back- oh wait, never mind.’ Sk’jin sighs.

‘What’s going on?’

‘Taeh’yung got distracted- oh no.’ Sk’jin’s voice is heavy with exasperation. ‘Namjoon, Hoseok; move your asses, I think it’s safe to say that any secrecy we hoped for has been blown.’

Hoseok and Namjoon start full on sprinting, never minding the possibility of coming upon Guards.

‘What happened?’ Hoseok asks and Namjoon is about 5 seconds from saying ‘I told you so- we shouldn’t have done this’ when a loud sound thunders through the air and the hallway shakes.
‘Was it Taeh’yung?’ Namjoon asks; that boy was probably too impulsive for his own good, seeing how he’s behaved so far. He hopes no working-slaves have been killed.

‘No,’ Sk’jin sighs. ‘That was Yoongi.’

The Earthian Memorial Asteroid Belt glimmers in the distance- a shimmering graveyard of the remains of what was supposed to be Yoongi’s home-planet. He feels no particular connection to Earth. It was a planet, much like every other planet he has seen or heard about. There was nothing about it that held value for him. No actual meaning or relevance.

But the Yisheng Amme had sent him here on her behalf.

Yisheng Amme had said she was going to help Yoongi and he still doesn’t know what it is that she’s helping him with or on. But here he was. Having to witness the absence of what once existed, the source of his elemental core.

The ceremony held for the lives lost had been somewhat similar to the the memorial service held to honour the Yisheng’s back in Šerdesas. Except this time everyone wore black, and a majority of them were Human.

Yoongi had caught sight of the crew of the Stravechi Nava as well. They were now numbered only at 10.

K’mara had stuck true to her word. Yoongi did not participate in the trials or in the court hearings. He was never involved, asked, or requested for his presence though no doubt, Yoongi is sure it had been demanded.

However, his testimony had sufficed, at least for the time being. Yoongi doesn’t know how he’s going to be able to shed informative light onto the “Gaia Case” as they were publically calling it. K’mara had asked Yoongi to never reveal the details about what he had seen. A promise Yoongi could make easily because he had no one to tell.
Zhoumi remained in Šerdesas, and was kept for the trials as key witness and informant. It was possible that he would be tried and imprisoned for colluding with Yisheng Tlun'hla. But Zhoumi didn’t need to be punished anymore. The look in the Long-Huon’s eyes suggested that his entire existence was a prison in which he found himself.

Yoongi hasn’t seen Zhoumi since that day.

But that had been nearly 3 months ago now and Yoongi has been living in the Mars Docks since then. Titled as assistant to the Yisheng Directory, Yoongi watched over the extraction and safety of the 603,755 Beings found inside the Akramanese Ship. They would now be taking back the last of them to Šerdesas where they would be studied and observed by the Yisheng Headquarters and Venture Unit combined.

He hears no news or information regarding the trials. And he doesn’t care for it either. Yoongi simply proceeds with his tasks.

Most Beings working aboard the Mars Dock still aren’t aware of his presence. And Yoongi preferred it that way too. Which is why he’s genuinely taken aback by the sudden appearance of a tall Being, one Yoongi has seen in the first Court Hearing but never before aboard the Dock, smiling brightly at him as though he knew exactly who Yoongi was.

‘Hi!’ he waves blithely at Yoongi.

Yoongi doesn’t heed his greeting. He simply takes another turn to walk through the massive storage units built especially for the nesting Beings inside their specialized tubes. These tubes are different from the ones at base. The fluid they float in is strangely opaque and white, yet with a transparency and fluidity that likens it to mist rather than something liquid.

‘Wait up!’

Yoongi doesn’t wait and quick light footsteps approach him and he hears a rush of noisy breathing and it’s like he can hear this Being smile without having to see it.

‘I wanted to ask a question!’ he declares, putting himself in front of Yoongi.

In the past 3 months, Yoongi has not spoken to anyone inside the Dock. Only sending messages to Amme, replying to K’mara’s inquiries on his health and wellbeing, and sending instructions regarding the processes surrounding the extraction of the Beings inside the Akramanese ship.

‘So I heard that this is the last bunch of them!’ he exclaims. ‘All of my babies are headed off now! I was wondering if I could catch a ride back with them? I want to see them get there safe and sound!’

‘Who is your commanding officer?’ Yoongi asks, his voice lower than usual from continuous disuse.

‘Oh- the Being frowns. ‘I don’t have one? I mean, I’m kinda free-lancing this.’

‘…I don’t understand.’

‘I mean they know I’m here! I am assisting the Yishengs you see!’ he explains looking proud of himself.

‘I will contact Yisheng Amme and reserve a seat for you in the final shuttle.’ Yoongi replies, hoping that answer would suffice as he extracts his screen to look up this stranger’s records.
‘I’m so grateful! I’m Taeh’yung by the way,’ he introduces himself with a bright smile before looking around the large capsule. ‘You’re like one of them aren’t you?’

Yoongi goes back to staring into the strangely opaque white liquid and replies, ‘I don’t know. I have no memory of it. There are no records.’

Taeh’yung is unperturbed by his reply and continues addressing him as though this was an entirely normal conversation to have. Instead he extends his hand towards Yoongi, palm up. Yoongi notes the faint rings of copper etched into his palm. He can’t be sure if they’re natural or painted on. In the very center of his palm is an incomplete triangle, glowing a little almost. Yoongi doesn’t know what possesses him but his entire body just acts out of accordance and he places his gloved hand over Taeh’yung’s.

Taeh’yung takes off his glove and places his tanned hands over Yoongi’s incredibly pale and scarred ones.

‘You have Memory,’ Taeh’yung says simply. ‘You are Memory. You are in my memory.’ He glances over at the capsules, lightly brushing his hand over the surface. ‘They are all Memory.’

Yoongi glances around the massive room, unsure what Taeh’yung meant.

‘So- I think you’re supposed to be GI right? GI? IG?’ Taeh’yung looks confused.

‘GI.’

‘Ah! So- are all the GI Human?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Do you have a name?’ he asks instead now studying his hand intently.

His hands are warm, a strange buzzing energy exudes from this Being- Yoongi can only describe it as power. Power enough to collapse this entire facility if he chose. But Yoongi feels no fear inside him. The weight and pressure of another hand in his is foreign and strange.

‘Does it matter?’

Yoongi wonders at his own name. He wonders why it’s so important to really have a name.

‘Well- I guess it doesn’t- it’s nice to have one though,’ Taeh’yung grins, and he sits down, still holding onto Yoongi’s hand. ‘I like my name- I chose it for my own.’

‘You had another name?’ Yoongi sits down as well, unsure why he was doing any of this.

‘Many,’ Taeh’yung waves his free hand a bit. ‘Sometimes they get confused- but I’m sticking with this name, so that later, when the others who come after me, will recognize me through this name.’

Yoongi doesn’t know how to respond to this statement. But Taeh’yung doesn’t seem to mind; he unabashedly stares at Yoongi as though reading him.

‘You’re like one of them- but different,’ Taeh’yung quirks his head, his hand holding Yoongi’s with a firm grip.

‘I’ve heard that before.’

‘Really? From who?’
Yoongi thinks back to the neon-red eyes and shadowy figure, and how Taeh’yung had been speaking to it back at the Court.

‘I don’t know.’

Taeh’yung’s expression takes on one of regretful disappointment, ‘Ah- I would have loved to meet them.’

They don’t say anything for a while and Yoongi stares at their hands. This Taeh’yung seems contemplative as his eyes flit between the tubes and then to Yoongi.

‘I’m sorry for what happened out there.’ Taeh’yung says out of nowhere.

‘Out there?’

‘Earth,’ Taeh’yung looks sad. ‘She was a survivor- her Soul expanded for much longer than she was supposed to you know? But I guess…she was tired in the end.’

‘Earth was destroyed.’ Yoongi states bluntly. ‘Earth is not a living Being. It did not choose death; the planet was destroyed.’

‘They’re all alive,’ Taeh’yung says with wide genuine eyes. ‘Earth lived, a precious Soul.’

He has peculiarly deep green eyes that glimmer, the copper tones in his eyes appeared to move.

‘But you’ll meet another lifetime.’

‘Another lifetime?’

‘Yeah!’ Taeh’yung nods enthusiastically. ‘Everything is Continuum!’

Taeh’yung says the word as though it’s the first time he’s spoken it, slowly, dragging it out. There’s a warm pulse that spreads from their connected palms.

‘Do you see dreams?’ Taeh’yung asks out of the blue. Yoongi pauses a while, unsure how to respond for a while.

‘I do not have the memory to see dreams.’

Taeh’yung makes a thoughtful face before pointing around them.

‘They see dreams. Lots and lots of them.’

Had Yoongi seen dreams before? While he was being grown inside these tubes?

‘How do you know?’

‘Because I could hear it once- when I went inside their ship,’ Taeh’yung replies. ‘So many dreams. Past lives, Present lives, Future lives. All there.’

Taeh’yung looks at him thoughtfully before he raises his free hand, one long finger extended out.

‘What are you doing.’

‘Well.’ Taeh’yung frowns and it’s more comical than serious. ‘I’m not too sure. But he’s saying something.’
‘Who?’

‘The Second.’

Taeh’yung offers no other explanation but instead lightly taps Yoongi on his forehead, his eyes glowing a little in the process. A strange shiver runs down Yoongi’s back. Not one from cold or his sense reacting to something dangerous—this didn’t feel like that. It was different.

Taeh’yung beams at him and then stands up.

‘Goodnight babies! Sweet dreams okay?’ then he looks down at Yoongi and says, ‘You too babe!’

He happily strides away, waving goodnight at the tubes, leaving behind a very stunned Yoongi.

After a while Yoongi too stands.

He approaches the tube, his nose an inch from the glass separating him from the floating _dreaming_ Being inside.

‘Goodnight.’

Yoongi falls asleep later that night, and for the first time in his life, he _dreams._

*They were going to really have to get Namjoon a TeorSer before he sliced off Hoseok’s arm, or worse, his _own_ arm. Hoseok takes the Heliord handle from Namjoon who more or less chucks it*
back at him as though it was some infectious rabid animal out to bite him.

They easily take down the Guard who were patrolling the hallways. The security down here was a lot more lax than Hoseok initially thought it would be. Either there weren’t a lot of Guards, or the Slavers were overly confident in their own ship and security system.

‘Yoongi did what?!’ Namjoon hisses again as Hoseok easily overwhelms another Guard. He doesn’t feel too bad doing this; however whenever the working-slaves came up, Hoseok always felt a sense of guilt and regret. Luckily, the Engine Hulls were void of the working-slaves and manned with Guards.

‘The Hulls are connected to … well a storage facility of sorts- there’s a lot of…things. In this place.’ Sk’jin sounds strangely uncomfortable and a little breathless again. Hoseok wonders if his health was acting up again. ‘There were-’

‘-like my babies!’ Taeh’yung chimes in unexpectedly, reminding Hoseok that he had a Comm-Device just like them.

Hoseok doesn’t know how to react to this extraordinary statement and apparently, Namjoon felt the same because he mumbles quietly at Hoseok, ‘Who is this guy?’.

‘You were with him!’ Hoseok hisses back as they run down another hall, large doors at the end of it. According to Sk’jin the 4th Engine Mainframe was located there. ‘How am I supposed to know?’

‘He knows not only Yoongi, but Sk’jin as well,’ Namjoon grumbles. ‘They didn’t mention anything to you?’

‘I’m in the dark as much as you are,’ Hoseok sighs out as they reach the doors. Namjoon opens the door panels so easily Hoseok would have thought they were made to open if he didn’t see the little indents where Namjoon’s fingers dug into the metal sides.

‘You’re all right though right?’ Hoseok asks as he keeps a look out. Namjoon glances at him, a questioning look on his face.

‘I’m fine.’ He replies shortly, looking unsure as though guessing Hoseok’s motives.

‘What do you think he means by his “babies”?’ Hoseok asks, shifting the subject.

‘Honestly I don’t know- he got himself caught, dragging me into it because he just knew that Yoongi would come back for me or something.’ Namjoon shrugs, his jaw set as he concentrates. ‘He can do strange things- I can’t explain it. Have you heard of the term Zhak’gri before?’

‘No,’ Hoseok frowns in thought. ‘Is that what he is?’

‘It’s what he says he is- honestly it’s just too much to process- okay we’re in,’ Namjoon declares as the doors open slowly.

It’s wide and spacious, the walls and floors lined up with massive towers of faintly blinking lights, surround the mainframe core at the center of the room. There are Beings here, clearly Engineers or maintainers. They gape at Namjoon and Hoseok.

‘Get out,’ Hoseok barks out, igniting his Heliord to make his point.

The Engineers and maintainers scramble out, avoiding Namjoon and Hoseok as best they could. Any secrecy they had was already blown and they needed speed now.
‘Namjoon hurry.’

‘I’m on it,’ Namjoon huffs out- no doubt still touchy from being overruled by Yoongi earlier. That was something Hoseok had not been expecting. It was as though they were seeing a whole new side of Yoongi. Or maybe he was like this the entire time and they just never knew because Yoongi didn’t think it was necessary. It was also the first time where he spoke more than a few words and Hoseok is honestly still recovering.

Namjoon is already at the main core, his hands flying across the large panel and already, Hoseok can feel a strange charge take over the massive towers around them, the sound they’re emitting is different and all the lights stop blinking for a few seconds before everything changes.

‘Done,’ Namjoon declares, already stepping back but still typing something into the screen.

‘All right- you need to get back to Yoongi and Taeh’yung-’

‘What are they doing anyways?’ Namjoon demands as he presses something, jabbing harshly at the surface; a strange shudder takes over the entire place and if Hoseok hadn’t been somewhat prepared, he would have fallen over.

‘We’re going to set them free!’ Taeh’yung replies.

‘What is he talking about?’ Namjoon addresses Sk’jin as they make their way back, following the route they had taken to get there.

‘It seems as though they’ve been growing or at least, mimicking some form of AI birthing tank,’ Sk’jin replies. ‘I think that’s what those Orvanan came to see or something.’

‘So they didn’t have enough innocent Beings to fuck with so they decided to grow their own?’ Namjoon spits out venomously.

‘I can’t be sure but that’s my best guess too-’

‘So what are they doing? What were those explosions?’ Hoseok asks worriedly.

‘Yoongi found some TeorSers- a few Orvanan officers were there.’ Sk’jin explains. ‘Something you can use Joonie, so that you don’t hurt yourself.’

Namjoon turns and glares at Hoseok’s chest, where the Iris was securely fastened onto his shirt front.

‘So this is for the Orvanan?’ Hoseok questions.

‘Can’t say- just hurry- take a left here.’ Sk’jin adds as arrive near the elevator again. Namjoon gingerly makes his way over the slain Guards. Hoseok eyes the floating pyramid of green with the trapped Orvanan in it.

‘Do you understand what that is?’ Hoseok gestures at the pyramid.

‘Honestly I don’t know and I don’t care at this moment,’ Namjoon says bluntly, looking down the hallways they go past. ‘Doesn’t it feel too empty?’

‘It does,’ Hoseok grimaces.

‘Did you notice that the elevator hasn’t moved from this floor until now?’ Namjoon adds as they find a Guard slumped over the floor, clearly taken care of by Yoongi. Another Guard is up ahead-
at this point all they’d have to do would be to follow the trail of dead bodies.

‘What?’ Hoseok looks back at the elevator and finds that the doors are still open and the lift itself hasn’t moved.

‘It hasn’t moved,’ Namjoon frowns as they approach the end of the faintly glowing hallway. The air is green, most probably because of Taeh’yung. And the Being in question pops out as well, smiling at them.

‘Hey! Come on quickly!’ he gestures at them to hurry.

Picking up their pace, they rush towards the doorway, not sure what to expect. But it definitely isn’t the sight of Yoongi carrying 3 CapTanks in his arms, containing fetuses in them.

‘Yoongi put them down now!’ Namjoon more or less shrieks after regaining his ability to speak.

The facility they’ve entered is the size of a modest Hangar. There’s broken glass everywhere on the floor, and some crumpled bodies to the side.

‘There was a thick glass wall!’ Taeh’yung explains, as though able to read Hoseok’s mind. ‘Yoongi blew it up!’

Hoseok remembers the charges the Human had taken from the collars of the working-slaves and briefly wonders how in Spaces he rewired them to work in his will.

‘Yoongi we can’t take them all with us,’ Namjoon is trying to explain to Yoongi who looks nonplussed as he puts the CapTanks back into their shelves.

‘I was returning them. A few of them had fallen over.’ Is Yoongi’s completely leveled response.

‘So you contained the Guard? Was he able to report us?’ Namjoon presses once he’s sure Yoongi wasn’t going to do something extraordinarily strange.

‘I stopped him. I do not know if he reported us.’ Yoongi replies, he moves past Namjoon to push in some of the CapTanks that had shifted in the shelves. ‘No alarm has gone off.’

That much was true. They started no alarm, but Hoseok can’t help but feel strangely disoriented about the entire thing.

‘Sk’jin, are the Orvanan officers still here? Did they come on their own shuttle?’ Namjoon asks, scanning the shelves, a heavy expression settling on his face.

‘Their shuttles are still there,’ Sk’jin replies. ‘The Grezma guards are also still there, they’re headed back now though. If you’re going to try and sneak into one of them, you’re going to have to move fast. Otherwise hijack an Orvanan shuttle- but in that case only Hobi would be somewhat able to get into one of them.’

‘How much time until the Yishengs arrive?’ Namjoon asks.

‘One hour, I managed to access the Yisheng Dock itinerary. I’m following their trajectory and they should be here in an hour.’

‘All right- we’ve handicapped them and now they can’t move even if they want to. The Yishengs will get here and then-‘

‘What about the working-slaves?’ Taeh’yung chimes in. ‘They all have those collars- what if the
Guards and Slavers threaten the Yisheng by killing them all?’

Namjoon sighs into his palms as he rubs his face with frustration.

‘This is why I said we should have just left- nothing we can do right now can completely guarantee a safe and successful bout of planning,’ Namjoon mumbles. ‘Chances of us getting out of here without being spotted is already low.’

‘Shouldn’t there be a systems-board regarding the collars?’ Taeh’yung asks. ‘Can’t you easily override that too?’

Namjoon just gapes in response, clearly thinking of a counter response.

This Being was worse than Sk’jin and Yoongi combined. And Hoseok has a feeling he was going to somewhat be fond of this strange Being.

‘That can work- it’s probably located inside the Bridge.’ Sk’jin adds.

‘We would be removing their most effective weapons,’ Yoongi too adds to it. ‘We would disarm the slavers completely. The Guards are untrained and have no real tactical formation. The Yishengs can take over easily without fear of collateral damage.’

Again, it was bizarre hearing Yoongi speak so much. The words he was speaking contradicted everything Hoseok ever thought of him. Though his expression and voice is monotone and emotionless, his eyes seem to shine with a light Hoseok has never seen before.

Sighing and pinching the bridge of his nose, Namjoon says, ‘We won’t even have to go up to the Bridge, I just need a screen or something.’

Yoongi hands him 3 at once.

‘Fucking Spaces,’ Namjoon mumbles under his breath, his hands filled with screens.

‘Should we be staying here?’ Hoseok asks, peering out of the doorway into the empty doorway.

‘No- start moving. We’re still sticking to the original plan. If we’re able to deactivate the collars then there’s going to be enough chaos to cover our movement. Get up to the Central Facility at the very least- close to the Hangar so that you can access a shuttle.’ Sk’jin orders.

‘Hoseok you take the lead, I’ll cover from the back.’ Yoongi orders and Hoseok is still a little taken aback.

Yoongi hands Namjoon a TeorSer he picks up from the floor next to him and throws Hoseok one. Taeh’yung however, refuses any of the weapons and waves blithely at the CapTanks.

‘You’ll all be safe soon okay?’ he calls out, hurrying to the closest tank and kissing it gently. He rushes up towards Yoongi, walking alongside the Human, Namjoon behind them eyes glued to the screen, and Hoseok walks past all of them, leading them forward.

‘Have you met him again?’ Taeh’yung asks, clearly addressing Yoongi. Hoseok wishes he could watch their interaction.

This mess of a situation was surely throwing a new light on Yoongi. And Sk’jin. In fact, on everyone.

‘That’s too bad! He’s trying to help now, I saw him... I don’t remember when,- but I did. But
enough about all that! What about you? Where have you been this entire time?’

‘The Yisheng Headquarters.’

‘Really? Were you watching over my babies?’

‘I tried.’

‘Have you been able to dream?’

They arrive at the elevator before Hoseok can hear Yoongi’s reply.

‘It’s still here,’ Namjoon comments, a frown forming on his face. ‘This is one of the only elevators available in this section isn’t it? Why is it still here?’

Hoseok glances over at Yoongi who studies the elevator with a blank face.

‘We have no other option than to take it.’ he says.

‘I’m gonna have to agree with Yoongi on this one,’ Sk’jin says though doubt and apprehension is obvious in his tone.

‘No alarm went off- it’s possible that it’s just not in use,’ Hoseok offers though he knows it’s probably all bullshit. Namjoon’s grimace tells him as much.

‘We’re wasting time,’ Yoongi says, pushing past them and entering the elevator. Taeh’yung follows and sighing for the nth time, Namjoon too steps inside.

They were most definitely walking into some sort of trap.

‘How much longer for that thing you’re doing there Joonie?’

‘Almost there,’ Namjoon grunts out. Hoseok chances a look and finds that Namjoon isn’t exactly doing anything that seemed to require him breaking some complicated code. He’s just going through what appeared to be archives instead. But before he can take a closer look, the elevator stops with a grinding halt, nowhere near close to the level Hoseok had pressed in. They were at the bottom of the Central Facility, with the narrow bridges connecting to the elevator shaft. And surrounding them were frightened looking working-slaves and they all press up against the elevator, expressions of hopelessness and misery echo around everywhere. As far as Hoseok could see, working-slaves were gathered around the elevator shaft and even above them, where they seemed to be cuffed to the railings. They had been detected and now very evidently trapped. There was going to be no escaping this without a few hundred Beings dying.

‘Ah- up there!’ Taeh’yung declares, pointing up.

Hoseok follows Taeh’yung’s line of sight and high up on one of the Bridges were a line of Beings who Hoseok guesses are the Slavers. Taeh’yung waves at them as he says, ‘They said I had a pretty face!’.

‘Yes, very good- what do we do now?’ Sk’jin snaps.

‘You- you will give up your weapons-’ one of the working-slaves that is now squashed up in front of the elevator railings stammers out. ‘Or- or you will destroyed.’

‘Destroyed- not even killed?’ Namjoon snorts, finally looking up from his screen.
‘Namjoon-‘ Sk’jin sounds troubled.

‘I guess we’re staying put until the Yishengs come,’ Namjoon grumbles, taking a seat. The working-slaves jump at Namjoon’s actions, they’re all panicked and glancing around each other, their hands shaking where they’re gripping the railings and bars. ‘It’s up to you guys to explain why we failed our mission and what we’re doing here to the Yishengs.’

‘Look-‘ Sk’jin begins, sounding irritated.

‘Jin? You’re on a ship right? Can you fly over here? Like as close as you can get?’ Taeh’yung asks unexpectedly. There’s murmuring that surrounds them, there’s hysterical crying from many places as well and Hoseok wonders why and how Namjoon was so at ease with all of this.

‘I can do that.’ Sk’jin replies after a few seconds. Namjoon’s expression is incredulous.

‘What are you doing?’ Namjoon demands, glancing up from where he’s sitting.

‘I’ll be there in 10 minutes- are you sure about this Taeh’yung?’

‘What-?!’ Namjoon’s jaw drops open. Hoseok guesses he could have tried and informed Namjoon that Sk’jin could in fact, pilot a ship. But the opportunity never presented itself; besides it was too late now anyways.

‘Trust me!’

Rather than a question of trust, this was more of a case of intense desperation.

‘I’ll tell you the moment I’m close enough.’

‘As close as you can!’ Taeh’yung pleads.

‘P-please lay down your weapons,’ the working-slaves beg again. ‘Or- or they’re going to- they’re going-’

There’s a loud shout, and the working-slaves around the elevator flinch, their expressions stricken.

But nothing happens.

The same shout is heard but nothing happens. With shaking hands, a few of them touch their collars in shock.

‘Oh! You did it in time!’ Taeh’yung beams down at Namjoon before addressing the working-slaves. ‘You’re free!’

The effect that takes place is instantaneous.

Like a ripple in a still pond, the massive crowd of working-slaves realize that their collars have been deactivated. At first they’re unsure what to do, some are still disbelieving, while others are tugging at the collars, breaking it in half with a stunned expression. Taeh’yung reaches through the bars, and snaps a collar in half.

‘See? Free.’

There’s a scream that rends the air and a Guard falls off of a bridge and lands with a sickening crunching splattering sound some ways from where they were.
Then everything is thrown into chaos.

Roaring shouts fill the air and TeorSer fire reigns down. Instantly a shield of green covers their elevator and the TeorSer fire aimed at them bursts overhead, leaving the translucent green shield unscathed and unaffected. It’s obviously Taeh’yung, his palms are glowing green and he looks around happily.

There’s loud shouting and doors open up, and in pour units of Guards, Heliords lit up and swinging through the crowds of freed working-slaves who were almost maddened by their sudden new found freedom.

In the beginning they appear to be mowing down the working-slaves but a shrieking scream fills the air and the Guards are being pushed back. The Guards are trying to fight back but they’re being overwhelmed by the freed slaves who, with complete disregard towards themselves, attack the Guard, uncaring if they died in the process.

‘Until Sk’jin gets here shouldn’t we-‘ Hoseok begins but before he’s contradicted by both Namjoon and Sk’jin, Yoongi tosses him one of the Heliord handles before activating his own, kicks open the elevator doors, and steps out of the protective green shield. He disappears for a while and Hoseok is slightly worried for a while. But then a fresh massive unit of Guards appear and he too steps outside of the shield.

Namjoon sighs deeply from where he’s sitting and he stands too.

‘He’s one of those assholes isn’t he? Give him a sword and he’s an expert at first swing?’ Namjoon scowls at Yoongi’s back. The Human activates the second Heliord; a flashing flare of electric blue swings in arcs as he dives into the crowd of the Guards, striking down their numbers in comically high amounts in a few seconds. The freed slaves roar their approval and it’s like watching madness come to life.

‘Well,’ Hoseok hands Namjoon his TeorSer while Taeh’yung’s eyes start to glow an ominous green, a wide smile growing on his face as he skips after Yoongi. Hoseok swings the handle, activating the sword mid-swing and deflecting a TeorSer fired at him.

‘Guess that makes me an asshole too.’

He doesn’t get to hear Namjoon’s response but it’s probably something along the lines of show-off.

‘I’ll be there in 5 minutes. Please don’t get yourselves killed, thank you very much.’

Hoseok hears Namjoon snort before he takes out the rows of Guards situated at the bridges above them where they were firing down on the masses of working-slaves. Hoseok has to admit that the Kutsogleran has uncanny aim as he doesn't waste a single shot, each fire taking out its target.

Namjoon goes back to his screen, tapping a little here and there. Hoseok covers the Kutsogleran as he works. Green arcs of light fly from one corner of the massive space and Hoseok watches in awe as chunks and chunks of construction and building simply vanishes and bridges fall upon each other, the ground over which the Guard stood disappearing in green flashes. Hoseok doesn’t know why but he feels as though Taeh’yung would be giggling as he did whatever it was that he was doing.

Suddenly all the doors in the surrounding prison cells all over the Central Facility springs open and Namjoon easily breaks apart the screen into crumpled shards and tosses it aside. Fresh waves of screams and Beings flood the ramparts and bridges.
Hoseok watches with some horror and some amount of satisfaction as they escaping Slavers are met by the freed working-slaves and are pushed off, falling all the way down screaming to their deaths. A bunch of them have managed to run off, Guards taking over and using their Heliords against the working-slaves.

‘I’m close- where do you want me to be?’

Taeh’yung pops up in front of them out of nowhere, Yoongi, who is somehow splattered with blood, is behind him, Heliords still blazed up, his eyes glittering ominously. Namjoon actually takes a step back before collecting himself.

‘I can sense you now!’ Taeh’yung smiles, ushering them together and closer, hands glowing green. He looks around for a while and nods as though satisfied with the chaos. A pyramid of green light forms around them and without any warning they sink down into the floor as though it were liquid.

Understandably, Hoseok and Namjoon shriek in shock. Yoongi seems entirely unperturbed as they sink into darkness, lit only the the glowing pyramid walls and Taeh’yung’s hands.

‘Just stay there Jin- we’re coming to you!’ Taeh’yung’s eyes glow an ominous green, the copper lines that cover his skin moving and shifting.

Hoseok takes back what he thought about possibly being fond of this Being.
'Your body is not injured.' Amme states, all four of her hand dropping to her side from where they had been raised around Yoongi’s head.

‘But what is the matter?’

‘Your Soul.’

‘My soul?’

‘You are a Human. The Life-force of a Human is considerably weaker than most in this Universe, yet I can sense that your life-span has expanded approximately 600 centuries.’

600 centuries of existence and yet only now Yoongi is aware of it.

‘Soul is another term for Life-force, is it not?’

‘The Soul and Life-force are completely different.’

Yoongi is in the Yisheng meditation gardens, seated in front of Amme. If his calculations are correct, then a base lay under where they were currently seated. It seems as though Amme is able to understand his flow of thoughts and says, ‘Do you worry for them?’

‘They are me. I am them.’

‘Do you feel that they are your people?’

‘No.’

This was his 2nd month living inside the Headquarters, keeping watch over the bases while the court hearing went on. There were researchers and scientists, working alongside the Yishengs to study and observe the masses of Beings inside the tubes and as well as the Beings who were found inside the Akramanese ship.

Yoongi followed their motions, keeping watch— they called him the silent sentinel and did their best to ignore his presence if they saw him though that was rare. Yoongi spent most of his time inside the bases, and though he was offered lodgings inside the Yisheng Headquarters he preferred sleeping close to the tubes.

‘I have dreams.’

This time they’re sitting under the trees near the cliffs overlooking a large lake beyond the tamer regions of the Yisheng Forest.

‘I do not understand my dreams.’

‘Not all dreams have meaning Yoongi.’ Amme is surrounded by flowers that bloom in her wake, the Life-force she emanates brings vitality around her. But the moment she steps away, the flowers wither and die. Yoongi collects the dried flowers, watching as they are reduced to nothing more than dust between his fingers.

‘What do you see in your dreams?’

‘I don’t know. I don’t recognize the Beings in it. The location I’m in, or who I am in them.’

‘You do not recognize yourself?’
‘I know my face. But I do not know who I am.’

Amme pauses to think a while. She had told Yoongi that she was studying him as though he were a new species of Being, recording all of his words, his actions, his methods.

_The first of your kind._

‘What does it mean to have memory?’ Yoongi asks. ‘Do you not need memory to dream?’

‘Fetus’s growing inside wombs have dreams Yoongi- yet they have no formed memory.’

‘Why is that?’

‘There are many explanations for that. Some believe it is because of sensory reactions- a fetus is mostly made of an expansive nervous system after all. Some believe it is their mother or host’s memories and emotions they translate into their own understanding. Some believe it is the echo of their past lives. It is what each Being wishes to believe.’

‘What do you believe in, Yisheng Amme?’

‘I believe that all Life is Continuum.’

Yoongi has heard this many times before. From so many places. But he doesn’t understand it.

‘What is memory?’

Amme is conducting a careful research over one of the tubes, two of her hands extending out over the tube while the other holds up a screen. She writes over it swiftly.

‘Memory is different for everyone,’ Amme replies, her eyes blinking in sequence. ‘It holds different value- many Beings do not realize the extent of the power or meaning of memory.’

‘If you have memory. Does it mean you exist?’ Yoongi looks into the tube curiously.

This tube contained a young female in it; large eyes closed, skin strangely transparent, allowing Yoongi to see her sinewy bones that seemed hollow and light- could she fly? Did she have memories of flying imprinted in her DNA?

‘To exist does not always correlate with memory Yoongi.’

‘What does it mean to exist?’ Yoongi asks. ‘You are standing in front of me. I know you exist. You are in my memory now. Your entirety is made known to me. What of the others?’

‘Others?’

Yoongi looks upwards towards the rosy sky beyond the large glass dome overhead, ‘Those who live everywhere else.’

‘Do you doubt the existence of the trees in the forest outside?’

‘No.’

‘Even though you cannot see every single one of them?’

‘Yes.’
‘Why is it so?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘It’s because you believe in the possibility of their existence, supported by the similar visual stimulation you are receiving.’ Amme explains though Yoongi finds that this explanation doesn’t seem to answer the questions he has. Though to be fair, the questions he has are unknown to himself too. He can’t seem to voice out the multitude of questions he has. While he understands Amme and her words, and how his mind backs this information up with what is known to be rational and logical facts, he finds that there is no real understanding of it.

Before the Android Core had been implemented and initiated into his consciousness, Yoongi never had the need for memory, just simple sensory reaction and implementation to succeed in his missions.

He existed, that was a fact. He still existed now.

But why did it matter now?

‘What does it mean to be alive?’

‘No one knows what it means to be alive Yoongi.’ Amme answers simply. ‘Some believe that living a life of servitude to a cause makes them Alive. Others believe that by leaving behind a legacy, they are living. Some Beings don’t even acknowledge the concept of their own life because it is not a notion they believe to be of immediate occurrence, rather a state of simply being.’

‘Which one is correct?’

Amme guides him through the massive Yisheng Archives.

‘We all just believe what we will. There is no right or wrong in what we believe. Time, Space, Matter, Mass- these are conventions, a medium in which we live. The petri dish within which we exist, if you will. But what that means to each of us varies. As there are stars in the universe, there are Beings. And as there are Beings, there are individual thoughts. These thoughts are a result of memory, senses, and environment.’

‘Then are the beliefs based on the destruction of lives as we witness in either political or religious genocide justifiable. Are the beliefs based on the suffering of one for the good for all just? Is murdering someone for revenge acceptable, knowing that you may have indirectly killed more than just one Being in your path to self-anointed redemption?’

‘Those who believe in that, are sure in themselves of their justification- one act of violence and loss can be translated into victory and gain for another.’ Amme states, stopping in front of an old vellum made of what appeared to be leather. Amme had told him that these original manuscripts were still being preserved in the Archives, from every corner of the Universe in order for their original metaphysical aura to stay intact.

‘Is this simply an indication of where you stand in that situation?’ Yoongi’s nose feels itchy from breathing the air in here.

‘Yes.’

‘Then why did the Yishengs oppose the Akramanese takeover of the Known Universe? The Akramanese were right in their own terms. Yishengs Ndica, Sttion, and Tlun’hla were all right in their own beliefs.’ Yoongi states out. ‘Why did the others condemn their actions as wrong, and
why did they end their lives to “right” their “wrongs”.

‘For the same reason why you activated the highways in Šerdesas. You were aware of what was happening, and for what intent and purpose- yet you set about actions and motions that would take 631 lives and injure 2788 Beings. Do you remember why you did it?’

‘No.’

‘Are you sure.’

‘I don’t know.’

‘We all do things Yoongi- within our own right. Finding another Being who shares the same sentiment, the same value, the same purpose as your intentions, is close to impossible.’

‘Why is that? Everybody wants peace. They want happiness, they want success.’

‘And to each Being, peace, happiness, and success all mean entirely different things- they all represent different things. One Being’s peace, is another Being’s war. One Being’s freedom, is another Being’s enslavement.’ Amme turns the vellum carefully, perusing the soft pages.

‘Why does that happen?’

‘Because all Life is a Continuum Yoongi.’ Amme states, extending her free hands out and outlining a ring midair. ‘There is no end or beginning.’

Yoongi follows the motion of her hands, tracking the shape with his eyes.

‘That contradicts the Yisheng Code.’

‘Does it?’

‘Does it not?’

‘No Yoongi. We only add to it.’

Yoongi is silent.

‘If you want to live,’ Amme says after what feels like a full hour. ‘If you want to be, then you need to find that belief.’

‘From what I have learnt- all beliefs are right and wrong. And will bring both good and harm. To both myself and those around me.’

‘That is true.’ Amme states. ‘When I heal one Being, they may rise and inflict pain and sorrow onto others. Or they might spread peace and joy. When you assassinated an Officer, you might have ended a long line of corruption; or you might have added to it.’

‘Then why would you encourage me to find my own beliefs, when you know that the results will always be either or.’

‘Because Yoongi. That is what it means to live.’

The dusty motes from the Archives seem to follow him even out here in the gardens. Yoongi crouches down to better check on the budding sprouts, poking their pale green heads through the soft rich soil. They all seem to twitch, as though rustled by a wind. Yoongi instinctively digs his
hands into the warm soil, cupping his hands over some of the saplings.

‘I have a mission for you Yoongi.’

Amme stands some ways beyond the garden.

Yoongi last saw her 4 months ago. She appears changed, or did Yoongi’s perception change? Yoongi stands up from where he’s crouching, hands still clasped over the saplings in his hands.

‘I was not aware I would be participating in missions, Yisheng Amme.’ Yoongi states. ‘It has been 4 sols since my last mission.’

‘This is a special mission Yoongi.’ Amme explains. ‘But only if you agree to it.’

‘What is the mission statement?’ Yoongi asks after a while. He watches as the saplings near his feet grow quickly, forming little bushels near his feet.

‘Mission 013-937619 is a special operation issued by the Special Jury. You are to fulfill the role of Weapons Specialist within a team of 3 other Beings.’ Amme hands him a screen from within her robes. ‘All details you will find in there.’

‘Why me?’ Yoongi doesn’t unclasp his hands.

‘Because I believe you will find the answers to all of your questions in this mission,’ Amme explains, lowering the screen to the ground. ‘And you will find that you are not alone in your questions.’

Yoongi looks down at the screen; it’s been a while since he’s used one.

‘Come find me when you have made your decision.’

Amme performs her customary bow and leaves.

The thriving bushels nearby wilt and wither away.

Carefully, Yoongi opens his hands and the morning breeze carries away the dust, rising momentarily before disappearing entirely.
Namjoon finds himself falling hard on his ass on the floor of the Bridge of the Užkulisai Bridge.

‘Spaces-!’ he hears Sk’jin gasp from somewhere behind him.

There’s a squawk of protest as Hoseok too hits the floor and few more muffled thuds.

‘Get ready to fly out now.’ Yoongi is ordering, on his feet and already making his way towards his seat.

Namjoon pulls himself up, coming face-to-face with Sk’jin who looks extraordinarily unwell and disheveled. Hoseok, who looks a little queasy is staring at the ceiling through which they had clearly slid through but there’s no gaping hole, just the fading remains of a lingering thin string of green light outlining a triangle. What in Spaces had just happened?

They had been inside that glowing green pyramid and it felt awfully a lot like they were inside some lift, except they seemed to be travelling sideways? Namjoon isn’t sure, and now here they were, inside the Užkulisai. Namjoon swears at one point they had been briefly tossed out into space but that was most probably his imagination. It had to be.

Hoseok seems to be wondering the same thing but they both snap out of it and get into action. Hoseok scrambles towards the cockpit and Namjoon is already starting up the Navigation Table and quickly chooses a path for any random system as far away as possible.

‘Ship is locked in trajectory- Hoseok take us out now!’ Namjoon calls, strapping himself in.

‘Taeh’yung, that means you too!’ Sk’jin orders and Namjoon berates himself for momentarily forgetting about the Zhak’gri amidst all that happened. Taeh’yung nods and straps himself into a footstool and despite his feet touching the floor, swings his legs much like a child would. Namjoon was definitely going to have to sit Sk’jin, Yoongi, and Taeh’yung down and get a full explanation of everything. About how they knew each other, what that meant, who Taeh’yung is, how did Sk’jin know how to pilot a ship, and basically everything else. Maybe shower first though.

‘We’re hitting warp in 10 seconds!’ Hoseok calls out.

‘Yisheng ship approaching,’ Yoongi calls out, his voice sharp and alert. Namjoon glances at his screen in front of him and studies the quickly approaching Yisheng Ship. It’s much larger than the Slaver-ship and though not armed, intimidating as it loomed larger than the Grezma outpost.

‘In 5!’

‘But what about the baby?’

Namjoon, Hoseok, Yoongi, and Sk’jin spin in alarm to look at the Zhak’gri.

‘What baby?’ they ask in one voice.
‘The one in the cargo? Inside the OrTank.’

‘Setting into warp.’

A white light fills the Bridge and the familiar pull tugs at the base of Namjoon’s stomach lining as they vault themselves into space at the speed of light.

‘Baby?! I beg your pardon?’ Hoseok asks in a high voice. Namjoon has vivid images of the CapTanks from the Slaver-ship burning in his mind’s eye.

‘What are you talking about-‘ Namjoon begins but there’s blurred movement and Namjoon knows that it’s Yoongi. His form darts through the Bridge and out of the doorway.

‘Yoongi! We’re not at green yet-!’ Sk’jin gasps out, turning wildly in his seat to warn the Human but he’s gone already.

‘Warp safety measures are cleared-‘

‘Yoongi!!’ Hoseok calls out in bewilderment, moving swiftly out of the cockpit as Taeh’yung too follows after him. Namjoon, with some difficulty, manages to get out of his chair and is followed closely by Sk’jin.

‘What are you talking about?’ Namjoon hears Hoseok addressing the Zhak’gri as they run down the stairs ahead of him. The hair of the back of his neck rises and Namjoon is already dreading what he’s going to find.

‘About 4 sols ago, I came across them- like Yoongi, others. Lots of them!’ Taeh’yung explains. Namjoon’s stomach drops, dread and apprehension building with every step he takes.

‘They’re from everywhere; from past Time and space.’

Namjoon can’t help but glance at Sk’jin who is incredibly pale, his face drawn and his eyes unblinking. But Namjoon doesn’t detect any surprise in his expression. And when the Khol’isa glances over at him, Namjoon reads a sense of guilt, fear, and anxiousness.

They arrive at the bottom most Lobby and catch the sight of Hoseok and Taeh’yung disappearing into the doorway leading to the Hangar.

‘Namjoon-‘ Sk’jin is beginning to say but Namjoon ignores the Khol’isa for now, stepping into the Hangar as well.

Yoongi stands next to the Zhak’gri who is pulling out one of the larger OrTanks from Unit 9.

‘Careful with that-‘ Namjoon warns as he rushes closer but his words die in his mouth as Taeh’yung opens the lid, pushes aside the birthing tanks and pulls out a very cleverly designed lid underneath the tanks to reveal a smaller OrTank underneath that.

‘What the actual fuck-‘ Hoseok whispers under his breath but all of them jump when Yoongi roughly takes apart the outer OrTank as though it were made out of flimsy driftwood, laying the smaller OrTank bare and out in the open.

‘Wait Yoongi-‘ Sk’jin warns making to stop the Human but Yoongi is too quick and he lifts the lid off.

‘Look! It’s my baby! Well, one of them,’ Taeh’yung pushes the lid off completely to crouch next to
the OrTank.

Namjoon shuffles closer until he’s standing over the OrTank. Inside, suspended in what appeared to be mist, was a Being of unknown species.

‘What the fuck-’ Hoseok begins again as he too looks down at the OrTank in completely disbelief.

‘How did- what is this-‘ Hoseok can’t seem to formulate the questions he wants to ask.

‘He’s still sleeping- still dreaming,’ Taeh’yung says, placing his hand over the glass. Then he looks up at Yoongi and says, ‘Just like you.’

Namjoon is thoroughly taken aback by the expression on Yoongi’s face. A combination of shock, confusion, sorrow, pain, and what looked, strangely, like hope.

‘What do you mean?’ Hoseok asks, looking up from the tank to Taeh’yung and then to Yoongi. Instead of answering, Taeh’yung wraps his arms around the tube and pulls it upwards. Yoongi immediately helps the Zhak’gri, his face now displaying nothing but a strange sense of awe and wonder.

The Being inside the tank rotates gently as they make the tube-like tank stand up.

His face is young, cheeks slightly rounded, lips full, sloping eyes closed. His hair is a pale silver-gold, a colour Namjoon can’t rightly name. His skin is warm and tanned, as though he had just recently been in the sun. His features are entirely anthropomorphic and in fact, doesn’t look too different from Yoongi or Hoseok in built and form.

‘We should check for the battery-cells,’ Sk’jin says from behind Namjoon. ‘If this Being is surviving on…whatever that is, it must be charged or something.’

Sk’jin sounds composed and as though he’d been planning this out.

‘-this mission was already intended to be something else-‘ Namjoon studies Sk’jin carefully and something clicks.

‘Sk’jin,- can I have a word in private?’

Namjoon catches the way Sk’jin seems to catch himself, as though berating himself momentarily before he meets Namjoon’s eyes. His eyes flashes briefly and he nods once quickly.

Hoseok looks away from the tube to find Sk’jin glaring defiantly at Namjoon, while the latter looks angry.

‘Hoseok, watch over the Bridge please. Taeh’yung, Yoongi, please do not move the tank anymore and do not engage with the object or Being inside the tube.’ Namjoon orders, not looking away from Sk’jin.

‘Hoseok?’ Namjoon repeats, breaking their stare and addressing Hoseok. Sk’jin walks out of the Hangar Bay, his steps tired and heavy.

Glancing at Sk’jin’s retreating back, and then back at the tank, Hoseok nods; ‘Yeah, I’m going.’

Hoseok steps away and before he leaves, turns to look over the tank again.

He catches sight of Taeh’yung saying something softly to Yoongi, who has his hand up, as though wanting to touch the surface. Taeh’yung says something, and Yoongi is replying it seems, his hand
presses up against the surface.

And then as though in response, the floating Being inside, though “asleep” or whatever state it was that he was in, raises his hand up and lines up next to Yoongi’s.

* 

Chapter End Notes

(Author’s Note)
I love JJProject’s new album.
JJP is one of my first ships, I love this so much.
I have some bad news =( I won’t be able to update every week from now on. Uni starts
next week and honestly this semester is really gonna kill me I can tell already. So I’ll only be able to update every 2 weeks T_T
Please wish me luck for the upcoming semester I am definitely going to die
Sk’jin looks incredibly unwell. His skin is dull, his eyes slightly glazed as though fevered, and even his posture is weakened; as though he didn’t possess the energy to stand straight. However his expression is defiant and undaunted as he leads Namjoon into the Lobby outside the Hangar Bay. The Khol’isa takes a seat, exhaling out as though relieved to be sitting down. Namjoon doesn’t sit down and instead stands in front of him, arms crossed.

He had wanted to take a shower and hold a discussion with the Khol’isa in question, Yoongi, and the Zhak’gri but in light of recent discoveries- that was going to have to wait.

‘I’m setting up our trajectory to open-space,’ Hoseok announces. ‘I’m keeping watch over the broadcasting channels as well as underverse channels just to stay clear.’

‘Thank you Hoseok,’ Namjoon says before addressing the nonchalantly lounging Khol’isa. ‘What do you know about this?’

‘Would it hurt you to explain your questions?’ Sk’jin asks back tiredly. ‘When you mean “this” do you mean our mission? Do you mean my ability to pilot? Or how I know Taeh’yung? Or about the lovely parcel in our cargo?’

Namjoon wills himself not to snap.

‘You weren’t surprised to see that OrTank.’ Namjoon states, staring at Sk’jin for any reaction. Sk’jin’s impassive expression is extremely impressive.

‘No I wasn’t.’ Sk’jin shrugs then adds. ‘But I sure was when I first saw it. I thought you were here to ask me questions but all I’m getting are statements. Are we done? I think I want to go nap for a while.’

Namjoon wonders if there was ever a time where Sk’jin wasn’t the most infuriating Being alive, this side of the Universe.

‘What is he? The Being inside the OrTank?’

‘I’m just as lost as you are. But judging from Yoongi’s reaction, shouldn’t you be asking him that instead?’

‘Yoongi wasn’t the one who knew about it,’ Namjoon says tersely. ‘Sk’jin, stop lying. There’s no going around this.’

‘But I’m not lying Namjoon,’ Sk’jin replies serenely. ‘I do not know who that Being is, or what
he’s doing here, or how he’s here. All I know is that none of the special-jury members thought to
tell us of his existence and have given him the highest authorization code aboard this ship- even
higher than yours by the way.’ Sk’jin lowers down on the seat so that his head rests on the back of
the couch. ‘Like I said, I only found out about-’ he glances at a non-existent screen in his palm and
says, ‘-5 hours ago, so honestly Joonie, I’m as lost as you are on this one.’

Namjoon doesn’t say anything, studying the Khol’isa in front of him.

‘Look if you don’t believe me, just check the surveillance footage- I know you have them fed to
your NaviLet directly.’ Sk’jin yawns, closing his eyes as though readying for a nap.

‘Surveillance footage means nothing,’ Namjoon states. ‘There is no-

‘Oh of course,’ Sk’jin opens one eye, sighing dramatically. ‘I could have staged all of that- the
moment none of you were on the ship. How convenient yes? I took my opportunity, being the
healthy and kind-hearted Being that I am- and plotted out some unfathomable plan about
smuggling in some strange Being aboard the ship and simultaneously rescue your ass. Yes, a fine
thing to do indeed.’

He goes back to closing his eyes. Normally Namjoon isn’t one to go seek out an argument or start
up stressful triggering topics but here he was, arguing with the most obstinate Being he’s had the
misfortune of meeting.

‘You’re still here? Spaces, Joonie I didn’t know you would miss me this much,’ Sk’jin mumbles,
opening one eye sleepily.

‘How do you know Taeh’yung?’

‘I’ve known Taeh’yung for a while now,’ Sk’jin replies easily, with a badly suppressed yawn. ‘T’s
just how it is y’know?’

‘I don’t. Clarify. Now.’

‘Monosyllables. I do love those,’ Sk’jin sits up just a little, obviously sensing that Namjoon wasn’t
about to move away. He leans on his arm against the back of the couch, gazing up at Namjoon
lazily.

‘Look- Taeh’yung helped me out when I was stuck. I pretty much owe him all of this,’ Sk’jin
shrugs, gesturing to himself. ‘Kid’s weird, but he’s nice- and he can be trusted- though that
probably means nothing to you. I’m pretty sure you weren’t looking for my approval and now you
just doubt Taeh’yung even more. But seeing as how he knew Yoongi too, why not actually ask
Yoongi hm?’

‘Stop diverting the subject towards Yoongi,’ Namjoon sighs out tiredly, sitting down on the table
in front of Sk’jin. ‘Look- Sk’jin, I’m trying really hard to understand what any of this means-

‘And what makes you think I’m the one who knows the answer behind everything?’ Sk’jin side-
eyes him sleepily. ‘You’re asking the wrong Being all the wrong questions. Besides, isn’t it too
easy?’ Sk’jin adds. ‘Of course all of you suspect me. It’s easy enough to see that. It’s easy enough
to conclude that it’s me too. But isn’t it too easy? I thought you were smarter than that.’

‘Sk’jin look,’ Namjoon is exhausted. ‘I am not accusing you of anything-‘

‘Oh? Sure felt like it,’ Sk’jin gives him an unimpressed look.
‘I am not accusing you of anything,’ Namjoon repeats firmly. ‘I just want answers. Will you please just answer my questions without playing games with me or trying to twist my words.’

‘While I’d love to play games with you Namjoonie, it’s honestly not worth my time,’ Sk’jin grins at him. ‘And I am doing exactly what you want me to do. I am answering your questions. You asked me who that Being is inside the OrTank, and I replied saying that I don’t know; which is the truth by the way. Then you asked me who Taeh’yung is and how I know him. While I don’t exactly know who or what he is- I mean I doubt he knows it himself, I met him some sols back and he helped me out of a situation. I haven’t met him since until today. Do you have any more questions or can I finally go and maybe sleep?’

‘How did you learn how to pilot and why did you lie about it?’

‘Honestly Namjoon- how is that even a question,’ Sk’jin rolls his eyes, looking disappointed. ‘I was the pirate-lord of one of the biggest and strongest pirating clans for nearly a thousand years- you tend to pick up on skills during such a time.’

‘But why did you lie about it?’

‘Namjoon, honey, have you met yourself?’ Sk’jin raises his eyebrow appraisingly. ‘You already decided that you didn’t like me- probably because I’m Khol’isa like K’mara- which by the way, is really racist of you- and also probably because of my stunning good looks. It was just simply self-preservation.’

‘Self-preservation.’ Namjoon echoes, disbelieving of Sk’jin’s claims.

‘Yes. If you had known about my piloting abilities since the beginning, you would have probably reduced my authority aboard the ship to nonexistent. Don’t deny it.’ Sk’jin says dismissively. ‘Honestly, the way you’re handling things- I’m surprised we’re actually at this point in our mission.’

‘Don’t act like I’m the only person on this ship who is causing issues- I am hardly the problem here.’

‘Oh and I am?’ Sk’jin spits back with unexpected aggressiveness. ‘Your lack of communication and inability to see past you own preconceived notions is immature and honestly a disgrace to your profession.’

‘Don’t bring this up again,’ Namjoon stands up, glaring down at Sk’jin. ‘I already spoke about that and I apologized for it but-‘

‘-oh and such a noble thing to do-‘

‘-but it wasn’t as though it was entirely my fault- had you been more honest-‘

‘-I am honest Namjoon- the most honest Being on this ship and you would have seen that from the beginning had it not been for your insufferable pride-‘ Sk’jin spits out, sitting up.

‘-my pride-?’

‘-and your oh so brave and noble attitude- you’re no better than the rest of us- we’re all expendable here- don’t you see? Did you really think this mission was all they stated it would be?’ Sk’jin too stands up and point at the Hangar Bay. ‘That Being in there- this ship- this entire mission- did you really just accept it the way Lmiura presented it? What did she do that made you so stoic in your trust over an assignment created by some of the most untrustworthy Beings in this Universe? Did
she stroke your ego, made you feel like you were *important* or did she stroke something else-'

‘You are toeing a *very* thin line here,’ Namjoon all but growls, stepping straight up towards Sk’jin. ‘I have *every* right to doubt you— you were placed here, by K’mar as her spy, we both know this. Don’t deny it. Did you really think I bought anything you said? A “region expert”? That’s utter bullshit and everyone here knows it. And seeing as you can’t seem to let go of the past- your complete lack of participation in informing us about your criminal record and leading us on to Orvan and now here we are- possibly completely alienated and isolated from both GLA Docks and outposts- getting us stranded in the early phases of our mission. So if it’s my *pride* that’s trying to make this less than ideal mission work then you’ll be damn sure I’m going to continue behaving like this.’ Namjoon huffs out a humorless laugh. ‘You didn’t think it never occurred to me? You thought I’d just follow in on whatever orders *they* had- no Sk’jin; I am here for the same reasons like you- for the same reasons why K’mar made you her little bitch to report back to her-‘

Sk’jin seems to snap.

‘The *same* reasons as me?’ Sk’jin seethes out. ‘I think the fuck not you little asshole-’

‘Then care to tell me why exactly you’re here?’ Namjoon glares down at the Khol’isa under his nose. ‘Or why you were making calls to someone in a language that just so happens to not be included in Lisai’s directory of languages- maybe then I’ll “trust” you. Or maybe you can explain why Lisai’s directory is compromised and the databank is missing entire sections of information-‘

‘I owe you *nothing*- I could have left all of you back there,’ Sk’jin hisses, pushing Namjoon back, his eyes flashing bright and red. ‘Now that I think about it- maybe I should have done-’

‘And this is coming from the same Being who told me to believe in him,’ Namjoon laughs humorlessly again though his eyes are ablaze with fury. ‘I did not choose this- I did not want to be the *Captain* of this fucked up mission- but I felt that it required me to-‘

‘-oh of course! Of course!’ Sk’jin laughs, throwing his head back. ‘You would sacrifice your comfort and quiet lifestyle for the *good* of the Universe- thank you for honoring us with your magnanimous heart-‘

‘-you keep lecturing me on all of this- like you knew any better- just because you were a big fish in a small pond doesn’t make you the biggest or the best; doesn’t mean you *know* shit. You were a pirate-lord for longer than all of us combined have lived- what’s so great about that huh? You lost it all anyways-’ Namjoon is vaguely aware of Sk’jin’s expression shifting in a way that triggered warning bells inside his head but he can’t stop. ‘-and seeing the way you are, I wouldn’t be surprised if you lost your standing because you got all of your network killed because of your arrogance and inability to foresee the dangers you seem to thrive on-‘

Sk’jin shoves him backwards harshly.

‘Don’t-‘

‘-maybe you forgot to inform them of something important,’ Namjoon recklessly continues. ‘Maybe you forgot or maybe you just didn’t tell them because they *didn’t ask you*-’

There’s a strange pulse in the air around them and Namjoon is hit with a wave of nausea. Sk’jin is trembling where he stands, his entire being appears strangely luminescent and a strange red glow emanates from near his temples.

‘Do not *tell me,*’ Sk’jin’s voice is low, his features morphing horrifically. ‘You know *nothing!*
The air around Namjoon pulses again and Sk’jin seems to somehow appear taller, his features stretching and his eyes burning red and Namjoon can’t look away. Namjoon is horrified by the change taking over Sk’jin’s features- there’s a strangely dangerous and ethereal beauty to Sk’jin-one that could kill.

‘Jin!’

All sound is distorted and Namjoon can’t look away, his body is frozen and his chest feels compressed as though pressured in a way that makes him believe that if he had actual lungs, he would be struggling to breathe. Sk’jin lifts his hand, as though reaching for him and Namjoon knows he should move but his legs refuse to cooperate. Was this the Khol’isa’s abilities? Was this what made them such a formidable and deadly species of Beings?

‘JIN!’

Taeh’yung appears out of nowhere, entering the strangely warped bubble Namjoon and Sk’jin were trapped in, breaking the strange pressure in the air. The Zhak’gri steps forward in front of Sk’jin, blocking him from view.

Namjoon falls backwards against the wall, panting heavily as though starved of air. His limbs feel strangely disconnected from his body and he slides down the wall.

‘Hey, it’s okay Jinnie, don’t use your energy like that all right?’ Taeh’yung has the Khol’isa wrapped in a hug, unafraid of the still glowing Being in his arms.

Sk’jin’s eyes bore into Namjoon’s- and the Kutsoglerin still can’t look away.

‘You- you know nothing-’ Sk’jin grits out before his eyes roll backwards into his head and his entire body slumps against Taeh’yung.

Cold shivers run down Namjoon’s back, the hair on the back on his neck rising.

‘Jin? Babe? Oh no- how long has he been like this?’ Taeh’yung asks, looking back at Namjoon as though he hadn’t just interrupted what was no doubt going to be the horrific end-result of Namjoon’s recklessness.

‘He’s been unwell for a while now.’

Yoongi is standing by the entrance to the Lobby, as though he’d been there the entire time. Maybe he was, Namjoon can’t be sure. Yoongi doesn’t seem to have any opinions regarding what just happened- he doesn’t even seem interested, let alone inclined to judging Namjoon.

‘He just needs a little sunshine in his life,’ Taeh’yung smiles at them as he maneuvers Sk’jin around as though the Khol’isa hardly weighed anything. Lifting him up in his arms, Taeh’yung makes his way upwards.

‘The Medical Bay is this way,’ Namjoon finds himself saying, pointing behind himself.

‘Oh- no need for that!’ Taeh’yung beams. ‘I can do it.’

‘Wait- Taeh’yung,’ Namjoon frowns; he would stand but his limbs are still protesting. ‘You can’t just-‘
‘It’s all right,’ Yoongi cuts across, walking over to Namjoon. ‘He’s done it before.’

Taeh’yung just nods and walks up the stairs calling back with a cheerful, ‘He’ll be as good as new soon!’ and disappears to Level Two.

Yoongi sits down in front of him, legs crossed. He slouches forward, his spine curving in a way that probably wasn’t very good for him.

‘How do you know Taeh’yung?’ Namjoon asks tiredly.

‘I saw him in the Yisheng Headquarters,’ Yoongi replies directly. ‘He was involved in the Gaia Case. Then I met him again in the Mars Dock. He was part of the team responsible for handling the remains of the evidence left in that area.’

‘You knew Sk’jin before any of this, didn’t you?’ Namjoon asks with a sigh, feeling the urge to sleep for a week.

‘Yes. He was closely linked to the Beings involved directly with the Gaia Case.’ Yoongi replies. ‘I spoke to him once. He was different then. Now that I see them together, I believe Taeh’yung helped Sk’jin.’

‘What does that mean?’

Yoongi pauses, his expression is blank as ever. Sk’jin’s words from earlier rings in Namjoon’s mind.

‘And what makes you think I’m the one who knows the answer behind everything? You’re asking the wrong Being all the wrong questions.’

‘It’s not in my place to say.’

Namjoon carefully regards Yoongi. He thinks back to the Flotsam and Jetsam back in Grezma, how the Human didn’t seem fazed or confused by the fact that Lisai, an operating AI system, didn’t have a language in its database.

‘Yoongi.’

‘Yes.’

‘Were you aware of Lisai’s faulty database?’

‘Yes.’

‘Why didn’t you tell me?’ Namjoon feels a faint flare of irritation at this revelation but it subsides quickly. He was just too tired for this.

‘I thought you knew,’ Yoongi replies simply. ‘I noticed the first time I boarded the ship and used a screen. I wasn’t aware that none of you realized.’

Yoongi’s assumption made sense to an extent. It seemed like the kind of thing an Information Analyst would have figured out. Or even a Venture Unit agent should have figured out.

‘Why are you in this mission? And not because you were assigned or whatever- what made you decide that you wanted to be part of this?’ Namjoon asks, sitting up properly.

‘Because Yisheng Amme told me I would be able to find the answers to my questions.’
‘What questions?’

‘About everything.’

Namjoon sighs. Well that was helpful.

‘What do you know about that Being inside there? This isn’t the first time you’ve seen someone like him?’

‘Yes and no.’

‘What does that mean?’ Namjoon is really exhausted at this point; he wonders what in Spaces Taeh’yung is doing. He knows he should probably go check up on it- see what the Zhak’gri is really doing. But after everything that has happened and everything that has transpired, Namjoon finds that he’s quickly losing any inclination to really care at all.

‘I saw many like him,’ Yoongi replies, turning his head towards the direction of the Hangar Bay. ‘But he is like and unlike them. Like and unlike me.’

‘Is that how you were before?’ Namjoon asks, gathering the will to stand up and make his way upstairs and at least take a shower or something. Yoongi is still splattered in blood but he doesn’t seem to care.

‘I don’t remember.’

‘So is that one of the reasons why you’re in this mission? To maybe find out more about yourself?’

‘Yes.’

‘I see,’ Namjoon sighs one more time and struggles to his feet. Yoongi does the same, mirroring his actions.

‘Do you trust Taeh’yung?’

‘I do.’ Yoongi’s reply is immediate and firm.

‘What about Sk’jin?’

‘He wasn’t lying to you.’ Yoongi replies. ‘There was no lie in his eyes.’

‘Namjoon could you come up to the Bridge? We need to set course.’ Hoseok chimes in, sounding exhausted.

‘Just set it to wherever for the moment- put the ship on auto; get some rest Hoseok,’ Namjoon replies before addressing Yoongi. ‘Thank you for coming back and getting me out. I realize how easy it would have been for all of you to simply leave me behind. I am grateful that you didn’t.’

‘It was not my decision alone.’ Yoongi steps back, clearly headed towards the Hangar again. ‘It was a group decision.’

‘Either way, thank you.’

Yoongi doesn’t reply to that and walks away.

Trudging upwards, Namjoon makes his way towards the Living Quarters. He glances over at
Cabin 01 and wonders if Taeh’yung and Sk’jin were all right. He contemplates for a while, wondering if he should knock and inquire after the health of the Khol’isa. But after that explosive reaction and argument, Namjoon guesses he should probably make himself scarce around the Khol’isa.

Typing in his password, Namjoon enters his room with a sense of relief. His joints were starting to hurt a little, nothing too serious or distracting but it was better to be safe than sorry. He accesses the drawer over his bed and pulls out an oblong box. Picking out a white and blue pill and a dotted white tablet, Namjoon swallows them dry.

Making quick work of his clothes and discarding them down the shredder-chute, Namjoon checks over his body with a trained eye.

He’s grown used to his body- he doesn’t remember a time where he hasn’t looked like this. And perhaps that was for the better. He’s known many Kutsoglerin who haven’t been able to cope with the cruel afflictions casted on them. Namjoon doesn’t accept or appreciate what has been done to him, but he lives with it because he knows that there’s no other way to it. With practiced moves, Namjoon reaches behind his back and slowly undoes the latches that attaches the bionic case that makes up his back. Adjusting the wired mirror, Namjoon scans his exposed back for any misalignment or damage.

Namjoon stands under the shower longer than he normally does, allowing the hot water to wash down all of his bionic joints. Sensory perception was a strange thing for Namjoon; what he knew registered as pain wasn’t quite so for him. He carefully washes over his cuff-links, staring at the permanently reformed flesh on his wrists.

Were the Yishengs already taking care of the working-slaves? Would they be able to subdue and take over the slave-ship? How connected were they to the Venture Unit? The slaver from Raksane Tayi was no doubt a high ranking officer within the GLA- how many of them were involved in this? Still involved in the Alliance? Would Orvan finally be liberated or would their strange economic trade continue to flourish and her people living under the cruel reign of terror that they’ve come to accept as normalcy?

But what even constituted of normalcy anymore? The Orvanan knew no other life than the one they were living right now- they knew of no other culture except for this reality of slavery- would they even consider it slavery?

Namjoon stares down at his hands- one of the few original parts of him that remained. A constant reminder of what he was- where he came from. If Namjoon didn’t have these subtle reminders of himself, and what he looked like, would he consider his current body the same way he viewed it now?

What about the Orvanan? They were now living this lifestyle of slavery for over 700 sols; would they even begin to understand what freedom outside of their planet meant? What it felt like? Or would it feel strange- would it feel wrong, like something they couldn’t accept or even begin to understand.

Suddenly feeling indescribably exhausted, Namjoon leans back on the cold tiles of the shower stall.

So much happened in such a short period of time, each event transcended the former and none of these events made any form of sense or had a logical sound explanation. Everything that has happened since they left Šerdesas was a chain of events leading to this chaotic and tense position where Namjoon finds himself utterly lost and confused.
The Being inside the OrTank was purposefully kept there. None of them had reason to carry onboard a living Being inside an OrTank. Not to mention the cargo had already been placed inside their ship before any of them had even gotten in.

What was the reason behind this placement? What was this Being, who was this Being? Why was he placed in here? Was he dangerous? Was he a living biological weapon intended to destroy all of them? If this was a birthing tank of sorts then there would be a birthing date and they wouldn’t be able to stop it. What would happen?

But most importantly why didn’t the special-jury inform them of this? Who in the special-jury was responsible for his? Was it just one of them? Or was it all of them? Was this Being part of their mission? Sk’jin had said his authorization code had been more powerful than his own- that meant at least one of the special-jury members knew of this Being. Were they meant to discover him? If so why?

‘We’re all expendable here- don’t you see? Did you really think this mission was all they stated it would be?’

What could this Being possible mean in relation to the mission? Or was the mission simply made up and this Being was in fact, the main objective of the mission?

All Namjoon knows is that none of the special-jury could be trusted.

By the time he leaves his room, he hears Taeh’yung’s loud laughter ringing across the ship. There are other voices as well, they’re all speaking rather easily and casually. It’s odd, in contrast to the turmoil and apprehension mounting inside of Namjoon. A little wary and unsettled, he makes his way downstairs again.

The OrTank with the floating Being is tilted backwards against the Lobby couch next to Taeh’yung who was dressed in Sk’jin’s robes and his hair is sopping wet. Sk’jin himself is sitting on one of the larger single couches. Namjoon does a double take because the Khol’isa looks incredibly healthy again. Though his normal attitude of general vain cockiness is absent and he seems strangely subdued. Namjoon had checked the surveillance and followed the footage from when Sk’jin sensed something off, up until he made his way to the OrTank. He hadn’t opened the device, staring down at it, his entire body stricken with shock. Due to the high quality footage of the cameras installed all over the ship, Namjoon was able to very easily study the Khol’isa’s face and found only genuine confusion and wariness in his eyes. He also saw the way Sk’jin was very obviously unwell, his feet dragging, and his breathing strained. Every time he spoke into the Comm-Device he would take a moment to collect himself. But now here he sat, looking remarkably healthy. His eyes are bright and his skin glowing again.

Hoseok is also there, laughing in response to a story Taeh’yung is excitedly narrating. The Ngfy’widan laughs freely, tossing his head back. He’s got a towel around his shoulders and he’s holding an empty tray in his hands. Namjoon notes cups on the Lobby table. As usual, Namjoon doesn’t spot Yoongi at once who was sitting next to the OrTank, staring at the floating Being inside.

The Being inside is turned towards Yoongi. Namjoon is pretty sure the Being inside is soundly unconscious- it was slightly disconcerting to see the way he was attuned to Yoongi- or was he just like that with any single Being?

‘Namjoon!’

Taeh’yung gets up at once, jostling the OrTank that Yoongi instantly steadies, his eyes never
leaving the object.

‘You smell nice!’ is Taeh’yung’s greeting, sniffing him enthusiastically.

‘Uh yeah that’s great.’ Namjoon fidgets, edging away from the overly enthusiastic Zhak’gri. He catches Sk’jin’s eye and can instantly tell that there was no way in hell he was going to come out of this in the Khol’isa’s good books. Not that it mattered to Namjoon but considering the mess of the situation they were all in and they would need team effort and collaboration to figure things out, he was going to have to make an effort to at least pacify their non-existent relationship to one that didn’t always lead to a violent shouting match.

‘Sk’jin I am sor-‘

‘You’re here. We need to discuss what we’re going to do next,’ Sk’jin talks over Namjoon before he even has the chance to finish what he was trying to say.

‘It’s safe to say in light of recent discoveries that we need to reevaluate our mission and how we’re going to approach it,’ Sk’jin continues. Without his vain façade on display, Sk’jin is an entirely different Being. Everything about his body language has changed, his facial expression which was normally one of serene yet contemptuous beauty was now statue-like: beautiful, daunting, and cold.

Namjoon can feel the curious look Hoseok is giving both him and Sk’jin while Taeh’yung stares unabashed at both of them, mouth slightly open.

‘I feel like we need to pool our cumulative information and resources and plot out our next move,’ Sk’jin continues. ‘While GLA Docks are entirely out of the question, our only chance is with a limited amount of outposts.’

‘I agree; we should,’ Namjoon says as he makes his way towards the Lobby, standing next to the single couch chair opposite the one Sk’jin was sitting on across the large flat table in the center. ‘But before that I wanted to say that I’m sorry-‘

‘I’ll say this once,’ Sk’jin states flatly. It’s uncanny how emotionless and unresponsive his attitude is towards Namjoon. ‘I have no interest in hearing what you have to say outside of the mission and fulfilling the objectives of said mission. I don’t care what you have to say, what you think, what you feel, or what you’re going to do. We’re here for the mission and that’s the only reason why I am here. So as I was saying, most outposts are out of the question, however if we are able to weed through the list carefully, find out who the governors are, and possible even change ships or at least alter its appearance and digital ID, we should be able to use outposts safely. If not, we will have to go in-planet in a non-GLA system and use private Docks which will be expensive and time-consuming, and raise a lot of questions.’

His statement is met with silence for a while before Hoseok speaks up.

‘Private Docks are normally used a lot by Excavators and their guilds- I was thinking about this and wondering if we could disguise ourselves as Excavators; I’ve dealt with Excavators before and I know which channels they use. If we can mimic their usual way of business transaction and approach to outposts and in-planet docks, we could create a pretty stable and full-proof disguise.’ Hoseok glances at Namjoon, one eyebrow subtly raised in question. ‘Creating a new digital ID for the ship should be easy right?’

Namjoon pauses a while before answering.
Taeh’yung is looking at him with wide eyes whereas Sk’jin regards him with zero attentiveness or response.

‘Yeah it’s pretty simple – we just need to maybe adjust the Užkulisai from the outside- it’s a new model so it stands out,’ Namjoon huffs out dry laugh. If the special-jury were instigating something more than just this mission, they sure did an excellent job of making it difficult for them to simply blend in with their environment by giving them a one-of-a-kind ship.

‘I can help!’ Taeh’yung offers brightly.

‘Are you trained in mechanical engineering?’ Hoseok inquires curiously.

‘No! But I like to take things apart and put them back together.’

Taeh’yung says this with such an earnest expression Namjoon is almost inclined to agree but he stops himself. He glances over at Sk’jin surreptitiously and finds that the Khol’isa has an uncharacteristically fond smile on his face as he looks at Taeh’yung.

‘Oh- I uh, I see,’ Hoseok replies somewhat confused before addressing Namjoon again. ‘Where do we head then?’

‘Well first we need to clear a definitive path towards a Dock we know is safe,’ Namjoon sits down, noting that his joints didn’t hurt anymore. He looks around for his NaviLet before he realizes he should probably get a new one from the Navigation Table when it’s handed to him.

Namjoon had again, forgotten about Yoongi- apparently so did everyone else except for Taeh’yung who sits next to the Human, throwing an arm around him.

It’s strangely bizarre, seeing the Human in actual contact with another Being without it being a hand-to-hand combat move or reasoning. Namjoon suddenly remembers how Yoongi had essentially poisoned all of them just to track them without their notice and he suppresses a shudder.

‘Thank you,’ Namjoon says a second too late. But Yoongi doesn’t seem to mind. Or care. The correct term would probably be notice but Namjoon goes back to concentrating on his NaviLet for the time being.


‘We’re all right for another week for sure,’ Hoseok replies a little hesitantly.

‘A week? But I thought our calculations had us good for another fortnight or so,’ Sk’jin frowns a little.

‘Well that’s what I thought too- but I put into consideration this fellow here,’ Hoseok nods at the OrTank.

‘I don’t know how he’s being fueled or how his uh OrTank is being powered but if-‘

‘Nothing powers it,’ Yoongi speaks up. ‘He’s suspended inside independently off of his own Life-force.’

‘What do you mean?’ Sk’jin asks, a crease appearing between his brows.

‘Do you remember that place?’ Taeh’yung asks the Khol’isa. ‘It was all white and there were voices everywhere-‘
‘Yes,’ Sk’jin replies tersely, looking uncomfortable.

‘That’s this.’ Taeh’yung gestures to the OrTank. ‘Just contained.’

Sk’jin glances over at Yoongi who nods.

‘I see. So the OrTank isn’t really powered by anything?’ he asks.

‘Nopes!’ Taeh’yung pats the surface gently as though afraid of waking up the Being inside. ‘It’s just all him in there.’

‘What does that mean?’ Hoseok asks glancing over at Sk’jin.

‘These are Beings cultivated and preserved the same way the GI were cultivated and created,’ Yoongi explains.

‘So that makes him a GI agent?’ Hoseok asks slowly, his tone confused.

‘No. It makes him free.’ Is Yoongi’s extraordinary reply before he adds, ‘The GI were formed as a result of the Yishengs cultivating entire species of Beings from all around the Universe to harness them in their raw and true potential and to manipulate them for their own use. The Gaia Case touches on the subject of the GI experiments briefly but were overshadowed by the other parts of the Case.’

The discovery of the GI had been one that nearly crippled the major organizations with fear. Upon realizing that such a powerful and secret force beyond the control of any of their reach existed with agents who had no personal objective that could be manipulated, the major organizations had done all they could to obtain the GI agents.

‘But…but aren’t all the agents compromised? I mean,’ Hoseok glances at Namjoon for clarification. ‘A majority of the agents were all detained and kept under observation by the Venture Unit right?’

‘That’s what has been said,’ Yoongi replies calmly. ‘The GI agents who were released for duty - the ones who were birthed were all terminated the moment the GIU arrived in Šerdesas. There were some who survived. But they weren’t able to Sleep anymore, and weren’t able to process sentient understanding of their surroundings or their own placement in the universe. They fell into a vegetative state of being and are now being kept in the Yisheng Headquarters under surveillance.’

‘…wait what about the others?’ Sk’jin asks, frowning heavily. ‘Weren’t they being watched over by the Yishengs? What does the Venture Unit have to do with this? I thought they were given the GI?’

‘The Beings found after the Gaia Case were sent to the Yisheng Headquarters and are watched over by both the Yishengs and the Venture Unit.’

Namjoon doesn’t have a good feeling about this. He glances over at the Being inside the OrTank and then back at Yoongi before looking back at Sk’jin. The Khol’isa’s eyes are narrowed and calculating, as though processing what Yoongi had just said.

‘Have any of them woken up?’ Hoseok asks, his voice laced with trepidation.

‘I don’t know,’ Yoongi replies blandly.
‘So what does he have to do with this?’ Hoseok asks, gesturing to Taeh’yung. ‘I am trying to understand this but I can’t make sense of it.’

‘I met Taeh’yung before the Gaia Case was even called that,’ Sk’jin interjects. ‘He was able to help me out of a difficult situation and saved my life.’

Taeh’yung beams at the Khol’isa, sending him a wink that Sk’jin returns.

‘I met Yoongi before I met Taeh’yung; we helped each other- more like together we helped someone,’ Sk’jin surmises.

‘And I met Yoongi here in the Mars Docks! Well I saw him a few times before that but actually only ever really met him in the Mars Docks- I was helping out the Yishengs with my babies,’ Taeh’yung pats the OrTank. ‘Like him!’

‘Helped you out of a difficult situation?’ Hoseok repeats carefully.

‘It’s something from my past I’d rather not discuss Hoseok,’ Sk’jin replies carefully. ‘I can assure you it won’t affect our mission.’

‘So that’s out of the way,’ Namjoon sighs out before addressing Taeh’yung. ‘Where do you want us to drop you off? I can’t guarantee where we’ll be able to go-’

‘Can I stay?’

His request is met with extraordinary silence.

‘Taeh’yung,’ Sk’jin begins hesitantly. ‘I don’t think it’s a good idea-‘

‘But I swore that I’d always watch over my babies!’ Taeh’yung insists. ‘And here he is! I found him; and you and Yoongi! This is a sure sign! They’re telling me to stay as well.’

‘They?’

‘The others,’ Taeh’yung taps at his head and both Namjoon and Hoseok grimace in discomfort, unsure how to read into this.

‘Besides, I can help you guys! I’m pretty useful,’ Taeh’yung lifts his hands up, fingers forming ‘v’s, smiling brightly up at them.

‘I can agree to his statement, he would make a valuable addition to our mission.’ Yoongi chimes in unexpectedly.

‘I agree as well,’ Sk’jin adds seconds later. ‘Especially now that he’s here,’ he gestures to the OrTank. ‘I think we’ll need Taeh’yung involved.’

Namjoon glances over at Hoseok who is studying Sk’jin intently before looking over at Yoongi and then Taeh’yung. Namjoon already knows what he’s about to say and sighs inwardly.

‘You can stay,’ Namjoon resigns. ‘Sk’jin or Yoongi will inform you on our mission so you know what we’re going to do.’

‘Yay!’ Taeh’yung cheers, throwing his hands up and promptly goes and throws himself at Sk’jin who laughs in amusement.

‘However I think I can speak for almost all of us in saying that we know nothing about you or what
you do and what you can do,’ Namjoon interjects. ‘What is it that you do? What have you been
doing all this time?’

‘Ah, which do I answer first,’ Taeh’yung scratches at the side of his neck as he settles against
Sk’jin comfortably. ‘Well all right, so I’m the fifth generation “Zhak’gri”- I don’t like being called
that, so I chose my name for myself. I don’t know how to explain what I do- I can see it- but I don’t
know how to really explain it. But someone sort of explained it to me before, so here goes.’
Taeh’yung clears his throat, his expression taking on a mild and serene expression and his voice is
higher and softer as well. ‘Yishengs use the continuum of Life-force and take it and are able to
work in the width of its spectrum of allotted time and space. A Yisheng redirects and corrects the
forward flow of the cycle of continuum. But the Zhak’gri are able to go back in the cycle of
continuum and displace certain events without repercussions in the time loop.’

Taeh’yung expression serene expression drops and adds with a shrug, ‘Or something like that.’

‘Wait- come again?’ Hoseok is understandably very confused.

‘They displace links in the Life-force cycle. An acceleration to link loops within the same
continuum.’ Namjoon explains. ‘This is if you’re basing your theory on the Yisheng Code- did a
Yisheng tell you that?’

‘Yeap!’

‘That’s a little like time-manipulation isn’t it?’ Hoseok ruminates uneasily.

‘Not exactly- I don’t really know to be honest,’ Taeh’yung shrugs again. ‘I can see what I can do-
but I don’t know what it is exactly.’

‘So what have you been doing lately?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘Well after I finished my job in the Mars Dock, I wandered around for a while you know? It kinda
felt odd to not do something- so I thought I’d visit a friend of mine for a while and he told me
about this slave-ship.’

‘A friend?’

‘Yeah! He’s really nice and bright! He visited me in Teronko’ng Prison and I helped him out there!
He was really sad about what was happening. And I don’t like seeing anyone sad; so I went to see
if I could do anything to help.’ Taeh’yung rambles.

‘And then you got caught?’ Hoseok asks tentatively.

‘I wanted to get caught,’ Taeh’yung explains looking serious all of a sudden. ‘They’re a very
expansive network and very well organized. I couldn’t just go and blow up their ship without
killing so many innocents- besides, that would get rid of only one small part of a much larger
system. I wanted to understand where it was coming from, so I managed to get myself captured and
sent up to Grezma to get picked up. Then I met you!’

Taeh’yung beams at Namjoon.

‘So I just want to say thank you for helping me out! My friend won’t be sad anymore!’

‘Uh-’ Namjoon doesn’t know what to say.

‘We need to set-up the ship,’ Yoongi interjects out of nowhere. ‘We shouldn’t waste time in dead-
'Right,’ Namjoon nods.

‘Let’s go set-up then,’ Hoseok turns to address Namjoon. Namjoon nods wearily, following after the Ngfy’widan.

Looking back, Taeh’yung has seated himself across Sk’jin’s lap, listening intently with wide eyes as Sk’jin starts telling him their mission.

Neon-red eyes find his and Namjoon shivers at the strange hollowness he finds in the previously fiery taunting eyes.

* *

Namjoon looks exhausted.

Not in the sense of being physically exhausted but he just looks drained. He looks like he feels powerless and it’s quite apparent from the way he carries himself. Hoseok wasn’t there for whatever argument Namjoon and Sk’jin had. Again. But he guesses it didn’t end well considering the way Sk’jin was treating the Kutsoglerin. But at this moment, interrelationships between team-members was far from Hoseok’s immediate train of thoughts.

‘Anything from the news channels?’

‘Nothing,’ Hoseok replies. That was to be expected. For something as serious and intricately connected to the Alliance and possibly with many high ranking officers within the GLA and Venture Unit, news like this wouldn’t make it to the general GLA Broadcasting Channels. Hoseok had quickly dived into the underverse channels as well but there was no news there yet. That wasn’t a surprise either. To prevent any form link-up, all of the other possibly connected parties would instantly cut off all ties and that normally meant communication lines were the first to go.

‘This was a set-up,’ Namjoon says without preamble, sighing as they make their way up to the Bridge.

‘The OrTank you mean?’ Hoseok asks, not looking back.

‘Yeap.’

That much was obvious. But the main question now remained why they weren’t informed about this Being. And also who this Being was. It was true that during the Gaia Case, a large number of Beings were found, cultivated and created as a means of creating some form of “stock” or “preserve” of Beings to be grown and raised in another universe of sorts. Species and races that were extinct or erased from the Universe were found and had caused a great stir in the inner most circles of the main organizations. Whether these Beings were friendly, “natural”, and safe were questions that couldn’t be answered. So they had been put under observation, with all sorts of top-secret research facilities from every organization chiming in to figure them out.
So what were they doing now with this single OrTank with this particular Being? Hoseok had obviously run a scan through the Being, trying to identify the Being inside. But Lisai’s directory came out blank. And Hoseok doesn’t know if this Being was truly and alien or if this was Lisai’s faulty database working up again.

‘What do you think this means?’ Hoseok asks as they step into the Bridge. The HUD windows are white as they jet through warp-space with no particular trajectory set out.

‘I don’t know,’ Namjoon sighs out as he makes his way to the Navigation Table, activating the column listlessly. ‘I don’t know what any of this means anymore. This mission- or well, what we thought this mission was supposed to be, what we’re carrying, what we found- every single one of us- I don’t know what any of this means anymore.’

‘What did you and Sk’jin talk about?’ Hoseok asks as he leans on the Table, facing Namjoon who sinks down into his chair.

‘He discovered the OrTank while we were in the slaver-ship,’ Namjoon explains, tapping along the NaviLet. ‘It’s why he wasn’t surprised. And I don’t know if he would have told us about it had Taeh’yung not “sensed” it or whatever.’

‘How did he discover it?’

‘He was trying to update Lisai’s language database,’ Namjoon snorts like he thought it was ironic. ‘He tried to use my authorization-code but it wasn’t high enough.’

‘Wait- so that Being inside the OrTank- his authorization-code is higher than yours?’ Hoseok interrupts.

‘Yes,’ Namjoon leans back, rubbing at his face tiredly. ‘He was placed here purposefully. And I have a feeling we were supposed to eventually discover him- or maybe that’s just me overthinking all of this. I don’t know what to think if I’m being honest. I don’t know what agenda this Being has by being here. I don’t know why the special-jury failed to mention his existence. I don’t know if Sk’jin should be trusted in what he says; Spaces I don’t know if any of you should be trusted in this-‘

‘So what you’re saying is that there’s more to this mission than just delivering shit and fixing up planets?’ Hoseok asks bluntly.

‘Yes-‘

‘Wasn’t that obvious from the beginning?’

Namjoon stares at him blankly for a fraction of a second before huffing out as though mildly irritated and saying, ‘Yes of course it is- there was obviously more to this than they let on. It’s just this Being being here doesn’t make sense- nothing adds up. This mission itself doesn’t add up either. We’re trying to go to a System that could possibly contain technology that could potentially be used to manipulate the entirety of the universe and we have to destroy it while also “renewing” their planets? And all of this in secret? And now with this Being in the picture, what does it even mean anymore?’

‘Forget the mission for a second,’ Hoseok interjects, crossing his arms. ‘This was always going to be more than just a delivery mission- but I could never figure out what other purpose we would be serving if not for this mission’s objective- but his appearance is just…it’s just throwing me for a loop. I don’t know what to think.’ Hoseok squats down, leaning back on the Table. ‘Look- when
you’re made into a team for any mission,- no matter what type of mission, what sort of Beings are involved, they will always put into consideration team dynamics. None of us have ever been put into a team together- I don’t even think Sk’jin has been alive for the past few centuries to be put into a team. Yoongi is just…Yoongi- and then there’s the two of us- we were never intended to mix well. We can’t. Our backgrounds are vastly different- it’s like they purposefully put us together knowing we would never be able to tolerate each other or cooperate with each other while dangling what seems like an extremely dire situation to the outcome of our mission’s success. Our mission which as we now know is possibly just a dunce and the real reason for our departure is something else.’

‘What are you trying to say?’ Namjoon asks carefully.

‘What if they’re using our differences to hide the real purpose of this mission?’ Hoseok asks back. ‘Don’t take this the wrong way Namjoon but you’re not an agent; I know you’re undoubtedly intelligent and I’m not saying you don’t know what’s happening- but you were never in a position where you questioned every single aspect of your surrounding based on your immediate action.’

Namjoon shrugs like he takes no offence to it and asks, ‘So what do you, as an experienced agent suggest we do?’

Hoseok studies Namjoon for a while before answering.

‘I have a proposition and I don’t think you’ll like it,’ he says flatly.

Namjoon gestures for him to continue.

‘I suggest we dock in-planet; maybe in one of the cultivation-projects; there’s a system not too far from here with young planets. We could disguise ourselves as Excavators wanting to claim the planet first to discover any possible artifact and all that Excavator shit.’

‘For what purpose would we be doing that?’ Namjoon asks curiously, clearly sensing a deeper purpose to Hoseok’s suggestion.

‘I want to test out the things we’re carrying,’ Hoseok thumbs behind him. ‘See if they’re actually real or not. In fact I want to go through every single crate and OrTank and any other thing we’re carrying in our Hangar somewhere on a planet where we can dispose of it if necessary. I also want to take apart many of the components within the Užkulisai and see what all has been modified- check for trackers, check for rigging.’

Namjoon nods slowly, eyes narrowing a little.

‘That should give us time to adjust the ship as well, change up the exterior,’ Namjoon says slowly, his fingers slow down over the NaviLet as he thinks.

‘How much time would it take to create a new digital ID for the ship?’ Hoseok asks.

‘A day or so,’ Namjoon replies, ‘I’ll need to find a hub through which we can register the ship- I guess it’s good we have Taeh’yung on board- we can register the ship using his identity.’

‘Does he have any on him? Wasn’t he in Teronko’ng- that would make it extremely impossible to use him.’

‘We can give him a new one,’ Namjoon shrugs, looking back at his NaviLet. ‘Do you have a hub-line we could use to register the ship in?’
Hubs were like license registries through which independent ships or shuttles could legally register themselves as new ships within the Trade System. They were generally difficult to access, being set-up in offices within the Immigration Offices in GLA Docks. However most high-ranking officers within the GLA could directly access hubs. Or better yet, most Venture Unit agents knew of several hubs through which they could register their ships if needed, depending on their mission.

‘I do but I don’t know if it’s a good idea to use anything that could be traced back to me,’ Hoseok grimaces. Grezma was leaving a bitter taste in his mouth and he doesn’t think it’s going to go away easily either. ‘I used several before and have access to a bunch- but they could get traced back to me because they’re agent-specified hubs.’

‘The same with me,’ Namjoon looks up, one eyebrow raised. ‘What about Yoongi?’

‘I don’t know how the GI agents registered or used their shuttles- if they even had any need to register their Transporters through the International Space Registrar Laws,’ Hoseok muses.

‘Well I’ll go ask,’ Namjoon tiredly stands up but Hoseok stops him.

‘No I’ll go. I’ll also check on Sk’jin and Taeh’yung- probably have to give him a Cabin and input a new set of codes for him as well,’ Hoseok slides out a screen from the slim column of the Navigation Table. ‘He’ll need a screen too.’

‘What do you think of Taeh’yung?’ Namjoon asks as Hoseok sets up the screen to connect with the rest of the ship.

‘Honestly I don’t know.’ Hoseok replies bluntly. ‘I’ve never met someone like him before. And I did some research as well- Zhak’gri right?’

Namjoon nods.

‘Just sounds incredibly strange.’ Hoseok confesses, unsure what to think of. If what he said was true, and what Namjoon said was true, then Taeh’yung was a living walking breathing relic of a past so ancient, it was unfathomable. And based on his own explanation of his abilities and identity, it would seem like Taeh’yung didn’t know much about himself to start off with. Just how was he even still around?

‘What do you think?’ Hoseok asks instead.

Namjoon just shrugs.

‘At this point I just don’t care anymore,’ he sighs. ‘I don’t care who he is. I don’t care who or how he came to know Sk’jin and Yoongi- their past, their objectives – that Being inside the OrTank. I just don’t care anymore.’

Namjoon almost looks like Sk’jin. Fed-up and resigned to this confusion. They were both withdrawing into themselves, away from everything except for the mission. They were never trained for this.

Sk’jin and Namjoon were both incredibly capable and intelligent strategists with exceptional individual skill. But they both lacked in experience of being directed and controlled by a mission objective. Hoseok could tell from the beginning. Sk’jin was used to the way he lived before- when he was in control and he made the decisions. He was used to a time that no longer existed, used to a way of living and conducting his actions in a way that was backed up by countless pirates and heavy armoured ships and shuttles.
Namjoon came from a purely behind-the-screen background experience. He’s never worked the field before though he no doubt felt like he’s been doing so all his life. But Information Analysts worked alone. And they singlehandedly controlled and plotted the outcomes of their cleverly planned out strategies and plots, controlling everything from beyond a screen that distanced them from the messy reality of working and living within a mission field.

And it just so happened that the two of their personalities clashed in this way, resulting in this uncomfortable and strained grudging “relationship”.

‘Right well, I’ll go down and talk to Yoongi,’ Hoseok frowns a little to himself, remembering the way Yoongi wouldn’t move away from the OrTank. He hadn’t even cleaned up or anything, simply staring at the Being inside. That Being in there meant something to Yoongi, something Hoseok didn’t and would probably never really be able to understand.

‘What was the system you were telling me about? I’ll input the coordinates and set up a trajectory,’ Namjoon cuts into his thoughts.

‘It’s called Präyōka,’ Hoseok turns a little to access the Table better, tapping onto the surface. ‘It’s 4 days from here- there are a few planets in the system- all of them are habitable but I think we should aim for one of the moons instead.’

Namjoon pulls up the system and information on it and says, ‘Right, I’ll start checking on it. I’ll take the first watch on the Bridge.’

Hoseok nods and makes his way out. He spots Sk’jin in the kitchen, listening to Taeh’yung who seems to be deeply invested in recounting some story to the Khol’isa. Sk’jin simply smiles and nods, his attitude towards the Zhak’gri a complete change to how he normally treated the other crew members. Hoseok would probably put down the change to that of respect. Similar to the way you would when addressing or speaking to someone of a higher rank than yourself.

Yoongi isn’t anywhere around Level Two and Hoseok has a feeling he’d be with the OrTank that Namjoon had explicitly ordered them not to move out of Level One. And Hoseok is right.

Yoongi is still sitting on the Lobby couch, his entire body turned facing the Being inside the OrTank. He still hasn’t cleaned up, and the couch where he sat had some stains on it that looked suspiciously like bloodstains. Yoongi is still splattered in blood though it’s dried off now. The Heliord handles are still attached to the side of his working-slaver trousers.

‘Hey Yoongi.’

Yoongi looks away from the OrTank.

‘I wanted to ask you if you knew any hubs we could use to register the ship under a new digital ID,’ Hoseok explains briefly. ‘Namjoon and I can’t use ours – it could get tracked back to us.’

‘I do,’ Yoongi nods. ‘I can set it up for you.’

‘Thanks- just make sure it won’t get traced back to you or to us,’ Hoseok adds though he’s sure Yoongi knows this.

The Human simply nods before staring back at the OrTank.

‘Uh- maybe you should wash up? It’s probably not hygienic staying like that,’ Hoseok suggests.

‘Do you remember your dreams?’ Yoongi asks instead.
‘Not all of them,’ Hoseok replies, somehow used to Yoongi’s inconsistent conversation skills.

‘Do you remember your first dream?’

‘I don’t think anyone can remember their first ever dream,’ Hoseok chuckles a little.

‘I remember mine,’ Yoongi states.

‘What did you see?’

‘I don’t know.’

Hoseok pauses for a bit, wondering how to ask the next question without coming off rude.

‘So…how do you know you remember what you say, if you don’t know what it was that you saw?’

‘I remember what I saw, but I didn’t understand what it was.’ Yoongi clarifies. ‘Does that happen to you?’

It’s happening to me right now, Hoseok wants to say.

‘Not always,’ he says instead and adds, ‘Go clean up Yoongi- he’ll be all right here.’

To Hoseok’s surprise, Yoongi listens to him and gets up. He places the Heliord handles on the table and just like that makes his way upwards.

The OrTank is unexpectedly light. Hoseok had thought it would be incredibly heavy but it weighed no more than an average Being. Whatever fluid or gas the Being floated in clearly didn’t weigh much. Hoseok settles the OrTank on the ground instead of leaning back awkwardly on the Lobby couch.

‘Who are you?’ Hoseok mumbles under his breath as he squats down to regard the Being inside the OrTank. Hoseok has seen the way the Being inside shifts slowly, facing Yoongi every time he sat close enough. The Being doesn’t shift to turn to face Hoseok and somehow Hoseok thinks he prefers that. He repositions himself to look at this Being properly, studying his features which weren’t so different from his or Yoongi’s.

Hoseok understands why Yoongi stares at this Being as though riveted. Though his eyes aren’t open and he’s clearly asleep/unconscious, there was a strange connection; as though the Being inside was watching you, was studying you. Hoseok almost feels as though his eyes might open at any time and the thought of it somehow frightens Hoseok.

He quickly steps away from the OrTank and makes his way up, determinedly not looking back at the OrTank.
Taeh’yung is an unexpectedly refreshing change within the ship. Namjoon isn’t sure if it’s because it’s after what happened in the slave-ship or if it’s the sudden lift of tense and badly hidden animosity he normally receives from Sk’jin.

He fits into the dynamics (or at least creates one) of the ship and could be found all over the ship, doing the strangest things. In the past days, Namjoon has come to learn that the Zhak’gri enjoyed walking around barefoot, liked to wear other Being’s clothes, had no concept of personal space, and had many stories to tell. Usually, Hoseok and Yoongi were the ones who would indulge and listen to the Zhak’gri and his ramblings that sometimes went from sweet child-like storylines to carnage and death in a span of seconds while smiling the entire time.

Namjoon was right. Taeh’yung fit all too well with the rest of them and Namjoon doesn’t know if that makes him relieved or not.

Taeh’yung also had the complete inability to stick to one subject at hand. Sometimes he spoke as though he was addressing someone else entirely but it was only momentary. Then he’d go back to whatever narrative he was enthusiastically reenacting.

There was no change in the Being inside the OrTank. No sign of waking up, no movement, nothing. They had conducted scans they felt were secure and safe enough on the OrTank but they received no information or data on the Being. Even his age was confusing. While the scan used to read his internal biological system reported his age at approximately 1450 sols, the scans conducted on his exterior, accounting for the state of his hair, skin, and nails, put him at no more than 250 sols. Wondering if the scans were faulty, Hoseok had volunteered himself to be scanned and his readings had come out accurate on both scales. They were able to attach a screen that read the Beings health-tab over his OrTank. Through the sensors placed all over the OrTank, they were able to record and watch the Being’s heartbeat, brain-wave patterns, and nervous frequency. While his heart rate was very low, like a hibernating creature’s heart rate would be, his brain-wave patterns were extremely active.

‘He’s dreaming,’ Taeh’yung had said fondly, looking at the Being inside.

His brain-wave patterns did suggest that he was dreaming. Sometimes his heartbeat increased, and you could see his eyes moving behind his eyelids.

But perhaps what was strangest of all in this was the Being’s reaction to each of them individually.

When Sk’jin was closest to him, the Being seemed to be at ease, his heartbeat easing to a slow lull and his nervous frequencies settling down, as though he were falling deeper into sleep.

When Hoseok was close to him, there was not much change in his heart rate or in his brain-wave reading- rather his nervous frequencies seemed to increase and his fingers twitched several times as well. This seemed to unsettle the Ngfy’widan a lot and chose to avoid staying too close to the OrTank.

His reaction to Namjoon was subtle- like an acknowledgment. It was strange; Namjoon couldn’t describe it but he knows that everyone else felt it too. It was as though the Being inside the OrTank was aware of them, even in his sleep. His reaction towards them was a responsive one. And he seemed to respond the most to Taeh’yung who spoke to the Being as though they had been friends for centuries already. His heart rate, brain-wave pattern, nervous frequencies all pitched up whenever Taeh’yung was around.
But the strangest reaction was most probably with Yoongi.

The unknown Being seemed to actively move in accordance to Yoongi’s actions. If Yoongi stood to the right of the OrTank, the Being inside would slowly but surely drift to face the Human. If Yoongi placed his hand over the glass of the OrTank, the Being inside would raise his hand against the glass as well. His brain-wave pattern would spike, as though he was seeing multiple dreams. Unlike Hoseok’s wary reaction, Yoongi’s was one of utter awe and fascination. He spent a majority of his time in front of the OrTank. Sometimes sitting idly next to the OrTank, perusing his screen or watching something on the large entertainment system, or sometimes simply staring at the Being as though waiting for some form of reaction or response.

‘Approaching Ch’dra in 4 minutes.’

Namjoon shakes himself out of his revere.

The Prāyōka System was a young one, with a large sun and even larger habitable zone for her planets and their moons. They were closing in on Ch’dra, the moon of a volatile and volcano-riddled planet that seemed to glow even from this distance with all the lava that boiled on a majority of its surface. Though the planet was uninhabitable, it was a rich source of sulfur and many mining companies were settled in its moon. Scarcely populated and that too only by mining companies, a majority of the population was mainly Cyborg, Android, and possibly a handful of officers scattered about to supervise. They had purposefully chosen a dock that was populated only by Cyborgs so as to give themselves all the privacy they would need.

The moon Ch’dra still had a Dock where many Excavator Guilds came to temporarily dock or repair their ships. Which was what they had disguised themselves as for this trip.

‘All right so Sk’jin and Hoseok will oversee the cargo, I’ll look over the restocking and Taeh’yung will…will watch over the OrTank,’ Namjoon adds rather lamely but Taeh’yung gives him a bright thumbs up from behind him where he’s strapped onto a footstool. ‘And Yoongi will remain in the ship to keep an eye on our systems and on the channels.’

Everyone mumbles their agreement in varying levels of enthusiasm and stress.

‘Let’s land Hoseok.’

Ch’dra has an easy atmosphere, one that doesn’t burn too much as they enter the moon gently. It was a beautiful moon, with large circular lakes of clear blue liquid (which were actually pools of acid) dotting its oddly flat terrain. According to what Namjoon had read, safe water was available but it was underground and had to be mined. This factor had removed Ch’dra from being listed as a potentially habitable planet as it would be too much of a hassle to create a hydro-system avoiding all the underground pockets of acid as well. Not only that but the soil in Ch’dra was mainly infertile due to the salt excess from the acid pools. So when they land, the landscape around Ch’dra is a massive expansive stretch of granular dark grey soil, occasionally interrupted by larger pumice-like boulders.

‘All right, we can move out now,’ Hoseok calls as the ship is stabilized after landing. Taeh’yung whoops and bounds out of the Bridge excitedly.

‘See you in a bit Yoongi,’ Sk’jin calls out to the Human who doesn’t respond but that was to be expected.

‘Will you be all right using the Spardyti?’ Hoseok asks as they make their way down towards the Hangar Bay.
‘Yeah- I’ve driven one before,’ Namjoon replies. ‘It won’t be an issue. Just need to add some gravity-lifts and bring in the fuel cells.’

Hoseok nods, making his way inside the Hangar and opens the Hangar gate as Namjoon slides into the Spardyti.

‘Yoongi could you activate the Spardyti controls?’ Namjoon asks as he releases the magnetic safety strap.

The Spardyti dashboard lights up a few seconds later.

‘Thanks.’

It’s always delightful to feel natural air rushing about you no matter what planet you’re on. The air is a little dry and feels a bit gritty but it’s a definite welcome. Namjoon catches sight of Sk’jin standing outside already, his face turned up towards the sun, eyes closed. Taeh’yung might have “healed” the Khol’isa but Namjoon can’t be too sure about it. Namjoon stops the Spardyti just outside of the Hangar gate.

“How many?” Hoseok calls as he drags out a gravity-lift.

‘I think 3 should be enough,’ Namjoon replies, taking one of the lifts from Hoseok and easing it into the back of the Spardyti.

‘All right so here,’ Namjoon hands Hoseok the NaviLet. ‘The entire inventory list is on that, I’ve made it so that you can just check off the list according to the serial number on each of the cargo.’

Sk’jin approaches them as well, looking radiant under the sunlight and a lot happier than he has in days.

‘I think we should start with the bigger OrTanks first,’ Sk’jin suggests, shielding his eyes as he squints down at the screen in Hoseok’s hands.

‘Right, let’s begin by-’ Hoseok stops abruptly.

‘What’s wrong?’ Namjoon asks then he hears it too. The Spardyti quiets down, the dashboard darkens. A small sound suggesting that his Comm-Device shut down rings in his ear. The gentle hum of the Užkulisiä also quiets down and the turbines on the wings of the ship stops as well.

‘What in Spaces is going on?’ Hoseok taps on the NaviLet a few times before he does a double take, staring behind Namjoon with a befuddled expression on his face.

Namjoon turns to find Yoongi walking out of the ship, headed towards them.

‘Wasn’t he supposed to be keeping watch inside the ship?’ Sk’jin questions, looking confused before raising his voice, ‘Yoongi what happened?’

‘Did he start-up the ship?’ Hoseok ruminates as Namjoon steps forward to talk to the Human. Hoseok turns to address Sk’jin again.

‘I think we should begin with the last of the OrTanks-’

A familiar hum suddenly fills the air and Hoseok moves instinctively.

The NaviLet in his hand burns into bright pieces as something incredibly hot sears over his ear. Hoseok hears Namjoon gasp in shock and Sk’jin stumbling.
Hoseok reaches back, grappling Yoongi who was still holding up the Heliord in his hands and twists his wrist, making him drop the weapon onto the granular sandy floor. But before Hoseok can even begin to try and apprehend Yoongi, the Human is moving already - straight for Sk’jin.

Another Heliord blade burns up in the air and it flashes and slices across the air right around Sk’jin’s head.

A green bubble immediately erupts around the Human who nonchalantly drops the Heliord onto the ground and then proceeds to strip.

‘Yoongi-!’ Sk’jin gasps as he stumbles and falls back, his hand automatically clutching his ear, his expression slightly pained. There’s blood seeping through Sk’jin’s fair fingers.

‘What in Spaces-‘ Namjoon pants out, helping Sk’jin stand up as Hoseok stands in front of the two of them. Taeh’yung appears from near the Hangar gateway, his hands glowing green and a quizzical expression on his face.

What was Yoongi doing?

Standing in just his underwear Yoongi finally turns to address them, hands raised up above his head as though to show he held no weapons. Hoseok can’t help but notice the intensity of scars and discolouration all over the Human’s body. Not a single inch of his skin was left unmarred.

‘We are under surveillance,’ is his extraordinary statement, unfazed by his near complete nakedness. ‘And we are being tracked. This entire mission was a set-up.’

‘What the fuck-‘ Sk’jin still sounds like he can’t believe what just happened.

Hoseok carefully studies what Yoongi just did. The ship shut-down. He just destroyed the NaviLet in Hoseok’s hands, including all of their Comm-Devices.

‘How do you know this?’ Namjoon demands.

‘Because Yisheng Amme told me.’

‘What?!’

Taeh’yung approaches them cautiously, peeking over Namjoon’s shoulders.

‘The Užkulisai-02 was designed and rigged to be used and operated for Mission 013-937619.’ Yoongi states. ‘Mission 013-937619 was also designed and orchestrated to fail 3 months into its operation where the objective of the mission, what it was carrying, where it was headed, and for what reasons it was issued would be revealed to the entirety of the Known Universe.’

‘What-‘ Sk’jin sounds stricken, barely grasping for words, his eyes flashing red.

Yoongi stares at them steadily.

‘I am sorry for not revealing this earlier but due to recent events I was unable to inform you. Now that we have landed here where we can readjust the ship and make it completely-‘

‘And why the fuck should we trust anything you’re saying?’ Sk’jin hisses, storming up towards Yoongi.

‘You don’t,’ Yoongi replies simply. ‘But you know you should. What with all that we’ve seen, and with the way nothing adds up. I know that all of you have had doubts. And now with his arrival,
it’s apparent that the mission we were set out to complete is just a set-up.’

No one speaks.

‘We were tricked,’ Yoongi says simply. ‘They knew what would work against us. They knew the exact right things to say, knew exactly what would make us agree to this mission, and they set us up.’

Sk’jin curses in a jumble of his own language, walking away, anger obvious in his movements. Namjoon is still staring at Yoongi, studying the Human intently.

‘Fuckin’ hell this fucked up–‘ Sk’jin is seething furiously while Taeh’yung jumps around trying to placate the Khol’isa.

‘Namjoon, Hoseok, Sk’jin,’ Yoongi addresses them steadily. ‘Please.’

Sk’jin pauses in the middle of his angry outbreak before sitting down on the ground, clearly done with the entire situation. He glances up at them and says, ‘So what do we now?’

‘Yoongi, put your clothes back on,’ Namjoon orders. ‘Taeh’yung you can remove the…whatever that is. We empty the ship, rewire everything and purge it,’ Namjoon declares sharply. ‘The closest station is no more than 30 minutes from here we can go on foot and retrieve what we need.’

Namjoon glances back at the Užkulisai with a dark gleam in his eyes.

‘The ship is in complete power lockdown until we clear it.’
(Author’s Note)

Wow two weeks into university and I want it to end already this is a great start guys, I love life, I love university, why am I doing this? Oh right, so that I can get a job in the future so that I can eat, have a roof over my head, and have access to wifi.

So yes! I will only be updating every two weeks from now on! I could probably do weekly updates but I don’t want to compromise the quality of my chapters ehe, so yeah

I want to say I hope this chapter clarifies things but I know that’s a lie but hey! Taeh’yung is officially a part of the Užkulīsai! Yay!

I also just found out that Hansol from Toppdogg just came out as asexual and I feel like I could cry

This is such a big deal omg. While I don’t know the band all too well, I did read articles about how fans were worried about him some time ago and how appeared to be suicidal and oh god this is such an important news omg bless his soul fuck that was such a brave thing to do oh my god. As an asexual person myself, this really hits me hard. I really REALLY FUCKING hope he’s not given a harsh time for this. Oh my god I’m shook, legit wow.

Most people won’t really understand what this would mean to other aces – it’s different from coming out as any of the other lgbqt but at the same time similar.

Most times people ask you if there’s something wrong with you, or that you probably haven’t met the “right person to fuck” or something along that line and to come out and just very honestly state that you’re asexual and don’t want anything to do with sex is just- god I don’t even know what to say.

But fuck yes! FUCK YES! Go Hansol! Embrace it, be proud of it, and fuck anyone who thinks otherwise! #REPRESENTACE
also this was beta-d very quickly so please excuse any grammatical errors.

See you in the next update!!
The sun is shining.

It’s warm. Maybe a bit too warm. But there’s a gentle breeze that blows about occasionally and the sweat on his skin cools. He fights the urge to yawn, instead opting to stretch his arms over his head. He blocks the sun with his hands for a while, rings of light burst through his fingers, light splitting into spectrums of colour for a fraction of a second.

‘Don’t look at the sun! You know that the eclipse is going to take place soon- do you want to fry your eyes?’

He snorts, rolling his eyes and looking over to the side.

‘So hand me those glasses and stop complaining.’

‘GUYS! HEY GUYS! COME OVER HERE AND CHECK THIS OUT!’

‘Please control your sister’s volume settings I swear to god the entire neighbourhood can hear her.’

‘Just because she’s AI doesn’t mean she has “settings” what the fuck-’

‘Don’t tell me you didn’t ask your parents for a remote control for her settings-’

‘I was five let it go-’

‘I SAID COME CHECK THIS OUT YOU ASSHOLES-’

‘WE’RE COMING FOR FUCK’S SAKE CONTROL YOUR VOLUME-’

‘Siblings indeed you both swear so much-’

‘Shut the fuck up-’

The floorboards are warmed by the sun and they’re dry under his bare feet. It’s a lazy afternoon and the urge to nap is slowly overtaking his senses.

‘Finally- come check this out!’

She just turned 13 last week and to celebrate turning into a teenager, she decided to chop off a majority of her hair, leaving it into a silky rather bushy bob of a cut below her ears. They had to salvage her hair, seeing as she had taken to the scissors herself. Their mother nearly had an
aneurism at the sight of badly butchered hair and rushed her willful daughter to the salon to somewhat make it look better. She had a sparkly little star-shaped clip on her hair, pulling it back behind her ears that were recently pierced as well. He remembers buying the clip for her from an accessory store from the Mars Docks. It was made in Earth, but she still freaked out nonetheless.

She points enthusiastically at the floor. They had a large tree outside of their apartment unit facing one of the many parks that was grown and maintained in the Settlement Arc. Sunlight was pouring through the canopy of leaves and the floor was riddled with crescent shaped lights.

‘Isn’t this amazing?’ she asks, eyes wide and filled with awe.

‘It is,’ he admits before he adds, ‘Don’t let mum hear you swearing – she’ll blame me again.’

‘We both know she swears more than the two of us-besides, you aren’t even here long enough for me to learn your “wicked ways”.’ She rolls her eyes.

‘Yes well, I’ll be gone soon enough so you’re saved from my influence for another 7 years.’

She suddenly looks sad.

‘I’ll be 20 by the time you come back- that’s not fair.’ She frowns. ‘I’ll be old.’

‘If you think 20 is old what do you think I am?’

‘ancient.’ She giggles.

‘You’ll be taller than your brother no doubt-ouch!’

He takes a seat next to her on the ground, ruffling her hair.

‘You’re talking as though you won’t message me every other day and like we won’t see each other through calls.’

She sighs, leaning into her brother.

‘Next time we meet I might even come to Tayi and surprise you.’

‘Yeah?’

‘Yeap- and I’ll be better than you- just wait.’

He laughs, throwing his head back.

‘It’s a deal.’

‘We should probably get going if we want to watch the eclipse properly.’

‘Do we have to- I mean, it’s not that great of a thing-‘

‘Don’t be a spoil sport and move your ass- am I right?’

‘He’s right.’

He huffs out a defeated laugh.

‘Fine- gang up on me then.’
Yisheng Amme’s quarters served as her office as well. And this is where Yoongi finds her. The entirety of her room, a tall dome ceilinged chamber, is covered in thick leafy vines. It’s warmer in here as well and the air thicker somehow.

Amme is sitting cross legged over some mats, on her lap is a great serpent like creature, its scales a deep red that almost seems black. It was probably her pet, a creature from her own dangerous planet. It coils about her, its strange blunt head regarding Yoongi with milky white eyes.

‘Did you make up your mind?’

‘What is the mission’s original objective?’ Yoongi asks, taking a seat in front of Amme. The creature bares its teeth at Yoongi—displaying 3 rows of sharp translucent teeth.

‘You will find it in the—’

‘That’s not what I meant. This is a mission doomed to fail. Logically speaking, this is a collective unit of Beings who have no common ground, no shared viewpoint, and all from clashing parties. This is a mission created to fail. What is the reason behind this?’ Yoongi clarifies.

Amme puts her hands together for a while and regards Yoongi carefully. The creature in her lap slithers away and disappears into the plants.

‘We are existing in a very delicate and dangerous position right now Yoongi.’

‘The Yisheng Headquarters?’

‘No. The Universe as we know it.’

‘I do not understand.’

‘What happened 4 years ago has triggered a genesis that could destroy everything,’ Amme says flatly. ‘And if this is to occur again, then we will not be so lucky as we were. As you are well aware, there are Beings within this committee who would probably want to use this technology in Bhumi for their own agenda. For what purpose or result, we can only imagine, but it’s clear that we
cannot allow this to happen.’

‘Is it not a natural progression Yisheng? The cycle of life; we all live as predators until another comes and we become prey.’

‘And so is fighting for survival. Would you choose to witness the end of all Life as we know it?’

‘I know little of it. It wouldn’t be a waste, Yisheng.’

‘So are you refusing the mission?’

‘No. I just wanted to know why you would send these Beings to a mission that is obviously going to end in their demise and inevitable failure.’

‘And I believe that you would change that Yoongi,’ Amme replies. ‘These candidates that the other committee members have submitted were not random choices— they were not selected for their ability or skill— rather they were chosen for their connection to this mission and for their clashing ideals and goals. You are a Being with no direct goal or inhibition. By attending this mission you will make sure that the mission is a success— and that no one single member gains the upper-hand. These Beings have been brought in as pawns. To move about as their masters would.’

‘Is that what I am? A pawn?’

‘Yes. And no.’

‘Please explain.’

‘I did not lie when I said I would be sending you on a mission that could help you find the answers you’re looking for Yoongi,’ Amme replies quietly. ‘This is a mission that has been created to fail, there is no doubt in that. Everyone involved in your unit; the Ngfy’widan who killed his father, the Kutsoglerin who comes from a horrific past, and the Khol’isa pirate-lord who existed as nothing more than memory for centuries and now you, a GI agent with no cognitive memory. There is no possible outcome where your entire team could ever properly work together. However I believe that you can see to the success of this mission. And that you will find the answers to your questions.’

They sit in silence for a while. Sometimes Yoongi isn’t sure which of Amme’s eyes to look at. He settles for the first pair most times.

‘So while I fulfill your agenda against the others, I would be finding the answers to my own questions?’

‘Yes.’

The serpent-like creature approaches Yoongi and coils around him. Yoongi can feel the heat it emanates through his clothes.

‘The entire ship has been rewired to the precise order and command of the committee— the database network has been compromised and many of the other features such as security, firewalls, engine systems, ship controls, and archive systems have been redesigned to send a direct feedback of its records and changes back to each of the committee members.’ Amme informs him. ‘This information is of course hidden from the other crew members.’

‘Why are the committee handicapping the mission if so much depends on it?’
‘Because while they want it to succeed, they also want it to fail so that it might fail and be discovered, leading them to a much more public and easily controllable state of events.’ Amme explains. ‘Where they can use the panic and confusion of the masses to their advantage and gain control.’

‘You are telling me that while the other committee members have a second agenda regarding this mission, you do not, and therefore would like to see it succeed? Why should I believe you? You are a member yourself; you could be lying to me and have your own agenda.’

‘That might be true.’ Amme nods. ‘I could be lying to you. But I could be telling you the truth. I do not ask you to believe me Yoongi- I am simply asking you to see to this mission’s success as is stated in the mission objective. That is all I care about.’

Yoongi considers Amme. As a Yisheng, she was bound at a much higher, nearly spiritual obligation and duty, to the Universe. However well this might be translated over into some individuals, the actions of the Yisheng was to always preserve and maintain the balance of the Universe.

‘So we’ll be under constant surveillance?’

‘Yes.’

‘Why did you tell me?’

‘Because I want this mission to succeed. The true intentions of this mission, the true objective of this mission must succeed. Because we have to live.’

The serpent-like creature turns its head towards Yoongi again, staring at him balefully.

‘What is your answer?’

‘Mission accepted.’
Develop Communication Skills!” by Dr. Prof. J.S. Sklien was of no help. Yoongi closes the screen on the final chapter of the book with a quiet sigh.

‘All right so Sk’jin and Hoseok will oversee the cargo, I’ll look over the restocking and Taeh’yung will…will watch over the OtTank,’ Namjoon orders from where he sits. ‘And Yoongi will remain in the ship to keep an eye on our systems and on the channels.’

Yoongi doesn’t reply- not exactly knowing how to respond in all honesty. He’s probably read more than 500 books on the topic of communication and social etiquette and even listened to many programs designed specifically for agents or other Beings working in the emissary positions and or GLA status. But none of them were of any help.

He’s spent this entire time onboard the Užkulisai in perpetual silence that he knows most people would find awkward or uncomfortable under normal circumstances. In his case however, Namjoon and Hoseok seem to think he’s aloof and distant rather than lacking in the social etiquette department.

‘Let’s land Hoseok.’

Yoongi taps along the screen in his hands, reading through the ship’s archives on fuel distribution, keeping note of where most of the fuel was being used up the most.

The Užkulisai used a lot of fuel for a ship her size- something Yoongi had instantly noticed and also something he had expected. Many of the gages and measurement systems regarding the fuel management of the ship had been altered and shifted purposefully to give the crew members an incorrect reading of the ship’s status. They were running very low on fuel and he’s glad that Hoseok had come up with his own idea about the fuel usage rather than Yoongi somehow interject or hint at restocking. He wasn’t sure how he would say it and he wasn’t sure how it would be taken in the first place.

That was something else he was going to have to discuss with Namjoon as well. If they don’t kill him first of course. No chapter in any book he’s read offered any sound advice on how to break a news of such weight. There were plenty of chapters on “How to Tell People Bad News!” or “Passing on Difficult Messages the Easy Way!” and none of them seemed to exactly fit Yoongi’s situation. Besides, he doesn’t think sitting the crew around at a table surrounded with aroma-therapeutic scents would help his cause. Besides, there were no fragrance-oils readily available in the ship and it would take a long time to order and have it delivered to the ship.

So Yoongi has thought long and hard on how to break the news to them. Luckily he didn’t have to instigate or guide their next steps to get them to this point. Yoongi guesses that all of them needed some time out, considering the direction Namjoon and Sk’jin relationship (or lack thereof) was headed, it was probably a good idea to head somewhere they could stay away from each other and not just inside the ship.

‘All right, we can move out now.’

Yoongi hadn’t even been aware of the fact that they had landed already. He glances up at the camera situated right above him, watching over all of the Bridge from a high angle. There were more cameras planted all around the ship. It had taken Yoongi nearly a week to find all of them.

Hoseok eases the ship down to stand-by mode, rearranging the ship system’s to in-planet settings. The ship’s shield shimmers brightly once before fading away with the slightest twinkle.

Taeh’yung cheers as he gets off of the footstool, his borrowed robe fluttering behind him as he
skips out. Finding Taeh’yung had confirmed his decisions in Grezma; further inspiring Yoongi to quickly come clean. He had even gotten time alone with Namjoon and had even gone out of his way to buy ingredients for food with which he hoped to get Sk’jin in a good mood for the moment he told the Khol’isa what he knew. But then everything else happened and Yoongi worked off his frustration as he laid waste to the K’it’y guards based there.

‘See you in a bit Yoongi,’ Sk’jin chimes at him. Before Yoongi can think of a response the Khol’isa turns away, as though he hadn’t been expecting a reply anyways. Yoongi deflates a little in his seat, wondering if a he should have replied with ‘okay’ or ‘of course you’ll see me later— we live in the same ship’ or ‘in a while, crocodile’. The first one seemed the most appropriate— it was a word of confirmation that was casual and easygoing without sounding too formal or rude. And Yoongi has seen pictures of crocodiles and doesn’t think Sk’jin would appreciate the comparison once he finds out.

They leave the Bridge, making a lot of noise as they do so. It was often very easy to hear the crew members walking around the ship. The noisiest was Taeh’yung who had no care or heeded what his limbs made contact with. He was the definition of a storm as he skipped down the stairs, bare feet making extraordinary noise against the matted steps. Next was Namjoon who walked with a slightly heavier gait than the rest. Yoongi puts it down to his bionic built.

Sk’jin, though elegant and smooth in his movements, wasn’t as quiet as one would expect. There was times where he would make the most uncharacteristically clumsy move, as though miscalculating his own physical density or the proximity of an object. He also walked slightly tilted, as though permanently imbalanced in his core. Yet he hid these with exceptional grace, using them to his advantage and exuding something like effortless/lazy grace while in fact disguising his slightly skewed sense of perspective.

The most quiet Being after Yoongi was Hoseok. Which was to be expected considering what he had been before. Hoseok moved with unexpected grace and fluidity- a trait that reminds Yoongi of the GI agents. Hoseok’s physical appearance betrayed his real capabilities. He was a lithe and slim Being and at first glance didn’t seem imposing in the least bit. He was neither very tall or short- his built wasn’t heavy or spritely; overall Hoseok just seemed average in his physical capabilities. However after Grezma and the slave-ship, it only firmly confirmed to Yoongi of the Ngfy’widan’s lethality. Yoongi doesn’t remember the last time he worked so flawlessly with another Being in such a hastily thrown together situation as the one they faced in the slave-ship. It was as though Hoseok was in the same wavelength as Yoongi- moving and mirroring and supporting Yoongi’s every line of action and thought. Hoseok would be a terrifying opponent to have in a fight- so he would have to base his next few steps in anticipation of Hoseok’s instinctive abilities.

He glances out of the large HUD windows, taking in the dry dark landscape a little absently. The massive lakes of acid glimmered at him from the distance in the horizon. This was a good moon to land on. It was perfect for discarding anything they might find that would potentially harm them. That would potentially harm him.

‘Will you be all right using the Spardyti?’ he hears Hoseok ask Namjoon. He would have to make sure that the entire ship was fully shut down.

‘Yeah- I’ve driven one before,’ Namjoon replies. ‘It won’t be an issue. Just need to add some gravity-lifts and bring in the fuel cells.’

Yoongi gets up from his seat and exits the Bridge.

‘Yoongi could you activate the Spardyti controls?’ Namjoon asks, his voice a little strained. Yoongi activates the controls from the screen in his hands as he walks down the stairs to the
Living Quarters.

‘Thanks.’

The cabins were all designed to look the same and to be the same. However Yoongi had taken quite a lot liberty in “redesigning” his cabin space. A manual search (meaning Yoongi took apart the entire room) lead to the discovery of 3 cameras, 4 microphones, and 3 sensors. He removed each and every one of them and basically separated his room from the rest of the ship. Judging by the faces of the other group members, they had no idea they were being spied on. He would need to inform them on that too.

After carefully scanning through every inch of his cabin and deeming it clear, Yoongi had put back the walls, floor, and ceiling and unpacked the one thing he had brought with him.

His helmet.

Picking up the black helmet from on top of his table, Yoongi slips it on.

[UŽKULISAI SYSTEMS CORE]
[ACCESSING SYSTEM-LISAI]
[INITIATE OVERRIDE]
[INITIATE OVERRIDE]
[OVERRIDE SUCCESS]

[ENGINE CORE_ON/OFF]
[SYSTEMS CORE_ON/OFF]
[LIFE SUPPORT_ON/OFF]
[MASTER SWITCH_ON/OFF]
[MASTER SWITCH_OFF]

Removing the helmet, Yoongi hears the ship quiet down, the hallways fall into darkness where no natural light can permeate. Yoongi picks up the Heliord handle and makes his way down.

‘I think we should start with the bigger OrTanks first,’ Sk’jin is suggesting. He sounds healthy.

‘Right, let’s begin by-‘ Hoseok is obviously the first one to notice. Yoongi is surprised he hadn’t noticed the moment he shut down the ship.

‘What’s wrong?’

Communications goes down as Yoongi makes his way to Level One. Taeh’yung is there, sitting next to the OrTank. There is no light save for the strange green luminance that the Zhak’gri seems to naturally emit.

‘Yoongi?’ he quirks his head in question as though he knew that the sudden power loss wasn’t one of mistake or some systems reboot.

Instead of answering his unasked question, Yoongi taps at his own ear and holds out his hand in
front of Taeh’yung. Clearly confused but still compliant, he hands Yoongi the Comm-Device in his ear. Yoongi crushes the little device between his fingers.

‘Thank you.’

Taeh’yung beams at him and wraps an arm around the OrTank, no questions asked. Yoongi makes his way out and finds Namjoon and Hoseok with their heads bent over the NaviLet and with Sk’jin looking down at them from a short distance. This was almost entirely too perfect.

‘What in Spaces is going on?’ he sees confusion and wariness settle on Hoseok’s face as he taps on the NaviLet as though in hopes of waking it up. The systems shutdown was catching up now and so all the system-communications from the Navigation Table was now shutting down. He looks up and Yoongi doesn’t find suspicion in his eyes- instead Hoseok goes back to the NaviLet as though he had other things to think about other than potentially faulty ship-systems. This might be easier than he calculated.

‘Wasn’t he supposed to be keeping watch inside the ship?’ Sk’jin sounds a little sleepy, as though by standing under the sunlight made him at ease. ‘Yoongi what happened?’

‘Did he start-up the ship?’ Hoseok doesn’t pay him heed, clearly dismissing the issue for Namjoon to handle who walks towards him, a questioning look in his expression.

‘I think we should begin with the last of the OrTanks-‘

Yoongi realizes just as he starts up the Heliord blade that they trusted him. It was the only reason why Hoseok would turn his back to him, disadvantaging himself. Why Sk’jin wasn’t regarding him with instant distrust and rapid calculation. It was the reason why Namjoon was walking towards him, a question on his lips and his attitude easy and open.

Yoongi is filled with guilt as he realizes that he’s manipulating their trust in him.

It’s easy calculating the speed in which the Heliord blade activates and he times it perfectly to extend over both Namjoon and Hoseok’s ears- destroying the Comm-Devices on their ears. Deactivating the device and activating it again, it extends over Hoseok’s hands, breaking the NaviLet into pieces. He reaches, so quickly he’s sure Namjoon doesn’t realize, over for the Kutsoglerin’s personal screen and crushes the device with just a single hand just as Hoseok’s instincts take over.

Just as Yoongi anticipated, Hoseok takes on the offence and is quick to disarm Yoongi through being disarmed was a part of Yoongi’s plan in the first place. The Heliord handle drops and while still held captive by Hoseok, Yoongi reaches for the other handle in his pocket and the blade seers into life and slices at Sk’jin’s ear. His timing is a little off, feeling a little disoriented by the sheer disbelief in Sk’jin’s eyes. As though he couldn’t believe Yoongi was doing what he was doing.

A green light erupts around Yoongi and he instantly drops the Heliord from his hand. He remembers what Zhoumi had said about nudity but right now he had to show that he hid nothing on himself and so he strips.

‘Yoongi-!’ Sk’jin’s gasp is pained, incredulous, and confused. His ear is bleeding and Yoongi feels guilty again. He spots Taeh’yung near the Hangar gateway, looking confused but still trying to help.

‘What in Spaces-‘ Namjoon looks stunned. He doesn’t seem to realize he’s holding Sk’jin up, his stance protective. Hoseok is there just as quickly, placing himself in front of the two behind him.
Tactically speaking, Yoongi would praise Hoseok’s quick thinking but he has no intentions of attacking them.

Raising his hands over his head in the universally accepted gesture of “I have no weapons on me” and “I mean no harm” Yoongi hopes to convey his friendliness as such. Chapter 15 in “Building Better Relations in the Work Place!” had said that body language was extremely important. It clearly doesn’t work because the three in front of him are regarding him as though they thought he lost his mind. Which Yoongi doesn’t blame them for.

So rather than stretch out this strangeness and possibly get killed by Taeh’yung who was very unpredictable, Yoongi speaks up.

‘We are under surveillance. And we are being tracked. This entire mission was a set-up.’ He summarizes briefly.

A good introduction was key to captivating your audience’s attention. Something he read in “How to Improve Your Speaking Skills!”. That chapter might have been the best thing he’s read so far because everyone is riveted.

‘What the fuck-’ Sk’jin sounds even more confused.

Hoseok is regarding him carefully now, his yellow-ringed eyes calculative as he studies Yoongi’s previous actions.

‘How do you know this?’ Namjoon demands, still standing in front of Sk’jin.

‘Because Yisheng Amme told me.’ Yoongi replies, arms still up. The sun felt nice on his back. Pleasant and warm. Maybe a bit too dry. Taeh’yung is stepping out into the ramp now, still looking puzzled.

‘What?!’ Namjoon’s eyes are wide with confusion.

‘The Užkulisai-02 was designed and rigged to be used and operated for Mission 013-937619.’ Yoongi further explains. ‘Mission 013-937619 was also designed and orchestrated to fail 3 months into its operation where the objective of the mission, what it was carrying, where it was headed, and for what reasons it was issued would be revealed to the entirety of the Known Universe.’

‘What-‘ Sk’jin is so genuinely confused, he looks like he’s close to passing out again.

‘I am sorry for not revealing this earlier but due to recent events I was unable to inform you. Now that we have landed here where we can readjust the ship and make it completely-‘

‘And why the fuck should we trust anything you’re saying?’ Sk’jin storms up to him, eyes burning, his entire body language exuding frustration and incredulity.

‘You don’t,’ Yoongi answers. ‘But you know you should. What with all that we’ve seen, and with the way nothing adds up. I know that all of you have had doubts. And now with his arrival, it’s apparent that the mission we were set out to complete is just a set-up.’

It’s remarkably quiet. Yoongi can see the way each and every single one of them is furiously thinking.

‘We were tricked. They knew what would work against us. They knew the exact right things to say, knew exactly what would make us agree to this mission, and they set us up.’ Yoongi explains simply. Amme might have said that she didn’t have her own agenda within this mission, but
Yoongi didn’t believe her. He never believed her in the first place. And now even more so with his appearance.

Sk’jin is hissing, shoulders bunched and head low as he gesticulates violently in the air. Namjoon looks uncertain yet at the same time like he wasn’t entirely surprised.

‘Fuckin’ hell this fucked up—’

Taeh’yung’s attempts in placating the Khol’isa are both amusing and worrying as he hops around trying to face Sk’jin, pulling funny faces at him.

‘Namjoon, Hoseok, Sk’jin,’ Yoongi read in “Making Friends!” that continuously repeating a Being’s name familiarized your voice to them, therefore creating a better platform by which you could appeal to them. Nicknames were good, but in a serious situation, the writers had advised that the reader stick to official names. ‘Please.’

It seems to work, as Sk’jin stops his furious pacing and throws himself on the ground looking completely done with everything. He glares expectedly at Namjoon and asks: ‘So what do we now?’.

Namjoon doesn’t notice Sk’jin’s glare, instead he’s already looking at Yoongi.

As individuals, they all had their shortcomings within the team. However, one thing Namjoon didn’t lack was initiative.

‘Yoongi, put your clothes back on,’ the Kutsoglerin commands. ‘Taeh’yung you can remove the… whatever that is. We empty the ship, rewire everything and purge it. The closest station is no more than 30 minutes from here we can go on foot and retrieve what we need.’

The shield around Yoongi disappears.

‘The ship is in complete power lockdown until we clear it.’ Namjoon declares.

‘I’m sorry about your ear,’ is the first thing Yoongi says to Sk’jin who stares at him blankly for a whole 3 seconds before throwing a punch that Yoongi saw coming and could have blocked but he doesn’t.

Sk’jin’s fist lands squarely across his jaw, rattling his teeth a little. This probably wasn’t Sk’jin’s full strength but it still hurt a bit.

Taeh’yung squeaks, flailing as he puts himself between Yoongi and Sk’jin, arms thrown wide. Namjoon looks ready to pull back Sk’jin while Hoseok situates himself in between to put an end to any sort of scuffle.

‘No violence please!’ the Zhak’gri pleads, hopping about. ‘It doesn’t solve anything!’

‘You could have fucking decapitated me you Earthian piece of shit!’ Sk’jin shrieks and adds in the same tone as he turns around storming off towards the ship, ‘Wear some fuckin’ clothes!’

Taeh’yung glances back at him, a slightly amused but at the same time curious expression on his face.

‘All right Yoongi?’

Yoongi isn’t sure how to answer to that so he simply nods. He wears his clothes again, dusting
them a little as they picked up a massive amount of the dark granular dust that made up the ground of the moon.

Holding up a hand and pulling his fist to form a thumbs-up, he says: ‘I’m a-okay.’

‘I keep telling you; don’t look at the eclipse directly like that- we need to get to the hill-top first you fucking idiot-’

‘-stop yammering- I’ll do what I want dick-face-‘

‘There are **children** here, will you two control yourselves?!’

‘Sorry-‘

‘-swearing in front of the children **and** lying my goodness you’re really something-ouch!!’

*He laughs out loud, shaking his head at the two in front of him.*

‘Come on! You want me to carry you?’

‘No- I can walk there myself!’ he declares stubbornly despite the way his thighs were burning and his feet were sore.

‘Atta boy!’

‘Can you carry me instead?’ she asks, looking tired and sweaty.

‘Sure thing kid; want some water?’

‘Ma already gave me some. I can drink at the lake.’

‘You sure? Don’t want you fainting about.’

‘I’m **fine**-‘

‘No attitude!’

‘Yes ma.’
She flashes a cheeky wink at him which he returns. They both knew she had too much attitude anyways- something she picked up from having too many older brothers around her all the time.

‘Where’s dad?’

‘Being slow- as usual.’ His older brother snorts.

‘I’ll go check on him. Might be his knees,’ he offers, already turning back around.

The landscape is amazing- wide winding valleys and a steady trickle of people moving upwards to the hill-top. The sky was a strange colour, because of the way the sun and the moon were dancing. A heavenly dance. He personally thought it was a bit too slow for a dance.

‘Be careful!’ their mother calls out after him.

‘I will ma!’

* *

Sk’jin is still glaring at him, his ear covered in tissue-plast and ointment (carefully applied by Taeh’yung who treated the latter like he was a child) as they sit above the ramp of the Hangar bay. Taeh’yung was outside, dragging the OrTank behind him as he scuffled around the soil, creating mounds and structures with delight, talking animatedly to the Being inside the OrTank.

Sunlight seemed to have a visible effect on the Being, his form uncurling even more, as though trying to expose himself to more of the sunlight. Making sure to keep Taeh’yung and the OrTank in his peripheral vision the entire time, Yoongi turns his full attention towards the remaining crew members. He just told them about his last meeting with Amme and all that she told him.

‘Lal Haenoon told me something similar,’ Hoseok says, rubbing at his face tiredly. He’s procured a head-band of sorts, pushing back his hair from his face. ‘He wanted me to make sure that the “mission” would succeed because every other Being in the special-jury wanted their own agenda to be fulfilled.’

‘Lmiura said the same,’ Namjoon divulges. ‘She wanted me to make sure that the Venture Unit and the GIU didn’t interfere with the success of the mission- she said that you were probably working for their agenda so I had to make sure that none of you would succeed.’

Sk’jin looks like he wants to say something but he stops himself and instead says, ‘K’mara said no such thing- she offered me a deal, and I accepted.’
‘What?’ Namjoon looks like he wants to ask more but didn’t know how.

‘All of you were brought in because of this who Gaia Case thing and about making sure the “universe would be kept safe” or some other noble bullshit,’ Sk’jin scoffs. ‘Clearly, you can tell I’m not exactly the most legal or normal of Beings around. K’mara offered me new identification, a ranking officer title in the GIU,- basically a new life, if I agreed to carry out this mission.’

‘Couldn’t you have done that regardless?’ Hoseok asks carefully. ‘You’ve been off the grid for a … fairly long time I’m thinking.’

‘There aren’t a lot of Khol’isa out there,’ Sk’jin shrugs, leaning back on his arms. ‘sides my handsome face stands out a bit too much.’

‘Considering the fact that they all basically said the same thing to each of us,’ Namjoon takes them back to the main topic at hand. ‘It’s obvious that it was all intentionally planned to make us agree, setting us up against each other.’

‘Or-‘ Sk’jin interrupts. ‘Considering I wasn’t told the same-‘

‘-because you wouldn’t have agreed to the mission if you were approached the same way we were,’ Hoseok says simply, ignoring Sk’jin’s irritated look. ‘Like Yoongi said, we were all tricked- very cleverly, to agree to go into this mission. They used our background against us. They used my guilt against me,’ Hoseok says easily before looking at Namjoon, ‘They used your beliefs regarding duty and obligation,’ he turns to address Sk’jin, ‘K’mara used what you needed to start over to get you to agree.’

Hoseok then nods at Yoongi, ‘And the same with you- Amme used something she knew she could manipulate you with something and she did.’

Hoseok sighs heavily, ‘This entire mission was designed to blow up in our faces and we were the scapegoats to take the blame while the GLA and the Venture Unit and the GIU clamor to “control” the mess.’

‘So what do we do next?’ Sk’jin asks a little forcefully. ‘I mean yeah, we figured it out and the “mission” didn’t fail- yet. Where does that put us? So what if we strip the ship down- so what if we switch ships completely and hide away from the special-jury; what do we now? And what even is the point anymore?’

‘We still continue with the mission,’ Yoongi states bluntly.

‘You can’t be serious,’ Sk’jin frowns. ‘You yourself said this mission was a farce-‘

‘-it was designed to fail but the main and real objective behind this mission is still extremely important,’ Yoongi cuts across. ‘You should know that- you have single handedly witnessed and lived through the result of-‘

‘-yes. And I don’t need reminding of it again,’ Sk’jin says curtly. ‘And neither do I want to risk going back to that-‘

‘-then what is he doing here?’ Namjoon butts in, gesturing towards the OrTank that Taeh’yung was now using as a foundation pillar to build a sort of sandy structure around. He clears his throat, sitting up a little before he continues.

‘So, fine- we now know how they wanted this mission to turn out, and how they were all just waiting for one of us to blow a fuse and jeopardize the mission and get discovered,’ Namjoon
summarizes off. ‘And let’s say we abandon the mission and we just run away from this. Technically, they wouldn’t have a reason to come after us. They could string together a bunch of other people who were involved in the Gaia Case and send them off on the same mission. But they won’t. And we won’t be able to hide anymore either.’

‘What do you mean?’ Sk’jin blinks in confusion. The Khol’isa seemed ready to warp off into the most distant remote system he could find and stay there away from this entire mess for the rest of his life, new identity be damned.

‘Because of him.’ Namjoon points at the OrTank again.

‘Why was he placed here- what is he doing here? What does he have to do with any of this? What is his purpose in this mission?’ Namjoon questions before he continues. ‘He’s clearly important.’

‘Important in what way?’ Hoseok asks.

‘In a way that suggests his discovery would trigger a huge eruption within the GLA,’ Namjoon says carefully. ‘Even if our mission were to be exposed as it is, revealing the true nature of the Gaia Case to the Known Universe and all that- his discovery would probably be a whole lot more effective in a completely different way.’

‘What are you trying to say?’ Sk’jin looks fed-up.

‘This Being isn’t connected to the Gaia Case as we know it- I think it has to do more with Bhumi and the treaty that barricades the GLA from entering the system,’ Namjoon replies thoughtfully. ‘You all know what the Bhumi System holds,- the history behind it and the treaty- what if this Being is connected to all of that?’

‘How?’ Hoseok inquires.

‘I don’t know,’ Namjoon shrugs. ‘But Lisai wasn’t able to detect his species or race- his age is off, his identity is untraceable. Yet his authorization code is the highest. ‘

‘Lisai is faulty-’ Hoseok begins but then he pauses. ‘Do you think Lisai was purposefully altered to hide his identity from us in case we were to discover him?’

‘That, amongst other reasons,’ Namjoon nods but adds in an unsure tone, ‘But I feel like the GLA Database won’t have any information on him anyways. The Gaia Case discovered a lot of new and lost species of Beings.’

‘What if he’s from there?’ Hoseok asks with a frown. ‘What if he’s from Bhumi?’

‘Well there’s only one way to find out why he’s here. I say we wake him up- I don’t know, break the OrTank or something,’ Sk’jin throws out with a huff.

‘No,’ Yoongi says firmly. ‘He will be born when he’s meant to. Not out of force.

Sk’jin rolls his eyes.

‘I have to agree with Yoongi on that one,’ Hoseok says slowly. ‘We don’t know what sort of Being he is- it’s too much of a risk to wake him up; for both us and him.’

They fall into silence again.

‘All right let’s consider this.’ Namjoon exhales, a permanent furrow appearing between his brows.
‘We know that it’s not only the special-jury who know about this mission. The Venture Unit Board of Divisions, the GIU Trifecta, Yisheng Directory, and a few of the GLA Head of Departments know the full extent of this mission.’

Hoseok and Sk’jin nod slowly, waiting for Namjoon to elaborate.

‘What if when this mission was first conceived; it was indeed created for the objective it was based on- to go to Bhumi, rid the System of every possible Akramanese technology or remains, and secure the surviving planets in there if possible.’ Namjoon summarizes briefly. ‘But what if there were individuals within this group of Beings who thought they should take a different route- the one where we all think each of the organizations we represent is trying to undermine the other and trigger some universal-scale calamity that could potentially retrigger the events from the Gaia Case.’

‘Then of course their suggestion would be shot down immediately,’ Hoseok counters. ‘It’s just not right.’

‘Which would then lead to internal conflict- they’re now all paranoid, suspicious of each other and their intentions,’ Namjoon nods.

‘So instead of further investigating amongst themselves- they decided to pack up all of their problems into another location- into us,’ Sk’jin says emphatically. ‘Then they send us on our merry way on a faulty ship and considering our fantastic group dynamics, we’d probably end up killing each other- and whoever rose as the victor would then win over the cause of whatever side they supported.’

‘But then Amme decided to put Yoongi in,’ Hoseok smiles grimly at the Human. ‘Maybe the Yisheng Directory can be trusted-‘

‘No,’ Yoongi says simply. ‘Because if we are to consider Namjoon’s theory and think of it as true, it still doesn’t explain him.’

‘You mean my baby?’

They all try not to flinch but it’s futile. Taeh’yung is standing next to the ramp, holding up the OrTank as though it weighed nothing.

‘Taeh’yung, you said you were involved with the Yisheng regarding the um…the process of moving Beings like him around right?’ Namjoon asks.

‘Yeap!’ Taeh’yung grunts a bit as he leaps up onto the ramp. ‘My little sleeping babies.’

‘You said…you said that they came from a different time,’ Hoseok says hesitantly. ‘What did you mean by that?’

‘Oh,’ Taeh’yung pulls up the OrTank and squeezes himself and the OrTank between Yoongi and Hoseok. ‘A bit like Yoongi actually.’

All heads turn towards Yoongi who shrugs and says, ‘I don’t know anything about myself. It’s the main reason why I came on this mission. To understand.’

Everyone deflates again.

‘Can you like…look into the past and see who he is?’ Hoseok tries.
‘It doesn’t work like that,’ Taeh’yung explains with a short laugh. ‘That’s not something I can do.’

‘So…what can you tell us about him?’ Namjoon asks, nodding at the OrTank.

‘Well-‘ Taeh’yung glances at the OrTank, the Being inside hovering around slowly, making to face Yoongi who sat next to the OrTank. ‘He’s been in there for quite a while but he’s overall quite young I think. He feels familiar to me the same way Yoongi feels familiar to me- the same way Jin feels familiar to me.’

Sk’jin raises both of his eyebrows in question.

‘From a different Time,’ Taeh’yung explains. ‘From long long ago.’

‘Okay how about I put this bluntly. Is he dangerous?’ Hoseok asks.

‘Being dangerous is solely situational isn’t it?’ Taeh’yung replies, shifting around where he sat until he lay back with his head on Hoseok’s lap. He squirms a bit before stretching his long legs out. ‘Anyone can be dangerous given the correct circumstances.’

‘Correct circumstances?’ Namjoon repeats quietly, sounding amused.

‘I meant-‘ Hoseok begins impatiently.

‘He’s not dangerous,’ Taeh’yung grins up at the Ngfy’widan. ‘He’s not going to…explode or like, be radioactive. He’s pretty…pretty normal. A bit like Yoongi.’

Hoseok glances over at Yoongi, wondering what aspect of the Human was remotely normal.

‘How can you tell?’ Namjoon asks.

‘The flow of Life-force,’ Taeh’yung shrugs. ‘It’s different in everyone, in every species, race. The way it’s structured inside each person- it’s like magic.’

Taeh’yung long fingers wiggle about as though casting some spell-effect in the air.

‘He’s been in the tank? Not born there?’ Yoongi inquires out of nowhere, watching the way the Being’s iridescent hair seemed to glow under the sunlight. His cheeks appeared rosy almost from the exposure to the light.

‘Not a lot of them were born in there,’ Taeh’yung explains. ‘Just like you.’

It’s the most facial expression anyone has seen on Yoongi’s face. His eyes widen, mouth opening slightly.

‘What do you…what do you mean?’ his voice is still the same though.

‘You weren’t born in there,’ Taeh’yung says thoughtfully. ‘You were…in there.’

Yoongi seems stunned into silence- or at least he was slipping into some thoughtful revere.

‘So…he’s safe?’ Hoseok asks, glancing over at the floating Being.

‘Pretty much,’ Taeh’yung tries nodding and fails.

‘Wait- how do we know we’re not being tracked the way Yoongi poisoned us?’ Sk’jin snaps.
‘How do we know that Being isn’t a living tracking device placed here. What if we just dump him
Sk’jin’s eyes widen at Yoongi’s tone and the pure threat laced in his normally monotone deadpan voice.

‘There’s nothing on him,’ Taeh’yung pipes up. ‘Or I’d see it.’

‘Wait- you did something to me in Grezma,’ Namjoon frowns. ‘You touched my forehead-‘

‘Oh yeah- you had something in you- a weird structure. I thought it was like, an accident or something, so I removed it from you- but I can see it in Jin and in Hobi too, so I guess it’s normal? I saw lots of it in the food!’

Every other head turns to glare at Yoongi who shrugs as though he couldn’t help his actions.

‘So we’re back to square one,’ Namjoon sighs.

‘What were you guys discussing?’ Taeh’yung asks from Hoseok’s lap.

‘What we’re going to do next,’ Sk’jin replies before Namjoon can. ‘Long story short, we’re fucked.’

‘Ah…’ Taeh’yung blinks up at them with a confused expression. ‘So…you’re not going to be taking him back?’

‘Taking him back-? What are you talking about?’ Hoseok looks down at the Being intruding on his lap.

‘He said you were taking him back to his planet,’ Taeh’yung replies, eyes wide and innocent.

‘He spoke to you-?’

‘Taeh’yung-‘

‘WAIT JUST A MOMENT!’ Sk’jin literally screams, standing up. He aggressively points at the OrTank and then at Taeh’yung and then back at the OrTank and then back at Taeh’yung. He does this for a while before clearly giving up and sitting down again, taking a deep breath and forcing a smile.

‘Taeh’yung. Please explain what you mean. From the beginning; maybe from the part where you can talk to him hm?’ Sk’jin’s eyes are glowing red and his smile is beautiful yet slightly demented.

This does nothing to throw off Taeh’yung who sits up, hair frazzled.

‘It’s not like I can speak to him all the time,’ he clarifies, patting the OrTank. ‘It’s only been twice so far.’

‘And…and what did you guys uh, talk about?’ Hoseok’s voice is a little strained. Namjoon just watches on in complete disbelief.

‘He spoke to me first- it’s a little tricky?’ Taeh’yung scratches the back of his head. ‘He asked me if we were there yet. And I said I didn’t know. Before I could ask him more questions he drifted off again.’
Taeh’yung places his ear against the surface of the clear glass encasement.

‘Then the next time he spoke to me, he asked me the same question. And he stayed a little longer to explain that the ship was taking him back.’ Taeh’yung explains. ‘He said it was very important?’

Hoseok shiftily moves away from the OrTank, eyeing it warily. The Being inside is facing Yoongi, still in the same unconscious state of being. Yoongi is staring at the Being, as though trying to communicate with him or get him to talk to him. Sk’jin seems to be lost in thought, eyes unfocused and glazed.

‘This still puts us in square one,’ Namjoon cuts into the silence.

‘What do you mean?’ Taeh’yung sounds as though he thinks Namjoon has lost his mind.

‘What do you mean?’ Namjoon shoots back.

‘You have to take him back,’ Taeh’yung pats the OrTank.

‘I agree with Taeh’yung,’ Yoongi speaks up unexpectedly.

‘This isn’t about casting a vote-’ Namjoon starts to say but Sk’jin quickly interrupts him.

‘I agree with Taeh’yung and Yoongi.’

Namjoon frowns across at Sk’jin who expertly ignores him, looking over at Hoseok who squirms from being under the spotlight.

‘I choose neither,’ he says slowly but firmly. ‘While I can’t agree on going to Bhumi based on Taeh’yung’s word- no offence to you-’

Taeh’yung just smiles brightly to show that he took no offence.

‘I can’t seem to think of any other plan of action we could take. I feel like I know too much yet nothing conclusive is coming out of it. I just don’t know what to do.’ Hoseok finishes, crossing his arms.

‘We’re a unit, a team- the votes are 4 for going to Bhumi,’ Sk’jin summarizes.

‘Four-?’ Namjoon frowns heavily.

‘His authorization code is higher than yours- meaning his rank is higher than yours- if he wants to go to Bhumi, then we’re doing that,’ Sk’jin points at the Being inside the OrTank.

‘You don’t even know if he meant Bhumi if what Taeh’yung is saying is true- no offence,’ Namjoon adds with a nod at Taeh’yung who shrugs in reply.

‘You said so yourself that this was connected to Bhumi-’

‘I theorized- it’s not conclusive-’ Namjoon corrects Sk’jin quickly.

‘It makes the most sense-’

‘The most-!’ Namjoon actually stands up in his frustration. ‘Then fine,’ Namjoon throws up his hands. ‘Let’s all just continue with this mission despite knowing full well that this isn’t going to end well for any of us! We just found out that this entire thing is a set-up, a trap, and we’re still going to continue?’
No one replies. Sk’jin doesn’t look away, staring up at Namjoon defiantly. Yoongi is staring intently at the Being inside the OrTank while Taeh’yung looks a little dazed. Hoseok avoids eye contact and busies himself with one of the Heliord handles.

‘Fine,’ Namjoon turns around, walking away back into the Hangar. ‘Then let’s do exactly that!’

‘You could just leave,’ Sk’jin butts in, stopping Namjoon in his tracks. ‘It’s not like you have to stay. Besides, I can Navigate- pretty sure Yoongi can too.’

The air turns tense and Hoseok actually facepalms.

‘Fuck off,’ Namjoon mutters, turning his back and walking away.

Sk’jin actually looks surprised at Namjoon’s reaction.

‘So…’ Taeh’yung looks unsure, looking at each of them for some conclusive statement.

‘We’ll take him to Bhumi,’ Sk’jin says with a tired smile.

‘Yay!’ Taeh’yung cheers and stands up, his long sleeves flapping as he exits the Hangar.

‘You’re really not helping your case out with Namjoon you know,’ Hoseok comments wryly.

Sk’jin shrugs dismissively.

‘Why…why are you making this decision?’ Hoseok asks carefully.

‘Why aren’t you fully against it?’ Sk’jin asks back at once.

Hoseok doesn’t know what to say. Sk’jin gives him a look as though saying that’s exactly what I mean.

‘Yeah- probably why Namjoon decided to stick around too,’ the Khol’isa laughs. ‘And also to say I told you so when the moment is right.’

‘Are you really just doing this to irk Namjoon?’ Hoseok asks incredulously.

‘I’m not making my decisions for petty reasons,’ Sk’jin replies with a heavy frown, still looking like his mind was elsewhere. ‘It’s just there’s something strange about this entire mission or whatever it is. I don’t understand it, and I want to.’ There’s a dark gleam in his eyes as he regards the Being inside the OrTank.

‘I hate not knowing,’ he says quietly.

‘So…so you would risk going to Bhumi in hopes of understanding this situation?’ Hoseok asks incredulously.

‘Yes,’ Sk’jin replies simply, his eyes glowing neon. ‘Because I made a promise.’
‘Mind your steps!’

‘I got it!’

‘I don’t think it’s a good idea to send him all the way down?’

‘It’s good for him- he’ll get used to the place.’ He sits back, lifting his feet up and groaning. His feet were sore. He glances up at the sky. They still had some time before the eclipse would properly start.

‘It really isn’t that impressive.’ He comments.

‘Not for you I wouldn’t think so,’ he wiggles his eyebrows.

‘Hey- I’m sensitive, don’t say things like that-‘

‘I understand what you mean. I’ve flown past nebulas and supernovas and black holes and nearly everything you could think of but-…but there’s something that will always captivate me about the solar eclipse.’

‘There’s a special tour just to watch eclipses; you should consider taking it up.’

‘No way!’

‘I am not kidding- I swear on- on…on my life!’

‘It’s not worth much then.’

‘Shut the fuck up.’

They all sit in silence for a while, taking a short break. The wind is refreshing after all that climbing. Landing the ship had been difficult due to the wind-speed earlier in the morning, but right now it was god-send.

‘Any news?’

He looks away, a slightly pained expression on his face.

‘None.’

‘We’ll keep searching. There are a lot more known trajectory paths that lead to Tayi- we’ll track it and find it.’

‘Thank you.’

‘Don’t thank me until we get it done.’

‘You’re just saying that to sound cool.’

‘I am cool you dick! I’m giving you the first watch for that comment!’
Mutiny! I call mutiny!

Using the natural lighting wherever they could, the Užkulisai motley crew of Beings get to work with speedy efficiency. They first strip down the Spardyti, installing a new systems-core into her engines and computerized assets. Making sure that it was no longer connected to the ship and all surveillance and tracking devices were removed and destroyed, they leave it out to complete its installation process. Namjoon had left nearly 45 minutes ago to get supplies from the nearest station and Yoongi catches sight of him walking back, tugging along a long line of gravity-lifts loaded with fuel-cells and batteries as well as an additional lift with materials Yoongi had requested him to bring.

For a whole 5 minutes, they all had to seriously consider their next series of action. The Užkulisai wasn’t considered a large ship by most standard, but with a total of only 5 Beings available to essentially take apart and scour the ship, and then reinstall everything, was a daunting task.

They were still in the Hangar Bay, going through each OrTank and crate they carried, taking apart everything they could and scanning what they couldn’t. There was already a huge pile of devices and objects they deemed suspicious and was kept outside to be discarded.

‘Are any of these actually legit?’ Hoseok asks out loud to no one in particular, holding up a small tank.

‘The fuck is that?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘…some form of…organic uh tissue?’ Hoseok replies unsurely.

‘Organic is a rather broad term. “Organic” means any and all elemental compound containing carbon atoms in their molecular formula therefore both salad leaves and diamonds can be considered organic- in fact, diamonds are more organic than leaves.’ Is Yoongi’s extraordinary input.

‘…but i think salad leaves are a better option for consumption.’ Sk’jin replies somewhat slowly, exchanging an amused look with Hoseok.

They had all made the unanimous agreement to first remove all forms of tracking/surveillance devices all over the ship. It was easier said than done and Yoongi and Hoseok were tasked with the
delicate task of retrieving said devices from between walls, floors, ceilings, and nearly every other object around the ship. Being the most experienced in such a field, the two work quickly though it’s exhausting.

Hoseok drags his feet out of the final cabin room, carrying a small crate of chips, surveillance devices, and lengths of chopped wires. Though they removed the physical hardware objects, the most important task of removing the digital manifestation of these devices was much more difficult and tasked to Namjoon. He’s sitting at the Lobby outside their cabins where he’s set up his own station of newly bought screens as well as an independent and wholly brand new connection to the GLA Database. He hadn’t moved from his position for the past 7 hours and Hoseok finds a large stack of mugs and cups and bottles set around him, all empty. The table is ringed with condensation prints from his drinks and Hoseok, not for the first time, wonders at Namjoon’s metabolism and how it could even exist in a functional homeostasis.

‘Is that the last?’ Namjoon asks, not looking up from his screen.

‘Yes- for the cabins at least,’ Hoseok drops the crate on the couch. They had been getting rid of all of them in the acid lakes nearby. There was something strangely therapeutic about watching the devices fizzle and spit out violently into nothing as the lake dissolved everything. A little frightening, but still cool.

‘Where’s Yoongi?’

‘Bridge.’

‘Ah.’ Hoseok sighs a little. Namjoon was a little curt with him, answering in monosyllables and not exactly looking at him. But then again- he was doing the exact same thing with everyone else so Hoseok decides not to feel guilty about it.

He makes his way up to the Bridge and he finds Taeh’yung there as well. The OrTank is standing rather precariously on one of the footstools and Hoseok is torn between going and placing it down on the ground or just letting it be. But Taeh’yung is making his way back to the OrTank. He notices Hoseok and waves enthusiastically as though he hadn’t just seen him an hour ago.

‘Hi Hobi!’

‘Hey,’ Hoseok smiles. It was somehow natural to just smile every time Taeh’yung smiled. He had that effect on everyone on the ship in varying levels. Hoseok has never actually seen Yoongi smile (or hold any other expression) so he doesn’t know if it’s the same with the Human.

‘I thought you were helping Sk’jin with the cargo?’ Hoseok questions the Zhak’gri.

‘We finished,’ he explains with a smile. ‘Thought I’d come and help you here!’

‘Where’s Sk’jin?’ Hoseok looks around the Bridge wondering if the Khol’isa was there in the Bridge.

‘He went to the lake,’ Taeh’yung explains, pointing out of the wide windows over at the distant glimmering line indicating the acid-lake.

Hoseok knows that most of the suspicion and paranoia he had in regards to his fellow crew members had all been choreographed by the special-jury. They purposefully played on their wariness and skepticism and used it to create this atmosphere of mistrust and doubt. But he still can’t help it.
He feels uneasy at the idea of Sk’jin going by himself to get rid of their junk at the acid lake. He knew that Sk’jin probably wouldn’t jeopardize their mission but at the same time he can’t guarantee it either.

Hoseok finds that he can’t make any more decisions based solely on his intuition because now, not only does he doubt the others and their intentions, he doubts the foundation by which he made those conclusions regarding each individual crew member.

The appearance of this Being clearly meant something else for both Sk’jin and Yoongi. All of their decisions seemed to be made in regards to this Being and seemed of utmost importance to them too.

‘Did you find anything interesting?’ Namjoon asks, appearing at the doorway, carrying a large screen and long loop of wires in the hook of his arm.

‘Nothing!’ Taeh’yung looks sad. ‘It was all exactly what was written in the inventory list.’

‘I guess that’s a good thing then,’ Namjoon sighs as he throws himself in his chair.

‘Did you find a new system for the ship?’ Hoseok asks.

‘Yeap- customized it as well. Based it off of the first model,’ Namjoon explains. ‘The ship should be able to fly by tomorrow evening.’

‘Gives us time to fix the outside,’ Hoseok looks out of the windows and up into the sky. The planet that Ch’dra orbited was glowing a dull orange in the watery blue sky.

There’s an ear-piercing metallic shriek and everyone winces.

‘Sorry,’ Yoongi says appearing from behind his chair, pulling on a piece of metal until it gave way and came off.

‘What is that-’ Hoseok begins to ask but Namjoon suddenly jolts, his eyes opening wide as though he’d just seen a ghost.

‘What happened?’ Hoseok asks the Kutsoglerin instead, looking around at wherever Namjoon was gawking at.

‘He- he reacted to the sound.’ Namjoon points at the Being in the OrTank. ‘He flinched too.’

There’s a stumbling sound and Taeh’yung is leaping over a footstool, his eyes glowing green as he nearly slams into the OrTank.

‘I’m sorry, I’m so sorry- everything is all right,’ he coos.

This wasn’t abnormal- Taeh’yung frequently spoke out loud to the Being inside. But what isn’t normal is Taeh’yung turning excitedly around and gesticulating at them, whispering loudly.

‘He’s talking!’

Before Hoseok can even take a step forward, Yoongi is already there, an almost wary distance of a foot between himself and the OrTank.

Taeh’yung takes his hand and places it over the OrTank.

‘Say hi Yoongi,’ Taeh’yung encourages.
Hoseok notices the apprehensive look Namjoon throws him.

It’s quiet. Utterly quiet.

‘Ah- he’s asleep again,’ Taeh’yung says, letting go of Yoongi’s hand. ‘He got startled by the sound.’

‘I’m sorry,’ Yoongi says unexpectedly, addressing the Being inside.

Nothing happens for a while. And then to Hoseok’s immense disquiet, the Being inside the OrTank smiles.

‘Hey dad!’

‘Oh! What’s the matter?’

‘You were taking long- thought I’d come check on you.’

‘You mean your mum told you to check on me.’

‘…that might have been the case.’

‘Glad to know you genuinely care for my well-being.’

‘Dad,’ he deadpans.

‘Just kidding,’ his father laughs, the yellow rings around his eyes gleaming. ‘So, are you excited to finally start up in Tayi?’

‘I think you’re both more excited than I am- I’ve been to Tayi many times dad.’ He scoffs. ‘It’s not all that great.’

‘If you say so,’ his father says gently. ‘But neither your mum or I will be there this time.’

‘I swear not to get drunk and get into trouble.’
‘That’s the least of my concerns if I’m being honest,’ his father chuckles. ‘Not a lot of us get around- I don’t want you feeling alienated.’

‘That’s the least of my concerns- here, give me that dad, I don’t want you throwing your back. Again.’

‘Literally just the one time that happened and you and your mother will never let it go-’

‘Well, if we want to catch the eclipse and join in on the celebrations, then we need to hurry and honestly dad- you’re really getting older.’

‘Attitude young man!’ he scolds though there’s a twinkle in his eyes.

They walk up the ramps around the more unstable rock formation of the hill. Metallic ramps are situated everywhere, making it easier for the lifts to work. But for today, it was a holiday.

A celebration.

And a memorial.

‘You don’t have to worry dad,’ he says after a few minutes of silence. A few other Beings walk past them but he keeps in pace with his father.

‘As your parent I am always worried,’ his father replies. ‘What we do isn’t the most ideal thing- and I guess now I know how my parents felt about it too.’

‘Well- then you can also understand how I feel right now, don’t you?’

‘Well if one things for sure you can really work your way around words,’ his father grumbles.

He laughs heartily at his father’s disgruntled voice.

‘I’ll be fine dad- it won’t be any different than what you or mum did.’

His father pulls a funny face.

‘That’s exactly what I’m afraid of.’

*Earth might have been destroyed but nearly every aspect of its recorded history was archived and saved within the GLA Database. Yoongi spent years digging through the eons of information, history, stories, and every little thing available to him from the planet where his DNA came from. Yet Yoongi still feels no connection. He had thought that by perhaps exposing himself to what
Earth was, how the Humans there behaved, that he would be able to somehow rekindle or awaken some form of deeply grounded genetic memory or characterization that would help him regain a sense of identity, a realization of self.

‘I know you

I walked with you

*Once Upon a dream.*’

It’s an old *old* form of entertainment from Ancient Earth. He doesn’t really pay it too much attention though. Instead he watches as the Being inside seems to respond to the old melody of the tune. Yoongi notices that his readings were changing; his pulse increasing and his fingers twitching.

‘I know you.

*That gleam in your eyes*

*Is so familiar a gleam.*

*Yet I know it’s true*

*That visions are seldom what they seem.*’

He saw dreams. That much was apparent. But what did he see in them?

‘*But if I know you I know what you do*’

*You’ll love me at once*

*The way you did once upon a dream.*’

‘Please talk to me.’ Yoongi pleads quietly. He spoke to Taeh’yung before. If they were both the same, why couldn’t Yoongi hear his voice? Why didn’t he choose to speak to him? He had smiled a few hours ago- but Yoongi wasn’t sure if that had been a result of his apology.

‘Oh!’

‘Oh- I’m awfully sorry! I didn’t mean to frighten you!’

‘It wasn’t that! It’s just that you’re a- a…’

‘A stranger? But don’t you remember? We’ve met before!’

‘We- we have?’

‘Of course! You said so yourself! Once upon a dream!’

‘What do you dream of?’ Yoongi asks quietly.

The Being inside doesn’t reply. He never does. Not that Yoongi is expecting a response per se. He’s just waiting.

‘Will you remember what you dreamt of? Or will you forget them?’

Yoongi wasn’t sure for the Being in front of him, but at least 40% of the known species throughout
the Known Universe couldn’t remember a majority of their dreams 5 minutes after waking.

‘Are you the answer to my questions?’

The Being in front of him doesn’t respond. He’s Dreaming. The same way the others had been Dreaming. Probably the same way Yoongi had been Dreaming before he was woken up. But this Being was unlike him and unlike those he has seen inside the long tubes back in base. For one, his back was smooth, no indentation drawn down his spine unlike Yoongi’s and unlike the others who were inside the tubes. Yoongi also spotted light indications of aged scars and natural discolouration on his skin.

What did Taeh’yung mean?

There had to be no other explanation. They were created and birthed in those tubes, nursed and housed until they were fully grown and then put through Dreams so that they could Know. What did Taeh’yung mean by saying he wasn’t born in one of these?

It’s silent inside the Lobby.

The Užkulisai is a naturally silent ship. Yoongi has been on countless shuttles and ships before, but none have been as quiet as this one. He appreciates the silence, it’s soothing; almost like the Yisheng Headquarters. But now even more so with the entire ship in shutdown and most of the crew members in their cabins asleep. Namjoon’s newly installed system was picking up slowly but surely. So much so that internal communications systems, life-support, gravity-functions, and shield-systems were all fully installed. Lisai, or how Lisai was originally supposed to be, was also nearly fully updated, giving Yoongi the chance to watch these old entertainment mediums.

He plays it in the background more for white noise than anything else.

‘My name is Yoongi. What is your name?’

Was this Being the reason why Amme told him he’d find the answers he was looking for? Because right now Yoongi only has more questions. Like why didn’t Amme tell him about this Being inside the ship? Or did she not know about him herself? If so, who was responsible for keeping him here?

Judging by the expressions of the other crew members, they had no idea either. Their reactions were genuine and completely authentic.

Music from the screen fills the Lobby, startling Yoongi out of his revere. He lowers the volume a little before looking back at the Being inside the OrTank. There’s the briefest hint of a smile on the Being’s lips, as though he was seeing something that made him happy. Or perhaps he heard the music?

‘What are you dreaming of?’

Yoongi places his hand on the OrTank cover.

‘Can you hear me?’

‘Yoongi?’

Yoongi isn’t one to be crept on but Taeh’yung was unique. Though the Zhak’ gri was one of the noisiest Beings Yoongi has ever known, he had the uncanny ability to completely lose his presence time to time. As though what you saw of him right then wasn’t exactly where he was.
‘Taeh’yung.’

‘Not sleeping?’ the Zhak’gri smiles at him, taking a seat opposite him on the table. ‘Can’t sleep? Won’t sleep?’

‘All.’

Taeh’yung laughs a deep rumbling chuckle.

‘What did you mean?’

‘Hm?’

‘What did you mean by “a different time”?’

‘Ah,’ Taeh’yung nods in understanding.

He looks a bit more serious as he pauses before answering.

‘There are many things I don’t understand. Thing I can just know- things that I’ve seen; in here, and in here,’ he taps at his head and at his chest, over his heart. ‘So for most parts…I don’t know how to explain what it is I know- except that I know. Does that make sense?’

Yoongi shrugs.

‘Yeah…so…the best way to say it…would be…’ Taeh’yung struggles for a while, crossing his legs as he makes himself comfortable. ‘It’s like you came…from a different lifetime.’

‘A different lifetime?’ Yoongi repeats.

Taeh’yung nods, proud of himself, as though that explained everything. But it doesn’t.

‘What are you watching?’ Taeh’yung asks, already looking excited.

‘It’s from Earth,’ Yoongi explains. ‘It’s called “Sleeping Beauty”.’

Taeh’yung makes a sound of awe and then adds, ‘It’s rather fitting, don’t you think?’

He pats the OrTank fondly.

‘It is.’
Namjoon leans back on the wall of the Bridge, looking out of the massive window down outside. Sk’jin was pacing about the dark ground, pale robes fluttering in the strange orange-twilight that was apparently Ch’dra’s night light.

Unable to sleep, Namjoon had the idea of maybe walking outside- he always felt better being in-planet. Felt a lot more stable and, no pun intended, grounded. But Sk’jin had claimed territory outside, pacing about here and there. Sometimes he would stand still for long periods of time, sometimes he would make short burst of pacing. Other times he’d just crouch.

What was he thinking? What was he even doing?

In the strange twilight, Namjoon randomly catches glimpses of neon red eyes. It’s a little frightening, but from this distance, Namjoon pays little mind to it. He had then decided to maybe work on the rest of the Bridge, but all that was left to do was to wait for the systems to finish installing.

He pulls himself off of the wall and turns his back to the window, away from Sk’jin’s pacing. It wouldn’t do him good if he was caught. Sk’jin might accuse him of spying or something else and another argument would ensue.

Making his way out, Namjoon nearly trips over Taeh’yung on the stairs, catching himself just in time.

‘Captain!’ Taeh’yung grins in greeting. ‘Whatcha doing?’

‘Just…just thinking,’ Namjoon replies and internally adds trying not to get killed falling down the stairs. ‘Thought I’d go for a walk but outside is currently occupied.’

‘Ah- I saw Jin walking around,’ Taeh’yung nods as he takes a seat next to Namjoon. ‘I’ve been wondering- for the Beings born on moons- do they consider the planet they’re orbiting at their moon or are they aware of the fact that they are a moon?’

Namjoon chuckles, glancing down at the Zhak’gri.

‘I don’t know- ask someone from a moon next time?’

‘I should.’ Taeh’yung nods seriously, like he was really serious about doing it.

‘What are you doing here?’ Namjoon asks in turn.

‘I kinda got stuck here,’ Taeh’yung grins. ‘Yoongi is in the Lobby downstairs and you were here- I didn’t want to disturb the two of you, you see. So I just sat here, listening and sightseeing.’

‘What’s Yoongi doing?’ Namjoon asks, taking a seat next to the Zhak’gri though he could guess what the Human was doing.
‘He’s watching over my baby,’ Taeh’yung bounces his knees about as though flapping them.

‘Is that… I mean, he’s been there for a really long time,’ Namjoon says with some concern, glancing down at the staircase. He had seen Yoongi sitting next to the OrTank, staring deep into the tube at the floating Being inside. It was strange, as though sensing someone else beyond the tube, the Being inside was angled facing Yoongi, not shifting around as Namjoon has seen him do so as he floats via surveillance. Seeing him smile earlier had been disarming.

Namjoon sighs out heavily.

‘Don’t worry,’ Taeh’yung says with a smile, leaning against him. ‘They’re just dreaming now.’

They sit in silence for a while.

‘By the way- it’s not like… it’s not that I don’t believe in what you can do…’ Namjoon starts off hesitantly. Taeh’yung look up at him from where he’s leaning on his shoulder with wide eyes.

‘I just… everything that’s happening doesn’t… doesn’t make any sense to me.’ Namjoon explains, feeling a little lame. ‘I don’t know what to think.’

‘Then don’t think!’ Taeh’yung says enthusiastically. ‘Be like me! Just let things flow the way it’s supposed to!’

‘That’s the most reckless advice I’ve ever heard,’ Namjoon chortles.

‘But I’m still here,’ Taeh’yung states simply before sitting up straight again and reaching up to cup Namjoon’s face.

The Kutsoglerin freezes, unsure what to do. Taeh’yung squeezes his face a little, smiling in delight.

‘You have cute dimples,’ he states before kissing said dimples.

‘Uh-‘

‘You think too much. Four used to think too much too- he still does,’ Taeh’yung doesn’t let go of his face and honestly Namjoon thinks he might start sweating soon because he’s so not used to this. If he still had intestines, he guesses they would be coiling about the way he’s read in books.

‘Your Life-force is super strong- and so are you. So is your mind. Strong- a little dense,’ he adds.

Namjoon tries not to feel offended.

‘A lot like metal,’ Taeh’yung clarifies unnecessarily. ‘Metal is nice- it’s smooth and strong, and it can be malleable too. But metal can rust, it can break, it can wear off- you’re wearing a little. Don’t wear down. Okay?’

‘I uh- I’ll try-?’

‘Good,’ Taeh’yung finally lets go of his face and smiles even more brightly and gets up.

‘If I’m metal, what are you?’ Namjoon finds himself asking as Taeh’yung makes his way down the stairs with uncharacteristic quietness.

The Zhak’gri turns around, face strangely void of expression as he looks up at Namjoon.

Half of his face is bathed in the dim emergency light switched on around the ship, and the rest is in
shadow. His eyes gleam a strangely ominous green as he states in a voice that sounded strangely layered.

‘I’m Nothing.’
(Author’s Note)
HAPPY BIRTHDAY JUNGKOOKIE MY SON MY CHILD YOU’RE 20 NOW NO LONGER A TEENAGER BLESS YOUR GOLDEN SOUL idc if in Korea they say 21, I follow modern Earth rotations as the basis for calculating age and years so HE’S 20
*coughs*
It’d been really cool if Jungkook popped in out of nowhere because it’s his birthday and that seems poignant but storyline
Hahaha
*laughs nervously*
“Phosphene” [noun]: the ring of light or stars you see when you rub your eyes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

‘Can’t you, I dunno, like take leave or something.’

‘I don’t think that’s possible?’ he laughs.

‘You know what I mean,’ she huffs irritably, blowing her hair out of her face.

‘I’ll see y’all in a bit- you’re both too slow and I refuse to third-wheel emotional family stuff.’

‘Then get the fuck out of here,’ he responds without missing a beat.

‘Language!’

They both flick him off, making him cackle at their identical reaction. He draws some attention to himself as he skips up ahead, gangly form bouncing all over the place with surprising weight for someone so slight.

‘Still not used to seeing others here,’ he comments, watching the way the crowd parted to let him through, gaping after him with some awe.

‘Well- not ones that look like him,’ she replies with a small laugh.

‘Take care of mum while I’m gone.’ He says quietly after a while.

‘You don’t have to tell me that,’ she mumbles.

He feels bad about having to do this. But this was a rare opportunity after all- not everyone was offered the chance to join the Raksane Tayi Scientific Research Panel. And their mother had insisted- lecturing him with a bewildered tone at his hesitation to accept. But that had been during one of her better spells- when she was more herself than whatever it was she had turned into now. And even though he knew that he would be light-years away, this would create a better future, establish a better future for his sister.

The only thing he regretted from all of this was knowing that he she would have to grow faster than other children her age. That she wouldn’t be allowed many of the experiences that she would normally go through for a girl her age. That she would have to give up on so much not out of necessity but out of obligation and love. That was always the worst- knowing that you would hate yourself for not doing it. And he knew that all too well, because that was what he was doing now.
'Did you go see him?' she asks quietly as they climb up some of the stairs.

'No,' he replies easily. 'I will when I come back.'

'That’s…that’s so far away.'

'You’re starting school and trust me, it won’t feel too long.' He grins as he bends down to hug her. 'Remember? I’m ancient, I know how schools are.'

'Try to come back as quickly as you can.' Her voice is wobbly, like it was about to break.

'I will.'

The gritty dark soil of Ch’dra’s crust is oddly heavy but strangely soft. Namjoon leaves behind deep footprints that remain untouched even when a strong breeze blows about. Closer to the lakes the soil solidifies to chunkier salt-based rock, forming gleaming graphite-like slabs towards the edges of the overly saturated blue lakes of acid.

Tilting the gravity lift, Namjoon empties the last stack of mechanical waste from the ship and avoids getting splashed. The acid is rather dense, not creating a lot of splash but Namjoon would rather not have his clothes riddled with holes.

Not sure why, Namjoon sits on the edge of the jutting lip of the slab over the lake. He removes his boots, wiggling his mechanical digits a little before he lowers his foot down to touch the surface.

It’s not pain- it’s just a strange sensation. The first outer layer, the polished layer of the bionic metal used to replace a majority of his bone, slowly erodes away.

‘That’s a rather dumb thing to do.’

Namjoon doesn’t have to look up to know it’s Sk’jin.

‘Just testing the acidity level.’ Namjoon replies evenly.

‘You could have just one of the pH papers to do that.’

‘It’s not like it matters to you,’ Namjoon comments with a shrug as he pulls his foot up and puts
his boot on again. Sk’jin doesn’t comment and doesn’t speak until after he eases the last of their waste into the lake. Under normal circumstance, Namjoon would have to step back, avoiding the dangerous fumes that could burn his throat and possibly even his bronchioles raw; but seeing as he didn’t exactly have a pair of working organic lungs, Namjoon continues to watch the metal of their junk corrode and dissolve away as it sinks slowly into the deep blue pits of the lake.

‘Did I forget something?’ Namjoon asks, still not turning around. He knows Sk’jin is still there, as his shadow extends over into Namjoon’s slightly wider peripheral vision.

‘No.’

‘So why are you here?’

The last of the waste dissolves into nothing and Namjoon bends down to pick up the handle of the gravity-lift. Sk’jin wasn’t avoiding Namjoon- he was simply ignoring him. And very expertly too. So Namjoon doesn’t know what to expect now that the Khol’isa is here.

‘To talk.’

At this Namjoon finally turns around and faces the Khol’isa. He looks serious, and not like he’s trying to get a rise from Namjoon or mock him in any manner or way.

‘How can I help you?’ Namjoon asks, tugging on the gravity-lift as he sets out into an easy-paced walk. He was exhausted, having worked endlessly without much break. His mind was still buzzing with codes and formulas; this was the sort of thing he enjoyed but given the circumstances under which he was forced to work, Namjoon longs for any form of reprieve- even if it was throwing out the junk.

‘I wanted to discuss what we’re going to be doing for this mission,’ Sk’jin replies, keeping pace with him, hands behind his back.

‘What else is there to discuss?’ Namjoon inquires and it’s not like he’s trying to instigate some sort of argument- he really doesn’t think there was anything more to discuss. ‘We all collectively concluded that this mission was just a scapegoat for the special jury to use for their agenda, and that it was probably going to end with our deaths or worse, and then it was decided that we would follow through on the mission regardless. There’s not much to discuss about it anymore.’

Sk’jin doesn’t say anything for a while, and as Namjoon would rather not look at the Khol’isa, he wasn’t sure what sort of expression he had either.

‘734 sols ago, I was leading my ship through the dead-space between the Systems of Cabcd and Sluchaen. We were tracking a slaver-ship, possibly carrying a few Beings that were closely related to some of my crew.’ Sk’jin suddenly states without preamble. ‘Ever the champion of freedom, I prepared one of my best and fastest ships, took with me my most capable and worthy crew and set out for this dead-space. We didn’t find the ship, instead we found an unregistered planet. It was odd- we could see it, but we couldn’t sense it in any of our scanners. We made up a plan- that we would closely watch the planet. Maybe it was being used to hide the slaver’s headquarters- maybe this was where the Alliance were situated you know?’

Namjoon finally glances over at Sk’jin who was looking up at the sky thoughtfully.

‘I was a pirate yes, but- the shit the Alliance was doing was too much you know? It’s amazing how things still haven’t changed till now,’ Sk’jin sighs a little, looking away from the sky, prompting Namjoon to look ahead again.
‘Well, we didn’t think much of the planet- space is after all, unpredictable- some spike in radiation could have caused a major block on our scans. Shit like that happens all the time.’ Sk’jin continues and adds with a smirk. ‘There was a short problem though- being from Khol’isa, I have uncontrollable urges to cocoon myself in my own cells and breakdown to a cellular mass of gooey gunk. My “hibernation period” was hitting me and I had to retire- as usual I handed over my title and position to my most trusted crew member who had been with me for nearly half a millennium and I went to “sleep”. It’s not all that great,- sleeping that is,’ he clarifies. ‘We get sent back to a weird hallucinatory state of mind- it’s like being back in Khol’isa all over again. Not the best of times you know? Anyways- so as I broke down to cellular levels in my cocoon, a lot of shit happened. The unregistered planet happened to be the crash-site of an illegal Venture Unit operation known as the Hyper-Reality Expansion program- you’ve heard of it, no doubt?’

Namjoon nods, wondering where this story was headed.

‘Well, they crashed into that planet due to the entity they were hosting in their ship- called the “First Nightmare”- poignant isn’t it? A sort of strange Being created by the Venture Unit scientists as a result of continuous and horrific experimentation. It could create these rifts in reality- create an alternative dimension with the help of certain technology and its own twisted mind. It was one of the reasons why this planet was hidden from our scans and couldn’t be detected- it was to an extent, existing in its own dimension of reality even though we could see it. I’m not all too clear on the science behind it- but just as you might be suspecting, it had a lot of connection with the Gaia Case.’ Sk’jin pauses a while before continuing. ‘Well, as it would happen, our ship picked up on a distress signal from that planet. My lieutenant sent down a small ship to check on it. We lost communications for a while and only got it back when the ship returned. Except it returned with only 1 of the 8 Beings my lieutenant sent down. The surviving member reported that he had barely escaped- that the others were kept prisoner by some pirates that were stranded down in-planet.’

Sk’jin clears his throat a bit, ‘We have a policy- as all pirates do- we don’t leave anyone behind. And so they decided to go down there, TeorSers blazing, proton missiles ready, and shields at maximum. The moment they were close enough to the atmosphere of the ship, it completely malfunctioned internally. You see, the surviving crew member was in fact an imposter- a doppelgänger if you will. He crippled the ship and we crash landed. I was still in a cocoon but the crash jolted me out- it was strange- I never experienced that state of consciousness before- I was awake, I could see all over my ship, yet I could not move, I could not speak, and I could not touch. But I could watch my crew members die as they succumbed to their injuries, I could hear their screams of terror as strange carnivorous creatures feasted on the injured, and I could feel it- the First Nightmare.’

A shudder runs down Namjoon’s back. They’ve both stopped walking and Namjoon can’t look away from Sk’jin as he continues to narrate his story with a light nonchalance.

‘It was odd- I could see how it consumed the sanctity of everyone’s minds, mimicking and copying and cloning every Being’s form to lure them into its trap. I watched, without being able to do anything, as every single surviving crew members got sucked into an eternal loop of terror and darkness within their own minds. They slept and slept and slept and in their minds they were trapped, dying over and over again as terror trapped them. I watched as their bodies decomposed, I watched as the ship gave out, collapsing and at some point even mercifully falling over some of the crew, ending their suffering. Or so I thought- their bodies perished but their minds were trapped in that alternative realm.’

‘How did you survive?’ Namjoon finds himself asking.
‘Survive?’ Sk’jin laughs. ‘I didn’t survive- I died too. My body decayed, but my mind wasn’t ensnared by it. It tried so hard, but it could never take me- it couldn’t latch onto my physical state because I didn’t have one when we crashed. But I couldn’t return either- so I just lingered. It soon forgot about me and I just stayed there, unable to get out, unable to kill myself, unable to sleep. I watched many ships crash into that planet- and I watched many Beings die and get trapped. But I remained- I was just there. I just witnessed. I tried to protect- tried to help- some of them could see me. Some of them could sense me- but they were all too freaked out to really understand what was happening- and they all ran away before I could do anything. But I kept trying- I tried over and over and over again,’ Sk’jin huffs out a laughter. ‘I was exhausted. But what could I have done? Nothing- I could do nothing.’

‘So how are you here?’ Namjoon asks carefully.

‘A ship crashed again- like it did so many times,’ Sk’jin replies, carefully brushing his hair, his hands lingering on his temple. ‘Except this time, it wasn’t some trade ship or pirate ship- it was a GIU ship. Carrying a team of Beings sent to investigate the planet- sent to investigate the First Nightmare though they didn’t know what it was. They all died of course- save for one. A young lieutenant from Long-Huo.’

*Long-Huo.* Things started clicking inside Namjoon’s mind.

‘He was different- there was something about him- and I knew at once that he would survive- that he would be the key. So I latched onto him- helping him as he too nearly lost his mind. I would sometimes take over his body, controlling him- it was like having my own body again.’ Sk’jin raises his hand, looking at it as though he didn’t quite understand what it was he seeing.

‘Well- long story short, a few other Beings arrived- the First Nightmare was defeated and the planet relieved of its control. All those who were trapped there, all those who were contained, all the minds that were ensnared were all freed. Save for one.’ Sk’jin points at himself with a smile. ‘So I stayed with the Long-Huo lieutenant; he was a little unstable anyways, and he had brashly made a promise to me that he would make sure I was “cured”. We both knew it wasn’t possible, but I let him believe it. Somewhere along the line I met Yoongi- he could see me- odd I know,’ Sk’jin laughs. ‘I didn’t have a form- I just was- there was no explaining it. But I thought to myself at that point- maybe there was some hope to it- then I met Taeh’yun and here I am.’

‘Taeh’yun?’ Namjoon repeats, hoping for some explanation but Sk’jin continues past that.

‘The reason why I’m telling you this is because the Venture Unit was behind all that bullshit I just told you,’ Sk’jin states. ‘Not just the Venture Unit- but the Yisheng Directory, probably even the GIU, and of course head-members of the GLA.’

‘What are you trying to say here?’ Namjoon asks carefully.

‘What I’m saying is that we both know that there is something beyond the mission- more than what Hoseok or even Yoongi can understand or comprehend.’ Sk’jin replies, an uncharacteristic worried expression on his face. ‘I read through the logs and archives off of that ship carrying the First Nightmare- I read every single file; there were *many* countless other programs and operations being run just like the Hyper-Reality Expansion program. And there are probably many being run *now*. And now with the Gaia Case being exposed- even to this *contained* level that it’s currently in- it’s creating too many opportunities, too many possibilities.’

‘The Being we’re carrying, the “objectives” of this mission- *all* of us in this ship.’ Sk’jin waves his hand around. ‘Hoseok’s father was directly involved in aiding the Yishengs with the Gaia Case- his father tried to recruit him but Hoseok refused- it’s why and how he was exposed and the Venture
Unit held their own internal coup d'etat. Yoongi is from the GI- he was there for everything. And then there’s me, and then there’s you. I know that we all agreed that this was so much more than what we initially thought it would be about- but I think this goes beyond that- beyond any level we thought possible.’

Namjoon doesn’t reply- it’s a little overwhelming, hearing all of this and having to come to terms with it. Sk’jin looks genuinely disturbed, a strange sense of instability to his normally put together countenance.

‘I’m not asking you to trust me- this isn’t about trust,’ Sk’jin sighs, translating his silence to that of distrust. ‘This is about understanding why we’re here. We need to figure this out. The two of us.’

‘And you think going to Bhumi, that actually following through with the mission, will help us understand everything?’

‘It’s the only option there is,’ Sk’jin replies carefully. ‘If you do not choose to believe me then it’s all right, if you cannot trust me that’s all right too- I don’t expect you to; but I hope you can accept the fact that I’m not taking the situation we are in lightly.’

‘You said K’mara offered you a new life- that that was why you accepted this mission- were you lying about that?’ Namjoon asks.

‘I know you don’t trust K’mara- and believe me when I say I don’t trust her even more than you do,’ Sk’jin’s eyes darken as though recalling some memory. ‘I know too much- but she believes that I’m selfish, greedy, vain- kinda like what you think of me. She thought she could use that to manipulate me.’

‘So you’re here to make sure the GLA and every other organization isn’t about to create some fucked up operation like the one you were stuck in?’

‘I’m here because I was purposefully chosen and placed in this mission and I would like to know exactly why and for what reason,’ Sk’jin replies as they catch sight of Taeh’yung running out of the ship, waving at them with his long arms. ‘It goes past everything we talked about.’

They start walking again, approaching the ship. The colour had been altered and any possible physical transformation that they felt was safe enough to alter had been completed a few hours ago. Though it didn’t look all that different, the Užkulisai looked completely different from its former appearance. Luckily the Užkulisai-02 wasn’t all too different from the Užkulisai-01, and the first model was rather popular so they didn’t stand out too much. A few ParaBots were still scuttling over the surface, smoothening out the outer layer and checking on the new paint job. According to Hoseok, painting it a rather bright colour would actually help camouflage it more than a neutral colour. Which was why the Užkulisai was now an obnoxious green.

‘This colour still pains me,’ Sk’jin comments lightly. Namjoon hums back in agreement.

‘I still don’t like this plan, of going to Bhumi,’ Namjoon says after a minute of silence. ‘But I agree with you.’

Sk’jin doesn’t say anything in reply. Taeh’yung bounds over to them, a wide smile on his face.

‘Hobi and Yoongi have finished the final check-up on the engines,’ he informs them brightly, skidding to a stop in front of them and throwing himself at Namjoon.

With a grunt, Namjoon catches the long-limbed Zhak’gri.
‘The shipment should have arrived by now,’ Sk’jin looks up at the sky as though judging the time. ‘See you later Captain.’

Namjoon puts down Taeh’yung who immediately makes for the gravity-lift, sitting on it and looking at Namjoon expectantly.

Namjoon doesn’t move, watching the Khol’isa disappear into the ship.

‘Taeh’yung.’

‘Hm?’

‘How did you fix Sk’jin from his previous state?’

‘Oh! He told you?’

‘He did.’

‘Sk’jin is special- Khol’isa’s are special,’ Taeh’yung says in a strangely thoughtful manner. ‘Their Memory is strong- it shapes them, more than their cells, more than their bones- they are who they are, because of their Memory. I just had to help him Remember what it was like- I had to show him where to go back to.’

‘Is that why he doesn’t have horns? Khol’isa have horns right?’ Namjoon asks, pulling on the gravity-lift when Taeh’yung pleads at him with large eyes and a hopeful smile.

‘I think it’s on purpose,’ Taeh’yung replies, bouncing a little on the gravity-lift. He lifts his hands, they glow green and a shape reminiscent of horns form for a moment before vanishing into the air. He smiles up at Namjoon before saying, ‘I don’t think he feels like he deserves them.’

He finds his father halfway up the plateau, taking a rest near one of the jutting rock shelves. He looks worn and sunburnt, but still healthy and ail. There’s an aged wisdom to him- in the way his hands are rough and coarse, yet somehow his wrists smooth and only marked by veins that pop out because he’s feeling hot. He wonders if his wrists will look like that too when he grows older.

‘Are you here to help your old pa out?’ his father winks.
'Is it your knees?'

'Actually this time it’s my ankles.'

'You’re falling apart pa.'

'You will too when you get to my age,' his father admonishes with an amused smile. ‘Our crop isn’t going to magically water itself- we need to keep an eye out on the flood zones too- too many things to watch over.’

'I’ll be able to help you from next season,’ he declares. ‘I’ve learnt a lot from the grain houses. I know I can help out in the fields.’

'The grain houses will miss you,’ his father grins, getting up with a groan. He instantly steps closer to his father, allowing him to take his shoulder to better balance himself.

'But I want to help Pa- besides, Ma always puts me in cleaning- I like running the grinders,’ he complains half-heartedly.

'My Ma used to put me in cleaning too,’ his father reminiscences fondly. ‘It will teach you a lot as you grow older- only the smart ones are put in cleaning.’

'So you used to be smart?’ he asks innocently.

'Your older brothers are such a bad influence,’ his father grumbles just as a bright light, something he could only describe as the brightest lightning he’s ever seen flashes through the sky above them.

There are gasps and shrieks.

'What is that?’

Everyone is staring up at the sky- the sun was still entirely round and full- the moon still hadn’t moved to block it out yet.

'What’s what?’ he asks, confused- there were no clouds, it couldn’t have been lightning right?

His father frowns, squinting a little as he peers into the distant horizon; his expression quickly transforming from confused to fearful at once.

‘RUN-!!’

There is too much sound, too much light, too much everything. He feels himself flying through the air- the whole world a mess as he spins and spins and spins. What was happening? Did he slip and fall? But the ground wasn’t wet- they weren’t close enough to the lake for the ground to be damp.

The sky is suddenly made clear to him and in this eclipsed light, strange sights- like mountains afloat rings of pure fire fill up the sky. The clouds seem to disappear in their wake and he can’t think straight.

Then the mountains start to erupt into beams of light, rocky discs shooting out of them from their sides. He doesn’t understand, he can’t possibly begin to understand. But all he knows is that this wasn’t good.

Suddenly he hears screaming- and the earth around screams in harmony.
**Dirt fills the air and so does light- it’s a strange combination- a strange sight. White fire bounces off of the slopes and he can feel their heat- nothing like the fires he was used to burning in the little kitchen hearth of their hut, nothing like the torches lit up at night to keep the yards safe.**

*His father is there- half of his face covered in blood- he’s saying something but he can’t hear him- he sees his lips moving but there’s no sound. Just white noise, white light, white screams-***

*Everything is white.*

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Sk’jin drew too much attention- and the Khol’isa clearly knew this, judging by the way he was more or less strutting around the Station. His walk is somehow even more elegant than before, robes fluttering behind him as though moving along the flow of a breeze that seemed to only blow around the Khol’isa. Heads turn everywhere and he’s instantly super popular amongst the Excavators.

Excavators were glorified titles for historians turned relic/antique/grave robbers. Though they aren’t up in the radar as much as pirates are, they held their own reputation around the Universe. A much more ditsy, more academic, and slightly “mad” air to them. They weren’t necessarily a “bad” lot to hang out with. You wouldn’t have to worry about being stabbed in the back (literally or metaphorically), or something worse (literally and metaphorically) if you hung with the Excavator crowd. In fact, many students from Raksane Tayi’s School of Cosmic Archaeology and Research were known to take their internships with certain guilds of Excavators for at least a year. Sometimes the interns would return- sometimes they’d come back after a decade or so, having been stuck in some prison in another System.

Yoongi has never had an issue with the Excavators before and has used their channels several times before. It was easy slipping into their ships unnoticed because all they ever had eyes for were either very ancient things, or very beautiful things. And at this moment, though Yoongi won’t voice
Excavators had a, putting it mildly, rather manic obsession with any species of Beings who were known to live for long periods of time. And though Excavators aren’t known outside the criminal offence charges of breaking and entering, robbery, desecration, and illegal migration- they were sometimes known for kidnapping. Not for money or ransom; most Beings kidnapped were treated with care and almost all accounts were summarized with “confused, but never endangered”.

Yoongi wonders how they’d react to Taeh’yung.

It was probably a very good decision on Namjoon’s part to put the Zhak’gri in the ship at all times, naming him the defender of the Being inside the OrTank. And Taeh’yung took that position with perhaps too much heart and zeal.

This particular guild were restocking their very battered ship, having spent too much time in a planet that was too close to a dying sun- the radiation the star spewed eating away at the atmosphere of the planet and the radiation nearly frying their ship and the guild in question. It would explain why a bunch of them were covered in tissue-plast and had a slightly doped expression on their face- no doubt a result of too much pain medication. Lucky for them, this Station had a very well stocked and advanced Medical Bay and were being treated accordingly.

‘I was there,’ Sk’jin tells an Excavator with a bright smile. ‘And it’s so much more beautiful than the reports have said.’

Yoongi stands behind Sk’jin, a sort of bodyguard because he’s sure that, given the chance, the Excavators would really love to grab Sk’jin and hightail away to record and verify his stories and tales. It’s not quite necessary though, because though the Excavators are eager to listen to Sk’jin and interrogate him in the least creepy manner, they keep a safe respectful distance from the Khol’isa. But Sk’jin is really enjoying himself, answering every question, adding more information, telling them stories and first-hand accounts on certain major events. It really put into perspective how long Sk’jin has been alive, and how much he remembers.

‘You are blessed to have witnessed such a sight Mahodya Sk’jin!’ one of the Excavators say with awe in his eyes. A majority of the guild were from the planet of Pr’thvee; their people were very flamboyant and had a flair for dramatics, using long elegant terms to address each other. They had some of the best poems across the Known Universe and were known for their poets and lyricists. They were also known for their long beards- the longer your beard, the higher you were regarded. This was the norm for all genders in Pr’thvee. If Yoongi isn’t mistaken, the title Mahodya meant ‘kingly guest’ and Sk’jin seemed to know this too as he practically preens under the address.

‘I wouldn’t necessarily say blessed, but it was something,’ Sk’jin laughs elegantly though the glint in his eyes makes Yoongi wonder under what exact circumstance the Khol’isa was in when he had witnessed the continental rift on the planet of Drar.

‘Mahodya Sk’jin,’ one of them says respectfully, approaching the Khol’isa with an armful of what appeared to be clusters of living crystals. A closer look shows Yoongi that they weren’t crystals, they were flowers.

‘We were stopping by Man’ibv and picked up on a few relics there- these flowers, Vitka’v, are native to the moon and we believe that it’s quite fitting for someone of your legacy.’ He states, handing Sk’jin the flowers.

The Khol’isa looks genuinely moved, taking the flowers with an awed look on his face.
‘You are most generous,’ Sk’jin begins to say.

‘But you have graced us with so much more Mahodya,’ he counters. ‘We are honoured to have met someone like you. A chance meeting, a most wonderful thing!’

‘I will treasure our meeting,’ Sk’jin smiles, bowing elegantly in true Khol’isa fashion - he had even gradually changed his speech, matching the elegance of the Pr’thveen. ‘I am honoured to have met you here.’

There’s a profuse amount of bowing and thank you thrown about. Yoongi wonders if Sk’jin would notice if he slipped away outside.

‘Sir! I have your items!’

They turn to address one of the Station keepers - an Android fashioned after the natives of Raksane Tayi. He’s entirely humanoid and his silver eyes carry only the slightest hint of the Android goldtint.

‘Oh thank you!’ Sk’jin bows elegantly to the Excavators one last time before taking the smaller items from the sprightly Android while Yoongi took the handles for the gravity-lift laden with the larger and bulkier goods.

‘The other items are being loaded outside in your vehicle. I’m afraid you will have to wait before we receive our stock of beamer cells,’ the Android states apologetically. ‘The GLA Patrol will be arriving with new stock in 4 days’ time. If you can wait till then, we would be happy to supply you again.’

‘Oh that’s all right,’ Sk’jin replies affably. ‘I understand - but we are short on time so we will make do. Thank you for your service once more.’

‘Not at all, would you like an additional lift?’ the Android turns to address Yoongi, causing the nearby Excavators to finally notice him.

‘No,’ Yoongi replies, wondering if he should tack on a thank you or a it’s not a bother but he’s too late to add anything when an Excavator approaches him, eyes wide and sparkling as he says, ‘Forgive me if I’m wrong, but are you Human? From Earth?’

Sk’jin’s eyes narrow, watching the interaction carefully as he settles the payment with the Android to the side.

‘I am Human yes. I have never been to Earth.’

‘Ah- you are an expat- how many generations now?’ the Excavator asks, looking and sounding genuinely interested.

‘I don’t know,’ Yoongi replies truthfully.

‘Well, it does get confusing I would suppose,’ the Excavator ruminates, stroking his long beard before adding, ‘But I just simple wanted to give my condolences and at least give my respects. Although you said you never were there, the idea of losing the womb that birthed your very DNA must be deeply unsettling.’

Yoongi supposes it does, and manages a nod. The Excavator seems satisfied, translating his silence to contemplative reflection of the destruction of his home planet.
‘A young planet, not too interesting by Excavator’s standards; but she was a strong little thing,’ he smiles widely, his mouth stretching a little to reveal small sharp teeth. Most might consider it disconcerting. ‘I am glad you didn’t lose a home.’

The tall bearded Pr’thveen hands him a single flower.

Yoongi is at a complete loss on how to reply even more so now. He dumbly takes the flower, finding it softer than he expected. The petals are transparent, opaque only where veins thinner than hair thread through the petals, creating the appearance of faceted gems. It’s exceedingly beautiful and Yoongi feels the urge to wash his hands before touching the flower again.

‘Come on Yoongi,’ Sk’jin calls, saving him the trouble to reply. ‘Let’s get going. It was a great honour talking and meeting with all of you!’ Sk’jin adds with a benign smile at the guild of Excavators.

They all wave their beards merrily at Sk’jin, and some at Yoongi when they notice him.

Sk’jin is definitely in a good mood. The trip would have taken 2 hours, but they were now more or less gone for nearly 5 hours because Sk’jin had decided to befriend nearly every Excavator in the guild. And he really did befriend the guild. Though his title as Communications Manager might have been more or less phony, Sk’jin was certainly a smooth talker. Yoongi finds himself wishing he had at least a marginal percentage of the Khol’isa’s eloquence.

‘Well,’ Sk’jin says conversationally as they leave the Station lobby, he sniffs the flowers delicately. ‘We’re sort of fucked.’

Yoongi has to agree as he takes a sniff of the flower. It’s lightly fragrant—something Yoongi isn’t familiar with. It’s pleasant though.

‘How long can we stay up with what we have?’ Sk’jin asks.

Beamers were an extraordinarily important component of a ship— it transformed, distributed, and directed raw energy from fuel cells for the entirety of the ship. And due to the previous tampering of the ship’s system, they were going to have to redo all of the beamer network across the ship if they wanted accurate readings on the ship’s systems. System failure was not an option and they needed to be at maximum functionality if they were going to succeed in this mission.

‘Maybe 5 days,’ Yoongi replies.

‘We’ll need to travel on temporary systems then,’ Sk’jin frowns. ‘We can’t afford to stay here— they know we’re here— or at least in this System; but if we can only fly a maximum of 5 days on what we currently have— we’ll need to land somewhere else quickly.’

‘The GLA Patrol will be arriving in 4 days,’ Yoongi adds as they step out into the sunlight. The entire landscape is bathed in an eerie reddish colour; a result of the sunset— or rather a result of the eclipse. The planet that Ch’dra orbited was now eclipsing the sun, reading the small acidic moon for its own bizarre version of night.

The Spardyti is docked outside, the back open as Androids load up the heavy items to the back, securing the crates of much needed ship parts and extras are latched on to the hollowed out back of the Transporter.

‘I’m not much of a fan of solar eclipses,’ Sk’jin comments wryly out of nowhere, watching the planet eclipse the sun. A strange halo of reds and oranges erupts— casting silhouettes of the high bursts of sulfur clouds from the planet’s surface. ‘We’re a contradicting lot, us Khol’isa’s— hate the
sun, yet somehow we can’t rightly live without it.’

Yoongi doesn’t reply back- unsure what to say at that given moment.

‘Is it still called a solar eclipse when it’s the planet that’s eclipsing the sun or is it called planetary eclipse?’ Sk’jin ruminates.

Yoongi shrugs in reply. There’s a flare of light up in the atmosphere.

‘Ship’s coming in,’ Sk’jin comments, squinting a little as he looks up. ‘Doesn’t appear to be of GLA make.’

Yoongi notices how a bunch of the Androids Comm-Devices all glow at the same time and a few of them leave the Spardyti and head back inwards.

‘What do you think?’ Sk’jin asks with a slight frown as he begins threading some of the flower stalks together.

‘Possibly another guild,’ Yoongi replies. ‘Or just a private trade ship. Or pirates.’

Sk’jin sighs out of his nose.

‘Do you think they’ll have the beamer cells?’

‘Would it be worth asking?’ Yoongi asks back, removing his screen from his pocket to use to zoom up into the bloody sky. Sk’jin steps closer, peering down at the screen as Yoongi sets the focus.

The ship in question is large, shaped like a slightly wonky cube, and Yoongi can’t be sure if it’s the light of volcanic planet looming to the side but it appeared to be an ochre hue. But despite the rather unconventional design, it was quite obvious what type of ship it was and who it belonged to.

*Pirates.*

Sk’jin glances down at Yoongi, one eyebrow raised subtly. It’s a non-verbal question. And if they weren’t stuck in such a situation; Yoongi wouldn’t be agreeing to this situation. But they were in dire need of beamer cells; and it was possible that the pirates would sell them some.

There’s some scuffling sound behind them and Sk’jin is smiling in greeting but the Excavators hasten to make themselves scarce, rushing towards their own Transporter, waving their beards hastily at them in goodbye. Pirates and Excavators left each other alone- sometimes they helped each other out, sometimes they reported on each other to the GLA. Excavators thought that all pirates were either too destructive or crass and pirates thought that Excavators were just a bunch of maniacs with a penchant for weirdness.

‘Do you reckon they’re bad news?’ Sk’jin asks, gesturing to the approaching ship in the sky as he watches the Excavators drive off. He akes a wreath of the flowers and places it over his head carefully.

Yoongi shrugs again.

‘Looks like a crew of…maybe 100?’ Sk’jin estimates, eyeing the ship carefully. ‘Do you think they’re affiliated with Grezma?’

Yoongi doesn’t know and he wonders how many times he can shrug before it looked too repetitive.

‘Guess we’ll risk it,’ Sk’jin claps his hands together with a resigned sigh. ‘I’ll do the talking. Do
you think you could like, sneak in and steal it off of their ship?’

‘I don’t think that’s a smart idea. Beamer cells are large- they can’t be snuck in and out of a ship that’s most likely still active after it lands.’ Yoongi replies.

‘Worth a try,’ Sk’jin mumbles off, arms crossed as he regards the approaching ship, clearly thinking of how to approach them. He looks like a deity planning on his next step towards creation, crowned with those flowers that were glowing red and pink in this lighting, flaring out into bright beams of violent orange at some angles.

‘Do you want to stay back or sit with me?’ Sk’jin grins.

‘My feet hurt,’ is Yoongi’s reply, making Sk’jin laugh out loud. Yoongi doesn’t know why that’s funny. His feet did hurt, he would probably have to purchase some new soles for his shoes.

‘Sir. Your Transporter is ready, would you like to be driven back?’ one of the Station Androids approaches them.

‘Bless your heart, that’s quite all right,’ Sk’jin spins on his heels, flashing a beatific smile at the Android. ‘Thank you for your hard work!’. He waves at the other Androids as well who smile in response.

‘Do you happen to know who they might be?’ Sk’jin points at the landing ship. Yoongi can hear it now, a distinct low hum of heavy engines and machinery.

‘Fuel stop,’ the Android replies with a smile before adding. ‘You are perfectly safe here.’

Sk’jin has a slightly amused smile before he thanks the Android again.

‘Do you maybe want to take back the Spardyti and I’ll talk to their lot?’ Sk’jin nods towards the Transporter, ready with all their goods.

‘No. I’ll stay.’ Yoongi replies, making sure that the Heliord handle was in reaching distance and the TeorSer set to stun. ‘Please hold my flower.’

‘You’re so sweet,’ Sk’jin grins as he adds Yoongi’s flower to his own bunch. ‘Staying back to protect me?’

‘Staying back to witness everything so that you and Namjoon don’t have another argument over what you have been doing,’ Yoongi replies bluntly.

Sk’jin’s smile slips off of his face with a rapidity that’s comical but Yoongi doesn’t laugh. He pulls a face, groaning dramatically.

‘Guess that’s also sweet of you,’ Sk’jin snorts, throwing his head back before he adds: ‘I think we should go back inside and sit? If we’re standing out here they might think we’re making to confront them or something- pirate, you know?’

Yoongi nods his agreement and they step back into the Station in silence. Yoongi wonders if he should apologize for what he said, though he’s not entirely sure if there was anything offensive in what he said. Sk’jin’s ear was no longer bandaged, having been carefully treated by Taeh’yung who cooed and petted Sk’jin’s head every time, blowing gently on the wound even though the ointment was designed not to sting.
‘What do you think?’ Sk’jin asks out of the blue after they sit in a rather strained silence inside the lobby. It’s entirely empty now, save for the serving Android behind the bar. It’s a lot wider than Yoongi had estimated, without the guild sitting inside of it.

‘About what?’

‘This mission.’

‘That’s what I want to find out.’ Yoongi replies.

‘…as in?’ Sk’jin looks like he’s struggling to understand what Yoongi meant. But they’re interrupted by the sound of approaching footsteps and raucous laughter. Sk’jin rolls his eyes at the approaching sound.

The Station lobby doors burst open and a rather robust Being bellies in. Quite literally. His belly proceeds him and he waddles inwards. He appeared to be a guard of sorts, looking about the Station with beady eyes. He spots Sk’jin and Yoongi- or possibly only Sk’jin who has shifted to lounge very elegantly over the inelegant chairs of the lobby. The flowers gleam white under the Lobby lighting and only highlights Sk’jin’s beauty to the newcomers.

The guard appeared to be watching over someone who clearly thought he was very important, judging from the way he strutted inside, holding an expression of self-importance and purposeful criminal intent; as though he was actively thinking about the best way to be evil in all of his actions. Yoongi hears Sk’jin stifle a chuckle.

He was probably the Pirate lord- or captain level at least.

A bunch of other pirates come bumbling in, whistling in appreciation at Sk’jin who does a great job of acting out “fake” nonchalance as they enter. Sk’jin idly fiddles with one of the flowers in his arms, feeling at the petal with rosy fingertips. The pirates gather around the Lobby, throwing themselves onto the more comfortable lounge chairs while some took on the long bar table, calling for drinks from the serving Android behind it.

‘Hey! What a pretty thing you are,’ one of them grins at Sk’jin as they get closer. ‘Are you headed to Kyakkyawa? I’d like to place my bet on your serial number.’

Yoongi doesn’t need a better light to see Sk’jin’s face to recognize the distaste on his features. It’s subtle, and he doesn’t think anyone else other than himself notices. This Being was from Ceteri, Yoongi is sure of it- more specifically from Bakin Karfe. A majority of them seemed to be from that general planet or System. They had a reputation of being perverse and the planet was overall avoided by planet-hopping tourists who would rather not be harassed or groped whilst touring their host planet’s countries. Unless you were into that sort of thing of course- if that was the case then Ceteri was a planet for you.

‘I’m afraid not,’ Sk’jin replies easily, blinking demurely up from his flowers and adds, ‘Might I know what you’re referring to?’

‘But you have to be- you’re replying smart and shit- is the little twerp your manager or something?’ another other asks, slinging his arm over the first Karfine nodding at Yoongi.

‘What he means, my pretty, is if you were headed for the annual Kyakkyawa Hosting Pageant.’

Yoongi has to stop himself from firing his TeorSer as the captain leans over to whisper into Sk’jin’s ear. Sk’jin seems to be containing himself from letting loose an elbow or something as well.
‘The Kyakkyawa Hosting Pageant?’ Sk’jin repeats, glancing over at Yoongi who honestly doesn’t know what this pirate scum is talking about. A few others gather around, eyeing Sk’jin with another type of appreciation that borders on disgusting.

The captain takes his time walking around the couch, clearly thinking he was quite the alpha-male as he sits on the table in front of Sk’jin, legs spread wide as though to emphasize his presence. Yoongi has the intense desire to shoot his kneecaps.

‘It’s a…contest of sorts,’ the Karfine captain says slowly, smiling at Sk’jin. ‘Only the most beautiful are put up on stage and a massive panel of judges vote to see who will win.’

Sk’jin smiles but it’s not the elegant beatific smile he had earlier. This was somehow rather dark, a little bit more dangerous.

‘I’m flattered but no,’ Sk’jin replies, his eyes narrowing just a little.

‘Pity- you’d be a very good contestant,’ he leans back a little, regarding Sk’jin with a critical eye. ‘Maybe a bit old- but you’d do.’

Yoongi notes the slightest hint of annoyance spark up in Sk’jin’s eyes.

‘That’s where we’re headed- needed a little break y’know? Away from the prying eyes of the GLA, gives us all the time we need to appreciate real beauty,’ he drawls, looking around and jumping a little when he finally notices Yoongi.

Sk’jin and Yoongi both quickly glance at each other. Yoongi gives him the slightest quickest nod and Sk’jin’s mannerism entirely changes.

‘Is that so?’ Sk’jin angles his head to the side a little, leaning in to talk to the captain, coyly fiddling with the flowers in his hands as he looks up through his eyelashes. ‘Tell me more about this contest.’
It takes a while for his eyes to adjust to the intense burst of light.

‘What was that?!’

‘What was what?’

‘Shh-!’

They pause momentarily, ears pricked.

‘There-‘ he points, his voice sharp.

He watches carefully, the sloping lands around them still and seemingly serene. The light was starting to tint, a strange colour taking over- and there.

‘Start us up now-‘

‘What is it-‘

‘Do it now!’

‘-shit it’s them- something’s wrong with the ship-‘

‘Send out the breakers- how the fuck did they get through the atmosphere it’s crumbling even as it moves-‘

‘Wait-! They’re-‘

‘-shit!’

‘He’s still there! They’re- they’re still there-‘

‘We can’t go back now it’s not- we don’t know what it was or-‘

‘No! We’re going back now! We’re not leaving anyone behind. Set us back and put all thrusters on stand-by for emergency warp- I don’t care if we lose some of our beamers.’

‘But-‘

‘Did I fucking stutter?! Get to it now!’
Watching Taeh’yung “work” is equal parts fascinating and confusing.

For one it’s absolutely breathtaking. Hoseok feels like he’s witnessing something akin to real magic.

‘It’s not magic,’ Taeh’yung had tried to explain. ‘It’s just…it’s part of Life, and of Time.’

That did nothing to explain or help Hoseok understand but it seemed like Taeh’yung himself didn’t really know what he meant either. So instead he sits at the kitchen counter opposite Taeh’yung, and watches him remove the trace remains of whatever radioactive isotope Yoongi had mixed in with their food.

Taeh’yung’s skin is warm in tone with a hint of some copper-ish shimmer under this natural lighting. It’s even more obvious when he’s doing…whatever it is that he’s doing. His hands were glowing green- and Hoseok isn’t just describing the light that glows out from a source in his hands- but Taeh’yung’s entire hand glows a tinted light. Lines and shapes form and move over his skin—too fast for Hoseok to really catch proper sight of but somehow still visible. Taeh’yung’s eyes also seemed to glow; not in the same way Sk’jin’s eyes gleamed a neon-red; and not the way Namjoon’s eyes sometimes caught the light at a strange angle, making his eyes look like pale glowing orbs reminiscent of pale moons. There was something distant and hollow about it— as though staring into his eyes for too long would somehow transport you elsewhere. Hoseok couldn’t bring himself to look at Taeh’yung’s eyes for too long, feeling a strange sense of intense uncomfortableness from doing so. But it was all right because Taeh’yung, much like his wide and exaggerated body movements, never looked at one thing for longer than 3-4 seconds.

Taeh’yung struggles a little with a sealed container of tea leaves. As expected, most of the contaminated items were used in drinks. Sugar, salt, tea, and other food items the crew members used most frequently. Yoongi certainly kept a sharp eye on everything. But Hoseok can’t bring himself to really mind it all too much. After all, Yoongi’s less than savory technique of tracking did sort of save their lives in Grezma.

‘Hobi!’ Taeh’yung grimaces in a comical manner, handing Hoseok the container he’d been struggling with for the past minute.

Hoseok takes the offending item and opens it easily, making the Zhak’gri clap and pretend to swoon.

Other than Taeh’yung’s nifty abilities and tricks (the extent and capacity of which Hoseok doesn’t think he’ll ever understand), having the Being aboard the ship was almost therapeutic.
Taeh’yung seemed to bring out a gentler, somehow much more honest version of Sk’jin than how he was before. Though Hoseok has never doubted Sk’jin’s honesty before, there was always a layer of “glamour” over his actions and words- making him seem untrustworthy and suspicious. Most of that act had been reduced and Hoseok was looking at a whole new side of the Khol’isa.

The effect on Yoongi was probably more on the subtle side, but it was one that Hoseok noticed nonetheless. He was more inclined to talk, more visible, if that made any sense, and somehow strangely more real. There was a strange sense of illusion to Yoongi’s overall presence and having Taeh’yung around somehow created a lucidity over the Human.

In Namjoon’s case, Hoseok puts it down to the line of events that led them up to this point. It had been nearly 4 days now, since Yoongi’s mind breaking reveal and their Captain was somehow strangely more relaxed though Hoseok wouldn’t word it that way. His behavior was changing, not forcibly presenting himself as a leader or captain, but rather slipping in with them as part of the group, rather than someone controlling them. He was normally cooped up in one of the lobbies where he’d set up his screens to create a whole new system for the Užkulisai and rarely spoke unless spoken to. And Taeh’yung being Taeh’yung, spent most of his free time sprawled on the couches, pillowing the Kutsoglerin’s lap and talking a mile as Namjoon actually did respond.

It was close to nightfall and it was going to be their last night here. They had been delayed a full day due to late deliveries on some of the parts they needed for the Užkulisai. Sk’jin and Yoongi were at the Station picking up their items; speaking of them, they were late. Hoseok grimaces at the idea of those two in specific being late and how Namjoon would react to it. They would probably work into the night and hopefully everything they had fixed would work well.

But Hoseok has no doubt about it.

Despite the chaotic combination of the individuals forced into this team, they were very skilled in what they did. Combining skilled Beings who were somehow all united in the same crisis miraculously brought about effective and constructive teamwork.

Not only did Namjoon recalibrate and reprogram nearly more than half of the ship’s systems, but created new ones from raw code in a matter of 2 days. Not to mention Sk’jin’s shocking expertise in mechanical-engineering, working down in the engine hull with Yoongi for continuous hours on end. They were both able to rewire the entire engine beamers and recalibrate the gages and readings.

Hoseok himself had finished working with Namjoon on the commandeering systems for the Užkulisai just that morning and had worked with Yoongi on the weapons/defence systems.

‘Thank you Hobi,’ Taeh’yung beams, taking the container and his hands glow again for a split-second before he nods emphatically as he did after every object he “cleaned” out. ‘Everything is good now!’

The Zhak’gri leaps off of the counter and randomly selects a tin.

‘We should brew some to celebrate!’ Taeh’yung declares, looking around for cups.

Hoseok gets off of the counter as well, wondering if he should get something to eat before he heads back to the engines room.

‘Which cup do you want?’ Taeh’yung asks, dangling a bunch by their ears on his fingers. Hoseok glances at the cups with some surprise- first he didn’t know they had that many cups; second, he actually does find one to his liking. He points at the glossy green cup with a flower-shaped imprint
all over the surface creating a nice texture.

‘Nice choice! This is the Hobi cup,’ Taeh’yung declares, actually whipping out a marker of sorts and with flourish writes the letter “H” on the bottom.

The sound of a door opening alerts both of them and Namjoon appears. He waves at them, walking over towards the Kitchen area.

‘Namjoonie!’ Taeh’yung holds up the cups again. ‘Choose one!’

Blinking a little slowly, as though tired, he squints before he’s close enough and points at the obnoxiously yellow mug. Hoseok tries not to judge the Kutsoglerin.

Taeh’yung, sticking his tongue out a little, writes down “N” on the bottom of the cup before settling it down. His own cup, an all too dainty white cup with elegant filigree painted in gold around the rim is placed carefully down next to Namjoon’s. He measures out the tea leaves with a lot of care before pouring out hot water. Beaming with satisfaction, Taeh’yung turns around with the cups, handing one to Hoseok and then to Namjoon.

‘Tea?’ he asks the Captain, handing him the cup.

Stretching stiffly before accepting the drink from Taeh’yung, Namjoon glances down at the tea dubiously as though remembering what it used to contain. With a sort of amused grimace, he nods his thanks at the Zhak’gri before taking a seat at the dining table.

He looked exhausted- as though he hadn’t been able to sleep all too well. There were dark shadows under his eyes and Hoseok wonders if the Kutsoglerin was somehow in a state of malnutrition. He’s still not entirely sure how he managed to sustain his metabolic functions and wondered if it would be too sensitive a topic to probe into. His hair was damp- probably just showered to freshen up and stay alert for the final push before take-off.

‘Hey- are the ParaBots done?’ Namjoon yawns before taking a sip.

‘The paints all done,’ Hoseok replies.

‘Baby do you want some tea too?’ Taeh’yung skips over to the OrTank stood up on the floor to the side and hoists it up and over onto the dining table seat. ‘I think you’d like this cup- it’s small and cute like you!’

Taeh’yung busies himself with a small soft orange cup with a curled lip before he drops said cup, eyes widening as he stares at the OrTank.

Alarmed, Hoseok too quickly looks about to observe the OrTank and his heart nearly leaps out of his chest because-

‘Is he crying-?!’ Namjoon chokes out before recovering and adding, ‘I thought he was encased in fluid-‘

But even from where he sat, the little droplets were apparent. At first they clung to his cheeks, as tears normally did- however after a certain period of time they just floated off- little globules of tears floating in the misty substance that sustained the Being.

Taeh’yung approaches the OrTank, saying something low in a soothing tone as he pats the OrTank.
‘Is he- uh, is he saying something?’ Hoseok asks nervously. No matter how many times he tried to
tell himself that the Being inside there was probably harmless, he still can’t help but feel greatly
unsettled by him. Hoseok felt as though he could not only sense them, but hear and see them too.

‘No- I think,’ Taeh’yung makes a cooing sound before continuing, ‘I think he saw a nightmare.’

‘…is that possible?’ Namjoon asks as he shifts his chair further away from the OrTank.

‘If you can see dreams, you can see nightmares,’ Taeh’yung replies simply.

Sk’jin and Yoongi walk in just at that moment. The Khol’isa looks extraordinarily beautiful in a
crown of crystal-like flowers; he’s carrying an armful of the flowers with him whereas Yoongi’s
overall presence seems to diminish entirely beside him. And not for the first time, Hoseok wonders
what Sk’jin would look like with his horns, before whatever it was that happened happened to him.
Because right now Sk’jin could probably go to some non-GLA planet and declare himself a deity
of sorts and it wouldn’t be entirely unbelievable. Hoseok is reminded of the sculptures put up on
display in Šerdesas’s art galleries except Sk’jin is not a statue carved out of diamond geodes. Light
refracts off of him and fills the Lobby with bright spots of dancing light and everyone has to take a
moment to blink at the sudden brightness.

Sk’jin and Yoongi pause, studying them and their expressions carefully.

‘Did I miss something?’ Sk’jin asks after a few seconds, eyes darting around the Lobby before
latching onto the Being in the OrTank. Yoongi is already making his way to the OrTank, putting
down the items he was carrying in his arms.

‘He’s crying. Why.’

If Hoseok didn’t know Yoongi any better (though he can’t rightly say he knows Yoongi), he would
think he wasn’t interested and was asking out of politeness. But he knew Yoongi (or as well as
anyone could possibly familiarize themselves with the Human) and could hear the strained worry
in his voice.

‘We don’t know,’ Namjoon replies. ‘He just- it just happened.’

‘Is he in pain? Hurt?’ Yoongi asks Taeh’yung who has his ear pressed against the cool surface of
the OrTank.

‘No- but I think he feels better now- he’s heard everyone’s voices. It’s calmed him down,’
Taeh’yung beams at them.

‘He heard our voices?’ Sk’jin repeats, looking at the Being in some confusion. ‘He can hear us?’

‘I don’t know,’ Taeh’yung shrugs a little. ‘He can sense you; I don’t know about hearing, but I
wouldn’t be surprised if he could.’

Taeh’yung looks proud, like a parent would of their child.

‘It was just a nightmare,’ he explains to Yoongi who was bent over, watching the Being intently.

‘Nightmare?’ he says the word carefully, like it was foreign.

‘So- how was your trip?’ Namjoon asks. Hoseok glances over at the Khol’isa with some wary
expectancy. Sk’jin normally didn’t answer Namjoon’s questions directed at him, so he glances at
Yoongi instead who, as expected, doesn’t reply. The Human’s attention is drawn entirely to the
‘Wow! Those are amazing!’ Taeh’yung walks around the table and bounces up to Sk’jin.

‘They’re called Vitka’v,’ Sk’jin informs the Zhak’gri, holding up the bunch for him.

‘They smell great!’ he adds, sniffing the flowers (!?!?!) enthusiastically. ‘Can I have one?’

‘You can have all of them,’ Sk’jin smiles benignly at the Zhak’gri who takes up the bunch enthusiastically.

‘I take it you met with some Excavators?’ Hoseok asks, as Sk’jin brushes his hands delicately over the side of his robes as though dusting them off.

‘Yes- as well as some hot-shot pirates; and I have information that I think we can use,’ Sk’jin adds, walking up and sitting on a chair regally.

Taeh’yung plops himself next to Hoseok, fiddling with the flowers in his arms- now table- and Hoseok has to admit that they smelled nice- which was odd considering how unusual and fake they appeared.

‘Did you buy those? They’re expensive,’ Namjoon asks, eyeing the flowers on Sk’jin’s head with some trepidation.

‘They were a present- a thank you present from some very nice Excavators,’ Sk’jin replies serenely before he adds, looking a tad bit too pleased with himself. Hoseok is surprised Sk’jin actually answered Namjoon’s question. ‘Let me tell you what happened, but first I have a question.’

The Khol’isa leans forward on the table and asks, ‘Have you heard of the Kyakkyawa Hosting Pageant?’

Hoseok has heard of it- it was supposed to be a sort of beauty pageant- except it was actually an extremely illegal and horrifying fighting arena. Most contestants were genetically modified or reconstructed to enhance not only their appearance but their bodies as well. The most recent winner that Hoseok remembers hearing about, was a slender female, no more than 4 feet tall with hair as blue as the sky and the strength to literally rip the spine off of her pageant competition in under 8 seconds of stepping into the arena.

Fighting arenas were of course, illegal under the GLA. However, this was a truly primitive source of entertainment that seemed to delight many many Beings all across the Universe. In fact it was so popular that the organizations that hosted this “event” collected impossibly massive sums of money and units from the gambling it produced, leading them to make deals with the GLA to make the officials and patrols suddenly turn a blind eye to the weeklong event. It was similar to the Cogs- the highly illegal planet-hopping racing competition. And similar to the way the GLA sent scouts to select Racers from the Cogs, they had scouts sent to collect potential assassins or guards from amongst the “beauty contestants”. Hoseok is pretty sure some of the Venture Unit Heads of Divisions had one or two of these contestants as part of their personal vanguard.

Judging from Namjoon’s expression, he too seems to know about this “pageant” because his expression changes to disgust.

‘What about it?’ he asks.

‘Well, it’s going to be hosted in 2 days’ time- not so far from where we are actually,’ Sk’jin tells them pleasantly. ‘In a planet called Pompa. Less than 30 hours from here.’ he wiggles his eyebrows at
Namjoon looks contemplative as he mulls over Sk’jin’s unspoken but clear suggestion.

It was actually a pretty good idea. They could use this event to cover their tracks while still being able to access everything they could need as well as have time to wait for orders to be delivered. The organizers of the event practically paid the GLA to look away and right now that was what they would need. Not to mention there would be a lot of Beings from all over the Universe from every side and “faction”- they could blend right in.

‘Don’t we need to bring in a contestant ourselves to enter the planet that’s hosting the event?’ Namjoon asks, one eyebrow raised.

‘Not necessary- even if that’s required, we could I was a contestant,’ Sk’jin poses elegantly. ‘I think I’d fit right in.’

‘Too old.’

Sk’jin glares at Yoongi who doesn’t seem bothered by Sk’jin’s death stare. Namjoon turns his laughter into a hacking cough.

‘So what’s the consensus?’ Namjoon asks around the table. ‘Do we go to Pompa?’

Yoongi nods his agreement, while Taeh’yung beams in response. Sk’jin also nods and then turns to address Hoseok. Glancing quickly over at Namjoon who seemed resigned to the situation, he too nods his consent.

‘Then that’s what we’ll do,’ Namjoon declares, standing up.

‘Another thing,’ Sk’jin says suddenly, ‘A GLA Patrol will be arriving in 4 days’ time here.’

‘We’ll be gone by then,’ Namjoon shrugs.

‘And we couldn’t find any beamer-cells.’

Namjoon swears under his breath before turning to address him, ‘How far can we make it on what we have?’

‘Around 4-5 days?’ Hoseok replies, looking over at Yoongi for confirmation who nods.

‘Then I guess we really should go to Pompa,’ Namjoon scowls. ‘Let’s get back to work and get out of here.’

‘Here Hobi,’ Taeh’yung says suddenly, a little too close to his ear. He places a crown of flowers on his head, clapping with delight.

‘Absolutely stunning,’ he declares with a proud nod. He has a flower tucked behind one ear as well.

‘Thanks Taeh’yung,’ Hoseok manages to smile as he secures the item on his head before standing.

‘Can I have one?’

Hoseok does a double take at Yoongi’s question but Taeh’yung more or less flies towards Yoongi, using his hands to take measurement of the Human’s head.
‘We’re all going to look very handsome!’ Taeh’yung declares emphatically.

Namjoon slowly walks back as though hoping Taeh’yung wouldn’t notice him. But it fails of course and after 15 minutes, everyone is walking around the ship with crystal flowers on their heads.

And everyone still has the flowers on their heads 10 hours later as the eclipse over the planet moves away to welcome the morning and the sky is no longer a strange fiery colour but instead a familiar watery blue. They were now all nervously gathered in the Bridge; Namjoon stands at the Navigator’s Mast, NaviLet in hand and his lips pressed tight together into a thin line.

‘All ready?’ he asks tersely.

Everyone nods in reply, holding up screens in their hands.

‘Wait—’ Sk’jin interrupts before addressing Taeh’yung. ‘I think he should be put back into his original storage? If something goes wrong, it would be safer for him to stay in the tank’s original casing.’

Taeh’yung looks down at the OrTank in his arms and then up at Namjoon as though for verification.

‘Sk’jin is right; put him back in the storage Taeh’yung,’ Namjoon orders. ‘We don’t know what will happen but OrTank cases are designed to withstand any technical issues- so he’ll be safer in there than anywhere else when we start up.’

Taeh’yung pouts but nonetheless nods in agreement.

‘I’ll see you later all right?’ Taeh’yung says as he makes his way across the Bridge.

Hoseok wonders what transpired between Namjoon and Sk’jin because they were both…normal with each other. And not just as some civil front of sorts.

‘Ship locked and secured?’ Namjoon asks Yoongi who nods in reply, staring down at the offline screen in his hands.

‘Containment and emergency procedures ready?’ Namjoon turns to Sk’jin who also nods in reply from where he was sat.

‘Hoseok?’

Hoseok glances over at the dashboard in front of him, his hands already on the controls. He too nods in reply.

They stand in silence until Taeh’yung returns.

‘On 3,’ Namjoon calls out. ‘1…2…-3!’

Everyone taps on the green tab on their respective screens and for a split second nothing happens and then—

The Užkulisai hums to life, a whirr of electronic movement, some clicking sounds, small pops and then complete and utter silence.

‘Welcome to the Užkulisai. I am Lisai- the Užkulisai AI System under your command. How may I aid you today?’
There’s a collective exhale of relief from everyone in the Bridge.

‘Hoseok, start her up.’ Namjoon orders, carefully watching his screen. This entire situation would have been a lot more serious and stressful if they weren’t all crowned with Vitka’v.

‘Starting up engines and systems,’ Hoseok replies, voice light but strained.

The Užkulisai engines hums to life, the air outside the windows billow with dark soot-like dust and dim the light that filters inside briefly.

Namjoon doesn’t say anything for a while, only intensely perusing his NaviLet but then, after a solid minute of strained silence, his shoulders loosen a little, his posture easing.

‘We’re green,’ he declares, looking relieved. ‘All systems are running- no indication of original setup detected. We’re off the grid.’

Taeh’yung cheers and Hoseok slumps against his chair, utterly relieved but it’s only for a while.

‘All right- getting readings,’ Sk’jin announces from where he sat, frowning at the screen and muttering under his breath what were clearly curses before he says. ‘I think we’ll need a whole lot more to really fix up the ship.’

‘But we’re at green to take off,’ Namjoon says as he readies himself behind the Mast. ‘Let’s get out of here quickly- I’ll lay out the trajectory for Pompa; Sk’jin, create a list of everything we’ll need. Yoongi, as soon as we’re stable, double-check on the engine gages.’

‘And me?’ Taeh’yung raises his hand up.

‘Uh- you can…’ Namjoon trails off.

‘You can go get your baby out of his case,’ Sk’jin cuts in. ‘After we’ve safely made it out.’

Taeh’yung gives them both a thumb’s up, which Yoongi returns for some odd reason. Namjoon gives him a brief amused smile before saying, ‘Trajectory set for Pompa- take us out of here Hoseok.’

Hoseok taps across the dashboard, tapping on the engine tabs and he feels the ship respond to every slide of his hand.

‘Aye aye Captain.’
After the final flash of light, it’s too quite. Too still.

But it’s not cold.

Everything is quiet again.

Sound waves and frequency was nullified in space- and even if all the screaming and yelling and shouting had abruptly come to an end, he knows he’s still going to hear it.

Sweat drips down his face, his skin burns hot and blood oozes from his many wounds.

Bodies litter the floor, blood splattered everywhere.

The knife is still hot in his hands- with some difficulty he drops it.

It felt like a dream- a nightmare. He felt strangely unhinged from reality- like this wasn’t really him.

Everything has shifted- has tilted from perspective. The entire Universe seems warped; and the only thing he can feel is the intense heat that spreads over his body from the knife that was in his hand.

It’s not the sight of blood that gets to him. It’s not the bodies that litter the floor that unsettles him. It’s not the stench of death that laces the air that disturbs him.

It’s the heat in his hands.

His footsteps echo loudly behind him and all around. The emergency lights had been activated and it casts long shadows on the obsidian black floors. Somehow he finds himself in front of a large ornate sink. The metal of the tap is hot on his skin.

Methodically he washes his hands. He’s not sure if they’re his hands though- he doesn’t necessarily feel connected to them- the only thing he could sense was that strange heat. The water worsens the feeling and it’s starting to boil now. Switching the tap off, he looks up, expecting to find the mirror fogged up from the amount of heat he must have been exuding.

But the mirror is clear.

The mirror was definitely reflecting him, covered in blood, many cuts and wounds and burns decorating any visible surface of his skin. He’s surprised he’s not on fire. And just to be sure that he was looking at himself, he raises his hand, pressing a wet finger on the surface that should have made a sizzling sound because of how hot it was.

He doesn’t recognize himself. But then again, wasn’t this just a dream?
Pompa was a planet that felt entirely too designed for Namjoon’s personal taste. Even from this distance, the planet looked oddly fabricated. The oceans too blue and sparkly, the clouds too swirly and the continents too geometrically aligned. The continents line up across the equator in a band of geometric-triangles facing each other to create a literal belt around the planet. The poles of the planet are capped with nearly perfectly circular continental plateaus of unnaturally smooth ice. According to what Namjoon read about the planet, it was in fact entirely natural.

‘Pretty,’ Taeh’yung comments as they approach said planet. ‘In like- a very weird way.’

The planet was quite rich in phosphorescent elements laced into their thermosphere and exosphere, causing the rather “plastic” glow around the planet. The sky as seen from the surface of the planet was a slightly kaleidoscopic view of space intermingled with the tranquil blue of their ozone. “Sky-fortune” was apparently quite a popular practice in Pompa; where their fortune-tellers (who preferred the titles “Skryer”- a play on words that Namjoon begrudgingly finds amusing) read the patterns of the phosphorescent patterns in their atmosphere and predicted futures, fortunes, and any other thing you could think of asking.

Just the other day, they had watched a screening of a popular “Skryer” from Pompa who predicted the winner of the Pageant over dinner. This “Skryer” had described the “King/Queen” as a true noble, with silver blood in their veins (‘is that a thing?’ Taeh’yung looked fascinated), and with the sun hidden in their eyes (‘I feel like that’s really practical- especially at night- wait would there even be a night if you had the sun in your eyes? Or is it inverted? But then that would blind you?"
Joonie, what does it mean?’). This sent a mass-mania amongst avid fans and they were lined up to watch the matches out on the streets already. But then another rival “Skryer” had predicted that a quote “shrouded demon of many faces” would win the Pageant.

At that Taeh’yung had looked up from his bowl of potato soup and rather blankly said, ‘That’s rude- Hobi isn’t a shrouded demon, he’s an angel!’; causing Sk’jin to swallow his soup down the wrong pipe, spraying an unfortunate Hoseok as he coughed most unattractively.

There was even a live-stream of the skies of Pompa for those who wanted to try their hand at “Skrying”- most Beings used the live-stream as aesthetic background visual effects for their eateries or other similarly pleasant establishments.

‘Seems like the perfect place to host the Pageant,’ Hoseok had commented with a snort.

‘It’s always been like that,’ Yoongi had offered.

‘You’ve been there before?’ Sk’jin looks surprised.

‘417 sols ago- I assassinated the parliament from Métrico-05 and made it look like they were all infected by the same virus they caught during a diplomatic trip to Métrico-11 and died as a result of the combination of jungle-fever, dehydration, and sunburn.’ Yoongi replies, blowing on his food to cool it before eating it and adding: ‘I have no record in Pompa- we’re all right.’

Sk’jin had choked again, this time splattering an unfortunate Taeh’yung with tea.

Namjoon had obviously conducted a thorough search of the case later and found to his utter dismay that Yoongi’s cover had been so thoroughly convincing in its strangeness that had he not known about it, would have really thought it was an unfortunate (17 Pompen parliament members all died hours within each other in the exact same manner) and fascinating incident.

‘Uh- how exactly did you do that?’ Hoseok had asked warily, handing Taeh’yung a tissue without looking at the Zhak’gri. Yoongi takes a long time to chew and swallow his food before he replies.

‘I poisoned their food.’

Needless to say none of them continued eating their dinner that night.

‘All right- we’re close enough to make our call. Namjoon?’ Hoseok turns in his seat a little to look up at the Navigator’s Mast.

‘Right- as we’ve already pre-ordered the stuff we need, we’ll be able to collect everything within 6 hours of landing- during this time we can restock on stuff we couldn’t find before, maybe actually buy things that aren’t just Flotsam and Jetsam branded goods.’

‘Hear hear,’ Sk’jin mumbles as he taps along his dashboard.

‘I for one, would like more tea,’ Yoongi comments.

‘Yes well- tea and all that,’ Namjoon waves. ‘Hoseok and Yoongi will go pick up our stuff from the docking station- I’d rather not have anyone, Android or not, come over to the Užkulisai. We’re trying to stay hidden so I’d prefer it we remained so- which leads me to Sk’jin and Taeh’yung-‘

Sk’jin makes an affronted sound though he doesn’t look up from the screen.

‘-you’ll both be getting the other supplies- please don’t draw attention to yourselves,’ Namjoon
ends bluntly.

‘Okay!’ Taeh’yung gives him an enthusiastic nod that does nothing to reassure Namjoon.

Rather than believing in his team members, Namjoon trusted in their loyalty to their own agenda. It was clear that none of them were doing any of this for each other, or out of respect for each other, or even for the sake of the Universe- but instead were bonded through a unanimous agreement to see through the mission for their own reasons. And whatever agenda they might have, they all knew that the secrecy of their presence was the most important factor weighing in on achieving whatever it was they wanted. Namjoon doesn’t know how much of that is actually a good thing, but if that meant that they weren’t going to jeopardize the overall mission or the Beings directly involved, then he was willing to accept it.

‘Is everyone buckled in?’ Hoseok calls out even though he has indicators on his dashboard telling him the same.

The ship was running smooth and well. They all kept a careful eye over the systems, constantly checking over the most important components of the ship. Their schedule was stricter and everyone much more vigilant- the slightest sound triggering responses such as screen/NaviLet extraction, running out of the Bridge/Kitchen/Cabin/Engines-Room and sprinting off towards the Bridge/Kitchen/Cabin/Engines-Room, pulling out tool kits, readying emergency doorways just in case there was a vacuum breach though that system wasn’t even remotely touched. So after nearly 24 hours of living in intense level of anxiety, coming upon the enhanced planet of Pompa was honestly a relief.

‘We’re good,’ Namjoon replies for everyone as he checks on Taeh’yung specifically.

They descend into the atmosphere and already their windows are alit with strange lights that almost seem solid, bokeh like effects roll off the panes like actual physical masses of light.

‘Trippy,’ Hoseok mumbles, blinking a little with the continuous flashing of light.

The moment they’re past the top most layer of Pompa’s atmosphere and they close in on the sight of the curvature of Pompa’s circumference Hoseok announces that they’re free to move about. Taeh’yung jumps down to the tower-mast with Yoongi and sits on one empty chairs. Namjoon makes a mental note to make the weapons inaccessible for Taeh’yung.

‘Oh wow they’re really not hiding the fact they’re hosting aren’t they?’ Sk’jin snorts from the side.

Floating amongst the clouds and honestly creating flying hazards were gigantic holographic advertisement boards each with a face of the Pageant contestants. Many of the contestants looked like very young males and females with delicate bone structure, fragile looking skin, and rosy cheeks. But according to their “promotion videos” could probably break Namjoon in half in a matter of seconds. There were other contestants who were of varying aesthetics but the Pageant this time around seemed to really like the delicate look over others.

Sk’jin snorts again as he reads one of the holographs they fly past.

‘Excuse me, but I am far better looking than all of them,’ he comments in a superior tone.

‘But old.’

‘Look you Earthian piece of shit-‘

‘What’s our launch-ring number again?’ Hoseok interrupts pleasantly over Sk’jin’s would be tirade
about his age (a comically touchy subject with the Khol’isa).

‘M13-04-229,’ Sk’jin grumbles, arms crossed and honest to Spaces pouting as he glares at the back of Yoongi’s head.

‘Thank you,’ Hoseok beams.

‘While we’re here can we go watch a match?’ Taeh’yung asks eagerly, pressing his face on the surface of the HUD windows while Yoongi grabbed the hem of his borrowed shirt in a cautionary manner.

‘That’s not legal,’ Hoseok rolls his eyes, ‘And in events like these, the GLA might have an agreement with the Pageant but their agents still hang around- it’s best if we stay away from the arenas and gambling pools.’

‘Legality is a construct of powerful Beings,’ Namjoon finds himself saying absent-mindedly as they fly past another hologram; this time of a sprite-like Being, his skin shades of soft magenta and with pitch black eyes with crystal-like wings that looked more like decoration than actual anatomical use but Namjoon is willing to believe it was probably some strange defence-mechanism. ‘It doesn’t really mean anything.’

A rather profound silence follows his statement and Namjoon feels a little sheepish.

‘But what about slavery? That’s considered illegal or is it also just another construct of the powerful?’ Sk’jin asks, breaking the silence. There’s no actual challenge in his voice- it was as though he was just simply wanted to know Namjoon’s opinion on the matter. Understandably, this really takes Namjoon aback.

‘That’s basic moral principle,’ Yoongi replies from the tower-mast before Namjoon can. ‘But that too is conjecture,- morale and ethics are variables that are ever changing depending on whatever principle or form it is implicated upon. Most of which are selfish.’

No one speaks for another 15 seconds, just looks shared.

‘That’s fair,’ Sk’jin nods slowly in agreement, tapping along his arm in thought. Hoseok seems to be suppressing a smile of sorts as he steers the Užkulisai towards the launch-ring.

In their attempt to make their planet a true exotic/tropical getaway, the Pompen refused to construct buildings or structures past 30 meters at most. And most of these tall buildings were part of their Docking Bays and Spaceports.

At this distance, the water below looks less fake and more familiar- the sky over Pompa really did cast a filter over the whole planet. There were a total of 21 geometric continents, all quite close to each other so expansive colourful bridges were built to connect each continent to each other. As the majority of lived-in continents were clustered in a ring around the equator, Namjoon figured their stay, however short, would be a rather warm one. And as luck would have it, it was high summer in Métrico-15 and Namjoon doesn’t even have to step out of the ship to know it’s hot. He can see heat waves warping the air around the Dock they land on and to everyone’s amusement Yoongi complaining in the most neutral tone about how much he disliked hot weather.

Muted black bands now ringed all of their left earlobes; a new set of Comm-Devices that Namjoon had customized. Sk’jin had clearly thought he was being overly paranoid but Namjoon ignored the raised eyebrow when he explained the changes he made. It would now act like a tracking device with added sensors linking the wearer to the health-tabs on the ship. It was also custom designed to
only work when the Being it was designed for used it.

The Docks are wide and open, as though built so that any tourist who came there wouldn’t miss the scenery. And Namjoon appreciates good scenery but there seemed to be more holograph than actual scenery from where he was sitting. The sun was also directly above them and so the sunlight was pouring down on him inside the Bridge and despite the filters and deflective shields over their ship, Namjoon feels like he’s surrounded by whatever humid heat awaited the others outside.

‘Do you want anything?’ Taeh’yung asks as he hops up to the first tier after they land.

‘No, I’m good,’ Namjoon smiles. ‘I’ll see you all later.’

Taeh’yung gives him a loud smacking kiss on his cheek followed by a throaty giggle as he gleefully runs off. Hoseok waves, smiling at Taeh’yung’s antics while Yoongi raises one hand in a random salute of sorts. Sk’jin smiles wryly and says as he walks past, ‘Don’t have too much fun by yourself.’

Honestly Namjoon would have been irritated before but now he replies with a ‘I’ll try,’ making the Khol’isa cackle in mirth. He opens up the tracking application, keeping note of where each Being was headed. Rather than have their cargo delivered to them, Namjoon thought it better if they went themselves. A ship and details regarding the ship could be easily remembered whereas faces could just easily get confused and muddled especially during such a busy time.

Switching on the camera feed outside their Hangar gate, Namjoon watches the others leave, all complaining about the heat except for Sk’jin who seemed to welcome the warmth with great delight. Making sure that the perimeter around the ship was covered and properly under surveillance, Namjoon dives back into tweaking some of the Užkulisai’s systems again. Though the ship was running smooth, Namjoon caught up on some small glitches and aspects that he knew he could improve upon. But as they had been flying through space, thought better than to try something while they were out there.

Namjoon loses track of time though he periodically glances at the screens for the surveillance feed and the tracking application. Hoseok and Yoongi had reported every hour or so on their progress whereas Taeh’yung and Sk’jin were a lot more random and sporadic, updating Namjoon on arena matches and some grizzly detail on how a contestant’s jaw was punched clean off of their face.

‘Hey, can you access the traffic report? My hands are a little occupied,’ Hoseok comms in.

‘I’m sure they’re quite busy,’ Sk’jin suggestively comments.

There’s a resigned sigh from Hoseok while Taeh’yung makes inappropriate sounds in the background. Namjoon hopes no one around them notices.

‘Give me a minute,’ Namjoon replies as he extracts Hoseok’s location.

There were no airways in Pompa as they didn’t want to “mar” the scenery with extended and high airways so instead all traffic was directed on ground. That and the added sudden peak in tourists and avid Pageant watchers, made for terrible traffic conditions.

‘Seems like you’re gonna be stuck there for half an hour so,’ Namjoon says as he studies the traffic-level indicators of the area they were in.

‘Sucks not having airways here,’ Hoseok mumbles.

‘It’s their aesthetic- it’s fine,’ Namjoon grins, scanning the area and finding that the traffic eases up
closer to the Docks. Seeing as the Pageant had already started, most of the heaviest traffic was located further inside Métrico-13.

‘My aesthetic is not being stuck in traffic.’

‘What other aesthetic do you have?’

‘...uh, what do you mean?’

‘I don’t know- I was asking so that I could understand what you meant and why you would classify being stuck in traffic as a possible aesthetic some Beings might enjoy while you don’t.’

‘I don’t think anyone enjoys being stuck in traffic-‘

‘But the word aesthetic means something concerning great beauty or an appreciation of beauty- if you are addressing traffic-jams with obvious contempt, then using the word “aesthetic” is incorrect.’

‘This is the most hilarious thing I’ve ever heard this entire month,’ Sk’jin chimes in while Taeh’yung is laughing his head off in the background.

‘It’s uh- it’s supposed to be ironic- like sarcasm Yoongi,’ Hoseok tries to explain.

‘I see,’ Yoongi replies.

‘You do?’

‘No.’

Namjoon hears Hoseok sigh just a little before he rather naturally starts explaining the nuances and subtleties of sarcasm. Sk’jin will randomly comment while Taeh’yung laughs appreciatively at the examples Hoseok makes up on spot. Oddly enough this entire situation feels pleasant and comfortable.

‘Oh this is too heavy for me!’ Sk’jin exclaims dramatically out of nowhere. Glancing over at the tracking application, Namjoon notes that Sk’jin and Taeh’yung were just downstairs.

‘Whatever will we do?’ Taeh’yung declares with a plaintive sigh.

‘Oh no, you must carry on young one! Leave me behind! I will defend our burdens!’

Namjoon literally facepalms.

‘Oh no Jin! Fear not! I know our Captain is strong and capable! His arms are so smooth and strong and-‘

‘You both realize there are lifts in this Dock?’

‘But the walk from the lift to our docking bay is so far!’ Taeh’yung whines. ‘Pretty please help us?’

‘All right, all right, I’m coming,’ Namjoon rolls his eyes. He’s pretty sure Taeh’yung and Sk’jin could easily bring back their “shopping haul” by themselves. He hears them sniggering. He also notes that Hoseok and Yoongi were now close by, no doubt looking for a gravity-lift near the terminal. They would be able to leave in an hour or so, depending on how long it took to install the beamers.
With a resigned sigh, Namjoon leaves the Bridge, making as much noise as he wanted down the stairs.

In the Lobby before the Kitchen was the OrTank. The Being was floating serenely as usual and Namjoon is happy to note that he hadn’t cried or done anything remotely strange or unanswerable and was as normal as he could be. He’s facing Namjoon, as though he had heard him come down the stairs and had turned to greet him. Namjoon is only just a little disturbed by that but decides to ignore it. Namjoon waves at the OrTank, then rolls his eyes at himself.

However he’s startled when the Being inside lifts his hand with swiftness he hasn’t witnessed before. Pausing in front of the stairs, Namjoon squints a little even though he can see clearly. There was no follow up movement, no change. Taking a tentative step closer, Namjoon notices that though he wasn’t crying, the Being’s eyebrows were furrowed, eyes moving rapidly behind his eyelids. Was he seeing another nightmare?

‘Hey, you okay in there?’ Namjoon says quietly, remembering how Taeh’yung had said that the Being had relaxed once he heard their voices.

The rapid eye movement ceases but he still looked a little disturbed.

‘You’re okay- we’re just-…’ Namjoon struggles a little, wondering what to say and wondering if any of it would make a difference and also why was he attempting to placate this Being.

‘-we’re just making a short stop- we’ll fly soon okay? We’ll get you back to your planet?’ Namjoon says, patting the OrTank hesitantly.

The Being inside relaxes a bit more.

So perhaps he did understand- or perhaps it was all just sensory. Babies didn’t understand speech but speaking to them in soft soothing tones calmed them down. Maybe it was the same case?

‘We’ll be there in a few minutes- Namjoon could you ready the payment?’ Hoseok asks, sounding a little breathless, jolting Namjoon out of his reverie.

nThe “shrouded-demon” speaks,’ Sk’jin cackles as Taeh’yung laughs boisterously.

‘Please- I beg of you.’ Hoseok sounds both amused and fed-up.

‘Yeah, I’m headed down anyways,’ Namjoon replies, tearing his eyes away and quickly heads for the stairs. He was going to have to ask Taeh’yung to check on the Being just in case.

It’s terribly hot out but luckily the sun was going down and it wasn’t as harsh as it was when they had landed. Making sure that the ship was locked up, Namjoon heads for the elevators, watching the distant horizon that wasn’t glossed over with holographic billboards of ethereal Pageant contestants.

‘That took you forever,’ is the first thing Sk’jin says when the elevator doors open to reveal Sk’jin and Taeh’yung with what appeared to be at least 6 crates of goods. They’re both wearing completely different clothes in obnoxiously colourful pastel shades of yellow, lavender, and green.

‘What in the fuck-‘

‘Don’t swear, there are children here!’ Sk’jin hisses admonishingly, covering Taeh’yung’s ears.

‘We’re the only ones here!’ Namjoon gapes at the crates. ‘What did you buy?!’
‘Stuff!’ Taeh’yung explains. ‘For me! I needed clothes! And other things!’

‘I-‘

‘Okay let’s get these loaded and into the ship!’ Sk’jin beams, pushing one of the handles of the gravity-lifts at Namjoon and breezing past, hands empty. Taeh’yung shoves a flappy looking garment into his face, hands him the other handle and also breezes past.

‘What’s this?’ Namjoon shakes his head to remove the affronting item from his face.

‘A present!’ Taeh’yung declares. ‘I saw it and thought of you!’

‘Uh-‘ Namjoon looks at the garment, a rather large pale blue smock-like garment but with excessively long sleeves. Then he looks up again and notices that both Sk’jin and Taeh’yung were wearing similarly designed clothes.

‘Thank you?’

Taeh’yung just beams in response before Sk’jin gestures at him to hurry up. Grumbling, Namjoon pulls the lifts into the wide elevator.

‘Please wear it!’

‘I uh- I will, after we leave- or later after we get in- or now- now is good too,’ Namjoon hastily adds because Taeh’yung’s eyes widen as though sad.

He ignores Sk’jin snort as he shrugs on the thin garment.

They struggle a little out of the elevator, because Taeh’yung insisted on sitting on the crates, causing him to hit his head on the elevator’s door post when they exited. Taeh’yung is clutching at his head while Sk’jin is doubled over with laughter and Namjoon is struggling pulling both gravity-lifts out of the elevator with impossible sleeves when Hoseok and Yoongi appear from inside the neighbouring elevator; Hoseok looking deeply unimpressed while Yoongi looked impassive as ever.

‘Well- I suppose we should get going now-?!’ Hoseok splutters when Taeh’yung throws a flappy garment at him- this one in soft orange.

‘Present!’ Taeh’yung hands Yoongi a soft petal-pink one which the Human takes without question and pulls it over his own clothing.

‘Uh-‘ Hoseok looks over at Namjoon, eyeing his clothing and then somewhat slowly and carefully pulls the garment on as they start making their way to their docking bay.

‘The colour really suits you-‘ Taeh’yung stops smiling suddenly, eyes widening, head turning towards the direction of the Užkulisai sharply.

‘Taeh’yung-?’ Sk’jin begins but suddenly Yoongi pushes past, sprinting forward towards their docking bay. Hoseok is second to move and Namjoon follows up a split second later.

‘Guys-?!’ Sk’jin is calling after them, sounding confused but alert as well. Hoseok has already removed and readied his hidden TeorSer from the holster on his side, aiming in preparation to attack/defend. But there’s no need to fire, because as they make their way towards their ship, Namjoon already knows that they’re too late.
The Hangar gate of the ship has been pried open and exposed.

Namjoon’s mind is reeling- he hadn’t even been gone from the vicinity for more than 5 minutes at most- the entire ship was **locked** and their security incredibly tight. There was surveillance **everywhere** and it was still **day**. There were sensors all over the ship, with alarms and reports sent to Namjoon’s NaviLet at every subtle disturbance.

*How did this happen without their knowing.*

Then suddenly, a cold rush of fear overtakes Namjoon.

Taeh’yung and Yoongi are already sprinting in, but they don’t stop at the Hangar. They don’t check to see if their cargo was touched- they both head upwards at once.

Namjoon is vaguely aware of Sk’jin cursing behind him while Hoseok deviates a moment, reaching for the screen over on the Lobby. Namjoon sprints up the stairs to find Taeh’yung and Yoongi standing extraordinarily still in the middle of the Lobby.

An *empty* Lobby.

‘He’s gone.’ Yoongi stares blankly at the Lobby couch where they had last left the OrTank. Where Namjoon had last seen the OrTank- he had even **waved** at the OrTank, even **spoke** to him, **touched** the OrTank before he walked down.

‘He has to be here-’ Sk’jin stammers, eyes widening as he looks about helplessly.

‘No-‘ Taeh’yung is staring blankly at the table. ‘He’s gone.’
Chapter End Notes

(Author’s Note)

DID YOU SEE MY BAG?? DID YOU SEE MY BAG??
Sorry
NOT SORRY
DNA
BYE
LOVE YOURSELF-HER
BYE
PIED PIPER
BYE
THIS ENTIRE ALBUM BYE
I HATE THEM SO MUCH this is a lie I love them so much I can’t even
Also but uh, Mic Drop is gonna be my wedding song. Idc what anyone has to say
about it, im gonna walk down the aisle to Hoseok’s rap. And like, why wasn’t I born
with dimples.
I would also like to sacrifice a kidney in order to learn the choreo for
Also, I don’t think I can properly say when I can update anymore T_T because of uni
that’s why. God, it’s like, a sudden outpour of assignments left and right. One class
has 5 assignments that NEED TO BE COMPLETED IN ONE WEEK WHAT SORT
OF BULLSHIT IS THIS I DID NOT PAY YOU TO KILL ME THANK YOU
So as an apology for being a whole week late, here is a very long chapter ^_^
Also happy belated birthday to the other half of my Moon Children, Namjoon.
“Kaleidoscope“ [noun]: a constantly changing pattern or sequence of objects or elements.

Chapter Notes

[warning- some parts of this chapter might be very grotesque, so I’m just giving anyone who gets queasy or effected by the idea of gore-related things a warning. When you see “2 hours ago” just skip the first 4 paragraphs and you can continue reading!]

See the end of the chapter for more notes

‘It’s beautiful.’

‘You’ve seen it at least 3 times already.’

‘Doesn’t stop it from being beautiful- and it’s gonna be another 56 years before the next one shows up on this side.’

‘Do you know old you’ll be in 56 years?’

‘Yeah- do you?’

‘I’m too aware.’

The lights shift- a strange tint fills the air and everything turns quiet. If he listens close enough, he guesses he’d be able to hear the sound of the wind outside the Arc and the sound of the massive turbines keeping them afloat. Instead he listens to the sound of her breathing.

He’s seen the eclipse one too many times for it to be anything interesting or new. But the look of awe and fascination on her face makes him feel like it was worth coming up all the way here just to be part of her memory. After all, this did make a pretty cool event marker in his timeline.

‘There’s that story- about how the moon and the sun are lovers- you heard that before?’ he asks.

‘Yes! I read a story about that!’

‘Back in my planet- it’s actually a part of one of our religions you know?’ he doesn’t even blink, looking up at the slowly forming eclipse without any protection- not that he needed it anyways.
'Oh! That's kinda cool!'

'Cataclysmic more like,' he snorts. 'Literally everyone wanted to get married during the eclipse— it was like, good luck or something. Like how no matter what, the moon and sun would always find each other— the married couple would always find each other too.'

'But that's cute,' she argues.

'I mean I guess, but it's like, such a common thing you know? My parents did the same.' He rolls his eyes and gets distracted by the sight of a food stand.

'Finally it's empty— be right back!' he waves and lopes his way towards the hotdog stand, something that never failed to delight him for some reason. He wonders if he should get him a keychain with a hotdog on it or something.

'Do you think it's possible for the eclipse to last forever?' she asks out of nowhere, still looking up at the sky as a dark wedge starts to form in the sky.

'I'm pretty sure the reason why people like the eclipse so much and freak out about it is because it's temporary and doesn't happen frequently,' he replies wryly. 'It's why we're all out here despite having seen it happen so many times.'

'No I meant- ' she stops for a while, still not looking away. 'What if time froze? And all we ever saw was this— like, what would that be like?'

He doesn't reply. Instead he looks up as well, watching as the dark wedge grows bigger and bigger, fully covering the sun in a matter of seconds. The sky turns a strange dim shade and there are gasps and sounds of exclamation.

A flare erupts through the sky and the brightness of it all ingrains itself into his mind. The ring of white fire glows and every time he blinked it beamed at him.

The world is transformed under this light— under this sky— and the entirety of time seems to pause, to allow them to witness this known cosmic beauty for just a few seconds longer— just a few heartbeats longer. Just long enough for him to feel as though he was breathing at the same pace with everyone gathered around them. To feel as though he were looking at the same sky with everyone— to feel the planet sigh at the sight of the eclipse.

'It would be just like this.'

Sighing, Hoseok wonders, really, if it was too late for him to call this entire thing quits.
He did not sign up for any of this.

Long gone was the initial excitement and rush he felt, feeling as though he were back on a mission from the Venture Unit. Long gone.

His jaw is still sore, his fists still sting, and he’s sure his ribs are bruised, and honestly, he would kill for something cold to drink at this moment. He would actually kill for a lot things at this moment, but noooooooo. He scowls at himself, hefting Namjoon properly across his back as he quietly creeps out through the heady smelling bushes of overly luscious looking flowers, nearly fluorescent under this lighting.

Spaces, what a pretentious neighbourhood with all of their ridiculous plants and topiary trees that were fucking inconvenient to climb. There’s some slight rustling sound behind him which he ignores- or tries to ignore. He wants to turn his head and whisper, ‘Be more quiet- if this wasn’t part of the plan I’d have fucking killed you already you dumbass!’ but that would defeat the purpose of their plan.

Right. Their plan.

Hoseok can only hope that Taeh’yung hasn’t killed anyone- or worse befriended anyone. Also, who knew Namjoon was that uncoordinated?! And Sk’jin really should stop feeding Taeh’yung hare-brained ideas like that if they all wanted to come out of this unscathed.

Then of course Yoongi.

‘I hope you’re all happy,’ Hoseok grumbles.

‘I’m so sorry!’ Taeh’yung still sounds extremely guilty and a little amused. ‘I didn’t know that Pa would get knocked out like that- I swear it was an accident I thought he was going to dodge!’

That’s what Hoseok thought too, but apparently the Kutsoglerin’s reflexes weren’t the best.

‘Where are you?!’

‘With Jin!’

‘Is he still knocked out?’ Sk’jin asks, amusement laced in his voice.

‘Yes he is- can you not sound so keen about it though,’ Hoseok grumbles before adding, ‘How’s Yoongi.’

‘Doing great. Right Yoongi?’

Predictably, there’s no reply.

Sighing, Hoseok makes his way towards the Hover-7 parked behind the topiary tree shaped like a Hover-7.

‘How much time do we have left?’ he asks, gritting his teeth as he maneuvers Namjoon over the Hover-7. Damn the Kutsoglerin for having ridiculously long limbs. Hoseok was not cut out for this.

‘The first match is in an hour. Is your tracker still following you?’

Hoseok glances back at the topiary tree shaped in a phallic form and spots movement in the shadow.
‘Yeap.’

‘Great. See you soon Hobi- you should make some bets- get us back some units.’

Hoseok sighs again.

He looks up at the sky wistfully and mourns for the simpler days of his life as an agent for the Venture Unit.

**10 Hours Ago:**

‘This is fine.’

There were probably too many situations where Hoseok has had to deal with live bombs.

To name a few, Hoseok was once strapped to a chair with a plasma-bomb attached to his feet while he tried to rewire the hair-like wires with his only his pinky and ring-man finger of his left hand. The other time was when he was trying to retrieve an “item” from a “safe house” that was rigged with explosives which were triggered by motion sensors. The most memorable is of course tackling a rogue militant personnel who had gone completely mad and nearly blew up an entire Dock. Hoseok had packed up the raving militant into an OrTank and hoped for the best.

‘This is totally fine.’

Luckily it worked out for him and Hoseok was praised for his quick thinking.

However this was very different.

Because while bombs consisted of wires, fuses, explosives, timers, sometimes bionic triggers, chemical catalysts, and a complex digital system safeguarding the timer, and Hoseok knew how to deal with most bombs with confidence, this situation was a little difficult.

And Hoseok knows it’s not fair for him to compare Yoongi to a live bomb but that’s how he felt at the moment.

The air around the Human is entirely dark and his expression suggests that he’s rather unhinged. Hoseok has never been able to really predict or read the Human before, and now with this unsettling air surrounding him, Hoseok doesn’t know what to expect. Hence, the comparison with live bombs.
Hoseok tries to ignore the steadily growing thrumming sensation under the skin.

‘Everything is fine- we’re fine, this is fine.’

Yoongi looked close enough to exploding despite having absolutely no facial expression. Hoseok wonders how he does it and if it’s a skill he could pick up if he morphed himself to look like the Human.

There was no way to describe the look in his eyes.

‘Everything is fine-‘

‘Will you shut-up!’ Namjoon hisses at Sk’jin who was talking to himself in a low voice, reassuring himself repeatedly.

Taeh’yung seemed equally disturbed, his head tilted as though he didn’t understand what was happening. His gaze is riveted on the spot where the OrTank had last been placed, a dent on the cushion of the couch from the rim of its exterior shell still lingered.

‘Lisai pull up surveillance from the past 15 minutes,’ Namjoon orders at once, sliding into one of the chairs over the large table in the middle of the Lobby.

‘Shouldn’t we alert security?’ Taeh’yung asks skeptically as he seems to somewhat recover, blinking rapidly as though clearing his sight.

‘No,’ Namjoon shakes his head at once. ‘We need to know if this was purposefully directed at us or not-‘

He stops midway his sentence as their surveillance is fed into the screen mounted above the table.

‘You just left the ship- fast forward a little…’ Sk’jin begins to say but Namjoon hasn’t even been out of frame for more than 10 seconds when two figures appear, walking casually as though everything was completely normal. They didn’t even hide their faces, chatting amongst themselves easily.

‘What the fuck-?’ Sk’jin curses out in obvious disbelief at the two Being’s complete disregard to their identity. They even walk around the Hangar Gate until they find the camera and even lean in as though to make their faces more apparent. What was going on?!

‘Lisai, scan their faces and make a comparison through the GLA Database,’ Namjoon orders as he hurriedly types on another screen.

They watch carefully as the two Beings pause before the Hangar Gate and they seem to study it carefully for a few seconds before one of them backs away and the other pulls out an oblong device from inside their pocket.

Hoseok reaches over and pulls up their readings on their security field surrounding the Užkulisai- any foreign object that didn’t have the same serial code as the ship or didn’t have permission from the ship would instantly trigger their alarm on contact.

However the moment the object touches the Hangar Gate, the security field readings flat-lines.

‘What did they do?’ Sk’jin demands, sounding angrier and angrier by the second.

The object then proceeds to crumble, but along with it, pull the nearly 10 inch thick metal door
apart. Namjoon switches the camera view from within the ship instead. The two Beings proceed to investigate their cargo, looking over the Spardyti with what looked like an impressed look. One of them pulls out what could only be a bio-scanner and as he waves it about, pauses rather abruptly, alerting the other who was pulling out one of the OrTanks carrying the birthing technology.

They don’t say anything but move together at once. Namjoon changes the camera feed again and they track them moving up. When they catch sight of the OrTank they high-five each other in obvious satisfaction.

‘Nice- I’d say we’re getting a good sum for this.’

‘Yeah- wait up, lemme check if he’s dangerous or some shit.’

‘Twerp like that? He’s naked, can’t do much harm naked.’

‘Y’never know- well, seems to be asleep- hey!’

One of them approaches and slaps the surface of the OrTank and there’s a strange crunching sound directly behind Hoseok. The screen in Yoongi’s hand crumbles to the ground in a sad combination of metal shards and wires and glass. Hoseok doesn’t want to look at Yoongi at this moment so he looks back at the screen.

‘He’s completely out- maybe a new experiment?’ the one closer to the OrTank squats down to take a closer look. ‘He’s real pretty too.’

‘Could be- this’ll make them happy. Reckon they’ll come looking for him? Apparently they’re a private trade ship? Says here they’re headed for Matlaab.’ One of them peruses a screen.

Hoseok frowns. This sounded strangely familiar- a situation he’s heard of before.

‘I think so- should we leave our note?’

‘Go ahead.’

To everyone’s immense disquiet, the one who was squatting stands up and turns his head around a little before he finds one of the cameras. Namjoon switches to that one immediately, zooming in on the Being’s face in the process.

‘Hey- so we’re taking your stuff here. If you want him back, you’ll need to buy him back from us tonight in Métério-09, Pangpar District, 00-417, 8 o’clock sharp- remember that time- it’s your allotted appointment time. Also, it’s the house without the flowers. You can’t miss it- the entire place is stuffed with flowers- we kinda stick out.’

The other Being snorts in reply, nodding as he doesn’t look up from the screen.

‘Right- and don’t try alerting the GLA or the forces here, it just won’t work. Great doing business with you; if you don’t show by 8:30, he’s officially ours and I think that’s that- so, yeah. Bye!’

And just like that, the two Beings heft the OrTank between them and make their out of the ship.

Hoseok curses internally.

In some twisted underverse logic, this made perfect sense. Events like the Pageant or the Cogs made it an all too perfect environment for smaller criminal syndicates or pirate-clans to try and give themselves a “boost up” in the market; either by establishing their abilities and skills as an
organized party for hire, or by raising their “reputation” within the undervese, or sometimes simply to stir shit up. If there was one thing Hoseok could take away from this situation and be relieved was in the fact that this wasn’t a targeted attack, but rather simply an unfortunate event they were now roped into.

Before arriving here, Hoseok had done his research on the Pageant as well. Similar to the way the Cogs was used by pirates to channel some of their more frowned upon business transactions, the Pageant hosted not only their normal roundup of fighting matches and arenas, but underground auctions, illegal (even by Pageant standards) matches, gambling (using more than just units), and worst of all- trafficking.

And situations like this didn’t just happen in large-scale events like these,—even commercial and “legal” fighting arenas were rigged with blackmail, bribery, and threats. Fighters were paid or ransomed to lose their fights- or contestant parties were compromised by other parties and were made to lose. However, those were predictable and often easy enough to overpower- but this was being executed in a much larger scale than Hoseok was capable of handling- even with their current numbers.

Hoseok can no longer ignore the energy swirling just under his skin, egging him on silently.

Namjoon has somehow pulled up the surveillance feed from the Deck itself and they watch as more Beings similarly dressed as the two who entered their ship meet near the elevators on different levels. Namjoon quickly accesses other cameras from all over the Dock and they watch as nearly every ship is easily and rather casually robbed.

‘They’re…are they thieves?!’ Sk’jin demands, mouth previously agape. ‘They’re robbing other ships?! Just like that?! And demanding we buy back what’s ours?!!’

‘Wait look-’ Namjoon switches the main frame and pulls up a feed showing a few Beings fighting the thieves outside a ship a few levels below them. Then again, with the same casualness, one of the “thieves” pulls out a TeorSer and fires multiple times, killing the other Beings.

Sk’jin seems to be in permanent shock, disbelief etched all over his face. But this was starting to make sense to Hoseok, and obviously to Namjoon too.

‘They left less than 5 minutes ago- no attempt in hiding their getaway vehicle, nothing,’ he wipes at his face in frustration. ‘They wanted us to get a look at their faces, to identify their ship,- they’re not hiding. We won’t get anywhere reporting this to the forces here-’

‘And we can’t even if we want to,’ Sk’jin intercedes sharply. ‘We don’t even know what the OrTank is and who he is- if we receive help, how do we explain what or who he is? We can’t bring in anyone who might potentially expose us-‘

‘And they won’t?’ Namjoon indicates at the screen.

‘We can get away with it from them,’ Sk’jin says emphatically. ‘We’re in Pompa after all- with the Pageant going on,- clearly they think he’s a contestant or something, they’ve taken a lot of other stuff from the ships here, I think we should wait it out while they’re being distracted and-‘

‘-what if he’s scanned?’ Namjoon demands, eyes flashing angrily. ‘What if they try to break the OrTank and take him out of it-‘

‘-no one is going to be stupid enough to try something as dangerous as breaking free an unidentified Being during a fucking Pageant Namjoon,’ Sk’jin snaps.
There’s a strangely familiar sound that hums around in the air.

‘This entire place is crawling with GLA agents- we were obviously tracked all the way to Ch’dra and it doesn’t take a lot to figure out that we’d come here to make use of the Pageant to cover our steps,’ Namjoon spits out. ‘These Beings are doing this with casual ease that suggests that they’re backed by the GLA- what if he’s taken back and his appearance is noted-’

The sound grows louder and Hoseok notices a small blinking light from the screen in Namjoon’s hand and a minimized tab over the ship’s surveillance shows movement in it.

‘-the likeliness is too low and highly improbable-’

‘What are we going to do about Yoongi and Taeh’yung?’ Hoseok interjects sharply.

‘What about Yoongi and Taeh’yung-‘ Sk’jin begins to ask but pauses, eyes widening as they hear the familiar humming vibration of the Spardyti. It’s only then that the Captain and the Communications Manager realize that Yoongi and Taeh’yung are missing.

Sk’jin is yelling Yoongi and Taeh’yung’s name as he darts out.

Namjoon stands up at once, looking over at the surveillance feed and watching as the Spardyti pulls out. He had no control over the Transporter and couldn’t stop it from inside the ship.

‘Yoongi, Taeh’yung- get back here now,’ Namjoon orders over Sk’jin’s cursing and angry tirade directed at the two. But there’s no reply from either of them.

Hoseok glances at the time- they had approximately 4 hours left before their “appointment”.

‘Yoongi won’t do anything rash,’ Hoseok supplies with a sigh.

Namjoon gives him a look that roughly translated to ‘no offence but how the fuck would you know that’.

‘He’s gone to scout,’ Hoseok explains absentmindedly as he allows himself to sink into that familiar sensation again, his skin warming all over. ‘He’s checking the area, looking for good places to camp out in. To spy, essentially. We would eventually have to do that and Yoongi is the best option for spying.’

Namjoon looks like he wants to argue but Hoseok sees the way Namjoon realizes that yes, if they had planned this out, Yoongi would have been assigned to spy and then-

‘-and Taeh’yung would be sent with him because he can sense the OrTank and would be able to tell if he’s all right or not,’ Hoseok finishes Namjoon’s thoughts for him.

Namjoon looks like he’s really struggling to come up with some sort of counter argument or something. He gives up a few seconds later before throwing his hands up into the air and slumping where he sat.

‘So what do we do next?’ he asks, looking at Hoseok expectedly but not in a patronizing manner. Rather Namjoon looked relieved that someone else seemed to have a better grasp/understanding of the situation.

Sk’jin is still cursing as he examines their Hangar Gate, clearly having lost any semblance of collectiveness as he pulls at his hair, ranting in Khol’isa, fists flying in the air.
‘Well, we’re first going to need units to buy him back- if units are what they want,’ Hoseok begins at once. ‘So we need to start shifting our units to an untraceable source, ready to be transferred.’

‘Right-‘ Namjoon nods, already pulling up their accounts. If there was one thing they weren’t worried about, it was about their financial support. But they couldn’t use GLA-funded units because their source and delivery point could be tracked, they needed underverse units.

Namjoon also seems to realize this at the same time.

‘How much do you have on you?’ he asks.

‘Not a lot,’ Hoseok replies honestly. ‘It’s been years since I had any dealings with the underverse and haven’t had any missions in that area either.’

‘Same,’ Namjoon frowns. ‘I changed all of my units, Sk’jin, what about you?’

‘What the fuck do you think?!’ Sk’jin hisses in reply. ‘I didn’t even have a fucking body until 4 sols ago-‘

‘Right, right- sorry I asked,’ Namjoon sighs, shaking his head in response to Hoseok’s stunned questioning look. What did Sk’jin mean by that?

‘Yoongi?’

‘There’s a bank located in the coast-‘

‘We are not robbing a bank,’ Namjoon buries his face into his hands, voice muffled.

‘We aren’t? But that sounds like fun? We can wear masks right?’

‘YOU’RE BOTH GOING TO STAY PUT AND NOT DO SHIT OTHER THAN SPYING ON THAT PLACE YOU HEAR ME?’ Sk’jin screams, causing both Hoseok and Namjoon to flinch.

‘ANSWER ME OR SO HELP ME I WILL-‘

‘Yes! We won’t! We’ll just watch- right Yoongi?’

There’s no answer.

‘Don’t nod- Jin can’t see you, remember?’

There’s a moment of silence before Yoongi speaks.

‘We’re only going to watch.’

‘Why does that sound like a lie,’ Namjoon groans.

‘Well, first we get all the units we can gather,’ Hoseok sighs. ‘Next we find out who’s behind this— is Lisai still running their faces through database?’

Namjoon nods, pointing at one of the open tabs on the screen.

‘We track and locate their position- find their network, associates, motives, connections, everything.’ Hoseok grimaces. If they wanted more than just units then it was going to be a whole other level of trouble for them.
‘Sk’jin,’ Hoseok adds. ‘Could you fix the door?’

‘What does it look like I’m doing?’ Sk’jin snaps. The screen with the live footage from the Hangar shows the Khol’isa extracting a few kits.

‘Where are you going?’ Namjoon demands.

‘Gonna get information from the streets,’ Hoseok replies, feeling his face warm up as the muscle, fat, and tissue shift over bone.

‘You’re leaving me alone, with an angry Khol’isa, while attempting to get units that we don’t have?’ Namjoon deadpans.

‘You’ll be fine,’ Hoseok says, patting the Kutsoglerin on his shoulder as he pockets the Heliord handle in his inner pocket and a small compact TeorSer as well.

‘But I’m the Captain,’ he hears Namjoon mumble though he’s already beginning to access what appeared to be financial accounts from the GLA Departments.

‘If that’s the case, I’d appreciate it if the Captain would kindly request the Dock for some ParaBots.’ Sk’jin chimes in, voice still laced with irritation masking his obvious anxiety.

Hoseok hears Namjoon sigh before he’s out of earshot.

Carefully adjusting the TeorSer deeper into his inner pocket, Hoseok steps out of the ship into Pompa’s humid heat.

But Hoseok doesn’t feel the weather, neither does he care for it- the only thing he can feel is the pulse of excitement, the promise of cause and effect; but mostly, thrill of the hunt.

This felt exactly like a mission- and though Hoseok tells himself that he didn’t miss being back in the field, that he didn’t long for the swift and almost natural lifestyle of an agent- he couldn’t deny the fact that it felt good.

He can’t hear anything and everything is still white.
Things move in the white landscape around him. Things he doesn’t understand. Fire blossoms from their hands. Mountains fly in the sky above them but everything is still white.

Who were they? What was happening anymore?

He desperately wishes that everything would at least turn back to a normal colour. That this bleached white landscape would go away. He rubs at his eyes, creating a strange reddish tint around his vision in the process.

He’s pushed back, falling all over the place; for a while he allows himself to be pushed around. He can’t fight this white-stain that bleeds at him from the sky. The mountains in the sky erupts in loud colours, like avalanches of snow except this wasn’t snow. Snow was soft and clean, and he remembers being pushed around on a smooth piece of bark by his brothers. This wasn’t winter, this wasn’t snow.

This was just madness.

He gives up, falling and being thrown harshly against the side of the rocky hillside. The sky looms above him and the mountains simply hover- no movement, no falling- nothing.

Massive bird like shapes stream across but these were not migratory birds; these were not the flocks that they hunted seasonally. These had wings of fire, beaks of cruel light, and every time they landed, more white erupted everywhere.

He can’t feel his hands but he somehow manages to lift them. And for the first time he notices colour.

Red.

His hands are red.

But that wasn’t right- his hands were like his brother’s hands- his mother’s hands. His father’s hands.

The colour bleeds from his hands, spreading everywhere rapidly and with alarming saturation and clarity.

He suddenly wishes everything was white again.

Because in this red, he can clearly make out the dead faces; their vacant eyes reflecting the strange fire that blossomed all over the air.

Because in this red, he can see his father collapsing, losing his outline stark against the white and bleeding into the never ending red that threatens to drown him. His hand stretching out to him- the same hand that he knows so well.

There’s a shrill continuous shriek- like someone was screaming at him to run. But he can’t move. He can’t take a single step.

He can only watch and he can only breathe until everything turns red.
8 Hours Ago:

The Hover-7 was a little too easy to borrow and Hoseok doesn’t really feel guilty about it but pretends to do so anyways. The roads are stuffed and traffic is as ridiculous as Hoseok last saw it some hours ago but considering he was on a Hover-7, customized and designed to be a little slimmer than its predecessors, Hoseok easily zips through the jammed streets and finds his intended location easily enough.

Parking the Hover-7 in a much safer place than he found it, Hoseok makes sure to change his face properly before removing his helmet.

Hoseok feels at ease out here.

It’s hot. It’s humid. The streets are dirty and a lingering smell of city-pollution, fuel, exhaust, sweat, and greasy food stains the air. And there are too many Beings around for it to be remotely comfortable or pleasant. But Hoseok feels freed.

He takes on the native appearance of the Pompen- large rounded eyes, a short and slight forehead, and high-set cheekbones. His hair shifts colour to a ruddier hue and with some quick borrowing finds clothing that allowed him to better blend with the environment.

Hoseok has never been uncomfortable with his own appearance, but the idea of slipping into a newly formed identity somehow calmed him down. Allowed him to think differently, to see differently, and to be seen differently by others as well. It was probably because of his lifestyle that he preferred existing in a permanently disguised manner; this mission was the first in many many sols where he remained in his natural form.

Or at least that’s what he told himself. Hoseok stares at his hand- a new hand, one that wasn’t covered in scars that no amount of medical care could get rid of. Turning his open hand into a fist and then releasing it again, Hoseok trails the deep, thin wound down his palm. He’d been hiding it ever since he got it- but he never took the treatment to fully remove or erase it despite a Yisheng offering him to completely remove it. Hoseok still kept that scar on him despite transforming his hand all the time.

Lowering his hand and allowing the colour to shift to one that better suited the natives of the
Pompen, Hoseok shifts his attention away from his thoughts and focuses at that task before him.

‘Yoongi?’

‘There are 10 guards outside. Only for show- no purpose. They’re not there to defend or attack- just for display.’

‘What about communication-transformers? Or receivers?’ Namjoon asks hopefully.

‘None. If there are any- they will be short radio-waves- inaccessible without the correct frequency gage.’ Yoongi replies at once. ‘I could take down one of the guards but none of them are carrying Comm-Devices or any other form of communication device.’

‘Yeah- and Finel tried too, like, an hour ago- he got nothing.’ Taeh’yung adds, not explaining who or what this Finel was. ‘They scanned the guards and none of them register in any database either- they’re all clean.’

The faces Namjoon had scanned and attempted to identify through the GLA Database had been fruitless. So any possible leads they were hoping to glean from the surveillance footage was dashed away almost immediately.

Yoongi and Taeh’yung had arrived at the location of their destined meeting place in a completely different continent an hour or so ago and had already placed themselves at a decent location, scouting out the area. But apparently they weren’t the only ones. Yoongi reported at least, fifteen other Beings, similarly positioned and tasked, all spying at the opulent mansion that was their given meeting point.

‘This is taking place underground.’ Yoongi adds. ‘There’s probably a whole underground network.’

The area of Métrico-09 was one of the wealthier and better structured continents. And Pangpar District was a small section close to the scenic shorelines that seemed to house impossibly rich Pompens. Having expected to sneak through security, Yoongi had placed the Spardyti some ways along the shoreline almost underwater but found to his surprise that no such security existed. But based on his reports, there were plenty of cameras (which were all turned off), and lots of security posts (which were all empty), and plenty of security measurements in the form of motion sensor-triggered stun-nets, sirens, and even a small cyborg task force (all deactivated and found in a container unit just outside the District border). This was also how Yoongi had found the other Beings who were similarly occupied. Apparently Taeh’yung had befriended all of them and they were now all gathered outside street 00-417, and more or less just chilling. There was no point in spying on a place that literally just threw open all of their doors for you, welcoming you and entreating you to “spy” on them. It was clear- that they had no fear and that no single authority could touch them during this Pageant season. It only meant one thing.

‘So they’re not worried- possibly linked with the Pompen government?’

‘Yes.’

Hoseok had been expecting that. Based on how casual and at ease the thieves had been, it was safe to say that this entire stunt was being conducted by the Pompen government rather than just the Pageant.

‘How’s your baby Tae?’ Sk’jin asks, now no longer sounding like he was about to flip tables. He had finished sealing the doorway a few minutes ago and had been loudly complaining about
staining his robes with metal-polish.

‘He’s all right- safe,’ Taeh’yung chirps back, his mood having lifted once he could sense (Hoseok doesn’t understand how the Zhak’gri is doing that or how much he could trust in his abilities but he would take Taeh’yung’s [and by extension, Sk’jin and Yoongi’s] word for it) the OrTank and befriending a bunch of Beings around them. They were now apparently watching one of the matches on a screen and had already placed bets on who would win. Also, if Taeh’yung was to be trusted in this information, one of the guards was watching with them as well.

‘Do you…do you think you can like- talk to him? See how he is?’ Namjoon asks hesitantly.

‘Nopes! He only communicates when he wants to – and I’m too far- well, that, and also there’s too much here, you know?’

‘Uh- yeah?’ Namjoon replies, sounding like he really didn’t know but didn’t want to ask either.

‘Where are you Hobi?’ Taeh’yung asks.

‘Browsing,’ Hoseok replies, walking into a small gulley that smelt strongly of unwashed public bathrooms.

‘You’re in Métrico-07 though? What are you doing there?’ Taeh’yung inquires, sounding curious.

‘Check the pawn-shops.’ Yoongi says quietly before he can reply.

‘Or one of the Android Maintenance places,’ Namjoon chimes in. ‘You should be able to get a live-in there.’

Hoseok hums in reply, not wanting to explain that he wasn’t looking for someone for information; rather he was looking for something. Besides, a live-in (field agents or Information Analysts who were stationed permanently in certain planets) was too risky to approach considering their immediate predicament.

Although Yoongi was a GI agent and has possibly done more field-work than Hoseok, he wasn’t trained to infiltrate and neither was he…Hoseok frowns a little in his thoughts. Was Yoongi even aware of his missions? He read the files regarding the GI and he’s seen the way Yoongi behaves and acts- did the Human remember what it was like?

Then there was Namjoon who went through his missions via screens, never actively being present in the field in a physical way. He was normally galaxies away, surrounded by walls and walls of screens, conducting his missions with the taps of his fingers.

For field-agents, it was different. Finding information, or as they put it, browsing, was different. Depending on what sort of mission you were assigned, field-agents were normally paired with an Information Analyst who would aid the field-agent in finding information, performing more complex database/systems dive, or simply digitally controlling technical aspects of the mission from their station. Hoseok has worked numerous times with a small group of Information Analysts and appreciated how much easier it was for him during these times. But Hoseok doesn’t have his own personal Information Analyst who has been pre-informed on the mission objective because none of this was planned.

So in situations like these, where field-agents found themselves stranded in foreign planets they weren’t supposed to be in or simply needed a short getaway, they all had an unspoken agreement and understanding of setting up a “safe-room” where information regarding that planet, contact information for connections that were safe and approved, supplies, and most importantly, data
containing Venture Unit deals with said planet, were carefully hidden.

Hoseok doesn’t know if Pompa has one such place, but considering its location, and with current events surrounding it, he’s sure that there should be at least one of these in the planet. Besides, planning events like the Pageant required a few years at least, so it’s possible that in the past few years, a few agents dropped by.

He breaks free of the stinking gulley and finds himself in a bustling metropolitan zone, with massive holographic screens everywhere, showing the live-match for the general public. There’s a large city-square to one side where masses of Pompen and other tourists were gathered, all cheering as the fights progressed. Hoseok is in time to watch a slender male Being spit out glaringly red blood before screaming at his opponent, teeth bloody and pointed. Looking away, Hoseok spots one of the massive Transportation terminals and makes his way over. This would be the third one he’s checked for a “safe-house” and he hopes that he’s in the right place.

‘Ooh- yes, bite him!’ Taeh’ yung cheers and it corresponds to the cheers behind Hoseok, coming from the city-square he just walked through.

‘That’s a nice way of confessing your biting-kink Tae,’ Sk’jin comments with some amusement.

‘Don’t shame it till you’ve tried it,’ is all Taeh’yung says and Hoseok silently sniggers at Namjoon’s spluttering reaction.

Crossing over to the station lockers, Hoseok walks across with easy determination; like he knew exactly where to go. Because to an extent he did. He quietly counts the lockers, making his move as he heads towards the locker numbered 7213.

And just one look at it tells Hoseok he’s in the right place. Tapping his finger on the security screen of the locker, he opens the small door and pulls out the lone screen inside of it. It’s attached to a charger at the back so Hoseok doesn’t unplug it, knowing someone else might need to use it later. Instead he pulls out his own screen, connected to the Užkulisai, and begins to transfer the files after connecting the two over a temporary line. Checking over the screen, Hoseok finds that the last user had accessed this 8 months ago. He hears some cheering in the background but that doesn’t mask the purposeful step that’s directed in his direction. Keeping his stance just as casual and free, Hoseok checks around the locker for any additional material he might want to use. There’s a few medical-kits stacked neatly over each other, a few TeorSer chargers for a variety of models, and other forms of chargers.

Not all safe-houses were actual houses- sometimes they were lockers, sometimes they were entire pent-houses, and other times a stationary Android working in public maintenance. But whatever it was, it was always disguised in fairly public and open locations. Hiding in plain sight. The most common were lockers in terminals- normally the main Transportation hubs in-planet.

‘Is this you Hoseok?’ Namjoon asks.

‘Yeah.’ Hoseok sets the timer at

‘This is great. Thank you.’

‘No problem- how’s Pompa’s system security?’ Hoseok asks, waiting patiently for the transfer to complete.

‘Unsurprisingly easy,’ Sk’jin replies instead. ‘As a result, there’s nothing concrete here at all- just statements, laws, normal government shit.’
The transfer is complete and Hoseok carefully places back the screen, pocketing his own back into his jacket. Making sure he didn’t overlook anything, Hoseok deactivates the screen, mentally apologizing to any Agent who might come here to look for this in the future, and watches all of the data permanently delete itself till the very end. He hopes they understand that the safe-house location was compromised so it had to be changed.

‘Where is this from?’ Namjoon asks carefully.

‘Sources,’ Hoseok replies evasively, hoping Namjoon has heard the term thrown around before so that he would understand what Hoseok meant. He places the screen back and promises to come back and “restock” the locker.

‘Ah- all right. You’re headed back?’

‘Yeap-‘

‘Can you pick up something to eat, I’m starving.’ Sk’jin butts in.

‘There’s a kitchen downstairs-‘

‘Then why don’t you go and cook something- no? What do you know! Me too.’ Sk’jin trills in an exaggeratedly enthusiastic voice before he drops it to his normal one. ‘Hoseok, can you please buy some food? Something spicy please.’

Shaking his head at the Khol’isa’s antics, he replies in affirmation and heads back out.

Forgoing the route he took to get here, Hoseok walks through the city-square leisurely, looking up at the holographic screens as though interested in the live-match.

‘Wow- this is a shitload of information…‘ Sk’jin says slowly.

Hoseok looks around casually, blending in perfectly with the crowd and without having to see the Being, keys in on their location and overall appearance.

‘This code is a little…‘ Namjoon says and Hoseok grins to himself, somehow proud that other fellow Field-Agents were giving an Information Analyst of Namjoon’s skill some difficulty.

‘You can do it!’ Taeh’yung cheers, followed shortly by Yoongi’s bland and deadpan, ‘I believe in you’ making Sk’jin laugh hysterically in response.

‘All right- I’m in,’ Namjoon says a few minutes later, sounding a little miffed and defensive.

‘You’re so cool!’ Taeh’yung cheers again.

‘Well done,’ Yoongi intones in monotone.

Sk’jin is laughing again and Namjoon hastens to speak if only to move onto another topic as soon as possible.

‘Well- I don’t think we need information regarding Métrico-03’s seven deals with pirates for smuggling in Shirinm’eva,’ Namjoon chuckles.

‘This place is really hard-core,’ Sk’jin comments in amusement before Namjoon whistles low and long.

‘What is it?’ Hoseok asks as he walks out of the city-square, looking about the stalls of food. The
Being stalking him isn’t doing a very good job and Hoseok wants to sigh.

‘Well- this is from the government here in Pompa,’ Namjoon confirms slowly. ‘Wow…well, this is…’

‘This is interesting,’ Sk’jin completes, a hint of seriousness laced in his voice.

‘Yoongi- why did you assassinate the parliament from Métrico-05?’ Namjoon asks.

‘Though they were not involved with the Isbahaysiga Alliance, they bought a lot of slaves- singular. For betting in arenas.’ Yoongi replies. ‘They would buy slaves, send them to train, and have them fight. The Isbahaysiga Alliance never set foot in Pompa or the System, but many of her emissaries frequently took part in illegal arenas similar to the Pageant.’

Not strictly guilty for forming a bond with the Alliance, but nonetheless still in the wrong.

‘So you were ordered to assassinate them because they took part in arena gambling?’

‘It was during the time the Alliance were getting out of hand- I believe many buyers were killed to send a message to the Alliance and to tame them.’ Yoongi replies.

Hoseok pauses to buy some juicy roasted meat from a stall and thinks that it was a pretty good idea. If you removed the buyers, then business would go down- so of course the Alliance would have to comply.

‘Were these orders from the Venture Unit?’ Sk’jin asks. ‘Do you know?’

‘We were never told who gave us our mission- all our mission were distributed from database. Unless a…senior GI officer personally employed you.’ Yoongi explains.

‘Senior GI officer?’ Sk’jin repeats.

‘I don’t know what they were called. But they were from different organizations- sometimes none at all.’ Yoongi replies.

‘Turns out Pompa has quite the history with arena-fights,’ Namjoon continues speaking as though he hadn’t heard the other’s conversation. ‘Culturally speaking, they’ve always hosted large tournaments like these. And there used to be two species living in Pompa- the Pompen are one, the other were called Pompain- but the latter were smaller in population, populating the continents in the poles.’

‘This already sounds like a great bedtime story,’ Sk’jin snorts.

‘Yeah- something about believing they’re a superior race, the Pompen overruled the Pompain and had them fight in their arenas for centuries- their belief was that the sky indicated their species superiority over the Pompain.’

‘Please tell me it wasn’t based on something stupid like skin-tone,’ Sk’jin sighs exasperatedly.

‘No- based on hair colour,’ Namjoon replies. ‘Red hair is considered superior because that colour doesn’t exist in the sky; the Pompain had either silver or azure hair.’

‘That’s even more stupid than I initially thought; I’m sorry I asked,’ and Hoseok can hear Sk’jin scowling.
Hoseok glances around and finds that yes, nearly every Pompen had ruddy hair. There were a few exceptions but those were other Beings from other planets. Nearly every native of Pompa were red-headed.

‘So I’m guessing after they banded with the GLA that particular sport was banned?’

‘Yeah- banned and made illegal but still practiced in secret sometimes. And then later they left the planet to attend other arenas, and after a few centuries here we are.’ Namjoon sighs.

‘So that’s what this is then?’ Hoseok asks, scanning the food stalls carefully.

‘It’s been around for a while. They’re called the Gremio-’ Namjoon stops.

‘And?’ Sk’jin sounds a little irritable as Namjoon doesn’t follow up. Namjoon still doesn’t say anything and Hoseok hears Sk’jin sigh. He hears the Khol’isa huff, sounding like he was moving about. Probably headed to wherever Namjoon was, to look at whatever it was that had Namjoon silent.

There’s a roaring cheer from behind him and Hoseok glances back. He catches a clear look of the Being stalking him- a Pompen. And he doesn’t look away from Hoseok; again with the cool casual ease. Like he didn’t care that Hoseok had caught him in the act of stalking him.

‘It’s an auction-house,’ Sk’jin says sharply. ‘The Pompen government and the Pageant have banded together to create an auction house. Fucking Spaces.’

The Khol’isa mumbles under his breath indistinctly, as though reading from something before he speaks clearly again.

‘The Gremio Auction House is created as a result of the Pageant and its host planet. It’s what they call their partnership. Fuck-‘ Sk’jin pauses before he continues, his voice hard and his tone harsh. ‘They put up items for auction, and if you can’t afford to buy it back, you have fight for it in the auction-arena. Spaces, this is…’

‘So there are other bidders- probably placed there to create impossibly high bids, forcing their victims to fight,’ Hoseok gathers.

‘They run the Pageant and in the meanwhile create these fight pits- they’re more brutal, a lot more violent- regular Beings, simple traders and merchants fighting against the bidder’s choices, and with no rules whatsoever- this is all catered to the rich-upper-class society of Pompa. Fucking Spaces, is this what’s been happening while I was gone?’

‘But I thought that the Pageant was already illegal to start off with, and didn’t have rules or regulations regarding their fights.’ Taeh’yung chimes in, sounding unsure.

‘That’s true but this brings in more money- anyone can join,- and the target audience is somewhat…’ Sk’jin sounds even more uncomfortable.

‘Is it made controllable by the audience?’ Yoongi asks.

‘Yes.’

Hoseok grimaces. He’s not surprised to hear about it; he’s just disappointed. Because the Pageant fell under the care of the Liaisons and Parley Division in the Venture Unit. Which had been led for over 120 sols by S’ava Hhlai, the very Being who was now leading Hoseok’s former Division. Any and all decisions regarding the extent of how much the Venture Unit would ignore and allow these
events to continue on was controlled directly by the Division Leader and his associates.

So that meant that he definitely knew about the fighting pits. And that he had either decided to ignore it, or in return, gain more profit from it.

‘They’re all one large network,’ Namjoon explains with a tired sigh, speaking for the first time. ‘They’ve been doing their utmost to gain profit, and the Pageant found a great target-market to leech off of here in Pompa.’

‘So why are they stealing from other ships?’ Taeh’yung asks sounding confused.

‘I think it’s to make sure no one talks about this outside of the Pageant grounds,’ Namjoon ruminates before sighing again. Namjoon sounded like an extremely aged Being burdened with the Universe’s problems.

‘Wait- does this mean we’ll have to out-bid other Beings who might try to buy our OrTank?’ Sk’jin asks sharply. ‘Fuck- is this public? Are you fucking kidding me-?!’

Hoseok would have felt more comfortable at the idea of bidding in this auction if their own stolen property wasn’t so eye-catching. If it had been something as simple as an engine-part or in some unfortunate ship’s case, their entire left wing, it would have been easier to buy back their property. But this was the OrTank and that was definitely going to attract the attention of potential bidders. This was obviously a great way to make money, so Hoseok knows they’re not going to be the only ones there, bidding for their item.

‘How much money did you get Pa?’ Taeh’yung asks out of nowhere.

Pa?

There’s stunned silence over the Comm and Hoseok can actually feel Namjoon’s confusion over the line.

‘Uh…I’m getting there?’ Namjoon replies tentatively. ‘I’ve gotten 125,000 units?’

‘That’s great! You’re so cool Pa!’

There’s a suspicious coughing sound from Sk’jin’s end of the line.

‘Where is this from?’ Hoseok asks as he stops in front of a drink-stand, looking over the neon colours of the iced drinks and wondering if any of them were potentially poisonous or hazardous to his system.

‘…sources.’

Good enough, Hoseok thinks to himself.

‘I’m being tailed.’ He adds casually, pointing at the violently purple drink on display and raising two fingers.

‘You have a tail?’ Sk’jin sounds alarmed.

‘It’s been an hour or so,’ Hoseok replies calmly as he hands over some units, nodding his thanks to the distracted vendor. ‘Not really hiding it though.’

‘I think it’s safe to say we’re being watched as well,’ Namjoon says a little later before adding, ‘But aren’t you changed?’
'I am- but I think he’s been following me from the start- they have pretty interesting gadgets with them- it’s possible they’ve marked me,’ Hoseok sips on the drink and finds that it’s pleasantly sweet with a hint of sour. It’s extremely refreshing.

‘Shouldn’t we head over to Métrico-09 now?’ Sk’jin asks. ‘I’ll feel better knowing our ship is close by in case we need to gtfo.’

‘What does gtfo mean?’ Yoongi asks.

‘Get the fuck out,’ Sk’jin replies.

‘Hoseok- you want us to pick you up or you’ll head there yourself?’ Namjoon asks.

‘I’ll go over myself,’ Hoseok replies, looking over and catching sight of his tracker some distance away. ‘Need to see how good these trackers are.’

He throws the other drink over at Pompen tracker who catches it, eyes widening in shock. Hoseok gives him a nod and walks over to the parking lot.

‘Don’t forget food.’ Sk’jin reminds him as Namjoon barks out: ‘Priorities!’

*

Hoseok doesn’t know if he wants to roll his eyes or laugh or join in on the loud and amused game of catch Taeh’yung has started around the massive gardens of the Pangpar District. Street 00-417 was bustling with all sorts of Beings, all displaying their anxiety and stress in different ways. And Taeh’yung was there, dead-center of it all, playing catch. Using a real life Being as the object being tossed around. Though the Being tossed seemed to be having the time of her life, high-pitched giggles filling the air as more of her very minute species are tossed into the air as well. It’s already nightfall, the street lit up with powerful lights hovering above them like miniature suns.

The gardens here were ridiculous- in every sense of the word. If flowers could be flamboyant then that’s exactly what they all were here. But it wasn’t the flowers that were putting Hoseok off- rather the topiary trees situated all over the area. Shaped like nearly everything you could think of, the trees, which were dyed (!?!?!!) in different colours all stood at least 4 meters in height, making Hoseok’s eyes hurt at the sheer saturation of their colours in this bright lighting. He parked his Hover-7 behind one of the topiary trees which was coincidently shaped like a Hover-7 and hoped no one would steal it.

‘This has been going on for 32 minutes.’

Hoseok nearly jumps out of his skin at Yoongi’s voice.

‘Spaces-! Wait,’ Hoseok frowns down at the Human who appeared out of nowhere. ‘How did you know it was me.’

‘I know what you look like,’ Yoongi replies as though it’s the most obvious thing. Before Hoseok can reply there’s a shrill cry of ‘HOBi!’ and his arms are full of Taeh’yung who abandons his game of catch and throws himself at Hoseok. Hoseok is grateful for his reflexes as he catches the Zhak’gri who happens to be taller than himself and sets him down as quickly as possible though Taeh’yung still manages to wrap both arms and a leg around him. His face is inches from
Hoseok’s, eyes wide as he takes in his appearance.

‘Handsome- but I like the real Hobi!’ he declares as he unwinds himself from Hoseok, reaching up to feel his hair and saying, ‘Will I look good with this hair colour?’

‘Honey you’ll look great in every hair colour,’ Sk’jin tells him.

Taeh’yung cheers, looking down at Yoongi expectantly before the Human nods as though in agreement not before sending Hoseok a look of amusement. Or at least, what Hoseok guesses is amusement. Hoseok grins back nonetheless.

‘How is he?’ Hoseok asks, nodding towards the mansion that was more decoration than actual house. There were fountains on the rooftop- the fucking rooftops.

‘He’s all right- nothing fishy happening,’ Taeh’yung says before glancing down and asking, ‘Is that for me?’, pointing at the food Hoseok had brought.

‘It’s mine too,’ Sk’jin butts in, his voice sharp with warning.

‘But you’re not here! So it’s mine!’ Taeh’yung eagerly reaches for the bag of food, eyes twinkling.

‘We need someone to remain back in the ship- I volunteer,’ Namjoon says over Sk’jin’s warnings at the Zhak’gri. ‘In case we need to “gtfo”.’

‘We need security inside the ship as well- can’t risk getting robbed twice over,’ Hoseok replies.

‘Tae- why don’t you stay with your Pa on the ship?’ Sk’jin proposes, glee palpable in his tone of voice.

‘Please don’t call me that-‘

‘I’ll go to Pa,’ Taeh’yung volunteers.

‘Why are you calling him that?’ Hoseok asks curiously.

‘Uh- he’s total daddy material?’ Taeh’yung waves his spork that came with the food about as though it was the most obvious thing in the Universe.

‘Taeh’yung-!’

Sk’jin’s hysterical high-pitched laughter cackles the line, making Yoongi close his eyes as though pained.

‘But I think you’d make a great dad? I mean, 2 agrees too?’ Taeh’yung says over a mouthful of meat, offering one to Yoongi who stares at it for a second too long before taking a bite.

‘Uh that’s- um nice Taeh’yung-‘

‘Namjoon! Are you insinuating that Taeh’yung makes you uncomfortable?’

Taeh’yung looks so genuinely sad and put-out that Hoseok immediately feels the need to somehow placate the Zhak’gri but oddly enough, instead Yoongi reaches up and pats Taeh’yung once on the head, rather stiffly, and the latter grins brightly in return, offering him another piece of meat.

Namjoon is spluttering, ‘What-?! No! Spaces, it’s just- well-‘
‘I won’t call you Pa then,’ Taeh’yung says, sounding sheepish.

‘No- no it’s fine- you can call me- I just- I don’t mind being called Pa-’ Namjoon says.

‘Oh- that’s a pretty good way of confessing your kink-’

‘Sk’jin-!’

‘Pa, it’s okay if you like it that way too!’ Taeh’yung says over another mouthful of meat. ‘To each their own!’

Hoseok doesn’t know if he’ll be able to look the Kutsoglerin in the eye after this without remembering this gem of a conversation.

‘We- we’re landing in 10 minutes- Taeh’yung-’

‘Yes daddy?’

Hoseok momentarily wonders if Taeh’yung was actually unaware of the situation but the Zhak’gri gives him a roguish grin and Hoseok does his best to reign in his snort.

‘Just-…wait, are you all doing this on purpose- you are aren’t you- fucking Spaces you’re all assholes-’

Sk’jin’s laughter is infectious and Taeh’yung and Hoseok laugh out loud while Namjoon fumes.

‘Is it a good idea to have Taeh’yung stay in the ship?’ Hoseok asks. ‘He’s the only one who can sense our friend in the OrTank-’

‘It’s the ship we need to worry about as well,’ Namjoon cuts in. ‘If we don’t have a means to escape, then there’s no point for any of us trying to protect the OrTank- Taeh’yung is the best singular option to remain and watch the ship- you and Yoongi are more than enough to deal with any situation that might arise inside the auction.’

‘I’m not too bad myself you know?’ Sk’jin comments.

‘Uh huh sure.’

‘I could literally take you down right now you exoskeleton-’

Suddenly, a tinkling music sounds throughout the air from the mansion they were congregating outside of.

A clear female voice starts announcing something in Pompen before switching to GLA Standard.

‘Welcome, esteemed bidders and guests to the Gremio Auction. We thank you for partaking in our humble event. Our doors will open in 10 minutes. Please gather yourselves and make a neat line at the main path. Please comply to our rules and hand in any weapon you might be carrying! You will receive your items after the Auction is over! We guarantee the safety of your items!’

Hoseok hears both Namjoon and Sk’jin snort at that.

‘Please do not push and please be patient! Everyone will be submitted into the auctions!’

Everyone looks around shiftily, eyeing each other in confusion and hesitation as well. Then a bunch of Pompen who were gathered closer to the mansion begin to line up, looking excited and
talking amongst each other. Not only were the Beings who were robbed gathered outside, but 
spectators, bidders, and other sorts of Beings were also gathered.

‘You guys line up- I’ll join you soon. Taeh’yung?’ Sk’jin says. Hoseok checks his screen and finds 
that their ship just landed outside of the District border, close to the Spardyti.

‘I’m coming,’ Taeh’yung sing-songs.

‘Don’t get distracted- go straight back to the ship all right?’ Hoseok calls after the Zhak’gri who 
skips away, waving goodbye at the Beings he had befriended. The Zhak’gri turns mid-skip and 
gives him two thumbs-up before disappearing into the crowd.

Hoseok and Yoongi shuffle over to the long line, keeping an eye over everyone gathered there.

‘Some agents here,’ Yoongi says quietly. ‘Observers.’

Hoseok sighs out, scanning the crowd. Many of the Beings there who were in similar disposition 
like themselves all had a wide-eyed anxious look to them. But the others, all excessively dressed 
upper-class Pompen, were all excited and gleeful, talking about what they could possibly buy. It 
makes Hoseok sick to his stomach.

‘Sk’jin.’

Hoseok looks around in the direction Yoongi was looking at and finds the Khol’isa walking with 
elegant leisure towards them. He’s changed his robes to very elegant and rich looking ones in silky 
blood red and a contrasting soft pastel-blue with flowering gold designs over the hems of his 
sleeves and on his collar. His hair is artfully styled, gleaming a darker shade of his normally silvery 
pink to a more dusty-rose. He has a silver and gold circlet around his head, giving him a regal 
appearance that makes everyone stare at him as he passes them.

‘Hello,’ he smiles down at them when he’s close enough. ‘Where is my food?’

Hoseok hands him over the container he’d managed to save from Taeh’yung and the Khol’isa 
proceeds to eat the juicy meat with uncanny finesse and neatness. It was as though they had an 
unspoken agreement, not to talk once they stood in line- this seemed to be the sentiment shared by 
the others like them and entire sections of the line were in complete silence, fidgeting with anxiety 
and nerves.

‘Hi daddy!’

Sk’jin promptly coughs out his food, his circlet shifting on his head and nearly falling over his eyes 
as he half-chokes, half-cackles. Yoongi, with a hint of judgment on his face, helps Sk’jin clean up.

The lines move rapidly and they were now close enough to spot a large scanner situated outside the 
door and some burly Beings carrying baskets in which weapons and anything considered 
inappropriate for the auction were being placed. Hoseok catches sight of a male Pompen with long 
auburn hair, animatedly talking to the Beings who stepped up the patio stairs, a large screen in his 
hands. Looking around, Hoseok catches sight of his tracker and nods at him before they make their 
way forward.

‘Welcome to the Gremio Auction! On behalf of the Auction, here is a care package!’ the Pompen 
chirps when they step up the mansion patio, handing them silky bags. ‘What is your house name?’

Hoseok frowns a little, glancing over at Sk’jin and Yoongi. They had not thought about naming 
themselves- that was a little foolish after all. Yoongi is simply caught up in going through the bag,
a blank expression on his face so Hoseok knows there’s no help from the Human.

‘We’re uh-’ Hoseok tries but Sk’jin smiles pleasantly and says, ‘House of Falling Vitka’v Petals.’

‘Are you fucking kidding me, Spaces what the actual fuck-’

‘All right! You’re all registered!’ the clerk trills. ‘Please make your way inside into the arena and take a seat! The auctions will start in 20 minutes!’

‘Thank you,’ Sk’jin smiles again, causing the clerk to give Sk’jin an even brighter smile than Hoseok thought was possible.

‘House of Falling Vitka’v Petals- really?’ Hoseok inquires, glancing at the tall Khol’isa who was clearly suppressing a wicked grin.

‘Yes- very poetic isn’t it?’ he replies lightly. ‘Do you like it Yoongi?’

‘No.’ Yoongi replies, pulling on a freakishly bright hat over his head that read ‘Camera! Set! Auction!’ in even flashier writing. Hoseok checks his own “care package” and finds a similar hat with a bottle of water.

‘What about you Taeh’yung?’

‘You have dead cells coming out of your mouth.’

There’s a moment of stunned silence and then Sk’jin breaks out into hysterical laughter, clapping Hoseok on his back painfully.

‘That’s the first time in my life that I’ve heard that!’ he exclaims, wiping at his eyes.

‘What does that even mean?’ Hoseok snorts.

‘It sounded cool? I wanted a poetic comeback!’

‘And “dead cells” is poetic?’ Namjoon scoffs.

‘It’s innovative.’

‘Okay- sure.’

‘It is, daddy.’

‘fucking hell-‘

The interior of the house is as grand as the exterior. Opulent marble walls lined with gold trimmings and excessively decorated chandeliers hang off of the ceilings. They enter the main lobby that is lit up with at least 8 different crystal chandeliers of varying opulence and excess. Two winding staircases overlook a central doorway that’s flung open, revealing a wide staircase leading downwards to what appeared to be a large tunnel made of blocks of marble and chunks of rock. There are chains and cuffs hanging from the side as well and Hoseok can’t help but wrinkle his nose at the sight.

‘Ooh, kinky,’ Sk’jin comments. Hoseok has a feeling that if Namjoon were here he’d facepalm.

A few other Beings were making their way down skeptically, eyeing the chains with obvious horror, and Hoseok is sure they’re other crew members from different ships, all robbed in the past
24 hours. The Pompens simply walk past, not batting a single eye.

They make their way down, Sk’jin leading while Hoseok and Yoongi walked behind him, eyes peeled. Hoseok notices the excessive amount of cameras and grimaces. The tunnel is long and straight, with no other doorway save for the ones at the end. There are more Beings here, some standing to have a chat, while others were frantically typing on their screens, and others keeping panic attacks at bay.

‘I have a contestant here!’ a voice shouts. ‘This is madness! I am here with the Alliance-‘

Hoseok frowns at that, looking over the shouting indignant Being quickly as they walk past him and a few other Beings trying to placate him.

‘They really don’t discriminate in their victims do they?’ Sk’jin snorts. ‘I guess it’s good for some of them- one good turn deserves another after all.’

They finally make their way to the main arena and true to Yoongi’s observation and scanning, the entire area underneath the mansion above was much much larger. Nearly spanning twice the length of the gardens above, the arena shaped and designed like an amphitheater is domed with a single guard-tower hanging above with powerful headlights directly downwards into the lowest tier of the amphitheater. The lowest tier spanned out to a slightly concave floor and on opposite ends of the slightly oval tier were two massive gateways. Frequent and slender pillars hold up the ceiling at intervals, and a few of the more agile long-limbed, tailed, and webbed Beings have situated themselves on the pillars already. There are at least 50 rings in the arena and it was already more than halfway full of Beings, gathered there for the Gremio Auction.

Sk’jin whistles lowly.

‘Wow- guess a lot of us are gonna lose our shit eh?’

No one replies to that. Sk’jin guides them over to one of the middle-rings, taking a seat next to one of the pillars.

‘How much have you gathered Cap?’ Sk’jin asks after a while.

‘170,000 units.’ Namjoon replies tersely.

Hoseok knows it’s not enough. That’s already a ridiculous amount of units but he knows it won’t be enough. Not for a real life living Being like the one they had in the OrTank.

‘I can really go and rob a bank right now,’ Taeh’yung offers perhaps too eagerly.

‘No- the banks are all closed and emptied out.’ Yoongi supplies unexpectedly, as though he had been considering that idea too.

By the time the entire arena is packed with Beings, some even standing by the aisles as there were no seats, the two gateways at the bottom tier open up. A petite female Pompen appears and judging by the cheers she gets from the natives of the planet, she must be famous. She was slender and petite, like the rest of her species, and her skin was a neutral creamy sandy colour. Her eyes were larger than normal and Hoseok wonders if that’s a regional thing or some form of cosmetic surgery made to enhance her eyes. Her long red braids swing around in strangely timed waves, as though controlled by a separate force, not following her line of motion. She’s wearing bright yellow clothes, as though to stand out even more than she was. She stands behind a slender metallic podium and poses as though she were in some photo-shoot.
This was starting to feel a lot like the matches Hoseok caught sight of on the holographic screens earlier that day. A large arena, a presenter, and a huge excited crowd. Except this felt a whole lot more dangerous. Hoseok hasn’t forgotten the fact that these Beings inside the arena were the very ones who would be controlling the arena matches as well. He prays to every single deity he’s heard of, praying that they can afford to buy back the OrTank.

‘Hello Gremio Auction!’ she trills. The bidders and native-watchers simply cheer in response. The others, like Hoseok, Sk’jin, and Yoongi, keep quiet, watching and listening carefully.

‘Welcome to this lovely event tonight! Are you all ready to spend your units?’ she points the microphone in her hand towards the arena to deafening screams.

‘All right! Let me first lay down the rules for first time comers!’ she twirls around.

‘As you all know- no weapons allowed, no fighting, and no cheating!’ she winks, twirling again. ‘We have our own security here and they will not hesitate to stop any disturbances that might arise! You have been warned! We will not take any responsibility!’

She twirls once more before continuing: ‘And now for the auction rules! In order to gain back your item- you will either need to bid in underverse units against other bidders and buyers; or win a series of rogue-rounds in our special arenas! If you cannot afford the bidding cost- you are always welcome to the rogue-rounds! Each guild will contribute a fighter in order to gain back their item, no units required!’ the auctioneer announces too cheerily, wide smile in place and teeth gleaming. ‘Are there any volunteers?’

The entire arena is deadly silent. Everyone seems to have done their research, judging by the apprehensive and sweaty faces of the ship-crews gathered there. Some were deathly pale, balking at this information. The rest of the audience watch with perhaps too much glee.

‘Right then! Let’s start off our auction!’ she trills brightly and taps the podium once with a silver hammer.

A bunch of burly Beings step forward from the lower doorways, carrying a bunch of items amongst them. Hoseok does a quick scan and doesn’t find their OrTank there. He breathes a sigh of relief for a moment before he focuses his attention forward again.

It’s a horrible thing to witness. Because the auction doesn’t just involve the ships that were robbed, but also other Beings who were excessively rich and had nothing better to do than toss about their units, raising the bar of the item in question to ridiculous heights. The ships that were robbed of their items are forced to pay extravagant amounts of money and when they manage to beat the other offers, are trumped by some random rich asshole who doubles the price offered. Hoseok watches as many crews scream hysterically, launching themselves into physical fights but are instantly restrained by unnervingly effective guards who knock them out with well-aimed TeorSer fire shot from the guard’s dome above.

‘239,000 units.’

Some are forced to think about fighting, looking increasingly agitated, while others simply give up, watching with hollow eyes as important ship parts, obvious relics or memorabilia, or even sometimes actual Beings, and Androids are taken away to be used by the Gremio as they saw fit. Hoseok knows for a fact that many of the items would simply be discarded or “recycled” as waste while the unfortunate living Beings were sold off into slavery or worse.

Namjoon updates them frequently on the amount he’s managed to get while Taeh’yung offers the
occasional commentary from the live-shows above-ground.

Hoseok gnaws at his lower lip, willing himself not to give in into anxiety. As the auction goes on, more and more bidders come in and it gets even more difficult for the ships to pay the cost of their items. A total of 11 ships already lost their items while 2 chose to fight. Only 3 ships were able to buy back their items and Hoseok is glad for them. As time went on, the bidding prices went higher and higher.

‘271,000 units.’

Almost an hour later, their OrTank is carried forward and to Hoseok’s immense disquiet, the entire arena seems to quiet down a bit as all heads turn to stare at it. Hoseok feels Yoongi tense next to him and Sk’jin’s foot tapping increases rapidly. He seemed unharmed, the OrTank untouched and undamaged as well. But to Hoseok’s agitation, the Being inside seemed distinctly uncomfortable; a furrow between his eyebrows, his hands clenched into fists. Exposed like this, to a massive crowd, Hoseok feels the weight of what this could do- what this could instigate. Here, in front of this raving and mad crowd, was living proof of the Gaia Case. They were now all balancing on the very edge of exposing everything in the worst way possible.

‘Yoongi.’ He hears Sk’jin says sharply.

Hoseok looks over at the Human, his entire posture screaming distress though his face remained neutral.

‘Calm- we need to stay calm- he’s all right.’

‘He’s just a little stressed Yoongi- he’s all right,’ Taeh’yung says quietly, clearly watching the entire thing through the Iris on Sk’jin’s robes.

A few other items are brought in- including what appeared to be a large pet creature of sorts with brown bushy wiry hair, a very wet snout, and no visible eyes but with its ears pressed back on its head in clear dejection, whining piteously as its owner, a very small Being, squeaks out plaintively from across the arena.

‘We have quite the items here!’ the auctioneer announces brightly, waving one of her arms in a grand gesture. ‘First up! This…thing!’

She gestures to the immense create that just ducks its head even more as jeering laughs ring across the arena.

‘We’re starting up with soon-to-be steak meat-’ the auctioneer points out again, clearly enjoying the howling laughter of the bidders.

‘Oh! That’s a N’nukwu,’ Taeh’yung exclaims. ‘They’re very rare- and very loyal to their masters. They live for ages and ages- he must be a part of the Obere’s family for a long time- they’re like, really strong, but are super docile. Poor baby. He must be so scared.’

Hoseok would feel bad for the Obere and the N’nukwu under different circumstances, but at this moment his attention is drawn to the bidders who were attempting to take a closer look at their OrTank.

‘I think my baby can feel his distress- it’s why he’s stressed,’ Taeh’yung comments.

If the Being inside the OrTank could feel the N’nukwu’s distress, then he could most certainly sense the danger he was in. Hoseok is almost beside himself with anxiety as he waits for their turn.
'Oh Spaces, you really don’t want to mess with the Obere though,’ Sk’jin comments wryly as there’s a literal harmonious shriek of anger that rings sharply through the air.

The Obere were a rather small species of Beings that reminded Hoseok of badly carved wooden figurines. They were strangely endearing to an extent with their burlap-like robes draped across their bodies covering their rough skin. They had 3 eyes, all large and opal like in colour with small rosy noses and lips with pointy ears. They had no hair but instead had craggy twig like horns protruding like aged gnarled roots through their heads in a gradient of ashy wood to rosy peach. They made vicious fighters, having very sharp fingers perfect for stabbing and poking their enemies to death. But most of all their voices were dangerous, causing permanent damage if they screamed loud enough.

As a result of their screaming symphony, a few around them keel but the guards are quick to take action, firing at a few of them and knocking them out as though in warning.

‘100,000 units!’ one of bidders yells.

‘No! I got this! 110,000 units!’

‘We have 110,000 units! Any more offers for this lump of meat?’

‘Listen you fucking asshole-‘ the Obere squeaks out, raising his tiny fist at the auctioneer.

‘And sold to the Guild of R’ce!’ the auctioneer waves her hand.

The Obere bursts out into tears, hiding his face in his small gnarled hands. The rest of the Obere are trying to comfort him, their opal-like eyes wide and gleaming with unshed tears.

Taeh’yung makes a small sad sound and Hoseok feels a twinge of sadness. Nothing good would await the N’nukwu and the Obere probably knew this.

The auction continues and Hoseok knows that their OrTank is being put up the last. It was clearly being coveted the most by other bidders as well, many saving up to bid for it and the few ships gathered there were able to buy their items as a result.

‘Next up!’ the auctioneer walks over to the OrTank, the only item left on stand.

‘What a pretty face! Look at that body! A mysterious Being!’ she trills in a high voice. ‘A lovely gift,- perhaps a muse? Or perhaps, a friend to keep close and personal?’ she winks suggestively.

Hoseok feels a very strong urge to throw something at the auctioneer.

‘Mysterious Being in the OrTank bidding time is open now and we- wow! We already have an offer for 150,000 units!’ the auctioneer announces, throwing about exaggerated exclamations.

‘Don’t put any offers yet-‘ Namjoon says urgently.

‘How much do we have now?’ Sk’jin asks tersely.

‘I just got an additional 10,000 units- we’re at 280,000 units-‘

‘That’s not going to be enough,‘ Sk’jin says, eyes scanning the area as more bidders raise their offer.

‘House of Sh’marr offers 300,000 units!’
Hoseok’s eyes widen, his body growing numb. This was the highest bid to ever be placed since the auction started.

‘Fuck-‘

‘335,000 units-‘

‘House of Falling Vitka’v Petals offers 335,000 units!’ Sk’jin proclaims at once, standing regally, all eyes turning to look at the Khol’isa, his presence intimidating and a strange light wrapping around the Khol’isa. There’s murmuring at once and a few Beings around them look at Sk’jin uncomfortably. Then there’s a swelling silence that immediately follows as the auctioneer looks around for a higher bidder and Hoseok can feel sweat dripping down his back, ears pricked up.

‘And 335,000 units-‘

‘House of Jtāharū offers 500,000 units.’

Hoseok feels the pit of his stomach fall. Looking over he finds a small group of Beings sitting at the very back row of the arena, dressed entirely in white, half of their faces covered in alabaster masks, revealing only their mouths.

Sk’jin grabs at his arm, his eyes narrowing as he studies the group.

‘500,000 units going once!’ the auctioneer seems stunned too, her already big eyes even bigger.

‘We don’t have the money for this!’ Namjoon hisses. ‘I’m trying and I don’t-‘

‘500,000 units going twice!’

‘Then what the fuck do we do-?’

‘500,000 units going thrice and-!’

‘House of Falling Vitka’v Petals would like to win a series of rogue-rounds to regain the Mysterious Being in the OrTank,’ Yoongi states, standing up.

‘Sit the fuck down,’ Sk’jin hisses, pulling Yoongi down again and already putting on a winning smile on his face. But before he can even begin to make excuses, the auctioneer latches onto Yoongi’s words like a leech to flesh and she brings down her hammer thrice in succession and points at them with a flourish.

‘Contenders for the rogue-rounds pledged and accepted by the Gremio!’ she states excitedly. ‘Please bring forth your contestant after the auction-‘

‘I would also like to purchase the N’nukwu for 335,000 units from the Guild of R’ce.’ Yoongi adds.

‘YOONGI WHAT IN SPACES-‘

The Guild of R’ce cheer in enthusiasm, agreeing to Yoongi’s terms.

‘Sold! The OrTank will be kept safely until your guild wins the rogue-rounds; you may retrieve your item now!’ the auctioneer announces as the burly guards take back the items that were either lost or waiting to be won via rogue-rounds.

Yoongi stands up, walking down calmly towards the lowest pit without sparing them a single
Hoseok glances over again at the small group, the Guild of Jtāharū and is immediately wary of the fact that they were now all staring at Yoongi. He can’t place their species and he most certainly can’t tell what they’re thinking. They hadn’t spoken up until just now, and that in itself rings all sorts of alarms in Hoseok’s mind. He grabs the front of Sk’jin’s robes, pointing it over to their direction.

‘Namjoon?’

‘Yeah I’m on it- just- just give me a second’ Namjoon replies, sounding harassed.

‘I don’t like them,’ Taeh’yung says suddenly, stopping midway in his dramatic sobbing over Yoongi’s act of “heroism”.

Yoongi walks down to the pit and straight towards the N’nukwu who was hunched over on the dais it was placed on.

Riveted, Hoseok and Sk’jin lean forward, watching as Yoongi raises his hand up to the giant of a creature, allowing it to sniff his hand. He seemed to be speaking but they were too far to hear. After what seemed to be the longest minute of Hoseok’s life, the N’nukwu raises its head up to Yoongi’s hand, wet snout sniffing. Then after a few seconds, a large red tongue pokes out and licks Yoongi’s hand. Sk’jin grabs his arm rather painfully while biting down on his other hand as though to repress any urge to squeal.

Then, with a gentleness Hoseok didn’t know the Human possessed, he pats the creature on the head (much more natural and genuine than with Taeh’yung from earlier) and coaxes it to stand and walk. Standing on its legs, the N’nukwu’s head is almost at Yoongi’s shoulder height. Hoseok glances over at the Obere clan and they’re frozen too- the owner of the N’nukwu was crying, obvious pain and heartache etched across his features. But that soon morphs into shock and disbelief. Because instead of bringing the N’nukwu over to their side of the arena, Yoongi guides the docile and shivering N’nukwu by its leash over to the other side of the arena. Everyone’s attention is riveted at them; the silence so heavy Hoseok is sure you could cut through it. The previously crying Obere is watching Yoongi with shock while his fellow crew-mates watch in equal disbelief.

Yoongi hands over the leash to the Obere the moment he’s close enough and the silence breaks as the Obere squeaks in delight, hugging the N’nukwu- more like mounting over it in sheer joy. The N’nukwu gives out a weird sort of barking sound that breaks the silence even more and there’s some clapping before the entire arena breaks out into tremulous applause.

‘I…’ Sk’jin is gawking at Yoongi who is nearly knocked over as the whole of the Obere crew launch themselves at him, hugging his limbs and torso in thanks.

‘I can’t believe I just witnessed that with my own two eyes,’ Sk’jin says reverently.

‘I can’t believe we just lost 335,000 units for something that wasn’t even ours.’ Namjoon sighs despondently.

Hoseok can’t help the smile that grows on his face, despite everything that has happened, as he watches Yoongi carefully detach himself from the weeping Obere. He glances over to where the House of Jtāharū were sitting and he’s filled with immediate apprehension when he doesn’t see
them anymore.

‘What are we going to do?’ Sk’jin asks, looking a little dazed.

‘I guess we’re going to fight the fucking rogue-rounds. Who wants to volunteer because it’s certain not going to be me.’

‘I’ll do it.’ Yoongi says quietly, making his way through the crowd that were cheering him on.

There’s a snort from the Comm-Device, clearly from Namjoon who mumbles something about rhetoric questions.

‘YES! LET’S MAKE YOU REALLY PRETTY YOONGI!!’ Taeh’yung squeals in delight, followed shortly by a comic groan of pain from the Zhak’gri while Namjoon mumbled darkly under his breath.

Sk’jin looks over at him, an amused smile on his face and says, ‘I don’t think this could any worse than it is now.’

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He can’t do anything but hide.

Hiding hiding hiding hiding hiding hiding

Was that all he was capable of now?

He wants to tell them to run. To hide. He’s screaming on the top of his lungs – if he could he would bleed the warning to them. But he can’t. And instead he has to keep watching every single one of them collapse- their minds sinking into the red gloom that had once plagued him but was not his immediate reality. He watches them slip away and every single time, he feels himself die.

Nothing remained anymore; they didn’t remain anymore.

His hand was still stretched out- as though reaching for him as though he knew that he was watching.

And there was fear in his eyes right before he fell. Fear of not knowing what would happen.

There was also forgiveness. Or was that damnation?
He can’t tell the difference anymore. Not in this reddish emergency-light. Not even when day breaks overhead and sometimes manages to filter through the vines that have crept over the windows. But no matter what lighting was available- that hand was still outstretched towards him. And he always came back to that spot, to look at that hand. Unable to grasp it, unable to help.

Until time went on and the hand was nothing more than an imprint in his mind’s eye and one that haunted him.

And it kept coming back- it kept bringing back the strange forms and outlines, white at first, and then a disturbing red as though it tore them off of some searing nightmarish flesh.

He keeps screaming: STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP

But it doesn’t stop. It probably won’t stop. And he has no escape.

He can’t move from this spot- he can’t escape.

All he can do is watch.

Watch and hide.

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It does get worse.

At least 10 times worse than before.

5 Hours Ago:

Hoseok finds himself acting like Sk’jin’s guard, his normal face on this time around, following the Khol’isa around the shockingly large underground network. Not a lot of ships had chosen to fight—rather they chose to give up on their item, knowing there was no way that they were going to win.
But the ships that did choose to fight- a total of 9 ships, and their representatives, were now waiting inside an anteroom waiting to register their “fighters”. Some of their “fighters” are with them, large strong burly Beings of different species and different levels of nervousness. It’s an oppressive environment, laced with desperation and anger both. But Sk’jin is surprisingly composed, a smile set on his face as he makes conversation with the Being sitting next to him despite not receiving any reply whatsoever.

‘Ah- it’s your turn now,’ Sk’jin smiles beatifically, causing the Being in front of them to literally stop and stare as though unable to process how and why Sk’jin was so at ease. ‘Good luck!’

‘Is that a good idea?’ Hoseok asks, watching as everyone around them looks at them uncomfortably.

‘Ah, I enjoy spending company with you Hobi,’ Sk’jin says pleasantly. ‘It’s like a breath of fresh air.’

‘Okay…?’

‘Really refreshing,’ Sk’jin adds before saying, ‘I’m just laying out an advantage. A psychological one of course.’

‘Advantage?’

‘Yes- so that the others gathered here will feel disabled by my ease and will automatically think our fighter is ridiculously strong.’ Sk’jin explains.

‘Yoongi is strong though? I’m not worried about them – I’m worried about the bidder’s contestants and what the audience will do during the match.’ Hoseok mutters. Things could go horribly wrong- most Beings who were involved in these sorts of events were sadistic by nature and though Hoseok doesn’t doubt Yoongi’s abilities, it doesn’t stop him from imagining the worst.

‘Psychological play goes a long way,’ Sk’jin smiles.

Hoseok leaves Sk’jin to his “mental games” and back to his screen. Hoseok had tried knowing that there wouldn’t be a concrete answer, on searching for any data related to “House of Jtāharū”. It seemed as though everyone involved in this auction were all there under extensively complex pseudonyms and aliases. Namjoon was having a field-day with all the work he suddenly found himself in. Hoseok still hadn’t caught sight of those Beings after the auction ended, the crowd was too thick and they needed to register Yoongi into the rogue-rounds. Namjoon had found some footage of the rogue-rounds from other Gremio Auctions from the past years and it was not pleasant.

‘Sk’jin?’

‘Yes oh Captain of mine, how can I help you?’ Sk’jin replies with a bright smile, humming under his breath.

‘What are you wearing?’

‘Never in my life did I expect to start off any conversation with you like this- but I guess I’m down for it?’ Sk’jin replies as Hoseok heaves, having choked spectacularly on his own spit.

‘Just- fucking Spaces,-‘

‘What do you want me to wear?’ Sk’jin teases, ignoring Hoseok’s glares. ‘I guess you’re one of
those types with really strange kinks—'

‘We need different clothes for Yoongi, fucking **Spaces** will you stop?!’

Sk’jin laughs uncontrollably for a while before replying, ‘Robes, sweetheart- in red. Why don’t you come here and help me out of it? Or you could watch?’

‘**Taeh’yung is coming to get it.**’ Namjoon says sharply.

Sk’jin muffles his laughter into his fist, whacking Hoseok on his back repeatedly out of mirth while the other Beings gathered around the room stared on. Contestants were given their own “dressing rooms” to get ready in. They were also ordered to have their entire crew participate in the event. They were asked politely but Hoseok knew at once that it wasn’t a request- rather it was a threat. So Namjoon and Taeh’yung had locked up the ship, grabbed the basic necessities, and had arrived about 30 minutes ago. They were now watching a few matches apparently, and Taeh’yung had a favorite as well.

Similar to the way the Pageant was hosted, contestants were made to look “beautiful” or appeasing to the eye so that they could better sway the crowd to their favour and win them favourable help or simply prevent them from releasing any potential harmful action against them. Sk’jin had loudly lamented that if he had been included in that, everyone would be swayed to his side due to his beauty. It had been awkwardly silent for a few seconds before Namjoon separated them and they left for the dressing-room.

‘House of Falling Vitka’v Petals!’ a voice calls as the previous Being walks out, looking much paler and his hands shake while his crew members behind him were equally disturbed.

Sk’jin and Hoseok stand, walking into the adjoining room. It’s a large airy space with wide windows and a domed ceiling open to the night sky above. The entire room is decorated (rather tastelessly) in crystal statues and gold figurines. The floors are glossy and everything is too reflective to Hoseok’s liking.

A female Pompen sits behind a ridiculously ornate desk and gestures to them to sit. She’s dressed in neon blue, the contrast with her fiery hair makes Hoseok’s eyes hurt.

‘Welcome! Please take a seat and I will begin with our rules and regulations!’ she chirps, looking all too pleased with the whole situation.

Sk’jin takes a seat while Hoseok stands behind him, posture stiff and unrelenting. The Pompen doesn’t press him to sit and instead pours Sk’jin out an iced cup of something tinted green. Sk’jin politely nods in thanks and probably had his overly charming smile on his face.

‘So, before we start, here is a form that you must sign declaring that we, the Gremio Auction, are not accountable for the death of your contestant. And should your contestant die, we will claim the item he/she/it was fighting for. If you win the rogue-rounds, then you and your contestant as well as your item are free to leave at once.’ She relays pleasantly while Sk’jin reads the contract with nonchalant ease.

He takes up the pen offered and scribbles a loopy signature over on the line and hands it back to the Pompen.

‘Perfect, thank you for your cooperation,’ she smiles, tucking the paper into a drawer filled with similar papers.

‘So here are the rules to the rogue-rounds,’ she crosses her hands over the desk. ‘No weapons
allowed—no help from crew members, and to never harm the audience.’

‘Is that all?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘Yes,’ she smiles again. ‘Do you have any questions?’

‘Yes—what marks a victory in the rogue-rounds?’

‘Death of your opponent,’ she replies chirpily.

‘Of course!’ Sk’jin chuckles.

‘Any other question?’

‘None at all,’ Sk’jin replies pleasantly.

‘Excellent! I hope you enjoy your stay,’ she says standing up, clearly dismissing them.

Sk’jin stands too and without a second glance, turns away. Hoseok notes that the female Pompen looks a little surprised at Sk’jin’s behavior. Clearly no one else had behaved with such ease or this flippantly.

She calls for the next house as they exit and a few shaky Beings step into the room after Sk’jin and Hoseok. Taeh’yung is waiting for them outside, staring blankly at a point on the floor without blinking.

‘Tae?’

Taeh’yung snaps out of it, grinning as he notices them.

‘I was just making sure my baby was all right,’ Taeh’yung points downwards. ‘He’s down there.’

‘Is he all right?’ Hoseok asks, glancing at the floor too.

‘He’s all right—asleep again. Dreaming.’

‘Well at least one of us is getting sleep,’ Sk’jin laughs. ‘Let’s go dress up Yoongi—’

The Khol’isa stops dead in his tracks, smile slipping off of his face before he quickly pulls Taeh’yung back and Hoseok follows immediately, ducking behind one of the large ornate pillars out in the main hallway of the mansion.

‘What is it?’ Hoseok asks, peering over Sk’jin’s shoulders and his stomach churns.

‘That’s the Tayian from the slaver-ship?’ Namjoon asks sharply, clearly having spotted what was going on through the Iris still attached on Sk’jin’s robes.

After leaving Grezma, they had all reviewed the footage from his and Yoongi’s Iris’s, scanning the faces of those who were there in the lobby of the Central-Bridge in the slaver-ship. The Tayian in question, Van Seulgaan, was from the Department of Trade; a high ranking officer who, they found to their immense disquiet, worked directly under Chief Shn’ow, one of the other Beings that comprised the special-jury.

Whether or not Chief Shn’ow was involved in the Alliance was still all conjecture and theory, but Seulgaan being here so openly opened up a whole new list of possible internal corruption and negotiations between the Alliance and the GLA. Not for the first time, Hoseok feels like he’s
learning too much information that was going to lead him somewhere he would regret.

‘Is he here because he tracked us or is this some crazy coincidence?’ Sk’jin hisses in question.

‘He’s lining up to sign up contestants,’ Hoseok says slowly, watching the Tayian making his way through. He didn’t look any worse for wear and Hoseok wonders how he must have escaped the slaver-ship. He’s being guarded by two other Beings, not the slaver-guards from Grezma, but entirely different looking Beings.

‘He’s part of the Alliance- it’s possible that he brings in the occasional contestant to fight- maybe not in the main arenas, but for the fighting-pits,’ Namjoon mumbles quietly.

‘Should I follow him?’ Hoseok asks, tracking the Tayian’s movement carefully.

‘I think we should keep our distance,’ Namjoon replies at once. ‘You’re already being tracked, and I’m sure we’re all under surveillance- we can’t bring ourselves into the spotlight more than we already have.’

‘What if he recognizes Yoongi?’ Sk’jin asks, gnawing at his lower lip.

‘We’ll worry about that when the time comes- it’s possible that his contestant will fight before Yoongi. And he might leave,’ Namjoon theorizes.

Sk’jin looks like he’s inclined to disagree but he doesn’t say anything.

‘Let’s just really change up Yoongi so that he’s unrecognizable.’ Namjoon says, ‘Come on guys, the first match will start in 15 minutes.’

‘Can we watch Pa?’ Taeh’yung asks excitedly as they make their way back to the dressing rooms, making sure to stay hidden the entire time.

‘Actually we should,’ Namjoon replies. ‘We can understand how the arena is conducted.’

Sk’jin hums in agreement distractedly, glancing over at where the Tayian stood, looking disturbed.

‘Jin?’

Sk’jin starts out of his revere before smiling at Taeh’yung, ‘I think we should colour Yoongi’s hair- what do you think?’

Taeh’yung giggles madly at that and the two start discussing what hair colour they should use. Hoseok looks back discreetly and instead catches the eye of his tracker. Even in here, they were being tracked.

‘What about a nice soft blue?’ Sk’jin offers.

At that, Yoongi, who hadn’t spoken since he offered up himself to the rogue-rounds, voices his reply in his usual monotone.

‘No.’
His perspective feels a little skewed. Or maybe it’s because exhaustion finally took a hold of him and he was now somewhat collapsed on the floor at an awkward angle and the mirrors around him were reflecting angles of the ceiling in a way he’s never seen before.

His breath comes out harsh now- as though he didn’t need to breathe before and his body just only realized he needed to breathe.

The sound of his pants echo harshly in the empty room along with the steady dripping sound of water leaking from a nearby faucet. Normally the sound would irritate him- but he’s too far gone to sit up and tighten the tap. But his hand still attempts to reach up, desperately but unknowingly reaching up to quiet the tap.

It’s still red, no matter how many times he washes his hands.

How long had it been?

Seconds minutes hours days weeks months years decades centuries.

Who knew anymore.

Didn’t she once say, that if time could stop, or pause, it would be because the Divinity willed it so- so that they could experience that moment for longer. Time slowed down for love, time slowed down for happiness- pushing and pulling the moment longer so that all could cherish that moment and appreciate it better. But this wasn’t a moment of happiness.

There was no love in what happened here.

They would be here soon. They would find what happened, and then would find him as well.

Would she be there? Would she understand?

But how could she? Because he didn’t understand either.

His vision starts to blur- and maybe he was finally offered the relief of death. Was it possible? Maybe it was for the better?

He hears footsteps, clacking loudly and he can feel their voices before he hears them.

They’re yelling and shouting. His vision blurs so much it’s as though their hands are inflamed and wrought in white flames.

Maybe he could burn in that fire and it might purge him of what he had done.
2 Hours Ago:

Hoseok grimaces as another sweaty body pushes themselves up against his arm. Taeh’yung seemed to be enjoying himself, looking around excitedly as the crowd cheer on the new fighters in the pit. This appeared to be an actual fight between potential contenders- and not Beings forced to fight for their items. That had been horrible to witness, even more so when the bidders and audience threw in their units to have flames thrown at the contestants, or have them horribly handicapped by actually buying the favoured contestant weapons. It was only the beginning and Hoseok knew it would only get worse.

What shocked Hoseok was the fact that there were children watching the rogue-rounds. They were cheering on the fights, their parents lifting them onto their shoulders so that they could a clearer view of everything that was taking place. Sk’jin had looked properly aghast at that while Namjoon didn’t seem perturbed by this at all. Oddly enough, Hoseok finds that their reactions contradicted their personalities so far.

The lowest tier of the amphitheater is splattered in blood and other biological parts. There had been a horrible death 2 fights ago, where one of the contestants had the entirety of their guts spilling out onto the floor, tumbling backwards and leaving a horrible trail of innards.

The doors open again and this time two female Beings enter. The crowd roars even louder than before and Hoseok leans in a little to study the new contestants. They bore a striking resemblance to the Pompen and Hoseok understands the situation perfectly.

‘They- they look incredibly alike,’ Hoseok says slowly, feeling uneasy as he studies their form carefully. Not just as a species, but these two Pompain looked related.

‘That’s because they’re probably related,’ Namjoon says quietly before adding, ‘This is cruel- the Pompain must still exist- but only for sport.’

There’s a quiet sigh from Sk’jin over the Comm-Device.

The crowd is roaring and jeering, and though Hoseok doesn’t understand the language, he’s pretty sure filthy and cruel words were being flung down at the Pompain contestants below. The air is charged with the domineering superiority of a privileged race of species, feeling powerful in light
of the result of their cruelty and inflicted oppression. Hoseok feels nauseas.

‘They’ve been reduced to something lower than animals.’ Namjoon watches with hardened eyes.

‘What do you mean Pa?’ Taeh’yeung asks, voice soft and deep, ignoring the arena-master who was yelling out the rules at the Pompain.

‘That’s what happened in Kutsoglera,’ Namjoon says with a short scoffing laugh. ‘They would make the strong young ones fight each other- entertainment and sport for the bored pirates. If they refused, their families were killed off- slowly, painfully. Or worse.’

Hoseok doesn’t want to ask or know what Namjoon means by “worse” but he knows enough to understand. And he also understands why Namjoon seemed so strangely off when they had first discovered the Gremio.

The female Pompain start fighting and it’s brutal. It was obvious that they were trained for this fight. They both fight, impassive and blank- but not the way Yoongi was expressionless. This was different. They looked completely destroyed.

‘It’s a way of asserting dominance- of suppression; to completely destroy any worth, any value, any respect you would have as a living Being- to completely destroy you and to remove any notion or love to live.’ Namjoon doesn’t flinch as the shorter of the two Pompain falls back, landing on her arm wrong and the sound of bone breaking rips through the air.

Taeh’yeung doesn’t say anything but instead wraps his arms around Namjoon, resting his head against the Kutsoglerin’s, briefly nuzzling the side of his face.

‘It’s all right,’ Namjoon smiles at the Zhak’gri. ‘It was in the past- long gone and finished.’

Taeh’yeung keeps his arms around the Kutsoglerin regardless.

Hoseok notices that Namjoon didn’t even looked remotely disturbed at the idea of this whole arena-fight. Sk’jin had looked disgusted and even outraged. Taeh’yeung had looked sad and disappointed, but Namjoon. Namjoon looked like he was used to the entire setup behind the Pageant. The Kutsoglerin looked resigned – as though he expected nothing more from this reality before him.

Hoseok turns his mind back towards Yoongi, and what he would have to face. He had no doubt that Yoongi would sail through these rounds and win them back the OrTank- but at what cost? His stomach burns and Hoseok wants nothing more than to burn this entire establishment to the ground. Namjoon seemed unmoved, his eyes impassive as he watches the Pompain shred each other apart. Taeh’yeung seemed strangely quiet, somber almost, eyes a little vacant as though listening to someone speak, he even nods a few times as he rests his head against Namjoon’s shoulder.

The crowd cheers as one of the Pompain practically throws the other across the pit and the crowd is chanting, bloodlust thick and heavy in the air.

Suddenly, Namjoon starts, cursing under his breath as he stands to a crouch, gesturing quickly at them to start moving.

‘What? What is it?’ Hoseok asks at once as Taeh’yeung jolts, looking about confused.

‘It’s Van,’ Namjoon hisses and Hoseok and Taeh’yeung are quick to crouch up and follow after the Kutsoglerin as well.
‘He’s headed our way-‘ Namjoon curses under his breath, looking around the arena for the closest exit. But there were too many Beings and the lighting too bright to successfully hide and getaway.

‘Did he see you?’ Hoseok asks, wanting to look back but not wanting to risk being recognized or noted. He could always change his face but seeing as his tracker knew his whereabouts even when he changed his face made him rethink his actions. If Van Seulgaan was involved in the Gremio Auction, then whatever technology they were using would be accessible to the Tayian.

‘Yes- but there were too many Beings between us at that moment- it’s possible that he didn’t recognize me-,’ Namjoon relies back as best he could as they push through the throngs of Beings. The chances were slim- the Tayian would, without a doubt, recognize Namjoon and Taeh’yung. They needed to get them out of there at once. Or at least hide them somewhere until Yoongi won the rogue-rounds.

‘Guys get out of there now,’ Sk’jin orders at once. ‘At least Namjoon should- he won’t recognize Hoseok but-‘

‘Taeh’yung- blow something up,’ Namjoon turns, addressing the Zhak’gri who blinks slowly in reply for a whole 5 seconds before he breaks out into a bright grin.

‘So you want me to create a diversion?’ Taeh’yung looks surprised and too eager.

‘Go bat-shit crazy,’ Namjoon waves his hand dismissively and Hoseok wants to maybe stop this idea but he doesn’t have a better one up his sleeve and Taeh’yung seems to already know what to do. His eyes glow an ominous green and Hoseok instinctively holds his breath.

‘Wait!! Spaces don’t fucking do anything!!’ Sk’jin screams. ‘He’ll know it’s us indefinitely if you use your abilities- he’s seen them before- he’ll recognize it! We still have to stay in the arena you dimwits!’

Taeh’yung pauses, mouth open in a perfect “o” of surprise.

‘Right- right, that was dumb-‘ Namjoon fidgets, looking around a little desperately for another route of escape, clearly racking his mind for another idea.

‘You can create another kind of diversion,’ Sk’jin says exasperatedly and Taeh’yung makes a sound of realization that really, should be very foreboding but at this point, they really couldn’t afford to be recognized by the Tayian. Taeh’yung then snags a random scarf off of some Being’s head, covers his face, and nods once.

‘Okay! Don’t clench your jaw too much!’ Taeh’yung flexes his hands a bit, causing Namjoon and Hoseok to both glance down at his hands in confusion.

‘Don’t clench my jaw-?’ Namjoon repeats, head tilting a little before Taeh’yung lets out a rather convincing gasp of horror and rather violently pushes Namjoon away into the highly excited crowd.

‘How dare you touch me like that-?!’ Taeh’yung demands in mock horror, shoving Namjoon again, who honestly wasn’t even standing that close to the Zhak’gri. Namjoon gives him a slightly wary confused expression before his eyes widen in realization. Taeh’yung then takes it upon himself to wink at Namjoon and without changing a single expression on his face, socks the Kutsoglerin hard. Namjoon, who Hoseok prays was expecting it, flies backwards, a spray of blood issuing from his mouth? Nose? And he falls over in a heavy heap, taking down a bunch of rowdy drunk Beings with him.
‘Take this Being away!’ Taeh’yung continues to cry out, wringing his hands as though caught in traumatic throws of hysteria. Not that anyone would actually notice seeing as everyone was now throwing punches and yelling loudly. Hoseok dives towards Namjoon’s convincingly unconscious body and heaves him up and discovers that the only reason why Namjoon looked so convincingly unconscious was because he was actually unconscious.

Taeh’yung continues to send everyone into hysteric bouts of rage and soon everyone in the arena is fighting.

Hoseok sends Taeh’yung a grim smile before making his way towards one of the exits. Namjoon is incredibly heavy and Hoseok is already working up a sweat. He’s about to ask Taeh’yung for help in lifting the Kutsoglerin but Taeh’yung is gone.

‘Fucking Spaces, Taeh’yung where are you-!’

Hoseok narrowly dodges an angry drunk Pompen’s fist but unfortunately drops Namjoon on the floor. In his attempt to pick up the Kutsoglerin again, Hoseok is too slow to dodge the random fist thrown his direction and his jaw rattles in his head- more from shock rather than pain.

Quickly shoving off the Being who attacked him, Hoseok grits his teeth and picks up Namjoon and quickly makes his way out, avoiding the raucous crowd as best he could.

‘Hoseok?’

‘What?’ Hoseok barks, dodging another punch but getting shoved into the wall and falling heavily on his side in a way that he knows probably wasn’t good for his ribs. He grimaces at the pain but continues forward. Unfortunately some random idiot really wanted to pick a fight with him so steadying Namjoon on the wall and hoping he would stick there, Hoseok makes quick work of the angry Pompen, his fist meeting the Pompen’s jaw with a sharp and resounding thwack sending him flying back. He returns to Namjoon who was slowly slipping down. This was all fine- peachy.

‘I was just thinking- we need more information.’

‘You think?’ Hoseok pants as he finally gets out into the main hallway where it’s thankfully less crowded.

‘Yes,’ Sk’jin sniggers. ‘Everything all right?’

‘Fucking peachy,’ Hoseok blows hair out of his face, adjusting Namjoon to his side properly.

‘Great! So I think you should kidnap your stalker and get information off of him- he works for the Auction, he should know why Van is here and how he’s connected. Someone of his status- he must be well known,’ Sk’jin suggests.

‘Oh yea- don’t worry about that,’ Hoseok pants, dragging Namjoon’s dead weight over the entrance lobby that was bustling with eager looking Beings, trying to catch a glimpse of the fight inside. He looks over and yes, his tracker was following him, albeit with some difficulty. Seemed like he got caught in some of the fight as well. Hoseok manages to finally get himself and Namjoon out into the patio outside.

Sighing, Hoseok wonders, really, if it was too late for him to call this entire thing quits.
I’ve been listening to the soundtrack for Planet Earth II and it’s the best. Honestly. Please listen just for ambiance or for when you’re studying it’s literally so motivating yet calming yet enthralling yet soothing I love it.

ALSO HAPPY BIRTHDAY PARK JIMIN SUNSHINE MOCHI BOY

I wanted to be on time to update this fic for his birthday but...yeah, so *coughs* please take this long ass chapter instead.

Also, the idea behind the pageant is inspired by this event that takes place in Texas. It’s something that’s horrendous and honestly appalling. It’s an annual rattlesnake killing FESTIVAL- a fucking festival where they capture and round up nearly thousands of rattlesnake and make sport of killing them in brutal and torturous ways. What’s even more messed up is that they bring children to this festival and have them partake in killing the snakes, even making them paint with rattlesnake blood. I’m not the biggest fan of snakes, like I’m not gonna approach one to pet one, but that doesn’t mean I’m going to go into the wild, purposefully hunt these creatures, and torture them for entertainment. Rattlesnakes are creatures that congregate in families-
they’re sensitive to their family, like they LIVE in families, mothers fathers children-all one nest. They’re also very easily agitated and nervous which is why they rattle their tails- to display their nervousness. It’s not a sign of aggression. So in the festival they take the rattlesnake families and torture them in front of the other snakes- it’s disgusting and it should stop. This is the article about the festival and WARNING the pictures are really graphic so if you’re effected by that, don’t look. Especially if you’re triggered by the sight of snakes.
but if you want to sign petition to stop this festival- which I am imploring all of you to do so, please sign up here!
https://www.rattlesnakeroundups.com/#1
“Breakeven” [noun]: the point at which cost and income are equal and there is neither profit nor loss.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The curvature of the Earth is pale blue only for a fraction of a second before it turns bright gold. He feels himself jolt in his seat, gravity returning to the ship. If he concentrated enough, he would be able to see the Settlement Arc from here. But he doesn’t.

It was difficult saying goodbye. Knowing that it would be a long while before he returned. How much would it change. How much would still remain the way he remembered?

Would he still be able to get his favorite coffee from the small café across the school compound?

Would he still be able to run up the stairs of their house, knowing, out of sheer habit and reinforced behavior, to skip the 6th step because no matter how many times they fixed it, creaked ominously every time you stepped it.

Would the lily ponds around the Arc Square still look fake, and would he always go and pinch their leaves just to make sure they were real?

Would the air outside his favorite spot to relax and smoke on the wind-turbines still smell a lot like cat-piss, laundry detergent, and engine fuel?

Would she still scold him for smoking? Would she still remain the same?

Would their mother still remember him? Or would she forget him too, lost in her sorrow and pain.

He looks away from the view to his right, and instead to his left.

He was already flat out asleep, mouth slightly open, snoring lightly. He wants to roll his eyes and maybe put a small piece of candy or something inside his mouth so that he would sort of choke. Not in the sense of wanting to kill him or cause him harm- of course not. Just for the sake of revenge because that’s what he did to him once.
Needless to say now would be the perfect time for revenge. But he doesn’t.

Instead he rearranges his neck so that he won’t get cramps.

He looks back out again and his breath gets caught in his throat. To his horror, he finds himself choked up- eyes starting to burn. Unsure why, he feels as though this was going to be the last time he would see this view again.

He knows he’s being irrational- that his emotions are getting the best of him. But at the same time he allows himself this small moment and repeats his sister’s words in his mind, taking the warmth of her voice, the joy in her eyes, and the beauty of the sorrow of the moment into his memory. To remember it forever.

‘You’ll see it again.’ He says from the left quietly, as though he’d been awake the entire time. ‘You’ll come back before you know it.’

He doesn’t reply, just nods once.

Would he still be able to count the flowers in their garden?

*\n
It takes a lot to knock Namjoon out.

His head was rock hard seeing as his skull was nearly entirely bionic plates fused together and galvanized with a carbon-based “softening” gel that absorbed any shock his brain (which was still entirely very original and untouched) might suffer from.

But apparently, despite his thin and lanky appearance, Taeh’yung was fucking strong and when Namjoon wakes up, feels like his teeth are loose, a strange throbbing sensation that wouldn’t
constitute as pain (because he knew, quite intimately, every and all sorts of pain) but a weirdly uncomfortable presence on the side of his face. As he regains awareness, Namjoon finds that he’s been seated, a little carelessly if he’s being honest, on the floor, slumped against a very familiar Hangar wall.

He hears voices- one familiar and the other foreign. He realizes his hearing has gone a little shot and fucking Spaces what were Taeh’yung’s bones made of?

Taking a deep breath (not that it was strictly compulsory) and closing his eyes, Namjoon counts to 10. There’s a weirdly congealed feeling that is stuck somewhere in his nasal passage- had something ruptured? Maybe one of the smaller capillaries? Fuck, Taeh’yung was strong.

Footsteps approach him as he reaches 7, but Namjoon doesn’t worry. He knows the quiet light gait, the steady and balanced footfall, with no preference over weight distribution.

Sk’jin always favoured leaning his weight on his right leg, his footfall a little uneven. Namjoon doesn’t even hear Yoongi approaching so he can’t really analyze the Human’s walking style. Taeh'yung was a whirlwind of noise and sound, announcing his arrival before he was even in the general vicinity.

Hoseok is eyeing him carefully when Namjoon looks up.

‘You all right?’

Namjoon rolls his shoulders as though experimenting, flexing his fingers and pulling up his legs from where they were splayed on the floor, clearly having been dumped there. Most likely by the Ngfy’widan before him.

‘I’m good,’ Namjoon replies truthfully as he gets up. There’s no displacement or discomfort so Namjoon knows he’s not broken or unhinged anything. He looks around before asking, ‘How long was I out?’

‘Almost an hour,’ Hoseok replies, leaning back on the newly repaired Hangar Bay door. It’s a different colour and sections of it scarred from where Sk’jin hastily reconstructed the damage inflicted on the main frame. But Namjoon isn’t complaining- the ship was ready for take-off at any time and that was all that mattered. They had restocked, refueled, and made sure that every single aspect of the ship was running smooth. All of the parts they had ordered had been delivered- they were ready to go and Namjoon’s next priority (after making sure no one died or worse get caught) was to get them the fuck out of there as soon as possible.

‘What’s happened since then?’ Namjoon asks, wondering why Hoseok hadn’t made to move at all. Instead looking as though he had something to tell Namjoon.

‘Pa? You’re awake?’

Namjoon’s reaction to his sudden new “title” was involuntary and uncontrollable. He practically recoils, not that he was averse to the new nickname or term of endearment or whatever reason Taeh’yung had in mind. It wasn’t a negative sensation either. But something else entirely he didn’t exactly know how to explain.

Definitely not a kink though. Unlike how Sk’jin framed it.

‘Yes- I’m here.’ Namjoon replies.

‘Hooray! I’m sorry for punching you so hard!’
‘It- uh, it’s inconsequential at the moment,’ Namjoon replies with a shrug before getting back to the point. ‘Where’s Van Seulgaan?’

‘I think it’s fair to say he doesn’t know we’re here.’ Hoseok replies. ‘He hasn’t raised the alarm and we haven’t been followed.’

‘You had a tracker on you though,’ Namjoon frowns. ‘Related or not- he could trigger an alarm.’

‘I do. Well- did,’ Hoseok replies with a small grin before turning serious. ‘Sk’jin did some research- Van has a few fighters involved in the Gremio Arena as well as in the Pageant. As far as we know, he’s come alone. He’s been given top-class security as well as his own private quarters back in the mansions. I’m guessing he’s a benefactor or patron of sorts.’

Namjoon nods, indicating his understanding.


‘We’re safe pa,’ Taeh’yung’s voice suggests he’s grinning and Namjoon can almost see his face, beaming brightly, fingers raised to form “v”.

‘OrTank?’

‘Asleep!’

‘Okay- right.’ Namjoon then nods at Hoseok who has an politely expectant look on his face, as though waiting for Namjoon to recover or finish his niceties, ‘What is it?’

‘I went through the source I sent you earlier today,’ Hoseok begins at once. ‘I was reading into the information collected on Pompa. It was a thought I had, but I didn’t want to bring it up without having actual proof or at least, a decent enough argument to support my theory.’

‘About Seulgaan?’ Namjoon asks sharply.

Hoseok nods before continuing, ‘You’ve heard about how the previous Head of the Infiltration Division was terminated when it was revealed he was directly involved with the Gaia Case?’

Namjoon nods in recollection. That had been Hoseok’s former Division in the Venture Unit before he quit the organization as a whole.

‘The new Head Division is S’ava Hhlai- who was moved from his previous position as Head of the Liaisons and Parley Division,’ Hoseok looks at Namjoon, as though checking to see if he understood his implication. And Namjoon does and almost wishes he hadn’t.

‘You think S’ava Hhlai is involved with this?’ Namjoon asks tersely.

‘For an organization this large and complex, and so completely hidden, you need at least, a few Beings in positions that high up,’ Hoseok tells him blankly. ‘Based on the information collected on Pompa and everything else related to the Pageant, and the fact that organizations like the Cogs and the Pageant are directly under the Liaisons Division- I think it’s safe to bet that S’ava is a benefactor of the Pageant, even if he’s not directly connected or involved with the Alliance.’

‘It would explain how and why Van so easily escaped capture in Grezma,’ Namjoon ruminates.

‘That’s what we thought too,’ Sk’jin joins in. ‘Which also means that someone from the Yisheng Directory is involved. All Beings taken by the Yishengs are under their direct authority. Van was
‘There were 6 of them,’ Namjoon muses out, remembering the Central Bridge room and the Beings gathered in there.

‘Only four are left though!’ Taeh’yung pipes in unexpectedly.

‘What? How do you know?’ Namjoon presses.

‘I killed one of them?’ Taeh’yung replies like it’s obvious. ‘During that huge fight - and the other was like, trampled to death when they were trying to escape! It was terrible!’ he adds with a laugh.

Hoseok grimaces at him at that.

‘Well… in that case, yes 4 of them,’ Namjoon says before saying quietly to Hoseok, ‘Taeh’yung will really have to stay hidden - the others from the Alliance - or at least Van or someone from that room, might want revenge.’

Hoseok nods in grim agreement before continuing, ‘It’s not just that- S’ava was here less than a year ago.’

When Namjoon had received the files from Hoseok’s “sources”, he hadn’t checked further beyond files directly relating to the Pageant and the history behind Pompa and her arenas. The data had been heavily encrypted with a code Namjoon knew was designed and maintained by the agents of the Venture Unit.

‘And he wasn’t alone.’

Namjoon frowns at that.

‘Who was he here with.’

‘Chief Shn’ow, Head of the Trade Department,’ Hoseok grimaces. ‘And member of the special jury.’

Namjoon could balk at the sheer implication of this information- and in relation, how that information could potentially harm them.

‘Are you sure?’ Namjoon asks sharply.

‘100% sure,’ Hoseok replies, not at all offended by Namjoon’s questioning. ‘The data collected and saved by agents are kept as sources in planets- to help each other out,’ Hoseok explains. ‘We all work for the Venture Unit, but we know they won’t hesitate to drop us if it serves their purpose better. So we sort of create a safety net for each other- to save us from the system we’re working for.’

‘And S’ava and Shn’ow’s arrival was listed in the data?’

‘It was- they stayed for a week.’

‘So the Isbahaysiga Alliance continues to exist and the Pageant is most likely its commercial link with the Venture Unit,’ Sk’jin summarizes before he adds a: ‘Smart.’

‘So if we’re not careful,’ Hoseok shrugs, not having to complete his sentence.

And Namjoon knows.
If they weren’t careful, and if Van Seulgaan saw them, reported them back to S’ava, who would then report it to Shn’ow; then they would have the entirety of the Venture Unit, GIU, and GLA forces after them. Also, they could stand to lose the OrTank once Van Seulgaan catches wind of it.

‘If the Yishengs are involved in this- do you think it could be Amme?’ Namjoon asks. ‘Do you think Lal Haenoon and the others know about this?’

‘It’s possible,’ Yoongi says quietly. ‘It is also highly unlikely.’

‘Not a lot of high-ranking Yishengs exist anymore,’ Hoseok says thoughtfully. ‘Not to mention, they’ve lost the respect they once had with the higher working circles of the organizations.’

‘Still doesn’t stop them from being incredibly powerful,’ Sk’jin puts in. ‘Losing respect won’t stop you from still being the most powerful Being in the room. If they can’t command respect, the Yishengs could always use fear- they’ve already proven that they’re not hesitant in manipulating their status and positions for power; what would stop them now?’

‘Because they’re not all like that,’ Taeh’yung chimes in unexpectedly and says gently, ‘You saw it.’

It’s silent from Sk’jin’s part after that.

‘So it’s safe to say the Venture Unit definitely knows about this, but still allow it to happen?’ Namjoon asks.

‘It probably still exists because of the Venture Unit,’ Hoseok scoffs. ‘It’s not like a lot of these things are secret- the Venture Unit is quite open with their dealings. It’s what we’re known for.’

‘Does that mean you were involved in stuff like this when you were in the Venture Unit?’ Taeh’yung asks, voice a little awed.

Hoseok has a strangely haunted expression on his face for a fraction of a second before his expression goes back to nonchalance and he shrugs saying, ‘We all were. In the end.’

‘Well- one way to make sure,’ Sk’jin comments before Namjoon can say anything, tone even. ‘Hoseok?’

‘Right- so, remember my tracker?’ Hoseok questions.

‘Yes?’

‘He’s in the Lobby.’

‘What?’

Hoseok starts to move towards the door leading to the aforementioned Lobby. Namjoon quickly catches up.

‘How did you catch him?’ Namjoon asks as they step out and sure enough, there sat a Pompen, tied up with just a single rope on the Lobby couch. Closer inspection shows that he’s not exactly sitting- he appeared to be suspended, only an inch from the couch, at a very strained angle, from the vent above.

‘Hm? We’re practically best-friends,’ Hoseok shrugs one shoulder as he waves at the Pompen. ‘I invited him in.’

The Pompen spits angrily at that, wincing as the cut on his lip widens.
Hoseok has used only a single length of mechanical rope but it’s to great effect. It must be something agents knew how to do because despite being looped only once around the Being’s torso, it cleverly twists around the Pompen’s wrists, elbows, neck, crisscrossing behind on his back and looping under his upper-thighs in what should be a nearly painful strained angle at his crotch.

‘I told Hoseok to interrogate him- we need inside information.’ Sk’jin explains.

‘I think we all know why you’re here,’ Hoseok begins simply, his stance doesn’t indicate any threat or aggression, neither was he playing with the Pompen or trying to taunt him. He was simply speaking in a business-like manner. ‘Answer our questions. And we’ll negotiate your release.’

‘This is bullshit-‘

‘I have no issue killing you now and getting another one of you in here,’ Hoseok interrupts coolly.

‘First question: who are the Beings controlling both the Pageant and the Auctions?’

‘I’m not answering you-‘

Hoseok doesn’t even approach the Being- he doesn’t inflict any of the usual interrogation tactics Namjoon has witnessed (and suffered) before. Instead he tilts his head to the side, expression hidden from Namjoon.

The Pompen’s eyes are locked into Hoseok’s, unblinking and strained. His jaw tensing and veins popping on the side of his forehead. With some difficulty, his breath coming out in forced exhales, the Pompen grits out: ‘-what-…what did you- do?’

‘Your name is S’gui Tllo, 93 sols by GLA Standard, and currently unemployed,’ Hoseok lists.

‘You were born in Métrico-11 out of wedlock between a Pompen and a Pompain. Which is why you cannot find employment, and also the reason why you are currently “working” for the Auction, is this correct?’

Namjoon is stuck between wanting to ask Hoseok how he knew this, and also asking why the Pompen/Pompain was slowly turning purple for no apparent reason. The rope around his throat wasn’t tight and it wasn’t digging on his trachea either.

‘I also have reason to believe that mixed Pompen are not regarded highly; and I think it’s safe to believe that though you volunteered to work with the Auction, you also have something being held against you. False charges? Accusations? Have you been framed for the wrong doings of some Pompen and they’ve baited you with the promise of removing all charges from your background?’

Hoseok hasn’t moved, hasn’t changed his posture from the casual stance. The Pompen sends a pleading look at Namjoon, desperate and tear-filled as his eyes start to bulge a little, his skin blotching.

‘Don’t say anything. Let Hoseok finish.’ Sk’jin warns quietly in his ear. ‘He knows what he’s doing. And he won’t actually die- it’s just a simple drug used by agents for interrogation in most prisons.’

‘But it couldn’t just be that? That’s too easy; too simple,’ Hoseok continues. ‘You have family don’t you? You were one of the luckier ones I’m guessing. For a while at least. Your hair is more red than the others descended from the Pompain. But unfortunately, your sister took on more of your father’s genes.’

The Pompen/Pompain’s eyes close, spit dribbling down the side of his mouth uncontrollably.

‘Did they say she would be freed after the Pageant was over?’
It’s a while before S’gui Tllo nods.

‘Like I said- I won’t hesitate killing you,’ Hoseok repeats. ‘Your life and existence don’t matter to me. However it matters to your sister. So are you ready to talk?’

A few seconds later, there’s another nod.

‘Thank you,’ Hoseok says as he finally moves, holding up a sealed compressor-syringe. Applying it to the exposed skin on the Pompen/Pompain’s arm, the effect is instantaneous. He’s retching as he coughs, finally able to breathe normally.

Hoseok steps back, waiting for S’gui Tllo to recover a bit more.

‘Who are the Beings controlling the Pageant and the Auction?’ Hoseok repeats.

‘I don’t know everything,’ S’gui Tllo coughs out at once. ‘We’re just- we’re just pawns, being used for this event. I don’t know who outside of Pompa are involved- and the ones here- I’m not sure either.’

‘Tell us what you know,’ Hoseok sits down and Namjoon follows suit.

S’gui Tllo continues to float at an awkward angle, but his head is no longer angled to strain upwards to talk to them. He wasn’t comfortable, but one of the annoying strains on his body was removed.

Gradual and systematic “rewards” while letting your captive still know who was in power; straight out of basic agent training.

‘F-from what I know,’ S’gui Tllo begins. ‘Nearly all the Ministers of all the districts are involved- at least from the Nationalist party.’

‘There’s an opposing government party?’ Namjoon asks curiously. He hadn’t heard about opposing government factions in Pompa. Pompa was run by Nationalists who clung to their old cultures and beliefs, implicating them into the policies and laws while still somehow maintaining a decent relationship with the GLA.

‘There aren’t- officially. But in order to live under the GLA policy, there’s a neutral party- mainly consisting of GLA authorities who are involved in the government in each of the districts,’ S’gui Tllo explains, his voice still strained and weak.

Before Namjoon can even begin to search for a screen, Hoseok hands him one at once.

‘Are the ministers here?’ Hoseok asks.

‘Not all,’ S’gui Tllo replies thickly, swallowing with difficulty. ‘9 of them are. The others are in their own districts. But-‘

He stops, looking like he wasn’t sure if he should continue or not.

‘What is it?’ Hoseok asks, tone still neutral.

‘You’re…one of your items was taken up for the auctions, and I understand that you’d be angry- I’ve seen all sorts of reactions; it’s not just the Pageant that starts off this sort of arena you know? The government here does things like this frequently; it’s just never been this big before,’ S’gui Tllo says slowly. ‘If you’re…you’re trying to get revenge or something- it won’t work. It can’t.’
‘What do you mean?’ Namjoon asks, looking up from the screen from his search.

‘They have connections- within the GLA, pirates, others,’ S’gui Tllo tells them quietly. ‘A lot of cases have taken place- where the Ministers will get killed, or assassinated- or will go missing. But they’re always replaced. It’s not the Beings here that controls this entire situation- they’re replaceable. If one falls, two will take over. It won’t stop. It’s why we’ve given up. Every time we try to stop it, every time we try to put an end to it, we’re crushed at once.’

Namjoon feels incredibly bad for these Beings- stuck in a vile situation that exists only for you and your kind, while the others around you have adapted your pain and suffering into a culture that is celebrated, where profit is made from the your torture.

But Namjoon has also seen this before. So many planets, countries and regions within planets- even entire systems. The root of the problem ran so deep that there was no real method of finding the main cause and destroying it. It was just left to continue to grow. Allowed to exist.

‘There was a Being in the Auction,’ Hoseok’s voice hasn’t changed- still neutral, his expression as impassive as before, showing no emotion or change from what he’s heard. ‘From Raksane Tayi. He’s a high-ranking officer in the GLA, by the name of Van Seulgaan. What do you know of him?’

S’gui Tllo frowns a little, expression of disgust.

‘He’s one of the slavers- he buys fighters from the ministers, and sells some to them too. Is he really a high-ranking officer from the GLA?’ he looks stunned and appalled.

‘Have you seen him here before?’ Hoseok asks just as Namjoon’s search completes and the complete list of Beings who were involved the Pompen neutral-party unfolds in front of him.

A total of 43 Beings- and at the very top of the list was Van Seulgaan’s name.

‘He’s the Deputy Minister of the neutral-party.’

‘Wait- who’s the Minister then?’ Hoseok asks with a frown, glancing at the screen in Namjoon’s hands.

‘There’s never been one,’ S’gui Tllo shrugs with difficulty. ‘At least we’ve never known one. There’s only ever been a Deputy.’

‘If that isn’t suspicious as fuck.’ Sk’jin chimes in. 'My unit is on Shn’ow.'

‘S’gui Tllo, have you heard of the Isbahaysiga Alliance?’ Namjoon asks, ignoring the fleeting glance thrown at him from Hoseok.

S’gui Tllo’s expression darkens, spitting out again before he asks, ‘Who hasn’t?’

‘Your race weren’t exterminated were they? They were sold to the Alliance,’ Namjoon says quietly.

S’gui Tllo nods, looking down, anger emanating from his tied up form.

‘Well- that ties everything in quite well. Full offence but the Pompen are fucked up.’ Sk’jin scoffs.

‘They come here every year- choosing amongst us- those who are taken never return,’ S’gui Tllo growls out. ‘They’re here now- their ship is stationed outside; broadcasting the arena-event to all
the sick fucks who couldn’t be here to watch first-hand.’

‘Van’s ship is here? It can’t be the slaver-ship can it? That’s too obvious and blatant.’ Sk’jin ruminates.

‘What about the deal with the arena- will they really let you go if you win the rogue-rounds?’ Hoseok asks.

‘If you win, then yes,’ S’gui Tllo replies. ‘But they normally lose- I have personally never seen anyone win- a non-contestant never wins in rogue-rounds. I’m sorry- but your friend will probably die tonight and you will lose your item.’ S’gui Tllo pauses for a moment before he says, ‘You’re not a trade-ship. You’re agents- but, you’re also in hiding. If you weren’t- then you could always get Van or the other GLA officers here to help you. I’ve seen that happen before too.’

Hoseok stills entirely.

‘Your item- it’s…it’s caused a lot of excitement. They’ve tried to open it; but they couldn’t,’ S’gui Tllo continues. ‘Normally the contestants from the Ransoms are slotted to fight first- they’re not entertaining you see. Too easy to defeat; but…your friend has been pushed back. Much further down the timeline.’ S’gui Tllo looks unsure before he blurts out, ‘I think they’re trying to delay your stay here. I don’t know why- but…but I think they want the OrTank. Or they’re trying to get higher bidders for the OrTank- the Pompen are known for their greed. It’s possible they’ve put him for auction beyond the one here- over on the underverse channels with the Alliance.’

It’s completely quiet; both inside the ship and over the line.

Hoseok grimaces a little before he makes to stand. The look of apprehension is back in S’gui Tllo’s eyes as Hoseok approaches him. But with a simply tug, the rope binding him comes undone and he falls onto the couch, limbs finally free. He’s shaking a little, uncertainty and anxiety apparent in his movement.

‘You understand that you’re not allowed to tell anyone about our conversation here, correct?’ Hoseok asks.

S’gui Tllo nods fervently in reply, ‘I won’t- I swear, I won’t.’

‘All right.’

It happens almost too quickly and Namjoon barely has time to register Hoseok’s movements. Hoseok reaches for his TeorSer and raises it up, is set to fire mode, finger on the trigger.

‘Hoseok-!’

Namjoon reaches over, pulling away Hoseok’s arm just in time for the shot to just graze over the Pompen’s scalp, singing his hair.

‘What the-!’ Hoseok looks livid. ‘He’s a liability! We can’t let him go- and we can’t stay here to watch him either. They’ll notice he’s missing and track him back to us-‘

S’gui Tllo is screaming in pain, doubled over, clutching at his head in clear agony.

‘We can’t just kill him- Hoseok, this is not one of your missions-‘

‘No it’s not!’ Hoseok ignores the pained cries of the Pompen as though he doesn’t hear it. ‘This is our mission- this could expose us- much more than just to the special-jury- just- fuck, Namjoon-
‘The auction is already interested in us, they want us to stay longer, until they can figure out the OrTank,’ Hoseok hisses. ‘Van Seulgaan is here as well- and right now literally nothing can get us out of here, except for ourselves and that too only if we’re extremely careful! If Van catches wind of us, or if the auction somehow informs him of the OrTank- we’re fucked. The only thing keeping us alive is this fucked up planet and its people’s greed. And this-’

He points down at S’gui Tllo who has passed out from his pain, his inky blood staining the Lobby couch.

‘He’s desperate- we owe him nothing. Him helping us will do nothing for him. The fact that we’ve taken him in has already signed off the death certificates over his own head and his sister’s head!’ Hoseok continues without pause. ‘The only thing that could save him and his sister is telling the closest authority figure in the auction about what’s happened to him. He knows this- if we let him go free, then he’s definitely going to expose us!’

‘I know what you mean- I understand the decision you think we need to make,’ Namjoon tries to interject but Hoseok isn’t done.

‘Do you!?’

‘I do!’ Namjoon spits back out. ‘But this isn’t-’

‘No,’ Hoseok replies firmly. ‘There are not “buts” and “ifs” in this- we all made the choice of following through this mission. And that’s what I am doing right now. For this mission to be successful, we need to understand that we’re not going to able to do this without blood-shed. Do you think Yoongi wants to fight? You think he doesn’t know that he’s fighting other Beings, with their own agendas, their lives, their family’s lives, even their planets lives on the balance?’

Namjoon doesn’t have a reply- he has nothing to say. Because Hoseok is right.

‘Do it outside,’ Namjoon finally gets out. ‘Take him outside and do it there. Not in here. Not in my ship.’

‘It’s not your ship-’ Hoseok begins.

‘I don’t fucking care Hoseok!’ Namjoon yells as he steps away. ‘Take it outside!’

* *

Namjoon washes his face, taking deep breaths. There’s no swelling, no bruising. Just some slight dents that would even out later. You couldn’t bruise if the capillaries under your skin didn’t break and swell, causing slow asphyxiation over the cells there. You just couldn’t bruise or swell if you didn’t even have capillaries in the first place. He presses over the tissue around his jaw. Shifting the layers under his skin to rearrange them properly. He turns his face around, pushing until he felt it looked nearly back to normal.

Stepping out of the en-suite, Namjoon immediately reaches for the thin oblong box over his bed.
He takes out the red, blue, as well as white lined with purple pill.

‘What are those for?’

Namjoon doesn’t need to turn to know what Hoseok is referring to.

The past few days of working around the ship, going in and out of places and rooms, conditioned Namjoon into forgetting to close his door. Also, at this point, he no longer really cared much for secrecy or privacy.

‘Medicine- life-support,’ Namjoon shrugs, placing the box on his desk before dry swallowing the pills.

‘What do they do?’

‘Stabilize my body’s pH balance, makes sure my “circuits” are working just fine, makes sure the rest of my remaining biological functions are still operational,’ Namjoon lists off as he digs for a new shirt to wear. ‘Just things to make sure I’m in my optimal health.’

‘Do you have to take them every day?’

‘Not all of them.’ Namjoon replies as he removes his shirt and wears a new one.

‘What if you forget?’

‘Do you forget to breathe?’

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘Do you forget to breathe?’ Namjoon asks, finally turning around.

Hoseok is already carrying a bag, his jacket changed out for another one.

‘No.’

‘That’s my answer to your question.’

They step out of the Užkulisai, the sound of the sea rushing up to the shore greets them. It’s almost tranquil and peaceful- and it would be if the knowledge of what was happening, of what happened, and what would happen wasn’t so staggering.

Namjoon doesn’t find any evidence to suggest what happened to S’gui Tllo and he’d rather not ask. The sea was a convenient enough place to get rid of a body.

Hoseok doesn’t offer any answer, and doesn’t bother telling Namjoon what happened either.

‘Can someone please bring food, I swear on my ass if I don’t get any food I’m going to fucking eat Yoongi.’

‘I don’t think Yoongi would taste good? Not enough fat.’

‘Taeh’yung honey, no. That was just a joke- I wouldn’t eat Yoongi.’

‘Ah, okay.’

‘Because you’re right- not enough fat.’
‘Theoretically who would you eat?’

‘Why is this conversation taking place?’ Yoongi asks quietly.

‘Well- Namjoon is out of the list- sorry hon.’ Sk’jin replies with genuine seriousness, as though actually contemplating the entire situation. ‘Not Hoseok either- he’s all lean muscle. He’d be a bit dry.’

Hoseok looks like he doesn’t know if he should be relieved or insulted.

‘Tae, I love you with all my heart, but I don’t know where you’ve been, and what you’ve been doing, and I like to know all of these before it goes into my mouth- to an extent.’ Sk’jin declares. ‘In the end, I’d eat myself, because I think I have the perfect balance of fatty muscles.’

Hoseok grimaces uncomfortably, shaking his head quietly.

‘I’m still learning.’

Hoseok looks unsure how to reply, glancing over at him with a questioning look, clearly still caught up with the whole “he’s be a bit dry” statement.

‘I’m still learning about working in the field- not to the extent of how you or Yoongi or even Sk’jin have done so far,’ Namjoon clarifies. ‘There are beliefs I have; either influenced or created by myself, about how the universe around me should and shouldn’t be. My view is based on what I saw, what I read, what I was able to live through the screens of my office. The ideas and logic I live by are reflected off of digital space- on electrical code, systems, and networks I know I can control. And that’s what I like. What I am good at.’

‘I understand that,’ Hoseok says slowly.

‘So I am still learning- the universe beyond the one I know. It’s not one I’m fond of. The heat, the realness, the instantaneous spontaneity of tens of hundreds of other Beings around me. They’re all things I would rather ignore, rather stay away from,’ Namjoon snorts. ‘You’d think it was something that wouldn’t or shouldn’t faze me; but that’s just how it is.’

They stop in front of the parked Hover-7 by a crop of sea-worn rocks.

Hoseok had been right. And Namjoon knew that. He wished he wasn’t right.

‘So I’m learning that now. I need to learn- if I want to lead our team, to complete this mission. I need to know. So next time there’s a situation like that- and if I argue, just tell me I’m being an idiot.’ Namjoon half-grins.

‘Namjoon-’

‘No- you were right.’ Namjoon says as Hoseok looks somehow conflicted. ‘We couldn’t risk it. We couldn’t risk him- I wasn’t thinking for the mission.’

Namjoon had felt terrible for S’gui Tllo. His situation, the life he lead, the burdens he carried, and the weight of the responsibility he had for his sister. It all felt too much. But Namjoon also knew, that they couldn’t risk the mission. They couldn’t risk being caught, couldn’t risk losing when they’ve come this far, this deep.

Hoseok remains quiet for a while before nodding. Namjoon wonders if he imagined the slight shake in the Ngfy’widan’s hands.
‘Come on- let’s go get Sk’jin his food. I don’t trust him or Taeh’yung with anyone or anything.’

Red is all he sees.

*For hours. Days. Weeks. Years. For a hundred lifetimes.*

Red stains the surface of his skin. Red stains the vision of his eyes. Even when he’s given a reprieve. A rest. Or even when his eyes close without his knowing, everything is red.

Red is pain.

Red is death.

Red is horror.

Red is the colour of his tears, burning his red skin, as red fire is applied, in a room full of red objects.

Red is sharp.

Red is cruel.

Red is shrill.

Red is the colour of his bones, exposed in the red air, as red metal replaces it, in a bed covered in red sheets.

Red is final.
Red is death.

Red is the promise of hopelessness.

The waiting room was supposed to be a neat sizeable room with comfortable chairs, full length mirrors, even a shower, and a table with refreshments (long depleted), and a large entertainment screen that couldn’t be switched off and only played the live Pageant fights above-ground. It smells slightly moldy and some attempt was made in covering up the smell by planting excessive amounts of potpourri around the room in precariously placed crystal bowls. When Namjoon was previously here, it had still been somewhat neat and orderly, but now it’s changed entirely. Not just in terms of furniture placement but also in number of Beings inside the room.

Namjoon finds that the entirety of the Obere clan are there, and the large fluffy N’nukwu is also there, dozing with its head on Taeh’yung’s lap. The Zhak’gri is chatting animatedly with the Obere in their own language before he notices them. Jumping up, Taeh’yung dives at Namjoon, nearly in tears, apologizing for hitting him.

‘I’m so sorry pa!’ he wails, eyes sparkling with unshed tears.

‘It’s all right,’ Namjoon replies, trying his best to gently break out of Taeh’yung strong hold. Honestly, how strong was this kid? Namjoon stops himself there; Taeh’yung was most likely older than himself—possibly older than all of them with the exception of Sk’jin.

Speaking of Sk’jin, he’s lounging rather majestically on a day-bed of sorts, greeting them with a regal wave of his hand, looking effortlessly handsome. Hoseok is handing him his food and all appearances of looking elegant and regal is gone in a flash.

But what is most surprising is Yoongi. More accurately: Yoongi’s hair.

Yoongi’s hair is a neon pastel blue.

It’s practically fluorescent the way it’s so stark yet somehow soft. Namjoon doesn’t know how to describe it. He’s never paid attention to hair colour before, let alone shades of colour in general. So he finds it quite hard to describe the shade of the Human’s hair.
The Human in question looks as passive as ever, seemingly uncaring about the state of his hair, his clothing (in Sk’jin’s robes, turned inside out and trimmed so that it was gold with red lining), his accessories (Sk’jin’s ridiculous gold circlet), or the state of his face in general (made up with make-up Sk’jin procured from Spaces knows where).

‘He looks great doesn’t he? He’d qualify for the actual Pageant upstairs,’ Sk’jin grins through a mouthful of food.

There’s a high-pitched chorus of agreement and the Obere flock around Yoongi again. The single Obere, who was probably the owner of the N’nukwu, was seated next to the Human, tiny minute hand clutching onto Yoongi’s sleeves, short legs swinging from the settee they shared.

‘What are they doing here?’ Namjoon asks quietly, smiling at the Obere who have to literally lean back to smile up at him. They were cute, in a rather creepy way. Maybe that’s why they were fond of Yoongi and Taeh’yung- both of whom could very well be considered cute but rather creepy.

Birds of a feather- or something like that.

‘They came here to wish Yoongi luck- and to thank him again,’ Sk’jin explains, waving Namjoon over to sit down. ‘We need to talk,’ Namjoon says as he sits on the floor, leaning back on the day-bed.

Yoongi must have heard him (how, Namjoon doesn’t know, what with the Obere’s high-pitched voices, the Pageant on the screen, Taeh’yung’s loud and deep voice, and Hoseok’s laughter as Taeh’yung tells him something) because he quietly leans down to the Obere next to him and says something.

Within a minute the Obere have packed up, and with a final shrilly cry, and a loud bark from the N’nukwu, they leave.

‘Well, that solves that,’ Sk’jin says with an amused grin before biting into a pastry like baked-item. ‘Considering the fact that we’re royally fucked, what’s our next step?’

‘I asked Sehr about the rogue-arenas,’ Taeh’yung pipes us as he settles down on the floor, cushioning Namjoon’s thigh under his head. Namjoon can only imagine that Sehr was one of the Obere. ‘No one whose stuff got taken has ever won. They’re all lost.’

Namjoon grimaces down at Taeh’yung.

‘How do they know?’

‘I think they kidnapped someone too; got information out of them,’ Taeh’yung replies with an uncomfortable expression on his face, wiggling a little. He sits up and scooting across on the floor on his butt, goes and pillows Hoseok’s thighs instead. ‘Ah! Much better!’

‘I’ll win them all.’

Every head in the room turns to look at Yoongi.

His expression is as neutral as ever, as though he was talking about some inconsequential topic like the weather from that morning.

‘It’s not that I don’t believe in you,’ Namjoon begins. ‘There are a lot of variables to this- these fights are designed so that the Beings trying to fight back their items all lose- and in our case it’s
even more so.’

‘I will win. I won’t lose.’ Yoongi repeats.

‘We’ll leave the fighting to Yoongi,’ Sk’jin speaks before anyone else can say anything. ‘Right now we need to plan what to do next.’

‘First we need to make sure we’re not spotted or seen,’ Hoseok says at once. ‘Secrecy is key here-Van cannot know we’re here. He’s never seen me, Yoongi, or Sk’jin before. But we can’t be 100% sure on that. If S’ava Hhlai is involved in this and Van is working for him; then it’s possible that he knows who we are- and what we carry. If he sees us, he’ll know at once. We need to make sure Yoongi is unrecognizable or Van is at least, unable to watch his fights.’

‘It’s not just Van too- there are other Ministers involved- we can’t rule them out. If all of this is connected, we need to make sure that they’re all compromised,’ Namjoon adds. ‘Also let’s not forget this entire thing is being broadcasted through the underverse as well.’

‘Can’t you stop that pa?’ Taeh’yung asks, turning on Hoseok’s thigh to look at Namjoon with wide eyes.

‘I could- but I don’t know where the distribution source is located- it’s safe to assume it won’t be here,’ Namjoon replies.

‘Van’s ship is here isn’t it? Or well, nearby,’ Sk’jin corrects himself. ‘Based off of what our friend said, I think it’s safe to assume that Van is always here even for the local arenas- so the distributor is surely in his office? Or maybe it’s in-planet? Does it say where the neutral party’s office is located?’

‘It’s in Métrico-01,’ Namjoon replies, remembering the information he pulled up on the GLA’s headquarters here.

‘The main recording system would be down here- but the distribution channel should be on the ship,’ Hoseok ruminates.

‘Why don’t we like blow up the Minister’s offices here, and the ship, distract everyone involved, and Yoongi will win his fight- we grab my baby, and we leave?’ Taeh’yung suggests with a mad twinkle in his eye.

‘Tae honey that’s-‘

‘-a good idea.’

Even Taeh’yung looks at him as though Namjoon was mad.

‘What?’ Sk’jin sits up. ‘That’s not going to stop the arena, or the Pageant-’ Sk’jin begins rationalizing.

‘We’re not trying to stop the arena,’ Namjoon explains. ‘Distract- without punching anyone- get any potential officer or Being who might know about our mission away from this place. They’re doing this out in the open- but I don’t think they’d appreciate everyone in the GLA knowing about their connections and dealings with organizations like the Pageant- their headquarters or offices getting blown up or invaded will distract them from watching.’

Hoseok, who had reacted similarly to Sk’jin, has a look of understanding on his face. He nods slowly in agreement as he grabs his screen, absent mindedly balancing it on Taeh’yung’s head.
'But we all can’t just go and blow up these places,’ Sk’jin argues.

‘We won’t have to go there ourselves,’ Hoseok remarks, ‘If we can sectionalize areas around the offices or headquarters, cut off the power supply or trigger a false alarm, or like Taeh’yung said, blow something up via their computerized systems, then we won’t have to even leave this place.’

‘Van’s ship?’

‘I can do that by myself- or with Hoseok,’ Namjoon replies at once. ‘We can borrow a ship or Transporter up to Van’s ship.’

‘Which is it though?’ Sk’jin asks skeptically.

‘Well it’s not the slaver-ship, but close,’ Hoseok faces his screen towards them, displaying the Pompa Dock log. To the side of the screen, Namjoon sees the tab open for the registered GLA officers on duty in Pompa.

‘Yeah,’ Hoseok snorts, ‘He’s using his official ship. He’s very confident in himself, this one.’

‘But if we block out the video feed- won’t Van be notified? You’ll get caught in the ship,’ Sk’jin argues.

‘Not if I cut the feed at the distributor- Van’s ship will still receive the footage, but it won’t get sent out,’ Namjoon replies.

Sk’jin still doesn’t look happy about their plan.

‘Look I don’t like it either- but we have to,’ Namjoon says as he stands up.

‘Wait- you’re going now?!’ Sk’jin asks incredulously.

‘Yes? I can access the city-systems while getting to Van’s ship- signals might actually be stronger than down here,’ Namjoon replies before looking over at Hoseok, ‘Ready?’

Hoseok is about to stand, gently removing Taeh’yung from his lap with a friendly head-ruffle when Sk’jin speaks up, ‘Wait- Hoseok should stay here- keep an eye out on Van down here. He can follow him around without being noticed.’

‘But Taeh’yung has to stay here-‘

‘I’m coming with you,’ Sk’jin states plainly.

Namjoon can feel 3 pairs of eyes going back and forth between Sk’jin and himself.

‘Right- well, stop eating and let’s go,’ Namjoon nods.

‘I eat when I’m stressed, fucking sue me,’ Sk’jin growls out over a mouthful of pastry but he’s already getting up, brushing off crumbs from the front of his robes. It should look disgusting, but the Khol’isa manages to do even that with elegance.

‘I’ll go check if the coast is clear,’ Hoseok says, ‘Come out when I say so.’

‘Yoongi’s match begins in 90 minutes,’ Taeh’yung says as he occupies Sk’jin’s former day-bed, reclining back with no semblance of grace or elegance. ‘Will you be back by then?’

‘We should be back by then,’ Namjoon estimates. ‘If not- we meet back up in the ship.’
Yoongi nods in understanding before adding with two thumbs-up, ‘Good luck.’

‘Uh- you too,’ Namjoon replies.

Yoongi still doesn’t lower his hands, an expectant look in his face.

Taeh’yung from the day-bed subtly (read: not subtly) gestures a thumbs-up as well, nodding in Yoongi’s direction.

Hesitantly, Namjoon raises his hand into a reluctant thumbs-up and Yoongi finally lowers his hands.

Suddenly Namjoon is gripped with a strange sense of fear as he looks over at the Human. He’s not sure if it’s the new hair colour, the clothes, the make-up; but he looks incredibly slight, fragile almost. He’s seen what Yoongi can do. What he has done. All great feats of extreme physical and mental prowess, exceeding nearly everything Namjoon has witnessed in terms of skill, forethought, speed, and strength.

Yoongi is no longer looking at him, just looking down at the floors with blank interest. And Namjoon is frightened.

For a single moment he’s suddenly lost- unhinged from the reality surrounding this mission. What about this was so important that Yoongi was going to risk doing all of this, knowing for a fact that his survival was low, that losing would bring about a disaster they couldn’t even comprehend- a disaster that was still somewhat theoretical.

‘Right- I’m ready, let’s go,’ Sk’jin butts into his thoughts. He’s changed clothes, to something darker and more practical instead of robes. Closer inspection shows that it’s Yoongi and Taeh’yung’s clothes combined.

‘All clear you two. Take the right and through the normal route- most of the Beings have gathered to the arena to watch the fights.’ Hoseok lines in.

‘Yeah- we’re on it.’
They start to appear before him.

Voiceless, shapeless, formless.

Just—...nowhere, everywhere, somewhere, elsewhere.

He tries to speak to them. He has a voice. He can speak. He can almost touch them.

But they don’t know.

They just don’t know.

But they gather around him. Those who still clung on. Those who were still trapped. Those who still remained.

Sometimes he could see their faces.

On those days he would cry, his heartbreaking as this nightmare continued over and over and over.

And sometimes it was as though they knew. They would come to him, formless and shapeless yet somehow trying to approach him.

Although it was possible he was just wishing for that. He couldn’t tell.

‘Do you remember me?’ he asks all of them every day.

He gets no response.

Sometimes it came back—sometimes surprised as though it had forgotten he was there.

How long has he been here now? He doesn’t remember.

There were some days that felt so extraordinarily still— it was as though he was timeless— and he wanted to give into that endlessness. But he liked to believe they wouldn’t want that. He liked to believe that they wouldn’t want him to go.

‘I can’t go not because I don’t want to— but because I don’t know how to,’ he tells them one day.

He can move. He can be outside the ship, in the forest, in the waterfall, in other destroyed ships— but he could never leave.

He wanders and wanders. Wading through the thick stagnant drag of Time and nightmares— but he would always end up back there again. Back in that broken ship, in that broken room, in the darkness that awoke him. And they’re always there too. Waiting for him.

‘Do you remember me?’ he asks again. ‘Because I don’t.’
‘So what are we doing?’ Sk’jin asks again, yawning.

Namjoon wonders if Sk’jin’s abilities extend past his Khol’isa ones into being a permanent pain in the ass. His ass in specific. Not that Namjoon would mention it. Sk’jin would probably smirk, wink, and then say, ‘if you want me to be the reason of the pain in your ass, then of course,’ and Taeh’yung will burst out laughing, Hoseok will try not to laugh, and Yoongi will (as usual) look like he doesn’t want to be there. It’s strangely quiet out and the sky is a dark hazy techno-coloured mess, holographic advertisements blocking out the view of the stars. The neighbourhood is quiet and dark and littered with parked terrain-transporters all over the main streets. It almost feels wrong to be walking with Sk’jin of all Beings down this seemingly normal street, surrounded by family homes (albeit filthy rich and dubiously associated) on either side.

‘Well first we get a Transporter that can go off-planet,’ Namjoon replies.

‘Where do we get that?’

‘I was hoping you would use your communication abilities to get us one,’ Namjoon replies lightly.

‘Ah!’ Sk’jin smirks at him. ‘Well of course Captain, your wish is my command. Upon whom should I bless my dulcet tones? What worthy fool shall hear temptation-‘

‘The closest Dock is located not too far from here,’ Namjoon interrupts, ‘But I think we’ll stand a good chance of snitching some of the guest’s ships.’

Sk’jin looks around at the rows and rows of Transporters.

‘Well, security is off,’ Sk’jin scratches at his chin in a dramatic manner. ‘And we’re not being tailed I see.’

‘It’s probably the timing,’ Namjoon replies.

‘Or they’re just confident that no matter what we do, they’re going to gain the upper-hand'
anyways.’ Sk’jin shrugs, walking over to one of the Transporters.

‘You don’t like this plan do you?’ Namjoon asks.

‘No. But it’s the only one we have, and I have nothing else to offer. So I’m going to help in any way I can to make sure it succeeds,’ Sk’jin replies before adding as he points at the Transporters, ‘These have pretty good security in these,- I think it’s better to get to the Dock.’

Namjoon nods in agreement and they continue walking.

‘Hoseok didn’t kill that tracker by the way,’ Sk’jin says conversationally.

‘What?’

‘He didn’t kill that Pompen. He just knocked him out and shot him with some sleeping pill or something.’ Sk’jin clarifies.

Namjoon suddenly doesn’t know how to feel about it.

‘They’re doing this because they want to- because this means something to them,’ Sk’jin adds. ‘And as their team-members, as Beings who have agreed to take part in the same mission, we have to respect and accommodate their actions and intentions- whatever it is that they need to do- whatever it is that we need to do in turn.’

Sk’jin jogs forward a little until he’s ahead of Namjoon and begins walking backwards, facing Namjoon.

‘You’re going to fall,’ Namjoon warns.

‘I won’t- I trust you,’ Sk’jin winks before continuing. ‘I saw the way you were looking at Yoongi, and at Hoseok as well. The way you look at Taeh’yung, at me. We’re all doing what we’re doing because we want to. Because of what we believe in, what we know, what we want to know. We’re all doing this within our capabilities- Yoongi knows what he’s doing. He volunteered for a reason. Hoseok knows what he’s doing. His actions are not influenced by what we say or do. And Taeh’yung…’ Sk’jin trails off with a laugh. ‘Taeh’yung is just Taeh’yung.’

‘And you? You still want to know what this is all about?’ Namjoon asks, remembering their conversation in Ch’dra.

Sk’jin smirks at him, cocking his fingers at him as though holding up a TeorSer and says, ‘Bingo. And it seems like all of this is a part of what we’re trying to understand.’

He turns back around, walking in pace with Namjoon.

The walk to the Dock is spent in relative quietness, only interrupted by random updates from Hoseok or Taeh’yung. They’re close to the local Dock, already stuffed with parked Transporters of all kind. There are a few eateries as well, packed with locals or the drivers/pilots of the Transporters belonging to the rich Pompen.

‘Why don’t you go get us something quick to eat,’ Sk’jin gestures towards one of the eateries. ‘I’ll go get us a Transporter.’

Namjoon frowns at that.

‘Trust me- you being there won’t help me,’ Sk’jin snorts. ‘I can’t have you looming behind me
trying to persuade someone into giving me access to their Transporter.’

‘We could just steal-’

‘We don’t want to raise alarms- besides, we need the authorization code and all of that while leaving the skies,’ Sk’jin rolls his eyes at Namjoon as though he was being purposely obtuse. ‘We should invest in a small Transporter- something to use outside for shit situations like this.’

‘I’ll…look into that.’ Namjoon says somewhat lamely.

‘Good boy- I mean, daddy,’ Sk’jin winks at him before skipping off. ‘Get me some food!’

Sighing, Namjoon enters the closest eatery. If they were being followed, it could look as though they simply wanted to go somewhere to eat, or even try and get sponsors outside the venue. This wasn’t strictly legal (there were many laws and regulations within the arena apparently- which was ironic considering the entire thing was illegal through and through), but it was far better for them to act like they were doing this rather than show what they were really up to.

The eatery is stuffed with Pompens and tourists alike. Their attention is riveted on the match- apparently they had reached the semi-finals and everyone was betting units by the thousands like it was nothing. Namjoon doesn’t think even Sk’jin would enjoy the food served in here so he orders some Pompen beverage instead- a lurid orange in colour. It has a clear slightly bland taste that’s rather refreshing. Positioning himself with his back to the empty bar save for the Android server facing the crowd ahead, Namjoon reaches for his screen and casually hacks into Pompen’s city system. It takes a while finding the electricity/energy channels and locating all of the district minister headquarters and offices as well as their private homes or residences. But once he’s in, it’s child’s play. Internally apologizing to their neighbours and in some cases, entire regions, Namjoon starts decoding the pathetically easy firewall and enters the control panel. Choosing a random pattern, Namjoon selects an even number of office to residence and purposefully creates a sudden surge of power through their electric/energy lines in that region. The first "glitch" in the upcoming series of electrical surges.

‘Hoseok- you there?’

‘Here.’

‘Van?’

‘In the arena- he’s watching the match,’ Hoseok replies. ‘I’ve seen a few of the other minister’s here too.’

‘All right good. Sk’jin?’

‘Please don’t break my flow.’ Comes a quick and hissed whisper.

Namjoon looks over to the screens mounted high up on the eatery wall. The fight is nothing short of violent. Except it’s been shot to look aesthetically pleasing. There are over a hundred cameras, focused and trained on individual fighters. They pan, zoom, stretch, the fights- even do dramatic slow-motion during recap, adding effects of strobes and lens flare during the play-backs at break time. The eatery is cheering- clearly divided in the center, one side supporting one fighter each.

An arm curls around his waist and a pair of lips all too close to his ear whispers, ‘Hey, you come around here often?’

Namjoon really wants to punch Sk’jin, because of course it’s the Khol’isa.
‘Got a ship? Let’s go,’ Namjoon knocks back the last of his drink.

‘Wow- won’t buy me a drink? Straight to business?’ Sk’jin is still a bit too close to him.

Sighing, Namjoon swipes a unit-card over the till and leaves, Sk’jin clinging to his arm.

‘You’re never going to be able to pick anyone up with that sort of expression-’ Sk’jin begins berating him the moment they leave the eatery. Sk’jin still hasn’t let go of his arm.

‘I’m not interested in picking up anyone from anywhere,’ Namjoon sighs out, wondering if he could ask Hoseok to partner with him instead of Sk’jin. But Sk’jin did make a strong argument so he gives in.

‘Well- if someone is really interested- or they’re drawn to your dark brooding thing you’ve got going on- you might not have to,’ Sk’jin laughs lightly.

‘Dark and brooding?’ Namjoon finds himself repeating to his horror. Sk’jin looks surprised that out of all he said, Namjoon would pick up on that.

‘Yes? You have that whole tall dark mysterious shit down to an art- it’s great, you should learn to use it to your advantage,’ Sk’jin grins.

‘I’ll consider it.’

Namjoon wonders if he’s slipped into some weird dimension or alternative universe where he’s having a rather amusing and equally footed conversation with Sk’jin. Or maybe something was in his drink. They walk around the Hangar a little, and if Namjoon finds a completely unconscious Pompen posed to appear as though he were asleep or drunk on the floor, leaning on a mechanic’s stool, then he doesn’t mention it.

‘Well, here’s our ride,’ Sk’jin waves an arm casually.

It’s a maintenance-transporter; one designed to go up the highest levels of the stratosphere and even a little beyond that, to maintain the holographic billboards.

‘Perfect disguise I say,’ Sk’jin nods proudly, quite pleased with his catch, eyes flashing red. ‘No one will look twice.’

‘You make it sound so simple,’ Namjoon grumbles, looking over the small sturdy ship before adding, ‘You can fly this?’

Sk’jin snorts.

‘I could fly this in my sleep.’

‘You don’t sleep.’

‘I said what I said.’

The maintenance-transporter carried a maximum of 6 Beings. Or at least it was supposed to. The transporter was clearly designed for the Pompen anatomy and Sk’jin and Namjoon find themselves uncomfortably squashed at the cockpit, their shoulders rubbing and their heads nearly brushing over the ceiling.

‘Cozy,’ Sk’jin comments as he starts up the Transporter and speaks into the communication board, his voice changing, his accent pulling and slurring much like a Pompen: ‘Control, this is MT-09-
332-TB9 headed out for a round. Did I do that right? What else do I say? Do I say “copy”? Copy?
Sk’jin acts as though he’s conversing with someone, adding suppressed giggles and sounding convincingly intoxicated.

‘Gotcha- you guys have fun out there,’ a similarly accented voice replies followed by a snicker.

‘There’s no security check though?’ Namjoon questions.

‘Yeah- but this Pompen was pretty chatty with the rest of his mates,’ Sk’jin replies. ‘Gotta make sure there’s a sort of story to follow up on why he took the ship out. Why not for wild night out in the sky y’know?’

‘I’d rather not know.’

‘Poor innocent baby, I’ll protect you,’ Sk’jin says in a mockingly babying tone.

Namjoon rolls his eyes in response, reaching for his screen again as the Transporter takes off with a mighty rumble of its powerful engines.

‘Makes me realize how quiet our ship is,’ Sk’jin says loudly over the sound of the turbines.

‘Hoseok- what’s the situation?’

‘Everyone’s still in place.’ Hoseok replies at once. ‘You’re up?’

‘Yeah- I’m cutting the power,’ Namjoon replies, looking up to check on the view below. The city beyond the suburban area was sprawling and chaotically lit.

‘3…2…1.’

The effect is instantaneous.

Huge sections suddenly flicker and go off, some areas lighting up again and the others bathe in darkness.

‘Anything?’

‘Nothing yet.’

Sk’jin takes them up steadily, allowing them a wider view of the planet below.

‘Visibility will go down for a bit,’ Sk’jin says over the sound of the engines. ‘We hit the stratosphere and then we’ll be out in the clearing again.’

Namjoon nods in reply.

‘Wait- yeah- I think they got notified; wow, a whole bunch of them just got up and left.’ Hoseok reports back.

‘Van?’

‘Yeah- he’s leaving too.’ Hoseok replies, ‘I’ll follow him out.’

‘Be careful.’ Namjoon, Sk’jin, Yoongi, and Taeh’yung all say at the same time.

There’s a slight stunned silence from Hoseok before he chuckles and says, ‘I hope you all know
I’ve never been captured even once during my time as an agent.’

‘That’s so cool Hobi! I hope you get to experience it once!’

‘Uh-‘

‘Let him be,’ Sk’jin says dismissively, waving a hand.

‘Thank you?’

‘You’re welcome!’

Sk’jin shrugs as though saying, ‘there, see? Handled’.

Namjoon continues to fluctuate the power grid, switching on and off the power, flooding some areas with bursts of power, in some places weakening them to barely there levels. He can see how a little later, efforts were made in trying to stabilize the energy but Namjoon has complete control. He’s concentrating so much he barely registers the fact that the engine noise has completely gone and they were momentarily floating as the gravity function took a while to initiate.

‘All right Captain and Navigator- guide us to the Dock,’ Sk’jin looks over at him expectantly.

The Pompen Dock is like any other regular Dock- only a little smaller seeing as they knew now that most tourists who came to Pompa for one particular reason- and that reason being the sole cause of this entire mess. So the Dock wasn’t used much, and most Beings landed their ships or Transporters in-planet.

Namjoon keys in the coordinates into the small NaviLet planted on the dashboard of the Transporter and they slowly shift, the position of the beamers changing. The purr of the space-engines vibrates the small Transporter and they start moving upwards.

‘How much time left for Yoongi’s match?’ Namjoon asks, just to confirm again.

Sk’jin doesn’t even look down at his screen or at the dashboard when he replies, ’47 minutes.’

‘Do you guys have enough time?’ Hoseok asks.

The Dock looms ahead and above them. Docks felt even larger than they normally did when you were in a Transporter this small. Apprehension washes Namjoon anew and he nods grimly before replying, ‘It’ll do.’
'Are you all right?'

He doesn’t know.

They all approach him from a distance. They stay back. Wary. Unsure.

He can feel the Yisheng’s ability working; knitting open skin, numbing aches and pain, relieving exhaustion. But his hands are still on fire. And it doesn’t purify him.

He once witnessed a sacrificial offering— a live Being walked straight over a board over a great roaring furnace. He could clearly see the way their eyes were glazed— hypnosis or drugs, he’s not sure. He also sees the surgical marks on the side of their throat, removing their vocal chords so that they wouldn’t scream once they hit the flames below.

‘Sir? How do you feel?’

He felt nothing when they jumped into the large drum of fire.

He felt nothing when the drum fell apart in a ceremonial representation of birth, and the Being inside writhed around, looking as though they were dancing in ecstasy.

He felt nothing when their skin got caught on the floor, peeling off.

He felt nothing when the smell of burning flesh wafted around him. He simply watched on, intrigued by the reactions of the others around him.

‘What you did was necessary— what you did had meaning. It wasn’t pointless. You have saved us all.’

They all applauded— almost seemed to envy the Being, but didn’t approach them to replace them. They just watched, and spoke and spoke and spoke. They all look up to the high-priest who doesn’t move, doesn’t say anything.

The officers around him watch him carefully, before looking over at the Yisheng, as though to check if they could approach him or not.

When in the end the Being burnt out, collapsing in a twitching state that he knows was caused more by asphyxiation rather than actually burning, the entirety of the temple breaks out into song. The high-priest raises their hands into the air, leading the song into full volume. A song to guide and lead the noble sacrificial spirit into an afterlife of glory and pleasure.

‘You did well— right now it doesn’t feel like it. But you will see. What you did, what has happened— this will change the Universe.’
The temple empties, and the burnt charred remains of the Being is abandoned. The songs sung about their spirit is sung elsewhere now- somewhere below where they will feast and dance-praising exaltations over the charred bones.

‘What will you do?’ he asks.

‘Nothing,’ the high-priest replied. ‘The birds and rats will come to eat it.’

They don’t have enough time.

By the time they land, move around unnoticed (a difficult feat considering they were both rather tall, and Sk’jin was just generally very eye-catching and was naturally inclined to be the center of attention rather than not), and get to the Bay where Van Seulgaan’s ship was docked, they barely had 20 minutes left before Yoongi’s match would start.

‘We coloured his hair, and I put make-up on him,’ Sk’jin argues next to him. ‘Not to mention the fact that this is a fight. No matter how skilled you are, you’re gonna get hit, Yoongi’s face might get bust and swell up-’

‘-I don’t want to sound like I’m judging you from an ethical platform here but that’s exactly what I’m doing-’

‘-I’m just saying even if we don’t make it in time- there might still be a chance of some kind,’ Sk’jin scowls.

They were standing at the platform crossing over the Bay where Van’s ship was docked. It’s a massive ship, 4 times taller than the Užkulisai and 6 times as wide. They had managed to snag the Dock’s maintenance uniform and so they were properly disguised. But it wasn’t as though they would be allowed to casually enter the ship. There wasn’t a lot of security around the place, but any possible point of entry was being guarded by Beings similar to the slaver-guards they had seen in Grezma. Sure they could take them out, but they didn’t want to get caught.

‘Can’t you just access their core-system by like, I don’t know, throwing in your Comm-Device somewhere close by, latching on to the frequency, or something like that?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘That’s…impossible?’ Namjoon replies, wondering where in Spaces Sk’jin came up with that idea.
‘You need access to the direct source of all the ship’s systems and programs to manipulate it.’

‘Huh,’ Sk’jin raises both eyebrows. ‘He really was something then.’

‘Who?’

‘Hm?’ Sk’jin looks over at him as though realizing they were on a timed mission to get to the central-core station. ‘Nothing- I was just remembering some stuff.’

‘Right well- I think we can sneak under the ship- go up through the water cells,’ Namjoon glances down at the ship. ‘Might be a tight squeeze through the vents.’

‘That’s risky. We could still be seen,’ Sk’jin argues, looking down at the ship with a frown.

‘Well- I can’t hack into the ship’s internal system but I can mess up the Dock’s ParaBots and have them swarm the ship.’ Namjoon holds up the screen displaying the interface for the Dock’s mechanical station functions. Sk’jin gives him a vaguely impressed look.

‘How much time would that give us?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘The Dock will be able to fix the error in a few minutes- we’ll be able to sneak in.’ Namjoon calculates quickly.

‘You seem confident,’ Sk’jin comments before they start making their way down.

‘I’ve done this before,’ Namjoon replies, pulling the hood of the uniform over his head. It was uncomfortable, seeing as the uniform was made for a Being who did not exactly fit his build. Luckily it was long enough. ‘Well- not personally, but for an agent.’

Sk’jin doesn’t press for answers.

The ParaBots suddenly burst out of their alcoves lining up the walls of the Dock. They scuttle over in a massive hoard and begin analyzing and scrutinizing the exterior of the ship.

Standing behind a few of the cargo crates close to the ship, Namjoon and Sk’jin wait until the guards and sufficiently distracted and make a quick walk towards the underbelly of the ship. Finding an opening, Namjoon and Sk’jin squeeze through the water-cells and immediately climb up the plank, pressing their backs onto the narrow scaffolding lining the water-storage hull.

‘And now?’ Sk’jin asks before adding, ’11 minutes left.’

‘*We’re taking Yoongi out now,*’ Hoseok adds, his voice strained with stress. He had followed Van out, seen him take off on his Transporter and headed back in just over 10 minutes ago.

‘We’re getting there,’ Namjoon replies tersely as he accesses BluePrint and the full working outline of the ship lights up on his screen.

‘Right, the central-system core is located below the Bridge- we can get there through the Bot-lines,’ Namjoon quickly shuffles along the scaffolding, as an orange line makes a path from their location on the screen to the room they were headed for. Bot-lines were small ducts that veined most commercial and or cargo-ships so that ParaBots and other smaller bots could enter for maintenance purposes. Though ParaBots were very efficient in their tasks, most ducts were made to fit the average Being inside of it. And by average, definitely not Namjoon or Sk’jin’s size.

‘Lead,’ Sk’jin says simply.
Every passing second feels like a large ax swinging closer and closer to his neck. There’s a bolted down barred blockage in front of the Bot-line which Namjoon easily removes with a quick tug. They both wince at the jarring metallic sound that follows but they don’t linger long. Namjoon hoists himself up with difficulty before waiting for Sk’jin to climb in as well.

‘Small cramped spaces- my favorite,’ Sk’jin grunts.

Namjoon has no time to reply, so instead making sure the screen in his hand was stabilized, starts following the line.

They were both too tall, too broad to be doing things like this. They couldn’t crouch properly- it was more of a prolonged and weirdly angled plank-crawling more than anything. Every few seconds, Namjoon scrapes his head on the jutting metal lips of pipes and tubes and smaller vents bringing in wires. Namjoon ignores Sk’jin’s complaints of pain as they creep through the cramped vents.

‘I hate everything right now- I can’t see anything except for Namjoon’s flat ass,’ Sk’jin hisses.

‘This is not helping!’ Namjoon whispers quietly as they wait for the steam vent ahead to clear.

‘I’ll complain as much as I want!’ Sk’jin snaps back quietly.

‘You guys realize that you don’t have to whisper right?’ Hoseok chimes in, his voice laced with amusement.

‘Are we almost there?’ Sk’jin continues to whisper.

‘Almost- I see the wire frame from here.’ Namjoon replies. It was starting to feel very claustrophobic in here.

‘Wire frame? Don’t we have to go into some room?’ Sk’jin questions sounding suspicious.

‘No- I just need the main wiring system-’ Namjoon manages to get out before Sk’jin lets out a huff of annoyance.

‘So why am I here?’ Sk’jin asks emphatically.

‘I told you I would have gone myself but-’

‘-they really are like two kids aren’t they?’ Hoseok chuckles.

‘It’s cute!’ Taeh’yung adds.

This promptly shuts them both up.

After some more pained crawling/planking, Namjoon and Sk’jin pull themselves over to a thickly coiled nest of wires.

‘The air-ducts are down here,’ Sk’jin comments before adding, ‘6 minutes.’

‘No sign of the ministers coming back,’ Hoseok says quietly. ‘Yoongi?’
‘I’m just outside the arena gates.’

‘Tae?’

‘I’m inside the waiting room- don’t worry! I won’t let anyone see me!’

‘Namjoon?’

‘I’m going in now,’ Namjoon grits out as he quickly rewire one of the mainframe wires into his screen. Most systems will alert the ship for intrusion if you were to do this outside the Bot-line wires. However, seeing as Namjoon wasn’t planning on just separating some wires and checking to see if any were burnt or damaged, but doing a deep-dive into the ship’s system, that was definitely going to trigger the firewalls. So instead Namjoon activates his own personal and customized virus; it allowed him to duplicate the exact same coding used in the ship’s system to enter unnoticed without raising any alarms despite being a rather direct and obvious intrusion.

‘So there’s this wonderful application,’ Sk’jin begins, voice carrying over quietly to where Namjoon is patiently waiting on tenterhooks as his little brand of virus makes its way into Van’s ship’s system. ‘You simply input the name of the dish, the planet of origin, and the list of ingredients comes out. Then you have the option of recreating this dish, with similar ingredients found in your vicinity. Many of the Flotsam and Jetsam have been asked to cooperate with this software, so that travellers who prefer cooking for themselves, or are perhaps craving home-based meals, have a close match to their native ingredients. It’s what I did when I cooked Yoongi food from Earth. Do you think I should that? I should cook him a great meal for his win. Maybe this thing called pizza.’

Namjoon isn’t sure why but he asks, ‘What’s that?’

Sk’jin makes a sound suggesting that he’s extremely pleased with Namjoon’s question. The installation is completed and all the channels open up.

‘It was listed on the Top Ten Most Popular Dishes from Earth, ranked by both Humans and other Beings in a poll conducted by the GLA Universal Culture Report,’ Sk’jin says rather excitedly. ‘The most popular version of this pizza – spelt P, I, Z, Z, A- pizza, is a flat round dough, covered in a sauce made of tomatoes, garlic, salt, and some pepper. A thing called cheese is added on this, and a wide range of assorted vegetables and meats- some of the more popular choices are mushrooms, greens, ham, something called pepperoni. It looks amazing. I want to look for replacement ingredients.’

‘Uh- yeah, we can do that,’ Namjoon replies somewhat absentmindedly as he finally reaches the broadcasting channels under the communications mainframe.

‘Really? How marvelous! Yoongi would appreciate that, right?’

‘Uh- yeah sure.’

‘Joonie? 2 minutes.’

Namjoon doesn’t bother replying to that as the entire networking system finally uploads on his screen. He wishes he had a bigger screen as he scrolls down to find the main distribution channel. It wasn’t as though this was difficult- the time constraint was really stressful and Namjoon could honestly do without that.

He exhales with relief as he disconnects all of the ports, scrambling the signals. No alarm is triggered and the main distribution channel is still sending out signals except it’s all scrambled and
irreversible. Namjoon doesn’t know how long it will take to alert Van about this situation- or if he would be alerted about it. He cushions his head on his arms for a brief second, his muscles strained and his body rushed from intensity of it all.

‘It’s done,’ Namjoon quietly whispers out.

‘Yoongi’s just stepped out into the arena,’ Hoseok says almost at the same time. ‘They’re introducing the fighters and the stakes.’

‘The OrTank?’

‘He’s not shown,’ Hoseok sounds confused, ‘Taeh’yung?’

‘He’s asleep- they haven’t moved him.’

‘What’s wrong?’ Namjoon asks, pushing himself up again, getting ready to leave. How was he going to turn around in this cramped space?

‘It’s just…the item the fighters are battling for is normally placed up on a dais,’ Hoseok mumbles.

‘We know they’re interested in him,’ Namjoon replies, pulling back the wires and coiling them back to their sockets. ‘They probably don’t want to cause more Beings to be interested. Sk’jin let’s go-’

Sk’jin is nowhere to be seen

‘Sk’jin?’

‘Namjoon- crawl up ahead- I…you have to see this.’

‘Sk’jin we should leave-’

‘Namjoon. Now.’ Sk’jin sounds unsure.

‘Are you coming back pa?’

‘Yeah- in a moment- stand by all right? Get ready to leave as soon as possible after Yoongi wins.’ Namjoon grits out as he crawls forward quickly, not liking Sk’jin’s tone of voice. He makes it down the vent and he comes across a cross-section. But he doesn’t have to guess where to look next. To the right, the duct widens out a little, allowing Namjoon to actually crouch on his hands and knees. Sk’jin is at the end, looking through a ventilation turbine that was slowly spinning.

And only now does the smell Sk’jin was talking about before hits Namjoon.

It’s strangely rank- not rotten or fermented; just incredibly old and stale almost.

‘Are you guys almost out? What’s wrong?’ Hoseok asks, by whatever agent-honed senses he was able to pick up on their silence, knowing at one something was awry.

‘We’re- we’re finding another exit out,’ Namjoon doesn’t know why he’s lying.

Sk’jin turns his head, eyes gleaming red in the weird light that filtered through the shifting fins of the turbine. Namjoon quickens his pace until he’s shoulder to shoulder with the Khol’isa. Sk’jin just nods at the gap between the fins and Namjoon peers through.

It’s clearly a laboratory of sorts- sterile white walls, a Medical-Bed just a little to the side, and a
bunch of cabinets. But that wasn’t what was the most alarming, or why Namjoon is reeling in his mind.

‘Guys what’s wrong?’ Hoseok asks.

‘We can’t tell them,’ Sk’jin says at once in a barely audible voice. ‘I don’t know how Yoongi thinks or processes information- but I can guarantee this isn’t going to help him in the arena!’

‘Just a dead end,’ Namjoon replies tersely. ‘Sorry- we got spooked. Is the fight starting?’

‘The final bets are taking place.’

Namjoon takes a deep breath.

The laboratory is filled with OrTanks- not just any regular OrTank, but identical to the one Yoongi was about to fight to death for.

And they were all empty.

‘We need to get out of this planet.’ Namjoon grits through his teeth, crawling backwards quickly. ‘Now. Taeh’yung? Are you there?’

‘What’s wrong pa?’

‘I don’t care what you do- I need you to get to the OrTank, pull him out of there and start heading for the ship,’ Namjoon orders as Sk’jin also crawls back towards him

‘What’s wrong? Why? Pa?’

‘They’ll see us- they’ll know it’s us-‘ Sk’jin argues at once from behind him.

‘I know-‘ Namjoon flattens down as they reach the smaller vents. ‘-and at this point I don’t care- we just need to get out as soon as possible-‘

There’s a distinct clunking sound that resounds through the vents.

Namjoon stops immediately. Turning around to look at Sk’jin as though to confirm what he heard, he finds that the Khol’isa is frozen, eyes wide, looking tense.

‘Was that-?’

Something metallic; a canister of sorts, falls through vent on the other side of the cross-section in the vents. And almost immediately a white smoke starts to fill the vent.

‘They know we’re here-!’ Sk’jin hisses, shooting forward. ‘Hurry and get out-!’

‘Namjoon?! Sk’jin-?!’

Not caring about the wires or that they were definitely making a lot of noise, Namjoon scuttles forward but he knows that it’s too late. He doesn’t need to breathe for an extended period of time but Sk’jin is a different story. His pace behind him has slowed down dramatically in the past 5 seconds and the white smoke around them thickens even more. Sk’jin’s eyes gleam faintly in the weirdly viscous white smoke before blinking shut and he collapses.

‘Hoseok get ready to leave- Taeh’yung-!’ there’s a pop in his ear and Namjoon knows they’re doomed now.
Cursing, Namjoon reaches over to pull Sk’jin but at that moment the entire duct shudders. Freezing his movement, Namjoon manages to catch hold of Sk’jin’s hand and grips hard.

The duct thunders again and this time wires around him snap, catching at his skin. Moving without realizing what he was doing, Namjoon rushes backwards towards Sk’jin, shielding the unconscious Khol’isa.

There’s an ominous grating metallic shriek and suddenly Namjoon is falling and bright light surrounds him.

The horrible stench of something foul and rank overwhelms him as he opens his eyes properly, trying to shake off his disorientation. He finds himself on the floor of the laboratory, surrounded by even more OrTanks.

‘Perfect,’ a voice says just as a booted leg comes into Namjoon’s view.

‘Tell Seulgaan we got them.’

There’s a sharp blinding pain that blossoms on the back of Namjoon’s head and right before he loses consciousness, Namjoon thinks: not again.
(Author’s Notes)

Guess who actually made it in time with the update?? Yes me. I don’t know why, and I’m suspicious AF but university has gotten less stressful after midterm. Did they lower the pressure on our assignments and projects, or is it that I’ve gotten used to it now? Or is this a combination? Because I find that I have a bit more time? And I don’t know if I should be suspicious or not…
I also found that I’ve been getting unexpectedly good grades in my 3D classes like, okay? Since when?? These two classes were the ones I was most worried about?!?! And I suddenly have legit good grades???. *is shook and confused*

ALSO SOMEONE NEEDS TO WRITE A ZOMBIE AU WITH BTS IN IT. NOT A SCARY FEELS TRIP ZOMBIE AU BUT LIKE A CRACK ONE. I love how Jin practically threw Yoongi to the zombies to save himself.
also someone needs to write a Snow White and the Seven...Six dwarves au or something. fucking hilarious.
and and and!!
i've had this WIP since like, March this year and it's a chaptered yoonmin arranged-marriage ABO-ish au. it's gonna be like, 5 chapters is anyone interested. it's also i think an apology to the people have read passengers and cried at me about it so...like a super fluffy fic as a "please forgive me"? even though it's late? i swear i wanted to put it up before uni started but i got caught up with...a lot of stuff...ehe, and then i tried to put it up for jimin's birthday but then...uni...and i haven't had the time to really write it so it's been slow....but i enjoy writing a lot of fluff to take a break from the intensity of adegu *sweats *
so yeah, i should be posting the first chapter like next week ^_^
i hope you all enjoy this.
'All good?'

‘Yes, fucking hell, I already told you less than a minute ago.’

‘Yeah well, Humans are weak- gotta make sure.’

‘I’ll fucking show you weak you bean pole- move!’

His friend cackles as he jumps away from his swinging punch.

‘Short arms! Are all Humans small like you?’

‘Literally fight me.’

‘Nah- I don’t fight children.’

‘You two! We’re still on mission!’

‘Sorry!’ they both yell back, but their team-leader has a suppressed smile on her face. Or a grimace. Either one, it was hard to tell with her features. But it was probably a smile; because they were finally out in clear open air, in-planet, and not inside a ship.

They jab at each other as they track through the rocks, low but strong lights illuminating their paths from their hand-held TeorSers.

‘You still haven’t told them about this have you?’ he asks as they stop goofing around. They couldn’t help it. They’d been stuck in a ship for almost a year. And this was the first planet they were able to dock into. And it smells fresh, but at the same time, it smells old. Up until now, they were walking over ancient igneous rock; black and smooth. But he knew they would soon approach; the massive valley they had flown over. Visibility was low- but morning was just beyond the horizon and they were walking towards it. Heavy storm clouds hung overhead, but with no sign of rain.

‘They’ll worry,’ he replies. ‘I don’t want her to worry. Besides, it’s not like I could anyways. Confidentiality and all that shit.’

‘Confidentiality or honest to goodness no communications line? I feel so stranded here.’
‘We got here just fine didn’t we? We’ll get out all right,’ he snorts, pausing a moment to catch his breath.

‘It’s getting steeper.’

‘Yeah, no shit Sherlock.’

‘Sherlock?’

‘Human phrase,’ he waves his hand dismissively.

‘What did you tell them?’ he asks.

‘I said it was a special case study; that I was part of a diplomatic mission,’ he explains.

‘Well…that’s not entirely a lie.’

‘No…no it’s not.’ He agrees.

‘You didn’t even tell them that you were joining the corps were you?’

‘I don’t think they would like the idea of it,’ he shrugs. ‘They think I’m still part of the Raksane Tayi Scientific Panel.’

That part wasn’t a lie. He was still part of the Scientific Panel. Maybe just not the “scientific” branch of it though.

‘She’ll find out when she joins the schools in Tayi; you know that, right?’

‘Yeah- but that’s something I will worry about in 2 years’ time.’

They walk in silence for a while. Their team is spread out but evenly, all within eye-sight. They’d been walking for nearly 5 hours now, but they encountered nothing. No insect, no animal, no Beings.

‘You think we could discover anything though? I mean; we were given permission but this still sort of feels like breaking and entering.’

‘The entire planet is under their supervision- their people as well,’ he shrugs. ‘We’ll be fine.’

‘Yeah; I hope so. Can’t wait to sleep on the fucking ground with rocks and everything.’

‘I’m not that desperate.’

‘Yeah sure...what was that?’

He pauses, ears pricking up at once.

‘What is it?’ their team-leader asks at once.

‘Do you hear that?’ he asks. They all trusted his ears the most. His species were known for their particularly keen hearing abilities- rumors were that they could even hear thoughts if they tried hard enough (all complete bullshit, according to him).

Everyone quiets down, alert and cautious. Then he hears it.
A soft quiet voice, singing in the distance, carried by the wind.

They were in a wide rocky terrain, the wind could pick up on the sound, no matter how far, and spread it wide and around, bouncing and echoing on the rocks.

‘Is that…is that singing?’

‘I think it’s singing.’ He confirms.

‘Bring out the frequency-radar,’ she orders one of the others. ‘Run a scan- is it digital or real. It’s too clear to be heard.’

Then a loud very real, very deep sound permeates the air followed by a flash of bright magenta light.

They all cover their eyes immediately but he’s still looking up at the sky, into the stormy clouds, pupils following movement over the dark sky.

‘What is it-?’ he tries to ask but the sound is gone just as immediately as it had come. The singing had stopped too.

‘What was that?’

‘A ship,’ he reports at once. ‘Extremely large- very fast. Round in shape.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘Positive.’

‘We can’t take chances- we’re in unchartered territory; we need to make careful moves. We need to be cautious.’

‘I thought it was said that the planet was dormant?’ one of them demands. ‘Practically unknown to the rest of the Universe?’

‘That’s what the readings say- we can’t be sure.’

‘Did you recognize the design?’ she asks him.

‘No,’ he replies at once. ‘I’ve never seen it before. And I don’t think anyone would forget it.’

‘All right- we stick to the plan. No splitting up, no deviating. Just keep a sharp eye out; anything unusual, you report at once. Everyone clear?’

‘Clear.’

‘Run that frequency –radar, let’s find that source.’
Curses leaving his mouth in a rough torrent of languages, Sk’jin finds himself on a mildly cool marble floor, patterned with light and thin veins of gold.

‘Sk’jin, thank you for coming to meet me.’

Khol’isa etiquette dictated that you bow, lowering yourself while bowing your head once. They had a culture of being courteous; an entire culture situated around the elegance of movement, of refined and systematic gestures used to convey and or reflect thoughts and behavior. The Khol’isa were known as some of the most elegant, noble, and wise Beings living in the Universe.

But Sk’jin does none of this. He feels far from elegant, far from refined. He’d been jumped- and then knocked out. When he had come around, he had found himself bound, gagged, and stuffed into a cage of sorts.

He just stands at the doorway, looking into the office he remembers all too well.

‘What do y’want?’ Sk’jin demands at once.

‘I just wished to speak to you,’ K’mara states simply. ‘When we awoke from the Bloodmoon, only 73, 821 of us were sane enough to survive. Ever since then, only 48, 104 of us adapted to the new world we found ourselves in. I know each and every of my people- I know them by face, by name, and by the nightmare we all shared. And yet, I do not know you. I do not see you in my memory. Who are you?’

Sk’jin doesn’t reply, instead he makes himself comfortable on the chair. The office is incredibly pristine, opulent but not tasteless. Sk’jin feels out of place in here. It was a complete reversal from his current living conditions. Speaking of which.

‘I wasn’t aware you knew where I lived,’ Sk’jin scowls at the Khol’isa in front of him. ‘How’d you find me?’

Their eyes lock and the sharp, bright pull of her eyes summons a blinding pain to his temples. He hates himself for looking away. Hates himself for the way the world of red, hands, and glass spear through his memories.

‘I have a very good team under my command,’ she says instead. ‘No one can truly hide from me. Where there are Beings, there is greed, there is need, there is desperation. This greed, their desperation, can all be bought in exchange of information.’

‘Well congratulations then,’ he spits out.

‘So, will you speak with me? You are the prodigal son, long lost, and now returned. I would welcome you amongst our people again- to give you a home-’

‘Nice try- it ain’t happening,’ Sk’jin sneers. ‘I’m here, livin’, doin’ what I want, not getting’ ‘to trouble. I ain’t causing shit, so you can leave me ‘lone. T’was nice meetin’ you and shit- so I’m gone.’

Sk’jin stands, pushing back his chair.
‘How is Zitao?’

Sk’jin was expecting this. So he doesn’t show any change in his expression. He also knew that he couldn’t lie to K’mara.

He had known, the moment the guards had shown up at his door. He had hoped that he would be able to live, undisturbed, just for a while, before he felt ready and sure enough to move out into the Universe again.

Taeh’yung had done his best. Bringing him back, pulling him out of that space- he had been given no explanation, because Taeh’yung didn’t know how to explain it. He did, however, carefully and gently tell him one thing that now haunted his steps and every move.

‘I’m sure y’know better than me,’ he mutters, still standing. ‘Didn’t ya say ya got eyes everywhere? Why ask me when you probably track ‘im?’

‘It’s safety precaution- and we do not invade privacy. I just simply know where he is- and besides, it’s not like he’s hiding either. Unlike you.’ K’mara leans back on the chair, lifting her chin a little to look him straight in the eye again. Sk’jin looks away.

‘As you well know; I was able to find out more about your life- a little more about your story. You were difficult to track- but you lead quite the illustrious life didn’t you?’ K’mara smiles before she lifts up an incredible flat and highly customized screen. She taps across the surface for a moment in feigned contemplative action. ‘Sk’jin, you were the leader of what most would consider to be the largest pirating network in the Known Universe. You controlled more than half of the Underverse and you were one of the main reasons why the Venture Unit couldn’t buy or deal connections with the Underverse. Such power- a pity it all fell away because of one smartly placed agent who lead you awry.’

Sk’jin grits his teeth down, hands itching to rub at his temples because his headache was persisting now.

Lies, he thinks.

‘That was a lifetime ago,’ he manages. ‘It’s irrelevant.’

‘Is it?’ She tilts her head to the side. ‘It says here you went to Orẹ 7 months ago- how is that irrelevant? Wasn’t he from Orẹ? Why did you go there if it was irrelevant?’

‘Why are you following me?’ Sk’jin demands.

‘Please sit down Sk’jin, and allow me to explain why I asked you here-‘

‘-your fucking men dragged me here out of force!’ Sk’jin gesticulates wildly.

‘And I apologize for that,’ K’mara replies smoothly. ‘We had no choice but to use force; I knew you would refuse to come see me if I asked you.’

Sk’jin stares down at K’mara for a while before he takes a seat stiffly again. K’mara smiles and leans forward as though preparing herself to speak. Clearing her throat, she starts.

‘I will not ask you for details regarding your life while you were away, or pry into how you are here, or about Zitao,’ she declares. ‘These are private aspects of your life-‘

‘-so now you respect my privacy?’ Sk’jin mutters scathingly. Nonplussed, K’mara continues.
‘Private aspects of your life and so it shall remain. I have brought you here because I wish to offer you a deal.’

‘No.’

‘No?’

‘No.’

‘You don’t know what I’m going to say.’

‘No I don’t, and I don’t care either,’ Sk’jin shrugs. ‘I ain’t about whatever shit you do ‘round here.’

‘So you’re saying you’re not at all curious? About what happened to you? Why it happened? Don’t you want to know more?’ K’mara asks. ‘You were tricked by-’

‘Look,’ Sk’jin interrupts. ‘I was played- shit happened. It’s not a big deal ‘nymore. It happened, so it happened. It’s in the past.’

‘How generous of you,’ K’mara smiles. ‘So are you saying you don’t want to read his files?’

Sk’jin’s eyes snap up to meet K’mara’s.

‘What the fuck do y’mean?’

‘He was an agent- of course he kept records and made reports. He also had a highly detailed private account- it was only recovered less than a sol ago, after we were able to finally go through all of the remains on that planet.’

‘He worked for the Venture Unit,’ Sk’jin says sharply. ‘Why do you have it?’

‘Under the GLA Clause of mission-related recovery on GLA-authorized mission, the recovery and or discovery of such items is under the property ownership of the organization responsible for bringing it back,’ K’mara says smoothly. ‘Any and every thing we found on that planet is under the GIU now. Including you.’

Sk’jin tenses.

‘I am a living Being- I am not owned,’ Sk’jin hisses out.

‘But are you?’ K’mara leans forward a little bit again. ‘What happened to your horns?’

‘Fuck you,’ Sk’jin hisses. ‘I’m through here.’

‘You can’t leave. I won’t allow it.’ K’mara states simply. ‘Please sit down. You may leave after I explain everything.’

‘Then stop fucking talkin’ in circles and get to the point!’ Sk’jin snaps.

‘As Khol’isa, we come the closest to immortality,’ K’mara says instead. ‘Immortality, as we both know, is nothing more than just extending a single nightmare. A nightmare you can’t escape, make what you will of it.’

‘The fuck are you trying to say?’ Sk’jin sighs out.
‘The Hyper-Reality Expansion program was designed to look into the possibility of creating an alternative dimension that would be able to control and manage large numbers of Beings. Not just within planets; this program, if successful, would have been able to control Systems and galaxies—maybe even the entire Universe. Of course, as we both know, it was not successful.’ K’mara laughs lightly. ‘Creating this blanket would have required a source of energy— a force that could continue on and on, ever expanding, ever growing— continuously over and through time and space. And of course, you would think Life-force is the answer. But I think we both know it’s not.’

Sk’jin feels his palm sweating.

‘I won’t ask you about what you know— but I think we both know what I’m talking about. Who we’re talking about,’ K’mara emphasizes lightly.

‘What does this have to do with me?’ Sk’jin asks tersely.

‘As you know, the Gaia case has been closed and shut from the mass public,’ K’mara sips on her tea for a moment before continuing. ‘No one is to know about what took place— who orchestrated it, and why it was done.’

‘Sure,’ Sk’jin shrugs.

‘And it is regrettable to say that though this discovery has been one of monumental exposure of just how truly enriched in evil we are as a system of organizations, it has also exposed unexplainable additions that we cannot explore openly.’ K’mara adds with a pause, ‘Additions that could all combine to form and create another Gaia Case.’

‘This has nothing to do with me,’ Sk’jin mutters.

‘It does.’ K’mara replies carefully. ‘When you were the pirate-lord of the Underverse, you kept all alliances between the Venture Unit and the pirating networks at bay— or at least most of it. After you left, we were able to form a stronger alliance with the Underverse— we were able to trace and find stronger connections within our cases, purge those who would wish to harm the lives of innocents and ruin what we have worked so hard to achieve.’

‘Well, I’m sorry I stole that from y’all,’ Sk’jin scoffs with an eye-roll. ‘Spaces, the entire fuckin’ GLA and GIU couldn’t fucking break through the Underverse— it’s no wonder y’didn’t catch wind of any of what was happenin’ round you— you fuckin’ think you’re all doin’ a good job aren’t you? Think twice— y’don’t know shit ‘bout anythin’.’

‘And I agree,’ K’mara nods. ‘We don’t know anything. If what has happened recently implied anything, it is that we’re blind. Extremely blind— and it’s not just us— not just the GLA, not just the GIU— even the Underverse. There are forces, there are dimensions, creations and Beings beyond the scope of our understanding— with abilities and power we cannot hope to understand.’

‘And I’m here because you want me to go back ‘n stop it all for you? Sweet, but not ‘nterested—sorry,’ Sk’jin raises his hands up.

‘Not stop it. I want you to go and understand it for me.’

‘You want me to work for you?’

‘I do.’

Sk’jin laughs, throwing his head back.
‘There is a mission being created and put together right now; by myself, and a few others who think like me- perhaps not all honourable or trustworthy, but we all still stand by the same thing,’ K’mara says, ignoring the way Sk’jin slumps against the table, still wheezing.

‘Oh yeah?’ Sk’jin hiccups. ‘What’s that side?’

‘The side where I can still live as I do- where I can still do as I please,’ K’mara states simply. ‘I am not going to try and sell you GLA propaganda and tell you that this is for the betterment of the Universe and all living Beings. I am here, asking you to risk yourself for me because I am selfish and will not allow some misinformation, or ignorance, to take away what I’ve worked so hard for.’

Sk’jin is taken aback.

‘Well- y’ain’t holdin’ back anythin’ are you?’ Sk’jin laugh humourlessly.

‘I do not lie to my fellow Khol’isa,’ K’mara says. ‘And I do not think you would appreciate it either.’

‘And what’s this mission ‘bout?’

‘We were able to trace back, with information we were lucky enough to gain directly from an eyewitness and source, about the possible genesis of what triggered the start of the Gaia Case,’ K’mara explains. ‘I think you might have met him before.’

Sk’jin doesn’t respond to that, a vivid image of striking silver eyes comes to mind.

‘When we studied this information further we came across an “addition”,’ K’mara says carefully.

‘You mean when the GLA or the GIU do something they’re not supposed to do and fuck things up?’ Sk’jin offers.

‘Possibly yes,’ K’mara sighs. ‘We were able to trace this information to Bhumi- an estranged System that refused the GLA but signed a treaty of peace as long as they were left undisturbed.’

‘I’m guessing this peace didn’t last long.’

‘It did not. They were a strange race of species- their abilities and skills, not to mention their elemental structure- it was all ancient- they had a culture, a whole new life and existence beyond anything we have ever seen and known- untouched and hidden almost.’

‘But you found them- or did at least once.’

‘An accident,’ K’mara says carefully. ‘There are no details further explaining what happened.’

‘Sure.’

For the first time since this entire ordeal started, K’mara seems to lose her composure at Sk’jin’s lack of interest. And before she can say anything Sk’jin makes a show of yawning and gets up.

‘Well- this was fun ‘n all, but I’m gonna go-‘

‘Some of them are still alive,’ K’mara says abruptly.

‘What?’

‘Members of your crew- some of them are still living,’ K’mara says gently. ‘Some are in prison-
some are still roaming the Underverse.’

Sk’jin doesn’t say anything- doesn’t speak.

‘Don’t you wish to see them?’

See them and do what?

‘I cannot imagine what you must have gone through,’ K’mara says quietly. ‘I cannot imagine the pain you must have suffered. It was as though the Bloodmoon followed you there.’

‘Yeah well- what’s done is done.’

‘And this could all repeat again.’ K’mara says emphatically.

‘And what do you want me to do about it?’ Sk’jin demands. ‘Sure I know shit- sure I went through shit- I’m not involving myself anymore-‘

K’mara pulls out another screen and slides it over to Sk’jin.

‘These are all the files he ever had- reports, entries, everything,’ K’mara pushes it towards him. ‘I am sorry I had to break your privacy to read it.’

‘My privacy?’ Sk’jin repeats.

‘You were mentioned many times in there.’ She smiles. ‘I am sorry.’

Sk’jin frowns.

‘Consider this my gift to you,’ she says with a small sigh. ‘And if you are willing to speak to me again; then you can come to me any time.’

Sk’jin wonders just how many sols it took for any single Being to ever find themselves truly free of what once held them together.

‘Or I’ll come find you,’ she smiles. And it’s a promise. A threat. Sk’jin’s wariness spikes up again as he looks up from the screen on the table to K’mara’s face.

‘Would you like a new place to stay perhaps? I’d hate to see a brother in such an unfair disposition.’

‘I’m doing quite well- thank you,’ Sk’jin says in clipped tones, stepping back. ‘I would appreciate you not comin’ ‘round to bother me ‘nynore.’

He turns and walks towards the doors.

‘You won’t take it? I think you should.’ K’mara calls after him.

‘The past is in the past,’ Sk’jin turns to look her straight in the eye even though his head hurts as a result. ‘That’s the problem with our people- we live in the past. We can’t move on.’

His hand is on the door-handles when K’mara calls after him again.

‘Sk’jin.’ She says quietly. ‘He left you a message.’

‘I don’t care!’ Sk’jin turns around, voice shrill and sharp. ‘I don’t give a fuck about some fucking
message- or any of this shit! It won’t stop what happened- it won’t stop the nightmares- it won’t stop their voices! It won’t bring them back to life!’

‘If that’s so, what’s the harm in taking this?’ K’mara replies calmly, unperturbed by Sk’jin’s retort.

Fuming and disbelieving of his own actions, Sk’jin storms back to the desk and grabs the screen.

‘I’ll be waiting,’ K’mara says, no expression on her face.

Sk’jin slams the door behind him.

In the beginning it was different. There was a room he’d be taken to. Once a week.

And at first they do nothing more than analyze him. Strange looking- they were all strange. None of them looked alike. None of them seemed related to each other. Their faces and forms were all strange and different. A few looked like his people, but they clearly weren’t. They spoke a lot- but he couldn’t understand their words.

Then it started changing.

He was taken to another room, at regular intervals. They would look at his skin, apply something cold, or sometimes hot, or simply spray him with something. He didn’t know what was happening.

Until one day he woke from his nightmares into another one. His skin was on fire, and his bones were frozen.

They took him away and put him to sleep.

When he woke up he lay in a bed soaked with blood- his own. And with the side of his body open.

When he screams he’s cut short and made to sleep again. He doesn’t know or understand how they do it but he goes back to sleep.

And when he wakes again, he’s on a cold hard surface. No blood. No colours. Only cold and grey. There are 8 moons above him; shining bright and strong.

He calls for his mother. For his father. For his brothers and sisters. But no one comes. No one answers.
There is no eclipse in the sun. There is no ceremony celebrating the eye in the sky.

Someone steps in front of the 8 moons- a giant it would seem. It speaks, voice harsh and coarse to his ears.

He raises something in his hand- something small but something that looked sharp.

Darkness falls again and he’s in his nightmares again. But he finds safety in them now. Because in these nightmares, he knew wasn’t really in pain. That he wasn’t actually bleeding.

Everything changes when he opens his eyes again.

‘He’s too young for the fights. There’s no point in sending pipsqueaks like him to the fights.’

Their words made sense.

‘We could get the young ones fight against each other.’

‘That’s not gonna entertain- that’s shit and boring as fuck.’ Another voice snorts. ‘He seems resilient though- not a lot of his category survived you know? It’s been maybe a whole sol since we started? We should use him as one of the study-subjects. I think the researchers will want him.’

How did he understand them?

‘We’ll get paid good for him- he seems more advanced than the rest.’

‘All right- take him away.’

He stops feeling the colours one by one; until everything fades away into one blurred scream of pain and hopelessness. At one point, he just stops feeling.

He no longer felt like himself.

There was only one thing that persisted in him.

And that was colour.

One single colour.

Bleeding into his vision, stinging him under whatever remained of his skin. And despite coming to hate it. Despite wishing it away. It’s the only thing that grounds him. The only thing he can cling on to.
Sk’jin really hates himself for this. He was so predictably weak. So predictable. Of course K’mara would come for him from this angle.

He slumps onto the low flat bed of the apartment he’d been hiding in- the owner had apparently left for a holiday of sorts. It was one of the better living arrangements he had gotten into.

It was taking him longer than we wanted, adapting to the Universe and how much it had progressed and changed since he was a part of it. And now he wasn’t sure if he was even part of the universe anymore. Was he even alive?

He takes out the screen and without allowing himself to think much about it, scrolls through the menu tab until he comes across a video message with his name on it.

Hands shaking, Sk’jin takes a deep breath before tapping on the file.

It’s old. The quality of the footage is a little scratched and Sk’jin can tell it’s been edited to clear up the damaged bits of the pixels of the corrupted data. But it does nothing to prepare him.

Despite the jagged edges of the footage and the obvious aged appearance to the video, he has never looked so real to Sk’jin. Dimpled smile on place, large brown eyes filled with nervousness rather than his usual dignified glare. His body language indicated just how high his nervousness must have been when he’d been recording this. It was strange seeing him like this- he was always so reassuring, so well poised, serious, and calm. His mannerism bordering on stoic- egging Sk’jin to heckle and tease him.

It was surreal seeing him like this. What he’d been seeing in his waking nightmares was nothing more than a tinted hazy echo.

It was almost as though he had come back.

‘Hey,’ he coughs. He always coughed when he was nervous. And he was only ever nervous around Sk’jin. ‘I’m guessing this is something you’d watch if…if things don’t go how I planned them to go.’

He looks around for a moment, dark grey hair falling over his eyes before he pushes it away as though annoyed. It did annoy him, Sk’jin knew that all too well. But he grew it out because Sk’jin had told him that he liked his hair like that. That he enjoyed brushing his hair with his fingers.

‘I think you always knew-‘

‘I did,’ Sk’jin whispers in reply, unable to help himself.

‘-but you just kept me around- keep me around,’ he corrects himself. ‘I thought you were gonna toy around with me- then if I was lucky you’d kick me out. Or maybe even kill me. But you didn’t. You
‘I didn’t,’ Sk’jin replies quietly. ‘You know I didn’t.’

‘They sent me here on an off-chance, that I’d be able to convince you- or maybe influence you. To discover more about the Alliance. To really infiltrate the shit that’s going on in this Universe. You always said I cared too much- that it would be used against me. That it was a point that could be used to manipulate me. And maybe that is what they used to get me here- and maybe I’ll die because of it. But...I got to meet you, didn’t I?’ he laughs quietly, wiping at his face before he looks down, expression serious.

His chest aches. Sk’jin hasn’t felt this in a long time.

‘It’s not...it’s not just the Alliance. There’s something darker- something far worse than what we think the Alliance is doing. There were records of sightings- rumors and stories. Things that don’t make sense. But it all stemmed from the Underverse- it’s why we’re trying so hard to forge this deal- trying to open the Underverse so that we can get the connections. But...’

‘But you knew that opening that connection would also mean opening it for everyone and everything else,’ Sk’jin says quietly.

‘You’ve lived for so long- not calling you old!’ he grins in that rare way Sk’jin loved; where his dimples seemed to deepen to impossible depths. Sk’jin remembers poking into them sometimes, asking him if he kept food there to eat later. ‘And you’ve seen so much. Been through so much. And I know why you would...try to protect what you have now. Because I try to protect what I have. And at this moment, it’s this place. It’s this ship. It’s you.’ He pauses a while. ‘I want to be serious, but it’s kinda difficult when I can hear you shouting in the Bridge even from here. I think Ti is going to come get me in a moment- she’ll probably scream at me to scream at you.’

That was possible. It was extremely possible. Sk’jin guesses that’s exactly what happens.

‘I still don’t know if you’re just...if you’re just toying with me. I hope you’re not. I hope you weren’t. Or maybe it would be better if you did. I don’t know,’ he pauses, as though distracted. Sk’jin hears his own voice in the background.

He laughs quietly, eyes twinkling in that rare way they sometimes did.

‘I...I think I should just stop this here- and tell you face to face.’

And he did. He did, and Sk’jin now wishes he hadn’t.

‘And I shouldn’t…I shouldn’t leave this for you should I? I should probably also tell you- I have faith. Not in the fact that you have to make the right choice. The right decision or because you feel obliged- morally or whatever. But faith in you. And unless I’m being played. Unless this is all... just a way of messing with me- then I’ll say it here,’ he looks straight at the camera, warm brown eyes serious and heavy. ‘The Universe is so much wider, so much more than we could ever fathom. There are forces that exist- either good or bad, we cannot tell. And I know you’ll say that it’s my “annoying hero-complex” and “stereotypical protagonist who lives with his own self-righteous convictions” speaking but I also know that you understand exactly what I mean. And I know, that you will do it one day. Because you’re not what you make yourself to be. You are so much more.’
He smiles that smile again- impossibly fond and endearing.

‘I NEED YOU TO COME AND CONTROL YOUR DAMNED BOYFRIEND FOR A MOMENT HERE-‘ Ti bursts through the door, light flooding the dark room.

‘NOT MY BOYFRIEND!’ Sk’jin hears himself scream back.

‘I LITERALLY DON’T CARE- DO SOMETHING!’

He chuckles, shaking his head fondly.

‘The Khol’isa make life-long promises and hold true to that,’ he ponders a moment, readying himself to head back to the Bridge. He’s fiddling with the edge of his sweater. ‘And I promise you now, that I’ll make you see it.’

* 

It’s a beautiful day.

Šerdesas was typically beautiful all day round- including their nights which Sk’jin preferred. But the sunrise feels nice.

And dressed as though to match the sunrise, K’mar fixes a smile to his face as he walks towards Sk’jin. He’s wearing robes of rosy pink lined with gold leaves.

‘It is a beautiful morning,’ K’mar says in way of greeting before he bows elegantly.

‘It is,’ Sk’jin replies, standing to bow in response. K’mar seems pleased at his mannerism before they both sit on the park bench. They both sit in silence for a while, not speaking.

‘I accept your offer.’ Sk’jin says lightly. ‘Under a few conditions of course.’

‘Of course,’ K’mar laughs in reply before asking, ‘What made you change your mind?’

‘I made a promise,’ Sk’jin replies smoothly, looking up at the rosy sky. ‘I don’t break my promises.’

‘Of course,’ K’mar says again.

‘When does this mission start?’ Sk’jin asks, relaxing as he feels the sun on his skin.

‘In two years,’ K’mara replies. ‘You will have plenty of time to catch up, get back on your feet.’

Sk’jin wants to laugh at that. He’d been on his feet for a long time now. Too long.

‘Sounds good,’ he replies instead. He feels K’mar staring at him, her gaze questioning, as though unsure of how to react to Sk’jin’s behavior.

‘Well then,’ K’mar says, a little slowly. ‘I am glad. Welcome back Sk’jin; I hope we can finally conclude this mess together.’
‘Hm,’ Sk’jin hums in reply. He looks over at K’mara, sending her a bedazzling smile that seems to disturb his fellow Khol’isa. ‘I hope so too.’

K’mara is still looking at him with a guarded questioning look.

Sk’jin sits up straighter, turning his body towards the smaller Khol’isa.

‘So, shall we discuss my terms and conditions?’

---

The ground beneath him shakes.

*Portends of another fall. Of lives lost.*

*Of voices screaming endlessly into the void. Of dreams stained black and red and white.*

*Out of habit, out of routine, out of need he steps out towards the sound.*

The sun is neon but bleak- fumes of heat rise about him, the foliage heavy with humidity; almost as though bearing the same fate as all who landed here.

The sound was far off. Perhaps over two or three horizons. But the tremors had reached him- they always did. No matter how far off, no matter how distant. Because he was connected to it- to that world where time was replaced with the fear of slipping into a nightmare. A great plunge, slow, dark, and crushing.

*He takes his time walking. Was he even walking? He just was- he just… moved. He felt no form of himself- he felt no shape of his Being, placed within the dimensions of this reality. Or rather, the reality he once knew.*

Smoke rises- a tall column, stark yet faded; tinted red.

*He can hear their voices before he sees them. Confusion, distrust, panic, worry.*

*It’s the same.*

*He watches them for a while- never too close in case it saw him again. It might have forgotten him for a while now; and he preferred it staying that way.*
They last longer than the previous ones that fell. It’s unfortunate because it appeared as though they had come to this planet with the intention of finding it. They don’t seem surprised to see that ship; they study it; watching and observing. But they don’t have to look at it from afar to know of its nature when it stood amongst them—wearing the skin of one of their members.

It locks eyes with him for a moment before turning away. It knew he wouldn’t stop him. He never has. He never could.

They were at a stalemate with each other. Grudging forces in tandem with each other.

‘WHY ARE YOU HERE?’ it screamed at him.

‘I don’t know,’ he wanted to reply. It didn’t matter anyways.

In the end, there’s one that lingers. One that has understood. He doesn’t know how this Being has figured it out. But he’s accepting this—accepting the reality around him, or at least trying to, better than anyone he’s seen on the planet. He looks distraught but that was to be expected.

‘Who— who’s there?’ he demands one day, expression wild. He’d been following him around—wandering behind him slowly. Seeing if he was indeed capable of surviving. And so far, he had lasted the longest out of them all.

‘You can see me?’

‘I can fucking **see everything**—get the fuck out there and tell me what’s happening!’ he screams.

Not one to disappoint, he takes a step forward.

The Being, to his credit, doesn’t flinch, doesn’t waver. He just stares.

‘Who are you?’

‘I dunno.’

He seems to accept this answer.

‘How do I know you’re not…not part of that thing.’ He rephrases his question. ‘Fuck—how do I know I’m not fucking crazy?’

‘Listen—kid, y’know you’re dehydrated and shit right? Go get some water or somethin’.’

‘No—no I can’t stay— I have to leave—there’s so much—there’s too much, I have to report back—’ he begins freaking out again. His panic, confusion, and fear seem to coil out of him in smoky ribbons. A strange sight.

‘—they need to know—**he** needs to know, if they find him; if they understand this—’

‘Kid—calm down. Breathe— you need to breathe.’

He suddenly drops on the ground, his body shaking with shivers despite the fact that he’s sweating heavily, skin flushed in a way that suggested over-heating and sunburn.

He knew where everything was in this god-forsaken planet. And he knows that it wouldn’t take more than 10 minutes to get to a stream. Not that he ever used it or needed it; but he liked the sound. It was better than the white-noise that permeated his surroundings. Like some horrendous
elegy into a nightmare.

‘Kid- calm down-‘

He’s not calming down. That much was for sure. And he doesn’t know how or why he does it but he swoops down on the Being, grasping onto his shoulders and dives straight into his mind.

Everything is black- and for a fraction of a second, he sees the inside of a foreign ship, the silhouette of a tall Being, a lopsided lazy grin, and a nice gentle voice speaking.

When he comes around, he goes into shock.

His vision is clear- no red to tint his surroundings. He could smell the damp green in the air, feel the oppressive heat of the humid weather around him. He lifts his hands- talons on his fingers, scales spreading down from his wrist.

‘What are you doing?’ a small voice sounds inside his mind. Or their mind. ‘Who are you?’

‘Jus’sleep for a while kid- I need to do some stuff.’

He takes a while walking back. He wasn’t used to this form; not having a form for so long. But this...this felt different- it felt almost like hope. He drinks from the streams- and his senses go haywire, nearly collapsing under the sudden overload of information and feelings. And he finds himself collapsing onto the ground, breathing in harsh gasps. There was pain, but also comfort.

It felt strange.

And a little like redemption.

When he makes his way back, he realizes now just how bad it had all been. He barely recognizes the ship anymore. It’s entirely covered up in vines, grown over and thick from centuries of growth. The main ship is barely visible. It takes him a while to cross through. He cuts his body a little on the harsher, stronger, older vines. But he finally makes it inside.

It’s strangely preserved. As though he were walking through one of those recreational museums the younger ones were so enthusiastic about.

It takes him a while, but he manages to find all of them. Or at least, what was left of them. He takes them outside, towards a soft brown patch of soil. He dedicates the entire day into digging; keeping himself hydrated regularly.

He places the bones into the pit and carefully covers it.

The sun is low on the horizon and he turns back, walking back to the ship, and towards where he knew he was waiting.

His form is still there- stretched out towards the direction of his room, hand held up.

He still can’t decide if the look in his eyes was of damnation, or if it was of forgiveness.

He takes the fragile skeletal hand in his, remembering the flesh that covered it, the high and free laughter that fell from his lips in peals when he lightened up.

‘Maybe I can live up to that promise now.’ He says quietly, picking up the bones with utmost care. It felt strange to hear himself speak- to hear words mirroring his thoughts into real phonics and
Namjoon’s worried expression greets him when he opens his eyes. Momentarily, instead of Namjoon, it’s him, watching him with a worried look.

‘Hey,’ he says quietly. ‘How are you feeling? Can you hear me?’

Namjoon’s brow is furrowed, expression controlled and careful.

‘Unfortunately,’ Sk’jin replies, shaking himself awake. Neither of them were bound or cuffed-they’re inside a small room with no furnishing. Just bare walls. Namjoon is on one side, not looking too worse for wear. Namjoon’s skin is broken but there’s no bleeding. There’s a smattering of…something- Sk’jin isn’t sure. Bruises of some sort.

Namjoon rolls his eyes but it’s not out of irritation. Rather out of habit.

Sk’jin’s head is pounding and his throat feels as dry and coarse as sandpaper. He hated losing consciousness. Unnecessary memories resurfaced and he couldn’t stand it.

‘So- are we headed to our execution or are we about to witness the apocalypse?’ Sk’jin asks, sitting up carefully. He’s incredibly dizzy but speaks to distract himself.

‘They were just waiting for you to wake up,’ Namjoon jerks his hand to one side of the wall which promptly opens up and Van Seulgaan stands behind it.

‘Fuck- go away,’ Sk’jin mumbles irritably. ‘I don’t want to see your ugly face so soon after waking- it was hard enough with him being here.’ He nods at Namjoon who gives him a resigned frown.

‘Cheeky,’ Van chuckles. ‘Get up and follow me.’

‘No “please?”,’ Sk’jin mumbles again as he gets up, fighting his nausea. Namjoon helps him stand up though he waves the Kutsoglerin away the moment he’s stable enough not to totter about.
‘Sk’jin,’ Namjoon grits through his teeth, as though in warning.

‘Yeah yeah I know,’ Sk’jin grumbles in response. ‘Don’t be an asshole etc. Right?’

Oddly enough this makes Namjoon smile. ‘At least you know yourself.’

‘Lead the fucking way.’

The ship, now that they’re not crawling through bot-vents, is spacious and well designed.

There were staff, scuttling around in the long hallways. Many of them dressed in medically affiliated uniforms and Sk’jin doesn’t want to think of what takes place in this ship. It was perhaps a bit too ordinary, a bit too neat, and a bit too sterile looking. The stench from the vents still lingers in the air though.

For some reason, Sk’jin expects Van to take them to some prison or something, with OrTanks and cages, maybe throw them in there and aggressively torture them or something along that line. He doesn’t expect Van to take them to a spacious meeting room, overlooking the wide and open Hangar Bay opening, with Pompa looming a little below. There’s a long table at the center with comfortable seats and plates line up in front of three of the chairs. One at the head, and two facing each other.

Van gestures towards the seats and beckons them to sit down as he reclines back, reaching for a silver goblet filled with a pale orange liquid.

‘Something to eat? Drink?’ he gestures at the table as he grabs a bunch of fruits from a bowl and puts it on his plate. Namjoon doesn’t budge, shoulders a little tense but otherwise putting up a very convincing look of nonchalance laced with some mild irritation. As though he was being awfully delayed or set back with what was happening.

Sk’jin thinks ah fuck it and reaches for a few of the fruits himself. Namjoon doesn’t seem surprised at his movements.

‘So- we meet again,’ he nods at Namjoon after taking a sip from his goblet. ‘I was honestly just happy, ignoring you and your ship. But then you had to involve yourself with my ship- and you just happened to be carrying something rather interesting, mildly put,- and word is that you’re quite the catch right now.’

He peels one of the fruits, chewing thoughtfully before glancing over at Sk’jin, one eyebrow raised.

‘Sk’jin the pirate-lord,’ he says as though impressed. ‘One of K’mara’s now?’

‘I’d be mad because I’d say you're racially associating me, but you’re right,’ Sk’jin replies through a mouthful of fruit.

‘Honesty. That’s nice.’

‘t’s expensive,’ Sk’jin manages to reply before swallowing. Namjoon gives him a tired look.

‘That too,’ Van nods in agreement.

‘So- why are we here?’ Sk’jin asks, wiping at his mouth.

‘Well- other than the fact that I caught you sneaking around my ship and completely corrupting my
Van explains. ‘And also, you nearly drove me bankrupt with that little stunt you pulled off in Grezma. I lost a lot of my bonds, most of my dealers, and an entire ship of goods. I had a lot of angry clients- and barely made it out alive.’

‘Pity,’ Sk’jin says before popping a few fruits into his mouth. They were delicious.

‘So it seems like you took my words to heart Namjoon,’ Van turns to address Namjoon. ‘Though I didn’t expect you to just suddenly drop out from the GLA radar like that. Word is that you’ve all gone rogue. Quite the bounty on your heads. Pulling off stunts like this isn’t going to help you out.’

He gestures towards the window, down at Pompa.

‘And I could report you. Or just arrest you right now.’ Van shrugs. ‘But I thought to myself. Why should I disregard a unit of Beings who were able to single-handedly, and I think I must add, unknowingly and unwillingly hindered and destroyed a business transaction that took 2 decades in the making.’

‘Indeed why should you,’ Sk’jin mumbles over his fruit. He feels Namjoon kick him. Instead he twists his feet and latches onto Namjoon’s foot, trapping him down. Namjoon glares at him from across the table, struggling to get his foot out but Sk’jin latches on. Van eyes the two of them, a mild look of judgment on his features before he continues.

‘I’ve long been a patron of the Pageant,’ he declares. ‘I have won some, lost some- it was a hobby of mine. I enjoy watching- something of a past time you could say. But it was never of much worth to me. Until today. In the Pageant, if you win, you could stand to earn a very good amount of units.’

‘You surprise me,’ Sk’jin peels a fruit with some difficulty.

Van hands him a fruit knife which Sk’jin takes with a nod of thanks.

‘And though I am not one for physical wealth-’

Sk’jin snorts and Namjoon rolls his eyes.

‘-I have lost quite a bit recently. And you and your fellow…”crew members”- are to blame for this.’ Van reaches for a jelly like dessert, again filled with fruits and tucks into it with an elegant silver spoon. ‘So I will now strike up a deal- one that I might add, you don’t deserve-‘-you’re so kind,’ Sk’jin mutters lightly as he reaches for the dessert as well. Namjoon has given up trying to pull his foot away.

‘-and will now offer you to clear up your debt to me, so to speak,’ Van concludes, ignoring Sk’jin’s random inputs.

He looks at the two of them, as though expecting some sort of response to his statement. When he receives nothing but blank stares from both Sk’jin and Namjoon, Van continues.

‘You have an extremely capable fighter at your employment,’ he addresses Namjoon.

‘He’s not under my employment,’ Namjoon replies at once.

Van smiles blandly at that, ‘You have an extremely capable fighter in your crew. And we are now standing before the largest fighting arena in all of the Known Universe and Underverse combined.’
‘We don’t earn money from rogue-rounds,’ Namjoon states, his voice steely. ‘We are fighting to pay off our ransom.’

‘We all know that your GI friend could easily wipe through the rogue-rounds,’ Van waves his hand dismissively. ‘This isn’t a fight worthy of someone like him. He deserves to fight where his true worth can be really seen.’

Sk’jin’s skin crawls at that statement.

‘I have been lucky enough to witness the GI fight before,’ Van says unexpectedly, drawing the faintest look of interest in Namjoon’s eyes. ‘And I’m sure that this one will be able to pull through and win the Pageant for me.’

‘The Pageant?’ Namjoon repeats.

‘Yes. This is where the most money is made.’

‘I hate to be that Being but we aren’t registered,’ Sk’jin states, pushing away the jelly fruit. It was too sweet to his liking. ‘We can’t just hop into the Pageant and start fighting. There’s a process and they’re already at the semi-final rounds.’

‘Yes- that is true- but such contestants can back down and nominate another player in their stead,’ Van declares. ‘I’m sure some Houses and Guilds would prefer to back down, earn a lot of money, save their contestant, and come back for another year.’

‘You’re willing to spend units on that?’ Namjoon scoffs. ‘You contradict yourself.’

‘Not everything is bought with units,’ Van turns to address Namjoon with a thoughtful nod. ‘But you don’t have to worry about that aspect- the GI can enter the Pageant safely and within the rules-’ he turns to address Sk’jin now and says with a smile, ‘So don’t worry.’

Sk’jin rolls his eyes in response.

‘So- what is your decision? Do you agree, or do I simply hand you over to the GLA?’ Van asks. ‘If you fight for me, and you win me my profits back- you are free to go.’

‘We will not make decisions without the rest of our crew-‘ Namjoon begins.

Van just reaches into his pocket, produces a screen and with a single tap, a holographic 3D live-footage plays.

Hoseok and Taeh’yung are sitting on either side of Yoongi, who appeared unscathed and actually a little bored. His hair was rumpled and his skin a little sweaty. But other than that, he didn’t have a single scratch on him.

‘Your captain wants to speak to you,’ he says to the hologram.

Taeh’yung starts at that and his eyes zero in on the camera lens and he beams brightly.

‘Pa! Jin! You’re both okay?’

‘Fine,’ Namjoon sighs in reply. ‘All good there?’

‘Peachy,’ Hoseok replies casually.

‘Yoongi? Doing all right?’ Sk’jin asks as he cuts up another fruit. The bowl was starting to get
empty.

The Human holds up a thumbs up.

‘He won that round so easily! It was so cool! It was like, 10 seconds!’ Taeh’yung says excitedly.
‘He just went and bam! Done!’

Sk’jin and Namjoon share a look at that.

‘So. What’s up?’ Hoseok asks, grimacing and not even bothering looking at the camera.

Sk’jin speaks before Namjoon can, ‘You guys remember Van right? Slaver?’

‘He called me pretty!’ Taeh’yung chirps. ‘It was creepy!’

‘Yes- him,’ Sk’jin glances at Van who is watching all of this as though somewhat amused. ‘Well; it would seem that he lost a lot of units, and he’s holding us responsible for it for some reason.’

Taeh’yung gasps dramatically while Hoseok rolls his eyes. Yoongi is entirely unfazed, attention drawn elsewhere. Sk’jin isn’t even sure if he was listening to them.

‘So he’s saying if we win the Pageant, he’ll let us off of our “debt” and we’ll be “free”, though we had nothing to do with it.’ Sk’jin purposefully intones his voice, dripping with annoyance and irony.

‘That’s unfair!’ Taeh’yung stands up only to be pulled down by Yoongi who says, ‘That’s fine by me.’

Namjoon grimaces at that and again before he can say anything, Van claps his hands together, and smiles as he says, ‘Well- approval from your contestant, and your crew members know enough to understand that there’s no other way than to agree to my terms and conditions.’

Hoseok gives a short nod while Taeh’yung sighs dramatically and also nods.

‘Good.’ Van taps the screen and the hologram dies out.

‘So then, Captain Namjoon,’ he puts his hands together in a contemplative manner. ‘What do you say?’

Namjoon looks over at Sk’jin, one eyebrow raised. Sk’jin rubs his legs between his own, bouncing a little on his seat as he does so. He shrugs in reply, ‘Not much of a choice.’

Namjoon sighs before nodding stiffly.

‘Agreed.’

‘Perfect! Your contestant has 2 more rounds to win in the rogue-rounds, and then we’ll take him up to the Pageant,’ Van claps his hands together. ‘Well- now that that is out of the way. Let’s discuss the OrTank and why you have it.’ Van pushes his plate away, expression still mild and unchanged.

Sk’jin feels Namjoon stiffen though his interest is definitely piqued.

‘Throughout my long years in this business, I have come across many Beings. Rare, dangerous, unique, ancient- some downright abominable; but the most interesting ones I’ve come across are the eggs.’ Van says delicately.
‘The “eggs”?’ Sk’jin repeats, making sure his distaste was loud and clear over on his tone.

‘Yes. It’s what we call them. They’re extremely rare- and only sometimes do we get our hands on them. So when I saw that egg, and found that it belonged to your ship- I was doubly curious.’ Van replies. ‘How did you come by this egg?’

‘We don’t owe you an explanation-‘ Namjoon begins roughly, eyebrows furrowing in that way where his eyes become hooded.

It’s a good look for intimidation and looking aggressive but that’s not what they needed right now. Right now they needed some good ol’ honesty.

‘We’re working on a classified mission issued by the joint authority of the GLA, GIU, Yisheng Directory, and Venture Unit,’ Sk’jin reels off smoothly. ‘We are contractually obliged and restricted from telling anyone else other than those directly involved in this mission about the contents and objective of the mission. If you wish to inquire about our mission, however, please contact Admiral K’mara. She will readily explain to you.’

Namjoon gives him an unmasked and very open expression of disbelief and incredulity.

‘If you are indeed working for the GLA and all of them combined,’ Van waves a hand in a circle in the air. ‘Then why are you on the run?’

‘I am Admiral K’mara’s trusted aide,’ Sk’jin states simply as he leans back, allowing a coy smile to settle on his lips. ‘What has happened so far- being hunted across the Universe, being tracked and traced- is all part of our mission. Your involvement in our plan was not intended- I wish we could gather the full authority of the GLA to clear matters up between us, but that would be under direct violation of our contract as well as mission statement. Not to mention, you would probably not wish for this to take place, considering your position and status.’

‘If that’s the case, as a commanding officer of the GLA, I will further apprehend this egg as well as your mission and take over as advisor,’ Van replies smoothly. ‘By using the clause under the GLA policy of mission failure.’

‘You are first and foremost a member of the GLA are you not?’ Sk’jin asks, ignoring Namjoon’s nudges under the table.

Van nods to that.

‘So you should know that by under the GLA Clause of mission-related recovery on GLA-authorized mission, the recovery and or discovery of such items is under the property ownership of the organization responsible for bringing it back.’ Sk’jin reels off. ‘And this is only applicable if said mission has actually been terminated or has been set to deactivated. This is not the case with our mission, henceforth that clause is null. The egg is under our property and right- and our mission is still set. Whatever inconvenience we are facing at this moment is in fact due to your appearance and involvement.’ Sk’jin leans forward, brushing aside his hair.

‘Or do you want to associate yourself to the failure of this mission?’ Sk’jin asks. ‘And find yourself in court, questioned not only by the GLA but the Venture Unit, the GIU, and the Yisheng Directory?’

Van Seulgaan doesn’t comment. He simply stares straight at Sk’jin. But Sk’jin sees it. Sees him calculating.

Namjoon hasn’t said a word, watching them quietly from the side.
‘K’mara did well in choosing you as her pawn,’ Van says after a while. ‘We are at a stalemate.’

‘As agreed, we will win the Pageant, and all winnings will be transferred to you,’ Sk’jin leans back again, nodding once at Namjoon as though for confirmation. ‘Then we will leave- taking back with us everything that is rightfully and lawfully ours, under the mission statement. If you want to intrude you’re going to have to talk to Admiral K’mara.’

Sk’jin stands and not a second later, so does Namjoon.

‘This was a fun talk- we’ll be leaving now,’ Sk’jin says, giving his best dismissive nod towards Van before turning around and heading towards the doorway. He spares Namjoon a look and he can see the questions in his eyes. In this dim light, his eyes look like a warm shade of brown.

‘You’re relying on the goodwill of one of the most cruel Beings to ever place a seat on the GIU Trifecta,’ Van calls after him. ‘I hope you understand what it is that you’re doing.’

Sk’jin only turns his head around, smiling sweetly at the Tayian.

‘Thank you for your concern Van Seulgaan.’

* 

Sk’jin walks past the ranks of Van’s guards breezily, arms clasped behind him as he takes lofty steps down. Namjoon is just a little behind him to his right, grimacing at everything and everyone. They walk out of the Hangar and back towards where their stolen maintenance Transporter was waiting for them. If it was still there.

He can feel Namjoon’s agitation rolling off of the Kutsoglerin in waves. He wants to look back and maybe tease him a bit about it but it’s most likely that he’ll burst out into some agitated speech and Sk’jin doesn’t have time for that.

‘Hey! Hey you two!’

They both pause, finding a bunch of Docking Bay officers approaching them.

‘You’re trespassing- we’re here to take you back to Pompa, back to your ship,’ one of the Pompen states brusquely.

‘Oh! Oh my! We’ve been trespassing Namjoonie!’ Sk’jin giggles at the Kutsoglerin who grimaces even more in reply. ‘Please take us!’

The Pompen eye them suspiciously before they round around them and lead them through another hallway. Sk’jin skips along in the front, looking back to wink at Namjoon. Namjoon shoots him the most unimpressed look he’s ever managed. It’s a new record.

They’re taken to a regular Transporter used by the Pompen Sphere-Patrol and then unceremoniously pushed into a small holding cell with no seats and only hand rails.

‘Cozy,’ Sk’jin comments, leaning up against Namjoon.

‘There’s enough space for us to stand separately,’ Namjoon says brusquely.
Namjoon’s exaggerating- there was barely enough space for two of them. This would be small even for the Pompen.

‘But what’s the fun in that?’ Sk’jin leans a little closer- his head was still hurting. He was going to have to ask Taeh’yung about this- if he could give him an explanation that is. Namjoon tenses up even more, arching his body away despite not being able to.

‘Do I make you nervous?’ Sk’jin asks as he grins at Namjoon’s obvious discomfort. Namjoon stops fidgeting for a moment before sighing.

‘I’m not comfortable with close contact.’ He replies roughly, glancing down briefly at Sk’jin.

His eyes are warm and brown in this lighting.

Shaking his head a little, trying to clear his mind, Sk’jin grins a little late in reply. To make up for that, he leans in even more to the point where he now looped his arms around the Kutsoglerin. Namjoon isn’t the most comfortable Being to lean on but Sk’jin isn’t looking for comfortable. He’s just…teasing.

‘Well I’m comfortable with close contact,’ he says, resting his chin on Namjoon’s shoulder.

They’re quiet for a while. The transporter starts up, the holding cell hums lightly around them. There’s a single bar that’s loose and it rattles ever so slightly, creating a repetitive sound that Sk’jin knows will irritate him in a few minutes.

‘This is humiliating,’ Namjoon mumbles after a moment.

Sk’jin laughs.

‘Are you embarrassed?’

‘I’m uncomfortable.’ Namjoon says, his tone suggesting Sk’jin better move. But moving away would mean being almost face-to-face. And in this lighting, Sk’jin would prefer not to look at the Kutsoglerin’s face.

‘Don’t be- I’ll keep this moment secret and safe.’ Sk’jin readjusts his arms and makes himself more comfortable. ‘Might bring it up randomly but only suggest at it.’

‘Spaces, please don’t,’ Namjoon huffs out, hands awkwardly placed. Namjoon was slightly physically awkward when he wasn’t holding onto a screen or a using the Navigation Table.

‘Hm, sure daddy.’

Namjoon sighs as though exhausted. Sk’jin cackles.

‘How much of what you said was true?’ Namjoon asks.

‘Well- that depends,’ Sk’jin replies with an honest shrug. ‘K’mara does indeed trust me- and the OrTank is ours by law. Van can’t take it from us under the cover of following “laws” without exposing himself.’

‘And what if he does report to K’mara?’

‘He won’t,’ Sk’jin laughs a little. ‘You’re cute- you think he actually will? He knows he can’t.’

Namjoon finally looks down at him at that.
‘Good thing we have you as Communications Manager,’ is what he says and it’s not what Sk’jin was expecting.

‘Only the best for you Namjoonie,’ Sk’jin gives him his most beautiful smile- more effective under the sunlight but this would do for now. As usual, Namjoon is hardly fazed by his smile- Sk’jin isn’t exactly used to Beings not being effected by his beauty. So it’s honestly a little refreshing. Instead it’s like he’s studying him. Again, something Sk’jin is not used to.

Most Beings, when they discover his species, prefer not to look him in the eye. The same way Hoseok didn’t actually really hold eye-contact with him.

‘You’re keeping something,’ he states. It’s not a question, or one of musing- it’s a direct statement. And Sk’jin can’t contradict him. ‘I don’t know what it is. And at this point, I know I should be asking you about it. But I won’t. Because you know more about all of this then you want to explain. Maybe because you aren’t allowed. Maybe because you won’t- I don’t know. But what I want to know, is why you’re here. Why you’re still here.’

Sk’jin studies the Kutsoglerin’s face carefully in turn. At this distance it was hard not to.

There was an almost seamless blend between real and bionic skin- and Sk’jin can only tell the difference because he’s this close. Namjoon’s eyes are dark- a strange combination of something dark yet transparent. His eyes reflected light in a strange manner, making Sk’jin wonder how much of anything did he really see clearly. The strange mottled bruising is slowly fading away- faster in the area where bionic skin covered his face. Sk’jin wants to feel at Namjoon’s skin to see if the textures were different or not.

‘Other than enjoying your wonderful and invigorating company?’ Sk’jin asks in reply.

‘Yes- let’s not use my winning personality as the reason behind everything,’ Namjoon sighs, looking upwards again.

‘Well Namjoonie, it’s because now I see.’

He doesn’t know why he dreamt of the eclipse. He didn’t even know that something like that had happened when he was young.
Out of all the memories that could have resurfaced, it had to be one he had no recollection of.

Had it always been that way? Had he always lied to them?

Slowly, he gets out of bed.

They would be returning to Raksane Tayi today. A lot had happened apparently, but he couldn’t bring himself to stay up to date. All he knew was that it was over. Or that was what they had told him.

It was over, and it was thanks to him they were able to uncover so much. Thanks to him that they had come this far.

His hands are still burning, and he’s surprised no fire starts when he folds his blankets up.

It’s white out. The stars pulled into bright streaks as they warp through space, tearing through time and life. They would be there in an hour or so. He stands in front of the window, eyes fixed on nothing until the lines start to slow and form strange shapes and blobs. When he blinks the image is seared into his mind. But all he sees is the eclipse of that memory. Starker, brighter, and stronger than the stars that start to settle into their natural shape and form.

The bright and strangely sparkly lines around the Raksane Tayi System appears before him; her twin suns blinking at him from a high distance.

‘We will be arriving in 15 minutes.’

Mechanically he prepares himself. Logically speaking, he knew that the moment he stepped down, he would be whisked away for questioning and more questioning. Nothing he didn’t go through here in the ship. Then after that he would be expected to testify before the GLA Court, repeat everything he’s been repeating for the past 6 months.

It fell out of his mouth in perfect recital. He no longer felt anything about it anymore. It no longer even made sense to him. He was entirely detached and sometimes he wonders if it was a good thing.

By the time they arrive on one of the outer-system moons, docking the massive ship, he’s someone else. Not that he looked any different- he just could never recover who he was and now he was no one.

His parents always told him that to be a true agent, you had to be no one, and you had to be everyone.

If that was the case, he had done an excellent; because clearly all he had grown to believe and understand had all been a lie.

The moon is lightly populated- seeing as it was used for transit most of the time, the Beings gathered in this massive moon-dock were simply temporary tourists or maintenance workers. However, amongst this faceless crowd one sticks out to him in the most painful manner.

She looks older than the last time he saw her.

But then again, so did he. Or so he was told. Most of the time he barely recognized himself.

They don’t move any closer or any further. They just stare.
Then carefully, as though drawn to each other, they take careful light steps.

And with each step he feels himself ignite. The floor cracks and splits from the heat he emanates- his shadow is warped like a mirage and his body tilts, back bending, head bowing and he can’t take it anymore.

Like a crumbling log of burnt wood, he falls over at her feet.

Air chokes out of him and it’s smoke- black, thick, and smothering.

But her hands are cool- her air is cool and as she falls next to him, he shudders from the sudden cold.

He gathers enough courage to look at her and he finds that he doesn’t recognize her anymore.

‘Was it…was it painless-‘ she breaks down.

The cold is gone, replaced with fire, dark and intense.

‘P-please-‘ she heaves out. ‘Tell me-‘

Broken chants. He can’t say anything more. There was nothing to say. Because words meant nothing now.

Her hair is on fire.

‘I’m sorry.’

‘PA!’

A bundle in the shape of Taeh’yung erupts at them as they make their way down the street towards the hosting mansion. The sun was rising behind them and Sk’jin feels his headache abate as the rays of the sun touch down on him. The street looks different from when they had last walked on it less than 10 hours ago.

Landing had been entertaining- apparently Namjoon had done such an effective job, the power was still out in many places across Pompa. And not one to miss out on being petty, Sk’jin thinks it’s
well deserved.

‘Are you all right?’ Taeh’yung wails, nearly strangling Namjoon in the process and practically lifting him up into the air much to the latter’s disapproval.

‘I- I’m fine- yes thank you please put me down-‘ Namjoon says in his best stable voice. Sometimes Namjoon spoke to Taeh’yung like he was an animal that could sense fear and would attack him if he showed any signs of discomfort. In Namjoon’s defence, it was likely to happen.

‘Jin!’

Sk’jin is prepared and greets the Zhak’gri with a warm hug. Taeh’yung pretty much rubs his face against his own before he pauses rather dramatically.

‘Oh-!’ Taeh’yung gasps, pulling back to look him dead in the eye. ‘You collapsed again.’

There’s that frown on his face, his eyes dancing with a faint green light.

‘Sun’s out- I’m all right,’ Sk’jin reassures.

‘If you say so,’ Taeh’yung says after a while. ‘There’s food! You want?’

Sk’jin chuckles, wrapping an arm around Taeh’yung.

‘Yeah- let’s go.’

‘Where’s Hoseok?’ Namjoon asks.

‘Oh right! He told me to give these to you guys!’ Taeh’yung reaches into his pockets and hands them new Comm-Devices. ‘Yoongi’s second match is going to start in 10 minutes-‘

‘-it’s what?’ Namjoon demands- frozen halfway in attaching his Comm-Device to his ear.

‘It starts in 10 minutes?’ Taeh’yung repeats.

‘It’s not supposed to be this rushed-‘ Namjoon hisses, now jogging towards the mansion, ignoring the greeting calls of the Pompen hosts by the doors.

‘Oh yeah! They’re doing that because Yoongi’s such a good fighter!’

Namjoon gives him a quick look and Sk’jin grimaces in reply.

‘We can catch the fight now! Hoseok’s taking him down!’

‘Hey- I thought his fight was scheduled only for later tonight?’ Namjoon says at once.

‘That’s what we were told- but no,’ Hoseok sounds tired and disgruntled. ‘We can’t say anything about it. We just have to follow through with it.’

‘I think they want to tire him out,’ Sk’jin tells Namjoon quietly as they make their way down the long stone paved hallway to the arena. ‘This is definitely Van’s doing.’

‘How’s Yoongi?’ Namjoon asks, absentmindedly accepting Taeh’yung’s hand who then takes Sk’jin’s hand and he skips between the two of them, trying to brush the top of his head on the low hanging light fixtures.
‘The same,’ Hoseok replies grimly. ‘I guess.’

‘Yoongi?’ Sk’jin tries.

‘I’m all right.’

‘Hoseok- what was his first fight like?’ Namjoon asks quietly- clearly only for Hoseok’s channel.

‘Short.’ Is Hoseok’s blunt reply.

The cheers of the crowd eggs them forward.

‘I think Van will try to injure Yoongi from this point,’ Namjoon says suddenly.


‘But doesn’t he want to win?’ Hoseok asks, sounding confused.

‘He does- but he always wants what we have,’ Namjoon replies. ‘He can’t claim it- Pageant laws though twisted are strict. They abide their own laws regarding the ransom. And even though Van’s involved- he can’t twist his way here- he’s only part of the neutral party. He has no actual authority regarding their cultural events. The Pompen were incredibly shrewd in how they managed this. And even more so now with the Pageant hosting in their planet.’

They step into the arena and it’s somehow entirely changed in the past 10 hours. The Beings gathered now appeared less Pompen and more like other Beings. This unsettles Sk’jin and apparently Namjoon as well.

‘Who are all these Beings?’ Namjoon asks no one is specific.

‘They started showing up and the Pompen just dwindled off upwards.’ Hoseok replies tersely.

‘We’re getting ready to leave.’

Sk’jin feels a bitter bubble of discomfort rise up in his throat.

‘This is too much exposure,’ Namjoon says quietly. ‘We’re really going to draw too much attention.’

‘Too late to think about that,’ Sk’jin says quietly as he scans the arena. ‘Yoongi’s going to have to fight upstairs- that’s even more televised.’

‘WELCOME TO THE SEMI-FINALS!’ a high-pitched voice bellows. It’s not the same Pompen, but another- this time male. ‘INTRODUCING THE ONLY REMAINING MEMBER OF THE AUCTION-ARENA! FROM THE HOUSE OF FALLING VITKA’V PETALS- SUGA!’

‘Wait what-‘

‘Suga?’ Sk’jin repeats, laughing and momentarily forgetting his worries.

‘Yeah! It’s because he’s so sweet!’ Taeh’yung explains. Sk’jin doesn’t see that sweetness in the Human but he lets Taeh’yung be.

‘Oh- you were the one who came up with that name,’ Namjoon says as though not surprised.

‘SUGA COMES TO CHALLENGE OUR CONTENDOR FROM THE HOUSE DL’ ANG- THE SPLENDID ORNAS!’
'I guess “Suga” isn’t too bad then…’ Namjoon mumbles a little.

The crowd goes wild as a K’hlak comes charging out of the opposite doorway, leaping around and bellowing a mighty roar just feet from Yoongi. The Human doesn’t even blink, just simply looks up at the hulking beast of a Being.

‘Let’s go get a seat!’ Taeh’yung says excitedly, leaping into the crowd before they can stop him.

‘I missed his first fight- I look forward to this one.’

Van Seulgaan stands behind them, looking down as the arena doors open and Yoongi steps out. Small, discreet even with his pale blue hair and flowing robes.

‘I shall be placing a high bet,’ Van informs them before bowing and walking away.

Namjoon looks over at Sk’jin with an expression Sk’jin can quite place.

‘We might as well,’ the Kutsoglerin says. Sk’jin nods in agreement and makes his way down the steps. They flag Taeh’yung down who was standing to his full height, waving his long arms at them.

No one is sitting- everyone stands, devices clutched to their hands as they cheered and took pictures.

‘ARENA IS CLEAR IN!’

The crowd screams alongside the arena-master.

‘3!’

‘2!’

‘1!’

Yoongi is a brutal fighter. But strangely kind.

The K’hlak were a fighting species of Beings from a rough and tropical planet some 3 galaxies away. They were 90% muscle mass and 8% roaring and 2% brain. This made fighting them something of a hassle because though predictable and easy to dodge- they practically never tired and had extremely thick skin. And Yoongi was weaponless.

The K’hlak, or Ornas, charges at Yoongi with a bellowing roar.

Yoongi is fast. Sk’jin thought he’d seen him fight before. Seen him really move before. But here.

He’s nothing more than a fleeting shadow, a bright blue blur at some point. It should be impossible for someone of Yoongi’s biological built to move like this. To be able to function in this rate.

‘WOOO!! GO SUGA!!’ Taeh’yung screams from next to Sk’jin.

The first minute is spent dodging and ducking. Yoongi was analyzing the Being before him. Studying his form, looking for weaknesses.

‘He’s going to need a weapon,’ Sk’jin mumbles to himself.

‘Don’t worry!’ Taeh’yung screams into his ear, clearly having heard him. ‘He’ll get one!’
‘What-?’ Sk’jin wants to ask Taeh’yung what he meant but the cheer roars and Yoongi is suddenly sprinting across the arena to one side, diving and rolling and when he stands, he’s suddenly armed with double axes.

‘Who-?’

‘It’s the Obere,’ Namjoon says tensely. ‘They’re trying to help. They’re sponsoring him.’

Sk’jin can’t spot the Obere in this crowd; the screaming and cheering increases. To Sk’jin’s disquiet, Van is clearly seated on a raised step, looking impressed and an expression that was far too collected and calm to Sk’jin’s taste.

‘The fight will be over soon,’ Taeh’yung says excitedly. And not even 15 seconds later, the K’hlak totters around, dizzied by the tight-knit chase Yoongi lead it on.

The K’hlak roars out but it’s made short as Yoongi leaps impossibly high- the ax in his hand gleams bright for a fraction of a second before burying itself into and out of its thick throat. The second ax gleams cold and sharp and with a sound that echoes throughout of the arena, buries itself over its gnarly thick head.

Yoongi lands on his feet nimbly and not 3 seconds later, the K’hlak keels over, a pool of deep purple blood pooling about him.

The crowd cheers on aggressively.

Sk’jin feels a tug on his sleeve as the arena-cleaners move forward, body bags and cleaning props at hand.

‘AND THE WINNER IS SUGA! WE WILL SEE YOU IN THE FINAL ROUNDS IN AN HOUR!’ the high-pitched voice trills.

‘Let’s go,’ Namjoon says quietly. Sk’jin grabs Taeh’yung’s tunic around his nape and tugs, bringing the Zhak’gri with him. Sk’jin feels van’s eyes following them out and when he turns around to look, refuses to acknowledge the small smile on the Tayian’s face.

They try to move quickly away from the arena but they’re interrupted by the appearance of white-garbed Beings. They’re slender and slight in built, a majority of their faces hidden behind a white mask of alabaster-like material. The House of Jtāharū, if Sk’jin isn’t mistaken- they had outbid them during the Gremio Auction. There were three of them in total, all of varying heights but the same slight built carried over on all of them.

‘We will give you 500,000 units for the OrTank,’ the shortest of them says without preamble. His/her (?!? Sk’jin can’t tell) mouth was the only thing exposed and it only opened a small bit. Their voices sound strangely digitized- as though they spoke through a badly wired speaker-unit.

‘The OrTank is ours,’ Namjoon says firmly, eyeing them carefully. If Sk’jin isn’t mistaken, he had also run research on this House, but had found nothing conclusive. Taeh’yung on the other hand seems obviously upset at their appearance and hostile. His features are twisted, frowning heavily and his eyes gleaming. There are patterns swirling just under his skin and to Sk’jin’s absolute disquiet, his hands were starting to glow.

‘We will accept no price-’ Namjoon is saying, but the speaker of the House of Jtāharū actually takes a step forward and says, ‘1,000,000 units for the OrTank.’

Namjoon gawks at them and Sk’jin can’t help but mirror the same expression. Their joint shock
distracts them momentarily from Taeh’yung who charges past them and straight at the House of Jtāharū.

‘Taeh’yung-!’ Namjoon scrambles to grab him. But the Zhak’gri pays no heed. He hisses in a different language and actually lunges at them, hands glowing bright green.

But the Beings from the House of Jtāharū are quick. Though the accurate term would be they were fluid.

There’s a strange moment where they seemed to lose their corporeal quality—fading as though a hologram and warping in the air as they shot backwards, reappearing into full solidity. What’s even more disconcerting was that they appeared unfazed by Taeh’yung’s actions.

‘Taeh’yung stop-’ Namjoon grabs the Zhak’gri back, holding him down.

‘We require the OrTank- we offer you more if you-’

‘The OrTank is not for sale,’ Sk’jin says sternly, stepping over to stand in front of Taeh’yung and Namjoon. Taeh’yung still hasn’t looked away—eyes gleaming bright green. ‘No amount of unit or trade will buy him over.’

The Beings of the House of Jtāharū turn their heads over towards Sk’jin and his skin crawls.

‘Very well.’ The main speaker says in automated tones. They slip away and disappear into the crowd as the arena momentarily relieves itself of the gathered Beings during the short breaks between the fights.

‘Taeh’yung.’

Sk’jin looks around to find that Taeh’yung is still upset, eyes narrowed and he’s still struggling a little, as though trying to pull away from Namjoon to go after them.

‘What is it?’ Sk’jin asks, wondering if he wanted to know the answer.

‘I don’t like the way they smell,’ Taeh’yung hisses, standing straight and his posture relaxing a bit. Namjoon still holds his arm warily, eyeing the Zhak’gri carefully.

‘Smell?’ Namjoon repeats.

Sk’jin can’t help but glance back, feeling extremely unsettled.

There’s roaring screams, announcing the new up-coming fight.

‘Where are you guys?’ Hoseok asks.

‘We’re coming,’ Namjoon replies, still holding Taeh’yung’s arm in his hand.

‘What do you mean?’ Sk’jin asks quietly.

Taeh’yung doesn’t reply for a moment, his eyes suddenly distant, as though thinking of some distant memory.

‘We should go—let’s not talk here,’ Namjoon says quietly, pulling Taeh’yung firmly but gently. Sk’jin nods in agreement.

‘How’s Yoongi?’ Namjoon asks as they make their way to the dressing-rooms.
‘He’s all right. He got a scratch but it’s not deep- no poison, no toxin.’ Hoseok replies.

‘Jin.’

Namjoon is saying something to Hoseok, guiding them through the hallways. Taeh’yung turns his head just a little bit.

‘What is it?’ Sk’jin finds himself adopting a gentle tone as he addresses the Zhak’gri.

‘Do…-do you remember?’ he asks vaguely. ‘That place? It was white- filled with voices and forms and shapes? Old, a little sad?’

Sk’jin swallows, throat constricting a little bit.

‘What about it?’ he asks.

‘Do you remember the ship-‘

‘Taeh’yung.’

Sk’jin doesn’t even realize he’s stopped walking.

‘Sk’jin?’ Namjoon is looking between the two of them in worry.

‘They smell like that ship.’ Taeh’yung says quietly.

Sk’jin is pulled back- his mind reeling as he pushes away overwhelming memories of that white void- of the endless voices and memories. Of the pain and permanent end of life and death- pushing Time away into nothingness.

‘Sk’jin?’

Snapping out of his involuntary stupor, Sk’jin looks up to find Namjoon looking down at him worriedly, Taeh’yung hovering just behind the Kutsoglerin.

‘What's wrong,’ he asks carefully.

Sk’jin realizes that Namjoon’s instead holding him up.

‘I think-‘ Sk’jin’s tongue feels heavy.

Namjoon leans forward, as though to urge him to speak.

‘I think we have to report back to the special-jury.’
Has anyone watched “Call me by your name”? I’ve been listening to the audio book while doing my assignments and the music for the movie is JUST FUCKING PERFECT I HOPE SUFIAN FINALLY GETS THE RECOGNITION HE DESERVES FOR BEING SUCH A GOOD MUSICIAN And who else was not expecting that Sk’jin flashback. I sure as hell wasn’t. AND I LOVE MONSTA X’S COMEBACK YASSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS QUALITY CONTENT I AM HERE FOR THAT And the next update might be late! It’s my finals week and *laughs nervously* I haven’t even started on one of my final projects *coughs* BUT AFTER THAT I AM FREE FOR LIKE A MONTH SO EXPECT WEEKLY UPDATES AFTER THAT AYO Also my jikook heart is singing with that GCF in Tokyo thing I’m crying they’re so precious I love them bye Also I had to bring up “Suga” because THAT AMA INSTA STORY WAS SO CRINGE-WORTHY- “his smile is sweet as sugar” NO PLEASE STOP ODGHLSDFGHSLDKFJSDFGDF my diaphragm inverted into itself when I read that. But I can’t wait to see my sons dressed to the nines, killing it on the red (?) carpet again. I hope though this time, Jimin looks a little happier this time around *sweats*. I ALSO FUCKING HOPE THEY DON’T GET ASKED FUCKIGN STUPID QUESTIONS AND REPORTERS ACTUALLY FUCKING DO THEIR RESEARCH
“Beauty” [noun]: a combination of qualities, such as shape, color, or form, that pleases the aesthetic senses.

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains quite a lot of violence and considerably graphic depictions of morally questionable fighting techniques! Please tread carefully!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

‘Are you all right?’

His friend seemed troubled ever since the day they saw that unidentified ship. It hadn’t appeared again and they didn’t detect anything out of the ordinary on their radars either. Their core-ship that was orbiting the planet detected nothing either- though both might be due to the heavy and thick layer of storm clouds that shrouds the planet. Their timing was a little unfortunate, what with the season and all. It seemed to cast a heavy air of wariness, tiredness, and paranoia around the team. Even short-radio signals occasionally messed up, causing them to frown, their thoughts turning grim and the desire to head back out building up each second.

‘Yeah I’m good,’ he replies with a nod. ‘This is getting old pretty quickly though.’

He gestures around them; it’s damp, muddy, dim, and cold. Though he had originally appreciated finally being in-planet after so long, he can’t help but agree with his friend.

‘You can say that again,’ someone in the back mumbles. ‘My feet have been wet for 2 days straight. Two. This is some unhealthy shit.’

There are murmurs of agreement.

‘Also- when is this forest going to end? I swear to all that is holy I might start a fire and fucking burn this place down.’

‘Please keep all arsenic tendencies under control,’ their leader barks from the front though she sounds 2 seconds away with agreeing.

‘Yeah- might not want to bring back our little ghost now would you?’
‘Fuck, don’t say that- fucking creepy.’

That voice they had heard singing had definitely been real. The scanning team had managed to record the last 2 seconds of the voice and had processed and filtered it as best they could. There were words in there, but none they could recognize or identify; even with the GLA Database.

But they hadn’t heard it since that one time, but the memory of it lingered in everyone’s minds. While it might have spooked the others, it felt almost serene to him. And to his friend too.

‘It sounded sad,’ was what he had said. ‘Sad, pained- full of longing.’

‘Cap,- let’s take a short break? Please? I need to drain my boots,’ one of them calls out.

‘We’re approaching a ridge in 10 minutes- higher ground,’ she calls back. ‘We’ll take 1.’

‘One minute?’

‘One hour.’

They groan gratefully in response; spurred on a little by the idea of higher ground and a break. They had been on their feet with little to no breaks for over 15 hours now. A break was long overdue.

The forest seems to cut off rather abruptly, giving way to hard dark stone from muddy clay in a span of a few steps.

‘Well…okay?’ their leader looks confused but relieved. ‘All clear?’

‘We’re good!’ the scanning team calls back.

The ridge is a wide cliff that gently breaks off to an easy slope downwards into a strangely autumn-hued forest below. His friend takes a deep breath of the cool air and exhales out long and exaggerated. The team laughs, relief obvious in their body language as they dump their heavy wet bags on the hard ground, stretching cramped and tired limbs. But now that he was here, out in the open, he suddenly feels restive.

‘We should scan for a water source,’ their team leader announces.

‘There’s a waterfall 15 minutes south-east from here, up there,’ one of the scanners replies, mouth filled with dried (partially) fruits.

‘I’ll go,’ he volunteers at once, before anyone else can. Not that they would, seeing how tired they were. They’d probably settle it by drawing lots like they did before.

‘You sure?’ she asks, giving him a once over.

‘I’m sure Cap,’ he replies, already unpacking the frame for the collapsible tank and gravity-lift.

‘I’ll come with you,’ his friend says at once, standing up with a groan.

They walk quietly- his friend seems to sense whatever weird burst of energy that suddenly possessed him and asks no questions.

The air around them lightens the higher they climb. The ground is craggy and dark grey, fresh moss growing in spirals over the wet surface. He hears the waterfall before he sees it. It’s not big, just a steady stream that pools into a dark clear pond. Starting the filtration process, they set up
the pipes and inflate the tank.

‘I’ll look after this,’ his friend says. He smiles in thanks before making his way higher. He could still see their team below, not moving too far off if he needed help or vice-versa. The forest they trudged through is below him to one side, dark and gloomy- but on the other side, the autumnal forest sways gently in an early morning breeze. Taking a deep breath, he takes a seat on one of the many flat rocks.

Sitting seems to sap him of his strength and he closes his eyes. If he emptied his mind, then this felt exactly like how it did during the monsoon season back on Earth. He didn’t go in-planet on Earth too often- only a few times for academic purposes and the occasional family vacation. But he loved the rainy season- even more so when the sun would shine through the clouds. There was something entirely different- something entirely wholesome about the way the sunlight felt on his skin when he was on a planet.

He’s stirred from his thoughts as his friend approaches, sitting on another rock heavily.

‘Don’t you want to rest?’ he asks.

He is tired- incredibly so. But something told him he had to be here.

‘It’s fine,’ he replies with an easy shrug. ‘I’ll rest later.’

‘You should rest now,’ he insists, ‘Or well- when we get back.’

He stares out into the cloudy sky for a while- unsure why or how he was feeling this way. Maybe it was homesickness- or maybe it was just his fatigue getting to him.

‘I feel like I’ve spent…spent all my life resting,’ he huffs out a short laugh, his head spinning a little from the exertion- he’s not sure why, but he’s feeling an incredible pull to all of this. ‘And now I can finally…’

He pauses- he doesn’t know how to explain this to him. Maybe it was all just plain old quarter-life crisis.

‘And now I can finally be.’

And then suddenly, quite out of nowhere, he hears a soft and light humming tune. It’s a surprise, but somehow- he’d been anticipating it ever since he broke free from the damp forest. Scrambling, he turns, rather desperately, to locate that sound. He finds nothing-

‘What is it?’ his friend asks, alarmed.

The clouds above them break, and through the heavy grey and purple clouds, soft rosy skies peak through, and a golden light falls upon the moss covered rocks nearby.

This was why he came here. As though he knew that he would see this. He isn’t even aware that he’s holding up a hand, as though to reach forward and grab at the light- to hold it close and never let go.

‘Sunshine.’
Yoongi understands fighting.

He understands missions.

He understands objectives and goals.

He understands that in order to function, he needs to eat, drink, sleep.

He understands that in order to maintain stability in a group dynamic, he needs to contribute equally and keep up an equal level of tolerance, space to adjust, and acceptance.

He understands that right now, with this situation, he needs to win, for more than just one reason.

He understands that there are aspects to this situation that he does not understand. That he may never come to understand.

He understands that if he is injured right now, it would diminish his chances of winning.

‘Are you hurt? Got any injuries?’ Hoseok asks immediately.

Yoongi shakes his head. He’s had to fight off K’hlaks before. More than 2 at a time, on more than one occasion. So it had been relatively simple- especially after he received the axes.

Yoongi understands that in order to win, he must remain unharmed. Which was why Hoseok was making this inquiry.

‘Only a scratch,’ Yoongi shows the side of his arm- he had grazed the side of his arm on the K’hlak’s armoured flank.

Hoseok takes a quick look at it, passing a small hand-held scanner over the scratch.

‘Okay- there’s no poison or toxin,’ he says in a low voice, as though speaking to himself. ‘Just clean it up later. Tired? You should stock up on ionized-water the moment we get back. That was a heavy blow,’ Hoseok presses. There’s a permanent furrow between his brows. One that hasn’t gone away since all of this started.

Yoongi understands that Hoseok is under heavy stress. He doesn’t, however, understand why he did not like the strained frown on the Ngfy’widan’s eyebrows. Unsure but somehow feeling like it was the right thing to do, Yoongi reaches over and with his pointer finger presses on the crease between Hoseok’s eyebrows and replies, ‘I’m fine.’
Hoseok is momentarily cross-eyed as he stares at Yoongi’s hand, expression shocked.

‘Let’s go.’ He says. He wants to take a shower, he had blood splattered on one side of his body. Sk’jin was going to get mad that he dirtied his robes.

‘…right.’

Hoseok leads the way, rummaging in his pockets momentarily before asking, ‘Where are you guys?’

He pulls out Yoongi’s Comm-Device from inside his pocket and hands it to him.

‘How’s Yoongi?’ Namjoon asks.

‘He’s all right. He got a scratch but it’s not deep- no poison, no toxin.’ Hoseok replies for him.

Yoongi understands that his health is priority.

‘All right- we have things to go over- we’re going to have to create our own database on the next fights- we’re at a great disadvantage not knowing the opponents in the Pageant and not knowing their skill sets,’ Namjoon says, his voice heavy with fatigue. ‘Not that I don’t trust in Yoongi’s abilities. But we need to start studying his possible opponents outside of the rogue-rounds.’

‘Agreed- I think we can ask Taeh’yung about some of the opponents- he was watching them before,’ Hoseok replies, glancing over at him every few seconds as though to make sure he was all right.

Yoongi doesn’t understand why he was doing this.

*Database has no explanation.*

‘Okay then- Yoongi how are you feelin- Sk’jin?’ Namjoon’s tone changes to one of worry.

‘They smell like that ship.’ Taeh’yung’s voice says softly.

Yoongi stops mid-step.

‘Sk’jin?’

‘Yoongi- you okay?’ Hoseok asks immediately, giving him a quick once over, health-scanner already at hand despite having scanned him not even a minute ago.

The ship?

‘What’s wrong,’ Namjoon sounds vaguely wary.

‘I think-‘ Sk’jin stutters. ‘I think we have to report back to the special-jury.’

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Namjoon and Sk’jin both look worse for wear. It didn’t help that they were both wearing ill-fitted maintenance uniforms- it pulled comically at Namjoon’s long legs. Yoongi wants to maybe point
them out and make a joke; but the “How to be Funny! An easy guide for the socially awkward!” book had nothing to do with short pant-legs so Yoongi remains quiet.

Sk’jin doesn’t even blink at the state of Yoongi’s (well, his) robes and is instead pacing rather restlessly. Yoongi can see the confusion on both Hoseok and Namjoon’s faces. Taeh’yung is uncharacteristically quiet- his eyes a little glazed as though he wasn’t quite there with them.

Yoongi can understand why they were confused. Yoongi would explain, but no one has asked the questions he knows he can answer.

‘What do you mean we should report back?’ Hoseok asks, clearly trying to establish a common ground of information in this discussion. ‘We’ve spent weeks avoiding the GLA and any other possible way in which they could possibly find us, and now we report back?’

‘This- this is something else,’ Sk’jin gnaws at his lower lip.

‘Sk’jin- please, just sit down for a moment, and tell us what you mean. And you too Taeh’yung.’

Taeh’yung doesn’t appear to have heard his name. Sk’jin pauses a moment, struggling, it would appear, with what to say.

‘4 sols ago, when the Gaia Case was created and the special jury founded- it was all a result of the discovery of the mysterious species of Beings simply known as the Akramanese,’ Yoongi finds himself speaking up instead. ‘The Akramanese were created as a result of the Yisheng’s involvement in their attempt to create a Universe without freewill- a Universe they could control. Out of the many experiments they conducted, this one in particular would go awry. Not only did the Akramanese inherit their creator’s objectives, they took it a step further and wanted to overtake this dimension of existence. They were defeated of course- their ship, technology, and existence obliterated from history. During this crucial war for the freewill of the Universe, Taeh’yung, Sk’jin, and I were closely situated to the occurrence surrounding the defeat of the Akramanese.’

‘…we get that part,’ Namjoon says slowly. ‘But why do we have to report back to the special-jury?’

‘Because Taeh’yung could smell it.’ Sk’jin blurs out. ‘That damn fuckin’ ship!’

‘Smell what exactly?’ Hoseok asks, exasperation lacing into his voice.

‘The Akramanese mothership,’ Yoongi explains.

Hoseok still looks lost whereas Namjoon looks like he’s thinking extremely hard.

‘But if they were destroyed- why would any semblance of them still exist?’ Hoseok questions.

‘The same reason why we’re being sent to Bhumi,’ Sk’jin replies, gripping at his hair. ‘Every single thing, every single Being, every embryo, every tech, pulled from that Akramanese ship was completely destroyed in the explosion that demolished it and Earth. So why should it still exist here if it didn’t mean that they could still be out there?!’

Hoseok actually backs away as Sk’jin leans down to hiss at him.

‘Sk’jin- sit down,’ Namjoon says tersely, leaning over to push the Khol’isa away from Hoseok. ‘Taeh’yung, are you sure?’ he adds, looking over at the Zhak’gri.

‘I am,’ Taeh’yung replies. ‘I won’t ever forget the way it smelt. The way it felt.’
‘So what does this mean and why should we be effected by it?’ Hoseok asks, clearly trying to lay out some form of equal footing on information.

‘It means,’ Sk’jin takes a deep breath. ‘That we’re fucked.’

Yoongi understands that this response makes no sense and only serves to irritate the former Venture Unit agent more.

‘Sk’jin,’ Hoseok begins with a heavy scowl. ‘You’re not making sense- could you please just explain to me why this is bothering you so much?’

‘YOU WEREN’T THERE!’ Sk’jin screams in frustration, causing Hoseok to take a step back. ‘YOU DIDN’T HEAR THEM! YOU DIDN’T SEE THEM- IT’S-’

He stops, taking a deep breath. Hoseok is understandably baffled.

‘I agree with Sk’jin.’ Namjoon cuts in firmly. ‘We should report back to the special-jury.’

‘I don’t know how I can explain this to you…’ Sk’jin actually loses track, gaping at Namjoon. ‘What did you say?’

‘I said I agree. We will call the special-jury.’ Namjoon repeats.

Sk’jin seems too stunned to speak, mouth still agape, eyes wide.

‘But-‘ Hoseok begins, standing up as well, a deep frown etched on his face.

‘Okay- we need to first get into the order of things here,’ Namjoon steps a little away in order to face the entire room and all of them. ‘First of all, we’re not going to be able to leave this planet,’ Namjoon says bluntly. ‘Van Seulgaan is not going to let us go- we’re too valuable, and we have too many possible variables he can exploit to his advantage. It’s not just the OrTank- it’s us. Each and every single one of us. There’s no possible way he’ll stick to his word- He’d be stupid to. We’re too valuable and vulnerable at this stage- and we do not have the means to overturn this situation around for our benefit.’

‘But he knows we’re on a specialized mission- he wouldn’t dare stop us-‘ Hoseok counters.

‘But he also suspects we’re on the run- I mean we do have a bounty on our heads now, according to him,’ Namjoon replies with a sigh. ‘The further he studies Sk’jin’s statement from the ship, he’s going to realize that it doesn’t add up- he probably already did.’ Namjoon glances over at Sk’jin who is still gawking at him in surprise. ‘Not that you did a bad job- it’s just with someone like Van, we can’t possibly take any chances.’

Sk’jin snaps out of whatever stunned stupor he’d been caught in and nods.

‘Not to mention those Beings- the House of Jtāharū,’ Sk’jin continues his point. ‘I don’t know how they’re connected to that ship- and I’d rather not find out- and knowing that they want our OrTank, we can’t afford to get caught up in this.’

Hoseok’s eyes narrow, studying them both before looking across, over at Yoongi.

‘What do you say?’ Hoseok addresses him.

‘We should call the special-jury,’ Yoongi says in agreement. ‘But we should get away before they arrive.’
‘How do we do that?’ Hoseok asks emphatically.

‘We could just stay until they get here,’ Sk’jin begins to say hesitantly, but Namjoon shakes his head.

‘No- if they come here, and we’re here, I can guarantee you that we will be pulled out of the mission,’ the Kutsoglerin states.

There’s sudden pause- as though everyone just took a step back to analyze their situation, minds calculating and theorizing. Sk’jin breaks the silence first.

‘Not that I don’t appreciate your support here Namjoon but,’ Sk’jin states flatly, ‘You were never for this mission- why do you want to leave before the jury get here? That is if we are going to call them here.’

Namjoon remains motionless for a moment before positioning himself to look around at all of them.

‘Up there- in Van’s ship,’ he begins. ‘OrTanks, just like the one we have, were lined up, empty. Meaning he had access to them- to what extent I’m not sure, it’s all just theory at the moment but that also means that he is involved deeper and further into whatever this is.’

‘Empty?’ Hoseok repeats in a hollow voice.

‘Empty,’ Namjoon confirms. ‘We can’t tell if he got them empty, or if there were Beings in there-like ours. He even referred to them as “eggs”- something I haven’t heard of or read in any of my research. We don’t know the full details but we have to assume the worst.’

‘And the worst here being?’ Hoseok asks, listening intently.

‘That Van Seulgaan is not only a part of the Alliance but directly involved with the connection between the Alliance, the rest of the GLA and the Yisheng Directory, and the Akramanese,’ Namjoon says bluntly. ‘And if someone like Van is involved this deep with this situation- then that doesn’t stop the others from the jury from being involved as well.’ He stops, looking over at each of them carefully before asking, ‘What was it that they said- when they first each came to us all.’

No one replies.

‘They selected each one of us to represent them and act on their behalf because they didn’t trust the other members within the jury,’ Yoongi replies.

‘Exactly,’ Namjoon nods. ‘We were sent here, to find out, through each other, who would want to use the Akramanese technology to further their agenda. This is the same thing they all said to us; our reason for division.’

‘Are you suggesting that we find out who out of the jury is actually involved?’ Hoseok asks incredulously.

‘That’s exactly what I’m saying,’ Namjoon nods. ‘We were sent out on this mission, deliberately blinded and crippled- if we are able to find out who it is, then by extension, we are also completing our mission; which is to entirely rid the Universe of any remnants of the Gaia Case.’

Sk’jin and Hoseok glance at each other, checking each other’s reactions.

‘You’re talking about luring out the very Beings who put this entire thing together- those Beings
are singlehandedly some of the most powerful Beings in the Universe, and setting them up to find out, which is of course all conjecture, if they’re involved with the Akramanese?’

‘Yes.’

‘So we call the special-jury,’ Sk’jin begins, ‘Then what? We escape before they come? Like Hoseok mentioned- how do we do that? And out of the jury who do we call? Because I’m not sure about you guys, but I’m not keen on calling any of them.’

‘No- we call all of them.’ Namjoon says. ‘We call each of them separately- I don’t care if they figure it out- I don’t care if they’re all gathered in the same place when we call- they can’t back out. Especially K’mara and Lal Haenoon- if we draw them all here, they have no choice but to purge this organization.’

‘They can still effectively cover it up-’ Sk’jin begins to say but Hoseok speaks up as though thoroughly amused.

‘You want to make this live don’t you? The broadcasting channel? From Van’s ship?’

Namjoon nods.

‘They have no choice.’ Namjoon actually grins. ‘They have to come. Either to cover up their own involvement or to claim the victory over Pompa’s highly illegal and anti-GLA activity. They will come.’

Sk’jin looks thoroughly shaken but at the same time entirely enthusiastic.

‘Not bad Joonie,’ he grins. ‘How are we doing this then?’

‘Well first,’ Namjoon looks over to address him. ‘Yoongi-’

‘I won’t lose,’ Yoongi replies at once.

Namjoon just blinks in response- clearly taken aback. Yoongi wonders if he’s said something wrong.

Of course he would win. There was no other option.

Regardless of whether or not Van Seulgaan was planning on overtaking them; regardless of whatever and whoever were after them- he was going to win. Regardless of how any of this was connected or not. Because he had to.

Yoongi understands this perfectly.

The OrTank was kept under their protection- it was their duty, and if what Taeh’yung said was to be trusted, then the Being inside the OrTank was depending on them to take him back. They had more than just the stated objective in this mission, and Yoongi would make sure that he would see through to it.

‘That’s not what I was trying to say,’ Namjoon huffs out. ‘I just…- I just want to say that I am sorry.’

Yoongi does not understand. He’s thoroughly confused; what did the Kutsoglerin mean by that?

*Database has no explanation.*
‘I am sorry that I’m asking you to do this- that we’re asking you to do this.’ Namjoon clarifies.

‘You didn’t ask me,’ Yoongi states bluntly. It was as though Namjoon didn’t understand that. ‘I volunteered. It was my intention to do so- and I will carry it out until I win and I can bring him back and take him home.’

‘Him-?’ Namjoon is saying before his eyes widen a little with understanding.

‘It is within my capability,’ Yoongi further clarifies. ‘Out of all of us, I am the only one qualified and skilled to undertake these fights.’

Yoongi is briefly worried that the others would take offence to his words. Because all of them were skilled beyond average- whether it was in hand-to-hand combat or weapons skill. But no one looked offended- in fact Sk’jin is shaking his head and smiling to himself while Hoseok shrugs as though to say, ‘he’s right’.

Namjoon looks at him for a moment longer and then he too smiles. Yoongi wonders if he’s missed something here. Some minor detail of sorts.

‘All right then- Yoongi’s next fight is in 45 minutes right?’ Namjoon addresses Taeh’yung who seems to have recovered a little.

The Zhak’gri nods.

‘Right- based on my calculations, the GLA patrol unit are probably still in the Grezma area, along with the Yisheng ship. If we send out an emergency broadcast for help- they will arrive here within 6 hours.’ Namjoon says as he retrieves his screen. ‘However we cannot allow any communication to make it through here – and the only one we can send out is the broadcasting channel from Van’s ship.’

‘You’ve already taken care of most of the power-lines here- could you completely fry their communication signals?’ Hoseok asks, also pulling out his screen.

‘I can put Pompa under complete radio-silence in and off-planet,’ Namjoon states without a hint of pride or arrogance in his voice. ‘We’ll have to go back up to Van’s ship-’

‘I’ll do that,’ Hoseok volunteers at once. ‘Just run me through what needs to be done.’

Namjoon nods at that before questioning Taeh’yung again, ‘How many rounds do you think Yoongi will have to fight in the Arena upstairs?’

‘They’re in the semi-finals!’ Taeh’yung looks excited again. ‘He’ll have to beat an opponent in the semi-finals before entering the Final Round.’

‘So all together you’ll be fighting 3 fights,’ Namjoon glances over at him as though to make sure he understood. Yoongi nods, a tad bit slow, in reply.

‘The fights are pretty back to back,’ Taeh’yung supplies. ‘It depends on how fast the other fights take place- it’s all high-paced entertainment value here!’

‘If-…when Yoongi wins the rogue-rounds,’ Sk’jin corrects himself. ‘We get the OrTank back right? Immediately?’

‘Yeah! I watched some of the older rogue-rounds,’ Taeh’yung confirms. ‘They’ll bring out the prize during the Final Round and if you win, the champion can take it back!’
‘All right then,’ Namjoon claps his hands together once. ‘The moment Yoongi wins, he’ll bring over the OrTank, and we safely deposit him back to our ship. He’s our priority here, so we make sure he’s always safe.’

Everyone nods in unison.

‘After that, we go up to the Arena. And then Sk’jin will take over the Užkulisaï and keep her on standby near the Arena,’ Namjoon nods at the Khol’isa who winks in response, pushing back his hair in a flirtatious manner. ‘There’s no guarantee what conditions we’ll be facing and when we can leave—how we’re going to leave.’

‘I’m the emergency getaway transporter,’ Sk’jin quips.

‘What about me?’ Taeh’yung asks eagerly.

‘I need you to stay with our OrTank,’ Namjoon says seriously. ‘He’s a target right now— and we can’t afford to lose him. Stick close to him—no matter what, protect him at all cost.’

Taeh’yung nods enthusiastically at that.

‘If things get bad—then Taeh’yung, I don’t care what you do—either of you. Just get out of the planet at once.’ Namjoon continues, ‘Yoongi and I will be fine here and we’ll be able to get out—’

‘Are you sure?’ Sk’jin asks skeptically.

‘Positive—it’s the most logical thing to do,’ Namjoon affirms quickly. ‘After I’m done with my stuff, I’ll go to the Arena to wait for Yoongi; see what needs to be done in case of injuries, stuff like that. But if things go sour—just leave.’

‘But what about Hobi?’ Taeh’yung rushes to Hoseok, rubbing his face against the Ngfy’widan’s.

‘Hoseok will head up to Van’s ship and restart the broadcasting— at this point, Van will find out, I’m sure, but he won’t be able to do anything because I will cut Pompa off from any form of communication coming in and out of the planet.’ Namjoon explains. ‘And like I said, if things go bad, then you and Taeh’yung will leave, pick up Hoseok, and just—I guess just continue on. Yoongi and I will come and meet you.’

‘We should make a rendezvous point—just to be safe,’ Hoseok adds.

‘How about back to Ch’dra? No one will expect us to go backwards,’ Taeh’yung suggest, clapping his hands together.

‘Yeah—let’s do that,’ Namjoon nods in agreement.

‘Van is going to suspect something, you know that, don’t you?’ Sk’jin says this more like a fact than a question.

‘Of course he does,’ Namjoon snorts. ‘But he’s never going to suspect us calling all of the jury.’

‘When do we do that?’ Hoseok asks.

‘Right after Yoongi’s win, the moment we get our hands on the OrTank,’ Namjoon checks over at him as though to make sure he was all right with it. It amuses Yoongi a little. Nonetheless he nods.

‘You’ll be alone for the first match in the Arena,’ Namjoon continues, ‘I’ll try to make it there—you’ll be all right?’
Yoongi doesn’t know how to respond to that. So he just nods.

Database has no explanation.

‘We have some time before the match starts- Yoongi do you want something to eat?’ Sk’jin asks, his eyes studying Yoongi’s robes with a look of disdain.

‘He needs ionized-water,’ Hoseok says at once. ‘And I’m taking a look at your cut.’

Sk’jin nods, already stepping out to retrieve the required items followed by Taeh’yung who latches onto the Khol’isa, clearly intent on conversing. Yoongi notes how Namjoon watches after them for a moment before shaking his head slowly to himself.

‘I’ll be right back- need more tissue-plast,’ Hoseok states after he rummages for a while inside the medical kit. Namjoon nods in reply before making his way over to Yoongi and sitting down.

‘Do you think this is a good idea?’ he asks suddenly.

‘I don’t know,’ Yoongi replies honestly. ‘No amount of planning can ever predict what will or will not happen. There are too many unseen factors involved with our situation for us to properly plan and foresee the future.’

Namjoon huffs out a laugh before wiping at his face.

‘Yeah you’re right.’ He nods in agreement before he turns his head a little to look at him. ‘I wanted to talk to you about something,’ Namjoon says quietly. He pauses, as though waiting for Yoongi to tell him to continue. Before Yoongi can nod or do something, Namjoon continues.

‘Van said he had seen the GI fight before- is there any way, any possibility in which you might have come across him before?’

Yoongi doesn’t even have to think back for this as he replies, ‘No. I do not remember him.’

‘Is it possible if you could find out, how he’s connected to the GI? If I’m not mistaken, only the deep inner circles of the Yisheng Directory had access to the GI,’ Namjoon presses.

‘When we were given our missions, we were never told who issued them or who commissioned them,’ Yoongi states honestly. ‘I had an officer who distributed my missions to me. But beyond that, I knew nothing of the other agents, what they did, and who they worked for.’

Namjoon nods in understanding, looking disappointed.

‘I am sorry.’

‘No- I get it,’ Namjoon shakes his head.

What did Namjoon get?

Database has no explanation.

‘I was wondering if maybe we should ask Taeh’yung to go to Van’s ship- to understand what he’s carrying,’ Namjoon says out of nowhere. ‘But I think it’s better to assign him to the OrTank.’

Yoongi nods. He understands this decision. Taeh’yung was the only one out of them who could sense the OrTank. More accurately the Being inside of it. And while the idea that there might be others out there like this OrTank, not under the joint care of the Venture Unit and the Yisheng
Directory as they were meant to be, what mattered most now was the one under their protection.

‘I have another question Yoongi- if you don’t mind my asking.’ Namjoon says carefully.

Yoongi is a bit more prepared for this and so he nods in reply.

‘Why are you doing this?’ Namjoon asks carefully.

In all honesty, Yoongi doesn’t understand why he’s doing this.

*Database has no explanation.*

Yoongi thinks back to the Yisheng Headquarters, to the rows and rows of OrTanks, to all the Beings placed inside there. He thinks of his own situation- of his placement in all of this. He thinks about the young face, asleep and drifting inside the OrTank- of how he feels each time he looks at him.

Yoongi doesn’t understand and neither can he explain it- but if he were to put it into simple words, provided by what he’s understood of the emotional spectrum, he would say he feels a sense of kinship with the Being inside the OrTank- a sense of belonging that connects further and deeper than just this strange connection they shared through the OrTank as their basis for birth. He felt a sense of need- each time the Being drifted in the Tank to face him- like he needed Yoongi to hear him. To hear him speak. He felt it even more when he raised his hand to the surface- as though reaching out for Yoongi with something. Something Yoongi knew he needed.

Something he knew he missed.

It made no logical sense. There was no explanation to his thoughts- just a feeling. He doesn’t know how to put these into words, but he does say what he understands. So he just says: ‘Because I want answers.’

*Database has no explanation.*
It had been an invasion.

A raid.

Rape.

A grand purge- a cruel and great plague spread across the entirety of their land- their country, their planet.

He knows now. He knows too much. Sometimes he can’t handle it- and he’ll be taken to another place- another lab and there he’s knocked unconscious again. When he wakes up he’s “improved”.

They tell him that they're giving him a great opportunity- a wonderful chance. That he was helping them gain so much.

Was their gain bought with his depravity and loss?

He had once managed to run away. Escape, using his sudden new found knowledge. But he’d been caught.

But not before he caught a glimpse of his land. Of his home. Of his everything.

Great mountainous structures of ugly metal stretched over the land and towards the sky- its perverseness left no area unscathed.

They had come with the intention to rape- to humiliate, degrade, and destroy all sense of self, all memory of self. The only thing they would leave behind would be self-loathing, madness, and broken remains of what was.

‘We’re here to improve the savages.’ He heard them say.

How was he a savage when they were mercilessly slaughtering his people for their entertainment and gain?

Was this what lay beyond the great Stretch above?

‘We know better- this is what you need. You will thank us.’

Were they telling him this, or were they just reassuring themselves? Because surely, no living being alive could ever possibly believe themselves capable of such entitlement.

When he is rescued it is already too late.

It was already too late the moment those “mountains” had appeared in their skies.

It was already too late when he had run down the hilly slopes looking for his father.

It was already too late when the eclipse had formed.

The others are surprised when they see him. He spoke calmly- he had no fear when he saw them coming. He didn’t move, didn’t question, didn’t react. Not even when one of them burst out into tears. He doesn’t understand why. Because he had cried for years- but it had done nothing but bring him more pain.

‘You’re going to be all right.’ They had said.
But nothing **right** in him remained anymore. Everything inside of him was wrong.

‘We’re here to help you,’ they had said, their faces stricken and sad.

‘You’ll be all right,’ they keep repeating. ‘We’re taking you somewhere safe. You’ll be safe.’

Safe?

‘Is it what I need?’

*His question tastes red on his tongue.*

*They don’t understand his question.*

*And it remains unanswered.*

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Stepping out into an arena to fight feels like routine. There was a set of objectives he had to complete. A mark he had to reach. An end-result he had to achieve. Fighting in the rogue-rounds feels a lot like setting out on a mission.

[RECEIVING DATA]

**COORDINATES: POMPA**

**CONTENDER – FINAL ROUND. ROGUE-ROUNDS.**

**TERMINATION**

**MISSION ACCEPTED**

And Yoongi understands missions.

The moment he walks into the arena, Hoseok would leave for Van’s ship to begin the process of broadcasting the Pageant. Namjoon will also leave for the closest circuit-systems utility station to take over all of Pompa’s communication networks. Sk’jin and Taeh’yung will wait for Yoongi’s match to be over, take back the OrTank to the Užkulisai, and wait for the Pageant to be over. At the same time, each of them will call or message the special-jury member responsible for putting
them there while Hoseok makes sure that Van’s broadcasting channel is directly in line to target Raksane Tayi- in particular: Šerdesas. By that time, Namjoon would have finished his work quick enough and will be in time to join and wait for him inside the Pageant arena.

‘You’ll be all right,’ Hoseok says, his lips thin and pressed down hard against each other. The Ngfy’widan’s eyes gleam a little in this little alcove created for the contenders to wait before being set out in the arena.

Yoongi knows he’ll be all right. No matter what awaited him outside these doors, he was going to win. Hoseok doesn’t look at him while he’s saying this, confusing Yoongi. Was he speaking to himself? Was he reaffirming to himself that Yoongi would win?

*Database has no explanation.*

Unsure what to do, Yoongi hesitates, wondering if he should maybe extend a comforting hand. He awkwardly raises a hand, which draws Hoseok’s attention and a quizzical eyebrow.

‘Are you all right? Is something wrong?’ Hoseok asks instead.

Yoongi can hear the Pompen’s voice as they announce the final match, riling up the crowds. The roars will be deafening once he exits this small room instead of the constant buzz that surrounds him.

Yoongi stretches his hand out and places it on top of Hoseok’s head, which is higher than his own head. Hoseok looks down at him with some confusion before he bursts out into laughter.

‘A bit more like this,’ he says, holding up his own hand and smoothly patting over Yoongi’s blue hair. Yoongi had seen his own reflection and wasn’t sure what to think of it. It was the first time he’d seen his hair in that colour, or cut into that style. But Sk’jin and Taeh’yung were immensely pleased so he guesses it’s not an appalling sight. At least not by their own standards.

‘A bit more relaxed,’ Hoseok grins.

Yoongi bends his arm at the elbow, attempting to mirror Hoseok’s arm.

‘Whatever this is, I want no part in it,’ Sk’jin’s voice floats in.

Sk’jin looks tired despite his exposure to the sun and having consumed nearly his weight in food at the speed of light. Yoongi extends his arm over to reach the top of Sk’jin’s head- a difficult feat as the Khol’isa is much taller than Hoseok. Sk’jin just takes it in by stride and hastily pats Yoongi’s head too.

‘Here- change of clothes,’ he says.

‘Where’s Taeh’yung?’ Hoseok asks, looking around for the lanky Zhak’gri.

‘He’s tracking the OrTank- they’re bringing it up,’ Sk’jin explains as he unfurls the robes and holds it up for Yoongi to slip into. It’s one of his other robes, a silky pale rose coloured one with intricate silver patterns around the hem and collar. Yoongi already feels vaguely guilty, knowing that it would be covered in blood at some point in the next 10 minutes.

He removes the red and gold robes and exchanges it for the rose and silver ones. Sk’jin is quick to “fix” his hair just as the telltale signs of the countdown for the arena begins.

‘Everything is still in order,’ Sk’jin tells him, expression easy though his tone is a little tight.
‘Everything is going according to plan. You go do the best you can do.’

Yoongi nods, wondering why they kept speaking to themselves while addressing him.

‘It will be all right,’ he tells Sk’jin.

The Khol’isa smiles at that, a pained look in his eyes.

‘He’s been taken over!’ Taeh’yung announces loudly as he scrambles into the alcove. ‘He’s outside now!’

Yoongi is somehow filled with anticipation at this news.

‘How is he?’ Yoongi asks Taeh’yung quietly.

‘Asleep- he’s dreaming a lot right now. I think it’s the sudden rush of consciousness around him- it’s effecting him.’

‘Surely not in a bad way right?’ Sk’jin asks tersely, looking over Taeh’yung and Yoongi with a strained expression.

‘No! Not at all! He’s very curious!’ Taeh’yung says. ‘Or nervous? Scared? They’re a little confusing when-‘

‘-and okay let’s go Yoongi,’ Sk’jin turns him around to face the large double-doors.

‘He’ll be all right- he’s fine.’ Sk’jin’s grip on his shoulders is starting to become painful. ‘We’ve got this. Everything will be all right.’

‘Go get my baby Yoongi!’ Taeh’yung cheers excitedly from the back.

Before Yoongi can give him a thumb’s up in response, the doors open and the roars of the crowd quite literally pushes Sk’jin off of his shoulders. Without looking back, Yoongi steps out into the arena for the third time that night.

He was tired. But not to the point where he couldn’t function. The tiredness in his limbs was a familiar one. A sensation he lived with for a long time without fully registering what it was. And now it was back, and it was as though his body was triggered into motion- one that it never really quit.

His eyes find the OrTank at once, stood up on the dais that’s been pushed up to the side of the arena.

It calms him down, seeing that OrTank still safe and unharmed. Except now it was wholly exposed for everyone to see. To Yoongi’s immense disquiet, the Being inside is not relaxed as he normally was when floating inside the OrTank. His form is somehow tense, legs curled up to his chest even more, shoulders bunched up, head tucked in. It was as though he knew that he had to remain hidden.

It fills him with a strange sensation- one that feel burning hot in the lining on his stomach- something akin to anger, but not quite.

His eyes focus next on his opponent and Yoongi knows at once that this final stage is different.

His first fight had been against another ransom-contender. Yoongi ended it quickly to spare the Being, and it had been decidedly “un-fun” for the audience, according to Taeh’yung. Which was
why his second fight consisted of the K’hlak. But this time he’s sure that Van Seulgaan must have selected, or at least, nudged this fighter into the arena for this final round.

The Being is tall and elegant, her features are bold and strong- her aura and stage presence was no joke. She was beautiful in a surreal way. Her skin sparkled as though gold dust was embedded into her very cells. Her hair was fine and long, sweeping the ground elegantly in a silky coil of jet black. She looked unassuming- simply beautiful, and nothing more. But these types- the most unassuming types- were often times the most dangerous.

She regards him quietly, no expression on her rather delicate features. Her cheeks are dusted with a rosy hue similar to Yoongi’s robes and her eyelashes were transparent and sparkled as though each single strand was dipped in diamonds. She was breathtaking and clearly had the favor of the crowd. Based on what Yoongi can summarize, she was a Vel’leno- heavily altered and operated on though. Because their skin did not look like that naturally- but her hair was a big clue.

It was appalling to think that the Alliance had spread all the way to this species who were known only for the beauty of their hair. What could they want from them? Illegal hair? That made no sense.

Yoongi doesn’t hear the countdown end, or the screams of the crowd. Instead he zeroes in on his opponent.

Who has disappeared.

Yoongi instantly lowers himself, nearly flat onto the ground, narrowly escaping a powerful leg that comes swinging out nowhere for his head.

She was fast.

And armed.

She clearly had sponsors lined up, battling it out to hand her weapons. She’s wielding a long barb-ended spear that winks in the flashing lights of the arena. Yoongi instantly calibrates himself to adjust to the reach of the spear- putting it at 2.3 meters- the shaft of the spear was very smooth- the only area with texture was the area for gripping at the end, meaning she wouldn’t be able to shorten the spear at close combat.

Yoongi slides on his knees, his robes following his movements in a swirl of rose and silver as he quickly takes over their distance. She was fast. But he was faster.

She lands the first blow- her almost fragile and delicate fist meets the side of his body with a resounding crack. The force is strong- but not enough to crack a rib. He would bruise but that was of no consequence. Deflecting her other arm, Yoongi uses her spear as a shield- causing her other fist to hit and slip across the smooth shaft of the spear. This causes her grip to loosen and Yoongi is quick to disengage himself from her recovering arm, stealing the spear in turn. Taking advantage of the smoothness of the handle, he lets it slide down the length of his arm before gripping on the textured handle and burying the barbed head into the ground, vaulting his way over her head, to land behind her.

Yoongi doesn’t understand why the Vel’leno wasn’t fighting her full strength. Yoongi can tell the difference when Beings fought with their all, or with those who were holding back. Despite her beauty, obvious strength and ability- there was something strangely odd about her.

His leg sweeps back- catching her ankles and causing her to fall back. Yoongi acts fast, lifting the
spear and bringing it down lengthwise. She raises her arms into a cross to defend herself- grappling with it, and pulling Yoongi forward, forcing his own momentum to work against him. But it was all right- because Yoongi was expecting that. At this close range, he’s quick to bring down his elbow to her throat- enough to crush her windpipe. But she’s seen his intention and deflects his move easily with a quick jab- bringing her foot upwards to throw Yoongi aside.

Yoongi isn’t even fighting with a lot of complicated action or plan- at this level of fighting, even Namjoon or Sk’jin could easily defeat her in hand-to-hand combat.

Yoongi lands on his feet but is quick to leap forward. His plan was to tackle her- which she would deflect by shifting to the right. Then Yoongi would use this to lunge at her leg, and fracture her bone at the thigh, disabling her movement.

However, the Vel’leno doesn’t move away. Instead she too lunges forward in a move that was simply suicidal. He was better posed for this- their velocity would mean landing on her back, with his on top, potentially cracking a rib and causing a concussion which would most definitely lead to disorientation and vertigo.

At this close range, Yoongi is able to observe his opponent better. Though undoubtedly beautiful, there was a strange haze to the glow of her skin- Yoongi sees the make-up, the cracking skin under the layer of cover-up- he sees the strange smokiness in her eyes, as though glazed over. The Vel’leno’s hair was glossy and full but at the roots they were pulling in bunches- attached by some form of silicone gel to a heavily discoloured scalp. At this close range, Yoongi can smell her too. A nauseatingly sweet smell- one of decay and rot.

She was dying.

Yoongi realizes his mistake- she had intended for him to do this very move. From the beginning- from the choice is weapon she was wielding- it had all been done so that he would gradually move closer. She chose to flaunt her speed because she knew it meant that Yoongi would have to get closer to fight her. Yoongi realizes his mistake too late.

Because the moment they’re falling back, she leans down to bite down on his neck.

Yoongi has never been bitten before- in any of his fights. Attempts were made but his uniform was like an exoskeleton. These attempts were normally desperate ones, made while struggling. But this was intentional. Her teeth are thin and sharp, and pierces through his skin easily. And even though Yoongi has never been bitten before- he knows that it’s not supposed to feel like this.

He rolls off of her the moment they land and a pair of daggers drop by her side- sponsored. Yoongi winces at the surging burning pain on his shoulders but he doesn’t have the time to look or check on it. She’s already picking up the daggers- just a little disoriented, and she’s glaring him down. Her mouth is stained with his blood and Yoongi gives them a wide berth. He needed to rethink- that bite had been intended. Surely. Was that bite the entire purpose of this fight?

It hits him at once.

She hadn’t been set out into this arena to defeat him.

The lights overhead flicker, bathing them in darkness for a moment and Yoongi, not expecting it, readies himself for an attack from the Vel’leno but instead she screams as though frightened.

The lights come back on and she’s frantically shifting around, as though terrified.

She was afraid of the dark. Yoongi thinks of the way her eyes were smoky- she was dying, her eyes
couldn’t function well.

Yoongi darts forward, only to nearly lose his jaw as she blindly swipes backwards. Her movements are crazed now- uncontained and wild. Her speed is still tremendous but she trips easily. She’s careless now- moving in havoc. She throws one of the daggers at Yoongi but he catches it mid-air and meets her halfway.

Their daggers clash, sparks flying. She isn’t even defending herself as much- the only reason why she was even moving was out of habit- out of conditioning. The lights flicker again and Yoongi wonders if this is Namjoon fiddling with the power-system grid. He did say he would get this done quickly.

She screams again, jumping an extraordinary distance to back off. The burning feeling on Yoongi’s shoulder is spreading all over his body.

*She needs light.*

Yoongi blinks the sweat out of his eyes, and to his horror his vision swims before him. Struggling for a moment, Yoongi focuses again and on the Vel’leno.

Their eyes meet and the smokiness to her eyes doesn’t mask the panic and pain she was feeling. It was as though he was begging her to end it now.

Yoongi was essentially made to exist in the darkness- both metaphorically and literally. The entirety of his missions were conducted while his senses were obstructed by the tight confinements of his suit and helmet- not to mention the weight of it.

But here.

Where he was wearing simple light robes and his head was free from any encasement, Yoongi is all too ready to end this. Not to end this for the sake of winning- but because of the Vel’leno.

The lights flicker again and Yoongi aims and throws the dagger in his hands. The arena turns pitch black and she screams.

Yoongi only has a 3 second window.

But it’s more than enough.

When the lights turn back on, the crowd witnesses Yoongi on the ground, the Vel’leno underneath him, and her dagger upright and buried deep into her chest, her blood spraying high and upward.

The arena is dead silent for a total of 5 seconds and the roar of voices is enough to physically jolt Yoongi. His entire body feels like it’s on fire. And he’s not sure if he heard it or imagined it. But there’s a faint whisper- one that sounds of apology just before the Vel’leno’s eyes dim and close. He gets up with difficulty, nausea hitting him hard. His dagger was still shuddering where it was stuck embedded on the wall of the arena, stuck there when the Vel’leno defended herself from its path, but exposing herself to Yoongi’s direct attack.

But Yoongi ignores the dagger and his feet take him to the other side- towards the dais. The sharp pain right under his ribs is burning now- he sustained no real injury- because that hadn’t been her intention. Or more accurately, that hadn’t been Van Seulgaan’s intention.

He sees a flash of ruddy hair and the Pompen host is back. Yoongi pants, his chest heaving in a way he knew wasn’t right. He painfully make his way to the dais, struggling to reach for the
OrTank. He’s not sure but he thinks he blacks out for a few seconds because he’s leaning on the OrTank heavily. The Pompen is shrilly exclaiming congratulations, but Yoongi pays no mind.

The screams of the battle fade away rather blissfully, his ears filled with a muffled sort of sound. Despite feeling like he is on fire, his skin feels cold but the touch of the OrTank is soothing in a strange way. The Being inside jerks as though waking up- but his eyes remain closed. He moves faster than Yoongi has ever seen- not that it was at all fast. His movements are still delayed but they were definitely faster than normal. He’s facing Yoongi now, hair fanning around his face in a network of silver gold.

‘I got you,’ Yoongi manages to mumble out. He hears familiar footsteps hurrying towards him. ‘We’re taking you home.’

There are hands on him- Sk’jin’s- and another presence he identifies as Taeh’yung’s. Yoongi is incredibly disoriented but he manages to focus on the Zhak’gri.

‘That was one of the champions from the past Pageants!’ Taeh’yung exclaims, his voice muffled, looking awed before he glances down at Yoongi and promptly blurts out, ‘Poison.’

That made sense now.

The next few minutes are blurred and when he’s lucid enough to scope his surroundings, Yoongi finds himself back in the dressing-room.

Sk’jin and Taeh’yung are arguing loudly over him.

‘I’m not a Yisheng!’ Taeh’yung repeats, looking upset. ‘This is not within my ability to heal! I don’t even heal- you were different-!’

‘The more he moves, the faster the poison will spread-’ Sk’jin is going through every medical product they had. ‘Namjoon I’m going to need you to hurry and get us supplies here-’

‘What did you say-‘ Taeh’yung seemingly asks no one but then looks down at Yoongi.

‘You’re awake! Good okay, drink this-‘ Taeh’yung holds up a cup to Yoongi’s lips and he just drinks, unsure of anything.

The moment he’s able to swallow the strangely thick liquid he gasps out, ‘Is he- is he safe-’

‘He’s right here,’ Taeh’yung immediately reassures him. ‘He’s all right- he’s worried- so don’t move okay? Just drink this we’ll get you a cure-‘

Sk’jin is on his neck and Yoongi can smell cleaning agents. He can’t feel his neck- or any part of his body actually at this point.

The door suddenly burst open, making Sk’jin and Taeh’yung jump. Sk’jin’s eyes flash red but Taeh’yung is already smiling in greeting.

‘Sehr! You guys! This is amazing! You’re the real MVP!’

The Obere flock around him and Yoongi would find Sk’jin’s expression humorous if he had the energy to react. The N’nukwu bounds in, sniffing at Yoongi worriedly. The N’nukwu sneezes, as though offended by what he smelt. Some of the Obere observe the OrTank with unmasked awe and surprise while a bunch of them are talking loudly to Taeh’yung who is nodding vehemently, his hands held out as they place items into his palms. Sk’jin is talking on the Comm-Device in a low
and fast tone- most probably arguing with Namjoon.

‘-I don’t care about that at this moment Hoseok, you and Namjoon can just send the messages for
us, I don’t have the time-’

Despite being unable to feel his limbs- Yoongi forces himself to focus. Yoongi struggles to sit up
but manages with the help of the N’nukwu. The nausea that hits him is disorienting. The very
singular strands of muscles within his body feel like they’re frozen up and disconnected from each
other- like he had no control over his limbs. He’s never felt like this before.

The Being inside the OrTank is facing him- body turned all the way, hands reaching up as though
to reach for Yoongi.

‘I’m-…I’m all right,’ Yoongi wants to say this a little louder, but his voice is strained and
weakened. Taeh’yung, however seems to understand. He takes Yoongi’s hand in his and with his
other touches the surface of the OrTank.

‘I’m all right. I’m all right,’ Yoongi mumbles, not registering the slight sting of the compressor-
syringe snapping on his forearm and neck at the same time.

‘You’re not all right- so stop fucking moving he’s not going anywhere!’ Sk’jin pulls him back and
makes him lie down. ‘That bitch was sent to fucking poison you- what the fuck is this I can’t
identify it-’ Sk’jin is seething, holding up a small basic scanner over his neck.

‘Here use this-‘ Taeh’yung cut in, long arms extending past Yoongi’s head.

His vision gives out for a while and he’s suddenly back- his ears ringing, vision cleared, and his
skin clammy.

‘-his heartbeat is somewhat stabilizing but his temperature is still really high- I already
administered everything I feel is safe enough-’ Sk’jin was clearly talking to Namjoon and Hoseok,
giving them live updates.

Yoongi definitely feels much more awake and stronger, but he can tell that his strength has greatly
diminished. The N’nukwu is snuffling him, as though trying to lick off whatever poison was now
coursing through his veins.

One of the Obere- the one who Taeh’yung said was called Sehr, is by his side, an empty
compressor syringe in his/her hands. They say something, which Yoongi doesn’t understand.

‘It’s really fast working- it’s eating up his cells, Namjoon I could really use some help here-‘ Sk’jin
is saying when he stops suddenly.

The door to the dressing room slides open and Van Seulgaan stands there, hands clasped behind his
back.

Before Yoongi was even aware, he’s moved and stands in front of the OrTank, Taeh’yung only a
step behind him. The N’nukwu growls, standing in front of Yoongi protectively.

‘Please relax,’ Van Seulgaan smiles. ‘I simply came here to offer my congratulations. You have
won me a lot of units.’

The Obere hiss at him, though they don’t raise their voices.

‘My friends, I would advise you to leave,’ Van Seulgaan addresses them genially. ‘It won’t be safe
if you stay any longer.’

‘You can’t just threaten third party members like this you slime ball-‘ Sk’jin bursts out.

Yoongi reaches over to tap Sehr on their shoulder. The Obere looks up at him expectantly.

‘Thank you for all your help,’ Yoongi says quietly, his words come out slow, as though he was lagging. ‘You have repaid your debt twice over- please secure your safety.’

The Obere’s 3 opal-like eyes are wide and unblinking, processing Yoongi’s words.

‘We are in honor together, Human Yoongi,’ they squeak, twig like hair shifting a little. ‘Our bond is at peace.’

*Database has no explanation.*

The Obere gather themselves and line up to leave. The N’nukwu licks Yoongi’s face before allowing Taeh’yung to pet him and they leave the dressing room.

‘Adorable,’ Van comments, still standing at the doorway though his eyes now lingered on the OrTank. ‘Well. It is unfortunate to see you so Yoongi. If you wish to pull out of the Pageant, I can have that arranged of course. All you have to do is hand the egg over to me, and I will consider your debt paid. As the Obere said it: *our bond will be at peace.*’

‘No,’ Sk’jin, Taeh’yung, and Yoongi say at the same time.

Van Seulgaan’s eyes twinkle at that.

‘You understand that in your condition, you will not be able to win the Pageant- let alone a single round.’ Van states.

‘We will see about that,’ Sk’jin replies, complete and utter cool confidence in his voice.

‘You understand that you cannot escape, don’t you?’ Van comments. ‘I can take down your ship before it even takes off. You cannot leave this planet without my consent.’

‘We have no plans on running away,’ Sk’jin replies coldly, stepping forward, blocking Van’s view of the OrTank.

‘Oh I have complete faith in you, Khol’isa,’ Van smiles benignly. ‘So I hope you understand when I say, that according to Pageant protocol, that Pageant’s guards will now be following you throughout your House involvement in the Pageant? It’s just to make sure that no rules are broken of course.’

Tall, strongly built, non-Pompen appear behind him in the hallway. They appeared humanoid in form, though Yoongi cannot see their faces. They were most likely the Pageant’s security- except knowing the fact that Van was so deeply involved with the Pageant, they were most likely his own personal security unit.

‘We wouldn’t want to break any rules,’ Sk’jin replies with a sweet smile though his voice is dripping with anger.

‘Indeed- so, my contestant will be taken over to the Pageant in 15 minutes,’ Van gestures to Yoongi. ‘Will you be accompanying him?’

Sk’jin pauses for a moment and Yoongi wishes he had the Comm-Device in his ear.
‘No,’ Yoongi speaks. ‘They will return to the ship and bring it to the Pageant arena.’

Van looks down at him with some amusement while Sk’jin nods in agreement though he looks like he wants to argue.

‘Very well then, your guards will take you to-‘

The power in the room suddenly surges and then flickers and completely dies before coming back on again. And the moment it does, there’s a buzzing sound from Van Seulgaan’s pocket. He doesn’t even check to see what it was. Instead Van narrows his eyes at them, cursing under his breath.

‘This is you, isn’t it?’

‘I don’t know what you mean,’ Sk’jin replies coolly.

Van regards them with mild temperance before turning heel and walking out. The guards, however, remain. Sk’jin walks over and slams the door shut on their faces.

‘Good timing Joonie,’ Sk’jin says as he rushes over to Yoongi and asking, ‘Hoseok- are you in place? Yoongi-how are you now?’

Yoongi slumps back, leaning back on the OrTank that has shifted again to face Yoongi.

‘Better,’ Yoongi replies.

Sk’jin looks like he wants to argue this point but he stops, clearly listening to something. Yoongi nudges Taeh’yung, tapping at his ear. The Zhak’gri removes his own Comm-Device and carefully attaches it on Yoongi’s ear.

‘-the special-jury have all received the messages,’ Hoseok is saying, ‘And I’ve already started the broadcast. It’s live on every channel in Raksane Tayi. Unless Van blows up his own ship with all of his “goods” in here, nothing will stop this broadcast. I’m making my way to the top of the Dock now to hide.’

‘All right- no signal is leaving or entering the planet as well,’ Namjoon is saying. ‘I’ll be there in 15 minutes I just need to make sure it remains like this for at least 3-4 more hours.’

‘But we can’t do this anymore,’ Sk’jin argues. ‘Yoongi is not capable of fighting anymore- we can just-‘

‘Do what? There’s no option here!’ Namjoon argues back. ‘We continue with the plan- we have to- or at least until Yoongi is inside the Pageant arena- then you and Taeh’yung do whatever needs to be done, and escape!’

Sk’jin exclaims out loud in a few languages- none of them good words- before he spits out, ‘This was a dumb idea from the beginning- why don’t we just use Taeh’yung’s abilities and just fucking get out of here- we’ve already cut the communication lines- you can, I don’t know, completely overtake the planet and make it so that only we can go-‘

‘I am not doing that- to make that happen would mean to completely overwrite the power grid structure which would not only effect just simply electricity and communication signals but power for hospitals, highways, living units, Docks, and other ports- our action could cause countless of accidents and deaths.’
‘Then Taeh’yung can just go-‘ Sk’jin argues again but Yoongi stops him.

‘No- we stick to the plan. I can still fight. I will win this. So you and Taeh’yung should also stick to your original plan and head back to the ship now,’ Yoongi states firmly. ‘The medicine is working. I can do this-‘

‘This is not good- we have to re-evaluate our plan-‘ Sk’jin argues.

‘The next match is in 20 minutes we can’t do anything- there are no Yishengs around and we’ve already sent the messages. This isn’t going to end well either way- the only factor here that we didn’t count was Yoongi getting poisoned- other than that, the plan is still executable-‘ Sk’jin snorts derisively at that but Namjoon doesn’t stop. ‘-

‘Namjoon is right,’ Taeh’yung declares suddenly, ‘We should stick to our plan.’

Sk’jin is close to fuming but after a moment he nods stiffly.

‘Fine then. If any of us dies in this stupid plan then I’m going to fucking leave this planet and all of you. I don’t fucking care anymore!’ he declares as he holds up a towel to Yoongi’s face. ‘Now hold still I need to make you beautiful.’

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He doesn’t tell him his name. It wasn’t important. And he doesn’t ask either.

He’s not sure if it was because of the fact that he could now possess a form, to move as he wished- to feel and touch as he once did so long ago- that he feels awake. As though he was emerging from a deep sleep- but his nightmares still follow him.

But now it was their nightmare. And sometimes when his nightmares got too strong- he would take over. He once took over for nearly a month. And during this time he finds them a cave to live in. He was Long-Huon- still very young, but undoubtedly talented, skilled, and intelligent. But what had happened- this place- what he’d seen, had taken a lot out of him. The same way it did with the others. He was not quite broken- he was cracked- and that was where he would take over. Filling in the cracks, completing them both.

They relied on each other- depended on each other. Together they grew stronger, putting together a strange semblance of normalcy and dependency.

And as though sensing him- sensing them- the others start to appear.
White and pale and wispy—almost invisible under sunlight. Translucent, yet strangely solid at times. They were echoes, rings of their former vibrance.

At first he’s afraid—were these sent by it? But they just hover close, appearing away from the shadow of his memories—leaking out into this pane—shifting through the space his possession creates.

They speak to him. To them. Soft voices—this is new as well.

‘You promised.’ They whispered to him.

‘I know I did. And I will do everything I can,’ he tells them quietly.

‘You promised.’

‘I know.’

He still can’t tell if the look in his eyes were of condemnation or forgiveness.

‘I won’t stop— I will never stop.’

It used to spook the Long-Huon a bit— but then he started speaking to them by his own volition. On days where his lucidness was clearer and stronger he would speak to him too. Telling him information, new data, sometimes an anecdote of his past. He mentioned a few Beings many times over. He can hear the love he has for them in his voice.

He also hears the guilt.

They sometimes share dreams—sometimes nightmares.

‘Who was he?’ he asks one day, eyes locked on a wispy form that lingers by the trees. And the Long-Huon knows—he can see his dreams, his nightmares—see the hand that had reached out for him. The hand he couldn’t take in his own.

‘You know.’

It’s after over a year when something happens. When a miracle takes place.

A familiar sound thunders through the air—and a bright streak of light. They step out, peering into the sky to spot the ship because that was what it was.

It’s a small ship this time around—private, probably involved in trade. When he spots it, tearing through the thin clouds into full visibility, a sensation builds up in him—one that they shared. Because he knew that ship—he knew.

He saw it in their dreams.

‘How—’

He chokes on his words.

‘I promised you that we’d get out of here,’ he grits through his teeth as he raises one hand, finger pointing and tracing the path of the unsteady ship. ‘And that’s how.’

It vanishes behind a hill and they hear crushing sounds.
Yoongi isn’t entirely aware or properly awake during his journey to the Pageant arena above ground. All he knows is he’s guided out of the dressing room, leaving behind an extremely agitated Sk’jin, an almost crying Taeh’yung, and the OrTank behind. His robes were different too; Sk’jin forcibly changing him into white robes with little to no decoration. It was just a simple white robe with sleeves that were perhaps just a little too long but the span of it seemed to make him look like he had wings. The material was thin and soft- comfortable against his skin that felt feverish and pained.

The poison was really taking a toll on his appearance as well. And Yoongi wonders if that was the reason why the Vel’leno looked so odd. Their biology was clearly different, which was why the poison would affect them differently. His skin was paler than usual and though his eyes weren’t smoky, his vision was definitely giving out. He’s not sure how much of his strength was compromised- but his muscles still felt disconnected and frozen. Though he told Sk’jin that the medication he had received had helped him somewhat, it had only cleared his disorientation and somewhat reduced the amount of pain he was feeling.

Yoongi could deal with pain- it wasn’t an issue- but he was compromised, and he didn’t know to what or which extent.

‘We’re back at the ship Yoongi- he’s in here safe, next to me,’ Taeh’yung tells him quietly. ‘He’s-uh…he’s speaking a lot right now- or dreaming- I’m not sure, but I can hear him a lot right now. I think he’s worried.’

‘We’re on the ship- we’re headed out to the arena grounds- we found a place to park, it’s on Section 41-0062- about 5 minutes away from the stadium.’ Sk’jin reports tersely. ‘Namjoon?’

‘I’m already there- found a Transporter and got here,’ Namjoon replies. ‘I have some medicine that might help Yoongi.’
'Tayi is going nuts,' Hoseok reports shortly. 'I don’t know about Pompa- I don’t think they’ve really noticed, but all the channels going out are going crazy- the Underverse is pretty much going insane. The GLA should be here soon- give it an hour at the most.'

'Have they responded?'

'No- but I don’t think that matters at this point,' Hoseok replies. 'I’m moving again- Van’s set out a massive search for me.'

'Please stay safe Hobi!'

'Don’t worry- I’m just hiding in plain sight, the guards have walked past me like, 4 times already.' Hoseok sounds a little amused.

'At least some of us are enjoying themselves,' Sk’jin grits out. 'We’re up- we’ll be at the Arena in a bit.'

The Transporter he’s in stops and his “guards” stand, gesturing to the doorway. Yoongi suspects that the guards are some form of Android, built specially for this event. He hasn’t seen their chests rise to indicate breathing, and neither has he seen them adjust themselves.

With pained difficulty, Yoongi stands up. He catches sight of his own reflection and is only just a little surprised.

Sk’jin hadn’t done much- only added colour to his cheeks and lips, and added a layer of some form of luminance on his skin. He looked incredibly young.

'Yoongi will be fighting up against a semi-finalist from Lum called Tl’mei- and…well. Her last opponent was literally broken in half-'

'Namjoon I don’t think we need to hear this at this very moment-' Sk’jin interrupts.

'OH! I saw her fight! She was so cool! She’s like, tiny! But like, so powerful! Not fast though- but incredibly strong, like once you get in her grip it’s kinda-'

'SO we maintain distance in the fight,' Sk’jin interrupts angrily.

'It will be all right,’ Yoongi repeats himself as he steps out of the Transporter and finds himself inside another facility of sorts. It smelt like sweat, antiseptic cleaners, and blood in here. Namjoon is waiting for him by one of the doorways. He’s carrying a medical kit of sorts and Yoongi vaguely wonders where he might have gotten it from.

There are guards standing next to him as well but the Kutsoglerin disregards them easily.

'Hey,’ he nods in greeting. ‘They took my screen- apparently someone messed up something massive here.’

'Oh,’ Yoongi says lamely. He wishes he could say more.

'Let’s go get you scanned and shot,’ Namjoon smiles tightly.

They walk together in silence into a small hallway. Yoongi briefly entertains the idea of overtaking the guards around them- numbered only at 15 (easy enough for him and Namjoon to overtake) and getting out of there. However Van Seulgaan waits for them at the end of the hallway, an irritated expression on his face.
The moment they’re close enough the Tayian lashes out a fist across Namjoon’s jaw. Namjoon barely even moves, his head turning a little. Instead Van Seulgaan wrings his hand in pain.

‘What have you done?’ he demands. ‘I cannot make contact with my ship, or anything outside of the planet- what have you done?’

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about,’ Namjoon states coolly.

‘Give me his items! Have you kept the ship on lockdown?’ he demands, facing one of the guards.

‘Yes sir,’ an automated voice replies and Yoongi is now certain they were Androids of sorts. ‘The ship Užkulisai-02 is under rift-lock. All passengers have been detained inside.’

Van Seulgaan searches through Namjoon’s screen but judging from his mounting frustration, he couldn’t find anything condemning. He throws the screen down on the ground and stomps on it.

‘What exactly are you doing? We have a match to get to,’ Namjoon asks with a frown.

‘I could have all of you killed right now!’ he seethes.

‘Namjoon- be careful-’ Sk’jin’s warning tone is seeped with worry and panic.

‘You will have to wait until after we win the Pageant,’ Namjoon says in a patronizing tone glancing down at a non-existent watch on his wrist. ‘I need to treat my friend here before the fight-so if you will excuse us.’

*Database has no explanation.*

‘Namjoon he could literally kill you right now-’

Namjoon pushes past Van and walks away. Yoongi follows suit.

‘You think you’re doing the right thing,’ Van calls after them, ‘You know nothing! You don’t know what you have done!’

Namjoon turns his head briefly, eyes cold as he addresses the Tayian: ‘Do you?’

They walk a few more steps and Namjoon calls back, ‘I would leave, if I were you.’

Yoongi looks back to find Van gaping at the back of Namjoon’s head.

‘But he can’t, can he? No communication signals means no way of flying out.’ Yoongi asks.

Namjoon chuckles for a moment, ‘Yeah, he can’t leave until the signal-block is lifted.’

‘Yeah- about that. He just broke your screen, how are you getting that lifted?’ Hoseok asks.

Namjoon smiles mysteriously, ‘Don’t worry about it.’

‘Nice. I’m almost attracted to you right now Namjoon,’ Sk’jin quips in with a fake laugh. ‘But what the fuck was that about? He could have killed you!’

Namjoon rolls his eyes.

‘No- he wouldn’t have,’ Namjoon replies as they enter the elevator. ‘He’s obviously working for someone- or at least answering to someone. Van’s already messed up twice now- he can’t afford to
mess up again. He’s going to want to keep us alive so that we take all the blame- he needs a scape-
goat.’

‘Did you just fucking throw us under a Transporter to save us from another Transporter?’ Sk’jin
demands.

‘Double usage of the same metaphor; nice.’

‘Don’t fucking start-’

‘Am I your friend?’ Yoongi asks as they exit the elevator to an excessively grand hallway that
would have been quite luxurious if it weren’t for the random pools of blood on the rich carpet and
the stench of rot.

Namjoon looks taken aback, pausing a moment before saying, ‘I’d like to believe we are friends
Yoongi- as much as it is possible given our situation.’

Database has no explanation.

‘Contestant- this is your room.’

The guards stop them, pointing them to a room.

It’s a clean but still excessively opulent room with gold ornaments everywhere and a large gilded
circular bed at the very center. A few chandeliers hang from the ceiling, all bright neon colours and
it hurts Yoongi’s eyes.

‘Are you in pain?’ Namjoon asks worriedly, noticing the fact that his eyes were watering.

‘No.’ Yoongi replies despite the burning in his eyes.

‘Just sit for a moment- we have 5 minutes left, this should help,’ Namjoon says, guiding him to sit
down.

The compressor-syringe hurts this time, and Yoongi instantly notices that his pain tolerance has
gone down as well. However, whatever Namjoon has shot him with does make him feel better. In
fact, a bit too well.

‘What is it?’ Yoongi asks, opening his eyes and finding that his vision was clearing. The lights
didn’t hurt as much and he was starting to feel stronger as well.

‘In Kutsoglera,’ Namjoon says lightly. ‘When they experimented on us- on the others, our bodies
were failing to remain stable, so they would use a combination of medication to give us a “boost”.
It was the only thing that worked for us- and it’s part of the medication I need to take regularly as
well.’

‘Is this your medication?’ Yoongi asks, looking down at the compressor-syringe in Namjoon’s
hands.

‘Some bits, yes,’ Namjoon replies, looking over him carefully. ‘I added a few other things from a
nearby hospital while I was making my way here- you should be all right for-…for a few hours.
But after that, we will need to get you completely treated.’

Yoongi nods, feeling a surge of energy flow through him. He stands up, feeling no pain from his
neck, his side. He felt incredibly strung up.
‘Yoongi- just because you feel better doesn’t mean the poison isn’t working anymore- it’s still in your system and works even faster and stronger when you move. So try and end it as quickly as you can.’ Sk’jin says sharply. ‘I’m checking your blood sample in our Medical Bay and by the time you get back I should have some form of reasonable cure for you.’

‘Thank you- I will remember that,’ Yoongi replies.

‘Contestant, it is time for your match.’ One of the guard announces.

Yoongi nods, making his way to the door.

‘Yoongi wait.’

Yoongi looks around to face the Kutsoglerin.

‘I know you said you volunteered to do this- that you want to do this- but I am sorry.’ Namjoon says, his tone sincere.

Yoongi doesn’t know what to say- mostly because he’s not sure what Namjoon actually means by all of this.

_Database has no explanation._

‘Yoongi! You can do it! I believe in you!’

‘We believe in you- and we’ll get you out of there. Don’t worry.’

‘Don’t’ fuck up my robes, those were fucking expensive.’

He removes his Comm-Device and hands it over to Namjoon.

‘You consume very powerful drugs,’ Yoongi says.

Namjoon snorts at that before letting out a truly amused laugh.

‘Yeah- yeah I do,’ he nods, taking the Comm-Device. ‘I’ll be here waiting.’

Yoongi nods and turns.

The door closes behind him as he walks out of the room and into the hallway.

It’s quiet but Yoongi is not fooled. They exit the hallway and into a larger atrium-like hallway where other contestants were gathered. They all stare at him, silence filling the large room. There’s an elevator waiting for him towards the end where a small petite female stood. She was obviously his opponent for this fight.

Her features are porcelain like, her lavender hair soft and tied away in a simple braid. She appeared to look like a child but Yoongi can tell immediately that she was nothing of the sort. Her arms are longer than normal, but almost vine like. Yoongi remembers Taeh’yung ramble, about her grip being strong. Nothing out of the ordinary was discernible about her and when he is feet from her, she finally looks up at him.

Her eyes are bright blue, the skin around her skin silver giving way to a pearlescent white.

It was as though an artist had been given free rein to create the most ethereal Being he could create and as a result, this Tl’mei was born. Yoongi doesn’t know anything about their species- and even
if he did, he wouldn’t be able to determine her abilities. All he knew was that she was immensely strong.

They both step into the elevator and Yoongi can feel the way the booth tilts the moment she takes a step inside. Her weight was clearly disproportionate to her size. 10 guards step in with them, surrounding and dividing them. No one says a single word.

Until-

‘Human.’

‘Yes.’

The elevator comes to a stop and the doors open to deafening applause and blinding lights.

The guards step out first, forming a rank on either side.

The Tl’mei steps out and Yoongi follows suit.

The Pageant arena is at least 10 times the size of the underground arena. It’s also open to the sky overhead and Yoongi can see the floating holographic advertisements in neon. Right now it was his face and the Tl’mei face on display. Yoongi vaguely wonders when they got that picture of his face.

The arena ground is large and Yoongi walks a complete minute before stepping towards the middle, indicated by a golden mat that’s very new, covering the blood and gore that’s splattered all over the dark floors around it.

It smelt like excitement, carnage, and death.

They arrive at the center and face each other.

Yoongi looks around, the crowds blurring to haphazard shapes and forms of colour and screams. He looks up, hoping to catch some stars in the sky above but he’s a little disappointed. There are a few neon coloured clouds though, but Yoongi doesn’t care much for those. Fighting out here in the open felt better somehow, in a strange way.

Above him the holographs all transform to a countdown, starting at 10.

He watches until the numbers shift to 5 before looking away.

The Tl’mei is simply watching him, form petite and elegant. They were both somehow disadvantaged here. They had never seen each other fight, and they knew nothing of each other. They were both tired from their previous fights, but they both had something to fight for.

The colours change to red around him as the countdown ends and the Tl’mei attacks first.

Yoongi maintains his distance, finding that his speed was only just a little compromised. The Tl’mei was expecting him to move away, judging by the fact that she slams her slender arms down on the ground, causing the floors to erupt upwards, blowing dust and bits of flooring up at Yoongi’s face. The ground shakes and cracks at a huge radius and the crowd screams in favor.

Yoongi backs up even more- here, they would be offered no weapons, no “gifts”. This was all just raw hand-to-hand combat. Or anything they could use to their advantage. So as Yoongi rolls away, his hands catch onto the loose surface of the floor and he peels off a chunk of it and throws it with
all his force at the Tl’mei. She punches it away without even blinking but Yoongi doesn’t let up.

His hands dig into the cracked floors, hurling slab after slab at her, approaching her closer and closer. She too shifts closer and closer.

All Yoongi had to do was not get caught in her grip. He estimates her reach, calculating the length of her arms and estimates it at 3.7 feet-

Her arms extend forward in a bizarre rope like manner, looping around him as quick as lightning.

Startled, Yoongi manages to slip free though the side of his robes tear off and he finds himself apologizing to Sk’jin.

Her arms could extend.

He doesn’t have the time to experiment or figure out the extent of how far her arms could extend so Yoongi does what no one in this situation should do and dives forward towards the Tl’mei. She’s clearly not expecting it but she’s quick to recover. But it’s not fast enough because she can’t match up to Yoongi’s speed. He’s ducked under her arms, crouching incredibly low onto the ground, picking up a bit of the cracked slabs on the floor, Yoongi slams his laden hand upwards.

The slab cracks under her chin and Yoongi almost instantly regrets it.

Most Beings would fly off, or at least tether backwards. But she barely even lifts her head at the force. Instead Yoongi’s arm hurts from the density of her body.

Her knee comes flying out of nowhere and Yoongi crosses his arms over his torso, absorbing the force of her delivery. Yoongi’s bones were reinforced- possibly not to the degree as it was with Namjoon’s, but it’s the only reason why his arms weren’t broken immediately. His left shoulder, however, does disconnect briefly. But by the time he lands lightly on his feet, squatting down to balance himself, he pushes it back into place, not registering the stinging pain.

She was beyond strong. And Yoongi calmly realizes that he was not going to win this through strength. He was going to have to be very careful. And fast.

She jumps forward, her legs clearly a lot more powerful than they appeared, and she’s vaulting in the air, arms held up to slam downwards at him.

Yoongi realizes at this moment that though he should be careful and fast- meaning he had to duck out of the way quickly before she smashed him with her twig-like arms- he could do something incredibly dumb by (Sk’jin’s standard) but effective.

He chooses the latter and also makes a running jump upwards- meeting her head on. From the way her eyes widen, it’s clear she was not expecting him to do that. And she’s already too high up, her velocity carrying her too fast, to change her arms or truly defend herself as Yoongi twists midair, his knee coming into sharp contact with her abdomen.

They fall together, but Yoongi manages to land on top and uses the few seconds he has to pummel hard and speedy punches. Her head is as hard as rock, and though Yoongi understands the sentiment of a fair and justified fight, he has never, in his many years of being a GI agent or even now, fought by what was considered honourable. So it’s without hesitation that he blinds her, fingers hooking into sockets as quick as lightning and he’s rolling away as quickly as possible.

She screams, arms reaching up to grab at him but Yoongi is already a few meters away. He’s quick to move though, picking more slabs and charging down at her where she was partially encased into
the flooring as a result of their fall. She screams louder and pushes herself up despite the steady flow of debris Yoongi throws at her. Blinded, she is disadvantaged as she wildly spins around, trying to locate Yoongi. Thinking quickly, Yoongi picks up more of the floor slabs and throws them towards her left; she lurches in that direction blindly and Yoongi moves quickly, making a leaping run and lands on her back. They don’t fall, as Yoongi had hoped, but she remains standing. Quickly, Yoongi grapples around her neck, choking her backwards. Most Beings would have had their necks snapped backwards but not her. She struggles for a moment before she tilts backwards. Yoongi jumps off but she catches the end of his robes, causing him to fall backwards.

Her arm comes landing down, just inches from his outstretched arm, the ground cracking with contact. Rolling over Yoongi is back on his feet but is suddenly overcome with nausea, his vision swimming violently.

It’s only for 2 seconds but it’s enough for the Tl’mei to swing her arm just so and Yoongi is flying backwards, pain erupting on the side of his body. He lands painfully on his back, his head cracking something beneath it. His vision is jarred and blurred but he can just about make out the form flying down at him. Yoongi moves as quickly as he can, and is just in time to avoid being crushed to death. She does however, grab him and Yoongi is forced into some very quick hand-to-hand defensive stances as he blocks what feels like tons of rocks thrown at him.

His breath is knocked out of his body, his ears ringing dangerously, but not loud enough to hear his ribs cracking, as her fist makes contact with his chest.

Yoongi’s body is numb- he feels like he’s breaking at every possible surface. Namjoon’s medication had clearly worn off now.

He looks up just in time to see her running towards him, though the direction is a little off, considering she can’t see him. Yoongi quickly throws a slab to her left and she pauses. Clearly listening hard. Yoongi is barely moving, not even allowing himself to breathe. She listens intently. Yoongi’s vision swims, his body on fire, and his head pulsing. But he could do this. He has to.

He crouches down, low and quiet.

On all fours he crawls forward- he was doing something incredible un-careful and un-fast but he knows he has to do this. The crowd is screaming even more and she’s losing concentration. Her arms are moving around carefully as though to feel for Yoongi nearby.

Just as she is 3 feet in front of him, Yoongi leaps.

She’s hears him just as he leaps, crossing her arms over and it’s exactly what Yoongi wants. Grabbing a single arm, Yoongi uses his momentum to swing it back and as he lands, bringing her falling down onto her back, rolls forward with the long limb, and hears the resonating crack of breaking bones.

She screams but it’s not exactly enough to completely incapacitate her because that very broken arm grabs and pulls at him. But it’s not as strong and she’s still too slow.

Noting where the bone was sticking out from her pale skin, Yoongi uses these points to swing his own arms own, breaking the arm off cleanly, moving forward towards her form and dodging the arm that comes up to defend herself, lands an uppercut to her jaw.

But Yoongi is losing strength- and he’s losing speed. She only jolts backwards and her good arm is already swinging forward and catches him around the middle again and this time he can’t slip out.
A pained groan escapes him as she squeezes and he jerks him forward. His ribs crack and his back strains- she was trying to literally break him in half.

Yoongi brings down his elbow on her head 5 times in a row but she doesn’t let off. He notices the bone of her arm sticking out on her now useless arm and he leans to the side, definitely feeling something in him break, he grabs at the bone and tears it off, bringing it to the side, slicing at her throat.

She drops him with a garble shriek.

‘HUMAN!!’

Yoongi can do no more than crawl backwards, his body shaking against his own will. She grabs him and with astounding strength hurls him across the floor. He skids across the ground but his momentum forces him to stand up, lurching into place- he coughs and he knows there’s blood. But there’s nothing he can do. She’s facing him now- running purely off of instinct, running up to him- ready to strike. But Yoongi can still dodge- he’s still able-

He’s too slow and she catches him across his shoulder and he falls. But he refuses to stay down and gets up at once. The Tl’mei smiles a bloody smile at him and bounds up to him- legs still graceful coiling and launching her up and forward and-

He was losing. He lost.

His hearing must be the first of his senses to fail him because no sound hits him. His vision was also now fully fading away as everything started to fade out, oddly into white rather than black- he can’t move away- he can’t dodge this fall anymore, he can’t-

There’s a ripple of light- pure gold and soft. A quite humming settles around him- Yoongi doesn’t understand.

The Tl’mei falls mid-jump, a strange ripple in the air blocking her leap and she crumples to the ground. Overwhelmed by what was happening, Yoongi manages to turn around and witnesses a bright but soft light, and a great rush of wind that envelopes him from above.

‘Yoongi?’

Database has no explanation.

He doesn’t know this voice. But why did it sound so familiar? He doesn’t know this voice but somehow the only thing that comes to his mind is safe.

His legs give out on him and Yoongi falls.
He doesn’t go back.

They don’t seem surprised.

Disappointed perhaps. But not surprised.

‘I am sorry,’ they tell him.

He shrugs it off. It made no difference in the end. Whether or not they were sorry. What did it matter?

They weren’t the ones who pulled the knife out.

They weren’t the ones who could still feel the heat of the blade searing into his palm to this very day.

He doesn’t go back to her either.

He can’t and he doesn’t expect her to wait for him either. There is no return. And there is no moving forward either.

He just stays.

His mind strays back to the sacrifice he had witnessed.

The fire has ebbed away now, and only charcoal, dust, and ash remains. This was the finale- the end of his participation. The fire claimed him and now all that was left was this.

‘What will you do?’ he had asked. The body disintegrates- cracked and broken bones, charred flesh and liquidized fat.

It just stays.

‘Nothing,’ the high-priest replied. ‘The birds and rats will come to eat it.’

Looking down at his hands, he no longer feels the flames or the heat of the knife.

But he can taste ashes in his mouth.
The pain that shoots through him as he lands on his knees jolts him to some degree of lucidness. But it still doesn’t help him. Yoongi doesn’t understand what it is that he’s seeing.

*Database has no explanation.*

Opening his eyes, he finds a strange shield of light hides him from the audience. It’s opaque- much like fleeting glimpses of sunlight filtering through the trees- creating cascading ribbons of light that exist only for a fraction of a second. But it surrounds him now and Yoongi is alone in this strangely peaceful light.

No- not alone.

It wasn’t the Tl’mei- she was stunned- crazed, flaying against whatever this shield of light was -at this *light*. This was…- *he* was the source of light.

There’s a rift in the light before him- and a form appears, clearer and outlined a bit more.

*Database has no explanation.*

Was this another contestant he had to fight? Was this part of the Pageant? But Yoongi hadn’t heard of this before. And he had heard his name being spoken. His name in the rogue-rounds had been *Suga*– his real name wasn’t used. How could his opponent know? Or did Van send this Being out to finish him?

*Database has no explanation.*

Yoongi tries to stand; the screams of the crowd around him feels physical. Their voices crushing him, digging deep into his injuries and tearing him open. He’s exhausted. What was happening? Was this part of the Pageant?

He’s so *exhausted*.

The lights are concentrated over him- waiting for him to fall; waiting for him to succumb.

He’s only mildly aware of spitting something out- or was it just pouring out of his mouth without his control? Yoongi closes his eyes, relief flooding him. Like this, he could stand. A cool breeze runs over him, over bare and bruised and bleeding skin. It’s nothing short of bliss.

It was obvious he wouldn’t be able to fight after this- that meant Sk’jin and Taeh’yung would fly out now. If Namjoon is smart, he would leave with them seeing as they were only 5 minutes away from the arena- they would then go pick up Hoseok, and leave. Taeh’yung could easily destroy the rift-lock, and provide the ship with a strong shield. Pompen forces wouldn’t be able to follow them with the communications signals messed up, and the Užkulisai was outfitted with its own system that made it independent, it would be able to fly out of Pompa safely.
Golden light like a halo radiates from this Being, too blurred and far away for Yoongi to really see.
But Yoongi doesn’t need to see.
Because he can feel.
And Yoongi knows exactly who he is.
The Being from the OrTank steps up right in front of Yoongi, expression worried, and oh- his eyes.
Database has no explanation.
Eyes as dark as the night sky empty of stars, yet ringed with a bright ring of white, the Being from the OrTank stands before him. He’s clad in a tunic like shirt that looks strangely familiar, his hair is soft and dry- no trace of dampness. Save for the tears that are welled up in his eyes.
‘Yoongi?’
He hears sorrow in his voice. Sorrow, and pain.
Memories flood Yoongi’s mind. None of which makes sense. Were these memories, or were they dreams?
‘No I meant-‘ she stops for a while, still not looking away. ‘What if time froze? And all we ever saw was this- like, what would that be like?’
Database has no explanation.
Hands, cool and soft, cradle his face. It should hurt. It probably did. But Yoongi can’t tear his eyes away from the twin eclipses in his eyes. He can’t look away from the silvery-gold hair, the warm tan skin, the light freckles dusting the high points of his face.
Database has no explanation.
Yoongi tries to speak, but his body is numb and his vision is blurring in the way he was all too familiar with.
‘What is your name?’ he wants to ask. But his tongue is numb, and all of his senses are fading away.
A flare erupts through the sky and the brightness of it all ingrains itself into his mind. The ring of white fire glows and every time he blinked it beamed at him.
The Being smiles softly, eyes turning into crescents as he kneels down with Yoongi carefully, arms looping around his form and holding him close. The tears in his eyes fall, creating tiny streaks of light down his cheeks. His hair is longer now that it’s not suspended in whatever fluid that encased him.
Database has no explanation.
Yoongi feels his exhaustion overwhelm him and he keels.
But he’s there to keep him upright- he’s there to catch him.
The world is transformed under this light- under this sky- and the entirety of time seems to pause.
Sun-warmed leaves, a summer breeze carrying the promise of rain, and a vivid memory of a blue planet, curved perfectly against the starry expanse of the Universe behind it.

And Yoongi wants this moment to last longer. To allow him to witness this cosmic beauty for just a few seconds longer- just a few heartbeats longer. Just long enough for him to feel as though he was breathing at the same pace with everyone gathered around them. To feel as though he were looking at the same sky with everyone- to feel the planet sigh at the sight of the eclipse.

This is what it felt like.

*Database has no explanation.*

Bright lights erupt above him- above them. Familiar symmetrical lights and the burning blue energy flames of engine turbines. Yoongi is vaguely aware that he’s being moved but the eclipse appears again. Rosy lips move, forming the syllables of his name.

‘Yoongi?’

‘*It would be just like this.*’

*
(Author’s Note)

So that’s happening.
Ehe
Please scream at me.

DID YOU SEE MY BAG?
DID YOU SEE MY FUCKING BAG?????????
IT’S THICK
I CAN’T LOL OMG

There’s so much that has happened since I updated the last chapter I can’t think of anything to write except congratulations to all of my sons and daughters on winning their awards and for giving epic performances.

AND HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO KIM SEOKJIN I WISH I HAD HALF THE LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE THAT YOU DO- no but legit I have mad respect and love for Jin. I admire his effort, his tenacity, and his determination to prove himself, not just because of others, but for himself- his self-discipline, the lack of fucks he has to give, and the obvious care he has for his band members. Kim Seokjin is the best eldest hyung they could ever have and I love him so much. Mr World Wide Handsome I pray that you will only ever receive love and happiness for the rest of your life you ridiculously funny and beautiful man. I can’t even with you.

I was listening to the Thor original sound score while writing this chapter. Some epic shit right there people.

All right- time for some serious business

**Net neutrality**

I am going to leave some links here that you can all sign up for. TLDR guys if this passes, people in the US, and let's admit it, soon, around the world, we're going to have to pay for using sites like tumblr, ao3,aff,twitter, even youtube- not to mention pay even MORE for amazon, netflix, and any other thing that requires the internet. the internet needs to remain free. this can't happen and we need to stop this at once. imagine having to study for a paper and having to pay to use wikipedia. For more information you can go here: [over here](#).

or if you just want to sign up, it won’t take more than 2 minutes for each of these links, go to these websites and sign the petition. It won’t require anything more than your name, country, and email address and later a verification email will come to you and you just click at the link and it's done.
here
and here
this doesn’t just effect the US- but the rest of the world, because we know that this will spread. The sites have their signatures already but we need to do more- need to show HOW FUCKING STUPID THIS IS
please do this
it is SO important
imagine having to PAY to read fanfiction- or having to pay to WRITE fanfiction. Or worse yet, having to pay to use twitter or tumblr, OR YOUTUBE- HOW WILL WE WATCH BTS????
HOW WILL WE FUCKING STUDY? I PASSED ALL OF MY EXAMS BECAUSE OF WIKIPEDIA
so please. Let’s do this. the internet is the only place where we can actually be free- even the shitty side of it, let’s do this guys

on a much lighter and happier note
UNIVERSITY IS OVER for a month AND I AM FREE for a month SO YOU CAN EXPECT WEEKLY UPDATES AGAIN for a month
AND ALSO THAT YOONMIN AU I WAS TALKING ABOUT SOME TIME AGO
AYO
SEE YOU ALL NEXT SUNDAY
“Promnesia” [noun] [modern Latin]: From Greek pre- "before" -mnesia "memory".

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I want to leave.

It’s an ocean of light.

A sky of light.

An eternity of nothingness that encompasses no shape or form or colour- only light.

There are voices here- of him. Of her. Of them.

Of everyone.
Voices of the past.

Voices of the present.

Voices of the future.

*I know you, I walked with you once upon a dream*

There is singing, there is crying, there is screaming, there is laughter.

If you asked him where this was, he would say *It was, it is, and it will be* because that was what this truly was.

Was he happy? He’s not sure- was that a concept that was remotely important here?

Was he sad? He’s not sure.

What he does know is that he needs to be somewhere. He needs to go home.

He needs to go back.

That is all he remembers. That is the core of who he is.

*I know you, that look in your eyes is so familiar a gleam*

And he clings to that- and he lingers in what is. Sometimes he hears voices that are clearer than others, feels colours that are louder than others. Sometimes it’s just empty. But recently, if there is a concept of time here, after many an age, he finally hears something.

He can hear their memories.

And it’s louder than anything he’s heard before. Clearer, brighter, stronger.

And they are colourful – with so many emotions. It hurts his heart- because the colours he sees the most are pain, anger, sorrow, fear, regret, self-loathing, and worst of all, the colour that is starkest and brightest yet darkest of them all: homelessness.

*And I know it's true that visions are seldom all they seem.*

Sometimes he feels the colours close by, and sometimes they’re far away. Sometimes the colour of suspicion and doubt shine brightest. Then sometimes the colour of confusion and paranoia deepen in hue.

And sometimes it’s empty. It’s empty and he wonders if it’s going to be empty again but suddenly-amidst this endlessness of light, there is an eruption of pure and green energy.

*But if I know you, I know what you'll do*

And through this light he hears a voice. Or was it 5?
'Who are you?'

'I am the Yemenifesi Ch’inik’eti,' he responds to the voice. ‘Who are you?’

‘We are the Fifth, born of the first Awakening. What are you doing here?’

'I came here to seek shelter, to bring safety to my people. To take them home. What are you doing here?'

‘We could feel you. How long have you been here?’

'I don’t know. Time is not a concept that exists here. I don’t know where I am.’

‘We have seen this place before. Do you wish to leave?’

'I need to go back.'

You'll love me at once, the way you did once upon a dream

‘Where?’

‘Back home.’

‘Can you leave? I will try to help you, I don’t know if I can.’

He looks at the green energy- almost as ancient as this light around him- almost as powerful.

‘I have never tried- I don’t know how to.’

‘Follow it.’

‘Follow what?’ he asks. He really wants to leave now. Because he sees another colour bleeding in through the green. A colour he wants to eradicate. A colour he needs to remove.

‘Follow their voices, their dreams, follow their souls, follow their memories, follow their hearts- they will guide you.’

‘I will try.’

He’s searching now- for a way out.

‘What is your name?’

What was his name? He had a name.

He has a name.

He finds the exit. Through the bleeding colour that he has come to hate. It’s faint at first. But not for long.
A soft light fills the air before—soft and golden—like sunshine.

And he remembers his name.

‘My name is Jimin.’

Jimin stands besides Hoseok, watching as the body blackens, the fat glistens and melts, gathering the soot around it and forming waxy shapes coiled like solid smoke.

‘What will you do?’ Hoseok asks the high-priest.

‘Nothing,’ the high-priest replies, with shocking casualness and ease. ‘The birds and rats will come to eat it.’

Jimin feels a shudder run through him. He wants to stand in front of Hoseok, and block his vision from this sight.

Because Jimin can see how Hoseok sees himself in the charred bones, remains of a sacrifice offered and honoured but forgotten and consumed. But he can’t—instead he can taste the ashes of the air in his mouth—dry and bitter as the pain Hoseok feels, dropping the knife he used to kill his own father.

‘I’m so sorry,’ his father had whispered in the end. And Jimin’s heart breaks at the love that is so clear and apparent in his eyes. In their eyes. He chases after Hoseok as he trips across the hallways of this massive ship that housed the Venture Unit. The knife falls from his hands and Jimin can feel it burning in his own palm.

When Hoseok looks up into the mirror Jimin stares deep into his eyes.

This was that moment— it is that moment— where the fires have burnt away from around Hoseok, and left nothing but charred bones, liquidized fat, and cracked raw flesh.
Jimin watches as Venture Unit officers and agents come running in, a Yisheng behind them. They whisper amongst themselves, pointing at Hoseok, expressions of fear, disgust, as well as relief etched on their faces. He watches them thank him, Jimin watches them pour their gratitude over Hoseok but they all leave after the sacrifice has been offered. They all leave before they can see the charred remains.

They hold no glory over bones.

Jimin wants to take Hoseok’s hand, where he feels the fire of the knife etched there. But before he can reach for his hand, a loud sound thunders through the air- and a bright streak of light erupts above him.

Jimin steps out alongside Sk’jin, his form shrouded and hidden within the form of this other Being. His eyes burn strong and neon red. Determination and the strength of a promise long kept, long protected.

Together they track the motion of a ship- one that is laced with familiarity that does not come from himself. Jimin has seen it in their dreams.

‘How-‘

‘I promised you that we’d get out of here,’ he grits through his teeth as he raises one hand, finger pointing and tracing the path of the unsteady ship. ‘And that’s how.’

It vanishes behind a hill and they hear crushing sounds.

‘If they’re still ‘live kid- ‘s go check on ‘em.’

Jimin quickly follows the Venture Unit agents through the crude and cruelly constructed maze of a lab. The stench of death, chemicals, and blood seeps into his pores. They had destroyed the power grid, shrouding the place in darkness and overtaking it with a stealth attack.

Jimin can’t take his eyes off of the remains of the people that once lived peacefully in this planet. This planet that was once young, lush, green- with just the smallest hint of civilization growing near the river lands. What was once farmlands were barren and overridden with cruel iron and metal. The ground that was soft and rich with clay was watered with blood, tears, and curses. Even the sky had changed colour, from a bright clean turquoise to dead ash-grey.

Kutsoglera had died, and along with her, her children too.

Remnants of her people that managed to survive were limited in number, and were barely recognizable for who they were and what they originally looked like. Jimin can only see the echo of their previous selves. The rest shrouded in bionic metal, experimental elements, and cruel bioengineering.

But what does surprise him, amidst the fear and death that coloured the bland walls of this facility, was the intense ruddy glow surrounding a few of the Beings here. And mainly so around him.

‘You’re going to be all right.’ One of the agents who had previously broken down into tears says to a much younger Namjoon.

The gravity of the darkness in his eyes weighs down Jimin’s chest- feeling an overwhelming rush to push aside the other agents and hold the young child in his arms, willing him to forget the years of torment he lived through.
'We’re here to help you,' one of them says and Jimin wants to scream.

What had the Universe come to? What had all Life come to? Did Life hold no more value?

‘You’ll be all right,’ they keep repeating. ‘We’re taking you somewhere safe. You’ll be safe.’

No one could promise safety. Not when the Universe moved like this.

‘Is it what I need?’

Jamin sinks to the floor before Namjoon, where he sat on a table, the weight of his gaze crushing him.

‘Do you want to rest?’

Jimin is startled as he finds himself on a cluffy hill. He can smell a storm in the air- the promise of rain. He could shudder in relief at the transition. But that relief is short-lived.

Because that colour is everywhere here. It stains the sky red and the promise of death brews more imminently than the storm overhead. Jimin quickly pushes himself up from the rocky ground he found himself in. He follows the sound of the voice and he climbs up a few boulders before he catches sight of a distant sunrise over an autumnal forest.

A sudden sorrowful exhilaration, a realization that he’s been here before.

Movement catches his eye and Jimin quickly scrambles over. There’s a tall stringy Being- Yoongi’s friend. He’s stained with that colour too, and Jimin already knows what’s going to happen. What will happen.

Desperately, he tries to find Yoongi. would there be a way to warn him? He had to. How did he not realize this until now?

All Life is connected- a Continuum that goes on and on, looping into each other. How could he have not figured it out. Finally- he catches sight of the Human.

He look tired, his hair dim and matted, and his skin a little ashen from too much physical strain and not enough rest. But what mattered the most was that Yoongi wasn’t stained that colour.

‘It’s fine,’ Yoongi replies with an easy shrug. ‘I’ll rest later.’

‘You should rest now,’ his friend insists. Jimin has never been able to see Yoongi’s friends face properly- was this because Yoongi himself couldn’t remember?

‘I feel like I’ve spent…spent all my life resting,’ Yoongi replies with a small huff of a laugh. ‘And now I can finally…”

The young Human pauses a while, looking over the great horizon with an expression bordering between sorrow and bliss. Jimin wants to walk towards the Human, but he’s stuck. He can’t move.

‘And now I can finally be.’

Jimin wishes he could reach up and touch the Human. But he can’t.

So instead he hums. The tune that Jimin can hum from sheer memory. The tune that filters through the ocean of light.
Yoongi suddenly turns, his eyes locking onto Jimin’s. Jimin stumbles back a little, overwhelmed beyond words.

‘What is it?’

Jimin wants to say something- tell Yoongi to please please please run- run now-

But he’s frozen and that pale golden light starts to wrap shine from behind him. It was time to go. He found the exit and he has to leave. Leave the past, leave what was and enter the present to what is.

Yoongi smiles, still looking deep into Jimin’s eyes.

‘Sunshine.’

The sun to his right breaks through the clouds and is shining around Jimin, warm and bright, soft and gentle. It eats away at that colour and Yoongi approaches him, hand reaching out as though craving for its warmth on his skin.

Jimin holds his hands out before him and catches Yoongi before he falls over.

He’s drenched in sweat, blood splattered over his face- he’s barely awake and yet his eyes remain stubbornly open. Locked onto his.

Jimin can’t stop the tears rolling down his eyes as he helplessly holds the Human in his arms. Finally able to grab hold of him.

He couldn’t do anything before- the past Was and he could do nothing to change it. But he was here Now and Jimin is determined.

‘Yoongi,’ he keeps repeating because it’s the only word he knows Yoongi will understand.

Oddly enough, and in a way that hurts Jimin’s heart even more, Yoongi smiles. It’s small, strained, and so misplaced with their situation. And ever so softly, the Human whispers, ‘It would be just like this.’

* You have to wake him up

‘Did you hear that?’
Taeh’yung is 99.99% sure they heard singing. He glances at Sk’jin, checking to see if the Khol’isa heard it too.

He’s talking to you. Listen closely.

But Sk’jin doesn’t pay them heed. Because the Khol’isa is paying close attention to the fight.

Taeh’yung narrows their eyes at the OrTank.

‘Was that you?’ they ask quietly.

Lean in closer- you can speak to him. You have to wake him up

They don’t hear much. Only feel.

And they felt a lot. Taeh’yung could sit there for hours, communicating just like that. Reading his emotions, understanding what he wanted to say. Sometimes the connection was there. Sometimes it wasn’t. Like he was falling in and out of sleep.

Somewhere just beyond the panes of sleep and death.

It is Light there. Only Light, and only Death.

‘Can you hear me?’ Taeh’yung asks quietly, looking into the Being’s face. He wasn’t of a Species Taeh’yung directly recognizes. They have a feeling the First might know. But the First’s memories and thoughts were always too faint, and Taeh’yung’s never had the patience to really listen to her.

He can hear all of them. He can see all of them. You have to wake him up

Sk’jin is wincing as he watches the fight. He couldn’t watch it, unable to witness as Yoongi is thrown across the arena like a rag-doll. But Taeh’yung watches. They don’t look away.

They would witness this moment- so that it would live on and with each Awakening, he would remember this and they would know.

He has unexplained memories.

Imagery of unexplained darkness that was living and breathing- each exhale and inhale shaping the dimension they knew and occupied. Vivid colours of the genesis of creation, raw and chaotic energy that pulsed; a wild and crazed heart suddenly beating, pumping Life through its system. And like a great heaving mess, the Universe was born of darkness and colour, Life circulating and spreading.

Lean in closer- you can speak to him. Let me speak to him.

What was, what is, what would be all existed continuously in the Universe. Nothing was ever truly forgotten, nothing truly died- the dimensions of what was, what is, and would will be just expanded and expanded, creating new space and form. The memory of what was building what is to make way for what will be.

This was Continuum. And this was the Universe.

This is everything and nothing.

The Zhak’gri were the first. First born of the Awakening, first born of the Darkness.
And the first to be consumed.

Because where there is Life and Darkness, there is Death and Light. And the Zhak’gri contain this within themselves- because they knew that all that was, would come to what is, and would later become what will be.

Or at least that’s what they keep telling him. But Taeh’yung has never cared much for the Universe or what was going in around it. Regardless of past, present, future. There was too much happening around them, too much to see, too much to experience, for him to really bother getting caught up with the “truths” and “realities” he was being told to understand.

What mattered the most to Taeh’yung, was to do what none of the other 4 ever did. And it wasn’t just about blowing up moons, building a planet, or kick-starting a whole new species of Beings from their elemental core.

Taeh’yung figures it was pretty cool that it was their people, the Zhak’gri, the first of all living Beings to have ever existed in the Universe, were the blueprints of all living Beings. He also thinks it’s cool that their people, or well, what remained of them, were the first and only Beings to have ever gotten close to succeeding in creating and using dimensional rifts. As a result of this, their people were somehow able to achieve a sort of reincarnation that allowed their souls to continuously exist. So that when the host died but the soul was reborn, memories created in its previous host would still exist.

It was cool, but honestly Taeh’yung doesn’t understand why it was even a thing that had to happen. Taeh’yung was the Fifth, born of the Awakening. The period between his consciousness and his previous host had been a very long time. So much so that Taeh’yung believes they might actually be one of the last surviving. Many of the other Zhak’gri’s, tired of their continuous existence, took the dramatic end of the stick and literally flung themselves into the nearest blackhole. Taeh’yung, despite his behavior, was not prone to such dramatics.

Instead he just wanted to live.

To just be alive for the time he was meant to live, and continue on living to the fullest of his ability, and to aid those around them who might need it.

This was the Fifth birth, and Taeh’yung is pretty sure it’s the only time they’ve ever felt alive. Sometimes the other 4 voices come up to argue, to try and direct him to a certain path- to continue the search. What was this search even about? Taeh’yung doesn’t care about dimensional rifts and reaching into other life-forms not of this reality. He doesn’t care for breaking the Continuum or to control Life.

He just wanted to live, discover and find new planets and civilizations, make friends, make sure other Beings were living good lives, and be happy.

But there are times, during this time of his Birth, where they are witness to certain things, and he will stay to make sure that they see it, so that the memory of it may permeate the entirety of his soul, so that when the Sixth is born, that they too would feel what he felt, see what he saw, and
understand what he did.

And today was one of them.

‘This is fucking stupid!’ Sk’jin hisses, his eyes gleam as though wet. ‘Get him out of there now- withdraw from it now- is this worth it-?!’

‘He’ll pull through- he can do this-’ Namjoon argues back.

Sk’jin has looked away, and there really are tears in his eyes.

‘Yoongi is going to die!’ Sk’jin says harshly. ‘And we’re just-’ Sk’jin pauses, he’s distracted from the screen they were watching to another screen. Taeh’yung looks away from Yoongi’s fight and feels a flare of irritation at the sight of Van Seulgaan making his way inside their ship.

The Tayian doesn’t look as composed or collected as he normally did and Taeh’yung registers the Second expressing her disappointment. They were descended of her, as were many from that general System. But whatever remained of her essence, her elemental core, had long been diluted. The only source of almost entirely unadulterated elemental essence from the Awakening based off of the Zhak’gri could be found in the Khol’isa.

That was why K’mara had been so careful around him. Because she could see them.

The first of my children

Sk’jin was different- his core altered in a way that even Taeh’yung couldn’t see. In a way none of the 4 could really explain.

Because you don’t want to see

The same way he couldn’t really see into Yoongi.

Because you don’t want to see

The same way he couldn’t see into the Being inside the OrTank.

Because you don’t want to see

Taeh’yung just wanted to live and explore and have friends, but it would seem that the Universe didn’t want him to just be an observer.

‘What the fuck is he doing here-’ Sk’jin burst out, turning around to get up but the Android guard pushes him back down to his seat on the couch. They’re in the Bridge, Sk’jin occupying Hoseok’s seat at the cockpit and Taeh’yung standing behind him, the OrTank safely strapped to one of the unoccupied seats.

‘He’s here for him,’ Taeh’yung says at once, gripping the handles on the side of the OrTank.

‘Let me go or so help me I will end you-’ Sk’jin hisses at the Android just as Van walks in.

He’s attempting to look poised but Taeh’yung can practically smell anger and fear emanating off of him in strong rolls.

You have to hide him.

You have to wake him up
The Being in the OrTank suddenly twitches but Sk’jin and Van are too occupied, glaring each other down to notice.

_-…walked with you…a dream-_ the song, with a soft singing voice suddenly sounds again. Except it’s louder and clearer this time.

‘I can hear you,’ Taeh’yung breathes out softly, crouching down and taking the OrTank to the other side of the cockpit, looking as though he was hiding. ‘Speak to me please.’

_He’s speaking to you, but you’re not listening to him._

The Being inside shifts a little, fingers flexing. Taeh’yung has spoken to him before. Has introduced himself, spoken to him. But it was all sporadic, without any pattern.

_You need to guide him. Guide him out. Guide him back out. You have to wake him up_

‘You said you wanted to go home, that they would take you home. But they can’t right now- not without losing,’ Taeh’yung says quietly, stroking the surface of the OrTank in a soothing manner. ‘They’re all trying very hard- especially Yoongi and-‘

Taeh’yung glances over at the fight. Taeh’yung knew that Yoongi would lose. And he also knew that Yoongi knew that.

He might be the best fighter out of all of them- but he wasn’t trained for this.

_You know that he can see all of this. that he can see all of this. let him follow the colours. You have to wake him up_

‘-I think he’s in trouble right now.’

_I want to leave._

_Lean in closer- you can speak to him. Let me speak to him. You have to wake him up_

‘Can you leave? I will try to help you, I don’t know if I can.’ Taeh’yung speaks for the Second.

_You have to wake him up_

_Closer- you know you can go closer- don’t worry, trust us, we won’t lose you in there_

_I have never tried- I don’t know how to._

_He’s been waiting. He’s been waiting and waiting. He needs to leave. And we will See. He needs to leave._

‘Follow it.’ The First speaks.

_Follow what?_

_Lean in closer- you can speak to him. Let me speak to him. You have to wake him up_

‘Follow their voices, their dreams, follow their souls, follow their memories, follow their hearts- they will guide you.’ The First speaks again and Taeh’yung finds himself back there again.

The world of white.
They stand behind him, their hands on his shoulder, looking on. You have to wake him up they say in unison. Taeh’yung is tempted to wave them off. Instead he directs his attention to the tear in the light. A shape bleeds out into form, pulsing in the wavelength of the song.

And he is born of song, Taeh’yung finds out. Ancient, unknown.

You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up You have to wake him up

‘I will try.’ The Being stands before him, his expression lost.

He’s searching now- for a way out.

‘What is your name?’ the Third asks.

He looks confused, thinking hard.

Please remember please remember please remember please remember

He will remember. He will. He just needs Time.

‘My name is Jimin.’

wake up

Sk’jin doesn’t normally get angry.

Irritated? Yes.

Frustrated? Maybe a bit too frequently.

Exasperated? All the fucking time.

But the moment he sees Van’s face Sk’jin is flooded with pure anger. The kind he hasn’t felt in a while.

‘Your contestant is losing. He’s already lost. He lost the moment he stepped inside that building- so now hand that egg over to me and I’ll allow you to take back whatever remains you can scrape
off of the floor.’ The Tayian announces the moment he’s close enough.

Sk’jin pushes past the Android guards, uncaring of what they might do and goes and shoves Van Seulgaan.

He knows it’s not effective but he’s not trying to beat Van into a pulp here even though he wants to.

‘Sk’jin? What’s going on? Hey-’

‘You listen here you little shit-face,’ Sk’jin towers over Van and he leans down so close their foreheads are almost touching. ‘You will leave my ship right now, or you are going to regret it.’

‘That’s not going to work- I’m done indulging you and your crew,’ Van shoves him back, normally passive face hostile and frenzied. ‘You think I believed any of the bullshit you told me? You’re all fugitives- running away, at the first opportunity, hiding and avoiding the real issue here- do you have any idea what you’ve done? What this could do-’

‘Oh- so we’re the ones who fucked things up?’ Sk’jin pushes him out again but he’s restrained as a few hands hold him back. ‘We were just fucking stocking up on the fucking Dock and this bullshit you’ve been funding threw us in for a loop and your fucking greed put us all here-’

‘I thought you would understand- out of all the Beings in this ship- I thought you would understand!’ Van Seulgaan barks back.

‘I don’t fucking care! Get the fuck out of my ship-’

‘They’re here!’ Hoseok suddenly announce. ‘Fuck they’re here-’

‘What? How? That’s not possible,’ Namjoon argues. ‘That’s not possible-’

Sk’jin freezes- and he also notes how Van has frozen where he’s stood.

‘What did you do?’ he whispers. ‘What did YOU DO?!’

His silvery eyes burn with fear and rage and he charges at Sk’jin. And it’s for a fraction of a second, just the tiniest movement, but Sk’jin notes how Van Seulgaan is suddenly distracted, his eyes shifting to look at something behind Sk’jin. But he’s already moving forward.

However, he doesn’t make it past a single step.

Soft yet strangely corporeal golden light erupts from behind Sk’jin and a flash of green forks around him.

‘Sk’jin, you and Taeh’yung get out of there now, they’ve brought the entire fucking Tayi fleet fucking Spaces-!’

By the time the light has dimmed and Sk’jin can finally open his eyes, the Androids have all collapsed in a heap and the ship hums to life, the rift-lock having been lifted. Van Seulgaan is out cold where he was standing.

‘SK’JIN!’

Sk’jin spins on his feet and nothing could have prepared him for the sight that greets him.

Taeh’yung is standing by the Navigator’s Mast, his eyes flaring green and a dancing ring of dark
green light around him like some bizarre upright halo. But this isn’t what’s blowing Sk’jin’s mind.

‘Jin! Are you all right!’ Taeh’yung nearly bowls him over, green light fading abruptly.

‘Tae-’ Sk’jin feebly raises a hand, pointing towards the Navigator’s Mast.

‘Ah right! This is Jimin! Jimin this is Sk’jin! Or just Jin!’ Taeh’yung steps aside, casually introducing the Being that has been asleep inside that OrTank ever since before this bullshit started what the actual-

He’s entirely naked, and not entirely embarrassed by that fact. Whatever liquid that was containing him dissipates into air in a matter of seconds, leaving this Jimin dry. Standing upright, he’s probably Yoongi’s height, but quite slight. His skin tone is warmer than Sk’jin had first observed, with freckles smattering the expanse of his skin. His hair sways about, a strange gossamer shade of silver and gold combined.

‘Sk’jin what is going on?! Answer me!;

But what really stuns Sk’jin is his eyes.

They looked just like solar eclipses.

‘Right! Clothes!’ Taeh’yung then strips off his outer tunic, holding it up for the Being to wear.

His movements look unsure but not unsteady. As though he hadn’t been “asleep” for probably centuries. He just…seemed curious.

And then all of Sk’jin’s anger comes rushing back in again.

‘All right so who the fuck are you?!’

The Being jumps at Sk’jin’s loud and angry tone. And honestly Sk’jin is so done with this situation he doesn’t care anymore. He marches forward to where he’s standing and before anyone has time to react Sk’jin grabs him by the shoulders, shaking him hard.

‘Sk’jin what’s going on? Taeh’yung answer me!’

‘Who are you and why were you in there? This is all because of you and I need to know why this bullshit started!’

The Being is, understandably, very shocked and stunned speechless.

‘Jin wait-‘

‘No! I need to know why he’s here- why we’re here!’ Sk’jin doesn’t even bother looking at Taeh’yung as he grips the Being’s bare shoulders even harder, uncaring if he was hurting him or not.

The Being doesn’t answer, just gaping a little before his eyes dart around Sk’jin’s face and instead of answering him or even looking abashed at this proximity, he reaches upwards, not to push Sk’jin away, but to gently place them on his temples.

‘Khoi ah gne an kal?’ he asks softly.

He has a gentle voice- not a low voice but he’s not pitchy either. There was something melodic in the way he spoke his words, a lilt to his vowels that made the language somehow strangely harsh
yet melodically soft. At this distance, Jimin’s eyes are hypnotic.

*Never stare straight at the eclipse- it’s dangerous.*

Before Sk’jin can even process the strangeness of what was happening before him, “Jimin” is stepping away from him, distracted by something. Then he pales- his skin losing colour in a shockingly fast manner, eyes widening.

‘Yoongi!’

Sk’jin has a million and one questions. But for now he’s going to stick to: *how does he know Yoongi’s name?*

Jimin is addressing Taeh’yung in the same unknown language, and before Sk’jin can even ask Lisai to translate, Taeh’yung is responding in the same language rapidly- hands flying, pleading it would seem. And Sk’jin understands why because Jimin suddenly turns about, quickly adjusting his tunic and overstepping the Androids and makes his way out of the Bridge.

‘Hold up-!’ Sk’jin feels like everything is happening too quickly for him to process.

‘Sk’jin! For fucks sake-!’

‘Jimin!’ Taeh’yung sprints forward, catching the Being by the hand and pulling him back, rapidly speaking.

‘FOR FUCK’S SAKE ONE OF YOU ANSWER ME-‘

‘He’s awake.’ Sk’jin mumbles, watching now with utter bewilderment as Taeh’yung and Jimin seem to be arguing back and forth.

‘What-?’

‘Sk’jin- don’t fucking lie-‘

‘I am *not* lying- that thing from the OrTank is awake and he did some weird shit and-‘

‘Fucking Spaces-‘

‘Namjoon, Sk’jin, you guys have to get out of there-‘

‘But Yoongi-!’

‘JIN!’

‘WHAT? FUCKING SPACES, WHAT?!’ Sk’jin screams back.

Taeh’yung and Jimin, to their credit, don’t flinch, instead they both step up towards the Khol’isa, invading his space.

‘Do you trust me?’ Taeh’yung asks, uncharacteristically serious.

‘What-?’ Sk’jin actually does trust Taeh’yung-maybe not his methods, but his intent. But at this moment, he’s not too sure about any of it.

‘Sk’jin please,’ Taeh’yung pleads, holding his hand out to take his own. Sk’jin feels a ripple, the familiar thrumming that always comes from Taeh’yung’s touch, as though he contained an energy
that was bursting to free itself right from under the Zhak’gri’s skin.

Listen to me child

It’s so faint, Sk’jin wants to believe it was in his mind. But he knows that it’s not. Because he’s heard this voice before.

‘Sk’jin- could you please just explain what’s happening- are you leaving? You have to leave- Hoseok just stay put until Sk’jin comes to get you-I’m going up, I have to get Yoongi out-’

‘You’ll get caught for fuck’s sake. Namjoon you can’t possibly escape the Pageant, Van, and the GLA by yourself-’

‘Sk’jin?’ Jimin’s tone is imploring and an added touch of something. One that doesn’t make sense but Sk’jin finds himself nodding.

‘All right. I trust you.’

Taeh’yung breaks out into a huge smile and says, ‘Joonie! Can you go over to the Pageant arena? There should be a place where contestant managers or House representatives can stay!’

‘Taeh’yung?! Can someone please fucking explain-’

‘Not now Joonie,’ Taeh’yung gently pushes Sk’jin towards the cockpit, making him sit. ‘Jinnie, can you take us to the arena?’

‘You want me to fly us into the arena?!’ Sk’jin splutters, unsure why his body wasn’t protesting as much as his brain.

Instead of Taeh’yung responding, Jimin suddenly crowds into him, taking his hands into his own. The warmth of his skin feels like unexpected sunlight.

‘Sk’jin, khognei tak in, kal to ang.’

Sk’jin has no idea what he’s saying but he finds himself nodding, hands already starting up the ship.

‘I’ll set up our flight trajectory!’ Taeh’yung volunteers cheerily.

‘You don’t know how to use it-’ Sk’jin argues though he’s already boosting their engines. Taeh’yung must have taken care of the rift-lock with his previous stunt with the green lightning thing.

‘I watched Joonie do it all the time,’ Taeh’yung says dismissively and to Sk’jin’s surprise, the trajectory is accurate and the ship’s cockpit system aligns to it, straight for the Pageant arena.

‘Ka lom eh,’ Jimin smiles down at him, ‘Nakin ah min gnai dam ang che aw?’ and he kisses his brow.

‘Uh- okay?’ Sk’jin somewhat dumbly replies, unsure why he wasn’t opposing any of this, as the ship lifts into the air.

‘Sk’jin? Are you all right? Taeh’yung?’

‘Just get your ass into the arena.’
'Just get your ass into the arena.' Sk’jin replies, sounding strangely at-ease and not at all harassed like he did literally 20 seconds ago. Namjoon steps into the elevator, glaring at the Android guards that step in with him, taking up additional seconds of his precious time.

‘Namjoon- can you please tell me what’s going on- some of the ships have landed on the Dock, the others are making their way in-planet- and if I’m not mistaken, I think I just saw a bunch of GIU ships too.’ Hoseok asks, exasperation laced into his voice. ‘The ship can’t come up here- it’s not possible without getting caught-‘

‘I don’t know what’s going on either- they’re just telling me to go up-‘

‘You’re going to get caught- I don’t know how- but this is not looking good for Yoongi,’ Hoseok says tersely. ‘If he was fully armed and armoured then he would be on equal footing- but he’s losing. Namjoon he’s losing; we need to get the OrTank out-‘

‘Well apparently he’s awake and-‘

‘They’re leaving! Sk’jin and Taeh’yung- the ship’s taken off!’ Hoseok exclaims with surprise. ‘I don’t know what you think you can do up there…shit, SHIT-‘

Namjoon exits the elevator, anticipation mounting inside of him. Here, he can hear the crowd roaring without any filter or added effect.

‘Hoseok, what’s going on-‘

‘They’re there- shit, Namjoon hurry up and get there, what the fuck is Sk’jin thinking?’

Namjoon doesn’t have to wait for an explanation because the moment he’s out in the balcony ledge that rings around the wide space of the Arena for the contestant Houses to sit in, he’s caught off-guard by the sight of the Užkulisai appearing overhead, her powerful lights casting a blinding radiance over the Arena grounds.

The lights focus and highlight an area on the grounds and Namjoon can just about make out two figures.

‘They’re getting Yoongi-‘ Namjoon’s realization comes out with a choked cough. ‘Spaces, fuck-‘

The back of the ship comes into view and to Namjoon’s intense alarm a figure jumps off.

‘What in the fuck-‘

‘Namjoon! Can you see us? Get over here now!’ Sk’jin commands, yet again, sounding strangely calm.

‘I can’t fucking believe this-‘ Hoseok is mumbling. ‘Namjoon-‘
‘I can’t just go!’ Namjoon retorts back, feeling everything from anger to amusement as he watches the ship lower down. ‘I’m a little surrounded if you remember!’

‘It’s fine! I’ll come help!’ Taeh’yung chirps in.

‘What do you mean-’

There’s a strange bright light that radiates from underneath the Užkulisai, right at the arena grounds where Yoongi should be. It’s not the ship’s own set of lights- this was different. It felt different. It’s followed by a bright crack of green light that is familiar to Namjoon. The green light forks through the arena, and Namjoon is already running. Because the Android guards all collapse in a heap on the ground at Namjoon’s wake.

He leaps over the balcony ledge, dropping down heavily but nimbly onto his feet some 10 feet below.

‘PA! OVER HERE!’ a loud voice yells. And it’s only then that Namjoon realizes that a strange silence has fallen over arena- a weird stillness. And to Namjoon’s increasing bewilderment, he catches sight of a few Beings from the stands, eyes wide and expressions full of reverence. As though they were looking upon some godly sight, filling them all with awe.

Taeh’yung appears from beyond the strange light, that upon closer inspection, looks almost solid.

‘Pa!’ he waves his long arms in greeting but he’s tackled down by a blurred object.

‘Taeh’yung-!?’

There’s a flash of green and Yoongi’s fragile looking opponent goes flying into the air, head strangely limp as she falls down with a thud.

‘Pa!’

Taeh’yung reappears, entirely unfazed. Namjoon decides not to ask questions, casting another glance at the alarmingly limp body of the contestant on the ground. Namjoon has seen his fair share of dead bodies to recognize them, no matter the species. Taeh’yung pulls him in towards the light and it feels strangely corporeal, as though passing through a strange membrane of sorts.

‘Is everyone all right-’ Namjoon begins to ask but he’s stunned into silence when he comes upon a strange sight.

Standing, as though waiting for him and Taeh’yung, is the Being from the OrTank. He has tears down his face, expression pained and filled with worry, and in his arms is an incredibly bloodied and beaten Yoongi.

He’s speaking rapidly in a language Namjoon doesn’t understand or identify to Taeh’yung who responds back, his tone placating.

‘Yoongi-‘ Namjoon tries to say but Taeh’yung is already speaking over him.

‘Pa! Go to the Bridge! Jimin and I will take care of Yoongi! Let’s go get Hobi and get out of here!’ Taeh’yung quite literally pushes him away, hurrying “Jimin” towards the direction of the Medical Bays.

‘Uh-‘
‘Namjoon! Up here! Now!’

Namjoon gives up on trying to understand and just listens to the Zhak’gri, casting one more look towards Yoongi’s direction. The Human is unconscious and barely breathing. Ignoring the bitter guilt that burns up his throat, Namjoon runs up towards the Bridge.

Hoseok is so entirely done and exasperated.

It wasn’t as though the line had died. There was a difference when the line through the Comm-Device died. There was the tell-tale *click* sound

No one was replying to him, no one was explaining anything, he’s literally stranded on a Dock, teeming with GLA officers and agents from both the Venture Unit and GIU. He’s shifted to blend in with the Pompen once again, easily following through with their confusion. Because that’s what Hoseok is.

Confused.

Very confused.

He’d been watching Yoongi’s match, stomach burning as he watched the Human get flung across the arena grounds. His hands shook as Yoongi wouldn’t stay down, wouldn’t stop. But with the arrival of the GLA, Hoseok hadn’t been able to keep track. But now here was the Užkulisai, quite simply entering the Pageant arena.

And then landing.

And then a bright light erupts.

The camera angles of the events sort of just freezes and no matter how many times Hoseok changes the channel or adjusts the frequency, nothing happens.

And then less than a minute later, the light is suddenly gone from one of the camera feeds, the arena is in chaos, and the Užkulisai missing.

‘-oseok? Can you hear me?’

Hoseok has placed himself in the Hangar containing Van Seulgaan’s ship, watching alongside other confused Pompen maintenance workers, as GLA officers purge the ship in a matter of seconds. They were terrifyingly thorough and quick to apprehend all of the Beings inside of the ship. They’re being shooed off towards the main atrium and Hoseok easily follows. He doesn’t bother hiding his screen or the content of what he was watching- every other Pompen made to work during the Pageants had a screen on them, watching the event take place. They’re ignored for the vast majority of the time the GLA officers have been in the Dock and Hoseok is all too eager being ignored.
‘Yes I can fucking hear you- what in Spaces happened?’ Hoseok demands in a fierce and low whisper as they make their way into the large Atrium.

The Atrium, like all other atriums in every other GLA-standard Dock, was a massive space within the Docks, creating hollows within the massive floating structure where entrances and bridges opened out and connected to each other. GLA Offices were located here. As well as medical bays, shops, eateries, hotels, even entire spas and luxury facilities such as salons, museums, garden spaces, and several restaurant chains. Each Dock had 4 Atriums, spanning the entire length of a Dock on four symmetrical sides. So the side of the Atrium facing out into space was nothing more than a massive window the travelled up and down the length of the Atrium.

‘I need you to switch back on all of the communication signal lines in and off-planet.’ Namjoon orders, sounding tense.

‘I can’t!’ Hoseok replies and before he can even begin to ask what was going on, Namjoon cuts over and says, ‘I transferred the main malware to the screen with you- you can control it now.’

So that was why Namjoon was unaffected by the fact that Van Seulgaan had destroyed his screen. The extent of Namjoon’s skills was a little overwhelming, but at this moment it’s entirely welcome. He switches tabs on the screen, looking for anything that might indicate he had the sole control over an entire planet’s communication channel signals.

‘Switch it all back on!’ Namjoon orders. ‘Access the tab to the left.’

Just as Namjoon says the words, Hoseok comes across a rather plain and obvious tab that reads COMMUNICATIONS GRID SYSTEMS and a very simple ON and OFF beneath it.

‘I got it!’ Hoseok taps on the ON and then asks, ‘What’s this for? Why? Aren’t we stopping their signals from reaching out-?’

‘We’re coming to get you- we needed a camouflage.’ Sk’jin explains, soundly strangely relaxed. Hoseok has simply stopped asking questions ever since Sk’jin’s statement of ‘he’s awake’.

There’s a wave of gasping sounds and shouts that fill the Atrium. This Atrium faced Pompa, and Hoseok understands why everyone was freaking out.

A sudden onslaught of multitudes of ships and Transporters, previously unable to leave all lift off.

Hoseok had of course kept track of all the ships that had left the planet, but were stuck in the stratosphere, unable to leave due to lack of signals coming in from the planet and from the Dock. There were some thousands in numbers but it seems to have increased, what with panic and the sudden appearance of the GLA.

It seemed to be a universal thing: that everyone loses their collective minds the moment an form of authority figure steps in.

‘Hoseok, can you please make your way to Hangar Bay 83-00FD?’ Namjoon asks.

‘Yeah I’ll be there in a few minutes-’

A small Transporter lands and as the doors open, the entirety of the special-jury steps out.

K’mara leads the group forwards, followed closely by Van Seulgaan, Lmiura, Xmi, Shn’ow, and last of all, Amme. But the Atrium is in too much chaos, dealing with the sudden barrage of ships and transporters coming from Pompa. And not to mention the entire GLA fleet suddenly hovering
‘They’re here. They’re all here,’ Hoseok reports at once, keeping a steady eye on all of them as he makes his way towards one of the exits that would take him to Section 83. He was in Section 21, so he would have to make his way to the next Atrium and then downwards.

‘All of them? Even Amme?’ Namjoon asks, sounding shocked.

Hoseok eyes the Yisheng carefully as he replies, ‘All of them. In the same ship.’

‘Well, that worked as planned.’

It’s the only thing that has worked out from the plan, Hoseok wants to say but he bites his tongue. He spots the exit and before making his way into it, glances back one more time.

A shudder runs down his back when he finds Yisheng Amme staring straight at him, her eyes unwavering. And even from this distance, Hoseok knows, that she knew.

‘Shit.’

‘What’s wrong?’

‘Amme just saw me.’

‘Shit.’ Namjoon agrees. ‘Move. Quickly. We’ll be there in a minute.’

Hoseok hurries, purposefully weaving through crowded areas, ducking under taller Pompens and other Beings alike. His heart is pounding, the back of his neck prickled. He can’t wave off the feeling of Amme’s dark eyes following after him and he fights the urge to look back. It’s only when he reaches the elevator that he allows himself to look back into the Atrium.

And to his intense disquiet, he spots Amme, standing tall beyond the crowd, closer than he ever anticipated, watching him.

The elevator doors close and Hoseok nearly slumps against the walls from relief.

‘She definitely saw me.’ Hoseok says, more to himself than Namjoon.

‘30 seconds.’

Hoseok spots the Užkulisai, already docked but ready to leave. And he hurries, disregarding any subtlety or discretion. The panicked gut instinct that he was being followed never letting up even this far from that Atrium. He doesn’t look back- not trusting himself and what he might see.

The ramp is already lowered though only halfway, the door is open and Hoseok can see the antechamber lit up. He picks up his speed and grits out, ‘Get ready- I’m almost there.’

‘We’re ready to move out.’ Namjoon replies back, just as tense.

Hoseok doesn’t realize he was holding his breath until he gasps his exhales, slumped against the back wall of the antechamber inside the Užkulisai.

‘Go!’ Hoseok gasps out but it’s not needed because the door has already closed and the ship is humming.

‘Strap yourselves- we’re going into warp in 10 seconds!’ Sk’jin announces.
Hoseok scrambles, exiting the antechamber and launching himself towards the Lobby. He runs past the Medical Bay and if it weren’t for the imminent warp-mode they were about to enter, he would stop to stare.

Yoongi is unconscious on one of the Medical Beds, a bunch of tubes attached to his arms. The capsule like casing has been lowered over him and clinging to that is an extremely familiar Being.

He glances up from Yoongi’s unconscious form, looking straight at Hoseok.

Chills run down Hoseok’s back as he quickly sits down, the security straps wrapping around him in an instant.

His eyes remind Hoseok of another time he had seen a solar eclipse. Just as the familiar pull of warp-mode tugs at the lining of his stomach, a voice comes to Hoseok’s mind unbidden.

‘I’ll be fine dad- it won’t be any different than what you or mum did.’

His father had pulled a funny face.

‘That’s exactly what I’m afraid of.’

It’s pleasantly quiet.

The sun is shining above him and it’s windy. He has a feeling that he’s quite high up, but he’s not sure where he is. That bit of information is a bit foggy. He remembers the taste of something bitter, something that coils around his tongue, spreads down his throat, and somehow to the rest of his body. It’s a tepid bitter sensation that Yoongi finds he doesn’t really like, but has somehow grown accustomed to it, feeling strange in its absence.

Small flecks of red flicker at the end of a small white smoking object between his fingers. Lifting his head he looks over at a magnificent view of the skies- clouds looming above, below, all around him. He blows out smoke, as white as the clouds.

He exhales wrong, coughing harshly, and excruciating pain throbs across his ribs.

‘-ongi!’

Startled, he makes to turn but he slips and falls, strangely enough, into the sky.

He wakes up coughing, pain that is somehow numb but very present and very very real, spreads over him. Pain isn’t really much of an issue for Yoongi. He doesn’t fear pain, doesn’t fear the aches and bruises and cuts.
His vision is blurred and everything is too bright. But he instantly recognizes the forms and outlines of his surroundings.

He was in the Užkulisai Medical Bay.

Flashing memories of his fight appear before his eyes, startlingly clear and stark before the blurred background of the Medical Bay. He’s still coughing. His chest feels like it’s shattered and compressed, sharp bits of his own bones piercing him continuously. The Tl’mei flails against an invisible shield- formless but bright.

Had that been a dream? Was he reliving a dream? Then that meant he would appear-

Yoongi tries to turn to face the light, anticipating his reappearance. There’s that light again, and just like he predicted, just like he dreamt, he appears again.

The Tl’mei blurs out instead- and so does the arena. His face comes into focus and slowly, so does the Medical Bay.

His chest doesn’t feel shattered anymore- rather he feels incredibly heavy. As though a great hook had latched onto his ribs, pulling him down. He can’t feel his limbs, but that part doesn’t bother Yoongi. It’s something he’s gone through before.

He was healing right now. And he knew he was safe.

He can detect a smile, a voice speaking to him, but his hearing isn’t all too great at this moment, so Yoongi doesn’t understand him. There’s a hand that appears, clearer than the face because of its proximity. Yoongi feels the hand carefully thread through his hair. It hurts. But at the same time, it feels all right. He closes his eyes, unable to open them longer. But he tries to open them again and the face reappears. The lights behind him are a little different. The face gets clearer and clearer and this time, so does the eclipse.

‘It would be just like this.’

When Yoongi finally wakes up properly, he’s able to sit up just a little, causing little alarms and sounds to go off around him. This is instantly followed by the sound of footsteps and a loud cry from Taeh’yung: ‘He’s awake!’.

The Zhak’gri bursts in, wide grin set on his face, hair a mess, and for reasons unknown, a ladle in his hand. His appearance is pushed aside, quite literally, by Sk’jin who storms inside the Medical Bay.

The Khol’isa’s skin is glowing, his eyes bright, and he smelled like something Yoongi can’t quite name, but associates with somewhere hot and dry.

‘Yoongi-‘

‘Where are we?’ Yoongi manages a croak, his mind finally coming up with the correct scent. ‘You smell like dust.’

Sk’jin blinks and then he rolls his eyes as he says, ‘You nearly fucking died. Put away that GI agent intuition- we’re in Ch’dra.’

‘Namjoon?’ Yoongi is pushed back with a surprisingly gentle hand as Sk’jin looks over his health tab, studying his readings while adjusting some form of drip.
‘Upstairs- and confused. Probably making his way down.’ He replies carelessly.

‘Hoseok?’

‘Outside, also confused. Probably headed back in.’ Sk’jin mutters. If Yoongi isn’t mistaken, Sk’jin looks irritated. And not at Yoongi. But at something else.

‘I’m here!’ Taeh’yung beams, his head popping from behind Sk’jin.

‘How long?’

‘Two days,’ Sk’jin finally looks away from the screen mounted on the wall next to his Medical Bed. ‘Your regenerative levels are insane.’

Yoongi pauses, wondering how he should reply to that. Taeh’yung walks over to sit on his Medical Bed, a feat considering it’s designed for one general sized Being and Taeh’yung is quite tall. He carefully puts his arms around Yoongi, holding him in a gentle hug. He presses his cheek against Yoongi’s, and the Human can quite literally feel his smile against his cheek.

‘Thank you.’

For a moment, Sk’jin’s irritation abates, and he looks at Yoongi with what the Human can only properly term as fond. But then Namjoon appears and Sk’jin’s irritated expression comes back.

‘Yoongi- hey,’ Namjoon says somewhat lamely.

‘Hi.’ Yoongi replies, hoping the response suffices. He feels Taeh’yung smile even wider.

‘Uh- how are you feeling-‘

‘Wow, I really wonder how he’s feeling,’ Sk’jin spits out. ‘You know, from nearly DYING!’

Namjoon closes his eyes tight, clearly trying to conjure up some patience.

‘I don’t know,’ Yoongi replies before he asks, ‘What is the situation of our mission?’

Sk’jin throws Namjoon a glare which Namjoon returns with a frustrated grimace. But before this exchange of tense facial expressions can continue, Yoongi hears a door banging open and Hoseok’s voice filling the area. Taeh’yung pulls away from Yoongi, obvious excitement in his body language.

‘-wait! Please be careful-!’ is all Hoseok manages to say when he appears in the doorway, out of breath, hair disheveled, eyes wide.

Yoongi’s mind is reeling.

He feels his jaw drop. He’s blinking rapidly, somehow unable to look directly at this Being’s face.

He was awake, and he was standing in front of him. In fact, he’s walking towards Yoongi, a smile breaking out on his face, hands lifted before him.

‘Yoongi!’

Yoongi is vaguely aware of Taeh’yung squealing while Hoseok appears at the doorway, also looking breathless as though he suddenly had to run. Everyone is speaking but Yoongi doesn’t really hear them. Not when his solid warmth wraps around him, triggering memories from the
arena.

He was real.

* 

Chapter End Notes

(Author’s Notes)

The only ship mentioned in this fic and it’s finally here. after 18 chapters. And they don’t speak the same language.
I hate myself.
The language Jimin speaks is a language I speak and it’s a legit language lol. My mum’s from a small state in India called Mizoram and the language there is kinda… unusual and unique with over 8 tones in the dialect. It’s called Mizo but don’t take my word for it when I say the spelling and meaning is accurate, I’ve purposefully changed some of the spelling and the words used because I prefer some words over another because I think it looks better.
And yeah, this update is a little…short- well short for this fic’s recent standard, because it’s gonna be weekly for a while ehe. So yeah…*scratches back of neck* I hope you enjoy.
Taeh’yung POV might be a bit difficult to understand so I’ll just clarify some parts here. When writing Taeh’yung’s sole perspective, I use they/them/their as his pronouns. However when Taeh’yung is referring to one of the other 4, the pronouns he/she will be used. The writing that's oriented to the left are the “voices in his head”. They were supposed to be MUCH SMALLER IN FONT SIZE but AO3 has really limited editing options i’m sad. They’re meant to be hard to read because Taeh’yung can’t hear them all too well either. So instead on AO3 i’ve put them oriented towards the left. Because Taeh’yung’s character is a complex one- he’s a lot of different Beings in one so when it’s his POV, all of him, speak at the same time, unless an individual voice comes out. It’s one of the reasons why he’s sort of so chaotic with his behavior and persona.
‘What in *Spaces* just happened?!’ Hoseok demands as he bursts in, in time to witness Sk’jin sinking into his pilot’s seat, face buried in his hands. Namjoon is in a similar disposition but he’s quick to recover. The Bridge lit up with the white light of warped space, the flare of it reduced and comfortably familiar to Hoseok. At least here in warp space they were momentarily safe.

Namjoon stands up from where he’d been squatting, making his way towards the Bridge door.

‘Need to check on Yoongi-‘

Hoseok stops him, holding him back.

‘He’s being taken care of by Taeh’yung- he’ll be fine without any of us having to butt in.’ Hoseok says, grip tightening over the Kutsoglerin’s arm. ‘I need an explanation.’

‘So do I,’ Namjoon retorts, pulling his arm out of Hoseok’s hold.

‘We all need an explanation,’ Sk’jin says tiredly from the front. ‘And none of us have the answers- only Jimin does.’

‘Wait- how did this even happen? How is he awake? Since when?’ Hoseok demands, walking up towards Sk’jin who stands wearily.

‘You can both watch the moment it happened.’ The Khol’isa says instead.

Pulling up the surveillance footage from barely an hour ago, the three gather around the Navigation Table and watch.

Sk’jin’s back is turned to Taeh’yung who is crouched beside the OrTank. They can hear that he’s speaking- but it’s in a language none of them understand.

‘Lisai- can you translate that?’ Namjoon asks, sectionalizing that audio in particular.


They watch as Sk’jin pushes Van Seulgaan back, only to be shoved back as well. And then suddenly Taeh’yung steps back from his kneeling position. Namjoon quickly zooms in on the surveillance here.
The Being in the OrTank- *Jimin* – opens his eyes.

And quite instantly the OrTank’s fixtures come apart, the side bars opening up like a blossoming flower and the liquid he was suspended in dissipating into the air like mist. It’s somehow entirely unremarkable. Maybe except for the fact that he seemed to be illuminated from within, blurry his outline momentarily. The Android guards are alert, aiming their TeorSers at Jimin and that’s also when Van seems to notice him. It’s an unassuming light- almost primitive, resembling the faint radiance of a candle’s flame. But it suddenly flares from the entirety of his being, solid and lingering. Taeh’yung is quick to act as well, a powerful ring of green light expanding from him, knocking out the entirety of the guards as well as Van.

They survey the footage a little longer until when Taeh’yung disposes of the Android guards and Van Seulgaan with little to no ceremony out of the ship.

‘Just like that?’ Namjoon is talking to himself.

‘It’s Taeh’yung- it has to be.’ Hoseok says at once. There was no other logical explanation. ‘He did say he could communicate with him-’

‘But he said it wasn’t clear,’ Sk’jin argues. ‘Trust me on this- I don’t think this was Taeh’yung’s doing. Something triggered this event, and I’m pretty sure only *Jimin* has the answer.’

‘This feels odd,’ Namjoon says, as though he hadn’t heard them speaking.

He rewinds the footage and it’s not to the awakening- but rather to where Jimin is speaking to Sk’jin.

‘What about this is weird?’ Sk’jin asks a little slowly, as though severely judging the Kutsoglerin’s priorities.

‘You just complied.’ Namjoon looks up and then adds, ‘You don’t just comply like this.’

Sk’jin doesn’t even bother looking irritated at what Namjoon is implying, but instead looks thoughtful too. When Hoseok analyzes the footage properly again, he does find it odd, how Sk’jin somehow easily agrees to Taeh’yung’s and Jimin’s requests with little to no argument. Or how Sk’jin just simply drops a topic, his panicked frustration ebbing away in a matter of seconds.

‘It’s not-’

‘It’s not Taeh’yung,’ Sk’jin says firmly. The conviction in his voice is solid. ‘I don’t know what I was thinking during these moments- when I watch them like this, it’s as though I don’t have any consistent thought- I only remember his words.’

‘Did you understand?’ Namjoon asks as he replays that one short section again.

‘Sk’jin, khognei tak in, kal to ang.’

‘No- I don’t,’ Sk’jin frowns before his eyes widen, leaning back a little as though astounded by the sheer force of his thoughts. ‘I know what this is.’

‘Sk’jin-’ Namjoon is already standing up from his crouched form, as though ready to placate the Khol’isa.

‘This is hypnosis- it has to be.’ Sk’jin points down. ‘The symptoms all match up. That *thing* uses hypnosis-‘
Hoseok doesn’t feel like that’s right.

‘Wait,’ Namjoon cuts in, hand raised. ‘But that doesn’t explain the arena.’

‘What about the arena?’ Sk’jin demands, head swiveling over towards Namjoon. Hoseok wouldn’t be surprised if he started breathing out fire.

‘When you landed- it was as though the entire arena were caught in some daze- they were all...awestruck,’ Namjoon says with some hesitance, he’s already typing up something on the side of the Table. ‘This wasn’t just crowd frenzy- it wasn’t-’

‘Hypnosis requires some form of eye-contact, a trigger to activate the hypnosis,’ Hoseok supplies, thinking back to how Yoongi had snagged the bells off of Sk’jin’s robes. Namjoon pulls up the live footage that had been streaming only minutes ago and rewinds it to the moment the Užkulisai lands and the moment Jimin apparently jumps off.

Namjoon zooms in on the crowds of the arena.

‘They look stunned,’ Sk’jin says slowly. ‘Caught in some…trance or something.’

Their eyes are wide, expressions similar to that of pious Beings reverently worshipping their Deity with all of their heart and devotion. This couldn’t be hypnosis.

But there was somehow literally no other explanation.

‘Is this something coming from him or is it just...Pompen trait?’ Hoseok asks. ‘Because you ran through and you were unaffected.’

Namjoon nods slowly.

‘We’ll have to talk to him,’ Sk’jin says flatly. ‘Just look at his behavior- does this look like someone whose been practically comatose for centuries? When I used to go into chrysalis I was disoriented for days, and that lasted a year max.’

It most certainly didn’t look like it. The Being walks around- well runs around- as though he knew the ship, as though he was used to the technology that was around him. Hoseok can’t be too sure, but whatever tech they had now surely had to be different from whatever time this Being lived in.

‘He also knew our names- well, mine and Yoongi’s,’ Sk’jin adds when no one speaks.

‘We’ll ask Taeh’yung about that- seeing as he’s the only one who’s able to communicate with him,’ Namjoon nods at the freeze-frame of the Being’s face. ‘But for now-’

He pulls up a screen with the GLA News Broadcast as well as another screen for the Underverse. And just one look shows how much of a mess everything is.

‘They were all there?’ Namjoon asks him.

Hoseok nods, pulling up a holographic screen of his own. ‘Venture Unit is going crazy as well.’

‘You said Amme was there too right?’ Sk’jin asks with a slight frown. ‘I wasn’t expecting her to appear. She’s one of the last members of the Directory.’

‘Yoongi is involved- and I think she’s far more involved with our OrTank than we can guess,’ Namjoon says slowly. ‘After all- they were supposed to be in the combined care of the Yishengs and the Venture Unit.’
‘So you’re saying that she might be more involved in this?’ Sk’jin asks immediately. ‘Are you saying she placed Yoongi here for a reason and it’s because of the OrTank?’

‘I don’t know,’ Namjoon shrugs. ‘I don’t know anything. We need to talk to him.’

They stare at the flashing headlines across the multiple news channels. All of the Universe was focused on Pompa- immediate outcries of taking Pompa out of the GLA are the most popular notion. Followed by confusion and shock because when Hoseok had released the live-feed, not only did it extend throughout the most of the GLA Universe, but the Underverse again. This brought out their Analysts, who were able to find the source of the channel distribution. By doing so, they were able to identify the ship as GLA property, and that too under the name of a high-profile Officer within the GLA. Many Beings from across the Universe, representing their planet or even System took to the channels, proclaiming their disgust at the corruption and blindness within the GLA.

The GLA never proclaimed that they were perfect. They had a few laws and regulations which were applicable and advantageous for all involved. But they made their mistakes. However the good that came from the GLA was always perceived strong and high enough to gloss over the “few” bad things they engaged in. Besides, the GLA had a good scapegoat in the shape of the Venture Unit.

But this.

This was exposing every single GLA organization.

‘I guess we’ve really kick started something,’ Sk’jin breaks the silence, waving one hand over the screens.

Hoseok isn’t naïve.

To start an avalanche, sometimes all you needed was to throw down a small pebble. And then everything would follow.

The screens display that a total of 8 planets and an entire System had already pulled out of the GLA. And this was only the first hour since the broadcast; which they hadn’t been able to shut down, and had resorted to physically block the satellite camera. Many Beings were already storming up GLA headquarters locations across the Universe, demanding explanations.

‘What did you do?’ Van Seulgaan had sounded so fearful in the footage. ‘What did YOU DO?!’

Had they just unknowingly cast the pebble?

They wait until Yoongi is stabilized. The moment he’s cleared and the moment Taeh’yung calls them, Namjoon, Hoseok, and Sk’jin pool downstairs, barricading the way out of the Medical Bay.
Yoongi’s bloodied robes are gone, instead dressed in a pair of clean looking clothes that Namjoon is pretty sure belonged to Hoseok. Hoseok too squints but decides not to ask, probably deciding that there was no point. The Human is stable, and the Medical Bay performing surgery. It smelled like disinfectants and blood but the Bay’s air-freshener system kicks in, cleansing the area.

Namjoon gets a better look at this Jimin, trying to place his species despite knowing that he wouldn’t be able to. Not when even the GLA database had come up empty.

‘So-’ Namjoon is about to start when Sk’jin cuts in.

‘Explain now,’ the Khol’isa demands, towering over the shorter Being.

Jimin takes a step back, eyebrows furrowed a little, glancing over at Taeh’yung.

Taeh’yung says something, his eyes darting over to all of them. Namjoon recognizes protectiveness from the Zhak’gri, as though ready to defend the unknown Being if needed.

Jimin replies, a little hesitant, eyes darting around at all of them carefully. He doesn’t look scared-he’s careful though, but not out of fear.

Taeh’yung nods with his words, sometimes saying a word or two as though to encourage him.

‘I think we should all introduce ourselves first,’ Taeh’yung beams at them, walking up to stand next to Jimin.

‘Sk’jin,’ the Khol’isa says, though it sounds more like a warning than anything else.

‘Hoseok,’ the Ngfy’widan states clearly with a small nod.

‘Namjoon,’ he adds.

‘And I’m Taeh’yung!’ the Zhak’gri adds unnecessarily.

Jimin seems to find this funny and chuckles a little at the Zhak’gri before he speaks. Taeh’yung listens carefully, nodding before he translates.

‘Right so- his name is Jimin,’ Taeh’yung begins. ‘He is from Ma’ikelawī, the center of the System of Menigišiti. And he is the Yemenifesi Ch’i nik’eti of his people.’

‘…is that supposed to mean something…’ Sk’jin asks carefully.

‘Yeah- he’s like, the prince- maybe even king. The words don’t really translate all too well into Standard,’ Taeh’yung replies easily.

Every head in the room snaps towards Jimin again who colours a little at the intensity of their stares.

‘…so he’s…royalty?’

‘Well- I think the better term would be…’ Taeh’yung struggles a little. Jimin says something quietly, a questioning tone to his voice.

‘He’s like the…protector? Defender? No that’s not it…-deity? No,’ Taeh’yung shakes his head, pausing to think. The silence continues on for far too long and Namjoon decides to break the silence.
‘We’ll just stick with prince for now?’ Namjoon offers, noticing how Sk’jin rolls his eyes, arms crossed.

‘Well yes- prince I guess.’ Taeh’yung nods before adding, ‘What would you like to know?’

‘First of all, what was he doing inside the OrTank? How did he get in there?’ Namjoon asks before Sk’jin can say anything. They needed to get some base questions answered first before they could proceed to other details.

Taeh’yung translates, words pulling and pausing as though he was listening to someone else speak and he was merely repeating the words. It does sound a little different than how Jimin spoke it, that was for sure. The language was purely tonal, the lilts of his syllables changing with every word, sounding oddly melodic.

Jimin’s expression darkens a little, looking melancholic and suddenly withdrawn. He nods once before he speaks.

‘I was on a diplomatic mission,’ Taeh’yung translates immediately, leaning in into Jimin as though to better hear him. Jimin looks at all of them as he speaks, earnestness and honesty apparent in his voice. ‘My sister who is the queen sent me to outer rim to meet with the GLA authorities. We were unsure of what the GLA meant- because they claimed that we had sent them a distress signal, but we had done no such thing. I lead my group of guards, as well as researchers, towards the Gateway. As our System was so well guarded, and we did not allow any to enter, we met at the Gateway. However, when we arrived there we would find out that it was all a trap.’

Jimin’s expression darkens even more before he continues, staring down at the floor, his hands clenched into tight fists.

‘The Gateway had been attacked- by a great Red Evil we did not recognize. They plundered the Gateway, and all her people. We were too late to help- I had left with the purpose of diplomatic negotiations, and armed only to escape or defend. Not for offence. We were stranded in the Gateway.’ Taeh’yung pauses as he listens to Jimin speak. ‘-and then we were discovered. Slowly, they took us one by one, until it was only me.’

Jimin looks away for a moment, to look down at Yoongi.

‘I was alone, running away- and then I met Yoongi-‘

Jimin’s words are met with stunned disbelief and shock.

‘Wait what-?’ Hoseok cuts in, disbelief etched on his features.

‘He’s lying-’ Sk’jin rolls his eyes at once.

‘He can’t.’ Taeh’yung cuts in unexpectedly.

‘What?’

‘He can’t lie.’ Taeh’yung repeats. ‘It is against his nature- the Yemenifesi Ch’inik’eti do not and cannot lie.’

‘That’s a lie,’ Sk’jin points out. ‘Everyone lies. Children, before they are aware of truth and falsehoods lie. He’s a grown ass midget adult- of course he lies.’

‘No, Sk’jin,’ Taeh’yung’s expression is deadly serious. ‘There is no lie in his soul.’
Everyone stares at Jimin and then at Yoongi, their thoughts haywire.

‘Assuming he’s truthful,’ Namjoon ploughs on, wanting to get to the bottom of this story. ‘That’s impossible. I know what Jimin is talking about. The Bhumi Treaty is a known piece of historical data within the GLA- the results were never made public, but the GLA, and especially the Venture Unit Information Analysts know of it. The System of Bhumi refused to join the GLA, and so signed a Treaty to never interfere with the GLA so long as the GLA didn’t interfere with them- they were run by a regency…’ Namjoon pauses.

He spoke to Lmiura about this exact same piece of information when she had come to him in Dziko.

‘What do you know about the Bhumi System?’ Lmiura asks.

Namjoon sighs heavily in resignation, leaning back on the wall and crossing his arms over his chest as he replies, ‘It was never a part of the GLA- they had their own planetary regency that ruled the planets. They had surprisingly advance technology developed by the natives of the System- most notably a sort of “space-camouflage” that hid their existence from the rest of the Known Universe. They refused to merge with the GLA – even in Trade and Tourism. They signed a treaty with the GLA, declaring their own independence. Their only request was to be left alone and the GLA respected that as per the laws of the GLA. However, 8 centuries later, a distress signal from Bhumi was detected and the GLA sent a small platoon to check on the System. They picked up some refugees who refused to seek shelter from the GLA and instead accompanied them back to their home-System. The platoon, including the native ships were annihilated upon arrival without any survivors. The System of Bhumi was lost for a few sols before the GLA was able to enter and find it again, thus giving the GLA the first evidence on the existence of the Akramanese.’

‘Well summarized,’ Lmiura nods. ‘Now, let me ask you a question: for a System that had no contact beyond its own borders, and a System that remained purposefully hidden for so long, how is it that you think the Akramanese found them?’

Namjoon studies Lmiura’s expression, searching for something, anything.

‘You can’t be serious?’

‘I am- it was perfect. At the time, the Yishengs needed a vast scape for their experimentation- a place that the GLA wouldn’t enter or observe. When Bhumi signed that treaty, they signed their own death sentence.’

‘They knew who he was,’ Namjoon says at once. ‘They found him, inside the ship, with the other OrTanks, and identified him. According to Lmiura, the entire thing had been conducted as a result of the Yisheng Directory’s meddling- which was how the Akramanese got to them- they used his System’s “camouflage” technology to develop and create their own.’

‘But how is this connected to Yoongi,’ Hoseok points out. ‘Unless-‘

‘Unless he was really there, and he too was similarly captured,’ Namjoon adds, before turning to Jimin, ‘How did you meet Yoongi? Who was he?’

Taeh’yung rushes to translate to a confused Jimin who was just staring blankly at them.

‘He says Yoongi was there with another team- they arrived after the Gateway was overtaken. He was afraid that they were planted there to lure him out. Because the Red Evil had many aides and kept many enslaved minds to do their bidding. That had been their original downfall, which led to
'Yoongi was part of the GLA?' Hoseok frowns. 'He has to be- if he was an Agent in the Venture Unit, we would have been able to find evidence of his participation. All Agents of the Venture Unit are archived, no matter who they were.'

'He also says,' Taeh’yung continues, 'That after he decided to trust them, they tried to take him out of the Gateway, to at least give him protection from the Red Evil, and report the situation to the GLA. They were unsuccessful, and the team, similar to his own guards, were taken one by one. Yoongi was the last- and he died trying to protect him.'

Namjoon hears Sk’jin’s breath getting caught.

'He couldn’t have died,’ the Khol’isa says slowly.

‘I’m going to make a guess here,’ Hoseok says grimly. ‘But the Red Evil he’s talking about- they were the Akramanese, weren’t they? Based on the first findings of the Venture Unit regarding the Akramanese, they were said to originate from Bhumi. But seeing as Jimin here seems to consider them an invading group- they probably were not from Bhumi.’

‘So then the Akramanese conducted this?’ Sk’jin looks skeptical. ‘They lured in the GLA and the Bhumians?’

‘Taeh’yung?’ Namjoon asks.

The Zhak’gri nods before translating. Jimin nods at the question before he replies.

‘No- we were not called by the Red Evil,’ Taeh’yung translates. ‘We were contacted through the GLA channel kept by the treaty-panel, which included my sister and myself. Which was why I left. Had we been contacted by another channel, we would have left with the armada. Our system is special and unique- and we would protect it to the death.’

‘Does...does he remember? The names of the Beings involved in the treaty-panel?’ Sk’jin asks carefully. Taeh’yung translates immediately.

‘Senator Enza, Yisheng Ndica, Zo Ingaal, and Admiral K’mara.’

Everyone reacts to the final name, eyes widening, curses being mumbled.

‘Why am I not surprised,’ Hoseok breathes out under his breath.

‘How did you communicate?’ Sk’jin asks, eyebrow raised.

‘Yisheng Ndica could speak for the Panel- he was able to understand us, as we were able to understand him, though his vocabulary was somewhat lacking.’

‘So-‘

‘Wait- we need to hear the end,’ Namjoon takes a deep breath, his mind reeling with all of this information. ‘What happened after- after Yoongi died.’

Taeh’yung translate again, his voice sad. Jimin’s head suddenly bows, looking pained as he speaks.

‘There was nothing I could do,’ Taeh’yung repeats softly. ‘We hid and hid for so long- it wasn’t just physical exhaustion. The Red Evil spread, tainting not only the planet but our very souls, our hearts. And we tried so hard to fight it. Yoongi tried so hard.’
To Namjoon’s disquiet, there are tears in both Jimin and Taeh’yung’s eyes. Jimin’s voice is watery, breaking every now and then.

‘After Yoongi died, I couldn’t do it anymore,’ Taeh’yung translates quietly, reaching over to hold Jimin’s hand. ‘So when they came for me. I didn’t fight. They tried to make me talk. To tell them the secret of my home. But I didn’t. I refused. When I tried to take my own life- they stopped me and put me to Sleep. And I was trapped. Sometimes I could hear voices- sometimes I could hear singing, whispers. It was always white- always empty. But somehow, always so full.’

Jimin finally looks up, looking them all in the eye.

‘I cannot explain to you what that was- where that was, but I was trapped, for a very long time. But I could almost wake at one point. I was able to hear. And I could hear your voices. All of your voices.’ Taeh’yung repeats. Jimin smiles, looking back at Yoongi. ‘And I could see your dreams. Your nightmares. And I knew I was close. That I could wake up. And then I heard Taeh’yung, and we spoke. He told me about you, and who you were.’

‘Didn’t you say he told you that we were supposed to take him back to his home?’ Hoseok quips up. ‘That’s how he knew- because if he is telling the truth, then it means he thought we were still the same GLA mission team that was with him before.’

Taeh’yung nods at that, ‘Yeap! I told them you guys were cool GLA people!’

Sk’jin grimaces comically at that.

‘All right- before anything, we need to redraw our trajectory,’ Namjoon announces. Sk’jin’s head turns sharply towards him, his expression dubious and questioning.

‘He’s from Bhumi- and he’s talking about his system- the one that’s hidden.’ Hoseok explains before Namjoon can. ‘If anyone knows a way in- then he should know.’

Taeh’yung starts to question Jimin immediately who nods at once in understanding before he replies, looking at them with a hopeful smile that doesn’t need translating.

‘All right- let’s go up to the Navigation Table,’ Namjoon says. ‘We’ll find a way to get in, and get him back to his planet.’

‘Namjoon-’ Sk’jin frowns.

‘He doesn’t want to leave Yoongi,’ Taeh’yung interrupts as he translates for Jimin. And sure enough, Jimin hasn’t budged an inch.

Namjoon catches Sk’jin raising one irritated eyebrow at him, and then a very skeptical eyebrow at Jimin. Talent.

‘Well- we can’t bring the Navigation Table down here,’ Sk’jin says with blunt emphasis.

Taeh’yung says something again and Jimin’s expression takes on one that promises stubbornness. One that Namjoon doesn’t want to deal with.

‘It’s fine- I’ll bring the NaviLet,’ Namjoon intercedes before Sk’jin goes off again. He leaves the Medical Bay and isn’t surprised to hear Sk’jin follow after him.

‘What is it-’
‘You know perfectly well!’ Sk’jin snaps as they climb up the stairs. ‘What we’re doing right now is beyond stupid! Going straight to Bhumi? Really?’

‘Look,’ Namjoon turns his head a little to address the Khol’isa. ‘The GI do not have any memories or any form of identity- so how does Yoongi still have his name? Why does Jimin know him by this name?’ Namjoon asks quietly. ‘No- this wasn’t random. Yoongi being the only GI agent with fully functional self-awareness and identity is not a coincidence- this was done on purpose. They knew- they knew who Yoongi was, and they knew who Jimin was. And they’ve purposefully sent them here together.’

‘And so us going and doing exactly what they sent us out to do is the correct thing to do?’ Sk’jin hisses. ‘What if this is what triggers another Gaia Case?’

‘It won’t because we know,’ Namjoon argues back. ‘Didn’t you say you wanted to know what was happening too?’

‘I do! But what I’m saying is that we need more time! To better understand and analyze-‘

‘We’ve started something,’ Namjoon shakes his head. ‘And it’s going to catch up to us. And when it does, we’ll be stopped- and we will never know.’

‘Is that what you’re telling yourself?’ Sk’jin demands. ‘And don’t talk about Yoongi as if you care for him. Yoongi could have died- he would be dead if it weren’t for Jimin. How are you so blasé about this?’

‘He wouldn’t have died-‘ Namjoon grits out as they arrive at the Bridge.

‘Can you even hear yourself?!’ Sk’jin hisses. ‘I can’t believe you’re the leader of this group! Your reckless plans and pride nearly got someone from your team killed and you don’t even seem remotely ashamed?!’

‘For fucks sake Sk’jin you don’t think I know that?’ Namjoon demands, pulling out the NaviLet from under the Navigation Table a little too forcefully.

‘Looking at you right now I don’t think you do!’ Sk’jin snaps back.

‘And might I remind you that it was Yoongi who continued on with the plan- he was the one who said he wanted to fight. I didn’t make him- none of us did. He was the one who volunteered in the beginning!’ Namjoon argues back as they make their way out.

‘Yoongi is not normal!’ Sk’jin hisses, his footsteps loud as he follows him down the stairs. ‘He doesn’t think the same way like we do- he doesn’t see what-‘

‘Are you second-guessing Yoongi’s decisions? Because he sure didn’t seem unsure when he poisoned us all-‘

‘-he was under orders-‘

‘-like you? Like the rest of us-‘

‘We are- were under orders- what Yoongi did, his decision, was his own-‘

‘-which wouldn’t have happened if-‘

‘If what?’ Namjoon finally stands straight, facing Sk’jin head on. ‘Please tell me what else we
could have done—please tell me my mistakes Sk’jin, I beg of you.’

Sk’jin glares at him, eyes fierce. But behind all that irritation, Namjoon sees something else. Fear.

‘Look—’

‘Did you guys…’ Hoseok is standing by the doorway to the Medical Bay, eyebrows raised.

‘I got the NaviLet,’ Namjoon raises the device up as he continues to walk. Sk’jin had paused for a moment.

He leaves the two outside for a moment, trying not to think about it. Instead he pulls up one of the surgical tray-arms from the wall and balances the NaviLet over it.

‘All right Jimin,’ Namjoon says with a nod towards Taeh’yung to start translate. ‘I’m gonna show you a map of a System we call Bhumi. Tell me if you recognize it.’

Jemin nods as he listens to Taeh’yung translate his words.

Namjoon pulls up the map, expanding it so that it was in Jimin’s eyelevel. Sk’jin and Hoseok walk in, the former looking calmer and less agitated. Jimin scans the holographic map, eyebrows furrowed. He’s saying something to Taeh’yung who nods once more.

‘Bhumi,’ Taeh’yung replies to one of Jimin’s questions.

‘Bhu-Bhumi?’ Jimin repeats the word slowly, eyebrows furrowing before his eyes widen just a little. An expression flits across his features— one of pain and sorrow. He’s quickly asking Taeh’yung something who nods in understanding and the Zhak’gri is reaching across, tapping over the NaviLet. Namjoon would have never guessed that Taeh’yung would be efficient in matters regarding Navigation, or in all honesty, anything technical considering how scatter-brained the latter seemed. Namjoon was obviously wrong because Taeh’yung pulls up the customization tab for the map. But before he can explain what it is, Jimin exclaims out loud, reaching forward to shift the map.

For someone who was asleep for a long period of time, or something along that line, Jimin had an incredibly easy command over the technology in front of him. He slowly rotates the map, before pulling at the edges of the holograph, expanding it until he stood at the center of the holograph. He turns around in the spot slowly, the blue of the holograph highlighting his hair.

‘Menigišiti,’ Jimin says simply. Then he frowns, saying something to Taeh’yung who points at the customization panel on the holographic display. Jimin reaches up, touching the panel with a slight frown. Taeh’yung is explaining and Jimin nods. Then with a little more confidence he taps across the holograph and then adds 3 more planets. Then he steps away, shrinking the map a little so that they could look at it from around the map.

Jemin points at each planet, naming them easily. He reaches the outer most planet before he says: ‘Megibïya.’

‘Gateway,’ Taeh’yung translates. ‘It means gateway, in his language.’

‘So this is where it happened,’ Hoseok frowns, stepping closer. ‘He’s placed 14 planets here though— but we know that Bhumi has 11 planets.’

Jemin shakes his head at that and Taeh’yung translates for him: ‘I would know— I lived there. It is my home.’
‘Tae, ask him if he knows anything about the Akramanese,’ Sk’jin puts in bluntly. Taeh’yung nods and repeats Sk’jin’s question to Jimin.

‘Akramanese?’ Jimin repeats, looking thoughtful. But then, a few moments later he points at one of the newly added planets and says, ‘Akramana.’

‘Can he tell us more about this planet?’ Namjoon asks at once.

Taeh’yung relays the question and Jimin’s expression takes on one that’s a little confused and also suddenly dark.

‘It’s the planet where they met with the Treaty Panel,’ Taeh’yung says. ‘It was where they hosted the GLA emissary for the duration they were there.’

Namjoon studies its placement in the map.

‘How did they find it? How did the GLA come there?’ Hoseok asks.

Jimin pauses a little, eyes narrowing slightly as he regards all of them. Taeh’yung says something else but Jimin shakes his head.

‘He is not allowed to speak of the secrets of his System to those who are not born of their core,’ Taeh’yung translates. ‘But there are some ways of entering Menigišiti, that are not just through Megibīya. They were however all sealed and protected after the Treaty Panel left.’

‘Not at all suspicious or weird,’ Sk’jin says under his breath.

‘But can we get in?’ Namjoon asks, ignoring Sk’jin.

Jimin nods at that, and asks a question.

‘Where are we right now?’ Taeh’yung translates.

Namjoon minimizes the map of Bhumi and pulls up their current coordinates.

‘We’re here,’ Namjoon points at their moving dot. ‘We’re going here.’ he taps at Ch’dra.

Jimin nods, head turning between the two priority maps set up.

‘How long will it take to get to Menigišiti from this location?’ Taeh’yung asks.

‘It depends on which trajectory we’re taking,’ Namjoon replies, glancing at Hoseok. ‘It also depends on where we can safely dock to restock on fuel and other supplies.’

‘But if we’re going by a route we had first planned,’ Hoseok adds, ‘It would take us approximately 3 GLA months.’

Taeh’yung translates the information and Jimin nods in understanding.

‘We can access 3 different entrances- one is obviously through the Gateway,’ Taeh’yung says. ‘But there are two that should be unknown and still hidden.’

‘I think the Gateway won’t be advisable,’ Hoseok ruminates. ‘It’s the planet that’s exposed to the rest of the Universe despite the entire area being barricaded. We can’t risk going through.’

Everyone jumps when Yoongi’s Medical Bed beeps loudly. Jimin’s attention is instantly riveted,
looking over the Human with apparent worry and fear.

‘It’s all right,’ Sk’jin says sharply. ‘It’s just the indication that the surgery was successful.’

Taeh’yung translates and Jimin nods, smiling at Sk’jin in thanks.

‘I have a few questions,’ Sk’jin continues, sending Namjoon a glare that dares him to interrupt. ‘I would appreciate some answers.’

Jimin nods as soon as Taeh’yung finishes translating.

‘What is this?’ Sk’jin asks, shoving a screen at Jimin. It’s playing the footage of the moment where the Užkulisai lands, and the people of Pompen are all at awe. Then the footage changes to the one from inside the ship, where Jimin himself is speaking to Sk’jin.

Namjoon is about to step in and stop this rather aggressive interrogation but Jimin ducks his head, looking sheepish and guilty.

He starts to talk, sounding somehow small and as though expecting some form of reprimanding lecture. Sk’jin looks livid.

Taeh’yung looks like he’s struggling to translate.

‘Uh- he says it was not done for the sake of manipulating you-‘

Sk’jin’s eyes narrow dangerously.

‘-and that there are no lasting effects,’ Taeh’yung continues, looking nervous on behalf of Jimin who continues with some difficulty. ‘It’s some form of hypnosis, but I don’t think that’s the correct word-’

‘You fucking hypnotized me?!’ Sk’jin hisses.

Jimin doesn’t understand what the Khol’isa is saying but he didn’t need to understand what he meant. His hands go up at once, stammering quickly and fidgeting where he stood.

‘It’s not hypnosis!’ Taeh’yung says at once. ‘It’s just- there’s no word I can use to translate this. It’s unique to him— to the Yemenifesi Ch’inik’eti-’

‘That doesn’t mean anything to me-‘

‘Sk’jin-‘ Namjoon pulls the Khol’isa aside, whispering low and quickly. ‘Weren’t you just telling me that this entire shit situation would have ended with Yoongi’s death if it weren’t for Jimin? His actions, meaning his “hypnosis” of you lead to that. He wasn’t doing it for the purpose of misleading you or influencing you to do bad- he did it to save Yoongi.’

Sk’jin pulls his arm out of Namjoon’s hold with a glare.

‘Is that what you did with the crowd?’ Hoseok is asking.

‘The Yemenifesi Ch’inik’eti have the ability to bring…to inspire…awe?’ Taeh’yung tries. ‘Inspire something like…something like mindless amazement. To somehow sway masses, without question, and without awareness of thought.’

‘Oh right- that’s a totally not dangerous ability,’ Sk’jin snaps.
Jimin doesn’t understand, but he can guess what Sk’jin is saying because he looks a little angry as he speaks.

‘It’s not permanent- I can only use it for a short period of time. And only in moments of grave danger, or absolute desperation. I cannot use it like a weapon.’ Taeh’yung translates quickly.

Sk’jin rolls his eyes, clearing disbelieving.

‘Jimin,’ Hoseok calls, as he types along his own screen. ‘Do you recognize any of these Beings?’

Hoseok has pulled up the pictures of Special-Jury. Jimin studies their faces carefully, listening to Taeh’yung’s translation.

He taps on the picture of K’mara, and then at Amme.

‘Amme?’ Sk’jin’s shock seems to momentarily make him forget his anger.

Jimin says something to Taeh’yung who in turn asks him back a question. For a short moment, Namjoon feels distrust as he regards Taeh’yung. Was he truly translating everything accurately? Namjoon glances down at Yoongi for a brief moment, wondering if the Human would understand Jimin or not.

‘Amme was with the Yisheng Ndica,’ Taeh’yung translates. ‘She was only present, but was not part of the Panel.’

‘Well…’ Hoseok trails off, eyebrow raised at Namjoon.

‘Thank you, Jimin,’ Namjoon says as he takes a step back. ‘We’re going to plot the safest trajectory back to Bhumi- I mean, back to your System. If you have anything you want to ask, or know, please do not hesitate to come to any of us.’

Taeh’yung translates as much and Jimin nods, saying something in return.

‘He says if you have any more questions, then he will be more than happy to give you any information you deem is important.’

‘Feel free to do whatever,’ Hoseok adds, ‘He can choose any one of the free cabins.’

Taeh’yung is translating as Namjoon, Hoseok, and Sk’jin walk out.

‘I still think this is dumb, but I know you’re not going to listen to me,’ Sk’jin says as they make for the stairs.

‘I agree with Sk’jin,’ Hoseok adds. ‘We’re doing exactly what they want us to do.’

‘But they don’t know-’

‘Spaces, Namjoon,’ Sk’jin sighs tiredly as they make it to the second level. ‘I think Van Seulgaan is a pretty good eyewitness, not to mention every single fucking Pompen.’

‘I’m not defending this plan-‘ Namjoon starts, pausing on the landing.

‘Yeah? Then why aren’t you listening to me?’ Sk’jin demands.

‘You yourself told me that you wanted to see this through-‘
‘That was before he woke up!’ Sk’jin hisses. ‘Before he said what he said! Before we knew Yoongi is part of this far more than we could have ever thought! Before we realized how fucking massive this thing is!’

‘Then you can leave!’ Namjoon retorts in exasperation. ‘If you don’t agree to this, you can just leave!’

Sk’jin glares at him.

‘You can get off on the next planet or Dock-‘

‘You know full well I am not going to do that,’ Sk’jin snaps. ‘I am saying we need to rethink this—come up with a better plan. Find out more information.’

‘And how do you want us to do this? Like I said before Sk’jin, if you have a better idea, please tell me.’ Namjoon huffs out.

‘While I agree with Sk’jin that we need another plan,’ Hoseok cuts in, clearly fed-up with their arguing. ‘We currently don’t have another plan. This isn’t even much of a plan. It’s a part of a plan we haven’t set in concrete. So if you both could put away your defensiveness and anger, I would appreciate it.’

Namjoon feels like he’s a child being chastised and Sk’jin too, frowns, glaring at the floor.

‘While it is our intention to eventually get to Bhumi, or whatever the fuck it’s called, we need to be careful regarding everything. It hasn’t even been more than an hour since Pompa, we cannot come up with a concrete and exclusive plan. We’ve been relying too much on one set-up, and overreacting when something amiss happens.’ Hoseok states. ‘We need to create a flexible plan, one that not only has a plan B or C, but an endless supply. We use what we have, what we know, to our advantage, but we set nothing in stone.’

Namjoon and Sk’jin both nod at the same time at that.

‘So what we do now is concentrate on getting Yoongi conscious and well. Getting supplies and really stocking up on them to the extreme. And keeping a constant eye on the news. And then we come up with a trajectory, making our way, safely, to Bhumi. Our priority is safety, security, and secrecy.’ Hoseok pauses. ‘The GLA is distracted right now— and we can use that to our advantage. No matter how much priority the Special Jury will try to place on us— they cannot do it publically without revealing who we are— they can’t even put out a mass wanted-list or frame us for something else because the higher-ranking officers of every GLA organization as well as the Underverse will be able to guess what they’re up to.’

‘We could throw them off,’ Sk’jin offers. ‘Send false information around the Underverse, make it seem like we’ve been spotted somewhere. Because you can be sure as hell they’ll be actively looking for us— maybe not publically, but they will be scouring for us.’

‘Scatter their forces everywhere,’ Namjoon nods in agreement. ‘Distract them elsewhere and we make our move.’

‘We start there.’ Hoseok nods. ‘Then we make it up as we go.’

Namjoon is uncomfortable at that, and apparently so is Sk’jin.

‘Trust me on this,’ Hoseok says as he walks towards his Cabin, ‘No offence to the both of you but this is a mission. And we need to start thinking like agents.’
The news about the Pompen involvement with the Pageant is the only thing over on the GLA news broadcast in nearly every channel. Reporters from across the Universe are gathered there- while some even bring up the Alliance and some other shady trafficking pirate-networks.

Namjoon switches the screen to the ship’s surveillance footage instead, taking a short break. There was nothing about the ship in the stadium, nothing about the bright light. The entire Pageant issue taking up, rightly so, the news networks. They were covered for now.

He understands Hoseok’s point of view, and Namjoon is all too willing to take it up and apply it to their situation. But that didn’t mean he was comfortable with it. Namjoon always had a plan- always had a concrete goal, and was able to move within those confines because he knew exactly what to do and how to do it. But like this, it was difficult.

He checks the Medical Bay and finds that Jimin hasn’t moved away from Yoongi.

He had met and known Yoongi *eight centuries* ago. How long had they remained in that planet? Running and hiding from a force they were not equipped to fight, incapable of understanding because who could? There was so much Jimin’s story explained, but Namjoon has so many more questions.

Checking over at the cockpit Namjoon eyes Hoseok who is reading some Underverse communication line he had just hacked, clearly looking up information.

‘I’m stretching,’ Namjoon calls. Hoseok nods in reply.

Namjoon makes his way down to the lowest level and to the Medical Bay.

Jimin is sitting next to the Medical Bed, looking over at Yoongi’s still unconscious form. He’s humming under his breath. Jimin has Yoongi’s hand in his, gentle but firm.

It was hard to believe, that such a strange, long winded and stretched out reunion would have ever taken place. Namjoon still isn’t sure what to believe in. But Taeh’yung trusted Jimin. And Sk’jin trusted Taeh’yung. And oddly enough, Hoseok trusted Sk’jin. And Namjoon finds that he trusts Hoseok. So in one long twisted way, here they were, suspended in this not-plan-plan.

Jimin looks up when he notices Namjoon there.

They were *without lies and falsehoods*; according to Taeh’yung. Something that honestly just
triggers a whole lot of distrust inside Namjoon. Because no Being in this Universe could be like this. But apparently Jimin was exactly that.

He smiles, calling his name, ‘Namjoon.’

Namjoon looks over at Yoongi. His health is improving at a great rate, though he was really using up a lot of medical supplies. Namjoon puts the supplies for the Medical Bay at highest priority.

Ji

Jimin smiles and holds out his hand, expression expectant.

Namjoon hesitates before giving him his hand.

Jimin’s touch is light but quick. He flips Namjoon’s hand around, pushing up the sleeves of his shirt. His expression is disturbed; pained almost. Then he’s on tiptoe, reaching up to touch Namjoon’s face. He doesn’t mask his feelings; he’s open and free with what he’s feeling.

Honestly, if living with Taeh’yung (even though it wasn’t too long) taught him one thing, it was not to fidget too much or be too shocked when he decided to randomly stroke your face. Though when Jimin does it, it’s different.

He’s studying, reading, analyzing.

At this proximity his eyes really do look a lot like solar eclipses. Permanently stuck solar eclipses.

To Namjoon’s horror, Jimin’s eyes are filling up with tears. Namjoon has a feeling he’s able to see more than just the surface of his own skin. Namjoon doesn’t move or squirm as Jimin continues to check his limbs carefully; touching the bionic flesh lightly. He’s saying something, voice tight and wet. Taeh’yung’s head peaks in. He asks Jimin a question and the latter replies, voice wobbly.

Taeh’yung looks sad as well. But not in regards to Jimin. Because he’s looking at Namjoon.

‘What is it?’ Namjoon asks, a little unnerved.

Taeh’yung shakes his head, and doesn’t translate what Jimin says. Instead the latter rolls his sleeves down, gently stroking his hand and then his face. He really has to tiptoe, reaching up this forehead. Namjoon squats down a little, and this gives Jimin the opportunity to kiss his forehead.

‘And I could see your dreams. Your nightmares.’

How much had Jimin seen? Jimin leans back a little and smiles. Namjoon tries his best to return it. What he isn’t expecting is the hug.

It feels almost as though Jimin is trying to hold him together- trying to channel all of his feelings towards Namjoon, as though hoping he would understand. But Namjoon’s not sure what the context is. But instead of questioning his actions, Namjoon hugs the shorter Being back.

‘Uh- it’s all right? Thank you?’ Namjoon finds himself saying.

Taeh’yung must be translating because Jimin nods into his shoulder before pulling away.

Namjoon is confused. And even more so when he finds Jimin doing the same to Hoseok a few hours later.

Jimin cornered Hoseok in the Kitchen where the latter had been fixing himself up something to eat. At first Hoseok thought Jimin wanted to eat and had offered his food. Instead of taking the proffered sautéed greens, Jimin took Hoseok’s face in his hands.
The Ngfy’widan actually took it better than Namjoon anticipated as he watched a little cautiously from the Lobby. Yoongi had done something similar to him before, so maybe Hoseok thought it was a Beings-Who-Were-Born-From-OrTanks sort of characteristic.

Hoseok had, for the fun of it, changed his face while Jimin was examining him. There was a lot of panicking, confusion, and then wonder, and then delight as Jimin understood what was happening. Jimin breaks out into laughter as Hoseok changes his face into a number of different sets, all intentionally unflattering. Jimin places his hand over his face as it undergoes change and his facial expression is priceless. But there was a point where Jimin took Hoseok’s hands in his. He gently traces the lines on his palm, making lines over Hoseok’s skin.

His expression is the same as when he was holding Namjoon’s hand. Pained, sad, and something Namjoon doesn’t recognize. What Namjoon doesn’t expect is Hoseok’s reaction.

He jumps, as though Jimin’s touch scalded him. But Jimin doesn’t let go. Instead he flattens the hand in his, and mimes something in the air. Judging by the stunned look on Hoseok’s face, it wasn’t making sense to him too. But Jimin is sort of satisfied- and he kisses his palm before he lets go. And then he’s smiling, gesturing to his face and then back at his own. He does this a few times before Hoseok guesses what he’s asking.

With an amused smile Hoseok’s face shifts into something that could almost pass off as Jimin’s face.

Jumin’s entire body is shaking as he laughs, clearly delighted. He then drags Hoseok over to Namjoon, gesturing again. Namjoon waits apprehensively and his apprehension is not for nothing because he never wants to see his face on Hoseok’s ever again.

Despite their rather rough “relationship”, Sk’jin stays put as Jimin “studies” him as well. He was still clearly distrustful, his posture stiff. But it was as though Sk’jin took this opportunity to study Jimin as well. They’re both studying each other, eyes piercing though the intent is completely different. Sk’jin had made rounds, checking up on Yoongi with his own eyes, when Jimin approached him.

Namjoon had held his breath in trepidation, ready to intervene in case Sk’jin flipped. But it’s not the case.

Jumin carefully runs his hands through Sk’jin’s hair, remaining for a while over his temples. He says something and Sk’jin has an unexpectedly melancholic smile as he mimes something at Jimin. Jimin is still studying his temples with great care and then lowers his hands. And then strangely enough, he places a kiss on Sk’jin’s temple. Even stranger, Sk’jin doesn’t protest.

Taeh’yung certainly didn’t mind. That was when you could hear Jimin speaking rapidly, asking questions and speaking a mile. Then they would both burst out into giggles, Taeh’yung tickling the Ma’ikelawīan’s sides.

Jumin is given his own room, Cabin-06, but he rarely stayed there. He had looked through the chamber with great interest, feeling the pillows and mattress. But he stayed in the Medical Bay more often than not.

Yoongi was recovering slowly but surely. The fight, what with the long-term effects of the poison, had greatly drained and damaged the Human’s muscular system. His organs had, at one point, all failed. Taeh’yung and Jimin’s combined efforts, along with the Medical Bed’s operation system, pulled him through. All they could do now was wait for the Human to regain consciousness.
When they’re close enough to Ch’dra, Hoseok calls Taeh’yung and Jimin up for landing. Jimin’s eyes were wide and in awe as they entered the moon’s atmosphere. He doesn’t say anything, just sticking to the window of the Bridge despite warnings of remaining seated. In the end, Hoseok is the one who drags the Ma’ikelawīan back, grimacing pointedly. Jimin smiles sheepishly before he acquiesces and remains seated until they land.

They land in Ch’dra and it’s blissfully void of any other ship. According to the latest news, every media-based organization was still over at Pompa to cover the situation. The GLA could do nothing to prevent this sudden surge of traffic and were barely making progress with investigations. They had created a perimeter around the planet’s borders but were barely maintaining it. Namjoon spares them no pity.

This also meant that the Special Jury were stuck there and Namjoon prefers that as well.

The moment Jimin sees Namjoon un-buckling himself, he flies out of the Bridge, Taeh’yung right at his heels. Sk’jin snorts when the two drop by the Medical Bay, carefully checking on Yoongi’s still unconscious form before scrambling away.

‘Children,’ Sk’jin snorts, rolling his eyes.

‘Do we just let them go out?’ Hoseok asks.

‘By all means, go after them,’ Sk’jin sighs tiredly, looking like he just wanted to sleep the day away. He would, if he could.

Hoseok pauses to think before he too leaves the Bridge. Namjoon spots him standing by the doorway leading out of the Bridge, watching Jimin and Taeh’yung run about in the strange glaring light from Ch’dra’s planet. They quickly stock up on supplies again, really keeping store with the fuel, water cells, and medical supplies.

Towards the evening, Hoseok takes the final trip to the Android-serviced Station and Jimin trailing him. The Ma’ikelawīan doesn’t seem to care that Hoseok doesn’t understand him, and engages him in conversation. It’s mainly lots of pointing and Namjoon guesses Jimin is describing some landscape feature he’s seen before and was making a comparison. Hoseok tries his best to respond but it’s a little futile.

‘Pa! I’m gonna cook! Would you like some tea?’ Taeh’yung chirps across the line.

Namjoon is working at his station while Sk’jin carefully overlooks their next trajectory in the Bridge, the blue of the holographic map turned purple as they sky above them reflected the orange glare of volcano riddled planet they were orbiting.

‘Sure,’ Namjoon replies dismissively. He can feel Sk’jin’s irritation without having to look at the Khol’isa. It had been building for a while now, but Namjoon didn’t want to address it. His main excuse being it wasn’t his duty, and he had other bigger priorities. But after the 6th sigh Namjoon looks up, one eyebrow raised.

Sk’jin raises one perfect eyebrow back.

Namjoon sighs in turn, and looks back down at his screen.

‘What are you doing?’ Sk’jin asks as little later as leans over the Table to look at the screen.

‘Setting up a new language reader,’ Namjoon replies. ‘This will provide Jimin with pictures- he’ll provide the name or word that describes that object and Lisai will store it, creating a new lexicon.
And of course, vice versa.’

‘So like- a dictionary? But just for his language?’ Sk’jin asks for clarification.

‘It’s a language we’ve never heard before- with very very little similarity to the ones that already exist in the GLA database,’ Namjoon can’t help the excitement leaking through into his voice. ‘The only similarity this language has is with the root language of K’arishkhali and that’s only by 1.4%. Be recording and archiving this language, we can not only establish a new lingual branch into the GLA Database, but also understand the foundations of speech and vocalization.’

‘…that sounds exciting.’

It was actually. But Namjoon doesn’t know how to really express this to him because he feels like the Khol’isa might make light of it.

‘Are you still mad about the hypnosis thing? It’s not hypnosis, you know that right?’ Namjoon tries.

‘Oh- I know it’s not hypnosis. I’m all too familiar with that, won’t you agree?’ Sk’jin asks dryly. ‘Regardless of what it’s called; reverence, awe, whatever, doesn’t stop him from being dangerous.’

‘You’re worried he might manipulate us?’ Namjoon asks, looking away from the screen.

‘I’m worried about what he might be influenced to believe, therefore using his abilities to convince others,’ Sk’jin replies, tapping across the display map.

‘There’s not much he can get influenced by, realistically speaking,’ Namjoon frowns a little. ‘Not to mention the language barrier-‘

‘You don’t need language to understand emotions Namjoon,’ Sk’jin rolls his eyes. ‘In fact, language often acts as a barrier- a filter of sorts, to mask intent and purpose. Lack of it might reveal more than he’s ready to accept or understand.’

Namjoon seems to be thinking hard for a while before he goes back to the screen saying, ‘That probably won’t matter- we’re taking him to Bhumi- I mean to…’ he struggles a bit but fails at saying the real name, ‘-to Bhumi. He’ll return to his planet, and there…maybe that way we can complete what needs to be completed faster.’

‘I sometimes can’t believe the lies you feed yourself.’ Sk’jin says, looking up at him blankly.

Namjoon sighs out wearily.

‘They are not lies- I am trying to think optimistically here-‘

‘Optimism won’t get you far Namjoon- you need to be practical and realistic here,’ Sk’jin says calmly. ‘You said so yourself- he was placed on this ship for a reason. They want us to take him there. Why are we still doing this, knowing now his history and his supposed mission?’

‘HE’S AWAKE!’

They both jump, Taeh’yung’s loud voice suddenly pitching. And sure enough, Yoongi’s health tab lights up on the side of Namjoon’s screen where he’d kept it activated all the time. Sk’jin leaves without preamble and Namjoon sighs. Taking a moment, he reads Yoongi’s charts. Not just for a Human, but for a standard Being, Yoongi’s regeneration speed was incredibly high. It was almost as high as Namjoon’s and Namjoon wasn’t even really all biological. In fact, based on Namjoon’s
studies of Yoongi’s health-tab from earlier on the mission, he found that the Human shared a lot of traits in cellular factors with him. Which was why he had immediately thought of giving the Human his own medication. It was a gamble, but it had somewhat paid off.

Namjoon understands Sk’jin’s point of view. He really does.

Because that’s how he felt.

With a heavy heart, Namjoon makes his way down.

‘Is Yoongi awake?!’ Hoseok suddenly gasps.

‘Yeah?’ Namjoon is taken aback. ‘How do you know-’

‘Jimin!’

Hurrying down to the lowest Level, Namjoon is in time to watch Taeh’yung hug the Human, pressing their faces together.

‘Yoongi- hey,’ Namjoon is all he can say when the Human looks over at him, eyes slightly disoriented but very much awake.

‘Hi.’ Yoongi says blankly. No tone in his voice to indicate how he was feeling.

‘Uh- how are you feeling-’ Namjoon tries.

‘Wow, I really wonder how he’s feeling,’ Sk’jin cuts over. ‘You know, from nearly DYING!’

Namjoon has to take a literal moment to collect himself.

‘I don’t know,’ Yoongi replies and then follows it up with, ‘What is the situation of our mission?’

At this, Sk’jin sends him a glare- as though saying see? The mission is the only thing he’s thinking about- he’s not thinking for himself! Namjoon scowls back but before he can reply to Yoongi, Namjoon hears the door to the antechamber burst open. There’s an excited sound from Taeh’yung and Namjoon steps aside, somehow feeling a sense of anticipation for what was about to happen. He hears Hoseok’s warnings before he sees either of them.

‘-wait! Please be careful-!’

Jimin runs inwards, expression hopeful and bright, bringing with him sand and salt, slipping a little around the corner before he barrels in.

‘Yoongi!’

Jimin practically slides across the floors, hands lifted up to cup Yoongi’s face briefly before pulling him into an embrace.

Namjoon can’t help the smile on his face as he watches Yoongi stare about at them, his eyes the widest they’ve ever been. His jaw is a little slack, and his hands lifted up as though in defence before his chest. He looks so confused it’s somehow adorable. Even Sk’jin watches with a somewhat begrudging fondness.

Hoseok appears behind Namjoon. He’s panting, sweat pouring down his face.

‘He bolted for no reason- well, I guess I know why now,’ the Ngfy’widan pants before holding up
a small packet, ‘Got the meds.’

Sk’jin takes the packet from Hoseok with a nod of thanks, ignoring Namjoon again.

Namjoon rolls his eyes, and shakes his head at Hoseok when he raises one sweaty eyebrow in inquiry.

Jimin is asking Yoongi questions, hands carefully touching his face. Yoongi is still stunned, eyes wide and unblinking as he gawks at Jimin. Taeh’yung starts providing translations though honestly, Namjoon is pretty sure it’s all going over Yoongi’s head.

And Namjoon is right.

Not only does it go over his head, Yoongi quite literally passes out.

His eyes roll behind his head and his body goes limp.

Jimin is gasping, fearful and worried as he calls Yoongi’s name a few time, gently shaking the Human. Taeh’yung is all over the Medical Bay, rambling in a bunch of languages. Namjoon hears Sk’jin sigh before he takes over the Medical Bed. When Namjoon makes sure Yoongi is all right, he regards Hoseok properly only to find the Ngfy’widan doubled over in suppressed laughter.

‘I’m glad you find the situation funny,’ Namjoon says with a short huff of a laugh. Hoseok just shakes his head, hand over mouth as he walks away. When Namjoon looks back inside the Bay and finds a half-hysterical Jimin being placated by Taeh’yung and his flailing limbs, while Sk’jin looks like he would rather warp straight into a blackhole than be there, Namjoon has to excuse himself to have a good laugh in the neighbouring Medical Bay.

Something was different.

‘Do you remember me?’

Jimin is hopeful as he sits close to Yoongi.

Hoseok is hopeful for Jimin. If Yoongi is able to remember, and he’s able to confirm that what Jimin is saying is true, not to mention information from a source that is hidden to them, they would definitely have a bigger head-start than the GLA. They would be able to make plans with more confidence.

‘What?’ Yoongi’s features register nothing but confusion.

Or not.

Jimin doesn’t look too disappointed or surprised. Hoseok has a feeling Taeh’yung might have told
him the possibility of that happening.

‘Jimin,’ he repeats again, pointing at himself, and then in turn at Yoongi, ‘Yoongi.’

Hoseok feels like Jimin is trying to trigger some memory in Yoongi, reenacting something that might have taken place a long time ago. If what Jimin is saying is true.

They fill Yoongi in on what happened up until the moment he woke up. As usual he takes the news in all without limited facial expressions, looking at each of them in turn as they spoke. This seems to disturb Jimin the most. He’s watching Yoongi with a sad expression, features occasionally twitching as though controlling himself. Yoongi notices everything and with his usual blank gaze, studies Jimin as though wondering what was the matter. But amidst that blankness, Hoseok notices his ever present confusion. And not to mention something a little frenzied, like he was keeping something back with great will power.

Jimin leaves the Bay a little later, followed by Taeh’yung.

‘Is what he’s saying true?’ Yoongi asks after they’ve finished their summary of everything that’s happened.

‘It adds up to what we know happened,’ Namjoon replies. ‘We cannot be 100% certain.’

‘The sun is behind his eyes.’ is his next remark.

Everyone stares at Yoongi, before looking at each other in confusion.

‘Um yes. So, how are you feeling? Better?’ Sk’jin asks, walking around the Bed to pull up the tray of food he had brought for the Human.

Yoongi nods slowly in reply, looking down at his hands, flexing his fingers.

‘Yoongi look,’ Namjoon sighs out. ‘I’m–‘

‘Don’t say it,’ Yoongi jumps in unexpectedly, still not looking up from his hands. ‘I did what I wanted to do. By my choice, knowing exactly what I was getting myself into. It was necessary, so I did it. Do not apologize.’

Everyone in the room is stunned again.

Hoseok leaves the Bay eventually, followed by Sk’jin who carries the empty food tray.

‘So,’ Sk’jin says in ways of greeting. ‘Do you notice it too?’

‘It could be a fluke,’ Hoseok replies grimly, making his way up to the Bridge. They would leave within the hour so he was going to check over everything one more time to be safe.

‘With everything that’s going on?’ Sk’jin snorts. ‘No Hobi- this isn’t coincidence. And you know it.’

Hoseok grimaces at that before heading up the stairs to the Bridge.

Of course he noticed. It was so so subtle, and Hoseok thought he was imagining it. But he sees it in Sk’jin’s expression, as well as Namjoon. And most of all, in Taeh’yung.

Yoongi woke up different.
Yoongi blankly scans the screen in his hands, scanning over the headlines and news. Half of his mind is occupied with the news at hand, and the other half with the information he’s gained from listening to Jimin via Taeh’yung and the questions that came with it.

According to Hoseok, Amme herself had been there, arriving at Pompa after their messages had been sent. Amme had long declared herself stationed in Šerdesas, to remain there and be ready for any questions or inquiries the GLA would have for her. Her coming to Pompa meant something. That what they had uncovered had the potential to trigger something huge. To catalyze a reaction they could not foresee.

Not to mention the fact that Amme had been there, to a location where Yoongi himself had been to. Had Amme known him before this? Had Zhoumi known of him? Had they singled him out? Orchestrated this entire “wakening” for this purpose?

What of himself did he know anymore?

Would he ever be able to remember, if what Jimin says is true?

Was his name Yoongi all along?

But other than these main thoughts- something small tries to wiggle its way up.

His thoughts feel different- in what way, Yoongi can’t explain. Because he doesn’t have the words for it either. His responses, his actions, seemed to come from his without second thought. A natural reflex- and only after he speaks or acts or sees or feels, he realizes it.

The way he replied to Namjoon’s attempt at apology. The way he couldn’t understand why his body felt so strange. The way his body seemed angled almost differently.

But most of all, the way he wanted to take Jimin and immediately hide him. It made no sense to him, now that we thought about it.

His thoughts are interrupted by movement at the doorway. They had hit warp a few moments ago, so Yoongi guesses they were now able to move. Most of them had announced they would try and
sleep and the response from Taeh’yung had been a snore. It almost made Yoongi laugh. But he caught himself, and wondered why that would have made him laugh.

Jimin stands by the door, in his hands the screen Namjoon had given him to speak into to record and archive his language with added pictures so that everyone could better their communications.

‘Yoongi?’

Yoongi wonders if he should nod, gesture for him to enter, indicate towards the stool near the foot of his bed, or respond verbally. Whatever that thing was that was making him be different, was apparently not a permanent thing. But Jimin makes up his mind for him and walks up to him, forgoing the stool and instead sitting on the bed so that he could face Yoongi better.

They sit in silence together for a while. Yoongi somehow can’t face Jimin like this alone, and that unknown sensation comes back again. Making the pit of his stomach churn and clench, his chest constricting.

Jimin carefully takes his hands, unclenching his fists and then placing them over his own face as though telling Yoongi it was okay; that he could touch him too. Or at least that’s what Yoongi thinks- he could be reading Jimin’s actions wrong. He didn’t have enough experience- body language and motion, yes. But such simple and subtle gestures are lost on him. He ignores the small sudden thought in his mind telling him that he read Jimin correctly.

Unsure what to do, Yoongi’s hands remain rather stiffly over Jimin’s face.

Jimin smiles encouragingly, letting go of his hand before reaching up to draw Yoongi’s face closer into his hands. Yoongi mimics Jimin’s motions and touch.

His cheeks are soft and warm, as though the sun had just warmed it over. His eyelashes are long and a dark grey. The freckles on his skin vary in size and colour but concentrate over on the high-points of his face. Yoongi momentarily wonders if Jimin is uncomfortable with having his face held like this. According to what he’s read in *Appropriate Behavior and Manners for the Distinguished Being of the Modern Universe* touching Being’s faces was considered invasive and classified as a form of assault.

But Jimin doesn’t seem uncomfortable by it. In fact, he seems used to it. Was this a cultural trait from his home-planet? Was this how they greeted each other? How they introduced each other? Yoongi has heard of certain cultures that were difficult to adapt to across the Universe- such as that of the Anning, who greeted each other with kisses on the mouth, regardless of gender, age, status, and position.

Jimin stares right back at Yoongi, his oddly glowing eyes looking straight at him unabashedly and seeing more than what Yoongi had to offer. He allows Yoongi to feel his arms, touch his neck, study his feet. He closes his eyes, apparently enjoying the feeling of having fingers run through his hair. Yoongi carefully brushes through his hair, awed by the colour and light each strand seemed to exude. Out of water, his hair is wavy and longer, but the colour somehow richer and even more confusing. Yoongi can’t tell if it’s gold or silver.

Jimin has lowered his hands already, but Yoongi is stuck.

There was something different. Something entirely unexplainable and out of Time, but this Being’s presence seemed to him like the rising of the sun. Something he’d been waiting for, something he knew would come, something so known, and routine. Something ancient and timeless, but at the same time entirely new and beautiful.
‘Yoongi,’ Jimin repeats again, and then points at himself, ‘Jimin.’

This clearly meant something. But Yoongi just can’t figure it out.

Who was he to Jimin? Who was Jimin to him?

‘I’m sorry I don’t remember you,’ he says despite knowing full well Jimin doesn’t understand him.

Jimin’s hands move. He feels the texture of Yoongi’s skin; carefully thumbing over the soft skin under his eyes. He fingers his hair, as though checking the texture. He even strokes his eyebrows gently and then his own, as though comparing them. He even peers curiously into Yoongi’s mouth, counting his teeth it would seem. His fingers follow the curve of Yoongi’s ears; he touches his own ear as well, and like with his eyebrows, seemingly comparing them. His fingers comb through his hair, feeling his scalp and frowning a little at the bumps he comes across- old scars and surgery wounds. Yoongi’s eyes close almost automatically, leaning into the gentle touch. He thinks he hears a soft sound, as though Jimin was smiling. When he does open his eyes, he finds that he was in fact smiling.

He continues to smile before he takes Yoongi’s hands in his, pushing up the sleeves and looking over healed over and old scars, lesions on his skin.

He asks him something, but Yoongi has no hope in understanding what he has to say.

‘I don’t understand,’ Yoongi whispers.

Jimin blinks a few times, clearly deep in thought.

‘Taeh’yung?’ Jimin says, and then rolls his hands forward. ‘Nak tuk?’

‘…Taeh’yung, tomorrow?’ Yoongi tries, also gesturing forward.

Jimin nods slowly, as though still unsure if Yoongi got his meaning. Then he goes into miming. He mimes falling asleep, and then waking up- then he does the rolling motion with his hand, looking at Yoongi hopefully.

Yoongi nods, giving him a thumbs up in hopes that he too could convey that he understood (hopefully) what Jimin was saying.

Jimin stares at his hand for a moment, then replicates the thumbs up as well.

They stare blankly at each other, Yoongi is unsure what to do. Should he say something additional? Jimin is just looking at him- he’s not expectant, not waiting for Yoongi to say something. He was just looking.

Yoongi really wants to call Taeh’yung even though the Zhak’gri was asleep, if only to understand what Jimin means by all this looking. But before he can do it, Jimin leans in close and hugs him again.

Yoongi might be wrong, but he feels as though Jimin might be trying to convey something to him. But before he can inquire via mime, Jimin pulls away, hands reaching up to cup his face again. He leans in close and Yoongi automatically closes his eyes at the proximity.

Jimin kisses both of his lids.

Yoongi opens his eyes when he feels Jimin’s hands slide away from his face. Jimin is looking at
him again, his expression unreadable. Yoongi suddenly feels exhausted.

‘Mu tui,’ he says quietly.

Yoongi’s eyes immediately close and all he can see is sunlight.

Chapter End Notes

(Author’s Notes)

I love Uhm Jung Hwa’s new song so much. And I found out that Suran composed the song!! Go queens!!

Well.
Net neutrality
Hahahaha
*sighs heavily*

But we can still do things. We can still continue to sign up petitions, email and post at the people responsible for this.

Speaking of whom
WOW I FUCKING HATE THEIR FACES SO MUCH JESUS FUCKING CHRIST IT MAKES ME SO ANGRY. WHY AM I NOT SURPRISED THAT THE VOTE WAS 3-2 AND THOSE WHO VOTED TO END NET NEUTRALITY WERE ALL MEN?? THE WOMEN VOTED NO OMFG ISN’T THIS ALREADY CLEAR THAT WOMEN SHOULD BE TAKING OVER WTAF

ALSO FUCK YOU AJIT PAI- MY HALF-INDIAN BLOOD IS SCREAMING AT YOUR ASS . DON’T FUCKING MOCK US BY MAKING STUPID ASS VIDEOS AND TRYING TO BE RELEVANT. YOU’RE NOT ASS-FACE, YOU’RE MOCKING US AND WE KNOW IT. SO TAKE THAT STUPID REESE’S CUP AND SHOVE IT UP YOUR ASS

I’m sorry to my readers im really upset about this.

BUT WHAT DO YOU MEAN THIS WON’T EFFECT OUR EDUCATION. ARE Y
OU FUCKING KIDDING ME? ARE YOU REALLY THIS STUPID?
Okay im done for real now.
I hope you all liked this chapter!!! See you next week!!!
“Serendipity” [noun]: an unsought, unintended, and/or unexpected, but fortunate, discovery.

Chapter Notes

Embraces you loosely
I wonder what dream it is
A thousand moons
Another river above the sky
I made it.

Be at peace Jonghyun

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This chapter contains several OC deaths, and this isn’t a spoiler because we knew from the previous chapter that in Jimin’s character’s past, Yoongi had died, and this chapter contains that scene. If you don’t want to read that part, it begins after the double asterisk marks. Then you can scroll till you see the double asterisk marks again. If you don’t want to read this chapter, then that’s fine too, the first section of this chapter is safe, and after the first asterisk you can just discontinue reading until the next chapter, because it’s not exactly what you already don’t know in terms of what happens. This is a detailed account of what happened in Jimin’s past as he explained in the previous chapter.
Jimin hurries down the hallway.

Normally he would pause to talk to the gardeners, asking them on the conditions of the crops on the fields, and if the greenhouses were in good condition. And then he would join them as well, although he was always partial to the pasture of soft petal yellow flowers. They were grown there for his benefit and no one blamed him if he was partial towards it. But he is barely able to spare a smile as he sprints down the smooth sandstone floors. He picks up his speed until he comes to the thick wall of white linen curtains, drawn back with ropes of threaded reeds.

‘Jimin!’

His sister, the Yelibi Inati, is already standing at the council table. The Great Council were gathering there as well, all dressed haphazardly like Jimin, having rushed here so early in the morning. There were a total of 22 members in the Great Council. Two representations of their planets all gathered at the heart of their System, Ma’ikelawî, to discuss and finalize any decisions that needed to be made.

Jimin’s older sister was born and anointed the Yelibi Inati, otherwise known as the Heart of the Menigišiti. Those born as the Yelibi Inati were marked at birth, with a glowing sigil on their forehead- a single ring of light to show that their heart was bound to that of the System.

Those born as the Yelibi Inati were random, and no prediction could be made of where they would be born next. However, what was known, for certainty, was that never in their long history, did the Yelibi Inati and the Yemenifesi Ch’inin’eti come from the same planet at the same time. The Yemenifesi Ch’inin’eti, otherwise known as the Fate of the Menigišiti, were born to unite the planets together, ruled under the Heart.

But when Jimin was born, opening his eyes to show dark eyes, ringed with light like a solar eclipse, the siblings changed the course of history. They were beloved and respected, and Jimin and his sister did their utmost to make sure they were deserving of such trust, guiding their united people together hand in hand for the past 138 years.

‘Tsirin! What’s happened?’ Jimin asks immediately, reaching out for his sister’s hands.

‘We have received an emergency call, from the Panel members,’ Tsirin explains. ‘They have sent a relief platoon, to “help” us with our situation.’

‘What?! What emergency?’ Jimin is bewildered, looking over at the other Council members who were also equally confused.
‘There is none. We sent no such message to the Panel,’ Tsirin confirms and adds, ‘But a message was sent nonetheless.’

Jimin frowns—that made no sense, ‘Has the Akramanan Council sent word?’

‘The message was not sent from Akramana,’ Tsirin says, still maintaining her calm. ‘The message was sent from Megibīya.’

She walks over to the table, activating the map of their System and making it large for clarity. The rest of the Council find their seats and are at the ready, rapt with attention.

‘But I received no such news,’ the representative of Megibīya is thoroughly bewildered, checking his screen for any message or notice on the planet he represented on the Great Council.

‘The Panel are there? But that’s not possible, they were only made aware of Akramana,’ the representative of Akramana, the Akramana Wenedi, asks with confusion. The Akramanan had obviously received no such information from his planet or the Council he was part of. It was in his planet, one of the outer-most within the system, that hosted the Panel when they signed the treaty with the GLA. It was one of the few gateways into the System, but it was well hidden, and the Panel were told it was the only gateway in.

‘Is there a possibility that there was a fault in the Transmitter?’ the Gorebēti Wenedi asks the Akramanan.

They were all sister-planets, and despite being the children of such close planets, the 11 species of Menigišiti were diverse and varying. Jimin always considered his own species incredibly simple and dull. Especially compared to those of Be’iji who were tall and elegant, six-armed, and their skin the colour of young saplings. The Be’iji Wenedi stand taller than all of them, peering into the map, their moss-green eyes scanning the broken message transcript. They were unique where they could read sound waves, rather than hear them. Jimin often wanted to ask how sound waves looked like, but had always stopped himself. Because there could be no fundamental explanation they could give him that he would be able to understand. Because if they asked him what his vision was like, Jimin would also have no explanation. How was he to explain the dimensions of his sight, when those dimensions did not exist in the Bei’iji’s sensory world? But T’ati, one of the two Wenedi, had laughed and tried her best to explain to Jimin. As though sensing his gaze, she sends him a gentle smile which Jimin mirrors though he knows she wouldn’t be able to actually see it how he saw smiles.

She probably saw the sound waves of his smile, the way they saw the sound waves of everything around them.

‘None- there cannot be any fault,’ the Akramanan replies immediately. ‘We designed it, we created it. There is no possibility.’

The Akramanan were skilled beyond words in technology and innovative mechanism. It was due to their ingenuity that they were able to harvest and direct their System’s special magnetism and allowed them to hide from the rest of the Universe.

‘What did the message say?’

‘The Panel sent this,’ Tsirin pulls up the message for all of them to see. ‘They sent it directly to me, and not to the Council. This worries me.’

Before Jimin can ask what she meant, the message pops up, a video that’s static and blurred, the
audio grainy and filled with background noise. It was the Yisheng Ndica, who had been able to understand them, a gift, no doubt, from their abilities as a Yisheng. Yishengs were called S’wezete in Menigišiti. But none had been born for over a millennia.

‘I hope you can receive this message,’ the Yisheng Ndica declares, looking unsure and worried. ‘We received a strange signal from a planet close to your System, from a planet the GLA calls Bhumi. We’re not sure if this is part of your extended System, but reports of great destruction, and a reported “cleansing” has taken place there. We have already sent out our forces to observe the situation. This is the message sent, and I hope you can clarify this for us. If this is simply my over-thinking, please correct me. If not, I am making my way to Akramana now, and we can discuss what to do.’

Tsirin immediately plays the message sent.

It’s incredibly fragmented and filled with excessive noise. However, words can be made out, and the Megibīya Wenedi both pale, their black eyes widening. They were tall and hulking, their skin texture rough and almost stone like even in colour. Their eyes were jet black, with a sort of yellow-ochre star shaped iris at the center.

‘-ing. We are leaving-…hips have left with the women and childr-…tayed behind to divert-…oming-…rong and many I cannot expla-…T’S HERE. THEY’RE HERE. WE NEED TO LEA-…ything is red-…it is evil-…’

The message breaks off to play another section. This one a different voice.

‘-just a few of us have escaped. We beg of you. Please help us-…hips flying out but are being hunted-…ping to the closest system we can find- …is evil. They are evil- … hat is it. It came and made the sky red-…everything was bleeding- nnot escape-‘ the message falls silent for almost 10 whole seconds before there’s a burst of static and then suddenly the message is crisp clean and clear: ‘-it appeared out of nowhere. They knew our home. They were able to overcome our defenses. My Heart, they are here to bleed us dry.’

An extraordinary silence falls over the room.

‘Please allow us to leave and return to our planet,’ the female Megibīyan exclaims at once, her voice shaking. ‘The gateway is closed- there must have been some issue, I don’t know- please allow me and Prat’nna to return and see what we can do!’

‘We need to go there at once,’ Jimin agrees at once. ‘If we can open the gateway from here and-‘

‘No wait-‘ the Akramanan Wenedi calls, looking troubled. ‘What if this is a trap?’

The entire Council falls into stunned silence.


‘By the GLA,’ the Akramanan Wenedi declares. ‘What if this is all a ploy- that they have, some way, found out that there are more gateways- Megibīya is not well hidden, and by entering our System the first time during the Treaty, they would be able to override many of our security measures. What if they’re attacking Megibīya, and are trying to trick us into breaking the Treaty, to sign with the GLA?’

There is a pregnant pause in air, heavy with doubt and suspicion.

‘But the Treaty-.’
‘How do we know they will abide to it? They are the most powerful organization across the Universe- they have joined and united countless Systems and Galaxies together- it cannot all be done in peace.’

‘There is a possibility that this is a trap,’ Tsirin agrees. ‘But that cannot be fake. It is not.’

‘I can confirm Tsirin’s statement,’ the Be’iji confirms. ‘I heard no alteration, no temperance, and no lie in the Yisheng Ndica’s words. This is all true. If they spoke out of concealment, I would hear it.’

‘If Megibiya is truly in danger, we would have known,’ the Megibiyan Wenedi declare though they look doubtful.

‘But there has been a recent report, of great changes in the tides of space beyond our borders,’ another Council reports. ‘It is possible that these fluctuations in radiation has potentially scrambled our connection, as well as potentially exposing the gateway to the outside world.’

Jimin shudders at that, worry filling him.

‘Get me a full detailed report on that,’ Tsirin nods at the Council member. ‘But we must move quickly. If the Megibiyan are already evacuating then we must take action immediately.’

Tsirin looks over at the Wenedi from Megibiya, both of whom were stunned, with the beginnings of fear quickly settling into their features.

‘I will leave with you and go to Megibiya,’ she declares. ‘We will safeguard our people, and bring them back here-‘

Jimin shakes his head.

‘This is not a good idea,’ he argues.

‘I know it’s not,’ his sister replies. ‘But I have to do this-‘

‘-but why you? Tsirin- you’re the Mother. You are the heart of our people, the Yelibi Inati of our planet, of our system. If you go, and this is more than what we can handle, then you will be-‘

‘-but you will be here. If all is amiss, and I fall, you will be there to take up my place. But if you fall- then I cannot lead, how can I lead without you by my side?’ Tsirin takes his hands in hers, placing them over her face before placing her hands on his face. ‘I am the Mother, yet you are our Fate. If there is anyone who could shape the course of our planet, of our system, then it is you. You must be kept safe.’

‘What of our people? If we both leave-‘

‘We do this for our people, we do this for our home. For the homes of the Megibiya.’

‘Yelibi Inati, I must agree with Jimin,’ the Megibiyan speaks up. ‘If there is a problem, then who better to counter a massive force than the Yemenifes Ch’inik’eti? My Heart, you must go to Akramana instead.’

‘And if this is indeed a trap, to lure you to Megibiya, then their plans will be at risk,’ the Akramanan declares. ‘We will accompany you to Akramana instead- Jimin is more than capable of handling any possible trick the GLA might have against you- I implore you, they spoke most to you during the Panel, Jimin was barely present- if they try to make a plan, it would be made against
‘Please sister. You know he is right,’ Jimin counters as calmly as he can.

It was the responsibility of the Yemenifesi Ch’inik’eti to unite the planets. But it was also their responsibility to bring safety to the System. It was in their given ability to do so. They were born for this purpose.

‘Please.’ Jimin adds one more time.

Tsirin pauses, looking over at each Council member one by one before she holds Jimin’s determined gaze with trouble but with hints of understanding.

‘You are right.’ Tsirin declares. ‘Forgive me, I spoke out of selfishness.’

There are smiles on the faces of the Council and Jimin squeezes her hand.

‘Who would you like to take with you?’ she asks.

‘Only my Guards. As well as Megibīya Wenedi, and Be’iji Wenedi.’ Jimin declares at once. ‘I do not wish to take our forces- take them with you instead, and position them at the gateways. We will travel to Megibīya and analyze the situation. My ship will be enough for any rescue mission.’

‘The Akramanan Science and Security Division will accompany you,’ the Akramanan Wenedi states. ‘If there is an issue with the gateway, they can figure it out.’

Jimin nods in agreement.

‘The Wenedi will depart for their planets, and unite once more in their Units to secure the gateway you are responsible for.’ Tsirin orders. ‘Report each and every occurrence, no matter how obscure, to the Council.’

The System of Menigišiti is a complex one. Small, but complex.

Eleven distinctly unique planets call this System their home and orbit a small but powerful sun they call *Yino*. They were closely linked, the other planet clearly visible from the next. Only two of their planets had moons though both were uninhabitable. But it was this close distance that enabled them to unify. The planets pass so close to one another that gravitational interactions are significant, and their orbital periods are nearly resonant. They were all roughly the same size and had almost equal distance between each planet. Except for Megibīya and Akramana which orbited at a much further range, causing both planets to have longer years and colder surfaces. Once every 32 years, their planets would all align, creating a strong orbital resonance between all 11, a passageway of sorts. This was what lead to the unification of the System, and the birth of the first Yemenifesi Ch’inik’eti.

This unity was reflected in the eyes of those born with the title. They had abilities that enabled
them to guide, lead, and bring peace during periods of strife and woe. And for over 20 millenniums, the Yemenifesi Ch’ink’eti alongside the Yelibi Inati, united the planets together in peace and harmony, hiding away from the rest of the Universe.

The naturally occurring magnetic displacement surrounding their tight-knitted planets created a natural and strong shield of sort, blocking all radio signals as well as most frequencies. This rendered the System of Menigişiti nearly invisible to the rest of the Universe. However, similar to the tidal fluctuations caused by orbital resonance, the movement of the planets within Menigişiti sometimes caused a rift to open in their space border, exposing the System out to the Universe.

This issue was fixed by the Akramana, who were the second closest to this naturally occurring shield and could observe and experiment upon it. They were able to create massive systematic battery-like cell system placed all over the System to harness and store the magnetic waves. Then it is used in areas where the rifts were going to open. The Akramana were in charge of watching these cells from within the System. And the Megibiya watched the cells from outside this reinforced border.

It wasn’t as though the planets of Menigişiti were ignorant of the existence of everything else outside their borders. They were all too aware, and as a result, chose not to include themselves or partake in it. They kept to each other; learning, expanding, and building.

Megibiya was a tidal-locked planet, like 3 other planets in their System. Meaning one side was always facing the sun without any rotation in its natural axis. This was one of its natural defenses, as potential inhabitants or dwellers would be dissuaded to attempt to live on the planet due to its extreme polar conditions. However, the people of Megibiya lived in the twilight zone, at a permanent sunrise, or a permanent sunset.

Jimin himself has been there many times. And he’s always enjoyed travelling around the center longitude of the planet, watching the sky turn from soft gold to dusty rose. It was a beautiful planet, ringed with light along its longitude. The side exposed to the rays of the sun was bright, almost like gold. There was no actual gold, just burnt and dried out desert, the sand in a permanent state of liquefied glass, reflecting light back into the System.

But to Jimin’s horror, this light glows a strange red.

‘Something is horribly wrong,’ the Megibiya Wenedi, Yyna, shakes her head. Her partner, Prat’tna, is grim and Jimin can sense anger and fear coming from him.

They hadn’t been able to contact the planet, as though they were being blocked out of reaching the planet. They were still far away, but were able to get a visual read on the planet. And what they were able to see terrified them. Jimin has a live frequency sent out to the Council on the whole time.

‘It’s as though the planet is on fire.’

Jimin nods in agreement. He turns his gaze towards his most trusted Guard, Nineti.

Jimin didn’t need guards, it was a formality he couldn’t argue. Because while it was made so that the guards would protect Jimin, they were there to make sure he didn’t over exert himself, or somehow use his abilities in a way that could be considered biased. They were his guardians, advisors, and best friends. He grew up with most of them, while some were older. They studied, trained, and were raised in the same place together. While their studies were based more on military strategy, defence, and tactical operation, they were schooled the same.
There were 6 all together, and wherever Jimin went, they went with him.

While Tsirin was his blood-sister, he felt the same kinship with them as he did with her.

‘What is your advice?’ Jimin asks.

‘Send a patrolling unit,’ Nineti declares at once. ‘Keep a safe distance, scan the area to make sure it’s secure, and then only approach. We cannot conduct a rescue mission if we are under attack.’

‘How can we know if they are indeed under attack,’ Dehin, his other Guard, asks from the Mast.

‘Though Megibīya is a tidal-locked planet, it still rotates on its axis at a very slow pace. Perhaps it is a planetary disturbance?’

‘No it is not,’ Yyna counters immediately. ‘There are different messages sent out for such situations. As well as monitors to trigger any such changes to notify not only Megibīya but the Council as well.’

‘I will lead a small unit from the gateway cells,’ Jimin declares. ‘We will fly off the radar, completely invisible. When we are sure we are secure, then you can come in.’

Jimin can already tell that Dehin and Nineti were inclined to argue but he counters their expression with his own. His sister often joked that he didn’t need words to communicate with his Guards, that a single expression could speak whole sentences. They both nod, though clearly displeased, and move out of the Mast to prepare the smaller, and faster ship.

‘Any frequency detected?’ Jimin asks to no one in particular.

‘None, we can report nothing. There is nothing out there. Not a single radio single, not a single radioactive wave- it’s just empty.’ The Akramanan Wenedi reports back immediately.

‘How close are we to the first border?’

‘10 more minutes,’ Yyna replies at once. ‘I have the repairs ship at the ready.’

‘Good. Can I speak to you for a moment?’ Jimin asks, nodding towards the doorway of the Mast. The Akramanan nods, standing up from her seat. Jimin leads her close to the stairs before turning to address her.

‘I don’t think any of us here think this is simply an issue with radioactive waves or some weather problem,’ Jimin says in a quiet voice as the Akramanan nods in agreement. ‘If there is indeed an issue with the cells powering the gateway, please fix it. Fix it, and if I cannot control the situation in Megibīya, then shut it down, and block all other gateways. Whatever this is, the GLA, some foreign invasion, it is clearly here for war. And we will not risk the safety of our home.’

The Akramanan holds Jimin’s gaze for a long while, disturbed and moved.

‘I understand,’ she nods slowly. ‘But I do not think the rest of the ship will agree.’

‘Which is why I must entrust you with this,’ Jimin pleads quietly. ‘When I heard that message- the description, the words they used. That, and the fact that the GLA were the ones who sent us this message- I cannot help but imagine the worst.’

The Akramanan Wenedi nods slowly, before she says, ‘Perhaps it will simply be a matter of radiation spikes.’
Jimin had imagined the worst.

But this transcended anything he could have imagined.

The planet was glowing red. The clouds that normally covered its surface, creating another layer of protection for the planet against possible mercenaries, were bright red. And even from this distance, Jimin can see bright forks of magenta lacing through the clouds. Unnatural and unreal-the serene grey and gold planet of Megibīya was covered in a blanket of red.

There is a field of broken debris around the planet, massive chunks of familiar technology and mechanics. And Jimin doesn’t need to concentrate to feel death bearing down upon them the closer they got.

But the closer they flew in, avoiding the remains of the Megibīyan naval-fleet, a massive moon rises beyond the curve of Megibīya, burning bright red as though inflamed.

It was no moon.

A ship so massive it appeared before them as though it were a moon, a deep red in colour, and carrying death.

Surrounding it was a strange hazy cluster, and upon closer and frightening inspection, revealed smaller ships, innumerable in their count, flocking back to the mothership.

And as though waiting for them, as though expecting them, they are found.

Jimin doesn’t understand how they are found- how they’re discovered. But they are.

And that was when Jimin knew, that they would have no chance of return, without bringing back this red evil with them.

They were too late. The message delivered to them had been old. Perhaps by weeks. Maybe even an entire month. Remnants of GLA ships could also be seen. Jimin sends this report back, wondering when and if the report would be received.

The haze of ships rocket towards them, and it was as though the massive mothership was crushing them with its gaze. Jimin felt sick to his stomach, his body going numb. He’s numbly aware of the way the Be’iji Wenedi collapses, hands clenched over her head, screaming without voice at the pain. He’s numbly aware of how his Guards rush, pulling up defenses as best as they could.

‘Take us to Megibīya,’ Jimin orders them, his voice surprisingly stable. ‘We will distract them, and allow the others to close the gateway permanently.’

No one hesitates- no one doubts Jimin’s words for a second. Even though they all knew that they were headed to their doom.

Because with just one look, with just one glimpse, Jimin knew, no amount of effort, would save the lives of his people.
‘Yyna. Destroy the cells.’

It is after 3 weeks of crash-landing through the churning atmosphere of Megibīya that they finally reach the twilight zone. They had crash-landed on the dark side of the planet- which was lucky to an extent as they had no need to wade through an ocean of liquid glass. They did, however, have to survive a frozen terrain.

It was a nightmare.

The landscape was dark and frozen, the only light that shone down was from the red clouds above. And that cast only a garish red glare over the solid ice planes. Strange creatures lived here, but none approached them, because no living creature could approach Jimin awake. He slept little.

And it wasn’t as though he could sleep.

The gateway had been closed. That much was for sure.

He could no longer hear the resonance of his home. It was blank.

Empty.

He could see the wear growing on his Guards. There were only 9 of them remaining.

The Be’iji Wenedi succumbed to their pain, their forms curling in.

They could not lay them to rest in the way of their tradition. They make do by covering their bodies with whatever they could spare and keeping them in the small backroom of the ship. The Megibiyan lead the way, their built far better suited for the harsh climates and rough environment.

And added to all of this, Jimin could sense a corrosion. Slow but obvious, gnawing at the souls of those around him.

It is however, by the edge of the end of the frozen climate, when a sudden warm breeze erupts around them, that Dehin falls.

Jimin holds him to his chest, telling his friend that he didn’t need to apologize. Dehin tells him that there was no need for him to apologize either.

And Jimin doesn’t apologize 3 times more in the following month. No matter how much the words want to spill from his mouth. Instead he listens for their final breath, their final word, and he captures it in his hand, in his mind, in his heart.

In his soul. Whatever was left of it.

And he holds it close to his heart, never letting go.
The first time Jimin saw them was when they broke through into the twilight zone. They stood high above on a craggy Cliffside, watching them, observing them. Whatever they were, were definitely nowhere similar to any Being Jimin could recognize.

They were cloaked in a shade of red that seemed to bleed into the air around them- and if you stared too long, it was as though they multiplied within this colour. Jimin’s blood runs cold at the sight of them.

He could sense no resonance in them- he could feel no pulse of life, no extension of any essence that could be considered a life-form. Even the Androids that accompanied the Panel had a faint form of life in their bionic bodies.

They came at random.

And every time they did. Jimin was forced to say goodbye.

Jimin felt drained. His body was still functioning- but it was as though his spirit was falling apart. As though it was seeping off of him into the red that was staining everything on the planet.

It was as though they could tell. That they knew Jimin was who he was.

The storm clouds above continued to boil and rage, and it’s under this light they discover broken cities and homes.

Destruction was minimum almost- only certain areas damaged. Almost as though to showcase their immense power.

And powerful they were.

Craters carve impossibly deep holes in the center of the cities, the wind howling as debris falls in continuously into them.

But what frightens Jimin the most, is how empty it is.

Not a single voice, a cry, a groan. No sound of insects, animals, any other creature.

Jimin feels empty by now.

This place was barren of living forms. Jimin felt as though his breath was too loud. And judging by how the others appeared, they seemed to feel the same way too. And out here, where the cities stood, they felt too exposed.

Paranoia took over them, and every single corner, every single window, every single alleyway, was occupied by them. One night, when they take shelter inside an empty building, high above the ground, Jimin wakes for no reason only to find every single window facing him has a hooded face staring straight at him.

His body felt empty, making way for fear and darkness.

They attempt to look for hiding spots that the Megibīyan could have possibly sought or created. They check even the sewers but find nothing.

No bodies, no remains.

Just emptiness.
'We need to return to the forest,' Nineti says quietly after one night. His chiseled face ashen and pale. Jimin notices that Yyna is no longer with them. ‘I think they get confused when we’re in the forest.’

They couldn’t confirm it. But they cling to the theory.

So they don’t stop and make for the closest hill. And while they’re moving out of the city, quickly passing under a fallen building, they are met, head on, with the Red Evil.

Jimin had not coined that term- rather it had been Prat’tna after he first laid eyes on them. And it stuck.

5 of them stood at the end of the perfectly intact elevated highway. Nineti is quick to cover him, his weapons raised. But Jimin stops him.

Focusing with all his heart and soul, Jimin steps forward.

‘Who are you?’ he asks.

Any Living Being who would hear this would simply feel his voice deep in their soul. They would hear no actual words- no actual sound. Simply an urgency, a need, to follow that feeling and return its call.

But the Red Evil was no Living Being.

They remain unmoving, disproportionately tall and thin. Yet their presence is overwhelming and Jimin wants to run and hide. But he won’t. He can’t.

If he can understand them. If he can somehow just reach to them-

Their movement is unnatural- their movements don’t make sense in this dimension. They seem to expand even more in height, their faces revealed as their robes give. Blank formless faces, with the smallest tear for a mouth, and hollowed sockets where eyes should be.

Jimin doesn’t know if what he can hear is actually their voice- or if he was glimpsing into a realm unknown to him.

One of a darkness so corporeal, it was breathing and pulsing- and it had its own life, its own form.

Its own mind.

Jimin is only vaguely aware of shouts- the sound of weapons being fired, and a great ominous straining sound. But he can’t move. He’s paralyzed.

The Red Evil looms over him, and all Jimin can see is darkness. His nostrils, throat, stomach, are instantly overwhelmed with the sweet rotting stench of something long dead and decayed.

It’s hand wraps around his neck and -panse of darkness and pain pain pain pain PAIN PAIN PAIN PAIN PAI-

When Jimin wakes up, he’s slung over someone’s back.

Jimin knows his breaths.

‘Nineti-‘ Jimin tries to speak but he’s urgently and quietly shushed. Jimin is suddenly extremely awake- his senses peaking to an almost painful level as he tries to scope his surroundings. He can
sense how worn and rough his friend’s soul is, death corroding his very essence.

They were in a forest- that much was obvious. It was raining as well, which overwhelms Jimin’s senses for a moment.

He blacks out again, the last thought in his mind being where the others were.

When he comes back, Jimin finds himself incredibly alone. He’s under a cliff face, to protect him from the strange torrent of rain that comes and goes without warning.

Nineti doesn’t come back.

Jimin can’t keep track of time here.

Had it been a month? A year? He doesn’t remember. He barely scrapes by, being unable to create a fire without potentially giving himself away, he moves closer to the sunrise zone. It’s warmer here and he can sleep better at night. It’s incredibly quiet, so Jimin finds a waterfall, hiding himself in a rocky alcove.

He finds no animals, no insects, but vegetation there was plenty.

He sometimes caught glimpses of ships- red, cruel, carrying death. And they flew past. Sometimes they hovered, lingered. Sometimes the sky wasn’t tinted red, though it still remained heavily cloudy and thunder cracked through the air. Sometimes it almost looked normal. But Jimin hid, covering his presence in the thicket of life that grew around him. Perhaps Nineti had been right. Perhaps they could not detect them amidst this abundance of life. But this wasn’t going to last long.

Life existed on a balance. And without animals or insects, this great vast green expanse would die too.

Sometimes, but barely, the sun shone down.

Distant and small- but Jimin could still feel its rays on his skin. He would soak it all up- as much as he could. He was looking upon the same sun his sister was looking at. The same sun he was born under. The same sun that shone behind his eyes.

And it’s during one of these rare occasions, when the sky is a normal colour, and the sun is out for a brief amount of time, that Jimin catches sight of a ship flying through the temporarily still sky. Jimin’s heart leaps to his throat.

That was a GLA ship.

It’s flying, but with great difficulty. With what equipment Jimin had left, he could focus his vision and spots that one of the wings on the flying ship is entirely broken, smoking profusely. Whoever was flying that was an exceptional pilot. It doesn’t crash, but that’s just barely. It lands far past Jimin’s hideout location. Much further down the waterfall and the cliffs.
Weighing the odds in his mind, Jimin makes his decision and makes his move.

It takes him, by his own calculation based on the subtle transformation of the plants around him, 6 days to find the GLA ship that has crashed. The ship was clearly beyond repair – Jimin wonders why they would just leave it so. Did they not feel as though they could repair it? Or was it perhaps they were planning on coming back here? Jimin glances up at the sky. It was always too cloudy for him to see past the thick stormy veil. Did they have another ship waiting for them?

Jimin quietly enters the ship- a small one made only for transportation it would seem. There were no living quarters- just a long seated galley connected to an open cockpit. Jimin walks up towards the cockpit and tries to read the labels. He was unfamiliar with this language so he’s lost in attempting to understand.

Had he been too late? Had the Red Evil already approached them? Taken them all one by one?

A shiver runs up his back and Jimin rushes out. His eyes scan the city line and he focuses his entire being, simply feeling.

The city is empty. A graveyard of hollow remains- homes robbed of their occupants.

Panting and feeling drained from not having exerted himself in so long, Jimin puts his back to the city and concentrates on the forest ahead.

It’s faint. But it’s there.

He can feel their life, pulsing deep within the forest. And it’s a sensation that he feels almost starved of. The presence of other living beings around him. Not just quietness and fear.

He follows their presence like a compass needle, guiding him in the right direction.

He’s exhausted, but Jimin doesn’t stop. He doesn’t falter. He takes short breaks, digging through the soil to find tubers and through shrubs for edible berries and other vegetation. It had been raining for days, and Jimin wonders if this was one of the reasons why the Red Evil were unable to really track him down. It also provides him with drinking water, drinking from large fronds and leaves. He keeps a sharp eye out for anything red- not too difficult out here in the dense forest where the tree foliage was thick enough to filter what available light they had into a dim greenish-light.

Jimin wonders how he’s going to approach these Beings. It’s the only other conscious thought in his mind.

It’s the 3rd day and Jimin finally catches sight of them. He was still inside the forest while the small group of Beings were gathered outside on a small clearing. And at this distance, with them at sight, Jimin can sense them all the better.

They were relieved- he can sense their spirits healing- absorbing life from the forest around them. They probably weren’t aware, but it was as though their very souls were thirsting for nourishment. Jimin knows how it feels. Because he too was drinking in their presence, the energy from their bonds, and the unity of their gathering.

There were a total of 11 Beings, all varying in appearance, carrying heavy gear and foreign weaponry. Where were they headed?

Jimin wants to reach out to them, in one way or another. And before he knows it, he’s singing.
He’s quiet and his voice purposefully soft. But the wind carries his voice. And he sees the moment they hear his song.

Jimin can sense no hostility. Only shock, surprise, some fear- and most of all, curiosity. Jimin feels a burst of joy in his heart, and he’s planning on leaving the high banks of the forest when a crippling cold catches him around the back of his neck, darkness pooling around his vision.

He’s quick to duck down, barely breathing, as one of the larger ships from the Red Evil shoots past.

Had they seen them? They were out in the open. Had they seen them?

Jimin knows he has to warn them. To tell them to leave this planet if they could. To report to the GLA on what was happening, if anything could be done at all. But Jimin can barely breathe.

His body was drained, and he shakes uncontrollably as he looks behind him, back into the forest.

It was dark, and he can see the outlines of the forest beyond.

And the darkness was looking back at him.

* *

When he finds the strength to walk again, it takes him much longer to catch up to the GLA. And this time, he doesn’t hesitate.

The forest they were walking through smelled like death. Life on the planet was giving out slowly, and this place, with so much damp and moisture was one of the first to give in. Jimin finds an exit faster than they do, and he checks to make sure they would be safe in the approaching opening. It wasn’t too far from his hiding spot near the waterfall. The same river that fed his waterfall had branched off here, creating a small cool stream of water. He quickly washes himself, drinking deeply. The sun was about to “rise”, with the clouds shifting in a way that would clear in the horizon. Jimin quickly hides himself in anticipation of their arrival.

He can feel them- feel their tenseness, their anxiety. Worry, fear, and nervousness surrounded them like the storm clouds above. And Jimin knows that he won’t be able to approach them without causing a great stir. He watches two of their members walk away from out of the damp and rotting forest, clearly looking for a source of water.

There are jutting rocks over on one side before giving way to impossible cliffs and mountains. He waits beyond an outcrop of clean mossy rocks, holding his breath.

He appears first, heart-achingly similar in form and face to his own people. He looks tired, his skin ashen and his shoulders slumped.

Death was draining this planet of life, even from those who did not know.

Another Being appears, taller and different looking. He too appeared tired, a lag in his movements that worries Jimin. The shorter of the two pauses, head turning to greet the permanent sunrise. Had they been able to figure out and understand this planet? Or was this the first of the permanent sunrise he was going to witness.
They speak to each other— their voices sound almost hollow. But there’s a sort of ring to the dark-haired Being; one that Jimin is drawn to. Because it sounds just like the voice in his heart, calling for home. To return once again where he belonged. His friend comes and stands next to him. They’re speaking in low voices, watching the sky above break to reveal the sunrise beyond.

Jimin realizes he’s singing, too caught up in listening to the familiar ring surrounding this Being. He was singing, but he hadn’t even opened his mouth. Fear takes over him – he didn’t know who they were. What they were here for. The Red Evil could be using them, to lure him out. To capture him. What if he had walked into a trap?

The unknown Being is startled, eyes widening as he gets up, his posture defensive.

But at that moment, sunlight breaks through and the entire clearing is covered in warm light and colour.

Their eyes meet, and Jimin’s fear abates.

* *

His name is Yoongi.

It took them a while to understand that Jimin did not speak any of the languages they knew. They could not translate it on their devices either. And so they were left to point, mime, and express themselves in order to communicate.

Yoongi had pointed at himself, saying his name out loud a few times. And then back at Jimin. ‘Jimin.’ Jimin had pointed at himself, and then back at him, ‘Yoongi.’

He smiles, nodding. And then he points at everyone else, going through their names.

When at least the names are established, they try to further their explanation. Jimin knows it was going to be pointless to try and speak. So after almost 10 minutes of miming his request, Yoongi understands his attempt and hands him his own device. His friend, Amic, is quick to catch on and activates the program he needs.

Jimin quickly but with comprehensive skill, illustrates what had happened. The Yemenifesi Ch’inik’eti could not lie. But Jimin was not lying when he chose to omit parts of the story involving where he came from. Based on what Jimin can tell from their reactions or responses, they must think he was part of a non-GLA system. Jimin wishes he could study them better, look into their eyes, feel their life under his hands, to be able to better hear the ring in their souls. But he’s not sure how well they would take to it. So he keeps back, studying them from afar as they were doing the same to him.

They clearly had roles and positions. Amic was responsible for what appeared to be some form of reading/scanning device. Yoongi was busy most of the time running some form of analysis on samples he harvested from every single place he could. He had, at one point, mimed to Jimin, asking him for a strand of his hair. Jimin had been unsure at first, wondering why Yoongi was asking him to pluck out his hair for him. But then he reached forward and lightly tugged at his hair, and Jimin understood.
When Yoongi read whatever analysis he gathered after studying his hair, his expression had turned confused. A few of the others gathered around him, asking questions. Jimin radiates peace, just a small amount, so that it would calm their spirits, and not cause their fear to corrode their souls. It had already taken some effect, and Jimin refused to watch as it happened.

They were headed to a location they had scanned and found in the their map-scans. They showed it to Jimin, in hopes that he would know just in case. But Jimin doesn’t. He carefully studies their map and is surprised to find that their scans and readings were fairly accurate. These scans had to be old. No map could be this detailed without years of observation and mapping. Had the GLA always kept track of Megibīya? Based on what Ndica had said, they knew of the planet, and had even given it a name. How long had they been under observation, and how much information were they keeping from them?

He follows them through the forests. He’s not sure how much of what he’s said actually translated well to them. He’s not sure how much they believe in him, because despite knowing about the existence of the Red Evil, they don’t seem too perturbed by this information.

Language barriers really did dull the extent of fear.

The leader of this unit, a slight yet very strong female Being by the name of Amad’la, often asked Jimin to walk with her. She seemed to think he knew the lay of the land. And though Jimin did not, he was able to better use his abilities to channel ahead, making sure all was clear. And it is clear. Most of the time, too much so, and it causes Jimin to feel unsettled.

The group don’t take frequent breaks. They knew they had little time, and taking Jimin’s attempts at warning, they only rarely stopped. But every time they did, Jimin couldn’t help but feel strangely endeared, or at the very least somewhat pleased by their attempt to converse with him. This was normally a common source of light-hearted entertainment as they attempted to mime certain actions, words, questions at Jimin, while the others watched with amusement. Leading this was usually Yoongi and Amic.

Jimin just looks at him curiously. Communication was difficult without the help of translators. But they’re somehow able to establish some form of mimicry-based language, and Jimin was always exceptionally good at reading the emotions and meanings behind spoken word.

Standard was a strange mix of words that felt heavy and steeped with a dullness that Jimin doesn’t like. There were few who spoke it well- with a certain accent that made it sound better. Yoongi’s was a little lazy, a little slurred- it made the cold dull language sound familiar. Like how you can casually slip into your regional accent without fear of being mocked or judged.

Yoongi always sought him out, handed him food and drinks, and walked close. Perhaps it was because he was the first to notice him, and the first to reach out to him, but Jimin too sought him out first.

And there was something pleasantly warm, a resonance in the way Yoongi’s soul seemed to sing out. Something that Jimin finds soothing and easing.

Yoongi was easily closest with Amic, who also walked alongside Jimin a lot, though most times he was tending to his own devices. Him and Yoongi appeared to be the oddest of friends. Yet a combination that clearly worked.

They were surprisingly filled with mirth and must have been funny based on how they made the others laugh with their antics and comments. Amic seemed to enjoy making fun of Yoongi’s height- and Jimin notices that he was in fact, the shortest in the entire group.
Until it’s discovered that Jimin is almost the exact same height as Yoongi, and they’re made to
stand together, shoulders touching. Yoongi is obviously loudly whining about something as he’s
made to remove his shoes, removing his added almost 2 inches. He grimaces comically as he
stands next to Jimin. There’s burst of laughter and Yoongi sighs heavily, as though exhausted of
his group. He then gives Jimin a small wink and easy grin before ruffling his hair.

It’s almost too easy to smile back. And it’s too easy to reach for Yoongi’s hand, stopping his
movement. He looks over at Jimin with question, head tilted. Jimin’s hand linger on Yoongi’s,
reading as best as he could for that short period of time.

There was nothing extraordinary about Yoongi.

He could detect nothing out of the ordinary in his soul. He could detect no swirling sense of
resonance in his soul either. He was just very simply, ordinary. But one thing that struck out the
most was one thing Yoongi had- or actually lacked.

While there was a corrosion settling in everyone’s souls- Jimin could find none in Yoongi.

‘Where are you from?’ Jimin asks quietly.

Yoongi is a little flustered, clearly not understanding. Hurriedly he takes out his device and hands it
to Jimin. Jimin notes that his previous illustrations, had been all saved in sub-tabs along the side. It
makes him smile. He illustrates a single circle, and outlines the continents of his home planet.
Then he points at it, and then back at himself.

‘Home.’ He says, willing Yoongi to understand.

Yoongi eyebrows go up and he nods, saying something and his friend hands him a device. Yoongi
smiles, raising a finger to tell Jimin to wait a moment. He gestures for them to sit and they take a
seat on one of the stretched out raised planks, avoiding the puddles of rain water gathered around
the forest floor. Yoongi shifts closer, their knees touching a little. Suddenly the device in Yoongi’s
hand lights up and a holographic projection takes form.

Yoongi points at something before gesturing around. This was where they were, according to
Yoongi. Jimin looks at the map, and finds that a few planets were missing. So the GLA had been
scanning them- for how long, Jimin is not sure, but the safety of his System was greatly
compromised, that was all he could tell. But he doesn’t comment and nods to show his
understanding. Yoongi taps on the surface of the device and leans back a little to give the map
some space.

Yoongi’s planet is blue and beautiful- almost the same size as Jimin’s own planet. Yoongi taps on
the map, indicating an area. He then points at it, and then at himself. He slowly says a word and
looks expectantly at Jimin.

‘Urrth?’ Jimin tries.

Yoongi smiles, nodding.

Jimin points at himself and then at his planet he had drawn.

‘Dis’bēti,’ Jimin says slowly.

Yoongi tries. He really does. It’s obvious language is not his forte because Amic is cackling at him
from the other plank. Yoongi’s aim, however, is much better than his language skills. Amic is met
with a wet splat of grassy roots. The tall gangly fellow wails dramatically before pretending to
faint.

Jimin looks back at the map while Yoongi yells at Amic.

Yoongi was so far away. Everyone here was so far away.

Would they be able to return? Jimin had his suspicions, but he knew, from the first hour of meeting these Beings, that they could be trusted.

Did they know what they had come across? What had they been told that they were here? What led them here?

‘Your home is stars away,’ Jimin says quietly. ‘I’m sorry you’re so far away.’

Yoongi turns to look at him curiously. So instead Jimin smiles and taps once on Yoongi’s planet, pulling it up from the map. He pulls up the map of Megibīya and puts them together. He indicates with his fingers, stretching his arms as far apart as possible, and then pointing at Yoongi.

Understanding lights up Yoongi’s eyes. He smiles, with a small shrug, as though to say, what can I do? It’s my job.

‘I’m sorry.’ Jimin tells him quietly.

The lights of the holograph seem to shed light into his eyes, showing Jimin the longing and sorrow he carried in him. He missed home, Jimin could tell. Reaching through the holograph, Jimin cradles Yoongi’s face in his hands. Yoongi is startled but doesn’t move away.

Jinim is aware that a few of the others are watching them, some with amusement and teasing, some with question. But he ignores them in favor of reaching out to Yoongi. He can finally really feel Yoongi like this.

Jinim knows that some find it intrusive, staring so deeply into their eyes. But Yoongi doesn’t flinch, he just stays still, relaxed and in turn, looks back at Jimin. What Jinim doesn’t expect is for Yoongi to raise his hands and mirror Jinim.

Jinim can’t help but smile, leaning forward to lean their foreheads together. Yoongi’s face is suddenly warm. He’s blinking rapidly, and Jinim can tell he’s nervous. Smiling wider, Jinim leans up to kiss his forehead.

He can see blue skies- high up. Clouds are floating below his feet, and he can smell some form of smoke. The vision is gone as quickly as it came.

There’s a sudden burst of applause, some hoots, and suppressed giggles. Yoongi is red in the face but he’s smiling too. He looks confused, unsure what to do. And someone is yelling something at him and he too moves forward and kisses Jinim on his forehead.

His lips are dry but soft, and it’s more of a graze than an actual kiss.

Amic cheers and barrels in, arms open wide towards Jinim.

Jinim spends the rest of that break doing the same to everyone, looking at everyone’s planets and some even attempting to describe what was famous or cool in their respective homes.

Yoongi sits next to him the entire time. And Jinim can feel his soul growing again, as he takes from the solidity of Yoongi’s presence next to him.
Despite feeling safer than he has in ages, Jimin still cannot fully rest. His senses were on high alert, and his paranoia never resting. He could barely catch sleep despite the insistence of the GLA team that he rest. Even that part Jimin was able to understand without the need for words. They had stopped to rest for the night in a small forest clearing just nigh of a mountain cliff. They were progressing around the twilight zone, closer to the location they had pointed out to Jimin. Jimin really really hopes that this location can grant them access to whatever frequencies and channels they would need to send messages.

They had been in this location far longer than Jimin was comfortable with. He tried to communicate this to the team but the Captain had only nodded in reply. She then pointed at some of their equipment, and mimed repair and maintenance. Jimin didn’t mention it again, but he kept his vigilance high.

The sky was less red today, and as Jimin steps out of the small tent they had given him to rest inside, he’s greeted with the permanent sunrise. The GLA team had known about the planet enough not to be too surprised at the phenomenon. But they still studied it and kept track, taking notes on the angle of the sun, the intensity of the light, and wavelengths.

Most of the team are asleep, catching up on much needed rest. A few others were around, keeping watch. They smile at Jimin in greeting. It would now be over a 7 weeks he travelled with them. And despite the language barrier, they take to him easily.

Jimin had doubts, for the longest time, about himself. As the Yemenifesi Ch’i’nik’eti, he could bring people together. Unite, unify, connect. He could move hearts, sway minds, and bring agreement in strife. And sometimes he wondered, if the people of his System ever held him in true companionship or regard. Outside of who he was, Jimin knew little of who he was. Outside of his work and title, Jimin knew little else of what it meant to truly introduce and establish yourself.

But here, with these unknown GLA team members, Jimin has no only had to earn their trust, but also do this without words.

Jimin upheld a vow that all Yemenifesi Ch’i’nik’eti did. They never used their abilities for selfish motives, or for situations and purposes that would cause significant changes to its alteration. And most of all, they never used their abilities to manipulate for personal gain.

It went against every fiber of his being, even thinking about it.

He hears Yoongi stepping out of the tent, his movements quiet and light. He can almost see it, as though he was watching Yoongi move. White mist escaping his mouth as he shivers a little in the cold morning. A strange chill had fallen over the past few days, bringing frost and a chill. Jimin doesn’t know if this was a result of the Red Evil, or if this was an actual seasonal change in the planet. He concentrates on the sounds coming from Yoongi.

He was probably performing a perimeter search, scanning their surroundings. Jimin smiles to himself when he hears Yoongi speaking in a low voice, asking questions, only to have a grunt in reply.

Jimin knows Yoongi’s routine. After doing the perimeter search Yoongi will make sure to check
all his immediate equipment and devices with him, despite having it on him all the time. Then he’ll take a step forward – *crunch* – and then he’ll come to stand behind Jimin. It was always like this, for the past few days that they’d been here. After a minute, Yoongi will step inside – *shuffling steps, fabric brushing on fabric* – and he’ll walk back to relieve the night duty.

Light breaks brighter over the horizon and Jimin hears the sound of life wakening. The sound of the other Beings inside their tents, shifting and adjusting. Some drained sounding yawns and creaks. The sound of plants pushing through the soil, the sound of leaves falling in the light morning breeze. It’s beautiful, and Jimin’s heart hurts to return home.

Jimin wasn’t even aware he was cold until he feels Yoongi’s hand on his arm. He smiles when he regards his friend. Yoongi has never approached him before out here and he’s only a little surprised. He’s also surprised when Yoongi more or less throws a blanket over him, not meeting his eyes. He says something, pretending to shiver and then pointing at him again.

Jimin smiles in thanks, wrapping the blanket around him.

Yoongi speaks words yet again, as he’s taking a seat next to him. He always spoke to him, despite not understanding each other. Sometimes he sounded like he was ranting, other times he was laughing, as though telling him a story. And Jimin listened, hearing more than just words as he could hear the emotions behind his words.

He tries to repeat Yoongi’s greeting to him. He can only assume that it’s a greeting of sorts. Perhaps strictly from his own planet.

‘Hei s-sunshhrine?’ Jimin tries out, with a waving gesture that seemed to extend System to System, throughout the Universe.

Yoongi gives him an amused grin before pointing at Jimin and saying, ‘Sunshine,’ and then at himself, ‘Yoongi.’

Wondering if he should be offended, Jimin quirks an eyebrow at that and shakes his head. Did Yoongi not get his name yet now?

‘Jimin,’ he points at himself and then at Yoongi, ‘Yoongi.’

Yoongi puts on a funnily serious face and shakes *his* head, pointing at Jimin again, ‘Sunshine.’

And before Jimin can say anything else Yoongi points at himself and says ‘Yoongi’ and then points at Amic who blearily blinking in the unexpected light. He’s waiting for Jimin to reply and he does so, a little slowly, with clear indication of his confusion.

‘Amic?’

Yoongi nods, and then pointing at Amic again he says, ‘Mickey.’

Thoroughly confused, Jimin tilts his head to the side. Yoongi just grins a bit more before pointing at the Captain Amad’la and says, ‘Cap.’

He does the same for everyone, naming them and then adding another name. Then it hits Jimin.

Nicknames. Yoongi was giving him a nickname.

Jimin feels a bit embarrassed at that, for not having caught on sooner. So he makes an exaggerated sound of understanding that makes Yoongi laugh.
‘Sunshine.’ Yoongi points at Jimin again.

‘S-sunshine,’ Jimin points at himself.

Yoongi nods and gives him a lopsided grin before saying something. There’s laughter from Yoongi’s friend, wholehearted and free. He’s shaking his head at Yoongi who makes some sort of hand gesture at his friend, clearly meant to be offensive.

‘What does it mean?’ Jimin asks. But Yoongi patiently hands him his device instead. Jimin pauses a moment, wondering how to illustrate his question when there’s an alarmed and terse voice calling out.

Yoongi is up at once and Jimin stands up too.

There’s a confusing continuous back and forth of words- but out of all the words, Jimin hears “Thua” repeated over and over again.

Thua was one of the team members who carried the equipment that was being repaired. He was the audio/frequency maintainer, if Jimin was correct in his observation. His skin crawls as he too launches back into the area where their tents were. He had been in the tent next to Yoongi’s but it was empty. They call his name, run scans, but they can’t find him.

Had the Red Evil come here and taken Thua? How did he not hear? How did he not know? He was barely asleep for 3 hours, and there was a watch around the tents. How did this happen?

Jimin takes a step back, racking his mind, wondering how he couldn’t sense it, when a suffocating cold feeling wraps around his throat, his nostrils filled with the sickly sweet stench of decay and rot. His body shaking, Jimin manages to turn his head.

Standing where he had been sitting with Yoongi is the Red Evil.

The red of its robes stains the air around him, whatever sunlight that was shining through is contaminated and red. The earth around it turns to ash and the trees begin to crumble.

Death.

Jimin was looking at Death.

It raises its hand towards Jimin- blackened and dry looking. It points at Jimin and-

‘Sunshine?’

Gasping for breath as though he’d been underwater, Jimin nearly buckles as the freezing chokehold he was in vanishes. Yoongi, pale and alarmed, manages to catch him before he falls to the ground.

He’s saying his name, repeating words.

But Jimin is heavily disoriented- as though he was ill-ridden with a terrible fever. His mind is woozy and his body numb. His head tilts back and looking down at him, at them, from above were the Red Evil.

His eyes threaten to close, his body shutting down.

Yoongi’s face swims before his eyes and Jimin remembers every single time he didn’t apologize. He remembers every single last breath he held to his heart.
He would not add more. And he would not die here where all those voices would be simply lost.

Filled with a mad type of energy, Jimin stands up, head tilted up.

He hears Yoongi’s voice behind him, and the gasps of the other team members. He is vaguely aware of the sound of their weapons clicking and loading.

Raising his hand he points back at the Red Evil and light erupts from him.

‘Death. You will not come for me. Or for them. You will leave.’ He commands- his voice expands in rings of light around him. Each word more powerful than the last. Words of Fate. Jimin focuses even more and he feels his feet lifting off of the ground.

‘Death- you will not conquer me.’

The red beyond the trees blur suddenly before rippling stark and bright.

‘We do not bring death.’

The red light vanishes and Jimin is falling. It’s not a high fall and Yoongi and Amic are there at once. They help him stand straight, looking over him in fear of injury. Amad’la appears out of nowhere, fear in her eyes. Jimin can feel all their emotions with startling clarity right now.

Confusion. Panic. Fear.

And an equally divided portion of these emotions are directed towards him.

She’s full geared, weapons up and at the ready. She’s clearly giving orders and Yoongi is saying something- his tone sharp and his voice low.

Amidst all of the fear, confusion, and panic, Jimin detects something else. Worry, concern, and something bright. Something warm.

Jemin looks away from Amad’la who is frowning heavily, replying back with harsh sounding words, and instead looks around at Yoongi.

Yoongi’s expression has changed completely. Yoongi was either apathetic, mildly annoyed, making funny faces with heavy sarcasm, or yawning mightily because he appeared to be in constant need of sleep. But right now Yoongi looks mildly terrifying.

His features are surprisingly relaxed, no glaring expression on his face. But his eyes are burning, an intensity that is unnerving, enough to make crowds quake. His words are calm and steady as he says something.

And despite all of this, his hand is still gentle. He gently pulls Jimin back and around him, so that Yoongi stood in front of him instead. Amic stands behind Jimin and he too, places a gentle hand on his shoulder, protectively almost.

Jemin isn’t sure what’s being said, but he feels as though a few of the team members there seem to blame him for the absence of Thua.

Jemin looks up again shakily and finds it bare of any red.

When Jimin comes to meet the team member’s eyes- he finds cold suspicion and doubt in them. And Jimin doesn’t blame them. Because if he were in the same position as them, he too would be suspicious of him.
However both Yoongi and Amic are free of these emotions. And Jimin finds comfort in their eyes.

**

The second disappearance takes place when they’re making a move down the mountain cliffs. Amad’la is saying something again, and Jimin understands now. They want him to stay back, to leave the team. But Yoongi and Amic are arguing against her. But Jimin can see the reasoning behind their words, behind their doubts. They had not known of the Red Evil until Jimin told them about it. And then they never saw it again. But just as they are so close to their targeted location, it appears out of nowhere. And Jimin had told them that he hadn’t been able to do anything to push back the Red Evil but for some reason, back in the forest clearing, he had been able to do so. Not just that, but he had displayed his abilities- they heard him speak the Words of Fate without knowing what Jimin was trying to do.

And perhaps they would be safer without Jimin there. Perhaps the Red Evil would ignore them. They had been safe up until then. Maybe it was Jimin they were after.

He stops their arguing, pulling Yoongi and Amic away with a shake of his head.

‘I will leave,’ he tells them, miming the action. Yoongi is quick to take on to his words and instead of saying anything firmly grabs him by the hand with a shake of his head.

‘No.’

Jimin came to understand a few Standard words. And this was one of them.

Yoongi doesn’t let go and continues to argue. But in the midst of this argument, there’s a warning cry from Amic who pushes them down quickly.

Jimin nearly retches at the overwhelming stench of rot that fills the air around him. His head spins as he scrambles to stand up. There’s a shock of light that erupts from next to him. Yoongi and Amad’la are already using their weapons in quick accurate succession, firing in the direction of the Red Evil who move at impossible speed and fluidity.

If the GLA team were afraid, they make no show of it. Instead they continue firing, their coordination and skill coming through to show that they weren’t just a team of researchers and scientists.

This continues to happen for the next 3 weeks. And in that span of time, Jimin is horrified as he witnesses the rapidity by which the souls of the GLA team corrodes. He kneels next to Amic who is breathing heavily, a strange sound coming from his chest as air clogs in his passageways.

His body functions and systems were breaking down.

Amic’s species were different from other various species in the team. Their wellbeing depended on the stability and strength of their heart. Perhaps this was why he was drawn to Yoongi, whose soul still remained whole and complete. Yoongi was growing fatigued as well. His cheeks sunken and
his face pinched. There was a tremor in his hands and his breath comes short after extended periods of time. But it’s worse for Amic and a few others. And it didn’t matter if they had more food or medicine. Jimin tries to tell them that it’s not a sickness of the body- but of the soul.

This planet was being drained of life, and so all living beings in it were slowly dying with her. Jimin could feel it in himself too. His head felt heavy- but most of all his heart weighed down, curling his back and dragging his feet. Yoongi walks besides him and tries to help. Jimin reaches for his hand and Yoongi doesn’t let go.

When Amic collapses, his limbs trembling and twitching out of his control, he just smiles. He coughs out a few words and Yoongi nods, refusing to look away, refusing to cry.

Jimin saves his last breath in his heart and later presses Yoongi’s head against his chest, in hopes that he could hear Amic’s voice there as he wept.

When they arrive at the location they had been walking towards for the past near 3 months, there’s only 4 of them left. But before they can even begin to plan how to scale the mountain side, Amad’la keels over and stops breathing.

They cannot spare the strength to give her a burial, so they place her under a tree instead. Jimin kneels besides her, folding her hands over each other before leaning over to press his forehead against hers in silent goodbye. He feels Yoongi’s hand on his shoulder and he makes to get up only to nearly fall over when the overwhelming stench of rot and decay fills the air again. There’s a flash of red and then it’s gone.

‘Yoongi-!’

Scrambling around Jimin finds that it’s only him and Yoongi left. He trips forward, nearly pushing Yoongi down with the wild desperation of his embrace. He tries to make Yoongi smaller, to hold him hard and tight against himself to protect him. He looks around wildly, his breath stuttering and when his hearing comes back to him, he realizes he’s singing in a broken voice.

Yoongi is watching him with great worry, desperate as he tries to understand. ‘I can’t protect you,’ Jimin manages to whisper.

They had lost most of their equipment, broken or damaged, or lost as they tried to escape the flashes of red that leapt around the trees.

‘I’m so sorry I can’t protect you.’

Yoongi is making hushing sounds, trying to placate him but this only serves to frighten Jimin more. Up until now, Yoongi still did not understand.

They scale the mountain side, slowly and painfully. Jimin has lost count on the amount of times he’s scraped his knees and hands raw. He’s lost track of the amount of times they’ve both slipped and broken skin over sharp cold rock. Jimin wonders why Yoongi is still so adamant. Though they still carried the equipment they would need to create the frequency to communicate, they still didn’t know if it would work. The sky is a fiery blood red, and forks of magenta lightning streak through the thick heavy clouds.

They’re resting by a small alcove, leaning against each other gracelessly. Jimin gazes up, willing the sky to clear. He missed the stars. He missed the sight of moons. He missed the warmth of the sun on his skin.
He missed his sister, his planet, his people.

Yoongi says something quietly and for a moment Jimin wonders if he’s sleep talking. But Yoongi opens his eyes and looks straight into Jimin’s. Yoongi was exhausted beyond hope, but his eyes were still clear. Jimin doesn’t understand how it’s possible. But it’s the only thing giving him strength.

He repeats his word and Jimin tries to repeat it as best as he can.

‘Saw..saw-ree?’ Jimin tries.

Yoongi just nods.

Whatever had been indicated on that map, had marked the existence of a construct of sorts. A slim tower that appeared to be a part of the mountain side almost. Stepping inside away from the high-mountain wind made Jimin realize exactly how cold it was. But the moment Yoongi steps inside behind him, he collapses.

Jimin is at his side immediately. He removes the equipment from Yoongi, stripping off the bags he carried that they had emptied out as best as they could before trekking up here. Yoongi is cold and no matter what Jimin does he doesn’t regain any warmth back. He lifts a shaking finger, pointing at his bag.

Jimin takes out the equipment and takes it back. But Yoongi just smiles and shakes his head.

Jimin is confused for a total of 2 seconds before he realizes it.

Of course Yoongi knew. He had understood all along.

Jimin digs through Yoongi’s bag quickly and comes across a crumpled paper and plastic packet. He’s not sure what it is. Inside there are small white rolls and a small sparkly star-shaped clip falls into Jimin’s hand. It was purple edged with glittery silver, clearly meant for a young female being’s hair. Jimin hands it to Yoongi with shaking hands.

‘Was this your sisters?’ Jimin asks, feeling the way Yoongi’s heart pulsed in sounds of homesickness and love. ‘Mother?’

Yoongi simply smiles at him. With shaking hands he puts the clip on his hair and Jimin helps him at once.

He asks him a question, shifting as though to pose.

‘Yes,’ Jimin nods, only now aware that he was crying. ‘Yes it looks very good on you. Very handsome.’

Yoongi laughs, and it’s such a small but precious moment- of delight and joy.

‘Sunshine,’ he smiles, holding a hand out. Jimin takes it, heart heavy with all the words he’s heard-with all the breaths he’s saved in his soul. He holds Yoongi’s hand to his face. It’s so cold.

Yoongi’s thumb slowly traces the skin under his eye. He says something else, and ends it with ‘sunshine’.

He still hasn’t asked what that word meant.

There was still no corrosion in Yoongi’s soul and Jimin wants to save him forever. To never let go
of that strength and purity. He shifts closer, practically hugging Yoongi’s arm to his chest. Yoongi
gives him another haggard smile.

He was so exhausted. Jimin can feel it. His soul wasn’t corroded but his heart, his spirit, and his
body was failing.

He says something else. Jimin shakes his head, indicating that he didn’t understand.

Still smiling, Yoongi tugs at Jimin’s shirt with his free hand.

Jimin shuffles even closer, till there’s less than a few inches between their faces. Yoongi smiles
and with a small nod forward presses a kiss on Jimin’s lips.

He says something, knowing full well Jimin wouldn’t understand.

And Jimin knows that this was the last of his breaths. That he was going to be forced to watch
Yoongi die, the same way he was forced to watch everyone die. And despite how heavy his heart
felt- how weighed his soul was- he would save Yoongi’s last word permanently in his heart. It was
a burden he would gladly bear for the rest of his life.

‘Yoongi-‘

He’s suddenly yanked back and the stench of rot overwhelms him.

He tries to scream- to pull them away from Yoongi but he can’t. His head hits something and his
world turns black.

‘We do not bring death.’

Jimin gasps awake.

The tower room is empty, the door flung open, letting in red light.

Yoongi is gone.

He couldn’t save his last word. Jimin is not allowed to save Yoongi’s last breath in his soul, where
it would continue to live, pulsing and beating with life next to Jimin’s.

Enraged with sorrow, Jimin pushes himself off of the ground, never minding his injuries or the
exhaustion he was feeling too. He emerges from the tower only to find the Red Evil standing
before him. There are 5 of them again. All the same height, all the same size. They loom down at
him in uniform stillness.

Feeling a reckless anger take over him, light bursts out of him. But the Red Evil doesn’t flinch.

‘I know you understand me. I heard you speak. Why are you here?’ Jimin asks.

He’s exhausted. He knows he can’t do this for any longer.

‘We do not bring death.’

‘But that is all you have done!’ Jimin screams. ‘That is all you have brought here!’

A powerful ripple of light burst from him, chipping the mountain side and creating a hollow
thunderous sound to echo around him.
'We do not bring death. We bring life.'

On of it steps forward suddenly, bending down at a strange and impossible angle. It raises its hand until it wraps around Jimin’s head.

Jimin is locked, unable to move. He’s slowly lifted into the air and the light around him is being pressed down- it’s painful, as though a great weight was bearing down on him, compressing him, threatening to crush him to his very core.

‘Would you like to see life?’

Jimin raises his hands, stretching and reaching until the tips of his fingers touch the Red Evil on its face.

It’s cold, strangely wet, and ancient.

Jimin is flooded with pain- not his own, but not of the Red Evil. There is pain- from a Universe of Memories that has been forgotten and abandoned. A Universe of life that once was.

And a Universe of obsession.

‘Can you see it?’

Jimin is staring into its eyes, unable to blink away or speak.

‘You will see it. Like the rest of them.’

Jimin drops to the ground, reality rushing back around him in harsh lines and sounds.

‘You will see it.’

Jimin shakes, his entire body shuddering- with cold, fear- he doesn’t know. All he knows is that he wants this to end.

The edge of the cliff swims before his eyes. The thought is half-formed, half-created. But before he can even make another attempt at moving, the bone-chilling cold settles over his head again.

And this time, everything turns white.
Jimin wakes up, his heart pounding almost painfully in his chest.

It takes him a moment to realize that he was not in Megibīya. That the Red Evil was not there. That it had been conquered and destroyed some 4 years back according to Taeh’yung. He had seen it. They had seen it.

Jimin notices that Yoongi is standing by the doorway, expression blank. Had he heard Jimin during his nightmare? Had Jimin called his name out loud in his sleep?

Jimin sits up properly on his bed. The cabin he was given was identical to the rest, and was the first room from the entrance.

‘Yoongi?’

He was greatly changed. His mind, his heart, and his soul felt different. Transformed, changed. Alchemized.

Altered.

And still exhausted. And it terrifies Jimin.

But it was still Yoongi.

And it wasn’t just because of his face- because even his face seemed a little different. The Yoongi Jimin remembers from Megibīya was expressive, spoke frequently, and was surprisingly noisy at most times. This Yoongi was completely different.

But that doesn’t bother Jimin.

He raises his hand up, smiling at him and beckoning him in. Yoongi blinks a little, as though contemplating. Then he walks inside and takes a stiff seat next to Jimin, hand carefully taking Jimin’s.

‘Even if you don’t remember me, I am glad you look at me the same way,’ Jimin says, knowing that Yoongi wouldn’t understand a single word.

Everything about Yoongi had changed. But the way he looked at Jimin still remained the same. And just like before, Jimin finds comfort and safety in them.

Yoongi still looks confused, a battle in his mind, in his soul. Would he ever remember? Jimin tries again, and points at himself and says, ‘Jimin.’ And then at the Human, ‘Yoongi.’

Yoongi nods, clearly not understanding. He repeats the actions back to Jimin, clearly hoping it was what Jimin wanted to hear from him. It was so similar to the way Yoongi had tried to communicate with him back in Megibīya that it makes Jimin smile. Yoongi smiles too, and though it’s not the same as before, it still warms Jimin’s heart.
He takes Yoongi’s hands in his, wondering, not for the first time, where he got all of the scars and lesions from. So instead of asking a question Yoongi wouldn’t understand, he kisses the Human’s hands. Yoongi is extremely confused but doesn’t pull away.

‘The last time I saw you, you had a star-shaped clip on your hair,’ Jimin smiles, touching his hair gently. The colour was different. Yoongi’s hair had been brown, but now it was close to black. ‘The last time I saw you, the sky was red, and we were both so exhausted.’

Yoongi is listening intently.

‘And you kissed me. Do you remember that?’ Jimin asks.

Yoongi only blinks in response.

‘The first time I saw you, you were so shocked to see me,’ Jimin smiles as he continues forward. ‘You were so spooked- you actually nearly threw the device in your hands. But you acted like you weren’t. You were the first one to introduce yourself. You told me all about your planet, even though I didn’t understand. Have you gone back? I want to see it now that I’m here. Do you think it’s possible?’

Yoongi doesn’t reply but it was all right. This felt exactly like how it was back in Megibīya. When they exchanged stories without understanding each other.

‘Then you tried to insist that I was shorter than you- but we were exactly the same height. Just like now. Would you insist on being the same height now?’ Jimin laughs and Yoongi smiles. ‘You and Amic were so funny. I know that Amad’la kept a stern face, but she found the two of you really funny you know? She would sometimes repeat your words and laugh to herself.’

Jemin lifts Yoongi’s hand in his and places it on the side of face and slowly lets go.

‘What does sunshine mean?’

Yoongi is silent, his eyes moving back and forth from his hand back to his eyes.

‘Sunshine?’ Jimin tries again.

Yoongi blinks slowly, a small furrow forming between his brows. He lowers his hand and says, ‘Sunshine?’

Jemin didn’t think it would be possible to feel the way he did hearing him say that again. So instead he nods and points at Yoongi and says, ‘Yoongi,’ and then back at himself and says, ‘Sunshine.’

Yoongi blinks a little at that, as though processing the words. Then he too points at himself, ‘Yoongi’, and then back at Jimin.

‘Sunshine.’

Jemin nods fervently.

Yoongi slowly nods back.

They just stare at each other for a while before Yoongi mimes eating, pointing back out of the door.

Jemin nods in response and also gets up as Yoongi stands up. Yoongi steps out first, looking back as though to make sure Jimin was following him out. Jimin just smiles, making a show to explain
he was going to wear a sweater. Yoongi nods and as though he thought of it last minute, adds a smile.

Jimin slowly wears the sweater, pulling at the sleeves until it fully covered his arms. He peeks out of the door quietly, watching Yoongi awkwardly hover near the dining table, clearly waiting for Jimin. Sk’jin is at the Kitchen, talking loudly while Hoseok was just leaving, heading for the stairs with a tray of drinks in his hands. Taeh’yung spots him at once and waves at him to hurry.

Yoongi looks up and their eyes meet. Jimin feels safe.

‘Thank you for coming back.’
MERRY CHRISTMAS YA HEATHENS

Predictably
I listened to Serendipity while writing this chapter.
I have this entire story preplanned and chronicled in my mind. And so this chapter has been stewing in my mind for a solid year already. So when this mv came out, and the lyrics, and the video and the songs, and the way Jimin looks and everything I just wanted to fucking cry.
The System of Menigišiti is based off of TRAPPIST-1, an actual solar system located 39.6 lights years away from us AND GUYS IT’S LIKE THE CLOSEST THING TO ANOTHER EARTH-LIKE SOLAR SYSTEM IT’S AMAZING PLEASE READ ABOUT IT WHEN YOU CAN.
I WAS SO EXCITED WHEN I READ THE NEWS ABOUT THIS SOLAR SYSTEM AND IMMEDIATELY DECIDED TO BASE MENIGISITI OFF OF TRAPPIST-1 So of course, like I mentioned, the science in this is kinda…made up. but it is based off of actual scientific facts! For example, you could potentially harvest magnetic energy and use it to generate magnetic fields. Of course, containing that energy in a malleable way and being able to control it is an entirely different story ofc. And ofc as we all know, blocking radio signals or frequencies can cause “blindness” – if an area exists where you cannot send any form of radio signal, it is basically invisible. And I thought the idea that the orbital resonance between planets should be cause enough to create some form of barrier that could deflect frequencies outside of their own direct orbit.
I hope this chapter wasn’t too terrible a thing to read during Christmas.
But then again, if you’re reading this during Christmas…and I was writing it during that time as well…I guess it makes us all kinda…yeah…Well we’re all in it together.
*shrugs*
All things created in nature have an opposing side.

The opposite of life is death.

The opposite of love is hate.

The opposite of creation is destruction.

The opposite of chaos is peace.

The opposite of light is darkness.

And the opposite of the Known Universe is the Underverse.

The GLA Known Universe was the entirety of galaxies and Systems that signed the GLA Treaty on Trade and Peace. And the flipside of this was the messy, chaotic, and often violent Underverse. Beneath the smooth sailing, peaceful reign of the GLA and its associate organizations, existed this expansive and intricate universe. The Underverse consisted of pirates, crime organizations, and mercenaries to name a few. And Hoseok has walked and lived the Underverse more than he has the Known Universe. He knew of the way it worked, the way it shifted, and the way it wasn’t really *under* the GLA, but rather, closely veined around it. The Underverse has always been a part of the Known Universe- this was a known fact in the Venture Unit as most of their dealings revolved around it. Hoseok always knew it was much more than just the “pirates and bad Beings that have to be arrested and locked up” propaganda that was being fed to the general public.

The same way everything created in nature had an opposing side, these sides balanced each other—meeting at a careful and often fragile moot. And whatever was maintaining this fragile balance between the Known Universe and the Underverse was falling apart. And it most probably had to do with what happened in Pompa. Or more accurately, what was still happening in Pompa.

After the *Broadcast* (as it was dubbed in the Underverse) had aired, it took nearly 5 hours to shut it down because that was just how good Namjoon was. This gave the rest of the Known Universe and the Underverse plenty of time to duplicate and record the original Broadcast and send it out into even further broader channels. While the GLA had done an almost decent job of covering up the entire thing and saving their own skin by masking their involvement as an attempt to go undercover, the truth was most definitely not lost in the Underverse.

Pompa was immediately removed from the GLA treaty, with heavy declarations of punishment and repeal set over their government and politicians. Many Pompens tried to escape but were caught. According to a few news sources, an entirely new prison was going to be built for this case alone. So now every organization involved with the Pompen Arena, as well as the Pageant, instantly liquidized and disappeared.
Hoseok, and Namjoon, had done some deep-dive hacking into some of the bigger channels in the Underverse and found out that not only had the Arena business in the Underverse had been greatly affected, but the chain of organizations that distributed medication through the Underverse to non-GLA systems and planets had been greatly compromised.

Knowing what he knew, Hoseok still felt that the Venture Unit did more good than harm. While they did take their profits and funds from war-torn systems and planets and through bribery and blackmail, they used those very same channels to send medical aid, escape ships, and smuggling channels through which victimized species could escape.

While the fact that the Venture Unit was very much involved with the Alliance was now too obvious a truth and one that couldn’t be ignored, Hoseok wants to believe that the other spectrum of good the Venture Unit was doing somehow balanced that. Hoseok tries to ignore the gnawing guilt building in him as he reads about how an entire system was now out of contact due to the termination of a pirate-network that had been involved with the Pageant. The System in question was a non-GLA System and suffering from great radiation spikes from their unstable sun. Hoseok switches off the screen, sighing out slowly.

‘Hoseok- I’ve just updated the complete trajectory.’

‘Cross-reference?’

‘Yeap.’

Hoseok sits up, his knees popping from having sat too long as he calls into the comm. ‘Could everyone come up to the Bridge?’

‘Coming up!’ Taeh’yung cheerily replies.

‘Yoongi?’ Hoseok leans over the cockpit and into the tower-mast to find Jimin looking up at him, smile on his face as he greets him with a wave. Yoongi, seated on the side, was explaining the functions of the weapons to Jimin, or at least somewhat attempting to do so.

Yoongi had been able to leave the Medical Bay earlier that day, and had made his way straight to the shower, then to the Kitchen to eat, and then straight to the tower-mast. Jimin had in turn, followed him nearly everywhere.

Jimin spoke quite a lot to the rest of them, despite the language barrier. He spoke most to Taeh’yung of course, the latter trailing after Jimin like a large cheerful shadow. However, whenever he was around Yoongi, he barely spoke. It was as though he was waiting for Yoongi to speak. To start something or initiate something. Jimin also seemed very alert on Yoongi’s health – he’d been given his own screen and it was constantly open on Yoongi’s health tab. Hoseok himself had gone over it a few times, wondering if he missed something with the way Jimin would stare at the reading. But there was nothing wrong. Yoongi’s health was improving quickly and everything was repairing itself at an exceptional and healthy rate.

Jimin also kept touching Yoongi. But it wasn’t out of some strange leery intention- rather it was similar to the way Jimin held his hand. As though he could see everything in your mind. Like he was looking straight into your soul, and through your memories.

It was also always incredibly quiet whenever the two sat together. But it didn’t feel strained or uncomfortable- it was almost as though they were simply waiting. And Hoseok isn’t sure what they’re waiting for. He’s not sure if *they* knew what they were waiting for either.
Hoseok gestures for him to come up, pointing behind him. Jimin nods in understanding and gets up while Yoongi does the same, falling behind Jimin by just a step.

Watching their interaction is interesting. While Yoongi knew nothing and had no memory of this Being, and this was made apparent by his obvious confusion, his mannerism spoke differently. His body language was entirely different. He didn’t flinch or move away from Jimin’s contact unlike how he would shift away from the rest of the team. He mirrored Jimin’s movements, as though constantly protecting him and shielding him. It seemed like a natural reaction— one honed into the Human without prior knowledge or conscious effort. As though Jimin’s presence was an expected one, one that occupied his awareness.

‘I’m here!’ Taeh’yung announces as he quite literally flounces in, borrowed robes fluttering. But he pauses dramatically, causing Namjoon, who was behind him, to walk straight into the Zhak’gri. ‘Wait- I have to do that again. It wasn’t right.’

Then walking back out of the Bridge he flounces in again, the flimsier material of the robes falling as though in slow-motion. It’s very elegant, Hoseok will admit—but entirely unnecessary. The Zhak’gri grins with satisfaction.

‘Taeh’yung, I know I said you could borrow my clothes until you get new ones, but can you not borrow my best ones?’ Sk’jin comments wryly as he too enters the Bridge.

‘I wanted to show Jimin!’ Taeh’yung explains as he latches onto Jimin who smiles brightly at the Zhak’gri, saying something in his language. Taeh’yung enthusiastically displays the fabric and holds it up for Jimin to touch. Jimin smiles indulgently as he says something—probably a question. He takes the fabric between his fingers and exclaims out as though impressed. He turns and waves at Yoongi to touch the fabric as well. The Human blinks for a moment and a second too late he steps forward and stiffly feels at the fabric. Sk’jin doesn’t even bother suppressing his laughter.

‘It’s very nice,’ Yoongi says. ‘It’s softer than it seems.’

Hoseok catches Sk’jin’s eye who gives him a pointed look.

It was somehow even more obvious now, without Yoongi being stuck in the Medical Bay. How whenever Yoongi spoke, there was something altered; something subtly changed within the Human. It seemed to happen more when Jimin was close by.

‘Fabric aside, if everyone could gather closer,’ Namjoon calls over to the three. ‘This is important—especially for Jimin.’

Upon hearing his name Jimin looks up, his countenance serious and ready.

They gather around the Navigation Table and Namjoon gives Hoseok a nod.

‘All right so,’ Hoseok draws everyone’s attention towards the center of the Navigation Table. ‘Here is our trajectory.’

Tapping along the NaviLet in his hands, a sizeable holographic map highlighted with bright coloured lines and dots appear. Taeh’yung leans down from behind Jimin, whispering low near his ear, providing translations. Hoseok is a little surprised by how Taeh’yung seemed so professional. Given his impulsive character and rather scatter-brained personality, Hoseok thought he might have to keep reminding the Zhak’gri about translating for Jimin.

Just like everybody else on the ship, Taeh’yung had a lot of facets and sides to him. And all of them were unpredictable.
‘That’s…really messy,’ Sk’jin comments as he leans against the side of the Mast.

‘That’s because it’s supposed to be messy,’ Namjoon says as he reaches into the map and touches the pale-blue line. ‘This is our main trajectory.’

The others fade a little, just thin and faint lines and the blue shines brighter.

‘Following this trajectory, we will arrive in Bhumi in 6 GLA months at most. This is the safest route we could come up with, taking into account our criminal records, GLA activity, and political status of each Dock, Planet, System, and Galaxy.’ Hoseok begins to explain.

It had been incredibly difficult coming up with a path- they had to think at least 10 steps ahead. The Special Jury would most likely set up another specialized team up against them to track them. A team consisting of agents, Information Analysts, agents and pirates from the Underverse, and highly trained GLA officers. They would probably have a similar trajectory like this, as they attempted to plot out their true path to Bhumi.

‘However, we have also created 4 other pathways to Bhumi- all of which can be immediately switched to at any given point and time,’ Hoseok explains as 5 other different coloured lines crisscross over the main blue one and merge into one singular blue over the rest of the colours. ‘The other pathways-’ he taps on the pale orange mesh of lines that expand all over the map and out of sight. ‘-are false networks. These are the ones we will trigger, either through GLA Docks, outposts, anything that has a broadcasting frequency directly connected to the GLA or the GIU.’

‘How do we do that?’ Sk’jin asks, head turning in question at Namjoon.

‘We create false records; first by imitating the Hub used by the ship or station we’re going to hack, and then writing up the report or account- in some cases video footage or even photographs, and send the information out through the local GLA channel.’ Hoseok explains at once. ‘This will create a frenzy of sightings- most of which will just be baseless spam that’s copying itself all over the network – this will give us time as well as cause any Analysts a massive headache.’

‘I hated it when agents did it,’ Namjoon mumbles under his breath before speaking up; ‘Which is why we’re going to double the spam- send double reports that duplicate and spread all over- some might even crash some Hubs- which is even better because that way their back-up systems will be effected as well.’

‘Nice,’ Sk’jin smiles in approval. ‘So where do we first access all these hubs? We need to get a good Dock or Port- one that we know spreads all over.’

Hoseok nods to that and reaches over to tap on one side of the blue lines.

‘We go here first,’ Hoseok taps on it, making it glow white momentarily.

‘Nuqtai- it’s a planet bordering the Ymir Solar System,’ Namjoon begins.

‘Nuqtai?’ Yoongi repeats unexpectedly.

‘Ymir?’ Sk’jin echoes, a frown replacing his smile.

‘Yeah? Please tell me you two don’t have a record there,’ Namjoon pleads.

‘No.’ Sk’jin and Yoongi both reply.

‘…but you’ve been there?’ Hoseok and Namjoon ask at the same time.
'Yes. Several times.' Sk'jin and Yoongi reply again at the same time.

Jimin lets out a nervous laugh, eyes flitting around at all of them as he subtly elbows Taeh’yung who is watching them with a slightly dazed expression.

‘For what?’ Namjoon asks and Hoseok is already regretting the answer because it’s: ‘Assassination,’ and ‘Dying,’ from Yoongi and Sk’jin respectively.

There’s a sticky silence before Hoseok hesitantly addresses the Khol’isa.

‘Dying?’

‘It’s where my ship crashed- like, a little outside- in between these two,’ Sk’jin waves casually between a stretch of space to the side of Ymir. ‘An itsy-bitsy creation gone wrong.’

Namjoon gives Sk’jin a curious look at that, and Hoseok can already tell that his mind is working a mile a second.

‘…this might sound redundant but would you have any history of being documented there?’ Hoseok asks.

‘Nopes! We just vanished- it’s dead space there. No one cared,’ Sk’jin shrugs easily.

‘And uh- Yoongi-?’

‘There were no eye-witnesses.’ Is his unfortunately chilling but reassuring response. Hoseok pushes on.

‘Nuqtai is not the best place, I can confirm that. However, it’s also where we can get the best information not available on the channels. We can also start circulating rumors from there regarding our location.’ Hoseok explains. ‘The planet is a giant hub for information and news- as well as an excellent place to start circulating rumors.’

‘Won’t it have too many actual eye-witnesses?’ Sk’jin asks, as he reads up the summary of the planet on the side of the map. ‘It looks like a trove.’

‘Trove?’ Taeh’yung repeats, pausing in his interpretation.

‘It’s a term used in the Underverse,’ Hoseok explains. ‘A grey-zone, where all sides of the party come to gather information, buy or sell it- unsafe, dangerous.’

Taeh’yung nods in understanding, providing Jimin with an extraordinarily short sentence in explanation. Jimin’s eyes widen comically.

‘Is it a trove?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘No- the GLA don’t step foot in here- it’s Venture Unit agents mainly but only when we have to. It’s Underverse property through and through.’ Hoseok replies and adds, ‘And I know that doesn’t exactly bring about the greatest comfort but given the chaos in the GLA as well as the Underverse- we have an advantageous cover and we can move about unnoticed.’

‘You’re sure?’ Sk’jin asks, eyes darting between Hoseok and Namjoon.

‘Absolutely,’ Hoseok and Namjoon reply at once.

‘When do we get there?’ Sk’jin asks.
‘1 week,’ Hoseok replies, tapping on the NaviLet and a small bright yellow light pops up, following one of the blue lines in the map. ‘We’re here now. We’ll need to leave warp before entering Ymir- it’s a no-warp zone.’

‘Will that be a problem?’ Sk’jin asks sharply.

‘No- Nuqtai is too far from patrols and this border here is void of asteroids, moons, or planets- not to mention Ymir is extremely large and quite uninhabited. The GLA don’t have a lot of branches here- neither do the GIU or the Venture Unit.’ Hoseok explains.

‘Why didn’t we even consider Nuqtai before?’ Yoongi asks unexpectedly. ‘If the planet is ideal to make a stop.’

‘Because it takes us out of our path,’ Namjoon replies, showing a somewhat compressed but still daunting view of how much they would be going off course just to go to Bhumi. ‘It wastes a lot of time, fuel, and units. But it’s also ideal in keeping the GLA off of our tracks.’

‘Everything we do is going to be risky- there’s no doubt about it,’ Hoseok states bluntly. ‘No matter how safe and secure we plot our trajectory, and how much we try and minimize probability and risk, we’re always in danger of being found or noticed. Which is why we’re making sure that our messy false trajectory is good enough to cover for us for long periods of time.’

Sk’jin nods slowly at that while Yoongi doesn’t move. Taeh’yung finishes translating and Jimin also nods, a small smile on his lips.

‘What about Docks though- we still need to register our ship, as well as submit logs,’ Sk’jin asks before nodding at Jimin, ‘And little tiny here is as illegal as it gets.’

‘We need to make an identity for Jimin first,’ Namjoon says as he taps along his screen. ‘I took the liberty of using a Hub from Ch’dra and made us all new identities- as well as for the ship. So our pass-codes have changed- don’t worry, we’re still at Trade B level.’

Hoseok nods in thanks.

‘Seeing as Jimin’s DNA and biochemistry is closest to Taeh’yung’s, and Taeh’yung has been frequently registered as being from Tayi, I’ve created a fake Tayian ID for Jimin. His fake position in the crew is medic,’ Namjoon smiles briefly at Jimin who smiles back a bit confused before Taeh’yung explains. He makes a sound of understanding and nods in understanding.

‘What am I then pa?’ Taeh’yung asks eagerly.

‘Uh- you’re our…’ Namjoon glances down at his screen, subtly making some edit. ‘Engineer.’

Taeh’yung looks extremely pleased and jabbers away at Jimin who looks impressed, patting Taeh’yung on the back.

‘So- that’s our trajectory and plan,’ Hoseok concludes. ‘Any questions?’

‘Where are we headed after Nuqtai?’ Sk’jin asks at once.

‘Grisial,’ Hoseok replies at once.

‘Grisial?’ Namjoon looks impressed. ‘That would make tracking us difficult.’

‘What’s in Grisial?’ Sk’jin asks.
‘It’s actually the Grisial System- but there’s only one planet, one sun,’ Hoseok explains. ‘The planet itself is uninhabitable- but there are mining companies around the rings- they mine crystals here.’

He taps on the planet, expanding it above the rest of the map. It’s a large planet with a wide sparkling ring around it.

‘If you like, put a ring on it.’ Yoongi chimes in unexpectedly.

Sk’jin lets out a loud laugh, head tossed back while Namjoon is stuck between laughing and also looking confused. Taeh’yung, who unnecessarily translates this, is also laughing and is shortly followed by Jimin’s own burst of laughter. He laughs so hard, his entire body tilts forward before bending all the way back, clapping in a delighted way. Yoongi himself looks surprised at himself- as though unsure how and why he said it in the first place.

‘Uhh- so yeah,’ Hoseok snorts before continuing, ‘The planet has a very unique and wide magnetism – the entire System does actually. And while it doesn’t mess with any issues inside ships or Transporters, it does make the area difficult to scan. It’s a nice wide stretch of space and we should be quite safe while warping through here in case we need to escape if things in Nuqtaï don’t go well.’

‘That’s nice to know,’ Sk’jin snorts, finally calming down after Yoongi’s joke.

‘Any questions? Jimin?’ Namjoon regards the Prince with an expectant look.

Jimin shakes his head after Taeh’yung repeats the question.

‘He says thank you,’ Taeh’yung translates, ‘And wants to know if there’s anything he can do to help.’

‘If there is anything we need to know or understand- we’ll ask-‘ Namjoon is beginning to say but Yoongi suddenly interrupts by raising his hand. It’s only a little stiff and awkward as everyone looks at Yoongi, waiting a second too long before the Human speaks.

‘This is not related to the mission or the map,’ he states bluntly.

‘…okay?’ Sk’jin leans closer as though increasingly interested.

‘The OrTank Jimin was placed inside was the same as the OrTanks found in the Akramanese ship. And is the same the GI agents were stored in before they are born.’ Yoongi states. Everyone nods in reply. ‘But there is a difference- because Jimin doesn’t have the scar on his back.’

‘Scar?’ Namjoon repeats. ‘What sort of scar?’

‘I have it- but I don’t know why,’ Yoongi explains.

Jimin shakes his head as Taeh’yung continues to translate. And before anyone can even say anything, Yoongi stands up and pulls off his shirt. Sk’jin makes a rather amused expression while Namjoon covers his eyes instinctively out of panic. But everyone is soon preoccupied by the intensity of scars and permanent discolouration over Yoongi’s skin. He looks like a patchwork of different skin- abrasions protrude outwards, scars layer over each other, and broken patches of capillaries and tissue create deep purple bruises in random burst of painful spots. But what’s most bizarre is the dent on Yoongi’s back.

Hoseok likens it to a dent you can find on your skin after having something pressed against it for a
long time. Like if you sat on the folds of your trousers for too long, you could see the print of the fold on your skin. Except Yoongi’s is permanent. And Hoseok can’t come up with an explanation regarding its function or creation. He’s pretty sure no Human was born with this characteristic. Mainly because it didn’t look natural at all.

Taeh’yung says something to Jimin who slowly shakes his head, eyeing the dent on Yoongi’s back with shock and confusion. He tentatively reaches under his shirt, as though to feel at his back.

‘The others had it too. I don’t know why Jimin doesn’t have it.’ Yoongi says.

‘Does it hurt?’ Namjoon asks, having lowered his hands and was now studying the dent on Yoongi’s back.

‘No,’ Yoongi replies before putting his shirt back on. ‘I’ve seen fetuses in the OrTank, and they have wires connected to their backs. It comes off after they fully grown- suspended the way Jimin was. But he has no dent on his back.’

‘It could be a life-support thing?’ Hoseok ruminates. ‘And as far as we can tell- that fluid was neither liquid or gas- it just kept them in a state of sleep right?’

‘Jimin- you said that Yoongi died during your time- but did you see his body?’ Namjoon asks sharply. Sk’jin’s eyes narrow as he regards Namjoon for a moment before glancing over at Jimin. Jimin stiffens, lips pressed down against each other tightly before he says something in short words.

‘No- he was taken away,’ Taeh’yung translates. ‘There was no body- many of them were taken and were never seen again.’

Namjoon mulls over this, his expression serious.

‘Any other questions?’ Hoseok asks.

‘Can I buy new clothes in Nuqta?’ Taeh’yung asks eagerly.

‘No- only Hoseok is leaving the ship,’ Namjoon replies at once. ‘Everyone else stays inside. We can get you new clothes after Grisial.’

Taeh’yung pouts- honest to goodness pouts, making sad eyes at Namjoon who tries not to fidget.

‘I’ll see if I can get something for you Tae,’ Hoseok says only to suddenly get an armful of the Zhak’gri as he squeals out delightfully and hugs him.

‘Anything else?’ Hoseok asks with some difficulty.

‘Sk’jin can I talk to you for a moment- in private,’ Namjoon asks out of nowhere, making everyone in the Mast look back at the Kutsoglerin.

Sk’jin narrows his eyes a little before giving him a small nod. They walk out of the Bridge, leaving everyone behind in some form of awkward silence. Until-

‘Hobi, here’s a list of what I want!’
Sk’jin follows Namjoon out to the landing by the stairs before entering the Bridge. He can already guess what Namjoon’s purpose is and he’s more than ready.

So before Namjoon can even say anything Sk’jin speaks up: ‘If I think you’re about to suggest what I think you’re going to suggesting- that’s a dumb idea, and it’s under the supervision of the GIU.’

Undeterred Namjoon speaks, ‘We won’t be that far away-’

‘We will be. We’ll be at least 2 entire Systems away even at Nuqta,’ Sk’jin retorts.

Namjoon’s lips press into a thin line.

‘The planet you crashed into all those years ago had the same inability to be mapped or scanned-similar to Bhumi. Not to mention the strange occurrences in that planet relating to the Venture Unit’s attempt in creating other dimensions- what if it’s all connected?’ Namjoon demands. ‘You cannot just hide planets, let alone entire Systems; this planet in dead space, and the Bhumi System are connected.’

Sk’jin knows they’re connected because the first time he heard of Bhumi, that correlation was the first thing he thought of. But Sk’jin puts his metaphoric foot down.

‘There is also no evidence that suggests there is any similarity to-’

‘Yes there is- and you know it-’ Namjoon presses.

Sk’jin grits his teeth down, visions flashing before his eyes.

‘I am not going back there are you out of your mind? Would you go back to your planet?’ Sk’jin demands.

Namjoon’s expression darkens.

‘I can’t go back because there’s nothing to go back to,’ Namjoon states bluntly.

Sk’jin takes a deep breath, trying to pacify himself.

‘Is it currently under GIU supervision?’ Namjoon asks, gnawing at his lip.

‘Yes it is.’ Sk’jin replies at once. ‘And every form of evidence found in that planet has been contained and sealed, stored away in the GIU mothership. What’s left is simply the planet itself. And I do not think our trajectory has added this planet to its calculations. We cannot deter, Namjoon.’

‘This isn’t about ignoring the mission- you know our mission covers more than just delivering Jimin to Bhumi- there are other connections here-’

‘I don’t remember signing up for some vigilante bullshit,’ Sk’jin snaps back. ‘What happened before with the slaver ship, and then with Pompa- those were great mistakes we made, with repercussions we are barely capable of handling, and most certainly don’t need to add to. I don’t
know what you’re thinking- maybe that what we did was some bull-shit hero-like thing- but it’s not- we fucked up big time and now we’re trying to hide from that fuck-up shit. So let’s not add to it. Got it?’

‘You told me you wanted to understand what else was happening- what other things the GLA were doing that-’ Namjoon ploughs on, ignoring Sk’jin’s statement.

‘Yes- that is what I said,’ Sk’jin snaps, remembering their discussion in Ch’dra. ‘But like I told you before that was before we triggered all of this into action.’

Namjoon grimaces at him. And honestly Sk’jin knows what Namjoon is saying. If they were in a different situation, where the entire Known Universe forces wasn’t looking for them, then yeah, Sk’jin would like to study these similarities in order to gain better understanding of what happened in that fucked up planet, and to prepare for what they might face in Bhumi. But they couldn’t simply do that on such a small whim. And one look at Namjoon tells him that the Kutsoglerin wasn’t just going to let this go.

‘Hoseok!’ they both call out at the same time.

Hoseok appears in a few seconds, expression confused and a little wary.

‘What?’

‘Namjoon has a crack-pot idea and I have a sound reasoning to bury it. Wanna hear?’

Namjoon glares at him before clearing his throat, drawing Hoseok’s attention.

‘Bhumi is not the only planet or system that has the ability to remain undetected and hidden,’ Namjoon says. ‘There is another planet that was hidden as a result of what we suspect-’

‘-there is no we here-’

‘-to be a result of early Venture Unit and GLA experiments regarding the Hyper-Reality Expansion Program that was shut down over a millennia ago,’ Namjoon explains.

‘You’re saying that there’s a connection?’

‘Yes- Jimin said that his System was hidden. But it’s not. At least not fully. It’s a System that was discovered and studied for near centuries- and even then it was still a mystery because you couldn’t ever scan or observe it without losing it in front of your very eyes. And based on what Jimin has said – they have tech that allows them to do this.’ Namjoon states. ‘And I think this connects to Jimin- at least based on what he’s explained. The Akramanese were only ever known of after that incident in Bhumi- and the Treaty Panel had been visiting them for years before that-based on what Lmiura said, and the fact that despite being hidden, the GLA was still able to make some scan of their System, they were able to somehow either overtake their tech or mimic it.’ Namjoon explains. ‘Their technology is something we have never experienced- and the way Jimin handles our tech-’

‘-is with too much ease,’ Hoseok agrees. ‘He clearly comes from a place with advanced technology- probably even more advanced than us.’

‘-what if the GLA stole their tech, and using that created whatever messed up that other planet?’ Namjoon concludes.

‘And while that is a good point,’ Sk’jin butts in. ‘We do not have the security or time to do
something like this. The planet I was on is in dead space, under heavy protection of the GIU- and need I remind you that K’mara leads the GIU?’

‘But this can explain so much-‘

‘Why not just ask Jimin?’ Hoseok offers.

‘What?’ Sk’jin and Namjoon echo at the same time. Sk’jin grimaces inwardly- they all had to stop doing that twinning thing.

Hoseok pauses a moment before calling, ‘Could everyone come up to the Bridge?’

* *

‘We never left!’ Taeh’yung exclaims when they walk back in.

They’re still at the Mast, and Yoongi and Jimin are attempting to have a conversation. He’s doing that thing again, where Jimin will point at himself and then back at Yoongi, waiting.

‘I think he’s expecting something- some statement or word?’ Sk’jin offers offhandedly as they step up on the Mast. ‘He keeps repeating your name and his name- he clearly wants you to remember something.’

Yoongi is obviously thinking hard, his mind practically whirring.

Jemin is leaning forward, expression expectant as Yoongi opens his mouth.

‘Your majesty?’ Yoongi sounds unsure. Sk’jin nearly chokes.

Jemin is confused for a total of 10 seconds while Taeh’yung translates. He then turns bright red, waving his hands frantically at Yoongi, stuttering rapidly.

‘He doesn’t want to be called that,’ Taeh’yung explains, translating Jimin’s embarrassed stammers.

‘Yoongi’s failing memory aside,’ Sk’jin calls out dryly, amused by the look Yoongi sends his direction, ‘Cap here has something he wants to ask Jimin about.’

Sk’jin is very amused by the look Namjoon sends his direction before he starts to speak: ‘There’s an uninhabited planet in the dead space that borders Sluchaen and Cabcd. It was previously undetectable and was the cause of strange magnetic waves that were credited to the massive disappearances of ships and Transporters alike. It was later discovered that an extremely old Venture Unit ship had first crashed into this planet carrying the remains of an experiment gone wrong in the Hyper-Reality Expansion Program.’

Taeh’yung translates before stopping abruptly.

‘There’s no word for Hyper-Reality in his language,’ he explains.

‘…uh… I guess, dreams?’ Namjoon provides.

Taeh’yung looks skeptical but he continues. Jimin listens closely, not speaking a single word as he nods.
‘I believe that this tech might come from your system.’

They wait in silence as Taeh’yung translates. Jimin’s expression remains the same, not a single hint or indication of what he was feeling.

Then he begins to speak, Taeh’yung nods along a few times. Jimin speaks for nearly over a minute, hands waving a little. Taeh’yung asks one question before he nods and then the Zhak’gri faces them and says, ‘He doesn’t know!’

Namjoon blinks a few times.

‘He spoke for nearly over a minute- and that’s all he said?’ Hoseok asks with a frown.

‘Yeah- there was some long thing about how he’s not really supposed to talk about how they hide their System- but he did say he really doesn’t know if what they use for their planet is the same as whatever planet you’re talking about,’ Taeh’yung expands.

But before anyone can say anything else Jimin asks Taeh’yung a question, a curious expression on his face.

‘He wants to know what you mean by the “dream space”.’

‘It was an experiment,’ Namjoon explains. ‘The Venture Unit wanted to create an alternative reality- a secondary dimension that was all inside your head- but it connected your mind to everyone else’s- a link, and it would be controllable by one Being. It was one of their attempts in taking over the Universe. The program was shut down and the ship carrying that technology and experiment went missing. We found out 4 sols ago that it had crashed in that planet I mentioned earlier.’

Taeh’yung translates this. It takes a while because Taeh’yung seems to be struggling with some of the words, thinking hard. Sk’jin doesn’t know why but he feels like this was leading to something he would prefer not to know. One glance at Namjoon tells him that the Kutsoglerin is about 2 seconds from bursting with anticipation. Yoongi is looking down, and Sk’jin notices how Jimin is still holding onto his hand. It makes Sk’jin stop his other thoughts and concentrate on their hands.

Jimin had that thing that he did. Touching them carefully, hands framing their cheeks, or touching their hands. Always skin on skin. Like he was reading into their minds, or sensing something. It wasn’t the same as with Yishengs- because Sk’jin couldn’t feel anything in his Life-stream. It was just a touch.

To connect.

‘Sounds very cruel and inhumane,’ Taeh’yung finishes translating for Jimin who looks very serious.

‘Jimin. Can you read minds?’ Sk’jin asks bluntly. He ignores the bewildered expression he gets from Hoseok and Namjoon. Yoongi actually looks around at Jimin as though anticipating an answer.

‘He can see memories- dreams, nightmares-,’ Taeh’yung explains after Jimin replies. ‘He can’t read minds. It’s not something he can do all the time.’

A strange shudder runs down Sk’jin’s back at that. He glances at Jimin who is slowly explaining something to Taeh’yung while the latter translated. ‘It’s not an ability he has non-stop- like it’s not uh…it can be stopped- and it’s only possible if the other person is willing. Or when Jimin is in…a trance? It needs to be done on purpose- with purpose and the correct intention.’
Jimin nods as Taeh’yung repeats a few words.

‘He requires touch right? With his hands?’ Sk’jin asks carefully. ‘So that if we just nudged arms, he wouldn’t just see my dreams or shit.’

Taeh’yung repeats Sk’jin’s question and Jimin nods in reply, adding a few words as though to placate. But Sk’jin doesn’t bother listening and instead catches Namjoon’s eyes who is already looking at him.

‘I’m tired,’ Taeh’yung is whining. ‘I think I want to sleep-’

‘Namjoon can I talk to you for a moment- in private.’

*%

Namjoon finds himself in the same place, the same stairwell, as Sk’jin faces him, same posture, same facial expression. They wait as Taeh’yung skips down the stairs with Jimin next to him. The latter gives them a curious look before waving goodnight. Yoongi slips past as well, following after the two down the stairs. They wait 10 more seconds before Sk’jin begins.

‘Remember when I said that I thought what you were suggesting was a dumb idea, and that it was under the supervision of the GIU?’

Namjoon nods.

‘Right. I lied. Everything is still present in the planet, and though the GIU are still running supervision over it, they’re been stopped to only observe the planet and have been banned from entering under orders of the GLA Judiciary.’

Namjoon finds himself literally praying for patience.

‘You lied-’

‘You’re always ignoring the more important facts for mundane gibberish,’ Sk’jin waves his hand dismissively.

‘The “important fact” you’re talking about was hidden because of your lie!’ Namjoon hisses out, ‘It’s not mundane gibberish- Sk’jin, I thought we agreed not to keep back information we know will be relevant to what we’re doing!’

‘And it wasn’t relevant! It still isn’t!’ Sk’jin snaps back. ‘Our mission is to take tiny-princeling back to his System- not take detours to heavily guarded risky planets in dead space!’

‘Then why are you saying you want to do it now?!’

‘Because I want to know if the GLA took his technology and manipulated it to create whatever the fuck nightmare I lived for centuries!’ Sk’jin snaps. ‘I’m being honest here- I selfishly want to know- to see if the hell I lived through was in fact created because of pip-squeak’s tech. And yeah-maybe we might somehow figure out something useful that will help us- which I still doubt by the way- but I’m willing to take that risk.’
‘You’re hiding something here again,’ Namjoon huffs out. ‘I already told you about the tech part-you weren’t convinced. What else are you thinking about? You asked him very specific questions and I’m ready to do the same unless you tell me what your real agenda is.’

‘Oh wow I’m shaking in my shoes,’ Sk’jin rolls his eyes. ‘Fine- remember when we had that really nice bonding moment in Ch’dra, and I told you about the First Nightmare,’ Sk’jin winks at Namjoon who grimaces but nods in remembrance of that information. ‘It saw me. And I saw it. But it could never touch me.’

‘Touch you?’ Namjoon remembers what Sk’jin told him with startling clarity. He sometimes mulls over it, and he shudders at the idea of it.

‘The First Nightmare had the ability to duplicate itself- replicate itself into another form-pretending to be someone else. It would take their memories, dreams, nightmares, - consume them. All it needed was a touch. It needed to touch its victims and they would get caught. It would be able to see into their minds. Does this sound familiar to you?’

Namjoon pauses. Because yes it did sound familiar.

‘But that’s a long stretch-’

‘So was your tech-talk.’

Sk’jin was brutally honest, that was one thing. He was also clearly a liar. Namjoon doesn’t know what to do. While the entire story about how whatever the thing- First Nightmare - Sk’jin encountered in that planet had to touch its victims to “read”/”consume” them was similar to the way Jimin had to touch someone in order to gain access to their thoughts- it was still rather sketchy in Namjoon’s opinion. But then again, so was his theory about the planet and Bhumi.

They’re at a stalemate once again.

Sk’jin raises one eyebrow and at the same time they both call out, ‘Hoseok!’

Hoseok has his arms crossed, expression unimpressed, as he listens to Sk’jin.

‘So you’re saying now that you agree with Namjoon’s plan. And that you want to go to this dead space planet- that’s guarded by the GIU, because by chance, Jimin might be able to explain what happened to the planet, also explain the reason why the planet couldn’t be seen, as well as demonstrate his abilities, explain the possible connection he has with the “experiment” that was in that planet, and what happened to your ship?’ Hoseok summarizes.

‘Yes.’ Sk’jin and Namjoon both reply.

Hoseok pauses a moment before calling, ‘Could everyone come up to the Bridge?’
They’re gathered around the Navigation Mast again, Hoseok literally facepalming where he stood.

Taeh’yung is half-asleep, slumped over Jimin who is holding onto Yoongi’s hand again, eyes darting around the room at all of their faces.

‘After we go to Nuqtai- we’re taking a detour here,’ Hoseok points at a blank space.

‘That’s dead space though?’ Taeh’yung yawns, looking down at it with sleepy curiosity.

‘That’s the planet that was undetectable- where I died,’ Sk’jin states simply. ‘And we believe this connects to Jimin and his System.’

Taeh’yung translates amidst yawns. Jimin nods, water dripping from his hair, clearly having just showered. His hair is darker like this, but it’s still difficult to tell if it was gold or silver. If he had any questions regarding Sk’jin’s death he doesn’t voice them.

‘He says he’ll do all he can to help. He also wants to know if there’s a possibility that their technology was stolen from them. He said something about how that might explain a few questions he has too.’

Namjoon nods grimly at that, feeling a little strange to have Sk’jin’s agreement. He almost wants to take it back but he doesn’t. With this, they could uncover more about their situation in a wider perspective.

‘Is that it?’ Taeh’yung asks with a mighty yawn. ‘I really wanna sleep pa.’

‘Yes- we’re sorry,’ Namjoon says with a smile, patting the Zhak’gri on his shoulder. ‘You guys go get some sleep. And Jimin, could I have your screen? I’ll archive the new words you set into the dictionary.’

He points at the screen in Jimin’s hands. Jimin nods in understanding without needing translation. After all this wasn’t the first time Namjoon asked him this. Namjoon was recording and tracking the process of transcribing Jimin’s language into a form that could be used to provide translations. Every word he asked Jimin to speak is recorded, in every variation possible, and then cross-referenced into the GLA Database to find similarities. They already had a numerical chart, as well as the alphabets. The more complicated grammatical and structural aspect of the language would have to wait. For now they needed commonly used words and terms.

‘Taking the night-round?’ Hoseok asks as he makes to step away from the Mast.

‘Yeah,’ Namjoon nods as he slots the screen under the Navigation Table. ‘I’m just going to put this into our archive.’

Hoseok nods and bids him goodnight.

Namjoon nearly has a heart attack when he realizes that Yoongi is still there. He almost didn’t see him despite the fact that the Human was literally feet away from him.

‘Spaces-‘

‘Going there might hurt him,’ Yoongi says unexpectedly.

‘What do you mean?’ Namjoon asks, bewildered by Yoongi’s statement. ‘Who?’

‘Memories are painful,’ is all Yoongi says before he quietly leaves.
The OrTank is kept in the Hangar Bay. They had analyzed it completely but found that there was nothing strange or unique about it. But Yoongi comes back to it frequently. It seemed fragile and almost cheap without a Being inside of it. Yoongi wonders where his own OrTank was.

‘Yoongi?’

Yoongi realizes that he’s never seen an eclipse before.

None that he’s actually realized and experienced as he was. He simply knew about them, knew what they looked like, and how they came to form. But he’s never seen one. But there are two of them, looking straight at him. And Yoongi knows that the moon blocks the sun, orbiting to cover its light, creating a ring around it before eventually moving past. But in Jimin’s eyes they’re permanent. Staying there, unmoving, caught in time.

And they’re blinding.

Yoongi couldn’t sleep. Instead he stayed up memorizing the trajectories and maps and details of their upcoming plan. When he finished doing that in 10 minutes Yoongi left his Cabin and mindlessly wandered around the ship. Despite not being able to sleep, Sk’jin sure acted like he needed it. Taeh’yung rarely closed his doors, and Yoongi can hear him snoring from the Lobby. So he made his way down instead, to just stare at the OrTank.

‘I couldn’t sleep,’ Yoongi says.

For some reason this makes Jimin smile, shaking his head.

‘Hhman ang khan tu na pon i la mu thei lo mo?’

Yoongi briefly thinks of calling Taeh’yung but decides not to.

‘Enge i ti mek?’ Jimin walks up next to him, looking down at his OrTank as well.

‘I was just…thinking.’

This also makes Jimin laugh. Yoongi smiles slowly in response.

Jimin studies the OrTank, mumbling to himself as he touches it, looking over it. He steps inside of it and for some reason this freaks Yoongi out. And before he’s aware, he’s yanking Jimin out, halfway across the Hangar away from the OrTank.

Jimin’s eyes widen in shock.

‘S-sorry,’ Yoongi manages to get out. ‘I- I uh, I don’t think you should go in there.’

He points at the OrTank and crosses his hands together to form an “X”. Jimin nods, still confused. Not sure what to do, Yoongi turns and promptly leaves the Bay. He’s aware that Jimin is following
him and Yoongi finds himself in the Bridge. Namjoon doesn’t notice him until he walks past. He’s used to the way Namjoon jumps every time he spots Yoongi.

Yoongi finds it extremely funny and sometimes does it on purpose.

He almost smiles but stops himself, unsure where that particular impulse came from.

Making his way to the tower-mast, Yoongi sits down, and Jimin is sitting next to him a few seconds later. He smiles at him, a slight hesitance to the way his lips pull up, his eyes holding a worried expression. It was boring sitting here, or at least, Yoongi thinks it’s supposed to be boring for most Beings. When Yoongi sat here, he normally listened to audio-books through his screen, read up history, studied basic GLA education, and tried to catch up on all of Earth’s filmography to better understand his original culture and past. If what Jimin was saying was true, then Yoongi had been alive and…and Yoongi over 800 years ago. What was happening in Ancient Earth 800 years ago?

A thought occurs to him and he reaches for his screen. Jimin watches his movements carefully, his legs drawn in, folded up and pressed against his chest.

He pulls up the records and archives from Earth, outlined by the GLA Database. He’s not sure about how many exact sols ago he was alive so he just types in a random year 850 years ago. Earth wasn’t the most interesting of planets and her solar system wasn’t exciting. The planets in it were normal and dormant, with the exception of Jupiter which was the largest planet in the solar system. No important or eye-catching activity is recorded- the option is available for headlines that came from Earth that year but before Yoongi threw himself into reading a full Earth-sol worth of news and headlines, Jimin leans closer and points.

‘Urthh?’ Jimin says carefully.

Yoongi wonders how Jimin recognized the planet. He nods.

Jimin’s expression turns bright at once, smiling as he looks down at the screen. He’s about to speak but then pauses, head swiveling clearly looking for Taeh’yung. But the Zhak’gri is not in the Bridge. Seemingly making up his mind, Jimin excuses himself. His movements are light and graceful; he’s almost as quiet as Hoseok. Yoongi hears him speak, and Namjoon reply with a questioning sound. A few seconds later, Jimin appears again, this time with his screen. He taps a few times on the surface before activating a sketching tab. Carefully but hurriedly, Jimin sketches a basic picture of a house- the design of it somehow transcending most galaxies and systems: a square box with a roof and windows. He then draws a stick figure and points at Yoongi, and then back at his own screen.

‘In?’ Jimin tilts his head.

‘…home,’ Yoongi nods slowly.

‘H-home,’ Jimin repeats carefully, his accent a little skewed.

Yoongi nods again.

Jimin goes back to the tab and next to the figure that’s supposed to be Yoongi, he draws another figure. This one is slightly smaller, and clearly female. Then next to that one, another female. He smiles expectantly at Yoongi, waiting for something. Yoongi looks back at the image, his mind suddenly filled with white noise. He’s not sure what to do or say.

Jimin looks back at the drawing and then adds a small detail to the figure of the smaller female. A
small star-shaped item and colours it in carefully with purple.

Yoongi stares at the stick-figures, his mind drawing blanks. He looks back at Jimin and shakes his head. He expects Jimin to maybe attempt drawing again but instead he feels fingers carefully feeling at his palm. He stretches his hand open. Jimin could “read” into his memories with contact. Yoongi isn’t sure if that was what he was doing right now. If someone tried to probe into your mind, wouldn’t you feel it? Jimin is watching him with a careful expression.

Was he doing it now?

Jimin places his palm over Yoongi’s and then he points at himself with his free hand, and then taps Yoongi’s head lightly, his head tilted to the side. He was asking permission, Yoongi figures, and so he slowly nods, not sure what to do now. So instead he settles for studying the illustration on Jimin’s tab. Yoongi doesn’t know what Jimin means by what he drew- but there was something of importance in what he just shared, Yoongi knew of it. And something deep inside of him doesn’t want to know. But another small small part of him, is reaching out.

Before he knows it, Yoongi changes the tabs on his screen and putting aside the image of Earth as she once was, Yoongi pulls up the footage of Earth’s remains. It was now a stretch of asteroids marking the former existence of a planet that was supposed to be Yoongi’s home. Yoongi points at the side-by-side pictures and then at the one Jimin drew, drawing the latter’s attention away.

‘How many planets do you see from here?’

He points slowly, pointing first at Jimin’s drawing, then at Earth, and then the asteroid remains. It takes a moment for Jimin to realize what Yoongi is trying to tell him.

His face blanches, breath caught in his throat. It’s automatic- his hands shake and Yoongi doesn’t understand.

Why was Jimin behaving as though it was his planet that was destroyed?

‘Yoongi-‘ he manages to say before he pulls him into a hug.

Yoongi is not the most comfortable at the moment. He’s squashed to the side, the arm of his chair digging into his ribs that are still a little sore. He’s not used to physical contact like this- and to this extent. It’s been 13 seconds and counting and Jimin still hasn’t let go.

‘It’s okay,’ he finds himself saying. ‘I don’t remember anything about Earth.’

Jimin pulls away, eyes wet as he looks over Yoongi’s face before placing both his hands on his face. Yoongi sits still, looking over Jimin’s face instead of feeling uncomfortable.

And it’s not uncomfortable- Yoongi feels like he’s long-gone past the time of feeling uncomfortable though it’s only been a few days since Jimin woke up and since he woke up as well. All of this felt familiar- his mind doesn’t register this sensation. Rather it’s his body that responds. He relaxes in a strange manner when Jimin was around. He felt better, though Yoongi doesn’t know why or how and in what relation, when Jimin was in sight. It was the same when he was in the OrTank. But now it was clearer, but just as confusing.

Jimin still looks upset, hands shaking as he holds the screen in his hands, looking down at the asteroids. Yoongi’s mind jumps to every book he’s read about offering comfort to Beings when they were upset.

‘Do…do you want to watch a movie?’ Yoongi asks tentatively.
Jimin looks up, eyelashes wet. Fidgeting with his sleeves, Yoongi dabs, probably a bit too harshly, at Jimin’s cheeks. His attempt at blotting Jimin’s face ends up with laughter from Jimin who pushes his hand away and wipes at his face himself.

Yoongi points at his screen for a moment before he decides to just pick a movie and watch it. He’s going through the list of movies when Jimin’s hand reaches in and takes the screen from him. Surprised but not acting out, Yoongi waits as Jimin scrolls through the almost endless list of movies. The titles were written and next to it a small moving clip and poster— but Jimin doesn’t pause to ogle at them or even study them. It was as though he knew exactly what he was looking for. It was almost as though he knew exactly what he was doing, as though this wasn’t the first time he’s seen something like this. Perhaps his past-self had done the same? If that was actually a thing?

Jimin pauses at a title and then taps on it before handing it back to Yoongi.

To Yoongi’s surprise it’s The Sleeping Beauty— a movie he just recently watched. It starts to play and Yoongi has a feeling that this would be the second time they both watched it together. Halfway through the movie, Taeh’yung appears. His bed-hair is spectacular and his clothes are inside out. He’s dragged a blanket with him and throwing it over Jimin, manages to worm his way into Jimin’s seat. They adjust for a while until they’re both squashed up in one place. Taeh’yung pauses a moment before he throws a small square of blanket over Yoongi’s knee.

It's warm.

‘Heard Chim singing,’ he yawns wide, though Yoongi has asked him no question.

‘Chim?’ Yoongi repeats.

Taeh’yung nods and with a sleepy grin says, ‘t’s his nickname.’

Yoongi glances at Jimin who is eyeing him as though he just realized something. He hurriedly points at Yoongi, rather aggressively.

‘Yoongi?’ Yoongi answers.

Jimin nods. Then he points at himself.

‘Jimin.’

He nods, and then he points at himself again and says, ‘Chim.’

Yoongi glances at Taeh’yung who is already asleep, arms sticking out randomly.

‘Chim,’ Yoongi nods. ‘It’s your nickname from Taeh’yung.’

‘N-nikk naim,’ Jimin tries out with a nod, before pointing at Yoongi and then at himself.

‘…you want me,’ Yoongi points at himself, and then at Jimin, ‘To give you a nickname?’

Jimin nods, waiting expectantly.

Yoongi tries. He really does. But he suspects that there was more to this than just simply wanting a nickname. If what Jimin was saying was true, then did that mean Yoongi had once given him a nickname? He searches Jimin’s face, wondering what he saw in the past, what he felt, what he thought, that would elicit a nickname.
‘I’m sorry I don’t remember,’ Yoongi whispers.

Jimin looks down for a moment, gnawing at his lip in thought. They don’t speak after that, and instead continue watching the movie.

Jimin hums along to the tune of *Once Upon a Dream* and Yoongi doesn’t question it.

Ymir is an extraordinarily beautiful stretch of space. It’s a no warp zone and though they’re only passing through for a total of 5 hours, they find themselves looking down upon a wide stretch of a massive golden nebula. It seems to move, liquid almost, as though the stars encased in their light and colour could move – dancing upon music unheard and beyond their imagination.

It’s breathtaking and predictably, Taeh’yung and Jimin are stuck onto the windows around the tower-mast, peering down with obvious excitement and awe. It’s been over 3 hours and the two of them were still excited. Namjoon finds it endearing- a little odd, but endearing. Odd, especially considering the fact that Taeh’yung should have probably witnessed a few nebulas in his lifetime. He’s not sure if Bhumi saw nebulas, considering Jimin’s awe over them. Maybe he was just enthusiastic? They were beautiful after all.

‘Kids, look up ahead,’ Sk’jin calls indulgently from where he stood strategically, the light from the nebula highlighting him in a flattering angle. Sk’jin had been doing that for hours- *star-bathing*, apparently. But Namjoon has spotted the Khol’isa taking discreet pictures of himself on his own screen.

Taeh’yung and Jimin both look upwards and gasps of amazement ensues as a whirling mass of blue and magenta swirl above them. Jimin actually stretches his hand upwards, as though to try and touch it. He stops himself halfway, as though realizing his action, looking a little embarrassed. Taeh’yung has no shame and jumps on his feet as though to reach for the stars above.

‘It’s even more beautiful than when I came here,’ he proclaims, ignorant of the way everyone’s (sans Jimin) heads swivel to stare at him.

‘You’ve been in Ymir before?!’ Hoseok demands, no doubt already thinking of potential routes around to Nuqṭai.

‘Yeah! It’s where the Yisheng found me! I was breaking a law or something,’ Taeh’yung shrugs.

Namjoon wonders why everything has turned into a space-drama with a plot even the readers of Sk’jin’s trash novels would turn their noses at.

‘…where in Ymir?’ Hoseok asks carefully.

‘Uh- swampy. Humid. Small,’ Taeh’yung says absently as he tries to look and down at the same time, nodding at a violent pace.

‘…what were you- wait.’ Hoseok takes a short moment while Namjoon looks up this *swampy humid small* planet. The Ymir System was home to 27 planets, 2 suns, some 78 moons, and 2
asteroid belts. And out of all of these, only 9 were capable of housing life and sustaining it. Ymir had an incredibly narrow and carefully maintained habitable zone.

Namjoon filters the list down to Ubhuku, a small uninhabitable planet. It wasn’t uninhabitable because it was barren- on the contrary it was bursting with life and was basically a planet-sized greenhouse. The atmosphere was quite acidic, so all the plants that grew there were evolved to thrive in those conditions. Many of the plants were carnivorous, Namjoon discovers. And it was also a planet where the GLA had tried to maintain a program of sorts.

‘Tae- were you ever involved in something called the ‘Accelerated Evolution Program’?’ Namjoon asks, clearing his throat.

‘No!’ Taeh’yung finally looks away, his eyes cross-eyed from nodding so violently. ‘It’s fake- it was made to cover up my “crimes”.’

Sk’jin and Hoseok both pale.

‘And that was?’

‘I only wanted to see if I could create life?’ Taeh’yung shrugs as he recovers from his disorientation. ‘I wasn’t trying to kill anyone or destroy anything-’

‘And so the GLA found you,’ Namjoon is trying hard to remain calm. ‘-and stopped you, and covered up your experiment by saying it was something they did?’

‘They didn’t stop me!’ Taeh’yung explains as he skips up to the Navigator’s Mast. ‘They just told me to continue and watched what I could do. Then after I made Umholi they decided to stop and they took me to prison!’

Hoseok looks like he’s about 2 seconds from fainting- or firing his TeorSer at Taeh’yung.

‘So you have a record?’

‘Nopes! I’m not supposed to exist,’ Taeh’yung replies easily.

‘It should be fine,’ Yoongi chimes in unexpectedly. ‘We are far from Ubhuku.’

While that was true, it still didn’t make this information any less disturbing. Also, what did Taeh’yung mean by create life? And what was an Umholi? Something tells him he doesn’t really want to know.

A small beep from his screen alerts him, signaling that his search was completed. Stepping away from the Mast, he makes his way down to the lowest tier of the Bridge where Yoongi sat. The Human was also watching the nebulas, though what he thought of them was a little vague as he held no expression on his face. Namjoon takes a seat next to him, handing him his NaviLet.

‘I found it,’ he says simply.

Yoongi takes the NaviLet but he doesn’t open the tab yet.

‘You can take your time with it- it’s pretty monumental I would think,’ Namjoon tells him.

‘Thank you,’ Yoongi says quietly, sloting his own screen over the NaviLet to transfer the contents.

Yoongi had asked him to look his name up on Earth- narrowing it down to a 30 sol gap on Earth from approximately over 800 years ago. It wasn’t difficult to do- finding and pulling old records
because every GLA-based planet or System was always recorded and archived in the GLA Database. It wasn’t surprising to Namjoon that Yoongi or any Human that looked like him wasn’t on the official GLA office records or credits. If what Jimin was saying was true, and seeing how closely related Yoongi was to all of this in the past, they would have removed every trace of his existence and or involvement. So instead he scanned Earth’s media and local forums. And after nearly 4 days he found an almost accurate match. He takes back the NaviLet from Yoongi once the transfer is done. Namjoon doesn’t know how Yoongi must feel, knowing that there was a lifetime of memories he couldn't remember- a life he once lived, with his own unique complexities.

Namjoon feels as though it might drive him crazy if he knew.

‘You’re welcome,’ Namjoon replies back sincerely.

‘For the last time, does anyone have anything else they might want to add before we go to Nuqtai?’ Hoseok calls tiredly from the cockpit.

‘It’s noisy as hell,’ Yoongi mumbles.

Namjoon is sure he’s the only one who heard.

* * *

‘It’s noisy as hell,’ Hoseok complains.

They had landed in Nuqtai some hour ago at a landing strip south of the main sprawling city. They were closer to the aqua-ducts that fed water to the cities. Yoongi is standing next to him, staring at the aqua-ducts with more intensity than strictly required.

‘I’ll get to the main system in a few minutes. Is Sk’jin done?’ Hoseok asks.

They left it to Sk’jin to “talk” to the immigration officers in Nuqtai. They weren’t actually officers- just a bunch of organized gangs that controlled certain areas of Nuqtai. You had to pay for their silence, rather than a landing spot. And Sk’jin was probably their best choice in such a task so the Khol’isa had left with a skip to his step, hair flipping back in a sparkling wave of pink.

‘He’s on his way back,’ Namjoon replies.

‘All right- I’ll call if anything’s amiss, otherwise I should be done pretty soon.’

‘Don’t forget my clothes!’ Taeh’yung adds.

Namjoon hears Hoseok hum a response before the harsh white-noise of Nuqtai’s sprawling excuse of a city cuts out.

‘Sk’jin has been standing outside for a while,’ Yoongi comments.

Namjoon checks his screen and finds that yes, the Khol’isa was just standing still some ways from the ship.

‘Sk’jin?’ Namjoon calls.
There’s no reply.

‘Lisai- can you check on Sk’jin?’

‘Communications Manager Sk’jin is currently on line. He is attending a call.’

Namjoon swiftly makes his way out of the Bridge and down the ship.

The air out is cool- the weather taking a turn with the day. It smells like stagnant water, rust, and pollution out here. Namjoon is quiet when needed and Sk’jin is close to a slightly rumbly aquaduct. The Khol’isa is talking in a low voice, attention riveted as he stands aimlessly atop the tank. It’s not Standard, and Namjoon has listened to that tape-recording from the first few weeks of their mission to recognize Long-Huon. Namjoon waits until Sk’jin finishes his conversation to clear his throat. Turning swiftly, Sk’jin levels him with a cool gaze.

‘Is this something you don’t want to tell me about because it’s not important?’ Namjoon asks.

‘You’re right. Is Hoseok back?’ Sk’jin asks sharply.

‘Not yet.’ Namjoon sighs out, ignoring the unpleasant feeling at the back of his neck. ‘Who were you talking to?’

‘Contact,’ Sk’jin replies evasively, there’s a sudden fierce look to his eye as he says, ‘Since we both decided to go to that planet, I thought it would be a good idea to nose around for additional information. He should know, after all he was there with me and was the reason why I could leave in the first place.’

‘Who is it? Your contact.’

‘I can’t tell you.’

‘Won’t or can’t?’

‘It’s none of your business.’

Namjoon doesn’t press on the subject.

‘What else did your contact say?’

‘That this was a dumb idea and you shouldn’t be our captain,’ Sk’jin replies at once.

Namjoon rolls his eyes.

‘He also said that there are only 2 ships surrounding the planet. There are no patrols- just spatial observation and footage recording,’ Sk’jin adds. ‘A simple magnetic detonation can cut them off long enough for us to enter the planet undetected.’

Namjoon nods in reply to that.

‘Hey- is Taeh’yung there with you? Does he prefer green or purple?’ Hoseok asks.

‘Purple,’ Sk’jin replies before adding, ‘Tae- Hobi’s buying you clothes, you got yourself a new daddy.’

‘Sk’jin please-‘
‘Yoongi, where is Taeh’yung, please tell him to put his Comm-Device back on,’ Namjoon sighs as he turns back around to go back to the ship.

There’s no reply.

Namjoon hears Sk’jin swear quietly under his breath. A second unpleasant sensation grips the back of his neck.

‘Yoongi, Taeh’yung, Jimin- where are you?’

There’s no reply.

Namjoon and Sk’jin sprint back into the ship. And they don’t need to search for too long to know that it’s empty.

‘They’re not here,’ Sk’jin huffs out.

‘Are you fucking kidding me?!’

Taeh’yung and Jimin walk a little ahead as Yoongi trails behind them. Taeh’yung convinced Jimin that they needed new clothes, to which Jimin had readily agreed. Yoongi is unsure but he believes that Jimin felt like he didn’t want to impose on anyone else for clothing and other items he needed. And though he knew they weren’t supposed to leave the ship- least of all Jimin and Taeh’yung, Yoongi just nodded in consent to Taeh’yung’s plea to go shopping.

The two walk in front of him, hands held and talking a mile a minute. Jimin had been wearing Hoseok’s clothes, which were the most practical and comfortable. Though similar in size, Yoongi’s own clothes ranged between tactical and full black. Jimin refused to wear black, a colour of mourning, according to Taeh’yung, in Jimin’s culture.

His screen was inside his inner pocket. Waiting for him to open the files. Unsure why, Yoongi found that he couldn’t open it.

Not yet anyways. He wanted to know. But he wasn’t sure if he wanted to remember.

Memories were painful. Thoughts and knowing were painful.

Did he even want to know? What would it show him? What would he find out? Would it be important to him where he was now? Or would it be rudimentary, useless junk taking up space in his mind.

‘Yoongi!’ Jimin calls him, talking rapidly as he points at one of the stalls, clearly delighted. Yoongi doesn’t understand a single word but he nods nonetheless, listening closely to the lilts of his voice, the rise and fall of his tone for timing.

But Jimin knew Yoongi- the Yoongi from the past. And he expected something from him. Wanted
something from him. He was waiting for something from Yoongi.

Would Yoongi be able to remember Jimin?

‘That’s really pretty Chim,’ Taeh’yung grins down at them. ‘It’s nice quality too!’

His mind didn’t remember Jimin. But the way Jimin’s hand felt in his told him otherwise.

‘Let’s buy it!’

Yoongi isn’t sure from where Taeh’yung is producing the units from- but then again, he did slip into Sk’jin’s Cabin, claiming he needed to change for the outing. It was as though the Zhak’gri had been waiting for Namjoon to leave, the way he so quickly rounded up Jimin and then Yoongi.
Yoongi has the feeling that Taeh’yung also didn’t tell Jimin about Namjoon explicitly telling them not to leave the ship. Taeh’yung had then switched off their Comm-Devices, grinning deviously before exiting the ship in an uncannily quiet manner. It was all too easy to slip past Namjoon and Sk’jin. Yoongi is almost apologetic towards their Captain.

Taeh’yung pulls Jimin forward and deeper into the market. Jimin reaches out to grab Yoongi’s hand as well, pulling him forward along with them. Taeh’yung with his height stares forward, eyeing the stalls and leading them this way and that.

Yoongi knows that they should go back. That they shouldn’t have left in the first place. But watching Jimin and Taeh’yung outside of the confines of the ship, around in this questionable crowd selling questionable items felt...felt nice. Like he was living a life that wasn’t his own. When he hears Jimin laughing at something Taeh’yung says, the force of his laughter shaking their joint hands, Yoongi wants to join in. But he doesn’t know how. And instead takes to eyeing pick-pockets and travelling merchants until they scurry off.

Jimin stops walking abruptly, nearly face-planting on Taeh’yung’s back. Yoongi is quick to hold him upright.

‘Tae?’ Jimin looks up at his tall friend. Yoongi recognizes Taeh’yung posture- he’s seen it a few times, when the Zhak’gri is alert- alert and wary. Yoongi covers Jimin from the back, angling him behind Taeh’yung properly so that the Zhak’gri’s larger frame shielded Jimin.

‘Taeh’yung?’

Taeh’yung stares up ahead blankly, his height an advantage in this crowd.

‘What is it?’

Jimin catches on quickly, his posture changing and his expression full of concentration.

‘I can smell it,’ Taeh’yung says quietly. ‘They were here.’

Jimin is quietly asking a question, his hand reaching out to shift under Yoongi’s sleeve, skin pressing against skin, trying to read Yoongi’s reaction.

‘It’s them- from Pompa,’ Taeh’yung doesn’t reply to Jimin’s question and instead repeats. ‘They were here.’

Taeh’yung could only mean one thing. Yoongi can instantly feel himself tensing, his senses flaring and despite his nearly entirely healed injuries, his body was still sore. But despite this his body is coiling in anticipation to attack or defend.
‘Then we leave.’ Yoongi says simply, already taking a step back while guiding Jimin back.

Taeh’yung doesn’t even bother looking at Yoongi when he says, ‘I’m going to look.’

Yoongi knows he should stop the Zhak’gri. But he doesn’t. Because if Taeh’yung hadn’t been the one to say it, he would have ordered the Zhak’gri to take Jimin back, and he would have taken Taeh’yung’s place. And Taeh’yung had that strange skill- ability- to *smell* those Beings from the arena- the ones that wanted to buy Jimin when he had been in the OrTank. He had the upper-hand here.

The Beings they had encountered in Pompa had definitely been strange. They bore no resemblance to the form of the Akramanese, or to the GI in general. Who they were, and what they were, was a complete mystery. But they wanted Jimin.

Yoongi guides Jimin back to the ship, Taeh’yung stepping into the crowd and vanishing in an instant.

‘Yoongi?’

‘Back – we have to go back,’ Yoongi says carefully as he guides them easily and quickly through the crowd. Jimin doesn’t ask any more questions- only once turns to look back around before falling into step with Yoongi. Yoongi taps on the small Comm-Device on his ear.

‘Namjoon it’s Yoongi.’

‘*WHERE THE FUCK HAVE YOU BEEN-*’ Sk’jin shrieks. Jimin jolts, having heard the Khol’isa.

‘The House of Jtāharū. They were here.’ Yoongi states calmly.

Sk’jin’s tirade suddenly stops.

‘*When do you get back?’* Namjoon asks tersely.

‘5 minutes,’ Yoongi replies at once.

But Jimin suddenly stops, pulling at their joint hands. With unexpected strength, he pulls Yoongi over to a stall inside one of the alleys until he stops in front of a trinket store. Yoongi glances around, scanning the area as he takes into account an additional branch of the street they were in. He needs to get Jimin back into the ship immediately.

‘*We’re leaving the moment you get back. Hurry.*’

‘Taeh’yung went after them.’

Jimin reaches for a small item, sparkling in the dim light. He turns to look at Yoongi, a sad smile on his face.

‘Yoongi-‘

‘*WHAT DO YOU MEAN-*‘

Yoongi steps closer and recognizes the small item as a hair clip. It’s purple, with some small silver dots around it. The main decorative item is shaped like a star. Jimin reaches up to pin the item on Yoongi’s hair. Yoongi remembers Jimin's small illustration.

‘Hey- you paying for that-‘
‘Yoongi what do you mean Taeh’yung went after them?’

Yoongi pulls Jimin back into the crowd, disappearing from the sight of the shop vendor who was now yelling. Ducking low and in the murky shadow of the throngs of Beings around the market, Yoongi leads them out, not responding to Namjoon, Sk’jin, or Hoseok. He concentrates on getting back, Jimin placed a little ahead of him.

They break out of the crowd and are instantly at the forefront of the landing strip gates. They slip past unnoticed by the officers and spot the Užkulisai up ahead. Yoongi can spot a pacing Sk’jin at the doorway. Some part of him is already regretting everything but he ignores it.

Jimin looks back once, to stare at him, eyes hopeful. He glances up at the clip on his hair but then sighs quietly before turning to face Sk’jin’s wrath.

They’re not met with screaming, in fact, Sk’jin just closes the door behind them and follows them up the stairs and into the Bridge. Yoongi wonders why they always took the stairs when they had a fully functional elevator installed at very convenient bends of the ship.

Namjoon and Hoseok are standing by the Navigation Table, both arms crossed.

‘Did they see you?’ Namjoon asks at once.

‘No- Taeh’yung said he smelled them. And said he would go check.’

Namjoon curses under his breath while Hoseok sighs, leaning back on the Table.

‘What do we do?’ he asks dully, fingers thrumming on the surface of the Table.

‘Clearly nothing- until Taeh’yung comes back or calls,’ Sk’jin throws himself on Namjoon’s seat.

‘Why did you even leave?’

‘Taeh’yung wanted to go shopping.’

‘Why didn’t you stop them?!’ Namjoon demands.

‘Jimin wanted to go. I followed them for security.’

‘But—’

‘Joonie I think if Yoongi tried to stop them, Taeh’yung would have still gone,’ Sk’jin says tiredly.

‘At least they had Yoongi with them.’

Namjoon curses under his breath.

‘Jimin honey why don’t you go wash up? Did you at least buy shoes?’ Sk’jin asks, voice still tired and nearly monotone from where he’s slumped, staring up at the glass ceiling.

Yoongi stares at Jimin’s bare feet, dirty from having walked around the crowded market street. He hadn’t noticed that Jimin was walking around without shoes. He had never asked for them, and had never mentioned them either. Jimin’s toes curl, as though a little embarrassed from having his feet stared at for so long.

Something suddenly clicks inside Yoongi’s mind.

‘Pa!’
‘Taeh’yung what the actual fuck-?!’

Namjoon looks like he’s about to burst a blood vessel on his temple.

‘Uh- so I’m kinda inside a ship? And they’re flying off?’

Namjoon visibly balks at that while Sk’jin looks 5 shades paler and 5 shades redder at the same time. Talent.

‘Taeh’yung. Explain yourself.’ Hoseok takes a deep calming breath, his hands straining over the Table.

‘Uh- so I followed that scent. And it’s this small ship? Like, a supplies ship? And I’m at the back? With some supplies? It has food!’

‘Turn on the tracker,’ Namjoon orders as he pulls up a different holographic screen. 'Twist your Comm-Device.'

‘Taeh’yung- don’t move from where you are. Stay hidden all right?’ Hoseok rubs at his temples, closing his eyes briefly before he starts typing on the Table as well. A small purple dot appears and Yoongi knows that Taeh’yung has activated his tracker.

‘Are they there?’ Sk’jin asks tersely.

‘No- but I think this ship belongs to them. It smells like them- but they’re not here.’

Jimin fidgets, unable to understand what was happening. He tugs at Yoongi’s sleeve, eyes darting around the Bridge.

‘Yoongi-’ Jimin begins.

_The clouds above them break, and through the heavy grey and purple clouds, soft rosy skies peak through, and a golden light falls upon the moss covered rocks nearby._

_This was why he came here. As though he knew that he would see this. He isn’t even aware that he’s holding up a hand, as though to reach forward and grab at the light- to hold it close and never let go._

Jimin reaches for his hand and Yoongi holds it tight.

‘Sunshine?’
(Author’s Note)

AYO NICE ONE YOONGI
AND HAPPY NEW YEAR Y’ALL
2018 HAHAHAHA honestly I have no expectations
The only good I can expect is quality music from my children (and I have many sons
and daughters)
And Black Panther
Infinity War
Uh…concerts if I have the money for it
Other movies
Yeap
Okay
Keeping standards low since 1990
'think he’s telling us his name?'

'I’ll try.'

The sun is warm and bright- a permanent sunrise that made Yoongi feel like he was stuck in time.

The strange Being is clad in simple clothes- dirty and torn, but somehow maintained. His hair is a strange colour- neither silver or gold, but somehow both at the same time. It’s beautiful- but it seems out of place. This Being seemed out of place. Like he didn’t belong here.

Yoongi steps up close, squatting down to be on the same eye-level as him.

He points at himself, ‘Yoongi.’

And then at the Being.

His eyes freak Yoongi out just a little. Despite being exposed to so many races and species of Beings, Yoongi has never seen eyes like his. Strange, beautiful, and out of place.

Yoongi notices that his feet are bare. There’s a fresh scratch over the top of his left foot.

Was he the one that was singing?

‘Yoongi,’ he tries again, pointing at himself. He smiles encouragingly as he points back at the stranger.

He raises a hand, pointing at Yoongi.

‘Yoongi,’ he says quietly. His voice is soft and clear. And it’s undoubtedly the voice that had been singing. Then he points at himself.

‘Jimin.’
‘Sunshine?’

It made sense now.

When Yoongi had gone to wake Jimin up the other day, he had tried to tell Yoongi this. But for some reason it didn’t mean anything to him. And now, the moment the words leave his tongue, it was as though he was seeing Jimin for the first time.

But also as though he had known him his entire life.

Jumin’s smile is wide, joy obvious in his features as he nods fervently.

‘Sunshine,’ he beams, pointing at himself and then back at Yoongi, ‘Yoongi!’

‘Sunshine-‘

‘Everyone sit down or something- we’re about to take off!’ Hoseok yells.

Yoongi tugs at Jimin’s hand and leads him towards one of the footstools.

‘They’re headed inwards into Ymir,’ Hoseok grits through his teeth as he starts up the ship, one eye scanning the sky above, the other concentrating on the tracking map to his left. ‘Any information on the ship?’

‘It’s a private ship- trade apparently,’ Namjoon replies at once. ‘They supposedly stocked up on over 50 cells of fuel. Information is probably wrong.’

Jumin reaches over, hand brushing against his chin and turning Yoongi’s head to face him. The ship readies for space-travel, gravity settings turning on and the air around them compressing- Yoongi feels it in the lining of his stomach. He also feels a strange sense of floating as he gazes back at Jimin- a strange sensation taking over the rest of his body. Jumin says something quietly before dropping his hand and smiling.

‘It’s part of the truth,’ Sk’jin states from where he’s sitting- bringing with him the sounds of the ship back to sharp volume. The Khol’isa is scanning the screen in his hands. ‘According to the officers, they were here for 8 hours. You don’t need 8 hours to buy 50 cells of fuel- is it possible to pull up footage or surveillance?’

‘No- Nuqtai basically has no surveillance- it’s all eye-witness and we won’t get far with that,’ Hoseok replies at once. ‘We don’t have the time either.’

‘Taeh’yung- I need to know with as much detail as possible- where in the ship are you?’ Namjoon asks.

‘Uh…I hopped in at the back? And I’m surrounded with crates and OrTanks and there’s food! I think it’s just the storage pa.’
‘Do you see an outlet? A vent?’ Namjoon asks desperately.

‘Uh…’ Taeh’yung hums for a long period of time. ‘Nope!’

Namjoon pulls at his hair for a second before he’s tapping along the screen hurriedly.

The Užkulisai lifts off easily and they’re high above the ground in a matter of seconds. Jimin tugs at his hand and pulls him towards the Navigation Table where the tracking scan was set up. He points at the small purple dot and says, ‘Taeh’yung?’

Yoongi nods. Jimin looks on worriedly- without translations he’s stuck not knowing or understanding the gravity of the situation.

‘Taeh’yung- could you tell Jimin where you are and what’s happening,’ Yoongi asks quietly. He ignores the way Namjoon and Sk’jin glance at him at his words.

Jimin tenses for a moment before his shoulders relax, his hand going up to his ear. He nods once, twice- before he’s saying something quietly. He pauses a moment before he smiles- Taeh’yung was clearly saying something funny to make Jimin feel better.

Of all the nicknames he could have chosen- why that one in particular?

‘We need to get close enough so that Taeh’yung can get back into the ship,’ Namjoon says tensely. ‘We can’t have them know that we’re following them-‘

‘Pa-‘

There’s a burst of static, some scuffling sounds, and what sounds like running feet.

Namjoon stops.

‘Tae?’ Sk’jin calls out tentatively.

‘Taeh’yung?!’

Everyone quiets down at once.

‘Uh- I think they discovered me-?’

‘Taeh’yung?’ Sk’jin’s eyes look like they’re about to pop out of his head.

Everyone quiets down again. The ship picks up, light flashing as they push through Nuqtaí’s atmosphere.

‘Taeh’yung?’ Jimin asks again, tugging at their held hands.

‘I…I don’t know-‘ Yoongi doesn’t know how to explain this to Jimin.

‘Who the fuck are you? What the fuck are you doing following us?’ a rough voice cuts into the Bridge, accent thick and heavy.

‘Hello my name is Sk’jin- I am so grateful that you found my baby brother on your ship,’ Sk’jin gushes out, a perfect balance of relief, gratitude, and emotion. ‘I have been worried sick.’

Namjoon is violently gesturing at Sk’jin- Yoongi doesn’t know exactly what he’s channeling, but he seems frustrated.
‘Who the fuck are you Sk’jin- and why is your baby brother on board my ship? Tell me why I shouldn’t shove him out of my ship?’

‘Oh please don’t!’ Sk’jin declares, emotion dripping in his tone though he’s raising a victorious fist into the air. Jimin is alarmed, reaching for Sk’jin quickly, eyes worried as he looks over the Khol’isa. ‘I’ll do anything! Please spare him!’

Jimin is glancing back at him and then to the others, clearly confused at Sk’jin’s thoroughly convincing acting and the reaction of the rest of the crew. He leaves Sk’jin’s side for a moment and comes back to Yoongi, taking his hand.

‘Taeh’yung?’ he asks desperately.

‘Taeh’yung is all right,’ Yoongi says quietly as Sk’jin continues to cry over the Comm, begging that Taeh’yung be spared. Yoongi takes Jimin’s hand and carefully repeats, ‘Taeh’yung’ and raises his hand into a thumb’s up. ‘Okay.’

Jimin stares at his hand for a moment before he nods slowly.

‘-please- if you have a heart, please spare him!’ Sk’jin is sobbing actual tears, his voice cracking, but his eyes are filled with delight and mirth. Jimin tilts his head, bewildered.

‘I hope they’re really thick because I wouldn’t believe this for a second,’ Hoseok sighs from the cockpit before he says, ‘Everybody please buckle up- we’re leaving Nuqtai.’

‘-please I beg of you! He’s my only family left! I promised our parents I would take care of him-’ Sk’jin casually seats himself, securing his harness around him. Yoongi guides Jimin to the cockpit and makes him sit next to Hoseok, activating the safety belt for him before taking a seat on Hoseok’s other side.

‘-seems adamant in running away though, if he decided to stowaway.’ Is the response they get.

‘I think they are thick,’ Hoseok raises one eyebrow at Yoongi. Namjoon on the other hand is adamantly staring at the ceiling, as though hoping that the stars above would grant him relief from what he was listening to.

But Yoongi finds that there was some hope. These Beings were clearly just muscle- just extra Beings who were possibly roped into all of this for the units. It was possible that they would be able to get Taeh’yung back and leave as quickly as possible.

Hoseok is cursing under his breath. He looked determined, locking in the ship Taeh’yung was in to the HUD in front of him. He puts the ship on autopilot, following after the small ship.

‘Forget going to that stretch of dead space past Ymir- we’re headed straight for Grisial after this,’ Hoseok mumbles. ‘We’re not going to put ourselves out at risk like this again.’

‘-I’m so sorry for putting you in this family drama,’ Sk’jin cries out, ‘But please- Tae? Tae- can you hear me? Why would you do this to me? Do you know how much you’re putting me through? What this does to me? What would our parents think?’

‘I wouldn’t know because they died Jin! They died and I’m stuck with you! I just wanted to get some space!’ Taeh’yung cries back.

Namjoon facepalms. He literally hunches over in his seat, both of his hands covering his face, feet curled from severe embarrassment.
‘It’s difficult Tae! We don’t have a lot- and we’re barely scrapping here where we are. I am selling my body so that you can survive! I just added more sols in service to the Captain so that we could retrieve you!’ Sk’jin sobs out though he sends a sly wink at Namjoon’s direction. Yoongi is sure that Namjoon would be falling out of his chair if he wasn’t being strapped in.

‘I didn’t ask you to do that- what was wrong with living in the farm? Why didn’t we just stay there-’

‘Because of our debts Tae! Mother and father were not the good folks you thought they were- they made bets and drove our farm to the ground!’ Sk’jin chokes out. ‘-if I didn’t take us out of there we would have been sold into slavery- at least here like this we can make our choices- even if they are limited-’

“We’re green,” Hoseok calls out in a low dull voice, pulling off his security belt.

‘-you never gave me choices!’ Taeh’yung is honest to Spaces hysterical crying. Hoseok glances over at Jimin who now looks confused rather than troubled. He seems to be putting 2 and 2 together. ‘-you’re too loyal to Cap and he gives you nothing in return! He doesn’t love you like that-’

‘Tae! I’m telling you we can do this- just please please trust in me! Okay? Please trust in me and believe in me! I can take us out of here- and give us a good life. But I need you to come to me, please? You’re my only family!’

There’s a stifling silence that follows and Hoseok looks like he’s appalled to find himself engrossed in this ridiculous drama. Yoongi stands, walking out over to the Navigator’s Mast. Jimin follows him, his eyes are wide, as though now fully realizing what was happening. Namjoon is huddled down on the floor next to his chair, cradling his head in his arms. Jimin looks torn between wanting to reach out to the Captain but not knowing what was acceptable to do either.

‘fine. Fine. And I’m sorry- I was- I was just so mad – I thought you gave up on us-‘ Taeh’yung hiccups, voice thick and wobbly.

‘Oh Tae baby, I would never give up on us- I love you so much my precious brother,’ Sk’jin coos softly, voice cracking and fading. ‘I’ll come and get you all right? Just stay there and be a good boy, okay? Don’t give anyone any trouble, all right baby?’

‘Yes Jin- I’m sorry,’ Taeh’yung sniffs, sincere apology and regret in his voice. ‘I’ll be good.’

‘Namjoon!’ Sk’jin hisses, ‘Talk! Now!’

Namjoon is unmoving.

Jimin seems to understand now, and he looks impressed. He mimes clapping his hands at the Khol’isa. Sk’jin smiles, pleased, and flips his hair.

‘I think you broke him,’ Hoseok mumbles from the cockpit. But then the Kutsoglerin starts speaking.

‘This is Captain Neemal speaking,’ Namjoon easily gives his 1/50 fake identities he created. They all had at least, 30 fake identities, all created through different Hubs and Port-spaces, all under 1 hour. ‘I see that one of my kids has stowed away on your ship- I can only apologize for the trouble he must be giving you- Spaces knows he gives me enough.’

‘Guh,’ the Being over the Comm grunts out. For some reason this makes Sk’jin raise a fist in the air, a delighted expression on his face.
‘We’re set!’ he whispers over at Yoongi.

‘You can pick this brat up over at Ts’ets’khli-,’ the voice grunts.

‘We can’t go there- we’ll be scanned and discovered,’ Hoseok hisses at once though he knows Namjoon knows this.

‘How about we meet in Ubhuku,’ Namjoon offers. ‘It’s closer, and we can retrieve the brat and get him out of your hair as soon as possible.’

‘Sweet kid though-’

Sk’jin mouths, ‘wow- Tae sure moves fast,’ and looks extremely proud as though it was his own achievement.

‘You won’t think that for long,’ Namjoon fakes disinterest and irritation in his tone of voice. ‘It’s empty there- we can conduct our business with ease, and gives me some time to take care of things, you know?’

Sk’jin mimes projectile vomiting and Jimin is pressing his hand over his mouth, stopping himself from laughing out loud.

‘Yeah look here kid- you’re gonna have to keep a real tight eye out on your crew y’hear? If ya can’t tame them, don’t take them in. whatever ass you’re sticking it into- ain’t worth losing all the units over.’

‘If you don’t say that my ass is totally worth it I’m killing you in your sleep!’ Sk’jin hisses from where he’s sitting. Namjoon doesn’t even look up from where he’s slumped on the ground, still holding his head up in his hands.

‘Oh you have no idea how much I regret it.’

‘You’ll get the kid back when you transfer the units and cells we used for the detour- and an inconvenience fee too.’ The voice adds.

‘Yeah- of course,’ Namjoon wearily reaches out to grab at his NaviLet, but he’s too far down on the floor. Jimin takes pity and hands it to him before squatting down and gently pets Namjoon’s head with his hand.

‘I’m sorry Captain- I’m sorry Jin,’ Taeh’yung sniffs again.

‘All right kid- I’ll be taking this from you now- see bye to your brother and your Captain.’

‘See you later Jin- and-…. and thank you Captain.’

‘This is drama I’d pay to watch,’ Sk’jin comments in a whisper before choking out a reply, ‘Be good baby.’

Namjoon curls up on the floor in a fetal position.

Jimin laughs out loud, his head thrown back. Their hands are still connected and Yoongi can feel Jimin’s laughter- the vibrations of it moving from the other into him.

It’s warm and heartening.

Yoongi feels like he’s growing, something inside him expanding outwards towards the warmth of
it.

And Yoongi guesses he understands why he chose that nickname.

The nagging feeling won’t go away. And Hoseok wonders if its indigestion.

The identity they had adopted was of a private trade ship- the easiest cover-up, as well as the most common. Most pirate ships were registered as private trade ships so they just blended in with the other billions of ships zooming about the Universe.

But that doesn’t stop Hoseok from being jumpy. It was going to take a full 2 days to get to Ubhuku and they were now on their 40th hour of moving through GLA borders in this suspicious System. Hoseok never liked Ymir or the Systems around it. But Nuqtaï was the only option they had to access that many Hubs with the lowest chance of discovery.

Or so he thought.

Hoseok knew that it would be difficult to stick to a divisive plan- which was why he had even come up with so many alternative plans and sets of action. He just wasn’t expecting this early a deviation- they hadn’t even left Nuqtaï and things were already messing up.

One comfort he has is that their plan on setting off anyone who might come after them was working. It was obvious that they were on some form of searching/hunting list because the moment Hoseok had set off the fake information, there were ripples of action taking place. Maybe not as organized, but clearly targeting them and their leaked false information. He scoured the Underverse for news coming

While he wasn’t happy that they were now in fact on the run, it made him better knowing that they were able to direct the attention of the GLA elsewhere while they weaved their way through to their plan.

But what even was their plan? All of this was a complete mess- Namjoon and Sk’jin both with their own criteria. Both trying to see things done and through. Jimin trying to get back to his planet, and Yoongi…well, now with the information they gained from Jimin, probably also trying to figure out his past.

Then there was Taeh’yung I’m going to strangle you when I see you- Hoseok palms at his face.

The Zhak’gri was clearly a troublemaker. Hoseok has half the mind to leave him be- to tell Namjoon to just leave him there. He was certainly more than capable of handling himself. He would have no issue escaping from a small ship based on what Hoseok has seen. But then again, based on what Hoseok has seen Taeh’yung do, he knows that the Zhak’gri was an irreplaceable asset in their ship.

And the nagging feeling inside him is worry- and he knows that (not indigestion because Sk’jin
was a shockingly excellent cook and made the most amazing food and had the tendency to stress-cook- lucky for them Jimin was a big eater and Yoongi just ate whatever was placed in front of him, no questions asked).

He knows he’s worried over Taeh’yung despite the fact that the latter could probably walk out of a nuclear war unharmed, probably wearing a flower crown. An odd imagination but somehow oddly fitting. But he can’t help it. To Hoseok’s disbelief and shock, he’s come to realize that he actually cares about the wellbeing of the Beings in this team- not just because they were useful additions into their joint cause and effort (which was honestly just questionable and life-threatening).

The ship carrying Taeh’yung was far up ahead, slowing down as they arrived at Ubhuku’s space borders. The planet itself wasn’t all too bad on the outside, the atmosphere thin and forgiving. However, like her sister-planets, Ubhuku had an extremely acidic atmosphere, as a result of their volatile oceans and seas. Despite Ubhuku being more land than water, the acidity in the air was like breathing in wafts of acidic vapour- all the plants that grew in that planet were adapted to the planet’s strange acidity, covered in a gooey substance that alkalized the acid, creating a constant shield of water around them. Which was probably why the planet was so humid and swampy. Upon checking up on the planet, they found out that Namjoon and Sk’jin could breathe the air on land-level. But Hoseok and Yoongi would have to wear a filter and full Space-Gear, and just to be safe, Jimin too. The ship would be protected from the acidic air but they don’t want to take any risks. The planet was interesting- it used to house a GLA research facility but due to the weak crust and loose soil, no structure could stay upright. That and prolonged exposure catalyzed most material into strange gooey rotted matter. Hoseok has heard that it’s something of a quick pit-stop for pirates. But only if they’re desperate.

It was also where Taeh’yung had apparently tried to play actual god.

Acidic planet, weird evolution, and gooey mush Hoseok could understand and deal with. But the idea that someone he knew, and shared a ship with, had somehow played god in this volatile planet, and was observed by the GLA was something that really didn’t sit well with him.

‘Scanner ready?’ Namjoon asks, appearing to his side.

Hoseok nods.

‘Right- if Taeh’yung tracked them right, they could give us a better lead into those Beings,’ Namjoon mumbles under his breath.

‘I still don’t think we should be doing this,’ Hoseok chimes in.

‘It’s not,’ Namjoon agrees with a shrug. ‘But we all have to do risky things in missions- it’s how we get information.’

Hoseok wants to disagree but there is truth in Namjoon’s words. Hoseok’s entire life has been surrounded and made by risks and chances he’s taken. Of course he was extremely careful-planning ahead for hours days weeks. But that had been only his life- Hoseok was only ever responsible for his life, his single mission.

Now he feels the burden of the team- having to think of 5 other Beings, calculate the risk of error and probability from their actions, with his own, and create some form of solid plan on what they had to do. And clearly it wasn’t working out.

‘We have the advantage of a better ship- so we can land faster, and prepare on site,’ Namjoon ruminates, eyes fixed on the view outside. The planet Ubhuku was slowly approaching- now a
small dot of muddy green against the backdrop of space. They were following the coordinates the other ship had sent them.

‘We’ll be entering Ubhuku in 30 minutes,’ Hoseok calls out in warning over the Comm. ‘Sk’jin have you finished cooking?’

‘Shut up.’

‘He’s still cooking,’ Namjoon sighs out as he walks over to the cockpit.

Hoseok wonders if Sk’jin had explicitly chosen cooking as his stress breaker because he knew Namjoon didn’t eat. It was probably in retaliation of Namjoon loudly announcing that he was going to bed every other night. They would be a second from going at each other’s throats but Hoseok stops them every time he can. Hoseok rolls his eyes at the two, wondering when and why he ended up becoming the “adult supervision” on the ship.

The coordinates took them to a flat swampy clear area.

Jimin is pressed to the window, eyes wide as he takes in the sight of the planet below him. It was a rather flat planet- the horizon continuing along without much break. It was just… lumpy.

‘Jimin should stay inside,’ Namjoon repeats the plan again, ‘Sk’jin and I will go out to talk. Hoseok will stand at the ready to take off. Yoongi, are you ready?’

‘Ready,’ Yoongi replies from the front.

‘Oh Captain- spare my brother and punish me instead!’ Sk’jin trills from where he sits. Hoseok grimaces at the way Sk’jin says punish. Namjoon sighs heavily and just throws Sk’jin a mask.

They didn’t need it, but it made for a good cover-up. Their faces wouldn’t be exposed.

With some difficulty, they had explained to Jimin that he shouldn’t be seen, and that he should stay inside until Taeh’yung came back and they were safely on their way out. He had nodded in understanding, looking a little upset at the idea of staying inside.

Hoseok has changed though he knows he shouldn’t leave the ship- as pilot, he would need to be at the cockpit, ready to take off at a moment’s notice.

When they land, the ship takes a while to calibrate the landing gear.

‘The surface isn’t ideal for landing,’ Hoseok grits out, watching the ongoing analysis on the whole process.

‘Any signs of life?’ Namjoon calls.

‘None,’ Sk’jin replies as he gazes out distastefully. ‘Nothing other than the plants could survive on this planet.’

‘All right- we have a 5 minute window here- Hoseok, is everything ready?’ Namjoon asks.

Hoseok starts up the aerial scanner and readies a tracker, holding it up for Yoongi when he walks past. It’s still unsettling every time Yoongi wears his GI uniform along with the helmet. He wasn’t in the standard dark blue Space-Gear Hoseok was wearing under his regular clothes- Hoseok doesn’t know how it’s been made, but apparently it had a decent ability to withstand almost every force invented. Jimin fidgets by the tower-mast, watching after Yoongi as the Human walks out. He was obviously not at all happy with the plan and he kept glancing out of the window, jumpy...
and confused.

‘Yoongi tell us when you get into position,’ Namjoon calls as he readies a unit-chip, and the code for a tidy amount of units.

‘Understood.’

‘I need to look like I’ve been crying,’ Sk’jin states, glancing at his reflection before addressing Hoseok, ‘Should I look ugly worried or beautiful worried? Should I try to look panicked?’ Sk’jin adopts a theatrical panicked expression.

‘Maybe just stick with normal worried,’ Hoseok offers.

Sk’jin sighs dramatically before saying, ‘You’re boring Hobi.’

Hoseok is about to counter Sk’jin and tell him that he was lucky that Taeh’yung’s captives were pretty thick because Sk’jin’s act was so obvious when he feels a tug on his sleeve.

Jimin is pulling at his sleeve urgently.

‘Pon ah thil an om.’

‘…sorry?’

Jimin points outside.

Sk’jin and Hoseok both look out.

There’s nothing outside the window. Nothing in the swampy clearing.

‘What do you mean?’ Sk’jin asks.

Jimin just points, a bit more vehemently outside.

‘Pon ah thil an om- enge ni ka hre lo.’

He looks worried, gnawing at his lower lip.

‘Jimin-?’ Sk’jin tries but Jimin lets out a frustrated exhale and runs out of the Bridge.

‘Hobi- scan the area again,’ Sk’jin orders sharply as he makes his way down to the tower-mast, pressing his face against the window.

Hoseok scans the place but comes up with nothing. The only form of life around was that of plant-life. Nothing more. Nothing less. Hoseok has heard of how if there were too many plants and algae growth in condensed areas, it could lead to confusion in scanners.

‘Motion sensors?’ Sk’jin suggests, shoulders tense as he carefully scans the horizon, fingers reaching out to activate the HUD settings on the pane before him.

Wondering what the Khol’isa was on about, Hoseok activates the motion sensors. A small signal tells him that Taeh’yung’s captor’s ship just entered the planet.

‘Sk’jin- if you could come down plea-woaH HEY JIMIN-‘ Namjoon begins but ends up yelling.

The motion sensor lights up on the window in front of Sk’jin and he gasps out loud.
‘Shit! Yoongi get back in now!’ Sk’jin shrieks, turning on his spot and running out. Hoseok quickly pulls up the sensor as well and to his horror finds a huge ring of movement closing in on them. Just meters from where Yoongi’s blue signal was lit up.

Hoseok quickly closes every single ventilation outlet- firing up the plasma engines and expanding the radius of their shield.

‘Jimin get back in here-!’ Hoseok’s heart leaps to his throat.

‘Yoongi!?’ Hoseok calls out as he leaps out of his chair, running out of the Bridge. ‘Lisai- return to autopilot and put the ship on green!’

‘Understood, Head-Pilot Hoseok.’

Jumping down the rest of the stairs, Hoseok sprints over the Lobby and into the Hangar.

The acidity of the air outside has seeped in a little and his eyes water at once, his skin smarting. Quickly pulling up his mask, Hoseok rushes forward to where Namjoon and Sk’jin are standing. The heat from the planet is instantaneous even though he was exposed for only a few seconds. He was already sweating. Namjoon didn’t seem too effected, though Sk’jin has a ruddy glow to his skin, sweat beading down the sides of his face already.

‘Why aren’t you-‘ Hoseok is about to yell, demanding why the two who weren’t affected by the planet’s acidity and environment weren’t doing anything.

‘Where’s Jimin?’ Hoseok demands, making sure no sliver of skin was exposed.

Sk’jin and Namjoon just point ahead.

Jimin is standing ankle deep in muddy water some distance ahead. He looks entirely fine and unaffected by the volatile air. Yoongi is there too, helmet on. But that’s not what was most startling.

Surrounding Jimin and Yoongi, were weird shaped blobs that slowly bubbled about them. They have strangely shaped antler-like projections atop their blob-heads. They were transparent-ish, but in a muddy way. They had no faces- and just appeared…like blobs. They were crowding around Jimin, weird oblong bodies bent over as though to look at Jimin clearly. Yoongi is there, his stance defensive but he’s not acting out. It could be because Jimin was holding his hand. Jimin is clearly talking to these blobs, neck craning in order to face (?!?!?) the blobs.

‘What the fuck-‘

Jimin turns a little, waving at them. And then all the blobs shift, their faceless forms obviously regarding them all. Hoseok swears he hears Sk’jin whimper out a curse.

‘In-coming ship.’ They all jump at Lisai’s announcement.

‘Shit-‘ Namjoon curses, finally moving.

‘Uh-‘

‘We have to get Yoongi back in hiding and we need to get Jimin back in-‘ Sk’jin hisses, real panic settling on his features. Hoseok has half the mind to tell Sk’jin he still looked handsome whilst panicked.
‘Yoongi- you need to go back to position and Jimin needs to hide- take him with you and just please stay away from sight!’ Namjoon hisses.

Yoongi doesn’t respond but he sees the Human tugging Jimin gently.

Their odd party move out of the swampy clearing and into the strange mushy lumps dotting the area. And it’s not even 30 seconds later when the other ship appears.

‘Do you think they scanned them?’ Namjoon asks worriedly as Sk’jin hurries to set up the fuel-cells on the gravity-lift.

‘It’s possible that the signals from the vegetation might have covered them but I’m not sure,’ Hoseok replies tersely.

‘Do you think those were Taeh’yung’s…creations?’ Namjoon asks carefully as they watch the small ship land some ways down the swamp. It’s smaller than the Užkulisai and older. It was clearly just a temporary ship- what with the license and model stamp freshly painted over the hull despite the entire ship being in dire need of a redo. The back of the ship opens slowly and it’s as though they hear Taeh’yung before they see them. A loud and dramatic shout of ‘brother!’ rings through the swamp. Hoseok nervously eyes the lumpy growth to the side.

‘Let’s go,’ Namjoon grits through his teeth, nodding once at Sk’jin as the latter pulls the filter-mask over his face. ‘Hoseok- let’s get ready to leave.’

Hoseok nods in response.

Namjoon and Sk’jin step out, feet squelching into the muddy and slimy water.

‘Lisai, redirect all weapons to the ship ahead.’ Hoseok orders as he closes the Hangar gates and makes his way to the antechamber to the side. ‘Yoongi- are you clear?’

‘Clear.’

Hoseok quickly activates the large screen before opening the side door by a smidgeon. He can still see the ship from here. Pulling up the scanner he had activated in the Bridge, Hoseok starts the application.

‘All right- let’s get into their system and see who else they’ve been talking to.’

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‘Jin!’ Taeh’yung cries, running forwards, legit tears down his face.

Sk’jin, not one to do anything half-assed, also has tears down his face, tripping elegantly (if that was a thing) as he too runs towards Taeh’yung. They crash into each other, Sk’jin sobbing as he scolds but hugs Taeh’yung. Taeh’yung is also sobbing, apologizing on top of his voice.

Namjoon is thankful for the mask over his face- it stops him from giving himself away as he tries
not to roll his eyes at Sk’jin’s and Taeh’yung’ act. So instead Namjoon turns his attention back towards the lanky Being who walked Taeh’yung out of the ship.

A total of 4 of them came along, hanging around the back, leery glances sent in Taeh’yung and Sk’jin’s direction as the two “brothers” sink to the ground, sobbing heartily. They were enjoying this too much.

‘Namjoon- Yoongi has placed the bug on their ship. Downloading their information now. I need 5 minutes.’

‘You’ve got a bunch of pretty ones with you,’ the Being says casually. ‘They seem like a handful- I can offer you a good price, I know someone who would be interested in a face like that- we can split the profits.’

Namjoon wants to maybe punch this Being’s face in and send him face first into the swamp. Namjoon can’t place his species, his face covered with a mask. The others behind him also have masks on. Namjoon notices that they hadn’t spared Taeh’yung one. This further irritates him.

‘Yeah- we know a bunch who are really into the pretty ones you know?’ the other adds, their eyes gleaming maniacally.

They were clearly just pirates- probably bought to work for the House of Jtāharū or something along that line. Money bought- meaning their loyalty could be bought, as well as their silence.

‘A handful they are- and I’ll be sure to see to their punishment,’ Namjoon replies easily, sending a withering look in Sk’jin and Taeh’yung’s direction. They both act accordingly, heads lowering, shoulders curling inwards. It’s suddenly so convincing Namjoon almost feels bad. He looks straight at the pirate before continuing, ‘Here’s a small thank you for your trouble.’

He hands over the unit-chip to the pirate before snaps out, ‘Stop being so pathetic cur, get the fuck out of my sight right now!’

‘Namjoon- the ship was last deployed from Pompa.’

‘And don’t try and save him- I’m not forgiving him,’ Namjoon yells at Sk’jin and Taeh’yung who pathetically trip back towards the ship. Namjoon faces the pirates again.

‘We’re good?’ he asks, jutting his chin out.

‘Those cells ours?’ one of them asks, pointing at the gravity-lift next to Namjoon.

‘For your trouble,’ Namjoon pushes the lift in their direction.

‘Hey- you’re from Kutsoglera aren’t you?’ one of them suddenly states.

‘Does it matter?’ Namjoon doesn’t fake his irritation.

‘Well-‘

‘Their last call came from an unknown source- just 5 minutes ago. Namjoon I think they’re stalling-‘

‘-not really. It’s rare to see your lot around here,’ the pirate shrugs casually before nodding at the other pirate to his side. ‘Grab the cells- check them.’ Then he turns to face Namjoon. ‘So- what brings you around here?’
‘Heard some shit went down in Pompa,’ Namjoon replies. ‘Seemed like a good opportunity to scan
the area, y’know?’

‘Huh- scavenging,’ one of the other mumbles, kicking at the watery soil.

‘Hey- it’s what puts food on the table then that’s good ain’t it?’ the main pirate shrugs. ‘Seems like
you like to spoil your pretty ones- this’s some high-tech Device on him.’

He holds up the Comm-Device in his hand, rolling it about between his fingers.

‘And a waste of money seeing as he still manages to run off,’ Namjoon scoffs, reaching his hand
out for the device.

The pirate doesn’t move, still rolling the small cuff between his fingers. His eyes study Namjoon
for a while.

‘How’s the cell?’ he asks.

‘Seems fine to me- all clear. Maybe we want a set more?’ the other suggests from where he’s
crouched over on the ground.

‘I need only a minute more and I have everything.’

Namjoon makes a face at the pirate, sighing tiredly before he calls out, ‘Bring another set you
pieces of shit!’

Namjoon wonders if all exchanges were this heavily tense. The pirates in front of him were all
feigning nonchalance but Namjoon can easily read their tenseness. Hoseok said that they were
stalling- and they had received a call 5 minutes prior. They had most likely reported the situation-
and it was possible that they were being told to stall until further notice.

There’s squelching sounds behind him and Namjoon recognizes Sk’jin’s footfall. The Khol’isa’s
presence triggers a few lusty gazes.

‘He’s a real prize that one- must’ve paid a lot to get him,’ the main pirate remarks. Sk’jin appears
to the side, timidly pushing forward another gravity-lift.

‘Yeah- he sure is pretty- I see why you keep him with you,’ one of the pirates crouched on the
ground says, eyeing Sk’jin up and down. ‘Bet he’d look real pretty when he cries.’

Sk’jin pretends to shudder, his hands shaking as he unties the tanks.

‘Hey- he just complimented you,’ the other pirate shouts at Sk’jin. ‘Why don’t you thank him
huh?’

‘Movement from the ship. Do I take care of it?’ Yoongi asks quietly.

‘No,’ Namjoon shakes his head, ‘My property- eyes off why don’t you?’

‘Fine hey- just appreciating,’ the pirates raises his hands as though he meant no harm.

‘Well- we’ll check on this and then be on our way,’ the main pirate says as Sk’jin shuffles meekly
to stand behind Namjoon, making himself small. ‘Boys- get this back in.’

Namjoon spots movement too. One of the other pirates comes walking forward, a screen in his
hands. His stance is casual. Too casual. He’s looking around as though taking in the scenery.
'Done.'

Namjoon is about to end the entire thing, already making to step back. But then he meets the main pirate’s gaze and he knows.

Everyone moves at the same time. There’s an eruption of TeorSer fire aimed right at Namjoon but he dodges it.

But before he can even speak, there’s a brief moment everything turns bright green.

Namjoon finds himself on the ground, splattered in muddy swampy water. He hears Sk’jin mumble out a curse, some squelching sounds and the Khol’isa’s face swims in his vision.

‘The fuck-’

‘You need to work on your acting skills,’ the Khol’isa states blankly. ‘You at least need to call me a bitch.’

‘Pa! Are you all right?’

Namjoon is jerked up and pulled into a tight hug. And over Taeh’yung’s shoulder Namjoon finds the 5 pirates in a heap on the ground, and the main pirate fully compressed in a familiar green triangle. Namjoon pulls off his mask, the heat of the swamp pressing down on him. It wasn’t too bad, seeing as his body instantly calibrated to whatever environment was presented to him. He looks over at Sk’jin who is splattered in some muddy water, hair slicked back and drenched from sweat. Any trace of meekness is gone from his features as he eyes the pirates on the ground with undisguised distaste.

‘Their ship-’ Namjoon points out sharply, eyeing the ship in the distance.

‘Yoongi’s taking care of it,’ Hoseok replies. ‘I’ve deactivated their ship for now. No signals being sent out, but channels still opened to receive.’

‘Keep an eye out on the space borders- I don’t want to jumped,’ Namjoon pats Taeh’yung, looking him over before asking, ‘You’re all right?’

‘Yes pa- oh! CHIM!’ Taeh’yung shouts loudly, arms waving in wide circles.

Coming out of the pirate ship are Yoongi and Jimin.

‘The ship is clear for inspection,’ Yoongi says quietly as Taeh’yung bounds over the swamp easily. Jimin waves back eagerly.

‘I’m so happy to see you-?!’

Taeh’yung is slammed into the ground by a wave of blobs.

Sk’jin lets out a shocked gasp, freezing on spot. But instead of defending himself, Taeh’yung is laughing loudly and delightedly.

‘…remember what Taeh’yung said about this place?’ Namjoon asks, swallowing thickly.

‘Uh huh,’ Sk’jin replies weakly, raising a finger and pointing at the blobs. ‘I guess…I guess that’s what he made?’

‘Yeah…’
By the time they reach Taeh’yung, Jimin is also already there. He’s nearly splattered head to toe with muddy water. He’s speaking rapidly, looking pleased as Taeh’yung continues to squeal, arms open wide as he hugs the blobs. It almost looked as though Taeh’yung was about to consumed, amoeba style, but the blobs seem to be hugging him back. Then Jimin leaps forward as well, pointing and exclaiming in delight. Taeh’yung turns quickly and gives out a loud shout of delight.

Sk’jin groans next to him.

Namjoon’s nonexistent blood runs cold when a titan-blob emerges from the ground, great heaving transparent antlers emerging from the muddy waters around the swamp.

‘UMHOLI!’ Taeh’yung shouts.

‘…what in Spaces is that- should I open fire…?’ Hoseok asks worriedly.

The blob stands at least 3 meters tall, antlers reaching higher than that.

‘No- I think- I think we’re fine,’ Sk’jin says sounding tired. ‘Let’s go check on that ship first shall we? I think the two of them will be all right here.’

Namjoon finds himself being pushed forward by the Khol’isa. Namjoon glances back at the blob and then at the heap of unconscious pirates and the floating green triangle. He wonders why he was ever worried for Taeh’yung.

Yoongi is waiting for them near the doorway leading into the pirate ship. It’s smaller than the Užkulisai but still definitely sizeable. Not being able to see Yoongi’s face is odd- like he was someone else entirely. It’s unsettling seeing him like this, and it makes Namjoon realize just how little they knew about the Human. But what was worse, was how less Yoongi knew of himself in all of this.

‘What a piece of junk,’ Sk’jin sniffs, wiping his face with his sleeve. ‘I know pirates have this rep and a sense of aesthetic but this is just going overboard.’

The ship is dirty to the point of looking like it was purposefully done. There are stacks and stacks of OrTanks, crates, damp boxes of wood and paper even, all crushed up to the sides. There are 4 other pirates in a heap on the ground- all (thankfully) unconscious- probably Yoongi’s work.

‘Most of them are empty,’ Yoongi says as he removes his helmet, safe inside the interior of the ship. He appeared entirely unaffected by the environment around him. ‘Come- you need to see the Bridge.’

Namjoon and Sk’jin follow the Human up a sloping ramp to the Bridge above. This entire ship was really more catered for shipment and cargo, seeing as there was no separation or divisions inside, save for support beams and pillars, and a walkway crossing the space above. Hammocks hung around the place, and ratty mattresses rolled up at random. The Bridge is by far the cleanest place inside the ship. Yoongi approaches the Navigation Table and taps on the surface once with a gloved finger.

A map appears, with a pale blue trajectory highlighted. There was nothing extraordinary about it by looking at it just once but Namjoon spots it at once.

‘Hoseok-‘

‘Hey- their last call came from Raksane Tayi.’
The ship is like every other ordinary pirate-ship. Dirty, disorganized, and littered with useless shit everywhere.

Sk’jin grimaces at the place, wondering why pirates insisted on living like this. When he had been pirate-lord, all the ships he commanded had been clean and organized. Sk’jin was a staunch believer in hygiene, and being inside this ship, as well as this planet, made him want to scrub off his skin and bun the clothes he was wearing.

Most of the loot in here was junk- despite being a cargo ship, they didn’t carry much of it. They were carrying fuel-cells, but it was out here in the open instead of being stored in the cell-slots under the hull where they were supposed to be stored. Taeh’yung hadn’t mentioned anything additional in relation to the House of Jtāharū, if that was even their actual name. It still creeps him out.

Yoongi quietly makes his way around to the front of the Table, removing a small screen from inside his pocket. He slots it over the table, immediately transferring all of the records.

Namjoon is already typing away, studying the trajectory.

‘Do you think that House was involved with the Alliance? Or with the GLA? Or the Gaia Case?’ Hoseok asks.

‘Or all,’ Sk’jin remarks, walking around the Bridge and studying the place. This was just a temporary ship- one that could be abandoned when needed.

‘I think we need to consider the fact that the House of Jtāharū will also be looking for us- or at least for Jimin,’ Namjoon says tensely. ‘If they did indeed “smell” like the Akramanese ship- the probability of their relation with the Gaia Case has just doubled. And I think we can safely say it is separated from the Alliance or from whatever Van Seulgaan was doing.’

‘How can you say that?’ Sk’jin presses.

‘Because they would have banded with Van,’ Namjoon answers simply. ‘When I conducted research on them I could find no name alluding to their House name- there was no record of their arriving in Pompa either. I tried finding them on the GLA database but there was nothing that resembled them based on the imagery we captured.’

‘Why would the pirates receive a call from Tayi though? Seems like a bad place for anyone working actively against the GLA policies to just hang out in.’

‘The GI were based in the heart of Raksane Tayi and were used to take down members of the GLA,’ Yoongi states suddenly. ‘Where else can you best hide, if not right under your enemies nose?’

Yoongi is right. But it hurt Sk’jin’s head just thinking about. Corruption and foul play was a thing Sk’jin was used to- but it was as though it had gotten three times as worse as he had imagined during the time he was asleep. And it seemed to plague the stronghold of the Known Universe the most.
‘Theorizing about this without sufficient information isn’t going to get us anywhere- let’s just find their trajectory and make sure we don’t overlap in any of the planets they have registered.’ Hoseok sighs.

‘Well, according to this trajectory, they were headed next to Ts’ets’khli and then to Ynqaba,’ Namjoon frowns. ‘That’s a war-zone, you’re not supposed to go there.’

Sk’jin sometimes wonders if Namjoon really was a veteran Information Analyst who discovered information vitally important to the Gaia Case.

‘Honey, war means money- war is the best business out there,’ Sk’jin rolls his eyes dismissively. ‘Why do you think it keeps happening? Within a country, between countries- between planets- within planets- it’s all for power, and it’s all for money. It’s the natural cycle of manufactured life.’

‘Manufactured life?’ Namjoon tilts his head, eyes steely.

‘The moment a governing authority is formed- the moment there is a deity, a figure-head that creates authority and a sense of structure- all who follow it automatically fall into manufactured life,’ Sk’jin shrugs. ‘A life that is dictated by policies, or religion, or oppression, or reverence- this is all manufactured. And in this, war is key, because that generates power, dependency, fear, and money.’

Namjoon’s jaw is tight.

‘Well, we can only figure out the meaning behind all of this by interrogating one of them,’ Hoseok chimes in before he calls out on the Comm, ‘Taeh’yung- is that pirate guy alive?’

Sk’jin catches the way Namjoon winces at his words.

‘Yeah? You want me to get rid of them?’

‘No!’ Namjoon replies at once. ‘Make sure the others are secured, and bring them back into the ship. We need to talk to the main pirate.’

‘A-okay!’

‘I’m done,’ Yoongi states, holding up his screen. ‘Should I get rid of the ship.’

‘No- no,’ Namjoon looks exasperated. ‘There’s no need for any additional violence.’

Sk’jin wants to laugh despite not finding this situation amusing at all. Because it’s annoying and gives him a sense of déjà vu he did not want or need.

Jimin turns to wave at them- it had become surprisingly dark rather quickly. And to Sk’jin’s fascination as well as a fair amount of nervousness, the blobs are actually glowing. Taeh’yung is humming in a low tone, and it’s rather eerie with the way faint pulses of green escape him in the muddy water, creating ripples that reflect on the blobs.

Jimin walks over to them, expression turning serious as he regards the ship behind them. His eyes are glowing in this dim light. And they really do look like solar eclipses now. He looks over at Yoongi who though was already wearing his helmet again, was obviously only looking at Jimin. Jimin holds his hand out for the Human. And Yoongi takes it of course.

When Sk’jin looks at the two of them, he can’t help the feeling of something foreboding. Not for a minute does Sk’jin think any of this is coincidence. This was all too purposeful, all too planned.
And this reunion was all part of that plan.

It’s too clear to Sk’jin- watching the two in front of him. He’s not sure if Namjoon and Hoseok really see it for what it is. Or maybe Sk’jin was looking too deep, looking for things that weren’t there. But what he does know is that it was probably going to end in pain- and that no one was going to be spared.

‘Pa! What do you want me to do with him?’ Taeh’yung asks as the triangle carrying the pirate from before emerges from the swampy soil. Sk’jin catches Namjoon quickly looking about for the other pirates, and is relieved to find them by one of the landing wheels of the pirate ship to the side. They were not bound or anything, but Sk’jin knows there was no chance of escape even if they wanted to.

‘We just need to go back and interrogate him,’ Namjoon explains, glancing about, ‘It’s getting dark. We should take this inside.’

Taeh’yung nods, the triangle floating back into the pirate’s ship. Jimin follows, a short question directed at Taeh’yung.

‘How do we know if he knows anything anyways,’ Sk’jin asks with a frown. ‘He just seems like a pawn.’

‘Because of what he said earlier,’ Namjoon replies, pulling out an OrTank to sit on it. ‘He said he could arrange for a meeting to sell you and Taeh’yung if I wanted to- to a buyer who would like your faces.’

‘I mean I’m flattered-‘ Sk’jin jokes. But as usual his jokes fly over Namjoon’s all too literal head as the Kutsoglerin sends him a glare.

‘It’s unlikely he’ll talk, is what I’m saying,’ Sk’jin sighs. ‘And even if he knew stuff- it’ll most likely

‘WAIT!’ Taeh’yung suddenly yells, causing all of them to pause and for the green triangle to break with a small popping sounds. He then rapidly asks Jimin something. The latter replies somewhat dazed but he smiles quickly, nodding as to affirm what he said.

‘Chim is so amazing!’ Taeh’yung exclaims before explaining. ‘He can make anyone tell the truth!’

A shiver runs down Sk’jin’s back. He catches sight of Namjoon tensing up as well.

‘That’s so amazing Chim- isn’t that great Pa?’ Taeh’yung hugs Jimin to himself. They’re both incredibly muddy and splattered- they look a lot like children at that moment.

Jimin smiles, pleased, and proceeds to imitate Sk’jin, flipping his hair in a wave of muddy silvery-gold. For some reason this makes Sk’jin smile.

‘Of all the Beings he could have imitated,’ Namjoon grumbles under his voice before he adds, ‘All right then- let’s get the truth out of him. Hoseok?’

‘I’ll be there in a minute.’
Jimin stands behind the bound and gagged pirate, hands reaching out and ready.

Namjoon takes a seat in front of the pirate alongside Hoseok who has changed his appearance. Namjoon wears his mask and nods at Jimin. Without further ado, Jimin places his palms over the temples of the pirate. They had decided that only Namjoon and Hoseok would be visually present before the pirate.

There is no visible change, no shifting in light, no surge of power, or anything that could be denoted as brilliant. Sk’jin glances over at Jimin who takes a small step back and nods at Namjoon. Sk’jin almost wants to ask, ‘that’s it?’ but stops himself. Taeh’ying gives him an excited double thumbs-up which Jimin returns slowly.

This was almost like Yoongi 2.0.

‘What is your name?’ Namjoon asks.

‘Khonen.’

Sk’jin is taken aback at the change in voice. The pirate- Khonen – had previously spoken in a guttural and harsh tone. Now his voice was…happy?! Oddly quiet and not at all gruff and aggressive.

‘Khonen, who do you work for?’ Namjoon asks.

‘I work for no one but myself.’ The pirate replies.

‘All right…what do you do Khonen?’ Hoseok asks instead.

‘I lead a small network of smugglers. We bandy with a few pirating-networks as well as the Venture Unit,’ he replies, still sounding happy.

‘Who are you currently associated with?’ Namjoon asks. ‘Who have you joined with?’

‘They are called the pure ones- the Creators.’

Sk’jin glances over at Taeh’ying who is exceptionally serious. He’s not translating, simply staring hard at the pirate, eyes glowing a green light.

‘Tell me everything you know about them,’ Hoseok says, leaning forward.

‘They call themselves the Omhlophe. They seek to create only the best, to birth the strongest, the most beautiful.’ Is Khonen’s shocking reply. ‘They move in small numbers- taking in small numbers. Only in small numbers.’

‘Does the term House of Jtāharū mean anything to you?’

‘No.’

‘Have you met them? What did they want from you?’ Hoseok presses.
‘I have spoken to them through the HoloComm,’ Khonen replies. ‘They requested our services, to enter the borders of Ynqaba, to retrieve their eggs.’

‘Eggs? What are those?’ Namjoon asks, voice strained.

‘The specimen they developed and created,’ Khonen replies. ‘They are retrieving them from the Universe, where they have been scattered.’

‘Scattered? How?’ Hoseok presses.

‘I do not know.’

Hoseok curses under his breath but Namjoon is quick to pick up the questions.

‘Do you know who Van Seulgaan is?’ the Kutsoglerin asks tersely.

‘No.’

Sk’jin can’t help but fidget. Van Seulgaan had referred to Jimin’s OrTank state as egg. And this was the second time they were now hearing this.

‘Have you ever worked for the Isbahaysiga Alliance?’

‘I do not answer to the Alliance,’ the pirate says with a smile. ‘The Alliance is falling apart- it has been for decades now, and even more so in the past few sols. I now only obey the Omhlophe.’

‘What payment do you receive from the Omhlophe?’ Namjoon asks with a frown.

‘They have a cure- to relieve my people of the plague that eats our crops,’ Khonen explains. ‘The GLA do not help us. The Yisheng refuse to aid us. They have a cure- and my people and I are paying for it as we can.’

‘Where are you from?’ Namjoon sighs out.

‘Zelek, 6th planet from the Ukuye System,’ Khonen replies.

Yoongi starts tapping on his small screen, clearly looking it up. Sk’jin steps back to stand next to the Human.

‘Have you seen other eggs?’ Hoseok asks.

‘I have delivered 3 eggs from Kutsoglera to the Omhlophe,’ Khonen replies to stunned silence.

Namjoon actually physically leans back.

‘Kutsoglera?’ his voice comes out in a cracked whisper. ‘How?’

‘The Galactic Security and Safety Department are only stationed off-planet. Security is weak- we were able to enter the planet and obtain the eggs.’

‘What were the eggs doing in Kutsoglera? How did they get there?’ Namjoon demands.

‘I do not know.’

Namjoon doesn’t move- his expression is a little unstable, eyes focusing on a spot on the floor.
‘Where were you going to take the egg if you managed to retrieve it from Ynqaba?’ Hoseok asks, casting a brief worried look over at Namjoon.

‘Our meeting points are sent to us after we pick up the eggs. They are not pre-planned,’ Khonen explains gently.

‘What line do you use to call the Omhlophe?’

‘It changes frequently- and they are the ones who call to inquire.’

‘The last call you received was from Raksane Tayi- who was that?’

‘My other crew- they called to report that eggs they were sent to retrieve had been ordered to find.’

‘Where were those eggs from?’

‘I don’t know. They get their orders differently.’ Khonen replies with a small yawn.

Yoongi nudges him quietly and Sk’jin glances down at the screen the Human was holding up.

Khonen was right- news on the planet was morbid. Their agriculture was suffering from bouts of unusual plagues and blights. Zelek was not part of the GLA- the System they were included in was in open hostile relations with the GLA and banned any help from the GLA. Not that that mattered to the Yishengs. This was probably a ploy by the GLA, to get the Ukuye System to suffer until they had no choice but to surrender themselves over to the GLA.

‘But the second call was from the Omhlophe- they wanted to know why we deviated from our trajectory.’

A chill runs down Sk’jin’s spine.

‘What did you tell them?’

‘We didn’t want them to be disappointed in us- so we lied, and said we had to do some repairs.’ Khonen explains.

Sk’jin is only a little relieved.

‘What do the Omhlophe look like? Where are they from?’ Hoseok asks, a last minute attempt in trying to rule out the House of Jtāharū.

‘They are white, and they are young. They come from everywhere,’ Khonen replies simply, yawning again. ‘They are the Universe, and the Universe is them. When they told me this, I wanted to laugh. But they weren’t joking.’

‘What does that mean?’

‘It means they are from the Universe,’ Khonen replies with a small laugh. ‘And now they just want to live and create.’

Namjoon and Hoseok sit in silence for a long while.

Jimin says something quietly to Taeh’yung who speaks out softly, ‘He’ll fall asleep soon- if you have any more questions to ask him, you should do it now- he won’t wake up for a while.’

Hoseok glances at Namjoon who isn’t responsive, and shakes his head for both of them.
They gather behind the now lightly snoring pirate.

‘Well that certainly confuses me more,’ Sk’jin says loudly, breaking the heavy silence around them. ‘So whoever this House is- they are now looking for the eggs- the very same OrTanks Jimin, and possibly Yoongi, were kept in. Which as we all know, were taken from the Akramanese mothership, and is now supposedly being kept safe by the Venture Unit and the Yishengs. And we also know now that Van Seulgaan knows about these OrTanks and also refers to them as eggs and has several in his ship. I’m also willing to bet that the empty OrTanks we saw in his ship were probably empty because that House or whatever bought them from Seulgaan- oh, and Seulgaan is part of the Alliance- which provided the Yishengs with live experimental dummies whenever they needed, in exchange for running the slave market business around the Universe.’

No one adds anything to that.

‘Oh and of course- apparently these eggs are scattered around the Universe and this House is looking for them.’ Sk’jin heaves out a sigh. ‘So basically from today we have come to know at least 4 more confusing and questionable facts and none of our answers have been answered.’

Khonen snores loudly.

‘How did these OrTanks even get around?’ Hoseok demands out loud at no one in particular. ‘Were they always out there, stored away randomly by the Akramanese or are they being carted off by the Venture Unit and the Yishengs into different Systems?’

‘Do you know what’s happened to the other OrTanks?’ Namjoon addresses Yoongi suddenly. ‘Yoongi please- we need to know in order to understand.’

Yoongi had told them that the OrTanks were kept under surveillance and security by the joint forces of the Venture Unit and the Yishengs. It was clear that Namjoon hadn’t particularly believed the Human.

‘I do not know,’ Yoongi replies, face impassive as usual. ‘If I did, then I would have told you.’

‘What are the OrTanks even doing in Kutsoglera? The entire planet is under repair,’ Hoseok quirks an eyebrow at Namjoon. ‘Is there anything else going on in Kutsoglera?’

‘None that I know of,’ Namjoon replies tersely. ‘It’s barely alive as it is.’

‘The Galactic Security and Safety Department is run by Xmi- another coincidence that he happens to be in the Special Jury?’ Hoseok exhales out heavily.

‘We need to get back to the ship,’ Yoongi says unexpectedly. ‘Their location is known to their other associates. They sent a report about meeting with us. And the Omhlophe call upon them at random. We do not want to be here.’

‘Yoongi’s right,’ Sk’jin quickly adds. ‘We should leave. Staying here isn’t going to explain anything else, and we don’t have the time to pick apart Khonen’s words.’

‘All right- Yoongi, you have all their records with you?’

Yoongi nods.

‘Let’s get going then,’ Namjoon turns and makes to leave.

‘Namjoon wait-’ Hoseok calls, making the Kutsoglerin stop.
‘What?’

‘We can’t just leave them here,’ Hoseok points at the pirate.

Sk’jin senses Jimin tensing, eyes darting between the pirate, Namjoon, and Hoseok.

Namjoon eyes Hoseok carefully.

‘Namjoon,’ Hoseok says firmly. ‘We can’t do this again.’

‘Not all of them have become pirates out of their own volition,’ Namjoon says tensely. ‘Not all of them have chosen the life they are living right now- they’re doing it for their planet- not out of choice.’

‘You’re right- and we’re in the same position too,’ Sk’jin cuts in before Hoseok can. ‘And they know it. And then they chose it. They exact same way we chose. They knew what they were getting into – they were aware of the lifestyle they were getting into. They knew what they would have to do – they didn’t take this step lightly. They knew exactly what they were doing, the same way we know what we’re doing. We cannot always make the right decision for everyone Namjoon- but we can always make the right decision for ourselves. And right now, making sure cover our tracks is the most important decision we can make because we certainly don’t need those freaks after us.’

‘We can’t let them go,’ Hoseok says quietly from the side. ‘Namjoon- they know too much.’

Namjoon seems to struggle for a moment. Then he nods.

‘Leave them behind-‘

‘-no, you know we can’t do that. They’re going to report back to them about this. and even if we block all of their channels and they’re unable to respond back, they’re going to come looking,’ Hoseok states bluntly. ‘We talked about this.’

Namjoon breathes out heavily.

‘Then I’m not doing this,’ Namjoon shakes his head. ‘I’m not going to issue the command either- if you want to do this, then it’s out of your own volition.’

Hoseok grimaces.

‘Gnoi ro!’ Jimin suddenly calls out, hand held up, furrow between his brows. Taeh’yung is quickly saying something but Jimin shakes his head.

Sk’jin wants to sigh heavily- he had a feeling Jimin would be Namjoon 2.0 and would be worse to deal with. Sk’jin wants to give up already. If Jimin supports Namjoon then there was really no point in arguing anymore. But Jimin doesn’t say anything else- he just walks up to the pirate again and places his hand over his head.

Again, there is nothing strange, no show of light, no surge of power. Nothing happens to Khonen- or at least none that Sk’jin can see.

Then Jimin makes his way towards the doorway, clearly headed for the other pirates.

‘What did he just do?’ Namjoon asks sharply.

‘He…’ Taeh’yung smiles sheepishly at them. ‘You know how he pretty much blew everyone’s
minds back in Pompa with like, cool gold light and stuff?’

‘…yeah?’

‘Yeah- so like, he’s concentrated that effect- and he’s like…stunned the pirate?’

Sk’jin feels his stomach fall to his feet.

‘I beg your pardon?!’ Sk’jin hisses, glaring at Jimin’s retreating back before addressing Taeh’yung. ‘He said he it didn’t harm anyone- and that it’s not permanent- he lied. He lied about lying! What else can he do?! What else is he keeping from us?!’

‘Well- omission isn’t lying is it?’ Taeh’yung shrugs. ‘Besides- he really isn’t lying about lying Jinnie- trust me!’

‘I don’t want to trust you! I want to punch you!’ Sk’jin snaps before asking, ‘So what- this alters their memories? What does it do?’

‘It leaves them in a sort of…elevated state of mind,’ Taeh’yung waves his arms elegantly. ‘No pain- and no recollection of what happened either. So they won’t be able to sell information on us!’

Namjoon seems to sag from relief.

‘All right- good. Let’s at least make this look like some robbery or something,’ the Kutsoglerin orders, sounding lighter than before. ‘Throw them off or something.’

‘Okay!’ Taeh’yung beams, looking too excited at Namjoon’s orders.

‘And tell Jimin I said thank you,’ Namjoon adds before he too exits the ship. ‘Yoongi- can you upload the information to Lisai’s database?’

‘Uploading,’ Yoongi replies from the doorway. Sk’jin isn’t sure when the Human got there. But his helmet was on. He was clearly watching over Jimin’s actions outside.

‘Jinnie? Hobi? Is everything all right?’

Taeh’yung is watching them, a curious expression on his face.

Smiling, Sk’jin walks over to the tall Zhak’gri and ruffles his hair fondly.

‘It’s all right Tae- come on, let’s make this place look bad- I mean…’ Sk’jin scrunches his nose and looks around. ‘Worse?’

‘Worse!’ Taeh’yung cheers, throwing his hands up before he makes his way to the Bridge.

‘Now we just chill here for a while,’ Sk’jin grins at Hoseok before taking a seat on an empty OrTank and dragging over a half-opened crate. ‘And maybe shop.’

Hoseok looks like he wants to argue. But then he shrugs to himself and walks off to the piles of crates to the side.

They make quick work of the ship- especially with Jimin and Yoongi coming to quicken their pace. They also carry back in all the pirates and position them about the ship. Sk’jin is surprised to find it very dark as they step outside of the ship. But the eerie luminance of the blob-creatures as well as Taeh’yung’s oddly dark-green light casts enough around the swamp for Sk’jin to make his way through without tripping.
Hoseok is walking behind him, pulling an OrTank of supplies they deemed clean enough to take back. Taeh’ung had apparently found some random clothes as well and could barely contain his excitement. Hoseok made sure to make the Zhak’gri swear to disinfect and thoroughly wash anything he took back into the ship.

The planet is quiet, but Sk’jin can hear life teeming about them. It was much cooler now than it was at day and despite feeling itchy and dirty, the cool breeze helps Sk’jin relax just a little. The Užkulisai is waiting for them and Sk’jin catches sight of Namjoon, helping Yoongi bring in the extra fuel-cells from the pirate ship.

‘You shouldn’t hold it against Namjoon,’ Sk’jin says to Hoseok as they splash about the swamp, their feet pulling into the mud. ‘He sees the Universe in two colours- black and white. Good and bad- victim and oppressor.’

‘It’s funny considering his background,’ Hoseok grumbles, not even flinching when one of the blobs appear to his side. ‘For someone who was the sole discoverer of the links between the Akramanese and the Yishengs, he should know that it’s not all black and white.’

‘It’s precisely because of his background,’ Sk’jin shrugs. ‘He was only a child- and to an extent what he sees, how he sees things- they’re still through the eyes of a child.’

Hoseok gives him an odd look.

‘He’s pure in that regard- he’s not like us Seokkie,’ Sk’jin grins. ‘We’ve been living in a universe of grey; things are rarely ever just black and white for us.’

He hears Hoseok grumble a noncommittal sound.

‘Jimin is a good kid,’ Hoseok sighs out.

Sk’jin snorts at that, causing the Ngfy’widan to shoot him another odd look.

‘Not denying that but- Jimin did that for Namjoon.’ Sk’jin shakes his head. ‘That had nothing to do with being good or having compassion- he didn’t understand a single word we were saying but he could tell well enough from what he saw- also proves to show he’s seen a lot in his time despite the fact that he looks like a literal child.’ Sk’jin snorts. He pulls the gravity-lift a little harder. ‘And he agreed with us- there was no hesitation in his act. He did it to spare Namjoon.’

‘Spare Namjoon?’ Hoseok looks wildly confused.

‘What do you think will happen when those weirdoes get here?’ Sk’jin asks, nodding back at the ship. ‘They’re pretty much memory-less. They’re useless now. What use would they be? They’re looking for beautiful perfect creations- what’s the point of those smugglers now?’

Hoseok doesn’t reply for a while.

‘And don’t think Jimin doesn’t realize this. You can’t be the prince of anything without having a painfully in-depth knowledge on the consequences of your actions. He knew exactly what he was doing,’ Sk’jin shrugs. ‘At least proves he’s not immature.’

Hoseok stops completely.

‘How can you be so sure?’

Sk’jin also stops.
‘Because it’s the truth. And you know it too.’

Hoseok stares off into the swamp, a deep furrow between his brows.

‘Anyways- that’s not important. What is important is what we’ve discovered from today.’

‘That everything is fucked up and connected so it’s even more fucked up?’ Hoseok rolls his eyes so hard Sk’jin is vaguely worried that they’ll roll all the way back into his head.

‘Well that too- but that’s something we already knew- it’s not a surprise. I’m talking about something new.’ Sk’jin wiggles his eyebrows before turning his attention back ahead. Namjoon is waiting for them at the opening of the Hangar Gate.

Sk’jin waves brightly, blowing the Kutsoglerin a kiss. Predictably, Namjoon walks away.

‘Something new? You mean Jimin’s newfound abilities?’ Hoseok inquires.

‘Good job!’ Sk’jin laughs before adding, ‘We have a living lie-detector now Hoseok. So why do you think Namjoon, the Being who has charged every single Being on this ship for lying, not immediately jumped the idea of interrogating all of us?’ Sk’jin stops to pat Hoseok on his cheek and wrap his arm around his shoulders.

‘It’s because he’s not all that mighty and good,’ Sk’jin whispers with a smile. ‘Namjoon’s just like us- he’s hiding something too.’

Chapter End Notes
AYO LOOK AT THIS
MORE CONFUSION
Also, I read the tweet fic Outcast and first of all I am HOOKED AND REALLY
INTO IT LIKE WOW I THINK YOONGI IS THE MAIN BAY GUY- LIKE SPLIT
PERSONALITY OR SOMETHING IDK- THE GAME MESSES WITH MEMORIES
SO I THINK YOONGI’S THE ONE THAT’S MADE THE GAME AND NOW HE
GOT CAUGHT IN IT HIMSELF
And about that very tweet fic- can we not, as a collective fandom, tag the boys in this?
I mean yea its fun and stuff but actually dragging them into it and commenting on their
posts etc – stuff like ‘omg Hoseok is fake’ and ‘yoongi is going to get Namjoon
killed’ and things is just really weird and also honestly I think a little creepy
I don’t think the author intended for this to blow up like this and im happy she hasn’t
stopped amidst the sensation this has caused- but please- moderation in tagging please.
There was a really good post on tumblr about this:
here,
and it outlines the situation quite clearly I think
in other news
UNI STARTS TOMORROW I AM NOT READY PLEASE SEND HELP
As it’s just the first week it should be okay
But! From later this month I think I’ll be going back to updates every fortnight?
I apologize for that T_T
See you next update!!!! *sends hearts*
‘Do you think he needs shoes? Has he lost them?’

‘I could try and ask…’

‘Of course you could.’

‘Shut up.’

Yoongi makes his way towards Jimin who stares about at them, posture uncertain and yet not afraid or shocked by their team.

‘Jimin.’

He turns around, a smile on his face. Yoongi tries not to let this stranger’s eyes get to him too much.

‘Yoongi,’ he says, giving him a small wave. Yoongi pauses—how was he going to ask about his shoes?

‘Uh-’ Yoongi points down at Jimin’s feet. ‘Your feet?’

Jimin looks down at his feet, toes curling slightly on the leaf strewn floor.

‘Do you need shoes?’

‘I don’t see any scars on his feet,’ someone says behind him, ‘No heel scars from shoes.’

Yoongi finds that this statement is true. It seemed almost universal that all Beings with anthropomorphic bodily features all possessed the similar age-worn scar on their ankles as a result of the wear and chaffing of shoes. But Jimin doesn’t have them. He had plenty of other scars—but none to show any visible indication that he ever wore shoes. It’s confusing but Yoongi wants to make sure. The floors around the area were rather unsafe, with harsh stones or broken pieces of twigs and bark ready to cut or stab.

‘Shoes?’ Yoongi tries again and this time he balances on one leg and removes his boot. Then he points at it, and then back at Jimin’s feet. Jimin’s eyes light up in understanding and he shakes his head, speaking in his language as he points at his feet and then back at Yoongi’s shoes and shakes his head again.

‘No shoe I guess,’ Yoongi thinks to himself as he puts his boot back on.
'Are you sure?' he asks again. Just to be sure. But Jimin just tilts his head to the side quizzically. Yoongi smiles instead, which is returned quickly.

‘Uh- you want food?’ Yoongi asks again, this time miming eating with his hands and patting his stomach. He’s briefly worried about the state of this Being’s clothes. They weren’t the thickest or the most durable. Simple tunic, over which he wore a hooded cloak, and trousers with the bottom rolled up to under his knees. Was he warm enough? Or perhaps his body just functioned differently.

Jimin nods a little later, a small slightly embarrassed smile following. It’s a beautiful smile, and Yoongi tries not to stare too much.

‘Food is always the best isn’t it?’ Yoongi grins as he sits down on one of the nearby rocks, beckoning Jimin over and pulling his bag over to the front. He can sense the Captain and the others watching them.

Jimin stands to the side a little hesitantly before settling on the stone next to him. Yoongi rummages around for the light-weight compressed food heavily laced with an excess of vitamins and health supplements.

‘I’m never satisfied eating these, but I’ve never been healthier,’ Yoongi says as he hands the packet to Jimin who looks at it dubiously. Not out of suspicion, but rather in a way that translated to: you eat this?!

‘Trust me, your hair will really improve in quality,- mine did,’ Yoongi opens the flat white packet and inside are flat wafer like biscuits. They’re not all bad- the flavor pleasant and didn’t leave a bitter aftertaste in your mouth. It’s almost similar to the flat-breads you could find on Earth in some of the specialty stores over at the neighbouring SettlementArcs.

Jimin watches his movements, as though ready to copy. Somehow Yoongi wants to tell this young Being that he needed to be more careful. What if (not that Yoongi was going to) he was trying to poison him?

Jimin opens the packet and takes out the wafer curiously. He sniffs it a bit, one eyebrow lifted. Then he looks up at Yoongi as though asking: you expect me to eat this?

Yoongi laughs before he bites into the wafer, ‘Good for your hair.’ He repeats and adds, ‘Not that you need it.’

Jimin’s head tilts in confusion again but nonetheless bites into the wafer. Yoongi points at the wafer and makes a happy face and an upset face. Jimin laughs, biting into the wafer again before miming a middle ground.

‘That’s pretty accurate,’ Yoongi laughs, looking away from the Being before him.

There’s a cracking noise from behind them, from inside the forest. Jimin jumps, posture defensive, eyes wide. But it’s only another member of their team, walking back from using a convenient tree to relieve themselves probably. Jimin calms down a little, eyes still wide and scanning.

‘You look scared,’ Yoongi remarks, glancing at the forest and then back at Jimin who also looks away. There’s unmistakable fear and worry in his eyes. What had he seen? What had he been through?

‘Why are you scared? Is there something here we don’t know about? Something we can’t see?’
Jimin opens his mouth but stops. He grimaces a little before hesitantly pointing at the forest and then taps right below his eye and the gestures at the camp.

A shiver runs down Yoongi’s back. Words were not needed when the implication was so obvious. 

They were being watched.

There’s little else Namjoon can really think about.

His mind has consistently been a mess since the mission started and now it was a perfect riot.

Why were they picking up these OrTanks from Kutsoglera? Were there Kutsoglerin Beings inside the OrTanks? But for what purpose and for what reason?

According to what Khonen had said, the Omhlophe wanted to create only the best, to birth the strongest, the most beautiful. Kutsoglera was nothing more than ashes and horrifying distorted destruction. And her people broken and far away from their mother planet.

Loud squelching sounds shakes Namjoon out of his thoughts. Some ways from the open Hangar entryway stood Taeh’yung, ankle deep in mud, glowing a faint green in the dark of Ubhuku’s night.

Namjoon watches with mounting discomfort as Taeh’yung is lifted into the air by slimy gooey arms. The Zhak’gri seems to be enjoying himself and was far from uncomfortable or threatened. He’s talking to the gigantic blob-thing he referred to as Umholi.

‘Anything on the radars?’ Namjoon asks though a screen is in his hands.

‘Nothing- but we should get going. Taeh’yung?’ Hoseok replies.

‘I’ll be right there!’ Taeh’yung chirps back, turning his head to flash a smile that’s visible even from this distance.

To Namjoon’s side, Jimin chuckles quietly as he watches the scene progress to a loud squelching hug-session as Taeh’yung hugs the blob-thing. The other blobs are all gathered around the two, bobbing up and down like thick bubbles in a theatrically designed pot of soup. Jimin is splattered head to toe in mud, swamp water, and slime clings to his hair and parts of his clothes. Namjoon doesn’t even want to think about Taeh’yung’s state of cleanliness or lack thereof.

Jimin chuckles again, crouching down as he watches on. Namjoon has a lot to think about at this given moment. But he can’t help but go back to Jimin.
Namjoon is more than just a little confused at Jimin’s biological functions. They had taken the
time to run tests and investigate his DNA and biochemistry in order to better understand him better,
as well as have a sort of definitive list that clarified what could be harmful for Jimin. And the test
results had come out not too far off from the general DNA structure and biochemistry of Humans.

To summarize it, there was nothing special about Jimin. At least, biologically, there was nothing
out of the ordinary. There was still that confusion regarding his age, but Namjoon puts it down to
the fact that Jimin had existed in whatever strange comatose state for an extended period of time.

It was possible that the Akramanese had kept him stored up in their mothership, for all those years.
It would explain his aging as well as preservation. Namjoon frowns at the idea of technology
existing where you could perfectly preserve an actual living Being without any side-effects. Well,
at least they hadn’t seen any side-effects on Jimin. Yet.

Growing embryos and harvesting cells from genetic coding and sampling made sense- it was more
or less just like AI technology. It was the whole preservation aspect of it that raised a lot of
questions.

They had performed a full medical check-up on Jimin as well, with Taeh’yung translating. Jimin
had said he was 247 sols old- though it’s confusing because Namjoon doesn’t know how to convert
that in GLA standard measurement. But based off of their own previous scans, Jimin’s age matched
with one of their scans. However, according to what they knew about Bhumi, the issue with the
planet and the system, had been more or less a millennium ago. So when they scanned Jimin again,
the same approximation age of 1450 sols kept appearing. It threw everything off by at least 300
sols.

The scans weren’t wrong, that much was for sure. So where did those 300 sols go off to? Was it a
mistake?

There had been mentions of time-alteration, of time-manipulation, in some of the wilder reports
Namjoon had dug into during his time as Information Analyst. But nothing could be proven, and
nothing was conclusive.

So now here there were with an honest to Spaces alien- knowing nothing about him save from
translations and possibly inaccurate medical scans. Not to mention his very broad set of skills and
abilities. What else was he hiding up his sleeves? How much of what Taeh’yung translated could
they trust? How much of Jimin could they even trust?

Namjoon is well aware of the risks they were taking right now, especially considering what they
knew, where they stood in all of that, and how this was connected to some of the biggest criminal
and horrifying secrets of the GLA and all associated organizations. But Namjoon’s been feeling
like he was at the edge of discovery- of uncovering something. He would be naïve if he said he
wanted the truth. He didn’t want the truth- because most times, the truth always originated in the
selfish greed of some power-hungry Being.

Namjoon’s curiosity wasn’t based on figuring out the truth or uncovering the source of any of this.
He just wanted to know why.

Why did the Special-Jury put them together like this? Why did decide that Jimin’ OrTank needed
to be taken back to Bhumi. Why did they want Yoongi and Jimin to reunite? Because that much
was obvious- it was staged to a certain degree, and made to happen. What was in Yoongi’s past
with Jimin that made his addition to this so important?
Were they born the same way?

Had Yoongi been taken, the exact same way Jimin had been taken? But that didn’t explain it either- because despite what Jimin has said about his apparent history with Yoongi, the Human clearly didn’t remember him. No records of a Human named Min Yoongi was ever reported to be part of any investigative panel in the GLA either. Namjoon had checked thoroughly.

Namjoon has had a lot of questions ever since the beginning of this mission. And at first he felt as though nothing could answer his questions. But now, with where they were and where they stood in all of this, Namjoon feels like he’ll finally be able to get answers.

‘We should close,’ Yoongi states blankly from behind them. Namjoon starts just a little but Jimin doesn’t seem surprised. Instead he beams up at Yoongi.

Yoongi pauses, and then he bows stiffly, extending his hand out to Jimin and says, ‘Your majesty.’

Jimin flushes bright red, hands waving frantically as he gets up, stammering in his language. Namjoon eyes Yoongi who has a curiously amused expression on his face, simply gestures for Jimin to go back inside the ship. Jimin is rapidly speaking, head shaking and hands covering his face as though embarrassed as he scurries off, Yoongi right behind him.

‘That was totally on purpose wasn’t it pa?’

Namjoon curses- mainly because he told himself to get used to Taeh’yung’s ability to pop up literally everywhere. It’s basically how they met in the first place.

‘What-?’

‘Yoongi,’ Taeh’yung explains, unaware (or uncaring) of the wad of goo sliding down from his hair to his cheek and under his tunic. ‘He just purposefully addressed Jimin like that.’

‘Uh-’

‘It’s so cute! It’s like he’s remembering!’ Taeh’yung grins before he shakes himself, goo and swamp water flying everywhere. Namjoon winces as he’s splashed. He makes a mental note to shower in the hottest water setting available.

‘Remembering?’ Namjoon repeats.

‘Yeah! How it was for him from that time,’ Taeh’yung sweeps back his hair, pushing the goo into his hair. Namjoon wants to push Taeh’yung into a vat of boiling water in hopes of maybe cleaning him.

‘…you mean remembering how things were before?’

‘Well yeah?’ Taeh’yung stops spreading goo deeper into his scalp as he says, ‘-I guess you could say it like that.’

Namjoon has a feeling that Taeh’yung saw more than he understood. The Zhak’gri waves brightly, palms glowing green as the blobs outside quiver and bob around as though in farewell.

‘Say “bye” pa!’ Taeh’yung grins at him. Namjoon turns properly to wave at the blobs. To his immense disquiet, they wave back weird gooey blob-arms.

‘BYE UMHOLI! BE A GOOD GIRL OKAY?’ Taeh’yung cups his hands together to yell.
‘How did you create those?’ Namjoon asks hesitantly as the engines hum to life and the Hangar doors close, narrowing their view of the swamp.

‘Hm-’ Taeh’yung continues waving his arms. ‘-well, there were a bunch of…cells? And they were just, you know, thriving around the place.’

The Zhak’gri waves around the scenery dismissively.

‘And they kept dying- I don’t think that uh…living beings like creatures and animals can survive this environment- so those organisms kept dying?’ Taeh’yung explains. ‘And so I felt bad for them- then I decided why not give them a helping hand right?’

Namjoon nods hesitantly.

‘So I just sort of- you know,’ Taeh’yung rolls his hands in a forward motion and no, Namjoon does not know. But he nods anyways because he’s not entirely sure he wants to know the answer.

The Hangar doors close and Taeh’yung lets out a sad sigh.

‘You uh- you’ll see them again,’ Namjoon tries, ‘They’ll be here, and you can come back, right?’

‘It’s not that,’ Taeh’yung smiles, a melancholic expression settling on his features. ‘I could still sense him here- it was as though he was still living.’

Namjoon doesn’t have time to ask Taeh’yung who he was talking about as Hoseok calls them to secure themselves for take-off. Namjoon is spared having to ask Taeh’yung to not sit on the Lobby couches as the Zhak’gri sits himself down on the benches to the side of the Hangar Bay. Namjoon takes a seat on the bench as well, at a safe distance from the goo Taeh’yung was dripping in his wake.

There was so much shock, so many revelations, in the span of a single day, that Namjoon finds it hard to really scope the general outrageousness of their situation and the Beings involved. Not that he wasn’t aware of it. Sometimes the subject at hand was so overwhelming, you forgot to look at it individually. And so much had happened since Taeh’yung somehow slipped into the ship as part of their crew, Namjoon realizes that he’s never actually spoken to the Zhak’gri about their situation in detail. Or the fact that he was so closely involved with the whole case. He could even smell these Beings- whoever the Omhlophe were.

If he was going to get answers and start uncovering reasons, he might as well start with the Being who witnessed so much.

‘What do you think about this situation?’ Namjoon asks as the ship picks up speed.

‘Hm? About?’ Taeh’yung’s eyes widen in question.

‘Those Beings- the ones the smugglers were talking about,’ Namjoon clarifies. ‘The Omhlophe. And not just that- about the Alliance- how they’re connected to the Akramanese- how the Omhlophe are connected to the Akramanese- how Jimin and Yoongi are born from those eggs-‘

‘-Chim isn’t born from an egg,’ Taeh’yung interrupts.

‘…what do you mean?’
‘Yoongi is- for sure, but not Chim. Chim was just- always like how you found him,’ Taeh’yung explains.

‘How do you know this?’

‘They’re both from a different time- but Chim’s soul is still the same. Yoongi’s has changed.’ Taeh’yung says with a serious nod. ‘I didn’t know about it until Chim told me that Yoongi felt different. He is the same- just different.’

Namjoon doesn’t know how to ask more questions based on that so instead he asks, ‘And do you think…do you think these Omhlophe- whoever they are, are like the Akramanese? Are they another Yisheng experiment gone wrong?’

This was one of Namjoon’s biggest worries.

The Akramanese were created by mistake and overlooked. They were able to discover through the Gaia Case that the some of the Yisheng Directory and a few of the Venture Unit Head of Divisions had organized their own attempt in creating a method through which they could somehow monopolize not just the entire Universe but to completely take over the freewill of the Beings living in it. With this came countless experimentations and studies, all conducted in hopes of creating a way to achieve this goal. Some were outright failures, while some fell off the grid, as was the case with Sk’jin’s history. The Akramanese however, had been a disastrous experiment and it was decided that they be cast out into a black-hole in order to completely obliterate and remove any such evidence of their existence.

However they survived this brutal attempt at execution and as a result they grew stronger and crept along the Universe. Transcending into Beings that were nearly multi-dimensional, the Akramanese succeeded in nearly over throwing the Known Universe into complete and utter chaos. The Akramanese had inherited a skewed notion of what the Yishengs and the Venture Unit had wanted to achieve- and so evolved into Beings with one singular goal in mind: to overtake the Universe.

Namjoon guesses they will probably never know how many planets, moons, stars, suns, this extra-dimensional force absorbed to power themselves- and Namjoon honestly would rather not find out.

So what if the Omhlophe were just like the Akramanese? Created by the Yishengs in their attempts to rule the Known Universe and then discarded and left to evolve on their own? Because what that smuggler Khonen had said was too similar to the way the Akramanese saw the Universe.

Like a place they had to cleanse and replace with their idea of creation and life.

‘No- they just smell like that ship. They’re not even similar to those weirdoes,’ Taeh’yung shrugs casually. ‘They smelt like them- but they were nothing like them. They seemed just…just like us.’

Namjoon frowns at that, looking over at Taeh’yung who pauses, eyes vacant as though listening to something else.

‘Just like us but-’ he stops. ‘-a bit different.’

‘Different how?’ Namjoon asks.

‘…I don’t know,’ Taeh’yung replies softly, concentrating on something else.

‘Is that how the rest of the “eggs” were? I know that you were involved with removing the OrTanks from the destruction zone. What did they feel like?’
Taeh’yung hums low before he says, ‘Like they were children, fast asleep, getting ready to wake up- *hoping* to wake up.’

‘What sort of Beings were they?’ Namjoon presses, desperate for solid answers rather than metaphoric symbols and analogies. ‘What did they look like, from where- and why-‘

‘They were from this Universe, but from a much longer past. From a different Time. Some were old, weary-‘ Taeh’yung smiles softly at this, ‘Exhausted.’

Who were exhausted and why?

‘But some were young, strong, bright,’ Taeh’yung concludes and adds with a frown, ‘I thought they would all be safe. I guess there are more babies to save now.’

‘How do you think Jimin is connected to this? To the Akramanese?’ Namjoon asks. He was surprised to find that Taeh’yung was serious in all of this. The Zhak’gri’s expression is thoughtful and his demeanor focused.

Taeh’yung leans back, arms crossed. His movements are accentuated by sloppy wet sounds and more goo seeps out of him around the bench and on to the floors. He suddenly seems aged; harsh lines falling across the lines of his face that seemed to morph, slowly changing his features. But the moment Namjoon blinks, it’s gone and Taeh’yung gives him a squelchy shrug, eyes bright as he says, ‘I don’t know!’.

Namjoon nods with a disappointed sigh. It was sort of a stretch to expect Taeh’yung to know all of the answers when they didn’t even know what sort of questions they should be asking.

‘Are you all right leaving your uh, *children*, back in the planet?’ Namjoon asks awkwardly.

Taeh’yung’s expression changes from pleasantly surprised to emotional in 0.2 seconds and he leaps straight into Namjoon, never minding the strain of the security harness around his chest. Namjoon’s shirt is instantly soaked in slime.

‘Thank you for asking pa,’ the Zhak’gri beams up. ‘But they’ll be fine! Always trust in evolution! The progression of time!’

‘Uh- yeah,’ Namjoon tries to move away but slime and the power of Taeh’yung’s hugs is a little too much for him to counter.

‘Pa can I harvest some of the slime and grow them in the Medical Bay?’

‘What the fuck-?! *No!*’

Hoseok is obviously not pleased with the decision to forego Grisial for the moment and detour to the dead space between Cabcd and Sluchaen. It’s quite obvious from the permanent frown and the ‘Are all of you actually fucking insane?’ that he spits out the moment Namjoon had asked if they
should fly under the Ymir System or over it.

And Sk’jin has lived long enough to predict what was about to happen.

Namjoon, a little affronted, replies with a, ‘We already went through this- we’re going to gather information beneficial to the mission.’

Hoseok is very obviously not here for this.

Yoongi is watching the Head Pilot and Navigator stare each other down over the Navigation Table, neither of them backing away. His stance is easy and casual, but he’s at the perfect distance to separate the two if needed. Jimin is sitting on one of the footstools, looking uncomfortable and concerned, eyes flitting between Hoseok, Namjoon, and Taeh’yung, as though asking for translation. Taeh’yung on the other hand, is yawning mightily, looking like he was about to drop off to sleep any time now. He was miraculously squeaky clean and had decided to dress in the clothes he’d found in the smuggler’s ship cargo.

Sk’jin wants to sit back on his seat and just enjoy the show. He’s counting down inside his head, to how many more seconds it would take for Hoseok to snap.

Namjoon and Hoseok normally agreed on most matters, and listened to each other’s input more than they did anyone else on the ship. They both seemed to have that ‘Being A is from the same organization so Being A must be reliable’ mentality that seemed pretty pervasive throughout the Universe. It was applicable in almost any situation. And it wasn’t as though Sk’jin blamed them.

But Sk’jin isn’t like that. His motto (one of his mottos) in life is ‘trust no one ever’ and so far that sentiment allowed him to continue on this far. Or at least, it did, to an extent. As Living Beings, we were all more than capable of going against what we know is good for us. Like right now.

In Sk’jin’s opinion, not that either Namjoon or Hoseok were asking him, was of indifference. He didn’t care where they went as long as they didn’t stay long. And if asked, Sk’jin would frankly answer that this entire idea of actually carrying out the mission was stupid. And seeing as his opinion was ignored, any additional journey made within that plan of stupidity was honestly just meh to the Khol’isa.

So while he did have a reason to go back, it was one he didn’t feel the urgency to see through into fruition.

‘You agreed on going here-‘ Namjoon states, repeating Hoseok’s agreement to their previous plan.

‘I did, and that was before the Omhlophe showed up,’ Hoseok replies with a frown. ‘We need to get out of the vicinity – even if that vicinity includes a few systems-‘

‘-but this is too good an opportunity to pass up!’ Namjoon defends. ‘There are aspects to this that we do not understand, and with this planet, we have a higher possibility of understanding or clarifying what we need to know!’

‘Knowing more doesn’t equate understanding anything!’ Hoseok snaps back, ‘I think we’re all living a prime example of that- this side-trip is not going to ground any of our theories as the
correct one- it’s just going to add more to our confusion and will create even more questions that we cannot afford to find out! We need to think smart here-‘

‘-and we are!’ Namjoon retorts. ‘We are thinking smart- we are thinking steps ahead of the Special-Jury, making layers upon layers within our plans and creating safety nets for ourselves! By doing this- we are not flying blind towards Bhumi without any additional information-‘

‘We are always flying blind!’ Hoseok looks 2 seconds away from pulling at his hair. ‘Not to mention Jimin doesn’t want to talk about his planet’s security measures- what makes you think he’ll explain anything when we go to this place? We’re just creating more openings through which we can be found-‘

‘But if we are able to-‘

‘Your plans have too many variables – it’s always what ifs and “what if” is not a good enough reason for me to willingly pilot this ship out of our planned trajectory!’ Hoseok spits out.

Namjoon gives pause before asking, ‘So you’re saying you won’t pilot the ship if we follow this trajectory?’

‘Yes,’ Hoseok replies stiffly.

‘Sk’jin- can you pilot us to that planet?’ Namjoon asks without looking away from Hoseok.

Hoseok also doesn’t back down.

Sk’jin sighs.

He wants to say no- because he agrees that this is stupid despite his agreement to the plan. However, he does see a valid point in all of this mess. So he shrugs and says, ‘Eh, why not?’.

It’s not the most reassuring response Sk’jin knows, especially from the way Namjoon grimaces a little.

‘Hoseok you are relieved from your pilot-duties-‘ Namjoon begins but Sk’jin cuts across easily, spinning on his chair.

‘You don’t have the authority to do that.’

Both Namjoon and Hoseok break their glaring competition to raise a questioning eyebrow at Sk’jin.

‘Princeling there has that authority,’ Sk’jin nods at Jimin who’s expression shifts into a wary one as all eyes fall on him.

‘You don’t need to do anything- I quit this mess,’ Hoseok spits out, walking off of the Navigator’s Mast and out of the Bridge. Taeh’yung suddenly sits up at that, wide awake. Even Sk’jin finds himself feeling surprised. ‘You can drop me off in Ts’ets’khli as you’re so adamant in blatantly fucking up everything!’ Hoseok yells behind him and vanishes around the doorway.

Sk’jin wants to laugh even though he knows it’s a bad idea. Because it was true- if they wanted to pass through Cabcd and Sluchaen they would have to make the compulsory stop inside Ymir in at least 2 different planets in order to gain the required and sufficient passes through the space-borders. If they decided to take another route- it would take 3 additional weeks in warp-speed to reach that location. Going through Ymir meant 2 days of normal-speed, and then a mere day in warp before they arrived in their location.
Jimin and Taeh’yung follow after the Ngfy’widan and quietly make their exit though it’s not without looking back with confused expressions.

Namjoon curses under his breath, throwing himself into his chair heavily, head in his hands at once.

‘You should apologize,’ Yoongi says randomly from where he’s standing. ‘We need a head pilot.’

‘I’m sure Sk’jin is more than capable-‘ Namjoon mumbles from behind his hands.

Yoongi eyes him, as though silently asking him if he was indeed more than capable of being head pilot. And yes, Sk’jin is more than capable of course. But he raises an eyebrow in Namjoon’s hunched direction and shakes his head before nodding towards the doorway.

‘I don’t know what you mean by that.’

Sk’jin almost facepalms.

‘Let’s go prepare lunch,’ Sk’jin says instead, getting up from his chair. ‘Give Namjoon time to cool off.’

Yoongi nods shortly and follows after Sk’jin as soon as he crosses over the Bridge.

‘If you’re sure about this-‘ Sk’jin begins but Namjoon cuts him off quickly.

‘I’m sure.’

They exit the Bridge and make their way down the stairs in relative silence until Yoongi asks, ‘Do you think he’s sure?’

‘He could be,’ Sk’jin replies truthfully before adding, ‘We’re all under a lot of stress- what with all the things we’ve just recently learnt.’

‘You mean about the eggs from Kutsoglera?’

‘Exactly that,’ Sk’jin nods as they walk across the Lobby towards the Kitchens. Hoseok’s Cabin door is closed, but Taeh’yung’s and Jimin’s are closed. They were probably inside with the Ngfy’widan. Yoongi seemed to have come to the same conclusion as well, head turned towards Hoseok’s Cabin door.

If there was a possibility of understand where and what these eggs were- the answers were most likely with Yoongi. Sk’jin knew that Taeh’yung oversaw many of the procedures involving moving the “eggs” from the broken Akramanese mothership into safety. But Yoongi, a Being that Sk’jin is now nearly entire sure was chosen to specifically be “woken up” or at least, was allowed a form of evolution in his self-awareness, was probably the one Being who held the most answers to all of this. Even if the Being in question wasn’t aware of this.

Besides, Sk’jin had spoken to Taeh’yung, but the young Zhak’gri, for all his raw power and abilities, could be as dense as a meteorite and couldn’t really shed any light on the matter. Sk’jin has come to realize that in order to gain any consequential reply or information from Taeh’yung, you had to ask the right question. And at this very moment, they didn’t have enough concrete information to come up with a question Taeh’yung could answer for them. Or at least, they wouldn’t be able to understand Taeh’yung’s answer.

‘Could you take out the preserves from the pantry? I think I’ll make something sweet to eat.’ Sk’jin
says as he passes his hands over the UV counter to clean them.

Yoongi carefully balances the jar of preserves in his hands and places it on the counter, eyeing the dark red jelly inside rather dubiously.

‘Isn’t this jam?’ he asks.

‘Jam?’ Sk’jin repeats as he holds out a sift for Yoongi to hold and places a bowl beneath it.

‘…I think it’s a Human term.’ Yoongi explains, eyeing the sift with interest.

‘Hm…seems rather fitting,’ Sk’jin shrugs and begins pouring the preserve into the sift before he grins and adds, ‘Because the ingredients are jammed together.’

Yoongi looks up at him slowly, and for someone who had a pretty expressionless face, Sk’jin feels incredibly judged.

‘Do you really know nothing about the eggs?’ Sk’jin hadn’t been planning on asking about this subject in this manner but the level of judgment he was receiving threw him off.

Yoongi doesn’t look up from watching the preserve slowly ooze out of the sift as he replies, ‘I saw a lot. But I do not understand.’

‘Keep holding that up,’ Sk’jin stops pouring out the amount he was eyeballing. Grabbing a flat spatula he presses down on the more solid bits of preserved fruit. ‘Care to tell me what you saw? Maybe we can understand together?’

‘I can try,’ Yoongi replies before asking, ‘You were inside that place. Did you understand what it was?’

Sk’jin shrugs, making sure that no lumps remained before dragging the bowl out from under the sift. ‘You can eat that. You might like it.’

Reaching for the compressor jar of cream, Sk’jin pours out the thick cream into the bowl of preserves before he answers, ‘There are things- some things, that can’t be explained. Thing that don’t have a logical explanation because its birth and foundation doesn’t always reflect or originate from what we know.’

He glances at Yoongi who was scraping the sift with a spoon. He seemed to be regarding the preserve with more concentration than what Sk’jin had said. Sk’jin wasn’t the most patient Being in the Universe. But he’s had his fair share of having to be careful and having to wait.

‘But that doesn’t mean you can’t try to understand it.’ Sk’jin mixes the combination together with a whisk. ‘Or at least see how it might affect the things you already understand.’

‘Like love?’

Sk’jin nearly upsets the bowl of creamed preserves.

‘Uh-‘

‘K’mara said that to me once.’

‘K’mara?’ Sk’jin repeats in a hollow voice, his mind racing.

‘I reported to her before the Gaia Case was in court.’ Yoongi says over a mouthful of preserves.
‘It’s very sweet.’

‘…it’s supposed to be. Do you like it?’ Sk’jin asks, hand stilling over the whisk.

‘It’s very sweet.’

‘…so, you worked for K’mara?’ Sk’jin presses.

‘For a brief period of time. It’s how I met you in Šerdesas, she asked me to keep an eye on the Heladian and the Long-Huon lieutenant.’

Sk’jin’s mind reels back, remembering the day he first met Yoongi. Had K’mara kept track of him since then? Sk’jin tries to quell the intensity of paranoia building in him. He hadn’t felt like this since the initiation of this mission. Maybe he was starting to slack-off. He was going to have to stay more alert from now on.

‘Did you tell her about me back then?’ Sk’jin can’t help the sharpness in his voice.

‘No.’ Yoongi reaches for the cream. ‘I deemed it unnecessary.’

‘Did…did K’mara mention anything about the “eggs”?’

‘No.’

‘Did she know you were born from one of them?’

‘I told her who I was at that time.’

‘At that time?’

Yoongi puts the sift down into the sink carefully.

‘I Am,’ Yoongi replies with no context.

Yoongi and K’mara. Both of them actively involved with the Gaia Case together, possibly before it even became an actual issue in court.

Before Sk’jin can ask any more questions, the door to Hoseok’s Cabin opens and for some reason Taeh’yung is on Jimin’s back while the Ngfy’widan follows after them looking a little better than when he stormed out of the Bridge.

‘I’m making dessert!’ he announces.

‘Dessert! Forward Chim!’ Taeh’yung yells exuberantly as he points ahead. Jimin just laughs and as though Taeh’yung was a small child, runs around with him on his back around the Lobby.

‘Children,’ Sk’jin snorts.

But instead Yoongi smiles- a softened look on his face as he watches Jimin running around with Taeh’yung on his back. Sk’jin wants to alert Hoseok, draw his attention to the Human but Hoseok clears his throat and says, ‘Are you free for a moment?’

Sk’jin looks away from Yoongi, the cheers and squeals coming from Jimin and Taeh’yung turning into breathless giggles as they chased each other about.

‘Well- I can multitask?’ Sk’jin indicates down at the bowl. His mind is still reeling from the
information Yoongi so casually dropped. Hoseok should know about this- or should he?

‘I don’t know what happened to you,’ Hoseok begins with no preamble. ‘Or much about anything that’s happened in that planet, how it relates to you- but do you really think any of this will actually bring about anything productive? I know what you said about going here- but even now, after what just happened, and knowing more about those Omhlophe Beings, are you still willing to take a risk for something that could potentially turn out to be nothing more than a waste of time?’

Sk’jin perfectly understands why Hoseok is clearly confused over his agreement to this trip. Back in Pompa, Sk’jin hadn’t exactly portrayed himself in the strongest light in regards to what happened in his past. So it was understandable that Hoseok would find his sudden change of mind to be questionable.

‘Jimin…’ Sk’jin begins quietly. ‘Jimin’s presence here. Who he is- where he’s from, and what he can do, all strangely ties in with everything we’re involved in. It might even be the reason why we’re all here in the first place. Or it could all just be over-thinking,’ Sk’jin admits truthfully. ‘But I can’t deny that there is something- connecting all of us with each other- to Jimin- to this planet, and what happened there. Not to mention the fact that these eggs seem to exist everywhere now. We’ve come this far- and I don’t want to remain in the dark about any of this anymore.’

Sk’jin is being genuine- after watching Jimin, listening to his story, putting all of the facts and data they knew- there was an undeniable desire building in him to recklessly dive in and discover what any of this meant.

And there was also another thing to all of this that was fuelling his decision.

‘And I also made a promise,’ Sk’jin adds casually, reaching for a baking tray. ‘Can you hand me a loaf of bread- the lighter one, please.’

Hoseok, unsure of this statement as well as randomness of his request, obliges in silence.

Taeh’yung and Jimin are still laughing, somehow having roped Yoongi into their antics. Taeh’yung uses Yoongi as a shield of sorts, hiding behind the much shorter Human as he giggles madly. Jimin tries his best to go around but Sk’jin has a feeling that despite looking like he didn’t want to be there, Yoongi was actually participating, deflecting Jimin’s attempts with such subtlety it could be overlooked.

‘…so what’s this supposed to be?’ Hoseok asks.

‘A sort of pudding,’ Sk’jin explains as he crumbles the bread into another bowl.

‘You’ve made it before?’ Hoseok asks, looking down at the preserves and cream mixture.

‘No- I just thought the combination should be nice,’ Sk’jin replies truthfully.

Hoseok gives him an amused look before laughing under his breath.

‘Is there another reason why you’re leaving?’ Sk’jin asks as he flattens the bite-size pieces of bread into a tray.

Hoseok fidgets for a moment, glancing out of the kitchen window, a distant look in his eyes.

‘There’s a lot,’ Hoseok mumbles, absent mindedly popping a piece of bread in his mouth. ‘But I don’t think I can do this anymore. But you guys don’t have to worry- it’s not like I’m going back to the GLA or Venture Unit. I think it’s pretty obvious that I’m not welcome there anymore.’
‘If you have nowhere to go- you could just stay here,’ Sk’jin offers. ‘If it’s all the same to you.’

Hoseok shakes his head, smiling ruefully as he says, ‘I think, you know as well as I do, that it’s never like that.’

Sk’jin nods in reply.

‘What do you think you’ll do now?’ Sk’jin asks as he grabs the preserve and cream batter. Hoseok holds the tray down for him as he pours the thick batter over the bread.

‘Go under for a few sols- if it’s just me, it’s easy,’ Hoseok replies with an easy shrug and Sk’jin believes him. Other than Yoongi, Hoseok would probably be the most difficult Being to find if he chose to remain hidden. And it wasn’t just because of his abilities as a Ngfy’widan.

‘If I hear about anything- I’ll try to get it to you guys,’ Hoseok adds.

Sk’jin chuckles at that, shaking his head.

‘You should stay away as much as you can,’ he advices with a wink.

‘Well you know me- attracted to danger,’ Hoseok winks back easily.

‘Take that handsome face away and put that tray in the oven,’ Sk’jin huffs as though flustered.

Hoseok laughs easily as he takes up the tray.

‘Children! What do you want to drink?’ Sk’jin calls out.

‘ANYTHING IS GOOD!’ Taeh’yung yells back amidst scuffling sounds.

By the time tea (without any trace amounts of radioactive isotopes) is set and poured into cups, and the pudding fully baked, Sk’jin calls the children over. This time Jimin is on Taeh’yung’s back, having finally managed to grab a hold of the Zhak’gri. Yoongi follows after them.

Despite Namjoon’s obvious absence looming around them, they have a relatively easy-going and light-hearted impromptu dessert-meal together. Jimin is clearly singing praises about the dish, having first taken a bite with some dubiousness.

They didn’t have any whipping cream, so Sk’jin wasn’t able to decorate the weirdly toasted yet mushy reddish lump that was pudding preserve. But despite it’s weird appearance, it tasted very delicious and the tray was emptied in minutes.

Food seemed to be the universal language of gathering and bring everyone together as a whole. Because despite the tense moment in the Bridge and the result that came about from it, they’re all freely conversing. Or at least trying to.

‘Tae- how about you and Jimin archive his language?’ Sk’jin suggests as Taeh’yung struggles to translate the more complex questions Jimin has about the food. ‘This will make everyone’s lives easier I think- especially Jimin’s, if he can easily communicate with us, even if it’s the basics.’

Taeh’yung nods enthusiastically at that, quickly translating Sk’jin’s suggestion to Jimin who is also nodding quickly, looking around for the screen Namjoon had fitted for him. Hoseok also looks on intrigued at the application Namjoon had designed.

‘It’s almost like every other GLA standard language translator during Exploration missions,’ Hoseok remarks. ‘It provides examples of key phrases that should carry the most commonly used
words in a given language and forms a pattern based off of it. Except in this case, it also creates a response back to the foreign language, allowing the alien to converse back.’

Taeh’yung translates this excitedly and Jimin’s eyes brighten up, looking relieved and delighted. He turns to Yoongi, taking the Human’s hand in his as he excitedly speaks to him. There’s a slight look of alarm in the Human’s eyes, still not used to the way Jimin so freely interacted with him. Sk’jin looks away, trying to ignore the way his chest feels the faintest of pain.

Using their distraction, Sk’jin slips away quietly and pulls up another cup and saucer. He knows Hoseok is watching as he carries the items with him upwards.

‘You sound like you’re having quite the party,’ Namjoon says dully even before Sk’jin can make his way to the Navigator’s Mast. It was dark inside the Bridge and Sk’jin feels like an exasperated parent trying to amend some argument between his sons. Namjoon is slumped on his chair, eyes unfocused as he gazes out of the large HUD windows.

‘If you’re talking about the loud laughter, it’s all Taeh’yung,’ Sk’jin comments before placing the cup of tea on the side of the Table. Namjoon eyes it cautiously, as though surprised and suspicious.

‘Look- I’m not the type to poison okay? That’s Yoongi,’ Sk’jin rolls his eyes and adds without preamble, ‘You should probably apologize to Hoseok- attempting to officially throw him out of the ship is a little much isn’t it?’

Namjoon scowls as he sips on the tea.

Sk’jin leans against the edge of the Navigation Table, something he knows Namjoon really doesn’t like.

‘He said he was leaving-‘ Namjoon says almost petulantly.

‘-and you saw that as a real threat?’

‘Why would he say it if he didn’t mean it?’

‘It was his attempt at bargaining- he knew you wanted to go- fucking Spaces he even agreed to go, he was literally the one who officiated the marriage of our opinions.’ Sk’jin waves a hand about. Namjoon doesn’t look amused by his analogy. ‘And you simply stopped it all.’

‘So now you want me to go and apologize and ask him to stay and go to Grisial?’ Namjoon asks back.

Sk’jin wants to roll his eyes until they roll back permanently. Instead he sighs as patiently as possible and reaches over to flick Namjoon’s ear.

‘I don’t want you to do anything you little shit-head,’ Sk’jin says calmly. ‘I want you to maybe stop thinking out of your ass for a moment but seeing as you can’t at the moment I brought you tea- because it’s supposed to make you Zen or something.’

He expects Namjoon to retort back a snappy remark but he gets nothing.

Sk’jin wonders if Namjoon knows about Yoongi’s involvement with K’mara and how far that transaction had gone on. He has half the mind to tell the Kutsoglerin but stops himself. It was, at this moment, inconsequential. And Yoongi hadn’t regarded it as a secret of sorts, so Namjoon would come to know the next time Yoongi drops an extraordinary fact about himself on them.
‘Take a fucking moment and be calm. You’re smarter than this. Be smarter than this.’ Sk’jin adds before he pushes himself off of the Table and makes his way to the exit again before calling back, ‘And stop sulking in the dark! You’re a grown ass adult!’

Yoongi wants to talk to someone. Though he’s not sure how to instigate it. He could just ask someone if they had a moment to spare. That was the standard in most of the books he’s read. So now the question was: who to ask?

He immediately rules out Taeh’yung.

Yoongi feels he’ll be more confused.

He also rules out Sk’jin. He has a feeling things might take a completely different route on this one if he’s able to fully finish what he wants to discuss.

He weighs in on Namjoon. But the Captain was more than just distracted. News that more of the eggs were out and about the Universe- and that too in Kutsoglera, really seemed to have shaken Namjoon. That and the argument from the Bridge.

So that’s why he corners Hoseok in his Cabin, fresh out of a shower.

‘Fucking Spaces Yoongi!’ Hoseok hisses, holding up a TeorSer right at Yoongi’s forehead.

He had impressive reflexes though if Yoongi wanted he could have definitely dodged and disarmed Hoseok but now was not the time. He’s also quite sure no one showered with a TeorSer on their being so he’s confused as to where and how Hoseok pulled that TeorSer out from.

‘Do you have a moment.’

Hoseok gapes at him for a moment before sighing and nodding.

‘When do you have a moment.’ Yoongi asks.

‘Uh…I guess now is as good a time as any?’ Hoseok replies, tightening the towel around his waist.

'I want to talk.'

'...okay...' Hoseok pauses in his movements, looking like he wanted to ask Yoongi a question. But he moves on, walking towards his dresser. 'What about?'

'This.' Yoongi hands Hoseok the clip who takes it with a confused expression.
‘What’s this?’ Hoseok holds up the sparkly purple hair clip.

‘Jimin bought it for me.’

‘…I mean…’ Hoseok squints at the object. ‘I guess it’s pretty?’

‘I think he wanted to tell me something.’

‘About your past you mean?’ Hoseok asks sharply.

‘I think I had a sister.’ Yoongi states simply.

Hoseok looks up from the clip and then at Yoongi.

‘Are you remembering? Things from your past?’

Yoongi still had the records Namjoon had given him- untouched, unread. Namjoon had said it was **monumental**. But Yoongi doesn’t know why it should be. He only knows that he wouldn’t really understand most of what he read if he were to explore the contents.

‘I am different,’ Yoongi tries to explain. ‘There are things, inside database- inside my mind- that are new. Or improved. Or regressed. But there is something I didn’t know before.’

‘So do you understand what that is?’ Hoseok asks as he returns the clip.

‘No. And yes.’

Hoseok pauses at that, blinking a few times before asking, ‘What do you mean by that?’

‘I have an answer for that; an understanding based on what I have come to know from being Awake,’ Yoongi replies. ‘But my answer only brings more questions, and I have no definite answers for those.’

‘So…why don’t you tell me your answer? Maybe we can put things together? From an outer perspective,’ Hoseok offers.

Yoongi nods, this was exactly what he wanted to do.

‘Jimin says that he knew me. That I existed, and **Was**, all those sols ago.’ Yoongi begins, ‘He also says that I died.’

Hoseok nods, reaching for a shirt, a lone one hanging inside the dresser. Yoongi notices Hoseok’s bags are all packed.

‘Yet I am here. And so is he.’

Hoseok nods again.

‘But I do not remember what happened. But he does.’ Yoongi fidgets with the clip in his hand. ‘We spoke, we communicated- we protected each other. And I died. I do not remember, but he does.’

‘Okay…so what are you trying to say?’ Hoseok asks as he pulls the shirt over his head.

‘The scar on my back,’ Yoongi replies. ‘I have it. But he doesn’t. The rest of the GIU had it. But Jimin, who was inside the same Or Tanks I came across in the Yisheng Headquarters, doesn’t have it.’
‘And none of the GIU, before you that is, had a cognitive memory or response to their existence,’ Hoseok ruminates slowly.

Yoongi nods in reply.

‘So my answer to your question is yes, I understand why this is happening to me,’ Yoongi has a strange feeling curling in the pit of his stomach. It was similar to how he felt when he first started waking up, and when he fell down the side of Zhoumi’s living complex.

A strange rush- light yet heavy at the same time, taking over his stomach.

‘The Human Jimin knew was not me,’ Yoongi states bluntly. ‘I am born of him- created and harvested, an exact replica- a complete and identical clone. The Human Jimin knew was not me. I am not that Yoongi.’

Hoseok pauses halfway pulling up his trousers.

‘So then…Jimin has remained the same. He hasn’t been replicated or cloned- the way you have, if what you’re saying turns out to be the truth of course,’ he adds as he slowly pulls his leg through the trousers. ‘So then why not replicate Jimin?’

‘That’s a question I cannot answer,’ Yoongi replies quietly and continues slowly, ‘But there’s also another question I cannot answer.’

Hoseok finally manages to wear his trousers, tossing his towel to the side.

‘And that is?’

‘I see dreams,’ Yoongi feels an almost strange sense of disassociation as he speaks.

‘What sort of dreams?’ Hoseok asks, pulling up his chair and taking a seat, leaning over to listen closer.

‘Of sunlight and rain- tiredness and pain. Of a planet I do not know. Of faces I do not recognize. Of voices I do not know. Of feelings I cannot comprehend. Of myself- but not quite myself. Of sunrises that never make it to day. Of Jimin.’ Yoongi lists the sights and visions that have laced through the darkness of his sleep for the past sols of being Awake. But now with Jimin’s arrival, his dreams were more than just blurred colours and shapes and sounds. There was form, line, and sense to the dreams he saw. And in them he sees Jimin.

‘Are these dreams…or are they memories?’ Hoseok asks carefully.

‘I cannot answer that- I do not know.’

Hoseok is quiet for a while, finger worrying at the edge of his trouser cuffs as he sits crossed legged.

‘When you clone someone,’ Hoseok begin seriously, ‘There is no possible way of cloning their memories- or their personalities. Memory, personality, perception- is all different no matter how similar you try to recreate the conditions by which they were created.’

Yoongi nods in agreement. He read the studies on cloning (illegal and banned with penalty of lifetime imprisonment in Teronko’ng Prison), and it had all been the same. Identical Beings were created, but none were the same in personality. In fact most cloning came out entirely wrong and incredibly ineffective.
‘Is this part of their technology?’ Hoseok ruminates slowly. ‘Is it something they do?’

‘I think it might have something to do, in their inherited obsession of finding a digitized soul.’

The moment Yoongi says it, he can tell from Hoseok’s response it’s something he wasn’t expecting. Hoseok’s eyes widen, yellow rings bright and alarmed.

‘What-‘

‘I am not a digitized soul,’ Yoongi states clearly.

‘…how can you know for sure-‘

‘Because I have seen one. I am not like him,’ Yoongi explains quietly.

‘You met-‘ Hoseok seems to balk at this. He stammers a bit.

‘Sk’jin has, so has Taeh’yung. But I don’t know if they knew.’ Yoongi adds.

Hoseok blinks a few times, head shaking a little as though trying to shake himself into understanding.

‘So…so if you’re not…then what are you?’

‘An attempt. A mass product. A failure,’ Yoongi replies. ‘Just a pawn to be used.’

Hoseok’s expression shifts, a ripple of pain spreading across his features.

‘Then why do you continue on?’ the Ngfy’widan asks quietly.

‘Because I want to know,’ Yoongi replies simply. ‘I want to know all the answers.’

Hoseok smiles but there’s no warmth to it.

‘Knowing doesn’t always make things better. It makes it worse.’

‘I know.’ Yoongi replies. ‘I want to know- not just for me. But for all of them. For the faces that I promised to remember. For Jimin.’

‘But Jimin remembers,’ Hoseok sounds confused.

‘But he doesn’t know why,’ Yoongi replies. ‘He left his home to understand why. And he never could. I promised him that I would protect him, that’s what Jimin said, and by doing so, I know I will find the answers.’

‘So the answers…could come from Jimin?’ Hoseok says tentatively.

‘They will.’ Yoongi replies.

Hoseok is clearly surprised by his confidence, his belief.

‘Namjoon found my records. From Earth- when I was alive,’ Yoongi adds without pause. He’s sure he’s read somewhere that there were better ways of going about a conversation. But he had a lot to say. And Hoseok wasn’t going to be there after today. So Yoongi doesn’t have time. Speaking of which.

‘Don’t leave.’
Hoseok looks like he’s not quite sure what to feel.

‘Wait- go back,’ Hoseok waves a hand. ‘You found your old records? Have you gone through them?’

‘No. I don’t…I don’t know if…’ Yoongi stops.

‘I understand,’ Hoseok cuts in gently, nodding at the clip in his hand. ‘It’s a lot to take in.’

Yoongi supposes so.

‘Why do you want to leave?’

Hoseok leans back, exhaling heavily.

‘I can’t watch this go on in this vein anymore,’ Hoseok shakes his head. ‘I am not going to relive this again.’

‘Does this have to do with your father’s involvement in the Gaia Case?’ Yoongi asks.

Hoseok hesitates before he nods. The Ngfy’widan looks like he’s weighing his options, eyeing Yoongi carefully. But Yoongi sees the way his expression of hesitance dissipates entirely- like he’d just given up. A sort of reckless abandon overtaking the latter.

‘How much do you know about me and my involvement in the Venture Unit?’ Hoseok asks as he gets up and falls to sit on his bedding instead.

Yoongi knew a lot. He even accessed the full video footage of the massacre as they dubbed it. But instead he replies, ‘Enough.’

Hoseok snorts at that, making himself comfortable on the bed and leaning all the way back onto the wall, legs stretched out before him.

Yoongi decides that he will take a seat on the chair. According to what he read in ‘20 Easy Steps for Your Android to be more Life Like!’ in step 6, they said that most living Beings didn’t stand still for extended periods of time. That they shifted about a lot. And this was very true. Both Sk’jin and Taeh’yung rarely ever stayed still for longer than a minute. Namjoon was always fidgeting, hands moving a lot. Hoseok himself was prone to doing that too.

He’s about to sit at the chair when Hoseok’s damp towel catches his attention. A flare of irritation fills him for a fraction of a second. And before he knows it, he’s moving towards the offending piece of fabric. Picking it up, he spreads it out over the back of the chair and finally sits.

‘…why did you do that?’ Hoseok eyes the towel and then Yoongi. Yoongi doesn’t really know how to explain the urge that suddenly filled him out of nowhere when he saw the crumpled towel. Or the irritation.

‘…it was annoying.’

Hoseok eyes him for a solid moment before he speaks.

‘When I was “invited” to join the Yisheng’s cause of Universe-Domination by my father- it obviously messed up a lot of things,’ Hoseok scoffs. ‘I didn’t know what to think- and when I did, I had too many thoughts, too many questions, too much of everything. I couldn’t look at what I considered to be normal or routine as normal or routine anymore- I suspected everything and
everyone. I almost went mad with the idea that everything was fake- everything was just one grand illusion- a cover-up for a cover-up for a cover-up and on and on, stacked layers of deceit and lies. And in all of this I just wanted the truth- I just wanted answers. And I searched for them- and I did all I could to get them. In the end, it destroyed the Venture Unit, it destroyed my family, and it has probably destroyed countless other families, countries, even whole planets and systems.’

Yoongi knows Hoseok is not exaggerating. Every action had a consequence, no matter how big or small. One object in motion is extremely likely to trigger another object in motion. And that would form a pattern of creating motion. On and on and on.

And this particular one Hoseok is talking about was the event that caused the Venture Unit to purge itself, inside out. The exact official count of the Beings who died during this purge has never been counted.

Because it was still ongoing.

‘I knew what I was getting myself into. But I didn’t stop- it was too close to me, as a Being, as a son-’ Hoseok pauses here. ‘I wanted to know more- I wanted to understand why- and that’s exactly what Namjoon is doing right now. What Sk’jin is doing.’

‘You regret it.’

‘Of course I regret it!’ Hoseok exhales a humorless laugh. ‘Not a single day- a single minute-‘

Hoseok takes a deep breath and shakes his head as he speak, ‘So no- I am not going to involve myself in something like this again.’

Yoongi nods, maybe a little too late, and says, ‘Be safe.’

Hoseok looks surprised by his reply but gives him a small smile.

‘I’ll try,’ Hoseok huffs out with a humorless laugh but his expression is light and the air around him not as heavy. It was as though he too shed off some of the weight around his shoulders. He looks across at Yoongi and adds, ‘Is that all?’

‘One more thing,’ Yoongi had ruled Sk’jin out as a candidate to speak to because of this final segment he wanted to discuss.

‘What’s up?’ Hoseok asks, crossing his legs over each other and reaching over his bed for the night-stand where a bottle of water stood. Yoongi waits until Hoseok finishes drinking because he’s afraid that the Ngfy’widan might choke.

‘I think in the past, my relationship with Jimin might have been different.’

He does actually choke on air, hacking out a loud choking cough before settling down to calm himself. Hoseok grips the bottle in his hands almost apprehensively.

‘Okay…could you elaborate?’

Yoongi doesn’t know how to elaborate on this because it doesn’t make sense to him. Which was why he was even talking about it.

‘In my dreams- I…’ Yoongi pauses. ‘I feel different.’

‘…as in- physically? Or just- how you see things, or know things?’ Hoseok tries. Yoongi shakes
his head.

‘All of that- but…whenever I see Jimin- I…’ Yoongi can’t explain the dreams- which he suspects are memories, but the very notion of that felt impossible. How could he inherit the memories of another Being he was cloned after? It was impossible.

‘In your dreams,’ Hoseok starts carefully. ‘Do you see yourself?’

‘See myself?’ Yoongi repeats.

‘Like…like in a movie- do you see yourself as an actor? Or is it as though you are seeing this through your own eyes?’

‘It’s me,’ Yoongi replies. ‘I see through my own eyes. When Jimin talks to me, I see him with my own eyes.’

Hoseok seems to have come to the same conclusion as Yoongi about memories and clones, a small frown settling on his features.

‘So you’re saying that your relationship with Jimin might have been…eh,’ Hoseok shrugs and adds with a hesitant expression, ‘Something more?’

‘I don’t know- because it’s different. I feel it in me, when I’m dreaming- I feel it, like it’s my own- but it’s his-’ Yoongi really doesn’t know how to voice it.

His dreams have been laced with a strange sensation- one that fills him every time he spoke to Jimin, every time he looked at Jimin. He can’t explain it. And it doesn’t help because whatever he was feeling in his dreams/memories transferred out into reality.

‘Why don’t you talk to him about it?’ Hoseok suggests. ‘He can help you remember. If it’s something you want to do- maybe it will help you, maybe it will help Jimin too. Maybe it will help the mission.’

‘What’s the opposite of what might happen?’

Hoseok smiles ruefully at that.

‘Memories are tricky Yoongi,’ the Ngfy’widan says with a small shrug, going back to take another sip of water. ‘Because they outline who you are- and sometimes you don’t want to remember who you used to be.’
His hand is burning.

He picks up his bag and with one last sweeping glance around his Cabin, Hoseok walks out. There wasn’t a lot to pack up in the first place, so it hadn’t taken him long. He’s wearing what he wore when he first boarded the Užkulisai, so in a sense, there’s a nice feeling of completion.

To his surprise, Yoongi is standing outside his door, and he’s holding out the Heliord handle they had taken with them during their fight in the slaving ship back in Grezma.

‘I think you’ll be needing it more than I will Yoongi,’ Hoseok smiles.

Yoongi shakes his head and says, ‘You’re better using it.’

Hoseok wants to laugh because he knows for a fact that no one could defeat Yoongi in weapon usage. But he accepts it anyways and takes the handle from the Human.

‘Thank you.’

Yoongi nods and then as though really thinking it through, holds his arms out stiffly. It takes Hoseok a second too long to realize what Yoongi was trying to do and he can’t help but laugh out loud. He takes a step forward and embraces the all too stiff Human, patting his back in the process.

Yoongi steps away, looking the most uncomfortable Hoseok has ever seen him (except during that time when Jimin hugged him after he woke up in the Medical Bay).

‘Take care of yourself,’ Yoongi mumbles before he promptly walks away.

‘Isn’t he the cutest?’ Yoongi mumbles before he promptly walks away.

‘Fucking Spaces-!’ Hoseok jumps when a pair of arms wrap around him from behind him. He hadn’t even left his Cabin – how in Spaces did Taeh’yung manage to slip in behind him without Hoseok noticing?!

‘Hi Hobi!’ Taeh’yung grins brightly, making himself shorter than Hoseok.

‘Eh- I can’t even stay mad at you,’ Hoseok grumbles as he struggles to walk forward, essentially dragging Taeh’yung along towards the stairs. He stops himself from taking the stairs and instead heads for the rarely used lift.

‘I’m gonna miss you Hobi,’ Taeh’yung states happily. ‘So will number 3!’

‘…I’ll you two too?’

‘No- it’s 3.’

‘…I’ll miss all of you?’

Taeh’yung makes a contemplative face, mouth puckering in thought.

‘I don’t know about 1, but I think 4 appreciates it. 2 doesn’t care but then again,’ Taeh’yung shrugs dismissively.

Hoseok manages to get them into the elevator and is a little alarmed to find himself actually breathless from tugging around Taeh’yung. He was going to have to increase his stamina level again.
‘I would go with you Hobi,’ Taeh’yung continues as though there had been no interruption or change of subject. ‘But I can’t.’

‘Stay with Jimin-‘ Hoseok knows how important Taeh’yung is to Jimin, and that was based only on the communications aspect of it.

‘Chim can take care of himself,’ is Taeh’yung’s unexpected reply. ‘I can’t leave Jin. Especially if we’re going there.’

‘What do you mean?’ Hoseok inquires worriedly. The Khol’isa had told him he’d be all right- and despite not knowing much about his history with the planet, Hoseok is still worried.

But the elevator doors open and Taeh’yung pushes them out. Sk’jin and Jimin are standing by the Hangar doorway facing the Lobby, Yoongi standing behind them.

A breeze fills the area- a natural breeze- and Taeh’yung inhales dramatically.

They had landed in Ts’ets’khli just about 15 minutes ago. The planet itself, much like every other planet in Ymir, was rather atmospherically toxic.

Ts’ets’khli was a rather large planet. Orbiting the planet were 3 half rings, creating a crooked and broken glittering ring of debris around the planet. From a distance, the planet was a powdery indigo, reflecting her natural state of geography and atmosphere. Ts’ets’khli was a very cloudy and misty planet, with a rather even distribution of land and water. The land was mainly mountains and valleys and due to the planet’s naturally acidic air. But unlike its sister-planets, Ts’ets’khli’s occupants dwelled underwater in large settlements, filtering their toxic air through intricate water-filtration systems. The landing docks were above water and had their own reinforced Atmoshield-allowing filtered air to flow through to mimic fresh and clean air.

Flying into the planet was tricky, what with all the heavy clouds and atmospheric storms with acidity levels that could melt rocks. But the GLA Officer on the Comm line made things easier as Sk’jin piloted them with ease through the opaque clouds and into a beautiful early morning sky.

Jimin’s reaction to this planet was different, watching with quiet awe as they had flown over the faint glowing patches of light from the underwater settlements below. The rings around the planet cast their own unique light over the planet and Hoseok had held back a smile when Jimin traced the lines of light that fell into the Bridge right into Yoongi’s hair. Yoongi hadn’t moved, allowing Jimin to trace the tracks of light over his face and hair, watching his movements with confused yet content eyes.

Taeh’yung’s grip around him tightens as they walk over to the Hangar. The sun was starting to rise and it would soon be very warm. Hoseok would have to wait a full day before he can get another ship to go elsewhere.

‘We’re like an unhealthy relationship,’ Sk’jin laughs in greeting. ‘Only together for the drama. Though none of us are getting any make-up sex from this.’

Hoseok is surprised to find that he might actually miss Sk’jin’ antics.

‘We can have make-up sex if it means you’ll stay!’ Taeh’yung cries out, now wriggling down like some weird worm to the floor.

Sk’jin laughs so much Jimin ends up laughing as well.

Taeh’yung is latched onto his leg, long limbs successfully wrapping themselves in a weird knot. He
looks up, eyes pleading and wide. Hoseok feels like he’s leaving behind a beloved pet.

‘Yeah well- I’ll get going,’ Hoseok says as he tries, with very small success, to get his leg out of Taeh’yung’s grip.

This felt weirdly awkward. And wrong. But Hoseok can’t stay here anymore. Not with the direction they were headed- both literally and metaphorically. His hand is burning and Hoseok needs to leave before his touch incinerates everything again.

They follow him to the Hangar opening. Namjoon isn’t there. And Hoseok wasn’t expecting him to be either. The grip on his legs is gone; Yoongi had deftly released Taeh’yung’s grip around him in a scariley easy manner and dragged the Zhak’gri by his long legs to the side.

The sun is fully out as Jimin steps forward, hair gleaming in an almost unreal manner in the Ts’ets’khli sun. He holds out his hand and Hoseok wonders if he too should call Jimin ‘your majesty’ just for the sake of it. But he doesn’t- because out here under the sunlight and with the breeze flowing around them, there’s something majestic in the way Jimin stood.

Hoseok finds himself feeling oddly subdued. Was this the effect Jimin had on Beings? Or did he just naturally command this sort of reaction? Hoseok takes his proffered hand in his left hand. But Jimin shakes his head and pointedly looks down at his burning hand. Hoseok almost feels as though it could literally be on fire as he lifts up his right hand.

Jimin takes it and presses both of his hands on either side, sandwiching Hoseok’s hand between his own. There’s a small hard object pressed into his palm and on instinct Hoseok takes a hold of it. Jimin smiles and kisses his hand.

It’s weird- because Hoseok feels like he should be getting on one knee and kissing this actual royalty on his hand instead. But Jimin takes a step back and gives him a small wave.

It’s unsettling as Hoseok turns his back to the Užkulisiai. He doesn’t look back even though he knows they’re watching after him. He enters the aquatic-lift to take him down to the T’se’tskhlese settlements below and as he sits, comes in full view of the Užkulisiai again.

Taeh’yung is prostrated on the ground, only his head arched up. Jimin is crouched next to him, patting his head in a soothing manner. Sk’jin is standing at an angle, making sure to absorb as much sunlight as possible. Yoongi lingers in the back, barely visible. And right next to the Human is Namjoon.

Hoseok sighs.

He didn’t hate Namjoon. He didn’t dislike any one of them. The last day before this had been awkward and expertly maneuvered so they didn’t meet. He wants to tell Namjoon this wasn’t against him- against any one of them. But he doesn’t know how well it will translate. He tries a small smile and finds that it’s not forced. He manages a small wave, hoping to convey to Namjoon that he didn’t have anything personal against him.

It was just the fact that this entire mission was starting to feel too personal, in a way he hadn’t imagined would be possible. The lift completely submerges into the water and Hoseok slowly breathes out.

It feels strange. There’s no sense of finality or end.

Not the way it had felt when he walked out of the Venture Unit.
Or when he walked away from his mother.

He fiddle with his hands, rolling the small Comm-Device Jimin had slipped into his hand. A way to stay connected. Hoseok would have put it back- could have put it back. But he kept it with him. Hoseok is dimly aware of the fact that his hand no longer felt like it was burning.

A great shadow passes over him and Hoseok looks up from his hand.

ts’ets’khli, like her sister-planets, was not the kindest to living creatures. Her land had plants and other flora, but not so much in terms of living creatures. However, her oceans and seas did host quite a bunch of diverse species. And the most famous of all their creatures was the balèn.

Large than the Užkulisai, the balèn were aquatic creatures with long thick bodies, flapper like fins, and a large fin-tail that slowly propelled them forward. They were gentle creatures, and were rarely recorded to be aggressive. Their skin is bumpy and textured and as they float past the aquatic-lift, Hoseok involuntarily holds his breath, gripping his seat a little tighter.

But they pay him no heed, and the balèn swim past him, straight upwards.

They travelled in herds, that’s what Hoseok had read about them. But they normally lived quite deep down underwater, and rarely surfaced if at all. Yet here they were, more than a dozen, all slowly drifting upwards. And Hoseok knows the reason why even before he can formulate the thought in his mind. And somehow it makes him smile.

The balèn all huddle under the shadow of the dock where the Užkulisai was docked.

Maybe even these creatures could sense royalty.

Jimin doesn’t have to understand their language to sense the ongoing tension in the ship.

It was already there ever since he was aware of what was happening in his dreams. A rift in the bonds within them. And not because of lack of connectivity- but rather a reflection of their own insecurities projecting out. And now it was increasing, monumentally- and now it had grown so large it was pushing someone out.

Jimin brushes his hand through Taeh’yung’s hair where he’s prostrated himself on the floor of the ship. The Zhak’gri was exaggerating of course, but Jimin could sense genuine sorrow at seeing Hoseok leave.

‘Is this because of me?’ Jimin asks carefully. He knew that the crew had a lot of disagreements. He’s had his fair share of dealing with committees and boards that never got along and tended to make things difficult for each other. It was easy enough to sense the discord and paranoia laced throughout the ship.

‘No,’ Taeh’yung pouts. ‘This is just stupid.’
Jimin turns his head to find Sk’jin also still gazing out, red eyes gleaming under the sunlight. A shadow forms around his head, shaped into two distinct shapes- an echo of what was. Taeh’yung had explained in some detail, what had happened to Sk’jin. But beyond what he knew, Jimin could sense what he can only describe as a storm brewing deep within this Being. A deep dark bloody storm that was contained and somewhat lost in this Being. But what confused Jimin about this, was how the storm had no beginning, but only a very violent and clear end.

Namjoon calls from behind them, already turning his back. He was probably telling them to get ready to leave.

Sk’jin says something along with Taeh’yung’s name before he too turns around and heads back inside. Only Yoongi remains, looking out with disconcertingly blank eyes.

The Human looks away from where Hoseok had previously and meets Jimin’s gaze, as though sensing it almost immediately. Jimin wants to see the liveliness and sheer strength of Life shining in the Human’s eyes again. He wants to see that familiar smile, hear that lilting voice as he laughs or cracks an obvious joke or smart response. But the look in Yoongi’s eyes haven’t changed.

He smiles, in hopes of having the Human smile back, like how he used to. But Yoongi doesn’t. Instead he walks up to them, and to Jimin’s surprise, sits next to Jimin. Taeh’yung turns his head, giving the Human a bright smile.

‘Yoongi looks like he doesn’t know what to do under the sunlight,’ Taeh’yung comments as he stretches rather violently.

‘He used to move through the woods as quickly as possible to get to sunlight before,’ Jimin says, watching Yoongi’s profile for a moment before looking down at Taeh’yung. ‘He was always looking for the sun. I think it made him feel better- like he was back on his planet.’

A pang of pain racks through Jimin. Earth had been destroyed not so long ago. Not only did Yoongi lose who he had been, but he lost his home in the process. Jimin cannot imagine how he must feel at this moment.

Taeh’yung turns over on his back, eyes nearly rolling back to look out into the sky. A breeze ruffles through his hair, a soft green glow in his eyes.

‘Do you know what it means?’ he asks.

‘What does what mean?’ Jimin asks in turn.

‘The nickname he gave you. Do you know what it means?’ Taeh’yung looks away from the sky and back at Jimin.

Taeh’yung had an interesting face- continuously changing though not in the same way as Hoseok’s did. Taeh’yung’s features shifted subtly, giving way to 4 distinctly different faces. Jimin can sometimes hear their voices when Taeh’yung spoke. It was very soft, and only audible if Jimin concentrated hard enough. And it was comforting.

Jimin has never met anyone like Taeh’yung before, and he doubts he ever will. Even the Yishengs he had met so long ago were nothing like the way Taeh’yung just existed.

He seemed to encompass Time, Memory, and Life- yet not possess any of it within him simultaneously- as though the raw power of those forces held no control over him.

‘No? Does it mean something funny?’ Jimin laughs, remembering the way Yoongi used to call the
members of his team in altering names frequently. Sometimes the responses were to throw whatever was close at hand at the Human, amused scowls following quickly.

Taeh’yung laughs, a throaty laugh that Jimin associates with the oldest face that sometimes appears on Taeh’yung’s features. There’s a fond look on Taeh’yung’s face as he glances at the Human and then back at Jimin.

‘No- it means sunshine.’

On the first day itself, Hoseok finds a bunch of Excavators loitering around in an eatery and easily befriends the group. Ts’ets’khli had a unique geological history and if you were brave (stupid) enough to attempt going about on the Ts’ets’khli lands, then you could come across some very interesting minerals and deposits. These Excavators were clearly dumb enough to do exactly that and had just finished recovering from the intense acid burns all over their bodies. Despite wearing specialized gear, Ts’ets’khli’s atmosphere altered all the time, rendering it impossible to accurately pinpoint how and when the acidity in the air would change.

Hoseok makes friends with them easily, shifting in to the form of a Tayian (the go-to, most trust-worthy species form based on Hoseok’s experience) and taking up the identity of a lone traveller searching for his inner-self past the privileged confines of Raksane Tayi. His disguise is accepted and unquestioned and he’s welcomed to their ranks (with the added bonus of units) and Hoseok has a ship to get to a System some 90 light years away. That had been 2 days ago. And now they were going to leave the next morning.

Hoseok still can’t shake the feeling of being unsettled- as though he’d forgotten something.

And he knows he hasn’t forgotten anything. He rolls his eyes at himself and excuses himself from the Excavators under the pretense of being too drunk. Which is a joke because Ngfy’widan’s had a strong internal system and rarely got drunk. Dropping his drunken walk (an art form in itself) Hoseok walks back to where the Excavators parked their terrain-based vehicle.

As Hoseok easily walks through the crowds of people going about the night market, his attention is caught by the sight of a bunch of Beings who were easily pirates. Ignoring them and taking a different route, Hoseok casually strolls through the street, pretending to window-shop. He glances at the window-displays, absent mindedly wondering if he should get his hair trimmed when loud carrying voices come towards him in the form of other pirates. They’re scurrying, clearly in a hurry, pulling a gravity-lift with them.

‘-Khonen should have already been here,’ one of them hisses angrily just as they make it into
Hoseok’s ear-shot.

‘They’re going to fucking flip- we were supposed to meet up. Have *they* left already-’

The sound of the crowds rush in again.

Hoseok can’t help himself as his body turns casually and follows after the two pirates. They’re both lugging gravity-lifts, behind which were stacked a pair of sealed OrTanks. A shiver runs down his spine.

Hoseok tries to stop but it’s too ingrained into his Being.

Studying the two in front of him, he notices their clothing and their appearances- they were just like Khonen. Had the smugglers he mentioned before already here? Or were these other smugglers? He casually checks out their OrTanks. They were the standard issue tanks- but were large enough to fit the OrTanks that had contained Jimin.

Hoseok easily walks past them when they meet up with some of their other crew. They’re angrily discussing amongst themselves while Hoseok walks over to a stand selling trinkets. He finds hairclips and briefly thinks about Yoongi. Out of the corner of his eyes, the smugglers all gather and begin moving. This time, there’s another added gravity-lift with them carrying an additional pair of OrTanks.

Randomly purchasing a star-shaped clip that was similar to the one Yoongi had shown him, Hoseok trails after them easily.

Just as he thought, they were headed for one of the aquatic-lifts. Hoseok walks past a few shops, snitching some items here and there and quickly changes his external clothing and shifts his face again. When they reach the lift, a few Beings were already there. Hoseok acts drunk again, tripping on his feet and losing his balance.

Some laughter follows as he attempts to stand and no more attention is paid to him. He trips after the smugglers and collapses on one of the chairs.

‘C-can someone wake- wake me up when we get up?’ he hiccups, words slurred and slow.

‘Yeah yeah- go off now,’ they snort. Hoseok’s head snaps back and he fakes passing out.

‘No word from Khonen?’ one of them asks gruffly.

‘Nothing- it’s why they’ve gone to check.’

‘I know our deal- but do they have to be here? They give me the creeps- and what are these anyways? We don’t traffic other Beings! This is the worst of illegal shit!’

‘We don’t have a choice! We have to do this!’

It’s silent after that.

‘Besides- it’s just that one last delivery from Khonen- and then we can take back what we need.’

‘Not all of it.’

‘This is business-‘

‘-our *planet* is not a business-‘
'it’s the only thing we can do! You think the heads of states care? Shut your mouth and just stay quiet! We don’t ask questions and we get what we need!’

Hoseok feels cold.

Khonen was back in Ubhuku, memories wiped clean from his mind. His hand starts to burn up, fiery warmth licking over his fingers, up his wrist.

And now it would seem the Omhlophe were headed there- or at least already there. How did they travel so quickly?

‘Should we wake him up?’

‘I doubt he’ll wake up,’ one of them snorts. ‘Can you smell that? It’s strong shit.’

They huff a little and exit the aquatic-lift. Moving quickly and swiftly, Hoseok slips past the closing doors of the lift, his form shifted. Discarding his jacket and picking up another shirt, Hoseok makes his way across the large Dock.

It was night but well lit. He catches up with their group a minute later, moving along the shadows of the ships docked there.

Hoseok is unsure where any of this was going to lead. What it would show him, or where it would take him. But he nonetheless activates the tracker in the Comm-Device and quickly attaches it to his ear. If he discovers something- anything – then he would be able to instantly alert Sk’jin.

He quietly thanks Jimin for slipping the device into his palm.

They stop at a large rather ordinary ship. Hoseok makes a round in its perimeter and estimates the crew at no more than 15 Beings. So far, no signs of the Omhlophe.

Quickly making his way into the ship, Hoseok sneaks in unseen and undetected.

Just like he suspected there were no surveillance, no active crew members, and zero security measures. He easily makes his way into the Bridge area. So far, nothing odd stood out to him. But then again, this ship was almost identical to Khonen’s ship. Nothing was out of the ordinary there too.

At the Bridge there are two Beings- both asleep.

Quietly Hoseok makes his way to their Navigation Table. Without the proper screen or identification or Namjoon’s hacking skills, Hoseok would have no way of getting through its contents. However, a small NaviLet is casually open to the side of one of the sleeping Being’s head. Without a sound, Hoseok reaches over and picks up the device.

Creeping out of the Bridge, he nearly shows himself but the smuggler who runs past him is too hassled to really notice Hoseok’s shadowed form in the dark hallway.

A bunch of them walk out quickly as well, groaning as they do so. Which was perfect because Hoseok now had a clear path to the Hull. Based on Van Seulgaan’s ship, all of the OrTanks had been stored there. So Hoseok quickly makes his way down.

He’s almost disappointed to find nothing when he ducks his head around the opening to the Hull. But the sound of footsteps alert him and he slips behind one of the engine-cores to the side. One of the smugglers from earlier in the night comes in with a gravity-lift and a pair of OrTanks. He walks
straight towards Hoseok and past him to another section. He tugs at what looks like an ordinary lever-switch and the floors to one side slides open to reveal a dark ramp. Hoseok keeps still until the smuggler goes in and reappears a minute later.

He switches off the lights and leaves the Hull.

Waiting another minute, Hoseok activates his Heliord, the handle tucked away inside the inner pocket of his shirt, to shed some light. He finds the same lever and pulls on it. The floor opens quietly again and Hoseok steps onto the ramp. It’s darker in here than above and Hoseok carefully activates the Heliord on full power.

The under-floor storage is no ordinary storage space.

Two entire rows of OrTanks, stacked over each other, lined up the sides and middle of the storage hull. And inside of them lay a floating Being, suspended in mist-like fluid, eyes closed. Over towards the end, the OrTanks he had seen being pulled in stood there, still covered.

Hoseok feels a shiver running down his back. He takes a single step forward and as though creating a chain reaction, all the Being inside the OrTanks slowly drift in the misty-fluid to face him.

‘Shit-’ Hoseok reaches for his Comm-Device. He had to tell the others about this now. The NaviLet in his hand suddenly vibrates- nearly making him drop it. The screen was blank and unresponsive. Frowning, Hoseok pockets it safely inside his shirt and taps on his ear.

‘They listen to you. Because he has seen your dreams. Their dreams.’

Hoseok is quick to raise the Heliord over his torso, taking a few steps back and angling it to protect his chest as he crouches down in quick defence. But there is no attack.

Only a single Being stands by the door. An all too familiar unknown Being, clad fully in white, face partially masked, and their entire stance extraordinarily stagnant.

The Omhlophe.

‘Where are the others? We did not sense him arriving here. Or perhaps it was simply the water.’

The Being’s voice is neither male nor female- neither rough or smooth. There was something oddly automated and delayed with the words- as though they simply repeated the words given to them.

‘I’m here alone,’ Hoseok states, repositioning his foot to make a quick run past the Being if he could manage.

They weren’t supposed to be here- unless that smuggler from earlier had been misinformed. Did they go to Ubhuku and already come back? His hand holding the Heliord burns hotter.

‘You still stay here, Ngfy’widan. And then,’ it says, voice strangely flat and monotone, as though forced through a stabilizer of sorts. ‘They will come for you.’

‘I don’t work for the Venture Unit anymore,’ Hoseok states. ‘I am no longer an agent- I have nothing to offer you.’

‘We do not care for the Venture Unit,’ it replies. ‘We speak of your ship. We speak of the Kutsoglerin, of the Human, of the Khol’isa, of the Zhak’gri. And now of the Yemenifesi Ch’inin’eti.’
‘They won’t,’ Hoseok shrugs easily, his heart racing and his mind frenzied. *They knew who Jimin was. ‘I quit- I am no longer part of their team. Working conditions- too much shit from the Pageant.’*

‘They will come for you,’ it repeats. ‘And until then, you will remain among us.’

Hoseok doesn’t even see it move but the Heliord in his hand is now in the Omhlophe’s possession and it’s already standing past the doorway that was now closing.

‘Namjoon are you there-‘ Hoseok calls at once. He first feels the trickle of something sliding down his neck and then the pain hits him.

The entire side of his face feels like it’s burning and his body convulses from delayed shock. Hands shaking he feels at the side of his head, struggling to stand up as he feels the lower half of his ear has been clear ripped-off.

His Comm-Device is missing.

‘Shit-! Fucking *Spaces-*!’

Hastily ripping at the edge of his shirt, Hoseok tears a make-shift bandage to wrap around his head, hoping to stem the bleeding. He grits his teeth as the over-sensitive exposed flesh of his ear is pressed down by the rough fabric of his shirt. Taking a deep breath Hoseok scans the under-floor storage for anything he could use.

The OrTanks are secured and bolted to frames to keep them contained. There were security harnesses for maintenance workers and or androids and Hoseok makes his way there. There had to be some sort of maintenance kit here. Or a port for electric units and chargers. But there’s none. It’s dark but Hoseok doesn’t have an issue with the darkness. However, the darkness gives way to the soft and eerie light of the OrTanks.

He feels the ship start up, the air humming in vibration.

He was stuck.

‘Shit.’

Securing himself into place on the wall, Hoseok leans back, taking a deep breath.

The Omhlophe were here- and they had left to check on Khonen and his ship because they clearly felt like something was wrong. And whatever these *eggs* were- they were important to them.

And more than that- they knew *exactly who* Jimin was.

And they wanted him.

He needs to get some form of communication through with the Užkulisai, to tell them to flee as far as possible. To take Jimin far away. He doesn’t know why they want him- but it couldn’t be for any good. He would have to be hidden- they would all need to work even harder to hide him. But how long would it take until they find him?

With both the GLA and the Omhlophe after them- and judging by how things were, they both knew *exactly where* they were headed. It was only a matter of time before either of them caught up to them in their trajectory to Bhumi.
He searches his pockets for any possible device he could use or attempt to fix to communicate with the Užkulisai. The NaviLet was switched off from the Navigation Table up in the Bridge so there was no chance of activating it unless he got to a power source to directly power it up. They had probably discovered that it was missing and so switched it off automatically. He puts the device back and his hand brushes against a small object. Pulling it out, Hoseok finds the clip he had bought in the market. He doesn’t remember even paying for it. He holds it up in his palm, the blue glitter catching the faint light of the OrTanks.

The burning sensation on his palm slowly abates.
I AM SORRY
FOR BEING LATE
BUT WOW
UNIVERSITY HAS BEEN A TOTAL AND UTTER DICK THESE PAST FEW WEEKS
AND ONE SPECIFIC PROFESSOR WHO WANTS TO SEE ME SUFFER I HATE HIM SO MUCH
I’m fine
So, my updates might be a bit random- but I will make sure to update every fortnight!! So don’t worry!!
I hope you enjoy this update!!!!
‘He doesn’t seem surprised by us.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘He’s not surprised by our appearance, our clothing, our tech – he’s curious but it’s not unknown to him,’ she comments.

‘Why should he be? He looks like he could be from Tayi, minus the eyes. Even from Earth.’

‘Don’t typecast me and my species,’ Yoongi deadpans.

‘Yeah- they don’t make them that pretty back in Earth.’

‘Moving on,’ she sends Yoongi a flat look. ‘Our scans can’t place his species- which is saying a lot. He also speaks in a language that isn’t part of the directory- and he looks nothing like the Bhumians we were briefed on.’

‘Not everyone from the same planet looks alike,’ he ruminates. ‘We can’t be sure if he is actually from here or not.’

‘He’s not,’ Yoongi replies easily. When they give him questioning looks he hastens to reply, ‘He’s curious about this place too- he sometimes studies the plants, the soil- he’s new to this place. A bit more familiar than we are surely- but he’s not from here.’

Yoongi glances over at Jimin who was sitting by the stream, a single hand in the cool water, eyes closed. He’s humming under his breath again- a habit, it would seem.

‘I think he has a rank of sorts,’ Yoongi continues.

‘Yeah- in your heart-‘

‘Shut the fuck up,’ Yoongi frowns though it’s without any irritation. ‘He carries himself in a different way- the way he is around us. The way he behaves- he carries some form of title.’

‘No- Yoongi’s right,’ she confirms. ‘We probably won’t be able to figure it out now- but he’s definitely carrying a high title or rank. Also, he looks the part.’

‘Shouldn’t we be more objective about that,’ they laugh though they’re not arguing the statement.
But Yoongi agrees.

‘Any sighting of that ship?’

Yoongi looks questioningly over at the tracking team. They all shake their heads.

‘Nothing shows up on our feed- the planet is blanketed in heavy storm clouds- it’s fucking up with our connections,’ they reply worriedly.

‘Well- according to the Director, the tower has those GLA standard machinery,’ she huffs with a small frown on her face. ‘I think it’s safe to say we’ll be able to get our systems charged and running up there.’

‘This sucks,’ he says with a tired sigh. ‘This place is exhausting.’

‘I know – same.’

‘No- it’s different.’

Yoongi listens curiously.

‘There’s a strange…a strange presence – it’s just…sapping everything- I feel something- I don’t know what- but it feels like waves, rising from the ground and upwards,’ he points upwards at the sky. ‘Like it’s being absorbed away- and I feel like I’m going up too.’

Yoongi gulps at that.

‘Don’t worry,’ she says firmly. ‘We’ll get out of here and I’m taking us all to a resort in Šerdesas- maybe at the Yisheng Headquarters.’

‘Fuck that sounds good,’ they groan.

‘Still- doesn’t make sense why the reports we were given make no sense,’ the others state. ‘I mean- are we even sure we’re in the right place? It’s been weeks.’

‘I’m certain,’ she nods. ‘I heard the messages and saw the clips. But I also don’t understand how it’s the way it is right now. We were sent out 3 weeks after that- there should still be an excess of debris around the planet.’

‘Solar winds? The sun in this System is dying- lots of flares,’ he ruminates before asking, ‘You think they got to that place- uh,-Akramain?’

‘Akramana,’ she corrects them with a roll of eye. ‘And I don’t know.’

‘What the fuck are the GLA even thinking,’ he rolls his eyes and Yoongi agrees. ‘Also shouldn’t the Venture Unit be handling this? Not us?’

‘Well- we just need to get the report through first of all I guess- then we can speculate. For now we should keep our main task as main priority.’ She replies with a shrug and sigh. ‘All right- break time’s over- let’s go.’ She orders before nodding at Yoongi, ‘Go get Jimin.’

‘Why me?’

She gives him an unimpressed look before walking away. Yoongi can feel his face heating up a little and he wants to maybe facepalm into the nearest tree. But before he can do that, he hears Jimin calling his name.
Jimin is standing near the tree line, beckoning Yoongi over. Cautiously, he makes his way forward. He’s not sure why he’s being so cautious—because they had spotted no living being or creature before—save for Jimin. But Jimin’s mimed words from the other day still echoes around in Yoongi’s mind. That they were being watched. And he can’t shake it off.

Jimin points forward, smiling as though quite pleased. He notices someone behind Yoongi and waves at them too. Yoongi hears footsteps and voices but his attention is captured by the sheet of water pouring out from between two cliff faces, creating a curtain of pure light, filtering the ruddy sky into something that resembled a soft sunrise.

And it takes Yoongi’s breath away.

He feels someone pat him on the shoulder and he starts. He’s shocked at how much the sight captured his attention— but then he realizes he was also listening to the sound of Jimin humming. A sweet soft melody that Yoongi feels as though he’s heard before—perhaps from a past memory, or maybe in a dream— but it’s familiar.

He turns slightly to observe Jimin, not wanting to stare outright.

And she was right. Jimin definitely looked the part of a ranked Being—possibly even royal, if Yoongi is being honest.

It wasn’t just his hair or eyes. There was something that called attention and a sort of reverence from deep within you when Jimin was around.

The clouds above break a little more and the permanent sunrise shines across into the cliff edge they’re walking on.

It wasn’t a physical aspect that made Jimin look the way he did. There were no words that came to Yoongi’s mind—instead it’s just an abstract notion; one that he feels might be a little biased. Or maybe a little whimsical. But as Yoongi steals glances at Jimin, he can’t help but think it was in the way the sun shone around him.

It was as though all that was light loved him— the glow of the distant ruddy sun actually casting gentle and soft illuminations over his skin. The way his hair seemed to absorb light and reflect it back with more ardor and brilliance.

It was as though he embodied sunlight.

‘Yoongi! You can go sightseeing later! Let’s go!’

Yoongi finally properly glances over at Jimin who looks over at the owner of the calling voice, a quizzical smile on his face.

Yoongi smiles, jerking his head to the side.

‘Come on sunshine, let’s go.’
‘Could you repeat that again,’ Namjoon gestures with his hand. Jimin nods, not needing translation as he slowly repeats the name.

They were renaming the planets in the System of Bhumi- or Menigišiti, as Jimin called it. He adjusted the planets, eyes calculating as he adjusted the distance between the planets through the NaviLet, typing in the correct formula to accurately realign the planets.

To their surprise the System is much smaller than they anticipated- smaller, and fuller.

The planets were closely spaced with little to almost no moons orbiting the planets. The planets further out in the system were tidal-locked; the main one here being the representative planet of Bhumi which they now knew was called Megibīya by Jimin.

Jimin is serious as he concentrates, typing through the number system Namjoon had been able to convert for him with Taeh’yung’s help and input. The Zhak’gri is also there, eyes illuminated by the blue light of the Navigation Table though the green in his eyes still shone through.

Yoongi would be standing there too, if it weren’t for the headaches he got.

They had started building up- slowly and increasing in pain bit by bit. At first Yoongi didn’t notice it – and when he did, he ignored it. But now his mind felt inflamed- his skull sensitive and his temples sore. He had taken pain medication- a first in a long while. But it did little to help. It almost felt the same way it did when the Android-Core had been introduced to his helmet by Zhoumi.

‘Akramana?’ Namjoon asks, his voice cutting through the controlled pained haze of Yoongi’s mind.

Jimin nods once, adjusting the size of the planet they were discussing. Jimin explains something while Taeh’yung leans in from the side, his lower lip jutting out in concentration.

‘It was the planet where they held meetings with GLA,’ Taeh’yung explains. ‘Like Megibīya, Akramana was a planet open to the rest of the Universe- or at least, somewhat visible.’

‘Based on the Venture Unit report at the time, they said the invading force came from Akramanese planet,’ Namjoon frowns. ‘What can he say about that?’

Taeh’yung repeats Namjoon’s question and Jimin is confused. He replies haltingly, head tilting to one side.

‘He doesn’t understand why anyone would think that- it makes no sense,’ Taeh’yung slowly translates, nodding as he listens to Jimin. ‘The people of Akramana were peaceful and were the sole reason why their System was kept safe- it was the Red Evil that destroyed Megibīya.’
‘Whatever report the GLA got was clearly mistranslated or confused then,’ Namjoon frowns while Sk’jin snorts and says, ‘Or purposefully waylaid to redirect the blame and suspicion to another source.’

‘Jimin says his sister meant to go to Akramana, where the Yisheng Ndica said they were headed, while he left for Megibiya to check on the distress signals Ndica forwarded to them.’ Taeh’yung summarizes.

‘So Jimin and his sister, the uh- leaders –of their System,’ Namjoon says carefully, ‘Received a distress signal, forwarded to them, by Yisheng Ndica, about a planet in their System, that was being under attack?’

Jimin nods at the translation.

‘It sounds as though this entire thing was planned,’ Sk’jin comments from the cockpit, eyes ahead as he flies them through space. ‘How did the GLA receive the distress signal clearly sent out for Jimin– if Bhumi– I mean Megibiya, had in fact even sent out a signal? Ndica was definitely involved in the whole mess,’ Sk’jin snorts. ‘Sniveling fool was pathetic and unworthy of his title- it was probably all his doing. This was most definitely a set-up- for what exact purpose I’m not sure but most definitely done to jump Jimin and his people.’

Yoongi wants to agree as well- and he would have said so, if his head wasn’t on fire. He remembers Ndica from the first court hearing held in the Yisheng Directory.

‘Or it could’ve been K’mara too,’ Namjoon ruminates slowly. ‘She was there.’

Yoongi catches Sk’jin’s brief glance at his direction with his words, as though he couldn’t help it. But then his expression turns alarmed.

‘Yoongi- you all right?’

At this, everyone turns to look at him.

Yoongi opens his mouth to say yes but instead he says, ‘I need to sleep.’

His dreams were longer now. Not just images, rushing sound, strange sights and smells.

He had progressed a lot from his first dreams- all colours and forms- blurred and haphazard. Now they were clearer, with purpose- and with continuation. Yoongi looked forward to sleeping, because it meant he was able to understand a little better. To somehow be.

But it also confuses him.

The records Namjoon had given him were still untouched, unchecked. Knowing didn’t always equate understanding. And that was where Yoongi stood.

‘Knowing doesn’t always make things better. It makes it worse.’ Hoseok had said to him.

He doesn’t remember their faces. Only Jimin’s stood out. Everyone else was blurred- their voices a little faded, and their forms somehow wispy. But Jimin is in his dreams- bright, clear, and stark.

And with every single dream- he remembered. But it was more than just memory.

It was similar to how he felt when the Android-Core was introduced to him- but somehow, despite having the entirety of the GLA database information transferred to him and shocked into him-
wasn’t this heavy.

When he wakes up again, his head is pounding and the strange cloying air of the forests in his dreams lingers in his nose. He’s also filled with a panic-driven impulse. Yoongi follows the strange desperate rush that fills him to make sure Jimin was all right. He’s not sure for how long he’s managed to sleep- but they were still all at the Bridge. Jimin was standing by the windows in the lower tier- talking to Taeh’yung as they point out the nebula they were flying past.

‘Sunshine?’

Jimin’s entire body turns, eyes widened as though stunned. His expression is clearly shocked for a long second before he smiles at him. It’s such a joyful smile, one laced with relief. Jimin rushes forward, cheeks pushed up with the force of his smile. His joy in hearing Yoongi address him with the nickname he was accustomed to was palpable enough for everyone to see. Or perhaps he heard something else- Yoongi’s not sure.

‘Yoongi,’ his smile falters, a look of worry settling on his face as he gets closer.

Yoongi feels better, hearing Jimin’s voice and seeing him standing before him. Not just in a dream- but here, right in front of him. He’s not sure what’s overtaking him but he barrels straight forward and pulls Jimin into a fierce embrace.

There’s a stunned silence that falls over the Bridge.

‘Group hug!’

Taeh’yung charges into them, wrapping his long arms around them both tightly.

‘Yoongi? Na ti vang gne?’ Jimin asks worriedly though he returns his embrace. He’s obviously asking what was wrong— but Yoongi doesn’t know. It’s just a strangely desperate feeling permeating into him through his dreams- it made no sense. Yoongi steps back and Jimin doesn’t try to follow or rebuff him- he’s just there, looking at him carefully.

‘Yoongi- is everything all right?’ Namjoon asks.

Taking a deep breath, Yoongi nods.

‘Chim! Look there!’ Taeh’yung pulls Jimin away and down to the lower tier of the Bridge.

Yoongi shakily makes his way to the Navigation Table. Namjoon is clearly doing a health-read on him. But Yoongi knows he’s going to come up blank. Namjoon doesn’t ask and Yoongi doesn’t say anything. What could he say in the first place?

‘Sunshine?’ Sk’jin smirks from the cockpit. At this Namjoon looks up from his screen curiously.

‘It’s what I called him before,’ Yoongi replies, watching the soft rosy light of the nebula above flicker across Jimin’s hair. It reminds him of his dreams- his memories.

‘Interesting-.’

‘I remember the exact moment I called him that the first time.’ Yoongi continues, unable to stop himself. ‘We were exhausted- we took a break by the cliff. We were making plans for our next move. She told me to get Jimin. And he was watching the sunrise. Which was odd because it never shifted- the sun was always rising- it felt as though time had no effect there. It messed with us a lot- I had terrible headaches too- I kept taking meds for it. We assumed he was royalty- or some titled
rank. For a lot of reasons- but I remember thinking, rather foolishly, that it was because of the way the sunlight seemed to love him.'

He’s met with deafening silence and Yoongi doesn’t know how to react.

Namjoon’s eyes are wide, unblinking as he stares unabashed at Yoongi. Sk’jin is no better, mouth agape and his hands no longer holding up the NaviLet which has fallen to his lap. Jimin is also looking at him, head turned away from the window. Taeh’ung doesn’t pay any attention, instead his face is pressed up to the surface of the window.

‘…what else do you remember?’ Sk’jin asks after opening and closing his mouth a few times.

‘Do you remember anything about why you were there?’ Namjoon asks, leaning into the Navigation Table attentively.

‘No.’ Yoongi replies, shaking his head mainly to force himself out of the images of his dreams. ‘I don’t remember their faces, or their names- why we were there. Their voices are all messed up. But I heard words- names of planets- of Akramana- but the information was unclear- we- we didn’t know what was going on either. We just wanted to get to the tower.’

‘Tower?’

‘How long have you been seeing these dreams?’ Namjoon asks.

‘They’ve started becoming clearer ever since Jimin woke up,’ Yoongi replies.

‘It’s…possible that his presence has triggered your memories,’ Sk’jin theorizes, his fingers tapping a beat on the side of his chair.

‘Have you gone through the records?’ Namjoon asks quietly.

‘Memories are tricky Yoongi,’ Hoseok’s words rings in his mind. ‘Because they outline who you are- and sometimes you don’t want to remember who you used to be.’

‘No,’ Yoongi replies.

Namjoon nods slowly before asking, ‘Is it causing you pain? Discomforts?’

‘I have headaches. I had medication, but it’s not going away.’ Yoongi replies.

Sk’jin stares blankly at him for a moment before he clears his throat pointedly and calls out, ‘Jimin!’

Jimin looks around, turning in Taeh’ung’s embrace, expression attentive.

Sk’jin then very exaggeratedly mimes placing hands on Yoongi’s head and points repeatedly between the two of them. Yoongi wants to laugh but he doesn’t. Namjoon looks slightly scandalized and a look of understanding settles on Jimin’s face. He easily slides out of Taeh’ung’s excited grip and makes his way to Yoongi. The worried expression on his face is still there as he approaches him.

He’s saying something to Taeh’ung who gives him a reply in the form of ‘eh’ and a shrug before saying something reassuringly. Jimin seems doubtful but he doesn’t say anything more.

The moment Jimin places his hands over his head, Yoongi’s headache abates.
'Is it gone?' Sk’jin asks from where he’s sitting.

Yoongi nods, a soothing cooling sensation gently calming his feverish headache.

‘I think it’s fair enough to say that Jimin might be both the catalyst and inhibitor of your memories,’ Sk’jin states simply. ‘His awakening has triggered your memories, and his presence seems to ease it.’

‘Jimin wants to know what type of pain you’re going through,’ Taeh’yung asks as he steps up as well, eyeing Yoongi curiously over Jimin’s head.

‘It’s my head. It hurts,’ Yoongi replies, explaining it to Jimin despite the fact they didn’t understand each other. Yoongi just continues staring straight into the twin eclipses that were Jimin’s eyes. The anxiety-driven desperation completely vanishes from within him. He’s so caught up staring he doesn’t hear Namjoon’s question.

Instead it’s Jimin who looks away, expression asking Taeh’yung to translate.

‘I think if we can somehow trigger more of Yoongi’s memories to reveal themselves, we might understand what more happened in Bhumi- uh, I mean in Megibiya,’ Namjoon ruminates.

‘That doesn’t sound like the best idea,’ Sk’jin frowns, turning in his seat to look over at them. ‘Memory retrieval forced or pressured can cause more than just psychological trauma.’

‘That’s up to Yoongi,’ Namjoon replies with an irritated look. ‘I’m just saying we need to look into every possible source we can find and seeing as Yoongi was, at one point in one way, present during the moment that triggered the appearance of the Akramanese- I mean “Red Evil”- we not only have a primary source of information, we have another Being who has knowledge of this area of Space.’

‘It shouldn’t be rushed,’ Taeh’yung pipes in unexpectedly, leaning from behind Jimin to place his hands over Jimin’s on Yoongi’s head. ‘Yoongi is my baby too- so I don’t want him to break.’

And it’s an odd word to use, really, but Yoongi can’t think of a better word to describe the way the other GI agents had died from mental and sensory overload. The living body was nothing more than a mechanism- a construct of systems and biological parts that fit in together for a function. And if the construct is pushed too far- if it is pressured into a certain set-up or installation it isn’t made for, or isn’t remodeled for a reboot, then it would break.

‘That’s a little ominous Tae but yes, I agree,’ Sk’jin says, his voice laced with relief. ‘We are all important assets to this mission and even though Yoongi might have information locked inside his…his DNA or something, we’ll just wait for it to unwind at its own pace. We can’t afford losing more than we already have.’

At this Sk’jin gives Namjoon a pointed look and any fight from Namjoon seems to dissipate at that.

‘Well- you’re here so I’m going to lay out our plan for the next few days,’ Namjoon announces.

Taeh’yung leans in suddenly, pushing them into another tight embrace, placing a loud kiss over both Yoongi’s and Jimin’s heads before jumping (quite literally, and very high) over to the Navigator’s Mast.

Jimin removes his hands from Yoongi’s head and brushes through his hair once before tilting his head to one side, as though to ask Yoongi if he was all right.
'I’m good sunshine,’ Yoongi says quietly.

‘Sunshine?’ Jimin repeats, a small private smile on his lips.

A vivid memory of Jimin saying the same thing runs through Yoongi’s mind- and somehow a voice that sounds like his, but not quite entirely replies, ‘That you are.’

This makes Jimin smile and he steps back a little before pulling Yoongi towards the Table.

‘Based on Sk’jin’s layout of the planet—’

‘-it’s not the most accurate but I tried,’ Sk’jin cuts in as he steps into the Mast as well.

‘-we’re headed here, above the general equator zone,’ Namjoon points at the 3D holographic model of a large planet. It’s a mock-design, based off of a template used by Navigators to illustrate rogue planets or non-GLA planets on the map. ‘This is where the Venture Unit ship is crashed- we’re headed there to investigate it. And even though it’s been thoroughly searched by both the GIU and the Venture Unit, I think it’s safe to say they don’t have what we have.’

‘What do we have?’ Taeh’yung asks, eyes round.

‘We have me,’ Sk’jin replies, flipping his hair back which Jimin imitates subtly. ‘And Yoongi, and Jimin, and you.’

Taeh’yung lifts a hand, clearly counting his fingers, muttering under his breath and then exclaiming, ‘Jin! You forgot someone!’

‘Well- Hobi isn’t here-’ Sk’jin begins, a badly hidden grin on his face.

‘Oh right,’ Taeh’yung looks down at his hand before his head snaps up towards Namjoon and gasps, ‘You forgot pa!’

Namjoon gives him a pained smile before he speaks.

‘So we’ll be investigating the remains- see if there is anything there that Jimin can identify or sense- see if there is anything the GIU has overlooked or left behind that we can use to better understand the situation we’re in.’

‘How long,’ Yoongi asks.

‘It depends- but no more than 2-3 days,’ Namjoon replies as he scratches his chin in thought. ‘If it’s nothing but a dead-end, then we just leave quickly and make our way to Grisial.’

Yoongi nods.

‘When will we get there?’

‘We’re a few hours away from the borders of Ymir,’ Namjoon closes the hologram and pulls up their current trajectory. ‘Then we go to warp for a day, and we’re there.’

‘What about the GIU observation crew?’ Yoongi asks.

‘Not an issue,’ Sk’jin replies with a shrug. ‘Trust me on that.’

Yoongi nods though Namjoon doesn’t seem comfortable. Sk’jin stretches before he says, ‘I think you need food- how about I cook you something hm? Jimin? Tae? Want to help?’
Taeh’yung takes Jimin’s hand and lifts their hands together, making Jimin stretch up to his toes to accommodate the height.

‘Yes!’ Taeh’yung exclaims.

‘All right- Lisai, take over for me will you sweetheart?’

‘Of course.’

The moment Jimin leaves the Bridge, a sight throbbing takes over Yoongi’s head. But it’s not painful- just a soft throb that he could ignore for now.

‘You’ll be all right?’ Namjoon asks as he takes a seat back in his chair.

‘I will,’ Yoongi replies though he’s not sure. ‘I recovered from something similar before.’

‘...you mean when you uh- gained awareness? Or something like that?’

‘When the Android-Core was implicated into my system yes.’

‘How long did it take you to recover?’

‘I cannot determine the point of recovery or the completion of it. I theorize that it is an ongoing process.’

Namjoon nods slowly at that.

‘If there’s anything I can do to help- then let me know.’ Namjoon says slowly, as though choosing his words carefully. ‘I wasn’t thinking- about how what we are doing would affect the others. Or how they might look at it. And while I know that- intention put aside- that we all want the same thing from this, I want us to do it on the same level of understanding, taking into account everyone’s input and deciding what’s the best thing to do.’

‘I’m not leaving, if that’s what you’re worried about.’ Yoongi finds himself saying.

Namjoon looks surprised before he says, ‘That’s good to know.’

‘I believe if you contacted and asked Hoseok, he will come back.’

Shaking his head Namjoon sits back on his chair. ‘I don’t think he will. But if he ever does decide to come back- the Užkulisai will always welcome him back.’
There’s a nervous energy emanating from Sk’jin. It peaked even more as they hit warp and the Khol’isa is anxiously going about, occupying his time doing any and everything.

Jimin learns that he cannot sleep- and it sorrows him. There’s a strange strain, an ancient barrier around Sk’jin’s stormy soul. It’s a strange description- and Jimin can’t help but feel anxious about it. But instead of the usual anxiety, suspicion, and frustration Jimin normally detects from Sk’jin, he can sense apprehension and fear.

But amidst this, he can sense a strange sense of anticipation.

The closest Jimin can come to describing what Sk’jin was feeling was when he had been a child, and he stayed out much longer than his sister or tutors had allowed him. The feeling of returning home, but knowing you were going to have to take responsibility for the wrong you did.

Because Sk’jin always felt oddly hollowed out- a great storm brewed in him- but it only existed to occupy the void within him. The storms were born from this chaotic void, in hopes of filling it up. But there was a great strain- one that stretched and pulled within the Khol’isa.

Overextending itself to somehow cover how incomplete Sk’jin really was.

Then it hits Jimin.

‘You lost someone there,’ Jimin states out loud as he stirs a bowl Sk’jin had given him to take care of as he cooked endlessly, ‘Who was he?’

‘I don’t think he’ll want to answer that,’ Taeh’yung tells him plaintively as he creates a coloured mosaic from dyed sugar cubes- Taeh’yung was useless in cooking, and so was assigned menial tasks around the Kitchen to keep him occupied. ‘It’s gonna be difficult for him.’

‘I know,’ Jimin replies, smiling at Sk’jin, hoping to relieve the obvious distrust he had in Jimin. Not that Sk’jin was hostile towards him. He was just wary and though he hid it very well, Sk’jin was fearful of him.

‘He lost all of his crew in this planet- he died in there too- and he watched his crew, his friends, countless strangers, all die there.’

Jimin feels as though there might be more to the story than they could guess.

‘Then why return? Or maybe he should have stayed back as we investigate the planet?’ Jimin suggests.

‘But I think he has a reason to go,’ Taeh’yung explains, popping a green sugar cube into his mouth and holding up a blue one for Jimin. Jimin takes the cube, feeling the texture of the cube between his fingers carefully. ‘He isn’t the type to do things unless he wants to do it. Or unless he feels…-‘

‘-like he needs to atone for something?’ Jimin suggests. ‘Because it feels as though he’s going back to seek justice- against himself.’

‘Being alive is so complex Chim,’ Taeh’yung says randomly. ‘But it’s the greatest thing- next to death.’

Taken aback, Jimin can’t help himself when he asks, ‘Why do you say that? How do you know?’
Taeh’yung gives him a secretive smile, holding his finger up to his lips and whispers, ‘We all live to die Chim.’

A shiver runs down Jimin’s spine, a scratchy voice itches at his ears, in his mind, in his very soul.

‘*We do not bring death. We bring life.*’

‘Pompen news is still the same,’ Namjoon says out loud to no one in particular. He hates to think of it in this way but Spaces he missed Hoseok’s presence in the ship. Hoseok was the most stable and sanest mind in the ship and his absence was astounding loud- especially for Namjoon.

Hoseok was always on top of the information game- he was constantly monitoring the channels, both from the Known Universe and the Underverse. He had a way of shifting along the information, finding the most feasible and dependable sources amidst the mess of misinformation and lies.

Namjoon feels strangely disabled.

Of course it hadn’t been personal. Not in the way most Beings would assume so. Hoseok left because he could no longer participate in the direction the mission was taking them. Or at least, in the direction Namjoon was leading them in.

His NaviLet lights up and Lisai’s automated voice sounds at his ear.

‘*Captain- we are 1 hour from our destination and pulling out from warp in 30 minutes.*’

‘Thanks Lisai,’ Namjoon sighs out before sitting up properly. It’s odd to see a mop of styled pink hair rather than the messy shaggy cut of Hoseok’s dark hair by the cockpit below the Navigator’s Mast.

‘Sk’jin- you want to make the Pilot’s log?’ Namjoon asks, feeling weirdly odd saying those words. Bu he gets not response.

A little confused, Namjoon stands up and walks down to the cockpit. This expanse of space was rather empty and vacant so there was no need to really keep an eye out for stray asteroids or debris.
But Sk’jin has been rooted in his seat for past his schedule cycle by a few hours already. At first it was as though Sk’jin was avoiding his duties as Head Pilot- remaining only as long as was required of him and then bolting to the Kitchens to cook overly complex meals, using Jimin and Taeh’yung as taste-testers (Namjoon thinks he might be a bit mental but he thinks he sees Jimin’s cheeks filling out a little and Taeh’yung’s jaw softening just the slightest). He was clearly stress-cooking. And stress-sewing too because he suddenly took to taking away the hem of Jimin’s new-found trousers and sleeves, a weirdly forced animated force to his actions (oddly enough Yoongi helps him out, displaying his neat stitches to the delighted surprise of everyone in the ship). If not he was loudly discussing inconsequential topics with Taeh’yung who was more than eager to laugh and talk.

‘Sk’jin-?’ Namjoon reaches over to touch Sk’jin’s shoulder, leaning in to get a look at the Khol’isa’s face. There was an alarmingly vacant look in Sk’jin’s eyes- as though he wasn’t all there. And for a startling moment, Sk’jin’s eyes roll back into his head before he snaps back into reality, eyes flashing and he’s reeling away from Namjoon, a low hiss escaping him.

‘Don’t fuckin’ touch me.’

Namjoon takes two whole steps back, hands raised up.

‘I won’t,’ he immediately replies. ‘I was just checking on you-‘

Sk’jin turns in his seat and looks away for a few seconds, shoulders rising up and down as though he was panting. When he turns to face Namjoon his expression is incredibly poised – as though nothing had happened.

‘We’re ready for landing in an hour so everyone get ready to buckle up- atmospheric pressure shouldn’t be too bad for Lisai- right honey?’ Sk’jin calls over the Comm pleasantly.

‘Of course.’

Sk’jin smiles though there’s no warmth in his eyes; only fear.

‘Everyone get ready for the Pilot’s log.’

* 

The planet is rather ordinary. It had no satellite and was a more land than water. They’re at the very top of the planet- the whitened polar caps of the planet gleaming from below. Great masses of clouds cover parts of the planet from view, but from what Namjoon can tell, it’s rather lush and green with little variation.

Sk’jin’s expression is vacant again, eyes reflecting the planet below ominously.

‘The GIU station is unresponsive,’ Namjoon calls out as he studies the bogey-signal he had sent out to check if there were any active scans around the planet. ‘Your source was right.’

The Khol’isa doesn’t appear to have heard him. So instead Namjoon shifts his attention to Taeh’yung and Jimin.

‘Can he sense anything?’ Namjoon asks, glancing over at Jimin who eyes the planet with confused
concentration.

‘He says he wants to get closer- to be sure,’ Taeh’yung replies, also watching the planet with a thoughtful frown.

Yoongi was at his station. He didn’t look well in the slightest. His health-tab read him at normal and with only the slightest of fevers. He had said he had a headache but Namjoon hadn’t heard anything more. He also didn’t have any more random outbursts of speech. He did however, go to sleep more often than before. For the past 3 days, Yoongi had spent more time asleep than awake. And despite their conversation, Namjoon is still worried over the Human’s health condition.

But Taeh’yung wasn’t worried. And though Jimin was obviously worried, it wasn’t to the extent of being alarmed.

Namjoon briefly wonders if he’s projecting his worries and guilt over Hoseok leaving over Yoongi’s slight illness. He sighs quietly to himself and checks on the small tab on his screen.

He’s sure Hoseok wouldn’t appreciate it but he’d been tracking the Ngfy’widan ever since he left. He still hadn’t left Ts’ets’khli- maybe he was waiting for a ship to take off. Namjoon tells himself it’s just to make sure Hoseok wouldn’t go back to the GLA and report them- but he knows Hoseok wouldn’t. He would never.

Hoseok was too loyal, and possibly too kind.

Looking away from the tab, Namjoon glances about the Bridge one more time before calling out, ‘If anyone wants to remain back in the ship- they’re more than welcome to. I’m not expecting anyone to go out of their comfort zone, and I don’t want them to either.’

‘t’s a bit late for that, in’it?’ Sk’jin mumbles from below.

Namjoon sighs to himself. It probably was.

* *

His entire being protests. His mind, his heart, his very soul seemed to be screaming at him.

But his hands move on their own accord. Safely passing through the light atmosphere of the planet. It’s so different.

So so different from when he first landed here all those centuries ago.

Everything had been bright flashing lights- heat, pain, darkness, and more pain. But now the contrast is a little too much. It’s too gentle and there is no screaming, no mounting fear.
No haunting eyes and pleading voices.

And most of all- no pressing presence of darkness.

Sk’jin’s calculations were pretty accurate.

The huge area that housed the extremely large and broken down remains of the Venture Unit ship gleams at them from a deep valley. There’s no immediate landing space large enough for the Užkulisai so Sk’jin flies them over to the top edge of the valley. The cliffs were strong here; Sk’jin would know.

And despite having existed in a surreal state during his entire stay here, Sk’jin remembers every single aspect of this area down to the most painful detail.

‘We’re green,’ Sk’jin announces, his voice strained no matter how hard he tried to control himself and sound casual.

‘Sk’jin-’ Namjoon is already saying and Sk’jin hates it- hates the pity and understanding.

So instead of responding to Namjoon Sk’jin gets up and walks out of the Bridge, claiming he needed to change to appropriate gear.

He tries to keep his mind blank- he’d been preparing himself for this moment ever since he made the executive decision to actually see it done. But he’s still not ready. And Sk’jin doesn’t think he’ll be ready either. He wanted to see Jimin’s reaction- to ask Taeh’yung what he thought in his point of view. He wanted to ask Yoongi his opinions as well. But he can barely keep himself together so asking the others about how and what they thought felt a little redundant.

He changes into more practical clothes- something he did own because though Sk’jin loved walking and lounging around in his beautiful robes, he was a practical Being and this situation required a lot of it.

By the time he gets out of his Cabin and makes his way down, he can smell the air and feel the humidity of the planet. Sweat forms on his brow and it’s not from the heat. Taeh’yung is standing by the doorway, clearly waiting for him. He smiles brightly, reaching out for Sk’jin and he gladly takes the Zhak’gri’s proffered hand.

‘It’s all right,’ Taeh’yung whispers into his ear, squeezing him into a hug. ‘It’s all right- nothing is here. It’s fine. I won’t allow you to get hurt or go back, okay?’

Sk’jin feels incredibly small and he nods shakily, squeezing Taeh’yung’s hand hard.

The urgency to turn back and hide overwhelms him. But he can’t hide.

Not again.

The Hangar Bay door is opened wide and the Spardyti ready to leave. Sk’jin had forgotten about the state of the Spardyti until the other day when he came across Yoongi tinkering around it. It had sustained some damage from its stay in Pompa but it was nothing Yoongi couldn’t fix. Speaking of Yoongi, the Human was standing behind Jimin who was quiet throughout their descent.

He made no noticeable or definitive reaction towards the planet and Sk’jin thinks that he’s being careful before jumping to conclusions. But Taeh’yung wasn’t uneasy- he was smiling, and this reassures Sk’jin.
Namjoon appears behind them, expression wary and careful.

‘Everything is ready so that we can leave immediately,’ Namjoon states. ‘We cannot leave the ship unguarded so Yoongi is staying back.’

Sk’jin is surprised. But as he looks over at the Human properly, he notices how unwell he seemed. He wasn’t recovering or improving- it almost appeared as though after every nap he took, he got worse.

Sk’jin feels a strange sense of disassociation as he walks towards the Hangar doorway. He notices how the others remain back a little- as though waiting for Sk’jin to make the first move.

It really hits Sk’jin, as the balmy sunrays and moist wind whip around him, that though he spent so many years trapped in this planet, this would be the first time he’s actually stepped foot on it.

It was still every bit muggy and hot as he remembered it to be. Or at least, could sense- he was never in the physical state of actually sensing on his own. But the heavy oppression is lifted- the weight of some shadow no longer pressing down. It was just another planet- a wild and uncivilized planet- but it was no longer trapped.

Distinct sounds of wildlife filter through the air and the nearby bushes and trees rustle with unseen creatures, watching them. Sk’jin remembers the great strange beasts that roamed this planet- some more animalistic, while the others were truly mind-boggling. He hopes they don’t spend too much time here to meet the creatures; either that or they were going to have to be careful not to spill any blood in case they attract attention.

Taking a deep breath, Sk’jin fully steps out.

‘Good?’ Taeh’yung asks from behind him, voice much more distant than he thought.

To Sk’jin’s surprise, he’s standing at the very end of the lowered ramp with his eyes closed.

‘Yeah- yeah, t’s good.’ he exhales out in reply.

The Zhak’gri steps up to his side, a wide grin on his face before he inhales deeply.

‘It’s old here,’ he comments. ‘Old and lost.’

‘Don’t insult me like this,’ Sk’jin tries at humor. But it’s lost on Taeh’yung who is now staring out, head tilted a little as though curious.

‘…is it safe?’ Namjoon asks carefully as he too steps closer, also eyeing the jungle curiously.

‘Oh yeah- nothing bad or weird!’ Taeh’yung replies a second late. Sk’jin tries to find any sign of falsehood or apprehension in Taeh’yung’s eyes but comes up blank.

There’s sound of movement behind him and voices. The Spardyti starts up and Namjoon is calling for the ramp to be cleared. Sk’jin side steps and to his extreme discomfort, finds that the eaves of the thick and extremely tall jungle woods sprung up entirely too close to the ship. He finds himself peering into the murky dark light of the jungle and he shudders despite the heat.

‘Sk’jin?’

He tries to look back but he can’t- he can’t look away from the depths of the jungle, can’t tear his eyes away from the blurred background of endless trees, vines, huge trunks covered in decades of
moss and climbers, shifting columns of light, hollowed eyes finding his line of sight-

‘Sk’jin.’

Sk’jin starts as he feels a hand on his arm. His immediate reaction is to shake it off but the calm that spreads into him makes him want to lean into the touch. Ducking down to avoid staring into the jungle that was staring back at him, Sk’jin allows himself to be pulled away and closer to the Spardyti.

It’s Jimin.

He has a worried look on his face, eyeing Sk’jin and then the jungle behind them. He doesn’t say anything and just one look at Jimin, Sk’jin knows that whatever was looking back at him from the jungle was not just in his head.

‘Jin! Chim! Let’s go!’ Taeh’yung calls, waving violently at them as he jumped off of the ramp, bouncing along on the soft jungle floors.

Jimin pulls him back towards the ship and it’s all Sk’jin can do to not scramble forward away from the intensely buildup of suspense attempting to grab him from the back.

They make their way back to the Spardyti where Namjoon is standing by the door. He’s watching them approach curiously, eyes flitting behind them towards the jungle.

‘Here,’ he says gruffly, ‘Emergency rations.’

‘It’s not like we’re going to separate or get lost,’ Sk’jin mumbles though he takes the small sling-bag and straps it over his shoulder.

‘Are you all right?’

Sk’jin is about to roll his eyes and reply with some conviction that yes, he was all right, and maybe mention something about how Namjoon should stop projecting his guilt towards him but he realizes it’s not directed at him. Namjoon is looking past Sk’jin and the Khol’isa turns in alarm.

It’s Yoongi.

His eyes roll behind his head and his body crumples almost gracefully off of the ramp.

There’s sharp gasp and Jimin’s blurred shape runs past Sk’jin and he’s in time to catch the Human before he hits the ground.

‘Fuck-’ Namjoon curses as he too quickly moves forward.

Yoongi has always been pale- but he’s pale to the point of transparency. His vein stick out like tastelessly painted on streaks of blue and violet- dark circles blossom around his eyes, his breathing shallow.

Jimin is carefully lowering him to the ground, pushing back Yoongi’s hair before placing his palms on either side of the Human’s temples.

‘Is he dehydrated-’ Namjoon skids to a stop before the Human, lowering the emergency-rations he was carrying to the floor as he looks over the Human with scanning eyes.

Taeh’yung comes slipping back on the moss-covered floors, expression bewildered until he sees Yoongi.
‘Oh no baby!’ Taeh’yung squats down, mumbling in Jimin’s language and the latter lifts him up.

‘Is he all right?’ Sk’jin asks, ignoring the prickle on the back of his neck- a warning that he was being watched.

‘It’s nothing to really worry about,’ Taeh’yung says quietly as they scurry back into the ship. ‘Yoongi isn’t…he isn’t himself in the way we are.’

‘What does that mean?’ Namjoon presses, eyeing the Human apprehensively.

‘Who he is, what he is- it isn’t a result of a natural progression of being,’ Taeh’yung says with light emphasis as they quickly make their way into the Medical Bay. ‘I can sense who he is- I can see him- but he’s like a child.’

‘Mentally?’ Namjoon asks but Sk’jin already knows that answer to that.

‘No,’ Taeh’yung shakes his head. ‘His memories are young- very young, but his mind-’ Taeh’yung smiles widely at that, ‘-His mind is wide and expansive.’

‘So…what’s happening to him now?’ Namjoon asks a little impatiently as they gather in the Medical Bay. Jimin carefully places the Human on the Bed, worry pinching his features.

‘His old memories are coming back- he doesn’t know how to process it,’ Sk’jin replies, finding it easier to breathe now that he was inside the Užkulisai, away from sight. ‘It’s information overload. It’s been happening for a while now.’

Namjoon grimaces, probably thinking back to all the odd moments of Yoongi’s recent behavior and obvious deterioration in his physical appearance.

‘Will he be all right when he wakes up?’ the Kutsoglerin asks, his chin jutting out in thought.

Taeh’yung shrugs as he helps Jimin pull out the IV patches and bag, ‘Physically he’ll be fine- I don’t know who he’ll be when he wakes up.’

Namjoon looks unsure at this statement. And rightly so.

‘But I could be wrong- maybe sleeping like this will be better for him.’ Taeh’yung smiles at Jimin who smiles back reassuringly, hand still resting over Yoongi’s head. Sk’jin doesn’t know how to feel about this. ‘Maybe this will help him become.’

It’s obvious from Namjoon’s confused expression that he didn’t really understand Taeh’yung’s words. So it was all just conjecture- and Sk’jin cannot come up with a sound hypothesis regarding any of this. He just wants to finish this and get over with it.

‘I’ll stay back with Yoongi,’ the Zhak’gri says unexpectedly. ‘You guys go ahead. There’s a lot of daylight left, but it’s best to get back in time.’

Namjoon looks a little taken aback by Taeh’yung’s clear and practical statements but he nods nonetheless. Jimin seems to understand and he doesn’t seem too worried as he looks back down at Yoongi. He asks something and Taeh’yung replies with a grin and a teasing tone towards the end of his statement. The idea of venturing out without Taeh’yung unnerves Sk’jin and he can’t help the way his stomach coils and twists. His mouth tastes bitter and he’s sweating again.

‘Jin.’
It’s Taeh’yung but it’s not him at the same time. Sk’jin can sometimes differentiate the voices, the faces. Not always, but sometimes. And he’s not sure what to expect he looks up at the Zhak’gri.

‘You’ll be all right- Chim will be there,’ Taeh’yung says in what Sk’jin guesses is reassuring.

‘How do we communicate?’ Sk’jin blurts out. ‘If Tae isn’t there, how do we understand Jimin?’

‘We have basic words of communication,’ Namjoon pats at the screen-pouch to his side and nodding at Jimin. ‘We just need him to see, need to verify our questions; besides, it’s not like we can’t use the Comm.’

Sk’jin’s attempt at a humming response dies in his throat, so instead he nods. Of course communication channels would be stronger now that everything has changed.

‘Let’s go then?’ Namjoon asks a little hesitantly, clearly not knowing how to react to Sk’jin and Taeh’yung’s previous conversation.

Feeling a slight flare of irritation, Sk’jin uses this and spurs himself into movement. He hears Namjoon follow him out, can feel his eyes on him but he doesn’t say anything. He doesn’t want to hear anything else either and Namjoon seems to sense this too.

‘What do you think will happen to Yoongi?’ Namjoon asks in a low voice as they cross the Hangar. The overwhelming feeling of being watched comes back and Sk’jin wants to shrink away immediately.

‘I don’t know- Tae is not worried- we shouldn’t be either.’ Sk’jin manages to reply, averting his eyes and staring at the floor instead as he walked.

‘It’s what they wanted I think,’ Namjoon says as they make their way to the Spardyti.

‘The Special-Jury?’ Sk’jin asks, still not looking up.

‘At least some of the Special-Jury,’ Namjoon clarifies as Sk’jin feels him carefully nudge him to the side, indicating the doorway for him. Namjoon obviously noticed Sk’jin’s sudden inclination for the floors, but he doesn’t say anything. Sk’jin climbs into the well ventilated Spardyti and doesn’t look up until he’s seated.

‘Maybe they want to know what he knows too?’

‘Yeah- maybe.’

Jimin enters, a small smile on his face.

‘Yoongi?’ Namjoon asks, turning his head to address him. Jimin nods in reply, holding up a thumb’s up.

‘All right,’ Namjoon pats his seat-buckle before adding, ‘Security on.’

Jimin makes sure to secure himself in and sits back, eyes searching the jungle.

They don’t speak at all. The coordinates were already implemented so the Spardyti simply follows the trajectory on autopilot. Sk’jin barely has to do anything. Jimin is simply looking down, sometimes making soft sounds of exclamation. Namjoon is studying the environment too, eyes narrowed as he clearly used whatever enhancement he possessed to take a look around.

Sk’jin just stares at the sky above.
'How dangerous is it to stay out while it’s dark?’ Namjoon asks after a while.

‘Remarkably dangerous - I wouldn’t advice it,’ Sk’jin replies. ‘There are really weird things about the place- why?’

Namjoon shrugs, ‘I’m just thinking of all the possibilities. What sort of danger? Creatures? Toxins?’

‘Creatures,’ Sk’jin replies. ‘It’s best if we leave quickly. They hide in the jungles so stick to open places rather than hide.’

Namjoon nods.

It’s quiet again and the Spardyti starts to dips gently. Sk’jin looks at his lap determinedly the moment he sees the tops of the jungle trees.

‘I’m sorry.’

Sk’jin glances to the side. Namjoon is looking out of the window, eyes reflecting the bright noon sky.

‘It’s fine,’ Sk’jin says tersely. ‘I wanted to know too. No one is forcing me.’

‘Regardless,’ Namjoon looks away to meet Sk’jin’s gaze, ‘I’m sorry.’

Sk’jin tries to shrug in response but it’s more of a twitch. He hears Jimin exclaiming as they dip lower and Namjoon’s attention is diverted as well. A shadow falls into the cockpit of the Spardyti and Sk’jin finally looks up.

The remains of the titanic ship looms ahead of him.

They had called it the Ghost Ship, Sk’jin remembers vividly, listening in on the GIU meetings and conversations. But they were wrong- they were so wrong.

A ghost was a term used to describe the spiritual remains of a once alive living being.

This ship was more than just alive.

The Ghost Ship is almost the size of an average GLA Immigration Office building with massive turbine engines spread out on long extending wings, curving into the main body of the ship like a crescent. Half of one of the mammoth wings had torn off, buried in centuries of vegetation and growth, off to the side. The remaining intact body is half buried, half uncovered- and what was exposed, was covered in thick vegetation and growth.

It lay on its side, tilted at a strange angle. A great broken dome shimmered, its glass broken through and replaced by strong and thick networks of vines and climbers. There was a tree growing out of one of the domes- one that wasn’t there before.

‘Spaces,’ Namjoon whistles. ‘This is something.’

Jimin is out of his seat, his gaze confused and his brows furrowed. His lips are pressed together in a thin line, as though aggravated.

‘Yeah- it gets old quickly,’ Sk’jin breathes out, hands gripping the controls of the Spardyti. ‘Jimin?’
Jimin looks back, his eyes searching for a connection. Sk’jin nods jerkily at the seat.

‘Sit- we’re landing.’

Jimin nods a second late and goes back to his seat.

His heart hammering in his chest, Sk’jin lands the Spardyti down safely in the massive grassy clearing.

He ignores the vivid imagery that threatens to overtake his present view- *fleshy shadows emerging- imitation skin melting off- screams of horror and pain- lifeless eyes and bodies- outstretched hands desperate for help for answers for relief for-

Sk’jin shakes his head, inhaling shakily as he gets up before Namjoon or Jimin can ask him if he was all right. He doesn’t want their understanding looks, or apologies, or anything- he just wants answers and to get the fuck out as quickly as possible.

‘TeorSers?’

‘Fuck yes.’

Jimin refuses the weapon and Sk’jin isn’t surprised by that- and he would have voiced this if his mind wasn’t so preoccupied. Stepping out of the Spardyti is less dramatic and a whole lot more anticlimactic than Sk’jin had imagined. Though he’s not sure what he was expecting in the first place. He knew that this place was safe. That there was nothing to fear anymore. That the Nightmare he survived was gone and would never come back again.

But the Nightmare in his mind was still very much alive- and he can already feel it creeping up on him, watching from the thick shadows of the jungle beyond the wide field.

‘It’s odd that there’s no growth around the ship,’ Namjoon remarks, eyeing the reedy grass around the crash-site.

‘It’s always been like this,’ Sk’jin comments, his instincts telling him to reach a water-source to hide himself. But instead he faces the looming ship and despite the slight tremors running down his body, he stands firm.

‘All right- I think it won’t be too hard to find an entrance-‘ Namjoon is saying but there’s a sudden eruption of wood, leaves, and general foliage from their right.

Sk’jin remembers these creatures. And he doesn’t like those memories either.

Massive- nearly 8 feet tall, and strangely lean, these oddly reptilian creatures ran at a tremendous pace, and in *packs.*

‘What the fuck -‘ Namjoon raises his TeorSer but Sk’jin is already grabbing the back of the Kutsoglerin’s shirt, his immediate fear and shock overwhelming his crippling anxiety and he bodily drags Namjoon back into the Spardyti.

‘We need to get the fuck out-‘ Sk’jin hisses before nearly choking on his own tongue when Jimin walks out into the grassy field- *towards the stampeding pack of carnivorous creatures.*

‘JIMIN-!’ Namjoon yells out, pulling away from Sk’jin’s grip.

Jimin pauses, not because of Namjoon’s yell- but for no direct reasoning.
And once again, he displays nothing out of the ordinary—no flashing lights, no surge of power—nothing. Jimin just simply stands there, posture at ease and carefree, as though nearly 2 dozen beasts weren’t charging at him?

The great pack of beasts break to a halt feet from Jimin and Sk’jin’s eyes water at the rank smell that they bring with them. How was Jimin standing that close and not recoiling? Namjoon is cursing under his breath, TeorSer still raised.

Jimin raises his hand and the creatures flinch—-one snaps its long jaws at him. But Jimin doesn’t mind, instead he gently pats their scaly heads.

Then in one sudden motion, the entire pack seem to perform a strange bow, their forearms lowering their upper torsos to the ground.

Namjoon gawks at the sight and then back at Sk’jin as though to confirm what it was that he was seeing. Sk’jin has no explanation.

The pack leaves, the ground thundering in their wake as they break through the jungle and disappear into the shadows. Jimin turns around to face them and makes a sour face, miming throwing up and exhaling violently as though to get rid of the smell now stuck in his nose.

Sk’jin wheezes out a laugh, the nervous agitation seizing his body now somehow gone from this extraordinary display. Namjoon sort of laughs too, though it sounds more like a strained groan.

‘That was something,’ Namjoon comments weakly.

Sk’jin can do nothing but nod slowly in response.

Jimin looks up at the massive ship, taking in all of its broken glory and destruction. He points at it, and then at Sk’jin, a questioning expression on his face.

‘Not me—this isn’t me,’ Sk’jin replies, shaking his head for added effect. Jimin doesn’t respond exactly but just presses his lips together in a thin hard line before looking at it again.

‘Tae, could you ask Jimin what he’s thinking?’ Sk’jin asks as they slowly make their way across the short distance between the two ships.

‘Gotcha!’

It’s a moment before Jimin starts speaking again, hands gesturing lightly though Taeh’yung wouldn’t be able to see.

‘He’s asking how old the ship is.’

Sk’jin can feel Namjoon’s gaze on him. But Sk’jin isn’t 100% sure either. Of course the Venture Unit had started experimentations for a long period of time—but this ship was special.

‘We don’t know for sure—but it was already this broken up and destroyed when I got here,’ Sk’jin replies. ‘From what I overheard and was told, I think it’s almost 1500 years old—possibly more.’

Jimin listens to the translation, still studying the ship with intrigue and wariness.

‘Based on the design of the ship I’d say you were correct,’ Namjoon says beside him. ‘The model and make—the materials, the overall appearance isn’t from this millennium even.’

The ship was a tad bit opulent and excessive—Sk’jin has gone through the interior of the ship and
he knows that there was no actual functional use to many of the grand lobbies and atriums that lined up the ship layers.

‘Chim says it feels older.’

‘Yeah—probably because time was weirdly altered,’ Sk’jin replies as he takes the first step forward. It felt as though both Namjoon and Jimin were waiting for him to make the first move.

Jimin asks no questions after listening to Taeh’yung’s translations, as though he had been expecting to hear that. Feeling somehow oddly hollow, Sk’jin steps into the long shadow cast by the ship and into sprouting green mess of vines. The ground beneath his boots is soft and black, the grit of the clay loose and ash-like almost.

The climbers are young and easy to tear off, but the deeper they get, the stronger the vines become. Namjoon steps in a few seconds later and calmly pulls at the vines. They snap easily under his hands even though the Kutusoglerin is exerting no real force or strength. Jimin looks around the thick alcove of vines they’re walking through, the sheen of sweat highlighted in this strange lighting. His eyes glow brighter in this weird twilight inside the thicket of vines and climbers, a strangely non-violent and less traumatic version of a solar eclipse.

‘I understand what you mean. I’ve flown past nebulae and supernovas and black holes and nearly everything you could think of but—...but there’s something that will always captivate me about the solar eclipse.’

The memory is vivid—tinted red from the Bloodmoon that chased him tirelessly.

‘There’s a special tour just to watch eclipses; you should consider taking it up.’

The atmosphere of the planet was pale and bright as the curvature of the globe expanded beneath them—

‘No way!’

‘I am not kidding— I swear on— on...on my life!’

‘It’s not worth much then.’ His grin is teasing, dimple showing clear on his cheek. And his eyes bright, warm, and clear. Too clear, too kind, too naïve.

‘Shut the fuck up.’

Jimin smiles when he notices Sk’jin’s staring. Sk’jin tries to smile back and it works a little. He hears Namjoon stumble a little before the vines suddenly give way in a series of cracking sounds and they meet a dark metallic surface. Namjoon presses his hand over the face, pushing back the vines.

‘You sure it’s near here?’ Namjoon asks looking back, barely sweating or effected by the heat.

‘It is,’ Sk’jin nods with surety. He remembers the broken gaping hole on the side of the ship, blasted open by a bunch of rowdy pirates who were screaming for their lives only to be consumed by the creatures Jimin had so easily placated a few minutes ago. There had been a massive nursing den of them, and the pirates had been careless enough in their fear to trigger the violent protective urges of the creatures. Sk’jin could do nothing but watch as their blood pooled around the large atrium.

He walks forward, surprised at how his body seemed to listen to him despite the initial gripping
fear that threatened to paralyze him just minutes ago. He squeezes past a few thick vines that were more like trees at this point, and his hand slips over aged metal edges, covered in centuries of moss and vegetation.

‘Here-’ Sk’jin is starting to say but Namjoon is quick to walk out first, angling a hand out as though to stop Sk’jin and Jimin from walking in.

‘What in Spaces are you doing.’ Sk’jin asks in a deadpan.

‘Making sure it’s clear,’ Namjoon grunts back before he vanishes around a mossy edge. Sk’jin feels a hand grip at his arm and Jimin is standing next to him. He nods forward, an expectant look on his face. Sk’jin sighs and he’s about to make his way forward when he’s alarmed by a thought.

Was Jimin somehow calming him down right now? Had he suppressed his anxiety and fear while they were out? Deciding to question him via Taeh’yung later, Sk’jin guides them out.

The atrium that had been one of the locations of many bloodbaths and torturous nightmares opens to him in a disturbingly anticlimactic manner. It’s wide as it is tall and in their current location, they were walking on the walls rather on the designated floors.

‘The GIU entered through the roof?’ Namjoon remarks, looking upwards.

‘From the walls I’d say,’ Sk’jin glances up and finds that a large hole had been drilled through all the way down on one side of the tilted walls of the ship. Vines hung down, offering the possibility of climbing it.

Jimin is talking quietly to Taeh’yung on the Comm, his hand over his ear as though he couldn’t help it.

Namjoon walks over to the middle, glancing downwards instead at the floors covered in natural fauna and soil to the point where they couldn’t see any of the original metallic walls. Water is dripping somewhere- condensation of sorts, Sk’jin presumes. At one point, there had been a strange outburst of mini waterfalls inside this ship- but that had been centuries ago.

If it had been surreal to enter the planet, Sk’jin would categorize this very moment as a feverish relapse into a nightmare you couldn’t escape. Sk’jin looks at the ground, covered in at least 4 sols of growth and the general circle of life. It felt both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time.

Looking upwards again and into the drilled ceiling above, Sk’jin finally allows himself to wonder if his ship was still intact where it had crashed.

‘Namjoon, Sk’jin,’ Jimin calls out to them, pointing to one side of the wide atrium.

He’s pointing a little upwards, towards a slope that lead up to tilted doorways.

‘That’s the way into the lower levels,’ Sk’jin tells Namjoon quietly before adding, ‘Tae- tell Jimin to go wherever he wants to- and that we’ll follow him instead.’

Jemin pauses in his movements before he nods in their direction.

And then walking with a sense of confidence and familiarity, Jimin walks up the vegetation covered slope towards the slanted walls.

‘I’ll bring up the rear,’ Namjoon says quietly, taking a step back. Sk’jin is briefly thankful- his back covered, he won’t have to look back. It’s quiet the further they walk inwards- all about are signs of the GIU’s expedition of the planet and the ship. The remains of light fixtures, new pipes
and wires not yet covered in layers of moss or entirely buried. There are broken gravity-lifts and what appeared to be empty crates and OrTanks as well. Sk’jin hears Namjoon side-stepping briefly as though to scan the objects.

Things changed- and Sk’jin doesn’t recognize many parts of the place. He’s also not sure on how to maneuver in the ship in this form of solidness. And the further they walk, the higher they climb, yet it feels as though they were entering into the very core of the ship. They don’t talk- no one says a word. Jimin walks the tilted walls and ceilings like he’s been doing it for a long time, only occasionally looking back as though to check on them.

His feet were bare, and it reminds Sk’jin of bare scaly feet, untrimmed talons scratching along the earth and grass.

Jimin stops in front of a wall- or at least the point where a wall and the ceiling met, before going up and opening into several wide doorways.

‘Elevator doors,’ Namjoon comments. Jimin clambers over a few broken debris and mounds of sedimentation and heads straight for the second-left opening. With more strength than Sk’jin thought he was capable of possessing, Jimin pulls the rusted and jammed door apart and sticks his head into the darkness.

‘I doubt those are operating,’ Namjoon remarks.

‘The wires should still be strong- vines as well,’ Sk’jin sighs as Jimin pulls his head out, a small frown on his face. ‘What’s wrong?’

Jimin looks around at the elevator doorways again, head tilting like he’s not sure about something. Then he proceeds to check every elevator doorway.

‘Tae- could you ask Jimin what he’s doing?’ Sk’jin asks as he takes a break against a fallen over ventilation shaft, crumpled in a heap up against the slanted floors.

Jimin starts speaking, quiet voice filling the dilapidated lobby area. Namjoon is carefully observing the area, eyes narrowed as he takes in the interior.

‘There was a lot of funding for this,’ Namjoon states quietly. ‘Not just the size- material and make. It’s been centuries but under all this dirt, the entire ship is still intact. I won’t be surprised if you could start it up if it’s fueled again.’

‘Let’s not get ahead of ourselves,’ Sk’jin replies dryly. He feels exhausted though it’s not in a physical sense. He felt the intense urge to sleep though he knew there was no option there.

‘Chim is saying he lost it.’

‘Lost what?’

‘The sound he was following,’ Taeh’yung explains, his voice sounding a little stuffed, as though he was eating. He probably was. ‘It’s gone.’

‘What sort of sound?’ Namjoon asks, taking out his screen.

‘He didn’t specify.’

Jimin makes a small sound of exclamation suddenly and spins on his heel and rushes towards Sk’jin.
‘I think he’s heard it again,’ Namjoon is saying when Jimin charges straight towards the floors behind Sk’jin.

Before either Namjoon or Sk’jin can warn out a yelling, to their intense shock Jimin simply vanishes through the wall.

‘What the fuck-‘ Namjoon immediately steps forward, hand stretched out.

‘This isn’t supposed to be here anymore,’ Sk’jin can’t help but retract backwards, eyeing the seemingly solid wall with heart pounding fear. ‘It’s not supposed to be here-’

Jimin appears again, his expression bewildered but not surprised at the seemingly fake wall he just walked through. He gestures for them to start moving but then the wall behind him vanishes as though it was never there in the first place, taking away the grime covered, aged barrier, revealing a seamless continuation of the broken remains of the ventilation pipes Sk’jin had been sitting on, and downwards to wide staircases.

‘What is doing that? Is this digitized-walls? But those require excessive amounts of energy and fuel,’ Namjoon asks sharply, his posture defensive and apprehensive.

Jimin starts talking again and this time jogs towards Sk’jin. Taking his hand Jimin guides him forward and Sk’jin knows he’s using his abilities on him. It worries Sk’jin that any one Being has such an ability as Jimin’s but he’s distracted by what lay at the bottom of the stairs.

An even wider atrium opens to them, lit up by broken beams of sunlight filtering in from high broken seams above. Sk’jin is vaguely aware of Namjoon starting up the headlamps and the area starts to light up properly as the lamps soar past Sk’jin’s head and straight outwards.

It’s a huge computerized core, stretching up like some strange mountain in the middle of this atrium. And like wires meeting an electric outpost, great thick pipes as large as Sk’jin’s entire body string through the air, feeding into the very top and cavernous mouth of this core. And Sk’jin feels shivers overtaking his body as he eyes the glass chamber at the top, large enough to fit one single Being inside of it.

‘Spaces- what the fuck is this place,’ Namjoon whispers, as though afraid of being overheard.

Jimin lets go of his hand and jogs downwards.

There are more glass chambers around the main floors of the atrium- and in them are clear signs of imprisonment and restriction. Sk’jin doesn’t have to look at Namjoon to see how it affected the Kutsoglerin.

‘They worked on It here,’ Sk’jin says as his feet continue to take him down. The headlamps situate themselves midair, offering more than enough light over the place that saw the birth of the First Nightmare.

Namjoon doesn’t ask any questions, simply observing instead. Jimin is at the bottom and he sprints straight forward.

Namjoon hurries and Sk’jin follows the Kutsoglerin.

‘What’s gotten him-‘ Namjoon is beginning to ask when he pauses. Because Sk’jin can hear it too now. There’s a distinct hum in the air.

‘Something’s still running,’ Sk’jin frowns as he glances up at the core. If it weren’t for what Jimin
did, he would be a shaking mess at the stairs, unable to move, speak, or even think.

‘Something left by the GIU?’ Namjoon asks as they get to the bottom just in time to see Jimin pulling open a large metal door with a groaning creak.

‘Something tells me they never got in here.’ Sk’jin comments before adding, ‘Tae get ready!’

There’s choking sounds, proving that the Zhak’gri was most probably eating. Jimin disappears inside and they pick up their pace. They skid over the atrium floors, nearly tripping on the countless wires and ancient roots that had entwined itself over the place.

Jimin reappears, face ashen and eyes wide. And in his hand he’s holding a small device that shouldn’t be eliciting such a reaction from the latter. But Sk’jin knows better than to question seemingly normal things.

‘What is it-’

Jimin starts speaking, haltingly, like he was in a state of disbelief. He’s twisting the item in his hands, incredulous and shocked as he literally has to take a seat. He plonks down on the ground while Namjoon walks over to the doorway to investigate. Sk’jin crouches down, any excuse to sit really, and waits for Jimin to finish speaking.

‘It’s a part of the technology from his System,’ Taeh’yung translates slowly. ‘It’s part of their security- uh-it’s supposed to use orbital magnetism and converts that energy to create a…refraction? Deflection? Of its surroundings and like…project a dense non-penetrating shield…and uh, it’s not supposed to be here.’

‘So it is- this is tech from his System, they’ve been using his technology to fuel their research and experiments,’ Namjoon states harshly as he reappears.

Jimin looks up helplessly at them, his expression so plainly confused and desperate. Like he was asking them how his System’s technology got here. He opens his mouth as though to speak but nothing comes out.

‘Can I?’ Namjoon asks, reaching for the cell. Jimin places it in his hand and gets up immediately, feet hurrying him along the girth of the atrium as he continued going through every doorway and opening he could find.

Sk’jin just sits still, concentrating on breathing in and out.

‘Just this…this one single cell,’ Namjoon can’t even seem to vocalize his thoughts at the moment. ‘Of course, it’s possible that they were already messing with a lot of things, and this just added to it…was using this the cause of everything?’

Sk’jin glances at the small cell, wondering the same thing.

Was that small, insignificant and incomplete cell from Jimin’s System’s technology the reason why the First Nightmare even existed? Was it the reason why all of this had happened?

‘It makes sense- they knew for a fact that Bhumi- Menigišiti, had this sort of tech. They were able to tie in the connections- it’s how the Venture Unit was able to figure it all out. They saw the connections between this planet, the Akramanese, and then traced it all the way back to this treaty.’ Namjoon is mumbling to himself.

Jimin reappears empty handed, his expression not as wild and lost as it was some minutes ago.
‘Taeh’yung can you ask Jimin if there’s anything else in here he can sense or hear—’ Namjoon begins as he hands the cell back to Jimin who immediately reaches for it. There’s a small pang in Sk’jin’s chest—this was a piece of his home.

A piece of his home that was most probably responsible for the destruction of so many other homes.

Jemin shakes his head in reply.

‘We should get going then,’ Namjoon says as he checks his screen again. ‘Let’s not stay too long.’

The sun was still out and Sk’jin is surprised that the Kutsoglerin isn’t pushing their stay. But he wasn’t going to argue this suggestion so he gets up. He glances upwards at the empty glass chamber.

Pale elongated groping hands, sightless eyes, screaming mouths, melting skin.

‘WHY ARE YOU HERE?’

Sk’jin looks away firmly.

‘Does Jimin want to stay longer?’ Namjoon asks hesitantly, eyeing the area warily as the headlamps float back towards him, darkness following in their wake. It was as though confirmation of his theory did nothing to placate him or make him feel confident.

Jemin shakes his head again after Taeh’yung translates.

Namjoon gestures forward, jerking his head to the side with a look directed at Sk’jin, ‘Let’s go.’

Jemin is quiet as they make their way back, clearly deep in thought. He’s holding the cell in his hands, and his posture is a little stooped, as though burdened by the lives lost as a direct result of that cell’s existence.

‘Do you realize that this is the only time something has come out how it was planned?’ Sk’jin asks absently.

Namjoon hums a noncommittal reply before adding, ‘Has it really?’

When they reach the tilted atrium, they’re surprised to find that it’s much darker out than they anticipated. The sky above was a watery inky blue and Sk’jin can just about make out the stars. Jimin’s pace has slowed down; his movements seemed weighed down and he was tripping over roots and wires. He was clearly very distracted and upset.

‘We should hurry,’ Sk’jin says at once. Namjoon nods, feet hurrying in response.

‘Jimin?’ Sk’jin calls, looking around at the slightly distracted Being. ‘Let’s go— it’s getting dark.’

He points upwards and at his palm to indicate time. Jimin nods, still distracted but hurries nonetheless. Namjoon is waiting for them at the broken down entrance, already pushing aside vines with one arm.

‘All good? We can come back tomorrow if we need to,’ Namjoon says uncertainly at both Sk’jin and Jimin.

‘It’s all the same to me,’ Sk’jin replies, exhaustion seeping into him.
It’s cooler out now that it was evening and Sk’jin can hear nightly sounds of creatures and insects and general night life in the wild. He hears Namjoon breathe in sharply and Sk’jin can smell them before he sees them. The carnivorous creatures are asleep in heaps all around the Spardyti, darkened lumps, barely visible under the starlight.

A soft light movement catches Sk’jin’s eye and he readies himself to face some nightly creature but he’s mistaken. A cold rush holds him in place and Sk’jin is paralyzed.

It’s not the sight of the creatures that spooks Sk’jin, freezing his legs and stunning him to his core.

‘Spaces,’ Namjoon curses softly next to him. ‘They won’t chase after us when we lift off will they?’

Namjoon and Jimin continue walking forward but Sk’jin is stuck, eyes unable to look away, his lungs refusing air. The Spardyti lights up with their approach and throws a harsh light all over the wide clearing. The carnivorous creatures don’t stir, deep asleep as they slumber, ignoring the glaring lights.

And if Sk’jin thought what he was seeing was all in his head, he’s mistaken.

‘Sk’jin?’

Namjoon’s voice is careful and soft.

‘What’s wrong?’

Sk’jin wants to shake his head. His heart thundering, and the jungle seems to expand, red light bleeding into his sight. Under normal circumstance, he would joke it off. He would make a crude remark to embarrass Namjoon and make him go away. But he can’t.

Because he’s there. Watching from the depths of the jungle.

His silhouette is familiar, it’s clear, and it’s painfully familiar. A form he knew well. It’s imprinted into his memories: outlined by lights of a bright display screen, by flashing traffic lights, powerful headlamps near the edge of cliffs, by dim ceiling lights above his bedposts, by warp-light shining across the Bridge.

His hands extends out to him, reaching for him even though they both knew he was going to fail. And to this very second, to this very moment, Sk’jin doesn’t know if the look in his eyes were of condemnation or forgiveness.

Sk’jin startles backwards when a pair of very real, warm brown eyes appear before him. He blinks and he realizes there are tears in his eyes. He hears the last distorted words spoken in Taeh’yung’s voice and for a moment everything spins sharply and vertigo hits Sk’jin like a sack of rocks.

‘It’s not real,’ Namjoon says evenly as he holds him upright. ‘It’s not real. There’s nothing here Sk’jin.’

Sk’jin lets go of the breath he was holding; he would be ashamed to find himself shaking- his breaths uneven and almost hysterical. But he can’t find it in himself to care. Jimin is there too, staring out into the jungle as well. And quite suddenly, Jimin reaches forward, his hand over Sk’jin’s chest right above his heart, and the Khol’isa knows for certain that he was doing something. A calm settles into his muscles, his shaking stops and his breath returns to him at a normal pace.
'There’s nothing here,' Namjoon repeats again. Sk’jin realizes Namjoon’s leaning down slightly, keeping them in the same eye-level. ‘It’s all gone. You said so- and Taeh’yung said so. There’s nothing here.’

Sk’jin takes a deep breath, finally able to look past Namjoon’s eyes and back into the jungle.

They’re all looking back at him now.

‘You promised.’

‘I know.’

‘No,’ he manages to get out, raising a shaking hand and placing it over where Jimin’s hand rested against his chest. ‘They’re always here.’

Jimin can feel Sk’jin’s soul straining even more- almost to breaking point.

Planets were aligned to their suns, pulled by the gravitational forces exerted by the star, drawing them into various distances and maintaining this velocity to create a stable orbit. And Jimin has often thought that the very core of anyone’s being- their Souls, were very much like planets in their dependence and existence.

But Sk’jin was unlike this- he orbited an unknown force- one that was barred from him, but one that drew him in at violent velocities. And at this very moment, Jimin can feel it pulling at the Khol’isa with brutal force.

Jimin places his hand over Sk’jin’s chest, right where his heart was.

Strong, powerful, and forthright- Sk’jin’s heart hammered under his palm and Jimin can taste his fear, his anger, his pain- and most of all, his overwhelming guilt. Whatever had happened here was eating away at Sk’jin- beyond what Jimin could possibly hope to understand. The weight of this burden- of this storm- was so excessive, it was nearly overtaking the Khol’isa’s wearied and strained soul.

And it progressed into higher velocities the moment they landed on this planet.

Similar to the way planets were aligned to their stars; adjusting and composing themselves to the pull of the center of their solar system, this planet, like Sk’jin, felt as though it orbited another force. But Jimin knew this was not the case. There was nothing wrong with the planet. It felt tilted- almost as though the living core of the planet had shifted axis- altering its existence.
When they had first approached the planet, Jimin had sensed a strange sort of familiarity. And he hadn’t wanted to jump to conclusions, but it’s almost the same form of illusion or retraction of immediate mass as the technology they had developed in Akramana. But if that was the case, how was it here? And how was it obtained?

Jimin cradles the cell in his arms as the Spardyti lifts up. Those were the questions he had before landing on the planet. But now he knew.

It doesn’t surprised Jimin.

He has spent lifetimes in thought- occupied by singular notions or drowning in every conceivable idea- all born from the series of events that led up to his arrival in Megibīya. Every action executed, every word spoken. Jimin has drowned over and over again in these thoughts- in this guilt. And he long came to conclude, only to be cemented now by information given to him by Taeh’yung, that he had been betrayed by the Panel.

What happened in Megibiy. The coming of the Red Evil. The death of his people, of the bystanders in the form of Yoongi’s team- this was all a ploy- a carefully planned divisive attempt to enter Menigišiti.

And the cell in his hands was proof enough that the Panel had been interfering with his Home- probably long before they were introduced. And the ship below was also prime example of this betrayal- of this treason.

The cell in his hands was proof enough to know that they- in part himself- were responsible for the numerous pain and destruction that took place in this Known Universe. A small part of him is worried that once Sk’jin regains himself, once he’s far from this planet, he will conclude that the result of his current state- both physical and spiritual- was Jimin’s fault. But he doesn’t think about it, and pushes the thought out of his mind and instead focuses on the cell in his hands.

Jimin could always feel his planet- could always sense his sister. And the moment he awoke- the pain and fear that he had been shocked into, that he had been woken into- had long informed him that he was, in every sense of the word: alone.

But Jimin keeps a small and quiet hope deep in his heart. He has never left his System before- has never travelled beyond the ridges of their borders. He has existed within its security measures, within its technology and power- so Jimin has no conclusive comparison to contrast the lack of connectivity he felt with his Home and with his sister.

Would their own technology hide them from each other? He knew he ordered the Akramanan Wenedi Yyna to destroy the two-way cell that powered and charged their shields. Would that have effected how Jimin can reach to his own Home?

He almost feels a sense of pride- he hadn’t been able to detect the defensive barrier or see past the illusion.

Jimin carefully turns the cell in his hands; this little device had singlehandedly disoriented and confused him. Infused with foreign technology and implicated to be used for something certainly more nefarious than a security system, it had still undoubtedly, thrown him off-guard. So it was possible, that his Home, still existed- and continued to move on in safety.

And even if he was away, unable to fulfill his duties as the Yemenifesi Ch’nik’eti of his people, they would still be left under the protection of the Heart of their Home.
Sk’jin exhales shakily.

This planet, and Sk’jin, felt dislodged and incomplete.

While it was true that the technology from Akramana allowed immediate space-mass to be manipulated and altered, deviating and refracting channels of communication and or observation, their technology did not create this emptiness.

Jimin felt nothing harmful from this planet- but he did sense a strange gaping void. As though scooped out and completely eradicated. A strange void- barren and desert like. Only the distant memory of it existed- and Jimin feels as though it should remain so.

Some memories were made to linger, to remain. Some were meant to be forgotten- out of fear of what it might birth.

So he looks past the void- and instead he listened to the voices. There were countless voices- audible once the ship was close enough to the planet. Jimin has never experienced something like this- the space he existed in, the expanse of white, had been different to this.

It was as though whatever was here was waiting.

Just waiting for a return.

The same way Sk’jin’s soul seemed to be waiting- drawn towards a strong and powerful pull. But it’s too chaotic for Jimin to properly divine. He can’t pinpoint what it is exactly about the Khol’isa that seems to simultaneously drain him, yet rage about within him to bursting point. But the way he had stared out into the jungle- there was a strange joy in his eyes- but most of it had been fear and guilt.

‘Being alive is so complex Chim. But it’s the greatest thing- next to death.’

Namjoon is quiet as well.

He had guessed, theorized, that there was a possible connection- the GLA who sent them out had feared it. And now it was true. That the technology from Menigišiti fueled and powered countless research and experimentations- most of them for selfish and cruel reasons. And it was probably this very technology that led to the series of events that made Sk’jin who he was today- and what he went through.

Namjoon subtly glances over at him and Sk’jin.

Jimin knows Namjoon wants answers. That his search for answers does not only come from the need to fulfill this mission- but from a deep seated desire to know why.

Why any of this happened.

Why the GLA evolved into this state. Why the Yishengs betrayed the Universe. Why Jimin’s Home was subjected to cruel attempts of invasion. Why Hoseok had to live through what he had to do. Why Sk’jin was the way he was. Why his planet was destroyed for no reason than to serve as a sick experimental facility. Why Yoongi was the way he was.

But Jimin doesn’t know either.

He has no single clue- not an inkling to understand why any of this happened. What else had been effected, what else triggered and started, by the technology stolen from his Home? What other
souls and hearts were completely destroyed and forgotten, as Beings of vain self-righteousness attempted to shape the Universe to their ideal?

He wishes he could give Namjoon the answers.

But he can’t.

When they land the Spardyti in front of the Užkulisai, Taeh’yung is waiting for them at the Hangar gate.

‘How is he?’ Jimin asks immediately the moment he’s close enough to the Zhak’gri.

‘He’s still asleep- I think he might wake up soon,’ Taeh’yung replies gently before going over to Sk’jin who trails in tiredly. Namjoon hovers outside, watching carefully.

The Kutsoglerin was obviously at a loss.

He was right after all- his theory had been proven correct. But what did that mean now? What could they do with this information?

Jimin quickly makes his way to the Medical Bay and quietly peaks inside.

Yoongi was fast asleep on the Bed, the drip connected to this hand halfway finished. His features were disturbed and restive, a slight furrow between his brows. He was just as pale though his veins weren’t that prominent anymore.

Jimin stands by the doorway as Sk’jin and Taeh’yung walk past. Taeh’yung is half-carrying Sk’jin, speaking in a low comforting voice. Sk’jin has calmed since- but it’s also because Jimin had made sure to ease his mind.

His heart, however, was an entirely different story.

The sound of nightlife and gentle shifting of naturally moving air quiets down again, replaced by the barely audible hum of the ship. And then Namjoon appears, looking quite haggard, as though he was finally letting go of the confident and upright visage he put over his lost and confused self.

He catches sight of Jimin and his posture changes immediately.

‘Yoongi?’ Namjoon gestures to the room behind Jimin, his tone questioning. Jimin nods and raises his hand with his fists clenched and thumb sticking out. This seemed to be a generally widely used gesture to indicate that the user was in agreement with the other in question. Namjoon gives him a small smile, glancing at the Bay behind him before moving upwards himself.

Jimin finally walks into the Bay. He knows he should probably wash- his feet were leaving darkened tracks of old soil and ashy vegetation and mechanical dust. But he’s tired. And being by Yoongi’s side is as comforting as it has always been since the beginning.

No matter how changed he was, Yoongi was still effortlessly reassuring- even despite his own confusion and how lost he was; Jimin has never felt a more steadfast or reassuring presence in his life.

As the Yemenifesi Ch’ìnik’eti of his people, Jimin was the pillar of comfort, of reassurance, of peace and harmony. Yet he rarely felt these things given to him. An occupational hazard, his sister had once said to him. But Jimin had never minded- because being able to bring his people together in peaceful harmony and unity was what brought him joy and fulfillment.
But being with Yoongi.

Was this what it felt like? To be reassured and comforted?

Jimin sits on the chair by the Bed, leaning his head on his arms crossed over the cushioning. Already his mind is settling, his limbs less strained. The cell rests inside his pocket but Jimin pays it no mind now.

However, now that his mind has quieted down, a lingering question still prevails in his mind. This is the one that baffles him the most.

Why was Yoongi here?

And how?

Jimin hums quietly under his breath, his hand finding and taking Yoongi’s into his own. He automatically closes his eyes, feeling at peace.

It’s strange because this Yoongi is different.

Like Sk’jin he’s incomplete, a little unhinged, and yet strangely wearied.

Yoongi’s breathing changes audibly and the hand in Jimin’s hold twitches just a little before his entire body shudders. Jimin stops humming and stands up immediately to find Yoongi opening his eyes, struggling with the shift in light. Jimin leans in, anxious to see if Yoongi was delirious or not.

There’s a strange film over his eyes- one that resembles the delirium of fevered Beings. And Jimin knows Yoongi’s not all there. But the Human’s eyes meets his and Jimin’s breath is caught in his throat- he’s taken back to Megibīya, back to that tower- back to that last straining moment-

Yoongi reaches up, hand cupping the back of Jimin’s head and gently pulls him down.

He smiles and Jimin’s heart is breaking- was this a dream? No- it was a nightmare- he was reliving his nightmare over again.

But this time he hears Yoongi’s whispered words and keeps them in his heart- memorizes the syllables and sounds. Because he would remember them this time- and he would never lose Yoongi again.

Yoongi was clearly going through some strange state of sleep, his body moving and his awareness confusing dreams for reality. Or in this case, memories with the present.

And Jimin knows this memory so well- because it’s acutely clear in his mind. So this time Jimin leans in first, pressing a soft kiss over Yoongi’s lips, lingering long before pulling away.

The difference in that few short seconds is staggering. Colour returns to Yoongi’s face, his breath restful, and the strain between his brows gone. He was simply asleep now.

Jimin misses Yoongi.

The one who gave him bright gummy smiles, the sunrise painting him soft muted colours. The one who would mime stories out to him in funny voices and expressions that made Jimin sometimes physically fall to the ground. The one that stayed by him, shielding him from any and everything- defending him from his own team-leader.

But that Yoongi was gone. Or at least, was gone for now. The Being before Jimin, this Yoongi,
was here- and that was what mattered. Leaning in again, Jimin kisses the Human’s lips softly once more- but this time it’s a promise.

‘It’s all right if you don’t remember- you don’t have to try so hard,’ Jimin whispers- hoping that though Yoongi couldn’t hear or understand his words- his Soul might.

‘You’re here; that’s all I want.’

* 

Chapter End Notes

(Author’s Notes)
I can smell
A mixtape
I am ready to be slain
This week has been a little kinder to me in terms of uni, thankfully.
BUT THE NEXT UPDATE SHOULD BE UP FASTER THAN THIS ONE
BECAUSE- well I can’t tell you I won’t spoil it. Also! For anyone curious about when Kookie is showing up I’m sorry to say it won’t be too immediate but it will be within the next 10 chapters!! Muscle bunny will make his appearance!!
Have a good weekend!! BECAUSE I SURE AS FUCK AM GONNA ENJOY MY SORT OF NOT REALLY FREE TIME BY WRITING LIKE A MAD MAN
It is the heat of a burn, the burn of a screaming throat, the silent scream of a dying sun, the death of the familiar warmth of their skin.

It is the fragrance of something blossoming under the summer sun, the flavour of giddy laughter under a neon sign-post, the reflection of a bonfire late at night.

It is the softness of their lips against yours, hesitance but desperate as they try to convey what their words can’t.

It is the edge of the shadows that crawl out from under their hand, reaching out to you, knowing that you cannot hold on.

It is the broken smile on an ashen face, pain and loss etched liked tattoos on their skin.

It is their absence; their pulse no longer beating against yours, the music of their heart silenced and hollow.

It is the price paid; doubled tripled. Heavy and ever growing.

It is pain; bitter and ever gnawing.

It is anger; destructive and purifying.

It is death; ever-lurking and drawing.

Sk’jin is startled from the report he’s reading when an annoyed face pops up on the side-tab.

‘Cap- we got him here.’

‘Hello my love-’

‘-for fucks sake,’ Nambike rolls her eyes, ‘Please act like that Captain you are and tell me what you want to do with him.’
‘Hm,’ Sk’jin hums, stretching under his sheets. ‘Bring him up.’

‘...the Bridge?’

‘No, bring him to my quarters.’ Sk’jin yawns as he props himself up elegantly on the bed.

‘Are you at least not naked.’

‘I can’t promise you anything,’ Sk’jin sing-songs.

He thinks he hears her sigh.

Sk’jin puts away the screen and pushes himself off of the bed long enough to pull on a pair of billowy pajamas but foregoes the top-robes for a practically transparent tunic instead. He lounges back on his bed and he doesn’t even have time to fluff up his hair to the perfect *I woke up like this* tousled effect he enjoyed the most when Nambike burst it.

A skill no doubt, seeing as all the doors slid open or shut. Yet here she was, short angry figure, powerful enough to probably single-handedly take down an entire fleet of GLA streamers with her *bare-hands,* glaring at him, unimpressed.

‘Cap,’ she grimaces, as though it pained her to call him that. But it was all a front of course. Sk’jin likens Nambike to a little sister, or sometimes to irk her, a daughter. He did practically raise her; her parents had been killed, slaves in the great Fytikos war that expended the poor as though they were ammunition. Sk’jin had barely managed to rescue her and a few other of her people before he then got falsely arrested for smuggling Cheimarosium.

6 sols after that in the prison Sk’jin had been locked up in which he successfully controlled by himself within 6 months of imprisonment, he’s “rescued” by the Negrhan and the rest of his crew.

‘Did you steal it?’ she had asked, furrow etched far too deep in her brow for so young a Being. Sk’jin snorts and picks her up despite her protests. He cradles her, balancing her on his hip and they stroll out of the prison that didn’t really need breaking into. Honestly, Sk’jin was just waiting for them to finally take the initiative to come pick him up. He could have walked out anytime he wanted.

‘Do I look like I’d steal from a mother?’

She regarded him with serious eyes, but still filled with an odd innocence. Commendable for someone who had witnessed all that she did at her age.

‘No,’ she had replied with surety. ‘You would ask permission.’

‘I doubt Cheimi would allow but you’re right.’

‘My child- my grown little child-’ he waves elegantly.

Unimpressed, Nambike steps aside and in walks the Being Sk’jin was reading the report on and it takes all of Sk’jin’s will-power to not laugh out loud.

Everything about him screams Venture Unit.

Even down to his *hair.* It’s dark grey and short, Sk’jin thinks he would look better with longer hair.

He was fresh off of their training academy, it’s obvious. According to the report he was from
Mwenzi, a lone planet that orbited a red-star in the Gyāla galaxy towards the borders of the Known Universe. And like his species, he was very tall, grey haired, and generally anthropomorphic. They were hardy and tough, and were disproportionately heavy for their slim built given their bone density and chemical make was made of heavier elements than commonly found in the anthropomorphic sub-species. Sk’jin is aware of the politics of his planet, of how his people had previously been enslaved by a neighbouring planet until the Venture Unit rescued them.

This was of course, only after the Venture Unit carefully removed themselves from the situation, having milked all they could from this simple planet. It made Sk’jin sick to see the Venture Unit now championing the Mwenzini knowing what they did to them.

‘Captain,’ Nambike nods curtly. ‘I present to you Ahadi- he’s been a great help to the Chikwata Clan and they wish to fulfill their gratitude to you by offering their strongest soldier.’

Sk’jin could laugh but he’s a professional dammit and he was going to play along. After all, this Ahadi did manage to get along this far- and quite cleverly too.

The Chikwata Clan were basically all brawn and no brain. They were undoubtedly very loyal, and after Sk’jin personally helped them (without doing much in all frankness) they declared that they would pay him back in kind. They weren’t the most subtle of Beings and loudly and boldly declared their allegiance to Sk’jin. It was also known that the Clan followed a tradition of gift-bearing and giving. So the Chikwata have been gifting Sk’jin for years now, and though the Khol’isa has tried to dissuade them, wasn’t able to stop them.

So it was quite obvious that Ahadi had gained their favour (again, not difficult) and persuaded the pirate-lord to give him over to Sk’jin.

Fighting the laugh growing in his throat, Sk’jin instead graces him with a smile and a genial bow of his head, knowing full well how his hair strands would fall over his face as he did so.

Nambike rolls her eyes so hard it’s a miracle they haven’t rolled backwards into her head.

‘I welcome you aboard, Ahadi,’ Sk’jin brushes his hair away from his eyes with fair and slender fingers, looking up through his lashes.

Ahadi is completely unaffected, not even slightly distracted by what Sk’jin knows are his factually entrancing good-looks.

‘Thank you Captain- I will show you my work’s worth.’

‘I’m sure you are more than worthy,’ Sk’jin smiles, his tone suggestive as he slowly eyes the tall Being before him. Nambike pretends to throw-up behind Ahadi before exiting the room with another unimpressed look thrown at Sk’jin.

Ahadi gives nothing. There’s absolutely no reaction from the openly lewd expression Sk’jin is giving him.

No defensiveness.

No interest.

No discomfort.

Not even amusement.
“He’s just…looking back.”

“Of course I expect you to be loyal to the ship, the Bridge, and the code.” Sk’jin sits up properly, pretending to stretch a little, his arms uncovered in all their bare glory. He knows that the tunic he’s wearing gives him little to no coverage as he gets up.

“Not to you?” he inquires, looking childishly puzzled. Suddenly he looks incredibly young and Sk’jin could coo. He almost feels bad for this Being and decides to let him off easy. He points at his robes hanging behind the Mwenzini and the latter takes a moment to realize what Sk’jin was asking before he carefully lifts the delicate fabric off of the hook and holds it up.

Sk’jin smiles beatifically at the Mwenzini and turns around, slipping his arms into the sleeves of his robes.

“Thank you,” Sk’jin nods before he steps away. He suddenly feels very comfortable and gestures for Ahadi to follow him to the window seat. After taking a seat himself, Sk’jin points at the pillows and gives Ahadi a welcoming nod.

“Sit sit,” Sk’jin smiles before he continues off with their conversation. ‘And no, not to me- never to me. Loyalty subjected to a single Being never ends well- has your training in the Venture Unit taught you nothing?’

Ahadi freezes, eyes widening just a little, brows furrowing immediately. His stance, though subtle, is already defensive. He also immediately lowers his gaze, away from Sk’jin’s red irises.

“You’re going to have to be better than that if you want to continue staying here,” Sk’jin says conversationally. ‘If you freeze like that the next time someone joking mentions it you’re gonna get killed. The Chikwata are kinda thick, so they wouldn’t notice. But here…’ Sk’jin trails off delicately. ‘Besides, it’d be a pity if you get killed- you have nice dimples.’

Ahadi hasn’t moved- he’s frozen and Sk’jin is about to take pity on him and maybe have him escorted out but he’s surprised when the Mwenzini takes a step forward and throws himself on the cushion in front of Sk’jin, looking heavily disgruntled.

“What?” Sk’jin laughs, ‘Did you think I wouldn’t be able to see? To be honest I think everyone saw.’

Ahadi groans, hands pressing hard into the sockets of his eyes as though embarrassed. And embarrassed he was, the tips of his ears are red and his entire body curved inwards.

Sk’jin leans back, amused as he watches Ahadi continue to bow his head in shame.

“So- how do you want to do this?” Sk’jin grins.

Ahadi looks away from his hands, wariness and hesitance in his expression.

‘Do you want to stay and do you want to go back to the Venture Unit? We could even stage a whole escape scene for you,’ Sk’jin leans in, feeling excited as he plots, ‘We could say I used my cool creepy Khol’isa eye magic on you and made you spill- but you were too cool to be hypnotized for too long and defeated me! Then you punch me across the face, not in a way that leaves scars- y’know, aesthetic type shit! And then ya get runnin’ off, and we can give ya a TeorSer and ya can fake it and fire off’n randomly and so ya have the fire count’n all- then ya steal a Transporter’n warp off!’

Sk’jin is standing, arms flailing as he describes this A+ plan to Mwenzini who looks thoroughly
shocked.

‘-I uh-’ he stammers out.

Sk’jin leans in, their faces inches apart.

‘Or,’ he lowers his voice and his hands reach behind Ahadi, balancing himself on the wall behind the Mwenzini. ‘You can stay here, and learn how things work- disappear from the Venture Unit- or you can continue to report me back, I don’t care- they can’t do anything to me anyways.’

‘They can,’ he argues back almost instantly.

‘You’re so cute,’ Sk’jin elegantly seats himself on the Mwenzini’s lap and he’s amused that now he’s getting a reaction. But it’s more out of sheer embarrassment than anything else. ‘You have so much to learn- stay, and I will teach you.’

Honestly, Sk’jin is expecting this young Agent to say no. Because who would say yes?

Sk’jin might not be a violent pirate or a cliché uncultured brute of a Being, but that didn’t mean he was incapable of making the choices and decisions he had to in order to get him here, as the leader of the most powerful pirating network in the Underverse.

Because Sk’jin was more than capable, more than ready, to execute some of the most morally questionable acts in order to fulfill his plans. And he didn’t heed the Underverse and their laws, or the Venture Unit and their requests to ally with him.

And that’s what scared the Venture Unit the most.

Sk’jin was not only one of the largest pirating networks in the Underverse, but was the largest private pirating network. He had no connections or inner dealings with the other pirates. He was not funded by any political force or organization. His network was nameless, closed-off, and station-free. They had no base, no specified location they gathered in.

And for centuries the Venture Unit has tried to stop them, or infiltrate them. But Sk’jin has captured the agents and sent them back on their merry way over 30 times. Sometimes they called it the Khol’isa Internship and no one has ever passed.

‘Yes.’

Sk’jin takes an embarrassingly long time to realize what Ahadi has just said.

‘I mean-’ the Mwenzini stammers. ‘I mean, uh, I’d like to stay. And learn.’

He looks so nervous, warm brown eyes wide and panicked. Like he’s not sure if Sk’jin is going to kill him or not. Or if this was all a trick or not.

And it’s not a trick or lure. Because Sk’jin isn’t interested in finding out what the Venture Unit wants from him now.

Sk’jin has never been interested in this ridiculous state of political agenda or deep-state issues or romanticized notions of espionage. Sk’jin is interested in knowing the minds of Beings. He doesn’t want to understand it, he just likes to know.

It is what brought him here so far, and it’s what Sk’jin guesses is the reason why he’s been so successful in leading a pirating network- because he didn’t have any intentions of doing so.
And right now- he just wants to know this Being- know his mind, his intentions, his actions.

Sk’jin smooshes the Mwenzini’s cheeks together the moment he recovers and places a kiss on his puckered lips.

‘You’re so precious I can’t believe this- they’re sending babies- literal babies to me,’ Sk’jin trills delightfully before he gets off with flourish.

‘Uh-’ Ahadi looks like he’s about to argue back but also terrified that Sk’jin might turn around and maybe slice him. Sk’jin yanks him off of the sitting area and drags him towards the doorway and out to the hallway. Ahadi makes a terrified sound behind him.

‘Oh I know you’re like, 240 sols old- still a baby by my calculations,’ Sk’jin shrugs before he adds, ‘Come along- I’ll give you a tour of the place! And please- for the love of everything beautiful,- meaning my face, pick up on your acting-.’

‘Jin!’

A young voice shrilly shrieks and Sk’jin is already ready.

Out pops out a young Ožkan, glistening blue skin blushing pink around the still soft horns adorning his head from exertion, bright eyes sparkling and his hands outstretched.

Sk’jin catches him and hoists him up into the air, tail, horns, hooves and all just as the loud clopping sounds of another Ožkan comes rounding up the corner.

‘Oh- Captain,’ Mri wheezes out a greeting before glaring at her son in Sk’jin’s arms. ‘I’d like to request a direct order from you.’

‘Oh? Does it have something to do with this one?’ Sk’jin leans back away from the Ožkan’s curious hands that always aim straight for his horns.

‘Yes,’ Mri glares unimpressed at her son, ‘He refuses to bathe.’

‘Ilya!’ Sk’jin holds the lanky boy at arm’s length, leveling him with a comic reprimanding look.

‘What did I say about hygiene when you’re on my ship.’

‘That it should be everyone’s priority,’ the little Ožkan mumbles, eyes turned down.

‘Are you disobeying the laws of the ship?’

‘…no.’

‘So does that mean you’re going to bathe?’

‘…yes.’

‘Good boy- listen to your mother you hear me?’

‘Yes Jin.’

Sk’jin hands over the little Ožkan over to his mother who gives him a grateful smile and a roll of her eyes before she notices Ahadi.

‘Ah- hello! Intern?’ she waves at the Mwenzini.
‘The freshest of them all,’ Sk’jin grins. ‘Isn’t that right?’

Sk’jin could laugh because Ahadi looks frozen again but then he recovers quickly (not quick enough but hey, he was learning a little) and replies with a winning dimpled smile (that takes Sk’jin back by surprise) and says, ‘I heard great stories from the other interns- had to try and see for myself.’

Mri chuckles, hoisting Ilya on her hip properly, ‘Oh yes they had the time of their lives didn’t they Cap?’

‘Only the best,’ Sk’jin winks at Ahadi who has lost all of his nervousness and actually even winks back, dimple deepening on his cheek.

Interesting.

‘I look forward to it.’

Mri actually giggles and Ilya waves at them from his mother’s back.

‘I’d give that a solid 6 out of 10,’ Sk’jin remarks as he walks ahead, Ahadi skipping a step to catch up. ‘Don’t panic- always be prepared.’

It’s a bit cliché and honestly expected because Sk’jin can sense the nervous energy emanating from the Mwenzini in growing volume since he stepped in, so it’s easy to sidestep the slim carbon-dagger that retracts out from under Ahadi’s sleeves.

Sk’jin is quick to disarm and shove him against the nearby wall.

‘You’re going to have to try harder if you really want to kill me or get yourself killed,’ Sk’jin smiles. ‘We’re a pretty tolerant bunch here with years of experience-‘

Sk’jin deftly blocks the punch and knee jab, not breaking his speech.

‘-and I will not hesitate to leave you stranded in an isolated moon with sub-par atmospheric levels where you will die from a combination of slow asphyxiation, incineration, and dehydration. So be a good boy, and enjoy your internship until your masters pick you up or you escape during our next fuel-restock.’

Ahadi’s eyes are not filled with fear or nervousness- instead they’re filled with a sense of intrigue, some confusion, and something Sk’jin can only label as begrudging respect.

The sound of the TeorSer trigger being set to stun-mode alerts them of another presence in the hallway.

‘Captain.’

‘Ah! Ti-!’ Sk’jin steps away and beams his best smile at Ti, his Navigator. Ahadi slides off of the wall to the ground rather gracelessly.

‘Enjoying your walk?’ she asks politely, pointing her TeorSer at Ahadi. ‘Need me to handle the trash for you?’

‘Honey, it’s rude to address the intern like that!’ Sk’jin scolds with a grin before reaching down and yanking Ahadi up. ‘Ti, meet Ahadi- Ahadi, this is Ti- she knows how to kick your ass in 50 ways with one finger!’
Ti’s sharp jet-black eyes scans Ahadi without even attempting to mask her intention.

‘51,’ she adds, ‘He’s got a little more give- more room to work with.’

Ahadi doesn’t know if he should be offended, scared, or amused. His facial expression is a combination of all.

‘Ready to launch?’ Sk’jin asks, fixing his cuffs properly before carefully rearranging his hair. Ti reaches up fixes his bangs for him while replying, ‘Yeah- we’re at green. Are we clear to leave? Or are we dumping trash?’

‘Hm,’ Sk’jin side-eyes Ahadi who is watching them carefully. ‘I don’t know- do we take out the trash Ahadi?’

Ahadi’s expression is unreadable for a fraction of a second, brown eyes blank before he looks away with a shrug and a smile and says, ‘I don’t know- seems like there’s a lot around here. Might take a while.’

‘Can I dispose of him?’ Ti asks, her tone deadpan.

‘No no,’ Sk’jin laughs pushing her forward and away. ‘I’ll come up in a bit and we can leave.’

‘If you say so.’ Ti refuses to budge, still eyeing down Ahadi.

‘Go- you worry-butt.’

‘Really? Worry-butt?’ she repeats, finally looking away from Ahadi.

‘You want “worry-ass” because I can say that-’

She scoffs out a huffy laugh and walks away, middle finger high above her head.

‘Right- that was Ti,’ Sk’jin points after his Navigator. ‘She’s great!’

‘You said that they weren’t loyal to you- that they were loyal to the ship- the code,’ Ahadi blurts out. ‘That was loyalty to you.’

‘Not to me,’ Sk’jin shakes his head and crosses his arm around Ahadi’s though it’s not before handing him back the carbon-knife. ‘My crew are not loyal to me. You see, loyalty to the ship and the Code means wanting what’s best for it- and what’s best for it,’ Sk’jin bows his head elegantly. ‘Is of course, myself.’

‘You are?’ Ahadi asks incredulously before he seems to realize what he’s just asked and looks like he’s 5 seconds from throwing himself out of the ship, eyes widened with horror.

Sk’jin laughs, shifting his arm around so that it wrapped around the Mwenzini’s waist and draws him close. He tiptoes just a little to whisper in his ear.

‘Honey, I’m the best thing you’ll ever see.’
Ahadi is, to an extent comic relief for Sk’jin.

He’s never been more entertained by the behavior, actions, or words of a Being the way he’s amused with the Mwenzini.

There are moments where he seems entirely capable, and in full control of his situation and surroundings. And then a moment later he plunges into confusion and extraordinary clumsiness that Ti was certain was an act for a while.

But it’s not.

Unfortunately.

Sk’jin is not amused when he looks down at the sight of the tall Mwenzini, prostrated on the ground, Ilya seated atop of him, surrounded by countless shards of an extremely expensive and rare artifact Sk’jin had been keeping for a good bargain.

‘Listen- even I’m not worth that,’ Sk’jin points at the seemingly dull looking fragments of the soot-like clay on the ground.

Ahadi sighs heavily, glancing over at Ilya who looks down at him with wide yellow eyes, a pleading look to them.

‘I guess Captain, you should punish me as you see fit.’

‘You’re very eager aren’t you?’ Sk’jin grins as the CleanBots roll in, removing the now worthless piles of ancient artifact dust on the ground.

‘Only for what you have to offer,’ he replies. It would be cheeky, if his tone wasn’t entirely deadpan.

Sk’jin laughs heartily and helps him stand before lifting Ilya into his arms and walking away.

‘Wait- you aren’t going to do anything?’ the Mwenzini looks understandably confused.

‘What’s done is done,’ Sk’jin shrugs. ‘I’ll make sure you pay though!’

But as time went on, and Ahadi started feeling more comfortable, wariness no longer stuttering his speech and behavior, his real personality started to show. And it was both amusing as well as intriguing.

For someone who grew up in the environment he did, with the history he lived in, and the involvement he had within the Venture Unit, he sure as fuck lacked awareness in what happened in the Underverse. Not that he was entirely unaware- he just seemed thoroughly taken aback by some of the things they discussed or some of the stories exchanged inside the Bridge.

‘Why don’t you do something about it?’ he asks one day.

Sk’jin looks up from his screen, lounging on his chair at the Bridge.

‘What do you mean?’ Sk’jin inquires.

Ahadi looks troubled for a moment before he approaches Sk’jin to squat down next to him.

‘I know I lack a lot of things- experience, understanding- I have a lot to learn and I will keep on learning,’ he pauses, gnawing at his lower lip. ‘But this is something you know- you live this
reality and you know how to deal with it. Don’t you want to stop it?’

Sk’jin thinks it’s commendable to be optimistic but he knows it’s not realistic.

And it wasn’t just an age or era or progress thing. Sk’jin has lived through everything. And optimism wasn’t something that got him through.

‘If you live with that mentality, you’re going to die a brokenhearted Being,’ Sk’jin says simply. ‘Life comes with a price- that you have to return it after a period of time. Peace comes with a price- even death comes with a price. Everything in life comes with a price that you have to pay- or make someone else pay. And when I do something, I do it in a way where I know I can pay the price, to the best of my abilities, without putting the ship in danger.’

Sk’jin glances out of the window of the Bridge, eyes latching onto the sight of the display of lights, bright and colourful- almost like a nebula in motion from this distance. It was anything but.

‘We’re just…going to fly past? Not do anything to help?’ Ahadi looks incredulous. ‘Those are innocent Beings! They’re being attacked for no reason!’

‘The cargo-freight under attack at this very moment carries in it raw materials and resources that the Cősăn pirating network are taking from it in order to supply the Vao’c Defence Brigade, which we all are aware are trying to overthrow their invaders who have enslaved half of their planet despite being lawfully protected under the GLA,’ Sk’jin reels off.

‘But that cargo-freight has innocent Beings in it,’ Ahadi emphasizes. ‘The result does not justify the means.’

‘And who are we to state that?’ Sk’jin asks. ‘Who are we to place judgment or decisions? If we stop them here- the Defence Brigade will lose their resources to build ships and defence weapons- entire races of Beings will be wiped out- legally, I might add,’ Sk’jin pauses before continuing, ‘Cargo-freights are operated by approximately 150 to 200 Beings. They all have families, friends, loved ones who no doubt depend on them. In fact, everyone you know or ever met is like this- we all have loved ones, we all have friends. We see beggars on the streets and we give them some of our loose change, hoping to help them- and maybe they do better with those units- or maybe they use it to buy illegal drugs and dope themselves away- what do we know?’

‘We know that there are Beings there that need our help,’ Ahadi states firmly. ‘Sk’jin, this doesn’t even require violence- we clearly outnumber and outmatch them- they would run away at once!’

‘Would you be willing to pay the price for your actions?’ Sk’jin asks. He ignores the way Ti’s head snaps up, eyes narrowing as she leans in to listen intently.

‘I would!’ he nods defiantly.

‘Then give the order,’ Sk’jin shrugs.

Ahadi does a double take and so does everyone else in the Bridge.

‘What-’

‘If that’s what you feel- and you believe you can pay the price for it, then give the order,’ Sk’jin gestures towards the Communication Port. ‘Announce it, if you want.’

Ahadi is gaping at him, but he doesn’t look away. Then slowly, he shakes his head.
‘I can’t pay it.’ He shakes his head.

‘You can’t,’ Sk’jin agrees. ‘But I can. Ti, send a warning to the Cósăn’s, telling them to back off. Call the GLA as well- where the fuck are they even?’

Ahadi doesn’t move but Sk’jin can feel his eyes on him as he readies the ship for battle mode. The rest of the Bridge follows through his actions quickly and without question.

‘Ahadi- you wanna man the Medic Port?’ Dariga, their highly skilled and illegally trained medic offers, standing up as well on his purely bionic limbs. ‘I think we might need a few extra hands yes?’

Ahadi blinks at last, looking back and forth between Sk’jin and Dariga before nodding and following the portly medic.

‘Why are you doing this?’ Ti asks him the moment the two leave the bridge, spiky eyebrow raised in question.

‘What do you mean?’

‘That,’ she nods in the direction of the doorway where Ahadi, ‘You know that it’s all an act right?’

Oh Sk’jin knew that all right.

It was a good act. A simple yet good act.

One that didn’t require a good player or actor.

Because it was a game Sk’jin knew how to play, and he knew how to use to his benefit.

The only difference here being Sk’jin knew the game settings but Ahadi didn’t.

The Venture Unit would never send anyone this incredibly inexperienced for no reason. No, they saw something in him that they thought they could use against Sk’jin. And it wasn’t to usurp him or overthrow his network.

The Venture Unit sent over this young Being, filled with a frustratingly stoic sense of idealism, well-intended propaganda speeches, and hopeful outlook to life to influence Sk’jin and sway him to join forces with the Venture Unit.

Sk’jin wasn’t the largest pirating network because of the number of ships he commanded or the fear he evoked with his presence. It was in his presence of the literal meaning behind the word network.

Sk’jin wanted to know a lot of things.

And by knowing a lot of things, he gathered limitless data, sources, resources, and information regarding almost everything in both the Undiverse and Known Universe.

And all the Venture Unit had to tell Ahadi was that Sk’jin was in a position where he could change all of that. Where he could shift the axis of this delicate balance and finally put an end to the criminal injustice, to the senseless death, and to the other Venture Unit propaganda Sk’jin doesn’t keep track of.

And Ahadi, who happened to be a genuinely well-intending Being who suffered only the ending of his planet’s brutal conquest and saw only the revival of their basic rights, was already filled with
the desire to do better, and was easily roped in to push their attempt to gain access to Sk’jin’s network.

‘Are you just playing around with him?’ Ti asks carefully.

‘I’m not,’ Sk’jin replies truthfully before he can stop himself.

‘Then why keep him here? Why entertain his ideas? Why actually follow through with them?’

‘Because I want what’s best for us- for the Beings we protect in here, for the families who call all of this their home, for the places and planets and people who need us,’ Sk’jin replies. ‘For homes lost and not found.’

‘But will this help?’ Ti asks, nodding towards the battle up ahead, no longer appearing like a distant nebula as they approached it.

‘I don’t know,’ Sk’jin replies truthfully. ‘We’ve always done it like this before—just never beyond what we knew, or who we knew.’

‘Isn’t that what’s keeping us safe?’

‘If this is a change we’re going to be keeping, then it’s one that I won’t make alone,’ Sk’jin smiles at his Navigator. ‘I would hear each and every one speak.’

Ti smiles at him, head tilted, ‘So if you always knew about that, did you also always know about the fact that he’s fallen in love with you?’

Sk’jin’s head snaps up so quickly he swears he hears his neck crack.

‘What?’ he asks sharply.

‘Ahadi. He’s fallen in love with you— or well, is falling in love with you.’

‘…you say that too easily.’ Sk’jin waves aside her comment dismissively. How absurd. Sk’jin makes sure that their shield levels are at maximum.

‘Because it’s easy to see. You’re telling me you don’t see it?’ it’s her turn to sound incredulous. ‘He’s always coughing around you. It’s funny, and embarrassing to witness.’

‘What do you mean he’s coughing— he’s clearing his throat— got an infection or somethin’,’ Sk’jin really doesn’t understand why Ti was pushing this. It made no sense. ‘sides, he’s always coughing.’

‘Yeah— in front of you. It’s his nervous tick, fucking Spaces,’ she rolls her eyes before getting up.

‘And where the fuck d’you think you’re goin’?’ Sk’jin calls after her with annoyance.

‘Somewhere I don’t have to witness your stupid ass!’ she calls back before adding, ‘And maybe check up on your boyfriend’s overzealous ass!’

‘Not my boyfriend!’ Sk’jin screams back.
And now Sk’jin wants to know.

And maybe he’s not doing this in the most advisable way, but he’s determined and the Khol’isa have always lived a rather reckless life, being nearly immortal and all that shit. But Sk’jin has never been known for his subtlety even though he can be when the situation needed it. So he’s extremely obvious, to the point where Ti actually physically leaves the room whenever Sk’jin leans over against Ahadi flirtatiously, fingers trailing up his skin. He’ll press up excessively close, lips moving close to his ears.

Ahadi begins to stammer, as per usual, escaping with panicked smiles and an obvious comic cry for an explanation as he hides behind various members of the crew who were too used to Sk’jin’s random antics to care. But Sk’jin never gains any evidence of any attraction and so he proudly states to Ti, gloating over her mistake.

She just levels him with a blank stare that looks a little patronizing. It irks Sk’jin greatly.

‘Spaces, you really have no idea do you,’ she sighs heavily before she reaches up to grapple his neck and put him in a headlock.

‘Shit like that don’t work with decent folk,’ she grunts as Sk’jin tries to struggle against her hold. It was futile of course- Ti was ridiculously strong and Sk’jin isn’t really trying either.

‘Who the fuck are decent folk?’ Sk’jin wheezes out, back aching from the angle he’s bent at.

‘Sounds fake-‘

She squeezes tighter, making Sk’jin actually squeak.

‘Uh-‘

Ahadi walks in, brown eyes widening a little before narrowing. He takes a careful step back, ‘I uh-will come back?’

‘It’s fine,’ Sk’jin tries to smile but okay, was Ti actually trying to kill him? ‘Ti and I were, you know-‘ he clears his throat with difficulty. ‘-just fooling around.’

Ti releases him, shoving him towards the Mwenzini who catches him and sets him upright at once.

‘What’s up intern?’ she grins.

It was funny because Ahadi has been with them for nearly 5 sols at this point, but Ti and a few others still liked to call him intern; either just to fool around, or sometimes remind everyone exactly who he was. Trust was not easily gained, and neither was it freely given. It was earned, and though in the past 5 sols, Ahadi has managed to win over and gain almost everyone’s trust and respect, a healthy level of wariness and caution still existed. And it would probably remain so as well.

‘I found something,’ he reports grimly.

‘…is it my collection of Heliords because I swear it’s just a hobby,’ Ti cracks a wide smile.

‘Your what-‘ Ahadi is distracted for a moment before Ti smacks him upside head.
‘OW!’

‘Stop whining- what did you find?’

Ahadi rubs at the side of his head, the skin on his nape actually turning red from the force of Ti’s smack. Sk’jin coos and presses his hand over the spot, soothing the sting gently. Ahadi actually leans closer, turning his body away from Ti’s small and powerful form.

It’s funny, seeing these two tall Beings attempting to put space between themselves and a Being who if really measured properly, could barely look over their shoulders.

‘Have you guys ever been to Orvan?’

‘Orvan? It’s in Trunga right?’ Ti asks.

‘Orvan?’ Sk’jin doesn’t register that his hand is still caressing Ahadi’s hair, fingers combing through the now, thankfully, longer grey strands. ‘Nopes.’

‘Eh,’ he shrugs, ‘Not surprising.’

It’s Sk’jin’s turn to smack him on the side of the head and Ahadi stands by the opposite wall, at a clear distance away from Sk’jin and Ti.

‘Anyways- just received a message from Açkın- more like Bjegli received a message from Açkın- and it was…’ Ahadi looks greatly troubled.

Açkın was one of their “free-lancers” as Sk’jin referred to them. They were the equivalent of Venture Unit agents that roamed about, going through different networks and working mainly in infiltration and information gathering.

Bjegli on the other hand was part of Sk’jin’s tech crew. They had picked him up a few sols ago, barely alive, having escaped the great slave-wars of his planet’s federation through, ironically, a slaver-ship. He was a brilliant mind and Sk’jin was quick to take him in. They came to learn the terrors of his federation and respected his wishes to be taken as far away as possible. He now lead the technical team and was crucial to any large-party “excursions” they initiated.

‘What is it?’

‘He claims that Bjegli’s family is still alive- and that he saw them being taken into Orvan.’

Sk’jin would have doubted this information if it weren’t for the fact that it came from Açkın.

‘Why Orvan? That makes no sense,’ Ti frowns.

‘Yeah- that’s what I asked too but-’ Ahadi looks beyond disturbed at this point, ‘Do…do you know about the Isbahaysiga Alliance?’

Sk’jin is already shaking his head.

‘We’re not going anywhere near the Alliance,’ Sk’jin says at once.

‘So you know what’s going on but you won’t do anything?!’ Ahadi demands. ‘This isn’t even a random thing- this is Bjegli- this is his family- and it’s not just that! You don’t need justification or a connection to want to do the right things-’

‘Stop being such a cliché protagonist,’ Sk’jin snaps.
‘A what?!’

Ahadi had a quick temper, easily riled up if you knew where to attack him.

‘You’re just like every other protagonist that is a massive hit for some reason- unreasonably emotional but it’s excusable because they come from a place of honour and well-intention- well-intention doesn’t save shit out here!’ Sk’jin retorts back just as quickly. ‘We’re not involving ourselves in this because this is something we cannot afford to meddle in.’

Ahadi exhales out heavily, eyes narrowed as he studies Sk’jin.

‘I know you say we always have to pay a price- that we need to be aware of what we’re paying for and with what,’ Ahadi states. ‘But I have seen you make countless decisions and perform countless actions that goes against what you say!’

‘Don’t fucking tell me about my own decisions-’

‘-you keep yourself in this heightened position- as though you know everything, and yeah maybe you do,’ Ahadi shrugs, brown eyes flaring. ‘You’ve lived longer than all of us- I can see why you would think the way you do- see things the way you do-’

‘-because I know-’

‘I’m not saying you don’t!’ Ahadi hisses back. ‘I am saying that it’s stopping you from doing what you could do- you claim you know all of these things, you have the answer and prediction for everything that could possibly take place- yet you never use it to your advantage. You just let it be- and for what? You claim the crew is loyal to the ship- to the Bridge, the code- it’s bullshit- they’re loyal to you- do you know why I’m so sure of this? Because I’m loyal to you!’

Sk’jin takes a physical step back.

‘I see the decisions you make, and yes, they’re for the benefit of the ship, for the Beings here. You’re more than just an asset needed for this ship- you said you were the best thing for this ship but you aren’t,’ Ahadi spits out. ‘If we were really discussing who is the most important it’s Ti- or Nambike, but the crew are not loyal to them- they’re loyal to you-’

‘Did you know that the Venture Unit is in league with the Alliance- that they profit off of the cruelty and oppression the Alliance weaves throughout the Universe?’ Sk’jin demands. ‘I don’t know what you were told, but that’s the hard truth. And we’re not going anywhere near that because the Alliance is bigger than you can imagine- there are things bigger than just hoping to do the right thing. So yeah- I want consequential meaning to motivate me to action- because if I do take action, I need to account for the other lives I might be altering as a result of my involvement- of our involvement. I need to account everyone’s lives involved here- and how each of them are going to affect other lives- so no. I am not going anywhere near here. Bjemli is free to do as he pleases and he knows this. Because he respects the code- “we do not challenge anything larger than us”.’

‘So will you tell him face-to-face-’

‘I already did and I will. Again,’ Sk’jin cuts across.

‘You’re being a coward-’

‘That’s not going to work,’ Sk’jin snaps. ‘You do not live life thinking about bravery, about courage, about what’s good or bad, what’s ethically correct or not- you think about survival.’
'That’s quite the saying to live by,’ Ahadi retorts, ‘-is that how your people survived-!’

Sk’jin doesn’t even have to touch Ahadi.

The Khol’isa lengthens suddenly, his entire being emanating heat and his features pulling. A bright liquid flame seems to erupt around his horns and his eyes are glaring red. Ahadi is pressed to the wall but he’s not looking away.

No, he’s challenging Sk’jin’s anger head on, his own eyes bright and furious.

‘Do not-’ Sk’jin hisses, voice layered and low-pitched. ‘-speak of it as though you were there.’

‘Captain.’ Ti says in a low warning tone behind him.

Sk’jin takes a step back, returning to normal and Ahadi slips down the wall a little from the lack of pressure pushing him. Sk’jin takes a careful and deep breath, sweeping his hair back around his horns that still felt hot to the touch even under his own skin.

‘Tone down the hero-complex,’ Sk’jin says simply. ‘It’ll get you killed.’

Ahadi walks out without another word.

‘I normally agree with you,’ Ti begins and Sk’jin already doesn’t want to hear it.

‘Do you think I was too harsh?’

‘Yes,’ Ti shrugs and adds, ‘Besides, he doesn’t want to be a hero- sure he’s a little naïve, and just because he wants to see something good done, just because he wants to see something change for the better, doesn’t mean he’s an idiot- it doesn’t mean he’s not realistic. He is realistic- he’s young and a little rash but he’s smart. He knows what he’s going. He’s not just an idiot.’

‘I’m not saying he’s an idiot-’

‘-well you’re making him feel like one. You do realize what you’re doing right?’ Ti raises an eyebrow. ‘You’re in denial. And this is how you’re handling it. You’re pushing him away.’

‘This has nothing to do with how I feel about him-’

‘But it does,’ Ti shrugs dismissively. ‘I know how you feel about the Alliance- but this is Bjegli we’re talking about. Stop thinking out of your ass for a moment and go cool down.’

‘I don’t think-‘

‘I said go cool down, fucking Spaces your eyes are still glaring,’ she squints looking away.

Sk’jin curses and storms out.

He doesn’t remember the last time he was this upset. He ends up pacing for hours, his mind abuzz with thoughts that basically spell out !????????????????????????????!!!!!!! with a lot of anger. He only stops when he gets a cramp on one leg and he instead ends up limping aggressively out of the Engines Room, grimacing in greeting at his crew who know when to keep their distance from their Captain. This in turn makes Sk’jin mad, and he huffs off. He’s thinking of maybe cooking something, angrily mumbling ingredients under his breath when he nearly trips over Ilya.

‘Jin!’
‘Spaces— didn’t see y’there,’ Sk’jin grumbles as he rights himself before he looks down at the young carefully. ‘What are you doing down here?’

‘I am not down here, I’m in the middle of being here, I am headed up!’

Children had so much cheek these days. It almost brings a smile on Sk’jin’s face. But he masks his anger for a moment, not wanting to mar anything for the young Ožkan.

‘…right— so why are you in the middle of being here? Shouldn’t you be in bed?’ Sk’jin asks sternly, tapping his foot.

‘I will! But I’m going for my secret meeting!’ he whispers in a conspiring tone.

Sk’jin crouches down, lowering his tone as well.

‘A secret! In my ship?’ Sk’jin pretends to be aghast. ‘Whatever do you do?’

‘It’s a secret!’ Ilya giggles. ‘Just between me, and Ahadi!’

‘Is that so?’ Sk’jin’s interest perks up.

‘Yeah!’

‘Well then— run along and make sure you get back to your mother,’ Sk’jin nods down the hall. ‘And be more quiet if it’s a secret!’

Ilya nods obediently and salutes Sk’jin before clopping off just as noisily.

Naturally, Sk’jin follows.

‘You’re late,’ Ahadi scolds at once.

Ilya giggles as he clops faster and there’s a grunt of a sound. As though Ilya threw himself at the Mwenzini, giggling in the process.

‘I ran into Jin! Like really ran into him!’

‘Oh?’

‘Yeah! And I told him I had a secret meeting to attend!’

‘Is that so?’

And Sk’jin already knows that Ahadi knows he’s there. But he doesn’t go away. Instead he stays and continues to listen.

‘Hm! Do you like horns?’

‘I think your horns are cool and pretty.’

‘Not as pretty as Jin’s,’ Ilya says in a matter of fact tone. ‘But almost there.’

‘Almost?’ Sk’jin can hear laughter in Ahadi’s tone.

‘Yeah! I’ll beat him when I grow older and become captain!’

‘Wow! That’s so cool! You’ll be a great captain,’ Ahadi laughs.
’I’ll be better than Jin!’

’How will you be better than Jin?’ Ahadi asks.

’Anyone can sleep anytime they want,’ Ilya replies gravely. ‘And I will buy a big moon!’

’Why a moon?’

’So that my mum has a house to live in.’

’Can I come live in that house too?’

’Don’t you have a house?’

’This is my house- but I think I want another one too.’

Sk’jin doesn’t know why he suddenly wants to cry.

Ahadi knew of his reality, of the many realities that existed within the Universe.

And just because one was different from the other, didn’t mean it wasn’t as real- or as important.

Just because Ahadi didn’t suffer through the oppression of his people didn’t mean he didn’t know how it felt. It didn’t mean he never saw how broken his people became- it meant he could see the potential for them to heal, and to create a better future, a stronger growth, a safe place for those who would come later.

Just because he didn’t see the gritty dirty aspects of the Venture Unit didn’t mean he didn’t know enough to understand how so many aspects of the Universe worked. It didn’t mean it discredited his thoughts and ideas.

And just because he still saw hope, and still saw good, and could still see a possibility in the future, where a better reality could exist, didn’t mean he wasn’t aware of what he would have to pay in order to see it through.

The only difference between their way of thinking was that Ahadi held on to the idea of a home, whereas Sk’jin long abandoned his, trapped in neon nightmares.

’We’re going to Orvan,’ Sk’jin states as he walks into the Bridge a few hours later. ‘Let’s see what we can do eh?’

The Bridge falls into silence.

’The Alliance has taken a lot from all of us in here. Be it directly or through what we have seen or heard. While we cannot change what has been done, or cannot hope to alter much within our current capacities, we can and will create a way to return Bjegli to his family, and in turn free those we can.’ Sk’jin leans against the back of his seat, pushing back his hair elegantly. ‘For anyone who doesn’t wish to participate, as usual I will not force you, for those who choose to stay, thank you.’

’The Alliance as in the Isbahaysiga Alliance?’ Nambike asks carefully.

’Are there any other Alliances that we know of?’ Sk’jin winks.

Ahadi simply strides forward, away from his station and practically lifts Sk’jin into the air with the force of his embrace. Sk’jin can’t help but squeak in surprise, and to his extreme chagrin, discovers that he’s blushing. The entire Bridge erupts in cheer and to Sk’jin’s surprise, the enthusiasm
mounts. Sk’jin is embraced by a majority of the Bridge crew and he doesn’t know how to feel.

He knows that his crew aren’t idiots. That they well understood what all of this could trigger. How no matter how much they plan everything, they would meet instances where they would have no control over any of the things they encounter. He knows each and every single Being in there, what steps they took, what steps they were forced to make, and what steps they couldn’t take, to get here.

‘My criminal record is going to have its own individual database at this point,’ Sk’jin grumbles though he’s smiling as Nambike, in a rare display of affection, hugs him. Then true to her fashion, she punches Sk’jin (he’d been expecting it, so he’s not quite winded as her fist meets his side) playfully.

‘Eh- you enjoy it,’ Nambike shrugs with a grin as she walks out of the Bridge, clearly to alert her platoon. Sk’jin doesn’t know how to handle the looks of excitement or of what he used to call “naïve protagonist expression” on the faces of his crew. So he quietly exits the Bridge instead.

He’s thinking of maybe taking a bath- he wasn’t exactly at his best, not having performed his daily cosmetic and hygienic routine. But he’s stopped by familiar footsteps hurrying behind him, and a pair of arms enveloping him into a hug that said more than words could.

‘If I get killed or arrested I’m beating your ass into a black-hole,’ Sk’jin manages to say, patting Ahadi’s arms around him, eyes threatening to close. This was a risky decision; too risky, in fact. And it’s stupid because Sk’jin can predict this- he can predict it down to the point where everything would go wrong- how everyone would react- and how much they would have to pay, how much they would have to lose. But with the sound of cheer from the Bridge behind him, and the warmth pressed to his back, the very notion of worry completely fades out.

And Sk’jin would be angry at himself, but he can’t.

‘That won’t happen.’ Ahadi grins, his smile too close to Sk’jin’s.

‘Oh yeah? What makes you think so?’ Sk’jin can’t even attempt to be flirty at this moment because he’s suddenly too caught up, too aware-

‘Because I know you,’ Ahadi whispers quietly, like it’s a secret.

And he’s right.

They discover more than they bargained for in Orvan and though Sk’jin doesn’t get killed or caught, he does obtain a few other notes to his criminal record. A Class 2 Arson, a Class 3 attempted murder, and a Class 2 defamation of the Prime Minister of the Orvan State of Tui.

But Sk’jin is also proven right.

Because they were unable to do what they originally set out to do.

Ahadi’s head is lowered, helping Sk’jin with the burn on his arm from the fire the latter had started as a means of escaping from the burning Tui parliament house.

‘It’s not your fault. Some things aren’t meant to work out,’ Sk’jin tells him gently. ‘None of us were caught, none of us died. And Bjegli stayed behind out of his own volition. He made his own decision.’

‘But they weren’t there.’
‘No. But what’s left now is to respect Bjegli’s decision.’

‘You’re not surprised.’

‘I’m not.’

‘Because you knew this would happen?’

‘I cannot always know what’s going to happen- nothing we do can ever be predicted accurately,’ Sk’jin tells him honestly.

‘But you knew.’

Sk’jin nods.

‘Why?’

Sk’jin chuckles.

‘I’m not a hero, or a protagonist.’ Sk’jin studies the burn on his forearm. It was healing well enough. ‘I am just living- not even aiming to do good, just simply out of selfishness and the need to know more. I do what I want to do, because it’s what I want to do. Nothing more, nothing less.’

Ahadi presses his lips together in a thin line. Even like this his dimples show. Patting him on the cheek, Sk’jin jumps off of the Medical Bed.

‘But that’s not you.’

Sk’jin laughs before leaning up to kiss the Mwenzini on his cheek, poking at where he knew his dimples were. Sk’jin doesn’t want to sound cliché but it is what it is.

‘You don’t know me.’

‘I do,’ Ahadi says earnestly. ‘And I will make you see it.’

‘See what?’

Ahadi smiles softly, looking down briefly as he says, ‘You.’

It’s always been described as the colour for passion.

For lust.

For love.

But Sk’jin doesn’t see it that way. And it’s definitely not what he sees either.

Instead it is gone. The bleeding edges of his vision, itching its way to paint his sight in the nightmarish hues of the Bloodmoon. It ebbs away into something else.

Something calm.
And it’s not as though Sk’jin finds himself “falling in love” or slipping into some fuzzy state of near delirious giddiness. He doesn’t suddenly look at Ahadi and see a new light. He doesn’t look at the Mwenzini and come to a sudden state of realization.

And even when Ahadi corners him in his own room, his expression unfathomable and his words quiet, Sk’jin still feels that calm.

‘Are…are you just toying with me?’ he asks carefully.

‘I’m not,’ Sk’jin replies. ‘You would know if I was.’

‘Would I?’

Sk’jin falls backwards with a groan. His back making popping sounds. He pats the bed next to him and Ahadi leans back, their arms brushing against each other’s.

‘I know why you’re here,’ Sk’jin states simply. ‘The real reason- not just the “internship”.’

Ahadi has greatly improved in his reactions and skills- either that or he’s already suspected Sk’jin to know.

‘If you did, why didn’t you drop me?’

‘At first I thought it’d be interesting to see,’ Sk’jin confesses. ‘I thought it’d be interesting to see the way you handled it, to see what you might see- knowledge, understanding, information- all of these are the same thing- the same idea basically, just seen through a different perspective. This perception, filtered through a Being, is what creates variations in thoughts, it’s what creates variety of information- it allows me to breakdown the data, and predict how it will be handled.’

‘So- I was just a study?’

‘Something like that,’ Sk’jin replies honestly. ‘But…well, you’re here now. You haven’t left, I haven’t kicked you out.’

Ahadi chuckles under his breath.

‘I know you know,’ he says quietly. ‘I know that you were trying to figure it out. It was probably Ti wasn’t it?’

Sk’jin exhales out slowly.

‘Yeah.’

‘So you weren’t playing with me?’

Sk’jin turns his head to find that Ahadi is already watching him. He looks away for a moment before rolling over to his side.

‘I…-‘ Sk’jin doesn’t know how to say any of this.

‘Can I kiss you?’

Sk’jin gawks for a moment, and he doesn’t know why he’s nodding.

Ahadi leans in and Sk’jin is caught mid-inhale, their lips pressing soft yet firm. Ahadi’s eyes are curious, hopeful, and expectant.
He’s asking a question, and despite not knowing the answer, Sk’jin responds with his lips.

Sk’jin is shocked at the way he completely loses his sense of self.

‘Wait-‘ Sk’jin doesn’t even push the Mwenzini away but Ahadi is quick to sit up, putting space between them.

‘I’m not-‘ Sk’jin can’t believe that he’s stammering. He sits up as well, dizzy with the warmth he was feeling, the way his body tingled pleasantly and for a shockingly clear moment, his vision is clear and untainted. ‘I uh-‘

Ahadi just smiles, leaning his cheek against Sk’jin’s- a gentle kiss of warmth, skin, and breath.

‘Yeah, I know,’ he smiles. ‘I’m sorry for making you uncomfortable.’

‘It’s- it’s not that-‘ Sk’jin can’t believe he’s stammering. Ahadi just smiles, nodding in understanding.

Sk’jin has never felt romantic interest in Beings- he’s never felt physical attraction despite knowing how to draw physical attraction. Despite knowing how other Beings were attracted to him. He knew what to do, how to behave, which postures to execute, to draw the attention of any and every one. He’s never met another Khol’isa outside of their ruined planet, so he doesn’t know how it was for them. It was never a thing Sk’jin felt an inclination for.

And it’s not as though he’s never experienced it. He has. But Sk’jin came to realize that it gave him nothing, and he felt nothing. Instead after a while, he felt wrong – and that was certainly not what he wanted. But kissing felt nice- and it wasn’t in the same sense or with the same intention as most would initiate or seek it. He could fake it, if needed. He could pretend to imitate lust because that was easy- because lust is self-generated and most Beings were too wrapped up in their own lust to determine whether or not it was consensual or even reciprocated by the other party.

Sk’jin kisses in trust- in a way that represented hope, patience, and care.

And it’s never out of lust or love.

When Sk’jin looks at Ahadi, he doesn’t feel the blushing rose of “first love”, he doesn’t see the flares of an all-consuming passion.

What he sees are warm brown eyes, open and trusting, still inexperienced and untainted by the decay of hope and expectation. Ahadi was so young, yet so old- his presence mutes the tint in Sk’jin’s vision. Cooling it down to a softened and pleasant desaturation.

‘I know,’ Ahadi says again quietly before chuckling a little, ‘And by the way, you’re going to have to do better than that if you really want to cause the effect you want.’

‘Effect?’

‘The whole sexy-seduction thing,’ Ahadi grins, his dimples making an appearance. ‘It’s…eh.’

‘The fuck does that mean-‘ Sk’jin starts throwing hands.

‘-it feels a little too trash-novel like!’ Ahadi ducks Sk’jin jabs with a laugh, falling back into the bed. Sk’jin crawls next to him, keeping himself elevated on his forearms.

‘Are you saying I’m too dramatic? It’s always worked,’ Sk’jin can feel his ears burning.
‘I don’t think you have to do anything more,’ Ahadi shrugs.

‘Yeah well- it worked on you,’ Sk’jin deadpans.

‘I knew you were trying to test and see how I felt. It was an act,’ Ahadi shrugs. ‘It was uncomfortable but funny. Besides, that’s not why… why I chose to come here.’

Sk’jin faceplants on the bed, not sure where to look.

‘Why are you here?’ Sk’jin can’t help himself from asking, voice muffled.

He feels a hand brushing through his hair, fingers carefully drawing over the outline of his horns. Sk’jin turns his head around and he can’t read the expression in Ahadi’s eyes.

‘Because you are you.’

*

Nothing changes really. Except sometimes Sk’jin finds himself curled around Ahadi in the Bridge, the Mwenzini dozing off against his shoulder. Sometimes he’ll carefully card through his hair, smiling in greeting as warm brown eyes blink sleepily at him. Sometimes he’ll feel a kiss on his cheek and Sk’jin catches a playful wink sent in his direction as the Mwenzini lopes off.

Sometimes Sk’jin catches Ahadi watching him, his expression beyond fond- beyond loyal, beyond anything Sk’jin has ever witnessed.

And he wishes he could give that to him, return the same.

‘You don’t have to,’ Ahadi looks disturbed when one day Sk’jin confesses as much. ‘I’m not waiting for you to do any of these- I’m not expecting anything. I just…’ he takes Sk’jin’s hand in his. ‘I am so honoured- that you trust me. That I am here, with you. You are you, and all of who you are, is what I respect, and I cherish.’

Sk’jin suddenly feels incredibly young and foolish- he feels as though he’s part of the trash-romance novels Ti secretly loved to read.

‘And you are who you are and you want things- need things- I can’t give those to you-’ Sk’jin tries. ‘I can’t even love Beings the way you’re supposed to-

‘-because it’s not yours to give,’ Ahadi stops him, making his way to kneel by his feet and taking both his hands between his darker ones. ‘Sk’jin, I meant it- who you are, is all of you. You are whole and complete- and just because there are others who are different than you, doesn’t make you incomplete- doesn’t mean I think you’re incomplete.’

‘You’re incredibly woke for someone who couldn’t accept that fact that the Venture Unit funded the Alliance.’

Ahadi gives him a really? look before he bursts out into laughter.

‘Trust me on this,’ Ahadi gives him his favorite smile- where both his dimples could be seen. Sk’jin removes his hands from Ahadi’s and carefully cups his face.
And maybe it was a mistake, because Sk’jin does trust him.

The Venture Unit comes around, poking about until Sk’jin corners one of the Division Heads and his bodyguards in an eatery in the Ghandhar System.

‘What is it.’ Sk’jin demands, not sparing his usual smile and greeting on the Division Head. The Head is gaping at him, drink dribbling out of his mouth unattractively as he tries not to jump in fright at having Sk’jin suddenly seated on the table next to him.

‘Oh uh-‘

‘Hello!’ Ahadi greets as he walks in, waving a hand.

The Division Head is trying his best to recover but Ahadi doesn’t give him a chance.

‘Here is my final report, as well as my formal letter of resignation,’ he says politely.

‘And adding to that I would like to say, again, that no, I don’t want to open my network to you,’ Sk’jin smiles beatifically for a second before getting up with a flourish and exiting the place as magnificently as he had entered it.

Ahadi grins at him, sun warm on his tanned skin, his eyes twinkling. Sk’jin feels as though they were children running about the market but he doesn’t care. Or at least he tries not to.

Nothing changes inside the ship either. Everyone had long accepted Ahadi and there wasn’t even a process of initiation. He was just there. And it made perfect sense.

But Sk’jin can’t enjoy it for too long. Because it was starting to get difficult to differentiate the nightmares from reality. Increasingly so.

And as usual Sk’jin pressed on, hoping that he’d be able to will it away.

‘You never learn,’ Nambike snorts when Sk’jin groans, rubbing at the base of his horns where they throbbed in pain. ‘It happens, without fail, like clockwork and you always freak out and wonder if you’re unwell. You’ve never been sick and yet you insist on getting every treatment from the medics.’

‘Don’t attack me like this on my own fuckin’ ship.’ Sk’jin gratefully accepts the pain-killer from Dariga who is also chuckling under his breath. ‘I’ll kick you out.’

‘With what, your fevered ass?’ Nambike scoffs.

‘Ahadi they’re being mean!’ Sk’jin whines at the Mwenzini who, having never experienced Sk’jin’s autophagocytosis, was in a sort of stunned state of research. Never has Sk’jin seen anyone more intrigued and horrified at the same time when he explained the general process.

‘You basically degenerate back into a cell?’

‘I guess you could say that it’s my-‘

‘-oh Spaces don’t-‘

‘-cell-ing point!’

Ahadi looks up from the screen he was perusing, Ilya seated on his shoulders.
‘I mean- I guess most would agree that you do have a hot ass-‘

‘There are *children present-*‘

‘I most certainly did not mean it in that way-‘

‘Can you and your boyfriend not do this here-‘

‘NOT MY BOYFRIEND-‘

But within a few days Sk’jin can barely stand without wanting to collapse so he guesses it’s not the best idea to prolong this any longer than he should and so gets ready. And by getting ready meaning he finally uses his bed for its intended purpose.

To go to sleep.

Or at least, what the Khol’isa understood as sleep.

With some difficulty Sk’jin prepares himself for the inevitable autophagocytosis. Even his hair was falling in thick chunks and he could barely stand to look at himself. And as usual, Nambike is there to help him out. But this time Ahadi is there as well- and so is Ilya.

‘I’ll be here,’ Ahadi teases, ‘A little older, but then again, not as old as you-!’ he dodges Sk’jin’s weak kick.

Ilya grins at them from the doorway.

‘Right,’ Sk’jin can feel the reddish burn of fever covering his eyes and he doesn’t want to remember Ahadi like this. Doesn’t want the Bloodmoon to taint the warm brown of his eyes into something else. ‘I’ll see you guys soon- don’t fuck up. If I wake up in prison I’ll kill all of you.’

Ilya makes a sad face, innocence and confusion on his face.

‘Oh Spaces,’ Nambike huffs out, walking over to the young Ožkan with a grimace aimed at Sk’jin. ‘Go get your melting ass fixed already- no need to scar innocent eyes.’

‘Yeah, love you too darlin’,’ Sk’jin waves, leaning back into his bedding.

She flips him off, not even looking back.

‘You’re nervous,’ he remarks, sitting on the side of the bed.

‘Yeah well,’ Sk’jin removes his robes and carefully folds it over the side of his chair. ‘A lot can happen- be it in a second, a minute- an hour. Or absolutely nothing will happen.’

‘What are you more afraid of?’

Sk’jin brushes back his thin hair, nervously feeling the base of his horns.

‘It’s the permanence of waiting,’ Sk’jin looks over at the Mwenzini. ‘That moment of agitation, anticipation- just stretched on.’

‘Is that how it is when you sleep?’

Sk’jin nods and also shrugs.
‘It’s hard to explain really.’
They stay in silence for a while.

‘I’ll miss you.’

‘It’ll be like, 2 sols tops,’ Sk’jin grins. He’s still unable to read the look in his eyes.

Ahadi carefully brushes back his hair, fingers lingering around the smooth texture of his horns. It feels nice, soothing and relaxing.

‘You’re gonna keep growing your hair right?’ Sk’jin teases, reaching up to take his hand.

‘Oh yeah,’ he grins looking back at Sk’jin, his gaze unwavering and trusting. ‘Make you swoon at the sight of my hair when you get back.’

Sk’jin laughs though it’s heavy in his chest. Ahadi looks worried.

‘I swear- get the fuck out, it’s normal,’ Sk’jin waves him off with a roll of his eyes despite being instantly nauseous in the process.

Ahadi just smiles, dimples forming deep on his cheeks before he leans in a little before he seems to reconsider and backs away.

‘I would like a goodnight kiss though,’ Sk’jin quips, attempting a wink.

Ahadi shakes his head, laughing low under his breath before he leans all the way in.

The lights overhead blocks Sk’jin from seeing Ahadi’s expression before their lips touch. Sk’jin only sees the familiar outline of the Mwenzini but he doesn’t have to see him to know that he’s smiling. He can feel it against his lips and it makes Sk’jin smile.

When Ahadi pulls back he is smiling down at Sk’jin with that same fondness, laced a little with exasperation and an expression Sk’jin isn’t entirely sure how to label. Instead he reaches up to feel at his dimples with a fond chuckle and pushes him off with a flick on his forehead.

‘I’ll see you when I’m beautiful again,’ Sk’jin laughs as Ahadi gets up.

‘Is that your way of getting me to tell you that you’re always beautiful?’ Ahadi asks, laughing as he looks back.

‘Is it working?’ Sk’jin has never heard Ahadi compliment him on his looks.

*Ever.*

Ahadi stands by the doorway, dimpled smile on place, shaking his head.

‘You’re gonna have to work harder than that Captain, I have a very specific aesthetic.’

Sk’jin manages to lift a finger at him before the door slides shut.

Sk’jin continues to laugh under his breath as the room is slowly bathed in darkness. All of the power directed towards the room is cut off and slowly the air starts thinning. Sk’jin understands why some might find it creepy seeing as Sk’jin had to literally die for this process to take place, but it’s as easy as…well,- as easy as falling asleep.
It’s not painful- at least not for the Khol’isa. They knew pain all too well. Besides, it wasn’t as though he wasn’t already dying.

Every other time he’s done this, it’s never been like this. And by this, Sk’jin isn’t entirely sure what he means by it either. It was just different. As though this time, when he woke up, things would be different.

And he’s not sure if it’s the whole dying thing getting to his head but there’s a sort of half-formed but very determined notion that grips his mind as the feverish pitch of his entire being rises up several knots. Maybe the Venture Unit were successful in their attempt to influence Sk’jin- or maybe this was always meant to be. No living thing can exist and not evolve- not be subjected to change.

And maybe this was Sk’jin’s change.

‘I-I promise-,’ Sk’jin mumbles out loud. ‘I promise you,- that I’ll make everything right again when I come back. I’ll even be the fuckin’ hero if that’s what’s needed.’

He exhales slowly, closing his eyes and giving himself into the burn of the fever that burns from within his very soul. Sk’jin slips into the reddish haze of his mind, his body stilling and his mind slipping until a familiar colour overwhelms him.

It is the heat of a burn, the burn of a screaming throat, the silent scream of a dying sun, the death of the familiar warmth of their skin.

It is the fragrance of something blossoming under the summer sun, the flavour of giddy laughter under a neon sign-post, the reflection of a bonfire late at night.

It is the softness of their lips against yours, hesitance but desperate as they try to convey what their words can’t.

It is the edge of the shadows that crawl out from under their hand, reaching out to you, knowing that you cannot hold on.

It is the broken smile on an ashen face, pain and loss etched liked tattoos on their skin.

It is their absence; their pulse no longer beating against yours, the music of their heart silenced and hollow.

It is the price paid; doubled tripled. Heavy and ever growing.

It is pain; bitter and ever gnawing.

It is anger; destructive and purifying.

It is death; ever-lurking and drawing.

The glare of the Bloodmoon erupts around him in full strength and Sk’jin steps foot inside Khol’isa again.

But unlike before, he knows that when he wakes up from this ancient nightmare, he would see them again. And when he returns, he would make everything right.

*After all, Sk’jin thinks, his Being dissipating and turning to ash, the Khol’isa never break their promises.*
‘And I’ll miss you too.’

It’s early in the morning.

But then again. It always is early here.

A tidal-locked planet only gave you so much option in term of weather.

Yoongi sits up, his back sore and cold. But at least he’s not wet or damp. Trying to sleep while your mattress is wet was the grossest and most depressing thing you could experience.

Exiting the tent, Yoongi scans his surroundings and immediately notices Jimin by the side of the encampment, facing a clearing that overlooked a valley below.

Jimin barely slept, staying up and only lightly dozing off. Yoongi notices how it’s normally with him being around and tries not to dwell on it too much. It was cold this morning, and Jimin was still only dressed in the clothes they had found him in. stepping back into his tent, Yoongi grabs a blanket and makes his way towards Jimin.

He carefully touches Jimin on his arm, hoping not to alarm him. Jimin doesn’t start, only looking mildly surprised.

There’s a deep emotion in his eyes- one of nostalgia, of longing.

‘It’s cold,’ Yoongi says, unintentionally rather gruffly. Jimin’s expression changes to one of
amused confusion. Yoongi pretends to shiver and points at the blanket again. Jimin smiles, clearly in thanks and wraps the blanket around himself in a secure manner.

‘Hey sunshine,’ Yoongi says as he sits next to Jimin.

‘Hei s-sunshhrine?’ Jimin gives him a small wave, something he picked up no doubt from observing them all.

It makes Yoongi smile and he shakes his head.

‘Sunshine,’ he says, pointing at Jimin. And then back to himself, ‘Yoongi.’

Jimin shakes his head, expression confused as though wondering how thick could Yoongi be not to get his name till now.

‘Jimin,’ he points at himself and then at Yoongi, ‘Yoongi.’

Pretending to be serious, Yoongi repeats: ‘Sunshine.’

But before Jimin can argue him again Yoongi points at him and gives Jimin a questioning look. Jimin gives him a narrow eyed look of confusion before slowly saying, ‘Amic?’

Yoongi nods, pointing and says, ‘Mickey.’

Jimin is beyond confused. But then Yoongi carefully breaks down the names and gives him the nicknames- some not so flattering or meaningful, while others were plays on their names. It takes a moment but Yoongi sees the way Jimin’s eyes light up. Making a sound of realization Jimin nods enthusiastically.

‘Sunshine.’ Yoongi feels quite accomplished.

‘S-sunshine,’ Jimin points at himself.

Yoongi nods and gives him a lopsided grin.

‘That you are.’

Amic laughs loudly from the side.

‘Fucking Spaces, you’re so gone,’ he teases.

Yoongi flips him a finger casually, setting him off even more.

Jimin nudges him, a look of confusion in his eyes. He repeats his question slowly but Yoongi doesn’t understand. So instead he hands him the screen, hoping Jimin would be able to illustrate his question to him. But before he can, a sharp voice rings out.

‘Thua?’

There’s clear alarm and confusion in her voice and Yoongi reacts before he can think, standing up. Beside him, Jimin does the same.

‘What is it?’

‘Thua’s missing.’ Amic tells him at once, worry etched across his features.
‘What?!’

Yoongi makes his way back towards the main encampment. Thua’s tent was right next to his own but it’s empty.

‘Did no one see him?’ he asks. But everyone is too confused to respond.

He couldn’t have just vanished without anyone having seen him. This made no sense.

‘Run scans to detect motion,’ she orders immediately. ‘Bring in our perimeter and let’s isolate the-‘

‘-guys bring it in tighter we need to make our reading smaller so we can detect Thua if he’s nearby!’

Yoongi quickly looks around for Jimin, to bring him closer when he notices how strangely still he was. It was as though he were frozen.

‘Jimin?’

He doesn’t seem to hear Yoongi, his posture statue-like, his attention riveted.

‘Sunshine?’ Yoongi reaches over and the moment he touches Jimin the latter collapses. Yoongi is quick to catch him, holding him upright immediately while scanning the forest. There was nothing there.

‘Hey- what’s wrong-‘

‘I don’t know but-‘ Yoongi’s chest constricts as Jimin pales rapidly, eyes rolling back momentarily before he’s greeted with the twin eclipses. Jimin’s eyes are clear and bright- but they’re not looking at Yoongi.

‘Sunshine? Jimin? Hey look at me for a bit yeah?’ Yoongi says urgently, holding Jimin securely against his chest with one arm while the other secured a TeorSer.

‘What’s going on-‘

Yoongi sees something red, something strangely bright growing in the reflection on Jimin’s eyes and his head tilts up before he can stop himself.

The canopy above was normally leaf strewn with branches weaving in and out. But this time it’s different.

Yoongi’s blood freezes over and his entire body is suddenly rooted to the ground. He can’t move, can’t speak.

Yoongi feels as though he were looking Death straight in the eye.

And everything burns red.
Yoongi wakes up feeling oddly light and disconnected.

But his chest feels incredibly heavy. Water clogged almost, yet his breath comes to him freely.

The ship is humming lightly but they were not flying. There’s something different in the air- an openness and movement that is distinctly natural. A differentiation that is stark to Yoongi for some reason.

While he felt rather normal save for the strange heaviness, Yoongi realizes that he’s shivering.

He’s wearing his own clothes, though the additional weapon holders and straps have been removed. His feet are bare as well but he’s wearing oddly colourful socks. Taeh’yung’s, Yoongi guesses.

He doesn’t make a sound as he walks out of the Medical Bay. He’s about to head upwards to his Cabin to change or maybe catch up on what’s happened so far with anyone who was awake when he hears soft humming.

His feet are carrying him without his say and Yoongi is in the Hangar instead. The Spardyti is parked outside, leaving the rest of the Hangar spacious and free. The gateway is partially open and a soft cool light floods in.

Sk’jin’s warning about the planet’s not too friendly wildlife comes to mind but Jimin was outside, and Yoongi has to go to him.

Ducking under the gateway Yoongi finds himself in the misty clearing outside, the ramp lowered and glistening with morning dew. The trees look different- less strange, but also very new. Yoongi spots slow sleepy movements beyond the foliage- great hulking shapes move around slowly and weave through the trees just beyond the edge of the clearing. At first glance Yoongi thinks they’re just grazing, but the beasts are swaying back and forth, as though caught in a trance.

And Yoongi knows why.

Jimin is standing in the middle of the clearing, his back to Yoongi’s. He’s humming and it’s as though the entire clearing, the jungle, the beasts, the very soil of this planet, are riveted with Jimin’s song. Yoongi finds himself feet from Jimin.

The sun is rising far ahead and Yoongi anticipates its warmth.

Slowly, Yoongi takes Jimin’s hand in his. Jimin doesn’t look away from the sunrise. Though he has a small smile on his face and steps closer to Yoongi.

‘It’s cold- that’s what I said to you right?’ Yoongi says quietly.
Jimin doesn’t reply, only squeezing his hand tighter.

‘I remember a little- some small thing here and there. And I think it will come back to me slowly- who I was, what I was.’ Yoongi breathes out slowly.

‘Do you think you could tell me who I was?’ Yoongi’s words are impossibly quiet. ‘But I don’t know if I want to remember who I was.’

The sun breaks through the mist and the temperature starts to change noticeably. There’s a hum in the air of insects and other creatures stirring awake as the sun rose higher, shaken from their stupor induced by Jimin’s voice.

‘Will that make a difference? Because I don’t know who I am now. Can I still be me, without knowing who I was?’ Yoongi asks. ‘Or am I not me- and am I just the reflection?’

Jimin looks away, the warmth of the sun in his eyes and Yoongi feels warm. Jimin reaches up to press his hands against his temples, the warmth of his gaze blossoming on Yoongi’s skin and the Human leans into his touch.

Jimin tilts his head to the side, as though considering Yoongi carefully.

‘You,’ he says quietly.

‘Me?’

Jimin smiles, gently patting his cheeks and nods. ‘You.’

‘I only see myself when I look at the mirror.’ Yoongi says quietly.

‘Tell me Yoongi, how many flowers can you see from there?’

Twin eclipses, bright and beautiful- hypnotic and familiar.

‘How many Yoongi’s do you see?’

Namjoon carefully looks over Yoongi who appears the same as usual. He wasn’t in pain or any discomfort, and he hadn’t somehow woken up with centuries old memory or information regarding any of the things he had done or seen in the past. He was just…about the same.
Sk’jin seemed subdued, unwilling to leave the ship and all for leaving it at once. Namjoon had left with Taeh’yung to return once more into the crashed ship, hoping the Zhak’gri would have something else to add. But Taeh’yung had simply run about, opening old cabinets and doors, talking loudly and walking noisily. He did however, pause a while to stare up the empty glass chambers that both Jimin and Sk’jin had been staring at too. Taeh’yung actually climbs up to the highest one, staring with unblinking eyes.

Then it’s all fine and he comes down, humming brightly under his breath before nagging Namjoon to go back.

It felt indescribably odd.

That something Namjoon had planned, or something he was looking for, actually came to fruition and produced a result.

It felt wrong, because nothing has gone right since day 1 of this mission and Namjoon doesn’t know how to handle any of this.

Jimin is carefully speaking into the screen, with Taeh’yung providing translation. They’d be able to create a somewhat accurate translation method if the two input Jimin’s language accurately. It would make for easier communication and hopefully wider understanding of each other in general. But then again, despite all speaking the Standard, Namjoon can’t say the rest of the had the best communication skills.

‘What do we do next?’ Sk’jin asks from where he’s seated, feet up and basking under the sunlight that streamed in from the windows overhead the Bridge. Yoongi sits next to Jimin, though he’s facing them, expression as blank as ever.

Namjoon can’t help but look out over at the cockpit and miss the familiar head of brown hair that provided him with the stability he hadn’t realized had supported him.

‘We fly to Grisial of course- we continue on with our plan. We study this,’ Namjoon nods at the cell sitting on top of the Navigator’s Table. Jimin’s initial explanation had been the only one he provided and it was all he would say about it, claiming that was all there was to it. Normally Sk’jin would make a comment about how he didn’t trust Jimin’s statement but the Khol’isa hadn’t said anything.

‘And see what it can show us.’

Sk’jin nods at that, his mind clearly elsewhere.

‘Could we use it.’ Yoongi asks unexpectedly.

‘Use what?’ Sk’jin asks, looking away from the sky above.

‘This planet was hidden from the rest of the Known Universe as a result of this technology. Could we cover our movements by facilitating this technology into our own?’

Namjoon notices how Sk’jin glances over him, a look in his expression that says he’s doing that thing again but before either of them can say anything Lisai speaks.

‘Incoming message from unknown source. Requesting permission.’

‘Shit-,’ Sk’jin curses under his breath, ‘-shit did they figure out we’re here-‘
Namjoon quickly pulls up the NaviLet to check the incoming call, activating his tracing systems to follow and trace back the call.

‘How is any communication channel coming in here?’ Namjoon mutters as his tracker fails to find the source, instead simply bouncing back to Ts’ets’khli instead, where it had last registered a location Namjoon had been tracking. There’s a sudden sharp sound that renders through the main Communication Board and the line automatically patches through.

‘Lisai cut the call immediately-’ Namjoon orders immediately, activating the virus he personally built to work against the system he created for the Užkulisai.

‘Hello.’

Everyone stops. Jimin and Taeh’yung who had stopped their work are now standing, alarm etched on their features.

‘Who is this and what do you want.’ Namjoon demands instantly.

It’s painfully quiet for a while before the voice speaks again.

‘We have a proposal for you. One that we had politely offered to you in Pompa. We would like to renew this proposal.’ This voice sounded different. Still flat, still incredibly odd, with a tone that Namjoon cannot identify as male or female or anything else.

Sk’jin suddenly stands and whispers, ‘It’s them.’

Dread courses through Namjoon’s mind. How did they find them? They were no doubt affiliated with Van Seulgaan, considering they were looking for the “eggs” the same way the Tayian was. And there was no doubt that Seulgaan had connections with at least one of the members of the Special Jury.

‘We spoke of this previously,’ Namjoon says firmly, fingers moving across the NaviLet with alarmed hurry. ‘We will not give you the OrTank. Nothing you can offer us will make us reconsider.’

‘We have an offer for you.’ The voice continues, as though it didn’t hear Namjoon speak.

‘I said we don’t want anything-‘

‘Please take a look.’

And Namjoon already knows what he was going to see.

The Communication Boards holographic display lights up without their approval and it displays a direct and obviously live-feed of what appeared to be a storage hull of a ship. And inside the hull are stacked OrTanks, this time filled with Beings who similar to Jimin, were afloat inside of it. It’s dimly lit but it’s more than enough to show them the purpose of this hijacked hologram.

Hoseok.

Jimin gasps as Sk’jin curses under his breath. Namjoon closes his eyes, fists gripping the edges of the NaviLet.

‘If you wish to recover the Ngfy’widan Hoseok, then we are willing to give him back to you in exchange for the Yemenifesi Ch’inik’eti.’
Jimin, who had been halfway across towards the hologram, pauses in his steps, hearing his own title spoken out loud. His eyes widen, looking around at Namjoon as though begging for an explanation. But Namjoon has no idea. He cannot even begin to fathom how they could have known. Why they know.

And the bigger question that comes with it.

What did they want from Jimin?

‘If you do not act, we will not hesitate to dispose of the former agent. He is of no consequential use to us. Thank you for listening, we await your response. Have a good day.’

Chapter End Notes

(Author’s Notes)

Yeah *coughs* Sk’jin is kinda…how’d you say, ace/aro I guess. I’m just not using those terms because in the scope of the Known Universe, where gender isn’t strictly a label of identification or blatant discrimination.
The Khol’isa have a unique culture, biology, and physiology- they don’t reproduce in the traditional sense of reproduction. So it’s not a part of their norm, to really feel or need sexual attraction.
It is who they are.
This chapter took long because I wanted to be careful with Sk’jin’s history, to give a better explanation of it, and the reason behind why and how he is the way he is now, or at least seems to show how he is. I hope you enjoyed it!!
AND THANK YOU "LATTEFORLATER” FOR ALLOWING ME TO USE YOUR OC
And AYE HOB- well news about Hobi.
speaking of which
WHO ELSE
CAN’T
WAIT
FOR
MARCH
2ND
BECAUSE I’M INTERNALLY DYING FOR SOME HIXTAPE GOODNESS

I have midterms coming up - meaning I have no exams lol, so it’s like a nice long break for me so I will be able to bring the next update on time!!
See you next update!!
There’s too much going on at the same time.

Yoongi suddenly loses Jimin who had just been in his arms seconds ago. He’s also suddenly fully armed, his team gathered around in position, all of their TeorSers aimed up and at the same time a liquid golden light erupts and Yoongi has never fallen to his knees as quickly as he does now.

There were great pieces of art from Ancient Earth. Great paintings and sculptures and media that denoted the lives of those who lived eras ago in the past. Yoongi never paid much attention to those. While it was important to study history to understand and learn for the future, Yoongi didn’t think it was necessary to dwell in it. Or at least that was the excuse he had as a teen- he just found it generally a little boring.

However, there were some pieces of art that stuck to him- ones he remembered clearly.

Works that were classified under street-urban, modern contemporary, and a niche collection of a style that persevered into their present in the form of graffiti. He loved the remakes, the classics, and the new ideas that surrounded these styles of art and though he was no artist himself, appreciated it and applauded the artists.

He didn’t think much of the “traditional classics” as they were referred to. The ongoing theme of religious depictions put him off of what he thought were, frankly speaking, uneventful pieces of art. He often found religious depictions to be a little too excessive- too worshipful (the irony) and glorified the notion that a god would come down to pass judgment and justice upon “sinners”. In Yoongi’s humble opinion, that sort of thinking gave you what he called the “holier than you” complex and as a result, depraved them of empathy and openness. And Yoongi could see it play out so well throughout Earth’s history.

But moving past that, and past the caged mentality most religion seemed to force its followers into, Yoongi never thought much for their artwork either. Save for one.

A baroque painting titled “The Archangel Michael defeating Satan” by Guido Reni.

Nothing about it stood out that much. In terms of execution and overall style, there were countless others in that same genre that were much more beautiful, much more intriguing. But when Yoongi saw it, for his own eyes, he had been unexplainably drawn towards it.

There was a raw power, strength and beauty, surety of victory, fluidity and sternness.

A call for awe, belief, faith, and devotion.

And that was what Yoongi felt as he beholds Jimin, wrought in light and majesty.

Jimin is up in the air, hand extended up, his entire being shining with light- no, he was light. He
speaks and his words like a distant bell, a thunderous storm, a soft breeze, a morning lullaby echoes sweetly, dangerously, intoxicatingly, soothingly around Yoongi and he wants to follow.

Yoongi almost expects a host of angels to appear by Jimin’s side- singing exaltations and hymns as he smites down the red devil before him. And with that, a floodgate of light will drown them all- in safety and security, saved by the coming of this deity, to bring wrath upon evil, and paradise for the good.

But Yoongi is rather far from being good, and they were far from paradise.

There’s a burst of light and the singing (Yoongi hadn’t realized that he had been listening to singing) ends abruptly.

Gone is the crippling fear and strange pressure in the air around them and Jimin is falling. He lands with a thud on his back and Yoongi’s feet are carrying him before he realizes it. Amic is there too, helping him stand. Yoongi’s heart is in his throat, looking over his form- was he injured? In pain?

But Jimin seems all right- a little shaken, weak, but nonetheless fine. His eyes are bright, the ring of light gleaming bright.

‘Jimin? Hey are you okay-‘

‘What the fuck was that?’

Yoongi glances behind him to find the rest of the team wide-eyed and terrified, weapons raised, forming a compact ring to cover all sides. Away from where Yoongi was now helping Jimin stand.

‘Yoongi, Amic, step away from him and come over to this side,’ she orders simply, TeorSer still aimed at the ready. Yoongi knew not to mess with her. She was an excellent shot and no matter the situation, never missed once she fired.

‘What?’ Amic sounds confused.

‘-this is clearly a trap!’ one of them bursts out. ‘We’re being drawn out and they’re taking us out!’

The panic in the air is palpable and almost bitter in Yoongi’s mouth. They were scared. Fuck, Yoongi is scared too, but that doesn’t mean he’s going to blame Jimin for what just happened. One of the other reasons being they didn’t even know what just happened.

‘Listen,’ Yoongi stands in front of Jimin. ‘We need to think about this rationally-‘

‘He’s here as bait!’ one of them snaps. ‘Whatever that was is-‘

‘If he’s bait and working for whatever the fuck that was, why would he go out of his way to protect us?’ Amic demands.

Yoongi feels Jimin’s hands gripping at the back of his gear.

‘This is not the time to be blind-sighted,’ she snaps. ‘If you could just for once, look past the pretty face and see the situation we’re in and just think-‘

‘I am thinking!’ Yoongi snaps. ‘He is not affiliated with them- he was afraid of them-‘

‘His presence here is luring whatever that thing was-‘
‘His presence is the only thing we have found!’ Amic cuts in angrily. ‘We were told that this was a trading planet under attack— that we had to come here to aid the GLA leave the atmosphere but we have found nothing— not only have we lost contact with our main-ship, we have also been going around in circles for days!’

‘I think we would know if we weren’t headed in the right direction—’ one of the mappers snaps at once.

‘Something is wrong with this planet,’ Amic emphasizes. ‘There is something deeply wrong and it’s all I could sense since we got here— and whatever it is, is like some strange—…some strange strain or flu it’s gotten all over us I can feel it!’ Amic breathes out heavily, expression determined, exasperated but most of all afraid. He points one long finger at Jimin and continues, ‘But him! Jimin— he’s the only thing that doesn’t feel wrong here, the only existence in this entire fucked up place that doesn’t make me feel sick.’

It’s silent, only the sound of their minimal movements as they fidget.

Jimin says something quietly from behind him and Yoongi doesn’t need to understand him to know what he’s saying.

‘No, you’re not going anywhere— you’re staying here with me. With us.’ Yoongi says firmly before facing her. ‘Before we were even aware of it, he could sense it. He knew how to drive it away. And that, by my books, is an important and necessary skill we need right now to survive. So if you want him to leave, I’m leaving with him.’

‘Me too,’ Amic quips at once.

She gives them all a hard glare before speaking.

‘Fine. I’d rather not all of us separate—’

There are voices of disagreement but she stops them with a single wave of her hand.

‘Yoongi and Amic have a point,’ she says tersely. ‘There’s a lot of information we’re missing here. Not just about this planet, but the reasoning behind why we’re here. I didn’t want to mention it before, but I think our purpose in coming here was not just a clean-up mission or anything else.’

Everyone tenses as that.

‘We’re going to figure out what the fuck any of this means, and if we’re going to understand any of this, we’ll need him— especially with what we just saw.’

Yoongi is relieved but also tense. There were some clear disagreements but Yoongi knew that no one wanted to separate. Safety came in numbers and as a team designed to function together as a single unit, losing one member was like losing a limb.

‘We pack up and search the area keep an eye out— stay close and do not for the love of god do anything stupid,’ she ends before adding, ‘I know what you’re trying to say here and I appreciate you looking at this situation from a different point of view.’

Yoongi internally gears up for the rebuttal of her previous words regarding Jimin.

‘You’re going to have to answer for him from now on. I don’t care what it is— but the moment anything goes wrong, if I so much as sense something strange he’s going and that means so are you.’ She ends quietly.
‘You’ll have to count me in that,’ Amic states from behind Jimin who was now simply looking back into the forest, eyes searching.

‘That won’t be necessary,’ Yoongi replies just as quietly. ‘But in any case I’ll gladly go with him.’

She gives him a look that isn’t one of disappointment or disapproval. Rather it’s one that’s a little confused.

Yoongi reaches back and takes Jimin’s hand in his, drawing his attention away from the forest.

Yoongi doesn’t understand the feeling himself, and he doesn’t know why it’s like this, but if the moment called for it, then he would follow Jimin.

He would follow the sun.

* 

‘If you wish to recover the Ngfy’widan Hoseok, then we are willing to give him back to you in exchange for the Yemenifesi Ch’inik’eti.’

Jimin, who had been halfway across towards the hologram, pauses in his steps, hearing his own title spoken out loud. His eyes widen, looking around at Namjoon as though begging for an explanation. But Namjoon has no idea. He cannot even begin to fathom how they could have known. Why they know.

And the bigger question that comes with it.

What did they want from Jimin?

‘If you do not act, we will not hesitate to dispose of the former agent. He is of no consequential use to us. Thank you for listening, we await your response. Have a good day.’

The line cuts immediately and it’s silent for 4 whole seconds before Sk’jin splutters out, ‘Have a good day?!?! Who the fuck do they think they are?!’

‘Can you trace the call,’ Yoongi asks immediately as he approaches the Table.

‘It’s from back in Ts’ets’khli,’ Namjoon readily replies, showing the NaviLet.
‘We can’t be sure-’ Sk’jin says as he too hurries towards the Table, doubt etched on his features.

‘No I’m sure they’re there,’ Namjoon sighs, suddenly feeling wearied. ‘Hoseok has a Comm-Device, it’s putting him in Ts’ets’khli.’

‘How? He returned the Device-’ Sk’jin frowns.

Namjoon had given the Comm-Device to Jimin, hoping he would understand to give it to Hoseok. And he did.

‘I asked Jimin to give it to him before he left-‘ Namjoon glances over at Jimin who is listening with increasing horror as Taeh’yung explains what was happening.

‘-you were keeping track of him? Like what, to make sure he didn’t report us-‘ Sk’jin demands.

‘Namjoon. If they have the Device it means they can track back to us,’ Yoongi states bluntly.

‘I know,’ Namjoon presses his palm into his face, taking a deep breath. ‘But if I deactivate it, we lose chances of tracking Hoseok, make sure he’s all right.’

‘But then again they can track us,’ Sk’jin throws his hands up.

‘How were they there? Why didn’t we notice? How did we not notice?’ Namjoon demands out loud.

Taeh’yung suddenly asks Jimin a question that makes the latter stammer out a response as though shocked. Taeh’yung makes a curious face before saying, ‘I think it’s because Ts’ets’khli is surrounded by water- or well, a majority of it is anyways.’

Namjoon glances at Jimin whose expression has settled to a completely neutral one.

‘What does that mean? Why is that so?’ Namjoon asks sharply.

‘We can talk about that later,’ Sk’jin cuts in sharply. ‘We need to discuss what we can do now- they could call back any time and we need a response. They can track us now, and I’m willing to bet that they have the ability to find us even if we deactivate the Comm-Device later; and I’m not sure about you guys but I’m not willing to leave Hoseok in their hands.’

‘We can’t bargain with them,’ Namjoon states at once. ‘We can’t just give the Omhlophe Jimin in exchange like this who knows what that could lead to-‘

‘So you’re suggesting we just leave Hoseok there-‘

‘I am not saying that for fuck’s sake can you stop jumping to conclusions before I even say anything-‘

‘Then what do we do-‘

‘I don’t know that’s why we should all talk about it I can’t just think of everything all the time-‘

‘Well that’s what you seem to do all the time-‘

‘Stop it!’

Namjoon and Sk’jin both stare in shock at Jimin, who had clearly snapped in Standard. He begins to speak quickly, hands gesturing emphatically and looking at the two of them with obvious
disapproval.

‘Uh- okay so uh he’s saying you two need to stop arguing all the time it’s not funny and there’s no
benefit to it, you have to comply together to make this work.’

Namjoon can actually physically feel Sk’jin’s anger mounting.

‘-and that we’re wasting time. There are many questions that need answering but we first need to
get Hoseok back’

‘Pipsqueak can shut his can right now unless he has something legitimate to offer.’

‘-and the surest and fastest way to do that is to agree to their plans and accept the exchange.’
Taeh’yung quickly finishes.

Sk’jin blinks a few times before staring hard at Jimin.

‘What did you just say?’

Jimin emphatically points at the Communications Board, and then himself and then gestures an
obvious pantomime indicating an exchange.

‘Wait-’

‘No.’

Yoongi, who up until now, hasn’t said a word since this started, has an expression that is the
closest thing Namjoon has seen to pure anger.

‘They know who he is. There was a reason why Menigišiti was attacked, the reason why their
technology was discovered outside of their System.’ Yoongi states, a hardened look in his eyes.
‘They knew who he was before we did and they’ve been collecting more of these OrTanks as well.
We cannot allow this exchange to take place- if this is anything like what was discovered during
the Gaia case we cannot allow them to take Jimin especially now that we can see how such a small
piece of their technology can create such nightmares.’

‘Jimin is actually right,’ Sk’jin counters bluntly. ‘They are already capable of tracking us, we have
no way of hiding and we have no lead or idea of what they’re capable of, who they’re connected to,
and what they want. We cannot run from them and refusing to make a deal with them will most
definitely lead to some pretty shitty situations regarding Hoseok and later ourselves. We can plan
this out carefully and-‘

‘-you’re countering yourself with your argument,’ Yoongi actually snaps, his expression the most
complex Namjoon has seen. The Human actually steps forward, arms uncrossed and strangely very
sentient in his mannerism. It’s enough to stun Sk’jin into silence as well, eyes wide as he regards
the Human with surprise.

‘What you’re saying is true and it can also be applied to why exchanging Jimin won’t work. We
know nothing of the Omhlophe, do not know what they’re capable of, who they’re connected to.
And what makes you so sure that they won’t obliterate us the moment we hand Jimin over?’
Yoongi asks and it’s wild because Namjoon almost doesn’t recognize this Human in front of him.

‘Yoongi,’ Jimin has an unimpressed look on his face, arms actually crossed over and one foot
tapping. Namjoon almost feels like he’s watching a child being chastised. He starts talking rapidly
in his language at Yoongi who to Namjoon’s continued surprised actually responds though he
doesn’t understand a word Jimin is saying.

‘-this is too risky, there are no certain safety marks we can measure with this situation-‘

‘-kan ti thei, kan thrian a nia chuan kei mani vang in tuna hian-‘ the earnestness in Jimin’s tone is apparent.

‘-and not only will we be definitively losing track of you once this takes place-‘ Yoongi continues to argue, taking steps towards Jimin as though hoping to convince him by getting closer.

‘-a buia ah. Kei ma vang in thihian in awm- kei ma vang in harsat na in dawng ah-‘ Jimin also steps forward, adamant in his argument that only Taeh’yung understands. The Zhak’gri looks oddly sad as he listens to Jimin’s words.

‘-there’s no guarantee of what we can expect from them-‘ Yoongi stops in front of Jimin, an almost pleading tone to his voice at this point.

‘-ka ti thrat a gnai! Kan khovel hi aw, a sual ah chuan a-‘ Jimin actually shakes Yoongi, gripping him around the arms with both hands.

‘And he has the audacity to tell us not to argue,’ Sk’jin comments wryly from the side. ‘At least we’re not dramatic like this.’

But Jimin seems to win, Namjoon doesn’t know how, considering the language barrier, but Yoongi bows his head, defeat apparent in his body language and his facial expression back to his normal one.

Jimin looks over at Namjoon expectantly, as though he and Yoongi hadn’t just stopped to argue at each other without understanding a single word.

And regardless of what Jimin says, handing him over felt wrong. But everyone is looking at him. They’re looking to him.

Namjoon internally woes the decision the Panel made in anointing him captain of this crew. But before he’s forced to come to some form of decisive conclusion their Communications Board lights up again and Lisai announces it.

‘Incoming message from unknown source. Requesting permission.’

Sk’jin glances over at him sharply before saying, ‘Request granted.’

‘Hello. Have you come to a decision?’ the voice asks the moment the line links.

‘Before we discuss anything I want to talk to Hoseok- patch him through,’ Sk’jin orders quickly.

There’s silence for a moment before the hologram reappears and Hoseok is standing, a careful wariness in his eyes as he glances around the room once before looking up straight into the camera.

‘Namjoon?’

Namjoon feels his energy drained from him suddenly. And before he knows it, guilt replaces it in an instance and Namjoon can’t even face the hologram.

‘Hoseok- it’s Sk’jin,’ the Khol’isa speaks at once. ‘We’re coming to get you.’

Yoongi twitches at Sk’jin’s words but doesn’t say anything.
‘All right.’ Hoseok pauses before asking carefully, ‘How’s everything.’

‘More or less exactly how Namjoon said it would be.’

‘Yeah? Good, I guess.’

Namjoon slowly looks up and finds that Hoseok has a small smile on his face. But the hologram cuts off and the voice returns.

‘Have you come to a decision?’

Sk’jin nods his approval from where he stood. Namjoon next eyes Jimin who also nods firmly. Taeh’yung also nods, though he looks a little guilty because Yoongi is adamant and he shakes his head. It strikes Namjoon that this wasn’t a decision for him to make, but a group decision.

‘We have. We agree to the exchange.’ Namjoon states clearly. ‘We also propose that we meet there in Ts’ets’khli-’

‘We are on our merry way to Ynqaba it would be nice if you meet us there,’ the voice states. ‘We can accomplish our deal without anyone butting in.’

Namjoon reigns in his frustration and with another glance at Sk’jin who again nods, he says, ‘Very well. Send us the coordinates-’

‘There is no need. We will come meet you the moment we see you. Please start moving along as from your current location, it will take you 5 sols via warp.’

‘This is a trap.’ Yoongi intones blandly from the side.

‘Namjoon.’

Jimin’s tone isn’t what Namjoon would define as authoritative or commanding. But he can sense the determination, the surety, and the confidence in his tone, simply telling him with just a call of his name, to agree with the Omhlophe.

‘Understood. We will see you in Ynqaba in 5 sols.’ Namjoon replies.

‘Perfect. Thank you for your cooperation. Have a good day.’

The line cuts.

‘Ynqaba was the next location Khonen and his crew were headed to- they were going to pick up some more eggs there,’ Sk’jin says at once. ‘Well there’s no way we’re going to be able to use the normal channels to get there with the war going on.’

‘That’s the least of our worries,’ Namjoon mumbles back, glancing over at Jimin quickly.

‘What the fuck do you have in mind,’ Sk’jin asks sharply, also looking at Jimin who was listening intently to Taeh’yung.

‘It’s just a theory, one that if it works will save us a lot of trouble,’ Namjoon replies, ‘And I don’t think Jimin will be happy.’

‘You sure?’ Sk’jin asks, a rare look of genuine concern in his red eyes. ‘We don’t know much about him, we’re basically only relying on Taeh’yung’s word and Yoongi’s past which he does not remember.’
‘It’s a price I’m willing to pay,’ Namjoon shrugs.

An odd look crosses over Sk’jin’s face, his eyes widening slightly. But he blinks and the moment is gone.

‘Well, if you’re sure,’ he says and his tone is withdrawn.

‘I am- anyways, let’s get going,’ Namjoon says even though the Khol’isa is already making his way to the cockpit, calling out orders to Lisai. He turns to address Yoongi now who still looked upset.

‘We’re flying out asap- so Yoongi, if you could prepare the Hangar Bay-‘ Namjoon hasn’t even finished before the Human all but runs out. Namjoon hears Jimin sigh out in exasperation and he too makes to walk out after Yoongi.

‘Jimin- please, before you go,’ Namjoon calls after his retreating figure before glancing at Taeh’yung. ‘I need to ask you something that could potentially make our upcoming attempt safer and easier.’

Taeh’yung haltingly translates, seating himself on Sk’jin’s vacant seat.

Jimin looks torn, glancing at the Bridge doorway quickly before he nods, stepping closer to the Navigator’s Mast.

‘I know you are sworn to never reveal the secret behind your System’s technology,’ Namjoon begins, ‘And I respect that.’

Jimin nods as Taeh’yung translates.

‘But I think we can easily agree on the fact that your tech has existed outside of your System for centuries now- and is possibly being used by forces of unknown evil, or by organizations who would exploit this if they found out about it.’ Namjoon continues. ‘I think it’s obvious that the mission we had been sent on was, to a certain degree, aiming to do something similar. But everyone on this ship collectively agrees that whatever tech you possess should remain in your System and out of the potential use of Beings who would mistreat it.’

Jimin nods again though it’s slower, eyes narrowed.

‘Which is why I need you to tell me what I can do with this that can help us get out of this situation safely and surely, and return you to your System,’ Namjoon finishes. Taeh’yung translates carefully, his tone though normally neutral as he does his translations, has a slightly pleading tone to it, as though also personally asking Jimin the same favor.

It’s not surprising when Jimin shakes his head.

‘He’s saying no,’ Taeh’yung translates apologetically.

Jimin’s expression is genuinely apologetic as well, but the determination in his gaze tells Namjoon that there was no point pressing it.

‘All right,’ Namjoon nods before facing Taeh’yung. ‘As you know, you are an official member of this ship, permitted to be part of the crew under my command. All crew members must respond to the acting captain of the ship, especially in cases regarding the safety of the ship and the rest of the crew. Therefore it is my express order to you to tell me what you deduced by yourself about this tech.’
Taeh’yung gapes at Namjoon for a moment, mouth opening and closing, eyes moving from Jimin to Namjoon every second.

‘Taeh’yung?’ Jimin reaches out to touch the Zhak’gri in alarm, his expression turning graver with every second as though he was suspecting something.

‘You understood that water had something to do with not being able to detect those Beings- and I know for a fact you thought of something, correctly at that,’ Namjoon glances at Jimin remembering how he had reacted. ‘-so I have to order you to tell me what you discovered.’

Taeh’yung looks stuck, truly caught in the middle. Then he pauses, lips pressed in a thin line together before he speaks to Jimin.

Jimin’s response is immediate, shaking his head, brows furrowing as he glares at Namjoon. It’s odd, being glared at by someone that looks like Jimin. It doesn’t help with the guilt Namjoon feels but he stands firm.

‘I just explained to him about your order and uh my place in the ship but-‘ Taeh’yung begins to say, but before he can continue Jimin’s eyes flash light, a golden sheen erupting for a fraction of a second but it stops the moment Yoongi appears in Namjoon’s sight, a hand wrapping around Jimin’s wrist.

If Namjoon had functioning heart that responded to his senses the way most natural Beings did, his heart would be racing.

Jimin appeared, in all honesty, extremely unthreatening.

His countenance was more welcoming, more gentle, kind- the way a stereotypical prince or idyllic king would be drawn in illustrated books for children. His movements were gentle in a way that was unlike Sk’jin’s whose motives were clearly unclear, creating mistrust at once. But Jimin had an aura that just radiated warmth and kindness.

But for that fraction of a second, Namjoon felt as though he was looking straight into the heart of the sun; crushing, powerful, and despite its light, unfathomably dark.

Jimin blinks rapidly, surprised to find Yoongi there.

‘Just tell us if we can use this, if you can help us,’ Yoongi says quietly as he takes Jimin’s hands in his. They’re glowing faintly and though it’s soft, Namjoon can just about make out the heat waves emanating from Jimin’s hands. How Yoongi is able to hold his hands, Namjoon doesn’t know.

‘You want to help I know,’ Yoongi continues saying quietly. ‘You don’t have to tell us everything.’

Taeh’yung translates the words as quietly as Yoongi speaks it and Jimin finally looks a little less stubborn.

‘Namjoon, explain why you want the tech,’ Yoongi says quietly, not looking away from Jimin. Namjoon is quick to take this opportunity.

‘This cell was the reason why this planet was hidden from scans and sensors. The ship that used this technology was also hidden permanently and allowed the Venture Unit to work in peace without being stopped or inspected. I know that this is part of your shielding technology from your System which is almost entirely hidden from us. So if something this small and singular could somehow hide an entire planet, can it be used to shield us?’
Namjoon waits as Taeh’yung translates. He seemed to be adding more to Namjoon’s words as well, his words earnest and appealing.

‘If they can’t see us, then they can’t shoot at us or attack us- their systems won’t be able to lock us in.’ Namjoon continues. ‘This means we can bring back Hoseok, and if we are backed with the certainty that this could cover us, we can take you back immediately without having to exchange you and make our escape and head towards Bhumi- I mean Menigištîti. Please, I am not asking you to tell me all the secrets of your technology or to explain how it’s created- we just need this to secure our mission.’

The more Taeh’yung translates Jimin’s expression softens little by little. He finally looks down, staring at his hands held in Yoongi’s. Namjoon wants to add more, but something in him (and the warning grip on the back of his arm from Sk’jin) tells him to stay quiet.

After a few more seconds Jimin finally nods and says something shortly to Taeh’yung who nods immediately.

‘He’ll do it,’ Taeh’yung grins brightly and happily.

Jimin adds something else quickly, glancing over at Namjoon and Sk’jin as well.

‘-he’s saying we will probably need something like a…facilitator? To transform the energy of the cell so that it can be used by the ship?’ Taeh’yung frowns, trying his best to translate the more technical terms.

‘Where do we get those-‘

‘-from the wreckage,’ Sk’jin replies at once. ‘I think what Jimin means is we will need a conductor designed to translate the energy or whatever it is this cell uses in order to harness whatever its abilities are.’

‘Will he be able to tell what it looks like,’ Namjoon asks Taeh’yung who repeats the question.

Jimin replies, expression hardened and distant.

‘Yes- the entire ship’s inner facility was designed around the cell,’ Taeh’yung replies carefully. ‘It’s been designed to distribute the cell’s energy.’

‘All right- let’s go,’ Namjoon glances at Yoongi, ‘Spardyti still outside?’

‘Yes.’

‘All right- Sk’jin-‘

‘I’ll fly Jimin and Yoongi there,’ Sk’jin replies blankly, expression guarded and carefully neutral. ‘You and Tae prepare for take-off.’

Namjoon gives Yoongi an inquiring look, for any objection but the Human simply nods in reply and later Jimin does too.

‘All right. Taeh’yung, could you prepare the Hangar Bay and make sure it’s ready to receive the Spardyti once it comes back?’ Namjoon asks the Zhak’gri who looks eager to help.

‘Got it pa!’

‘We should be back in a couple of hours,’ Sk’jin says already making his way out of the Bridge,
‘We’re gonna take the expandable gravity-lifts just in case.’

Namjoon nods, watching as they exit the Bridge before taking a moment to gather his thoughts. He stares blankly at his NaviLet for a moment.

‘Lisai, keep track of Comm-Device 32-0XV and maintain it under highest priority,’ Namjoon orders.

‘Yes captain.’

The unique black-bands he had customized and designed were created to register only to Lisai and to the unique channel within the Užkulisai. It was also designed to only work when worn by the ship crew only. But clearly Hoseok isn’t wearing his, but it was still registering under Lisai’s channel register. Eyes fixed on the lone cell on top of the Table, Namjoon wonders how many of these existed outside of the Ma’ikelawī System and what else they were being used for. There was a whole other reality within their own that used this technology, with uses and purpose far beyond what they could imagine.

What was possible now was unfathomable and beyond anything Namjoon could imagine. This entire planet itself was a prime example of that. Sk’jin’s relation to it, his story, what was born here, and what transpired here, was all a result of this singular cell.

This was beyond comprehension – something akin to how strange and ancient Taeh’yung’s abilities were, or even to an extent, strangely surreal like the Khol’isa as a whole.

Something like magic.

The Akramanese, or whatever it was they were called; the Red Evil, etc. were capable of things beyond what any of them could imagine. And even now, knowing what they knew, they still couldn’t understand what they truly were. What they were capable of.

And these Beings- the Omhlophe; their intention, their motives, their goals were unknown and as unpredictable as the Gaia Case. Taeh’yung had said they smelled like the Akramanese ship, that they felt the same, but that they weren’t the same. What did that mean? Were they some extension? A subunit?

But it all boiled down to this.

To this singular cell, and where it came from.

And this all led to Jimin.

And something tells Namjoon that Jimin would be the one to lead them, to show them the answers.
Yoongi cranes his neck in order to see the very top of the wreckage.

It was an amazing and curious sight to behold. A sight heavy with past pain, sorrow, and death. But today it is covered in green, covered in life and Yoongi would give it another century before it is entirely erased from sight, and possibly, from all memory.

‘I’ll stay here and keep watch from inside,’ Sk’jin says from the doorway, not stepping out.

Yoongi nods in reply. Sk’jin hadn’t been willing to return to the planet as a whole, so expecting him to willingly enter this ship again seemed a little harsh. That, and also the fact that Yoongi suspects Sk’jin needed some time alone. So Yoongi follows after Jimin, pulling along the lifts after him. Jimin easily guides them through a thicket of vines and climbers before they come upon an opening.

There’s a strange familiarity with how it felt inside the ship. Yoongi thinks back to headquarters, where he used to Sleep, and where he was made to Dream.

It’s empty, and it’s void.

Despite being surrounded by so much life and growth; in both places, one where the Yisheng Headquarters was built above, and this where a thriving tropical jungle grew wildly- stepping inside the secret and hidden places felt startlingly like it belonged to another dimension.

Jimin turns a little, pausing in his motions to wait for Yoongi to reach him. He smiles, pointing forwards and miming at himself and then at Yoongi.

‘Lead,’ Yoongi tells him quietly. ‘And I will follow.’

For a few seconds, Jimin doesn’t move. His eyes hold a rather distant expression, a little bit like pain, before he nods, a faint smile on his lips, understanding Yoongi’s tone more than his words.

They’re both quiet; Jimin with his bare feet, and Yoongi with his uncanny soundlessness.

Yoongi wants to tell Jimin that this was a bad idea. Not the part where they try and infuse this technology with their ship. But the part about the exchange. Every cell in his body, every fiber of his being rejects the very notion of this plan. And while theoretically it does seem like the best solution at this given moment, Yoongi can’t help but strongly feel against it.

Of course he doesn’t expect Namjoon to actually give Jimin over. Everyone on board the ship is well aware of how important Jimin is, and his safety and security is their main priority. But the very idea of having Jimin that close to the Omhlophe was extremely repulsive to Yoongi.

Of course he wanted to bring Hoseok back; the Ngfy’widan was an important ally that fell into this unfortunate situation as a result of their inability to come together as a working team. This was all their responsibility and Yoongi could see that.

And though Yoongi didn’t like any of this, he also saw no other way of getting out of this situation. The Omhlophe could track their movement via the Comm-Device Hoseok had on him. So even if they were to abandon Hoseok and attempt to run away, that would be effectively killing Hoseok while leaving everything unresolved without any idea of what to expect from these Beings.
They were stuck in a stalemate, and there was no other way to approach it other than to follow through with the Omhlophe’s proposal.

Not to mention, Jimin was incredibly adamant. Though he didn’t understand a single thing he had said to him and his understanding of Jimin’s character was probably not very deep or possibly even correct due to his own incapability within the functional emotional range, he knew could tell at once that Jimin could be incredibly stubborn if he wanted.

Little streams of light illuminate parts of the ship, but otherwise it’s almost entirely dark. But Jimin doesn’t have any problem seeing in the dark. Yoongi quietly slips on the helmet he’d brought with him, purely out of habit, and allows himself to see better. When Jimin turns around to check on him, he doesn’t seem surprised by the helmet. Instead he has a curious look in his eyes- one that Yoongi doesn’t understand.

They reach a tilted hallway that breaks downwards, revealing a large and almost cylindrical chamber, with stairs on almost all sides leading downwards to a main wide working dais-like platform. Jimin glances back at him again, as though to say they had arrived.

Yoongi takes a good look, the visor recording each section, running basic scans, identifying known parts.

This place was old, incredibly so.

But seeing as it was built to support and accommodate the cell from Jimin’s System, it simply begged the question of how long the GLA had known of what Menigiští truly was and whether or not they could see deeper and into Ma’ikelawī. There was much to be asked, much to be answered, but based on Yoongi’s relatively short experience living, he believes that not everything should be revealed at once, but rather gradually in due time.

They descend downwards; Yoongi counts 56 steps before he’s at the bottom. Jimin doesn’t pause but instead leads them towards the center and inwards the great structure that tapered upwards into a singular glass-encased box of sorts.

Yoongi follows Jimin into a slim and rather narrow hallway, the walls and ceiling lined with intricate network of wires and exposed chips. At the center of the furthest most wall was a small pocket, shaped and outlined to perfectly fit the cell that was now resting in the Užkulisai Navigation Table.

Jimin reaches the end, fingers carefully following the grid of wires and tracking their layout.

‘Yoongi,’ he points towards a mounted transformer to one side of the wall where a series of wires vanished into. Posing to stand the lifts by the doorway, Yoongi walks up to where Jimin was pointing and reaches up. The transformer opens up and a complicated matrix of wires and chips appear. Jimin taps his elbow and gesture to pulling out the wires from the sockets. Yoongi nods in understanding and they set about, deconstructing the wires. Yoongi hands Jimin a small but effective flat knife to pry the wire clasps off of the wall while Yoongi deftly unplugged the sockets, clipping the raw and extended wires quickly. They do this 4 more time before they can pull off the board on which the cell-socket had been mounted. Jimin is thorough in his search, peering at the wires and other boards carefully.

It was entirely possible that someone within his System had been distributing these to the GLA. It was also possible that they were being very carefully and systematically robbed. Or possibly, all of this happened at random, that there were no real bad sides, that it was just one unfortunate series of events that led up to all that happened. The possibilities were endless and Jimin was probably just
as confused as the rest of them.

‘Done?’ Yoongi asks as they place the board over the lift. It wasn’t heavy, but the wires were long and cumbersome.

Jimin nods, tucking in all the wires securely. Yoongi grabs the handles and begins pulling it up the stairs. Jimin joins him, trying to share in the task of pulling the lift. He smiles sheepishly, as though he thought it was funny but at the same time didn’t want to leave Yoongi to do the job.

‘It’s all right,’ Yoongi takes Jimin’s hand off of the handle. ‘I’m only directing it.’

Jimin puts his hand back, his expression adamant.

‘Lead, and I will follow.’ Yoongi tells him.

Jimin has that same expression from earlier when Yoongi had said those words. Something almost like pain.

‘Did I say that before?’ Yoongi asks.

Jimin approaches him, hands reaching up and removing his helmet almost gently.

It’s dark but not so much that the environment wasn’t visible. Yoongi blinks a few times before his eyes can properly adjust. His sight, he knew, had been altered and fixed to be of superior quality as compared to his fellow species and others as well. It takes only a few seconds for him to completely and fully adjust, using Jimin as his focal point.

His surroundings illuminate and clarify around him, centering from Jimin.

Jimin is looking closely at him, his expression searching, almost expectant. Yoongi has a feeling he definitely said those very words to Jimin before, to have initiated such a strong reaction from the latter.

It’s entirely silent and Yoongi remains still as Jimin continues to watch him. Finally, Jimin looks away and instead focuses on the helmet. He studies the object carefully, turning it over a few times before he makes to slip it over his head but Yoongi stops him, a strange feeling at the idea of seeing Jimin wearing the helmet.

‘No?’ Jimin asks.

‘No,’ Yoongi replies with a nod.

‘Okay,’ Jimin smiles, seemingly pleased with this small bit of communication. He hands it over to Yoongi who takes it with both hands. By the time he’s slipped it back on Jimin is beaming, quite pleased, and a step ahead, tugging at the lift.

‘Lead,’ he says, pointing forward.

Yoongi feels the urge to laugh— not a full-belly laugh, but more of a chuckle more than anything. Jimin seemed so pleased with himself that Yoongi can’t find it in him to change their arrangement.

Jimin hums under his breath as they make their way out. It’s a little surreal but Yoongi feels as though the dust motes in the air shift in motion in accordance to the tune of Jimin’s humming. Surreal, but probably not unlikely.

When they push past the vines and climbers Sk’jin is standing out by the opening under the sun,
peering out into the jungle. He doesn’t seem to notice their presence, instead simply staring out. He feels Jimin’s hand on his arm, as though inquiring what the matter was.

‘Take it inside,’ Yoongi tells him quietly, pointing into the Spardyti as he pulls off his helmet. ‘I’ll collect Sk’jin.’

Jimin nods, concern in his eyes as he looks at Sk’jin’s still form.

Yoongi makes his way through the overgrowth, making sure to make some noise so as to not startle the Khol’isa. He pauses, feet from Sk’jin before speaking.

‘We are ready to leave.’

Sk’jin nods slowly in reply.

‘Do you want to go in there?’ Yoongi asks the Khol’isa quietly. ‘We can, if you wish it.’

Sk’jin still doesn’t move, eyes fixed on something past the trees.

‘No. Not yet.’ He replies. ‘They’re not there.’

Yoongi doesn’t know what Sk’jin means by this but he doesn’t push it.

Sk’jin looks away, a smile on his face as he regards Yoongi.

‘Thank you Yoongi,’ he smiles.

Yoongi isn’t sure why Sk’jin is thanking him but he nods in reply.

‘We got the stuff,’ Sk’jin announces, ‘We’re coming back, please be ready!’

‘Got it!’ Taeh’yung replies chirpily.

‘How’d you like it in there?’ Sk’jin asks conversationally, suddenly rather light and seemingly back to his regular self. The past hour must have been very fruitful for the Khol’isa, seeing as he had entirely recovered.

‘Strange,’ Yoongi replies truthfully. ‘Familiar, yet new.’

Sk’jin nods to that, ‘I totally get what you mean.’

But Yoongi doesn’t totally get what Sk’jin means.

Jimin is already seated inside the Spardyti, the gravity-lift secured and put to the side.

‘Had fun?’ Sk’jin smiles down at Jimin who regards Sk’jin with confusion for just a split second before he smiles in reply, as though hoping that would suffice.

‘He’s cute,’ Sk’jin whispers loudly.

‘The cutest!’ Taeh’yung chimes in.

‘I’m not cute?’ Sk’jin chuckles back as he starts up the Spardyti.

‘No! You’re handsome! Like, super handsome!’

Sk’jin laughs, delighted. The Transporter rises in the air and they turn away from the wreckage.
Sk’jin doesn’t so much as glance back at it, his attitude carefree and nonchalant.

‘Thank you Tae, you are too.’

Taeh’yung makes screeching sounds that makes Jimin laugh out loud even though he doesn’t understand the interaction.

‘Ah! I think I can see you guys now! The Hangar is open wide and ready-?!’

There’s shuffling sounds and a lot of gasping from Taeh’yung that sounds excited and a lot of sudden cursing from Namjoon that sounds anything but excited.

‘Hey- you guys okay?’ Sk’jin asks, not a single trace of amusement in his voice. They’re not far from the Užkulisai but not close enough to exactly spot the ship so they have no clue as to what was causing this sudden commotion.

There’s an excited scream and a shrieking roar that to Yoongi’s alarm could be heard not just from the Comm-Device but from outside the ship.

Both Sk’jin and Jimin jump in shock, hands at their ears wincing at the loudness of the sound.

‘Fuck- shit what the fuck is that-’

‘Oh fuck-‘ Sk’jin curses, increasing speed suddenly and dangerously.

Jimin is spluttering questions, clearly directed at Taeh’yung but there’s no response.

‘Uh- I think it might be one of those things,’ Sk’jin ruminates. ‘Shit- guess we were in one place for too long-‘

‘-what the fuck is that?! Taeh’yung get back here-!’

Yoongi spots it before he spots the Užkulisai.

A strange dark green mottled hulking creature that stood hunched nearly on all fours, seemed to loom above their ship. It was incredibly large, to the point of being an actual physical threat to their ship. It had no visible eyes, yet it appeared to have a head of sorts and weirdly anthropomorphic limbs. And though it lacked in eyes, it more than made up in teeth.

‘Ah fuck, I think that’s Lumpy.’

‘WHY DOES IT HAVE A NAME-?!’ Namjoon yells.

Sk’jin actually laughs for a moment before he replies, worry in his tone, ‘There’s a bunch of them- I’ve never seen them like this before though- never knew they were this large.’

‘That doesn’t help- I’m back inside the ship I can’t fire at it-‘

‘Don’t! It’ll turn more aggressive,’ Sk’jin slows down at a safe distance, regarding the hulking mass. ‘Where’s Tae?’

‘He’s running around it,’ Namjoon hisses out clearly frustrated and panicked. ‘Fuck- Taeh’yung please stop-‘

‘I’ll distract it by firing a missile in the distance to attract it-‘ Sk’jin is beginning to say, activating the weapons board but Jimin suddenly stands from his seat and walks out of the main cock-pit
towards the door.

‘Jimin?’ Yoongi stands at once but Jimin makes him sit down again with exaggerated reassuring smiles and nods before calling Sk’jin and miming that he get closer.

‘...should I?’ Sk’jin asks Yoongi instead.

Flashing imagery of ancient paintings, golden light, and overwhelming power goes through Yoongi’s mind before he nods.

‘Well fuck,’ is all Sk’jin says.

They fly closer, successfully gaining the attention of the creature that rears its eyeless head at them. Jimin opens the door quickly and the emergency cabin-pressure functions activate, creating strong Atmoshield barriers around the open door area. They’re a little over the creature, with some distance from its long limbs. It screams at them, the velocity of its pitch physically shaking them a little. Jimin struggles a little to stand before he stabilizes himself.

Only to casually jump down.

‘Fucking Spaces-‘ Sk’jin curses, eyes widening almost comically and for once looking rather ugly in his shock. And Yoongi would laugh if he too wasn’t entirely reeling from what he just witnessed.

There’s a bright light from below them and it hazily reminds Yoongi of what he had witnessed with his poison-induced fevered mind back in Pompa. The way Jimin had descended down towards him in a flood of golden light.

And suddenly he’s not worried at all.

‘Sk’jin, prepare to land,’ he says quietly over Sk’jin’s stream of curses and profanities. Sk’jin, clearly taken aback by Yoongi’s lack of reaction, takes this to somehow calm himself down enough to take them downwards.

The moment they hit the tree-line Sk’jin burst out into hysterical laughter.

The strange create is crouched down, making itself small, Jimin on its shoulder. Taeh’yung is standing quite steadily on the creature’s lifted palm and he’s waving at them as though it was a completely normal thing.

Sk’jin continues to laugh hysterically all the way until they land.

‘Nam- Namjoon, are you seeing this?’ he gasps, actual tears in his eyes as they step out of the Spardyti.

The Kutsoglerin is there by the Hangar Bay, mouth hanging open, a large TeorSer in his hands.

‘I swear,’ he says in a dazed tone. ‘I thought I saw all there was to see.’

And Yoongi has to agree.

Here was clearly an unknown wildly dangerous creature behaving like a docile pet, head bowed as Jimin jumps off of its shoulder and onto its palm where Taeh’yung catches him gleefully. It lowers the duo down to the ground and while Taeh’yung runs back towards them, looking as though he was having the time of his life to gush at Namjoon who still can’t seem to close him mouth, Jimin
remains close to the creature.

Jimin places his hand over the great beast’s head.

And again, there is no great display of visible power or splendor. Nothing but a single touch—out of everything that Jimin was, out of everything that Jimin *is*—Yoongi can’t help but feel drawn towards this seemingly unimpressive moment. This simple touch, this quiet gesture. Everything about it was so much more powerful. So much more dangerous. So much more—

The creature stands on all fours again, a foul stench rolling off of it and Sk’jin actually retches next to him. Then slowly, it turns around and with a fluidity that was odd for such a large creature, slips through the thick trees.

‘That was fucking amazing wasn’t it?’ Sk’jin breathes out, hands on his hips, as though disapproving but also impressed.

Jimin turns his head around, beaming brightly and exaggerating his relief with a hand to his forehead as though he was feeling faint. Taeh’yung cheers him with a loud chorus of ‘CHIM!’ as he walks over to them.

But Yoongi shakes his head in reply.

‘What, you’re saying that isn’t impressive?’ Sk’jin snorts, crossing his arms in incredulity.

‘No,’ Yoongi finds himself saying. ‘It’s beautiful.’

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Jimin is relieved to leave the planet. He’s not sure if it was because of the way the emotional weight of the planet bore down on Sk’jin, or because of what he had discovered in the planet, or if it was because of what he could sense had been created and then removed from the planet, or if it was because leaving meant being able to bring back Hoseok and understand just who it was that wanted and knew him.

It could be a combination of all of these, but either way, Jimin is relieved to leave its surface.

He’s sitting inside the Engines Room, where the main components of the ship could be accessed. The technology from the GLA was not unlike what he was familiar with though Jimin feels like the entirety of the designs felt as though it was purposefully created to appear complex and difficult. He could see at least 10 different ways to simplify and improve the designs of the Engines Room, to use less resources, material, and fortify the energy-cells to be twice as powerful.

But perhaps they would evolve in the future, to better understand mechanics and systems. Life
moved ahead in accordance to what the beings within it could handle and understand. And in
Jimin’s experience he saw just how badly Beings reacted to something they didn’t understand or
could immediately facilitate into their reality.

There was always two main reactions: fear and aggression.

And these two sparked hatred, violence, panic, assumptions, and triggered illogical responses.

Rarely has Jimin seen a fair reaction.

And he had felt that the Panel that had been sent to negotiate with Ma‘ikelawí had been some of
the rare Beings who could accept and react with proper conduct and neutrality. But it would appear
that he was wrong.

There was no doubt in Jimin’s mind that someone of the Panel had betrayed them. There was no
other possible way of possibly obtaining their technology like this. The Panel had stayed in
Akramana for weeks, which could have given them the time and opportunity to potentially steal or
mimic their technology.

But they had not been able to detect any lie within the Panel- doubt, mistrust, and wariness for
sure. But they could hear no lie, hear no falsehood in their treaty and agreement. So how was it
that they could have betrayed them without their knowing?

‘This is really complicated,’ Taeh’yung frowns down at the wires jumbled about them.

‘Then it’s a good thing I’m doing this and not you,’ Jimin teases.

Taeh’yung drops the wires and goes back to juggling the cell in his hands. He gives Jimin a short
but sheepish look, one that Jimin understands instantly as guilt.

‘You don’t have to feel guilty,’ Jimin tells him at once. ‘I understand why you’re doing this- and I
will do all I can within my allowance as well.’

‘You’re scared,’ Taeh’yung observes, spinning the cell on his finger tip.

‘I am,’ Jimin nods as he kneels down next to a large core, popping open the covering lid. ‘What
else has been stolen from my home that has destroyed so many others? What has been exploited
and robbed, to serve the selfish and the wicked and feed their agenda? What did I miss? What did I
see but did not understand?’

‘You do not have control over that,’ Taeh’yung shrugs. ‘It’s not something you can orchestrate- no
one has that ability.’

‘No- but I carry that responsibility,’ Jimin replies, carefully studying the circuit board in front of
him. ‘It is who I am.’

‘Hmm,’ Taeh’yung hums thoughtfully. ‘I doubt that.’

A little irked, Jimin looks away from the circuit board at the Zhak’gri.

‘But it is- I am the fate of my people, I was born to guide and lead them in peace and unity. To
make them safe, to keep them safe.’ Jimin explains. ‘It is who I am.’

‘I knew someone,’ Taeh’yung stops spinning the cell. ‘Who felt the same way. That he was born
simply to do one thing, to be one thing.’
'Who was he? What did he do?' Jimin asks.

Taeh’yung carefully places the cell on the floor.

‘Everyone believes that they are born for one specific reason- that they are born to do one thing, that there is a cosmic reasoning of their existence; that their importance and identity comes from simply one thing and they are lost without it.’ Taeh’yung says instead. ‘That thought shapes their lives, it recreates them continuously- they are slaves to that notion. The way you are to your title, the way he was to his duty.

‘But it is purpose that gives meaning to our actions- otherwise we are simply nothing in the vastness of the Universe,’ Jimin argues.

‘Then would you say that all purpose is right?’ Taeh’yung shoots back. ‘It was the purpose of the Red Evil that destroyed Menigišiti, their identity and calling that made them do what they did. Would you say that their purpose is correct?’

‘…no.’

‘But it is who they are,’ Taeh’yung smiles. ‘You cannot control what can happen, you cannot carry that responsibility, because you are not them- you can only carry your own responsibility, control only what you do.’

‘What are you trying to say?’ Jimin asks, confused beyond words.

But Taeh’yung just smiles in reply and says, ‘Namjoon is here!’

And true to his word, Namjoon appears inside the Engines Room, carrying with him a few screens, a box of mechanical tools and supplies, while balancing a tray of what appeared to be tea.

He says something to Taeh’yung, nodding towards the tea. The Zhak’gri laughs, getting up to relieve the Kutsoglerin of his burdens.

Jemin looks back at the cell on the floor. He tries to make sense of Taeh’yung’s words. What did he mean by it?

All his life, Jimin was aware of his rank, his title, his purpose. He knew what he was meant to do, what he was supposed to do, and who he was supposed to be. After all, the title of Yemenifesi Ch’inik’eti was not an easy or light one to bear. So Jimin did all he could to live to this title, to this meaning. And with it came duties, responsibilities, vows, and guidelines that he bore and followed.

It was stated in his title; his purpose and meaning. He was the fate of his people- he would guide them to live in peace and harmony.

But he had obviously failed.

He vowed to protect and keep safe his home, his planet, his System. And yet here they were, here he was, ages into the future without knowing what happened, with no answer, no connection, and no direction.

‘You cannot control what can happen, you cannot carry that responsibility, because you are not them- you can only carry your own responsibility, control only what you do.’

Had he done something, instigated something within the boundaries of what he considered to be his duties, that started this? Did the purpose of his title blind him to what was happening around
him, that was glaringly obvious to those around him?

And Taeh’yung was right.

Each living Being lived in accordance to their own purpose- whether self-appointed or given- and that moved and motivated them. But was that purpose always right? Of course not, Jimin knew that.

So had the purpose of his title, of his birth-right, catalyzed a reaction that he could have stopped had it not been for borders he limited himself to? He stares at the cell for a while longer.

The secrets of his people’s creations, of their discoveries and hard work – long they swore to protect it, long they swore to maintain it and never let it leave the borders of their System. But for what? What was the basis of this secret? They preferred to keep to themselves, and there was no fault in that- yet what drove them to hide and defend themselves.

Did a fear for an unforeseeable future stop them from moving forward, from being a solution to an equation rather than being the problem or factor of fear?

‘Jimin?’

Jimin starts, surprised to find Yoongi sitting next to him. He’s holding a cup of tea in his hands, clearly made for Jimin.

A sudden and powerful wave of emotion hits Jimin.

Yoongi had cleaned up, changed his clothes; his hair was damp and a mess. Jimin can’t help but see all the scars on Yoongi, see all the years old lesions and layers of healed over tissue damage. He can’t help but sense the weariness within the Human.

Shakily he takes the cup and it only serves to bring a worried look in Yoongi’s eyes. The Human tilts his head, as though in question.

There was no predicting the future. There was no use in regretting the past.

The only thing anyone could be responsible for, the only thing anyone could control, was to do what they could in the present.

And Jimin couldn’t prevent what happened in the past. He couldn’t predict what would happen in the future. Maybe he would never know how or why this cell was here before him. But he could do something now, to enable them to succeed, and to at the very least, make the Beings of this ship safe.

‘Jimin! Namjoon wants to know if you’ll need any additional help or tools-‘

Jimin places the cup of tea next to the cell before he stands up, taking the cell with him.

‘In order to activate and use this cell, we will need at least 10 separate energy-cells to stabilize and defuse the orbital-resonance. We will also need at least 5 anti-matter cells to fuel the rate of fusion and transform it into a stable accessible source of fuel to replace the already existing shield-settings of the ship; I will also need at least 20 water-cells,’ Jimin reels off. ‘I cannot single-handedly operate this change in the ship in time for us to use it, and I want us to succeed- I want to bring Hoseok back, to complete this mission, and to go home. And in order to do that, I will do all I can to help you.’
Taeh’yung hastens to translate, a bright light growing in his eyes, unable to stop grinning broadly as he does so. Namjoon’s expression is first confused and then he brightens up as well. Jimin feels a hand gripping on the back of his shirt, looking back, it’s Yoongi and the Human has an oddly startled look on his face.

‘You’ll explain your tech?’ Taeh’yung asks excitedly.

Jimin nods in reply.

‘A lot has been done, by misusing what my people created in order to protect our homes. This cell alone has robbed lives, homes, cities, planets. It has destroyed more than I can comprehend, more than what I can see. I am no longer home, it is unknown to me now,’ Jimin grips the cell tighter, ignoring the emptiness that came whenever he tried to reconnect with his home. ‘And maybe I can stop that from happening- or-…or something like that.’

Taeh’yung pulls him into a strong hug out of the blue before he hastens to translate. Jimin is sort of stuck in Taeh’yung’s embrace though he doesn’t fight it. He can’t help but smile in reaction to the eagerness in Taeh’yung’s voice. When Jimin does finally manage to escape Taeh’yung’s strong hug he finds that Namjoon has an intensely relieved expression on his face, backed with joy and delight. But for some reason, Yoongi still appeared hesitant. Which was odd considering he had also asked Jimin to at least explain what he could about his tech to increase their chances of success.

‘Could you repeat what you need again? Namjoon says he’ll bring them out,’ Taeh’yung is vibrating where he stands.

Jimin nods and repeats the items they would need to properly install and use the cell to their advantage.

‘We might need stop somewhere to make sure it’s functioning as it should,’ Jimin adds.

Namjoon looks concerned at that. Then he hears Sk’jin’s voice on his Comm-Device and Namjoon is slowly nodding in agreement. They continue to speak amongst themselves but then Yoongi asks a question, and Namjoon replies a little slowly, like he was unsure. And then without preamble, Yoongi just leaves the Engines Room.

‘If we stop it could make the Omhlophe suspicious,’ Taeh’yung translates quickly. ‘They might change something or try something- we’re going to have to risk it-‘

‘I’m not sure if that…oh,’ Jimin pauses.

‘I think…well, I don’t think Yoongi likes this idea at all. Especially with so many loopholes…’ Taeh’yung says thoughtfully, scratching at his chin.

If the shield didn’t work, it meant that they wouldn’t be able to mask their movements and protect them from sensors, leaving them exposed and chances of Jimin actually being taken would increase. Jimin trusts that no one on the ship would allow him to be taken away. That was in itself a fact. And this wasn’t because Jimin had a self-entitled sense of importance, but because they did actually need him to complete their main mission and objective.

They needed each other, and that was a simple fact.

‘I’ll be right back,’ Jimin tells Taeh’yung who nods in understanding and Jimin appreciates that. What he doesn’t appreciate is the wild eyebrow wiggling and suggestive smile.
Ignoring how his ears felt hot, Jimin exits the Engines Room and makes his way upwards.

It’s easy enough being able to sense where Yoongi was. So his feet take him to up to the Second Level and straight to Yoongi’s Cabin door. It’s closed, but Jimin remembers Taeh’yung telling him he had the highest authority in the ship. Hesitantly, at first, he knocks tentatively.

‘That’s not going to work,’ Taeh’yung chuckles and it makes Jimin’s face burn with embarrassment. ‘The word you’re looking for is “open”- just call the ship’s name and say that.’

Jimin nods tentatively and clears his throat.

‘Lisai, open.’

The door slides open, making Jimin feel a little like he was doing something illegal but at the same time glad. Because Yoongi is on his bed, back turned to the doorway. It makes Jimin want to laugh; the Human’s behavior is incredibly child-like and most likely a result of not knowing how to feel or react.

‘Yoongi?’

If the Human felt any surprise or shock by Jimin’s presence inside his room, he didn’t show it. He was however, doing a spectacular job of pretending to be asleep.

His room is bare. Not personalized like Taeh’yung’s or Sk’jin’s, or adjusted like Namjoon’s and Hoseok’s. Nothing has changed much in the room, save for the black helmet that sits in the middle of the table. It makes Jimin shiver, seeing it separate from Yoongi like this. He’s seen Yoongi wearing it, and never thought much of it then. But here now, just sitting by itself, Jimin can’t explain the intense dislike he feels inside of him. He approaches the device carefully, tentatively feeling the surface.

Back inside the wreckage of the ship, it had felt different. But now it’s cold to touch, and impossibly smooth. There’s a density to it that suggests that its make was much more substantial- so much heavier than it appeared. And not just in terms of physical weight. Jimin feels the strange desire to slip it on but he doesn’t, remembering how Yoongi had stopped him at once. Instead he turns his attention to the screen next to the helmet. It wasn’t the same Yoongi carried with him- it was another NaviLet (Jimin makes sure to remember the names of devices or objects used within the ship) and he knows it’s the very same one embedded with the chip containing Yoongi’s past history.

Yoongi hasn’t read through it, as far as Jimin knows. He knew for a fact that Namjoon had wanted Yoongi to remember, in order to gain information regarding the Human’s activities back when he had been in Menigišiti.

Next to the screen is the hair-clip. An odd addition to this room, a spot of colour, or something far heavier than anything in this Cabin.

Jimin glances back at the bed. Yoongi hasn’t moved a muscle.

Like the other Cabins, there are narrow slivers that function as windows in a straight line above the desk. The expanse of space outside shifts steadily. Ancient light and motion creating the sight before him. Jimin watches the stars for a while, allowing the distant and calm sight to soothe him a little before he turns his back on it and faces Yoongi’s form once more.

Taking a few steps forward, Jimin takes a seat on the bed, and like before, Yoongi makes no show to indicate he was aware of Jimin’s presence inside the room. Making up his mind, Jimin shuffles
more into the bed and then leans back until his head touches the pillow. He’s a little nervous but
determined. He’s not sure how much Yoongi will understand- but he hopes his intention comes
through.

‘Yoongi?’ Jimin doesn’t know why he’s whispering.

There’s no answer.

Jimin stares up at the ceiling above the bed area.

‘I know you’re worried,’ Jimin begins quietly. ‘I know you don’t want me to go. I don’t want to
leave you too, you know? But I also know that you’ll come and get me.’

Turning his head Jimin smiles, brushing Yoongi’s hair with his fingers. ‘I trust you. I know you.’

They stay like that quietly for a few minutes and Jimin wonders if Yoongi has actually fallen
asleep. He can’t tell from his breaths and Yoongi always did possess a very quiet disposition.

‘Your home was taken away- and I know you don’t…you don’t remember it the way I know you
did. And maybe that was a result of something I could have prevented. Maybe it wasn’t. I don’t
know. But you’re back here, and I get to see you again.’ Jimin doesn’t know why he’s saying any
of this.

‘Lead, and I will follow.’

Taeh’yung had quietly translated the words, adding far more meaning and memory to the words
than Jimin had thought possible. Vivid memory of Yoongi’s tired smile, the strength of his soul,
the stability of his hand in his.

‘You don’t have a home anymore, and neither does Sk’jin, or Namjoon, or Hoseok- Taeh’yung
too,’ Jimin says softly. ‘And even though I do not know what happened to mine, I want to give that
to all of you. You told me to lead, and that you would follow. So please trust me, and follow me.’

Yoongi still doesn’t move.

Shifting to his side, Jimin carefully reaches around Yoongi and presses in as close as he dared.
Jimin listens closely, not just for the sound of Yoongi’s breaths, but for the hums and vibrations,
for the pulse of his soul.

It's there; faint and tired.

‘Yoongi?’

The Human doesn’t move or say a word. Quietly tightening his arm around the Human, Jimin
presses his forehead on the expanse of his back.

‘I’ll take you home again.’
Sk’jin watches as Namjoon and Jimin work together, Taeh’yung hovering around them, translating between them.

Based on what Sk’jin was able to listen in on and what Namjoon later documented in the Captain’s logs, Jimin’s System combined and utilized orbital resonance to mask their existence. There was a lot more detail involved but Sk’jin only listened in until he thought necessary for him to understand the basics. The other details he would leave to Namjoon.

Watching the two of them work together was almost like watching an excitable child learning something from an aged relative- the child here in question being Namjoon who looked far too delighted to be learning about this technology. Sk’jin doesn’t care much for it, concentrating only on getting them to this obvious death-trap.

Of course they had no other option than to agree to the exchange. There was nothing they could do and the Omhlophe knew that. Though of course what they didn’t know was that they had Jimin’s trust and willingness to utilize his System’s tech in order to hopefully mask their presence. Sk’jin doesn’t know how this is going to work in their favor, or how it’s going to take place, but the fact that they could potentially own a defensive mechanism that could effectively hide them from anyone who would look for them gives him a sense of security.

Security was an expensive and abstract notion that had no real generator. But with this hiding mechanism, it was possible that they wouldn’t even need to pay much of a price.

That is if it worked.

Jimin had wanted to try out the shield, but they couldn’t stop lest they cause suspicion and question from the Omhlophe who were obviously tracking their movements.

They were close to finishing the installment and based on the simulation-render Namjoon had run, the shield should technically work. There was a 78% success rate and like Taeh’yung had so eloquently said, that was better than 77%.

They were already within the borders of Ynqaba and they still had no call or message from the Omhlophe. It was setting Sk’jin on edge.

Everyone was fidgeting on their own. Namjoon at the Mast, staring blankly as he keeps an eye on the readings of the installed cell in the Engines Room. Yoongi was sitting in his usual seat below, staring blankly into the white expanse of warped space. Both Taeh’yung and Jimin were sitting on either side of the Human; Jimin asleep and oddly enough Taeh’yung was quietly reading.

The thick silence doesn’t last too long as Lisai announces, ‘Approaching first log-check in in 5 minutes.’

‘All right everyone,’ Sk’jin announces. ‘We’re not headed inwards so we’re just gonna stay put outside the border.’

Taeh’yung stretches loudly, tossing his screen to the side and shaking his entire body like an
animal shaking off water from its fur coat. Jimin starts awake before sitting up properly. Yoongi just nods in response while Namjoon performs the obligatory Captain calls.

‘Pull out of warp,’ he orders, adjusting in his seat for the millionth time.

They had no idea what to expect from this exchange, how to defend themselves if needed. This was in every sense of the word an incredibly stupid thing to do.

‘We’re pulling out of warp in 5…4…3…2…1-‘

The light from the stars don’t ease up and instead bright flashes of light spark up all over outside the window.

‘Sk’jin-?’

‘What the fuck-’ Sk’jin stares down at his monitors and his panels. He had pulled them out of warp- what was happening?

The ship suddenly shudders violently, triggering their additional emergency seat-security, and the white around them fades away like mist only to reveal a chaotic ongoing space-battle scene.

‘Fuck-!!’

Missiles fly overhead in bright flashes of light, narrowly missing them.

Sk’jin dives them downwards only to pull up sharply to avoid the massive broken off wing of a ship hurtling across and crashing into an unsuspecting Transporter that appeared out of nowhere.

‘What is Spaces-?!’

‘Shields up at maximum now!’ Sk’jin screams as he attempts to pull them up and away from the battle.

This was not what any of them were expecting when they had heard of the war in Ynqaba. All the reports had put the fighting inside the planet or within the borders of their moons-

‘-is that their moon?! Cool!’ Taeh’yung exclaims loudly as the briefly spot crumbled and cracked remains of a small bumpy moon to the side. There’s horrified gasps from Jimin, bordering pain and sorrow. The very space around them seems to scream with destruction and force, staining the stars beyond a murky red and grey. Bitterness coils inside Sk’jin's stomach, inching its way upwards.

The war in Ynqaba was a violent one within the neighbouring planets- but rather than being fought only in-planet, Sk'jin guesses they migrated outwards. Great.

‘Yoongi-‘ Sk’jin warns as he careens them, spinning the ship thrice to avoid an incoming series of proton-missiles. But there’s no need to call the Human because he’s already readied the weapons-panel, the entire system ready and the HUD lit.

‘Firing,’ he announces in monotone and with astounding accuracy takes down and blocks out the missiles aiming at them.

‘This wasn’t part of the records-‘ Namjoon pants, trying to establish a clear path through this mess of missiles, broken ships, explosions, and debris from fresh ship-wreckages being flung about like asteroids.

‘Sk’jin take us downwards there’s an abandoned and destroyed fleet-ship- use that as calibration
point- Namjoon orders and Sk’jin is already redirecting them.

Taeh’yung cheers from where he’s sitting as they flip over and rapidly fall through a thick cloud of dust and shrapnel, breaking through a few gathered ship parts. Sk’jin is intensely grateful for how strong the Užkulaisai was.

‘Shields at maximum- just go straight!’ Namjoon yells and Sk’jin locks them down and they plummet past streaks of hot white light, snapping through the debris like a stone through cobwebs.

They break through a thick and wide broken wing in thunderous crashing sounds and they exit the main battle point.

‘There-!’

Sk’jin nearly bangs his head over on the front of his panels with the sudden force with which they stop. He feels intense pressure heat up his face, his arms suddenly flung forwards. A whole bunch of items fall and crash down below. There’s a sharp cry of pain from both Jimin and Taeh’yung.

‘Lock-rift has been placed over the ship.’

With great struggle, Sk’jin manages to pull back as the cabin-pressure inside the ship rights itself and gravity settles normally. A lock-rift?! From where? Sk’jin tries everything. He puts their entire engine, activates every single beamer, every fuel cell- but there’s no budging.

‘Incoming missiles-!’ Namjoon warns and Yoongi is quick to respond in kind.

Light erupts around them, the pressure of the explosion moving the ship with its force. Instinctively Sk’jin looks away and tries to get a reading on their engines, wondering how he could boost them out of the lock.

‘Shit-’

Sk’jin looks up, the bright light fading only to highlight an annoyingly familiar ship tear through the wreckage of the fleet-ship before them.

‘What in Spaces-‘

‘Incoming call from Van Seulgaan. Requesting permission.’

‘Are you fucking kidding me-’ Sk’jin would give anything to personally wrap his hands around the Tayian. A massive slaver-ship that was another copy of the same slaver-ship they had escaped from in Grezma appears before them in all of its massive looming construct.

‘Should’ve fucking known he’d be involved in this sort of shit-’

‘How did he get out of Pompa-’ Namjoon splutters.

‘Accept call to main HUD,’ Sk’jin snaps, ignoring Namjoon’s protests.

The Tayian’s face appears on the window, his expression maddened and his appearance unkempt and rather crazed.

‘Scum!’ he spits at once. ‘Finally got you-‘

‘Shit, are they in alliance with the Omhlophe-‘
-oh you thought you were clever didn’t you? But you can’t escape me- I found you and you will PAY-‘

‘Engines under pressure. Please release strain,’ Lisai announces.

‘Fuck,’ Yoongi says quietly from the front.

‘They’re trying to string us in-‘ Sk’jin could scream.

‘Yoongi, deploy hull-hooks and anchor us back,’ Namjoon orders sharply. ‘Sk’jin put the breaks on.’

‘That’s not going to help us in the long run what the fuck are we going to do now- they’ve caught us before-‘ Sk’jin argues but still follows the orders. Their movement stops and Sk’jin notices how they were now more or less tethered to a large broken ship behind them, beyond which the great battle still went on.

‘Surrender now you have no escape!’ Seulgaan screams at them. ‘And maybe- just maybe I’ll show you mercy!’

‘Spaces I hate him so much-‘ Sk’jin curses.

‘Incoming call from unknown source. Requesting permission.’ Lisai tells them pleasantly.

Namjoon’s eyes widen but before he can speak, Sk’jin is out of his seat, launching forwards at Namjoon and effectively covers the Kutsoglerin’s mouth with one of his hands, the other with his fingers outstretched, jabbing under his jaw and making the latter gasp out gagging unattractively and rendering him incapable of speech.

‘Accept call!’ Sk’jin blocks the harsh blow aimed at his sternum and knocks Namjoon down to the floor before entirely removing himself from the Mast. How and when Yoongi got there he doesn’t know because the Human now stood between Namjoon and himself, hands raised a little as though ready to stop the both of them.

‘You have been caught. Why is that so.’ The voice asks plainly.

‘If we had an answer we’d give it to you,’ Sk’jin hisses back, catching his breath and warily watching Namjoon who stands back up. ‘Tell your lackey to fucking let us go now!’

‘We do not know of this situation. Please remove yourselves immediately-‘

‘If we could we would!’ Namjoon yells as he regains his voice, wincing and coughing violently.

Sk’jin abruptly cuts the call, an idea formulating fast in his mind.

‘What the fuck do you think you’re doing-‘ Namjoon doesn’t even wince when a missile flies past them.

‘Lisai- patch a call to Van Seulgaan now,’ Sk’jin orders.

‘Sk’jin you can’t be serious-‘

‘What do you want now-‘

‘Hey pasty-face listen- we surrender.’
Yoongi’s head snaps towards him in alarm, eyes wide as he stares at Sk’jin from where he stood. He’s so shocked he doesn’t even flinch when a missile explodes overhead, splinters and bits of wreckage falling down on them like rain, creating sparks as it meets their shield.

‘...what-’

‘Didn’t you say you were going to make us pay? Take us in- we surrender-‘ Sk’jin deactivates their breaks, before hurrying down to the weapon’s mast and deactivating the hull-hooks, dislodging them from the massive broken ship and steadying himself as they jolt out of the anchor. Jimin looks wildly confused and a little terrified whereas Taeh’yung looks like he’s having the time of his life.

‘Are you mad-‘ Namjoon demands, making his way out of the Mast almost entirely ready to probably punch Sk’jin.

‘I am far from mad- I am saving us,’ Sk’jin hisses quietly. ‘Seulgaan and the Omhlophe are not in league with each other- they don’t know each other. But they both want the same thing from us- and that’s Jimin-‘

‘So why are you surrendering-‘

‘Just-‘ Sk’jin pushes past to make his way to the Mast.

‘What do you think you’re-‘

‘Lisai place a call to Hoseok’s Comm-Device-‘

‘Linking.’

Sk’jin rounds up to face Namjoon and look him straight in the eye.

‘Listen to me,’ he states firmly and carefully. ‘Seulgaan and the Omhlophe are two separate forces we cannot possibly handle individually let alone together like this. And right now we’re stuck in a cliché romance-drama with these two-‘ Namjoon is understandably extremely confused at this point ‘-where we’re the hapless damsel in distress and these two are the romantic interests who want us. So what happens next?’

‘They fight for us!’ Taeh’yung gleefully answers from the front.

‘They fight for us,’ Sk’jin repeats. ‘Neither of them will back out of this- not when we’re this close. They’ll fight each other and during that time we slip past.’

‘That’s great and all,’ Namjoon replies still mad, ‘But what do we do about the rift-lock? What about Hoseok?’

‘Line connected.’

‘Hey- so as you can see we’re stuck in a situation right now- a rift-lock and we can’t leave. You gonna do something about this?’ Sk’jin calls, not looking away from Namjoon.

‘We are coming to retrieve you. Please stay put.’ The Omhlophe announces before the line cuts.

Sk’jin sees the way Namjoon seems to rapidly think before he reaches over and taps on the Table.

‘Van Seulgaan this is Namjoon, Captain of the Užkulisai, we officially surrender and comply to your arrest.’
‘Finally got some brains now haven’t you,’ Seulgaan sneers. ‘I’m going to make sure you pay-‘

Sk’jin reaches over and mutes the call.

‘Hoseok?’ Yoongi asks.

Namjoon raises his eyebrows, as though to echo Yoongi’s question.

Sk’jin glances out of the window above them and notices a startling white sizeable ship approach them.

‘Tae wanna do something incredibly stupid and risky with your daddy?’ Sk’jin asks, still looking up.

Taeh’yung leaps from where he stands, arms stretched above him in victory.

‘Yes! Finally!’

‘I think I know what you’re planning- and I think it’s my duty as Captain to tell you that this is a bad idea,’ Namjoon tells him. Looking away with a grin Sk’jin pats Namjoon on his cheek and pinches at where his dimples should be.

‘I’ll take care of Seulgaan, go and get Hobi back.’ Glancing over at Yoongi he adds, ‘Yoongi babe, could you take over for me? And Jimin?’

Jimin, bless his soul, confused and exasperated, also stands, looking for an explanation from anyone.

‘What do you think about role-playing?’
HOPE WORLD
IS
SO
FUCKING
PERFECT
BYE
HE LOOKS SO GOOD IN THE MUSIC VIDEOS I’M LITERALLY CRYING OMG
BLESS MY BABY MY SUNSHINE I LOVE HIM SO MUCH
AGHLRUHIELDFGKLASJFALSKFJHDK
And fuck so many comebacks this month?!?!
The downside of being multifandom is having too much content and not enough time
for any of it *sighs heavily*
Yoongi takes a short break.

His chest feels tight—not in the way it did as a result of his occasional smoking habits, and it’s not in the way where he’s developing a cough or cold. There’s a strange pressure-building deep within Yoongi.

Almost like a pressure channel collapsing into itself inside his chest.

He tries to cough, hoping to relieve the tightness in his chest. But he can’t.

It doesn’t work.

He absentmindedly fiddles with the foil of the cigarette packet in his pocket. He hasn’t smoked one in ages. Since Earth, in fact.

There was something about being back on Earth that just triggered Yoongi’s smoking impulse. Outside of Earth, he didn’t even touch it. But he carried the packet in his pocket at all times. Especially for situations like these. It made him feel better.

Like he was carrying a bit of home in his pocket.

A small secret he kept safe.

He also knows this isn’t strictly because of the cigarettes.

Rather it’s also because of the small glittering purple-clip he had discovered being snuck into his belongings.

She had done something like this before.

Sneaking in objects into his bag as though making sure that by some brotherly duty, Yoongi would always return home to give it back to her. She started doing that ever since he moved out of their home to study at a university in the neighbouring Settlement Arc. And Yoongi always came back home to return it to her.

‘Yoongi?’

Jimin too was far from home. He had illustrated via hologram what his planet looked like. What brought him all the way here?

Jimin looks down at him expectantly, worry in his eyes.
The past few days were tough. What with the tension between each Being, the fear, the confusion.

‘Hey sunshine,’ Yoongi’s smile isn’t forced and this unknown Being’s presence is soothing to the pain in his chest. ‘What’s up?’

Jimin points towards the back, gnawing at his lower lip in worry.

And this was something else added to all of the strain in the team.

A strange illness seemed to be slowly taking over a few of them. Fatigue, temporary loss of senses, fever, chills, racking coughs, and labored breathing. But it went past these symptoms.

There was something else about this illness.

And Amic was one of the victims.

Jimin gestures, placing his palms together and under his head to mime sleep.

‘Sleep,’ Yoongi nods. ‘I’ll stay up- it’s my turn to watch.’

Jimin looks back to where the team were huddled around, eyes sharp but weary. He seems to make up his mind and sits next to Yoongi instead. A few moments later, Jimin’s head makes its way to Yoongi’s shoulder.

‘Sleep,’ Yoongi whispers quietly, peering out into the forest. ‘Jimin sleep.’

Jimin nods into his shoulder wordlessly, a hand creeping around his forearm slowly, as though hoping Yoongi wouldn’t notice.

To reassure Jimin, and also to experience what it felt like, Yoongi gently brushes through Jimin’s silver-gold hair. Jimin leans in even closer at the contact, his hand now fully holding onto his arm.

‘I’ll be here when you wake up.’

*

Sk’jin steps out of his cabin dressed in one of his silky robes that survived what he mentally referred to as the Pompen Suga Carnage. Shortened to “PSC” as well, somehow sounded much more credible. It was just a simple matter of hiding this little gem away. It’s a soft lilac in colour
with dainty gems sewn around the sleeves and throat, creating a ribbed design structure around the torso before seemingly falling off in drops down the floaty fabric of the main coat.

It highlighted his hair to perfection and balanced the cool tone of his hair perfectly.

He steps out of his room, hands clasped behind his back. Humming to himself, Sk’jin makes his way downwards.

‘Namjoonie, Tae-Tae, are you guys already out?’

‘Yes we are!’ Taeh’yung chimes in. ‘We’ll be there in a couple of minutes!’

‘Perfect. Make sure your timing is right- and don’t lose Namjoon.’

‘For fuck’s sake-‘

‘I won’t lose pa! He’s safe with me!’

‘We’re being pulled in.’ Yoongi reports. ‘Landing inside the Hangar in 15 seconds.’

Sk’jin pauses at the mirror at the bottom of the stairs, carefully setting his bangs about and making sure he had nothing between his teeth. He absentmindedly thinks he should wear some earrings next time. A few gems maybe. Satisfied, Sk’jin makes his way down fully.

‘All right. Are you ready?’ Sk’jin asks, striding across the Lobby and into their Hangar Bay, the gate opens slowly, the shimmering blue of the Atmoshield glimmering in preparation. Yoongi is waiting for him, in his uniform full-black outfit complete with helmet.

‘Ready.’ He replies.

‘All right,’ Sk’jin steadies himself easily as they land. As the Hangar gates open fully and the ramp is lowered, they find themselves inside the large docking bay of Van Seulgaan’s slaver ship. This time the Dock is closed off and there is no direct view of the wide gaping slave-cages in the background for which Sk’jin is grateful. They couldn’t afford any form of distraction at this moment.

The Tayian himself is standing there, seething where he waited for them but with an almost manic grin on his face. Behind him stood more of the cyborg guards they had encountered in Pompa, as well as a rag-tag assembly of living guards.

Sk’jin barely manages to stop the eye-roll, a skill because he rolled his eyes as frequently as he swore. Instead he gracefully descends down the ramp, the thinner fabric of his robes flutter slowly behind him and settle around him a little late. Sk’jin really loves these robes. He inclines his head to the side in greeting before sending Seulgaan a smile that he definitely did not deserve.

‘Let’s please not get anyone killed or worse,’ Namjoon warns, a grumbling tone to his voice.

‘Oh, you overestimate me,’ Sk’jin smiles, gracing the rest of the gathered Beings a smile as well.

‘You have much to explain Khol’isa!’ Seulgaan spits out as soon as they’re close enough. His eyes are darting from Sk’jin to the white ship behind them.

‘Jimin- is everything ready?’ Sk’jin asks pleasantly just feet from Seulgaan. They had practiced some phrases in Standard so that Jimin understood what they meant in relation to this rather chaotic plan.
‘Yes.’ Jimin replies in his best Standard. Sk’jin stops himself from turning around to beam up at the front window of the Užkulisai.

‘Perfect- let’s start.’ Namjoon murmurs.

‘Van Seulgaan,’ Sk’jin greets the Tayian. ‘A procession! How nice!’

‘Cuff him,’ Seulgaan orders at once. But before any of the guards can approach them, Yoongi’s previously hidden and blackened form appears from behind Sk’jin and easily deflects the approaching guards attempts in even being able to touch Sk’jin.

Predictably Seulgaan starts at the sight of Yoongi’s form behind Sk’jin.

‘Who are they?’ Seulgaan demands as soon as he’s recovered, pointing behind them through the thick sea of debris at the gleaming white ship. ‘What the fuck is that?!’

‘Something we did not foresee! We made an unfortunate enemy in Pompa,’ Sk’jin tells him pleasantly. ‘And you see, they want their dues returned to them I suppose.’

‘Not before I’m done with you,’ Seulgaan retorts, much to Sk’jin’s delight. The Tayian jerks his head at the cyborgs and barks out, ‘Search the ship! Bring the others out- they can’t hide for long, what the fuck were you thinking?’

‘A whole lot more than you were,’ Sk’jin replies too quickly for Seulgaan to hear before he continues, ‘I’m afraid our beloved captain has just run away- possible in our smaller Transporter. The Ngfy’widan went with him, and I’m afraid it’s just sweet sweet Suga and me, cleaning up the mess for now.’

‘What about the other one?’ Seulgaan frowns. ‘The one who was always smiling.’

‘To be honest I don’t know,’ Sk’jin shrugs, ‘And in all fairness, if you knew him, then that would really perfectly explain him.’

Seulgaan watches him with intensely disbelieving eyes. Sk’jin was being careful. Though clearly unhinged and a little crazed, Van Seulgaan was still a cunning and powerful Being in his own right. Who he was, who he knew, and most importantly, who he was connected to, were still unknown to them. While they did have an advantage at this moment, given Seulgaan’s disturbed character, they still needed to tread carefully.

‘And the egg?’

‘Yoongi- are we clear?’ Namjoon asks quietly.

‘You’re clear.’

‘What makes you think I’d bring him out here?’ Sk’jin asks, eyes widening and a look of intense discomfort settling over his features in a convincing manner despite the intense relief he feels inside at the conversation he’s hearing. ‘We only just managed to subdue him.’

Seulgaan’s eyes narrow even more, but now there’s a hint of fear in his eyes.

‘So you’ve seen one of them with your own two eyes,’ Seulgaan mumbles, eyes switching over to Yoongi’s quiet form. And with unnerving monotone he simply states: ‘Abomination.’

Sk’jin senses Yoongi twitching next to him and he hastens to speak.
‘Abomination?’ Sk’jin repeats.

Seulgaan doesn’t explain any further and the cyborgs reappear from behind them.

‘No other presence detected within the ship,’ it reports in a pleasant automated voice. ‘One sealed OrTank retrieved.’

‘Take it down,’ Seulgaan orders the Beings behind him before rounding up to carefully stare at Sk’jin. ‘They do not sleep after being woken- how did you manage?’

Sk’jin keeps a mask of calm, his features perfectly poised despite his inner mind screaming questions. What did Seulgaan mean? Had he woken up others like Jimin? Like Yoongi? Were they unstable?

‘You know things, we know things,’ Sk’jin replies simply before adding, ‘I don’t want to change topics here but you do realize that that is out there? It wants us too.’

Seulgaan looks out briefly before turning to address his guards again.

‘Set up a line of communication right now,’ he barks. ‘Fix a channel to the white-ship there and connect them to me.’

‘You will want to be careful,’ Sk’jin warns with a smile. ‘They’re not the type who easily give up.’

Seulgaan doesn’t spare him a look or response as he takes the screen his guard hands him.

‘Who is this?’ Seulgaan demands imperiously.

The line clicks softly before an entirely new voice speaks up. Yet again, Sk’jin cannot place the gender or accent of the voice.

‘We request you hand over the Yemenifesi Ch’inik’eti, and the remaining members of the Užkulisai to us, and we will leave you in peace. Thank you for your cooperation.’

‘I have not given you my cooperation!’ Seulgaan snaps. ‘I do not care what issues you have with this rag-tag shit-heads but I’m claiming them so I would advise you to turn back. They are no longer your problem and I will make sure they cause no more problems in the future.’

‘If it is units you require then we shall transfer the needed amount and more in return for the Yemenifesi Ch’inik’eti and the crew members. Name any amount and it shall be yours!’

Seulgaan actually rolls his eyes.

‘Listen here,’ he states in a calm voice, unimpressed. ‘I don’t care what you have to offer or what you want to offer. I’m giving you a warning- leave, or I’m releasing the 10 proton-missiles that I’ve had locked on your location.’

It’s silent for a moment and Sk’jin momentarily panics. They had to keep the Omhlophe here until they could extract Hoseok out of their ship. If the Omhlophe decided that it wasn’t worth it, then they would lose Hoseok forever. And that wasn’t something Sk’jin needed in his conscience.

‘We are issuing you a warning to release the Yemenifesi Ch’inik’eti and the crew-members to us immediately or we will not be this courteous.’

Seulgaan frowns heavily at that. Though a threat that would have Sk’jin really sweating, it makes him exhale out in relief.
‘Release a missile- miss, but be close.’ Seulgaan orders.

Sk’jin turns around, willing his actions to be relaxed, to watch past the wings of the Užkulisai as a bright streak of electric blue streaks out through the debris and explodes close to the white ship.

‘We’re fine.’

Sk’jin wishes he could reply back but he doesn’t.

‘We’re almost there. 30 seconds.’ Namjoon says quietly.

‘I need one more minute.’ Yoongi reports quietly.

The light clears and the debris around the white ship scatters even more, causing issues with the already compromised visibility outside. The line is quiet and so is everyone in the Dock.

‘Next time I won’t miss,’ Seulgaan says simply. ‘Now leave, or I won’t be as courteous.’

Sk’jin waits with bated breath.

‘10 seconds.’

‘We regret to inform you that we will no longer conduct our approach with care. You were warned. Please be prepared to be boarded Van Seulgaan, we hope you have a nice day.’

A chill runs down Sk’jin’s back and he whips around to face Seulgaan who though rather unstable, looked remarkably calm.

‘Raise the shields at maximum, close all docks and bays. Reinforce the engines and set ready to warp-’ he makes to turn around but pauses to glance briefly at the distant white ship, ‘-destroy that filth.’

Sk’jin had said this was something incredibly stupid and risky and he wasn’t kidding.

Namjoon cannot believe he’s doing this. Even for someone of his mechanical built and practically inorganic being, being exposed to space wasn’t the smartest idea. There was a lot that they didn’t know about space even after millenniums of research and discovery and breakdowns. So much remained unknown and mysterious yet here he was; just feet from a full blown space-battle, with a slaver-ship waiting to obliterate his ship, and an unknown ship possible capable of obliterating his entire ship if they wanted.

Not for the first time has Namjoon questioned his decisions and actions this deeply in the past few
months.

Because you didn’t even have to be “smart” to know that transporting yourself through an open and unlocked Transporter in space, clinging to a handle to the side of the wall inches off of the floor, being guided and shielded only by the unknown abilities of a questionable Being was a pretty stupid thing to do.

Namjoon is not hydrophobic and neither is he agoraphobic- and the idea of drowning in space seemed bizarre and extremely unlikely. But recently, bizarre and unlikely things seemed to be happening rather frequently to him so he’s not about to take his chances either way.

The Spardyti is quiet and deactivated. The engines quiet and still, the doors flung open and the Atmoshield switched off. Everything has been turned upside down in here. Quite literally in fact. There was no gravity in here and Namjoon warily watches the massive bubbles of water sloshing around the place, some pressed up and enforced in certain areas. Instead of a shimmering blue shielding them from the vacuum of space, a neon green thing blocks the doorways and windows.

‘How is this even a thing?!” Namjoon bursts out, unable to contain himself anymore. ‘We are in space- there is no mass or volume that you could use to possible project us like this- vaulting through space-how are you projecting or generating independent energy-’

‘There is mass and volume all around us,’ Taeh’yung remarks looking at Namjoon as though shocked Namjoon didn’t know this. ‘Look at all of this energy-‘

‘Energy isn’t a palpable or corporeal mass-‘ Namjoon splutters, offended. ‘It’s the property of a system rather than a physical property-‘

‘Pa you think too much,’ Taeh’yung reaches over and takes his hand, never minding the blobs of water floating about that could drown them. The ship shudders as they hit another chunk of debris.

Namjoon is also extremely against this entire thing for another reason: the literal sea of debris they were floating around in.

The space-battle they had warped into had moved closer to the broken moon and left behind massive areas of debris and junk. Namjoon gives the debris a month or so before it’s pulled down to the small planet above them, inevitably drawing its own death sentence as a result of its own gravity. But for now it served as a sort of double-edged camouflage blanket for them, leading them slowly towards the stationary white ship below.

Namjoon hurriedly shoves a blob of water out of his general vicinity while Taeh’yung opens his mouth wide in hopes of having it land into his mouth.

Jimin had claimed, with no context or further explanation, that they would need water in order to really use the cell. He said they didn’t have the time, and Taeh’yung added he didn’t know enough of the more complex words in order to properly translate Jimin’s words anyways. And it was true-Taeh’yung tried his best, but some of the more complex words, ideas, forms, and general state of this technology was just too alien and complex to translate into Standard. Sometimes Taeh’yung would just stare out into the air before he was finally able to somehow manage to translate.

Water was key to all of this. And Namjoon knew this. He’s just not sure how it all relates.

Nonetheless, the whole thing was fascinating. Namjoon aided Jimin in constructing the rather odd oblong cylinder strapped to the floor of the Spardyti, originally designed to sit inside the Užkulisai.

What Namjoon understood was that they used the natural orbital resonance between their tightly
knit system, harvesting that energy into a stable and usable source of energy to create powerful electromagnetic shields in order to shield them from most transmittable radio-waves that could be used to scan or even actually visibly see them. It was in a sense, System-sized Faraday cages; constructed and set up in a way to deflect and or block out certain wavelengths and resonances that could pass through to reveal them. But the very idea behind it seemed too simple. There had to be more to it. Because it seemed rather odd to Namjoon, seeing as the GLA had tried this experiment before and hadn’t been able to harness the volatile force to create this sort of shield around themselves at such a scale. How did water come into play? It made no practical sense.

Just what exactly were Jimin and his people capable of?

Taeh’yung casually tosses the cell between his hands, slowly spinning in the air himself.

How was this small cell storing such a volatile force for so long, and how much havoc had this small device singlehandedly wrought?

‘You have much to explain Khol’isa!’ Seulgaan’s angry voice fills the air.

‘Jimin- is everything ready?’ Sk’jin sounds too pleased.

‘Yes.’

‘Perfect- let’s start.’ Namjoon nods at Taeh’yung who nods back delightedly and swims in the air, cell in his hand. Namjoon floats over to the open doorway where a few simple air-pressure tanks were attached. They wouldn’t need a lot- but it was always best to be safe rather than sorry.

‘Ready?’ Namjoon asks Taeh’yung who gives him a thumbs up and proceeds to jam the cell into the small slot of the cylinder.

There’s a moment of strained silence where Namjoon and Taeh’yung just stare at each other.

According to their calculations, they had been able to summarize that the success rate was at 78%. And like Taeh’yung had said- that was better than 77%.

Then slowly, a shiver runs through the Spardyti, the water floating about them freezes and then like molten glass flies past and encases them like a thin shield just outside of the green-tinted shield Taeh’yung projected.

‘Yoongi- are we clear?’

‘You’re clear.’

Taeh’yung lets out a cheer.

Sk’jin’s plan was extraordinarily dangerous, stupid, and risky.

But also brilliant.

Sk’jin, Jimin, and Yoongi would remain in the Užkulisai, awaiting capture and would allow themselves to be captured. Meanwhile, Namjoon and Taeh’yung would board the Spardyti, seal the Hangar, and open it up and float out into space without switching on a single engine or system. Taeh’yung would then seal them in, using his abilities (which Namjoon will not inquire as they did not have the time to do so and honestly Taeh’yung would only give him an even more confusing explanation that answered no questions) to sustain them as they float through the debris.
This sea of debris would then cover their motion and plan until Yoongi is ready and then they would activate the cell, and theoretically, it would mask their presence the same way Jimin’s home-system was masked. Seeing as how the theory proved itself and was now working, they would use the small air-pressure tanks to gently punt themselves through the sea of debris unseen by the Omhlophe and Seulgaan’s ship towards the former’s ship.

Taeh’yung says something to Jimin, a slight teasing tone to his voice. Jimin’s splutters and indignant responses are amusing and it almost makes Namjoon smile. But he has other things to occupy his mind as he activates the Spardyti’s life-support system and gravity. The engines hum to life as well but are not activated just yet.

The white ship is large- at least 5 times the size of the Užkulisai. It was a unique design- if it weren’t for the uniform white colouring, the ship appeared as though it was hastily and blindly thrown together. None of the wings matched, the hull design was greatly different from the main body, the windows were different in size and shape and seemed to pop out at random.

‘We only just managed to subdue him.’ Sk’jin is saying.

‘So you’ve seen one of them with your own two eyes,’ Seulgaan sounds remarkably calm and contained as he adds: ‘Abomination.’

Namjoon frowns at the choice of words. Taeh’yung pauses in his motion to give Namjoon a quizzical look.

‘Abomination?’ Sk’jin sounds similarly confused.

Namjoon cannot afford to be distracted by Sk’jin’s conversation- he was going to have to depend on the Khol’isa to make sure things went how they were supposed to there. They continue to hide themselves behind the debris and with the slightest release of air-pressure in the right direction, they start floating towards the now stationary white ship.

‘We’re approaching our target,’ Namjoon reports, feeling breathless despite not having any issues breathing. ‘Yoongi- are you almost done?’

‘I need 3 minutes.’

Amazingly everything was still going to plan.

‘Release a missile- miss, but be close.’ He hears Seulgaan order.

This was a great risk in their plan- getting caught in between missile exchange.

‘Incoming-‘

There’s a burst of light and shockwaves send them careening forwards.

‘We’re fine.’ Namjoon says at once. He looks around, and finds that they’re now incredibly close to the ship. Oddly enough that missile was practically god-sent. ‘We’re almost there. 30 seconds.’

‘I need one more minute.’ Yoongi reports quietly.

Namjoon checks on the tiny missiles locked and loaded onto the canon-like TeorSer that needed to be hefted up onto a shoulder in order to launch the missiles.

Magnetic-pulse detonators.
Powerful and small- it would give them the time they needed in order to make their escape and meet back with the Užkulaisai. It was designed to effect only their gravity-systems and engine-chips. But they themselves would need to be at a good distance before triggering it. Not that it would affect the Spardyti, considering no systems were activated or switched on so the magnetic pulses wouldn’t fry any of their engines or mechanics. However, Namjoon deemed it prudent to keep themselves on the safe side. After all, a lot of unexpected things kept happening and the last thing they needed was to get caught in the explosion and end up stranded.

‘Magnetic strips ready!’ Taeh’yung reports brightly.

And right down to the very second that Sk’jin had so haphazardly calculated, they find themselves under the belly of the Omhlophe ship, attached to the bottom with moderately strong magnetic strips. It’s not strong enough to trigger an alarm, but enough to keep them anchored.

‘Please hurry.’ Yoongi states quietly. ‘Van Seulgaan is preparing to attack.’

Namjoon nods despite knowing Yoongi couldn’t see him. He grabs the extra air-pressure tank already outfitted with a strap and he slings it over and around his back.

‘Keep her steady and attached,’ Namjoon tells Taeh’yung who nods fervently in reply, pulling out a slim and dark screen from inside his jacket pocket. ‘When you get there, release at once and come back. Fucking Spaces I hope this works.’

Namjoon sighs out before taking a deep breath and jumps out of the Spardyti.

This was the part that Sk’jin had called “heroic but idiotic- perfect for you!” with a smile directed at Namjoon. It makes Namjoon’s eyebrows twinge at the very memory of it. With steady releases of the air-pressure, Namjoon shoots forward quickly and up to the surface of the ship. He suppresses a shiver as he touches the ice-cold metal of the ship.

They hadn’t flown out at random- they aimed to reach a certain part of the ship for a reason. And that reason was the water-cell latches.

‘Seulgaan will launch in 30 seconds.’ Yoongi reports quietly. ‘I am here. Ready when you are.’

‘Pa is there! I’m getting Hobi now!’ Taeh’yung replies for him.

Namjoon has a bone to pick with Yoongi. Clearly the Human did not even try to break his habit of frequently poisoning them with extremely rare trace amounts of highly radioactive isotopes- but it was the only thing that was allowing them to keep track of Hoseok’s whereabouts though it’s only through Yoongi’s personalized screen. Namjoon wants to argue this worrisome habit but seeing as how it was working out in their favor, he can’t say much. Besides, it wasn’t as though it was preplanned- Yoongi, like Namjoon, had wanted to keep an eye on the Ngfy’widan after he left the Užkulaisai, and so made him a cup of tea in parting.

Namjoon had actually seen that moment unfold before his very eyes.

Yoongi had offered the former Venture Unit agent the cup, face stoic as ever.

‘Is it poisoned this time?’ Hoseok had asked, a laugh in his voice.

‘Yes.’ Yoongi had replied.

Hoseok had laughed harder and finished the tea.
In Yoongi’s defense, he hadn’t lied.

Space is a cruel and harsh environment. Instantly Namjoon feels crushed but his body withstands it. He finds the latches and with a strong punch to the side, pries it open.

Water-cell latches were traditionally not secured – mainly because though it granted access into the ship via ducts and pipes, it had no life-support supplied in here and was therefore a terrible way of entering a ship illegally unless you wanted to face a painful death. But Namjoon is spared this.

The water-cell racks are narrow and Namjoon has to push himself through, his clothes snagging on the protruding shelves. But it’s enough.

He finds the duct, smaller but similar to the one Namjoon and Sk’jin had used to infiltrate Seulgaan’s ship. But he doesn’t have to go in. instead he reaches in and grabs the thick coil of wires to the side. Carefully, he snaps a wire just enough to expose the underwire. Once he sees the gleam of metal, he carefully attaches a small temporary self-destructive chip that lights up the moment Namjoon lets go of the chip. Pulling back and in the same motion as one would while swimming, coils in the air and with his feet pushes himself out of the cramped space, keeping as straight as possible.

‘I GOT HOBI!’ comes a delighted exclamation followed instantly by a violent shuddering that sends Namjoon careening off to the side. Ripples of raw force flushes him out of the water-cell latch and for a wild panicked moment, Namjoon is hurled out into space without anchor or security.

Unfiltered and raw heat waves crash about him like heavy waves of water and just as Namjoon thinks he’s probably the victim of the 22% chance of this plan failing, a hand grabs him non too gently and in a moment of pure confusion and intense vertigo, Namjoon finds himself retching and heaving on the floor of the Spardyti, his body shaking uncontrollably. But he’s aware enough to just make out Hoseok’s face looking down at him in worry.

It’s his hand gripping his own and beyond the look of worry and immediate urgency, Namjoon recognizes the look of reconciliation and acceptance in the Ngfy’widan’s yellow eyes.

‘You look like shit,’ is all Hoseok says.

‘-ready as soon as you’re far enough,’ Yoongi is saying. ‘Seulgaan is still firing.’

Hoseok doesn’t look too bad- his hair is matted and his clothes severely crumpled. His face has sunken just the tiniest bit and there are dark circles under his eyes. But there is energy in his movement and though Namjoon isn’t sure if it was because of the adrenaline triggered from his unexpected rescue, it gives him a small sense of relief.

Namjoon can’t help but laugh.

There’s another ripple of shock that rocks the Spardyti.

‘NaviLe- NaviLet-‘ Namjoon coughs out, still dizzy but he has plans to see through.

The NaviLet is thrust into his hands as Namjoon continues to cough out, ‘Hoseok- please fly us towards the battle towards the moon- quickly- put us in autopilot, then I need you to fire this at the Omhlophe-.’

Burst of light and shockwaves push them at random and though there’s no sound, the force of the explosions are overwhelming. If Hoseok has any question about how they were here, what the
water was doing, where Namjoon had been, he doesn’t ask. Instead he just nods instantly- now was not the time for questions.

With shaking hands Namjoon pulls up the tab waiting for him.

The Spardyti hums to life and the glimmering green is gone, replaced by a light blue sheen that disappears almost at once. The thin shield of water remains though. The Spardyti shudders and careens precariously, making Namjoon slip and slide along the floor but he’s caught by Taeh’yung who hooks his legs around Namjoon’s waist from the back, clinging onto a chair himself.

‘Okay pa?’ he asks all too cheerily as Hoseok rights them.

‘Autopilot engaged,’ Hoseok announces, quickly exiting the cockpit and sliding over quickly to Namjoon and the loaded TeorSer to the side.

‘What’s this?’ Hoseok asks. Namjoon’s not sure what he means- was he asking about the TeorSer, the NaviLet, the water-shield?

‘I’m scanning all of their channels,’ Namjoon croaks out- he was definitely going to have to eat his meds after this.

‘Are you trying to override their systems?’ Hoseok sounds confused.

‘No,’ Namjoon shakes his head. ‘We need to get rid of the Comm they took from you- I attached a bug to scan their system and erase that channel so that they can’t use it to potentially track us or use it for their benefit-’

‘-wait, you’re going to have to recreate new channels-’ Hoseok interrupts again but Taeh’yung makes a sound of realization and he reaches inside his vest pocket and produces a brand new Comm-Device.

‘Pa made them! New ones!’ he declares, reaching around Namjoon to hand it to the Ngfy’widan.

Hoseok blinks at the tiny object for a moment before he shrugs and clips it on at once. Namjoon had at least 5 other channels as back up, so it wasn’t difficult setting up an entirely new one within minutes. He glances out of their still open doorway, the debris around them is churning with the force of the explosions and detonations, brief flashes of light streaking in and out violently. He’s not sure where exactly the Omhlophe ship might be but they weren’t aiming for an accurate shot.

‘But a bug is loud,’ Hoseok argues, ‘You’ll get caught at once-’

‘Not with that,’ Namjoon nods at the water shield around them. He finds the channel he had designed so carefully and neutralizes it at once. ‘Got it- it’s done.’

‘What-’

‘Yoongi- ready?’ Namjoon struggles to sit up with Taeh’yung’s legs still wrapped around his waist.

‘Ready.’

‘Hoseok- can you fire that?’

Hoseok only pauses for a second before he nods, shouldering the TeorSer and lifting it up.

‘Fire on 3…2…1!’
The air smells like ozone and carbon, a wave of heat washes of them as the small compact missile whistles past and through the debris, disappearing into the lights now at a decent distance from them.

There is no indication, at least no physical evidence, that the missile has met its mark. But there is another signal that Namjoon is waiting for with baited breath and it arrives in the form of Yoongi’s order.

‘Sunshine, now.’

The lights and explosions stop almost immediately and it fades away to give Namjoon a clear view of the Omhlophe ship.

There is no motion, no light, no movement- the massive engine hubs were dim and no light was indicated in the turbines.

‘Sk’jin?’

Hoseok has no idea what was happening but he too remains quiet, waiting with Namjoon and Taeh’yung for a response from the Khol’isa.

The seconds seem to drag on forever until Sk’jin replies, all too pleased with himself with a clear, ‘We’re clear. See you in a few minutes.’

Namjoon exhales out in relief and finally sits up properly. Taeh’yung’s legs fall off of him only to scramble upwards and jump up and down in celebration. Hoseok holds out a hand that Namjoon takes it.

Hoseok is shorter than Namjoon and doesn’t possess the same physical presence as the Kutsoglerin or the graceful elegance of Sk’jin’s form. He’s not lithe and slender like Jimin nor is he lanky and wispy like Taeh’yung. He wasn’t like Yoongi either where his presence was so slight you could all together look past it. But there was something solid, and reassuring about Hoseok- a sort of permanence to his being. A trait that Namjoon reasons as the main factor in why he found himself trusting the Ngfy’widan.

‘So,’ Hoseok begins, glancing out behind him at the Omhlophe ship and then forward towards the slaver-ship, and then to the on-going space battle to the side. ‘Care to explain?’
Sk’jin’s plan was brilliant.

Dangerous but brilliant.

‘But how do we know this Sool-gaan won’t instantly give up? These Beings are clearly dangerous and with abilities we cannot foresee or predict,’ Jimin asks.

‘He is intelligent,’ Taeh’yung translates Sk’jin’s words. ‘But he’s greedy and vain and angry. Never underestimate anger- it is the easiest emotion to manipulate.’

Jinmi nods in reply, unsure how to feel about it.

They would separate. Taeh’yung and Namjoon in the smaller ship, and attached to it the cell in order to hide their presence as they floated out to the Omhlophé’s ship. There they would wade through the debris to mask their physical presence, an added protection even though they were virtually invisible to every form of sensor. Namjoon would then take with him the chip he designed in order to erase the Užkulisa’s channels that had been stolen from Hoseok’s Comm-Device. While Namjoon took care of that, Taeh’yung would continue on and find Hoseok and extract him from where he was being held. Apparently they all had some form of “tracking” installed inside of them- and they had all stared blankly at Yoongi about it. Jimin didn’t understand but seeing as it wasn’t explained to him, he decided it probably wasn’t all too important.

Then to make sure that the Omhlophe didn’t do anything more, Namjoon would put some distance between the Spardyti and the Omhlophe and detonate a magnetic device to deactivate their major systems.

And then meanwhile, Sk’jin and Yoongi would go into the Sool-gaan’s ship and distract him, engage him in conversation and essentially use his ship as their own shield. But when Sk’jin had hurriedly explained that part of the plan, he paused and with a very pleased smile added something else that made Yoongi instantly reject it.

‘No,’ the Human says, shaking his head at once. He was disagreeing with Sk’jin, Jimin could tell.

They continue to argue, fast and snappish and it’s over in a few seconds. Taeh’yung seems reluctant to translate, glancing at Yoongi before clearing his throat and giving him a sheepish smile.

‘Sk’jin says that he wants you to disguise yourself as Yoongi and to go with him to meet Seulgaan,’ Taeh’yung grins. ‘And in the meanwhile, Yoongi can hide inside your old OrTank case where he will carry another magnetic-pulse device and set it off to shut down Seulgaan’s ship.’

Like Jimin had thought, this was a dangerous plan.

‘But – but if we are inside the ship-’ Jimin begins, wondering about the clear flaws in this plan.

‘Seulgaan will want to secure the most important cargo here- meaning you,’ Taeh’yung continues to explain. ‘He will want to secure you and keep you inside the ship as soon as possible- meaning they will take the OrTank, meaning Yoongi, deeper inside the ship- there, Yoongi can slip out and make his way to the engines and set off the device in there, without effecting the Užkulisa.’

‘And during this time, Sk’jin wants me to subdue Sool-gaan and his guards?’ Jimin asks carefully.

Taeh’yung nods brightly and adds, ‘And Yoongi will come back up, and the three of you will return to our ship, while Namjoon, Hobi, and I come back. With the cell activated within the Spardyti, which will return back to our ship, we will continue to remain hidden. Then we leave as
quickly as possible.’

Jimin can see a lot going wrong with this plan. But then again, they had no other choice- not when it was so sudden. The existing situation was already this dangerous, and Jimin does not want to face these mysterious Beings who knew exactly who he was. Taeh’yung had explained the events to him. And though vague, Jimin could not shake off the strange apprehension he felt every time he thought of these Beings. So he was with the rest of them in their desire to put as much distance from them as possible.

Not to mention retrieve Hoseok as quickly as they could.

So he nods his agreement.

Sk’jin looks pleased and he claps his hands, hurrying them along.

‘You’ll need to dress in Yoongi’s gear,’ Taeh’yung quickly explains.

Jimin is immediately worried- would he be able to convince this Sool-gaan that he was Yoongi? They were the same height, with similar built. But the difference between them is startling clear.

‘Jimin.’

Yoongi gestures quietly and walks out of the Bridge. Feeling nervous, Jimin follows after the Human and down to his Cabin. Yoongi is taking out the full black gear he wore every time they left the ship. He even wore it under the clothes he wore inside the ship. Not that it mattered, because Yoongi was always dressed in black, hardly any difference in the style or structure of what he wore.

He doesn’t say anything, instead calmly handing him the gear. Jimin takes it, the fabric feels oddly weighty and fluid- like it would slip out of his grip if he didn’t grip it tight. Jimin wants to know more about this material- about this uniform. He wants to know more about Yoongi- what he did before, what he was doing that he had this garment. But he doesn’t have time, so without much ceremony, he starts to undress.

Jimin isn’t particularly bashful or ashamed of changing out of his clothes in front of others- he grew up sharing his living space with his guards from a young age and onwards. But he’s conscious of Yoongi’s presence and he almost regrets his actions but he’s already in the process of changing. He tries to be quick but Yoongi’s gear is unusual and Jimin isn’t sure how to really wear it.

But he’s not confused for long.

Yoongi steps in and helps him.

Jimin tries to stop his sharp inhale as Yoongi helps him undress fully. Jimin can’t help how he’s jumpy, face flushing with colour as Yoongi slips the socks off of his feet, his hands quick and steady. Jimin is used to dressing and undressing in front of others but here, like this, he can’t help but feel affected. However there is no awkwardness or discomfort from the Human at his now utter nakedness. It doesn’t seem to bother the Human or affect him in the slightest. Perhaps it was because prior to this, Jimin was always entirely naked inside the OrTank, so it’s not that much of a big deal to Yoongi. Or perhaps it was simply a Human thing.

Jimin takes some comfort in this- this was a matter of importance and required speediness on their behalf. So he tries not to shiver too much as he slips into the oddly weighty gear that Yoongi holds up for him to wear.
It fits like second skin, yet despite the fluidity of the fabric, there is a certain heaviness, a weight that adds to his form and Jimin feels *invincible* but at the same time incredibly exposed. Even more then when he was naked. The fabric molds and seals itself over Jimin’s skin in a seamless manner. It sealed over in the back and before it closes, Jimin feels the softest and briefest stroke down the center of his back.

Did his back look different to Yoongi?

The weight that came from the suit wasn’t just from the physical mass it bore- but rather a *feeling* it seemed to emit. Jimin cannot place it- but he has the intense urge to take it off immediately. He stares at his arms, down at his body, feeling at himself- there was something *wrong* about this. About the gear, everything about it was just not right.

He feels *tainted*.

He doesn’t feel like himself in this.

‘Yoongi,’ Jimin can’t help the tone of his voice. Can’t help the discomfort and strangeness he felt. How did Yoongi deal with this? Or did he realize it himself?

‘This- this feels weird,’ he says knowing full well Yoongi wouldn’t understand. He pulls at the high-necked ribbing around his throat, face screwing up in discomfort.

When he looks up he catches a glimpse of his reflection on the mirror inside the bathroom. And Jimin is repulsed by what he sees- who he sees. This wasn’t him- this wasn’t Yoongi.

They were both changed, yes- especially Yoongi. But there was something about this gear, something about all of this, that made Jimin greatly unsettled.

‘Jimin?’

Jemin looks away from his strange reflection and at Yoongi instead. There’s a look of understanding in the Human’s eyes. Like he knew exactly what Jimin was feeling, what he was thinking.

‘This is so strange,’ Jimin whispers, all of the fight leaving his body. He looks down at his feet. The gear was like one full body suit, the boots rippling over and folding over the shape of his feet perfectly. This was wrong.

But there was nothing he could do. This was part of the plan and to make sure they were secure, to make sure Hoseok would return to them safely, he was going to have to do this. He could do this.

He *will* do this.

Yoongi’s hand appears in his field of vision and settles on his chin. Jimin feels his head being lifted, to face Yoongi properly. The Human studies him for a moment, his eyes dark and though he bore no expression, there was a depth to his eyes that felt familiar and safe.

‘Beautiful,’ Yoongi tells him.

Jemin flushes instantly.

He knew what that word meant. He ducks his head again, his hair falling around his face. This was not what he wanted to hear exactly. Especially in this situation. But it makes him feel better, oddly enough.
And then to his surprise, Yoongi taps at his chin once more and lifts his head up slowly. Then rather gently and with great intimacy that stutters Jimin’s breath in his throat, Yoongi brushes back his hair. Jimin wants to lean in, taking in all he could from this Human before him. Yoongi seems to really like his hair- even back in Menigišiti, when they would sit together, exhausted and frightened, Yoongi would take a moment to just simply marvel at his hair. As though drinking in the sight of it; like an elixir that granted him strength.

Jimin’s hair colour was a result of who he was- his sister was the same. Their people- their species, were known to have dark hair. Their parents had hair that was almost black. During a rather rebellious phase, Jimin had dyed his hair black, if only for a few hours of attempting to feel less isolated, and to blend in with his species. But it didn’t last long. Because he carried Fate in his eyes, and every time he saw himself, that was all he could ever see.

Yoongi pushes back his hair one last time before he lifts the helmet up. There’s a worried look on his face, as he holds the helmet up for Jimin to push his head into. Jimin remembers how Yoongi didn’t want him to put it on. Jimin figured it was an extension of a weapon- or at least a device that aided in the usage or application of some weaponry. Maybe he didn’t want Jimin to be in a situation where he was using it?

Jimin himself did not enjoy fighting. He did not see the appeal of brute force. But he also understood how it was applicable and at times, needed in certain situations.

‘We do not strike when struck,’ his sister had said, nursing a black eye with an amused expression. She received it as a result of a heated debate regarding some diplomatic issue and Jimin hadn’t been there, having been away on the other side of the planet. He had been young at the time and seeing his sister in pain and with an actual wound had greatly upset him.

‘You must have seen it coming,’ Jimin had pressed, angry and upset now. His sister had given him an amused look.

‘I did. And sometimes you just have to accept it- because there is more power in empathy than strength.’

That hadn’t placated Jimin one bit but he trusted his sister to know what she was doing. And just as well, ridden with guilt, the Being responsible for giving his sister a black eye had thrown himself on the ground before her feet, begging to be forgiven. And it was through this situation that his sister had gained her most trusted advisor.

He bows his head and allows Yoongi to push it over.

If the gear felt wrong, then this helmet was simply put, an abomination.

It’s suffocating and Jimin doesn’t know how Yoongi does it. It instantly blocks all of Jimin’s senses and he almost forgets to breathe only to realize he could do so freely. He blinks a few times before sight is restored to him and oddly enough everything seemed sharper, but also a little distorted. Sound rushes to him as well and almost quite simply, the helmet fits over his head quite easily. It almost feels like he isn’t wearing it, the only indication is the slight distortion in his vision.

‘Okay?’ Yoongi asks quietly, his voice unchanged and filtered through perfectly as though no barrier was raised between them.

Jimin nods, ‘Okay,’ he replies.
Yoongi looks unsure, his expression worried.

Jimin wants to lighten the atmosphere so he chuckles a bit before asking Yoongi, ‘Beautiful?’ knowing full well his face was covered from view. Yoongi doesn’t reply yet, now fiddling with some gloves before he takes Jimin’s hand, thumb carefully stroking the back of his hand.

‘Beautiful,’ he nods before slipping the glove into Jimin’s hand. Then he takes the other hand and repeats his actions, quietly repeating the adjective again.

Jimin is grateful for the helmet because his face is flushed, his ears burning.

There’s a simple honesty- a raw unfiltered genuineness in Yoongi’s tone and words. There was no reasoning or purpose- not the way Jimin was used to- not in the way where he was beheld high up by his people his title and who he was. This was different.

Yoongi now and Yoongi then were the same in that aspect. Who they were, conceptually and subjectively, was different. There was no denying it. But that remained- an identical imprint that lingered, stamped into Yoongi’s DNA, into the very force that governed his being and entirety.

It draws a reaction from Jimin that makes him want to look away, to hide his face out of embarrassment.

Maybe it wasn’t what Jimin wanted to hear- but he now understands what Yoongi was trying to say.

Who he was still existed- what he wore now, where they were now, what they had to do now, did not stop him or change him from who he really was. And though Jimin blushed to think about it, for Yoongi, no matter the gear Jimin dawned on, he would see him for who he was; and that was beautiful.

Pushing up the visor of the helmet, Jimin reaches for Yoongi, gloved hands cupping the Human’s face.

‘Beautiful.’

Yoongi looks genuinely stunned.

Slowly, he shakes his head to Jimin’s statement. Jimin can’t help smiling, repeating the word again. It was almost as though Yoongi was shy.

They walk together towards the Hangar where Namjoon and Taeh’yung were getting ready to leave. The cell quickly and hastily attached to the main engine component on the Spardyti. Namjoon looks impressed when Jimin approaches, clearly making a comparison as his eyes flit between Jimin and Yoongi. He says something and Taeh’yung nods enthusiastically to that.

‘Does this really look all right?’ Jimin asks Taeh’yung the moment he’s close enough.

‘It does,’ the Zhak’gri tells him reassuringly.

‘It feels wrong,’ Jimin tells him helplessly. ‘It’s- it’s heavy.’

Taeh’yung has an understanding look in his eyes. He understood the implications of Jimin’s words.

‘Only for a while,’ he smiles.

Jimin nods. He knows.
They empty out the OrTank casing that had carried Jimin’s original OrTank. It would be large enough for Yoongi to sit inside with the magnetic pulse detonator with some extra space. The Human steps inside without further ado and takes the small compact device from Namjoon and tucks in a screen with him.

There’s a strange sensation the electrifies Jimin with dread as they slide the OrTank case cover close.

‘He’ll be all right,’ Taeh’yung pats the OrTank case. ‘They’re actually quite comfortable!’

‘…how do you know?’

‘I hid in one for a week once!’

Jimin doesn’t want to know how or why Taeh’yung found himself in such a situation.

He sees off the duo, setting off in the Transporter. He eyes the OrTank case quietly, making his way to sit next to it if only for a few seconds. He places his hand over the surface, wondering if Yoongi knew he was there or not. They were pretty sound-proof, from what Jimin can observe in terms of the design and materials used.

By the time Sk’jin comes down, dressed in truly magnificent clothing, Jimin almost doesn’t feel like himself at all. And maybe that was why he didn’t feel nervous, or why he could descend the ramp to face this Sool-gaan. He doesn’t even feel much when the Being in question regards him with a strange contemptuous look. Something like fear, disgust, and most of all, pure and intense hatred directed at him. He can feel and smell fear, pain, death, and loss in this ship. It reeks of it.

Every inch of this ship was smeared in it. He could not see it, but he knew, that beyond the great gateway behind Sool-gaan, existed hell and damnation.

‘Yoongi? Okay?’ he asks quietly, wanting to reassure himself by hearing the Human’s voice.

‘Okay,’ the Human replies quietly as the cyborgs carry him past Jimin and out of sight.

Sk’jin is clearly enjoying himself heckling Sool-gaan, and this easily takes up time. There are alarming explosions of light but Jimin is reassured by Taeh’yung that they were all right every so often.

They keep communicating on the Comm-Device, Taeh’yung sometimes translating.

‘How does it feel wearing Yoongi’s clothes?’ the insinuation is clear in Taeh’yung’s tone and Jimin tries in vain to sound nonchalant as he splutters a nonsensical response.

His heart is at ease when he hears Taeh’yung excitedly announce that he retrieved Hoseok. And then Jimin mentally prepares himself. It would be soon now.

Not counting Sool-gaan, there were 17 other Beings, 24 cyborgs, and 2 androids. There would be more but that wasn’t immediately important right now and all access to this Hangar would be taken care of by Yoongi. Jimin can sense Sk’jin’s nervousness. Despite his very convincing attitude of confidence, the Khol’isa was obviously nervous. And with good reason.

Sool-gaan issues his orders, hand waving dismissively before he walks out of the Dock. Jimin doesn’t move as the guards approach them, flanked by the cyborgs who all aim their firearms at them. They would have to time this perfectly.
Sk’jin is quite obviously nervous, and maybe the Sool-gaan’s guards can see it too because they start speaking to him in mocking tones.

‘Yoongi?’ he asks quietly, allowing the guards to push him backwards. Jimin has a feeling they would take his helmet off and he couldn’t have that now. But at the same time he couldn’t prevent it because the cyborgs were still active. And every single explosion of light that ripples across the debris-strewn space outside increases his panic and nervousness. Jimin wants to reach out and take Sk’jin’s hand- but he couldn’t. Not when he was imitating Yoongi.

But they don’t have to wait long.

‘Sunshine, now.’ Yoongi tells him quietly.

Though it had been only a mere 30 minutes, Jimin had felt as though time had lapsed for eons. Exhaling as though he had been holding his breath, Jimin finally relaxes and his movement draws attention. The lights in the Docks blink out and give way to the glaring emergency lights and in one collective heap, all the cyborgs fall to the ground. But the remaining guards have no time to react.

Light erupts- soft and gently and soothing. A calm and reasonable suggestion- one that spoke of common sense, of logic- and one that could be classified almost as seductive.

‘Be at peace,’ he whispers softly, his voice a lulling hymn, a gentle song, and a powerful command.

‘Don’t take off your helmet!’ Taeh’yung translates urgently.

But it doesn’t matter.

Because Jimin finally feels like he’s overcome the gear- like he’s shedding the weight of it.

Actual physical growth is not a sensation most natural living beings experienced. At least not in a physical sense.

And it’s not a physical presence either- it’s not a tangible or palpable property that grows out of Jimin at his beck and call.

It was an extension of himself- it was his core.

It was his will and it was his intention.

And he knows he doesn’t have to extend this anymore than this room. But he does. The stench of death, pain, fear, and loss is replaced with sudden sleep and even though Jimin starts to feel a little light-headed he continues on. He had felt constrained and restricted- travelling for continuous periods of time through space was not comfortable for Jimin. He preferred being in-planet, where he could feel the surges of power deep within the planet’s core.

‘Jimin?’

Jimin doesn’t know how much time had gone by as lowers his hands and finds Sk’jin in front of him, eyes shielded and narrowed. ‘Stop.’

Jimin stumbles backwards a little, extremely dizzy and light-headed. His breaths sound harsh to his own ears and he quickly kneels on one knee on the floor, trying to regain his strength.
Sk’jin is talking to him and Jimin knows he’s asking if he was all right.

‘Okay-‘ Jimin manages to pant out, ‘I am okay.’

Looking over the grounds, Jimin finds the guards in heaps on the floor, fast asleep. The cyborgs are still in heaps on the floor and no living being was approaching them. Shakily, Jimin manages to stand again. He wasn’t going to be able to do much after this for some time- he would need rest. Sk’jin helps him up, still looking about the place with confusion, eyeing Jimin as well as though hoping for an explanation. The Khol’isa says something more, his tone sounds almost chastising, as though telling Jimin off for overdoing it. It makes Jimin smile.

‘It’s done,’ Jimin reports back weakly in his best Standard.

Sk’jin too says something before he’s nodding. He carefully lets go of Jimin as though to make sure he was all right. Jimin raises a shaky thumb’s up and Sk’jin takes this as a positive sign. And then he’s rushing back towards the Užkulisai, not sparing a single glance back at the Dock or the guards. But Jimin stays still. He wants to remove the helmet but he doesn’t want to be seen or recognized.

‘Yoongi?’ he asks nervously, pacing a little as he glances around for any rogue guard or some attempt to upset this delicate plan.

‘Coming sunshine.’

It feels almost like hours before Yoongi reappears, bursting through the doors towards the end of the Dock. Jimin tries to move quickly towards the Human, searching his being for any injury. But Yoongi is fine, his hands reaching out in response to Jimin’s own outstretched ones. When their hands meet, Jimin is finally at complete ease, his light-headedness ebbing away slowly.

They both head towards the Užkulisai, her engines humming and the turbines bright and active. And out past her glimmering slightly amidst the dense sea of debris, the Spardyti was returning as well. They would have to wait until it was safely docked in before they could leave.

‘Jimin,’ Yoongi points inside their Hangar at the magnetic strips waiting for the Spardyti to arrive. Jimin nods in understanding, making his way towards them to ready them to receive the Transporter. He’s fatigued and his body feels like it’s moving in slow motion but he doesn’t stop. They were so close to leaving this behind. But he doesn’t even get to step inside the Hangar when the whole ship suddenly jolts violently.

Falling to his knees at the sudden brute force, Jimin doesn’t need Taeh’yung or Namjoon’s warning cries to feel it.

Light blankets the wide gaping opening of the Dock as a torrent of missiles fall upon them.

‘-im in get inside now- it’s- it’s the space-battle, they’ve moved over-‘

‘Taeh’yung-!?’ Jimin recovers enough to stand up, wildly looking out but there’s too many flashes of light and the ship is tilting violently. Their own method of escaping by using the magnetic pulse was now crippling them. Sool-gaan’s ship was now simply a sitting target, with no protection or means of escape.

They had been too distracted- too worried for their safety that they forget the immediate danger that lay outside this ship. The very danger that they had nearly crashed into when they eased out of warp.
Jimin remembers Namjoon saying that this planet, Ynqaba, was in the midst of a great civil war. They had not expected this battle to spread from in-planet to their spatial-borders. And now they were caught in the middle of a war.

Jimin twists as he slides down the Hangar floor, trying to catch himself on the floor. He catches sight of Yoongi who is attempting to hold himself steady on the railings to the side of the ramp floor. The Human looks unperturbed, only a slight look of worry as he watches Jimin perch himself against the side of the floor.

‘Sk’jin!’ Jimin yells out, inching forward towards Yoongi to help him inside.

The lines of communication are scrambled and there’s too much white noise- everything was too loud. Jimin concentrates on moving forward, eyes never leaving Yoongi’s.

Yoongi is waiting for him, his expression steady, as though silently encouraging Jimin to move forward. Jimin feels restricted- he wishes he could remove the helmet but he knows it’ll keep him safe.

The blinding lights clear and Jimin is momentarily distracted at the sight that unfolds outside.

Jimin can no longer see the Spardyti. In fact the sea of debris and rubble has scattered far across and before him the whole mass of battle-worn ships gather and hover.

Jimin gulps, horror and shock flooding him in tremors. There were thousands of innocent lives in this ship. If they are attacked, then they could do nothing to stop it. Especially not with the Omhlophe waiting for them just beyond. But Jimin can’t help but wonder at these Ynqaba ships gathered outside. They were fighter-ships yes, but they weren’t numerous or powerful enough to take down a ship as large as this one. Perhaps the Omhlophe’s ship could have made an easier target, but a ship this size was sure to withstand their continued attacks for weeks even.

Sk’jin had said that there was a 78% chance of success.

This was probably the remaining 22% coming back to overthrow them.

‘Jimin!’

Tearing his gaze away from the barrier of ships before him, Jimin concentrates back on Yoongi.

The Human has already carefully clambered in and he’s stepping up onto the ramp when a bright clear light erupts outside of the Dock.

Momentarily blinded, Jimin braces himself for the force of impact but nothing happens.

At least not what Jimin expects.

There is no shock wave, no pressure from the force of the explosion of a missile. Instead there is silence. A strange, hollow silence and Jimin understands at once.

These ships weren’t here to blow them up or even attempt to fire at them. That explosion of light had not been a missile. It had been a very powerful magnetic-pulse.

Because these Beings, the ones in the battle-ships in front of him, knew they didn’t have the masses or power to take them down. But they could always rely on their planet’s natural gravitational pull to draw them in. And now, without the power or energy to source the brakes or anchors on Sool-gaan’s ship, they were harnessed into Ynqaba’s gravity range.
They were now, in every sense of the word powerless.

And as though the ship too had realized what Jimin had come to realize, darkness falls and sirens and warnings go off but it’s not before gravity vanishes partly and suddenly, everything is untethered and unstable. Jimin loses balance and falls over, his impact oddly slow but still disconcerting.

And then to his horror, before he can even remotely stabilize himself, the ship starts to tilt around dangerously, pulling Jimin down again. And to add to this, the Ynqaba ships start to fire. Massive forceful detonations, all aimed to push them further and deeper into Ynqaba’s gravity range.

Jimin tries to concentrate- could he reach out and stop this destruction? Could he reach out and stop this attack—

The ships suddenly lets out a deep and almost guttural groan.

‘Jimin.’

Yoongi is still there, trying his best to cling onto the ramp the same way Jimin was trying to cling to the Hangar wall.

A symphony of lights erupt around them- heat waves pushing over before ripples of force press Jimin down. The Dock *quakes* and then within a second, the ship starts to chip apart bit by bit. The light illuminates the Dock and Jimin sees the way the floor panels seem to peel off, chunks of wires and pipes floating out, weaker thinner metals curling and falling off. The heat is powerful and Jimin is desperate as he attempts to fight the overwhelming waves of force from the continuous rain of missiles and move forward to Yoongi.

Yoongi has managed to cling to the side of the ramp, his face contorted with concentration and pain. Jimin can see blisters forming on Yoongi’s hands and this spurs him forward even faster.

The Užkulisai tilts dangerously again and Jimin has the momentum to move forward- but this means that Yoongi is in even more danger.

‘Yoongi-!’

Jimin runs forward and he feels gravity returning, the slightest hint of a pull brushing against his exposed skin. Diving vertically, Jimin soars through the spinning air and grabs Yoongi’s outstretched hand. They fall in a heap as gravity pulls them down and Yoongi swings on Jimin’s arm over the edge of the twisting ramp.

‘Yoongi- please climb up-‘ Jimin tugs at Yoongi’s hand and the Human grips back even tighter before tensing almost violently for a second and he pulls himself up on Jimin’s arm and upwards. His free hand grips onto the lip of the ramp and he easily swings a leg over. Jimin scrambles to pull him up over, sitting up from where he’d been on the floor on his front, his body buzzing and strung from adrenaline and panic.

It all happens too quickly.

There’s a bright flare of light and before Jimin can even comprehend what he instinctively understood, Jimin yanks Yoongi into the Hangar Bay with all his strength just as a missile detonates right above them.

The force of the blast tilts the Užkulisai sharply and Jimin has no control as he falls out.
His vision is a kaleidoscope of lights, heat, stars, the Dock, and the Užkulisai.

He collides hard onto a wall and slides down.

And by all laws of physics, the Užkulisai should also be crashing beside Jimin- but gravity is wreaking havoc and the forces of the missiles jolts the very air around them and the Užkulisai is rotating upwards and outwards. How was this possible? That magnetic-pulse would have taken out all of their systems- how was the Užkulisai still able to function?

They don’t know what purpose the magnetic-pulses were meant to serve. If the gravity functions were falling apart- then life-support could also follow soon. Panic spreads inside Jimin and his body is electrified into action with fear. He pushes himself up and propelling himself forward, Jimin attempts to swim towards the Užkulisai.

As Jimin stretches, the Užkulisai flips around and Yoongi is there.

His eyes are wide with fear- and it’s not fear for himself, or fear of death or pain.

It’s the same fear within Jimin reflecting back at him and Jimin cries out, willing himself to move forward.

The emergency lights dim and the alarms shut off.

He doesn’t hear it, but he see Yoongi’s lip forming the syllables of his name- he was calling out to him- he was calling for him. And Jimin has to answer- he has to reach back. Yoongi’s hand is stretched out for him and Jimin tries-

There is an eruption of heat that rips through the remaining air and Jimin collides heavily with a careening OrTank and he falls back deeper into the Dock.

But the Užkulisai is suddenly upright and steady- her engines and turbines alight and powered.

‘What-‘

The air is spinning around Jimin and the Uzkulisai is the only steady thing in his vision. Yoongi is still there, eyes and mouth wide, as though he was screaming- his hand is reaching out but the ramp is closing him in and in a matter of a couple of seconds, the gates of the Hangar Bay are closed and Yoongi is gone.

There is another detonation and fire, white and hot rains down on Jimin from above the Užkulisai. Jimin’s scream is deafening even to himself as the Užkulisai shoots out through the cloud of fire and out of the riotous Dock into open space beyond before it is hidden from his sight by a blanket of explosions.

‘YOONGI!’

As though he was being yanked back by a rope, Jimin falls backwards through the air and he’s crashes. His vision dims, his entire being threatening to slip into unconsciousness. But he can’t. So he concentrates- there was only one thing Jimin could concentrate on. Jimin can only hear himself breathing- his pulse roaring like thunder in his ears. He counts his breaths- pacing his thoughts, his movements, forcing his recovering to align. When he pulls himself together, he feels how a great pressure is pushing him with bone-crushing force against the walls of the Hangar. If it weren’t for the gear he wore, Jimin would not have survived.

‘Yoongi-!’ he chokes out. ‘Y-Yoongi-! Taeh’yung-!’
He’s pushed down heavily and though his vision is blurred and compromised, he sees the horrified dead faces of Sool-gaan’s guards close by. Jimin cannot look.

‘Lisai!’ Jimin calls out desperately, his mind reeling with all the words and terms he memorized with so much dedication. ‘H-help!’

The automated voice sounds clear and stable but Jimin doesn’t understand. But he can understand the tone- the AI was asking him a question. All AI’s were designed and programmed to prioritize living Beings and prevent any harm from occurring. Whatever it was asking Jimin, had to be of good. To help him.

Jimin flips- pressure dragging him downwards instead and to his horror he watches as loosened gravity-lifts and other large gadgets are ripped off of their hinges and crash down around him. The Užkulisai was nowhere in sight and Jimin has no way of knowing if it was safe or not. He can’t afford to think about it- the Užkulisai had purposefully left the Dock. It had left Jimin behind.

Lisai’s voice repeats the same words and Jimin, in his heavy disorientation understands just a few words and one of them is ‘return’- and that’s what Jimin needs. He needs to return- he has to return. He cannot leave Yoongi again- he cannot allow this to happen again-

‘Yes!’ he manages to cry out.

His vision which had previously been clear and sharp, with just a singular warped line to the side to indicate his visor, is now suddenly overwhelmed with light-lines and letters forming in nauseating rapidity.

Jimin crashes against a wall and with agility and speed he didn’t know he possessed, spins and rolls away as a massive bolder falls where he had just been.

‘Lisai-?!’

The words are going past so quickly they look like blurred neon streaks- trying to look past them, Jimin crawls forwards towards a vent. It was a contained space- he would be safer in there-

He slides along the floor as the ship tilts again but Jimin holds onto the floor’s textured surface, using Yoongi’s gear to his advantage. It’s a difficult climb and he keeps repeating ‘Yes!’ to Lisai’s questions. A stray pipe catches itself on Jimin’s leg and he holds back a cry of pain and moves on. Below him the planet Ynqaba was looming shockingly close. So his hunch had been right. They were pushing the ship towards their planet.

Everything was screaming- the ship, the living beings in it, the very atoms that existed within that space- everything was screaming and Jimin’s throat is parched and strained.

Just as he grabs on to the vent-lip the blurred lines freeze and vanish, leaving behind a long paragraph of words and sentences he does not understand.
‘Yes!’ Jimin cries out one more time before pulling himself inside the narrow vent. He doesn’t even know what he’s agreeing to but he just screams it.

‘Lisai?!’ he shouts. The screaming is louder in here and Jimin can’t help but close his eyes.

‘Please- Yoongi!’ he screams. ‘Taeh’yung! Sk’jin! Namjoon! Hoseok! Can you hear me?! Please!’

The screaming rises to a numbing pitch and light flashes through his closed eyes and Jimin is forced to open them.
It's white and as though the universe had inversed. Great lines of stars streaked past, leaving behind black spots that blinked and are gone in an instant- voices and laughter and crying ring around until they burst into colour.

Jimin feels his stomach convulse, his entire being shivers and his head is suddenly fevered. Feeling as though two great hands were squeezing his brain, Jimin struggles to look away, his hands trying to push away the sight before him. But he can’t let go- he had to hold on to the ladder or he could fall out of the vent and back into the hangar-

[TEMPORAL LOBE FUNCTION AT MAXIMUM]
[SYSTEMATIC FUNCTIONS AT MAXIMUM OVERDRIVE]
[OVERDRIVE]
[OVERDRIVE]
[OVERDRIVE]
[OVERDRIVE]
[SYSTEMS CRASHING_PROCEED Y/N]
[SYSTEMS CRASHING_PROCEED Y/N]
[SYSTEMS CRASHING_PROCEED Y/N]
[SYSTEMS CRASHING_PROCEED Y/N]
[SYSTEMS_ - _]
He’s back in the vent.

His breathing is harsh and his mouth tastes like bile. His entire body shakes violently, his mind is filled with a sort of buzzing that reminds Jimin of night-insects but just amplified at least 10 times in volume.

Jimin thinks he might have fallen unconscious again because when he opens his eyes again, everything feels strangely normal.

‘Good evening Jimin.’

It’s eerily silent. It is also dark, and it’s impossibly cold. The very air around him is still and Jimin only just realizes he’s on his back. But he doesn’t care about any of that.

‘Your health-tab suggests that you have sustained a concussion, please do not move too much. You have also sustained 3 cracked ribs, a cracked fibula, and bruised your 4th and 5th lumbar vertebrae. Your suit has aligned to support you, so please do not strain yourself.’

As though the words triggered it, pain floods Jimin’s body and he can’t help the cry of pain that comes out of his mouth.

This was a dream. It had to be a dream. But the pain was too real- this vent was too real. The soreness of his throat, and the heaviness of his tongue was too real.

‘Li- Lisai?’ Jimin croaks out, willing himself to wake up. This was a dream. It had to be. It wasn’t possible- this wasn’t possible. This had to be a dream- if he could hear Lisai, he had to be in the ship. Or at least near-by.
‘How can I help you?’

This was not a dream. This was real.

This was all too real.

He can hear the words. Hear the foreign tones and by all means, by all logic Jimin shouldn’t be able to understand.

But he does.

‘Y-Yoongi-‘

Pain blossoms along his chest and Jimin coughs violently.

‘Weapons-specialist Yoongi is out of reach. Channels from Yngaba do not allow off-planet communications.’

Off-planet?!

Jimin racks his pain-fevered mind, bright spots appearing before his eyes as pain floods his body, leaving him shaking to his core.

‘Lisai- where-…where I am.’

‘You are currently located inside the XBI-001-43, a trading ship under the command of Van Seulgaan of Raksane Tayi. You have entered the country of Luargeri in the planet of Yngaba illegally. Please obtain your pass at the nearest Immigration Office, located 3.1 light years in the System of Ymir.’
“The past, like the future, is indefinite and exists only as a spectrum of possibilities.”

Stephen Hawking.

I’m SO SORRY for the late update!! Istg uni is killing me this semester T_T

But I hope you enjoy this update!! It was really fun to write and WOO THIS IS GONNA BE GREAT JIMIN UNDERSTANDS STANDARD NEXT CHAPTER IS GONNA BE SO FUN *coughs* i mean, it'll be chill *coughs*
“Reach” [verb]: stretch out an arm in a specified direction in order to touch or grasp something.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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Ancient Earth had a lot of cultural and urban myths and lore they were fond of. From the timeless legend of vampires, to the mystical belief in sprites and fairies, Humans never ran out of fanciful ideas and stories to entertain themselves. Out of all of these, the most improbable, according to Yoongi, has always been zombies.

He found the entire notion difficult to believe, even theoretically. Because no theory ever procured could ever rationalize or reason the possibility of zombies. The only explanation Yoongi could accept in regards to zombies changed the whole lore to something else— which was more of a psychological explanation, citing mental deterioration and reducing the unfortunate Human feral and senseless. The actual “turning into a brain-dead flesh eating horror” was laughable and Yoongi used to spend a lot of time debating the entire thing with his classmates when he was still in high-school.

But now as he watches his team members slowly fall apart, their minds fading, their eyes glazing over, and their bodies succumbing to a strange illness that both drained and pained them, Yoongi feels as though he was witnessing the fabled and cinematic zombie apocalypse. Except there was no immediate turn. There was no dramatic overture. No gradual descent into a crazed instinctual blood/brain-lust.

Everyone was too aware of what was happening. Too aware of their own change.

They could feel it in the air, on their skin, in between their hair strands.

They could feel it in their skin, permeating through the tissue and deep into their bones.

And Yoongi knows this because he feels it too.

A strain— a fragile and very precariously held balance was now starting to take over him.

And Yoongi cannot describe it. But he can see it mirrored in their eyes. He can’t explain whether it was an illness of his body. Or if it was just something entirely imagined. Or if it was instead a sickness of his heart, and instead of blood, he pumped pain and sand through his veins.

Each step he took felt disoriented and heavy, slow and haphazard. But it wasn’t so bad.

Especially compared to the others. Especially compared to Amic.

‘You look like shit,’ he grinned, his cheeks hollowed out dramatically, his hair falling off slowly. Yoongi is reminded of terminal cancer patients he saw portrayed in movies from Ancient Earth.
‘Yeah- you’re looking really sharp out here,’ Yoongi comments back as he takes a seat next to his long-time friend.

There’s nothing to say. They can’t say anything. All they could do was stretch out the time between the inevitable collapse, between the expected vanishing. So far 2 of their team mates had vanished and there was nothing they could do.

What could they do?

‘You know-‘ Amic coughs out, ‘-I always thought- thought that all those movies we used to watch- were a bunch of bullshit.’

‘They were,’ Yoongi laughs but it sounds more like a sob.

‘I liked the Dis-nee ones though,’ Amic confesses.

‘Yeah? Me too,’ Yoongi wonders if by pretending they were normal, if by pretending none of this was happening, if they could stall or delay this inevitable truth that was about to become reality.

But Amic makes it hard to pretend.

‘I’m dying,’ he says simply. ‘The movies always made it seem so calm. So…so welcoming almost.’

Yoongi’s heart, or whatever was left of it, wrings out another pulse and pain floods him.

‘But I don’t want to go- I’m just- I’m just falling-‘ Amic’s voice breaks and the fear in his voice is palpable.

I want to catch you- but Yoongi can’t say it. Because he can’t catch Amic. He can’t reach for him. He was falling too and there was no denying the darkness they were plummeting into.

‘If- if it’s any comfort I’ll be joining you soon,’ Yoongi tries.

Amic frowns at him.

‘No,’ he shakes his head. There’s a strange glaze to his eyes- and it’s almost as though he could see past Yoongi, like he could see through him and beyond him. Beyond them.

Beyond this.

‘-you won’t.’

There’s a smile on his face as Amic apologetically calls for them to take a break. And Yoongi knows this wasn’t going to be a short break. He immediately makes his way towards his best-friend, towards the Being who he bonded with- all of his memories of Tayi, of training, of the initial introduction to life outside of Earth, was integrated with Amic.

Yoongi could not recollect any memory that did not have him in it. He couldn’t see himself without this tall lanky Being by his side.

‘I can hear him singing,’ Amic whispered.
‘-what?’ Yoongi’s ears are filled with static, his vision swimming before him.

‘-it’s nice,’ Amic smiles.

Jimin appears behind him, his eyes reflecting Yoongi’s sorrow, Amic’s pain, and everyone else’s fear. Amic tries to mime this praise at Jimin who tries his best to understand. They end up laughing, Jimin holding Amic’s hand in his. Yoongi can see them shaking and he wishes he was strong enough to hold them still.

But he knows he can’t.

When Amic dies, he dies with a smile.

Anger floods Yoongi.

Amic did not want to go. He fought it- he fought so hard. But there was an inevitable force- one they could not fight, one they could not oppose. And they were bent to its will.

Jimin is still kneeling next to Amic, his hand pressed over a still and cold chest. He clenches his hand into a fist over Amic’s chest and raises it to his own, over his own heart. He whispers soft words, gaze directed towards the sunrise and then back down again.

It’s profound, and private. But Yoongi can’t feel it.

He feels far away.

Far away from Amic. From his team. From Jimin.

He was falling and he didn’t have the strength, or the means to struggle.

Quite suddenly, Jimin embraces him close, arms wrapping around his shoulders and head in a way where everything stops and Yoongi is reeling back. The sound of Jimin’s breaths suddenly take over and Yoongi finds that he can finally breathe. Yoongi feels encompassed.

And with the next inhale and exhale, everything comes rushing back.

His sobs tear out of him the way a scab peels from a wound.

He feels raw and exposed- everything burns and Yoongi almost wishes he was falling again. If it meant not having to feel this, Yoongi would gladly fall again. And as though sensing his thoughts, Jimin holds him tighter, hands brushing through his hair, whispering soft words that Yoongi doesn’t understand.

Yoongi is so exhausted.

He just wants to sleep and sleep and sleep- he just wants all of this to end.

‘Yoongi.’

Jimin’s voice is quiet, afraid to break his grieving or something. And in this expanse of death and pain, the only thing that grants Yoongi any reprieve- no matter how temporary, is knowing that Jimin is there.

Jimin holds him so tight it’s almost painful- but Yoongi craves that closeness. Craves feeling anything but death and this ebbing. Pressing his ear to Jimin’s chest, he can hear Jimin’s heart
beating and Yoongi clings to the thrumming pulses, hoping that by placing himself this close to its resonance, that he might be able to feel alive.

Namjoon can’t believe he had forgotten about them.

It was Hoseok’s alarmed warning that alerted him to sudden onslaught of Ynqaba ships that were now headed towards them.

They were, to an extent, still entirely hidden and protected. However, Seulgaan’s ship, the Omhlophe ship, and most importantly, the Užkulisai were all in imminent danger.

‘Sk’jin?!’ Hoseok calls out again- but they’re met only with static and silence.

They don’t know if Taeh’yung’s warning had even reached them because after the familiar coloured explosion, all lines of communication had gone off and Seulgaan’s ship had dimmed.

‘That was a magnetic pulse,’ Namjoon puts the engines of the Spardyti in full blast and discarding their initial attempt at discretion and secrecy, he pulls them out of the debris. After all, it wasn’t like Seulgaan or the Omhlophe would notice. Not when they were being attacked. Hordes and hordes of ships were firing missile after missile- bright lights and flares blind them at every second and Namjoon relies solely on the screen before him to calculate their course.

‘Fucking Spaces-‘ Hoseok curses as they shoot upwards, keeping the sudden attack below them.

‘They’re trying to drag it down to their planet- they want the resources,’ Namjoon spits out, realizing what the Ynqaba were trying to do. ‘Seulgaan’s ship is basically one massive mine of resources and materials they need but can’t afford.’

The Ynqaba were fighting a brutal and draining war against each other- the Underverse was providing both sides of the war with equipment but at a very high price. So upon seeing a ship like
the slaver-ship, and also the Omhlophe ship, the Ynqaba were quick to prioritize. Someone lost a battle, clearly, and now they were headed over to claim their reward.

They had practically traipsed in and handed themselves over on a shining platter.

‘We need to get them out,’ Taeh’yung pleads, eyes wide and looking hassled.

‘We can’t go in like this- we don’t even have tactical shields on this thing,’ Hoseok curses.

Sk’jin, Yoongi, and Jimin were in there. And they had no way of knowing if they were all right.

Their plan had gone along smoothly- down the timing, down to what to expect from Seulgaan. Sk’jin had done an extremely good job at predicting what would happen. And Namjoon cannot rue him about the Ynqaba. Because he should have seen it coming. They should have all been more aware.

He knows that Yoongi had made it back up. That Sk’jin was already inside the ship judging by the gloating comment he had directed at Namjoon just seconds before their lines of communication went down. He also knows that the Uzkulisai was an incredibly designed ship, made to survive extreme conditions. But with the magnetic pulse that went off, and with the confusion and chaos-

‘Shit- they’re firing at the engines- they won’t be able to fly,’ Hoseok looks away from the window to look at Namjoon. His expression is helpless.

‘What do we do?’

There’s nothing they can do. They can’t dive in- not with their current transporter.

They could only wait. Only hope that the Užkulisai would somehow pull through and burst out of the slaver-ship.

‘They’re pushing them towards the planet,’ Taeh’yung reports quietly. His expression is blank, eyes eerily wide and glazed. Hoseok scrambles around, turning and running down towards the opposite end of the Spardyti.

‘The other ship is being overwhelmed,’ he reports, peering through the small window at the rear of the Spardyti. ‘They’re not moving either.’

‘It’ll be some time before they can- or unless the Ynqaba fired another magnetic pulse at them,’ Namjoon says tersely. His hands are gripping the controls so hard they bend slightly under his fingers.

‘-amjoon-‘

Sk’jin’s voice breaks through the static and it’s nothing short of a miracle. Hoseok sprints back, quick to try and stabilize the channels again.

‘-rying to fly out-…’ the frequency pitches up to a shrill whistle and Hoseok visibly winces, trying to focus the channels.

‘-n’t control the ship-‘

‘Is Jimin all right?!’ Taeh’yung asks immediately, gnawing at his lower lip in what Namjoon can only describe as the most normal display of emotion he’s seen from the Zhak’gri.

They get no response from Sk’jin- only more static.
The anticipation and stress reaches breaking point when a burst of light erupts under the slave-ship, lighting up that expanse of space and suddenly the slaver-ship is glowing.

‘They’re being pulled down by the planet’s gravity,’ Namjoon hisses under his breath.

The edges of the ship burst into bright light and with a rapidity that was almost fake, the entirety of the ship is tugged down with a force none of them were ready to witness.

‘-shit- can you fucking hear me-’

‘Sk’jin! We can hear you-‘

Out of the ignited slaver-ship burst out a thin small blazing white line and Namjoon knows it’s the Užkulisai.

‘-it’s collapsing- fuck the engines are burning up I can’t pull out-‘

Namjoon doesn’t even think twice when he puts the engines on full-power and sends them hurtling towards the small speck of light.

‘It’s too close to Ynqaba’s gravity border-‘ Hoseok begins to counter but he that’s all he say.

‘Sk’jin- we’re coming to get you-‘ Namjoon is saying but something erupts in a strong powerful light below the slaver-ship and engulfs that entire region in a bright neon white cloud.

The line turns static and cuts off again.

‘Shit- connect to main OS in the Užkulisai now!’ Namjoon orders.

‘Užkulisai offline. No channels are in operation.’ Lisai’s cool voice replies.

‘Namjoon- incoming.’ Hoseok reports sharply, his head turned towards the back and gaze locked on something behind them.

But before Namjoon can say anything Taeh’yung stands up.

There’s a burst of green light and Namjoon flinches violently at the sight of a wrathful Taeh’yung, exuding a powerful pulsing green light around him.

In Namjoon’s personal opinion, Taeh’yung reminded him of the gods of ancient lore.

Not a deity for good, existing not to guide or destroy, but existing simply as a manifestation of some primal and wild force. There was no rational reason behind any of Taeh’yung’s decisions, the way he carried out his life, or the way he chose to be. And while he proved no threat to them, for now, Taeh’yung was in himself, more dangerous and destructive than a fleet of war-ships.

Taeh’yung raises a hand up.

Where Jimin exuded no palpable or visible force of strength, Taeh’yung was the opposite.

Everything about him is chaotic and unstable. For a moment Namjoon feels almost as though the very atoms in the air would break apart at their bonds, reducing all elemental cores to nothing more than vacuum.

Rings of light erupt out of him and the light is so loud, Namjoon is momentarily deafened. Hoseok looks pained as he covers his ears, eyes closed and mouth open in a silent roar.
Then all at once, the light quiets and blinking to clear his vision, Namjoon finds that the space behind them is nothing more than a large expanse of thick dust. Shivers run down his spine unbidden. And when Taeh’yung turns around, Namjoon does not recognize him.

The air around him is pulsing, vibrant, and warped. Taeh’yung’s eyes are solid neon green and his gaze falls on the burning slaver-ship descended into the planet.

The Zhak’gri utters a strange sound- a word. And it vibrates through the air, pushing back Namjoon’s hair with a force similar to a violent gush of wind. But this was no wind- no gust of air, no might storm- it was nothing but pure raw power and Namjoon’s breath is crushed from the sheer strength of it.

Then the space outside warps and a green light, as powerful as a solar flare, erupts from behind Namjoon and heads straight down.

‘Taeh’yung no!’ Hoseok gasps out. How the Ngfy’widan had the wherewithal to move or even remotely think is beyond Namjoon. Hoseok is flinging himself in front of the Zhak’gri, arms flung wide. ‘Hey Tae- stop- we don’t know what’s happened to the others- we cannot guarantee their safety- or of the innocent Beings inside the slaver-ship!’

Namjoon hadn’t realized how much Taeh’yung had morphed until he shrinks back to his lanky and stringy form, eyes sparkling, and hair a mess.

Namjoon realizes that he was scared.

His body had stopped- his mind overwhelmed and an all too familiar pained weight pulling at his throat, wrists, and ankles burns him into absolute submission.

‘You’re right!’ he exclaims as though his voice hadn’t just echoed around them in terrifying tolls that Namjoon is pretty sure could have sounded in the depths of the Universe. ‘I wasn’t thinking! Sorry Hobi! Sorry pa!’

Gathering what will and self-control he had left, Namjoon pushes himself out of the paralyzed frightened stillness that had come over him. He hopes it goes unnoticed. He rubs at his wrists where no metal burnt him- not anymore at least.

‘Pa?’

It hadn’t gone unnoticed and Namjoon quickly shakes his head, turning back towards the window where the slaver-ship was now entirely aflame- a white mass falling into Ynqaba. The Užkulisai is nowhere to be seen and judging by how the rest of the Ynqaba ships were headed back downwards, they had succeeded in drawing both ships down to their surface.

‘It’s- it’s fine- sit down, we need to get to the Užkulisai,’ Namjoon hurriedly waves Taeh’yung and Hoseok back to the seats. ‘We need to fly down there- they’ve been drawn in. How’s the situation in the back?’

‘Shit-‘ Hoseok curses, neck strained as he looks back out of the rear-window. ‘I don’t know what you did, but good call?’

Taeh’yung beams at him, raising both hands in thumbs up.

‘Pull up the trackers- let’s find them as quickly as possible,’ Namjoon orders.

‘Do- do we report to the GLA- or to a patrol somewhere? Seulgaan is still a GLA officer- we could
send a distress signal- one to distract,’ Hoseok offers as he switches the tracker from finding his own before taking over the pilot functions.

‘No- not with the Omhlophe around- besides this area is not under GLA law or jurisdiction. They won’t come no matter what- it would just create more political strife,’ Namjoon shakes his head. ‘And even if they do come- it would be the Yishengs.’

‘Then that’s-‘ Hoseok pauses, distracted. ‘-hey, isn’t Jimin supposed to be on this too?’

‘What do you mean?’ Namjoon grabs the screen, eyeing over the screen.

Hoseok jumps when a huge broken wing suddenly orbits its way in front of them and he has to turn them sharply. Namjoon takes the screen from him in the meantime and Hoseok concentrates on making his way past the debris with great care. Just because their presence was masked, didn’t mean they couldn’t be visibly spotted or have things crash into them. The Spardyti was not built for this sort of mission and despite being quite successful in still surviving in a Transporter that wasn’t supposed to be used off-planet, Hoseok is not taking his chances, regardless of whatever alien technology they were implementing.

‘Jimin- Jimin is not in the Užkulisai,’ Namjoon realizes. The screen clearly indicated that the slaver-ship had crashed near the shores of one of the continents, whereas the Užkulisai had crashed deeper and center of that continent. And Namjoon spots the two tracker lights- one for Yoongi, and the other for Sk’jin, clearly situated where the Užkulisai had crashed. But the other light.

‘He’s still inside Seulgaan’s ship.’

Sk’jin hates falling unconscious with a vengeance.

When he comes to, he’s filled with anger at everything.

He’s angry at Van Seulgaan for being a general all-round asshole.

He’s angry at Namjoon by default.

He’s angry at the Omhlophe for choosing this area to negotiate.

He’s angry at the Ynqaba war.
He’s angry at Lisai’s voice, alerting him through the Comm-Device that the Užkulisai was in dire straits.

He’s angry that he’s even actually here.

He’s angry at the burning pain around his shoulders, his right thigh, his head, and for no visible reason, his left pinky-toe.

He’s angry that his robes are torn and covered in what appeared to be centuries of dust and debris.

He’s angry at Yoongi for nearly killing him.

Sk’jin’s memory is still very fresh with the way Yoongi had literally screamed at him to take them back into the slave-ship. Sk’jin could have never imagined Yoongi looking so unhinged and crazed but the Human had come bursting into the Bridge, a mad and disheveled look to him as he ordered Sk’jin to go back.

And Yoongi looked like he was about to launch himself at Sk’jin and kick him out of the cockpit (and maybe even the ship who knows) when there’s a massive thunderous boom and light like a tsunami comes crushing down inside the Bridge.

So yes, Sk’jin purposefully flew them out of the Dock, knowing full well that neither Yoongi nor Jimin were securely placed inside the Hangar. But it was a risk he had to take.

Their immediate purpose was to get out of the place, to leave as quickly as possible, and most importantly make sure they had a way to get out. Meaning they couldn’t lose the ship. And despite reassurances that the Užkulaisai was an incredibly strong and customized ship, Sk’jin wanted to take no risks. And Sk’jin had seen an opening in the middle of all that missile barrage and he fucking took it. Who knew when the next window of opportunity would open for them. The ship was strong yes, but being on the receiving end of 100+ missiles in a span of 10 seconds was not something he wanted to test whilst being inside the ship.

He’s still angry at Yoongi.

And a little amused.

But he’s angriest at the glaring light that’s threatening to blind him.

He was definitely inside the ship- something he could sense despite not being in complete control of his senses and being heavily disoriented. And also-

‘Artificial atmosphere generator is at critical levels. Reboot?’

Lisai’s voice is very clear, meaning that wherever he was- either crash landed in Ynqaba or floating senselessly in space, or Spaces forbid, stuck in some nightmarish reality- the ship was still intact. So maybe he did owe Yoongi an apology for leaving Jimin behind.

His senses come back to him slowly and so does a lot of pain.

Sk’jin realizes that the burning pain on his head was a result of hanging upside down.

Sk’jin disengages himself from the cockpit seat and lands heavily on his side on the roof of the Užkulaisai. It takes another minute to sit up and understand his surroundings. The thick glass ceiling that covered the Bridge was miraculously intact and only somewhat shattered in some areas but there was no breaking. Sk’jin has to hand it to the design of the ship. It was sturdy as fuck. Maybe
all those rumors about how the Užkulisi could drill through the core of a planet was true.

The annoying glaring light was coming from outside- where had they crashed into? It appeared to be a powerful spot-light of sorts.

‘Artificial atmosphere generator is at critical levels. Reboot?’

‘Bitch I know,’ Sk’jin groans out as he stands up. ‘Reboot all systems at critical level.’

‘Understood.’

‘Where am I?’

‘You have entered the country of T’tenga in the planet of Ynqaba illegally. Please obtain your pass at the nearest Immigration Office, located 3.1 light years in the System of Ymir.’

‘Well fuck,’ Sk’jin whispers under his breath. ‘Where are Namjoon and Taeh’yung? And Hoseok and Jimin?’

‘Captain Namjoon, former head-pilot Hoseok, Taeh’yung, and Jimin are offline.’

Using the hanging chair for support, Sk’jin looks about for Yoongi. To an extent he wasn’t too worried about Jimin.

Sk’jin has a feeling that he was more than capable of taking care of himself and surviving a crash into the planet and a few explosions. No big deal. He was also wearing whatever super-suit that Yoongi normally wore. And this was why Sk’jin is worried he’ll find a splattered Human body somewhere in the Bridge.

But he comes across no such body. There’s no blood or remains of gore.

‘Please try to reconnect with the missing crew,’ Sk’jin coughs out, his side burning and his shoulders incredibly sore.


‘Find weapon-specialist Yoongi,’ Sk’jin orders, looking about for a screen or NaviLet. Anything at this point.

‘Weapons-specialist Yoongi is in the Second Level Lobby.’

Stumbling on his feet, Sk’jin makes his way as quickly as possible out of the Bridge. They were upside down, and he has no idea how they’re going to right themselves. He also has no idea how he’s going to make his way to the Second Level.

With no mean level of strength, a lot of calculation, and balance, Sk’jin climbs up to the Second Level, breathless and with quaking limbs.

Only to find Yoongi standing in the middle of the Lobby, half of his face covered in blood, staring down at Sk’jin blankly.

Other than the blood Yoongi seems entirely all right. How that’s possible, Sk’jin has no idea. But he’s relieved.

‘Fucking Spaces-‘ Sk’jin scrambles to push himself up and flails towards Yoongi. ‘-fuck, you’re
The next thing Sk’jin sees is the ceiling (floor? Technically floor), his jaw probably dislocated, and his mouth full of blood. Was that a tooth? Teeth. Yoongi punched him so hard two of his teeth fell out.

‘What the fuck-’

‘You left him.’ Yoongi states plainly before appearing in Sk’jin’s very blurred vision.

Yoongi punched hard.

Sk’jin was flat on his back, at least 3 meters from where he was originally standing, and his body painfully numb.

‘Before you punch me again- can I at least explain why I did it.’ Sk’jin croaks out.

‘I don’t care,’ Yoongi replies simply, he’s not even looking at Sk’jin anymore. ‘You did what you thought you had to do. And I will now do what I have to do.’

Sk’jin sits up with sudden alarm, heart in his throat.

‘Don’t-!’

Sk’jin honestly thought Yoongi was going to possibly kill him. Honestly it wouldn’t surprise Sk’jin. Not after that maddeningly crazed scream Yoongi had let out prior to their crash. Also because Sk’jin reasons that to an extent, it was deserved. But Yoongi is already moving out.

‘What the fuck-’

‘Intruder alert. Security systems have failed and are no longer working.’

Cursing under his breath, Sk’jin tries to stand up but his disorientation (and pain, thank you Yoongi) pushes him around until he collides with the wall. Or was that the ceiling.

Sk’jin can’t tell.

‘Intruder alert. Security systems have failed and are no longer working.’

‘Fuck fuck! Yoongi!’ Sk’jin gasps out, flailing a little as he tries to stand. But the Human doesn’t reply.

And that’s when it hits Sk’jin.

Yoongi left him behind.

‘Wow-‘

Sk’jin is laughing hysterically when half a dozen armed dangerous looking Beings appear inside the Lobby. The bright spot-light made sense now. It was probably their transporter or something.

These Beings were not the same ones he saw in Seulgaan’s ship. They weren’t wearing what Seulgaan’s guards were wearing either.

These were, no doubt, natives of Ynqaba. The ones who shot them down, pushing them towards their planet’s gravity. They’re rather anthropomorphic, but their features are incredibly sharp and
cruel. Their skin is an ashy colour, as though they were malnourished. And maybe they were. Sk’jin can’t tell with his blurred vision and anger simmering inside him.

They didn’t appear too old, though a few had facial hair. They seemed to regard him with contempt and curiosity. Not the best combination but better than greed or smugness.

Sk’jin stops laughing after a while, and they approach him slowly. They’re armed with incredibly heavy looking gear and at the same time, incredibly made-up looking ones. Rustic almost. In fact, one of them is holding a pitch-fork.

Were these scavengers? Pillaging and looting areas after the war left? Or were they military personnel? Police? Sk’jin can’t figure it out. He’s still angry at Yoongi. Fuck him and his ability to simply vanish.

‘He looks out of it.’ One of them remarks. ‘Never seen his kind. Looks weak to me.’

‘Wouldn’t say that for sure. He survived the crash didn’t he?’

Good, at least they spoke standard.

‘Check for more survivors. I thought we scanned two Beings.’

‘Maybe there was a fault- I only see him.’ The other replies. ‘No one else.’

Wow, thanks Yoongi, Sk’jin thinks, laughing again and harder this time. He can’t see, but he’s pretty sure the Ynqaba natives are eyeing him with a lot of judgment.

‘Think he’s lost his mind?’

I wish.

‘Looks like it. We can get back ransom for him- or we can give up to the Collectors. Might get a good pay.’

‘The Collectors are a better idea. There’s no guarantee for a ransom pick up.’

Sk’jin briefly wonders if it was at all probable that the others would come back for him. He was going to be taken out of the ship, and that was what they would need. If they got Hoseok back, they had a more than capable pilot as well. And the only other Being who had been with him left him behind.

There was no use for him.

‘Search him and then bind him.’ A voice barks out. Sk’jin hears the familiar sound of a scanner and he laughs even harder. ‘And maybe shut him up too. Clear the place out and let’s get going before the others arrive.’

‘Got it.’
Hoseok is glad to be back.

And by “back” he means back to the endless shit-luck and consequences of wildly planned actions and involvement of forces that honestly made no sense. Back to piloting a transporter that shouldn’t be used off-planet but here they were, using the transporter off-planet, and attempting to enter a foreign planet’s atmosphere with little to no functional protection.

Nothing had changed.

Great.

Hoseok braces himself as they enter the planet of Ynqaba.

But whatever was being used to shield them inside the transporter was strong enough to prevent them from burning to a crisp.

The planet was sizeable and was made up of 8 entirely separate continents. The land seemed dark and dry- probably a result of continuous war. The loss of their ecosystem was obvious, because even as they approach the surface, any sign of visible vegetation is rare, if not entirely missing. They had high mountain, but only a few had snow on them.

This was a planet ravaged and broken by war.

‘We’re not far,’ Namjoon says tersely, staring straight ahead, his mouth a thin line.

They had no contact with the Užkulisai, not a single signal or frequency from any of the channels.

However Yoongi’s obsession with poisoning all of them seemed to work for the better, and they were able to pinpoint everyone’s locations.

‘They’re moving apart,’ Taeh’yung comments from behind him.

‘Who?’

‘Yoongi and Jin,’ Taeh’yung replies, a frown obvious in his tone of voice. ‘Chim is also moving, but he’s still inside that ship I think.’

‘At least they’re all still mobile,’ Namjoon mumbles under his breath. And Hoseok privately agrees.

‘It’s only Yoongi who is moving,’ Taeh’yung adds. ‘Jin isn’t moving.’

Hoseok frowns at that. Why would they separate? In situations like these, numbers mattered. They would be better teamed up. Or was Sk’jin injured? A crash like that could easily render them incapacitated despite the security and stability of the Užkulisai.
Flying into Ynqaba was no easy task. Not with an ongoing spatial battle as well as continuous air/land battles. There was a lot of debris outside the planet, as well as within the atmosphere in forms of stations and arcs. They used the masses of debris to hide themselves though it greatly held them back in terms of speed and time management. Hoseok was sweating by the time they were at landing distance from the surface below.

The entire System was at war and going through unnoticed was a feat, even with their camouflage/defense tech, or whatever it was. Hoseok knows that Namjoon and Taeh’yung don’t have the time to explain what any of tech actually did; but that didn’t stop him from being intrigued. He wants to know what happened in that planet- what did they find, what did they see. But that was going to have to wait.

The plan was to get to the Užkulisai first thing and deposit Namjoon there so that he could fix what needed fixing. Then Taeh’yung and Hoseok would quickly make their way to where Jimin was and pick him up. It was a basic and simple plan but Hoseok has lost all trust in those now.

‘Yoongi has stopped moving,’ Taeh’yung reports, sounding even more confused. ‘He’s just…he’s not that far from Jin but-’

He makes a confused sound.

‘What is it?’

‘Jin is moving- and very quickly too.’

Unsure what to make of the whole thing, Hoseok puts the Spardyti on neutral and they cruise quietly over the graveyard of a city below them.

Hoseok feels Namjoon’s questioning but quiet look directed at him. What was going on?

The area the Užkulisai had crashed was in what Namjoon discovered was an abandoned mountain-side city. And when they fly over a particularly high and blackened sharp mountain, the entirety of the mountain-side city is revealed to them.

And it was indeed quite literally a mountain-side city.

What must have been great and beautiful structures that seemed to grow from the high mountain sides were carved out and exposed, their natural sandstone walls grey and ashen in colour. What was once a vibrant and obviously flourishing city was reduced to faded and crumbling remains.

High broken structures stretched out from mountain sides, suggesting a complex motorway of sorts must have crisscrossed here before. And a very recent path of destruction cuts an almost bloody gorge which like a huge indicator, points them straight to an upturned Užkulisai.

And pulling out from the crash-site is another transporter.

Tensing, Hoseok quickly veers them off to the side, hoping they weren’t sighted.

‘Someone got there before we could,’ Namjoon states tersely. ‘They’re taking Sk’jin.’

‘Where’s Yoongi?’

‘He’s moving now-‘

And because Hoseok is looking for him, he spots a small dark figure dart out from large piles of
rubble, steadily making his way to the Užkulisai.

‘What the fuck?’

‘What do we do?’ Hoseok asks, eyeing the transporter that moves further and further way, taking Sk’jin with them. Namjoon doesn’t reply for a moment, his eyebrows deeply furrowed, clearly doing a lot of thinking.

‘Land us,’ Namjoon orders. ‘We get answers from Yoongi.’

The air is harsh and smells heavily of pollutants. It’s also strangely stale and Hoseok wants to cover his mouth and nose. Taeh’yung obviously does not like the smell and he’s making loud retching sounds as they exit the Spardyti. Namjoon is the only one who doesn’t seem to have an issue with it. Hoseok lands them close to the ship, realizing with a panicked jolt that the crash had created a rather deep crater inside of which the Užkulisai lay. This was not a good tactical position. They could be ambushed and would have no way of properly defending themselves. It was also going to make taking off difficult.

They rush out, craning their necks to look up at the forcibly opened Hangar Bay gates. They were going to have to climb up.

‘Fuck- Yoongi!’ Namjoon yells.

‘I got it pa!’ Taeh’yung says cheerily and honestly Hoseok has no idea what to expect from the Zhak’gri but there’s no need to panic because Yoongi suddenly appears overhead and nimbly leaps down, landing quietly in front of them. His face covered in dried blood, parts of his hair matted down, and his eyes aflame, Yoongi doesn’t even spare them a glance and he’s already briskly walking.

‘Yoongi what happened-‘ Namjoon asks at once while Taeh’yung exclaims out in horror, reaching for the Human at once.

‘Sk’jin left Jimin behind,’ the Human states bluntly as he pauses momentarily. ‘Scavengers found us. They took a majority of our supplies and resources, as well as Sk’jin. We need to bring Jimin back.’

It’s silent for a few seconds and Hoseok speaks up, seeing as Namjoon seems to have lost the ability to speak.

‘Yoongi- Jimin is all right, his tracker is still lit up-‘

‘We need to get him back. We left him behind. I have to go back to him,’ Yoongi states and that’s when Hoseok realizes that Yoongi is carrying a sling-bag of sorts. A very familiar sling-bag of sorts. In fact, Yoongi is draped in familiar looking devices that Hoseok didn’t even know they had on board.

‘I cannot leave him again.’

‘Wait-!’ Namjoon yells out. ‘You’re not thinking straight- Yoongi calm down for just a second-‘

‘Sk’jin left Jimin behind,’ Yoongi repeats. ‘I need to bring him back.’

Something clicks inside Hoseok’s mind and before he can even properly form the thought in his mind he says, ‘There were at most, 10 scavengers, judging by the size of their transporter. Armed like that, you could have easily taken them all out.’
Namjoon seems to understand exactly what Hoseok was saying. His eyes darken and he glares down at the Human.

‘Yoongi, did you let those scavengers take Sk’jin?’ Namjoon asks in a low serious voice.

‘Yes.’

Hoseok isn’t sure why he’s not surprised.

‘What the fuck-’

‘In a mission, we get rid of things we do not need. We use only what would profit or strengthen our mission’s success rate. My mission is to protect Jimin. I didn’t need Sk’jin for that. So I left him.’ Yoongi states simply.

‘Yoongi no-‘

‘If you wish to discontinue, then I will not stop you. But I going to Jimin.’ The Human declares bluntly.

‘Yoongi wait-‘

But the Human pushes past easily, making his way towards the Spardyti.

But he doesn’t manage to take another step past as a neon green ring erupts around him.

Yoongi looks back, only his head turned, eyeing Taeh’yung who looked sheepish but at the same time frustrated.

‘Yoongi!’ he actually stomps his feet. ‘This is not how you do things! You can’t just leave Jin like this!’

Yoongi blinks once, twice.

‘He left Jimin.’

Taeh’yung seems at a loss for words and actually makes a loud whiney sound before looking over at Namjoon as though begging the Kutsoglerin to fix this situation.

‘If it is true that Sk’jin left Jimin behind- then he was, in many ways, wrong to do so,’ Namjoon says carefully, one hand raised a little as though to placate both parties. ‘However, we cannot decide if it was all done out of malice- it’s possible he had no choice. However, what you did was wrong. You simply allowed Sk’jin to be taken by a bunch of Beings we have no idea about. And you will apologize when you see him later.’

‘He needs to apologize to Jimin first.’ Yoongi declares.

‘Yes- we will all apologize to each other when we get out of here- and in order to do that, we need to upright the ship, make sure it’s all right- and then collect Jimin and Sk’jin.’ Namjoon states very clearly, looking very much like he was talking to a very stubborn child who was purposefully throwing a tantrum.

Yoongi seems to be struggling, expression still blank but he’s clearly thinking hard. Then he looks away, and if Hoseok isn’t mistaken, he’s actually pouting.

‘Understood.’
Namjoon nods at Taeh'yung who releases the Human, still looking apprehensive, as though expecting to be told off. A high contrast to how he had behaved outside of Ynqaba.

‘Right,’ Namjoon eyes Yoongi carefully. ‘We’re going to install the cell in the Užkulisai, make sure it’s at full function, then we’re going to track both Jimin and Sk’jin, and pick them up. Is that understood?’

‘Understood.’

Namjoon sighs heavily, glancing over at Hoseok, his expression exasperated and tired. Then he looks over at the ship with a frown.

‘We’re going to have work fast,’ he comments. ‘It’s going to get dark- we don’t know what could be around.’

Hoseok looks up and back around the city above them. Sure it looked empty and abandoned, but they couldn’t be too sure.

‘First order of things we need to make sure all the systems are still intact,’ Namjoon declares, studying the thankfully intact wings with sharp eyes. ‘Then we flip her over.’

Scaling the back of the Užkulisai is no easy feat but they do manage getting in, no words exchanged. The success of their new journey depended on speed, efficiency, and tact. They all quickly make their way towards the Bridge, avoiding fallen objects as well as the mess that had leaked all the way down from the Kitchens.

‘Lisai how are the internal housing-systems?’ Namjoon asks as they trip into the upside-down Bridge.

‘All systems are functional. Right wing turbine compromised. Engine 05 needs manual realignment.’ Lisai surmises.

‘All right- I’m going to reverse the gravity so we can all walk properly,’ Namjoon calls, arms stretching up to reach for the Navigation Table above him. ‘Grab on to something.’

Taeh’yung takes this as an invitation to cling to Namjoon, face mushed up against the Kutsoglerin’s throat with a pleased smile. Namjoon doesn’t even bat an eye, bracing himself onto the arm of his chair on the Mast. Hoseok also grips his chair, his hands placed in a way where when he adjusts in reverse, he would land upright. Yoongi has outdone all of them without trying, already seated on his chair in the tower-mast (it was finally living up to its name up there).

‘Reversing,’ is all Namjoon says.

There’s the familiar pull in the lining of Hoseok’s stomach indicating the switch in gravity. Slowly but heavily, everything falls upright- or at least is placed the way they should be if the ship were still upright. Landing on the balls of his feet, Hoseok takes a few seconds to adjust himself before sliding into this seat. Looking out into the now darkening space outside the window, Hoseok starts up the ship.

‘All systems stable. Prepare for planetary take-off?’ Lisai asks.

‘No- reverse turbines and switch engine to neutral hover,’ Hoseok calls out even though he’s manually doing all of it. ‘Set us 30 meters above ground.’

‘Of course.’
It’s odd seeing the way they move, seemingly downwards, and instead behold an upturned darkening horizon.

‘Those look like storm clouds,’ Namjoon comments darkly. ‘Lisai- weather forecast for our coordinates.’

‘Thunderstorm approaching. Expected duration 6 hours. Precipitation at 3pH. Proceed with caution.’

‘What the fuck-’

‘...the planet is polluted,’ Namjoon explains in a low voice. ‘Look at the land- it’s obvious the entire planet is dying.’

‘It’s not,’ Yoongi says quietly from the front as they rise higher. Hoseok would ask what he meant but he’s concentrating on stabilizing them enough to successfully flip them around. If they were in motion, then it would be easy- but their engines were not at full power, so he was going to have to maintain a perfect equilibrium of jet-expulsion from the turbines to flip them over, time their rotation and make sure they don’t veer off elsewhere.

Hoseok has honestly not stopped sweating from the sheer stress of piloting since he was rescued rather extraordinarily by Taeh’yung no more than an hour ago and he just wants to catch a break. He successfully flips them around and Namjoon corrects their gravity once more. But there is no time for congratulations or break.

‘All right- I’ll go install the cell out of the Spardyti- Hoseok could you go to the Engines Room- Yoongi, could you check the turbine?’ Namjoon orders, already exiting the Bridge before adding, ‘Keep tracking Sk’jin and Jimin!’

Yoongi doesn’t reply but simply makes his way out as well. Hoseok is quick to steer them away from the lengthening shadow of the mountain-side city and out in the open and dry expanse outside. Landing them properly but only at stand-by, Hoseok makes to get up and head for the Engines Room when Taeh’yung suddenly appears before him.

‘Spaces-!’

‘They didn’t do anything to you?’ the Zhak’gri asks, his expression rather blank.

His stay with the Omhlophe had been an odd one, Hoseok admits.

After he’d been trapped in that room with the OrTanks, no one came to check up on him for almost an entire day. He had felt the ship he was in hum to life. Then he felt movement and had braced himself in the narrow gap between two OrTanks, adamantly trying not to look at their faces. Then a Being, not one of the Omhlophe, had appeared, cuffed him, and taken him out of the area, out of the ship, revealing that the ship Hoseok had snuck into had in fact been landed inside another ship. He didn’t see any of the Omhlophe- it had been dark and Hoseok could only sense and somewhat deduce he was inside a Hangar of sorts. Then he was led into a storage like facility through a lift and deposited into one of the cells.

Nothing more. Nothing less.

Hoseok had been extremely paranoid, jumpy at every little sound. He was under observation of course, but that was it.

‘Nothing,’ Hoseok replies. ‘It was odd- I only saw one of them. Once. And then after that,
nothing.’

‘What about the other babies?’

‘They were like Jimin- asleep, floating.’ Hoseok replies before he remembers a key detail. ‘They all had that indent on their spine- like Yoongi does.’

Taeh’yung blinks slowly a few times, eyes never leaving his. It’s disconcerting, especially at this proximity. Because looking at Taeh’yung like this forced Hoseok to come to terms that he knew nothing of this Being before him. And the worst part of it, was that Taeh’yung himself didn’t seem to know much about himself either.

‘I’m glad you’re back,’ he smiles softly, eyes turning into crescents before pushing himself quite comfortably into Hoseok’s space and sitting on his lap. His long arms wind around him and he nuzzles into the side of his face affectionately.

‘Please don’t ever leave again.’

Squirming but trying not to offend the lanky Zhak’gri, Hoseok stammers out, ‘Uh- yeah, I’m staying Tae- don’t worry.’

Taeh’yung gives him a happy smile and kisses his cheek sloppily before pulling away and saying, ‘Good! I missed you so much!’

And with that he runs off, all limbs and bouncy hair.

It takes Hoseok a moment to recover and remember that he was headed for the Engines Room. He gets up without interruption, but this time he’s got a wide smile on his face.

It takes longer than it should but Jimin is weak and his limbs don’t want to listen to him. But he manages to crawl/push himself along the vent. It’s dark and Jimin cannot see- his surroundings are oppressive and narrow and if he was capable of being a little more aware of his immediate environment, Jimin would be frightened out of his mind. But at this moment his mind is slow and his reaction limited. But his instincts were taking over and Jimin blindly crawls forward to the best
of his abilities.

There is no indication that he was even headed for a potential way out. He just had to move. Had to get out.

With a pained cry, Jimin slides downwards abruptly. It’s momentarily wet and Jimin panics at the idea of falling into a body of water in this darkness and not being able to find his way out. But it’s extremely shallow—barely an inch or so. However it does reduce friction and causes Jimin to slip even more until he’s landing heavily on his side.

His breath is knocked out of him and he nearly blacks out once again.

For a moment Jimin thinks he’s seeing stars but the more he blinks, his vision clears and he realizes he’s looking at actual points of light. Gathering himself as best as he could, Jimin pushes himself up back to a crawl and slides across the slippery surface towards the light.

Jimin hadn’t expected the lights to appear that close to his face—his perspective was clearly skewed. Taking a moment to steady his breathing again and summon whatever will he had to hopefully realign his perspective, Jimin pauses before what he figures is a vent-cover.

As his vision clears, and he’s able to focus again, Jimin realizes he’s staring down into a heavily dilapidated atrium of sorts, flooded with emergency lights that aren’t as bright as Jimin had initially thought. Taking a deep breath, Jimin pushes at the vent until he realizes that he needed to pull at the vent. Sticking his fingers through the holes, Jimin manages to yank the cover away and with an irrepressible urge that practically ejected him out of the narrow and dark vent, Jimin collapses heavily onto the cold floor a foot below.

His breathing escalates and his vision darkens again.

‘You are experiencing a panic attack. Please remain calm.’ Lisai tells him.

But his ears are ringing in a high pitch and trying to do anything beyond just hyperventilating was too tasking.

And maybe because he wasn’t all there just yet, Jimin fails to sense their presence or the loud explosion. He does, however, register the flash of light and he only has a second to brace himself.

There’s a strong wave of heat and light and Jimin feels himself being shoved around the floor before he hits something with his back. And then before he knows it, he’s being bodily picked up from the ground. There’s a voice, and before Jimin can focus on what it is, he feels hands on the helmet over his head.

It’s instantaneous.

As though a burst of electricity hit him, Jimin is suddenly mobile and his senses return to him with a vengeance. He struggles against the grip that’s holding him up and falls on all fours. With a burst of adrenaline, Jimin shoots forward in a low run. His vision is blurred but he can just about make out an opening he *prays* is the door.

But before he can reach it, something hits the back of his legs and Jimin is sent skidding off of the floor again. But that doesn’t stop him from reacting.

With his vision returning to him slowly, Jimin notes that his would-be assailants are cyborgs-Seulgaan’s cyborgs. There are 3 of them. Shifting his weight and ignoring the flare of pain that radiates from his side, Jimin readies himself to attack. He had no weapons on him, and he was too
weak to do anything of great consequence. All that was left was to physically fight.

He knew he had no chance in running- he didn’t know the layout of the ship, and he was not physically capable of outrunning cyborgs. If he could just deactivate them at the neck- where he hopes the main circuit wires were located like they were back in his System- then he should be able to at least, buy himself enough time. Jimin was not the strongest fighter, but he was fast.

But before he can take a step forward in offence, a pair of cyborg arms cage him in, holding his arms down at a painful angle. Jimin chokes out a pained croak, his vision darkening at an alarming pace. He tries to kick but he’s held down and the hands are back on his helmet.

‘No-!’ Jimin shouts, trying to push backwards but it’s too late.

The air smells stale and like air-coolants and like death.

The lights are glaring without the protective filter-shield and Jimin flinches at the onslaught of sensory assault.

How was he going to contact the others now? How could they know where he was? Would they be able to find him?

‘-lease do not resist. We will take you to medical aid now.’ The cyborgs echo at him in unison as soon as his hearing clears a little. Jimin realizes he’s breathing harshly, the ringing in his ears settling to low white-noise instead. His throat is parched and his temples were throbbing. Pain racks through his body again and he can’t help but cry out. That is until one of the cyborgs approaches him with what looked like a syringe of sorts. The implant is quick and painless but the relief it brings Jimin is monumental. It also brings a strange state of complete relax over his body.

‘What- what is this-’ Jimin stammers out.

‘Prisoner is communicating in unknown codec. Refer to Director.’

The grip on his arms is loosened just a little and his legs are dropped, but it didn’t matter because Jimin can barely put on foot in front of the other. His mind however, was clearing up greatly. They used some form of tranquilizer on him. That was for certain. His mind was not affected, but his body was very rapidly losing all sense of mobility. Jimin could barely keep his head up straight.

He’s effectively dragged down hallways and other atriums. At one point they’re going over a narrow bridge below which a great fire was raging. Jimin’s mind was clearing but he’s still disoriented.

They walk out of one small atrium that’s dark save for neon orange head-lights when the door bursts open and Jimin is smothered by the stench of death and pain.

Gagging and trying to pull himself away from the overwhelming ocean of pure carnage, Jimin struggles his best. But it’s futile. Gasping for breath and trying not to retch as his mouth waters in protest over the assault on his senses, Jimin is instead hauled up as though to stand and he understands why.

They were outside towards the center of the massive ship, if Jimin is seeing right. They had entered a large hollow cylindrical shaped atrium that stretched up and down in great measurement. Broken bridges and pillars stretched around and to Jimin’s horror, piles of bodies were strewn about, and the stench of blood lingered in the air. Crudely built cages were broken everywhere and great piles of rubble and debris, some the size of the Užkulisai, were embedded all around. Yet despite all the chaos, it’s surprisingly calm. No screaming, no wailing- just a strict and almost
stricken sense of calm. And at the center of it all stood Van Seulgaan, half of his face soaked in blood, his clothes covered in who knew what, and most frightening of all, a look of terror in his eyes.

He spins around as Jimin and the cyborgs approach him. The Tayian looks at him incredulously before his eyes gleam in recognition. The cyborgs holding him stop and one continues over, presenting the helmet to Seulgaan and speaking to him. Jimin is too far to hear, but Seulgaan doesn’t look away from him.

The look of terror is replaced with a calculative one. And Jimin already does not like where this was headed. Seulgaan holds onto the helmet before approaching him.

‘You’re not that GI agent,’ Seulgaan narrows his eyes.

Jimin knows he’s too weak to subdue them. He was at a great disadvantage and Seulgaan was clearly looking to reap whatever benefits he could possibly gain in this truly low moment for him.

‘You’re one of the abominations. I saw you- in Pompa.’

**Abomination? What did he mean?**

‘So that Khol’isa was lying…’ Seulgaan eyes him warily, he's clearly talking to himself now. ‘How are you like this?’

Jimin wishes he understood what Seulgaan was saying. What did he mean?

‘What- what talking- about,’ Jimin manages to ask.

Seulgaan looks taken aback at his words.

‘You understand me?’

Jimin nods slowly.

‘Who were those Beings? In the white ship,’ the Tayian asks sharply. ‘Were they after you?’

‘I- I don’t know,’ Jimin replies honestly. They didn’t know, in all honesty, what the Omhlophe were after in the long run.

Suddenly, the entire ship shudders and there’s a loud explosion. It’s coming from outside.

‘Is there no possible way of escaping?’ Seulgaan asks sharply, clearly at one of his crew. He clearly doesn’t get the answer he wants.

‘There’s no helping it then,’ he says quietly before nodding sharply at someone behind Jimin before turning around. Jimin is instantly moving, following the Tayian. There’s a loud sound and just as they enter a corridor that closes behind them, a flash of light goes off and some of the heavier chunks of debris crash through.

‘Pack only the most essential cargo,’ Seulgaan orders, talking to his crew again. ‘Leave the others behind- this ship and the others will be our payment.’

Jimin realizes, with sudden and horrified clarity, that Seulgaan was about to give over his ship, his “cargo”, and everything else over in order to escape the planet.

‘Call whatever channel they have and make the deal- it’s one they can’t refuse.’ He concludes
sharply before he’s turning the corner to access a large lift. ‘We’ll meet you in Hull E-45.’

Jimin feels them ascending. The lift shakes frequently but the cyborgs and Seulgaan make no notice of it. In fact, Seulgaan is simply staring at Jimin, eyes narrowed and calculating.

‘You’re different,’ is all he says.

Jimin refuses to look afraid. So he looks straight back at Seulgaan, his expression as blank as possible.

‘We’re getting out of here,’ Seulgaan tells him simply. ‘This is a dangerous planet and we’re extremely disadvantaged. No GLA platoon will rescue us and I’m not going to expose myself either. You can follow and not cause any issues and we’ll leave this place quietly and safely. Do I have your cooperation?’

Jimin does not like Seulgaan.

But he was the only available option for Jimin to get out of this situation.

Van Seulgaan, in Jimin’s opinion, was perhaps not a Being he would trust or categorize as a “good” being. However, his dedication to his business meant prioritizing his assets and making sure his source of income was taken care of. After all, no one wanted to buy or own a product that was already damaged. So there is at least the fact that Seulgaan would do everything in his ability to secure his cargo- or at least the most valuable ones, and that included Jimin now.

He nods in reply.

‘Do anything to hinder our escape, I will not hesitate to leave you behind.’

Jimin doesn’t bother responding to that so he looks away instead. The lift comes to grinding halt and the doors open with some difficulty.

It’s noisier here, and the overwhelming wave of death and destruction is somewhat lessened. Jimin still has no control over his limbs, held up only the cyborg behind him, he feels like an object whose value and price had just been stamped over him.

And maybe it didn’t reek of death in this area of the massive ship, but it didn’t stop it from being any less worse.

Because it reeked of sorrow.

Seulgaan had amassed a lot of Beings to work for him- all part of what Jimin understood to be something called the “Alliance”- all working in trafficking and selling living Beings for the morally and ethically depraved. And here they all were.

And it breaks Jimin’s heart.

Because it wasn’t as though these Beings wanted to be here out of choice. Not all of them. Jimin is hoisted past grieving Beings, clutching at sisters and brothers, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters. The Universe was not separated by those who did good, and those who were bad.

The Universe was separated into Beings who were allowed the chance to do good, and those who weren’t.

Jimin is distracted by the arrival of a small rag-tag group of Beings, all in various stages of injury
and medical aid.

‘We’re surrounded,’ the one at the front reports. ‘They’ve shut up all of our communication channels- we can’t even call for aid-’

‘We won’t be getting any,’ Seulgaan shakes his head. ‘How’s the evacuation holding up?’

‘We need at least 15 more minutes,’ he replies, looking tense.

‘Take it,’ Seulgaan pats the Being on the shoulder, ‘And get as much of us out of here as quickly as you can- prepare the shields and jump to warp immediately- understood?’

‘Got it- what about you?’

He looks a lot like Seulgaan, Jimin notes. Undoubtedly, they were the same species.

‘Not until you all leave,’ Seulgaan replies grimly before nodding tersely at the others. ‘Now hurry- and bring me that headset.’

They nod in understanding and sprint off.

Seulgaan was undoubtedly a villain to thousands- possibly millions. He was vile, responsible for the pain, separation, death, and complete degradation of humanity and ethical value. However he was also the leader, the guide, of many who looked to him to secure their lives. To keep them safe- to fend for their families.

Villains did not exist, plotting against the weak and defenseless out of pure evil or sadistic tendencies. Villains did not exist to simply create discord and pain for the sake of being a villain. Every action taken had the potential for pain, had the potential for evil.

Van Seulgaan was a villain for Jimin. But how many Beings did the Tayian actually save? How many Beings saw Van Seulgaan as their savior?

How many Beings saw Jimin as their savior?

And how many saw him as the villain?

‘Take him to the pods,’ Seulgaan orders, looking back at the cyborgs, not even sparing Jimin a glance. ‘Secure him in there and set him to our planned trajectory.’

‘Understood,’ the cyborgs reply in unison.

Jemin hears it before he sees it.

A strained impossibly high-pitched ringing that makes the hair on the back his neck stand on end.

The ripple of energy that rends the air before him warps his vision and everything is sent careening down to the floor.

The cyborgs holding him up crumple to the floor and the distinct hum of the ship, indicating that at least a few of the systems were still running, immediately dies.

And for one odd moment, from where Jimin is on the floor, his vision seems to really warp as the very walls of the Docking Bay they were in peels off. And to his horror he realizes it’s not a trick of his eye or even a result of some mirage. But massive constructs with colossal pincer like extensions were indeed pulling the walls of the slaver-ship apart.
The floor shakes and there are hordes of Beings running past Jimin. He’s paralyzed and he cannot move, an open and easy target for the stampede of petrified Beings. But by some miracle he’s spared being kicked and stepped on. The cyborgs around him are instead casualties of this stampede. There’s a lot of yelling and screaming, as well as the unmistakable rhythmic pulsing blasts from firearms.

Thundering thuds echo around and Jimin tries to right himself, unable to see more than just the floors. With a cry, Jimin manages to turn himself over to the side and he regrets it instantly.

Bright lights rapidly fan out, almost slow, almost beautiful, from high up- as though stars were falling down.

And each falling star hits someone, flares erupt and screams rend the air, before they instantly crumple to the floor.

Massive chunks of the ship is torn apart, and Jimin thinks he’s hallucinating but the sight before him is all too real.

The sky is a washed grey, no star in sight as massive broiling storm clouds amass over them, promising lightning, darkness, and destruction. Thick and chaotic forks of lightning vein the clouds, and silhouetted against this depressing backdrop are dozens of battle-ships, all of which Jimin had seen in combat out in space. They were clearly surrounded and were in the process of being ransacked.

Floodlights pour in and illuminate the whole Docking Bay with blinding light. The firing stops and the screaming stops as well.

‘Surrender now and you will be spared.’ A voice echoes out from above them.

‘We surrender!’ a voice responds back.

Van Seulgaan has managed to stand, despite the great injury he suffered on his arm and the blood splattered across his face. His expression is tense and angry and fearful.

‘I am Van Seulgaan, captain of this ship, and board member of the Isbahaysiga Alliance,’ he announces boldly, doing an exemplary job at sounding confident and sure. ‘I surrender this ship, and its cargo to you, the Reformist Union of the Beings of Ynqaba! We will leave you to all you wish, in exchange that my crew and I are allowed safe passage out.’

It’s silent for a long while.

‘Tell me, Van Seulgaan. Would you allow a thief to safely leave your home?’

Jimin does not like Seulgaan.

But he was the only available option for Jimin to get out of this situation.

And he can’t do anything as a clean almost slow bold of light, fires through the air, and rather casually passes through Seulgaan’s chest and out towards the back.

‘No. You wouldn’t.’

The Tayian doesn’t seem to register it at first, he’s blinking a little slowly, a curious expression on his face.
And just like that, Van Seulgaan keels over.

Jimin’s immediate reality changes in an instant.

The lights blind him, and Jimin doesn’t know what’s happening around him. He desperately hopes that he’ll be overlooked, buried here amongst the heaps of cyborgs. Yoongi always went back and forth unseen, and it was more effective when he wore this suit. And for nearly an hour of waiting, paralyzed against his will, watching with watering eyes fleeting movement just beyond the white glare of the edge of light, Jimin thinks he might just be overlooked.

But Jimin has no such luck.

The air is filled with muffled whimpers, the thud of metal of flesh, the echo of a blast, the sharp ring of coarse and crude laughter, and a constant strange drilling sound that doesn’t go away. Seulgaan’s body is some ways from him, his oddly greyish blood turning an odd black as it began to dry up. The air is no longer thick with grief, pain, and death— but an added odour of greed, bloodlust, and hysteria blends in thickly.

‘Well well- what a beauty.’

Heavy boots appear in peripheral vision. There’s a soft scratching sound and the stench of some form of smoking weed assaults Jimin’s nose.

‘Abi, take a load of this one. Don’t he look familiar?’

Another pair of boots appear in front of him.

‘Huh- ain’t he one of them?’

Jimin is doubly alert.

One of them?

According to what he learnt about Yoongi’s most recent years through Taeh’yung, was that he was part (or at least created into) a secret organization that assassinated and infiltrated a variety of places, organizations, countries, governments, and even planets to fulfill a mission or duty given to them. They all wore this very suit, as well as the helmet.

‘Well well- looks like we really struck gold. You might wanna ring up the Collectors- tell them what we found.’

A rough hand pushes him on to his back and 3 separate heads loom down at him, silhouetted against the glaring spotlight above. Jimin cannot make out their faces, but he can sense malice, greed, and wanton cruelty rolling off of them like smoke.

‘Yeah- they’re gonna be real happy.’
(Author’s Notes)

UGH UNIVERSITY COULD KILL ME NOW AND HONESTLY I WOULDN’T EVEN REALIZE I WAS DEAD BECAUSE I’D STILL BE WORKING ON MY PROJECTS IN SPIRIT FORM I can’t believe I have 1 more year of uni please save me someone thanks
All black-hair bangtan however, did give me some energy- so I was screaming about it while rendering my animation in 3 different computers, staring at one very low resolution picture for hours
Then EUPHORIA HIT AND I JUST
There’s some trick-ass time bending shit going on here isn’t it? Like, the HYYH au is canon- then euphoria is like that, alternative reality au with only fluff tagged on it. I can see the tags ao3 style for hyyh and euphoria it’s epic please take a moment to imagine it too
Burn the stage has been giving me so many feels- like I never thought I could become fonder of bts but look at me now, feeling like I literally gave birth to 7 wonderful men and wanting to protect them for the rest of their lives my children you’re all such wonderful human beings
Im gonna go cry over how perfectly sly yoonminv were in bts run b y e
‘Yoongi?’

It’s the first time in days-weeks, that Yoongi feels rested.

His eyes are heavy, and despite the gentle voice calling his name, Yoongi cannot open his eyes.

Sleep has never felt this good. Sleep has never felt this safe.

Sleep has never felt this close to death.

Yoongi had laughed when he heard someone tell him that sleep was like death, but without the commitment of actually dying. He had found it funny then, and it makes him smile again now. Not because he thought it was amusing, but because he agrees.

‘Yoongi?’

The voice switches tone, sounding softer and lighter, as though whoever was calling him had a smile on their lips.

Yoongi wants to ignore the voice despite how sweet it was.

There’s a hand on his hair, fingers carefully carding through his hair and it lulls Yoongi back to sleep.

When he wakes up again, he’s heavily disoriented.

He also realizes he was still smiling.

Whatever food he was able to keep down is lodged in his throat and Yoongi could throw up anytime. But he was too exhausted to even vomit. His vision is blurred and it’s impossible to focus. So Yoongi simply waits for his vision to return to clarity, blinking slowly. Next to him Jimin is also asleep. His arm is looped around Yoongi’s, his body turned and tucked facing him. Yoongi cannot see his face, but he doesn’t need to see the details to know what they looked like. Yoongi could trace the slope of his nose out of sheer memory, could outline the shape of his eyes, outline the soft curves of his lips, pick the exact flushed shade of pink from his cheeks.

Yoongi would laugh if he had the strength.
Laugh at himself for being like this. Not the part about him being sick, but the fact that he was here, in this situation, practically at death’s door, yet completely lost in devotion for this Being he doesn’t even know.

Would there have been a time, another reality, a different time, where he would have met Jimin under different circumstances? Where he could have been introduced, and they would gradually become closer? Or would they have grown together, knowing each other from infancy- where their lives were so integrated that they would have never dreamt of a possibility of never knowing each other. Or would they have been colleagues, smiling politely at each other as they met at some basic canteen.

Maybe if alternative universes existed, if parallel dimensions did exist with theirs, and at this very moment, at this very minute, another Yoongi existed. And in that minute, so did Jimin. And they were together- maybe asleep like this. And maybe instead of being surrounded by death and pain and sorrow, they’re surrounded by simplicity, normality, and the reassurance that when they opened their eyes, the first thing they would see, was each other.

Pain unlike any other he’s felt rips through the hollow of his heart. Where once an organ of wet thrumming tissue pulsed beneath his ribs, existed a husk, drained of life. And even in this state, Yoongi’s heart is broken, and each fragment still burns with pain and sorrow.

With some difficulty, Yoongi turns his head to the other side, unable to endure the heartbreak as he looked upon Jimin.

The captain was on his other side, also asleep. The other 4 remaining were also asleep, the lot of them creating a ring around a moss covered tree.

They weren’t capable of creating a watch anymore. They were too sick.

Too weak.

Too exhausted.

But they stuck close, moving slowly.

Yoongi can hear her shallow breathing, begin to see the sheen of fevered sweat on her skin from this distance. Blinking a few more times, Yoongi’s vision clears. Not a lot, but much better than before.

It stands in front of him.

The red of its clothes bled into the air around it, forcefully altering its surroundings to warp and fold inwards, screaming as they bent out of shape. Everything about it was wrong. Everything about its existence was wrong.

Yoongi is frozen where he sits.

His limbs have no strength, his eyes are barely focusing. But he can’t look away. He cannot shift his gaze from this grotesque force of unnatural evil.

And it holds Yoongi’s gaze. And though Yoongi could see no visible feature, he could sense its eyes and Yoongi cannot look away.

It points at Yoongi, and for a fleeting second, Yoongi believes it’s trying to say something.
‘Yoongi.’

As though electrocuted, Yoongi jolts into action, his breath punching out of him. He throws himself on to all fours and dry heaves, his eyes stinging and burning.

A pair of arms wrap around him and he’s being pulled back with panicked strength.

‘Yoongi!’

Jimin appears before him, distraught and worried. There are obvious sounds of TeorSers firing and Yoongi hears the captain shouting. Jimin holds him tight, his entire body tense, his features hardened, his eyes darting everywhere. Yoongi senses flurried movement around him and he guesses it’s the others. Did someone go missing? It had been a week since the last Being vanished. And 3 days since they left Amic behind, buried in a shallow grave under a blanket of leaves.

The captain appears, her expression beyond tired.

‘We should move,’ she exhales out, her voice drawn and brittle. She doesn’t say anything else.

‘Sunshine, help me stand,’ Yoongi smiles at Jimin, making attempts to stand. Jimin understands at once, and with now shaking limbs, helps Yoongi stand. Jimin pushes back his hair, his hands smoothing out his matted hair, as though attempting to make him feel better.

Yoongi feels his heartbreaking again and he’s not sure, but he thinks Jimin can sense it too. Because he stops, eyes piercing through as though he could see all of Yoongi. His hand falls to his chest, over his heart. His gaze softens, and Yoongi can see nothing except sorrow.

Eclipses were considered beautiful in nearly every planet, every System Yoongi has been to or has heard of.

But was beauty always synonymous to sorrow?

‘I wish I had known you—...in a different life,’ Yoongi tells him, knowing that he still wouldn’t understand. But it was all right.

‘Yoongi?’

Because he always knew, right from the start.

‘Let’s go sunshine.’

That the time of the eclipse would move away, and that veiled Elsewhere where Time seized to exist would come to an end.

And Yoongi would be left behind, dreaming for the warmth of sunlight.
Jimin walks in a straight steady line, following the reedy Being before him who keeps glancing back at him. There’s leer to his smile and Jimin wants nothing more than to free his bonds and throw this Being to the floor. After his initial panic and fear abated, Jimin is filled with anger and frustration and a whole world of pain. All around him the survivors of Seulgaan’s ship are being rounded up and placed into freight-like Transporters. No one is using any firearms to order their newly acquired prisoners around at this point. Gigantic constructs like magnified boxy cyborgs patrol the area outside, manned by their controllers and pilots.

‘Hey! Where you taking that one?’ a voice calls out.

‘s a special one!’ the Being before him calls back. ‘One of them hatched eggs!’

A shiver runs down Jimin’s spine. They knew about the OrTanks?

How? Jimin was under the informed impression that no one outside of a certain ring of Beings within a place called Raksane Tayi knew about this. So how were these Beings of a war-torn planet- a war-torn System aware of the OrTanks?

‘Taking him to the Collectors?’

‘That’s right.’

‘Take the Transporter to the far-end then- it’s leaving soon.’

Jimin is shoved towards the side and steered around harshly. He nearly trips over his feet but rights himself, not wanting to be manhandled or bound again. A rusty but strong Transporter, smaller than the others around the area stands at the very end of the row. Without preamble he’s shoved inside in the back and forced to sit on the floor. Two different hands clamp down on his shoulders at once and keep him down. Jimin finally looks up at his captors.

There were 5 in total inside the Transporter with him, and 2 others in the cockpit.

‘He’s different. Doesn’t look like any of them from Pravasi M’hanun,’ one of them comments as they shine a bright light on his face. Jimin doesn’t flinch, staring away from the point of light and glaring.

‘He’s wearing the uniform though.’ A hand picks at his sleeve and Jimin twists away sharply before he’s forced to sit still again. ‘His eyes are weird.’
'Maybe some GLA scheme again?'

'I literally don’t care what he is- we’re gonna get rewarded for bringing him in,’ the one gripping his shoulder spits out. ‘I’m this close to finally affording a way out of this accursed planet- we need to really push for the units.’

‘You really think Zelek will be any better?’

‘They get jobs from out-of-System, they get to travel out and have the freedom to move. Here, we’re just stuck working for them- just fighting- I don’t know about you, but out of the two evils, Zelek is better.’

‘There’s food here-’

‘This shit ain’t food-’

‘I’m 2 full sets away- who knows this midget might get us out.’

Jimin stays put, already trying to draw out and preserve any bit of energy he could use. The Transporter starts to move and a booming thunderous sound erupts. For a moment Jimin thinks something has exploded but when he catches a brief sight of a massive lightning bolt through the badly tinted windows, he realizes they’re outside of Seulgaan’s ship and were now traversing through the storm.

Even out here in nature, he was blocked from being able to somehow absorb back some energy. Were the sun shining, he’d heal faster. Quite suddenly, everything starts to swim before his eyes. His ears give out, a strange warped filter over his sense. An unnatural warmth itches its way from under the suit he’s wearing and all over his skin.

This was not good.

Unintentionally he exhales out in a loud shudder. His sides are cramping and burning, and in this cramped space the air feels thin and everything starts to catch up to him.

‘He looks like he’s about to throw up,’ one of them grunts- the voice reaches him in a strange slow pull, as though the voice was quite far away. ‘Make sure he doesn’t die-’

‘Scan him, make sure he’s not gonna snuff it any time soon.’

Vision swimming, Jimin’s body tilts without his approval but he’s being harshly pulled back. Jimin doesn’t realize that he’s passed out, conscious in a weird state of slow thought, pain, and a strange heat that pulses around his head. He’s woken with a sharp stabbing pain right below his ear and a strong coursing cold surges from that spot and violently clears up his head.

The first thing Jimin realizes is that he’s not inside the Transporter- rather he was in a sizeable room that reeked of death and decay. Not just of decomposition or organic breakdown, but of a stale and old, polluted corruption and Jimin realizes the smell is actually the air around him.

‘-less it’s wrong; I thought we got all the hatched ones?’

‘We did- but this one isn’t from here- we got him outta the crashed ship- we think he’s one of them.’

‘Oh?’
Jimin finds himself in a room that resembled the Bridge of a ship though he can immediately tell he’s definitely on ground; there is a chill that permeates through the floor and into his hands and knees that could only come from dark and damp earth.

‘What’s a hatched doing with the Alliance? And no less from the GI.’

They look a lot like Khonen- or at least, from the same species.

‘You shouldn’t have fucking killed their boss- could’ve gotten answers from him- you can’t get shit from their lot,’ another voice speaks out from the corner. ‘Best rid of him fast while he’s incapacitated.’

‘He’s a hatched- that means we get our tallies-’

‘Get the fuck out and shut your mouth- he’s ours now-’

‘Come now- let’s at least pay them their trouble,’ the other voice reasons. ‘This is someone they would be interested in- he’s pure after all.’

Jimin looks up at that, wondering what any of this meant. Pure? Isn’t that what the Omhlophe considered themselves? Pure?

They’re not really paying him any attention- he’s hardly a threat right now, incapacitated as he is. Jimin wonders if he really looks all that unwell.

‘We’ll just make sure he’s actually a hatched, then you will receive your dues.’

‘Right sure go ahead,’ his original captors sneer. Looming shadows approach him from the back and before Jimin can defend himself or ready himself, a hand pulls at the collar of his body-suit, pulling right at the hidden lapels with a practiced hand that is both alarming and confusing. How did they know?

His heated skin is suddenly exposed to the cold hair as the lapel falls apart on his back and Jimin shivers violently. There’s an alarming silence that follows.

‘There’s nothing on his back.’

Jimin grits his teeth, willing himself not to squirm too much.

‘Where the fuck did he-‘

‘So you expect us to take your word for it, by stealing a uniform – no less from our private stores! And making some unfortunate slave wear it, you thought we would believe that this was one of the GI? That this was a hatched?’

‘Hey look no-‘

There’s scuffling and a very quick succession of TeorSer fire being shot and Jimin hunches even lower onto the ground, his dizziness hitting him harder. He’s not sure if he’s passed out again but when he opens his eyes again, he finds a few faces looming down at him, turning his head this way and that.

‘Put him through the delivery- and then put him downstairs- if he survives, we send him out - he has a good face.’ One of the blurred faces moves away, dismissive and uncaring.

‘Take the uniform back as well- return it to the stores and make sure its secured.’ The other face
goes away as well. One last one lingers and it’s his hand that lingers on Jimin’s head. His fingers get caught in Jimin’s hair strands, pulling rather harshly and roughly.

‘This is pretty,’ he mumbles. ‘Have it sent back to me.’

The Užkulisai is ready and set, and with the cell installed, they were completely hidden and camouflaged. Safe, save from the storm they were now forced to sit and wait out. It’s a storm unlike any Namjoon has witnessed. Lightning as thick and wide as the Spardyti streaks overhead, and acidic rain like angry ocean waves washes over the windows in an alarming fashion. The Užkulisai was without a doubt an exceptionally strong and powerful ship but in conditions as chaotic as this, Namjoon doesn’t want to risk anything; especially when they were handling foreign technology. They only activate the bare minimum and sit in a startlingly quiet and almost out-of-place peacefulness illuminated only by the lightning and the pale green glow of Taeh’yung’s hands.

It was odd, sitting here, and not doing anything- but Namjoon is grateful because they were now all forced to simply be.

‘According to the scans, the storm should be over in 10 minutes,’ Hoseok calls out quietly.

‘What are their positions?’ Namjoon asks even though he could easily check himself.

‘Jimin’s movement have slowed down. He’s definitely moved away from the crash-site, closer towards the mountain ranges,’ Taeh’yung supplies from where he’s sitting next to Yoongi. ‘Jin is still moving- not sure where he’s headed but it’s down north of the scan.’

‘Anything from outside?’ Hoseok asks, head turning a little.

‘Nothing,’ Namjoon shakes his head, ‘Storm is too strong, and there are not enough frequency channels for me to access to check their movements- they have no working satellite.’

‘How do they manage communications then? How do they even fly out?’ Hoseok asks out loud.

‘Probably independent emitters,’ Namjoon ruminates. ‘When they’re out in space, they probably
have a series of ships that carry their channels and it links back down here to whatever controls division they might have.’

‘I don’t think there’s any mention of any agent staying here,’ Hoseok frowns. ‘Or simply not this planet- her sister planets might have some archives- but nothing comes to mind from Ynqaba.’

Namjoon himself hadn’t been able to find much about Ynqaba or the Ukuye System. Zelek had recently come to mainstream news due to the terrible famine, causing a lot of her people to flee by all means necessary. Khonen had mentioned working with the Venture Unit as well

‘Some agents work freelance,’ Hoseok adds, as though guessing what Namjoon was thinking. ‘They might be backed up sometimes- but in cases involving non-GLA Systems or planets, they might link some of their leaders or in Zelek’s case, link the merchants or traders with pirates so that they have some form of exchange system.’

‘I thought the Venture Unit provided Systems like Ukuye with aid alongside the Yisheng Directory?’ Namjoon asks with a frown. ‘Even in they’re not under the GLA, if they’re in critical state, the Yisheng Directory always steps in to provide aid and supplies.’

‘My work never brought me here,’ Hoseok explains, ‘If there was anything about Ukuye, it wasn’t important enough to be discussed in the meetings or I was just never ever around to hear it.’

‘How did the war even start though?’ Taeh’yung asks from the front, kneeling on the chair and peering over the back at them.

‘What do you mean?’

‘Why did it start?’

Hoseok glances at Namjoon in question as well before shrugging at Taeh’yung.

‘I’m not sure about it to be honest,’ the Ngfy’widan replies.

‘From what I could find, the System, much like the Ghandhar System, wished to remain separated from the GLA,’ Namjoon surmises. ‘But it fell into internal corruption, in-planet and out-planet wars. Resources aren’t the highest or readily available in Ukuye, unlike Ghandhar which is why it’s able to flourish despite being independent of the GLA.’

‘It’s funny,’ Taeh’yung says quietly, resting his head on his arms, eyes glowing green as he tracks a bright streak of lightning overhead.

‘What is?’ Namjoon asks, wondering what Taeh’yung could possibly mean.

‘All of the trouble we’ve seen, all of the misery we’re seeing, all comes from Systems and Planets that do not fall under the GLA,’ he remarks, his head craning around to follow the lightning bolt. ‘It’s almost as though they’re being punished.’

Namjoon’s heard enough stories and gossip regarding the “conspiracy theories” of the GLA. About how non GLA-systems were not only more likely to suffer, but were most likely targeted by pirates and other forms of misfortune not just because they lacked the GLA security, but because everything was designed and constructed by the GLA themselves to do so. How the GLA purposefully neglected certain Systems or planets because adding them would bring no actual benefit. And maybe there was truth to that. And maybe there wasn’t any.

And maybe now Namjoon was more inclined to believe it because the force of good behind the
GLA, the heart of kindness that directed the path of the GLA, were found and exposed, uncovering their hypocrisy and unsettling similarity to totalitarianism.

‘No force exists that allows dominance of power like that Tae,’ Hoseok says in an unexpectedly gentle way. ‘Most Systems and Planets that aren’t part of the GLA that fall under such circumstances aren’t a result of punishment or some twisted form of submission. It’s mainly because they are vulnerable without the GLA, and because they have Beings who are in power who do not think beyond their own selfishness.’

Taeh’yung just continues to stare out into the sky with doleful eyes.

‘It’s not just GLA propaganda,’ Hoseok continues. ‘They really do try.’

‘What would happen if the GLA didn’t exist?’ Taeh’yung asks, lifting a hand as he points along the path of a large bolt of lightning.

‘I don’t know,’ Hoseok shrugs. ‘More war, more fights- starvation, lack of development and advancement.’

‘So the GLA intervenes, pauses the natural progression of a planet, of a System, for profit?’ Taeh’yung looks down, hand still pointing up. ‘Isn’t that the opposite of what the Yisheng believe in?’

‘I don’t know Tae,’ Hoseok replies with a shrug. ‘And there’s no point in speculating what the Universe would have been like, or what it would be like- if there are things that need to be changed, then we cannot look to the past with regret, we can only look to now and fix what we can.’

Taeh’yung blinks a few times, his eyes unfocused before he nods slowly and with a strange smile says, ‘You’re right.’

Namjoon doesn’t know how much of what Hoseok said was something the Ngfy’widan himself believed. It sounded very optimistic and though Namjoon did not believe that optimism was foolishness, it seemed a hard virtue to own when you had a history as intense as Hoseok’s.

‘5 minutes before the storm clears.’ Yoongi announces.

‘We need to first find a tower or transformer so that I can access their systems,’ Namjoon repeats one more time. He’s sure Hoseok doesn’t need reminding, but Yoongi was exactly all there, and he could never be sure of Taeh’yung. ‘Then after that we find have a clear layout of this place they’re keeping Jimin in, I’ll cut the power, Taeh’yung and I will distract them away from his position, Yoongi will retrieve Jimin, and Hoseok will remain at the ship to fly us out. All clear?’

Taeh’yung nods enthusiastically whereas Hoseok just raises a thumb’s up in acknowledgement. There’s no movement from Yoongi.

‘Yoongi?’

‘Understood,’ the Human replies.

Namjoon grimaces but doesn’t linger on the topic. The sky outside was already lightening and the storm looked a little bit more like a storm.

When the storm reduces to a steady shower of rain, they begin activating the ship. To Namjoon’s intense relief, everything was working well and one glance at the monitors and screens show that
the cell was working as it should.

‘Keep us close to the terrain- we need to make sure we’re not visibly spotted,’ Namjoon orders as he pulls up the screen indicating Jimin’s indication. His dot had come to a complete standstill next to the base of a long mountain range. Sk’jin’s was still moving, away from their general area. Despite their obvious disagreements and grievances they had with each other, Namjoon understands Sk’jin’s use and importance to this mission. Not to mention just how much he knew. They couldn’t lose him at this point, for more than one reason.

Namjoon still doesn’t trust the Khol’isa. There were many things unexplained, many questions unanswered, and a lot of explanations that didn’t make sense. So while Sk’jin was useful for the mission, Namjoon wants the Khol’isa to be within his sight to make sure he wouldn’t do something detrimental towards them as a whole.

‘There’s an acid fog above the mountains, we could use it as camouflage,’ Hoseok reports, alerting Namjoon. The Kutsoglerin looks away from Sk’jin’s blinking dot and focuses on the view before him. Ynqaba was pretty flat, but they were coming around to some rather spiky and strangely formed mountains. They’re black and sharp in appearance, almost unnatural in their formation. Namjoon hadn’t read any information regarding any form of destruction over the continents of Ynqaba so he’s not sure if this was a result of warfare or just their natural terrain. Either way, it was providing them with surprisingly convenient coverage.

‘Acidity level?’ Namjoon asks.

‘At 5.6,’ Lisai replies smoothly.

‘Everyone wear a protective suit- you too Hoseok,’ Namjoon orders.

‘I’ll go get them!’ Taeh’yung cheerily volunteers, leaping off of his seat.

‘Lisai run a scan to check for the closest port of electricity,’ Namjoon orders, readying his NaviLet.

‘Searching.’

Namjoon waits all but 10 seconds patiently before Hoseok turns around to give him a confused glance.

‘It shouldn’t take that long-‘

‘Refining search.’

‘Frequencies should be available on the ground at least,’ Hoseok frowns. ‘Even if they don’t have satellites.’

‘None found.’

Even Yoongi turns around in his seat to look at Namjoon, expression expectant.

‘Well- this certainly changes things,’ Hoseok frowns. ‘How are we supposed to enter this place if we can’t access any digital port?’

‘Hoseok land us somewhere close- so that we can check the parameters,’ Namjoon orders with a frown as they continue to glide silently through the fog.

‘If there’s no electrical outlet, we can’t use BluePrint.’
Namjoon shakes his head, thinking hard. Taeh’yung comes back, gear and suit at the ready in his arms.

‘What’s wrong?’ he asks, eyes wide.

This was why the Ynqaba fleet had been so quick to use magnetic pulses to cripple them. To an extent, their technology which was so compromised, was actually an advantage for them against other Beings who relied heavily on digital-frequency based technology.

‘If we’re going to do this as planned, we’re going to have to do this blind.’ Namjoon announces before he adds, ‘Lisai, reverse our own magnetic fields outside the ship- so if they detonate another pulse, we won’t get affected.’

‘Understood.’

‘We’re all going to have get out there- not enough eyes,’ Hoseok indicates outwards as he takes a suit from Taeh’yung with a small smile at the Zhak’gri.

‘Actually no,’ Namjoon shakes his head.

‘What do you mean?’ Hoseok glances over at him briefly. ‘For the plan to work, I’ll need to go on ground.’

‘No- we land close enough, drop Yoongi off- if it’s only him, he won’t be noticed,’ Namjoon explains. ‘We take the Užkulisai and create the distraction past down the mountain range.’

‘But-‘

‘Understood,’ Yoongi stands, taking the suit from Taeh’yung.

‘We’re at a disadvantage,’ Namjoon tells Hoseok bluntly. ‘We’re used to moving around in a setting where everything is accessible and attainable through our screens, through our Comms- but this is another world. And for us to get Jimin out, we need to access him the way he was brought here- manually. And Yoongi is our best chance.’

Hoseok pauses for a moment, as though mulling his statement in his mind before nodding.

‘Yoongi, want my Heliord?’ he asks the Human who was freely changing into the suit.

‘I already have it.’ Yoongi pulls the handle out from behind (?!?!?) him and swings it once before pocketing it into the WeatherBeat coat Taeh’yung holds up as though to hide his modesty. Hoseok does a double take, gasping loudly.

‘Wait what-?!’

'Approaching suitable landing site.' Lisai announces.

'Land us,' Namjoon orders as Yoongi finishes suiting up. 'Scan the area just in case-'

'Woah!' Taeh’yung exclaims loudly, pressing up against the window eagerly. 'Such a weird mountain!'

'Taeh’yung maybe sit down-' Hoseok calls tiredly but he suddenly stops.

Squinting a little, Namjoon waits for the acidic wash of fog to thin as they land. To his surprise, their landing sounds strangely hollow, the weird echo as the beamers brush away debris from what
Namjoon had thought was the mountain side.

'This isn't a mountain,' Hoseok is getting off of his seat, grabbing a screen as he jogs up to the window. 'This is a ship.'

Namjoon immediately starts a deeper scan.

'Listai- identify make and design of unidentified ship.' he orders, quickly waiting for the scan to finish. But before Lisai can announce it Yoongi speaks up rather quietly and casually.

'This is a customized exploratory ship designed and customized for the usage of the Yisheng.'

'Vessel J'ù ēn-00-87, registered under the Yisheng Directory.'

'What is this doing here?'

'I don't know, but I think I know why the Omhlophe were looking for more "eggs" here,' Namjoon says tersely. 'Come on- let's get going.'

* *

Times were simpler when one look at Sk’jin made nearly every Being quake in awe, fear, and respect. When his name commanded attention and wariness. When his glare literally stopped fights. Or started them. When the sound of his laughter brought chills down backs.

Spaces, he missed those times.

Now he’s sat in the back of a Transporter that has definitely seen better days. Probably also smelt better some 30 sols ago. Right now it smelt a bit like cured meat, wood smoke, damp laundry, and
old air-coolant. Not a pleasant combination but Sk’jin reminds himself that his olfactory senses would adapt to the smell in approximately 3 minutes. Hopefully.

He’d been in a strange state of being half-conscious, half-knocked out. He vaguely remembers being taken out of the Užkulisai, no Yoongi in sight, and out into a very windy very dry arid landscape. He could’ve sworn he saw crumbling buildings at one point but that was it. Then he blacked out for a while, coming around only to find himself strapped into a seat, inside a Transporter of sorts.

There’s a total of 4 Beings inside the Transporter, not counting the two who sat up front beyond several partitions.

No one says anything, just sitting in a sort of resigned smelly silence that Sk’jin picks up on immediately despite his headache. Most of them had removed their heavy rustic gear save for the smallest of them. They were a lot more anthropomorphic than Sk’jin had guessed, their skin not so harshly grey as he had first registered. Or perhaps it was the lighting. Their eyes are dark, pupils a little smaller than usual. A majority of them were masked, or had protective goggles on, one of them in particular is nearly entirely covered up in dark and heavy gear. What hair Sk’jin can see is thin and rather fragile looking. Their entire species, as a planet, and as a System, were suffering greatly. Khonen had mentioned his planet’s suffering and as a sister planet, Sk’jin has no doubt that Ynqaba was going through the same, or worse, conditions. He can't quite make out their faces, but he can tell that they're not exactly a specialized military unit or even a rebel force. They appeared to be a rather odd combination of Beings, ages varying though they all appeared to be of the same species.

They’re watching him carefully.

'Family?' Sk'jin manages to croak out. 'Risky isn't it though?'

Nearly everyone's eyes quickly flit over to the figure sitting opposite Sk'jin. Ah, the leader, Sk'jin ruminates, quickly eyeing the Being. Even though he was masked, Sk'jin can tell that he's older, much older, than the others gathered here. He's not too sure about the physical aging process of the Beings living here but he guesses due to recent environmental and mental upheaval across their planet, their life spans were shortened and aging spurred on. Different from Khol'isa of course, where they were stuck in one continuous eternity of bleeding darkness.

'You all scavengers or something?' Sk'jin asks out loud.

They’re looking at him curiously, as though not quite sure what to make of him. Which was understandable of course. Sk’jin did greet them with hysterical laughter, missing teeth, bloodied clothes, apparently all alone in a ship that crashed onto their planet out of nowhere. Spaces, he was going to punch Yoongi if he ever saw the Human again.

Sk’jin’s headache is gnawing away at his temples and right above his eyebrows. He wants to rub at them, or maybe bash his head against the closest wall. Even a pillar would do.

'My name is Sk’jin by the way- thought you'd like to know. I'm from Khol'isa,' Sk’jin introduces himself blithely. He's met with more confused expression.

'No introductions? Oh well,' Sk'jin shrugs. 'So, how long until we get where we're supposed to go? Because I think I might be bleeding out somewhere and honestly if you don't have a Yisheng on site or something I might die without medical aid. Got knocked around quite violently you know?'

There's still no response.
'I really don't think you're gonna get any units from whoever you're trying to sell me to if I'm dead-just saying.' Sk'jin shrugs again.

If Sk’jin had been in their position, he would have left himself behind immediately. Because he recognized a lost-cause when he saw one.

And Sk’jin has been lost ever since he drew his first shaking breath, covered in muck and his own cellular waste, violently trembling in Taeh’yung’s arms 4 sols ago.

'Get him a press,' one of them says roughly. Sk'jin doesn't know what a press is, but can only hope it's something compressed designed to relieve his pain, and not squash him. The smallest of them all, who was the one covered head to foot in protective gear, approaches him and Sk'jin notes that this one is female, and much younger, judging by her actions and timid movements. She pushes up her goggles and Sk’jin can immediately tell she’s not the same species as those gathered here. Her eyes are wide, pupils a warm brown and large. What skin is exposed is fair and much smoother than the others. Her eyes however are sharp and wary- she might be young and possibly inexperienced, but it clearly wasn't going to stop her from killing him if it came down to it. Sk’jin gives her his best fatherly smile. The look of blank confusion is a little bit too amusing so Sk’jin ends up chuckling. She gives pause, her posture rigid, ready to spring aside.

'Sorry! It's just, I tried to look reassuring but I'm just really bad at it!' Sk'jin manages to say amidst laughter. ‘And also, if you really want to get profit off of me, I think it’s best to demand over 800,000 units- wait, do you use Standard units here?’

He’s met with blanched faces, wide eyes. So maybe the notion of 800,000 units was a little improbable.

‘You’re telling me you won’t get paid that much? Even the Alliance sells their cheapest slaves over 50,000 units. That’s the minimum price.’

‘The Alliance is dead,’ a voice tells him sharply.

‘And so I’ve heard,’ Sk’jin shrugs, remembering the rumbling information they had received from the Khonen in Ubhuku. Khonen was from this planet, Sk’jin remembers with a grimace. ‘But it’s the Alliance’s fault I crashed here so I guess we’re both telling the truth but only one of us is right.’

There’s a rather pregnant pause following his statement before the Being Sk’jin labeled as their leader speaks.

‘The Alliance was destroyed over 20 sols ago- in our very System,’ he states. ‘We went to war with them and destroyed all remaining major ships- we know what Alliance ships look like- that was not one.’

Sk’jin thinks back to what he read and he’s pretty sure he didn’t come across any information like that. Also, if this was true, it would mean that Namjoon would have read about it and they would have been given an hour long lecture about it no doubt. The young female peels off a small object carefully with surprisingly clean fingers and trimmed nails before applying the light object to the side of Sk’jin’s neck. Sk’jin notices how her exposed skin is glaringly different from Khonen and the others gathered around. But he dismisses that observation for a moment and concentrates back on their leader.

Or maybe he was right. Maybe they really did fight the Alliance in this System and it was covered up because this System wasn’t registered under the GLA and the GLA wouldn’t want the glory of defeating the Alliance given to a seemingly small and weak unknown System. Sk’jin wants to roll
his eyes; politics, ruining everything.

‘Well- that ship that crashed on your surface around the same time I did was a slaver ship that belonged to a very much active member of the Alliance- I would know because you know, I was escaping him.’ Sk’jin shrugs.

Reckless, a voice that sounds annoyingly like Namjoon’s sounds in his ear and Sk’jin ignores it. Whatever she had applied on his neck was working slowly but surely- it was probably some form of pain killer. Anyways; so what if he was reckless? He was pretty much abandoned on this planet, with the likeliness of his rescue practically 0. What did he have to lose? Maybe he could actually turn this situation around and work it to his advantage. It wouldn’t be the first time he’s randomly been stranded on a planet that’s in political chaos and left it carrying an honourary title of sorts. It would in fact be the 7th time if he chose to do so. It would have been the 8th if he had agreed to some arranged marriage but Sk’jin was not about that lifestyle so he simply faked his own death and left the planet while Nambike complained the entire way.

He’s met with scoffs.

‘Am I wrong? Pray, do correct me and tell me about it,’ Sk’jin pretends to make himself comfortable, leaning back on the uncomfortable wall. He’s given a lot of skeptical looks, but Sk’jin waits expectantly. The young female starts to check on his injuries, starting with his head.

‘What’s there to tell?’ another female voice speaks out from the side. ‘There was a huge war with the Alliance, we won, divided the resources gained from it, and somewhere along the line we fucked up and here we are.’

‘By the Alliance do you really mean the Isbahaysiga Alliance?’ the young female asks rather abruptly.

‘Camat!’ a voice hisses sharply.

‘The very one,’ Sk’jin nods, angling his head so that she could access his injuries better. ‘This ship was controlled by the Tayian Van Seulgaan, wonder if he survived the crash- either way I’m sure there are more of him around.’

‘It doesn’t matter if there were survivors or not,’ the young Being tells him, Camat, with a scowl. ‘They just want the ship and its raw resources.’

‘They?’

‘Collectors.’

Ah, the Collectors.

‘Then why didn’t you take my ship? If that’s the main thing you want.’

‘We’re not there yet,’ she tells him resignedly before dabbing a piece of gauze in a rather suspicious salve jar.

‘Ah,’ Sk’jin hums in understanding before hissing as his wounds start to smart. ‘You guys are really low.’

He’s met again with irritated glares but there’s no argument.

The Transporter suddenly halts and there’s a string of curses. The salve Camat is using splatters
and Sk’jin winces, tasting the bitter medicine.

‘Oh! Sorry-’ she’s saying but she’s pulled back and a tense atmosphere fills the air.

‘What’s going on-’ Sk’jin grimaces as he swallows involuntarily with a shudder.

‘Shh!’

The partition between the cockpit and the back seals shut and Sk’jin is dragged to sit beneath it. Camat crouches down next to him as well and pulls over the boxes of random devices they had stolen off of the Užkulisai and quickly covers it with fabric that stiffens and forms a convincing metallic camouflage that resembles the interior of the Transporter. It’s dark, only a bit of faint illumination seeps through whatever camouflage was covering them. Sk’jin makes himself small and shimmies down even more and out of sight. Camat gives him a quizzical look, as though wondering why Sk’jin was so easy and quick to comply. Her eyes are strangely orb like in the dark- not exactly glowing, not exactly reflective. They almost remind Sk’jin of the eyes of nocturnal animals. He’s sure she can see very well in the dark. It’s apparent she doesn’t trust him because instead of holding up the gauze with the medicinal salve she had been dabbing on his forehead, a sharp dagger now rested under his jaw.

‘This really isn’t necessary,’ he whispers. Camat levels him with a glare worthy of Namjoon. There are 3 distinct knocking bangs on the door and Camat presses the blade close in warning. Sk’jin rolls his eyes in response.

The doors swing open and there’s the tell-tale sounds of TeorSer activation. And not only that but the wind is literally howling and the sound of thunder mid-crack booms in the air.

‘Anything to declare?’ a voice calls in. Sk’jin surmises that they’ve been stopped by a patrol of sorts.

‘Nothing- headed home after a run near the Cliffs,’ the leader replies.

‘Oh? Didn’t see that crash?’

‘Saw it- others got there before we did- and a storm is coming up.’

‘Hey, come on Bhān, you’ve got Dilag driving- no storm is going to stop you.’ Another voice chimes in. ‘Come on- out, we’ll do the search and if you’re telling the truth you can go, easy. If you’re telling the truth of course.’

‘Neither of us are equipped to handle a storm that size, it’ll be best if we start moving-‘

‘Come on out Bhān- you and your little group- oh, your daughter ain’t around? A pity,’ the same voice comments.

Sk’jin chances a look at Camat and her expression, or at least what Sk’jin can make out, is cold but afraid.

Ah, I see.

‘Listen Nakā- we don’t ask question-‘

‘A’āpyu- let’s go,’ Bhān says quietly, ‘Everyone step out.’

The blade from under Sk’jin’s jaw quickly moves away and Sk’jin chances another look at Camat
who isn’t bothering to look at him anymore, her stance defensive. There are footsteps, objects moving around and rough banter. Sk’jin and Camat do not look away from each other, waiting in apprehensive anticipation.

Camat was clearly the “daughter” in question here. And Bhān, the leader of this unit was her “father”. They were clearly not the same species and the patrol knew about her and were “curious”. Clearly, Bhān had no intention of letting them near Camat, risking her hiding here in the back with Sk’jin, a complete stranger who was possibly insane.

Footsteps approach their spot and Camat tenses even more, her grip on her dagger tightening. She makes to rise, clearly ready to strike out.

Now, Sk’jin is pretty sure that there is no chance of their fighting and escaping this unscathed and honestly this group seems much better than whatever patrol unit was outside. Quietly and quickly Sk’jin reaches over and pulls Camat down, shaking his head before he stands swiftly.

There are all together 4, not a large number, but what was daunting was the automated megastructure outside, large weaponized claws aimed straight at the entrance. Great, this planet used and implemented rustic cybotronic machines as part of their weaponry. Cybotronics were crude, rustic, and rather wasteful in terms of fuel, but great for planets like Ynqaba, where apparently the citizens were surviving based on a scavenger-lifestyle.

‘Hello,’ Sk’jin smiles in greeting at the 4 TeorSer nozzles aimed at him at once, his arms are up, palms facing them. ‘My name is Sk’jin, it’s a pleasure to meet all of you.’

It’s a stifling moment of intense tension but Sk’jin doesn’t stop smiling. Then the TeorSers lower and Sk’jin has a clear and unobstructed view of their faces, and most importantly, has all of their attention. It’s all he can work with right now- he has no access to hallucinogens, no hypnotic element.

But that was never an issue for Sk’jin in reality.

‘If you could lower your TeorSers, I’m sure there’s nothing here of value or interest to any of you,’ he smiles, concentrating as he steps closer, eyes never leaving the Being in front of him.

Many Beings (like Namjoon) believed that the Khol’isa could only use their abilities with the aid of hallucinogens and other little helpful items. This was a misconception the earliest Khol’isa evolutions established in order for them to gain the trust of the Universe they found themselves integrating into. And while Sk’jin doesn’t know if the same applies to others of his own species, he has never needed any additional help. In his experience there were some who could withstand and hold up their own, but that was incredibly rare.

So when face to face with these 4 simple-minded, starved, single-minded Beings, it was all too easy for Sk’jin to wrap them all around his finger.

‘Hey-‘

Sk’jin doesn’t look away, staring deep and straight into the patrol guards eyes.

‘We’re just returning from our run- we saw nothing. Storm spooked us,’ Sk’jin purposefully makes his voice a little lower, smoother. Stepping even closer, Sk’jin whispers, ‘Why don’t we keep this a secret? Between us?’

It taints their eyes briefly- and Sk’jin doesn’t know if this is something he imagines, or something he hates, but their eyes twinkle with the faintest red, and the Bloodmoon looms above him once
‘Understood- nothing to see here,’ the patrol states simply with a rather lazy smile. ‘The storm is headed around south-east,- so you guys be careful yeah?’

And rather simply, they hop aboard the cybortronic and amble off into the darkening scape.

Stretching a little, Sk’jin smiles as his would be captors enter the Transporter again, masks gone and expressions bewildered. There were 2 females, and 3 males- and they all looked aged though Sk’jin is sure they weren’t as old as their faces suggested. TeorSers are at the ready, their posture tense. One of them steps forward closer, entirely removing his head piece to reveal a balding greyish head, spotted all over in darker spots. Bhān, Sk’jin realizes, is definitely older than the others gathered. He was also most definitely the leader as the others wait behind him for his command.

‘What did you do?’ Bhān demands, though he doesn’t appear hostile. Just curious and a little wary.

‘My species- we’re rare,’ Sk’jin replies with a shrug, wincing as he exerts his muscles. Fatigue hits him quite hard. Great, he really doesn’t want to pass out again, he can literally hear his cells screaming at him. ‘So I’m not surprised that you haven’t heard of us. Most of the GLA haven’t.’

‘What was that? Hypnosis?’ Camat asks, stepping out from behind Sk’jin.

‘That’s a pretty basic summary yeah,’ Sk’jin takes a deep breath before his body decides it wants to sit.

‘Hey woah-‘ Camat is there, suddenly pulling her mask down. She’s remarkably unlike the others- skin smooth and fair, a strange blood-stain that edges out from under her eyes in a way that’s definitely purposefully species-related. Her teeth are strangely larger than what they should be, and are blunt and heavy looking. ‘We really should get him treated. This isn’t good.’

Bhān looks down at him, his expression calculating and careful.

‘Why didn’t you use that against us? Turn us away from your ship,’ he asks instead.

‘Well-‘ Sk’jin pauses, chuckling a little under his breath when he realizes just how much Yoongi had preplanned everything. He incapacitated Sk’jin to the point of being unable to use his abilities yet awake enough to somehow still save his skin. ‘-to be fair, I wasn’t exactly the most lucid or stable.’

Camat snorts, hastily disguising it as a cough.

‘And I didn’t really sense any threat for you. Danger sure, but no threat,’ Sk’jin replies, leaning back and promptly sitting up again when his body protested the movement.

‘Why don’t you use it on us now?’

‘Do you want me to?’ Sk’jin asks back before adding, ‘Look, I’m stuck here, away from my ship, in an unknown planet, with what appears to be a ridiculous storm approaching. I have no intention of escaping this place, getting lost, and eventually dying in a planet I wasn’t even supposed to come to. You’re my only chance of survival right now, obviously, so that’s why I’m here.’

He shrugs again, calmly waiting as they process his statement. And it was the truth. There was nothing Sk’jin could do stranded in this planet- his only way of survival was with them.
‘Listen,’ Sk’jin knows that this is prime time to somehow get himself out of this situation without being sold off or killed somewhere. Sure they didn’t look particularly threatening, he got lucky, but he could always get sold off to Beings who could do worse. If there was a way of going back, then this was it. Though a small voice in the back of his head asks why he was even bothering in the first place. If the others come to get them, their priority would be Jimin. Meaning they’d meet Yoongi, who would tell them what happened. It was unlikely Namjoon would be willing the risk of remaining here just to find and collect him.

‘I get that you need to sell me to like, I dunno, get units to get some anti-rust spray for this tin-bucket but,’ Sk’jin gestures to the Transporter. ‘But I have a ship, missing crew, and an important deadline to meet. Whatever you’re getting paid is not going to be worth it- I would know, because I know I’m expensive. And you are not getting your money’s worth.’

No one says a word.

‘I need to get back to my ship- make sure it can fly, and find my crew,’ Sk’jin continues. ‘If you need units, then I can give you more than you could possibly hope to receive from your Collectors or whatever they’re called.’

‘It’s not units we’re getting,’ Camat tells him quietly. ‘We’re paying our dues by handing you over.’

_Huh, _Sk’jin thinks, this was unusual. ‘You’re _paying_ to live?’

‘Camat,’ Bhān says quietly. She lowers her head a little as though in apology.

‘It’s getting late,’ one of the females states. ‘What do we do? We can’t get to the Collectors before the storm.’

‘Yeah- and I’m not risking driving us through that without refueling,’ another adds.

Bhān looks around at the Beings behind him before glancing over at Camat.

‘Pe,’ she says quietly, an almost whiney tone to her voice. _Father_, Sk’jin thinks to himself, wondering how and why he found himself intruding upon another war-trope of a story.

Bhān nods once and the team moves in practiced unison. Two head back towards the front at the cockpit, and the others climb up on board. Camat is smiling, helping him shift back into a much more comfortable position. Sk’jin isn’t quite sure what to make of the smile and what it could mean but he hopes it’s nothing stupid.

‘Storms coming in- we’re settling down until it blows over.’ Bhān orders as they all step inside again.

‘I’ll be able to fix you up once we’re back in the den,’ she tells him. ‘Just hang in there for about an hour.’

‘An hour?’ Sk’jin wheezes. ‘I don’t make promises I can’t keep.’

‘Pe, can we use another press?’ she turns, addressing Bhān. He nods and Camat moves back towards the gear lined up the side of the Transporter.

‘An hour,’ Bhān states. ‘You might want to tell me why and how you’re here, and why you seem to think the Alliance is still alive.’
Sk’jin sighs, making himself comfortable before talking. He tells them an abridged, altered version of what happened combined with their go-to cover-story. They were a trade ship that had an unfortunate run in with the alliance because their cargo was switched at a Dock. They came here to exchange their cargo but due to the battle taking place above, they were both caught in between the line of fire and plummeted down.

There’s a sharp and short burst of laughter from the front. The main driver, a hardened and rather sharp looking native looks back briefly with an amused expression.

‘You have the worst luck.’

‘Tell me about it,’ Sk’jin mutters.

‘So your crew- all dead?’ one of the females, A’āpyu, asks him.

‘I don’t know,’ Sk’jin replies and he’s actually being honest. Other than Yoongi, he has no clear indication that any of the others were alive, or even in the System anymore. ‘I need to find them.’

‘We registered two Beings inside your ship before we approached,’ she informs him, looking serious and worried, as though concerned for Sk’jin’s unfortunate ship-mate. Sk’jin could snort.

‘There were 3 of us inside the ship as we plunged- I tried my best to control the ship, but gravity, missiles, my injuries,’ Sk’jin sighs again. ‘I was at least somewhat able to not flatten myself.’

Camat gives him a rueful smile at that, carefully applying the press to his neck this time before handing him a small metallic canteen of water. Sk’jin drinks greedily and quickly, nodding his thanks. While the others seem to believe him, Bhān watches him with careful eyes. And it wasn’t just a thing that the leader would do- it was almost as though he knew that Sk’jin was purposefully leaving out key information. Sk’jin winks at him, and he gets an eye-roll in response.

‘Storms behind us- wind is picking up. Strap down,’ the driver calls as the Transporter hums and a distinct clicking sound resounds before the familiar pressure of a vacuum seal settles.

‘Storms that bad here?’ Sk’jin asks as Camat helps him secure his safety belt.

‘We’re lucky it’s not that acidic. Again.’

Sk’jin snorts.

‘Has it always been this bad?’ he asks, nodding outwards.

Bhān shakes his head with a short laugh. ‘It wasn’t like this even 20 sols ago.’

‘20 sols?’ Sk’jin raises his eyebrows.

‘I know,’ he snorts with a shake of his head. ‘No one would believe us.’

But Sk’jin does. Because he’s seen this happen many times. Too many times. And sometimes within a sol, within months. Sometimes it didn’t even take a full day.

‘Was it a neighbouring planet?’ he ventures.

A few of them laugh, heads thrown back.

‘No- no, we did this to ourselves,’ Bhān tells him as the Transporter tilts and the driver grumbles an apology- looking out of the main window, Sk’jin is grateful for the vacuum seal because it was
more “ravaging ocean and lightning” rather than “storm”.

‘After the war with the Alliance, all the planets suffered greatly- ours more than others. We were already low on resources and well- our ecosystem isn’t the kindest. We were struggling and in the end…we did this to ourselves. We elected and voted for death, rejoiced when he came into power, and still raised cheers as he broke all of our alliances.’

‘Ah,’ Sk’jin nods in understanding, looking away from the window. ‘Government collapse?’

‘We saw it coming, but we chose to ignore it,’ Bhān sighs. ‘Within a few sols everything changed. We thought it was a process of transformation- for good. We felt heard, like we were finally being given the opportunity to speak out against those who benefited from the war- from those who never fought the war but only watched on, saving themselves.’

‘But we were just used as usual,’ A’āpyu cuts in, her eyes a little unfocused, clearly reliving something in her memories. ‘We were used and discarded- we gave ourselves over to the very Beings who abandoned us. And they made us feel as though it was all through our own free will.’

Sk’jin has this happen too many times. He wouldn’t say he was surprised. Disappointed maybe, that the Universe still hadn’t changed in all the centuries he was gone. In fact, now that he’s here, he could say that it’s gotten much worse.

‘So what happened? Why are you paying “rent”?’

Bhān sighs heavily, ‘Being alive is expensive. And it’s the only thing we know how to do.’

Sk’jin grimaces comically and this makes everyone laugh.

‘It’s not just that,’ A’āpyu snorts, ‘It’s like you said- it’s rent. Ynqaba has turned into a planet where you turn in everything you find that’s salvageable for trade or the military, and you’re given rations in exchange. You work for food.’

‘My ship has a lot of food,’ Sk’jin chimes in with his most winning smile despite now being half slathered over in bitter salve. ‘I can offer you my weight in food.’

‘It’s not just that,’ A’āpyu laughs, shaking her head while Camat looks amused too. ‘We need to register ourselves every week- we add our credits like that, and when we gather enough, we can migrate to better regions, even planets.’

Sk’jin raises a single crusty eyebrow at that (it’s harder than you think). He thinks back to what Khonen had told them, about how his planet was at the brink of starvation and how he was working for the Omhlophe hoping they would provide them with a solution.

‘So—these Collectors of yours- they’re the ones who control things?’ Sk’jin inquires.

‘Not quite,’ Bhān shakes his head. ‘They’re the ones who stamp our trades, they rack up our tallies. But in the end they’re basically just the delivery system.’

Sk’jin would be taken aback by how easily they were telling him all of this; considering he was a stranger who just displayed abilities that shouldn’t be taken lightly. But at the same time he’s not. Because they had nothing to lose by telling him all of this.

The most likely outcome from all of this would change nothing for them. Sk’jin was a foreign factor they could get rid of if they wanted. What they did to him could potentially benefit them,
they could get a pretty good deal regardless of whether or not they were being paid their actual dues considering Sk’jin’s value. Or if they chose to let him go, still have absolutely no effect. If they do come to an agreement or arrangement, then Sk’jin was entirely dependent on them and Bhān knew this.

‘Who are the Collectors?’ Sk’jin asks curiously. ‘Are they from around here? Another planet? Remnants from the Alliance? They don’t happen to wear white robes do they?’

‘What? No,’ Camat scoffs as she ties a lengthy gauze around his head securely, the salve squishing into his hair. ‘They’re just a bunch hoo-ha’s that have nothing better to do than pretend they’re better than all of us.’

Bhān’s expression blanches, his posture a little tense as he studies Sk’jin carefully. Sk’jin is about to question him, honing in on the eldest of this crew when he quickly but surely shakes his head and subtly nods his head away. Later, he signs, we will talk later.

‘There- that’s all I can do for now,’ Camat tells him with a small smile.

‘I am healed already,’ Sk’jin remarks with a graceful bow of his head and adds with sincerity: ‘Thank you.’

She smiles wider now, looking sheepish and goes to sit next to her father. Sk’jin winks at Bhān again before he looks around at the others.

‘So! How come you all speak such good Standard?’

‘No-!’ Jimin tries jerking away but he’s met with a sharp and heavy blow across his jaw and he’s pinned down on the chair.

His head is jerked back and before he can register anything else, a burning searing pain runs down his scalp and there’s a burst of laughter at his cry of pain.
He’d been bodily carried out of the room and lugged around like a sack of meat. If Jimin had any food in his guts, he’d been throwing up already. But his body felt hollow and oddly separated, especially after they removed the GI-suit off of him and threw a worn and dirty tunic over his body. The suit had been heavy, but it had protected him- now Jimin feels incredibly vulnerable, and his pain doubles. There was a prickling shot of sorts directed on his neck and Jimin guesses it was a sort of medicine, to at least keep him somewhat alive for whatever purpose they had for him. It helps clear his mind from the fog of fever and pain a little.

His head is jerked back again and the same buzzing sound rings at his ear and the burning shave skims across his scalp.

Not wanting to give them the satisfaction of knowing he was in pain, Jimin grinds his teeth down and bears the burning pulling heat on his scalp. Chunks of his hair falls around him and in all honesty, he doesn’t care for his hair like that; it was in the fact that this was being done to him against his will.

Jimin feels tainted and used.

Yoongi’s face comes unbidden to his mind and Jimin’s anger, fear, and pain vanishes in an instant.

Phantom touches of the Human’s hand running through his hair cools down his burning scalp, and the panic rising up his throat like bile ebbs away. And instead Jimin feels exhausted. He wants to crawl towards that uncertain but gentle touch. To just give in and slump down, knowing that he would protect him.

But he remains rigid and as impassive as he can until all of his hair falls off and his body shivers beyond his own control. There’s gruff talk again and he’s being shoved out of the seat. Doing his most to keep his balance, Jimin rights himself.

Jimin focuses only on Yoongi.

Thoughts of the Human.

The soothing timbre of his voice, the quiet certainty of his presence, the calming quality of his touch.

The burning light in his eyes every time he held Jimin’s gaze.

Jimin’s heart is breaking, pained with the intensity with how much he missed Yoongi.

This was worse than reliving the past- worse in the knowledge of not knowing.

Was he alive? Did he escape? Was he injured? Jimin doesn’t know- and he had no way of knowing.

He was alone.

Again.

He could feel nothing, he could do nothing.

He’s pushed out of the chair and he falls over to the floor in a heap. His mouth bursts with the tangy iron warmth of his own blood, having bit the inside of his cheek too hard. There’s raucous laughter and he feels himself being lifted off of the floor and dragged. When he’s able to concentrate, Jimin finds himself out of the dark wet room and in the hallway again. He tries to
fight the grip on his collar but it proves impossible. A searing lash strikes at his feet and he loses balance, his weight pulling at his collar and effectively shutting him up.

It doesn’t last long, he’s dragged down the hallway and into a narrower darker hallway where the smell is worse. Jimin realizes with a start, that he doesn’t notice anything digital or technology based. The doors he’s dragged past are heavy stone doors, layered with wood and or some sediment. The lights are dim and sparse, just a small bulb blinking feebly. He thinks back to the old and rustic Transporters he’d been dragged into, of the crude mechanical structures and weapons. He’s shaken out of his thoughts by a series of noisy clanging and to Jimin’s intense horror, a growling sound.

There’s some shouts, more clanging and a weird buzzing sound followed by a sharp yelp.

For a moment Jimin thinks he’s going to be sent back out into Seulgaan’s ship, but instead he’s pushed into a dark and dank room that reeks of rot. Losing balance, Jimin falls to the ground in a heap, his elbow grazing against coarse and gritty floors.

His head shorn, his body numbed from pain, his skin aflame, Jimin is gasping out his breaths. His vision, though completely dark and his surroundings practically indiscernible in this lighting, blurs and his focus is off. The suit had protected him from the worse and had also functioned in a way where it was slowly righting his bones, twisted muscles, and other smaller injuries. Attempting to at least right himself and put pressure off of his bruised ribs, Jimin rolls over to his front.

A low snarl fills the air.

Freezing, Jimin concentrates with all his might on his hearing. Had he imagined that? What was that? Was it inside this room-

Another growl that’s clearly threatening rumbles out at him and Jimin slowly raises his head.

It takes a while for his eyes to get used to the incredibly dim lighting in the room but he manages to make out a hulking shape in the corner. And with that, a pair of dull white orbs, blinking at him.

Jimin feels like he’s staring straight into the eyes of a wild and dangerous beast. He completely stills himself and raises himself just a little.

They had put him here for an obvious reason. The stench of blood and rot was not accidental either.

Jimin tries to channel calm- even if he wasn’t restored, he could still use basic and common tactics in dealing with wild creatures.

The growl continues and Jimin breathes out slowly. It reeked in here, but he couldn’t allow that to overwhelm him. He couldn’t panic, he couldn’t cry out.

Every single action could trigger an attack, and Jimin is in no way or form prepared to defend himself.

He moves slowly, still crouched but his posture straightening. He didn’t want to appear threatening or dominating- he simply needed to show that he meant no harm, that he was strong, and that he was not a threat.

Is this what they did? Getting rid of their hostages by throwing them into pits with wild creatures? Was this some form of sport? Some sickening form of entertainment?
Jimin doesn’t look away from the glowing eyes as he straightens a little more, kneeling carefully. He ignores the pains of his body, ignores the burning of his skin, ignores the pains of his heart.

There’s a strange sharp buzzing sound and the dark form violently shudders before it scuttles forward.

Jimin backs away, faster than he thought he was capable but he is now standing and quickly he asserts a careful but defensive stance.

‘Stop!’ he commands.

It wasn’t enough to completely subdue the creature but it does stop. And then it weirdly contorts-as though its limbs were expanding and-

Jimin’s breath hitches in his throat.

This was no creature or wild animal.

Tall and emaciated, a living Being stands before him and takes a step closer. In the dim light, a young face appears. Pale and wide eyed, hair in shaggy matted strands fall around his face. He’s foaming in the mouth and the growling sound is coming from him. Jimin can sense anger, blood lust, and something wildly primal reeking from this young Being- but above all of that Jimin can sense fear.

His cheeks are sunken, and Jimin can see how his ribs appear to stick out, visible even through the ratty tunic not unlike what Jimin was wearing. His feet are also bare, nails either broken or entirely gone, or talon-like and filthy. There’s an animalistic wildness to this Being and Jimin cannot tell if he had any actual self-awareness or not.

Jimin concentrates and continues to look straight into his strange orb-like eyes. Jimin knows that you’re not supposed to maintain eye contact with wild creatures and beasts, but this was no wild thing. This was a living Being. And eye-contact was necessary.

To Jimin’s surprise and glimmer of hope, the Being looks away, eyes lowering though he was still growling.

‘Hey there,’ Jimin says softly, crouching down a little to show that he posed no threat, extending his hand out in a loosely held fist. ‘Shhh, it’s okay, I won’t hurt you.’

The young Being stares at his hand, the growl in his throat still present.

‘I won’t hurt you,’ Jimin repeats softly before switching to Standard, hoping his words weren’t too slurred. ‘Safe- not hurt.’

A glimmer of understanding lights up in his eyes and Jimin has hope.

‘Understand?’ he tries carefully.

The Being doesn’t move, staring at Jimin for an unnervingly long time. Then slowly, he nods once. Relief floods him and Jimin smiles. Then slowly, he lowers himself until he’s sitting down, legs crossed, posture relaxed.

The wild Being scuttles off at the movement, despite being slow and careful. He crouches, head ducking down between his knees as though fearful that Jimin would hurt him.
‘Safe,’ Jimin repeats again, ‘Safe-‘

The young Being turns his back to Jimin and despite the darkness, despite the dirt, Jimin can clearly make out a deep indent running down the spine of the young Being. Blinking a few times, Jimin concentrates harder. He wasn’t seeing things- it wasn’t a trick of light, it wasn’t a scar. It was the exact same dent down Yoongi’s back.

He’s suddenly both alarmed and excited. What did this mean?

Was he also like Yoongi? Did he also wear a uniform once? Or was he more like those *eggs*- they had talked about the eggs, and had been familiar with it. Was this Being the only one? Or were there more? He needed to get closer.

He ignores how pained the soles of his feet are for the moment, Jimin shuffles forward just a little. He raises a hand and places it over his own chest.

‘Jimin,’ he says, ‘I’m Jimin.’

The young Being is wary again, his posture tense as he looks around at him. But Jimin doesn’t let up; he can’t do much. His previous command, at best, would have only been able to subdue his immediate aggression and fear. But beyond than that it was all up to how he interacted, how he approached this volatile Being.

‘Do you have name?’

The young Being crouches even lower, his stance defensive, but curious. Then he slowly moves forward, slowly making a single round around Jimin. Jimin knows it’s dangerous to expose his back to a potential threat but he remains calm. He stops himself from fidgeting. He appears again and this time he’s much closer.

His eyes aren’t a light colour, Jimin notes, instead they were very reflective and oddly orb like. Almost like nightly creatures. His skin is pale but splotchy, and heavily scarred. Jimin can see lesions and serrations on his skin, many of which were still in the healing process. He winces at the obvious lack of care, of the cruel treatment this young Being has been through. When did he wake up? Was he another of Seulgaan’s *eggs*? Or was he entirely different? Where did he come from?

He shifts forward until he stops in front of Jimin, his stance now more curious rather than aggressive. Slowly, making his actions obvious, he lifts his hand, palm up.

It’s an intense minute, with Jimin maintaining his calm and cool, waiting patiently to see if this wild Being would attempt to attack him again. His side is numb, and he knows he’s fevered, and there was nothing more he wanted than to take a shower and sleep in his bed. But he was potentially facing his end and he had to do all he could to survive.

To his surprise, the Being lowers his head, and though his eyes are still watching Jimin, his expression changes from complete wariness to curiosity.

Jumin carefully caresses his thick and matted clumpy strands of hair. At this distance Jimin can really smell the stench of dried blood, rotted tissue, and other odors that make his eyes water. But he doesn’t stop or recoil.

His stance eases, his shoulders relaxing just a little. Jimin smiles reassuringly and continues to brush through wiry hair until his shoulders entirely ease up.

‘Name?’ Jimin tries again, gently rubbing behind his ears in a way he hopes is soothing.
Jimin wants to touch his back- to see if it really was like Yoongi’s, or perhaps some terrible form of torture inflicted upon him. But he was going to have to be very careful.

Jimin allows him to step closer and he makes gentle cooing sounds, as you would with wild or terrified animals. He looks even younger up close and Jimin’s heart breaks. So young, so afraid, so ruined.

When his hand reaches up to wrap around Jimin’s wrist, he notes that his fingers appeared stained with red- almost as though permanently tinted with the colour of blood. His touch is much more gentle than Jimin had mentally prepared himself for. He turns his hand over, sniffing at his hand and wrist before placing it over his head again.

Chuckling, Jimin continues to stroke his head.

‘Good?’

Jimin is not expecting a reply.

‘Good.’

His voice is small and gravelly, as though he hasn’t spoken actual words in a long time. This makes Jimin a bit more hopeful.

His hand shoots out again and this time he places Jimin’s hand over the top of his head again, somehow much more purposeful. Jimin wonders if he’s trying to get him to be less gentle when his finger bumps against something that doesn’t feel like clotted blood or dirt. Carefully and gently, Jimin pushes past the matted clumps of hair until he feels and then sees a strange sort of crudely designed plaque. Jimin doesn’t understand what it is, but he’s filled with a rush of anger and sorrow. This was obviously causing him great discomfort and pain, judging by the crusted layers of blood and other secretion layered over. There were bits of hair missing too, ripped out from the roots as though in irritation and Jimin wants nothing more than to give this Being a bath.

‘Does this hurt?’ he asks before adding in Standard, ‘Hurt?’

He receives a nod.

‘I’m sorry,’ Jimin whispers, removing his fingers away and hoping to at least soothe the pain by gently scratching around the swollen area. He’s met with wide eyes that no longer reflect anger or fear. But just complete and utter wonder.

‘Name? Do you have name?’ he tries again before placing his hand over his chest again, ‘Jimin.’

He blinks a few times, eyes closing for a few long seconds as his posture entirely relaxes. His mouth opens a few times, tongue moving as though to form a word he hasn’t uttered in a long while. He does this a few times, swallowing thickly again.

‘Safe,’ Jimin repeats again. ‘I…I am safe.’

Jimin gently scratches behind his ears, hoping to receive an answer.

‘J-J-‘

He’s struggling, swallowing a few times. Jimin waits patiently.

There’s a loud explosion, the vibrations of which pulses through the ground and causes ripples to
form on the cracked dirty concrete. They’re thrown to their sides and Jimin lands with a pained cry, his head colliding sharply with the floor, his wounds opening again. He can feel blood, warm and wet oozing out on his fevered skin.

There’s a startling animalistic growl that rips through the air and it’s alarmingly close. Alarm bells ring in Jimin’s mind and he’s sitting up at once despite his heavy disorientation.

Just feet from him, the young Being has regressed again- his stance tense, ready to pounce it would seem, his eyes gleaming dully and his mouth frothing.

It hits Jimin.

The smell of his blood was driving him ravenous.

It made sense now. Why they put him here.

This young Being was obviously starved and tortured. Whatever was screwed onto the back of his head was probably used as a way of controlling him. His hunger and untrained unchecked instincts used against him. His nature was used against him, manipulated, and reshaped into a living recycling machine.

Rather than being scared Jimin is angry.

‘You can stop it,’ Jimin tells him, shifting backwards slowly. ‘I’m not going to hurt you, so you can’t hurt me.’

He’s shaking, clearly trying to control himself. A pained animalistic growl rips out of his throat and he lunges forward. Jimin falls back, scrambling to find any purchase on the dirty floor, to support himself and maintain eye-contact.

There’s a strange buzzing sound and Jimin is able to pinpoint its source. It was coming from the back of his head, where the flat device was embedded. Someone was controlling him, aggravating him with pain to goad him. Jimin extends his hand and he knows it’s a risk but he knows that this Being’s reaction was not created out of his own volition, but used against him.

‘Shhh,’ he smiles. He reaches deep within him, drawing what he could of his own energy, or his calm. ‘Safe. I am safe.’

The shaking worsens- he was clearly controlling himself but at a great strain to his own forced instincts. His body starts to sway, tilting around. Hands curled into fists his growls increase. He thrashes on the floor for a few seconds before he starts hitting his head against the floor.

‘No, no, don’t do that-‘ Jimin pushes himself up painfully, reaching forward to stop his actions. ‘Don’t do that-‘

‘-stop-‘

Jimin freezes, hand stilling mid-air.

‘Stop-…please.’

Pausing, Jimin hums under his breath. It used to work on everyone- he would hum a little, sing a gentle melody, create quiet tunes. It worked on everyone. It worked on Yoongi.

When his finger brushes down matted hair, he’s met with snapping teeth and a snarl. But Jimin
doesn’t back down. He continues to hum, waiting for the dull glow of his eyes to abate. Dizzy and extremely weak, Jimin continues to hum, shuffling even closer. He hums an old tune, one his sister used to hum to him when they were children, trying to figure out who they were, and what they were.

‘Sometimes we don’t get to choose what we become,’ she tells him, already so mature for someone barely past 14 summers. ‘But we always get to choose who we become.’

‘This is not who you are,’ Jimin hums quietly. ‘Whoever is doing this to you is forcing you into something you are not. This is not who you are.’

He collapses, his weight though alarmingly light, sends Jimin landing back on his bottom rather painfully again but he controls his cry of pain. His breath comes out in harsh pants, trembling against Jimin’s shoulder. Wrapping an arm around his still shaking malnourished body, Jimin embraces the wild young thing. He weakens even more, body shuddering rather violently. Jimin is worried that he’s becoming sick when he realizes they were sobs. Gently and slowly, Jimin tilts his head back to get a look of the young Being’s face.

His tears leave clean tracks down his face, creating streaks in the layered grime and dirt. But his eyes are back to normal- no longer glowing in that haunting way, but now clearer than before. His eyes are a warm brown, Jimin notes, and they’re large, sparkling almost with the added tears.

‘Safe,’ Jimin whispers quietly in Standard, stroking his head gently as he smiles. ‘Safe-‘

The buzzing sound increases sharply and Jimin can actually feel the charge of electricity that shocks the poor Being in his hand. And within a fraction of a second, any sense of self-awareness, of consciousness and understanding, is replaced with primal rage and hunger. Jimin is forcefully pushed back, his head smacking on the ground.

The last thing he registers is a crushing pain on the side of his neck.
I WONDER WHO THAT IS
HA

University is over BTS is having a comeback what a time to be alive
my favorite song is outro-tear it instantly shot up to my top 5 bts songs i am shook i love this album to death
also i never knew i'd be saying this but wow inkigayo has really good camera work
now that i think about hahaha -_- shitty camerawork aside wow american media really doesn't seem to grasp or understand the concept that all music is music regardless of language, country, etc. a "boy band" doesn't need to have rabid fans as the main reason for their fame, like, have you ever considered that they're famous and beloved because you know, they make good music? because they have relatable songs and lyrics, because they're just a bunch of boys who love what they do and we just happen to love what they do? come on, people, please, this deep rooted xenophobia needs to stop, you don't have to be american to be "reasonably" famous. stop concentrating and making everything about how crazy the fans are and instead focus on why we actually love them and the answer to that is simply their music, thanks.
and while i love that bts are getting a wide platform to perform and promote their music, i somehow kinda hope they don't go back anymore (unless it's for a grammy nomination nice one yoongi) because the behavior and attitude of the american media was nothing short of disgusting and had me giving them a permanent side-eye the entire time
that being said they all looked amazing, what i could see of their performance was amazing, they actually looked more comfortable and relaxed this time around and the interviews were better than last year *cringes violently* i can't wait for them to get to korea and i can finally see the performance we all deserve
also low key really liked that picture of taylor swift and bts idk why but i feel like sope+TS would make the sassiest, pettiest combination in the world lol
AND
NOW THAT I AM ON BREAK
PLEASE EXPECT MORE FREQUENT UPDATES WOOOO
It’s with a strange sense of resignation that the captain tells Yoongi that their numbers were now reduced to just four of them. And it was with a strange sense of resignation that Yoongi accepts this fact.

‘I’ll be next,’ she tells him, no emotion on her face.

She wasn’t trying to be brave. She wasn’t trying to appear strong or even trying to do anything. She was simply stating facts. Facts that didn’t make sense, but facts that became their reality the moment they entered this planet’s atmosphere.

All facts were set the moment Yoongi saw the sharp glimmer of ice, bright and harsh like diamonds, striking of the edge of the planet, bordering the harsh deathly environments this strange planet harbored.

He could have turned around. He could have returned to the main ship. But he didn’t.

He could have done a lot of things.

Maybe not have drunk himself into a terrible hangover the morning before leaving Tayi.

Maybe he should have washed the dishes before leaving. Now his dishes would be moldy and that would be a pain to take care of.

Maybe he should have listened to Amic, and drunk more tea rather than coffee. Maybe he would take up on that later, make Amic proud and show him that he was indeed attempting at a somewhat healthier lifestyle.

Or maybe he should have spoken more. Especially to his family.

Like tell his sister what he was doing.

Or go back to Earth, be the brother he was supposed to be. Be the son he was supposed to be.

‘-oongi?’

She’s watching him closely, as though concerned for him. Yoongi wants to laugh. There was no place for concern here. It didn’t matter.

‘Sorry- I just, just sort of internally passed out I think,’ he replies, trying for a smile. He looks around and finds Jimin listening and nodding to the last mechanical engineer from their team. Without words, he’s explaining to Jimin the function of each device that when put together could
create a powerful signal, strong enough to break through the immense clouds of magnetic static that broiled the atmosphere.

‘There’s...there’s something you should know,’ she tells him quietly.

All of his attention is focused on her and Yoongi finds the strength to sit up straight.

‘What is it?’ he asks quietly.

She looks away for a moment, watching the permanent sunrise, her normally sharp and clear eyes glazed over with a strange grey-tint. Yoongi wonders if he has it too.

‘This isn’t the first time the GLA have been here,’ she sighs out.

‘I mean yeah? We know that?’ Yoongi struggles to understand.

She shakes her head, turning around to look at Jimin instead.

‘He is important,’ she tells him quietly. ‘Not because he knew about us- he knows of us- that means someone went to him before.’

Yoongi has so many questions.

‘I heard from her that they had sent envoys here for centuries already,’ she pushes back strands of her hair, a majority of which gets caught in between her fingers and pulls away from her scalp in chunks. She doesn’t seem to notice. ‘But nothing came of it.’

‘Did something happen?’ Yoongi manages to ask.

‘I think...I think so,’ she frowns. ‘But I can’t be sure.’

‘What else did she say?’

‘She said they finally came to an agreement. And that they were headed for a negotiation of sorts.’

‘Do you think Jimin will know?’

At the mention of his name, Jimin looks over, expression expectant. Yoongi just smiles, shaking his head. Jimin smiles in return before turning his attention back to the devices.

‘Maybe- maybe not- I mean,’ she sighs. ‘I don’t know.’

That was the underlying theme to all of this.

“I don’t know”.

It permeated everything.

The ground Yoongi walked on, the air he was breathing, the sight he was seeing. He didn’t know anything.

They all somehow gain a strange sense of energy as they approach the high mountain, its shadow falling at a permanent angle to the side, where the forest was a strange dark and damp place. The soil was sponge-like and the strong odour of rotting vegetation filled the air. Yoongi tried to make Jimin wear the extra soles he had with him, worried for his feet. But Jimin had shaken his head, caressing his face gently before making Yoongi pack it away again.
Yoongi wonders what it would feel like to fall asleep every night with his cheek under Jimin’s hand.

When they tread dryer grounds and finally break free from the draining shadowed land and look up the tall mountain side, she makes a strange sound and before anyone can catch her, she keels over.

They rush to her side and when they roll her onto her back, Yoongi knows she’s already gone.

When they bury her, Jimin kneels next to the mound of leaves they were able to access to at least mimic some form of proper burial. This was probably a ritual of sorts from Jimin’s planet. Yoongi has seen him doing with every Being—well, every Being that wasn’t taken or missing.

Jemin leans over, pressing his forehead over hers, murmuring soft words. Yoongi notices that Jimin’s shoulders are shaking—was it fatigue or tears, Yoongi doesn’t know. All he wants to do is reach over and hold him close. Instead he opts to touch his shoulder, offer support and whatever strength remained in him.

There’s an odd terrible smell that permeates the air and before Yoongi can register it, Jimin freezes under his hand.

There’s a movement of colour—of the very threads of sight, bending and shifting and it bleeds red, as though Yoongi’s reality was literally bleeding. The movement is gone and so is their last team member.

‘Yoongi—!’

Winded, Yoongi doesn’t know what’s going on except that he’s on the floor, a shaking Jimin over him, trying to cover him as though to hide him. He’s hysterical, his entire body violently shaking.

It’s enough to somehow wake and energize Yoongi enough to hold him back, asking what was wrong despite knowing Jimin wouldn’t understand. So instead he tries his best to placate him. Jimin is stammering under his breath; words, sentences—he’s singing.

Yoongi listens to the broken words, the hollow tune—Yoongi listens to sound of Jimin’s heart breaking.

When Jimin finally pulls away, the eclipses in his eyes bright and shining, he whispers something.

‘What is it?’ Yoongi asks, gently brushing through his hair, hoping to calm him down.

He repeats the words again, sounded even more broken with every syllable. It sounded like an apology.

Maybe Yoongi couldn’t be the brother he was supposed to be. Maybe he couldn’t be the son he was supposed to be. But he would do anything, he would do everything, to be there for Jimin.

Yoongi shakes his head, shifting so that he was kneeling now, taking Jimin’s hands into his.

‘This is not your fault,’ Yoongi tells him quietly. ‘You’re not hurting me.’

Jemin’s attempts at stabilizing his breaths breaks, a sob ripping out of him.

‘Jemin,’ Yoongi gently tugs at their hands. ‘This is not your fault.’

Jemin slumps against him, his face glimmering with tears before he ducks his head, tears
immediately dampening the fabric of Yoongi’s shirt.

‘You don’t hurt me.’

Yoongi tries not to think of a crowning ceremony he once witnessed. The Head Council Chief threw the magnificent mantle over the young King’s shoulders, and the High Priestess placed the crown on his head. There is no magnificent mantle- just an ordinary, hard-wearing blanket. There is no crown either- only the reflection of early morning sunlight highlighting a clear ring-like halo around Jimin’s head.

Yoongi can imagine him crowned and garbed in royal gear – a magnificent crown of Grisial crystals that looks like stars compressed and encased inside gems. He can see robes billowing, shifting in a non-existent wind, the silver and gold threads gleaming under the starlit heavens.

But at this moment Jimin is just Jimin. Not royalty, not the future King of his planet. No. Jimin was right now a lost Being, looking for a way to get back home. He was dressed in worn ragged clothing, no jewels on his neck, head, or hands; no robes billowing around him. He was just Jimin.

And yet Yoongi is overwhelmed by his beauty.

Yoongi would do anything and everything. But he knew, they both knew, it wouldn’t be enough.

‘Lead me, and I will follow,’ Yoongi smiles.

Jimin nods, as though understanding his words. He helps him stand, taking his gear into his arms and positioning himself in a way where Yoongi could lean his weight against him. Their hands meet and entwine.

‘Take me where you will, and I will go gladly.’

The wind picks up, the light ripples and falls in rays of gold and amber all around them.

Jimin doesn’t need a crown, doesn’t need rich robes, not when the sun cloaked him in light; not when all of Life seemed to worship him.

Yoongi wonders if Death would tremble at his beauty.
It hurts.

It’s not something that could be categorized under a physical pain.

This was more like madness. A strain in his entirety that took over not just his mind, but his body was edging close to a desperation that made him want to set fire to everything around him. A frenzy clawed under his skin and Taeh’yung seemed to recognize it, judging by how intently looks into his eyes, a knowing look on his face.

‘You will come back,’ he tells him quietly with a smile, ‘And you will see again.’

And Yoongi doesn’t know what he means by it, but he takes the space-gear helmet from the Zhak’gri and pushes it on before making his way into the pressurized chamber.

‘All clear,’ Hoseok tells him before the door slides open to reveal a misty environment before him. Yoongi jumps off, landing lightly on his feet, making no sound upon impact.

The space-gear he’s wearing is surprisingly light, a complete polar opposite to the suit he’s used to. It was light, despite offering him protection, somehow made him feel like a part of the environment around him.

There was something about the suit, something about being a part of the GI, that made you not only feel but become excluded from reality. Like he never belonged anywhere. Like he wasn’t allowed to be anywhere.

But here, in this suit, he feels like he’s part of the eroded “mountain-side”, yet completely hidden.

Was this how most agents felt?

Maybe he should ask Hoseok.

He looks up and the Užkulisai is already disappearing into the acid mist.

‘Find a way in,’ Namjoon tells him quietly. ‘Once you find Jimin, we’ll set off the distraction.’

‘Understood,’ Yoongi replies quietly as he walks over the curved edge of what appeared to be a gigantic beamer turbine. Yoongi should be able to find the exhaust funnel and enter through there.

The plan was to create a timed explosion some distance from the area, to draw out most of the Ynqaban or at least distract enough to create a cover for Yoongi and Jimin to get back.

‘This is interesting,’ Hoseok comments, ‘According to the Yisheng Directory archives this ship is still functional and is supposed to be travelling through the Pomoc Nebula, observing a stray pulsar and helping with the evacuation of the nearby inhabited planets.’

Obviously it wasn’t.

‘It’s also registered as a new ship- there’s even a live feed covering the evacuation- and-…wow, there’s the ship.’

‘It’s a replacement- a clone if you will,’ Namjoon comments. ‘The real one is here- if we take a sample, we might be able to judge how old it actually is- figure out how long it’s been here.’
According to the history of Ynqaba available, there is no record of the Yisheng’s involvement.

Hoseok sounds like he’s reading from a page. ‘I feel though, that if there was Yisheng involvement, and something this important quite literally fell into a planet, and was instantly replaced by a replica, it has to be related to the Gaia Case.’

‘I was thinking that too,’ Namjoon states rather absentmindedly before adding grimly, ‘I suspected it- this ship- or at least the one in Pomoč is under Yisheng Amme’s authority.’

‘I’m willing to bet this one might be under her name too,’ Hoseok adds. ‘From the trials and court hearings, we know for a fact that 3 of the Yishengs from the Directory were directly involved- three that we know of and were convicted of their crimes-‘

‘-out of which 2 died,’ Namjoon adds. ‘If we want the answers, we’ll need to access the ship logs- I’m not sure if it’s still there or not.’

‘I can get it.’

‘Our priority is Jimin,’ Namjoon replies at once, sounding a little surprised. ‘We get Jimin, and then Jin, and we leave-…’

There’s a sigh from the Kutsoglerin, weary and long.

‘-straying out of our path and trying to understand beyond what we’re capable of handling has lead us here- and it was my doing. It’s a miracle we’re all somehow still together- or will all be together soon. And that’s what we need right now- unity. So even though it would be helpful to retrieve the logs, in the end we will end up with more questions, more confusion.’

Yoongi is a little surprised by Namjoon’s statement. So is Hoseok, judging by the silence that follows. Yoongi briefly wonders if Sk’jin would have some sort of comment in reply to Namjoon’s statement- probably something snarky and unhelpful.

Yoongi has no regrets in leaving Sk’jin behind. Though he can see how that was not the most intelligent thing to do; nor was it the most productive.

He doesn’t really know how to describe how he felt- what he was thinking. All he felt was a rage within him. Not just at how things turned out- not just at how Sk’jin hadn’t even tried to stay back and retrieve Jimin.

It was madness, it was rage, it was frenzy. It was fear.

And most of all it was terror.

Jimin falling out of his reach, away and out of sight- it kept replaying in his mind.

His body ached to follow- to reach out, to defy all of the laws of motion and gravity and physics and time. To jump and reach for him and to just never let go-

It didn’t fade. It wouldn’t fade. He was burning and he couldn’t stop.

His body moved on its own accord- a sort of blindness took over him- and was still taking over him. His entire being was gasping for breath, for light.

‘So no- we’re sticking to our plan, to our mission. We get everybody together, and we follow our original plans.’ Namjoon concludes before adding, ‘Have you found an entrance?’
Yoongi reaches the edge of the wing which could very well have been a cliff from a distance. Acidic decay and erosion had created strange stalactites of oxidized residue like rust. It covered a vast area of the ship, covering the original metal alloy with a strange dark and oddly porous coat of the substance. Squatting down, Yoongi touches the surface and finds that like most acidic salts, was fragile and flaky. There would be no durability or dependence on the rusty growth that covered the ship.

The jump down the beamer-turbine was too deep to jump into, and too steep for him to scale down without wires or a gadget to help him. As all ships were designed to do so, the outer shell lacked any magnetic properties, making it impossible to stick on to with magnetic gloves or the like.

‘Yes. I’m calculating my entry point,’ Yoongi replies, knowing his answer came a little too late.

‘Is it a turbine?’ Namjoon asks. ‘If it follows the general design of all beamer-turbines, there should be shafts around the upper surface of the wings to access the combustion chambers—a pressure valve.’

Yoongi scans the ledge of the wing he’s on, looking over the porous texture with careful eyes. A few seconds later his eyes catch the slightest raised layer to his far right, indicating a sort of hatch of sorts. Quickly crawling over, Yoongi extracts a flat dagger, digging under the fragile but sharp layer of oxidized acid-salts until the blade scratches the original metal, leaving a shiny etching behind. He digs out the salt in flat chips until a hatch handle flap appears. Prying it upon, it reveals a handle of sorts and Yoongi yanks it open.

Everything inside is surprisingly clean. And also unsurprisingly emptied out.

Looking inside, Yoongi can tell that it’s been stripped clean of every salvageable material/device. Even down to the rungs of the side ladder. However the latches were still attached, though there were clear indications that they too had undergone a serious attempt at being removed.

‘Found a way in,’ Yoongi reports as he lowers himself, feet easily finding the small latch. It wasn’t much, but it was all Yoongi needed.

‘Be careful,’ both Hoseok and Namjoon say at the same time, in uncanny harmony that makes Taehyung giggle quietly.

Yoongi climbs all the way down carefully, his hands feel hot but a strange cold compression expands inside his chest. It still hurts, but he can’t pinpoint the pain.

‘If it’s a pressure valve, you’ll be able to pry open the valve easily enough,’ Namjoon states helpfully as Yoongi descends lower into the darkness. ‘It should take you straight into the combustion-chamber and you’ll find another latch that will take you to the maintenance chamber—it might be very small.’

His feet land on a rather flimsy surface that bends with his weight. This was probably the valve Namjoon mentioned. It’s trickier than Namjoon had theorized but it still easy enough sliding the discs off. The turbine wings are gone too, leaving behind a strangely empty space, filled with broken wires and debris all over the floor. It’s all too easy finding the latch because the door is missing and Yoongi can see straight into the chambers further in.

‘Yoongi- according to your readings, the air is breathable now.’ Namjoon informs him quietly. ‘We’ve also found a suitable location to plant the timer— we’re ready whenever you are.’

‘Understood,’ Yoongi replies, pushing open his visor.
Yisheng ships didn’t have an excessive amount of security systems. Because Yishengs themselves were their own walking security system. As a result, the entire ship has a very open and exposed layout. There were obvious changes made here and there. Rather crude and roughly placed barriers, levels divided into smaller sections meant for storage or sleeping. There’s a deep and old stench in the air- one that seemed to steep the very molecules of the air with its taint- like a disease spreading around.

Yoongi wonders back to Namjoon and Hoseok’s theory. Was this perhaps a ship previously commanded by Amme? It made more sense that Ndica was the one behind it, after all he was involved in the Gaia Case. What more could the Yishengs have infiltrated? The extent to which they had taken advantage of the blind faith the Universe had in them had certainly fueled their mission to exploit and control the Free-Universe. What else had they done? How many millions of lives had they destroyed in their attempt to “save” the Universe?

When Amme had told him that they would be under complete surveillance inside the Užkulisai, it hadn’t surprised him. Of course not- it was expected almost.

But when Amme had told him he would find the answers to his questions with this mission, he hadn’t expected the answer to come in the form of Jimin.

It was apparent to Yoongi now, that Jimin was what Amme had been referring to. The possibility of the Yisheng not knowing about Jimin was practically 0. It also meant she knew more than she ever told Yoongi. That she knew more about Yoongi, about his kind- about the “eggs”. About his past.

It also meant that Zhoumi knew more.

Had it all been an act? Or had it all been some coincidence? Logically speaking, Yoongi knew that it couldn’t be coincidence- there was no such thing. Not in this Universe. It had all been formulated, all been planned.

Zhoumi knew of Yoongi- of the real Yoongi, who was born and raised on Earth, and then who mysteriously vanished in a planet later abandoned. When he gave him his name, he behaved as though it has been new to him- as though it hadn’t been preplanned.

Would his past help him understand? Would his past make him realize? Make him remember? The data Namjoon had gathered for him was still stored inside his cabin, waiting for him to go through the files.

Amme had said he would find his answers in this mission.

But Yoongi is left with more questions.

And maybe Jimin was the key to his answers.

But it brought another question to Yoongi’s mind; why did Amme want Yoongi to find the answers?

Especially now, with the way things were transpiring- where every single day uncovered some terrible dark secret the GLA, the Venture Unit, and the GIU had instigated or organized.

Why was Yoongi sent on this mission?

Yoongi senses their presence before he even sees or hears them. He ducks back into the narrow opening, keeping incredibly still. A small group of Beings walk past, talking low amongst
themselves. Yoongi notices that their younglings were with them too.

He waits until they’re out of earshot before stepping out.

The smell is stronger here but Yoongi collapses his helmet before sliding it into his pocket. He walks past strung up tents, indications of being lived-in evident the further Yoongi steps into this ship. There’s a continuous gyrating sound that fills the air in a low roar- Yoongi isn’t sure but it sounds a lot like rushing water.

There aren’t a lot of Beings around in this area, but Yoongi takes the precaution of picking up a wide and hooded garment slung on a line to the side. Covering his conspicuous space-gear, Yoongi ducks inside a tent before taking out his screen. It was most likely that any area of imprisonment was somewhere downstairs. This was a large ship, judging by what Yoongi could deduce when they had approached the mountainous ship, going down would take a long and tedious time. This would have been easy of course, if he had access the layout of the ship, and had surveillance aid. In a ship where not a single digital port was functioning and everything was conducted through rather archaic technology, they were technically disadvantaged.

But Namjoon was also right in his decision. Because none of that posed a problem for Yoongi.

The tracker indicating Jimin’s position places him directly below where Yoongi was sitting. He was going to have to go through each level to find him.

Making sure the area was clear, Yoongi leaves the tent and heads for the wide door ahead. The walls were covered in some form of mural, covering the original pale metal. There were strange orbs that hung about, emitting a weak fluorescent light around the area. They didn’t have the technology to run this ship, but they made do.

The closer he gets to the opening, the louder the gyrating sound gets and the warmer it feels. The stench is somewhat reduced as well. Not knowing what to expect, Yoongi is distracted by the cavernous opening he walks out into.

The ship had indeed been hollowed out and scavenged- to the point where the central foundation of the ship had been entirely removed, and the internal structure had fallen apart. However, a network of wire, smelt metal columns, and reinforced rock slabs held the gigantic structure up. Some areas were entirely caved in, but after decades, had life grow over it in the form of slate floors screwed into the broken floors and ceilings, ungainly walk-boards and pathways strung up together with wire-meshes crisscrossed the area. And amidst all of this barely patched together mess, was a literal city of Beings.

The loud gyrating sound as well as horrendous fumes comes from what appeared to be a waterfall of sludge, blackened and Yoongi is quite sure, toxic that seems to the main source of a somewhat crudely yet efficiently designed hydraulic system that fuelled a series of small lifts, pulleys, and a whole network of moving buckets.

Yoongi quickly studies the massive space, looking for a way down. He finds a rickety stair case over the edge and heads for it. He just simply walks out into the clearing, bustling with locals, laughter ringing about in some place, younglings running around. This was obviously the living quarters or at least the zone for it. All the Beings gathered here appeared to be families- the old, or the very young. No one pays Yoongi any heed and he passes through easily.

‘How’s it going?’ Hoseok asks, all still waiting for Yoongi’s report.

‘This will take time,’ he replies.
There’s a strange familiarity with the ship. The layout, the structure; decades of filth and lack of maintenance had reduced it to nothing more than just the skeleton. But Yoongi catches sight of what appeared to be the metal frame-work for a Medical Bed, even what looked like a hollowed out Navigation Table being used as a sort of furnace cage, where bright fires were lit as a primary source of light.

‘Is it heavily occupied?’

‘Yes- families.’

It’s silent over the Comm and Yoongi reaches the stairs.

‘I think it’s fair to say that the families and sick would be living at the top most areas,’ Namjoon says quietly. ‘Any other form of “business” would be conducted all the way down, where it would easy to access and well…suppress.’

‘I’m gonna go plant the timer,’ Hoseok announces, ‘Do you think I should cover it with an extra WeatherBeat or something- I don’t want the acidity to eat at the device and blow it up too soon or something.’

‘This is a big ship,’ Yoongi comments. ‘Should I get captured and allow them to take me to prison?’

‘What the fuck- no!’ Namjoon stammers out quickly. ‘You shouldn’t be seen! That’s why you’re there!’

‘How many levels are there? Or how many can you actually even see?’ Hoseok asks.

‘A lot,’ Yoongi replies because he honesty can’t tell how many levels there are from where he was standing. There was a mist that hung in the air, the crisscrossing beams and wires making it difficult to actually guess how large the place was.

Raucous laughter rings through the air and Yoongi catches sight of a bunch of young Beings-geared and heavily garmented, they were headed towards the other direction. They were clad in a way similar to the Beings that had entered the Užkulisai after they had crashed. They carried crude spears and spikes, clearly ready for some sort of outing.

‘I found potential source of information.’ Yoongi reports.

Based on his calculation, he could take down 3 of the 5 within a second, the other one a second later, and the final one he would leave for questioning.

‘Potential-’

‘Yoongi no,’ Hoseok says firmly. ‘Do not engage.’

‘…I found a possible guide,’ Yoongi acquiesces, keeping his head down as he weaves through the tents and randomly placed living space objects strewn haphazardly. ‘They might lead me down.’

He thinks he hears Namjoon sighing in relief before he adds, ‘Stay low and- oh.’

‘Fuck-‘

The line cuts off and Yoongi momentarily worries. But the line comes back on and Taeh’yung excited voice fills the line.
Woah! Claws!

…what?

It’s the first time Hoseok has heard Yoongi sounding genuinely confused.

‘Uh…we have an…interesting situation here,’ Hoseok doesn’t know exactly how to feel at the sight they were now beholding.

They had landed some ways away from the “mountain”, finding a cleared area in an actual mountain a little higher than the crashed ship. Hoseok wonders if the slaver-ship too would one day meet a similar fate as the Yisheng ship.

They were now just waiting for Yoongi to find Jimin- a task that would take a questionable amount of time, seeing as the ship was apparently larger on the inside and with no clear path to take them to Jimin’s exact location, there was no telling how long it would take Yoongi to get to him. Hoseok was already suited up and geared, ready to take the small but powerful explosive and plant it in the mountain side. It could very well cause some form of avalanche, and despite being keen on creating a chaotic diversion, Hoseok had no intention of destroying any form of livelihood or living area. Which was why they chose this rather remote mountain side.

So Hoseok was honestly just taking his time, trying to catch a small break when until quite accidentally, a rather sizeable (though small in comparison to the Užkulisai) honest to goodness, fully functional and very surprised cybortronic and its pilot stumbles across them over the blackened rock surface.

It’s honestly the shock of everything that stops either party from reacting.

The Ynqaba pilot inside is slack-jawed, eyes nearly bulging out of his socket as he stares at them. Hoseok in turn can only gawk back because really? Cybortronics?

Cybortronics were considered a relic of the past- they appeared impressive and threatening but were generally speaking useless in actual defense and offense, unless you were fighting against another cybortronic. And while some had great potential, like every other machine designed and
invented, it really depends on the Being piloting the cybertronic. And while Hoseok doesn’t really want to judge a planet by its history, or lack thereof, he honestly doesn’t believe that there would be any decent pilots on these things.

And then simultaneously they both react at the same time.

The pilot fires at them immediately, a loud and fire-based missile that is so weak it makes Hoseok feel sorry for the pilot.

‘We can’t fire or we’ll draw attention to ourselves!’ Namjoon hisses just as Taeh’yung cheers, watching the cybertronic with utmost fascination.

When the smoke clears, the cybertronic and its pilot have painstakingly turned around and were trying to escape.

Hoseok and Namjoon share a look and tossing the explosive at Taeh’yung, Hoseok shoots off immediately.

‘Please bring me back the claw!’ Taeh’yung calls out after him.

Cybertronics were slow. And Hoseok doesn’t like to boast but he’s fast. His helmet collapses and forms over his head just as he shoots out, already crossing the length of the Užkulisai in a matter of seconds.

The soil beneath his feet is very dry and despite looking compact, rather sandy. It does nothing to help with support or traction but Hoseok isn’t a trained agent for nothing. He quickly sprints across, turning sharply without slowing down. The mountainside sloped downwards and it’s more than enough momentum for him to catch up with the teetering cybertronic before him.

There’s a terrified scream of sorts and out of the cockpit of the cybertronic leaps out a young Ynqaban, mask worn hastily over his face. He makes a mad dash for it but Hoseok has momentum as well as gravity working for him and he quite literally dives down the slope, tackling the Ynqaban down.

‘Did you get him?’ Namjoon asks tersely.

‘Yea.’ Hoseok pants out, regaining his balance quickly by pushing his knee down onto the pilot’s back.

‘Get who?’ Yoongi asks, obviously still completely out of loop.

‘Don’t forget my claws!’ Taeh’yung adds.

‘Claws?’ Yoongi sounds incredibly lost.

‘We’ll tell you in a moment-‘ Namjoon hastily adds, ‘Hoseok?’

‘Yeah-‘ grunting a little, Hoseok is about to loosen his hold but the Ynqaban was clearly a little stronger and less winded than Hoseok had initially thought and he pushes off rather mightily, throwing Hoseok off balance for just a second.

But Hoseok regains his balance and lunges for the Ynqaban at once.

Fights were not pretty by any means. It wasn’t well choreographed, it didn’t make sense. It was just a desperate rush of sense, adrenaline, fear, and sometimes hysteria. And while Hoseok is very
well versed in hand-to-hand combat, his opponent clearly isn’t.

He’s screaming quite loudly and honestly if Hoseok wasn’t trying to take him down, he’d be concerned.

‘What’s-‘

‘Not now!’ Hoseok lunges and blocks a wild punch aimed at his…where was he even aiming? It’s a wild 10 seconds of the Ynqaba screaming his head off, limbs flailing, before he trips and falls backwards, literally knocking himself out.

‘…is everything okay now?’

Hoseok doesn’t even know why he’s breathless. He didn’t even really do anything.

‘Yeah- yeah it’s all good,’ Hoseok pants out, about to reach down and drag this Ynqaban back when a whole half-dozen Ynqaban pilots and cybortronics round up the corner.

In an unwelcome moment of déjà vu, they all just gawk at each other.

They stare in utter disbelief at Hoseok, then down at their unconscious fellowman, and then back at Hoseok.

‘I…might need back up,’ Hoseok manages to get out before he turns heel and sprints up the slope.

‘What-?!’

Loud crunching sounds, heavy robotic limbs, loud hollow shots, and screams rise up behind him. If Hoseok was running fast before, he’s practically flying now. Maintaining a zigzag motion, Hoseok dodges what appeared to be metallic-shots being fired at him.

Ynqaba was definitely lacking in technology. But whatever they lacked in technology, they made up for in gusto.

Nearly slipping on the sandy soil as he turns the corner, Hoseok rights himself and is only very briefly worried about the fact that Taeh’yung was skipping towards him, no helmet on his head, hands glowing green, smiling a bit too widely.

Hoseok is quick, but not quick enough to dodge whatever was fired at him.

It catches him just mid-thigh and honestly it’s just a graze and Hoseok doesn’t think it’s even broken skin, let alone the space-gear he’s wearing. But that doesn’t seem to register in Taeh’yung. Because the Zhak’gri who was just beaming and excitedly saying, ‘More claws!’ his expression turns incredibly blank.

‘Taeh’yung-!’

Hoseok turns just in time to see a quick but bright ripple of green erupt out of Taeh’yung, the sandy soil around them rising up to float in an eerily still manner and even more alarmingly, the 3 cybortronics, and 6 Ynqabans were also afloat. There was a strange dissonance that rippled in a sphere that gleamed bright green. Hastily, Hoseok jogs back to the Zhak’gri, facing him in alarm to find a strangely twisted smile in place of his usual wide cheery grin.

And to Hoseok’s immense horror and Namjoon’s choking gasp over the Comm, the Ynqabans seem to distort within the sphere, followed by a strange lack of sound despite the obvious pain they
‘Hey, Taeh’yung? Tae?’ Hoseok steps in front of the tall Zhak’gri, carefully reaching out to grip at his raised wrists. ‘Hey- I’m fine, it’s all good right-’

Taeh’yung blinks once, twice. And again, for a brief frightening moment, Hoseok doesn’t recognize the Being before him. But it’s gone in a second and the bright neon in Taeh’yung’s eyes vanish and at the same time loud crashing sounds fill the air, followed by groans of pain, and to Hoseok’s immense distaste, violent retching.

‘Hobi! You’re okay?!’ Taeh’yung cries out, reaching forward to grasp Hoseok by his face, looking over him with child-like worry in his eyes.

‘Yes Tae,’ Hoseok attempts to put some distance but it’s futile so he just allows the Zhak’gri to inspect his face and head though he’d been shot at his legs. ‘I’m fine- really I am-’

Taeh’yung’s face actually wobbles, tears forming in his eyes as he hugs him tight.

‘I- okay-…’ Hoseok looks around wildly for…well, for anything really. Namjoon is at the windows, near the Mast, face nearly pressed up on display, expression completely dumbfounded.

Hoseok really doesn’t know what to make of this- but if his training in correct emergency responses ever taught him something, it was to always make sure that vulnerable or unstable Beings were very quickly made calm.

‘Hey buggy,’ he lowers his voice, making sure to sound gentle, ‘I’m okay- see? No scratch, no bleeding, nothing.’

‘Okay,’ Taeh’yung says thickly, his arms still incredibly tight around Hoseok, before he ask ,’What’s buggy?’

‘You didn’t know? In the Ngfy’widan culture, we call our children bugs. So you’re a buggy to me,’ Hoseok gently pats the Zhak’gri’s head.

‘T-that’s really cool,’ Taeh’yung sniffs, sounding better as he pulls away, eyes wide and a little teary. ‘I didn’t know you laid eggs!’

Hoseok supposes he should have foreseen that misinterpretation. They did call their children “bug”- a sort of affectionate but at the same time reprimanding term. It seemed to fit Taeh’yung and it just left Hoseok’s mouth without warning. Either way, the Zhak’gri seems to like it and Taeh’yung pulls away, smiling his characteristic grin as he says, ‘I’m your bug!’.

Hoseok can see Namjoon facepalming by the window. His shoulders are shaking, and Hoseok isn’t sure if it’s from laughing or sobbing.

‘So...’ Yoongi sounds unsure. ‘…did you get the claws?’
Yoongi is not sure that the explanation they gave him about what just happened was entirely true seeing as it all sounded a little too ludicrous even by their standards.

‘Well, we have one- we’ll get him to talk,’ Namjoon had grunted, sounding as though he was lifting something heavy. ‘Just a sec.’

It was well over a “sec” and Yoongi still doesn’t know if Taeh’yung got the claws he’d been fawning over. He’s also still very much unnoticed, trailing after the loud and tall group of Ynqabans nearly half an hour after Namjoon’s last call.

And as far as he’s noticed, the young Beings he was trailing were the only physically able, full-bodied Ynqabans around. He’s gone down at least 20 different levels, and each level housed only the elderly, children, or the sick.

‘Yoongi, are you there?’

‘Yes.’

‘All right- all prisoners, or well, parcels,’ Namjoon says distastefully, ‘Are kept at the basement. The easiest way to access the basement is to head towards the central-store Bridge, where there is a still functioning lift of sorts that’s the only way in or out the basement. It's not too deep- just 3 levels. And uh…’

Yoongi waits, trying not to scratch at the building ache inside his chest. Instead he tugs the hood over his face so that it covered a majority of his features instead. He’d found more suitable garments to disguise himself in case anyone was to take a closer look. He was even carrying a random shaft, crafted to form a spear of sorts.

‘-right so-’ there’s some more grunting and a terrified squeal ,’-the central-store Bridge is also the most heavily occupied and heavily guarded area. So keep an eye out there.’

‘Understood,’ Yoongi replies. After spending nearly 45 minutes with the Ynqabans, he’s figured out the structure they had created in terms of crossing over to different levels. Every 10 levels or so, there would be a lift of sorts, which they had to wait for as the main hydraulic pump cogs worked to lift the weights balancing the speed and movement of the rickety metal boxes. Yoongi fit right in, shuffling in behind them casually and easily. Each lift was located at a random place, often times rather hidden behind the towering masses of tents, make-shift houses, and forgotten cargo boxes stacked in heaps.

‘How did these even get here,’ Namjoon mumbles, suspicious metallic sounds can be heard over the Comm.

‘It’s not unheard of in certain areas- especially mining zones,’ Hoseok replies.

‘But they’ve been replaced with cyborgs for over 3 centuries now,’ Namjoon explains. ‘And these aren’t mining cybortronics- they’re designed for mechanical repair and maintenance.’

‘No one’s winning anything in this,’ Hoseok exhales out noisily. ‘I can’t really refer to any existing cybortronics that I know- so I don’t know if these are GLA make or not.’

‘The thing about cybortronics, is that they were employed by the GIU for a lot of their construction work, especially when it came to their ships,’ Namjoon says quietly. ‘The last mass usage and production of cybortronics was for the workforce unit to build the GIU motherships.’

‘If we can find the original hardware still intact in them- we can find out where and when they
were produced,’ Hoseok adds. ‘Maybe figure out a timeline of their creation.’

That made sense- the way the Yisheng ship had been taken apart was not done through small hand-held hardware but rather via larger operation-machines.

Namjoon hums a response, clearly lost in thought. ‘We have clear indications of the involvement of the Yishengs, the GLA, ties with the Gaia Case, and now with the GIU-’

‘And now I’m guessing the Alliance is also involved- I mean, where else would they possibly deliver the “parcels” to? Pirates can only do so much – you need GLA involvement or the Venture Unit to really kick-start any form of trade-off.’

‘Not to mention the Omhlophe,’ Namjoon sighs out. ‘According to Khonen they were expecting more “eggs” from here. Or at least, some of the sister-planets.’

The lift grinds to a stop, only for it to slide down a bit more, causing a few to yelp. One of them even grabs onto Yoongi for support but doesn’t pay him any mind, even throwing back some form of thanks that Yoongi, after 4 seconds of intent calculation, purposefully waves off in the most casual manner he can. It’s unnoticed.

When he steps out after them, keeping in step with the sudden harsh shadow that’s thrown over them from a bright light source overhead, Yoongi knows that they’ve reach the bottom. Or at least the main base, away from the living quarters, and much closer to the ground. He easily steps away from the group, heading for one of the large piles of what looked a lot like the smaller cargo-freights from Seulgaan’s slaver-ship. Towards the front of the large chamber which Yoongi recognizes was once a large docking bay, bright numbers indicating landing pads still visible through the dirt and erosion on the ceiling and walls, were massive gateways. And though far, Yoongi can make out the terrain outside- a dull, windswept terrain over which glimpses of thundering clouds were fast approaching past the acidic mist.

He takes a moment to survey the new area. It’s smaller than the levels above, but much taller and with a vast number of cybortronics. Another thing Yoongi notices is how the stench is worse down here. The rank waterfall was nowhere to be seen, and Yoongi wonders if the smell had anything to do with the waterfall in the first place. Maybe it was the very air that smelt of it.

‘I think I’m close,’ Yoongi reports.

‘I’ve finished planting the explosive- we’re ready to come get you and Jimin,’ Hoseok replies back before adding, ‘Also- I don’t know how this will effect anything, but it looks like it’s gonna storm really hard.’

‘What do we do about them?’

It’s silent for a moment before Taeh’yung chimes in, ‘Why don’t we put them inside the machine and lock them in? I think they’re strong enough?’

‘Yeah- let’s do that.’

‘You mean I should do that,’ Hoseok huffs while Namjoon mumbles an apology.

Yoongi quickly climbs the freights and is able to see a clearer view of the large bay. They were obviously very busy right now, what with a massive slaver-ship rich with resources and materials for the taking. No wonder the Ynqabans Yoongi had been following were practically abuzz, distracted to the point of not noticing Yoongi’s very solid presence behind them.
Cybortronics of all size were marching around, carrying heavy and large torn off bits and shrapnel from the slaver-ship. It’s odd seeing small remains of such a mighty and evil vessel as Seulgaan’s slaver-ship being carried around, being received with cheer and roars of approval. It should resonate some form of karmic justice, but Yoongi feels nothing as he watches on.

It was just another cycle- one form of evil and misery diminished when Seulgaan’s ship crashed. Then it was picked apart and put together to create another form of evil and misery- but now, just in another shape, from another side of the spectrum. And it would continue on and on.

‘If you’re close to one of the entrances, you should be able to find the central-Bridge quickly- they all connect to it. It’s where “The Collectors” stay.’ Namjoon informs him. ‘They’re kind of the bosses- I have a feeling they’re the ones who sell off the parcels to the pirates. Or at least handle that part of the transaction.’

‘Should I get rid of them.’

‘No Yoongi,’ Namjoon sighs. ‘Please stay low and do not engage unless strictly necessary.’

The pain is worse than before and Yoongi itches to break free of it. The pain was acting like a strange energy- spurring him on faster. It was making him sloppy. And Yoongi knew this. But he couldn’t really control it.

Increasing his speed, Yoongi ducks even lower and sprints over the emptied and hollowed OrTanks strewn around, as though abandoned. He only slows down when he reaches the massive corridors, pacing himself alongside an approaching cybortronic before shadowing its massive movements. He jumps from shadow to shadow easily, all in open sight, until he easily mingles with a crowd of Ynqabans entering the central corridor he had spied earlier. Easily grabbing hold of a freighter-case from someone else and ducking around them, Yoongi passes the gateway security who were taking account of the items being brought in.

Yoongi passes through the long dark corridor and into a wide chamber inside with even more branches leading away randomly. Small cybortronics were walking about, stacking the cargo-freights to one side as another massive group of Ynqabans pried them open, pulling out the items inside and separating them. This was like the factory zone, where the items were separated into different groups. And quickly enough, Yoongi spots the zone where other living Beings other than the Ynqabans were being pushed into. Beings that Yoongi recognizes as the slaves he’d seen in Seulgaan’s previous ship back in Grezma, as well as a few of his guards. Yoongi briefly wonders if Seulgaan survived or not.

Yoongi swiftly dumps his case into a passing Ynqaban’s arms and makes his way over to huddles of Beings, all terrified and whimpering as a bunch of Ynqabans kept an all too close watch over them.

With more speed than was safe or advised, Yoongi strides through, urged on by whatever strained energy was buzzing under his skin. Yoongi realizes he’s sweating and that his breath was coming out faster as well. He didn’t feel unwell. This was nothing like how it had been when he’d collapsed when they had landed in the Nightmare planet. Or how it was when he was injured.

Yoongi briefly wonders if he should ask Namjoon to check his health tab. But he also knew that Namjoon was always keeping an eye out on all of their health- making sure they were all healthy and functional. If anything was amiss, then he would inform them of it. Besides, Yoongi doesn’t know how to ask. None of the books he has read could formulate his question because he didn’t understand what needed answering. The closest book that comes to mind for his situation was for the manual guide he’d read for GLA employees on how to apply for a sick-leave.
Yoongi doesn’t think that would apply in this situation.

He’s not sure, because he’s walking too fast, but he thinks he sees the way the prisoners catch sight of him. Their eyes widen, shocked at his presence no doubt. But he quickly walks past and quickly finds a narrow alcove behind some broken pipes and takes a few purposeful breaths.

He raises his hands up to chest level and to his utter bewilderment, finds that they’re shaking.

‘My hands are shaking.’

He finds that his voice is stable as usual, no emotion betraying him.

‘What? Are you okay?’

‘I don’t know.’ Yoongi replies. ‘I feel strange.’

‘...we never got to check you after the crash- what if you have an injury-‘

‘No it’s not that,’ Yoongi whispers, flexing his fingers. ‘I’ll be fine.’

‘-but Yoongi-‘

Yoongi steps out of the alcove and makes his way forward, balling his hands into tight fists.

The air was getting heavier down here, it started smelling a bit more like fire, a bit more like something burning- or maybe instead something that was being seared. It’s a coy oily smell and gets heavier as Yoongi steps deeper into the hallway before it opens into a chamber that looks like a standard Bridge of sorts, raised daises for Navigation Tables and meeting tables set about in a half-moon pattern, encircling a lowered pit that ended with 3 doorways. Whatever systems that were housed in this Bridge were completely removed, judging by the hollowed walls, gaping wire-holes, drained beamer cells that were now being used to store what appeared to be a sort of pickle in the corner. Only the shape and outline of the mechanical engineering that outlined and powered this Bridge remained.

‘I’m here. I’m at the central-Bridge,’ Yoongi reports. ‘I don’t think we’ll be able to find any access to ship’s archives. Everything has been scavenged.’

‘All right,’ Namjoon sounds uncertain. ‘You’re close. Just hang on- we’ll get you out the moment you get Jimin.’

He sounded nervous- concerned, as though worried that Yoongi might collapse. But it wasn’t like that. Yoongi studies the Ynqabans gathered in the chamber. It wasn’t as crowded as it was outside, but there was a fair number of them gathered in here, all bustling around, seemingly all making reports and calculating things over large sheets of hammered metal and graphite.

At the center of the chamber, where a hollowed out Navigation Table stood, were gathered a group of Ynqabans who clearly felt very important and powerful. They were dressed better, looked better off, and weren’t ashen in colour. In fact their skin appeared quite healthy, and by the planet’s standard, rather plump as well.

They were clearly the Collectors Namjoon had mentioned. They’re talking amongst themselves- more like 3 were engaged in a loud conversation, some dramatic retelling of some story that most seemed to have heard already, judging by their lack of facial expression.

There’s some commotion as someone brings in a few of the prisoners from outside, pushing them
in roughly. One of the Collectors just waves a hand without much regard, as though the slaves that had survived Seulgaan’s ship were hardly worth looking over. They’re pushed past where Yoongi was standing and he follows them silently, matching their steps easily.

There’s a momentary pause, when one of the slaves trips over their feet, sending them and another sprawling to the ground. Yoongi pauses, stepping aside a little, instinctually angling himself away from sight and shifting to the side. The other prisoners are being shoved into the middle doorway and Yoongi redirects himself.

‘All set here Yoongi- just give us the word,’ Hoseok tells him quietly as Yoongi casually dodges an incoming irritated Ynqaban guard of sorts, yelling loudly in a mix of Standard and their own language.

‘I’m almost there-’

This was a filthy place. And not just because of the place. Not just because of what transpired here.

No, there was a deep seeded darkness, a rot that took over everything.

And in that rot, no light could penetrate- no promise of relief could be hoped for. Not for the prisoners with their bleak and unknown fate, nor for the inhabitants of this planet, destined to die in the toxicity of their own making.

And yet in that rotting darkness, a brilliance of light, the full spectrum of colour, gleams faintly at Yoongi like starlight- clean, distant, and small.

One of the Collectors, who isn’t engaged in the loud conversation, but just instead nodding along to what was being discussed distractedly while keeping an eye on the scuffle with the slaves, was holding onto something soft, something small- something fine.

‘Yoongi?’

Yoongi would recognize it anywhere. The colour, the brilliance- the uniqueness behind every single strand.

‘-ey are you all right-‘

Pain erupts out of him like a corporeal force and the burning rage that has burnt inside his chest ever since he woke up inside the crashed Užkulisai flares out of him like a roaring furnace. It made sense now- the pain, the fiery burn- it all made sense.

The sound of his thundering heart drowns every other sound- in fact it’s so loud that it was probably why the Collectors and the other Ynqaban all seem to jump, their heads whipping around to stare at Yoongi in escalating alarm and panic.

Or maybe it was the fact that Yoongi had activated the Heliords he had carried with him, the bright blue blades humming and shining neon bright, casting a sharp shadow to fall over him.

‘-oongi what’s going on-?!’

The Collector drops it. Fine locks of golden silver, of sun and starlight, falls slowly out of the Collector’s gnarled fingers in his surprise.

Jimin’s hair.
Overwhelmed with rage and pain, Yoongi charges through in a storm of neon blue.

Sk’jin comes to find that his would-be captors consisted of a group of broken families.

Bhān and his daughter Camat, A’āpyu and her brother Dilag who was an especially skilled pilot and driver, and another pair of brothers, Rejši and Lajši. They all appeared older than Sk’jin, though actually meeting anyone who could potentially be older than Sk’jin was probably very unlikely.

Upon entering their “residence”, a natural network of caves that branched not too deep into a tall mountainside, where a string of small orb-like objects illuminated the place, Sk’jin can finally study the odd group.

Masks off and their bulky protective clothing shed, they appeared malnourished and weak. Stick-like arms and disproportionately widened bellies that was very telling of some form of intestinal infection (Sk’jin internally shudders), and upon closer and clearer inspection, a strange stain over their skin that wasn’t natural yet seemed to seep into their very pores. But they moved and worked with strength and energy. They clearly made do with what they had, and lived as best as they could under their circumstances.

The cave is outfitted with shrapnel and devices that were all obviously scavenged and assimilated through years of collecting. Sleeping areas were lifted higher, further into the cave. The storage area, a caged area that obviously stored the most important items was right next to the sleeping area. Everywhere else was basically like a gigantic outdated and cluttered mechanics bay.

Sk’jin is a little fascinated with their lighting system. He could see no wires, no batteries, no cells.

Sk’jin is surprised with the medical supplies, they were a little out of date, but were powerful and effective. He hasn’t seen that particular model of TissuePlast but then again, he can’t exactly identify the timeline from which it might have come from seeing as he was out of action for quite some time.

Camat, still heavily cloaked and dressed is sitting opposite him, carefully rolling out the TissuePlast into equal lengths. Sk’jin is…for lack of a better word, disrobed.
He sighs at the sight of his ruined robes, folded in a heap of blood splatter, dust, and who knows what else. They’re looking for clothes for him to wear, mumbling as they check their sizes. The air was very strange. It had an acidic quality that Sk’jin finds vaguely alarming, justified by how his robes were faring, practically turning to bits and fragments with his movements. To stop him from ending up stark naked, they sat him down and told him to stay put. Sk’jin is a little surprised by the somewhat conservative consideration for his nudity.

The weather is odd- it’s damp, but not humid. It’s not exactly cold either and for some reason there’s a lack of air. It was windy, but it felt stuffy at the same time. It makes Sk’jin’s skin work up a sort of half-sweat, overall making him feel damp and it was a disgusting feeling. The first thing Sk’jin is going to do when he returns to the Užkulisai is to shower. Actually no. He’s first going to punch Yoongi, and then shower.

‘It’s very pretty,’ Camat tells him quietly as she places the TissuePlast over his very bruised and battered sides.

Sk’jin absentmindedly tongues at his weirdly empty gum sockets before asking, ‘What is?’

She points with her chin towards his robes. Thunder momentarily deafens Sk’jin, his ears filled with a high-pitched ping that fades away after a full minute. The others don’t seem effected but Sk’jin guesses that’s what happens with conditioning.

‘I’m sorry they’re ruined.’ She adds, looking at the fabric again.

Sk’jin sighs and shrugs, wincing a little at the pain.

‘It’s fine- I have more. Or I can buy more. Or better, ask my Captain to buy me more. He owes me.’

‘Is that a common practice for payment? Buying robes?’ she asks curiously, waiting for the TissuePlast to align to his wounds, the bioengineered fabric adjusting to Sk’jin’s injuries and changing its chemical balance to support and neutralize his inflamed skin.

‘Uh- I mean, it’s not a custom,’ Sk’jin grins, ‘It’s emotional blackmail.’

She looks confused and doesn’t ask anymore questions.

‘You’re not from Ynqaba are you?’ he asks instead.

She glances up at him, a sharp look in her eyes.

‘No,’ she replies. ‘But I’ve never been anywhere else.’

Sk’jin cannot rightly place her species, but feels as though he’s seen her kind before.

‘All right- everything is set. I can’t do anything about your teeth though,’ she tells him as she gets up.

‘Camat, do you have any bottoms he can wear?’ Bhān asks, holding up a somewhat not too badly stained and sort of clean tunic for Sk’jin along with a long dark hooded cloak.

‘Yeah okay,’ she nods, getting up and jogging over to another side of the cave.

‘This is the best we have- but it will last longer than that,’ he nods at Sk’jin’s robes.

‘Excuse me for trying to look aesthetically pleasing,’ Sk’jin grumbles, accepting the tunic that
though didn’t look at all like leather, felt a lot like it. Sk’jin decides he’s neither in the place or situation to wonder about the hygiene of the clothing and slips it over his head.

‘Hey, you almost look like one of us!’ Lajiši calls from his corner of the cave where he was sorting out the food they had raided from the Kitchens in the Užkulisai. Obviously the food is foreign to them, because Lajiši and his brother were attempting to understand how to consume one of the many packets of tea, their expressions bewildered.

‘You- you boil that with water- it’s a drink.’ Sk’jin tells them. ‘And probably poisoned.’

They gawk at him.

‘Why is your food poisoned.’

‘One of the crew members, you’ll love him, it’s kinda his hobby,’ Sk’jin explains, standing gingerly without help because obviously Bhān doesn’t care for him.

Expressions of doubt and confusion takes over and Sk’jin doesn’t blame them. Bhān is clearly not amused, judging by the gruff way he clears his throat.

Stretching a little, Sk’jin tests his injuries.

The Khol’isa were built of strong stuff, mildly put, and in all honesty, Sk’jin’s been through worse. What does irritate him is the empty feeling in his mouth. Now he was going to have to get fake teeth, all thanks to a scrawny puny Human. His headache is building again, and Sk’jin knows that none of the outdated pain-relief medication they had in here would help. He just needed sunlight, modern and very potent medication, and to annoy Namjoon for satisfaction.

Thunder erupts around them like a fucking bomb, shaking the cave a little and Sk’jin winces a little, his ears suffering. Flexing his weirdly damp bare legs, Sk’jin looks around for Camat who should be coming back with those trousers for him. He really doesn’t want to walk about without any trousers. He has a bit of a complex regarding his legs, not that he’d ever own up to it. Instead Camat has her back turned to them, also changing out into something else. And generally speaking Sk’jin is really not interested in any naked Being, regardless of gender, sex, or species. So seeing naked Beings really means nothing to him, though sometimes he’s offended because there were some things he really didn’t need to see. It’s in these moments where he wishes deleting selective memory was an actual thing that was possible. But regardless of how he felt, he understood and respected that most Beings did not appreciate being stared at while naked, regardless of how he felt about it. So he’s about to look away when something draws his attention rather abruptly.

For a second Sk’jin thinks it’s a trick of light but it’s not.

Down her back, is a deep indent beginning at the bottom of her nape and all the way down in a straight line over her spine.

Bhān appears, blocking Sk’jin’s observation and Sk’jin wonders how he’s going to explain that no, he was not ogling his daughter or anything of that sort, when the look in Bhān’s eyes were not accusatory or aggressive, but rather curious and at the same time knowing.

‘How long is the storm going to last,’ Sk’jin asks, looking away from Bhān and over at Camat who was now fully clothed again.

‘No more than 3 hours if our radars are right.’ Bhān replies.

‘In that case, how about we have that chat eh? From one oldie to another?’ Sk’jin looks away to
coolly eye the Ynqaban in front of him. He had after all, confirmed Sk’jin’s non-verbal inquiry from inside the Transporter.

‘Here- these should fit,’ Camat reappears, holding up a pair of draw-string trousers.

‘You are a breath of fresh air in this rankness,’ Sk’jin bows elegantly before taking the trousers. Camat’s eyes widen, a flush overtaking her features as she stammers a reply. Bhān is clearly not amused as he shoves Sk’jin away with a mumbling, ‘wear the fucking trousers’.

Appropriately dressed and pretty much shoved about until they arrived near the mouth of one of the entrances to the caves. The Transporter they had arrived in was parked and basically drip-drying, while a draining system with some form of rudimentary filtration system was funneling the collected liquid into hollow OrTanks.

‘So,’ Sk’jin smiles, getting to the main point as well. ‘Normally at this point in my culture, I would offer you a beverage. But seeing as I am a humble guest clothed in the garments of your house, I will ignore any offering of refreshments.’

Bhān shoots him an nonplussed look before he digs out a small compact bottle and throws it to Sk’jin. It doesn’t smell bad, but Sk’jin can tell it was probably not the cleanest or freshest.

‘You know who Camat is- or what she is.’ Bhān comments as he takes a seat next to him. ‘I saw the look of recognition in your eyes. The mark on her back- you’ve seen it before.’

‘Where did you find her?’ Sk’jin asks after he swallows, not denying Bhān’s statement but reigning in his own questions. If directed well, Bhān would easily spill his story to him. Sk’jin just needed to guide the conversation away from the hopeless-monologue—*you ain’t seen what I’ve seen kid*—talk and get the information he needed.

‘You look young,’ Bhān says without preamble.

‘I can only hope so,’ Sk’jin snorts, wondering where the Ynqaban was going with this.

‘But I can see.’

Sk’jin looks at him with a questioning expression. But the elderly Ynqaban just shakes his head.

‘When the Alliance first came to our System, they promised us protection- they promised us wealth, trade, a chance to improve, a chance to heal,’ Bhān tells him. ‘They came in their massive ships, filled with strange looking Beings who were there to help us develop and improve our lands, our oceans. We’re not…our System is not a healthy one. The planets are weak, not a lot of resources that we can use to survive or trade in. But our people, we were tough, hardy- we survived, we evolved- but it was tiring and strenuous. And no parent wants that for their child- but here we had the hope that our children would have a better world, a better System, to live and grow in. That’s what my parents wanted. But it wasn’t what they thought it would be.’

‘Was it slavery?’ Sk’jin asks.

Bhān looks surprised, ‘What? No- there was no slavery involved.’

It’s Sk’jin’s turn to be surprised.

‘What- wait, what do you mean there was no slavery involved. The Alliance is all about trafficking and slavery.’
Bhān pauses to give Sk’jin a searching look.

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about but the Alliance didn’t enslave us.’ Bhān tells him clearly. ‘We’ve heard about their other dealings of course - the pirates later brought information, and many of our own travelled outside as well. But we were never enslaved.’

That was very surprising.

‘So…what did they do?’

‘They said they would help us- but that we should also help them in return. This was expected of course, a trade can only work when other parties are involved.’

Sk’jin nods in agreement.

‘The Alliance consisted of many Beings, all of them looked different to each other - but I still remember their leader the clearest. He was extraordinary looking, and powerful - many worshipped him quite immediately as a god.’

‘I mean I guess being handsome has its quirks-‘

‘He could heal with a single touch of his hand,’ Bhān tells him with a roll of his eyes at Sk’jin’s previous comment.

‘He could what?’

‘He could heal - him, and many of his people, could heal at will.’

A shiver runs down Sk’jin’s spine.

‘He wanted the smartest, ablest, young minds of the population to be trained by them, to essentially work for them - transcribe our history, write down our languages, learn and experience other cultures - they wanted to educate us, and by doing so, educate themselves about us,’ Bhān explains.

Sk’jin wants to make a smart-ass comment but doesn’t. Of course they took the children to plant their propaganda and “education”- children’s minds were like sponges, absorbing and keeping all sorts of information. If you wanted to change a planet, start by changing the Beings who will live in it later. Instead he nods for Bhān to continue.

‘I was amongst them - and to answer your previous question, that’s how we came to speak “Standard” so well - it’s what many of us can only speak now. Our mother’s language is known to only some, and it’s not the original either.’ Bhān adds.

‘So what happened to you? You were educated weren’t you? Why are you saying it wasn’t what you expected to happen?’ Sk’jin asks, urging the narrative on faster.

‘We were taken to their ships, and while we were away, learning and educating ourselves, they were conducting research on not just the species, but on the planets.’

‘Planetary experimentation?’ Sk’jin is thoroughly confused. The Alliance never did things like that. At most they would go, raid some poor defenseless planet like what happened in Kutsoglera, and just leave it. They were only interested in the profit that came from slavery, not from planetary experimentation.

‘They placed massive devices in the atmosphere, they altered the weather, changed the
atmosphere. They drilled the surfaces of our lands, drilled deep into our oceans. They removed things, they put things- I still don’t know the full extent of what they actually did but…but slowly…” Bhān sighs out slowly. ‘Slowly things just started to die.’

‘You saw the moon as you came here?’ Bhān asks.

Sk’jin nods, his mind whirling with all of this information.

‘We didn’t do that- that came as a result of something they did. It just stopped moving- And after that, Ynqaba really started to fall apart- the storms hit, the atmosphere soured- we just…we just started to decay.’ Bhān pauses a while, staring at the dripping water. ‘We say we fought the Alliance and threw them down- but it was just…it was just timing I guess. Something went wrong with the ships- there was a temporary failure and over at Lowet, one of the ships actually detonated completely. So the leader went there, leaving behind the ship docked here. And for a while, we already knew something was wrong- we could already sense that they were bringing us harm. So many threw themselves forward, and they overwhelmed the ship. There weren’t a lot of them-those who came with the leader. So it was easy to overthrow their defenses once they got into the ships. One of them crashed not too far from here, and ended the experiments. But the effects still lasted. One by one, the Alliance was overthrown, and they were defeated.’

‘What happened to your god?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘I don’t know- no one can know for sure,’ he shrugs.

‘You said they experimented on the people? What happened?’ Sk’jin presses.

Bhān gives him another keen look.

‘It was not what you could call a biological or physical experimentation,’ he says carefully. ‘What they did to the planet, was related quite directly to how it effected the people…when we- the ones who were taken into the ships, would return, we noticed how strange everyone had become-…a sort of…alteration, in who they were. Almost like hypnosis.’

‘I’m surprised you didn’t kill me instantly considering Ynqaban history,’ Sk’jin grins, leaning back gingerly. ‘I basically did something like hypnosis.’

‘I know the difference,’ Bhān tells him rather absentmindedly, as though reliving something deep in his memories before he snorts and looks up, ‘Oh- I know you’re a dangerous Being Sk’jin,’ Bhān smiles wryly at him. ‘But I felt no threat from you. Malice, anger, pain yes but…you have no threat in you.’

Sk’jin would be offended. He was plenty threatening, thank you very much.

‘There was a strange uniformity- a sort of echo in how they functioned,’ Bhān shrugs as though unsure himself. ‘It was weird- they would suddenly all do something alike, behave the same, or all suddenly go blank- and then nothing.’

‘Were they aware of what was happening,’ Sk’jin asks tensely, already not liking where this was going and what it was implying.

‘They were- it’s why they revolted,’ Bhān answers easily.

‘How are the other planets faring?’ Sk’jin asks, remembering what Khonen had said about their planet and how it was dying from intense famine and hunger.
‘The same, worse, better,’ Bhān scratches at his face with a sigh. ‘We’re all just…just trying to recover- of course, some places are better. Ynqaba never had much of a chance in the beginning- we were one of the poorest planets in the System- and then all that happened. It’s a miracle we’ve come here.’

‘Yeah- a whole fucking miracle,’ Sk’jin mumbles under his breath before asking, ‘And then what? I think I heard the mention of governments or something.’

Bhān actually lets out a loud ha! before chortling to himself.

‘There were those, who were driven by their anger and rage, to try and reform what happened- and it worked for a while. We weren’t a very strong planet, neither were we very advanced, but we had good strong cities, and later those changed into factories- news must have got out, and the pirates came. We sold what resources and materials we could scavenge from the Alliance ships and exchanged them for what we could obtain to fix our lives. We tried to bring back our planets to what they were- we reinstated our government- improved it even. And then well- you can’t sustain an economy off of nothing, and you can’t trade if you have nothing to sell.’

‘So the government revolts started? Civil wars? Fighting for resources?’ Sk’jin quips.

Bhān nods and the gestures around them, ‘And here we are.’

‘What was all that fighting over above your atmosphere?’ Sk’jin inquires. ‘They really fucked me and my ship over you know?’

‘It was a fight between Ynqaba and Lowet- the neighbouring planet- they decided to raid us,’ Bhān rolls his eyes. ‘They’re worse off than us.’

‘So how did you come across Camat?’ Sk’jin asks without preamble.

‘You’ve seen her kind before?’

‘Yes,’ Sk’jin replies. It’s not a lie because though Sk’jin doesn’t exactly recognize her specific species, he does recognize her make- and that was the same as Yoongi.

‘I was scavenging alone,’ Bhān explains. ‘Before I met with A’a’pyu and her little group. The ships have become…a sort of port- for everyone to gather around, to recreate a sense of community- to live together. It’s better off in there, shelter, safety from the weather, a better flow of food. Those who are in there have better deals as well in terms of trade.’

‘Then why not live in there?’ Sk’jin asks, knowing the answer.

‘I found Camat by mistake- I don’t think anyone other than the Collectors were supposed to know of her. Or her kind.’

‘There were more of her?’

‘A whole room,’ Bhān replies. ‘Or Tanks stacked over each other in long rows-…they were just…there. It was so odd- it felt…it felt wrong.’

Sk’jin can understand that all too well as he nods again.

‘I was just there to steal provisions- I had nothing that week, nothing to trade. And I knew where they kept store, where they kept their goods. And I was once young, able- I was fast, quiet- I just needed some provisions, but I found her instead.’ Bhān explains. ‘And I also found them.’
The hair on the back of Sk’jin’s neck stands on end.

‘I really wasn’t supposed to be there- and to this day, I still don’t know who or what they are…’ Bhān shudders, ‘I couldn’t see their faces- but they spoke in “Standard”- they were making deals with the Collectors at that time. They took the OrTanks with them, and I haven’t seen them since.’

Bhān sighs out slowly, ‘I followed the Collectors after that. I noticed that there would be times when they would leave to go on “meetings” with other Collectors. It took me a long time, but then I found them all, heading far too deep into the Corrupted Zones.’

‘Corrupted Zones?’ Sk’jin repeats.

‘The main areas where the Alliance conducted their experiments- it’s too toxic, too dangerous there; is what they told us. And maybe it was before- but not anymore… then they went in with their cybertronics. The Alliance’s devices still existed there, all too strong for them to breach or take apart with what they had…I stayed behind after they left and I investigated the area myself.’ Bhān turns to face Sk’jin properly who leans back a little, a little surprised by the change in posture. ‘The area was rotting, the ground soft and in many places sinkholes caved the down so I was extremely careful. There were pods, or at least what appeared to be small Transporters of some sort…some were all opened, some were still secured. I don’t know for how long I walked there, but I counted a total of 11 pods, and 4 had been emptied. The final one I came across before I got too spooked was sinking slowly. I didn’t have to look inside to know what was there- the idea of …the idea of all of them just sinking- just disappearing into that blackness…’ Bhān trails off.

‘I don’t know how they got there, or what they were. But that’s where I found Camat- the pods were surprisingly easy to open and… she was just a child, so small, encased and helpless- I just…I couldn’t do anything. I knew I couldn’t save all of them- I couldn’t…I didn’t even know why I was doing what I did- I just took her, and I just left.’

Bhān turns in his seat, looking behind him and into the cave where Sk’jin could hear them talking around, in good spirits apparently as they had raided a lot of food. Sk’jin absentmindedly keeps a mental note to empty out their second pantry and give them all of their food when they return him to the Užkulisai and maybe give Camat one of his robes.

‘How long did it take for her to wake up?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘Wake up?’ Bhān repeats, ‘No- I broke the OrTank.’

‘…you what?!’ Sk’jin splutters belatedly.

‘I broke the OrTank- I was worried- I didn’t know what she was encased in, how long it would last, was it in fact poisoning her? I didn’t know- so I broke it. And she woke up an hour or so later.’ Bhān replies with a frown. ‘And since then I’ve raised her as my own. We can’t go live in the ports, because the Collectors will want to take her. Some of the patrol units know about her- but they think she’s just deformed- maybe mutated. That’s not exactly uncommon here.’

‘Do you know what happened to the rest?’

‘I went back- I went back many times.’ Bhān sighs out. ‘They were completely empty. Only the pods remained. The entire area has sunken now- there’s nothing left.’

‘Do you still have the OrTank in which Camat was kept?’

‘No- I destroyed all of the evidence,’ Bhān replies with a shake of his head before he levels Sk’jin with a determined heavy gaze. ‘How do you know about this.’
Sk’jin pauses for a moment. He couldn’t tell this Ynqaban everything of course- but refusal to do so could lead to a lot of trouble and Sk’jin isn’t strong enough to take down 6 Beings.

‘I’m on a mission from the GLA,’ Sk’jin tells him easily. ‘I am investigating the Alliance and other related organizations. We believe that they’re involved in a very serious crime against the Known Universe and we’re tracking their possible relations with third-parties.’

‘But the Alliance is done-‘

‘What you saw wasn’t the full extent of the Alliance,’ Sk’jin tells him with a shake of his head. He decides not to tell him that they were most definitely not the Alliance either. ‘Just a small portion- they still exist today. And we’re trying to put an end to them.’

‘You mentioned slavery.’

‘Yes- it’s their main “business” you could say.’ Sk’jin replies.

There’s movement behind them and one of the brothers, Rejši appears.

‘Storms dying out- we can leave.’

‘That was faster than I expected,’ Bhān remarks.

Sk’jin frowns, eyeing the small bit of opening he could see from where he sat. It was still storming very hard, so he’s not sure what either of them mean by “dying out”. Regardless, he still follows them after they’ve packed up again and pell-mell fall into the back of the Transporter.

And to Sk’jin’s complete amazement, the weather has cleared. So much so it was almost as though it hadn’t even rained. The ground didn’t even appear wet. Camat wiggles her eyebrows at him, clearly amused by how shocked he was with the way the weather changed. He pulls a funny face at her and she bursts out laughing.

The ride back is nothing like how it was before. There’s conversation, laughter, and even an attempt at singing from Dilag who is promptly shut up by his sister’s fingers, pulling at his ears harshly. They swerve dangerously and Bhān barks at them for order, which they both listen to grudgingly. Sk’jin shares his stories- funny anecdotes from his past, not giving away much. Camat listens to him with rapt attention while the brothers join in with loud laughter at his punch-lines and puns. Bhān even chuckles a few times, though he looks like he regrets it every time.

Despite their appearance, Sk’jin reckons they were all probably less than 50 sols old.

It’s a sad, Sk’jin bitterly reflects. It’s also almost nostalgic.

The rough and easy banter, the individual compatibility- the lack of tension, their combined trust within each other; it’s painfully nostalgic.

The drive back is much shorter than Sk’jin had imagined it would be, but he guesses it might be because of the weather, which though definitely not sunny and clear skies, was much lighter and less damp than before.

Lajši is cracking a joke when they arrive, and Sk’jin is wheezing a little too much to actually really notice at first.

‘Uh- Sk’jin?’ Dilag calls from the front.
Sk’jin turns around mid-laugh at the sound of his name and stops abruptly.

The crater is still there from where they crashed in, and Sk’jin can very easily see the tell-tale signs of the Užkulisai’s take-off around the area.

Quite abruptly, Sk’jin starts laughing hysterically, clapping his hands loudly. He notices how the others are giving him worried and wary looks again. Wiping the tears from his eyes, Sk’jin manages to gasp out, ‘I’m definitely going to kill Yoongi!’

They give him a wide birth, amused and worried in the way they regard him as they decide it was better to keep moving rather than stay at the crater. They had given Sk’jin some time outside to scream and kick at the dirt.

It’s relieving, but also a little embarrassing in hindsight. But Sk’jin does feel a little better and when he comes back to the Transporter roughly apologizes for the drama.

‘We’ll take the mountain pass this time- the rain might have uncovered some extra shrapnel,’ Rejši calls from beside Dilag as they start up the Transporter. ‘We might be able to see if your ship’s been taken into one of the ports.’

‘I want to see the new ship that’s crashed,’ Camat puts in eagerly.

There’s a chorus of “no”s and she grumbles, sitting down with a comic frown. Sk’jin snorts and pats her head.

‘Is it safe?’ Sk’jin asks, clearing his throat.

‘Don’t worry,’ Lajši chimes in, ‘Dilag is an excellent pilot- he’ll get us through the mountain.’

‘I wasn’t worried about the mountain exactly,’ Sk’jin retorts dryly but trusts the locals to the terrain anyways. He’s quite sure they wouldn’t sell him out so he’s a bit more relaxed. Giving him time to be irritated again.

Yoongi took the ship and left.

He actually left.

Would they come back? Would any of them come back?

‘Do you think it’s safe for anyone of you to go check if my ship or crew are somehow inside one of the ports?’ Sk’jin asks.

Bhān shrugs, ‘Can’t say for sure- I’m pretty sure A’āpyu is still welcomed inside the port.’

‘It depends on the “mood”,’ she explains. ‘We’ll check and see if it’s okay to go take a look. If not I can’t make promises.’

‘I understand,’ Sk’jin sighs out.

‘Hey- this is good,’ A’āpyu she says kindly. ‘It means that he’s all right. He’s safe if he can still pilot the ship. You said that only the crew could fly it right?’

Sk’jin nods in confirmation, irritation bubbling inside of him.

‘You’ll get back to your crew- a crew is like a family,’ Lajši nods wisely. ‘We don’t leave family behind.’
That stings. It really does.

Sk’jin can only nod in agreement.

*Guess we really aren’t family,* he thinks, wondering how Jimin was faring.

‘You can stay until you can get back,’ Bhān says unexpectedly. ‘You’re doing something beyond any of us here- beyond what any of us will ever hope to understand- it’s important you survive and keep going on. Don’t give up just yet.’

Sk’jin wonders what expression was on his face for him to receive such a comment. He nods numbly again.

They pass the city on the side of mountain again, apparently it was run by some truly odd nightly Ynqabans who created a sort of toxin they inhaled, giving them “powers”. Bhān just rolled his eyes, mumbling something about stupidity and addiction.

The mountain pass was well- there was no pass. It was just a mountain side and it just so happened Dilag was exceptionally talented in driving and piloting the 8-wheeled Transporter over the terrain. At one point, they’re almost entirely sideways. A’āpyu curses, clearly not enjoying it while her brother cackles at her from the front. Camat laughs with the pilot, thoroughly amused.

‘What are you looking for?’ Sk’jin asks as they finally start driving over flatter terrain.

‘All that space-battle, and what happened before- you can randomly find materials and shrapnel-good for exchange,’ Lajši explains as he hands him a mask. ‘The mountains are always a little misty, so you’ll need a mask. Makes talking difficult though- you really have to shout.’

‘What makes you think I want to step outside,’ Sk’jin grumbles though he takes the mask.

They continue to drive, merry conversation and jokes flying about.

There’s a weird feeling inside Sk’jin’s chest as he looks around the Transporter. For a moment, he almost feels like he wants to forget the mission. Forget the GLA, forget everything. He glances at Bhān who is listening with disgusted incredulity over something gross Lajši is describing to him. The elderly Ynqaban catches his eye and Sk’jin somehow knows that if he chose to stay, then Bhān wouldn’t say no.

Should he stay back?

For all they knew, for all the GLA knew, he was dead at this point. The ship was gone. Yoongi was gone. Jimin was possibly not even alive anymore. Namjoon and Hoseok could potentially have been captured. And then Taeh’yung-…he would be all right.

‘What’s happened here?’ Dilag mumbles out loud and then lets out a laugh. ‘Well fuck me sideways but will you check that out.’

‘No one is fucking anyone sideways- woah…’ A’āpyu whistles before laughing. ‘Serves them right.’

Sk’jin looks up from his hands to peer out from over A’āpyu’s shoulders.

It’s quite the sight if he’s being honest too.

What appeared to be 3 huge cybortronics were stacked over each other in a way that was
technically impossible, and trapped inside them were several unconscious Ynqabans.

‘What in the fuck-’ Bhān whispers.

‘I’m not saying we do this,’ Dilag says slowly. ‘But this is a great opportunity and those are some pretty decent cybortronics.’

‘I’m saying we do this,’ A’āpyu orders at once. ‘Even if it’s just one- that’s still good enough to take apart. We can take it to the next port over.’

They’re gearing up in seconds and opening the doorway.

‘Come on Sk’jin!’ Camat calls after him. ‘Let’s go-

Her voice is instantly muffled as she wears the mask.

Sk’jin steps out gingerly, looking around the mountain side with some distaste. He feels a tap on his shoulder and finds Bhān there. He nods towards the side and Sk’jin follows.

They walk some ways from the strange sight and over to a much more open mountain side that’s surprisingly wide and offered a clear but still misty view of the blackened mountains. But that’s when Sk’jin realizes it’s not a mountain. Frowning he squints a little, adjusting the mask over his face properly and cursing at the scratched visor of his facemask.

A Yisheng ship.

That was 100% most definitely a Yisheng ship.

Swallowing thickly, Sk’jin walks further out into the clearing. Something felt strangely off. Reaching the edge, Sk’jin studies the Yisheng ship far below. It had crashed right into the mountain-side, and then promptly melted into it. You could barely tell it apart except for the large print at the side that was still legible despite all of the years of erosion.

Things were really starting to add up based on what Bhān had told him. The elderly Ynqaban stands next to him, also observing the place.

‘Alliance,’ Bhān sighs out before walking back to help them take apart the cybortronics.

Sk’jin just stares, his mind oddly blank.

The Yisheng had come to this System, under the pretense of being the Alliance, and had essentially destroyed billions of lives. For what?

And then the eggs were there. Bhān didn’t know what it was, but Sk’jin knew at once from his description that he was talking about escape pods. That’s what those pods had been. And inside them were the OrTanks. Released for safety measure when the Yisheng ship started to malfunction.

‘Hey! Sk’jin! Come look here!’

Sk’jin tears his eyes away from the mountain/ship and back to where the others were gathered, pulling out and dropping their fellow Ynqaban without much care or thought. Whoever placed them in there had cared enough that they wouldn’t be in harms way…

Sk’jin pauses, a strange feeling creeping over him. He looks down at the ground and then all around.
Clear marks and indications of some large vessel was imprinted all over the black and sandy floor. Deep indents of landing pads, heat blasts from beamer-engines. Turning around again, Sk’jin eyes the mountain, heart hammering in his chest. Then he stares back at the sight of the cybortronics.

Yoongi couldn’t do that alone. He was a terrifyingly skilled and strong Being yes- but he didn’t have the ability to tie up and stack the cybortronics over each other like they were toys.

_Taeh’yung._

That meant Namjoon. And Hoseok.

They were all here. They met Yoongi, clearly, and they were on the ship. They were here. Not too long ago. Wildly, Sk’jin takes to spinning around, looking all over the mountain side, towards the Yisheng ship, and into the skies. He can sense the puzzlement coming from the others but he ignores it.

Sk’jin’s heart leaps to his throat when he catches a glimpse of the Užkulisai flying high above over the Yisheng ship.

It was them. They were here.

And they had all _left without him_.

‘Hey! What’s this?’ Camat shouts loudly, holding up a familiar OrTank casing. Sk’jin would know the design of course- even from where he stood he recognizes the make and stylization of all the devices that belonged to the Užkulisai because he’s had to archive and go through each and every single one to make sure none of them were were altered with tags or trackers.

Suddenly the tracks on the ground, the cybortronics containing neatly bound and gagged Ynqabans makes sense. Everything adds up.

It all happens too quickly and yet too slowly.

Camat opens the OrTank case, her expression curious under her mask as she tugs on something inside.

‘**Camat NO-!**’

Camat vanishes in a bright flash and the mountain comes down right after.
(Author’s Notes)
I swear to god, every time I listen to the Tear album and I reach the end and Outro plays I just f u c k i n g pray to god and thank her for rapline. So yeah this chapter.
I beg for your forgiveness, please expect great things next week!!! My updates will be like, every 10 days or so? Something like that ^_^ someone asked me on tumblr about my schedule so it's around every 10 days!
And thank you so much to all the people who have commented, sent me messages, and recommended me!! It really motivates me to write and I’m so happy that what I do for fun is by extension providing other people with momentary joy and distraction from their lives.
Thank you so much!!!
“Disarm” [verb]: take a weapon or weapons away from.

Chapter Notes

also, if you want ambience music, look no further

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yoongi is half-conscious, his mind and body reeling, pulling away from the sheer will-power that held him together. The mountain isn’t all too high- it appeared dauntingly high, ominous and dark when Yoongi had been lucid enough to properly behold it. But after what felt like a few minutes of closing his eyes to rest, he was in the middle of climbing up the dark rocks and edges. But no matter where he found himself, Jimin was there.

Every time he opened his eyes, Jimin was there.

They’re on the side of a mountain, resting as much as they could before they had to inevitably move again.

There was no point, Yoongi knows. Deep down he knew from the moment he laid eyes on them- there would be no escape, there would be no release. But he needs to do this, not for anything else, but to give himself something concrete to do- something to achieve.

And maybe, if he held on long enough, he could somehow save Jimin.

He knows it doesn’t make sense. That it was unlikely. And maybe him continuing like this was in fact endangering Jimin even more. Jimin was still relatively healthy- and he had been in hiding before. Maybe he could escape.

He wants to tell Jimin to leave him, to save himself.

But Yoongi has always been a little selfish.

When Yoongi opens his eyes after what felt like just a few minutes of resting, he finds himself inside a little alcove, carved into the mountainside after years of corrosion and expansion. Jimin is there, eyes looking upwards towards the cloudy and ruddy sky. Yet his eyes are filled with stars.

He’s beautiful.

Painfully so.

But even with his body and mind giving up on him, Yoongi can recognize the longing in Jimin’s
eyes. Recognize the pain of being torn away from his home, of being in a place where he had no control, no say.

There was so much more to this, so much more than he could have known. So much more than Amic could have known. So much more than the Captain could have expected.

What could they do, when the manifestation of death was stalking them, was taking over this planet? And maybe Yoongi was only Human- he didn’t have any special ability, any special senses; Humans were listed as some of the weakest species in the Known Universe

‘I’m sorry,’ Yoongi tells him quietly.

Jimin is startled at his words, clearly not expecting him to be awake. He shifts closer, his head tilting questioningly. It makes Yoongi want to smile, knowing that Jimin was leaning closer as though hoping that the proximity would help him understand.

‘Sorry,’ Yoongi tells him again, not sure how he had the strength to smile.

‘Saw...saw-ree?’ Jimin repeats haltingly.

Maybe his fevered thoughts and yearnings for another time, where they were safe together actually existed. Didn’t Humans, at one point, believe that all life lived over and over again, how souls and spirits were always meeting, in every lifetime, in every era- one continuous loop, one continuous series of meetings, of living, of loving, of crying, of running, screaming, bleeding, laughing.

One continuous series of just dying.

Yoongi could laugh. He could curse at his luck with this lifetime. Was it luck? Was it fate.

Or was it something else entirely.

Would he see Jimin again in another life? Would he find him again?

He had to. There was no other option. Not after this.

Not after all of this.

He has to find Jimin again. He has to make everything right.

‘I’ll make everything all right,’ he promises. ‘I’ll make everything all right.’

Yoongi is somehow aware of the rest of the climb. Aware of every pained step, of every strained breath. Aware of all the cuts, wounds, gashes that appear over his skin, seeping through the fabric of his clothes. But Yoongi can’t stop it anymore than he can stop his own injuries. He’s aware as they enter what appeared to be a sort of communications tower, the large signal-chargers long deactivated and corroded to its very core, the wires broken and eaten away, covered in years of decay and rot.

Jimin is somehow able to open the door and Yoongi has no control over his body.

He collapses the moment he crosses over the threshold and everything turns blissfully black for a while before the solar eclipse wakes him up again. He feels rather cold and he feels his body being moving around, his arms and legs moving on their own.

When he stops moving, he realizes his bags and equipment have been removed and he catches sight of them, propped up to the side. Jimin is looking over him, desperation and fear etched all over his
His expression suddenly reminds Yoongi of the day he left Earth, bidding his sister goodbye.

There was a promise he couldn’t keep. A promise he wouldn’t be able to fulfill.

What would the GLA say to his family? What would his mother say? What would his sister do?

He points towards his bag, hoping Jimin would understand. He brings back the bag, pulling out the communications booster-device which was now entirely pointless considering this station was dead. So he just shakes his head, smiling in apology at Jimin. It takes a moment, but Jimin pulls out the empty cigarette packet, hands carefully peeling the main cover as though worried he was going to damage the years old packaging of paper and flimsy packaging.

In this dark and ruddy room, where the only untainted light came from Jimin’s eyes and still soft-looking hair, another source of colour and light fills his sight and Yoongi’s heart shatters even more. His entire being is tearing apart and he wants nothing more than to just sit on the balcony floors, where the woodwork had faded due to sun-exposure, listening to the sound of the kettle bubbling on the stove because his mother always had hot water at the ready. For emergencies, she had said. He just wanted to sit outside, listening with amusement at his sister’s shrill screams as her favorite television series suddenly decided to take a dramatic turn in plot.

Her hairclip falls into Jimin’s palm, glittery and small, still perfectly preserved, not a single sequence out of place. Jimin studies it for a while, the light reflecting off of the small glittery ornament in tiny purple stars across his face. He hands it to Yoongi, hands shaking.

He asks a question, quietly, carefully. He’s obviously asking about the clip, what it was, who did it belong to, why did he have it on him?

But that would take too much time to explain. It would take too much time to tell Jimin all about his mother, his sister, their home, about Earth. It would take too much time and Yoongi wishes with all his heart, all of his being to just show Jimin all of this.

Take him back to Earth, take him through the streets down in-planet, take him through the markets, show him all the “tourist” spots that are only there for show and not for any functional use other than to rob you of your units. He wants to take Jimin to the cafés, to show him that one bakery where they make really good croissants. Would he like croissants? Probably would. Everyone loves croissants.

Yoongi takes the clip and puts it on to his hair with shaking hands. Jimin is quick to help him, gently setting it into his matted strands. Jimin looks terrified and heartbroken. And Yoongi is a little selfish because he wants to see him smile.

So he strikes a pose, a terrible one in fact. Jimin is crying, tears sparkling down his cheeks, nodding as he tries to smile. He says something, as though indulging Yoongi in his little fevered attempts to create a lighter atmosphere. It makes Yoongi laugh, and this in turn makes Jimin smile for real. His eyes crinkling, smile wide enough to push up his cheeks.

‘Sunshine,’ Yoongi holds his hand out towards Jimin, confident that he would take it.

Jimin is quick to take his proffered hand, and instead of just holding it, presses it to his face.

What Yoongi would do to have this for the rest of his life. To feel Jimin like this- close, intimate, and so precious.
But Yoongi would disregard all of that, if it meant Jimin could be safe. If it meant he could return home, away from this place, away from this disease, away from all of this pain.

But Yoongi has always been a little selfish. He’s always been a little greedy, wanting more, needing more. Knowing full well that he shouldn’t. That he couldn’t.

Or that he didn’t deserve it.

But he pushes all thoughts aside. Pushes everything away. Pushes away this dank room, pushes away the thinning air, pushes away the sounds of his failing mind and body. Pushes away the fact that his vision was now dimming at an alarming pace.

With what energy he could, he gently strokes the thin and soft skin under Jimin’s eye.

‘I’ll always find you, so wait for me,’ Yoongi tells him quietly, ‘my sunshine.’

Jimin is understandably confused, not sure what to say in response. He wishes Jimin could understand. But maybe it was better he didn’t.

Instead he tugs on their hands, pulling Jimin closer. He shuffles closer, his face occupying most of his sight.

Yoongi is selfish, and he knows this. But he won’t stop himself.

He leans up just a little- enough so that their lips touch, meeting for a small light kiss.

‘I’ll always find you.’ He repeats, looking deep into his eyes, looking deep into the solar eclipses that now rule his universe.

His sight is fading, and Yoongi has always wondered how it would be to know, to be aware, that you were dying.

He doesn’t have to wonder about it anymore, because death was an all too familiar state of being for him. And now it was coming for him.

Yoongi sense them before he sees them. Before Jimin is even remotely aware- he feels them coming for him, his soul, his mind.

His memories.

He wants to warn Jimin but he was no longer in control of anything. Jimin is crying, his tears falling onto his chest and they feel like rocks, crushing him under every drop, carving out a permanent space to lodge themselves into his very being. Jimin holds him like he doesn’t want to let go- like he can’t let go.

And Yoongi doesn’t want to go. He knows that they’re coming, but he doesn’t want to go. He won’t-

In a nauseating rush, Yoongi feels himself being torn away- was his soul torn out? His body scattered?

All he knows is that they’re here- and they stood tall, like looming crumbling towers over him, impossibly large, impossibly tall- red bleeding out of them, crushing him in wispy clouds of red odour.

‘Y-you can’t touch him,’ Yoongi manages to whisper out.
Had he spoken the words or were they just resounding in his mind? In his soul?

‘You will not touch him.’

They just look down at him. Curious almost.

Then one by one, they move away from his view- terror like he’s never felt before rushes through his body. Terror for Jimin- terror that they will find him, terror that Jimin will do something terribly brave, but terribly stupid.

He thrashes, a sudden energy surging from him as he sheds his body- sheds his mind. His soul breaches through the tangible restraints of his movement and pure terror drives him across the red oppression.

‘JIMIN-!’

The light around him flashes, and the air pulses around him, suppressing him and crushing him, pushing him far away.

‘No-!’

His body stretches- breaking down into impossible formation across an endless expanse of cold darkness. His mind drawn and his memories are suddenly written in starlight that can be heard- a melody, a song- one that trembles each time a note ascends to a colour Yoongi has memorized- neither silver or gold, neither cold or warm.

‘I’ll come back- I’ll come back- wait for me-‘

The music stops abruptly and blackened hands appear through the colours and the song- the stars dim, the eclipse fades, and Yoongi is lost.

He struggles one last time- one last surge- crying and reaching out for the song that surges forward to meet him, stars turning into supernova in their attempt to reach for him- ‘I WILL COME BACK TO YO-‘

*I*

‘I think I’m close,’ Yoongi reports.

‘I’ve finished planting the explosive- we’re ready to come get you and Jimin,’ Hoseok replies as he settles the empty OrTank into a small crevice along the mountain side. According to Namjoon’s calculations, planting it here would bring one side of the mountain towards the back down, possibly creating a few landslides and triggering a quake that would spook the Ynqabans enough to be in chaos. According to their calculations and observations, there were no living settlements in that area either, so Namjoon had given his approval. It would create enough of a bang to resonate
quite loudly over the rather flat terrain, and that was what they needed. Looking away from the small but powerful explosive now neatly tucked next to a black rock, he glances up at the sky above.

‘Also- I don’t know how this will effect anything, but it looks like it’s gonna storm really hard.’

The mist had cleared to one side, the sky lightening somewhat from the area they had initially found the crashed Užkulisai. Considering the usage of masks, the gear, and the general corrosion that was plenty over the area and undoubtedly over the entire planet, Hoseok doesn’t think getting caught up in this storm would be a good idea. He glances down at the unconscious Ynqaban, bound and gagged all too enthusiastically by Taeh’yung. They were certainly not taking them into the ship, but they couldn’t leave them out here, exposed to the storm.

‘What do we do about them?’ he asks, looking up and over at the Užkulisai where Namjoon stood by the windows, tying up the Ynqaban they had chosen to interrogate. Namjoon had definitely changed when it came to situations like these, moving forward with a grim understanding and a sense of acceptance that spoke far more than his actions or lack thereof.

Taeh’yung appears around the corner, hands sooty and blackened from doing Spaces knew what. He’s also holding a “claw”, one of the retractable mechanical claws from one of the cybortronics. He clearly took a fancy to it and Hoseok doesn’t want to know what he was going to do with it.

‘Why don’t we put them inside the machine and lock them in? I think they’re strong enough?’ the Zhak’gri suggests, pointing at the heap of cybortronics to the side, looking a lot like pot-bellied Beings all over each other in a drunken slump.

‘Yeah- let’s do that.’ Namjoon nods from the inside, waving to indicate that he was done tying up the Ynqaban.

‘You mean I should do that,’ Hoseok rolls his eyes as he easily picks up the scraggly and unconscious Ynqaban and hauls them over his shoulder. Namjoon sheepishly mumbles an apology before calling Taeh’yung to collect the Ynqaban from inside the ship.

Hoseok doesn’t want to look all too closely at the unconscious Ynqaban. War and conflict between pirates was one thing, but internal conflict within a planet, within a species, within its people was something else entirely. There was pain that was somehow much more pronounced, much more personal, and infinitely crueler.

‘I’ll help you Hobi!’ Taeh’yung beams as he reappears, unconscious Ynqaban floating along behind him. He then proceeds to quite easily gathering the remaining unconscious Ynqabans into the neon green triangle, not unlike what Hoseok had seen in the slaver ship. Spaces, that felt like it took place sols ago.

Putting them in pairs, Hoseok stuffs the Ynqabans into the cockpit of the cybortronics. It was fascinating and Hoseok wishes he had more time to actually analyze the mechanics and systems behind the cybortronics. It was almost entirely mechanical, with a system of self-reliant, static-based mechanics that was quite energy sufficient to an extent.

He doesn’t want them using these cybortronics to come after them or to possibly set up an attack against them so Hoseok quickly tears off the mainframe wires and dislodges what looked and he hopes are the control-panels. Throwing them out into the ground outside, Hoseok climbs out and pulls down the heavy clear casing over the cockpit and makes sure it’s shut properly. Taeh’yung is waiting for him, arms held up and wide as though expecting Hoseok to jump.
It makes him want to laugh and with an amused grin calls down, ‘I’m not jumping down Tae, but I still appreciate the suggestion.’

Taeh’yung pulls a grumpy expression that’s more adorable than irritated but steps aside nonetheless. Hoseok climbs down, jumping onto the sandy black floor without so much as raising the dust.

‘Next time I’ll catch you!’ Taeh’yung tells him with a serious nod. Hoseok isn’t sure if that’s a promise or a threat.

‘Sure thing buggy,’ Hoseok chortles, patting the tall Zhak’gri’s arm.

‘If you’re close to one of the entrances, you should be able to find the central-Bridge quickly- they all connect to it. It’s where “The Collectors” stay.’ Namjoon tells Yoongi. ‘They’re kind of the bosses- I have a feeling they’re the ones who sell off the parcels to the pirates. Or at least handle that part of the transaction.’

‘Should I get rid of them.’

‘No Yoongi,’ Hoseok can clearly see Namjoon facepalming. He was doing that a lot. ‘Please stay low and do not engage unless strictly necessary.’

‘Come on, let’s get going bug,’ Hoseok calls Taeh’yung who had stayed rooted, eyeing the cybortronics like one would eye some art display.

‘Sk’jin’s tracker is moving again,’ Namjoon says quietly. ‘But there’s something off about it- I think it might be a storm somewhere close-by- it’s causing a lot of issues with the signal frequency.’

Hoseok pulls out his own screen, wiping at the misty surface and internally praying no damage would come to it from the exposure to the acidic mist around them. The tracker screen glitches sporadically, and Sk’jin’s marker blinks in and out, appearing at random all over the map.

‘What do we do?’ Hoseok asks with worry. They had seen him being taken away; perhaps to another similarly crashed Ynqaban fort. If they knew who he was, there was no doubt that the Ynqaban would want to call for some expensive exchange or transaction. But if Sk’jin was able and conscious, he would undoubtedly be able to survive. Hoseok is still shocked that Yoongi would leave Sk’jin behind like that- that the Human would actually just leave all of them behind. He’s also shocked to hear about how Sk’jin had flown the ship out, knowing full well Jimin wasn’t secured, when the entire mission was based solely around him.

‘We have to settle our priorities,’ Namjoon says tersely. ‘We need to retrieve Jimin first- Sk’jin is more than capable of protecting himself. Who knows, he might be insulted that we’re even worried about him.’

Hoseok smiles wryly at that. That was a possibility. He could also possibly greet them with annoyance, maybe lecture them about being late.

‘Lisai, keep Sk’jin’s tracker on top priority and the moment you get a clear line, inform me at once.’

‘Understood Captain.’

‘He’s probably giving his captors a run for their lives,’ Hoseok chortles, pausing midstride to call Taeh’yung along, seeing as the Zhak’gri hadn’t followed him. ‘Taeh’y-!!’
The Zhak’gri is brushing his hands together as though dusting them, a pleased smile on his face, clearly satisfied with himself. He notices Hoseok’s stunned expression and holds up two thumb’s up before skipping over.

‘Cool right?’ he asks delightedly, gesture towards the now neatly stacked cybortronics towards the side of the mountain, below a cliff face.

‘They’ll be away from the explosion! So Namjoon doesn’t have to feel guilty!’ Taeh’yung looks like he’s expecting some form of praise.

‘Um-…yeah, that’s really good buggy,’ Hoseok swallows, eyes narrowing as he looks for the fissure where the explosive was placed. ‘You didn’t move anything else?’

‘Nopes!’

‘All right….uh, good job,’ Hoseok pats Taeh’yung higher head, fluffing up the dark strands. Taeh’yung grins brightly before taking his hand in his own and swinging it between them as he merrily pulled them back to the Užkulisai. ‘My hands are shaking.’ Is Yoongi’s extraordinarily calm statement.

‘What-‘

‘What? Are you okay?’ Namjoon asks immediately.

‘I don’t know. I feel strange.’

Hoseok curses internally; no single Being, no matter how strong or altered, could easily survive a crash landing like that. Yoongi was pushing his health, the limits of his physicals capabilities.

‘…we never got to check you after the crash- what if you have an injury-‘

‘No it’s not that,’ Yoongi replies- he sounds a little odd, his tone unnatural in a way that Hoseok has never heard before. ‘I’ll be fine.’

‘-but Yoongi-‘ Namjoon splutters.

‘What is his medical status?’ Hoseok asks as they quickly make their way inside the antechamber, the door sliding shut behind them quietly.

‘Last I checked, he was miraculously all right,’ Namjoon replies, sounding hassled. ‘We need to get them both back as quickly as possible- we’re good to fly out right?’

‘We are,’ Hoseok nods as he runs up the stairs alongside Taeh’yung who looks thoughtful again. ‘We can set out right now.’ ‘Let’s do that.’

They rush into the Bridge and Hoseok realizes their hands are still clasped together. Taeh’yung squeezes his hand and plants a wet sloppy kiss on his cheek before throwing himself onto Yoongi’s vacated chair. Though hassled Namjoon raises an eyebrow at him in question and Hoseok can only shrug. But it’s sweet- almost makes Hoseok feel like he was missed and needed inside the ship.

‘I’m here. I’m at the central-Bridge,’ Yoongi tells them. ‘I don’t think we’ll be able to find any access to ship’s archives. Everything has been scavenged.’
‘All right,’ Namjoon replies at once, a frown on his face as he ran analysis on Yoongi’s most recent health tab reading. ‘You’re close. Just hang on- we’ll get you out the moment you get Jimin.’ He looks up from his screen and nods once at Hoseok.

‘Lisai- let’s start up and keep the ship low- activate shields but keep at minimum levels,’ Hoseok calls out.

‘Right away.’

‘Everything’s set up right? The Ynqabans put away?’ Namjoon asks.

‘All prepared,’ Hoseok replies, eyeing the cybortronics, satisfied that they wouldn’t get in harms way once the mountainside comes down.

‘Please be careful of the mountainside. Proximity at 3.2 meters.’

Hoseok carefully steers them out into the opening, away from the mountain side. He eyes the screen where Jimin’s tracker was blinking clearly at them, and not too far from that position was Yoongi’s own tracker. Eyeing his control panel, he steers them higher up into the mist, distant forks of lighting light up the horizon in the distance.

‘I’m taking us over the ship,’ Hoseok calls, ‘The main entrance has a series of landing platforms I think- we can retrieve them from there.’

‘Take us a little lower- I want to see it,’ Namjoon calls. Hoseok nods quietly, lowering them out of the mist, a little taken aback by how disorienting the mist was seeing as how much higher they were in the air than he had anticipated. He was going to have to keep that in mind.

‘All right- yeah I think we can do that- it doesn’t seem like it’s connected to any other place that the Ynqaban would use as a platform for escape,’ Namjoon calculates before adding, ‘Take us to the edge over there, we’ll be close enough but hidden behind that ridge.’

Nodding Hoseok calls out to Yoongi, ‘All set here Yoongi- just give us the word.’

‘I’m almost there-‘

The Human’s voice cuts off abruptly but they can still hear the line from his side. The Užkulisai slowly takes off, the mist and blackened dust swirling around them.

‘Yoongi?’ Namjoon asks carefully, they could hear nothing more than the Ynqaban language, some casual yelling. Yoongi’s tracker was stationary but there was no indication of him being uncovered or exposed.

Taeh’yung twists in his seat, eyeing them from the front, looking worried.

‘Safety belt Tae,’ Hoseok reminds him absentmindedly as Namjoon calls Yoongi again.

‘Yoongi, hey are you all right? What’s going on?’ the Kutsoglerin asks worriedly.

To their complete and utter shock, the distinct sound of the Heliord blade activating rings through the line.

‘Shit-!’ Hoseok increases their speed, ‘Lisai, prepare for hover-mode over unstable terrain-‘

‘Yoongi what’s going on??’ Namjoon demands, watching with wide eyes as Yoongi’s tracker moves in startling speed. ‘Shit- get us there now- drop us down over the platform, draw the rest out
and pull them away.’

‘Do I set off the explosion?’ Hoseok asks.

‘No- don’t,’ Namjoon gets out of his seat the moment they’re stable in the air. ‘We don’t need that anymore- take us over the top, Taeh’yung and I will go get Yoongi and Jimin.’

Taeh’yung cheers from where he’s sitting before he quickly disengages himself from the seat and runs up the stairs.

‘Let’s go get my Chim!’ he exclaims brightly.

‘There’s a storm approaching hard from the west,’ Hoseok reports, catching sight of huge bolts of lightning in the distance that was moving all too quickly to his liking. ‘Fuck, this could fuck up with our hover-’

‘Just get us as close as possible, we can’t let Jimin and Yoongi be taken or compromised,’ Namjoon orders, quickly pulling on protective gear though he didn’t need it as much as the others did. Taeh’yung is waiting impatiently by the doorway of the Bridge, vibrating almost with delight.

‘Communications Manager Sk’jin’s tracker cleared and operational. Renewing data input.’ Lisai announces suddenly.

And even though Hoseok is occupied, focused on flying the large ship through the mountainous ridges and terrain through disorienting mist and cloud, his eyes instantly search for the tracker screen.

It’s no longer glitching, no longer unstable. Instead very plainly and very clearly shows Sk’jin’s tracker blinking clearly at them. And at an extremely close distance.

‘What the fuck-’

‘Communications Manager Sk’jin’s coordinates are 21.98.00.33.’

An almost delayed shiver of apprehension crawls down Hoseok’s back and he twists in his seat to look back at Namjoon who has also clearly realized what Hoseok has.

‘That’s where we were-‘

A bright light erupts from Hoseok’s right outside the window, the mist and clouds disintegrating and evaporating as ripples of pure energy bubble out of the mountainside, bringing the wrong side of the mountain face down.
The light erupts out of the corner of his eye but Namjoon cannot look away from the tracker that blinks at him.

This wasn’t right- it couldn’t be right. There was no way.

‘Pa.’ Taeh’yung’s voice is small and strangely afraid. ‘We have to go to him now.’

The tracker light flickers and disappears.

For a second that expands what felt like a lifetime of petrifying horror, Namjoon is suddenly overwhelmed with everything.

‘Pa!’

Snapping out of it, Namjoon rushes back to the Navigation Table.

‘Change of plans,’ he orders out, his body moving seemingly on its own accord with confidence and reassurance; which was good because Namjoon is lost. ‘Lisai, switch to autopilot and take us to the platform at 22.95.03.21. Hoseok- you’ll be going and getting Yoongi and Jimin.’ He buckles into his seat, hastily directing Taeh’yung back to safety. Hoseok would be able to blend in with ease- they didn’t know what was happening with Yoongi but he’s already sure that any form of discretion would be pointless now. Yoongi had clearly snapped- he probably saw something or heard something that triggered him and despite the calm and entirely nonchalant look the Human possessed as his permanent expression and attitude, there was an underlying chaos that had been threatening to boil over ever since he had collapsed in the Nightmare Planet.

‘But what about Sk’jin-’

‘I’ll go to him,’ Namjoon replies at once, ‘Taeh’yung and I will go to him after we drop you off.’

Hoseok nods in understanding, taking the abrupt change in plans in stride. When they break through the last misty layer, whatever distraction or diversion they had planned on creating with the explosion had obviously worked because crowds of Ynqabans were spilling out, cybotronics lining up and moving already.

‘Lisai fire low-grade shells towards the right of the mountain- let’s draw them out and lead them to the other side,’ Namjoon orders as they turn around the mountain ridge, descending as quickly as they could. Hoseok is out of his seat as the ship fires 4 missiles behind and below them. ‘And prepare all Medical Bays asap!’

‘Understood.’

Hoseok is quick to run out, his movements quick and light as he calls out, ‘Lisai, open weapon storage unit 03- are all units charged?’

‘Taeh’yung, will you be able to find Sk’jin?’ Namjoon asks brusquely as they hover over the platform. It was empty of any living Being, only old and corroded frames of old ships and shuttles lay about, black dust gathered in mounds around the rough floors.

‘Yes,’ Taeh’yung replies, or at least, Namjoon thinks it’s Taeh’yung because the voice that replies to him sounds distinctly different.

‘I’m at the door- lower the ship more.’

‘Lisai, set the ship to hover at 1.2 meters,’ Namjoon orders, clambering over to the pilot’s seat.
Namjoon couldn’t fly it in space, where the risks and potential for accidents was higher and more likely. But down here, in-planet, it should be similar to piloting a Transporter. Given the Užkulisa is far larger than any Transporter Namjoon has ever piloted or driven. He just hopes the autopilot is good enough to take them back to the mountainside and back here to the platform.

‘I’m here,’ Hoseok reports, ‘No Ynqaban on sight- headed in now. I’m almost close enough to catch real-time coordinates from Yoongi’s tracker.’

‘All right- keep low, if we need to barrel through, we’ll come barreling through,’ Namjoon replies and adds, ‘Lisai, take us to Sk’jin’s last coordinates.’

‘Redirecting coordinates and trajectory.’

‘Careful with the storm- wind’s harsh down here,’ Hoseok adds and Namjoon catches sight of his lithe slim figure running across the wide compound towards the wide doorways. Glancing around Namjoon notices how the clouds seem much closer, heavy bulky storm clouds that appeared unnaturally dark and heavy. Lightning roped around them in thick branches. They would have to work incredibly fast.

‘Find closest landing ground,’ Namjoon orders as he gets up, ‘Keep the ship running.’

‘Understood.’

Namjoon runs out of the Bridge, Taeh’yung close behind him.

‘How did we not see him?’ Namjoon curses as they rush downwards, ‘How did the bomb trigger? Unless it was purposefully tampered with it shouldn’t have gone off shit-!’

Taeh’yung is strangely quiet behind him, not bothering with the masks or protective gear and quietly slips into the antechamber to wait.

Namjoon fumes under his breath, the only action he can take and the only emotion he can express because every other response resulted in heavy guilt.

‘Fuck,’ he curses under his breath as he retrieve the medical pack from the Dock and pulls down a gravity-stretcher alongside it. Sk’jin was hardy and tough- his coordinates had been at a relative distance from where they had placed the actual explosive, and Namjoon can only hope.

‘Approaching suitable landing site, 120 meters below Communications Manager Sk’jin’s last coordinates.’

‘How’s the weather? When will the storm hit?’ Namjoon asks as he runs out of the Dock and into the antechamber where Taeh’yung was standing, waiting for him to return.

‘Storm approaching in 2 minutes.’

‘Shit,’ Namjoon reaches into his pocket to retrieve the mask- not for anything else but simply for the filters and channels available through the visors. ‘Scan for living Beings in the area.’

‘Scanning.’

The door opens and the wind that gushes in actually pushes Taeh’yung back a little by the sheer force of it.

The mountainside they had left not 10 minutes ago is entirely unrecognizable.
Namjoon had made clear and careful calculations, taking in the size of the explosive, calculating the amount of energy it would expel, the density of the mountain rock, the structure of the layers above and below the main crust, and even down to the fault-lines he had to quickly scramble and find through what he had hoped wasn’t outdated GLA archives regarding the planet. They only wanted to create a diversion, not trigger a whole series of natural calamities.

They certainly did not want Sk’jin to get caught up in all of this.

Namjoon jumps out and is instantly disoriented as he sinks a few inches in the fresh loose blackened soil left behind by whatever avalanche had just ravaged the place.

‘Lisai keep an eye out for avalanches or landslides,’ Namjoon orders as he eyes the sky above them. The storm was going to hit anytime. He winces as a thick fork of lightning strikes a nearby peak, debris and rock flying high into the air from the contact. Taeh’yung walks ahead, seemingly undisturbed by the fierce wind and dust crackling along the visor on Namjoon’s helmet.

‘Scan for living Beings!’ Namjoon orders again, hand gripping the medical pack tightly, doing his best to catch sight of any sign of Sk’jin in this collapsed mountainside.

Suddenly Taeh’yung darts forward just as rain drops heavy and large start to fall around them. Namjoon doesn’t try to stop Taeh’yung or question his actions but instead follows immediately.

‘I think we’re on him,’ Namjoon reports back to Hoseok.

‘I’m inside- halfway there.’

Namjoon climbs up the gravely slope, the rain falling in a steady earnest shower now. But one look back shows Namjoon that it wasn’t going to be a pleasant shower for long. There’s a bright flash of green just as lightning strikes another nearby peak and the rain picks up speed. Namjoon ducks as a wave of blackened coarse soil flies overhead, rain starts to wash over his visor but he’s able to find Taeh’yung lanky green high-lighted form ahead.

‘Is it-’

Sk’jin is half buried in the coarse blackened soil, wearing clothes Namjoon does not recognize. His skin is extraordinarily pale, his face strikingly sunken, and to his horror, his eyes are open. Namjoon scrambles forward, placing the medical kit down and extending the stretcher immediately. Taeh’yung isn’t moving but Namjoon has no time to spare to see what the Zhak’gri was doing or how he was faring. Namjoon hovers over Sk’jin, blocking the acidic rain from hitting the Khol’isa face-on. For a moment Namjoon absentmindedly thinks Sk’jin would really not appreciate any damage to his face or hair.

His eyes are glazed, the red of his eyes dim and seemingly desaturated. Even his hair has lost all vibrancy and when Namjoon places his hand over the Khol’isa’s chest, it’s still and harrowingly quiet.

‘Shit fuck-’

A bright flash of green sends Namjoon tumbling down the slope a few steps, he barely manages to catch on to a larger bit of rock and painstakingly rights himself. The medical kit has fallen close to his head and grabbing it again, Namjoon scrambles up. By the time he crawls back the storm has hit them full on and everything is a blur of rain, wind, black sandy soil, and hissing steam from the acidic reactions of the toxic rain falling around them. But Taeh’yung’s form is clear, and so is Sk’jin’s who was now entirely out of the soil, eyes closed and chest heaving.
He wants to ask Taeh’yung what happened, but they don’t exactly have time. Thunder booms overhead and lightning temporarily floods the air with neon white light.

‘We got him!’ Namjoon yells, not sure if Hoseok could hear him over the sound of the storm or if his call was even going through with the storm. The stretcher is by Taeh’yung’s side and he’s gently tugging the Khol’isa on to it, lifting him from around his shoulders. Namjoon grabs Sk’jin’s calves and together they manage to place the Khol’isa over the stretcher. Namjoon quickly activates the straps and they shoot out from the side, wrapping around the Khol’isa and keeping him steady. Hastily pulling off his helmet, Namjoon places it over Sk’jin’s head, activating it quickly so that the visor would cover his face and protect him from the acid downpour.

Without having to say a word, or at least, Namjoon doesn’t think Taeh’yung has said anything because the storm is too loud, they pick up the stretcher and make their way down. The storm howls around them and Namjoon is praying that they don’t slip or fall in the midst of this chaos.

The lights of the Užkulisai is the only indication of where it is, as sheets of acidic rain washes over them. Namjoon guides them down, the rain itching at his synthetic skin and scalp. Focusing his sight, Namjoon picks the fastest and smoothest route towards the back of the ship.

‘Lisai! Open the doors!’ Namjoon pants out, vaguely surprised to find himself short on breath. A clear rectangle of light appears quite close by and they pick up speed.

The sensory overload from the storm almost entirely shuts out the moment Namjoon steps foot inside the antechamber.

‘Hoseok! We’re in- we got Sk’jin!’ Namjoon calls out again.

‘-ough the central-bridge-....ay down now-!’

The line is broken up and nearly all entirely white-noise, but Hoseok didn’t sound panicked and was clearly headed towards the central-bridge or was at least somewhere close.

‘Lisai start scanning Sk’jin now, prepare medical treatment in Bay 1!’ Namjoon nearly trips when the stretcher suddenly lifts up. Quickly checking around him, Taeh’yung had let go of the stretcher, his eyes unfocused, his movements paused halfway.

‘Taeh’yung we need to-‘

‘Pa- I can sense more- it’s faint,’ Taeh’yung stops completely, body turned towards the doorway, peering out into the stormy expanse beyond the doorway. ‘I think some of them are still alive.’

‘They captured Sk’jin and were clearly headed to hand him over,’ Namjoon shakes his head immediately as he directs Sk’jin’s stretcher towards the bend of the antechamber. Lightning strikes close by, filling the air with bright light tinted green where Taeh’yung stood. ‘Even if we do get to them, we can’t take them where we’re going. Our priority is our team, our mission; anything and anyone else is extra baggage.’
Hoseok dives straight into a world of chaos, panic, and hysteria.

Their plan had taken a completely unexpected turn—now triggering a series of events they had no way of predicting.

Yoongi was not responding but his tracker was still moving.

Jimin’s was in the same stationary position, not too far from where Yoongi was.

And Sk’jin.

How had that happened? Had he been captured and were they bringing him back here for ransom/trade? But what would have triggered the explosion? He had made sure it wouldn’t be triggered by movement, so the idea that the rain or some crumbling rock would have detonated the explosive was highly impossible.

The Ynqaban people are streaming out of the place below him. Hoseok doesn’t bother transforming himself too much, seeing as most were too panicked and occupied with running away. They were also shockingly old and fragile looking.

The Ynqaban they had come across were all clearly at their prime. Or at least, what could be considered their prime. They wouldn’t need any brute force charging through here, though Hoseok doesn’t take panicked hysterical crowds lightly. Those types were always the ones to cause the most damage. He’s a few levels above the central-bridge zone, and Hoseok isn’t sure if the area had recently caved in on one side, or if the entire left-wing of the dock had always been covered in a mighty mound of debris and parts. But judging by the way dust whirled in the air, the way everyone seemingly preferred to choose the incoming acid storm over staying indoors, he’s guessing it’s very recent.

‘Hoseok! We’re in- we got Sk’jin!’

The tightness in his chest is a little relieved and Hoseok can breathe better.

‘Almost through the central-bridge!’ Hoseok calls back, ‘I’m making my way down now!’

Hoseok curses, not allowing himself to look over at the avalanche that was the entire left-wing of what was clearly an impressive Dock. He runs past empty make-shift homes, fashioned after tents and shacks. Runs past Ynqabans who were hysterically running past him, clutching at their own chests because they possessed nothing of value except for their own lives.

What had they started?

Hoseok shimmies down a few looped wires, landing lightly on his feet before darting straight towards one of the massive entrances to the side. This clearly lead towards the central-bridge, based on what the Ynqaban had told them and judging by how Yoongi had successfully snuck in.

Hoseok quickly glances at his screen, checking for directions. There were too many Ynqabans and too many entrances all too close together. But amongst this pandemonium, Hoseok notices something distinctly strange.

Streams of Ynqaban are running out of the massive entrances save for one that remains hollow and startlingly dark.

Pushing past the stream and nearly tripping into the suddenly silent long corridor, Hoseok instantly changes his stance to a defensive one. The sound of the rushing crowd just meters from him has
suddenly hollowed out, sounding miles away as though Hoseok hadn’t just escaped the stampede of fleeing Ynqaban. He’s not sure why, but instinctively he knows he needs to remain quiet.

The corridor is long and rather empty. It’s also quite wet. A coolant pipe seems to have burst somewhere but the fluids are rotted and stagnant, a strong odour of mildew fills the air. And it’s strong enough to momentarily hide the stench of blood that hits Hoseok like a wave.

The lights suddenly flicker and Hoseok looks into a scene of absolute carnage.

Bleeding and mangled bodies are strewn about without a care. And judging by most of their fallen forms, in the process of running away. Or were at least trying to before something got to them.

Hoseok slips a little as he fully enters the central-bridge, and he’s not exactly surprised to find that the cause of his misbalance were pools of blood. There’s a sudden flurry of movement and it all happens so quickly Hoseok doesn’t quite know what to make of it.

Yoongi is almost levitating due to the speed with which he was moving. His Heliord blades are gone and what skin could be seen was entirely splattered in blood. The Ynqabans who are valiantly trying to fight him have already clearly lost- their terrified shrieks transform into horrendous gurgling as Yoongi gets to them in a flash.

‘Yoongi-!’

The Human is on him in a flash and Hoseok barely manages to defend himself.

There’s a crazed, unhinged look in the Human’s dark eyes- and to Hoseok’s complete shock, tears were flowing down Yoongi’s cheeks.

‘Yoongi stop!’ Hoseok hisses, countering the Human’s brutal clawed swipe.

Hoseok is surprised to find that Yoongi’s strike doesn’t actually hurt- in fact the Human was barely using his full strength. Had he tired out? It had been over 10 minutes since Yoongi’s abrupt silence over the Comm and Hoseok is pretty sure only 10 minutes against starved and weak Ynqabans wouldn’t tire the former GI agent like this.

He’s seen him fight in Gremio Arena and that was a definite testimony to the Human’s endurance, skill, and ability.

Yoongi doesn’t seem to recognize him, mindlessly and recklessly pushing forward. Yoongi is a deadly fighter- but he was also not himself. It was as though the Human was moving solely on muscle memory, his mind entirely elsewhere. Hoseok counters him easily, and with one quick and calculated hard shove, misbalances the Human and sends him flying back to the ground.

Yoongi lands with a loud thwack, his head smacking hard on the wet floor. Hoseok is quick to get to the Human, wondering if he’d been too harsh. Yoongi had very unnervingly commented about not feeling good.

Yoongi…Yoongi wasn’t technically a species of living Beings according to most. While he didn’t fall under the category of an AI, or a cyborg. Diagnosing him was difficult, figuring out how he would respond to most situations, how he would understand his environment, how he would translate what he saw or heard- this lack of information regarding the former GI agent made foreplanning difficult. What triggered him to become like this? What had happened?

A terrible thought runs through Hoseok’s mind but he knows it’s not true- Jimin was still in whatever cell they were keeping him in. He was alive.
Yoongi breathes strangely, an almost rattling sound as his back arches from the floor. Cursing under his breath, Hoseok slides towards the Human, checking him for injuries. He can’t find any wound or detect any broken or dislocated limb. He can’t say for sure about internal injuries but Hoseok doesn’t dismiss it.

‘Shit- Yoongi, hey- focus on me,’ Hoseok speaks quickly.

He wants to take time and carefully search the Human, but they can’t. They don’t have time, and they still needed to retrieve Jimin-

‘-hey, listen!’ Hoseok says sharply, snapping his fingers before Yoongi’s face. Yoongi’s eyes focus and he’s staring at Hoseok with a clarity that Hoseok isn’t familiar with. Hoseok can tell he’s lucid, but there is no recognition in his eyes.

‘You need to tell me right now if you’re injured.’ Hoseok demands quickly. They didn’t have time for care and patience- Hoseok could bind and perform emergency treatment for now.

Yoongi is suddenly sitting up, eyes wide, pupils the size of pin-pricks.

‘What’s- what’s happened-‘ Yoongi gasps out, his body heaving as he struggles to breath. ‘-where am I-‘

‘Fuck- Yoongi-‘

‘I- I couldn’t- I tried-‘ Yoongi stammers, his eyes wild as he tries to wipe his hands clean against his stained suit. ‘I- it’s-‘

‘Yoongi?’ Hoseok doesn’t know what to make of this sudden change in the Human.

‘I-I’m-‘ Yoongi balks and Hoseok realizes that the Human was going through a panic attack.

Quickly he shoves his head between his knees, grip firm on his nape while he roped his other arm across his chest.

‘Hey- breathe with me for a second,’ Hoseok tells him as calmly and quietly as possible. ‘Breathe with me- on one take a deep breath and hold it till I say so.’

Unsure whether or not the Human heard him, Hoseok takes a purposeful breath loudly and clearly. A second later, Yoongi does the same.

‘Hold it,’ Hoseok orders quietly, ‘And let go slowly- and then inhale slowly again-‘

Yoongi suddenly slumps sideways but it’s only for a fraction of a second because he’s suddenly heaving and coughing, violently turning in Hoseok’s arms on all fours.

‘Yoongi-‘

‘Jimin-‘ Yoongi gasps out, ‘Need- need to find Jimin-‘

‘Fucking Spaces hold still-‘ Hoseok grabs him, and holds tight. ‘What the fuck happened-‘

‘Why are you here,’ Yoongi asks, his voice suddenly stoic and his expression unnervingly neutral though he’s still breathing strangely. ‘I thought you would wait outside-‘

‘We fucking lost contact!’ Hoseok snaps before he adds, ‘I’ve come to get you and Jimin out, let’s fucking move already and leave this place!’
Hoseok makes for the lowered doorway, eyeing Yoongi carefully who looks around the central-bridge, a look akin to surprise on his features. He blinks rapidly, eying the corpses around him. His hands fist, as though expecting something to be there.

‘Yoongi!’ Hoseok calls sharply. Whatever mental GI agent breakdown or existential crisis he was about to have could wait until they were back on the ship.

‘Yoongi- we need to get Jimin!’

Yoongi’s head snaps up, his focus and clarity re-tuning once more and he nods, quickly making his way towards Hoseok. They quickly sprint through narrow doorway, littered with freshly fallen rock-chips, clearly from the explosion. Yoongi asks no further questions and Hoseok also keeps quiet.

‘According to this he should be further ahead,’ Hoseok ventures as he glances at his screen again.

The doorway branched off into smaller narrower hallways seemingly carved of stone. The central-bridge had clearly fallen apart and the Ynqaban had carved this series of tunnels through the ship and into the mountain-face. It’s bitingly cold and everything appeared damp. The odour that seemed to permeate the air outside the bridge had clearly been spewed out from within these tunnels. It’s also eerily silent and Hoseok doesn’t like how far they were plunging into the darkness. He has no way of knowing what they would meet once they leave this place.

If they can.

They reach a forked pathway and Hoseok is about to reference his screen again when Yoongi darts past and into the right tunnel, his body slamming purposefully on a door that looked almost identical to the rock-face that made the tunnel.

Rushing over, Hoseok also throws his body weight onto the door and after the second combined shove, the door creaks and the rusted bolts chip off.

Yoongi tears down the heavy door while Hoseok quickly sets his screen to the brightest mode.

Light floods the cramped and stinking room and for a moment Hoseok thinks it vacant but a pair of orb-like eyes glow at him from the corner, a rumbling growl follows. Hoseok quickly flashes the light into the corner and he’s met with hisses, the eyes turning away and now showing a matted head, covered in lumpy wounds, random chunks of hair, and a freshly bleeding large wound towards the top of his head.

Hoseok feels a trill of caution, one that was probably some remote primal reaction at the sight of the Being. He was obviously malnourished, unkempt, and has probably never really seen the light of day, but there was no mistaking what he was.

The species that hailed from the small and violent planet of Pravasi M’hanun were famed for their blood-lust and cannibalistic tendencies. They were an ancient civilization, with the potential of great growth as a society due to their keen intelligence, physical hardiness, and ability to easily adapt. However despite all of this, their greatest desire, or at least their greatest love, was not in community or development, but rather in blood baths and carnage.

The GLA had tried to intervene, fearing their extinction with the way they quickly and easily killed each other, but the species from Pravasi M’hanun had an incredibly short gestation period, and their children were, mildly put, aggressive since birth.

It always struck Hoseok as odd, seeing any of the 5 main species from the bloody planet outside in
the Known Universe. They were prizefighters and if fed well, and provided for (in the form of constant fights and gore), could be quite loyal. Most of the species from Pravasi M’hanun looked similar; pale smooth skin, dark hair, their extremities stained red as though the blood they had spilt permanently staining their appendages, and in some cases sharp elongated teeth.

While Hoseok is 99% sure this wild Being was of Pravasi M’hanun, he’s not sure which of the main 5 species he might be. The most commonly seen of the species were the Vicitra, who were the most civil (if you could call it that) of the 5 and had a good command over Standard.

How did he end up here? In Ynqaba of all places? Hoseok feels a surge of pity at the sight of the abused Being. He seemed incredibly young- had he known no other life? He’s about to pull Yoongi away, when the Human takes a step forward.

‘Yoongi I don’t think-’

A hand appears around the head, fair despite being dirty, carding through the matted lumpy hair on the wild Being’s head.

‘It’s okay,’ an unexpected voice says quietly in accented Standard.

The wild looking Being shifts a little and Jimin’s face pokes out from beyond his arms.

He looks filthy- covered in dirt and Spaces knew what else- but his eyes are still glowing, familiar shapes in the dark of the room. He’s covered in equally filthy garments, wrapped around his body in swathes as well as over his head. He appeared to be shivering.

‘Jimin-!’ Hoseok is so relieved he could collapse.

‘Wait-‘ he holds out his hand, ‘don’t come close.’ And Hoseok is thoroughly confused.

Jimin was suddenly speaking Standard

Yoongi stills too, and in this darkness, Hoseok can’t make out his expression. Instead after a second, Yoongi quietly and slowly kneels onto the floor.

‘Sunshine?’ he whispers.

The young wild Being flinches, growling and hissing at Yoongi as he turns swiftly- his posture curled and ready to spring. Hoseok realizes that whoever this was, was trying to protect Jimin.

‘It’s okay,’ Jimin says again from behind the Being who is focused only on Yoongi. Hoseok has a feeling Jimin is talking to him, and not them.

Yoongi takes a small step forward and the growling increases. Then oddly enough, Jimin holds out a hand to stop Yoongi from approaching and gently pats the other Being, saying something gently in inaudible Standard.

The Being seems to calm down but doesn’t really move away, doesn’t stop growling at Yoongi.

‘Jimin? Are you all right?’ Hoseok asks quietly.

‘I’m okay.’ Jimin replies, hand appearing again to give him a thumbs up.

‘So uh- who is this?’ Hoseok asks, also crouching down.

Yoongi had a point- they didn’t want to approach him as though challenging him. This Being was
running purely on whatever feral instinct had protected him so far- and seeing as he was now protecting Jimin, he was using those instincts to protect him too.

‘C-can speak-‘ the Being growls out. ‘-n-not animal.’

‘Not animal,’ Jimin repeats gently now appearing from behind him.

He looks worse for wear now that Hoseok has a closer look. He looks exhausted, and blood has matted and dried over his skin on the side of his head. There’s a huge splotchy mess of blood on the side of his neck, the skin torn that Jimin has clearly tried to cover with some make-shift bandages.

‘Not animal,’ Yoongi also says quietly, his head tilting to the side. ‘What is your name?’

His expression turns a little less aggressive, a little more unsure.

‘J-J—‘ he stutters out heavily.

Jimin quietly crawls out a little more, now shifting to his knees. He winces and it doesn’t go unnoticed by Yoongi who seems to move without his own knowing, hand reaching out as though to catch Jimin.

There’s a loud snapping growl and the young Being is growling aggressively again.

Jimin is quick to placate him, gently speaking in his own language this time, eyes looking over at them urgently as though wanting to say more.

‘It’s okay,’ Jimin tells him quietly, hand brushing down the nape of the wild Being. ‘Friends. Trust. Safe. They are safe.’

His posture still doesn’t let up, but he’s stopped growling. At least there’s some improvement there.

‘Yoongi? Move back,’ Hoseok calls to the Human. But he doesn’t move, hand still extended. Instead he shifts forward, eyes never wavering from the young Being.

Hoseok can feel sweat dripping down his back. Yoongi was in no condition, both mental or physical, to deal with an attack that was no doubt going to be a whole lot of crazy.

Jimin and Yoongi seem to be communicating, solely through their eyes because the former nods slightly. He’s saying something to the Being, his voice soothing and gentle, clearly addressing Yoongi in the conversation with the wild Being.

He moves away a little more and Jimin’s crouched up form slowly shows.

Hoseok’s breath catches in his throat as he sees Jimin’s feet, bloody and crusted. His injuries are obviously purposefully inflicted. Was he badly injured? What happened?

‘Who is he?’ Yoongi looks at the unknown Being who sniffs the air rather aggressively as the Human slowly approaches, hand still extended. It reminds Hoseok of how aggressive creatures or panicked creatures are approached. This was an extension of trust, to show that they meant no harm. Yoongi’s blood smeared hand is palm up, slowly inching forward, never looking away.

Hoseok also approaches slowly, angling himself to better see and better position himself in case things went dire. Closing in on the three of them, Hoseok realizes how young this wild Being really
is. He couldn’t be more than 20 sols at most. Also, in this proximity, Hoseok recognizes the look in his eyes. It wasn’t aggression or threat- it was fear. It wasn’t aggression or primal instincts causing him to shake and growl, it was complete fear. But at the same time, despite this fear, he was crouching before Jimin, not moving away despite Jimin’s gentle words.

Slowly, Jimin extends his hand forward to, reaching towards Yoongi’s proffered hand. The young wild Being pauses, tearing his eyes away from Yoongi and instead looking at their hands.

‘It’s okay,’ Jimin tells him again, his words a little tense as though fighting pain. ‘Safe. Jimin safe, Yoongi safe, Hoseok safe.’

He just blinks, unmoving, still coiled as though waiting to spring into action.

‘Safe, Jungkook.’

His posture relents a little and Jimin’s hand safely reaches over to Yoongi’s still raised hand. Jimin smiles, eyes wrinkling as he looks over all of them, as though what just happened couldn’t have ever taken a turn for the worse. He tugs Yoongi closer, his other hand still gently caressing the young Being, Jungkook, over his nape and shoulders.

‘We need to go soon,’ Hoseok says quietly, more to Yoongi because he was the one who would understand. But to his surprise, Jimin nods and after a quick thoughtful look says, ‘Important- Jungkook important.’

‘What do you mean?’ Yoongi breathes out, hand gripping Jimin’s firmly.

‘Jungkook,’ Jimin says quietly, looking away from Yoongi before gently tugging at the rag like tunic Jungkook was wearing. ‘Show.’

Hoseok doesn’t understand what Jimin could possibly mean but there’s a sense of anticipation. Amidst the mess of what happened during the past 24 hours, with what they had seen, and with what they had heard; Hoseok is more than ready for anything.

Jungkook is clearly not here for this, but after a few gentle murmured words from Jimin, he shakily turns, bowing his head even more. Pity overwhelms Hoseok again, wanting nothing more than to bathe this child and feed him something warm and hearty.

Jimin pulls up the dirty rag like tunic, making soft soothing sounds as Jungkook shudders.

Hoseok thinks he’s ready for anything. And maybe he wouldn’t be surprised if a bunch of crazed Yishengs suddenly burst through. Or maybe if rabid creatures came to crash their impromptu meeting. Or maybe Namjoon would call to say Sk’jin had transformed into a cybortronic. He wouldn’t be surprised.

Maybe with one exception.

There on his back, a long indent runs down the back of the young Being’s spine. Identical to the one on Yoongi’s back. And if Hoseok isn’t mistaken (he isn’t) identical to the one on every Being born from one of those “eggs”.

‘Like you,’ Jimin says, his expression serious but at the same time eager. ‘Yoongi- like you. Same.’

‘Hoseok- we got Sk’jin inside, he’s stable-...torming a lot, have you-...nd Jimin?’ Hoseok nearly jumps at the unexpected call. Namjoon sounds breathless and strained.
Hoseok cautiously backs away, not wanting to speak too loudly in case he startled the others.

‘We found him- they’re both all right- Jimin and Yoongi- and Namjoon we uh- we found something-...well, someone.’ Hoseok says quietly, backing away slowly.

‘-hat? Found what-’

‘We have to go,’ Hoseok tells the group. ‘The storm will overwhelm us if we don’t go now- the road might still be clear, we need to leave now.’ He addresses Jimin next, wondering how and when he managed to understand Standard or if that had somehow been a fluke- like some survival instinct kicking in and taking over for a while.

‘Jimin- we need to go now, they’re waiting for us- I don’t know when it will be safe later.’

Jimin nods in complete understanding before he pulls down the tunic and says in a gentle tone, ‘Jungkook. Go, safe place. Safe home.’

The young Being shakes his head, eyes wild, body trembling.

‘Namjoon- we’re heading out in a few minutes- I don’t know how long it will take us- are you clear?’

‘-oming over now- visibility is lo-...iking you up wh-...dropped you-.’

‘Jungkook,’ Jimin repeats again, his tone is gently pleading and persuasive and for a moment Hoseok feels strangely persuaded but despite the fact that he didn’t need any persuasion in the first place. It occurs to him that Jimin is probably doing something out of his own ability, which then makes Hoseok wonder why he hadn’t done anything prior to this. He had effectively stunned an entire arena filled with battle-crazed Pompen, what stopped him from doing the same here?

Hoseok is suddenly very worried over Jimin, wondering how incapacitated he must have been, or what was done to him to make him this incapacitated.

After some shaky breaths the young Being, Jungkook, finally seems to calm down, his eyes taking a slightly glazed appearance.

‘Follow me,’ Jimin tells him, pulling him gently by the threadbare collar of his tunic. But Jimin struggles to stand, wincing in pain and then collapsing. But Yoongi is there before Jimin’s knees can hit the floor.

His movement is fast and it triggers Jungkook who jumps violently, snarling out, teeth snapping before he lunges at Yoongi.

But the Human is quick to defend himself and to Hoseok’s surprise, doesn’t harm Jungkook. Instead with deft movements, twists and deflects Jungkook away, bringing him down to the floor, and hitting a point on his neck that makes him immediately fall to the ground, unconscious.

All with one arm.

His other arm is holding Jimin against himself, allowing the latter to use him like a crutch to upright himself.

‘Jungkook!’ Jimin gasps out in worry.

‘He’ll be all right,’ Hoseok says quickly, rushing over to grab the unconscious Being. He’s
extremely thin, but surprisingly tall as his limbs uncurl from their previous coiled and tense posture. Hoseok frowns as he lifts him into his arms; he barely weighed much and now that he wasn’t growling and snapping his teeth at them, Hoseok can see all too well how young he was.

‘Fuck.’

Shouldering the boy over his shoulders, Hoseok stands up and checks on Jimin.

He hadn’t even been able to protest or make any comment before Yoongi lifts him up and positions him onto his back.

‘Just hang on,’ Yoongi tells him quietly. ‘You’re safe now.’

Jimin wraps his arms around Yoongi’s shoulders as securely as he could with limbs that were clearly shaking and straining from the exertion of having to hold on. He winces, back curved in a way that Hoseok knew was a reaction of pain from somewhere on his torso. His head is wrapped in make-shift bandages, matted with blood and other dirt smeared all around it. They needed to really bring them back to the ship and have them treated.

And then gently, as though afraid of hurting Yoongi, Jimin leans his bruised head up against Yoongi’s blood splattered face. His eyes close, exhaling out shakily.

‘Safe,’ he whispers.

Yoongi doesn’t reply, only carefully hitches Jimin up a little higher on his back, arms securing around and under Jimin’s knees to support him.

‘I’ll lead,’ Hoseok tells them, ‘Stay low and behind me.’

Yoongi nods in reply and they set off.

‘Namjoon- what is your position?’

‘-e’re close-...hree minutes-’

‘Follow me- Namjoon is headed here.’

‘Sk’jin?’ Jimin asks quietly from behind them.

‘He’s- he’s all right,’ Hoseok replies, sparing a glance back to look at Yoongi. The Human shows now sign of remorse or regret. ‘Everyone is all right- we’re all safe.’

It was bizarre speaking to Jimin like this- like he could understand. It’s even more bizarre to hear his sigh of relief, followed by a low, ‘I’m happy.’

They enter the central-bridge without incident and it’s just as void of living Beings as it was when Hoseok had previously entered the place. He hears Jimin’s sharp intake of breath, but they move quickly, barely spending more than a few seconds as they dart through the thickening pools of blood on the floor.

‘Yoongi?’

They enter the long corridor and Yoongi still hasn’t responded to Jimin’s question. It was just his name- just a single word, but Hoseok can hear the multitudes of questions behind it.

It’s eerily silent and empty when they run out of the corridor and into what was previously a very
large Docking Bay. The avalanche of ship parts and destroyed remnants of thousands of living Beings pile up everywhere. Oddly enough, it’s even more overwhelming empty than it was when it was bursting with panicked hysterical Ynqabans.

‘We need to move 3 more levels- Yoongi, you good?’ Hoseok asks, glancing back behind him and nearly pausing at the sight of the two behind him. It had been dark before, so Hoseok hadn’t been able to see them all too clearly.

There was an strange contrast between the two of them.

Yoongi was pale skinned, dark clothed, and expression blank, blood now browning and drying over his entire Being.

Jimin was warm skinned, dirty but pale clothes, splattered in blood and other things, openly crying tears as he looks around; pain apparent from his features.

But despite the obvious and immediate contrast, Hoseok can’t help but somehow pair the two unlikely Beings- fitting so close, so perfectly- yet terrifying, haunting, and beautiful all at the same time.

Almost like an eclipse.

Climbing up isn’t as difficult or cumbersome as Hoseok had anticipated; the lack of screaming and running Beings shows them closer and easier ways of moving upwards and Hoseok is no more strained than a Being carrying deadweight on his shoulders would be.

‘We’re here! Hurry up, lightning is catching on!’ Namjoon calls, the line much clearer.

‘They’re outside-’

‘-it’s raining,’ Yoongi states. ‘I don’t have a helmet, neither does Jimin.’

‘Give Jimin mine,’ Hoseok pauses shortly, ducking his head down. ‘Jimin, take the helmet-’

‘No- Hobi,’ Jimin shakes his head before gripping harder on Yoongi’s shoulders. ‘Fine- not hurt. Won’t hurt.’

‘It won’t be too bad on me either you’re not well-’

‘Jungkook- give to Jungkook-’ Jimin nods towards the unconscious child. They didn’t have time to argue or debate the matter so Hoseok just nods and starts jogging towards the large platform landing gateways, deftly removing his helmet tabs before applying them over Jungkook’s unconscious head.

‘This will hurt,’ Hoseok calls over his shoulder grimly, diverting a little to grab a large bit of canvas like fabric that had torn out the side of a make-shit tent. He throws it over to Jimin who catches it, wincing at his bruised and raw hands scrape against the harsh fabric.

‘So make sure to at least stop direct contact.’

‘Hoseok-!’ Jimin tries to make him stop but they don’t have time and at this moment they just really needed to get out.

The rain isn’t too bad at first- and if it weren’t this copious or heavy, Hoseok would have been able to tolerate the slight sting. But 10 seconds in his scalp is burning and try as he might, his eyes are
burning too. Luckily the lights from the Užkulisai are strong and bright enough for Hoseok to just about make out where he was headed.

Hoseok increases his speed, finding the now damp gritty soil oddly good for running, and focuses on the bright lights ahead. However he’s distracted by a sudden and violent twitch.

‘Shit- shit!’

It’s cold, it hurts, and it’s an extremely effective way of waking anyone up. Hoseok picks up even more speed, not caring that Jungkook was now bouncing on his shoulder, clearly adding to the pain, triggering what was sure to be a confused and aggressive consciousness from the young Being. But the doorway to the antechamber is right there-

‘Hoseok where are you- the doors are opened and-’

Hoseok barely crosses over into the Užkulisai when Jungkook lets out a guttural scream and falls out of his shoulder in a loud wet heap. He skids across the floors, leaving behind a wet and dirty mess of rain water and grime.

‘What the fuck was that?!’ Namjoon demands, the ship tilting dangerously.

‘Jungkook you’re safe-’ Hoseok tries to calm the young Being, speaking in a low tone, trying his best to sound gentle despite the creeping gnawing at his skin from under the suit where the rainwater had seeped in. He swallows with great pain, unable to catch his breath, throat raw and his windpipe stuffed.

Yoongi and Jimin appear behind him, both of them collapsing onto the ground in a pained heap. Jimin curls up on the floor at once, his body trembling against his will but he’s trying to move- trying to get to-

‘Jungkook-!’

Jungkook is bordering hysteria, clawing at his head and face, trying to remove the mask. Hoseok can hear him hyperventilating and screaming under the helmet. He stumbles out of the antechamber and into the Lobby, falling heavily against the wall, trying to crack the helmet open by hitting it against the wall. Hoseok follows at once, only just aware that he too was breathing harshly and very loudly. He wants to approach Jungkook, to calm him down or at least knock him out but he’s too violent, too scared, too-

‘Jungkook it’s all right,’ Hoseok painfully gasps out, ‘You’re-’

‘Hobi? Chim?’

Taeh’yung appears from the other side of the Lobby where the Medical Bays were- he’s also wet, hair clinging to the side of his face. He looks worried, eyes wide. But before Hoseok can warn him, before he can say anything, Jungkook finally frees himself of the helmet, letting out a strangled guttural scream.

‘Oh!’ Taeh’yung gasps loudly, a smile forming on his face as he looks at Jungkook, ‘Another baby-’

With a loud shriek and with speed and force that has Hoseok reeling, Jungkook launches himself at Taeh’yung, burying his teeth into the Zhak’gri’s neck, taking them both down.

‘Taeh’yung!’
(Author’s Note)

So.
Jungkook.
Yeap.
Imagine him from around their debut era, a whole baby, must protect (says the person who is doing this to him sigh)
Important note here and disclaimer- you cannot knock someone out by simply applying pressure to certain nerve points. It’s kinda impossible but then again this is sci-fi but I thought I needed to clarify that because I am not about misinformation Pretends like I knew this all along and didn’t only just find out I was lied to all my life, thank you every martial arts film ever made as well as star trek that being said there are areas in the body that if hit with enough pressure and years of training and skill and with the right timing/environment, you can knock someone out with a quick jab right at their windpipe in the throat- this isn’t a joke, but should be used for very very serious situations where it’s life or death because you could potentially kill the other person.
i swear this was just research idk how i ended up with all of this info please don’t report me
and yeaaaaa I sort of made my 10 days schedule xD
ALSO DDAENG HAD ME DEAD
JUST WHEN I THOUGHT
NOTHING COULD BEAT OUTRO: TEAR RAPLINE GOES AND DOES THIS I
AM NOT ALL RIGHT
So in case you don’t read my other fics, just some minor news about how I might
randomly go mia or not responding to comments is because my sister has been really
unwell for the past year, and we’ve finally found a diagnosis and so now we’re
treating her. She’s scheduled for surgery next week I think and though the entire thing
is not life-threatening or a very complex procedure (it’s Cushing’s Disease and
apparently only 1 in every 10 million ever contract it?!?!? Like, thank you life?!?!?) but
it’s still stressful T_T
Writing gives me a way out of thinking too much, but so does replying to comments
and I’m sorry if I haven’t replied!!
And how do you tattoo a gif of Yoongi telling Jimin he loves him and Jimin’s reaction
onto your forehead? Asking for a friend
“‘Taeh’yung!’

A flash of green erupts, flooding the Lobby and blinding everyone. Hoseok feels himself being *pushed* backwards by the force of the rippling energy that expands all over and retreats back just as quickly right back to where Taeh’yung had fallen over.

‘Taeh’yung!’

Jimin is partially hyperventilating, face grimaced in pain as he struggles under Yoongi’s bodily protection. The Human made himself into a living shield, covering Jimin from whatever Taeh’yung had just released.

‘What the fuck is going on-?!’

Hoseok heaves as he stands, dizzy and pained and more or less barely staggers forward a few steps before he hears Taeh’yung’s giggle.

‘Buggy-?’

Taeh’yung appears from behind the lounge seats, looking remarkably well save for the slight bloody mess on his neck. And in his arms he’s carrying Jungkook, who appeared to be-

‘-fucking *Spaces did you kill him?!*’ Hoseok demands, pain forgotten as he rushes forward.

‘What? No!’ Taeh’yung looks wounded at being questioned so, cradling Jungkook even closer *away* from Hoseok almost. ‘He’s my baby! And so young!’

‘Tae-‘ a pained gasp from behind him resounds across the room.

Taeh’yung’s wounded expression changes to comic worry the moment he notices Jimin and Yoongi. He unceremoniously dumps Jungkook on the cushions and Hoseok is almost afraid to check on the young Being.

Obviously Taeh’yung wouldn’t have killed him, not especially after that excited look on his face when he saw Jungkook. How could Taeh’yung know *what* Jungkook was?

‘Lisai, medical scan right now,’ Hoseok orders as he painfully picks up Jungkook again. He was knocked out cold, face still and expressionless and *so so* young. Hoseok looks away to stop himself from feeling anymore than he was comfortable with.

Taeh’yung is helping Jimin who has a frown on his face, looking up and around almost confused before he asks, ‘Sk’jin?’.
‘He’s recovering,’ Taeh’yung tells him, sounding unexpectedly grave unlike how he had been cooing over Jimin and Yoongi just seconds ago. Jimin is still confused and with more strength and energy than Hoseok thought he possessed, Jimin trips forward and into the center Medical Bay.

Taeh’yung follows him at once but Yoongi remains behind.

‘Yoongi- you need to get checked too-‘

‘I think he has really realized it,’ Yoongi says unexpectedly.

‘Realized what?’ Hoseok asks, unsure what the context behind Yoongi’s words were.

‘That I am not Yoongi,’ is the Human’s extraordinary reply.

‘What do you mean?’

Hoseok really wishes that the Beings around him would stop talking in riddles and metaphors and incomplete monologues spoken out loud.

‘The Yoongi he knew would have never done this.’ Yoongi says as he helps Hoseok stabilize Jungkook in his arms. ‘The Yoongi he knew would have never let Sk’jin go. The Yoongi he knew would have never let him go.’

‘Yoongi this is hardly your fault-‘

‘He needs to put in a Bed,’ Yoongi swiftly takes over, taking Jungkook from Hoseok. ‘I’ll set him up, you’ll be needed in the Bridge-‘

‘Namjoon can handle it for now it’s on autopilot,’ Hoseok replies with a dismissive wave of his hand before adding, ‘

‘Even if the Yoongi in the past had done what I did today, he would be remorseful. He would feel guilt from his actions,’ Yoongi looks up, face splotched with discolouration from acid burns, dried blood, and dirty water. ‘I feel none.’

‘The “Yoongi in the past”? What do you mean?” Hoseok frowns as they enter the closest Bay. ‘Do you remember?’

The whole ship suddenly tilts, the lights flickering a little. Hoseok rights himself, dropping Jungkook’s legs in the process.

‘Namjoon what was that-‘

Yoongi darts to the side, pulling up a digital screen and accessing the surveillance from outside. It’s dark and only actually visible during the lightning strikes- but the stark and bright light formations are enough to inform them both on what was happening.

‘We’re being shot at-!’ Hoseok curses as another missile fires at their wings. Though there is no harm done, it’s disconcerting in this weather and with so many injured.

‘How?! We’re undetectable-‘

‘But we’re visible-’ Hoseok curses. ‘We need to lose them higher up in the clouds I’m coming right now-‘

This time something very powerful erupts around them, the whole ship shuddering violently. The
lights flicker and for a moment the Medical Beds almost light-out.

‘Magnetic-pulses,’ Yoongi states rather simply as he picks up Jungkook’s legs and places them over onto the Bed. ‘They’re trying to shut us down.’

‘Lisai activate Bed 3 for complete scan and diagnosis, follow up on any required operation required- induce temporary delta sleep.’

‘Understood.’

Quickly placing Jungkook inside the Bed and activating the emergency safety straps, Hoseok darts out, wincing with every step he ran.

‘Yoongi we need you at the Mast,’ he calls back before rushing up the stairs. ‘Buggy, you’re in charge of the Medical Bays- make sure they’re healing.’

‘Okay!’ is Taeh’yung’s much too bright response for such a situation. Though Hoseok doesn’t want to hear Taeh’yung sounding serious because that would end rather formidably for everyone involved.

Literally tripping into the Bridge, Hoseok balances himself and skids past Namjoon who is valiantly steering the ship. Hoseok would commend him but is rather alarmed to find that Namjoon was literally watching a video-guide on how to pilot the Uzkulisai through the welcome package that’s a part of Lisai’s system.

‘A guide?’ Hoseok comments, unable to help himself.

‘And I’ve managed to not crash us so it’s working fine,’ Namjoon snaps but any other comment is lost on Hoseok.

A sizeable portion of Namjoon’s bionic skin has been eroded, exposing the strange network of bionic mesh, metallic skeleton, and an alarming glimpse into what Hoseok can only reason is his brain.

‘Fuck.’

‘Yeah now not the time can you please take over I might actually break down from stress,’ Namjoon actually does look incredibly, and comically, stressed.

Hoseok slips into his seat, safety straps shoot out instantly, locking him in securely and just in time because a small fleet of flying Transporters appear directly before them and Hoseok takes over manually, pulling up sharp.

‘We can’t warp with all the debris outside or the storm,’ Namjoon exhales out as though genuinely breathless as he takes actual physical steps away from the cockpit as though to distance himself from the experience.

‘We need to get past their moon at least.’

‘Are we on track?’

‘Coordinates have already been set-’

A bright explosion erupts around, tilting the ship dangerously again.

‘Fuck-’
‘They’re trying to get our wings,’ Hoseok frowns, ‘They’re not equipped enough to take us down or cause damage but-’

‘But what?’

‘This storm-’

Lightning bolts the width of the Užkulisai flashes before them, heavy, destructive, and Hoseok can practically feel its power, goose-bumps erupting over his arms. His hair stands on end as the air outside the ship ignites and bursts into molten specks of light, sparking up the glass, threatening to eat its way inside.

‘Lisai track lightning and-’

A bright surge of power ripples through the ship and it’s immediately followed by a flurry of missiles.

‘Are- are they actually timing this?!’ Namjoon curses, strapping himself next to Hoseok. ‘What the fuck-!?’

A fleet of heavy large-framed Transporters appear out of nowhere, and to Hoseok’s horror physically drive themselves into the Užkulisai.

‘We need to take them down-’

‘Yoongi! Bridge now!’ Hoseok yells, a flare of irritation flooding him at the Human’s absence.

‘Is he all right-’

‘He’s fine-ish,’ Hoseok snaps before yelling, ‘Yoongi we need you at the Mast, Jimin will be alright Taeh’yung will see to him-’

Yoongi appears, unfazed and calm looking. He walks down to the Mast, without so much as sparing them a glance and is seated at the Mast.

‘Well that didn’t take much convincing-’

‘Lightning forming in 2.1 seconds.’

‘Shift gravity-alignment to Bridge!’ Namjoon orders just before Hoseok dives downwards, the ship tilting down onto its nose. But before momentum and Ynqaba’s gravity tugs at them, the ship re-configures its internal gravity-generator and adjusts itself to the balance of the Bridge’s floor, mainly the cockpit.

And using this sudden dive as leverage and momentum, Yoongi fires, bright blue tails appearing to curve upwards and away through the storm. To Hoseok’s surprise, Yoongi has fired the ship’s arsenal of what he considers rather weak for a situation like this.

And despite the previous irritation, feels guilty as he glances at the back of the Human’s head. But now was not the time to be thinking of anything other than dodging lightning and Transporter’s turned missiles. Instead he pushes away any feelings of guilt at having snapped at Yoongi and concentrates on his confusion as to why Yoongi seemed to have rather pointlessly fired out those missiles.

That is until another massive bolt of lightning erupts right behind them.
It’s not just the sound of thunder that explodes with so much force and raw energy, and the lightning that branches out immediately after is laced in bright-blue, similar to that of the proton-missiles Yoongi had just fired.

‘The fleet behind us is gone.’ Namjoon reports rather mutely, as though in awe of Yoongi’s actions.

‘There will be more above us.’

‘I’ll clear the path,’ Yoongi announces from the front.

For some reason this sends a strange shiver down Hoseok’s back. Glancing over at Namjoon, the Kutsoglerin doesn’t seem to notice anything odd. Instead he’s concentrating on the NaviLet in his hands.

‘We still don’t know what happened to The Omhlophe’s ship—though the magnetic pulse would have taken them out for a few hours—’

‘—they’ve had plenty of time to recover since then,’ Hoseok completes his sentence. ‘But they can’t detect us like this— we at least have that.’

‘Doesn’t stop us from being visible— fuck, how are they still tracking us through this storm?!’

From what Hoseok could gather about this planet in the short but stressful time he’s been here, it was that the planet and her people were, mildly putting it, hoarders.

The storm they were passing through was something of a gigantic blanket of charged particles and ions, creating its own channels, disrupting everything in its path that was remotely digital or computerized. Judging by how the Ynqabans made use of old mechanical constructs, and also judging the make and design of the Transporters he had seen in-planet and off-planet, it was safe to say they relied more on fuel rather than energy-cells, allowing them to survive and pilot their crafts through the acidic storm raging through their stratosphere.

This also meant that even the most simple and basic radio-based scanner would be able to detect the complete lack of this charged space. They were undetectable yes, but in this situation, that was what made them starkly visible.

‘We just need to get out of the storm,’ Hoseok grunts as he twists them sharply and then pulls them up.

Yoongi fires again and follows it up with another singular one right above them.

The light that erupts around them is blinding and lasts for almost a while 10 seconds until they’re suddenly above the storm, lightning chasing them upwards as though unwilling to let go.

Sparks melt and expand almost like rain on a window pane would before dissipating entirely as they now exit the planet. The storm below them looks almost solid, like a mass of slowly churning thick blackened water. Lightning erupts somewhere below, illuminating the sheer depth of the thunderstorm they had just escaped.

The Užkulisai shivers just a little as they burn through the final layers of the exosphere, leaving behind a dirty grey curvature of Ynqaba in their wake. Ahead of them, is a whole new level of stress.

There must have been some more space-battles or this area they had unfortunately decided to shoot out of was chalk-full of moon-rock, large shrapnel, asteroids, and other debris.
'We need to have at least 8 Steps cleared before we can hope to warp in this mess,' Namjoon calculates. ‘The ship is already prepared to dodge the larger asteroids-’

‘They’re still here.’ Yoongi announces rather simply from the front, pointing to the side.

Hoseok’s stomach feels it suddenly inverted when he spots a familiar white ship in the distance, hovering near the broken moon.

‘Great-

‘And we’re getting out now!’ Hoseok curses, boosting their engines to maximum. ‘Yoongi-’

The Human doesn’t need to be told.

Pulling up the manual control that locks the Human up into an almost standing pose, Yoongi deploys the proton-cannons.

Unlike in the storm where the explosions of highly charged ions and particles doubled and exaggerated the force and effects of the smaller proton-missiles, out here in Space, the cannons create clear and clean tunnels through the debris.

There is no display of fire or particles reacting and fusing and falling apart violently. Instead oddly stark beams of a rather dull white fans out before them in one sweeping motion, taking with it anything that it touched.

A cloud of fine dust washes over their windows rather slowly, as though somehow surprised at finding itself reduced to such a state.

‘This is very harsh on our energy levels,’ Namjoon alerts them quickly. ‘You cannot use this more than 5 times-’

Another extended wave of dull white sweeps their way and Namjoon grimaces.

‘It’s the fastest way,’ Hoseok mutters before ordering, ‘Lisai prepare for warp now, shift manual warp to me after we’re green.’

‘Understood.’

‘Buggy, report.’

‘Jin stable! Baby stable and really knocked out! Working on Chim! He can talk now!’

Namjoon has an incredulously confused expression on his face at that, like he has at least five questions to ask.

‘Ready for warp at your command.’

‘We’re halfway-’ Namjoon glances over at the white speck in the distance, clearly praying or something that they don’t see them despite the amount of action following them. The Ynqaban fleet fires out of their planet’s spherical border and like projectile missiles shoot straight at them.

‘They’re shockingly fast,’ Hoseok complains just as Yoongi quietly remarks, ‘Adjust tilt-shift to 36 degrees please.’

Hoseok complies, unsure what to expect. Yoongi fires another cannon but it seems to pretty much miss everything in front of them and rather uselessly chips off random asteroids.
‘Yoongi-’ Namjoon sounds like he’s ready to tell Yoongi down to the fractions of how much the cannons were draining their energy levels when he pauses and says, ‘Eh- good idea.’

The half-eradicated asteroids ricochet off of their position from the sudden eruption of energy that blasted their halves into oblivion. In doing so, causing a high-speed chain of reactions where the previously still and thick ocean of space debris starts to shuffle around haphazardly, crashing into the Ynqaban fleet.

‘-17 degrees please.’

Hoseok complies without question.

‘We’re halfway-...’ Namjoon pauses, head still as he stares out of one side of the window.

‘Fuck don’t tell me-’

‘They’re getting closer- they’ve spotted us-’

‘Lisai redirect anti-matter from Medical Bay reserve into cannon tank and fuse cannons 2 and 4, and cannons 1 and 3 together,’ Yoongi orders. ‘Extend and add range.’

‘Redirecting- Captain please confirm orders.’

‘Confirming orders, do it now!’ Namjoon yells as he gets up quickly, rushing down to the Mast next to Yoongi. He locks himself into the seat, lifting up in a similar way to Yoongi, hands gripping the controls as well. To Hoseok’s immense disquiet, the speck of white that he knows is the Omhlophe’s ship has become more than a speck, a blurred cloud around it where asteroids and debris were being blasted away as well.

‘In 3,’ Yoongi says quietly. Namjoon nods. ‘Hobi, 41 degrees.’

Hoseok complies immediately before calling out, ‘Buggy we’re going to warp - secure yourself and Jimin.’

‘1.’

‘Okay!’

‘2.’

‘Launching into warp-!’

‘1.’

Yoongi and Namjoon both pull down on the controls, syncing their timing and firing at the same time.

Brighter than before but strangely smaller than before, the cannons erupt out faster and extends twice as far.

‘Warping in 3-’

The light fades and a clear path, carved clean and dark through the asteroids appears. It also shows the Omhlophe ship closing in at an astounding pace.

‘2.’
A bright flurry of heat signals indicate a barrage of missiles aimed at them from behind them.

‘I.’

Light bends and refracts, pulling and distorting the physics of their surroundings, impossibly bright light spilling through the gaps of stretched elements and particles.

The Uzkulisai launches into warp and within a second, they were back in the familiar non-space of warped space and time.

No one moves, no one says a word. Hoseok can still see the way Namjoon and Yoongi are both still gripping onto their controls, shoulders tensed, fingers ready to pull at launch-triggers and deploy any and all missiles.

It’s painstakingly quiet and Hoseok cannot remotely imagine relaxing at this point. They’re all incredibly high-strung; as though waiting for something to happen. Anything.

They were at warp yes, but lately even infallible notions and truths were proving themselves temporary and Hoseok can’t shake off the feeling of being watched, of being followed.

It’s after a few minutes that Namjoon deactivates the chair from attack-mode. He seems to fold into his seat, exhaling out tiredly.

‘How’s Sk’jin?’ Hoseok asks, glancing at his medical tab anyways.

‘I don’t know,’ Namjoon replies as Yoongi also settles back into his chair, posture still stiff though that was how Yoongi looked anyways. ‘When we got to him...he- he wasn’t breathing. I swear he died.’

‘What happened?’

‘Taeh’yung,’ is all Namjoon says. ‘He did something. I don’t know what, but Sk’jin was breathing again. There…-there was colour on his face- I don’t know.’

They sit in silence again. Hoseok finally disengages the defense-mode over the ship, adjusting the shields back to normal and realigning the cannons back to normal.

‘Lisai run a scan, report any and all irregularities on all functions and systems,’ Namjoon orders, unmoving from where he was slumped.

‘Understood.’

‘Who is that?’ Namjoon asks, not having to clarify himself because there was no one else he could be talking about.

‘His name is Jungkook,’ Hoseok answers, glancing at his medical tab as well.

‘Care to tell me why he’s in the ship?’ Namjoon asks tiredly.

‘He’s like me.’ Yoongi replies unexpectedly.

‘...former GI?’ Namjoon asks carefully.

‘No, I don’t think so,’ Hoseok replies when Yoongi doesn’t. ‘He’s too young; he’s...he’s almost wild. Creature-like. He has the same mark down his back like Yoongi- and he was...he was protecting Jimin? We had to be careful- didn’t trust us until Jimin said it was all right.’
Namjoon doesn’t even stir at the news.

‘It makes sense,’ he mutters instead. ‘In some stupid fucked up way, it all makes sense.’

Hoseok nods in agreement.

They sit in silence for a few more minutes.

‘Where even are we going now?’ Hoseok asks after a few minutes.

‘Sticking to the plan, we’re headed to Grisial,’ Namjoon replies before he stands up slowly, as though his entire body was in pain.

‘You look like shit- you should go clean up,’ Hoseok remarks.

‘So do you,’ Namjoon rolls his eyes, which is a little alarming right now because his left eye is a little exposed, the skin around his socket having burnt off.

Hoseok’s skin has stopped stinging, his body no longer feeling fevered but rather almost numbed and strangely light.

‘I should shower,’ Hoseok frowns before he catches sight of Yoongi’s faded blue hair. ‘You too Yoongi.’

‘I’ll keep watch.’

Namjoon frowns at the Human who doesn’t even look around to acknowledge them. Namjoon raises a single brow in inquiry, eyeing the Human in question. They both remembered the odd messages they had received from the Human prior to losing communication with him. Hoseok still can’t understand the level and depth of how unhinged the Human had been when he found him. It was as though he was someone else.

Hoseok shakes his head in reply and gets up from his chair, and all numbness fades away and gives way to the sticky burning feeling eating at his skin. Wincing Hoseok nods towards the entrance of the Bridge. Namjoon is still looking at Yoongi worriedly.

‘We’re in warp,’ Namjoon tells the Human, ‘Lisai will take over and we can come back asap- we at least need to have you scanned.’

It wasn’t even the fact that he was drenched in acidic rain, and still somewhat smeared in blood and dirt, or how his suit was scratched and peeling in some areas from whatever single-handed massacre he had conducted inside that Central Bridge.

‘I’ll keep watch.’ Yoongi states again.

‘You’re injured-’

‘You can relieve me when you have treated yourself and Hoseok.’ the Human turns his head a little, looking at them both briefly. ‘I am a-ok.’

Namjoon looks like he’s going to argue but Hoseok shakes his head at the Kutsoglerin.

‘The medical kit should be below your seat,’ Hoseok tells the Human who nods his splotchy blue-haired head in reply. ‘Tell us at once if you’re not well.’

Yoongi replies with a thumbs up this time.
Swallowing his pills dry, Namjoon wraps his burnt off bionic skin with lengths of tissue-plast. Not that he could feel the pain of it— it was just uncomfortable and seeing as he had the items needed to regrow his bionic skin, he might as well. Namjoon has long realized that no matter what Species you were, appearing unlike what you are perceived to look like caused more problems and difficulty than he was willing to deal with. And with the state of their ship being as such, Namjoon doesn’t think it would do anyone any good to walk around with their skull exposed. He’d seen the way Sk’jin had studied him before, and most recently the way Hoseok had looked at him.

And like an identification tab that would forever label him for the rest of his life, Namjoon knows he won’t be able to ever get away from the nightmares that birthed who he was today.

Pulling on new clothes Namjoon exits his Cabin to find Hoseok waiting for him near the Kitchen, nursing a nearly empty bottle of ionized water in his hands. His mouth is stuffed with some form of food Namjoon is guessing, though Hoseok himself doesn’t really seem to know what he was eating in the first place. Noticing Namjoon, he makes his way across.

Hoseok had applied a generous amount of repair-serum all over his skin. It’s already halfway healed, but areas around his neck, face, and hands were still serrated and raw. His hair has been pushed back, still very damp from having showered.

‘All good?’ Namjoon inquires. Hoseok nods in reply.

‘What happened with Yoongi?’

Hoseok hands him a filled bottle of ionized-water before he replies, ‘I think he’s—...I think he’s remembering a lot from his past- or at least the past of the Being he was modelled after or something.’

‘Did he say something?’

‘That,’ Hoseok nods, ‘And there was a moment where he didn’t seem to realize where he was- or who I was.’

‘Memory regression?’

‘I don’t know- but I think…’ Hoseok pauses, crossing his arms as he leans on the wall to the side, expression thoughtful. ‘Having Jungkook here, is going to help explain a lot of things. Taeh’yung called him a baby- the same way he did Jimin when he first “sensed” him. The same way he addresses every other “egg”- even Yoongi.’

‘What triggered it? Yoongi I mean- ever since that planet, he’s been off.’ Namjoon trails off.

‘What happened?’ Hoseok asks.

Namjoon fills him in on what happened in the Nightmare Planet, explaining what they found, and how they were now virtually flying invisible. About how Yoongi had collapsed, how Sk’jin had changed, how Jimin who wasn’t lying *(or couldn’t)*, was clearly not telling them everything
anyways.

Hoseok remains silent for a while after the explanation.

Namjoon doesn’t realize it until this immediate moment but Spaces did he miss having Hoseok around. The ship felt complete now. The tenseness of his entire Being just eases completely.

‘I’ve always had this question in my mind,’ he says quietly. ‘Why Yoongi?’

‘What do you mean? He’s part of the GI, or was part of it at least-’

‘It’s not that,’ Hoseok shakes his head. ‘There’s something else. I kept thinking that at first Sk’jin was the variable- the single addition that made no sense to this team.’

Namjoon wants to comment that he too thought like that and hasn’t actually really changed his mind about it either.

‘There’s no need to mention or hide the fact that we’re all extremely aware and paranoid of each other and our personal involvement with this case,’ Hoseok begins, ‘And while this case is no doubt, for the original reasons intended, important, there is obviously more to it.’

Namjoon nods in agreement.

‘I expected Sk’jin to be the odd one out- he certainly fit the role, no ship actually requires a Communications Manager to function. But he’s here. I even entertained ideas that he was here to spy- to feed back information and honestly his behavior certainly added to it.’

‘I’m assuming you changed your mind.’

‘I did, I have changed my mind,’ Hoseok nods slowly.

‘How come?’

‘Because Sk’jin is too angry. He’s too…’ Hoseok sighs out slowly, ‘He’s too broken.’

Namjoon wasn’t expecting that reply.

‘And...and so now you think somehow that Yoongi-’

‘I don’t think anyone is being used as a spy- I don’t think that’s even part of the equation anymore,’ Hoseok replies shaking his head. ‘I think...I think we’re looking at this the wrong way.’

‘How so?’

‘We are all potential threats,’ Hoseok states flatly. ‘Whether or not what we want is a simple life away from our wonderful pasts, we all have agendas and ideals. We all have greed, desire, fears- in short, things that can be used to manipulate us.’

‘Okay…’

‘We’re too closely tied to the Gaia Case- we are…’ Hoseok is struggling for words, ‘We’re too unpredictable- too dangerous to completely let go of, too important to kill.’

Namjoon nods slowly in agreement. He knew that, because that was why he knew that knowing what he did, he was safe from the Venture Unit/GLA’s possible decision to mark him out permanently. It had been his security- a double edged sword essentially. And it had been the same
for Hoseok, and Namjoon had suspected the same for Sk’jin too.

‘Chaotic particles when alone often berserk out, causing or catalyzing reactions that cannot be predicted or determined.’

‘So basically they put us all here to keep a collective eye on all of us,’ Namjoon summarizes.

‘But there was no need to add Yoongi.’

‘But he knows-’

‘How do you think Yoongi became who he is? He talks about suddenly “knowing” or how he “woke up”. Yoongi was chosen for something. Out of all the Beings, of all the eggs that GI had with them or whatever they are, Yoongi was chosen and he’s aware. Only him- his name hasn’t changed, they knew who they were picking when they put Yoongi in the team.’

‘Because of Jimin,’ Namjoon states.

‘Because of Jimin,’ Hoseok nods in agreement. ‘This mission was always about Jimin- but now that I think about it. It has more to do with Yoongi, or at least, the both of them together, or something they both collectively know.’

‘But Yoongi has no memories—... he’s starting to remember.’

‘I can only assume he is,’ Hoseok shrugs, gnawing at his inner cheek before continuing, ‘There was more to why Yoongi was in that planet. There is more to Jimin’s story, not that I think he’s lying, but there was definitely something happening within his System than he was made aware of. A System like that, with such technology, the GLA would never let go that easy.’

‘So you think Yoongi might actually know more to all of this than he himself is aware of?’

‘I think both Yoongi and Jimin actually know more than they’re aware of.’ Hoseok corrects, ‘And we are just here to enable them.’

Namjoon pauses at that, his mind churning. ‘So what do we do?’

Hoseok shrugs in reply as though to say like hell I know and Namjoon can only grimace in reply because that was true. What could they do? While this was an interesting take on the whole matter, it still didn’t change the truth of their reality; they were still stuck in square one. In fact with what just happened in Ynqaba, Namjoon is pretty sure they’ve gone back a few squares and were now firmly in the negatives somewhere. But hey at least none of them were dead.

Maybe very injured and with an additional Being on board.

Speaking of which.

‘You said that the Being was like Yoongi- what else? Were there more of him around?’

‘I don’t know,’ Hoseok replies honestly. ‘It was just him in there- with Jimin. I thought about it and I think Jimin was thrown in there in hopes he’d be slaughtered.’

Namjoon grimaces at that.

‘What changed?’

‘Well...it’s Jimin isn’t it?’ Hoseok has a small smile, ‘He has that effect. Look at Yoongi.’
Namjoon nods in agreement a split second later.

‘He’s not GI- so I don’t know how he …-well, how he came to be. All the others I saw at the ship-they were mostly all fully grown, and very asleep. I don’t know how they could’ve woken him up-not in a planet like Ynqaba at least.’

‘The Omhlophe were waiting for delivery from that System though,’ Namjoon frowns. ‘That and the fact that there was clear Yisheng involvement of sorts. Maybe that ship was carrying eggs, and judging by the crash, the eggs…well, they just happened to be there?’

‘And the Omhlophe heard of it, and sent out their own people to search for more?’ Namjoon tries, ‘Spaces, how many of the eggs are down in Ynqaba? Or in that System overall?’

‘What- like, living breathing aware eggs?’ Hoseok asks, ‘Hard to imagine them so. Jungkook doesn’t seem all too tame- he can speak a little, but it’s like he’s survived solely on fear and whatever primal instincts he was born with.’

‘It’s not hard to imagine actually,’ Namjoon shakes his head, ‘The GI aren’t exactly prime examples of what these Beings were designed or gathered to be.’

Hoseok listens intently.

‘When the Akramanese, or the Red Evil as Jimin knows them, wanted to overthrow the Universe in their own twisted way, they were basically harvesting the Known Universe, for the most perfect or ideal “samples” of each Species, of each Race, to recreate them perfectly, into their own Universe. They didn’t just inherit the Yisheng’s fucked up ideology but added more to it by wanting to grow their know Universe with what already existed here.’ Namjoon explains, ‘So those they harvested, they were in every way ideal, created to be the best of who they were, to essentially restart Life. They were made better, stronger- they were made equal.’

‘So you’re saying that there is a whole population of…genetically superior versions of every Species out there who are capable of their own thinking, asleep inside OrTanks, and now, we have these Beings who call themselves the Pure Ones are after them?’ Hoseok whistles low. ‘And they know who Jimin is, and are now without a doubt, after him, meaning all of us?’

‘Yeah so question is how they know about the “eggs”, and what they want with them, and who they are,’ Namjoon carefully pushes at his tissue-plast that he could feel slipping off. ‘And most importantly why they want Jimin.’

Hoseok nods in agreement.

‘Is that where that rumor about only GI agents being able to take on each other comes from?’ Hoseok asks wryly before adding, ‘So Jimin could take Yoongi down?’

‘Yoongi would lose to Jimin regardless.’ Namjoon waves a hand dismissively, ‘But this goes beyond that- I’ve been thinking about this for sometime but I think there’s a difference between the GI and the well, eggs.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I think that…fundamentally speaking, the origins of the GI, and the origins of the eggs are pretty much the same,’ Namjoon explains. Hoseok nods, encouraging him to continue. ‘But the way they are born- more like the way they…they become, is different.’

‘In what way?’
‘From what we know of the GI, and what Yoongi has sort of told us, and what we’ve heard in regards to the whole myth, they’re practically like cyborgs, not entirely capable of self-aware comprehension or expression. They just simply exist- quite literally almost exactly like what the Yisheng wanted in the first place. However, seeing Jimin, and judging by how you described the new Being, both of whom are clearly not GI or affiliated with the GI, their wakening, and their conscious selves are very...well very alive.’

‘Do you think there are more...more of them out in the Universe? I mean, in all honesty, transporting all sorts of living Beings illegally in OrTanks isn’t unusual. If these OrTanks were ever misplaced or lost, and the Beings inside them...woke up, then are they out there, unaware and just...just living?’ Hoseok asks carefully.

Namjoon shrugs in response again, ‘That’s a possibility. And judging by what we’ve seen so far, not a theory we can just ignore and say isn’t plausible. Not to mention the Alliance probably had some hand in all of this, if they were also transporting eggs like Seulgaan did, then this could have spread wider and further.’

‘What do you think happened to Seulgaan?’ Hoseok asks after a few seconds.

‘I don’t know,’ Namjoon frowns. He’d completely forgotten about the Tayian amidst everything that had happened. ‘Probably struck a deal or something and he’s in the other side of the Universe.’

‘We could do it you know,’ Hoseok says shortly.

‘Do what?’

‘Track Seulgaan’s movement, narrow and define his contacts, find the others who are doing the same thing. See who they’re connected to.’

‘We could, but not with what we’re carrying- who we’re carrying,’ Namjoon shakes his head. ‘My curiosity and stubbornness already got us neck-deep into trouble. While I stand by the fact that Sk’jin purposefully kept information away from us, leading us to trouble with Orvan at the beginning of this mission waylaid us, my inability to see beyond what I wanted to see has gotten us here and here is not where I want us. We could have progressed further, progressed in a safer and faster route- one where we didn’t have to lose you and I am sorry for that.’

Hoseok looks surprised.

‘Thank you for coming back.’

‘...you kinda rescued me so it’s not like you really gave me a chance to choose.’

Namjoon nearly chokes on his own spit but then Hoseok burst out laughing.

‘It’s good to be back,’ Hoseok coughs out, patting him on the shoulder, ‘Can’t let you and Sk’jin kill each other in front of the children.’

‘The children are probably older than us,’ Namjoon deadpans.

‘I’ll go relieve Yoongi,’ Hoseok wheezes out, grabbing another bottle of ionized water and some snacks from a cupboard. ‘I’ll check over the reports as well and scan the Underverse for news.’

‘Spaces, please never leave again,’ Namjoon groans as Hoseok snorts again with a wave of his bandaged hand.
He waits until Hoseok is out of earshot and quietly calls out, ‘Lisai, is it possible to legally bind Hoseok permanently in service of the Užkulisai?’

‘That is a violation of Code 002 under the protocols regarding the establishment and practice of free-will. Unless you wish to force team members under a contract of slavery.’

‘Never mind.’

Namjoon doesn’t know why he’s sneaking into the Medical Bays but he is. He looks inside where “Jungkook” was being treated. Stepping in, he notices how the young Being...is actually incredibly young. It’s worrisome almost, the amount of injury and wounds he had. According to his health tab, he was estimated at 27 sols old.

There’s something different about how you become as a Being born into pain. Namjoon doesn’t know what to think of the Being before him.

Sure with him here, maybe they could have a clearer understanding of who and what he was, including Yoongi, Jimin, and a whole population of others like him. But then what would they do after?

‘Lisai do we have a complete biodata on him?’

‘Yes Captain, monitor 2 is updating.’

Namjoon pulls up monitor 2 and skims through the contents and is surprised.

‘Species: Pravasi M’hanun. Race: Vicitra.’

He didn’t look like any of the Vicitra Namjoon has seen before, live and or documented. But perhaps like every other specimen found within the OrTanks, he too had been modified or “made better”; something both the Yishengs and the Akramanese seemed to deem incredibly important.

Stepping closer to the Bed, Namjoon carefully examines the Vicitra.

The Vicitra were known cannibals, eating and consuming their own kind though it was not their only source of food of course. Cannibalism was part of their culture, a way of showing dominance, power, and or victory. They were normally very pale skinned, almost a pale lilac to an extent, and had blood-tinted finger tips, eye sockets, and other extremities. While the Pravasi M’hanun weren’t the most advanced of cultures or Species, the Vicitra were something of a prime example of top-notch evolutionary progress. They were cunning, intelligent, highly adaptive, and could put on a terrifyingly convincing persona of civility. And while their rather crude and bloody culture did influence their entire behavior as a Species, the Vicitra were good at handling political discussions as well as willing to stay, for a certain period of time, as ambassadors of sorts. They were part of the GLA, but were not involved in anything more than simple diplomatic issues of participation in the Galactic Court when needed so long as they didn’t eat other Beings outside of their own planet.

He hears Taeh’yung giggles, followed by a mumbling that distinctly sounded like Jimin. At least they were both all right- not too grievously injured or harmed.

Jungkook twitches a little at the sound but Namjoon remains calm. He had been under delta sleep while the Bed looked over his injuries, a wise move, Namjoon thinks.

What would they feed him? What would they do once he’s healed and alert? What do they do with him? There was no way they could leave him in some planet with living Beings in it. The
possibility of his capture and torture, or worse enslavement was high. Not to mention of course, being a young and unaware Being running purely on defensive instincts his whole life, he could potentially attack and kill those trying to maybe give him aid.

Jungkook twitches more and turns to his side, his brow glistening with sweat, wrinkled with pain.

Namjoon can smell the filth on him afresh as he turns, but he’s too distracted by the carved in indent down the Vicitra’s spine.

It was true.

It was identical to the one on Yoongi’s back.

‘Is he healing?’ Namjoon asks out loud.

‘Subjects healing rate is naturally fast. All injuries should be healed in 18 hours. Internal infections are currently being targeted.’

That explained the feverish sweating and grimaces of pain. Walking around, Namjoon notices a gaping but shallow open wound on Jungkook’s head, already cleaned and waiting further application of whatever medical process was being implemented.

‘Continue delta sleep- monitor brain activity and heart rate carefully.’

‘Understood.’

The door slides shut silently and Namjoon quietly peaks into the next room.

Jimin is sitting on the Medical Bed, a funny wincing expression on his face as the operational-arms clean and disinfect the soles of his feet. Namjoon grimaces at the sight of the lashing, wondering if maybe that would motivate Jimin in wearing shoes. Jimin had changed, the remains of his previous clothes are in the form of dirty rain water puddles that lead up the shredder tube to the side. He was now just wearing Medical-robies, looking beyond exhausted. Namjoon briefly wonders where the suit and helmet he borrowed from Yoongi went.

His head was being neatly bandaged by Taeh’yung who was animatedly speaking to Jimin.

‘-and then I thought, you know, why wouldn’t that be a good idea-‘

‘-I don’t think it’s good idea,’ Jimin winces and wait-

Namjoon doesn’t know what to focus on. Jimin’s apparent new talent in Standard, Taeh’yung’s completely nonchalant attitude towards it, or Jimin’s very battered state, or the bloodied mess on Taeh’yung’s shirt.

‘Oh! Pa!’ Taeh’yung spots him and waves brightly at him with a length of tissue-plast.

Jimin looks up at him, a smile that’s familiarly bright and genuine in joy as though Jimin was actually very happy to see him again. It’s a little difficult to comprehend but Namjoon takes it as a sign that Jimin was doing all right.

‘So uh-‘ Namjoon begins rather intelligently.

‘Chim can speak!’ Taeh’yung gives him a thumbs up.

‘Um- hello.’ Jimin waves at him with two of his hands, smiling sheepishly.
Namjoon realizes that it’s not proper conduct to gawk at someone without explanation or warrant like a fish out of water.

‘How are…how are you able to understand? To speak? What happened?’ Namjoon asks carefully as soon as he’s somewhat recovered, still not able to process how any of this could have come about.

‘I-‘ Jimin looks at Taeh’yung, almost out of habit as though to start indicating where the Zhak’gri would need to start translating. ‘When I woke up- I hear voice. Lisai. Something happen with…h-helmet.’ Jimin says slowly, indicating the shape of Yoongi’s helmet to Namjoon who nods in understanding.

‘There was letters. Words. Asking “yes” or “no”.’ Jimin continues, ‘And then…lots of light. I don’t remember. But when I wake up, I understand.’ Then as though a little embarrassed adds, ‘Difficult to talk.’

‘But you’re doing so well Chim!’ Taeh’yung exclaims, looking at Namjoon with an expected expression, as though silently telling him to agree.

‘Yes, you are doing very well,’ Namjoon says at once and he’s not lying either.

And while it was obvious Jimin was trying to explain how it happened, it was clear he didn’t understand it himself. GI technology was always a little fascinating. Developed in complete secret by the Yishengs, Namjoon has no difficulty in believing it would allow for such a thing to somehow install language skills within another living Being, especially one who has come to them under such circumstance.

Jimin smiles in thanks before tentatively asking, ‘Hoseok?’

‘He’s at the Bridge,’ Namjoon tells him, ‘He’s all right.’

‘Yoongi?’

‘I uh- I think he’s showering,’ Namjoon glances down at his NaviLet and finds that Yoongi is indeed in his own Cabin. ‘But he’ll come down soon- I want him to get checked as well.’

‘What happen?’ Jimin touches at his own face.

‘Just the rain,’ Namjoon smiles. ‘Nothing serious.’

‘Okay.’

‘Did they do anything?’ Namjoon asks carefully. ‘What happened when you crashed?’

Though Jimin certainly had no difficulty understanding Namjoon’s question, although he does have a slightly surprised expression throughout, as though surprised at himself for understanding him in the first place, Jimin takes a while to answer. He speaks out the words, sounding unsure, like a Being reading a difficult word out loud.

‘When I woke up,’ Jimin starts carefully, ‘I could understand.’

Namjoon nods for Jimin to continue.

‘Cy…borgs, take me to Seulgaan. He want to take me…away,’ Jimin says with a few pauses. ‘He called his…people. There were many survivors. They were leaving, but they came- the uh-…’ he
looks at Namjoon as though for help.

‘The Ynqaban.’

Jimin nods, slowly mouthing the word as though to make sure he would say it right.

‘Ynqaban. Seulgaan tried to talk, but they didn’t listen,’ Jimin frowns. ‘They took his life.’

Namjoon is a little taken aback by how Jimin words it. While the news of Seulgaan’s death doesn’t cause any emotional reaction in him, Namjoon is more interested in the way Jimin is relaying all of this.

Language was a tricky thing. The usage of words, preference of words used in describing or relaying information, especially from a Being who didn’t have any previous knowledge in it, was always a clearer insight into the way their minds worked.

‘I was…’ Jimin pauses again, ‘I was not whole. I could not help myself or the others around me. I thought they would also take me with others- but they saw Yoongi’s hel-met, and clothes.’ Jimin looks down at his hands. ‘They could also see the weight.’

‘The weight?’

‘They know what it was. They thought I am Yoongi.’

They knew the uniform- the GI uniform. But how? The GI were considered an urban lore that mainly circulated within the Raksane Tayi System. And though based off of what Yoongi himself has said before, and how he has indeed gone much further and wider across the Universe than simply being stationed in Tayi, it was shocking to hear about the GI being known and recognized in a planet like Ynqaba.

‘They take me away- to the…Bridge,’ Jimin frowns, fidgeting with his bandages around his head. ‘There were Ynqaban there. But not like others. They were the merchants- they thought I was the same, with my back.’

He reaches behind him, feeling at his back carefully.

‘But you don’t have one,’ Namjoon says quietly.

Jimin shakes his head, ‘The merchants took their lives, they said they were thieves trying to deceive. They took away Yoongi’s helmet and clothes; to put with the others. I am sorry.’

‘Others? They said there was more?’

Jimin nods, ‘In store.’

That really made no sense.

‘They take me inside that cage,’ Jimin continues, ‘They want- wanted, to see, if I could survive.’

‘They put you in that place with Jungkook?’

Jimin nods and then with a look at Taeh’yung says, ‘They control him. Like animal.’

Taeh’yung pulls out a small device, not more than an inch in width and almost entirely flat. It looked like a chip of sorts.
‘I think it’s something that when enabled, causes electric shock or something,’ Taeh’yung says, handing it to Namjoon who reigns in his anger that flares at the sight of the device.

‘It was on his head.’

Namjoon remembers the wound on Jungkook’s head and exhales out slowly.

‘He tried not to hurt me,’ Jimin tells him. ‘He tried very hard. He was in pain.’

Namjoon looks over Jimin carefully, eyes wandering over his wounds and injuries. His gaze lingers on his neck, close to his throat, where teeth marks could still be seen despite being nearly entirely healed over. Namjoon also realizes, with some alarm, that the bloodied mess on Taeh’yung’s clothes came from a similar wound though much fresher.

‘He did that?’ Namjoon asks, pointing to both of their necks.

‘He was afraid,’ both Jimin and Taeh’yung reply before the latter adds.

Namjoon nods in understanding, and with a carefully stable hand, gives Taeh’yung back the device.

‘Don’t alter anything in it, we can analyze it later and see what exactly was done,’ Namjoon tells him. ‘Why did you want to bring him here Jimin?’

Jimin pauses a little at that, a small frown settling between his brows.

‘He is young. Abandoned, and unaware- he has known no life other than pain, use, and hunger,’ his voice is soft but when Jimin looks up, there is a steeliness in his eyes that reminds Namjoon that Jimin, despite his gentle and near-ethereal appearance, was a leader of his System, a political figure of great power and authority, one who has no doubt had to make difficult decisions, learn ugly truths, and live a reality that didn’t allow him to be someone beyond his given title. And while he may have act upon moral and compassionate actions, he does not lose sight of the fact that everything had a much more deeper connection, darker story than visible. And that there was always something to gain, that there will always be something to gain first, before others can gain from you.

‘He is also born of the same place Yoongi was born from. His soul, his mind, his dreams are old-just like Yoongi. I want to know why. Why he is here, why Yoongi is here, why I am here.’ Jimin looks down again before adding in a quiet whisper, ‘I want to know why. And I want to know how.’

Namjoon nods at that.

‘I can accept that, and I can see the reasoning behind it. But when Jungkook wakes up, will he be…lucid enough to talk? Will he be able to communicate-‘

‘Not his words,’ Jimin interrupts him. ‘His words will not tell us. Yoongi’s words won’t tell us – but their souls can, their hearts can.’

Namjoon wonders if he’s missed something important here, pausing to glance at Taeh’yung who doesn’t seem to share Namjoon’s confusion but is instead nodding enthusiastically.

‘Get some rest,’ Namjoon tells them both as kindly as he can, hoping it didn’t sound like an order. ‘And when we can all gather-‘
Taeh’yung suddenly gasps and waves vigorously at someone behind Namjoon. Willing himself not to start too much, Namjoon finds Yoongi standing by the wall, half hidden from view.

He was no longer covered in blood and his hair was still dripping water as though he had hurried in his shower. He was also not wearing full black as was his norm, but instead a grey sweater over dark trousers. For a moment Namjoon almost feels as though he doesn’t recognize Yoongi like this. His expression is carefully masked, somewhat staged.

‘Yoongi! Come to get fixed?’ Taeh’yung jumps forward, trying to pull the Human in.

Yoongi is obviously there for other reasons; mainly Jimin.

Jemin pulls at the gauzing around his head, ducking his head a little and looking away from the Human.

A curious expression falls over Yoongi’s face, one that Namjoon feels as though could have been of regret- maybe even shame, as he too looks away.

This was odd.

It was already odd to find the Human anywhere else other than somehow being close to Jimin. Especially considering how close the Human had been to losing his mind over losing Jimin. He had even left Sk’jin behind as a result. And now that they were back, with Jimin injured, Namjoon had assumed it would take a fight and a half to get the Human to participate in ship duties rather than hover over Jimin. But here he was, putting physical distance between the two of them, watching Jimin with a rather nervous expression.

‘I’m fine,’ the Human replies to Taeh’yung questions, moving away from view as Taeh’yung tries to put a tissue-plast on him randomly, his voice fades as he steps away even more saying, ‘Just checking.’

‘Taeh’yung,’ Namjoon calls when the Zhak’gri looks like he’s trying to go after the Human. ‘Get Jimin sorted out first.’

Taeh’yung pauses, looking conflicted before he makes a grumpy expression and nods, returning to Jimin.

‘Shower,’ is all Jimin says as he gingerly rearranges his legs, making to get off of the Bed. ‘And rest.’

‘Both of you. Tae- you should rest too all right?’ Namjoon calls as he steps out of the Bay. He remembers the way Hoseok had drawn out a sort of compliance from Taeh’yung, addressing him with fondness which the Zhak’gri responded to positively. ‘Remember, you’re our buggy and you need to rest too.’

It seems to work because Taeh’yung looks at him with wide eyes that suddenly sparkle with the glittering force of a thousand stars and Namjoon is terrified that the Zhak’gri might start crying but he holds up valiantly and with an incredibly wide smile, Taeh’yung nods and says, ‘I will Pa! Don’t worry!’

Smiling to himself Namjoon walks out of the Bay and finally makes his way to where he had originally been planning on going.

However, Sk’jin is not alone. Yoongi is standing there, looking over Sk’jin with his usual blankness.
‘When he wakes up, he might try to kill me,’ Yoongi states plainly, barely acknowledging Namjoon’s presence other than to talk.

‘Which is understandable in a lot of ways.’ Namjoon replies wryly, pulling up a stool and dragging it over to the side of the Bay.

‘I am not sick,’ Yoongi continues. ‘Or unwell. I am changing.’

‘…change can be good,’ Namjoon replies slowly.

‘It can,’ Yoongi agrees. ‘I am aware of this change. But I do not know what it is doing, or how it is happening. There is change, but I cannot see it. I can feel it, but I cannot identify it.’

‘Is that what you meant when you were headed to the central-bridge?’

‘Yes. I did not understand it.’

‘Can you tell me…what it was?’ Namjoon inquires. ‘Or at least tell me what you felt?’

Yoongi nods, standing straight as though about to report to him. Namjoon wonders if it’s a conditioned action ingrained in the Human.

‘I felt pain,’ Yoongi explains. ‘Pain but not of my body, not of tissue, flesh, or bone. But there was pain. It hurt here.’

He raises his hand over his chest, over where his heart should be.

‘It kept growing- it expanded, all over me. To my legs, my arms, my fingers. I couldn’t control my actions- I was…-I was unsteady,’ Yoongi states slowly. ‘It was as though I had two minds- one unsteady, the other as I was.’

‘And what is that?’

Yoongi seems genuinely confused by this question.

‘Go on, sorry ignore my question,’ Namjoon urges.

‘The closer I got to Jimin’s location, the stranger I felt. I nearly uncovered my identity- not out of purpose, but because I couldn’t control what I was.’ Is Yoongi’s extraordinary statement. ‘But I could remain as I am. And I could go on- but I saw something and after that I do not remember what happened.’

‘You have a memory gap?’

‘I do not remember what happened, but I saw a dream,’ Yoongi explains. ‘I see a lot of Dreams.’

‘…what was in this dream?’

‘I was taken,’ Yoongi replies. ‘I was afraid. There was singing. Jimin was singing, and I needed to reach him. But I couldn’t. I needed to return.’

‘How did you wake up?’

‘Hoseok woke me up.’

That was when Hoseok found Yoongi. But Namjoon hadn’t been able to pay much attention
because he’d been worried over Sk’jin.

‘Everyone was dead.’ Yoongi tells him plainly. ‘Everyone was dead. Even Seulgaan’s slaves who were captured there. I killed them all. And I do not remember.’

‘Yoongi,’ Namjoon begins carefully. ‘I think it’s possible that you might have been building up to a panic attack of sorts, maybe an emotional imbalance.’

‘Why?’

Namjoon gapes for a moment.

The logic and reasoning behind most sentient emotion was lost on Yoongi. Namjoon wonders how many things the Human felt on an everyday basis without realizing what it meant or how it even came to be.

‘Because you were worried. You were stressed. You were afraid.’

‘Why?’

‘I…I cannot say,’ Namjoon shrugs. ‘You were worried about Jimin’s safety, you were worried that the mission would fail. You were worried you wouldn’t be able to find Jimin. And if you did, you were worried about how you would get out. Sometimes when all of these add up, you just…you just lose control.’

‘Has this happened to you?’

‘It has,’ Namjoon replies truthfully.

It hits Namjoon a little too clearly. A little too harshly.

Namjoon has been used to calculating and planning around Beings who have complex and ever-changing priorities, agendas, and thoughts. Yoongi was however, extraordinarily simple and straightforward. He just didn’t know how to express himself, and the Universe as a whole, did not know how to translate this either.

Yoongi was going through basic emotional responses and he didn’t know how to deal. As a result he seemed to somehow invert within his own mind, losing time and consciousness. Meaning his primal instincts, which were basically GI training and skills, kicked in, and went into overdrive as he tried to recover.

And maybe Yoongi actually knew this and didn’t know how to explain it, or even fully comprehend it. And maybe this was why he was trying to keep away from Jimin- because he felt guilt.

Deep down Yoongi knew that Jimin would not approve, that Jimin would not appreciate the blood spilt, that Jimin would not have left Sk’jin behind, regardless of what Sk’jin had done in the first place.

‘Is this why you’re avoiding Jimin?’ he asks as gently as he can.

Yoongi stares at him for a moment before he adds in a voice almost as quiet as though he was whispering, ‘Jimin does not like me,’ and then he starts to walk away, ‘He doesn’t know me.’

‘…Yoongi I’m pretty sure Jimin likes you?’ Namjoon struggles, turning in his seat to call after the
Human. Basic emotional responses or not, did Yoongi not feel the way Jimin looked at him?

‘I am not Yoongi,’ is his reply, looking down at his feet, expression just as blank as ever though his eyes are a little wide.

‘If you’re not Yoongi, then who are you?’

Yoongi pauses at the doorframe momentarily as he replies, ‘I am no one.’

‘Yoongi wait-‘ Namjoon tries to stop the Human but he’s already gone.

‘He said that before to me too,’ Hoseok tells him quietly, nearly making Namjoon jump. ‘I think his past memories- or at least the memories of the original Human Yoongi is making him realize… realize himself.’

Namjoon sighs out, leaning back on the wall.

What did they do? How did they do it? How many more are there? And what do the Omhlophe want with Jimin? What do the Special-Jury want with Jimin? With Yoongi?

‘How’s everyone?’

‘They’re alright I guess,’ Namjoon wonders what “alright” even constituted for anymore in this ship. ‘Taeh’yung took Jimin up to clean up, his injuries have been checked and are being healed I think. Jungkook is in delta, being healed. And Sk’jin…’

Paying his full attention back on the Khol’isa, Namjoon leans in closer from his stool.

Taeh’yung had obviously done something to him. There was more to his relationship with Taeh’yung than he let on, more to how Sk’jin came back. And though Namjoon knows he should respect and understand the situation as a complex and very intimate relationship between the two, he can’t help but wonder the basis and implications of what it all meant.

Pulling up Sk’jin’s medical tab, Namjoon frowns at the oddly high pulse reading on the tab.

‘I think he’s doing alright too,’ Namjoon replies a little late as he reads his charts, ‘I think he might actually wake up soon-‘

And as though his words were a catalyst, all of Sk’jin’s readings shoot up at an alarming rate and the Khol’isa twitches just once and-

‘NO!’

Sk’jin sits up violently, chest heaving, still caught up in whatever violent reaction he had experienced just before losing consciousness.

‘No-! Drop it-!’ He screams, the panic and desperation raw and heavy in his word.

Sk’jin nearly falls out of the Medical Bed, his body unrestrained and moving unpredictably. He lands with a hard smack on the floor, wires snapping out of him, spraying the air with some blood that has Namjoon wincing.

‘Sk’jin-!’

Sk’jin flails violently, limbs snapping at Namjoon but mainly hitting the floors and walls. Namjoon tries to restrain the Khol’isa to prevent him from hurting himself but it’s proving
difficult. Throwing aside all care about potentially upsetting his still healing injuries and wounds, Namjoon throws himself over Sk’jin bodily, pushing them down to the floor below the Bed.

Sk’jin 

‘Hey waah!’ Namjoon holds the Khol’isa down, restraining him from thrashing around too much. Where was Taeh’yung?

‘Sk’jin calm down! It’s okay- you’re safe- you’re safe!’

‘-get away-!’

Namjoon centers his weight down more, pushing Sk’jin down with his own body and blocking all of his wild movements.

‘Sk’jin you’re safe-!’ Namjoon manages to hold the Khol’isa’s head down, preventing him from hitting his head on the floor. Their eyes lock and Sk’jin suddenly stills. He’s still rigid, his body mid-thrash and Namjoon is painfully aware of Sk’jin’s knee ramming uncomfortably into his side.

‘You’re okay- you’re safe,’ Namjoon tells him carefully. ‘You’re back on our ship. You’re safe.’

Sk’jin isn’t even breathing, his eyes dilated to the point of pin-pricks. Where was Taeh’yung!!

He can’t look away, knowing that somehow this was helping Sk’jin, stopping him from thrashing. Desperately thinking back, Namjoon remembers the way Taeh’yung had addressed Sk’jin when he’d been unwell.

‘Hey Jinnie,’ Namjoon tries, ‘You’re all right. You’re safe. No one is going to hurt you yeah?’

Sk’jin’s fingers are locked in a tight angled grip on Namjoon’s shirt, skin white from the strain. Slowly he takes a shuddering breath and his body shivers.

‘That’s it- take a deep breath, you’re safe,’ Namjoon shifts himself carefully, ‘You’re doing good. You’re safe yeah?’

Sk’jin takes a few more breaths, his pupils expanding to normal slowly. Each breath he takes reduces the tremors and after a couple of minutes, the rigidness of his posture eases and Namjoon carefully lifts himself, kneeling over the Khol’isa while still maintaining eye-contact. Slowly easing Sk’jin’s fingers off of his shirt, Namjoon carefully straightens his rigid and cramped fingers in what he hopes is a soothing manner.

Out of the corner of his eye he sees Hoseok stepping away quietly, clearly having run down to help.

He settles Sk’jin’s hands down to the floor, carefully setting his limbs straight. Sk’jin’s blood that had splattered about while he was thrashing had splattered over the side of his own face, a few drops threatening to trickle down to his eyes.

Not wanting to break whatever state of focused shock Sk’jin was in, Namjoon carefully wipes at the blood splatter, sweeping it over to the side towards his temples, still not breaking their eye contact.

Sk’jin closes his eyes, chest heaving in one heavy inhale. When he exhales his body goes limp and Namjoon is frightened almost.
'Sk’jin?'

The Khol’isa opens his eyes, struggling almost, as though he had been merely sleeping and was now waking up. When he fully opens his eyes, Namjoon knows that he’s back.

‘Hey,’ Namjoon quiets his voice as best as he can, sounding as gentle as possible.

Sk’jin looks around, confused no doubt, on finding himself on the floor.

‘You’re safe. You’re out of Ynqaba- we got you out of that mountain. You’re safe now.’

‘-m-mountain-?’ Sk’jin stammers out. ‘What- where-.’

‘It was bad timing- bad luck,’ Namjoon tells him quietly, ‘We planted a timed explosive, to use as a distraction, so that we could pull Jimin out.’

Sk’jin’s eyes are a little glazed, pausing in their movements.

‘We were keeping track of you, but the storm messed all of our signals. We didn’t know you would be coming to that area, we don’t even know why the explosive was triggered- or how but-’

‘It was us,’ Sk’jin whispers. ‘In the end it was all us.’

Namjoon frowns, reshuffling on his knees to kneel better, ‘Sk’jin-?’

‘What happened- how-…how did I-.’ Sk’jin stops, ‘What happened to the-‘

‘They’re gone- it’s all right,’ Namjoon tells him quickly, ‘You’re safe, you won’t get hurt-‘

Sk’jin suddenly scrambles to his feet, a truly terrified expression on his face.

‘Sk’jin-!’ Namjoon stands as well, arms raised in case the Khol’isa fell again or started to go into shock.

‘No-!’ Sk’jin stops him, violently shaking his head, his face crumpling. ‘No!’

Namjoon pauses, unsure what to do. What had they done to Sk’jin that he looked so terrified? What happened that would warrant such a reaction?

Sk’jin stares down at his hand, and then his clothes, and then back at Namjoon.

‘You-‘ he stops. ‘You left me.’

‘What-‘

‘No-‘ Sk’jin shakes his head again, a strangely wide smile on his face before his expression contorts to anguish again. ‘No- I left.’

Namjoon cautiously tries to approach the Khol’isa again. It was wrong to see him this unstable- so completely and utterly helpless.

This was wrong.

Sk’jin was powerful, he was overwhelming and he knew it and he flaunted it. He was cunning, well poised, and incredibly prepared for anything.

Seeing him like this felt wrong. Namjoon almost wants Sk’jin to start insulting him, to start a
verbal fight against him.

‘Sk’jin-’

Suddenly, quite casually, Sk’jin stands up straight, his expression uncannily normal. He wipes at his face, seemingly not noticing the bumps and cuts and burns that tear open again from the harsh treatment, before clearing his throat and with an elegant bow of his head says, ‘I need a shower. I feel unreasonably dirty, Spaces, you would think hygiene was a priority in a Medical Bay.’

Then without so much as limping or looking strained, Sk’jin walks past Namjoon and straight out of the Medical Bay.

‘Namjoon?’

‘Yeah?’

‘I think…I really need a drink.’

Looking over at the Medical Bed, and at the walls still sprayed in fine spots with Sk’jin’s blood, and down at the floor where Sk’jin’s still rain-damp clothes had left smudged prints he sighs. CleanBots roll in swiftly, already cleaning up the floors while a few struggle to roll up on the walls. With a nudge from his foot, Namjoon pushes one of the rolling Bots to the wall and its whirrs as though in thanks.

‘Yeah, I’ll get us something.’

* 

In retrospect, Yoongi realizes he should have probably informed Jimin that he was there. He’s read a fair amount of books and watched a fair amount of movies that have repeatedly advised against this, with a plethora of examples of why you shouldn’t. Though he’s fairly certain, that from Taeh’yung’s loud greeting that was louder than necessary, should have alerted the entire ship of his presence in that area. Not to mention the ‘here! Take over for me! I’m hungry!’ and very strong shove that pushed Yoongi into the Cabin.

But Jimin still looks surprised as he steps out of the en suite, looking about with wide eyes, nervousness oozing out of him. He’s wrapped in a large towel, his head covered rather haphazardly with another towel as though he’d done it in a hurry. Jimin seemed oddly jumpy, not looking Yoongi in the eye.

‘Sunshine?’

Jimin shakes his head and Yoongi pauses, wondering what Jimin meant by that.
‘I won’t stay long,’ Yoongi states, remembering what he read on “What to Say, How to Say It, and When to Say It- a Conversation Guide on Sensitive Topics for the Socially Inept”. ‘I would like to apologize, for what you saw, for what I did, and how I was unable to keep you safe.’

The book had said that Yoongi should be to the point, without going into excessive detail. In fact, he replaced the words in the given examples to suit this very purpose.

‘I also want to apologize for how I behaved, what I did.’

‘What did you do?’ Jimin asks, unmoving from where he stood by the en suite.

It doesn’t seem odd to talk to Jimin- to communicate with each other. There’s a feeling that almost resembles satisfaction. Or more accurately to Yoongi, like the finalization of a mission. Unlike how Hoseok and Namjoon had been incredibly flabbergasted by Jimin’s newfound ability to speak and understand Standard, it felt absolutely normal to Yoongi.

‘I left Sk’jin,’ Yoongi says bluntly. ‘I abandoned him, to distract his captors, and I would have left without Namjoon, Hoseok, or Taeh’yung.’

Jumin doesn’t say anything, still watching him carefully, processing his words.

‘I also killed those Beings in the Bridge.’ Yoongi continues and adds, ‘I am sorry.’

They stand in silence and Yoongi waits the time they mentioned in the book (25 seconds) before he walks out. (Silence can be interpreted as refusal of your apology or confession! It is best to give them their space and if ideal, try again some days later). He’s almost done with his countdown, already taking a step back when Jimin shakes his head.

Yoongi also shakes his head, mimicking the action as though hoping it would help clarify what he meant by it. They just stare at each other, Jimin looking like he wanted to say something but didn’t know how, and Yoongi waiting. It’s well past the 25 second rule and Yoongi silently steps back.

But Jimin quickly steps forward, looking pained as he hurries on his feet to somehow waddle and stand in front of Yoongi, barring his way. His towel slips on his head and he desperately tries to cover his head, turning sideways and ducking down, crouching by the doorway with a sharp exhale of pain.

‘What happened?’ Yoongi asks at once, also crouching down, wondering why Jimin was so adamant in holding the towel around his head, nearly dropping the towel around his body in his efforts to keep his head covered. Was it hurting? Yoongi knows he was injured, having read the full details of his injuries carefully, watching his health-tab as he healed.

He shakes his head when Yoongi reaches for his head. Dropping his hand at once, Yoongi waits for some sort of explanation.

‘Are you hurt?’ he asks. ‘What can I do? Medical Bay? Taeh’yung?’

Jumin just chews on his lower lip for a moment, eyeing him with an expression that Yoongi categorizes as apprehension.

‘Sunshine? I-—will you let me help you?’

Maybe he didn’t want Yoongi’s help- maybe he didn’t want Yoongi there. And maybe he didn’t know how to say it to him.
‘Do you want me to go?’ Yoongi asks as Jimin secures both towels around himself a little more securely. Jimin shakes his head and quietly says, ‘No. Stay, please.’

‘What can I do?’

Instead of replying, Jimin shakily reaches up and pulls away the towel with a shaky breath.

A bitter feeling wells up in his throat, overwhelming Yoongi to his core.

Jimin doesn’t look up, instead fiddling with the towel in his hands, as though he can’t face Yoongi.

It now made sense, what he had seen in that Central-Bridge. Jimin’s head is shaved, shorn, and reddened, his skin bruised and bumpy. Without the towel, Yoongi can also see more of his half-healed injuries and wounds around his neck and shoulders.

He makes to cover his head, unable to look at Yoongi as though afraid of what Yoongi would think. But Yoongi catches his hands, lowering them again before gently turning Jimin to face him.

‘Does it hurt?’

Jimin shakes his head, unable to hold his gaze for more than a few seconds.

Yoongi pauses before touching his head, giving him time to move away. But Jimin stays, breathing in and out in a purposeful manner.

Whoever did this hadn’t done it to simply cut off his hair- but to shame and humiliate him. To make him feel out of control and to feel powerless. Yoongi’s entire being burns with anger and pain. He doesn’t know what to do. Jimin stays there, trying to make himself small, head ducked, eyes downcast, shoulders drooping.

What memories Yoongi has of Jimin, what recollection of thoughts, emotions, and senses he can still feel simmering underneath his consciousness, all shapes and illumination of Jimin have always mainly been of strength, grace, and a beauty that no words could justifiably describe. Jimin was by no means a physically large Being, he was barely reaching Yoongi’s height and he was built slim. But he carried himself in a way that just overwhelmed you through his sheer presence, like all light instantly shone on to him.

And at this moment, Jimin appeared broken, tired, and drained.

*Diminished.*

Yoongi’s chest constricts at that- a feeling of pain he can’t quite understand or classify.

He gently brushes his fingers over the shorn scalp. Some places were cut so close to the scalp, it left red burn-like scars.

‘Not beautiful,’ Jimin says quietly and unexpectedly.

Yoongi kisses the top of his head- his lips feeling the shaggy and slightly bumpy texture of his scalp. He’s not sure why he does it, but he’s seen Taeh’yung do it, and he knows it’s a common way of comforting someone, he’s read about it as well in countless books. And so the instinct comes rather easily.

And Yoongi wants to comfort Jimin. He *needs* to.

‘I’m sorry,’ Jimin tells him quietly. ‘Not beautiful.’
There's a sudden realization in Yoongi, one he can't exactly comprehend.

‘You’re the most beautiful to me.’

Jimin sniffs, fingers clenching and unclenching around the towel.

‘Always beautiful,’ Yoongi says again before kissing his scalp again.

Jimin ducks his head again, though this time more out of shyness than shame, his ears turning red.

Yoongi follows his instincts, pressing soft light kisses around the shorn head, down to the side and over to reddened ears. Yoongi knows that kissing was a form of comfort, but he had always thought it would be comforting for the person to receive it. So he doesn’t know why he’s feeling comforted by this. But feeling Jimin’s warmth like this, feeling his presence, his solidity- knowing he was right there in front of him, safe and secure enough that Yoongi could do this rather small act of comfort in turn settles his own restlessness.

Jimin’s breath is a little shallow, somewhat unstable. But he seems to melt into Yoongi’s hold, eyes closed, a rather overwhelmed expression on his face. He shivers when Yoongi kisses down the side of his neck, following a track of healing wounds, pink and shiny with new skin.

‘So beautiful.’

Jimin ducks into Yoongi’s hold, shivering as a few sobs shake his body.

Yoongi holds him as close and as tightly as possible while avoiding Jimin’s upper torso. They stay like that for a while, with Yoongi pressing soft kisses around his head and neck, before Jimin’s soreness catches up to him from sitting in a cramped manner on the floor. Jimin freezes as Yoongi scoops him out of the floor easily, seating him on the edge of the bed carefully before retrieving the medical-kit from the en suite.

Yoongi helps him reapply the repair-serum while Jimin cuts lengths of tissue-plast, handing them strip by strip as Yoongi bandages his feet. Without thinking much about it, Yoongi kisses the top of his feet after making sure all the tissue-plast were secure. Yoongi is about to lean away and stand up but Jimin beckons him closer, taking the repair-serum and dabbing it onto Yoongi’s face and ears where the acid rain had burnt his skin.

He would heal of course, having treated himself and eating the required medication for his injuries. But this felt nice.

Different from when the others had checked his injuries. Different from every other time he’s had injuries.

‘I want to cut,’ Jimin tells him quietly after they pack away the medical kit.

‘Cut what?’

Jimin reaches up to his scalp, fingers gingerly brushing over the shorn scalp and random tufts of hair.

‘I’ll bring you the shaver,’ Yoongi tells him quietly as he stands up, his skin tingling from where the repair-serum was still wet and active on his skin.

Each of the tiny en suites attached to the Cabins were stocked with every form of self-grooming devices you would ever need or imagine you needed. Yoongi remembers a shaver being one of the
items in this compact and well organized kit and finds it under the sink inside a small pouch.

When he returns, Jimin has used the towel that had been on his lap as a cape of sorts, to catch whatever stray hair that might escape.

‘Do you want to do it?’ Yoongi asks.

Jimin looks at the shaver for a moment, then slowly shakes his head and says with a rather amused small smile, ‘Cannot see.’

‘May I?’

Jimin nods.

Being as gentle as he could, Yoongi holds the shaver up to Jimin’s shorn scalp. Jimin jumps at the sound of the shaver but doesn’t flinch when it touches his skin.

It’s a quick and easy job. Not much of Jimin’s hair had survived the ordeal and whatever was left was easily shaved off. Jimin shivers at random, unable to control his body’s reaction.

‘Finish,’ Yoongi tells him, putting away the device on the nightstand.

Jimin carefully feels at his scalp, eyes blank for a moment before he looks up at Yoongi and laughs quietly, as though somewhat tickled by the new sensation.

Yoongi smiles back, or at least he thinks he might be. He hopes he is.

Jimin looks down, as though shy, before he notices that he was covered in fine and small strands of hair. He tries to brush it off of his arms but it doesn’t work.

‘Wait,’ Yoongi stops Jimin’s hand from spreading the strands. He removes the towel Jimin had been using as a cape to catch any stray strands of hair and folds it inwards a few times before using the damp cloth to gently wipe at Jimin’s bare arms.

Jimin squirms a little, face flushing with colour, but he doesn’t stop Yoongi.

He’s extra careful around his ears, and very slow around his still very fresh wound expertly patched up and already in the process of healing. A bit of Jimin’s ear had been sliced off near the top, but it was sealed and re-growing with the aid of a tissue-plast.

‘I can do it,’ Jimin tells him but he doesn’t stop Yoongi.

‘They took your clothes. And helmet,’ Jimin tells him, ‘I’m sorry.’

‘It’s okay. You’re safe.’

Jimin shivers even more when Yoongi gently tugs the other towel off, patting him down of excess water. He brings out his clothes and helps him put them on, pausing every other moment to gently kiss a bruise or healing scar. It makes Jimin laugh quietly, and Yoongi feels accomplished. Making sure his pant-legs didn’t rub against the still healing gashes around Jimin’s feet, Yoongi stands up and picks up the last item of clothing he’d brought with him.

‘Do you want to wear this?’ Yoongi asks, holding up the light-fabric beanie.

Jimin takes it slowly, feeling the ribbing between his fingers. With his free hand he carefully reaches up and feels at his scalp. With a slow shake of his head, Jimin gently pushes the soft fabric
away and instead sits back further on the bed, exhaling out as though suddenly exhausted.

‘Sleep, sunshine.’

‘Yoongi also sleep,’ Jimin tells him quietly, reaching out to take his hand.

‘I will,’ Yoongi replies and it’s the truth. He needed to sleep. He also needed to Dream again. He had to.

‘Sleep here,’ Jimin tugs at his hand quietly. ‘Please?’

Technically speaking Yoongi knows there’s nothing different from sleeping here than in his own Cabin. In fact, he appreciated having Jimin next to him when he slept.

It had been once, but Yoongi doesn’t remember ever feeling that warm before. It wasn’t as though Yoongi was ever cold when he slept. His blankets were thick and warm, his mattress comfortable and firm, his pillow at the perfect height.

But sleeping was always such a strange event for Yoongi. A whole process to embark upon through the day, and straight to bed only for the sake of dreaming, for the sake of Knowing.

And Yoongi always woke up cold.

Cold and strangely adrift.

But that time when Jimin had slipped into his bed, arm curving around him securely, breath warm through his shirt, Yoongi only realized how adrift he had been the entire time.

Not just in sleep, but within his very waking hours.

So he just nods and sits down next to Jimin.

‘Sleep,’ Jimin tells him, pushing him down a little. Yoongi goes down at once, laying on his back, arms at his side. Jimin shifts up on the bed and gingerly settles down as well, first on his back, and then carefully turning over to his side.

‘Yoongi?’

Jimin shifts a little closer, his head lowering down on the pillow until his forehead gently bumped onto Yoongi’s shoulder, sighing out slowly.

‘Yes?’

‘Stay,’ Jimin whispers against his arm, his legs curling up over Yoongi’s own.

‘I’m staying.’

‘Okay.’

Carefully lacing their hands together, Yoongi cradles their hands together against his chest. Jimin watches him with focused but sleepy eyes, blinking slowly.

‘Jimin.’

‘Hm?’
‘I’m not Yoongi,’ he whispers quietly.

He’s going against everything he’s read in all the books he’s consulted, in all the videos he’s watched, in all of the coding that came from Android Core manuscripts.

Yoongi feels Jimin still, his body stiffening a little.

‘I am not Yoongi. I’m sorry.’

‘You are,’ Jimin tells him, sounding a lot more awake now.

‘No.’ Yoongi shakes his head, looking up straight ahead at the ceiling above him. ‘Your Yoongi would not have done what I did. Your Yoongi would not have done any of this. Your Yoongi died, I am not Yoongi. I am no one.’

Jimin pushes himself up, making his way into Yoongi’s line of sight.

‘Mine,’ Jimin tells him earnestly as he shakes his head, as though to refute Yoongi’s words. ‘Yoongi is mine.’

‘I’m not Yoongi-‘ he feels a strange sense of frustration. He can remember. He can see what he had seen. Remember what he had thought of. But it wasn’t his- he inherited those memories, inherited those thoughts, inherited the irrational fear with which he had woken up with- screaming against a long gone reddish nightmare that tore him away from the stars. That tore him away from the sunlight.

‘How many Yoongi’s do you see?’ Yoongi asks desperately. ‘I said I would come back to you- that I would always come back to you but Yoongi didn’t- I’m not Yoongi I don’t know-‘

But they weren’t his.

They were not his memories.

‘I know.’ Jimin tells him slowly. ‘I know you.’

The very air is still, held in suspension from the light of Jimin’s eyes.

*Never stare straight at the eclipse- it’s dangerous.*

His body pressed against his, Yoongi feels a weight settle into him, one that has been missing. One that wasn’t even there in the beginning.

He was no longer adrift. Not anymore.

He was bound, anchored.

Jimin looks him in the eye and Yoongi is hypnotized. He can’t look away. Jimin leans in and kisses him softly, pulling away with a smile.

‘Mine.’

‘Jimin-‘

‘-mine,’ Jimin kisses him again. ‘Yoongi is mine. I know you. You are mine.’

‘-I don’t think-‘
Jimin kisses him again, longer, and so much softer.

If this was what it meant to be comforted, why did Yoongi feel strangely pained?

‘Mine,’ he whispers against his lips before kissing him again. ‘Please.’

Yoongi hadn’t realized how tightly he was holding onto Jimin until the newly grown skin-tissue on his hands pulled rather painfully. He lets go a little, a panicked desperation to just touch Jimin’s face.

Jimin leans into his touch, head turning a little gingerly before kissing his palm and then the pad of his thumb.

‘Mine.’

Yoongi nods slowly.

Maybe this was his answer.

It didn’t matter. None of it.

Who he was. Who he wasn’t.

If there was anything Yoongi had in common with the past, with who he used to be, or who he born out of, made an image of. They had one thing in common.

‘Yours.’

They both belonged to Jimin.

—

Sk’jin has lived through more than his fair share. Seen more than his fair share.

Things rarely ever surprise him. What happened in Ynqaba is not something he’s not seen before. It’s practically textbook at this point.

Wiping at the condensation of his mirror, Sk’jin studies his face carefully.

He’d been rather harsh on his skin, rubbing it almost raw despite the many blisters and cuts he had all over his skin. But at least he sort of felt clean.

He gargles a few times, retching a little again after having hurled the contents of his stomach in the toilet an hour or so ago. His throat feels raw and it burns every time he swallows. But he continues
to gargle, until at least his mouth tastes fresh. Opening his mouth wide, Sk’jin takes a look at his teeth. There’s a gaping hole that’s slowly sealing over. Gingerly poking at the empty socket with his tongue, Sk’jin wonders if one of the CleanBots has his teeth.

And of course Sk’jin knows how much he contributes to this- contributed to stories like these. There was no easy or correct way of going about it. Sk’jin contributed to situations like those in Ynqaba and he had profited from it.

‘Lisai how un-dead am I?’ Sk’jin asks as he retrieves the medical kit from under the sink.

‘Communications Manager Sk’jin, you are in 81% good health, a healing rate of 162%, detoxification process almost complete. You will be in full health in 2 hours, 17 minutes.’

‘Thanks.’

Squeezing out liberal amounts of repair-serum, Sk’jin starts methodically dabbing it across his face, careful around his temples that though were not hurting at this moment, felt strangely sensitive; cold, almost.

A Yisheng would be able to heal him in an instance, Sk’jin knows. Maybe not regrow his horns, but at least make him feel like he wasn’t incomplete.

Not that he would ever voluntarily allow a Yisheng to touch him that is.

They had rewritten the narrative of the entire Ynqaban race. Of their planet. Of their entire System.

Would the Universe even remember what Ynqaba would have been like. What it could have been.

Could the Ynqabans ever realize it themselves?

Changes within history, not limited to just something destructive or vile, altered the minds and hearts of those who live through it. Of those who are born of it.

And even more so, those who would see it as history.

Labeling something as history often removed yourself from the change in the narrative that lead you to where you are. And in doing so, history is then nothing but a story, rarely viewed as the catalyst that has raised you on its foundation. Courses of action taken now, in the past, in the future- shape and form the outcome of what is seen, what was seen, and what will be seen.

And the Yishengs know this.

And yet, there they were, uprooting and vilifying an entire System only for the sake of their greed and superiority complex. As though they had a higher calling, giving them the right to dictate and control those who did not live under their beliefs, all while lying, masking their actions with a sweet and gentle guise, fooling the entirety of the Universe.

Sk’jin absentmindedly realizes he’s completely crushed the serum-bottle in his hand, the liquid oozing out of his hand, between his fingers.

How many were there? How many countries, planets, Systems- could they even begin to comprehend any of it? Could they even begin to realize what they did, what they were doing, was effecting their present now.

How many Ynqabas were there. How many Bhān’s. How many Camat’s.
And maybe Camat hadn’t been born or alive in that situation—she was still oppressed and victimized by the state of living she was born into, a result of history that should have been written differently. Where their history should have been spoken into truth from a different narrative.

And it was because of that same change in history. That same alteration in the narrative of their connected lives, that Sk’jin had been there. The same reason why he had found himself at that very spot, at the very moment.

The same reason why Camat would think of picking up an OrTank. Why she would see that smooth OrTank and think of the profitable trade they could gain, think of contributing to their livelihood. To help her family in any small way she could.

Her mind, her priorities, all shaped and formed to think of only one thing: survival.

And it was in the end the one thing that killed her.

That killed everyone on that mountainside.

It was in the end what killed Sk’jin too.

Because while he could so easily blame the Yishengs, blame the GLA, blame everyone else, it didn’t stop him from being guilty either. Because if every action taken by these Beings effected, in some way, the lives of those who weren’t even born to witness that action taking place—what then of the actions Sk’jin took?

Sk’jin was part of the Universe. He was part of Life. He had taken up the pen, and had rewritten countless narratives, rewritten history as it was being made. How many countries did Sk’jin upend? How many cities, countries, even whole planets and Docks. Sk’jin cannot prevent the truth because he’s lived it, with complete awareness.

He’s lived it with complete awareness but it never mattered as much as it does now because Sk’jin knows he can’t make things right— I’ll make everything right again when I come back-

Survival never lead to life. Survival was the beginning of the end.

And Sk’jin has long lived out his end.

And that was the difference now.

He was no longer trying to survive, he was just trying to make his way to the end.

Checking his face carefully over one more time, Sk’jin steps out of the still steaming en suite and into his much cooler Cabin room. On the floor are his dirty clothes, loaned to him by Bhān and Camat. He opens his closet and takes out a clean and simply robe-set. It’s a nice cool blue in colour, neither bright nor dark— a colour Sk’jin thinks looks a lot like the eastern sky towards the evening. It’s one of his more simpler robes, that Sk’jin categorizes under sleeping robes. The fabric is incredibly soft but doesn’t clinging.

Sk’jin pulls on the soft fabric of his robes over his shoulders but stops abruptly.

It doesn’t feel soft anymore. Doesn’t feel silky against his skin. Not because the fabric had been ruined or because the stitching had frayed.

Sk’jin feels encased in ashen, gritty dust. Smothered in it—cocooned in it. His mouth is filled with it.
It almost feels as though he was wearing the earth that has buried him so many times.

Stripping himself of the robes mechanically, Sk’jin hangs it back into his closet and shuts it close.

Chapter End Notes

(Author’s Note)

Random topic here but have any of you experienced legit gay panic or remember your first ever gay panic
I was pretty late in discovering my orientation (i’m panromantic) and a lot of pretty intense christian upbringing does sort of tend to you know, shadow and condemn a lot of things but that being besides the point, let me lay out the scene of my gay panic™
my sister is a lecturer at a university here and she has an assistant, so this assistant helps her out a lot when it comes to translations and my sister asked her to accompany us to the hospital for better communication with the hospital staff
i went there to get my sister diagnosed
not be attacked with gay panic
my sister’s assistant who will remain anonymous fucking took my breath away?!? i
couldn’t look her in the eye?!? when i had to talk to her about filling out forms i was
addressing her left eyebrow?? and a really nice left eyebrow at that too btw
and i swear this is the Art Student™ talking but she has a really nice neck to head
ratio/slope
also her hair was like, idk, nature/gravity/everything proof idk how she does it it was
silky and it literally looked like those hair commercials idk what i wanted to do like do
i ask if i can use her hair as reference for my 3d work? would it even render right?
what settings do i use? final gathering or mentalray?? would it do her hair justice???
idk probably not with maya maybe nuke
i spent the entire time i was with her not looking at her directly and just giving really
awkward replies which thankfully were not really noticed because i am just generally
speaking socially awkward so it wasn’t anything really out of the ordinary for me to
reply 2 seconds too late but my mind was ike ‘PANIC PANIC PANIC A PRETTY
GIRL WHAT DO YOU DO OH GOD SHE’S TALKING TO YOU OMG SOUND
LIKE AN INTELLECT FFS YOUR IQ IS 134 SO ACT LIKE IT’ and im like ‘where
can i get fruit shakes’ when we’re standing literally right in front of the fruit-shake
stand
*sighs*
*i need help
i also hope i don’t see her again i am not ready and will never be ready
i am also writing a one-shot namjin and i hope to put it up by next week! Because
wow namjin
THAT THING THAT HAPPENED
I STILL CAN’T GET OVER IT
so yeah hope you enjoyed this chapter
There’s an awkward quietness in the air. One that Hoseok doesn’t know how to diffuse. He’s not sure if he should diffuse it. Namjoon is also clearly feeling the same.

It’s now been over a full Standard day since they warped out of Ynqaba and Sk’jin had finally emerged from his room. He had refused food, company, or treatment and had stayed inside his room. Taeh’yung had spent nearly half that time sitting in front of his door, not saying anything but sometimes humming, sometimes sending small triangles of light floating in and out of Sk’jin’s closed door. He only left after Jimin left his Cabin, pulling him away to go check on Jungkook, Yoongi trailing behind them like a quiet shadow.

And now, as though nothing had happened, as though Sk’jin hadn’t entirely shut them all away for an entire day after his strange recovery, he enters the Bridge exclaiming that he would very much like to know everything that happened while he had been taken.

Sk’jin smiles just as beatifically at them as usual, his skin almost entirely healed, almost no injury to be seen. His skin was a little dim, a little heaviness under his eyes. If you weren’t made aware of his injuries, you would have been able to dismiss those minor observations.

But the strangest thing in this was not the somewhat superficial injuries on Sk’jin but the change in his wardrobe.

He’s not dressed in his usual soft silky fluttery robes, long sleeves fluttering behind him like wings.
Instead he’s dressed in rather normal clothing. Dark trousers, a full sleeved shirt on top.

It feels inherently wrong to see him dressed like this.

‘Is there a problem?’ he asks them, eyes widening a little in carefully constructed worry.

‘We’re good,’ Namjoon says before clearing his throat. ‘So- uh, how are you feeling.’

‘Exceptionally well considering recent incidents,’ Sk’jin replies smoothly before sitting down. ‘How about all of you? I see we have a new addition in our numbers. Who and what is he? Did Taeh’yung rope him in or did he just climb in accidentally?’

‘We’re fine,’ Namjoon waves a bandaged hand dismissively, partially patched eye rolling in an alarming way. ‘Well- as far as we know, his name is Jungkook and it was Jimin who brought him on-board.’

‘Jimin?’ Sk’jin raises his eyebrows.

‘Yeah- he’s…he’s interesting,’ Namjoon says slowly before briefly summarizing all that had happened.

‘I see,’ Sk’jin nods slowly, ‘So basically GI agents have been in this area before, if they have uniforms identical to Yoongi’s. They must have been everywhere if they had enough to actually store them as part of their loot.’

‘That’s what we thought too- and there’s something else actually,’ Namjoon continues, ‘The reason why Jimin brought Jungkook in. He’s the same like Yoongi.’

‘What? A Human?’ Sk’jin asks, a deep frown forming between his eyebrows.

‘No- based on what we know, a Vicitra from Pravasi M’hanun,’ Namjoon explains. The oddest light flickers over Sk’jin’s eyes but it vanishes almost as quickly.

‘Interesting. So then- he’s…he’s from an egg?’ there’s a stiffness to Sk’jin’s tone. It’s almost imperceptible but it’s there. Namjoon doesn’t seem to notice as he pulls up Jungkook’s health-tab, a life-feed of his monitor system.

‘We have reason to believe the Yisheng’s might have been there for a while, maybe part of some GLA diplomatic mission or something.’ Namjoon tells Sk’jin as he turns the holographic display towards the Khol’isa. ‘It’s most probably related to the Gaia case though, considering the fact that the Omhlophe were headed to that System to collect eggs.’

‘That sounds about right,’ Sk’jin comments, his tone easy and agreeing as he reads through Jungkook’s health tab. His hands are steady, but Hoseok notes how his nails have practically been chewed off.

It feels wrong.

‘Was there anything you might have caught on to when you were captured?’ Namjoon asks the Khol’isa. ‘You had a closer look into the Ynqabans in general.’

Sk’jin blinks once, twice, then with a blinding smile says, ‘No Joonie, other than their lack of hygiene, one could not glean much.’

Namjoon grimaces with a nod.
Sk’jin was obviously lying. But Hoseok doesn’t know what to make of that. Sk’jin wouldn’t keep information away from them on purpose. Not one so closely related to what they were doing. So maybe this was something else?

Sk’jin must have felt his gaze because he glances over. There’s a pause, like Sk’jin realized that Hoseok knew he was lying. But instead of addressing it, or even waving it off with a flirtatious smile or something along that line, Sk’jin just looks away.

Something definitely happened, and it was something bad. That was the only way to describe or explain Sk’jin’s behavior.

The Khol’isa was still as snappy and sharp-tongued, but there was something else to him. Or rather something missing. He was so completely closed off it was almost alarming. Except there was nothing any of them could do.

‘Interesting,’ he comments as he reads over Jungkook’s health-tab.

‘What is?’

‘His healing rate is very high,’ Sk’jin comments. ‘Though based on this it could be better with improved diet.’

‘Well the Vicitra are very carnivorous,’ Hoseok comments, watching Sk’jin’s reaction carefully. ‘Just meat should be fine. Maybe on the bloody side.’

Sk’jin doesn’t say anything, only swiping along the holographic projection and pulling up the type-field.

‘Suggested diet for the Vicitra based on their biochemical data is fresh blood.’ Sk’jin reads out.

‘Hahaha,’ Namjoon actually huffs out the syllables, his expression frozen in a strained smile. ‘What?’

‘The Vicitra feed primarily on meat- flesh; mainly for blood,’ Sk’jin points out unnecessarily as he taps on a section of Jungkook’s physical examination. ‘Bloody flesh. This diagnosis of his stomach contents, plus looking at his digestive system, bodily functions- he’s not just a Vicitra, he’s a thoroughly pure Vicitra. Not tainted by changes and introductions of different biochemical introduced to his system through centuries of evolution- he is, in short, a very bloody carnivorous scavenger. Just look at his bone density- but most notably look at his circulatory system.’

‘…it looks fine?’

‘I’m talking about his blood you bionic lump,’ Sk’jin rolls his eyes. ‘His blood count is low-'

‘-that could just be due to his health, his deprived environment-’

‘-the Vicitra, and others who hail from that wonderful planet all require blood as part of their diet- their digestive system works in completely different ways to us- they are cannibalistic yes, but don’t let that hide the fact that starvation due to lack of necessary minerals missing in the biochemical balance of their bodies is what kills them fastest.’

‘So you’re saying cannibalism started as a means of survival?’

‘Well, I highly doubt during their Genesis period they looked at their fellow species and thought ‘wow tasty, 12/10 would eat’ and then just glomped them.’ Sk’jin raises an eyebrow.
‘So…so he needs blood.’

‘We could just give him the minerals he needs to survive,’ Hoseok chimes in, trying to save Namjoon and give him time to collect himself.

‘Did you know that the Khol’isa can actually survive only breathing hydrogen?’ Sk’jin asks unexpectedly.

‘…no.’

‘Yes- we can, if you replace oxygen with hydrogen, our bodies can adapt to break that down to use in a way similar to oxygen,’ Sk’jin smiles but it’s icy. ‘However, we become half-life, incapable of our full abilities and capabilities- we are also unable to withstand the mental strain on our minds- we end up deteriorating into our cocoon stage but we never come out right.’

‘So he needs this in the form of blood?’

‘Yes. So unless we’re willing to donate our blood on a regular, I suggest we find a place where we can find and buy blood, and lots of raw meat.’ Sk’jin announces primly. ‘Or this will effect him- probably physically. Stunted growth, skin issues, physical weakness.’

‘You sound like you’ve met a starved Vicitra before,’ Namjoon rolls his eyes. ‘Been friendly with them in the past?’

There’s no mistaking the way Sk’jin blanches a little, eyes widening a little, hands clenching just a little.

‘We have blood in the Medical Bay- not a lot, but that could last for a while,’ Hoseok says slowly, changing the subject and focus. ‘So we can plan where and how to get the uh, new food items.’

Namjoon grimaces.

‘Also, might I add that we do need to get some maintenance done on the ship,’ Hoseok adds, ‘We don’t have major damages, but I am not risking anything – not when we’re…when we’re like this.’

‘I’d ask you to clarify but I know exactly what you mean,’ Sk’jin comments blithely before adding, ‘I also need new clothes.’

‘A priority indeed,’ Namjoon mumbles under his breath.

‘What was that?’

‘An epiphany-,’ Namjoon says clearly, ‘-indeed. We all need to get supplies- Medical Bay needs to be restocked as well, not to mention the anti-matter cells.’

Sk’jin eyes him with distrust.

‘All right- let’s make a list, and find potential places to restock. Considering our camouflage at the moment, we could safely pass through certain borders but let’s still take all of our previous precautions,’ Namjoon concludes, already pulling up their trajectory on the Navigation Table.

‘What comes after we reach Grisial?’ Sk’jin asks. ‘I know that Grisial is basically our halfway point before we get to Bhumi- but I don’t think we’re equipped to get there.’

‘No we’re not. We’re supposed to continue in warp for 8 days after Grisial- but we need to get
supplies,’ Hoseok replies, ‘From what I know of the area, it’s a strictly mining zone. Grisial is
mined for its minerals, and nearby asteroid belts are also mined. We could find a mining-dock, that
would be easier to dock in, without being too close to any GLA-infested zone, and without too
many potential Underverse spies either.’

‘Mining zones are normally run by Androids right?’ Sk’jin asks as he eyes the holographic map of
that galactic plane, ‘Androids and cyborgs normally.’

‘Yeah but the Pits are normally run by the GLA Boring Committee.’ Namjoon comments,
highlighting the mining zone in orange against the blue of the holographic map.

‘Is no one going to make fun of that name?’ Sk’jin sniggers.

‘It’s a running joke at the Venture Unit,’ Hoseok offers as he highlights the Pits, essentially Docks
or cities where the living Beings of the mining industry placed there lived. They looked a bit like
Docks but were much larger to facilitate maintenance areas for very large machinery and
Transporters.

Sk’jin snorts.

‘But will we find the uhh, necessary food supplies in the Pits?’ Namjoon raises an eyebrow. ‘I
mean I get that they basically serve the same purpose as Docks so we should find a Flotsam and
Jetsam kind of place there.’

‘You’d be surprised to know that blood actually does constitute as a main ingredient for a lot of
Species,’ Sk’jin remarks as he pulls up information about the Pits in the zone. ‘Well, there’s a total
of 21 Pits in this entire plane. That’s a lot.’

‘Good- if we can find one close enough to Grisial, it means we can still the planets natural
resonance to block ours-’

‘Except we don’t have to anymore,’ Namjoon reminds him, ‘We’re basically invisible now- we
can choose any of these Pits and we’d still be hidden. I think we should go to the ones closer to the
border- that would allow a broader range of available items rather than the ones that are too close
to the planet itself.’

‘-well in that case, why bother with this trajectory at all? We could sail past unseen, undetected
anywhere. We could fly right past Tayi and no one would know,’ Sk’jin offers.

‘No- regardless of how safe and hidden we are, we have a mysterious group of Beings who know
of Jimin and his abilities after us – we can’t risk it.’ Namjoon shakes his head immediately.
‘They’re going to be hell-bent on us.’

‘Isn’t there a way of finding out who or what they exactly are?’ Hoseok asks, ‘They’re related to
the Gaia Case, there’s no doubt about it. But based on what we read, not related to the Akramanese
though there’s an uncanny resemblance,’ he nods at Sk’jin who smiles a grimace at him.

‘They should have left some form of record- sightings, something,’ Namjoon ruminates.
‘Especially if we were to dig into Systems that are more or less suffering due to the GLA and their
treaties.’

‘You know the more I think about it, I think Jimin’s System cut off part of their planet-count to
block out the GLA from getting back at to them.’ Sk’jin remarks unexpectedly. ‘We’ve seen all of
this happening- places that the GLA have been to, and then left behind- discarded really, barely
able to survive unless they turned to another source of help- like in Ynqaba’s case, with the
‘Omhlophe.’

‘We don’t know that for sure,’ Namjoon states firmly. ‘We can only speculate.’

‘I guess,’ Sk’jin replies absentmindedly.

‘Jinnie?’

They don’t have time to really turn around before Taeh’yung flings himself across the length of the Bridge and tackles Sk’jin into a tight hug.

‘Ouch fuck-!’ Sk’jin crashes into Hoseok who crashes into Namjoon who thankfully is able to hold them up.

There’s a gasp and Jimin appears by the doorway, wearing a beanie over the bandages wrapped around his head, and he too is quickly approaching the Table and also dives in to hug Sk’jin.

‘Okay- okay, oh Spaces-‘

Hoseok has never seen Sk’jin this uncomfortable. His hands hover awkwardly, his neck bent all the way back while Taeh’yung buries his face into Sk’jin’s chest, squeezing around his waist. Jimin is hugging the two of them from the side, head leaning on Sk’jin’s shoulder, beaming brightly at the highly uncomfortable Khol’isa who was now earnestly pushing Hoseok down in his attempt to move away from the sudden display of affection.

‘Buggy- could you let up-‘ Hoseok asks through gritted teeth, trying to smile as Namjoon tries to push him up to stand straight. But then Yoongi appears, pausing in front of them, face blank.

‘Wait Yoongi don’t-‘ Sk’jin’s eyes widen but then the Human follows Taeh’yung’s and Jimin’s example and approaching from the other side hugs him too.

‘Someone please do something,’ Sk’jin pleads in a small breathless voice.

Reaching over Sk’jin, Hoseok gently cards through Taeh’yung’s soft hair and with the gentlest voice he can produce under such pressed (literally) conditions says, ‘Buggy, it’s okay, Sk’jin is all right-?!’

Taeh’yung lifts his head and to Hoseok’s and Namjoon’s surprise instead of seeing joy or maybe even tears of worry, there’s a bright glaring fury in the Zhak’gri’s eyes.

‘Oh fuck-‘

Suddenly Hoseok is being pulled away by Namjoon and Yoongi has somehow managed to get to Jimin’s side, pulling him back.

‘I warned you,’ Taeh’yung says in a disturbing low tone. ‘I warned you, and you let go. Don’t do it again.’

‘You can’t tell me what to do- this is mine now,’ Sk’jin replies, equally low though he sounds chastised.

Hoseok’s ears pop and he realizes with alarm that something had happened with the pressure in the Bridge. Judging by Jimin’s alarmed face and Yoongi’s defensive stance, he wasn’t the only one to feel it.

Then easily enough and with a bright smile, Taeh’yung hugs Sk’jin again with a giggle.
‘It’s good to have you back Jinnie.’

‘Yeah yeah,’ Sk’jin replies tiredly before catching sight of Jimin and Yoongi properly, both of them watching the whole thing, one with a smile, the other as impassive as ever.

‘Yoongi if you’re going to punch me then you can do it now-‘

‘No punching,’ Jimin states with a disapproving look. ‘No fighting.’

‘You’re right this is weird,’ Sk’jin says to no one in particular before saying, ‘Yes, no fighting Jimin, we won’t fight.’

Jimin nods slowly to that, eyes narrowing just a little bit before he states without preamble, ‘Have to wake Jungkook.’

‘All right…’

‘Is he going to be this authoritative all the time now that he can speak Standard?’ Sk’jin asks no one in particular again. To Hoseok’s mild alarm, he notices how Yoongi’s hand seems to flex almost in a clawing motion though he stands still. No doubt because Jimin had a hand around his arm.

‘He’s still recovering,’ Hoseok says, addressing Jimin, ‘There’s a lot that’s happened to him so we need to-‘

‘Actually- waking him up now might be a good idea,’ Namjoon interrupts, ‘Vicitra are not known to be the sanest or the most civil-‘

‘I think all things considered, any species of Beings have the complete ability and potential to become highly functional members of society,’ Sk’jin interrupts smoothly. ‘Judging the outcome of a species based solely on the exaggerated beliefs of their most famed stereotypes is wrong.’

‘No one was saying he wouldn’t become a highly functional member of society,’ Namjoon quotes tensely. ‘I was just saying we need to be careful with how we proceed. This has nothing to do with stereotypes, but everything to do with precaution. Regardless of species, someone who has been subjected to unknown and obviously cruel treatment should be approached with caution. And I should probably say it’s a given that cannibalism is not a stereotype when it happens to be an integrated part of their culture.’

There’s a tense moment where they glare at each other. Jimin is watching them with apprehension in his eyes, hand gripping Yoongi’s arm, this time as though asking him to intervene. Taeh’yung is also quiet, watching Sk’jin with something like sorrow in his expression.

‘Can we move on,’ Yoongi requests after a few more tense seconds.

‘Why do you want to wake him now?’ Hoseok asks before Namjoon and Sk’jin can butt heads again.

‘Important,’ Jimin repeats what he said in that underground cell, ‘Jungkook is important. Must have answers.’

‘There’s no guarantee he’ll know anything,’ Sk’jin says and it’s almost gentle, and instead of addressing Jimin, he’s addressing Yoongi.

‘I need to understand,’ Yoongi states. ‘He is like me- another born how I was. Maybe he has seen
Dreams. Maybe he has Known for a longer while. He knows his name. It means someone spoke to him- he has a name, he is himself.’

There it was again. Yoongi’s belief that he wasn’t *Yoongi*. Or that he was *no one*.

Jimin seems to be having the same thought, his hand sliding down Yoongi’s arm to take his hand in his instead.

Who knows, maybe they were right. Maybe Jungkook would be the key to figuring out everything.

‘We can make it safe,’ Taeh’yung proposes unexpectedly. ‘And I agree with Pa- he’ll be weak right now. But he knows Chim- he’s also seen Hobi and Yoongi. We can make it safe, for all of us.’

‘And I am gaining strength again,’ Jimin adds, ‘I won’t be with no protection. Jungkook will not hurt me.’

‘We also have the reassurance that Jungkook would recognize his rescuers- he would know that they don’t mean harm-’ Namjoon is saying but there’s a huff of complete disgust coming from Sk’jin.

‘Namjoon sometimes the things you say shocks me,’ Sk’jin says sharply, ‘Just because you “rescue” someone, and that too the way Jungkook was taken, regardless of where and what his situation was, would in no way make you *pliant* to this potentially new threat. Yeah sure maybe this new place isn’t covered in shit, but I think you and I both know that cruelty isn’t only born in a shit-hole. Maybe reflect back a little before you open your mouth okay?’

Everyone watches them silently again, still unsure how to react.

‘You’re right,’ Namjoon replies unexpectedly, looking at Sk’jin with a strange sort of understanding. ‘I wasn’t thinking and that was insensitive of me. We proceed with waking Jungkook up then. Jimin’s protection and safety is our priority but so is Jungkook’s- he’ll be confused and he might react violently- we need to make sure he doesn’t hurt himself.’

‘Before waking him up we could administer a light sedative, make him a little sleepy?’ Hoseok offers.

Sk’jin shakes his head, ‘That won’t work- it will confuse him more. If we’re going to wake him, we should do it when he knows he’s fully in control of his body- we don’t want to start the entire thing by making him feel like he’s under captivity or in any way being regarded as a *thing*.’

‘Lisai, when will Jungkook stabilize?’ Hoseok asks.

‘5 hours 21 minutes.’

‘When is it advisable to wake him from delta-sleep?’ Sk’jin asks pointedly.

‘8 hours.’

‘Is that good for everyone?’ Namjoon asks, glancing at everyone.

There’s collective nodding (or in Sk’jin’s case a single-nod) and Namjoon continues, ‘Okay- so let’s lay out a plan to make sure things go as smoothly as possible.’

‘I will be there,’ Jimin chimes in at once. ‘Jungkook knows me- he will feel safe.’
‘Okay yeah- Jimin will be the one to basically wake Jungkook up,’ Namjoon concludes, ‘And then once Jungkook is reassured enough- we introduce ourselves slowly- Yoongi, Hoseok, Sk’jin, me, and finally Taeh’yung-‘

‘Why am I at the end?’

‘You knocked him unconscious- he’ll be afraid of you,’ Namjoon frowns.

Taeh’yung sulks at Namjoon.

‘He will need to be washed- I don’t know how we can do that- if he’s lived his entire life in captivity, he probably doesn’t know the concept of bathing or washing,’ Sk’jin ruminates from where he’s gone to sit, watching the video feed from the Medical Bay.

‘I had to block the CleanBots from the Medical Bay,’ Hoseok frowns, remembering how he had seen one of them attempt to clean Jungkook. Hoseok had very quickly rolled the Bot out, worriedly checking the slumbering child in case he’d been cleaned with whatever UV-powered stain-remover the CleanBots were outfitted with.

‘We’ll take it one step at a time,’ Namjoon nods, ‘Once he’s better accustomed we get him to clean up-‘

‘I can help,’ Jimin offers at once.

‘Me too!’ Taeh’yung offers eagerly.

‘Maybe just Jimin,’ Namjoon quickly says, ‘I think it’s safe to say he trusts him the most.’

Taeh’yung sulks at Namjoon again.

‘And then once he has adapted- or at least feels comfortable and is used to us, we can start asking him questions,’ Namjoon says with a look at Yoongi who nods.

‘I have a difficult question to ask,’ Sk’jin says, not looking away from the screen in front of him. ‘What do we do after?’

‘What do you mean?’ Taeh’yung asks, skipping up to the Khol’isa.

‘Well,’ Sk’jin begins slowly, a strange anger thinly veiled in his tone, ‘We have taken him out of his environment- of course it was a terrible place to live in- to exist in, no doubt. But what if he doesn’t have the answers- what if he doesn’t know? What if in the end, he’s just a blood-drinking helpless and wild Being who is of no use to our team? What do we do then? Our mission’s success, its direction, relies solely on our cooperation and mutual understanding of each other. We cannot leave him somewhere at random- we cannot expect him to survive. He’s one of the eggs, the GLA would be all too willing, and by tracing his whereabouts, the Special-Jury would realize this is related to us, narrowing our movements and giving clues of our plans. What do we do then?’

The Khol’isa looks up, looking straight at Jimin.

‘I understand that you need answers, but did you think about the consequences of what your actions could bring about?’

Jimin doesn’t look away, doesn’t react outwardly. His expression is calm and neutral; a practiced face, one that Hoseok has seen on the faces of Judges, politicians, priests- people who possess power.
‘He will stay,’ Jimin states simply.

‘Did you not hear anything I just said?’ Sk’jin demands, frustration bleeding into his words. ‘You can’t just make decisions—’

‘My ship,’ Jimin says quietly, his expression still neutral. ‘My authority.’

There’s a stunned silence that follows this statement. Even Yoongi looks a little surprised, glancing a little at Jimin with slightly wide eyes.

‘Wow,’ Sk’jin slow claps, his tone light but his expression heavy. ‘Wow- will you look at this!’

He stands and makes his way towards Jimin, his posture relaxed, almost lazy.

‘A little lord, who was napping for centuries, wakes up and thinks he still has the authority to order the Beings he should remember are there to help him- Beings he would have been completely lost without had he been woken by some other means- what if his place and Jungkook’s place had been switched? This little lord needs to realize he can’t just make decisions that are impulsive with so much at risk—’

‘You’re afraid,’ Jimin cuts across, taking a step forward to meet Sk’jin halfway. ‘You’re afraid of the answers.’

Jimin breaks out into a small but genuine smile, hands reaching up as though to take Sk’jin’s in his.

‘Don’t be afraid.’

‘Don’t fucking try me—’ Sk’jin hisses, body lurching forwards towards Jimin, eyes flashing neon red but he doesn’t make it any closer.

Yoongi is on him, tackling the much taller Khol’isa to the ground, managing to get Sk’jin’s arms behind his back, a knee placed over his sternum.

‘No Yoongi!’ Jimin is quick to pull the Human off of Sk’jin, who recovers from his shock and shoves Jimin’s hands away before struggling to his feet.

‘I am sick of this!’ Sk’jin hisses out. ‘You should have just stuck to your plan and left me in Ynqaba to just live. Fuck all of you, fuck all of this!’

He pushes past Jimin roughly and storms out of the Bridge.

Hoseok lets go of the breath he had been holding without meaning to.

‘Yoongi you okay?’ Namjoon asks, approaching the Human who had a hand placed over his side.

‘Sore,’ is all Yoongi says with a dismissive nod of his head.

‘His Soul is afraid- he is filled with fear,’ Jimin says quietly, glancing towards the Bridge doorway, ‘Fear, guilt, anger.’

‘I’ll go talk to him,’ Taeh’yung says quietly but to everyone’s surprise it’s Namjoon who stops him.

‘No wait- let him cool down for a bit. Then I’ll go talk to him,’ the Kutsoglerin declares. ‘I don’t want you two getting into a fight, the ship can’t handle that. But I do want to talk about what Sk’jin mentioned.’
Jimin ducks his head down at that, sighing before he nods.

‘I thought about it,’ he admits. ‘But I know Jungkook can help. I don’t know how- but I know he will.’

‘We have no evidence of that,’ Namjoon tells him gently, ‘We cannot prove that- that’s why we need a back-up plan. I understand your decision, your choice- I would have done the same too. But we now need to think of what we can do in case things don’t go how we intend them to.’

Jimin nods.

‘If, like you said, Jungkook is able to explain or give you answers, what happens after that?’ Hoseok asks as well. ‘This is a responsibility we need to look over very carefully.’

‘You understand why we can’t keep him, right?’ Namjoon asks gently.

‘We can,’ Taeh’yung says, ‘I was not part of this mission, but I’m here.’

‘Because you are aware, Tae,’ Hoseok reasons, ‘We don’t know how Jungkook will react- how he will cope. He is innocent- what we’re doing- what we’re doing right now is not innocent. We cannot expect him to live and go through all we’ve gone through the way we have so far.’

‘Jungkook is not animal,’ Jimin states simply.

‘No he’s not,’ Namjoon agrees, ‘He’s a child. And what we’re doing, what we’re headed into, is not suitable for children.’

Jimin exhales out, his actions showing that he accepted that, that there was no arguing it.

‘We can take him to a safe place,’ Hoseok offers though he’s not sure how that was guaranteed. Clearly Jimin is doubtful too. ‘There are places of refuge, Safe Stops, opened by the GLA and the Yishengs in several Systems solely for Beings escaping war, or Beings who have lost their homes and planets- there are normally no authorities in places like this, to encourage the normally illegal aliens to feel a little more comfortable- mainly agents working in that field who blend in with them. We could leave Jungkook there with them.’

‘But what if Beings like Seulgaan take him? We cannot trust them- we don’t have guarantee,’ Jimin argues. ‘He’s too important. We need him. To understand.’

‘Once he wakes up, and we are able to study him, then we can make our decision, okay?’ Namjoon says kindly but firmly. ‘We cannot make concrete decisions right now but we need to make room for the possibility of things to go differently.’

Jimin nods to that after a few seconds.

‘Okay then,’ Namjoon sighs out tiredly. ‘Let’s plan the next steps for Grisial. Taeh’yung could you go to the Kitchens and tell me what we need stock on? Yoongi, could you compile a list of the weapons infirmary and list what we need restocking in? Jimin if you could, please check on the device we’ve installed to make sure it’s running as it should and then could you come back up? We need to plan our trajectories based on your System. Hoseok and I will start narrowing down our next docking location.’

Everyone nods in accordance to their duties.

‘We’re going to do everything we can to avoid what happened in Ynqaba, and even before that. We
have a new source of worry added to basically the entirety of the GLA, Venture Unit, and Yishengs. We will do everything to find out more where and when we can, but please remember that our safety and security is our highest priority.’

Namjoon doesn’t know what to expect when he stands outside of Sk’jin’s Cabin. But he sure as hell wasn’t expecting the door to open after his first knock.

The Cabin is dark, illuminated only by the filtered warp light streaming outside of Sk’jin’s window. Sk’jin himself is sitting on the desk that has been placed against the window, his silhouette stark against the warp light.

The door closes behind him and Namjoon stands for a bit before sitting down on the ground, leaning back against the door.

‘I’ll apologize to Jimin later. For what happened in the Bridge, and for leaving him behind in Seulgaan’s ship.’ Sk’jin announces without preamble.

‘I’m not here to talk about that.’

‘I know why you’re here. I was just telling you what I plan on doing later.’ Sk’jin replies, his tone lacking his usual snappy quality.

‘We’re going to wake Jungkook in an hours time. We came to a plan of sorts where we will find a suitable planet with a Yisheng-based Safe Camps and deliver him there.’

‘You know that’s not feasible. Jimin knew what he was doing when he brought him into the ship,’ Sk’jin says quietly. ‘He knew we couldn’t allow someone like him to run off free- he knew we wouldn’t, knowing what we know now, and knowing what he is.’

Namjoon shrugs, a little in agreement, and a little in who cares now kinda way.

‘You wanna talk?’

‘There’s not much to say Namjoon. I’ll apologize, Jimin will of course forgive me, Yoongi will look for any opportunity to deck me again, and everything will return to normal.’ Sk’jin intones lightly. ‘That seems to be the pattern.’
'Not about that,' Namjoon repeats quietly. ‘Did something happen in Ynqaba?’

It’s silent.

Sk’jin’s Cabin is different from the times he’s seen it in passing. It’s strangely bare, weirdly spacious even though Namjoon knows all the Cabins are the same size.

‘Did something happen? Sk’jin?’ Namjoon repeats.

‘Nothing,’ Sk’jin replies quietly. ‘I just thought I had been abandoned- and I came to terms with that. And then- and then I thought I died. I was…’ Sk’jin laughs under his breath. ‘I thought to myself {finally-I am free of this stupid mission, free of annoying crew members, free of all this bullshit}- and then I’m back again. And your stupid face is the first thing I see.’

It almost feels good to hear the insult and Namjoon reminds himself not to accept insults as a general norm.

‘I knew someone just like you,’ Sk’jin says conversationally. ‘Fuck, that same denseness, that same stupid will to do the fucking right thing- t’s like you’re doin’ that on purpose- just to fuckin’ get on m’nerves. You even have the same fuckin’ dimples- fuck I hate it so much. Same fucking eyes.’

Namjoon wants to apologize though he knows there’s nothing to apologize for. Besides, Sk’jin would most likely get pissed off by his apology.

‘You’re the fucking same- fuck, I hate all of this so much.’ Sk’jin ends with a whisper.

‘I can’t speak for Yoongi but we had no intention of leaving you behind,’ Namjoon tells him quietly. ‘The honest truth behind our actions was that we needed to divide our time carefully- make sure that-‘

‘-there’s no need to explain to me darlin’,’ Sk’jin snorts out, ‘I wasn’t a priority- Jimin was- and I get it. It’s fine.’

‘It’s not fine because you thought we left you behind. We didn’t- we had no intention of doing so,’ Namjoon repeats firmly. ‘We came looking for you the moment we realized what happened- Taeh’yung found you. We thought we lost you.’

‘Yeah well- you should have just left me.’

‘Why are you afraid?’ Namjoon asks instead.

‘I’m not afraid,’ Sk’jin replies.

‘You are. It all makes sense now- you’re afraid. Why are you afraid-‘

‘I said I’m not afraid!’ Sk’jin hisses, turning around on the desk to glare at Namjoon, eyes glowing malevolently at him.

‘Then why won’t you tell me what happened,’ Namjoon demands.

‘You know I thought I knew exactly how this would go- and in fact, everything has gone exactly how I knew it would go- and that makes so so angry-‘ Sk’jin actually shakes a little bit. ‘I knew what would happen, but I’m still here, a damn fuckin’ fool.’

‘You knew what would happen?’
‘You live as long I have and you’ll start seeing how everything just repeats itself- fuck, the Yisheng’s were right- everything is a fuckin’ loop, fuckin’ continuum.’ Sk’jin laughs humourlessly. ‘Fuck sometimes I forget you’re all so fucking young- even Taeh’yung despite the others- you’re all so fucking young, fucking babies all of you.’ Sk’jin mutters under his breath.

‘I know that-’

‘No Namjoon- you don’t know,’ Sk’jin interrupts tiredly. ‘You really really really really don’t know.’

‘Then tell me.’

He thinks back to the talk he had with Hoseok the previous day. It was true, Sk’jin was broken, but carefully carefully put back together.

‘If I tell you,’ Sk’jin whispers, leaning his head against the window, his body curving and suddenly he looks incredibly old. His hair appearing white, and his skin fragile as light refracts through his fingers. ‘Then you’ll be afraid too.’

‘But you won’t be alone.’ Namjoon offers.

Sk’jin slowly turns, facing him a little. Two neon orbs stare out at him amidst the white warp light, studying him.

‘You’re just like him.’ He says and it’s almost accusatory. ‘What curse is this? This has to be a curse or some other bullshit.’

Sk’jin turns forward again, fuming under his breath.

‘Who was he?’

‘My best-friend,’ Sk’jin answers quietly. ‘My best-friend, my right-hand, my moral-compass, my laughter, my promise. Spaces I fucking hate him.’

This is probably the rawest Sk’jin will ever be, Namjoon realizes.

Hoseok recognized his anger.

Jimin recognized his fear.

‘What happened to him?’ Namjoon asks though he’s quite sure he knows, judging by what he saw in the Nightmare Planet.

‘He died Joonie,’ Sk’jin tells him simply. ‘He died, and I tried. But I couldn’t.’

And as clear as day, Namjoon can see his pain.
They gather one by one in the Lobby outside the Medical Bay, waiting for everyone to gather. Taeh’yung is fidgeting with the length of Hoseok’s sweater sleeve that the Ngfy’widan had removed and tied about his waist instead. Jimin appears next, trailed after by Yoongi. Yoongi’s injuries were almost entirely cured and healed over though he still carried himself with some care especially around his ribs. Jimin was also almost all healed-up, and though he didn’t have the bandages about his head anymore, he still wore the soft-fabric beanie. Namjoon wonders if it was to make him feel better or something.

And then Sk’jin enters.

Immediately the atmosphere tenses and Jimin is worrying his lower lip between his teeth, eyeing Sk’jin carefully but not lowering his stance. Yoongi doesn’t move or even look at Sk’jin, but there’s no doubt in Namjoon’s mind that the Human was very aware of Sk’jin’s movement.

The Khol’isa stands some feet from Jimin, posture a little stiff but relaxed before he clears his throat and begins.

‘Good afternoon in Standard Time,’ the Khol’isa announces before continuing in his usual grand manner. ‘Before we start I would like to apologize to Jimin for 2 offences. The first is for leaving him in Seulgaan’s ship- I should have thought and planned my movements better and remained to give Yoongi the opportunity to bring you back to the ship. I did not, and I apologize. The second is for my earlier behavior- it was wrong for me to insinuate you weren’t planning ahead when in fact you did in fact bring in a potentially vital resource into our mission that could benefit us and our next step. I will not apologize for asking you questions regarding this unknown Being’s presence though. I felt that it was in my authority and place in the ship to ask these questions.’

‘I thank you, but there is nothing to forgive,’ Jimin replies and then bows his head down and says, ‘It was wrong of me to use my authority in that way- to say I am more powerful, that is wrong. I am sorry.’

‘I am sorry I knocked your tooth out,’ Yoongi adds in a blunt tone that sounded anything but apologetic. Jimin lightly steps on his foot and the Human adds, ‘I am sorry for leaving you behind and allowing you to be captured. If I had not done that, you would not have been caught in that explosion.’

Sk’jin’s smile is stiff, his hand closing to a tight fist for a moment before he nods, ‘I accept both of your apology.’

And as though to somehow try and show his acceptance of their apologies he extends a hand up, clearly aiming to ruffle their hair or something along that line. But Jimin flinches back and Yoongi grabs Sk’jin’s hand and twists the Khol’isa away, pushing him into the Lobby seat. Sk’jin looks up, expression incredulous and shocked.
‘Fucking hell Yoongi I was just-’ Sk’jin begins but Jimin is quick to try and explain.

It was almost as though he forgot he could speak Standard, breaking out into his own language before hastily correcting himself, ‘-it’s okay- Sk’jin I’m sorry it wasn’t-’ he breaks off into his own language, occasional Standard thrown in.

He just stops and then reaches up and pulls his beanie down.

There’s an audible gasp from Hoseok and Namjoon is angry.

One of Jimin’s most notable feature was his hair- soft, silky, strangely anti-gravity with the way it seemed to float about almost in slow-motion about his head as he moved. It was a unique colour, both silver and gold at the same time- both starlight and sunlight at the same time.

But none of that was left anymore- and despite the obvious attempts made to heal and treat the injuries around his head, one side of his head was still blue and black, some areas still a little swollen, and clear indications of the scalp having been shorn, with shiny new skin growing over the reddened areas.

‘It- it was-’ Jimin looks down, eyes downcast, ‘Still shock- still shock.’

It was obviously done against his will, and whoever did that to his hair had done with little to no care. It had obviously traumatized him, so when Sk’jin had reached forward, he had reacted instinctively and as a result triggered Yoongi to react.

He quickly covers his head again, still looking down as though ashamed. Namjoon is distracted by sudden movement from Sk’jin who stands abruptly and makes his way towards Jimin. The latter watches with wide eyes though he stands his ground.

‘Uh-‘

Sk’jin stares almost blankly at Jimin before an annoyed expression takes over his face and with a rough shoulder-grab, pulls the latter closer towards him and shakes him.

‘Hair is superficial you hear me? It’ll grow back- and it’ll grow back fucking beautiful you hear me kid?’ Sk’jin says as he shakes Jimin who nods in haste. ‘You know what, hair is dumb anyways, I’ll shave my hair off- no, you know what, we will ALL shave our hair off. Actually, better yet we’ll shave Namjoon’s hair off-‘

‘-what the actual fuck-?!’ Namjoon splutters out.

‘-because you shouldn’t feel any less about who you are- you hear me?’ Sk’jin shakes Jimin again. ‘There’s no need to feel shame!’

‘Y-yes!’ Jimin manages to get out, a small smile on his face.

‘Good. You wear that bald head with pride, you hear me?’ Sk’jin lets go of Jimin before announcing, ‘I’m getting that shaver, Namjoon stay put.’ And walks out.

‘Wait-! Is he serious?!’ Namjoon demands, eyes widening in legitimate panic because he’s not sure if Sk’jin is joking or not. ‘Wait- Sk’jin we have things to do first!’

The Khol’isa doesn’t return.

‘I think he’s just a bit embarrassed,’ Hoseok comments quietly with a smile. ‘He’ll come back-
‘I’m sorry for stealing your underwear Hobi!’ Taeh’yung pipes in, hand raised, ‘And I stole Jinnie’s pudding too it was really tasty- and Yoongi it was me who left all those crumbs on your chair, and Pa-‘

Namjoon almost flinches back while Hoseok splutters to the side.

‘-I’m sorry for using your toothbrush, shampoo, and soap.’

‘…that’s okay Tae,’ Namjoon says slowly.

‘Great-‘

‘-but please stop using them,’ Namjoon concludes before he looks around and asks, ‘Does anyone have anything else they want to apologize for?’

‘I used your lotion too!’ Taeh’yung throws in.

‘-…yes- okay, that’s fine, don’t do it anymore,’ Namjoon sighs out before glancing around to make sure no one else had anything else to add.

‘I also-‘

‘It’s fine Tae,’ Namjoon tries to smile at the Zhak’gri. ‘There’s no need to confess anything anymore let’s just- let’s just move forward yes?’

‘And next time maybe ask permission yes?’ Hoseok adds, eyeing Taeh’yung briefly before asking, ‘How did you even steal my underwear? When?’

‘It’s nice fabric!’ is all Taeh’yung says, ‘It’s really comfortable!’

‘-wait are you wearing them now?!’ Hoseok demands.

‘Shouldn’t we wake Jungkookie now?’ Taeh’yung changes the subject, hopping towards the Medical Bay and dragging Jimin with him.

‘Right- yeah let’s do that,’ Namjoon nods, hoping to turn the events a bit more serious. ‘Jimin are you ready?’

Jimin nods as he pauses for a while by the door.

‘Okay so- this could go very wrong.’ Namjoon announces with a sigh. ‘But I agree that we should do this quickly, and if he can somehow give us the answers, or provide us with information, this will greatly benefit us and how we can plan our next step forward.’

Jimin nods in agreement to that from where he’s standing. Namjoon notices how Sk’jin reappears by the stairs, watching from the shadows as they revised.

‘However we do need to take full precaution.’ Namjoon adds, ‘We need to ease him into the environment, make him feel safe, and that he’s not being threatened. That means-‘ he turns to look at Yoongi, ‘No sudden quiet movements- that’s freaky enough even when you’re a fully functional adult Being.’

Yoongi actually has a small frown on his face, as though affronted by Namjoon’s words.

‘He saw you in the cave with Yoongi so I think he might register you as someone who was involved his rescue but that might also trigger pain and panic- so precaution,’ Namjoon tells
Hoseok who nods in understanding.

‘And Taeh’yung…’

The Zhak’gri perks up at his name, blinking rapidly for a moment, rapt with attention.

‘Don’t…don’t freak him out. Or like, spook him- be gentle and careful, he’s not exactly-’

‘He’s a baby!’ Taeh’yung exclaims with a sulk, ‘I know how to behave with babies!’

‘Right okay,’ Namjoon doesn’t look reassured at all- if anything he looks even more worried.

‘So Jimin will be there when he first wakes up- we will let him handle everything first- okay, from the top,’ Namjoon addresses Jimin, ‘What is the first part of this plan.’

‘Jungkook wakes up,’ Jimin recites easily, ‘I stay there, help him and tell him he is safe. If he is dangerous, I will make him sleepy again. If he is only little bit dangerous, I will calm him down. And no one should come until I say so. When he is ready, I will call Yoongi, and then Hobi. After that, we introduce everyone else, but slowly, and from distant.’

‘Perfect,’ Namjoon nods and adds, ‘Right- so, like we all agreed, only Jimin is going in first, and none of us are to show up or intervene. Jimin was in the exact situation before but with worse conditions and factors- they are in a controlled and safe environment and we will maintain that unless things get out of hand. Is that clear?’

It’s directed more towards Yoongi and Taeh’yung but everyone nods nonetheless.

‘Ready Jimin?’ Namjoon asks.

Jimin nods and holds up a thumbs-up before stepping into the Medical Bay. The door closes only partially behind him and everyone lines up outside in order of their introduction.

‘Lisai pull Jungkook out of delta-sleep, and provide life-feed to Lobby 1,’ Namjoon orders.

‘Understood.’

A holographic-screen projector pops up from the table before the couch and the usual colour-spectrum ripples across, forming the holographic projection of the surveillance from the Medical Bay. Jungkook had been unrestrained, any infusion-tab on him removed and sealed. They debated using a light sedative and decided that it was better to leave the young Being in complete control over his consciousness. If things escalated, Jimin would be able to control the situation.

Jimin stands by the Medical Bed, waiting as Jungkook is pulled out of delta-sleep. Hoseok keeps an eye on Jungkook’s health tab, watching as his pulse slowly increase, his brain-wave patterns start increasing, and within a few seconds everything sky-rockets and Jungkook lurches, back arching terribly as he cough violently, throwing up a little of what looked like something terribly like decomposed flesh.

To Namjoon’s amusement, Hoseok turns a little green.

Jimin doesn’t move, doesn’t say anything, until Jungkook is panting heavily, limp and obviously not in full control of his body. It’s after a few seconds that Jungkook seems to realize someone is there.

His movements are shockingly fast and Sk’jin swears under his breath as Jungkook half leaps, half
rolls off of the Medical Bed and barrels into Jimin. Yoongi twitches next to him, watching the feed carefully, his hands in loose fists. Taeh’young is gnawing his lower lip, watching the feed and then eyeing the partially open doorway turn by turn.

‘Jungkook- safe.’ Jimin says, partially hidden from view as he’s on the floor, Jungkook crouching over him, letting out a loud growl. ‘Safe- Jungkook safe, no hurt.’

They wait with bated breath before after what feels like ages, Jungkook stops growling and his crouch is less stiff. There’s a strange choking strangling sound.

‘Jimin-’


‘Safe?’

‘Safe.’

‘Where?’

‘My home.’

Namjoon can’t help but glance about at everyone else at Jimin’s words. Hoseok has a soft look in his eyes, watching their interaction carefully, eyebrows almost pinched. Taeh’young’s face is covered in tears and snot, while Sk’jin watches with a blankness that rivals Yoongi’s. Speaking of the Human, Yoongi is by the door, standing quietly, head turned towards the opening. Namjoon would be mad but he knows, or at least hopes, that Yoongi is professional and wouldn’t undermine their plans.

‘Why?’

‘Why?’ Jimin repeats, sounding curious.

‘Why am I here?’

This interests Namjoon. Jungkook was clearly much more aware than they had all initially thought.

‘You help me,’ Jimin tells him quietly. ‘You help me, I help you. Make you safe.’

‘What do you want?’

‘He’s smart,’ Sk’jin says almost inaudibly, ‘I don’t think he was born in whatever pit you found him in. He’s too smart for that.’

‘I want you to be safe,’ Jimin tells him earnestly, ‘And I want you to help me again.’

‘Help? How?’

‘To understand where you come from,’ Jimin replies, his hand appearing to gently stroke through Jungkook’s hair. ‘To understand everything we can.’

‘Will they hurt me?’

‘No one hurt you-‘

‘-not animal. I’m not animal.’
‘You are not animal,’ Jimin repeats soothingly.

‘Why is everyone standing outside? This is a cage?’

‘Well fuck.’ Sk’jin looks mildly impressed.

‘Jimin- ask him if he wants to see us all- if he can sense us, he knows how many of us are there- just tell him,’ Hoseok says quietly.

‘My home,’ Jimin tells him quietly, ‘Family- my family.’

‘Like you?’

‘Yes,’ Jimin carefully sits up on his knees. ‘Safe. Remember? Yoongi, Hoseok- family. Safe.’

‘Scared.’

‘Okay- stay behind me?’ Jimin offers, standing up slowly.

Jungkook, still crouched, nods a little.

‘Namjoon- walk outside,’ Jimin says. ‘Jungkook and me, outside.’

Namjoon glances at the rest of them, gesturing for them to separate a little so as to not appear like some massive threatening bunch.

Taeh’yung quickly shuffles towards the center of the Lobby, while Yoongi takes a few steps away from the door and stands some way from the opening. Hoseok goes to stand some feet from Yoongi, and Sk’jin quietly makes his way towards the opposite end of the room. Namjoon stands from where he’s sitting on the couch.

‘We’re ready when you are,’ he replies back.

‘We go outside slow,’ Jimin tells Jungkook, helping him stand straight. ‘No- not afraid. Safe, okay?’

He raises a thumbs up, tilting his head in question. Jungkook stares at his hand and then carefully and deliberately wraps his hand around Jimin’s thumb.

Taeh’yung clutches dramatically at his chest while Hoseok looks like he’s trying to fight a smile.

‘Yoongi? Door?’ Jimin takes slow steps towards the doorway. Yoongi steps towards the opening, still keeping his distance.

‘Lisai, open the door slowly please,’ Namjoon orders quietly.

The door slides open quietly and slowly, giving Jungkook time to adjust to the movement of the automated doors. Jungkook is looking around, eyes wide and body curled into himself, making himself smaller than Jimin. He doesn’t seem too shocked by his immediate surroundings yet- the technology around him not blowing his mind. He’s seen it before- maybe Sk’jin was right, maybe he wasn’t born wherever Jimin had been placed. Maybe he had been forced in there.

It’s obvious when Jungkook spots Yoongi standing outside.

He flinches, gripping onto Jimin’s shoulder and ducking down even more.
‘Yoongi safe,’ Jimin’s voice says clearly from beyond the open door. ‘Remember? Yoongi safe.’

Yoongi looks like he’s attempting a smile.

‘Who? Who is- who are you?’ Jungkook asks, stopping Jimin from stepping forward, watching the Human over his shoulder.

‘My given name is Yoongi,’ the Human replies. ‘I am the weapons-specialist aboard the Užkulisa.’

Jungkook considers this for a while before Jimin tries stepping forward again slowly. They step out carefully before stopping again when Jungkook spots Hoseok.

‘Carry-‘ the Vicitra says quietly. ‘You carried me?’

‘I did,’ Hoseok smiles and it’s more effective than Yoongi’s attempt. ‘I’m sorry I wasn’t able to protect you more from the rain. That must have hurt.’

Jungkook doesn’t reply but his slightly relaxed reaction, though minute, is a good sign.

But the moment he sees Taeh’yung, Jungkook shudders and shuffles backwards, taking Jimin with him. Taeh’yung is, mildly put, distraught.

‘No- oh no- baby it’s okay- I’m sorry I scared you-‘

They back into the Medical Bay again, Jungkook sinking down to crouch again behind Jimin’s legs. Taeh’yung also crouches down, crawling forward, eyes wide with remorse and an eagerness to placate.

‘I’m safe!’ he says gently, ‘Safe- I won’t hurt you, you’re my baby, please?’

‘Taeh’yung safe,’ Jimin tells the crouching Being behind him.

‘I’m sorry baby,’ Taeh’yung croons as he pauses some feet in front of them. ‘I’m sorry I scared you.’

‘Hurt you-‘ Jungkook says from behind Jimin’s leg. ‘Hurt you- p-please don’t hurt me.’

Jungkook curls into himself even more, a hand letting go of Jimin’s trousers to grip at his head where his wound had healed over just some hours ago. His fingers press into the previously shallow open wound and he shudders.

Taeh’yung expression goes blank, eyes widening as though in understanding. And then to everyone’s alarm, he crawls forward even more and hugs Jungkook as he clung to Jimin’s legs.

‘I’m not hurt- I’m all right. Thank you,’ Taeh’yung says gently, patting his head gently with one hand and carefully removing the Vicitra’s hand from his head. He card through the matted strands and shiny new skin and tissue carefully before gently directing the Vicitra to look out of Jimin’s shins. Jimin watches them apprehensively, hands held up as though ready to intervene. Instead Taeh’yung beams a bright grin and cupping Jungkook’s face in his hands says gently, ‘I’m not hurt- you were scared, we are safe, okay baby?’

Namjoon waits with bated breath until Jungkook nods into Taeh’yung’s hands.

‘Good!’ Taeh’yung leans in and places a loud kiss on Jungkook’s nose, causing the latter to flinch again. But when Taeh’yung pulls away to sit comfortably on the ground, Jungkook is watching
him wide eyes and Namjoon doesn’t see any fear in them. Just confusion.

Which is probably the most common reaction to Taeh’yung anyways.

Namjoon guesses now was a good time to introduce himself. Making his way over in obvious and open movements, Namjoon edges into Jungkook’s field of sight. Jungkook crouches a bit more but doesn’t take his eyes off of him.

‘Hi Jungkook,’ Namjoon smiles, also crouching down to sit down. Hoseok and Yoongi slowly do the same. With some difficulty, Jimin also crouches down and sits down as well.

‘I’m Namjoon- I’m the Captain of this ship and the Navigator. We’re very happy to have you here.’

Jungkook looks down, head bowed a bit more.

‘Captain?’

‘Hmm,’ Namjoon nods slowly, before saying, ‘It’s just a title- no one listens to what I say.’

Jimin and Taeh’yung chortle at that and Hoseok grins a bit.

‘We’re going to shave off his hair later, wanna watch?’ Sk’jin asks, appearing from the side and sitting down on the floor as well.

Jungkook’s reaction is completely unexpected.

Namjoon would have expected Jungkook to maybe flinch or recoil like he had done so far. But his eyes widen even more, posture opening up and expression that could only be translated into one thing: recognition.

Clearly, Sk’jin is surprised by this too.

‘Hi Jungkook, my name is Sk’jin and-‘

Jungkook pushes himself away from Jimin and half crawls, half scuttles across the floor towards Sk’jin.

‘Oh Spaces-‘ Sk’jin’s eyes widen for a moment as Jungkook pushes into his space and then baffling everyone in the room Jungkook reaches for his temples, dirty trembling hands shaking before he places them on his temples.

‘Missing- why,’ he asks in a whisper.

Sk’jin’s eyes widen even more, glancing over at Namjoon as though demanding to know why he wasn’t doing anything.

‘Same,’ Jungkook says slowly, ‘Same- my mother.’

Sk’jin’s expression turns from shock to confusion and wonder.

‘Mother?’ he repeats, trying to sit up a little from having tried to back away.

‘Mother,’ Jungkook repeats, ‘Same. Same, my mother.’

Sk’jin’s expression changes rapidly, his face almost contorting.
‘Did you have brothers? Sisters?’ Sk’jin asks quietly, raising his hand and with more gentleness than Namjoon thought Sk’jin could ever possess, rubs soothing circles over Jungkook’s cheeks.

‘2 brothers, 3 sisters- big family,’ Jungkook recounts, eyes closing. ‘And mother- two mothers.’

‘What happened to them?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘I don’t know- dead, taken,’ Jungkook answers. ‘Long time.’

‘Did they look like you? Or different?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘Some,’ Jungkook replies, eyes still closed, inhaling slow and deep. ‘Mother look like you.’

Sk’jin looks up at Namjoon at that.

Another Khol’isa? Other species? More Vicitra?

‘What happened to you?’

‘Taken,’ Jungkook replies, ‘Kabans took me. Like animal. Not animal.’

‘No you’re not,’ Sk’jin says gently, his eyes downcast, ‘You were taken from your family, I’m sorry. I’m sorry that happened to you.’

Sk’jin’s apology sounds broken and heavy.

‘Why don’t you have this?’ Jungkook asks again, fingers brushing across his temples.

‘I lost them,’ Sk’jin replies, ‘I lost them when I lost my family.’

‘No family?’ Jungkook asks quietly.

‘Not anymore.’ Sk’jin shakes his head.

‘Who gave you your name?’ Yoongi asks suddenly.

‘Mother,’ Jungkook replies, only flinching slightly. ‘Our mother gave us all names.’

‘Your mother who looks like me, what was her name?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘Darling,’ Jungkook replies earnestly. ‘Her name- Darling.’

‘That’s a beautiful name.’ Sk’jin smiles.

It’s the most genuine and open smile Namjoon has seen from Sk’jin. Not over done, not practiced or constructed.

Jungkook suddenly recoils, arms roping and pressing down on his abdomen. He growls and coughs in obvious pain.

‘He’s in pain- I think he might be hungry,’ Hoseok says as he stands up, ‘I can get him something to eat?’

‘I can go get and get him-‘ Sk’jin begins but Jungkook lurches into the Khol’isa, not allowing him to move away.

‘Maybe we start him off easy- just water?’ Namjoon offers, glancing over at the others. Yoongi is
already standing, situated behind Jimin who was still sitting. His expression is melancholic, hands forming tight fists. Taeh'ung is still crying, clearly stopping himself from crawling forward and hugging the young Vicitra.

‘Just water, his system won’t be able to handle solids until he settles with the light stuff first,’ Namjoon tells Hoseok before the latter quickly jogs up the stairs.

‘Hey- drink something okay? Make you feel better,’ Sk’jin tells him, adjusting the Vicitra so that he could sit back against the couch seats.

Jimin and Taeh’ung crawl forward but give him space. Sk’jin sits next to Jungkook, his entire demeanor somehow just indescribably exhausted and sad. If Namjoon could, without upsetting Jungkook, he would have told Sk’jin to remove himself from this situation. But considering how Jungkook seemed to calm down a whole lot with Sk’jin close to him, he doesn’t say anything.

‘Eat something and then-‘ Sk’jin begins.

‘Had to- had to survive. Eat-‘ Jungkook shudders, his body quaking. ‘Couldn’t stop- it hurt-‘

Sk’jin holds him close, regardless of how filthy Jungkook was, and gently rocks him.

‘Not anymore okay? Not anymore- you’ll be fine now- you’ll be fine.’ Sk’jin says in a soothing tone. ‘You’re safe here. Safe, Jungkook is safe, okay?’

Jungkook still shakes, clinging onto Sk’jin’s arm. Hoseok appears from the stairs, holding a small plastic cup in one hand, and a broth Namjoon knows Sk’jin had made a few days ago before any of this had happened. He also has a few bottles under his arm.

‘Hey Jungkookie,’ Hoseok smiles as he approaches the Vicitra, making his approach known. ‘I brought you some water okay? Make you feel better hm?’

Jungkook looks up, eyeing the bottles of water with some nervousness.

Hoseok pours some into small cup and hands it to Jungkook.

Sitting up as straight as he could, Jungkook takes the cup with both of his shaking hands. He drinks messily, the water pouring down his chin and neck, creating streaks across the layered dirt that covered his skin.

It takes a while, but he manages to keep in the water, almost half of the bottle Hoseok had brought, before he moves onto the broth. It was a light and savory broth, and Hoseok had spooned out only the liquid. Jungkook drinks it up hastily, and in his enthusiasm, bites onto the lip of the bowl, leaving clean deep indents from his sharp looking teeth onto the plastic.

He breathes heavily, clutching at his abdomen again. He struggles valiantly and manages to overcome the cramps, clearly refusing to throw up.

‘Does anything hurt?’ Sk’jin asks gently, still not moving away even though Jungkook’s eating session had left him splattered in broth and ionized water.

‘Not a lot,’ Jungkook replies.

He was still not super comfortable, his posture still a little stiff, eyes still darting about, catching every single movement from everyone. He was still jumpy, but Namjoon suspects that might be for a while.
‘Do you want shower?’ Jimin asks, having moved closer to help him eat. ‘Be clean?’

Jungkook hangs his head before saying in a small voice, ‘Yes.’

It was as though they all came to a silent unanimous decision not to question Jungkook just yet. Though Namjoon feels, judging from what he’s heard so far, that Jungkook might not be able to give the answers they exactly want. It was almost as though Jungkook was entirely normal, not born of an egg, not born fully formed without a sentient awareness that Yoongi and the other GI had been born out of.

The Khol’isa he called his mother had been an egg too, there was no doubt about it. Not to mention his sisters and brothers. How many were there? And how many of them were still in Ynqaba, awake and aware? Living lives without knowing their full history? Or perhaps they did know, perhaps Jungkook does know but he doesn’t remember anymore?

Sk’jin and Jimin helps Jungkook stand. Not crouched or hunched over, Jungkook is actually quite tall- almost Hoseok’s height. His limbs are incredibly thin and his skin pulls tightly over his cheekbones and jawline.

Everyone slowly makes their way up and they wait outside while Sk’jin and Jimin guide Jungkook into one of the Cabins to help shower him.

‘He was born Awake,’ Yoongi comments. ‘He was raised.’

‘But he’s the same,’ Taeh’yung adds unexpectedly from the doorway to the Cabin where they hear the gentle sound of water. ‘Same.’

‘Maybe same, but different,’ Yoongi tells him quietly before he backs away into his own Cabin.

‘Jinnie likes him,’ Taeh’yung comments.

And Namjoon wouldn’t put it that way, strictly speaking. But there was something about Jungkook that seemed to effect Sk’jin in a level none of them could understand.

By the time Jimin, Sk’jin, and Jungkook reappear, it’s with the latter all cleaned up, smelling like shampoo and soap. His skin now cleaned, is still an unhealthy tint that now clean shows all of his scars and injuries all too clearly.

His Vicitran features are more apparent now too, with his almost ruddy fingers that are a bit pale at the moment, and reddish skin around his eyes, ears, and back of his neck. His hair is clean but still in need of a good trimming. He’s in clothes that look like Taeh’yung’s that the latter stole from Jimin who had initially borrowed them from Hoseok.

He’s still nervous, holding the back of Sk’jin’s shirt as he follows them out into the much larger Lobby outside of the Cabins. Taeh’yung is quick to grab his attention, talking enthusiastically but not standing too close despite clearly itching too. Jungkook squirms behind Sk’jin who smiles at the Vicitra, pulling him forward gently.

‘Wanna see something cool Kookie?’ Taeh’yung asks, gesturing for him to come sit at the couch with him.

Almost as though asking permission, Jungkook looks at Sk’jin and Jimin. Sk’jin is a little taken aback but he nods. Jimin is quicker to catch on and he nods too before looking around with a small frown.
He waits until Jungkook and Sk’jin make their way to the center of the Lobby with the wide circular table and soft couches before making his way towards Namjoon.

‘Yoongi?’ he asks.

‘In his Cabin,’ Hoseok tells him. ‘Was he all right in the shower?’

‘Happy- he was happy,’ Jimin smiles and it widens more as he adds, ‘He likes Sk’jin.’

They watch Jungkook sort of sink into the couch, eyes widening as though surprised, frozen a bit where he sat. Taeh’yung has made himself smaller than Jungkook and was now pretty much snuggling to his side. Jungkook looks unsure, but with a look at Sk’jin who smiles at him, Jungkook tries a small smile at Taeh’yung.

‘You’re going to love me, I promise,’ Taeh’yung sniffs, eyes watering, alarming Jungkook who inches closer to Sk’jin.

Jimin beams at them before turning to address Namjoon.

‘I accept all wrong- all mistake,’ Jimin tells him earnestly. ‘All problem, that is coming from this situation- because of this situation.’ He corrects himself. ‘My responsibility, I will listen, and acting-act, for best result.’

Namjoon nods, accepting Jimin’s pledge.

‘We will do all we can to take the safest way for Jungkook, for all of us.’ Namjoon replies. ‘We will work together as a team- as a family.’

Jimin smiles even more widely at that, bowing his head in thanks. He walks away, watching the trio at the couch before quietly making his into Yoongi’s Cabin.

There’s a small gasp and Namjoon and Hoseok turn their attention back towards the center of the Lobby.

Jungkook watches, absolutely entranced, as Taeh’yung makes small glowing lights appear, soft green rings and triangles, making it fall about him.

‘I think they’ll be fine,’ Hoseok says in a quiet tone. ‘We should go back and reset our trajectories again.’

Namjoon nods slowly before saying, ‘I think we need to do something.’

‘About what?’ Hoseok asks, looking away from the trio in the Lobby.

‘We need more information- and we know what information we need now,’ Namjoon tells him quietly as they turn to make their way up the stairs. ‘It’ll be risky- but if it works out well, we will probably be able to make sense of what happened in Ynqaba, to Jungkook. And to Sk’jin.’

‘Sk’jin?’ Hoseok repeats quietly as they reach the top of the stairs.

Namjoon nods, ‘Something happened in Ynqaba- I don’t know what, but something happened. In the Bridge, he said ”You should have just stuck to your plan and left me in Ynqaba to just live”- he didn’t say to die, he said to live. Something happened, and it's changed him.’

Hoseok nods to that and says, ‘I noticed yeah.’ before asking, ‘What do you plan on doing.’
They pause by the doorway to the Bridge that lights up at their entry.

‘I’m going to contact an old friend.’

Jimin steps into Yoongi’s Cabin and finds the Human sitting on the edge of his bed, looking up at him as though he’d been expecting him. He’s holding a screen in his hands over his lap. Taking a seat next to Yoongi, Jimin slips a hand around his arm.

‘He was born different,’ Yoongi says. ‘He has memories.’

‘Yes- but he was born same place,’ Jimin tells him.

Yoongi doesn’t say anything, just looks down at the screen. There’s turbulence within Yoongi, one that Jimin doesn’t even need to concentrate to sense. So Jimin starts to hum quietly under his breath, reaching up run his fingers through Yoongi’s hair.

‘That song,’ Yoongi breathes out quietly, eyes closed.

‘Song?’

‘Where is it from?’

‘Memory.’ Jimin replies, ‘I hear it. In Memories.’

‘What do you remember?’ Yoongi asks, leaning into Jimin’s touch.

‘Remember when?’

‘The mountain. When they came.’

A shudder runs down Jimin’s back, pain that lingers just under his skin spreads out, wakening under his veins, flooding his body in memory of how his heart broke that day.

‘Yoongi tried to stop,’ Yoongi tells him quietly. ‘Yoongi didn’t want to go- he didn’t want to leave you. He tried so hard- he was reaching through darkness, through their hands, through music- he heard you singing. He followed until-…until he couldn’t hear it anymore.’
'I’m sorry,’ Jimin is horrified to hear his voice crack into a whisper, throat constricted, tongue heavy. His eyes burn and his vision is blurry. ‘I’m sorry–’

He wraps his arms around Yoongi, holding him tight.

He doesn’t know why he’s apologizing.

Apologizing because Yoongi remembers? Apologizing because he can’t answer Yoongi’s question with absolute confidence about who he is, what he is, and why he was here? Apologizing because he can’t do anything about it? Apologizing because he’s selfish?

Yoongi shifts, hands taking his arms away and tilting his head up.

‘Why are you crying?’ he asks.

‘Because I cannot do anything.’

Yoongi wipes at his face, rather stiffly and with probably a bit too much strength but that was okay, because it makes Jimin laugh a bit.

‘He said he would come back to you,’ Yoongi says quietly. ‘But I don’t know if this is what he meant.’

Yoongi’s memories were tricky. Jimin himself didn’t know what to feel or think of it.

While his heart, his mind, his spirit, and his Soul was different, this Yoongi was in front of him. And something deep in Jimin tells him that the Yoongi he knew, the Yoongi who died in his arms, who kissed his lips and called him sunshine was long gone.

And Jimin doesn’t know, can’t understand how or why, but Yoongi’s eyes remain the same.

Because regardless of the changes in the Human, regardless of everything different- the one thing that curled and drew into Jimin’s very Soul was the way Yoongi looked at him.

‘Have I ever told you the story about the Sun and the Moon?’

He remembers how the Yoongi in the past had an extraordinarily pure soul- not touched or tainted by the death of Megibīya. How no erosion took a hold of him. He was fatigued yes, but the Death that seeped through everything and everyone had no power over the Human.

This Yoongi…

Jimin dabs at his eyes roughly.

This Yoongi was his. Regardless of everything, he had come back to him.

‘He loved you.’ Yoongi tells him suddenly.

Jimin feels an excruciating pain in his chest- but its not of regret or anger or sorrow. It’s strange, the pain, but it’s almost…it’s almost a Yoongi pain.

‘I know- because I feel it.’ Yoongi reaches up to touch his cheek. ‘I feel it- when he looked at you. Sunshine. Sun. My sun, my light.’

Jimin knew- he knew, he saw it, he saw the way Yoongi looked at him, the way he held his hand, the way he lived just to be by his side until he could no longer do it.
‘And you loved him.’ Yoongi adds. ‘I could see it when you looked at him. You were shining.’

‘I did,’ Jimin whispers.

‘I’m sorry,’ Yoongi says rather simply.

Jimin doesn’t know what he’s apologizing for.

‘This is Yoongi,’ Yoongi says quietly as he looks down, tapping once on the screen.

And Jimin understands Yoongi’s meaning.

Yoongi had come to accept that he was different- not just someone who had forgotten his memories, not just someone who had been reborn from the old. He was new, he was alive, and he wanted to live.

But he also accepted his past- understood it, remembered it. And now, because he knew that he was the only one who would be able to give Jimin this small memory. He was going to be able to understand, and maybe, maybe let go.

It was almost as though he felt that Jimin deserved to know more about the Human who within a short period of time, managed to become not only a part of his most cherished memories, but become a part of his very being.

This way, Jimin would be able to keep Yoongi in his heart, his memory alive, pulsing with the music of his Heart.

‘Read with me?’ Jimin asks quietly, ‘Difficult for me.’

Yoongi nods.

The first part of the whole archive is just basic records and logs or academic history, or travel logs, and Immigration passes. It’s when they reach a section titled Interviews that Jimin pauses. There were video logs recorded. With a shaking hand, he taps at the first square.

Yoongi, the Yoongi he first met, appears.

His chest burns.

‘Hi, uh, I’m Min Yoongi. Nice to uh, meet you,’ there’s an almost awkward smile. ‘I am Human, obviously, and yeah, right, I’ll be 76 sols in a few Standard months, but I think I was nearly a hundred last year because of our proximity to this black-hole. Let’s not do that again.’

‘I keep telling you that was a mistake-’

The video feed cuts off to another shot.

‘So uh yeah- uhh what am I supposed to do here again-’

‘Fuck’s sake-’

The video is cut again and another shot comes back, this time with Yoongi sitting facing the camera, clothes a little neater as though attempts were made in trying to look smarter.

‘Yeah, okay, I like watching movies from AE period, I also like sunset walks on the beach, and have a real fondness for poetry meaning I’m deep a-f-’
The camera feed cuts again and Jimin laughs under his breath despite the burn in his chest.

Yoongi appears again, this time gingerly nursing his arm as though he’d been punched there.

‘I am specialist in Development Technology from the-‘ the audio cuts here ‘-GLA. I have been requested and asked to be part of the exploration team specializing in adapting and understanding alien technology for the betterment of the Known Universe.’

‘Are you excited?’

‘This will be my 10th mission, yeah I’m excited,’ Yoongi grins lazily, and a familiar ache echoes inside Jimin.

It’s like watching someone else, Jimin thinks to himself. Watching someone he once knew, someone he once met- someone he loved.

‘You’re smiling.’

‘Because I’m happy.’

They watch more videos, some serious ones that are records of Yoongi’s findings and reports (Jimin saves them to show Namjoon in case he finds something useful and important in these), or Yoongi’s own self-taken videos of strange looking planets, footage of his team members, all the same Beings Jimin met. Amic is shown frequently, tall and gangly, laughing alongside Yoongi as they hiked and climbed about, or sat hunkered down stressed over some strange tech.

There were a few videos of Yoongi much younger, standing next to a young girl that Jimin recognizes at once as Yoongi’s little sister. Her hair is always accessorized.

There are other videos, clearly taken on Earth, of Yoongi when he was much younger. Maybe Jungkook’s age in some of them. They watch all of the videos quietly, and after a while Yoongi takes his hand in his, placing oddly timed kisses over his knuckles and the side of his head.

The videos come to an end, and Jimin feels oddly lighter and at the same time weighted as though drenched in water. There’s more, records, logs, reports, statements. But it’s enough. At least for Jimin. So he puts the screen away over onto the nightstand.

‘I’m sorry,’ Yoongi tells him quietly again. ‘He couldn’t come back.’

‘You’re here,’ Jimin tries to explain. ‘That’s all I want.’

‘Does it hurt?’ Yoongi asks, taking his free hand to place over Jimin’s chest, ‘Because it hurts.’

Jimin takes Yoongi’s hand from his chest, kissing the back of it before placing it over his, feeling for his pulse.

‘Why does it hurt?’ Jimin asks, looking up from their hands to face Yoongi.

‘I don’t know- because I don’t know. I am not Yoongi- but I know how he feels, how he thought- I remember his memories now- but why do I remember them, if I am not Yoongi?’

Jimin doesn’t have the answers for that, can’t possibly explain any of this.

‘What can I do?’ Jimin asks, squeezing their hands. ‘What can I do to help- to not hurt?’

‘Talk more,’ Yoongi tells him rather bluntly and then rather belatedly adds, ‘Please.’
‘What do you want to hear?’ Jimin asks softly as he sits back on the bed and then guides Yoongi to rest his head on his lap.

‘Anything, everything.’ Yoongi replies, eyes closing. ‘Please.’

‘Have I ever told you the story about the Sun and the Moon?’ Jimin asks quietly, brushing through Yoongi’s hair again.

‘No.’

‘The Sun was powerful and beautiful spirit, all grew in light of the Sun- all life thrived and rejoiced in the Sun,’ Jimin tells him quietly, choosing his words carefully. ‘The Sun was powerful and strong, but the spirit was another part of the balance- where there is life, there is death, where there is light, there is darkness. There is a balance. And to balance the beauty and life of the Sun, there existed the Moon. A cold and white light, and all life hid, for this spirit was a hunter.’

Yoongi turns onto his back to face him, watching him carefully. Unable to look away Jimin continues.

‘The Sun and the Moon never saw each other, only hear whispers and quiet talk. The Sun was afraid, the Moon was more afraid. But one day- one day they met. They met high above- light and dark, life and death- it was short, it was too fast, too…too less time.’ Jimin finds himself whispering. ‘But that time was enough- because the Sun was not afraid, and the Moon was not afraid- fear became love.’

Yoongi doesn’t even blink.

‘And they could no longer stay. They could not dance. They had to balance.’ Jimin says quietly. ‘The Sun had to go, the Moon tried to follow- but there was no way- their paths changed. And it changed again and again and again- but their love remained- longing and seeking- circles and circles. The Sun remained the same- life and light. But the Moon changed, sometimes shrinking, sometimes growing, but it was always the Moon. And when the time was right, when they were aligned again, careful and slowly, but less time, they would dance again, and go again.’

Yoongi reaches up to gently thumb under Jimin’s eye, dragging slowly at the soft skin there. Then slowly he sits up, facing him and settling close. Yoongi continues to gently touch him, fingers caressing his face, down to his throat, his neck, just shy past the collar of his shirt.

‘Why couldn’t the Sun and Moon stay?’

‘Because there is balance,’ Jimin can barely hear himself, caught up, unable to look away.

‘But will you stay?’ Yoongi asks, leaning in until their foreheads touch.

‘Yes. Will you stay?’ Jimin asks, lips brushing against Yoongi’s.

Yoongi stills for a moment, dark eyes searching his, a turmoil of light and dark, emotions, and thought.

‘I will always come back to you.’ Yoongi finally says, kissing his words against Jimin’s lips.

Jimin’s breath hitches in his throat- the kisses Yoongi has given him before, were almost child-like. Innocent presses of lips against skin, kisses of reassurance, kisses of comfort. This feels different.
Desperation.

Bliss.

Sorrow.

Ecstasy.

Their paths had aligned, their meeting not destined by fate, but written and narrated by serendipity. But just like the Sun and the Moon, they could not remain. They could not remain, they could not stay.

And again, just like the Sun and the Moon, they found each other again.

‘Am I yours?’ Yoongi asks, eyes closed shut, forehead leaning down against his shoulder, shivering a little as he holds Jimin like he never wants to let go.

But this time.

_This time._

He would stay.

‘Mine, as I am yours.’

*
Chapter End Notes

(Author’s Note)

Ah- my internship ended but wow, I can safely say that I love my supervisor to death

Not only is he an intellectual whose bias is Namjoon, his favorite song is Run, favorite album is Dark and Wild, and loves Jungkook’s falseto

Not just that

He loves Taeyang and didn’t know if he was jealous of his wife or jealous of Taeyang because he couldn’t handle how perfect they are for each other

He is also a massive Sistar fan and worships Hyolyn like the queen she is

We spend days listening to everything from bts to twice to taeyeon to sunmi to big bang

He nearly cried when i told him about my experience at Wings when the tour came here to bkk

as a goodbye present you know what he got me?? So he loves got7 and when he found out that I did too and that we both are in love with the perfection that is Park Jinyoung, he gave me his Jinyoung poster from the Eyes On You album and I think I cried on my way home. Okay I didn’t but I was close.

They were so sweet! I had a lot of fun there and it was surprisingly greatly educational and actually felt like I was doing constructive work. Mainly because I was actually doing constructive work and participated in a lot of major projects. It was great!

But ah, here we are, somewhat a bit more free with time. The next update with be on time, please look forward to that.

I will also be updating that NamJin one-shot this upcoming week so please look forward to that for some nice fluffy awkward pure softness and nerdiness.
Honestly, Sk’jin is too old for this.

He was not made to dangle off of the ledge of a sewage system, with a massive network of pipes, wires, and cables running all around them, sparkling with electricity inside this dark pit inside a gigantic mining-asteroid, but here he was.

‘Is this divine punishment because I took your lip-virginity away-‘

‘This is not helping!’ Namjoon retorts angrily, dangling next to him with one good arm.

It’s odd seeing his other arm shredded apart. It makes that same guilt Sk’jin has been trying to ignore for the past hour threaten to spew out of his stomach.

‘I’m sorry.’

‘For fuck’s sake Sk’jin that wasn’t my first kiss-‘

‘Not that,’ Sk’jin sighs, looking about as though they weren’t clinging on to their lives over what Sk’jin suspects is a vast vat of sewage far below them. At least he couldn’t smell it. ‘Well that too- but my point being-‘

‘No- don’t apologize,’ Namjoon sighs out, mangled hand twitching, slowing dripping some sort of bionic fluid Sk’jin is pretty sure shouldn’t be leaking out. ‘I know we’ve had talks before and I know we all keep our own secrets- but right now I just- I just want us to get back.’

‘We could be identified at any point now with the local security after us- Hoseok and Taeh’yung are too far away; and Jungkook, Yoongi, and Jimin are just-…ugh, they’ll be fine waiting for us, sickeningly gross couple, fuck, I did not sign up to witness that.’

‘Oh- you noticed?’

‘What’s not to notice?!’ Sk’jin spits out, adjusting his feet on the small ledge along the all too smooth glassy walls. ‘Makes me want to throw-up.’
Namjoon unexpectedly laughs, his head turned away. Sk’jin wonders if all that chlorine was getting to the Kutsoglerin’s head.

‘Is it really the time to laugh?’ Sk’jin huffs out. ‘You should use that brain of yours and think of a way to get us out.’

Namjoon wheezes again before he shortles, ‘Out of all the things you choose to complain about now it’s about the nature of Yoongi’s and Jimin’s relationship?’

Namjoon’s entire form is shaking, quivering as he laughs into his the side of his arm.

‘I’m disguising my worry over the effect of such a relationship with contemptuous disdain, keep up Namjoon,’ Sk’jin huffs out, arms strained and thighs burning. ‘You think they’ll want that glass dildo?’

‘WHY DO YOU STILL HAVE THAT WITH YOU?!’

‘I COULDN’T GET RID OF IT- IT FIT REALLY WELL IN MY HANDS YOU KNOW?’

‘FOR FUCK’S SAKE-’

It’s hardly the time to be screaming considering their precarious location. Sk’jin spies the lifts dropping over to the other side of the cavern, the huge pipes around them trembling with the force of their contents. Sk’jin doesn’t want to think about it.

‘You’re worried that it might influence their decisions?’ Namjoon asks after a while, having calmed down a little.

‘You’re talking as though Yoongi was never influenced by Jimin from the moment we opened that fucking OrTank- everything he does is for Jimin, centers around Jimin.’ Sk’jin snorts.

Namjoon sighs quietly at that, as though resigned to the truth of it.

‘What do you make of it?’ Namjoon asks.’

‘Uh- Yoongi is disgustingly in love? I don’t know? I have no expertise over this matter,’ Sk’jin sniffs in disdain.

‘No I mean- based on what Jimin told us, and then on what Yoongi had to say- and what we can add together…is this Yoongi, our Yoongi, anything like the “original” Yoongi?’ Namjoon asks slowly. ‘And how much of the “original” Yoongi still remains in our Yoongi?’

‘To be honest I don’t know,’ Sk’jin sighs, ‘But what I do know is that this is not the time or place to discuss this, despite the fact that I love an oral exchange with you Namjoon.’

‘You have to make everything weird,’ Namjoon grumbles.

‘It’s my specialty.’ Sk’jin grins before adding, ‘So? What do we do? Hanging here forever is something I’d like to avoid so come on, tell me how we’re getting the fuck out of here because I highly doubt anyone comes down this far to check on stragglers and potential wanted-Beings.’

Sk’jin can’t really see all of Namjoon’s face but he’s sure the Kutsoglerin is rolling his eyes.

‘See that chipped panel up there? I’m 90% sure the rings we’ve seen around here are the maintenance lift-rungs. If we can access its wiring we can get it to come here- as both your arms are working- could you reach around me and access it? I’ll guide you through the process.’
Namjoon nods at the flat but large open panel with a multitude of switches on it. They’re lucky they both had no issue seeing in dim lighting.

‘I’ll need to climb around you- you sure?’ Sk’jin asks, eyeing their very precarious location with doubt. ‘I’m not very light.’

‘Well, neither am I,’ Namjoon huffs out, ‘Just hurry- let’s do this fast-’

‘-kinky okay-‘

‘-Sk’jin please,’ Namjoon groans.

‘Hey you were ready to speak in length about Yoongi and Jimin’s vague-ass relationship in context to Yoongi’s identity and what that could mean for our mission- let me have this,’ Sk’jin grits out as he slowly edges closer.

‘Fair point,’ Namjoon grumbles.

‘So- are you stable in that position or would you rather be on top?’

‘Why does that sound suggestive,’ Namjoon deadpans, unimpressed.

‘And you say I make everything sound weird,’ Sk’jin huffs, now just a foot away from the Kutsoglerin.

Namjoon sighs before saying, ‘Go from the back-‘

‘Wow- I never pegged you to-‘

‘Sk’jin!’

Snorting, Sk’jin makes sure to balance himself properly before he reaches over and around Namjoon, who has pushed himself flat against the glossy walls to give Sk’jin space. Unable to help himself Sk’jin kisses Namjoon’s left ear with a loud mwah! sound while Namjoon sighs heavily again.

‘Don’t worry Namjoonie- you’ll find someone who will want to kiss you for no reason,’ Sk’jin pats him as he fully makes his way to the side.

‘Yeah yeah,’ Namjoon grimaces before adding, ‘You think it’s like that with Yoongi and Jimin?’

‘What’s with the obsession with Yoongi and Jimin?’ Sk’jin grunts out, reaching a tricky part of the cliff-face. ‘Living vicariously off of them?’

‘Spaces, Sk’jin-‘

Chuckling Sk’jin looks over his shoulder but is surprised to find Namjoon looking genuinely worried.

‘You’re worried.’

‘I am,’ Namjoon admits. ‘Considering how things are going- and how we cannot predict anything, cannot see the reasoning behind any of this-‘

‘No- you’re worried about them- genuinely, about them as individuals.’
Namjoon looks stricken, as though he hadn’t just realized it.

‘I guess yeah,’ Namjoon sighs. ‘Especially Yoongi because of how-’

The entire cavern suddenly howls.

And it sounds too familiar-

‘Uh-‘

‘Sk’jin hurry now-!’

18 hours ago

This will hurt

It’s all right- pain isn’t unknown to me

I didn’t mean physical pain

I know what you meant

Unsurprisingly, Sk’jin has nightmares.

Not the type you see when you sleep, because sleep is quite literally a *dream* for the Khol’isa.

But nightmares, the type you see with your waking eyes- or maybe a bit like how most normal Beings would daydream.

It’s unsurprising but still annoying. Just because you weren’t surprised by a nightmare doesn’t mean it still doesn’t completely dislodge and unhinge you.

Blinking hard to get rid of the reddish hue overtaking his vision, Sk’jin looks down, where
Jungkook’s head was pillowing his lap as he slept.

Being clean on a regular basis and being medically treated for a week really effected the young Vicitra. His skin looked less grey, the natural reddish tint of his skin no longer appeared like bruises but appeared deeper and richer in colour. His hair, which Sk’jin and Jimin trimmed and thoroughly cleaned was bouncy and shiny.

Jungkook had obviously been taken care of. He had been *raised*, and he had been *taught*.

He could read some Standard, he had table-manners (though slightly messy and very *very* defensive), really loved showers, and had nearly perfect speech. He was also intelligent, and a lot more perceptive than anyone would have guessed.

His behavior towards the Beings on board clearly showed this.

With Namjoon, Jungkook was respectful, watching with wide eyes, listening with care, and always somehow more alert in the presence of the Kutsoglerin.

With Hoseok, Jungkook was much more comfortable, and liked to sit next to him as Hoseok explained impossibly difficult tactics and instructions on piloting, nodding as though he understood. When Jungkook had an issue with the Comm-Device, he went straight to Hoseok, fidgeting a little as he asked the Ngfy’widan to help him.

With Taeh’yung Jungkook was wary but he made no move to defend himself or react back to the Zhak’gri. He was, bluntly put, afraid yes, but there was an undoubted awe with the way he looked at him.

With Jimin he was protective, moving to shadow his movements and placing himself in a way where he could bodily protect the shorter Being. Which was pointless considering how Jimin was perfectly safe inside the ship. But hilarious because Jungkook did this every time Yoongi was in the vicinity.

It was almost as though Jungkook just *knew* without being told, that Jimin was Yoongi’s highest priority, and Yoongi was Jimin’s highest priority.

Clearly Jungkook had developed a sort of attachment to Jimin- the latter had not only treated him with kindness inside that cell, but had also set him free from the cruel bondage he had found himself in. As a result, Jungkook seems to have taken it upon himself to protect Jimin- and to also be somehow incredibly jealous if he wasn’t the subject of Jimin’s attention.

Just the other day Jungkook had come across Jimin and Yoongi in the Hangar Bay, where the Human had been readjusting their arsenal, and Jimin had been assisting, keeping record. It was a fairly boring but time-consuming task, but the two had been peacefully enjoying that time together, with Jimin humming under his breath. Yoongi must have told him something funny (an idea that is funny in itself), because Jimin had laughed so hard he fell off the bench he had been sitting on.

Jungkook had more or less leapt the distance of the Hangar Bay and crouched over Jimin, snarling at Yoongi.

Yoongi hadn’t moved to defend himself or even attack- he just stared at Jungkook for a while before saying, ‘If you want to defend someone, your priority should be their escape as you distract.’

Then he proceeds to explain to Jungkook the best way to defend and protect someone, pulling up instruction manuals and video examples from a screen. Jungkook looked so lost as Yoongi
explained and demonstrated the correct way of executing a defensive stance, he kept looking up at Sk’jin as though for help.

It was also clear from that moment that Jungkook was an incredibly fast learner; he picked up on everything Yoongi was demonstrating to him, his stance already improving. Hoseok even joined in after clearing a space in the Bay to demonstrate offensive stances and how to switch between them. Hoseok explains the importance of core strength, and how to maintain balance. Taeh’yung joins them too, trying to follow the instructions. Somehow Hoseok finds himself training Jungkook, Taeh’yung, and Jimin (though the latter seemed very well trained, and was just indulging the other two) in hand-to-hand combat.

Jungkook, now gaining strength, and realizing that he was indeed safe, was slowly shedding inhibitions as well. He smiled back now, albeit a bit slowly, and ducked his head in embarrassment rather than in fear, when spoken to kindly.

But out of all of this, what disturbed and strangely hurt Sk’jin the most was how Jungkook was around him.

You’ll have to be careful

I will

This is the only chance you’ll have unless you’re very lucky

Trust me, I’m anything but. I’ll be careful

Jungkook just followed Sk’jin everywhere he went. And without question, or permission, decided to take residence in Sk’jin’s room.

It happened from the very first night out of the Medical Bay. Jungkook had dozed off on the couch, and Sk’jin was wondering if Cabin 07 would be a good place to situate the young Vicitra when he woke up in a shocked daze, nearly hyperventilating before catching sight of Sk’jin and curling up around him. Then he fell back asleep.

‘Jungkook,’ Sk’jin had called gently. ‘Let’s get you into a bed okay?’

He managed to get the Vicitra to the Cabin.

It was like putting Ilya to sleep and Sk’jin tries not to think about it.

It wasn’t even an hour later when Jungkook burst out of his Cabin, clearly semi-awake and moving only on instinct. Hoseok had been there, warily watching his movement. But Jungkook seemed to be following something- he seemed to be sniffing and then as though he knew exactly where he was headed, went straight into his Cabin, and crept inside.

Hoseok had given him a wide-eyed look from the Kitchen.

Then they both quietly walked up to the door, looking into Sk’jin’s room.

Jungkook was curled up on Sk’jin’s bed, head on Sk’jin’s piled up blankets. And ever since then, he refused to sleep elsewhere.

And just like Sk’jin- Jungkook is plagued with nightmares when he sleeps. So more often than not in the past few days, Sk’jin finds himself where he is now, with Jungkook’s head on his lap, waking him and gently brushing through his hair every time he woke frightened from his
nightmares.

At least his bed was being put to use. Sk’jin rarely spent time on his bed save to sit and peruse his screen. He normally preferred sitting at the desk near the window, or just sitting out at the Kitchen area.

Jungkook also liked to receive permission from Sk’jin.

Whatever childhood he had, and if his mother had truly been a Khol’isa, then Jungkook seemed to naturally assign that role or guardianship over to Sk’jin just by face-value.

All Khol’isa were very distinctly similar- the same elegant features, the same sharp but large eyes, the same pale rosy skin, the same horns; and even though Sk’jin had lost his, Jungkook knew instantly and knew that something was wrong. It raises so many questions in Sk’jin’s mind. He guesses he understands how Namjoon must have felt, upon realizing that there were eggs out there, carrying the Kutsoglerin species in them, growing and birthing them. They were perfected, idealized, and grown to be perfect representation and replacements for those that already existed.

And Sk’jin hates him own species- hates them with every fiber of his being but the idea of an pure Khol’isa, of a Khol’isa untinted by the Bloodmoon, the idea of a Khol’isa whose very breath was not a continuous curse at their existence; it scared him.

It’s been nearly 7 hours now that Jungkook fell asleep, but Sk’jin hasn’t moved an inch, just staring out of the window at the never-ending, unchanging white expanse of warp-space. Jungkook didn’t move much in his sleep, just remaining curled up, occasionally twitching, and when he saw nightmares, tensing up almost painfully. But for the first time in the past near week, Jungkook is sleeping without any nightmares. Sk’jin wonders if it had anything to do with the light kiss Jimin had placed on the sleepy Vicitra’s forehead. If Jimin was able to make Beings speak only the truth, and Spaces knew what else, then making nightmares go away shouldn’t be too difficult, Sk’jin guesses.

‘Jinnie, is Kookie awake?’ Taeh’yung’s voice asks quietly at his ear.

‘Not yet- I’m going to wake him now.’

‘Can I come?’

‘Yeah sure-‘

Taeh’yung appears from the wall in a bright display of green that vanishes just as quickly as it appeared.

‘Tae, please- we talked about this,’ Sk’jin whispers at the Zhak’gri who coos quietly at the sight of Jungkook asleep, as if he hadn’t spent hours just staring at his sleeping form until Namjoon told him to stop because it was freaking the Kutsoglerin out.

Taeh’yung kneels by the bed, reaching out to gently stroke Jungkook’s hair.

‘There was another, wasn’t there?’ Taeh’yung asks suddenly.

‘-what?’

‘Like Kookie- another egg-hatched. They were there with you,’ Taeh’yung says quietly, looking up at Sk’jin.
The air slowly dims, reddening under the Bloodmoon that threatens to break horizon.

‘How do you know this?’

‘I sensed them- just one right? It was faint, and all over, mixed with the rain.’

Sk’jin feels nauseous.

‘They did something to that planet,’ Taeh’yung says quietly, giving Sk’jin an understanding look. It’s odd- but Sk’jin feels as though Taeh’yung knew exactly what happened in Ynqaba.

‘Do- could you feel it?’

Taeh’yung nods.

‘It wasn’t them- if it was, Ynqaba wouldn’t exist,’ Taeh’yung says quietly, brushing through Jungkook’s hair.

‘It was the Yishengs,’ Sk’jin nods.

Taeh’yung hums as though he’s not surprised, just disappointed.

‘They did things they weren’t supposed to,’ Taeh’yung says, sounding unlike himself. When he looks up at Sk’jin, he suddenly looks different. ‘They were made to guide, but now all they do is destroy.’

Taeh’yung looks away, looking like himself.

It unsettles Sk’jin.

Ever since he met the Zhak’gri- ever since their eyes met, Sk’jin cannot shake the unsettling feeling the Zhak’gri gave him.

Sk’jin wasn’t afraid of things or Beings- he was rarely scared.

But Taeh’yung sometimes terrified him.

‘Why didn’t you tell Namjoon?’ Sk’jin asks carefully.

‘Why haven’t you?’ Taeh’yung asks back.

‘Because…’ Sk’jin breathes out slowly, feeling at his temples where pressure was building. ‘Because if I did Namjoon and Hoseok, and then Yoongi and Jimin, would feel responsible.’

‘It was not their design.’

‘No, but their actions, our actions, my actions, made the design possible.’ Sk’jin sighs out quietly. ‘They already have their demons, their nightmares. They carry enough of the dead with them, they don’t need more. They’re young, unlike us.’

‘Life is continuum.’ Taeh’yung says, looking down.

Sk’jin doesn’t comment.

‘Do you see your nightmares again?’ Taeh’yung asks.

Sk’jin nods mutely.
‘Should I remove them?’

‘No–’ Sk’jin replies quickly. ‘No- it’s…it’s all I have.’

Taeh’yung looks up at him again, eyes wide and filled with sorrow and pain.

‘I didn’t want to scare you,’ Taeh’yung whispers, eyes glistening a little. ‘But I meant it. You can’t do that again. I can’t help you anymore.’

_You won’t be complete, you know that right? Is that still okay?_

Sk’jin nods, ignoring the way the Bloodmoon edges into his sight above his direct line of sight.

‘I know.’

_It’s okay- it’s not like I was ever complete to start off with._

* *

Sk’jin climbs up the last step and enters the Bridge quietly. He knows Namjoon is supposed to be in here, which is why he’s surprised to find Yoongi in there as well. And that too clearly in some form of discussion with the Kutsoglerin. At his approach, Yoongi steps away from the Table, away from a stunned looking Namjoon who is holding a small screen in his hands.

‘You’re sure?’ the Kutsoglerin asks in a rather surprisingly gentle tone.

The Human nods in reply.

‘There isn’t a lot I remember- most of what I do, is related to Jimin; but without a doubt, Yoongi was involved in something deeper in Megibiya,’ Yoongi says to the Kutsoglerin. ‘I would like for all of us to investigate, so that we may better understand what happened there.’

‘Thank you,’ Namjoon smiles, ‘I’ll call everyone up now.’

‘Jimin is still sleeping,’ Yoongi states.

‘I guess…wake him up?’ Namjoon replies slowly.

‘I think he’s caught up in his sleep cycle so he should be fine,’ Sk’jin says, carefully patting the Human on the shoulder. He’s still a little on edge with Yoongi, considering the fact that Sk’jin is 98% sure Yoongi will punch him given the chance.

‘I was with him. He was tired, and we slept together,’ Yoongi states bluntly. ‘We’ve been sleeping together in the same Cabin.’

Namjoon’s mouth involuntarily hangs open for a second before he closes his mouth shut with a click. Sk’jin on the other hand wants to cackle- at both Yoongi’s bluntness and Namjoon’s inability to handle this information.
‘Uh-‘

‘Did you take care of Jimin?’ Sk’jin asks, ignoring the way Namjoon’s head snaps towards him, expression horrified.

Yoongi blinks at him for a moment before saying, ‘We tend to each other when needed, yes.’

‘Okay there’s no need for-‘

‘That’s good! You should always keep a healthy balance and dynamics in this!’ Sk’jin nods, ‘Did you have all the supplies you needed?’

‘The care-packages are well stocked.’

‘That they are!’ Sk’jin nods in agreement. ‘Were they to your liking?’

‘They performed their function,’ Yoongi replies. ‘I saw nothing lacking.’

‘And were you both satisfied?’

‘Yes.’

‘Great!’

Namjoon has his face in his hands, almost pained by this conversation. Sk’jin can’t help the smile on his face, his cheeks are actually hurting from all of this.

‘Is there something wrong,’ Yoongi asks, clearly picking up on the strange reactions around him.

‘Not at all! We’re just very happy that you’re happy.’

Yoongi stares at them for a long while, clearly something very complex going through his mind.

‘Are you talking about sexual intercourse.’

‘Oh Spaces-‘

‘Yes Yoongi- I hope you’re both being safe,’ Sk’jin smiles, ‘If you need any advice I’m sure-‘

‘-sure we don’t need to know and Yoongi can find all the information he needs through database,’ Namjoon hurriedly cuts across, ‘It’s none of our business what they do- what anyone does in their free-time, with each other.’

Yoongi stares at them again before saying, ‘I am aware of what it is. I have memories of it.’

‘Oh Spaces-‘

‘Good! So you’re not utterly clueless!’ Sk’jin knows he shouldn’t be so invasive but Namjoon’s reactions are giving him life.

‘We did not engage in sexual intercourse.’ Yoongi states bluntly. ‘Neither of us can reproduce, it seems pointless.’

‘Well there is a lot of pointing of sorts-‘

‘Sk’jin! Please call the others for a meeting in 15 minutes!’ Namjoon orders tersely. ‘Yoongi, I would like you to tell the others what you told me- about Human Yoongi and his memories,’
Namjoon clarifies. ‘I have something important I want to discuss as well- and Hoseok is going to tell us about our trajectory in detail. So if both of you could prepare-‘

‘That’s something you also need to do before sex Yoongi-‘

‘Sk’jin!’ Namjoon wheezes out. If he could lose all colour from his face, he would have.

‘I will present the history of my memories as you wish,’ Yoongi states, stepping away towards his station.

Namjoon is quick to glare at Sk’jin.

‘We’re trying to maintain a professional setting here-‘

‘Namjoon sweetie, the moment we all left Tayi, the whole aspect of professionalism went out of the metaphoric window and was sucked into a black-hole,’ Sk’jin snorts but relents because Namjoon really looks like he’s going to suffer some bionic-stroke. ‘But I am curious to know and I am not being condescending or whatever but considering your body was reconstructed and built do you have like a metallic dic-‘

‘Lisai please call everyone up to the Bridge now!’

Hoseok gives him curious looks, clearly wondering why Sk’jin was still chuckling under his breath. But Namjoon’s facial expression is bright in his memory and it’s hilarious. Recently things have had little reason to be hilarious, so Sk’jin cherishes other Being’s moments of absolute discomfort for his own benefit.

Jungkook is also wondering why he’s grinning, but he’s smiling too, as though it gave him reason to smile. As a result, Taeh’yung ruffles his hair and squishes his cheeks, causing the Vicitra to lean all the way back in his seat, away from grabby hands. Jimin is watching them, hands twitching as though trying to intervene. Yoongi has made his way towards the center and now stands behind Jimin, expression blank as he watches Taeh’yung now try to kiss Jungkook.

‘Okay- so now that we’re all here,’ Namjoon calls them all to attention, blue light from the Navigation Table lighting his face up in a rather unflattering way, pronouncing the missing bionic flesh around his jaw and back of his head. ‘We have a few important things we need to discuss, but we’ll start first with Yoongi. As requested, I was able to find records of Yoongi when he was…- well, when he was wholly Human I guess. It was difficult, because as I suspected the moment we found Yoongi wasn’t a random genetic code hatched and grown, but based off of an actual living Being from the past, his records would have been erased. What I was able to find was vague and didn’t offer much information in regards to what he did, who he worked for, or where he was travelling to.’

‘But I remember things,’ Yoongi speaks up. ‘And based on what I read, saw, and heard from these records, I have been able to piece together information that in itself may not seem important, but considering what we are doing, what we know from Jimin, may help us understand more.’

Everyone leans in closer, Jungkook included, now no longer fighting Taeh’yung’s hold.
According to what Jimin and I discussed, by combining our memories, facts, and information, we have come to conclude that Yoongi, and the team he was with, were under the orders and guidance of now no longer existing branch of the GLA that concentrated on experimental technology and development. Yoongi stated that he was a specialist in development technology.’ Yoongi reels off as though he’s reading a statement. ‘Based on these memories, I have also understood that Yoongi and his team were sent to Bhumi to investigate, under guise of being part of the Raksane Tayi Scientific Panel. It was the lie Yoongi told his mother and sister. His friend, Amic, mentioned “corps”- and how they were part of it. I did research, but was unable to find any form of organization or GLA branch with “corps” in it. Yoongi and his team were also sent their with permission- they were sent there for a reason, which they were late to realize was a lie. His team captain seemed to understand the situation better, and she and Yoongi discussed it as well. She told him that this wasn’t the first time the GLA had been there. That attempts at negotiations were being made, and that it was being concluded.’

Yoongi taps at the Table, and a picture of himself appears, with information on the side about his past Human self. *Original self? Past self?*

He looks younger in the holographic projection, his hair lighter, his eyes a lighter shade. Their expressions are the same though- still stoic, with the somewhat involuntary unimpressed expression in the way their mouths were set.

‘From what I remember, and from what Jimin has told me about what he saw, Yoongi and his team lost control of their ship and crashed into Bhumi- or Megibīya. They were attempting to find a tower, set in a location around the habitable ring, high up a mountain. It was through this tower that they hoped to transmit a signal to send for help. I believe there might have been another ship that was waiting for Yoongi and his team outside of Megibīya,’ Yoongi explains. ‘However, Yoongi seems to realize that this was not going to help.’

‘The tower wasn’t there?’

‘It was.’ Yoongi replies, and Sk’jin notices how Jimin seems to tense, his eyes unblinking. ‘It was there, but it was long abandoned. No sign of existing technology, no indication of it having ever been occupied.’

‘False information? What happened after that?’ Hoseok asks.

‘False, or old, I don’t know,’ Yoongi replies. ‘Yoongi died there. Taken by the Akramanese, or as Jimin calls them, the Red Evil.’

Jimin’s eyes are shining with unshed tears, clearly reliving the memory.

‘It does sound vague, but I think that’s a good lead,’ Namjoon says as soon as he realizes that Yoongi is done. ‘Yoongi was involved in this much more than we initially thought- and if we are able to find out more information regarding this, then we will be able to understand what happened in Jimin’s System, what to expect from there, and why the Special Jury really want us there.’

Namjoon pauses a moment before he says, ‘I know we all agreed, for our safety and secrecy, to keep everything contained within our resources and within the ship- but in this occasion, I wish to propose an idea.’

Hoseok leans in a little, his expression serious.

‘We’re going to need information- not the type I can access through a Hub by diving deep into the GLA database. We’re going to need information by directly accessing the physical mainframe, do a
deep-dive into the core which I won’t be able to access even if I were to access a GLA drive through a Dock,’ Namjoon states.

‘How do you propose we do this then?’ Hoseok asks warily.

‘I call in a favour,’ Namjoon replies simply. ‘She’s an Information Analyst that works directly for the Venture Unit. She’s from Klia’ban.’

Hoseok’s expression changes from wary to impressed.

‘What’s in Klia’ban?’ Sk’jin asks, unsure of this location.

‘It’s a planet not far from Tayi- the Beings there were born as a result of an illegal genetic experiment gone wrong,’ Namjoon explains. ‘They tried to remove a genome from their DNA that weakened their natural exoskeleton, killing them as a result- instead they ended up entirely losing their shells, and became a rather…soft but healthy version of their species. The original Klia’ban refused to keep the mutations in their planet. So the GLA took in all 500 of the failed experiments, finding them to be incredibly intelligent and systematic in their thought process and trained them to be Information Analysts for the Venture Unit.’

‘How did you even gain access to the Klia’ban? They’re elite,’ Hoseok looks impressed, ‘That too, she owes you a favour?’

Namjoon huffs out as though offended, ‘She’s actually the reason why I got into the Gaia Case- I don’t think she wanted to be indicted, so she sent along some things she knew I would look into.’

‘…so it’s her fault you’re in this?’ Hoseok grins, amused. ‘She tricked you.’

‘Anyways- I can call in a favour from her- regarding this issue, as well as the one in Ynqaba.’

‘What do you mean?’ Sk’jin demands, his shoulders tensing and his hands suddenly shaking. He quickly lowers his hands to his sides.

‘The Yisheng ship there, the obvious presence of eggs there- it’s not just Ynqaba- it’s the entire System, we need to find out more information,’ Namjoon explains, eyeing him carefully. Sk’jin curses inwardly, the pressure around his temples building.

‘I see- that’s good,’ he manages to get out, fighting the urge to touch him temples.

‘I also want her to see what she can find out about the Omhlophe,’ Namjoon adds after looking away from Sk’jin slowly, as though debating Sk’jin’s reaction.

‘That’s a lot to ask,’ Hoseok observes.

‘Is she safe?’ Jimin asks quietly.

‘I don’t know,’ Namjoon replies. ‘But that’s where I want to bring in all of you.’

Jimin leans in closer as well.

‘I just want everyone to know about this so that we can all collectively decide on what to do. And we only go forward with this, if everyone agrees- not a majority, but everyone,’ Namjoon states clearly. ‘This is a risk- but if it pays off, we could gain a lot of useful information. And I won’t go ahead unless every single one of you gives their approval.’

‘We’ll need to think about it,’ Sk’jin says, proud that he sounded normal. ‘When do you plan to
contact her?’

‘To answer that question, Hoseok and I created a trajectory through Grisial’s mining space,’ Namjoon explains. ‘As I mentioned before, Grisial is a mining zone, with Pits located everywhere. My plan is to make contact when we’re in Pit 3.’

Namjoon pulls up a new projection, with Grisial in the center.

Even the holographic projection is beautiful.

Grisial was a massive inhabitable planet rich in expensive minerals, metals, and resources unique to the planet. But Grisial was most famed for her crystals - smooth but multi-faceted inside, light reflecting and refracting in mesmerizing ways. Many considered it holy, and were celebrated jewels of great value because it was difficult to mine.

The whole area around the planet is surrounded by a thick asteroid belt, and each asteroid was a mining haven. Sk’jin had owned jewelry made of Grisial crystals that he had stored safely. They had been a bribe, he remembers with a sour smile.

Jungkook makes a loud sound of awe and amazement at the display, reaching forward to touch but stopping midway as though electrocuted. Sk’jin ruffles his hair to placate the young Vicitra.

‘-we collect our items we need in Pit 3, and then travel at a “slow” speed all the way to the edge to Pit 18, giving us time to receive any call or message or information. Being close to Grisial puts us at an advantage because of the planet’s natural resonance that can further protect us from manual or close-hand attempts of infiltration. It also puts us at a Navigational advantage because from this point, depending on any form of potential risk we may have of being spotted or followed, we can lose them through the heavy trade traffic routes and access another route midway. Our chances of escape are calculated at a good percentage, especially considering how we cannot be tracked.’

It’s a sound plan.

It’s sound reasoning.

And really, there isn’t much Sk’jin can say against it.

It’s vital they receive all the information they can possibly get their hands on.

His screen hums, vibrating against the side of his chest, indicating a call. Sk’jin ignores it, tapping at the side of his Comm-Device to cancel the incoming call. He crosses his arms over his chest, subtly pushing away the screen deeper into his pocket and to the side. He catches Hoseok glancing at him, having clearly heard him.

The Bloodmoon edges in, just over the windows above, the holographic map slowly turning purple as red light seeps in from the warp above. It presses around his head.

‘What do you say?’ Namjoon asks, looking up at all of them.

‘It’s okay with me!’ Taeh’yung holds up his hands in thumb’s up.

‘Good with me too,’ Hoseok nods.

‘Good,’ Jimin adds while Yoongi echoes the same.

Everyone looks at him, expressions ranging from curious to hopeful.
‘Yeah, let’s do that,’ Sk’jin nods, trying not to think too much about the stuffy feeling in his lungs. ‘Even if your contact outs us, we can still escape. How do you plan on sending her the address for information?’

‘I don’t- I’m giving her a deadline with the information, and I’ll contact her again,’ Namjoon explains. ‘It’s not unusual between Analysts.’

Sk’jin nods to that.

‘So, everyone’s good with this?’ Namjoon asks, looking around the Table.

‘Kookie hasn’t said anything,’ Taeh’yung announces.

Jungkook’s eyes widen, shrinking in on himself, mouth opening and closing.

‘I-yes- all good,’ he says hurriedly, looking at Namjoon for a brief second before looking away again. Everyone looks around, uncomfortable but also amused, unsure how to react.

‘Right, I’m going to explain our trajectory,’ Hoseok cuts in, tapping at the map so that a path of orange lit up in the blue of the holograph.

‘We’ll exit warp above the belt here- right above Pit 3,’ Hoseok taps at the large floating mass in the belt around Grisial. ‘This is one of the more heavily populated zones and also busiest. From here we will follow route 7 to Pits 11, 13, and then route 10 to Pit 15, and then change to route 21 and finally arrive at Pit 18. These are specialized routes, almost like the polarized motorways in Šerdesas. They cut through a few asteroids, and through smaller Pits as well. We can visually blend in with the tourists or gem-merchants- if further pressed we can say we’re looking for asteroids to invest in. We’ll be changing our identity to Class III Trading Permit.’

‘Where are we headed after this?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘We’re headed to the Republic System of the Koitz Pulsar,’ Hoseok replies, ‘If everything goes according to plan, that is.’

‘That’s new,’ Sk’jin remarks as Hoseok minimizes the map.

‘Well, the Republic part is new; it’s an unstable zone- despite being a part of the GLA, a majority of its planets are fighting against joining the GLA- it’s extremely political,’ Hoseok explains. ‘A majority of the planets want to be independent planetary-states, but they need the GLA support. So yeah, lots of issues.’

‘Pirates?’

‘No- well, yes probably, but not like Ymir,’ Hoseok says while rolling his eyes.

‘Okay, so now that we’ve settled on that, I wanted to take this time to also ask Jungkook some questions,’ Namjoon says in a gentle tone.

The Vicitra flinches, leaning closer to Sk’jin on instinct.

Namjoon has not given Jungkook any reason to fear him, but clearly Namjoon’s title and “status” on the ship triggers something in Jungkook’s past, making him almost cower before the Kutsoglerin. Sk’jin can see how uncomfortable Namjoon is because of this but he tries to push past it.
‘Could you tell us about your past? As far as you remember,’ Namjoon asks, making his voice as soothing as he could. ‘We want to understand your past, and help you.’

Jungkook looks incredibly nervous, eyeing them all, shrinking in himself.

Looking up, Sk’jin notices Hoseok eyeing him, as though signaling him to talk to Jungkook.

Sk’jin feels sick. Because he already knows this story.

He already knows, in detail, he can imagine it- he can see it. He can taste the pain in the back of his throat. It’s dark, and it’s dry, it’s angry and it’s bitter and it hurts- his scream is still lodged in his throat and every time Jungkook looks at him, eyes wide and curious, Sk’jin can see her-

‘Can you tell me about your mothers?’ Jimin asks carefully instead. ‘Your brothers, sisters?’

Suddenly, Taeh’yung sits up and lets go of Jungkook, sprinting out of the Bridge. Jungkook misbalances and clings to Sk’jin. Without thinking, Sk’jin reaches forward, holding Jungkook in a wild, almost desperate rush dark mountains, ashy soil, the coming of a terrible storm and she’s holding the device up- a familiar device-

A touch on his shoulder shakes Sk’jin out of his nightmare, finding Yoongi behind him, stained red from the full force of the Bloodmoon above them. The Human had been the one to shake him out of his nightmare, and to his horror, Sk’jin finds that Jungkook is sitting away from him, hiding behind Jimin.

‘I- I blacked out- sorry,’ Sk’jin says at once, closing his eyes and rubbing at them quickly, his head throbbing. ‘I think it’s- I think we need to look for a UV-Bed when we get to Grisial.’

When he looks up from his palms, the red is no longer glaring and staining everything. Namjoon nods slowly, eyeing him carefully.

‘You sure there’s nothing we can do?’ Hoseok asks gently as Jungkook reappears from behind Jimin.

‘Yeah- yeah, I’m fine- I just- that happens sometimes. It’s just a Khol’isa thing.’ Sk’jin tries to smile, ignoring how the reddish light bleeds into his vision bit by bit.

‘Kookie look!’

Sk’jin is grateful for Taeh’yung’s ability to shock. Because Hoseok chokes mid-inhale and Namjoon’s expression turns incredulous. Taeh’yung is holding up one of the mechanical arms Sk’jin saw frequently attached to the Ynqaban cybortronics. When and how he got it, Sk’jin doesn’t know but Namjoon is face-palming while Hoseok mumbles, ‘I forgot about that, fuck’.

Jungkook on the other hand visibly brightens up at the sight of the clawed-arm.

‘This is what anu used to use- she had a large moving machine, with arms like this,’ Jungkook grins as he holds his hands out eagerly before he pulls his hands back, looking at Taeh’yung in a slightly terrified manner.

‘You can have it,’ Taeh’yung quickly tells him, pushing the claw towards the Vicitra. It takes a few seconds but Jungkook finally moves, taking the device from the Zhak’ gri who is delighted at this exchange as he asks in a low voice, ‘Do you love me now Kookie?’ which is unheard by the Vicitra.
‘Your…other mother was from Ynqaba?’ Namjoon asks carefully as he approaches the young Vicitra.

‘She was a Kaban,’ Jungkook says quietly. ‘She found us all- I was the last one.’

‘The baby,’ Taeh’yung grins, nearly vibrating where he stood as though trying to stop himself from reaching over and squishing Jungkook’s cheeks. To Sk’jin’s surprise, Jungkook nods to that.

‘Anu, ama, Talgun, Skezag, Elsang, Okanaat, Ilhaan, and Jungkook,’ Jungkook recalls, his fingers twitching as though counting them automatically. Had he repeated the names in the dark, hoping against all hope to hear their voices, to see their faces?

Did he slowly die in the dark, with only hollow echoes of their last memories together moving around him?

‘Where did you live?’ Namjoon asks, ‘In a big community? Alone?’

‘We lived in…in a cave,’ Jungkook says slowly. ‘A large cave, clean and filled with many toys and trinkets- lots of sleeping places.’

Sk’jin can see it. He can see exactly what this would have looked like.

‘What is your first memory? Can you remember?’ Namjoon asks again.

Jungkook pauses a while, fingers feeling the strong corroded metal of the claw.

‘I- I don’t know- I just…I was always there,’ Jungkook says quietly.

Namjoon nods at that before he glances at Yoongi.

‘I know…I know what you’re asking.’ Jungkook says suddenly. ‘You want to know if I’m one of them- from the Sunken?’

Everyone’s head snaps back towards Jungkook, the air stilling and slowly staining a brighter shade of red. Sk’jin blinks, willing the edging red across his vision to go away.

‘The Sunken?’

‘There are places- zones; black, dark, places; too dangerous to go to,’ Jungkook explains. ‘Anu and ama always tell us to never go there. We never did.’

‘What are these places?’ Namjoon asks eagerly.

‘Where anu found me,’ Jungkook whispers, as though telling them all a secret. ‘Where anu found all of us- it’s where ama came from too I think.’

‘What did she tell you about it? Who else knew?’

Jungkook looks at him, as though for permission. He’d been doing that a lot.

Sk’jin just nods, unable to think of anything to do or say.

‘She said we couldn’t tell- because they were looking for us. They were always looking for us.’

‘Who?’
'I don’t know- other Kabans, bad Beings, germs, wild creatures,’ Jungkook shrugs. ‘We were always careful- we never went to the center, or to the halls; if we did, we covered our faces and heads- especially ama.’

‘Did she teach you how to speak?’

‘Anu and ama,’ Jungkook whispers again, ‘Anu said ama was the smartest.’

Sk’jin can’t wrap his mind around it. A Khol’isa, born outside of the Bloodmoon? Born without nightmares?

‘Did they sleep?’ Sk’jin finds himself asking. ‘How- how did you sleep?’

Everyone looks at him with surprise and confusion.

‘It was cold- when it rained, it was cold,’ Jungkook explains. ‘When I was small, I slept with anu and ama.’

‘And did they sleep?’

Jungkook doesn’t seem to understand, his head tilting a little as though trying to comprehend the question. Sk’jin blinks hard but the red doesn’t go away.

‘We love sleeping.’

No one speaks, all having understood the point Sk’jin was trying to understand, to complete.

‘What happened? Were you taken?’ Hoseok asks gently.

Jungkook shakes his head, ‘I don’t know- it was dark and heavy and-‘

He flinches, hands gripping the metal of the claw with intense strength and force, creating little dents under his fingers.

‘I woke up alone.’

Sk’jin is vaguely aware of them speaking, but he can’t really hear them, not over how the Bloodmoon stains the Bridge around him and it won’t go away.

‘Was your ama like you?’ Sk’jin asks, looking up. He’s vaguely aware of how everyone has stopped speaking, small smiles fading into concerned frowns.

‘She was like you,’ Jungkook replies.

‘No- no as in- what did you-‘ Sk’jin is overwhelmed, the red light overtaking him and nearly rendering him breathless.

Suddenly Yoongi steps forward in the bright red light and in one swift motion, lifts his shirt over his back, displaying his naked back to Jungkook who flinches. Sk’jin takes this moment to close his eyes, breathing in slow and deep.

‘I don’t have it,’ he hears Jimin saying, ‘No one but you, and Yoongi.’

‘Why?’

‘We are the same- created the same.’ Yoongi tells him quietly.
‘I don’t- I don’t understand.-’

The Bloodmoon shines high and cruel above him, the sky stretches bright and dark simultaneously and now it bleeds over the gritty black mountains of Ynqaba- over the broken bodies of Camat, of Bhan, of-

A hand grips Sk’jin around his back, yanking him out of the bloody sky and back into the Bridge that is bright and void of any red stain.

Namjoon studies him carefully, looking down at him with worry in his eyes. Behind him, everyone else seemed to be busy looking over the map, discussing amongst themselves something Sk’jin can’t catch up to. How long had he been gone?

‘Are you okay?’

Mutely, Sk’jin nods.

‘I think we should invest in a UV-Bed,’ Namjoon tells him though it sounds nothing like a suggestion and more like a statement. ‘Or at least a scanner to attach to the Medical Bed.’

‘Sounds good,’ Sk’jin breathes out, finding that the air didn’t smell like death.

Hoseok glances at them with a questioning look before he walks away towards the cockpit.

‘Sk’jin! We can find nice clothing here,’ Jimin tells him with a smile from across the Table.

‘Oh- yeah I guess-’

Hoseok suddenly reappears, his expression tight and disturbed. Namjoon clearly picks up on it too.

‘What’s wrong?’ the Kutsoglerin demands at once.

‘I have bad news,’ Hoseok declares immediately, his actions purposeful but gentle when he angles Taeh’yung away from the central control panel.

‘Uh-‘

‘There have been leaks- of Yoongi’s fight at the arena.’ Hoseok says tersely, tapping a few times to connect his personal screen and project it into the Table’s system.

And there, surely enough, was Yoongi’s final fight. The footage has been messily edited, with the purposeful intention of focusing on Yoongi’s face.

‘There’s no explanation, no bounty, nothing,’ Hoseok explains. ‘I’ve been keeping sensors out in the Underverse for anything related to Pompa- I was just alerted about this.’

‘They’re trying everything to find us if they’re making this available,’ Namjoon states at once, coming over to where Sk’jin now stood behind Hoseok. ‘This has to be the Special-Jury- they want to expose Yoongi’s face-‘

‘But why Yoongi?’ Jimin asks, watching with a pained expression as Yoongi skids across the arena ground, the cheers of the Pompan crowd filling the air despite the volume being reduced. Jungkook crouches down instantly, hands covering his ears.

Hoseok quickly cancels the projection, looking down at the Vicitra worriedly.
‘Hey baby it’s okay- no more bad sounds,’ Taeh’yung coos gently as he crouches next to Jungkook. To everyone’s surprise, Jungkook turns a little to face Taeh’yung. The Zhak’gri is very evidently pleased, throwing a long arm around the Vicitra and making soft cooing sounds against his bowed head.

‘Has footage or news of us been introduced to the Underverse?’ Sk’jin asks as he regains his bearings, feeling better and a little lighter.

‘None that I know- but, I feel like this is a warning,’ Hoseok says evenly. ‘Yoongi’s identity, or lack of it, and his invisibility was a factor we used to our benefit- but with this video out there, any chances of a complete cover will be impossible. Not when there will be Beings out there looking for him.’

‘Can you see where it was released from? Was it from Pompa itself or-?’

‘Not from here we can’t,’ Namjoon shakes his head, replying in Hoseok’s place. ‘I’ll add this into the favour. See the source.’

Sk’jin nods to that.

‘Also,’ Hoseok frowns as he pulls up another tab from his screen, ‘I’ve been checking frequencies that have been crossing over our systems and I think-‘ he looks up from across the Table and meets Sk’jin’s eyes. The screen in his pocket suddenly burns, and Sk’jin is acutely aware of it.

‘Jinnie! I’m hungry!’ Taeh’yung declares loudly from where he’s crouched, successfully winding his arms and even legs around the young Vicitra who seemed to have realized that there was no point struggling against Taeh’yung’s incurable desire to hug all things.

‘Then starve,’ is Sk’jin’s instant reply.

‘But so is Jungkookie!’ Taeh’yung shakes Jungkook a little, ‘Right Kookie?’

Jungkook eyes Taeh’yung, then Sk’jin, and then Jimin and then back to Sk’jin before nodding and adding a small, ‘sorry’ at the end.

‘Okay okay- for fuck’s sake,’ Sk’jin rolls his eyes, avoiding Hoseok who was still watching him, ‘Come along children, let’s go fix breakfast or whatever meal we can make.’

‘I will help!’ Jimin declares as he comes around the Table, holding his hands out to both Taeh’yung and Jungkook to help them stand.

Sk’jin fairly runs out of the Bridge, followed closely by Jimin, Taeh’yung, and Jungkook.

To his relief, neither Hoseok or Namjoon approach him; they don’t even appear downstairs, sticking to the Bridge mainly. Instead, after breakfast has been made and consumed, Yoongi approaches him quietly. In all fairness Sk’jin hadn’t even noticed the Human had joined them for the meal until Jimin had pushed an extra plate towards him, clearly a portion for Yoongi. Sk’jin had felt a bit bad, but Yoongi hadn’t even noticed.

Yoongi takes up the dish-duty without comment, an odd thing considering how Sk’jin had realized early on that Yoongi purposefully avoided all kitchen duties and chores by using his lack of presence to his advantage.

‘Jimin was in love with Yoongi,’ he states without preamble, sliding in the dirty dishes into the UV-washer.
‘Uh-‘

‘And Yoongi was also in love with him.’

Sk’jin pauses in his actions of storing away the extra food.

‘Yoongi had wondered how it would feel to feel asleep every night with Jimin by his side,’ Yoongi tells him quietly, staring straight ahead of him, out into the white warp-light like he could something else beyond it. ‘With Jimin’s hand under his cheek.’

‘You remember that?’

Yoongi nods.

‘I slept with Jimin, his hand under my cheek,’ Yoongi tells him. ‘I sleep in the same bed, and I hold him when we sleep. He holds me when we sleep. I kiss him; he kisses me- and I don’t understand.’

‘Do you do that…because you’re not sure if that memory…that wish is yours, or his?’ Sk’jin asks carefully after some quiet contemplation.

Yoongi nods again.

‘Yoongi…’ Sk’jin pauses. He might tease and goad those around him who were in relationships or were nursing massive crushes on others, but he was absolutely clueless as to how to actually approach the subject. ‘Yoongi- uh. Are you- are you, you right now, in love with Jimin?’

‘I don’t know,’ Yoongi tells him bluntly, looking down when he realizes there are no more dishes left.

‘Is Jimin in love with you?’

‘He tells me that I am his. And he is mine,’ Yoongi looks away and stares straight at Sk’jin.

Sk’jin is at a loss. He doesn’t know what he’s supposed to say in this. Hoseok should be able to say something about now.

‘Sometimes- sometimes I think I am, but sometimes- it’s him.’ Yoongi explains. ‘I don’t know.’

And with that, Yoongi excuses himself and walks over to the Lobby where Taeh’yung, Jungkook, and Jimin were sitting. They took to watching random entertainment videos and clips, laughing together, showing Jungkook different things about the Universe. It had been Jimin’s idea; to educate Jungkook the way he had been.

Sk’jin pauses to think- studying Yoongi as he sat next to Jimin.

How did it feel to struggle with the emotions and memories of a past, one you could not call your own, but one that controlled your every move- one that dictated your entire life? It was a wonder that Yoongi didn’t lose his mind; being hyper-aware of another past, no wonder Yoongi doubted his present so much. No wonder he doubted everything about himself, because he didn’t know if what he felt, what he saw, what he thought, was original or not.

Sk’jin had his nightmares yes,- but they were his own.

His fears were his own.
His memories, no matter how horrible, no matter how heartbreaking, were his.

His happiness was his own too; memories of warm brown eyes, dimpled smiles. Memories of loud laughter, feet kicked up onto the dashboard, memories of being slapped upside his head even though he was a captain. Memories of bleeding skies, pained screams, of haunting eyes pleading towards him.

They were all his own. And Sk’jin was sure of himself in these memories.

‘Sk’jin!’

Jungkook senses him, head snapping towards him, a hand reaching out towards him, eyes wide and hopeful, a little apprehensive, but still eager.

Suddenly the Bloodmoon is back, and the red light stains the floors, the walls, the air, the table, the couch; it’s creeping over and covering Taeh’yung, Yoongi, Jimin; it’s spreading and spreading and Jungkook is morphing, eyes widening in fear and panic, mouth stretching open to a scream-

‘SK’JIN!’

* 

The first thing Sk’jin notices is the ceiling- an annoyingly familiar one that Sk’jin recognizes is from the Medical Bay.

‘I thought passing out wasn’t good for you.’

Hoseok is standing there, hands on hips, a look of disapproval on his face that is probably too effective because Sk’jin feels guilty. For no clear reason.

That is until Sk’jin glances down and notices that his screen is in Hoseok’s hands. Okay so maybe he knows now.

‘It’s- it’s not,’ Sk’jin agrees. ‘But there are times when I can’t help it.’

Hoseok’s mouth is turned downwards in a weird grimace, his yellow eyes sharp and disapproving. He reaches over and places the screen next to Sk’jin on the Bed.

‘You’re getting calls.’

‘I’m aware.’

‘You’re not answering them.’

‘No I’m not.’

‘Calls on a channel that’s supposed to be un-breached and a secret.’

‘I am aware of that too.’

‘Will you tell me about it,’ Hoseok smiles and it’s a bit creepy.
‘We all have our secrets Hobi, let me keep mine.’

‘But that’s one too many.’

‘If I tell you one right now, will you let me off?’

Hoseok narrows his eyes at him.

‘Don’t make promises you can’t keep.’

Sk’jin feels his heart stutter. It must have actually stuttered, because his medical tab is suddenly haywire and Hoseok looks positively alarmed.

‘I’m fine-’ Sk’jin says at once. ‘Just- just triggered.’

‘Sk’jin- you have to tell me,’ Hoseok grits out, glancing back between Sk’jin and his medical tab, ‘Will a UV-Bed actually help?’

‘I don’t know,’ Sk’jin tells him honestly. ‘I’m hoping it does. If you think passing out is bad for me and is a pain in the ass, imagine how I feel about it.’

Hoseok grimaces at him, retrieving a screen to the side, clearly performing an analysis on Sk’jin.

‘There’s no point in worrying,’ Sk’jin shrugs. ‘My existence is an anomaly, so everything about it, by right, shouldn’t be normal. This is fine Hobi, it’s sweet of you to worry.’

‘You shouldn’t do that,’ Hoseok frowns.

‘Do what?’

‘Make yourself expendable like that.’

‘We all are,’ Sk’jin says as he sits up slowly, sighing out. ‘That’s why we’re here.’

‘Well maybe so. But Jungkook isn’t. And now that he’s here- we need to be careful with our words, our actions, and our motives.’ Hoseok says grimly.

Sk’jin doesn’t respond to that but just sighs.

‘Jungkook didn’t leave the Medical Bay until just some time ago,’ Hoseok tells him quietly. ‘You must really look like his mother.’

‘Or maybe I just really exude motherly vibes,’ Sk’jin snorts, rolling his eyes.

‘I actually wanted to talk to you about him.’

‘…about me being a mother?’

‘No,’ Hoseok rolls his eyes.

‘What about Jungkook?’ Sk’jin asks, eyeing Hoseok carefully and noticing the discomfort the latter was exuding. ‘Is something wrong?’

‘No it’s just- his medical records- he’s healed up yes,’ Hoseok frowns, ‘But well, it’s not how it’s supposed to be I guess. I checked his record again today and he’s…it says he’s malnourished.’

‘He needs blood to really recover,’ Sk’jin says slowly. ‘He’s cured, but what he’s eating right now
isn’t helping is it? What are the possible results of having him “diet” with what we have with us right now?’

Hoseok grimaces at the choice of words.

‘Continued stunted growth? Complete weakness? Prone to illnesses, fragile bones- his metabolism will also be effected. His mental development as well.’ Hoseok lists off, eyeing the screen in his hands.

‘How long until this starts to build up.’

‘It already is- it’s been like this,’ Hoseok sighs out, ‘He was starved and gorged at that cell. He knew it was wrong, but he needed to survive.’

Sk’jin nods, remembering Jungkook’s stuttered words.

Suddenly the screen to his side lights up, a familiar hum filling the air. Sk’jin pointedly ignores Hoseok and cancels the call.

‘So we don’t have any meat on board-‘

His screen lights up again. Sk’jin ignores the incoming call again, knowing full well that Hoseok was watching him. He slides off of the bed, bare feet touching the cool ground.

‘We need to make a shopping list.’

*

‘No we are not getting you Grisial crystals- we’re only pretending to be merchants, and besides there is a waiting line for the crystals as well as a special permit to obtain them,’ Namjoon explains to Taeh’yung tiredly.

‘Right- adding non-expensive trinkets for Taeh’yung if we have time for it to the list,’ Sk’jin nods from where he sits, nursing a huge cup of very sweet tea Jimin had insisted he drink. Jungkook was drinking a similar drink next to him, stuck in a dilemma because he didn’t want to leave Sk’jin’s side but he didn’t want to leave Jimin by himself next to Yoongi either.

It’s weirdly cute, Sk’jin thinks to himself. And extremely entertaining because Jimin seems to understand the implications behind both Yoongi and Jungkook’s combined and separate behavior, but didn’t know how to approach the topic either.

‘We’ll also need to get hair—dye for Yoongi, and myself,’ Sk’jin gestures at Yoongi’s off-blue hair. ‘That needs to change- besides, he’s famous for that now.’

‘Should we make it red?’ Taeh’yung suggests. ‘Or green?’

‘Why not bright yellow,’ Hoseok offers from where he sat.

‘Pink?’ Jungkook offers so quietly that only Sk’jin hears it. Looking down Sk’jin finds the young Vicitra staring at his own head, clearly reminiscing something over the way he was just looking at Sk’jin’s hair.
'You don’t want me to change it?’ Sk’jin asks. Jungkook shakes his head.

‘Do you want to change your hair colour?’ Sk’jin asks with a grin. Jungkook shakes his head even more.

‘I’ll change it too! Can I pa?’ Taeh’yung swivels on the footstool, addressing Namjoon with pleading eyes.

‘Sure,’ Namjoon relents with a sigh.

‘I wanna make it bright red-’

‘We’ll be at Pit 3 in 20 minutes,’ Hoseok announces.

‘Okay, so I’ll head over to the public communications office, send out my message,’ Namjoon states before anyone (read: Taeh’yung) can change topics.

‘Taeh’yung and I will head to the Flotsam and Jetsam for supplies,’ Hoseok continues. They had all decided that Hoseok was probably the best option to handle Taeh’yung and keep an eye on him while both entertaining and distracting him from causing potential accident/ruckus that would bring him attention.

‘Yoongi, Jungkook, and I will stay inside, away from sight.’ Jimin says carefully and slowly, purposefully making his sentence as correct as he could.

‘I will head over to the terminal-counter to arrange our travel-route with the Grisial Tourism Authority,’ Sk’jin finishes before glancing at Jungkook and adding, ‘Don’t start any fights with Yoongi while I’m gone.’

Jungkook looks a little offended but also weirdly subdued, as though he had been entertaining that idea. It makes Sk’jin worry a little bit.

With everyone tasked and seated, Hoseok counts down their exit from warp.

Everyone is tensed, because the last time they had exited warp had been nothing short of a disaster. Jungkook seems to sense this as well, eyes flitting back and forth between everyone in nervous apprehension. They had deactivated what Sk’jin mentally coined the Invisibility Button and had tagged on a whole new digital identity over the ship in general. It was, however, completely ready to activate again. The reason why Jimin was going to be staying back was mainly for that. They would activate it again once they got out of Pit 3 and cruised along the Grisial motorway, but for now they were, in every sense of the word, very visible and trackable.

The familiar compression in the lining of his stomach indicates their start in exiting warp-speed, the white light outside pulling into streaks, allowing the dark of space beyond starlight to appear, until the lights fade and shrink into tiny spots above and below-

‘Wow.’

Wow is an understatement but there is no other word to describe the beauty of Grisial.

A gigantic planet of pure white, gleaming and catching light of its distant star and reflecting it back out into space 5 times as bright, Grisial was nicknamed the star-planet for good reason. And surrounding the planet, was a wide and vast and rather deep disc of asteroid debris that stretched so far that Sk’jin feels as though he were looking down straight into a miniature galaxy rather than a planet surrounded by asteroids.
It’s breathtaking and awe-inspiring.

Each asteroid was gleaming bright and yet gentle, casting a luminance that was not harsh or glaring. The entire belt felt like an ocean of light, rather than thousands of gleaming asteroids. If you watched closely, hues of every colour slowly spread, like ink drops in clear water, before fading out completely again. All of Grisial was like a band of light, the spectrum splitting at random, and different colours washing over softly and quickly.

‘Sk’jin could you announce us in,’ Namjoon asks quietly.

Startled out of stupor, Sk’jin reaches over the Communications Board.

‘This is trading ship ID 32-0089 class III requesting permission to enter Grisial with request type C: Tourism from the Immigration Bureau at Raksane Tayi,’ Sk’jin lies smoothly.

‘Identification confirmed and request permitted. Pit 3 is open to you. Welcome to Grisial 32-0089, we hope you have a wonderful stay.’ A voice replies a few seconds later.

‘Thank you.’ Sk’jin watches as their permit is granted in the form of a pass-code sent to them. ‘God the pass- Hobi take us down.’

Hoseok gently guides the ship downward, and before Sk’jin can ask how they were supposed to find their way around the place, the asteroids around them gleam a soft violet, indicating paths downwards into the belt.

Sk’jin is surprised to hear a thick sniffing sound and when he looks around, is surprised to find Jungkook with tears in his eyes. The Vicitra is also surprised by his reaction, touching his face as though he didn’t know why his body was reacting so. He looks at Sk’jin as though to help him understand. Pulling at his sleeve and covering his hand, Sk’jin dabs at the young Vicitra’s face.

‘It’s okay,’ he tells him quietly, ‘Sometimes you cry when you see something beautiful. It’s natural.’

Jungkook doesn’t seem to understand, but he nods anyways, ducking his head down and wiping at face harshly with a few more quiet sniffs.

The belt wasn’t just filled with large floating chunks of Grisial crystals, but was mixed with all sorts of rock and debris. Some were dark, gleaming like cheap dark glass, while some appeared to look like every other asteroid, a dull grey or dim black. Some of them had tiny lights all over them, a clear indication of a mining process, and some were barren and empty. Others were bored and hollowed, decorated with lights and creating a natural show of light and shadow which Taeh’yung had been very taken with.

Jimin is standing at the front, hands on the glass as he looks around awed. He waves his hands across the crystals, and Sk’jin isn’t sure if it was Jimin himself causing the lights, or the lights responding to Jimin because the nearby crystals brighten and gleam in the same motion as his hand.

Sk’jin glances over at Namjoon and Hoseok, wondering if they were seeing this too, but Hoseok was busy steering the ship (a good thing), and Namjoon was going over something at the Table, only sparing the occasional glance out of the window here and there.

Instead it’s Jungkook who seems to notice too, watching Jimin’s hands move, and watching how the lights seemed to follow this.
‘Who is he?’ Jungkook asks him quietly.

‘We don’t know,’ Sk’jin replies honestly. ‘But we’re taking him home.’

‘He said this is his home.’

‘It’s…it’s difficult to explain. Or understand,’ Sk’jin replies. ‘Not all of us understand much of
anything to be honest.’

Jungkook, to Sk’jin’s surprise, finds this funny and giggles quietly.

Following the guidance of the glowing asteroid rocks, the ship dips a little when it connects to the
polarized motorway crafted deep inside the asteroid belt, creating a safe and entwined path through
the massive area. There were a few ships here and there, and Sk’jin can see Namjoon eyeing each
and every one of them, a stony frown on his face.

‘How are the polarized roads even made?’ Sk’jin asks as he looks around the moderate traffic
along the motorway.

‘Natural gravity?’ Namjoon shrugs. ‘In Šerdesas they took advantage of their natural magnetic
fault lines; on asteroids like these, where the biggest ones have some form of gravity on them, they
just take advantage of that and make it so that they can channel that into forming one large strip-
the entire thing is solar-charged I think.’

‘We’re quite far from their sun though aren’t we?’ Sk’jin inquires.

‘We are- but Grisial is like a gigantic mirror- reflects and absorbs enough for this motorway.’
Namjoon explains as he gestures to the vaguely glimmering wide flat space along which other
ships, Transporters, and large freights moved along.

‘This is Pit 3. Platform 54-G is open and ready to receive you,’ a voice calls smoothly as they turn,
passing a massive jet-black asteroid and Pit 3 appears before them.

Structurally it resembled any other Dock, except it was made out of asteroid crystals of various
clear shades, making it look like a massive palace like structure of pure dark glass veined with ice.

‘Wow,’ Jungkook breathes out quietly, eyes wide as he looks upon the Pit.

‘Hard to believe this is a mining zone,’ Namjoon chortles a little, ‘It could very well be
transformed into a holiday getaway or something.’

‘But not as profitable,’ Hoseok laughs from the front, stretching after he aligned the ship to pull
straight into their designated platform. ‘Grisial makes enough profit to fund a whole System.
Everyday.’

Namjoon whistles low, which Jimin imitates, and then Jungkook tries to imitate as well. And for
someone who probably hasn’t whistled before, does a very good job of it.

‘I’m sorry you guys don’t get to go out and explore,’ Namjoon says, addressing Yoongi and Jimin,
and then Jungkook who bows his head, as though worried that his evident desire to go out and
explore would get him some sort of reprimanding action.

‘It’s okay,’ Jimin smiles, ‘I can watch from here.’

‘I’ve been here before. It’s not new to me,’ Yoongi states simply.
‘When were you here?’ Hoseok asks with interest.

‘23 sols ago,’ Yoongi answers. ‘My mission was to disrupt an exchange.’

‘…was it disrupted.’

‘It was.’

Taeh’yung giggles at that.

The landing platforms were cleanly cut into the surface of the asteroid, hollowed out, casting light in echoes around the whole place. There was a sense of somehow feeling submerged underwater though it was not dark but instead strangely bright. When they land, Sk’jin can’t help but excitedly walk behind a skipping Taeh’yung who gleefully throws open the Hangar gateway and dives out.

It wasn’t like sunlight, but Sk’jin will take it.

He knows that his issues were not caused solely due to the lack of sunlight, but this made him feel a little stronger, a bit safer.

‘Okay,’ Namjoon calls as he enters the Hangar behind Sk’jin with Hoseok and Jungkook. ‘Yoongi close up behind at once and report anything unusual. And everyone, for the sake of my sanity, please do not wander off or lose your Comm-Device okay?’

Taeh’yung salutes him, nearly slapping an approaching Hoseok on the face in the process. Namjoon watches them leave with an exasperated look on his face.

Waving goodbye at Jungkook who is crouched behind the Spardyti, Sk’jin steps off the Užkulisai, shortly behind Namjoon.

‘If there’s any issue-’

‘I know,’ Sk’jin waves dismissively, ‘I’ll inform everyone at once. Comm-Device is on and running.’

Namjoon looks like he wants to say something more but just nods once before taking off another way.

Their platform extends out into the main Bay, criss-crossing bridges and footpaths overtaking at random, held up by strong metal wires. Everything appeared glass-like and it’s strangely beautiful. Sk’jin quickly finds a lift and enters the zone he was supposed to go to.

‘The FJ is rather far- might take a while to get back up considering all the stuff we need,’ Hoseok reports. ‘It’s at the very bottom.’

‘That’s fine- just keep us updated,’ Namjoon replies at once.

‘I’m pretty far in myself,’ Sk’jin reports, looking through the clear walls that made the lift as he descends for a few seconds before the lift shifts and travels horizontally inwards.

‘I think I’ll be done that fastest then,’ Namjoon reports. ‘I’ve found a PCO already.’

Sk’jin leans against the walls, feeling like the contact with the material that seemed to absorb and refract sunlight made him feel better.

‘Zone 76 Grisial Tourism Authority Area E: Tourism and Sight-Seeing Package Guides and
Sk’jin and a few others step out. There’s more people here and Sk’jin easily blends in with the crowd. Now that he wasn’t in robes but just in regular ship-crew clothing, Sk’jin hardly caught any attention. Not that it mattered to Sk’jin because when needed he could easily slip away unnoticed regardless of what he was wearing.

The terminal-counter he was looking for was easy to find and the Androids manning the booths pleasant to talk to as well. They were designed to look like the Beings closest to Grisial, which, is Sk’jin wasn’t mistaken, was the Perigel System. They all bore a strong amphibious features; slimy skin, webbed fingers, large almost unblinking eyes, with an added crown of coral-like structure around the edge of their heads. Out of water they looked strangely gormless and rather clumsy. But in water, the Beings from the Perigel System were unmatched in speed, agility, and most notably, hunting.

But the Androids created after their image were far from hunting examples and instead smiled wide open-mouthed smiles as Sk’jin thanked them, permit in hand for their desired travel-route.

‘Hey, I’m done,’ Sk’jin announces, heading for the left again.

‘Sk’jin, could you come help us at the FJ? There’s a lot.’ Hoseok says shortly.

Suppressing a snort Sk’jin agrees as Namjoon also volunteers to give a hand. Changing his direction, Sk’jin heads for the landing with the lifts that would take him to the bottom most levels where the Flotsam and Jetsam was spread out over a few levels. But Sk’jin takes a short pause as he enters the landing.

Whatever the asteroid was made of, and whatever the Pit was carved into was of a clear and very strong material, allowing Sk’jin a very clear and very wide view of the entirety of the Grisial Asteroid Belt sprawled in all it’s luminous glory around him.

‘Sight-seeing, that’s nice.’

Spinning on his heel, Sk’jin raises his hands to cross over his chest in automatic defence.

‘We’re-‘

But a hand clamps over his mouth and he’s being very easily dragged out of the landing in a surprisingly casual manner without drawing any attention.

Sk’jin is in too much shock- no one could sneak up on him like this it was impossible-

‘Why have you not been responding to any of my calls!’

His mouth no longer covered and being shoved into a small ramp behind the lifts, Sk’jin can only gape in absolute confusion.

It’s been 4 sols.

4 sols since Sk’jin gained his Being back- since he was freed from the confines of the Original Nightmare. 4 sols since he lost his horns.

4 sols since he last saw-

‘Zitao.’
The Long-Huon looks well. Still as tall and gangly as ever, his natural expression caught between annoyance and disgust is emphasized even more with the frown that is very genuine on his face. And then everything hits Sk’jin in one heavy swoop.

‘What are you doing here!’ Sk’jin hisses, glaring at the Long-Huon who is glaring back as well.

‘You didn’t respond to any of my calls!’ Zitao hisses. ‘Something happened I could feel it- you know I’m worried-‘

‘How did you even find me- you’re not supposed to know-‘

‘I had help,’ Zitao hisses again before pushing them further down the ramp. ‘You were missing-‘

‘You were tracking me?’ Sk’jin throws his hands up in disbelief. ‘What the fuck-‘

‘I was worried for fuck’s sake!’ Zitao wipes at his face in exasperation. ‘And then I saw- I saw you went back-‘

‘I had to- you know I had to,’ Sk’jin spits out. ‘I couldn’t leave them there- I couldn’t-‘

‘They’re not there anymore! We buried them!’ Zitao hisses out but this time he sound sad, ‘We buried them Jin- I remember. We took all of their bones, all of their belongings, and we buried them- and after what happened they’re free-‘

‘I saw him,’ Sk’jin whispers, looking away. ‘I went back- and I saw him. I saw him everywhere-‘

‘It’s in your head-‘

Sk’jin snorts, ‘How ironic considering I was in your head the entire time unless you forgot that didn’t make me any less fake-‘

‘But you were alive-‘

‘And he is! They are! They’re alive in me!’ Sk’jin wants to scream. ‘The same way all of those kids were alive in your head- the same way what happened-‘

‘I’ve made my peace Jin,’ Zitao cuts across, his yellow irises flashing, black slits that made his pupils narrowing dangerously. ‘And you know this isn’t good for you- you were the one who kept telling me that-‘

Zitao stops, wiping at his face before he steps close.

‘Jin please- this isn’t good for you- just look at you, this isn’t right- I can feel it- it’s like you’re missing even when I see you-‘

‘I made a promise!’ Sk’jin shoves Zitao away. ‘I made a promise kid- you fulfilled yours, and now with that I get to fulfill mine- so you can’t tell me what to do-‘

Zitao snorts derisively, ‘No- you can’t do this-‘

Zitao is suddenly flying, tackled down by a blur of movement that Sk’jin had been too preoccupied to notice.

Namjoon is pushed off of Zitao who is quick to react.

Before Sk’jin can even put in a word they’re leaping at each other, determined to maim, at the very
least. Sk’jin is also subjected to quick glances that can only be translated into ‘why the fuck aren’t you helping me?’ from both Namjoon and Zitao.

Namjoon is a surprisingly able and effective fighter. But the only reason why Zitao isn’t cleaning the floor with Namjoon is because the Long-Huon probably already figured out what was happening. Which is why he gives Sk’jin a glare.

‘Stop!’ Sk’jin yells, flapping his arms about as he steps forward to separate the two, pushing their faces away.

‘-why are you like this?!’ Zitao slaps Namjoon’s arms, pushing him away, ‘Gross, get off of me fuck-’

‘-what the actual fuck-?!’ Namjoon ducks away from Zitao’s flapping hands.

‘Who is he?!’ they both demand before glaring at each other.

‘Oh for fuck’s sake calm the fuck down both of you!’ Sk’jin snaps. ‘Zitao this is Namjoon he’s the captain of the mission I’m in. Namjoon this is Zitao he was with me in the Nightmare Planet.’

There are looks of understanding in both of their eyes but they both regard each other with looks of suspicion nonetheless.

‘And you!’ Sk’jin rounds up at Namjoon. ‘Why didn’t you just pause to ask what was happening like a civil Being that I know you’re perfectly capable of being-’

‘I saw you getting dragged off,’ Namjoon explains looking irritated and exasperated. ‘You were fighting against him I thought you were being held against your will you were even yelling-’

‘Fucking Spaces- you- you didn’t even…’ Sk’jin can’t help but gawk at Namjoon.

‘What-’

‘You didn’t even…you didn’t even pause to ask what was happening you just- you just tackled him wow-’

Namjoon and Zitao just give him bewildered expressions.

‘Why are you here?’ Namjoon demands, clearly dismissing Sk’jin as a hopeless case.

‘Sight-seeing,’ Zitao answers with a smile so fake and sweet that Sk’jin is rather proud. Namjoon doesn’t seem to appreciate it as much.

‘Jin- we need to talk. I’m not leaving this System until we talk- and I know you’re staying here for 4 days based on the route you just registered for-’

‘-how do you know that-‘ Namjoon is demanding but Zitao blithely ignores him.

‘I will be on call and ready to meet you at any time- so you fucking get your excuses ready before that time or I will take you back with me.’

Namjoon steps in smoothly at that. They’re the same height, Sk’jin realizes so they can’t stare each other down but they were both damn well trying.

‘While I will not pretend to understand the nature of your relationship with Sk’jin I will ask you to back the fuck off. Speaking as his Captain I will not tolerate this threatening behavior-’
‘Oh pardon me Captain,’ Zitao trills, mimicking Namjoon’s voice badly and rather loudly. ‘But I was not talking to you- this doesn’t concern you and if you were really a Captain caring for his crew then maybe you would notice that Jin is in obvious need of emergency treatment.’

‘Zitao maybe you should leave now,’ Sk’jin cuts, pushing them both away from each other. ‘I’ll call you when I get back to my ship and-’

‘Whatever needs to be said can be said in front of me-’ Namjoon cuts in.

‘Literally no one invited you okay-’

‘Hey! This area is off-limits!’ a voice rings out in clear warning over a megaphone of sorts.

They all jump in alarm, not noticing that they had an audience watching them with varying expressions of wariness, amusement, and entertainment.

‘Uh Jinnie is everything okay-’

‘I am not here for this- please remember to contact me for fuck’s sake-’ Zitao is saying as he backs off, walking backwards quickly and to the intense amazement of everyone watching, sinks down straight to the floor.

‘What the fuck-?!’

‘Hey! The two of you! Stop right there!’

The Tourism Authority Security was strict- not wanting stragglers, smugglers, or pirates in the Belt. And at this moment, Namjoon and Sk’jin seemed to fit in this category, given their screaming and yelling and obvious near-brawl that just broke out. Sk’jin didn’t even realize that Namjoon’s sweater was torn, revealing his not so ordinary arm structure to the entire public before them.

‘Step towards us hands up in the air- are you armed?’ the Officer asks, there’s a total of 3 of them right now. They could easily overwhelm them, but Sk’jin doesn’t know what to think of the crowd and how they would react. Attacking was not a good idea, but-

‘Sk’jin.’

They make a very quick decision.

Being taken by the Tourism Authority would mean registering their photograph and fake identity into the registry. Meaning a direct link into the GLA Database. Meaning an instant alarm on their position because no doubt the Special-Jury were keeping an eye out for them.

Sharing one look, Namjoon and Sk’jin turn on their heel, and run.

‘Guys! Hurry and get back- on the ship-!’ Namjoon orders as they sprint down the ramp before taking a sharp turn into an alley that ran along the back of the lift-system, leaping over random objects, covered propellers, and lengths of cable. Fuck, the Perigel Officers were fast despite not being in water; Sk’jin makes a mental note to increase his fitness and athletic ability. Maybe train with Hoseok, who knows.

‘What?! What’s going on again-’ Hoseok sounds .2 seconds from giving up.

‘Do you need backup?’

‘No- no Yoongi, you stay put- we’re coming to you. Jimin activate-’ Namjoon jumps over a large
cart, foot catching on the lid and nearly falling on his face but Sk’jin is quick to help him stay upright.

‘I got it!’ Jimin replies, sounding worried and panicked.

‘Pa! Jinnie! What’s wrong-?!’

‘Don’t worry about us- just- everyone on the ship!’ Sk’jin wheezes out as they burst out into the crowd, startling a few Beings before diving into a crowd near a small market.

‘Sk’jin we can’t keep running-‘ Namjoon pulls him to a stop, ducking around behind a display of psychedelic postcards to one side, and what appeared to be glass dildos to one side, bending his knees to remain hidden. ‘We need to find a way to stay hidden and get back to the ship.’

‘Security is approaching the area, they’re going to surround you,’ Yoongi reports, having clearly already hacked into the security system in the Pit to watch them. ‘You need to exit the place now.’

‘Fuck-‘ Sk’jin quickly removes his outerwear, reversing and flinging it over Namjoon’s shoulders before pulling him down the market street, hurriedly pulling at an unsuspecting tourist’s dangling thin scarf and wrapping his head with it.

‘This won’t work-‘

‘For now it will-!’ Sk’jin hisses back at Namjoon who despite his words was also looking about for items to nick as they weaseled their way about the busy market.

‘Guys taking any form of public transit will get you spotted-‘ Hoseok sounds a little breathless as though he was running. Sk’jin hurries his steps, followed closely by Namjoon who throws another scarf like fabric over Sk’jin’s head, replacing the threadbare one. ‘You’ll need to find a way to get through to at least the closest docking platform zone-‘

Sk’jin would have found their current location funny in this market if he had the time and capacity to enjoy it. They were surrounded by rather questionable items, all of which were designed and marketed for usage in the bedroom for intimate purposes. Sk’jin might have giggled hysterically as they jogged past the stores, making a few people stare at him.

‘You just need to ascend up to Zone 90 and I can bring the Spardyti to you.’ Yoongi reports before stopping, ‘They’re surrounding your location you can’t-‘

‘Fuck-‘ Sk’jin stops, making Namjoon nearly crash into him.

‘Sk’jin what the fuck-‘

‘We can’t do anything- unless we fight,’ Sk’jin sighs, pulling them to stand at the side next to a stall that sold an array of glass dildos (10% Grisial Crystal! Guaranteed to boost your stamina!!).

‘And at this point, fighting will lead to more problems. If we just allow ourselves to be captured, and we pretend we were having some dumb love-triangle argument then that could work-‘

Stepping closer, Namjoon frowns at Sk’jin.

‘Why are you stopping?’ Yoongi asks, sounding understandably confused. ‘4 Officers approaching-‘

Sk’jin frowns back, arms crossed and ready to obviously get arrested. What else could they do? They were going to be taken by the Tourism Officers, arrested, their identities exposed, and then
taken back to Tayi.

But that doesn’t happen because Namjoon wipes at his face, sighing as though *exhausted* at Sk’jin, and pulls him forward and without preamble kisses him.

Sk’jin’s first reaction is to kill Namjoon of course.

But then it occurs to him that this is an excellent way to deter attention away from them. By *drawing* attention to themselves.

‘You’re a terrible kisser,’ Sk’jin mumbles against Namjoon’s lips- their embrace awkward and strained.

‘I’m not paying attention to quality here-‘ Namjoon grumbles back, face turning as though to kiss him deeper but it’s to shield them both.

‘Um-‘

‘Let me-‘ Sk’jin rolls his eyes and sweeping Namjoon backwards and down, takes the initiative to actually *kiss* Namjoon. Namjoon makes a weird, slightly terrified, sound but doesn’t fight it. For added effect, Sk’jin swipes at the dildos in display, holding them over their heads and he makes obnoxious sounds that makes Namjoon wince in great discomfort and obvious embarrassment.

Footsteps thunder past and Namjoon’s grip tightens.

Sk’jin likes kissing. It’s fun, and it also showed you a lot about the Being you were kissing.

And Namjoon’s inexperience makes him want to giggle. Namjoon’s kiss is just like his personality.

‘You can stop kissing they’re out of the area.’

‘WHAT?!-‘

‘WHO’S KISSING WHO-‘

‘Ca-captain and Jin-‘ Jungkook replies sounding very unsure of what he just saw.

‘WHAT WHY FOR FUCK’S SAKE-‘ Hoseok sounds beyond himself with confusion.

‘Wow that actually worked,’ Sk’jin declares as he pulls Namjoon up from dipping him downwards, the latter looks dizzy and slightly nauseous. ‘Don’t look *that* disgusted-‘

‘Um- I think you should start running-‘ Jimin states uncertainly.

‘Please make your way into the 5th stall and ask for the restroom. You can access the pipes from the vents.’ Yoongi states, sounding almost exasperated despite his deadpan tone.

Namjoon still looks a little overwhelmed so Sk’jin grabs his hand and pulls him into the direction they were pretty much ordered to go to by Yoongi.

‘Anything around?’

‘The market is surrounded. They will arrive at your location in 20 seconds again.’ Yoongi replies.

It’s a restaurant of sorts and Namjoon and Sk’jin quickly flit in and no one bats an eye at them as
they make their way to the back and to the bathroom. Sk’jin only just realizes that maybe holding two glass dildo in one hand while pulling in a very flustered Being behind him probably only meant one thing while entering a restroom.

Sk’jin has been caught doing much worse, so this doesn’t really matter much to him. Dignity was after all, just a concept.

‘Okay we’re in the restroom-‘

‘According to the layout, you should find a large shredder tube-‘

‘Yoongi I don’t think any of us are immune to a shredder tube-‘

‘Wait- I got it,’ Namjoon has recovered enough to join the conversation, pushing Sk’jin aside to access the wall behind the loo.

‘Uh what-‘

‘What-‘

‘What-‘

Namjoon removes the panel easily enough, fingers digging into the side of the metal. The whirring sound of the very sharp fast blades responsible for reducing nearly every form of recyclable waste into bits fills the air, activated by the sensor.

‘Namjoon don’t be an idiot-‘

And without even blinking an eye, Namjoon reaches into the tube and rips out a few wires, the whirring sound stopping immediately. Namjoon removes a completely unharmed arm looking at Sk’jin as though he was mad.

‘Did you really think I was going to stick my hand in into the blades?’

‘I didn’t know what you were going to do-‘

‘Hand me the dildo-‘

‘The what-?!’

‘THE WHAT-?!’

Sk’jin hands it over and Namjoon quickly leans into the opening, making a few scuffling sounds before an ominous clanging sound rings out and Namjoon hisses out.

‘What-‘

He suddenly jerks, as though violently punching something and the sound of the blades start up again but there’s a wrenching sound and the sound of the blades literally fall away.

‘…Namjoon-‘

‘Right- we should get going,’ Namjoon declares, pulling himself out of the opening only to show Sk’jin a very mangled forearm-

‘For fuck’s sake-‘
‘The Officers are outside of the stall- they’re asking about unusual activity. Please hurry the owner
is leading them inside.’

Namjoon eyes him as though telling him to hurry and quickly climbs in.

‘Don’t forget the panel-cover,’ he tells Sk’jin before sliding down the tunnel.

‘Fucking hell-‘

Grabbing the panel-case, Sk’jin climbs over the loo and quickly looks inside the tunnel, Namjoon
having already slid down. It’s dark and Sk’jin has no idea what to expect.

The door to the restroom jiggles and Sk’jin ducks all the way in, his feet finding a ledge where the
shredder-blades were installed. He pulls the panel-cover with him and making sure it clicks shut,
Sk’jin pulls his feet in and simply slides down.

The tube surprisingly curves rather gently and it’s oddly dry- Sk’jin had been expecting to be
bombarded with disgusting fluids and something else unimaginably disturbing but it’s surprisingly
dry and smelt strongly of some form of cleaning chlorine.

There’s light ahead and before Sk’jin can even hope to slow down, he spills out into a wide basin
like opening that dips downwards and into a massive hollow, deep inside the Pit that was clearly
the “basement” area. He’s vaguely aware of large pipes, huge cables, and what appeared to be
elevator shafts to one side.

‘Oh fuck-!’

Before he goes flying out of the basin, unable to control himself, a hand shoots out and grabs him
by the collar of his shirt, nearly ripping it.

‘Oh Spaces-‘ Sk’jin gasps as Namjoon grabs him and steadies him to a stop. ‘Fucking Spaces-‘

‘We don’t have communications this deep inside,’ Namjoon declares, shakily standing up, nursing
his arm. Sk’jin is almost worried, panicked even, before he realizes that the Kutsoglerin didn’t
have all too many pain-receptors. He probably felt that it was dislocated and nearly useless and
was uncomfortable, but he felt no pain.

The idea of it is almost incomprehensible to Sk’jin.

‘If we’re in underground- we can follow the elevator shafts and make our way to Zone 90,’ Sk’jin
plans, carefully edging towards the further side of the basin to look upwards. ‘It’s fucking dark.’

‘There should be maintenance stairs or something around here for the Bots,’ Namjoon declares.
‘There should be a maintenance station around here- over there I can see the rungs for some form
of adjustable maintenance-lift-‘

A strange sound howls inside the huge empty cavern.

It sounds, most disturbingly, like a toilet flush.

‘What was that-‘

A horrendous stench overwhelms them, causing Sk’jin to instantly gag and it’s followed by a
thunderous roar.

Sk’jin finds himself pushed to the side when suddenly the pipe he had slid out of is gushing with
what he can only suspect is sewage and waste.

To his great relief, it only lasts a few seconds before it’s followed by an equally strong flood of something that smelt strongly of chlorine. It flushes the basin out, leaving the dark glossy surface spotless. But Sk’jin doesn’t fail to shudder with disgust.

‘Oh fucking Spaces-‘ Namjoon takes a step back but then the entire basin tilts and upends.

His shriek of surprise caught in his throat, Sk’jin and Namjoon slip and are literally thrown off of the basin. Scrambling and instinctively throwing his hands above his head, Sk’jin manages to catch onto the lip of a narrow ledge some distance under the basin they had been thrown off of.

‘Namjoon-!’

‘Fucking-‘ Namjoon curses, dangling with one good arm, legs struggling before he finds a footing along the rough glassy walls. ‘We’re fucking cursed aren’t we.’

Sighing in agreement, Sk’jin nods exhaustedly.

‘This is great. Exactly what we need.’ Namjoon rambles on.

Honestly, Sk’jin is too old for this.
So my thesis proposal was accepted and approved
Why did I think 3D visual development was going to be a good idea
But I think you guys will be excited to know that I’m doing my thesis sort of based on ADEGU- especially Yoongi and Jimin’s short arc in Megibiya. It’s…a spin-off, you could say, of that storyline. But the visuals are all going to be how I imagined that place to look like. So I think I might upload my progress on it, and post them on tumblr or something and link it here so you know what the Uzkulisai looks like, what the screens look like, etc. that should be fun
I’m gonna die aren’t i
Yeah
Sigh
I also wrote a NamJin oneshot here if anyone’s interested in reading 16K of namjin being nerds and awkward and cute
Also
ALL HAIL GLASS DILDOS WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO
I had so much fun writing this chapter
Like im the author but fuck do I love Sk’jin he’s my favorite character I love him so much
‘So pretty!’

Hoseok doesn’t even look up from his screen where he’s perusing the map to find the stalls they needed to visit in order to complete their shopping list as he reaches out and firmly grabs onto Taeh’yung’s collar, keeping him in place.

‘It’s so pretty Hobi, can we look at it when we come back?’

‘If we have time buggy,’ Hoseok replies, eyeing the map before looking up to visualize the space they were in in accordance to the map. The first stall they would be visiting would be for Jungkook. He’s not too sure how they go in and order this. Did he go to the counter and say ‘yeah hi I need some blood and raw flesh, preferably a crate full, how much is the total?’ or was there some covert way of handling this sort of trade.

‘I think Chim would look great in that- I think Yoongi would appreciate it.’ Taeh’yung comments blithely, skipping closer to wind his arm around Hoseok’s. This pulls Hoseok’s attention away from counting the stall-numbers and glances at what Taeh’yung is talking about only to regret his decision.

It’s some form of body-jewelry, designed and made from Grisial crystals and its been draped over a mannequin in such a way that there is literally no other explanation for the purpose and “use” of the jewelry.

‘Taeh’yung,’ Hoseok says in his best reprimanding tone. ‘Don’t be inappropriate, and don’t mentions things like this to either Yoongi or Jimin unless it’s been requested by them okay?’

‘But he’d look pretty in it?’ Taeh’yung tilts his head.

‘I- yeah sure he would but-’

‘Oh! You agree!’ Taeh’yung’s eyes sparkle before he adds as though scandalized, ‘But you can’t!’

‘What-? No, Tae- let’s just get the stuff on our list- if we have time and can manage we buy something pretty yes?’ Hoseok tries to reason.

Taeh’yung just beams in agreement and immediately follows Hoseok without any further comment. He hums a random tune, head twisting and turning to look around, intrigued. Hoseok has thought this before and it’s even more cemented now than before.

Taeh’yung was like an ancient power, unimaginably wise and strong, but incredibly naïve and innocent at the same time. His point of view, in regards to everything, did not align with the
standard of a Universal mode of living: morally and rationally. Taeh’yung just seemed to exist in a state of being far beyond what any of them were used to or could hope to understand.

Taeh’yung could coo and gently pet a young child, but would probably have no qualms destroying a planet if he saw fit. And there would probably be no guilt or regret of any sort in the aftermath of his actions.

‘Is this it?’

Hoseok glances at the direction Taeh’yung was pointing at and finds that they were indeed in front of the store he was looking for. And it did not look shady or weird. It just...looked like every other grocer stall in the Jetsam and Flotsam. There are additional things in the store of course, and instead of having displays of food items, the store is lined with massive OrTanks storing in them what appeared to be pulsing lumps of flesh.

Due to his line of work, not much really disgusts or repulses Hoseok. He can see something and understand and react to the gore or quality of repulsion it exuded, but that didn’t mean he actively sought out or enjoyed sights like the grotesque display before him.

It was odd, because everything was clean, hygienic, and even well packaged.

‘How may I help you?’ an Android asks, sitting up from behind the counter.

Somewhat recovering, Hoseok manages to order what he needs. The Android nods and without further question goes about retrieving the needed items.

‘Would you like the tissue living or frozen?’

‘I- what?’ Hoseok chokes out, eyes widening.

‘All tissue, flesh, and blood purchased in our outlets are designed and grown to be living, so as to preserve the quality and freshness of the items sir,’ the Android explains smoothly. ‘Please have no fear! We conduct all our business under strict guidance of the Yisheng Directory and abide all of their ethics!’

This honestly does nothing to placate Hoseok as he eyes the living pieces of flesh.

‘...how does this work?’ he asks carefully as Taeh’yung eagerly walks up to one of the OrTanks watching a lump of meat pulse rather rhythmically. Hoseok is honestly a little afraid. Mainly because he’s afraid Taeh’yung will somehow be strangely inspired by what was around him and might be motivated to do something along the lines of growing and harvesting living tissue in his Cabin or something.

‘We design and genetically modify choice cells to harvest and grow, living without the need of a heart or a brain, cancelling any attachment it may have in the form of a living Being, therefore making our products some of he safest consumer products you could ever purchase.’

It still does nothing to placate Hoseok if he’s being honest.

‘How is it sustained?’ Hoseok asks tentatively.

‘All flesh, all cells need respiration in order to grown, and remain healthy. The process of respiration involves the inhalation of an element that then breaks down to form sugars in the cell, energizing it to maintain cellular function. That is how we are growing our products.’ The Android sounds like he’s memorized books on sales-pitching. ‘Our OrTanks come fully facilitated to
support our tech, and can be easily stored into your average kitchen cabinet! Or! You can customize your OrTank here!

‘-oh wow, okay,’ Hoseok, despite the overwhelming information delivered to him so enthusiastically, finds that the entire ordeal was actually handled pretty decently.

While the idea of whole species of Beings having unique and sometimes very bloody and raw diets wasn’t an unusual one, obtaining these products in an ethical and conserving way was something no one wanted to really think about; especially when the “meat” involved came from very sentient species of Beings.

‘I guess that’s a good idea-‘

‘Who is the diet meant for?’ the Android asks politely, holding up a screen out of nowhere as though to check on it.

‘A Vicitra,’ Hoseok replies, seeing no harm in mentioning such a thing considering that the Vicitra, though quite rarely found wandering the galaxy in their own tourism/casual holiday volition, the idea of their existence wasn’t all unknown or regarded with too much disgust or taboo.

‘Perfect! We have a wonderful store of both blood, bone broth, and fatty tissue known to be a favorite amongst our most deadly patrons!’ the Android beams as though nothing brought it more happiness.

‘Can you set apart a month’s ration for each of these please? And how long is the- uh, shelf-life?’ Hoseok reaches over and pulls Taeh’yung to his side, trying to stop him from opening some of the display OrTanks.

‘As long as you have a good portion of the item, you can continue to slowly harvest it, making it’s shelf-life well over 3 months! Of course, you must maintain the hygiene, temperature, and other settings to make sure it thrives.’

Hoseok is really trying not to regard these pulsing lumps of flesh as anything more than what they are: weirdly living lumps of dumb flesh. Bu it’s quite hard to do so.

‘Great- uh, we’ll take those,’ Hoseok manages a small smile and nod.

The Android smiles brightly and says, ‘Wonderful! Might I interest you in some of the specialty liver from-‘

‘No! Nopes! We’re good- just- just the items I requested, thank you,’ Hoseok manages to get out, trying not to sweat.

‘This is cool!’ Taeh’yung exclaims. ‘It’s so smart!’

‘They’re…they’re not- not alive are they?’ Hoseok winces even when he’s asking.

‘Oh, everything is alive Hobi,’ Taeh’yung smiles. ‘But I know what you mean- they’re not.’

‘You’re not lying to me are you?’ Hoseok chuckles weakly.

Taeh’yung just grins at him in reply.

Hoseok is still queasy as they exit the store, pulling along the gravity-lift they had brought with them, with 1 months worth of blood, bone broth, and fatty tissue. Honestly the ingredients in itself
wasn’t the matter here. Hoseok has had his fair share of questionable cuisine in his line of work, but to an extent he’s always known what he’s consumed. The “food” they were now pulling along behind them however, came from sources Hoseok would rather not know about.

‘Okay- time to head to the Kitchen Supplies section,’ Hoseok announces, pointing with his chin at Taeh’yung who nods obediently and insists on pulling the handle with Hoseok. Hands overlapping on the handle meant only for one hand, they walk along the wide paths of the Flotsam.

‘Oh-!’ Taeh’yung stops suddenly, causing Hoseok to reel backwards from the abrupt stop of their motion.

‘What is it?’ Hoseok demands, his senses prickling.

Taeh’yung is looking behind them, back into the crowd, eyes a little wide, eyebrows raised up. Then slowly he grins, looking very pleased.

‘Tae? What’s wrong?’ Hoseok looks around, scanning the busy zone.

‘Nothing.’ Taeh’yung replies before nodding in satisfaction. ‘Something familiar.’

‘…is that okay? Is it safe?’ Hoseok asks warily.

‘Do you remember your first ever grounded memory of your home?’ Taeh’yung asks suddenly, walking again.

‘Uh- I guess?’ Hoseok thinks back to high sweltering skies, grassy plains and dry wind. Of the ceramic jars arranged according to size stored high up on the shelves, away from his grabbing hands. He remembers the fabric and pattern and texture of his mother’s skirt, brushing against his face.

‘I guess I’m feeling a bit nostalgic,’ Taeh’yung grins before he exclaims, ‘Aren’t we supposed to get hair-dye?’

‘Oh right-‘

Taeh’yung gestures to the stall to the side, filled with all sorts of supplies for self-care. There are clothes in here too so Hoseok guesses they might as well get everything else on the list here.

‘What do you think about bright red for Yoongi?’ Taeh’yung asks, frowning down at a box set of the aforementioned hair colour.

‘I think we’re trying to go low-key here buggy,’ Hoseok replies as he picks up the tags for industrial-size cleaning agents from the stall. He’s feeling a bit more citrus this time rather than the herbal-aroma they had going inside the ship. ‘Maybe something brown? It’s more natural for Humans anyways.’

‘One of the Human’s I knew had dark red hair,’ Taeh’yung announces. ‘The other had a light golden brown.’

‘Regardless,’ Hoseok chuckles, ‘Let’s end his suffering and get him a brown.’

‘I’m gonna get this for Chim for when his hair grows out,’ Taeh’yung says as though in compensation for Yoongi’s lack of colour as he picks up a pastel-pink box. ‘I think this will look great on him.’
‘Pick something for Jin too. Maybe Namjoon as well?’ Hoseok frowns a little as he speculates.

Working as an agent, Hoseok knew all too well how efficient something as simple as changing hair-colour could be. Especially when you were disguising yourself to hide. It was something he knew well, and something he used to his immense advantage considering his biology.

‘What about Kookie?’

‘I don’t think it’s necessary for him just yet,’ Hoseok smiles. ‘He can keep his hair as it is.’

Taeh’yung nods to that and Hoseok picks out a floral-type based fragrance for the ship’s generic hygiene products.

‘Is he going to stay?’ Taeh’yung asks as he picks up a box of something mixed between purple and silver.

‘Who?’ Hoseok is not sure which he Taeh’yung is referring to.

‘Kookie.’ Taeh’yung clarifies. ‘Will he continue to stay?’

‘I don’t know,’ Hoseok replies honestly. ‘In all honesty, I don’t think he should stay. It’s too dangerous for him with us. But at the same time, it’s dangerous out there. Especially for someone like him.’

Taeh’yung nods slowly, picking up a forest-green colour and tucking it under his arm.

‘Will you?’ Hoseok finds himself asking.

Taeh’yung looks surprised by the question.

‘I know you don’t stay- that you won’t stay,’ Hoseok shrugs. And as he says it, he comes to realize that deep inside he knew this would be the case. Taeh’yung had arrived randomly and integrated himself into the ship without any ado, so it was only logical that he would leave randomly, leaving behind his absence. It makes Hoseok feel strangely empty but also almost relieved at the idea of it.

‘But will you? At least until we finish what we were set out to do.’

Taeh’yung makes a thoughtful face before saying, ‘I need to watch Jinnie.’

‘How is he?’ Hoseok asks carefully. ‘I- Namjoon told me he uh-‘

‘He almost relapsed.’ Taeh’yung states bluntly. ‘If we were late, and if Namjoon hadn’t been there, he wouldn’t be here.’

‘Namjoon? What do you mean?’ Hoseok frowns, remembering how Namjoon had relayed what had happened. Namjoon had very clearly stated how he hadn’t done anything other than carrying Sk’jin back into the ship and had been in the dark about everything that had taken place himself.

‘He helped!’ Taeh’yung smiles before he picks up a tag from the shelf, waving it in the air, ‘Can we get this air-fragrance? I think it’ll be nice if it always smelt like rain!’

‘Eh- I don’t think we have a diffuser-‘

‘-here’s the tag for the diffuser!’ Taeh’yung reaches high up and retrieves the slip.

Hoseok suspects they’ve spent more than they’re supposed to as they exit the Flotsam and Jetsam,
dragging behind them a very sizeable “grocery stock” on the gravity-lift plus extra packages that couldn’t fit.

‘I think we need to get help,’ Hoseok mumbles as he eyes the gravity-lift behind them. It was already nearly scraping the floors. They would need to rent one of the public lifts to take all of this back.

‘I can come.’ Yoongi says quietly.

‘No- all three of you stay inside- I’ll call Sk’jin, I think he’s going to be done,’ Hoseok says quickly just as Sk’jin announces he’s done with his assigned task. Good, everything was going smoothly. ‘Sk’jin, could you come help us at the FJ? There’s a lot.’

‘I’m done too- need an extra hand?’ Namjoon chimes in.

‘Yeah- the more the merrier,’ Hoseok shrugs as he directs the lift over to the side so as to not block the wide paths leading out of the Flotsam and Jetsam.

It was a magnificent view, and a much better looking and structured Flotsam and Jetsam compared to many of the FJ’s around the Known Universe. Massive columns of dark crystal-glass unique to the asteroids around Grisial wound up and around the massive chamber. Most of the asteroids around Grisial contained the unique crystal but in varying degrees of purity and quality. The asteroids the Pits were built out of were ones mixed with other heavier elements that allowed the GLA to build within it the way you would a regular Dock. And due to their own natural, albeit weak, gravity- construction wasn’t complicated.

‘Sk’jin’s health-tab just peaked.’ Yoongi announces suddenly.

‘What-?’

‘His position is moving away from the elevators- Namjoon you’re close-’

‘I’m on it- where exactly?’

Hoseok is already leaving the gravity-lift and is ready to make his way up but Taeh’yung pulls him back easily.

‘Tae we need to –’

‘It’s fine.’ The Zhak’gri smiles easily. ‘He’s not in danger. Just a visit.’

‘What-‘

‘Oh. Yes. It’s fine.’

‘What do you mean?’ Hoseok demands, addressing both Taeh’yung and Yoongi.

‘He’ll be fine-‘

‘Yoongi- can you access the surveillance-‘

‘I’m already tracking all of you.’

‘–…oh okay uh-‘

‘Sk’jin is fine.’
‘Jin? Are you all right? What’s happening?’ Hoseok demands, finding that he can’t move away without causing a commotion with the way Taeh’yung is holding onto his hand with more strength than Hoseok was mentally prepared for. Also, Taeh’yung had really large hands.

‘He’s safe-oh-?’ Yoongi sounds decidedly surprised.

‘Um- Namjoon...’ Jimin trails off, also sounding very surprised and then it’s instantly followed by a gasp.

‘What? What is it?!’ Hoseok demands, trying to wriggle his hand out of Taeh’yung’s hold.

‘Maybe um, you should coming-come back to the ship?’ Jimin says carefully and slowly.

‘I’ll support the lift Hobi,’ Taeh’yung tells him with another dazzling smile that Hoseok guesses is supposed to be reassuring. ‘No one will notice!’

It’s touching and comforting that Taeh’yung mentions this effort in being inconspicuous but Hoseok’s senses are tingling and he’s very uncomfortable. Why couldn’t he hear Sk’jin and now Namjoon? But Yoongi is still able to read both of their health-tabs, as well as keep a visual tag on both of them.

‘You’ll see,’ Taeh’yung pleads, ‘Let’s go back!’

It’s the only way Hoseok can quickly gain insight into this so he nods and starts pulling at the lift. Taeh’yung doesn’t let go of their hands but he does somehow manage to place all of their items onto the lift, no indication or glimmer of his abilities gleaming in neon-green at them through the crates and tanks.

‘The bots have delivered the cells. They’re outside the Bay.’ Yoongi reports and then adds, ‘The local authorities are chasing after Sk’jin and Namjoon.’

‘Why?!’ Hoseok demands, feet moving faster as he pulls Taeh’yung and the lift towards the massive elevators.

‘They caused a commotion in public. They are now escaping.’ Yoongi sounds bored and the elevator could probably afford to go faster but there are at least 10 other Beings onboard and they’re all taking their sweet time disembarking on their levels. Hoseok doesn’t care how he’s glaring down the others inside the elevator to the point where a vast majority of innocent stragglers make for an obvious escape on levels and zones they were clearly not headed for.

‘Guys! Hurry and get back- on the ship-!’ Namjoon suddenly announces, the lines cleaning up at once and Hoseok can now hear the two of them clearly on the run.

‘What?! What’s going on again-’ Hoseok groans, wiping at his face with his freehand while Taeh’yung massages his nape as though to soothe him.

‘Do you need backup?’ Yoongi asks, sounding prepared to blow something up.

‘No- no Yoongi, you stay put- we’re coming to you. Jimin activate-‘

Namjoon was ordering them to activate the invisibility-shield, Hoseok’s personal name for the device. That meant they needed to hide now.

‘-I got it!’ Jimin replies, sounding worried and panicked.
‘Pa! Jinnie! What’s wrong-?!’ Taeh’yung gasps out, looking comically worried.

‘Don’t worry about us- just- everyone on the ship!’ Sk’jin pants out, sounding winded.

It doesn’t nothing to make Hoseok worry less.

‘Security is approaching the area, they’re going to surround you. You need to exit the place now.’

‘Where are they?’ Hoseok demands before telling Namjoon, ‘Guys taking any form of public transit will get you spotted. You’ll need to find a way to get through to at least the closest docking platform zone.’

For some reason Sk’jin giggles rather hysterically.

‘-you just need to ascend up to Zone 90 and I can bring the Spardyti to you.’ Yoongi informs them, ‘They’re surrounding your location you can’t-‘

‘Fuck-‘

‘We can’t do anything- unless we fight,’ Sk’jin pants out. ‘And at this point, fighting will lead to more problems. If we just allow ourselves to be captured, and we pretend we were having some dumb love-triangle argument then that could work-‘

Hoseok is not expecting this conversation to turn this way and it actually makes him pause in his glaring competition with the other occupants in the elevator who are now all earnestly backing away from them.

‘Why are you stopping?’ Yoongi demands. ‘4 Officers approaching-‘

‘Where even are they?!’ Hoseok demands as the elevator stops once more to let in a small group of Beings. Hoseok glares them down.

‘They are now hiding at an illicit market.’


‘An illicit market,’ Yoongi states blandly. Hoseok catches sight of the Pit’s authority officers to the side, standing at ease. A thought occurs to him.

‘Can’t the authorities see them too-?’

‘It’s been overlaid,’ Yoongi replies.

‘That was quick-‘ Hoseok all but manages to comment.

‘Not by me,’ Yoongi replies.

‘Then by who-?’ but Hoseok jolts as he realizes they’re only a level away from their destination. Taeh’yung only giggles behind him.

‘You’re a terrible kisser,’ Sk’jin mumbles out of nowhere. It takes Hoseok more than a few seconds to recalibrate his mind to understand and keep up with the rapidity of how things were moving and changing.

‘I’m not paying attention to quality here-‘ is Namjoon’s extraordinary reply.
‘Um-’ Hoseok is so stunned he actually freezes, unable to move as the elevator panel-doors open up.

‘Let me-’

Managing to somewhat recover with the knowledge that getting back to the ship will hopefully clear up all confusion, Hoseok darts out, heading straight for the Užkulisai as Taeh’yung speed-walks behind him, gravity-lift moving faster and higher than normal but there aren’t a lot of Beings around so Hoseok doesn’t heed it much.

‘You can stop kissing they’re out of the area.’

‘WHAT?!’

‘WHO’S KISSING WHO-‘ Taeh’yung demands sounding too happy.

‘Ca-captain and Jin-‘ Jungkook mumbles quietly.

‘WHAT WHY FOR FUCK’S SAKE-‘ Hoseok doesn’t care that he’s literally roaring at this point, causing a few random repair-bots to fall and curl up from where they were mounted to the side of the maintenance-shed.

‘Wow that actually worked,’ he hears Sk’jin state before adding, ‘Don’t look that disgusted-‘

‘Um- I think you should start running-‘ Jimin cuts in unsurely.

‘Please make your way into the 5th stall and ask for the restroom. You can access the pipes from the vents.’ Yoongi orders, sounding annoyed only in a way the Human was capable of.

‘Anything around?’

They arrive at the Užkulisai, the Bay gates opening in advance for him. Jimin is there, eyes wide but not fearful as he stares at one of the screens mounted to the side of the Bay. Jungkook is there too, looking confused but still trying to be helpful.

‘The market is surrounded. They will arrive at your location in 20 seconds again.’ Yoongi replies.

‘Okay we’re in the restroom-‘

‘According to the layout, you should find a large shredder tube-‘

‘Yoongi I don’t think any of us are immune to a shredder tube-‘

‘Wait- I got it.’

‘Uh what-‘

‘What-‘ Hoseok demands at once followed instantly by a nervous, ‘What-‘ from Jimin who greets him with a helpless expression, sleeves rolled up, beanie askew as he activates the invisibility-shield.

‘Kookie help Taeh’yung out!’ Hoseok calls as he runs past the two in the Hangar.

The Vicitra quickly shuffles along, eager to make himself useful inside the ship as Jimin calls after him in surprise.
Hoseok speeds upwards, hearing the alarming sounds of something metallic and hard hitting something else metallic and hard. Yoongi is standing at the Navigator’s Mast, looking at a wide projection of multiple surveillance feeds of some zone inside the Pit, all keyed in on Namjoon and Sk’jin’s position. Or at least where they last were, outside a small restaurant of sorts where half a dozen officers were gathered.

‘Namjoon don’t be an idiot-‘

Hoseok skids to a stop by the Mast.

‘Did you really think I was going to stick my hand in into the blades?’

‘I didn’t know what you were going to do-‘

‘Hand me the dildo-‘

‘The what-?!’ Taeh’yung sounds like he’s about to pass out from glee.

‘THE WHAT-?!’ Hoseok demands.

‘…Namjoon-‘

There’s a strange blip in Namjoon’s health-tab and Hoseok isn’t sure what to make of what he’s seeing.

‘Right- we should get going,‘

‘For fuck’s sake-‘

‘The Officers are outside of the stall- they’re asking about unusual activity. Please hurry the owner is leading them inside.’ Yoongi calls to their attention, eyeing the surveillance feed calmly, as though the fate of the Captain and Communications Manager of their ship didn’t solely depend on how they were going to make it through a shredder tube.

‘Don’t forget the panel-cover.

‘Fucking hell-‘

‘This is madness it’s not going to work-‘ Hoseok wonders why and how Yoongi is so calm in all of this, and why he wasn’t even trying to attempt to help or look for ways to help. ‘We can at least try to shut down the shredder-tube-‘

‘It’s been taken care of.’ Yoongi states quietly. ‘They’re safe.’

Hoseok then realizes that there is more than one line of communication channel open, and it was coming from Sk’jin’s screen the Khol’isa had left behind.

‘Yoongi-‘

‘It’s safe. They’re safe.’ Yoongi looks away from the Table to look Hoseok straight in his eyes.

The lines from both Namjoon and Sk’jin cut almost immediately and Hoseok jumps a little as the officers break down the door leading into the restroom Sk’jin and Namjoon had been hiding in seconds ago. It’s clearly empty judging by everyone’s shocked reactions.

‘Will someone explain what this is?’ Hoseok demands rather than ask.
‘The explanation will arrive after Namjoon and Sk’jin get back.’ Yoongi declares, making no sense before adding: ‘Because I want some answers too.’

It’s another half an hour before Namjoon and Sk’jin’s channels connect and an additional 15 minutes before the two show up in their docking area, shuffling towards the ship at weirdly furious pace.

By the time the Hangar Bay gates open, they’re both close enough for them to just make them out. And in all honesty, Hoseok had been expecting them to be covered in unmentionables. But they’re both clean, and even from this distance, carried a strong smell of chlorine. But whatever they had gone through, hadn’t left them unscathed.

Namjoon and Seokjin look incredibly terrible but it’s Namjoon that takes the spotlight.

Jimin gasps while Jungkook freezes completely, eyes widening worrisomely. Taeh’yung actually wails as he sprints forward and out of the Hangar Bay and quickly ushers the approaching two inside quickly.

Namjoon’s arm looks…bad, mildly put. Added with his previous…injuries? Damages? It makes him look especially woebegone.

‘So-‘

‘Ah right, here-‘ Sk’jin reaches into his jacket pocket and retrieves something and throws it at Yoongi who just steps into the Bay. Hoseok realizes, with some delay and a lot of feelings that can only be translated into “?!?!?!?!?!?!” when he recognizes the item the Khol’isa had thrown at the Human.

Yoongi stares, rather blankly Hoseok might add, at the clear crystal dildo in his hands.

Jimin crouches on the ground, face buried in his hands, the tips of his ears burning red. Taeh’yung is wheezing while Namjoon walks over to Hoseok, the strong smell of chlorine actually making Hoseok’s eyes water. The Kutsoglerin sighs and says, ‘I can’t believe we were saved by fucking crystal dildos.’ before walking away and out of the Bay.

Yoongi then later, with deadly speed and accuracy hurls it at Sk’jin. But the Khol’isa is saved the concussion when Taeh’yung casually swipes it off of the air and cradling the dildo and then rubbing it against his face, much to Jimin’s intense chagrin, exclaims, ‘It’s so pretty can I have it?’.

Hoseok helps Namjoon in the shower, the latter being unable to do a lot now without the presence of a functional arm.

‘Is the ship okay with just Yoongi watching the Bridge?’

‘He’ll be fine- Sk’jin isn’t there,’ Hoseok snorts as he severs the bionic ligament still holding up random fragments of Namjoon’s useless arm. He knows Namjoon wouldn’t necessarily feel the pain, but he still internally winces.

‘Can you fix this?’ Hoseok asks, gesturing to his arm.
'I should be able to. But we’ll need to place special orders,’ Namjoon grunts out. ‘Might place them now, see if we can get them by the end of this trip. Seems unlikely though…kinda rare.’

‘Will that cause some form of alarm with the Jury- if it’s that rare, they might be keeping an eye out on places that distribute the things you need.’ Hoseok theorizes.

‘It’s rare, but not that rare.’ Namjoon replies as he holds up another severed ligament for Hoseok to cut, ‘But that’s a good thing to keep in mind- we’ll look for the items carefully.’

The texture is odd- almost fleshy, but strangely sharp on the blades of the surgery-scissors he was using. Hoseok knows that if he were to look into this bit of bionic flesh, he would find living cells imbued with identical crafted cells made of silicon, carbon, and if Hoseok isn’t mistaken, Tungsten.

‘So…the Long-Huon.’

‘Someone from Sk’jin’s past- they’re…they’re connected by the Nightmare Planet. I think he’s the one who got him out.’

‘I thought it was Taeh’yung who got him out? Or at least I assumed it was?’ Hoseok questions.

‘It’s complicated. And honestly something that I don’t think we need to know.’

‘Like what Sk’jin had said?’

Namjoon sighs before nodding as though it pained him to agree to the fact that Sk’jin had been correct.

‘Yoongi seems to know him too.’ Hoseok supplies. ‘What do you reckon about that?’

‘Well, Sk’jin, Taeh’yung, and Yoongi have all, at one point, met and “bonded” I guess,’ Namjoon quirks his fingers in quotation marks with his good hand. ‘Maybe Yoongi met them at the time?’

‘So…what did he want?’

‘To talk. Sk’jin hasn’t been replying. He seems to have promised something to him.’ Namjoon replies slowly before pointing at a flappy bit of bionic flesh. ‘That can be used to wrap around the tubes up here.’

Namjoon’s entire biological function is fascinating to say the least. Fascinating, and utterly heart-wrenching when you realize the pain and horror the Kutsoglerin went through with every single “correction” made to his being.

‘Are you sure it doesn’t hurt?’ Hoseok asks tentatively as they get ready to seal the arm just above the elbow.

‘I don’t really have pain receptors,’ Namjoon shrugs before adding. ‘I used to.’

Hoseok’s stomach churns.

‘Yeah? What happened?’

‘I asked the Yishengs to destroy them.’ Namjoon replies easily. ‘I can feel and sense yeah, but I guess pain doesn’t register the way it’s supposed to.’

Namjoon probably only sensed a slight discomfort, an awareness that informed him that something
had happened, and that it was probably not a good thing. And Hoseok doesn’t blame Namjoon for choosing to have his pain-receptors removed.

The entire remaining Kutsoglerin species, and not just Namjoon, had more than enough of pain.

‘It’s fine,’ Namjoon smiles at him, a small but genuine one. ‘Shit like this happens right?’

Hoseok smiles back, ignoring the sudden burning flare that erupts in his palms, ‘Yeah. It does.’

When they exit the en suite, they’re both taken aback to find Taeh’yung, Jungkook, and Jimin waiting for them at Namjoon’s door room.

3 pairs of wide eyes regard them and before either Namjoon or Hoseok can say anything, Taeh’yung honest to goodness bursts into tears and Jungkook follows shortly.

‘Oh uh-‘ Namjoon is lost.

Hoseok swiftly makes himself scarce, holding up the bowl of bionic remains to chest level as though using it as leverage against the 3 at the doorway. They immediately part to give him room before converging inside. And from the sounds of it, Taeh’yung has leapt onto Namjoon judging by the startled grunt and quite rebuke from Jimin.

‘Are those Namjoon’s bits?’ Sk’jin asks, poking his head out of his room.

‘Yeah- gonna put them in suspension-‘

‘Hey- you were in there for a while.’ Sk’jin wiggles his eyebrows at Hoseok, ‘A sudden thought occurred to me and I think you might know-‘

‘-I don’t know and honestly it really isn’t our business to know,’ Hoseok rolls his eyes before making his way down.

‘You don’t want to know if he has a metallic di-‘

‘Most of the Kutsoglerin species were systematically neutered as a means of permanent genocide during their invasion. It is not a matter to laugh about.’ Yoongi states, appearing behind them almost as though he had materializes on the stairs out of thin air.

‘Fucking Spaces-!’ Sk’jin jumps, nearly crashing into Hoseok. ‘For fuck’s sake Yoongi-!‘

‘Are we ready to leave?’ Hoseok asks.

‘Yes. Waiting for Namjoon’s order.’ The Human replies before turning to address Sk’jin who looks mildly confused at this direct attention.

‘As of now the Kutsoglerin population is at an all time low with fertility levels dropping to an all time low and chances of repopulation nearly impossible,’ Yoongi reels off, unbothered by Sk’jin’s continued muttering. ‘Unless of course, by using AI technology.’

‘Is that why he looked so thrown off when he heard the Omhlophe were in Kutsoglera?’ Sk’jin ruminates out loud as they reach the Lobby downstairs. ‘Makes sense.’

‘I thought you’d be more sympathetic about the topic,’ Hoseok comments, glancing at the Khol’isa. ‘Considering your species?’

Sk’jin rolls his eyes before replying, ‘The Universe could do without the Khol’isa- we’re honestly
Khol’isa can die,’ Yoongi states simply. ‘They are not immortal.’

‘Yeah but can we stay dead?’ Sk’jin asks though it sounds too much like a wish to Hoseok’s ears.

‘We could try.’ Is Yoongi’s reply.

Not sure if Yoongi was joking or actually being honest, but it makes Sk’jin laugh so Hoseok guesses it’s all right.

‘I see you and Taeh’yung went all out while shopping,’ Sk’jin says after he’s done laughing, leaning against Yoongi who is tilted, as though encouraging the Khol’isa to maybe not lean his entire weight on him. Sk’jin of course completely ignores him.

‘Yeah- Taeh’yung got all of you hair-colour,’ Hoseok shrugs as he carefully places the bionic bits into a jar with suspension liquid. ‘I just spared you rainbow hair Yoongi, there’s no need to thank me.’

‘I wasn’t going to.’

Sk’jin nearly falls on the ground as he laughs again.

‘What colour?’ Yoongi asks as though unable to help himself.

‘Back to your original- or as similar as possible,’ Hoseok replies with a grin. Yoongi doesn’t thank him but the small nod in his direction is as close as it gets.

‘So- so you found Jungkook’s food?’ Sk’jin manages to get out, clearing his throat as he pulls himself up straight and away from Yoongi who Hoseok has the strong suspicion must have pinched or poked Sk’jin away from himself.

‘Lisai please prepare incubator and set to preservation mode,’ Hoseok orders before replying, ‘Yeah- it’s actually quite interesting the way-‘

A sudden bell rings.

An honest to goodness bell chime.

‘That wasn’t me I swear on Namjoon’s nonexistent metallic dick,’ Sk’jin says at once, raising his hands up.

‘I think someone is at the door,’ Yoongi states.

‘What-?’ Hoseok reaches over to the side, tapping the screen awake and pulling up their surveillance camera tabs.

And just like Yoongi had said, someone was indeed standing just outside towards the back of the ship, arms crossed and tapping their feet impatiently.

‘I…was not expecting him to literally come to the ship…’ Sk’jin trails off.

‘Is this-‘

‘Sk’jin!’
Namjoon appears at the stairs, trailed closely by the others.

‘Why is he-‘ Namjoon calls out loudly.

‘I don’t know!’ Sk’jin yells back as he exits the Bay. ‘I’m going to find out!’

‘Who is that-?!’ Jimin is asking, making his way towards Yoongi before Taeh’yung bowls past in a flash of green, past Namjoon, past Sk’jin, and through the doorway.

Hoseok hastens to look over at the screen and is just in time to see Taeh’yung knock the unsuspecting Being outside the ship down to the floor with a high-pitched shriek.

After some confusion, a bit more yelling, and some hasty explanation from Sk’jin, Namjoon, and Taeh’yung, they find themselves all sitting awkwardly at the Lobby, smiling strained smiles at the stranger who was nursing a scratched arm from the fall he took with Taeh’yung.

For a fraction of a second there’s an aggressive silent argument between Sk’jin and Namjoon from across the Lobby. It clearly amuses the stranger, a Long-Huon if Hoseok isn’t mistaken.

The skin around his face is smooth but close to his jaw and temples, it’s textured with raised bumps that Hoseok knows are tiny scales. His hands which were not covered are long, ending in trimmed talons. But most characteristic are his eyes- sulfuric yellow with pupils shaped like narrow slits and every time he blinked, a thinner and slightly transparent secondary lid closes first.

Jungkook is both wary and intrigued, watching the Long-Huon from the stairs. To Hoseok’s surprise, Yoongi had moved there, almost as though to keep the young Vicitra company.

No one speaks and the awkwardness is mounting with a severity that makes Hoseok want to open a window and scream out of it.

‘So…’ the Long-Huon smiles carefully, eyeing all of them in turn. His posture is easy and relaxed, but it’s practiced and as an agent himself, Hoseok recognizes someone who has undergone intense training.

‘Captain, we are at green.’ Lisai calls out suddenly, making everyone in the room jump a little.

‘Uh right-‘

‘I’ll go.’ Yoongi announces from the stairs.

Hoseok is about to volunteer instead, because honestly he can’t deal with the awkwardness in the room anymore. He could instead just watch from a screen upstairs. But Zitao jumping violently when he realizes that Yoongi is in the room makes him pause. The Long-Huon looks unsure, as though thinking back to when and how Yoongi could have appeared when he had carefully scanned the room just seconds ago.

‘Fucking Spaces-‘ the Long-Huon lets out a long slew of curses in his own language before regarding the Human with confusion as well as recognition.

‘Nice to meet you again.’ The Human nods as he makes to go up the stairs, pausing at the base.

‘Uh-‘ the Long-Huon is understandable confused.

‘I was sent to assassinate you while you were transiting between Galūnė and Šerdesas 4 sols ago.’ Yoongi states bluntly, making every Being in the Bridge, other than Sk’jin, gawk at the Human. ‘I
apologize for that. I did my best to distract the GI away from you so that you could escape.’

‘…that was YOU!!?’ the Long-Huin shrieks, mouth agape.

‘Okay so yeah, past aside,’ Sk’jin interrupts quickly. ‘Yoongi if you could start taking us out- we uh- will talk here.’

Yoongi nods and goes up the stairs, immediately followed by Jungkook who climbs up on all fours, still throwing Zitao suspicious looks.

‘This is Zitao,’ Sk’jin introduces shortly. ‘We were together in the Nightmare Planet until 4 sols ago.’

‘Hi!’ the Long-Huin, Zitao waves shortly and Taeh’yung beams brightly, waving both hands at him.

‘Okay why are you here? I said I would contact you,’ Sk’jin frowns.

‘And miss talking to him?’ Zitao nods at Namjoon who bristles. ‘No way.’

Sk’jin looks seconds away from also opening a window and screaming out of it.

‘Okay first of all I need to talk to Sk’jin alone- and with Taeh’yung,’ Zitao announces as he stands.

‘No,’ Namjoon cuts in smoothly. ‘All discussions will be held here-’

‘I’m not here to discuss any of this with you-’

‘What needs to be discussed can be said here in front of all of us,’ Namjoon says through grit teeth and a clenched jaw.

Zitao levels him with a glare that’s so unimpressed and so like Sk’jin’s, Hoseok wonders who learnt it from whom.

‘Fine then,’ he shrugs before sitting back down and Sk’jin’s eyes widen in obvious panic.

‘Wait-’

‘Sk’jin is dying.’ The Long-Huin states flatly.

Hoseok’s stomach drops, his skin cold.

Namjoon looks like he’s experiencing the same thing, eyes wide as he blinks rather slowly at the Long-Huin. However, both Jimin and Taeh’yung just look down, heads bowed a little where they sat.

‘We know he’s not well- it’s why we’ve ordered the UV-Bed-’

‘No metal-brain,’ Zitao rolls his eyes. ‘He’s supposed to keep in contact with me about the progress of his living state. It’s why I’m here. He hasn’t reported back to me about anything for nearly half a sol now- he literally vanished from any form of trace; last I knew, he was back at that place- so of course I immediately came here to check. But…’ Zitao looks over at Taeh’yung who gives him a small smile which doesn’t sit well with Hoseok.

Because Taeh’yung looks strangely defeated.
‘I guessed as much,’ Zitao sighs before sending a glare at Sk’jin who huffs, throwing his hands up and saying, ‘I’mfine- I am healthy, functional, and most of all I am on a mission- you of all Beings should know how important this is to me. What it means to me.’

Hoseok shares a look with Jimin who, like Hoseok, doesn’t understand what Sk’jin means by this.

‘Listen- I don’t care what it is that you’re doing on this mission but-’

‘Zitao it’s them.’ Sk’jin says quietly and carefully.

The expression on Zitao’s face changes abruptly.

‘W—what?’

‘It’s something…I think it’s something they left behind,’ Sk’jin explains slowly before Namjoon stands up and steps over to Sk’jin as though to physically stop him from speaking more.

‘What are you-’

‘Zitao was there,’ Sk’jin explains, not sparing the Kutsoglerin a glance. ‘He knows about this, possibly even more than we do.’

Zitao, amidst his shock, realizes that they’re all staring at him and squirms a little in discomfort.

‘But they’re gone— with Earth, with— with all of them, they’re gone.’ Zitao states firmly.

‘They are,’ Taeh’yung says from where he’s sitting. ‘This is something else- but very similar to them— and…’ he glances at Namjoon before adding rather lamely, ‘—and maybe more.’

Zitao eyes all of them carefully before he squints up at Namjoon.

‘Does this have something to do with Admiral K’mara?’

There is no reaction from Namjoon who says in an even tone, ‘If you tell us what you know, we can come to an agreement and share our information with each other.’

Zitao doesn’t blink as he stares at Namjoon, appraising the Kutsoglerin with a single raised-eyebrow. The ship hums to life and a slight jolt is all the indication they have that they’re in the air.

‘Namjoon.’

Sk’jin is staring at Namjoon, his expression serious, his tone of voice has a slight hint of pleading in it.

‘Trust me.’

Everyone, including Zitao it seemed, all hold their breaths, anticipating Namjoon’s reply.

Then slowly, Namjoon nods once.

Sk’jin suddenly starts speaking in Long-Huon with a rapidity that sounded and felt more native than Standard.

It’s not too surprising, considering how most pirates, especially from the past millenniums were a collection of Beings discarded from modern Standard societies of the Universe. They spoke a huge variety of languages, and Hoseok guesses Sk’jin rarely spoke it aboard his own ship when he was
captain unless it was to GLA officers or even to other pirating clans.

Namjoon is clearly uncomfortable by this but then Yoongi quietly chimes in, ‘He’s relaying the general summary of our mission and what has happened so far. He hasn’t mentioned the details regarding Jimin’s planet and identity.’

Namjoon visibly relaxes, though only a tiny bit.

Jimin turns in his seat to face Taeh’yung, quietly murmuring a small question in his own tongue to which Taeh’yung replies with a small nod of his head. Jimin nods at that before getting up and leaving the Lobby, heading upstairs.

Namjoon doesn’t move, doesn’t say anything as Sk’jin speaks without pause, no comment or question coming from Zitao other than to nod a few times or shake his head a few times. His expression is grave and occasionally surprised. Yoongi makes his way down, quietly slipping into their midst and standing behind where Taeh’yung sat to the side. Glancing at the screen inside the Bay that was still activated, Hoseok catches a glimpse of Jimin sitting at the Table, Jungkook sitting on the floor nearby.

After what feels like a whole hour, Sk’jin finally stops.

‘Okay,’ Zitao says simply. ‘Can I see Yoongi?’

‘Yes.’

Zitao jumps again, hand going up to his chest at once as he curses again.

‘Sk’jin tells me you have a mark on your back. Can I see it?’ the Long-Huon asks.

Yoongi nods and pulls his shirt off as he turns around.

It’s unnerving no matter how many times Hoseok has seen it. That, and the old tissue scars, skin lesions, and permanent discolouration that spread all over the Human’s back.

Zitao eyes it carefully, leaning in a little.

‘This has always been on you?’

‘I believe so. All of the the GI agents had it,’ Yoongi replies.

‘Thank you,’ Zitao steps back and Yoongi pulls his shirt back on.

‘Okay- so no one freak out but I’m going to call a friend who will be able to clear up matters,’ Zitao declares.

‘…where are we picking him up-‘

Hoseok has never worked with anyone from Dakaṣayai before but he’s definitely heard of their abilities, and how the discovery of their planet and subsequently their species, lead to highest-ever success rate of undercover agency within the Underverse after the adoption of Hoseok’s own species into the Venture Unit.

And even though Hoseok is aware of their existence, having one teleport feet from you was startling, regardless of any advanced warning.

Hoseok immediately recognizes him and this recognition is reflected in the Dakaṣayai’s eyes as
well as he glances at Hoseok. He hasn’t changed much- only his hair is a little longer, a softer shade of brown. Every inch of his visible skin is covered in the distinctive Dakašayaii tattoo pattern, unique to each individual.

Dakašayai was an intriguing planet, only quite recently listed into the Known Universe. The species from Dakašayai were even more intriguing with the ability to actually teleport - a phenomena that not even the Yisheng could really explain but knew was heavily intertwined with Time itself. They were a very welcome addition to any work-space they decided to engage in, with their intelligence, adaptability, and not to mention, teleportation. If Hoseok isn’t mistaken, his name is Kai.

He nods once in greeting before breaking out into what Hoseok recognizes as the “professional face” and smiles politely, ignoring the stunned expressions of everyone in the room.

‘Hello. My name is Kai,’ he introduces himself. ‘It’s nice to meet you-?!’

Taeh’yung leaps at him, arms wrapped around him in a strong hug.

‘Jonginnieeeeee!’ the Zhak’gri squeals. ‘It’s so good to see you!’

Kai looks stunned before he breaks out into a much more genuine smile.

‘Hi Taeh’yung- it’s good to see you again too.’

‘Oh Spaces is Baek with you?’ Taeh’yung makes himself small, literally vibrating with happiness.

‘No- he’s visiting his home-planet right now,’ Kai tells him. ‘I’m sure if he knew he would have insisted on coming.’

Taeh’yung beams even brighter.

‘Uh-‘

‘This is Kai,’ Zitao introduces with a lazy wave of his hand. ‘A friend.’

Kai gives Zitao an amused look before he nods and says, ‘I have been briefed on what’s happened-‘

‘-you mean you eavesdropped,’ Sk’jin states flatly.

‘Eavesdropped-?!’ Namjoon stutters, ‘How?!’

‘Oh don’t worry! You’re still very much very invisible! Well you were!’ Kai hastily says, ‘I mean- we just followed Zitao’s concentration-‘

‘There’s no need to go into details what you need to know is that we are not actively following you or tracking you- due to my connection with Sk’jin I can normally hone in on where he is, and how he’s doing.’ Zitao cuts in smoothly. ‘He can do the same, but seeing how surprised he was to see me it’s clearly-‘

‘-kid please-‘

‘-can you not call me that here-‘

‘Can we get back to the topic at hand,’ Hoseok calls with a frown. ‘Seeing as you now know the details of our mission, as an agent to another, can we trust that you will not inform on us?’
Kai regards him with a serious look before stating, ‘I have no ties with the Venture Unit, or any other organization. I only answer to my family; and by revealing what you are doing, would hurt mine. So no, I will not reveal you. Can I expect the same from you?’

Hoseok nods.

‘The organization, or the Beings you have described,’ Kai begins with a nod towards Sk’jin, ‘are not the Akramanese- they were not born of what the Yisheng’s created- but are instead what we have gathered are Beings they themselves created, or took and reformed.’

‘The Omhlophe?’

‘I did not know they had a name, but they were there.’ Kai nods.

‘Where?’ Hoseok inquires.

‘When the Akramanese were made known to us, we were captured and taken aboard their ship.’ Kai begins before he pauses as though wondering how to plainly state everything in the simplest way possible.

‘I was taken aboard the ship,’ Kai explains, his tone is still light, his expression carefully controlled and his posture is “relaxed”. ‘I woke up in a large circular chamber, surrounded by…by many many Beings, afloat and asleep within their units like OrTanks. I do not know what we were doing there, why were placed there- but we were soon taken out and into a medical facility.’

Kai speaks carefully, purposefully editing his words to leave out certain things- mainly names and details about what he saw and what he heard. Hoseok doesn’t know if this is because he doesn’t trust them, or because he doesn’t want to speak it out loud.

And Hoseok understands the latter. Because he has seen and heard things that he would never speak out loud- never allow it to be heard by others, to let them, by connection, associate imaginable horror and evil with the words he spoke aloud.

‘Other than the Akramanese, I saw others- I did not know who they were, but they were working under the instruction of the Akramanese. They were in charge of torture without clear intention.’ Kai explains. ‘They appeared aware and were participating in their activities. Who or what they were was unclear to me then, and is still unclear to me now.’

Hoseok internally winces.

‘Did they look like this?’ Namjoon taps along his screen until he pulls up images of the Omhlophe, taken from their various side encounters, including the line they had received of their order to meet at Ynqaba.

Kai looks at the projections carefully and so does Zitao.

‘The masks weren’t there before,’ he says after a while. ‘The one I saw- she…she wore no mask. But she was white- very similar to this.

‘I’m sorry but how do we know this isn’t a convenient fabrication-‘ Namjoon begins, eyeing Kai carefully.

‘He’s not lying.’

Jimin appears by the stairs, Jungkook crouched behind him, peeking past his legs at the scene.
‘There is no lie in his Soul.’ He smiles before adding, ‘There is no lie within a star of two.’

Kai’s expression changes completely, as though blown away before he smiles what Hoseok can see is a very genuine one. He bows elegantly towards Jimin who flushes, hands violently waving as though trying to stop him.

Zitao elbows Kai lightly and the latter continues, ‘We were rescued, and taken back to be healed. That was when we realized that something strange had happened- something wrong had been done to one of us.’

Kai, with some hesitance pulls out a screen from his inner pocket before setting up a small holographic projection of a still image.

The image in it looks very much like Yoongi’s back, an indented line runs down the spine.

‘This wasn’t there before,’ Kai announces. ‘When we came back, his back appeared like this, with no explanation or indication of how it got there.’

Jimin and Yoongi have stepped up closer, the former with a confused expression.

‘And now?’ Jimin inquires.

‘It’s gone. After the Akramanese were destroyed, it vanished.’ Kai replies with a shrug.

Jimin frowns at that before looking at Yoongi almost helplessly. Yoongi doesn’t comment, only stares at the back quietly.

‘Human?’ is all he says.

Kai blinks in surprise.

‘Yes…so are you?’ the Dakaṣayaii asks carefully.

Yoongi nods before he turns to look at Jungkook.

‘We’re the same. To an extent.’

‘Can I see?’ Kai asks.

Yoongi nods, pulling up his shirt to reveal his back again. Jimin says something to Jungkook who nods a little slowly before he too pulls up his shirt.

Kai’s expression is closed-off, his eyes dark. He looks at Yoongi’s back and then at Jungkook’s who lowers his shirt immediately again.

‘Excuse me.’

And startling Jungkook, Kai vanishes just as he had appeared.

‘What was that-’ Namjoon begins, standing in alarm, expression suspicious.

‘Please wait-’ Zitao is saying, standing as well, his hand reaching up to tap at his ear, clearly listening to someone over his Comm-Device that blinks a little.
Namjoon is quick to pull Sk’jin over to the side.

‘I hope you know what you’re doing,’ Namjoon breathes out quietly. ‘I’m aware that you trust them. I recognize Kai myself- Hoseok and I have seen him during the Court trials- and I am aware of his connection to the Gaia Case. But they’re too close- and he’s able to see where you are- they can follow us here.’

‘-it’s fine,’ Sk’jin says quietly and calmly, not looking away from Namjoon’s determined gaze. ‘Trust me on this.’

‘What reason have you given me to trust you?’ Namjoon asks through gritted teeth.

‘This is how I’m earning your trust,’ Sk’jin replies, breaking their stare to glance over at Hoseok before adding, ‘This is me helping.’

Namjoon looks away from Sk’jin to also glance at Hoseok, as though waiting for him to give his say.

But before Hoseok can say or do anything, he’s saved the need to referee Namjoon’s and Sk’jin’s argument by the reappearance of Kai, but this time, he brings someone else with him.

Hoseok recognizes him too- he’s read his files and was one of the few thousands of Humans who survived what happened on Earth the day the Akramanese had attacked their planet. Taeh’yung squeals in delight, waving violently but not jumping him like he did Kai.

‘Hello my name is Do Kyungsoo and I am co-Navigator of the Stravechi Nava,’ the Human introduces himself in a clear and oddly deep voice. Hoseok wildly wonders if this is a Human trait: short, deep voice, a deadpan stare. ‘I was told that another Human was onboard here and had a curious mark down his back.’

Yoongi steps from the side at that, again startling Zitao who curses under his breath, making Sk’jin give him an amused smile.

‘I am genetically Human but have no personal memory of Earth save from Yoongi’s memories.’ The Human states bluntly.

Do Kyungsoo frowns a bit at that, head tilting a little. He looks around at them, no surprise registering on his face as he studies each of them.

If Hoseok isn’t mistaken, one of them probably had an Iris or something equivalent to that.

‘Why is this important to you?’ Namjoon asks.

‘When we were taken by the Akramanese, we were subjected to experimental practices,’ Kyungsoo states flatly.

It was most definitely a Human thing.

‘I don’t know what they did to me, but I left the ship with an indent on my back,’ Kyungsoo explains. ‘It disappeared when the Akramanese were destroyed.’

‘How?’ Jimin asks, thoroughly confused.

‘I don’t know,’ Kyungsoo shrugs. ‘We still don’t know.’

‘So Yoongi,’ Zitao speaks, addressing the former GI agent. ‘You were born out of those OrTanks?’
'I believe so,' Yoongi replies, 'I have no exact memory of it. I was only aware when a GLA officer by the name of Zhoumi applied an Android Core and installed it in me.'

The reactions from this statement on all three of the guests mirror the same level of shock, confusion, and anger.

‘Z-Zhoumi?’ Zitao repeats before turning on Sk’jin who immediately raises his hands up, also equally shocked.

‘I didn’t know,’ the Khol’isa manages to get out, eyes wide.

‘How do you know of him?’ Kyungsoo asks, pulling himself together.

‘He personally hired me to carry out duties on his behalf. I worked for him for a total of 7 sols.’ Yoongi replies. ‘He took interest in me and gave me my name.’

‘You mentioned…’ Kyungsoo looks at him curiously. ‘You mentioned that you have no personal memories of Earth, except for Yoongi’s memories- what do you mean by this?’

Namjoon twitches at this but doesn’t say anything.

‘I believe I was made in the image of the Human Being Min Yoongi of Earth.’ Yoongi replies. ‘While I may be genetically identical to him, I do not carry his soul, or his mind in me. But his memories appear to me in Dreams. And I can feel his Heart too.’

Kyungsoo pales, blinking hard for a moment. Kai standing next to him reacts the same but a few seconds delayed, before he glances down at Kyungsoo. The latter twitches, something that was like a reaction- maybe a nervous tick, before he scratches at his arm, revealing some of the skin. It’s brief but Hoseok catches sight of black lines like tattoos spread over his skin, identical to the ones of Kai’s arms.

‘What all do you see?’ Kai asks.

‘Most of his memories are foggy,’ Yoongi replies, ‘The ones I remember most accurately and most vividly are the months before his death. Before the Akramanese took him away.’

Kyungsoo studies Yoongi carefully, a strange expression on his face, lips slightly parted. Then he looks at Jungkook who looks away almost immediately, nervously fidgeting.

‘And you found Jungkook in Ynqaba, but he’s not one of the GI?’ Kyungsoo asks.

‘No,’ Sk’jin replies a little tensely. ‘In fact, him being here, how and where we found him, in relation to the Omhlophe is why I wanted to really speak to you. To all of you.’

Zitao nods immediately at that, standing straighter as he begins speaking in a clear voice, ‘I want to help you understand who and what those Beings are, and how they exist, considering the Akramanese are no longer existent, what are the Beings you’ve reported?’

‘I also understand that there is more to this than you can tell us,’ Kai states plainly. ‘And we respect that.’

‘Will you join us?’ Jimin asks, the seriously regality in his tone of voice takes everyone by surprise. ‘We would benefit in a- a union of our knowledge, technology, and identical- uh, ambition, to come to the truth. Will you join us?’
Kai is the one who speaks up after Kyungsoo and Zitao exchange glances.

‘We can’t.’ he says simply. ‘What happened 4 sols ago lead to-…lead to many things. It resulted in more than any of us ever wanted to experience.’

‘Does K’mara have something to do with this,’ Hoseok asks.

Kai nods, ‘We made an agreement- no one from any of the organizations would come to us or seek us, and we in turn would leave everything behind.’

Hoseok nods.

‘What are you looking for? Information? Data? Footage?’ Kai asks in turn. ‘It would be impossible to access the deep-state database.’

Namjoon agrees with a nod before stating, ‘I’m meeting with someone I used to know from when I used to work as an Information Analyst. I’ve asked them to look into any information behind the Omhlophe, based on the locations of their known whereabouts and captured imagery. I’ve also sent inquiries regarding the planet of Ynqaba and possible foul-play from the Yishengs and the Venture Unit.’

There’s no surprise at his announcement from the three, instead they nod as he speaks.

‘I sent them a message. I’m waiting for their response.’

‘I can look into that as well, I can contact my former Information Analyst,’ Kai nods. ‘Broaden the search.’

‘Are they safe?’ Hoseok asks at once.

‘Absolutely. They were the ones who hid me.’

Hoseok trusts in that immediately.

‘We cannot help you or join you in this- but what information or data we can access or send to you, we will,’ Kai concludes.

‘You mentioned before that you were headed to Bhumi,’ Zitao comments, glancing all over the room.

Hoseok sees the way Kyungsoo’s expression shifts slightly at that.

‘We are,’ Namjoon replies, ‘As stated by our mission.’

‘There’s nothing there anymore,’ Zitao frowns. ‘It’s nothing more than an abandoned planet- some pirates go there I think but it’s too far out for any purpose.

‘We are aware,’ Namjoon replies, glancing at Jimin quickly before adding, ‘But our mission-‘

‘I get it,’ Zitao nods before regarding the Kutsoglerin carefully and then over to Jimin. ‘Can’t stray from the mission right?’

Sk’jin snorts.

‘So you found Jungkook in Ynqaba? How?’ Kyungsoo asks.
‘We did,’ Hoseok replies. ‘He was a prisoner held by the locals.’

‘Were there others?’

‘None that we saw no,’ Hoseok replies.

‘What…what do you plan on doing?’ Kyungsoo asks quietly.

‘What do you mean?’ Sk’jin asks, a little defensively. Zitao raises his hand, drawing attention to himself as he locks Sk’jin with a frank expression.

‘I don’t know where you’re headed right now, or what your purpose is,’ Zitao tells them simply, ‘But I know that this is no place for someone so young- or for someone so strangely linked to this.’

They all glance at Jungkook who is sitting higher up on the stairs, a bit too far to properly hear them though Hoseok wouldn’t put it past the Vicitra to overhear their every word.

‘We can take him, and keep him in a safe place. Allow him to grow in a place where he would be safe, no one would question his place.’ Kyungsoo states before saying in a serious tone, ‘This is…very closely linked to events that should have never taken place. And lives were lost- innocent lives, Beings who should have continued living in this Time were taken from us. I understand you want to protect him. But you know that he will be safer away from all of this.’

Hoseok agrees.

Jungkook would be safer away from this ship.

Safer, cared for by Beings who were not all damaged or twisted or just so disassociated with all of Life. Jungkook deserved a chance- after all he went through, after the life he’s lead, Jungkook deserved the life none of them ever got to live.

‘We can’t make these decisions for him,’ Sk’jin says tersely. ‘It’s up to Jungkook to decide what he wants to do. Where he wants to go.’

‘Could you give us some time to explain?’ Namjoon asks.

‘Of course,’ Zitao nods. ‘We’ll uh-‘ he looks at the other two who give him identical looks of don’t look at me I don’t know before he says, ‘-uh look at…your Medical Bay.’

He fidgets awkwardly for a moment before he steps inside the Bay, followed by both Kai and Kyungsoo- the former loudly stating how wonderful the Bay was.

Hoseok catches amused looks from Namjoon and Jimin. Sk’jin on the other hand has a blank expression on his face, head bowed a moment before he walks over to where Jungkook was sitting by the stairs. They all follow after the Khol’isa and settle around in a loose semi-circle. Jungkook shuffles downwards, expression expectant and a little confused.

‘Hey Kookie,’ Sk’jin smiles, crouching next to Jungkook. ‘I want to be honest with you.’

Jungkook looks at all of them, confusion even more evident on his face.

‘We…we are not good Beings. We are not…we are not doing good things,’ Sk’jin begins bluntly. ‘We’re dangerous- what we’re doing is dangerous- even more so for you, for Yoongi, and for Jimin. We are running from a danger we don’t understand, towards a destination we do not understand or see. Most of us…most of us don’t trust each other.’
There’s a short laugh from the Khol’isa before he continues. ‘But you- you’re not like us. You were born into a loving family, a caring home. You were pulled out of that, and your life was changed. But…but that doesn’t mean you can’t hope to find something like that again- or to have a safe and healthy life, away from danger, away from pain, from hunger. And if you go with my friend Tao, he can help you find that.’

Hoseok, to his horror finds his throat tight, eyes almost burning as though threatening to spill tears. Jimin is in obvious pain, lips pressed down tight to the point of appearing bloodless. Yoongi stands behind him, watching silently, his expression closed-off. Oddly enough, Taeh’yung is also channeling the same expression, but instead he’s watching Sk’jin rather than Jungkook.

‘And we don’t want to tell you what to do but I think you-‘

‘Stay here,’ Jungkook manages to get out, interrupting Sk’jin, ‘I want to stay here.’

Sk’jin looks upset, almost angry. But Taeh’yung is there, shuffling around in front of him.

‘Kookie,’ he smiles. ‘Are you sure?’

Jungkook looks around at them before nodding once.

‘I’m sure.’

Unsure why, but Hoseok feels relieved.

Sk’jin steps back, still looking angry- but more than anything, he looks distraught.

Zitao pokes his head out, seeing as how they’re all moving back into the Lobby.

‘He said he wants to stay,’ Sk’jin reports tersely.

‘All right.’ Zitao claps his hands together, ‘We’ll get going I guess.’

‘When do you expect a response from your friend?’ Kai asks as he emerges with Kyungsoo, their hands linked.

Hoseok notices how Jimin stares at their hands, eyes trailing over the identical visible patterns over their wrists.

‘In 3 days time.’ Namjoon replies.

‘I’ll contact you then. How long are you staying here?’

‘Until we get the information,’ Namjoon replies before Sk’jin snorts again and says, ‘Why ask when you know?’

‘Sk’jin!’ Zitao smiles in a way that’s more scary than welcoming. ‘Can I talk to you for a bit?’

Sk’jin nods and without another word the two leave the Lobby and head for the Lobby upstairs.

Kai and Kyungsoo stand there, clearly feeling a little awkward before they both smile. It’s much more genuine and warmer than before.

‘Good luck,’ Kyungsoo tells them and then looking at Yoongi adds, ‘Be careful.’

The two disappear in the blink of an eye and Jimin and Jungkook both jump a little, still not used to
‘Is this safe?’ Hoseok asks, unable to get rid of the discomfort building under his skin.

‘Nothing really is,’ Namjoon sighs dramatically.

Hoseok wants to open a window and scream out of it again.

Namjoon studies the doorway leading into the Hangar for a moment before sighing and then saying, ‘Our supplies are all here right? Nothing missing?’

‘All here I think,’ Hoseok raises an inquiring look over at Jimin and Jungkook who both nod at once.

‘Okay- guess we should distribute the stuff.’

‘Pa! I got you a great hair colour! You ’ll love it!’ Taeh’yung declares at once, latching onto Namjoon’s good arm. ‘Come! I’ll show you!’

Namjoon allows himself to be dragged away, followed shortly by Jungkook who gnaws at his lower lip, sharp strong teeth on display as he asks tentatively, ‘Did…is Sk’jin angry at me?’

‘No,’ Hoseok says firmly before reaching over to gently ruffle the Vicitra’s hair. ‘He’s just got a lot on his mind.’

‘Yoongi come look at your hair colour!’ Taeh’yung calls, poking his head from the doorway.

Yoongi and Jungkook head towards the Hangar, the latter instantly competing with the Human in speed and he darts past quickly.

‘What do you think?’ Jimin asks him quietly, not moving from where he stood.

‘About what?’ Hoseok asks tiredly.

Jimin blinks a moment before saying, ‘About Jungkook staying. I said I would be responsible. That I- I would- will, takin-take care of him. But- I know this is dangerous.’

‘There’s not a lot of things we can do with our situation,’ Hoseok shrugs. ‘But we’ve made our choices- and so has Jungkook. And yeah- I guess it isn’t fair because I don’t think he really understands. But the option for him to leave is always open. Just like all of us. We can all leave any time we want.’

Jimin presses his lips together in a thin line, expression unreadable. Then after a moment or two, he nods.

‘Where is Kai from?’ Jimin asks, uncrossing his arms, his posture loosening up.

‘A planet called Dakaṣayai.’ Hoseok replies with a smile. ‘Did you notice something?’

‘Their souls were beautiful,’ Jimin smiles. ‘Bright- soft, almost-….no, it was the same. I am confused.’

‘You were confused. But I think you could sense it right? You said so yourself.’

Jimin nods, ‘A star of two,’ he repeats himself, ‘It’s what I se-saw. I don’t know how to describe.’
Hoseok smiles before he says, ‘Did you see the Human’s arms? He had those lines- they’re not tattoos- they’re a mirror-image of the lines on Kai’s skin.’

‘What does it mean?’ Jimin asks.

‘The Dakaṣayaii believe that all souls are born in stars- and that with every star born, 2 souls are born. Kai and Kyungsoo are souls born from the same star, soul-mates if you will.’ Hoseok explains as he makes his way to the Lobby table, switching off the projector that was still displaying the unsettling image of the Omhlophe. ‘I’m not sure how true it is- but that’s what the Dakaṣayaii believe and stand by.’

‘And will they always meet? The star-souls?’ Jimin asks quietly.

‘I don’t know,’ Hoseok replies honestly. ‘But I know that they also believe that when they die, the star they’re born from goes into supernova.’

It’s quiet for a while and when Hoseok looks up, is stunned to find tears silently rolling down Jimin’s cheeks.

‘Hey- oh, Spaces, sorry I didn’t mean to upset you,’ Hoseok says at once.

Jimin just shakes his head before glancing up at the stairs and quickly dabbing at his cheeks and says, ‘Thank you for telling me,’ and hurries towards the Hangar.

Sk’jin and Zitao reappear, both have very neutral expressions on their faces but Hoseok knows it’s all a front.

‘I’ll be going,’ Zitao announces just as Kai reappears behind him, making Sk’jin jump in surprise again.

The Dakaṣayaii grins sheepishly.

‘Keep in touch,’ Zitao smiles though it sounds more like a warning.

Sk’jin rolls his eyes in response, not even looking back for a reaction. Before Zitao can angrily retort Kai grabs his shoulder and they disappear.

‘It’s weird isn’t it?’ Sk’jin says, ‘I feel so open and weirdly exposed- the idea that Beings like Kai exist- the whole concept is really strange-‘

‘What did Zitao mean by that?’ Hoseok cuts across before Sk’jin can start a whole tirade on the Dakaṣayaii.

‘By what?’ Sk’jin asks tiredly. ‘By saying that thing about me dying? We’re all dying Hobi. We’re all headed there from the moment we’re born.’

‘But you can’t,’ Hoseok frowns. ‘The Khol’isa-‘

‘-bunch of crap,’ Sk’jin sighs before frowning a little and saying, ‘You know very well that I’m not-…I’m not well. I’m Khol’isa yeah, but not like what I used to be. I think it’s a little obvious with all of this gone.’

He gestures to his temples and Hoseok remembers the image of Sk’jin from his pirating days, of the beautiful and fragile looking horns adorning his head.

‘Sk’jin-‘
‘Look if it’s serious or something terrible I would have mentioned it okay?’ Sk’jin snaps before sighing and adding, ‘Okay I wouldn’t have. But it’s not serious. I’m like…I’m like all of you now okay? My body just doesn’t know how to handle it.’

Hoseok knows he can’t push it. Not now.

‘Does this have to do with what happened in the-‘

‘Hoseok,’ Sk’jin voice is hard and terse. ‘Leave it.’

‘Hobi! Come see Pa’s hair colour! I managed to put it on!’ Taeh’yung announces loudly before appearing at the doorway. ‘And you too Jinnie! Let’s change hair colours!’

The smile on Sk’jin’s face is incredibly believable as he responds enthusiastically to Taeh’yung’s hair-changing proposal. They walk into the gateway, their laughter and Sk’jin’s high-pitched squeaky laughter followed by Namjoon’s grumpy sounding response echoes out.

Hoseok sighs long and slow, gearing up to enter the Bay.

It’s a random thing- and Hoseok doesn’t know why he stops. But he does.

Picking up Sk’jin’s screen the Khol’isa had placed over on the Lobby couches, he moves quickly, easily memorizing the coordinates and channel frequency and saving it to his own. Yoongi had also used it, communicating with whoever had been on the other end of the line.

‘Hobi?’ Taeh’yung pokes his head in.

‘I’m coming buggy,’ Hoseok smiles, casually sliding the screen over to the table and propping up some of the misplaced pillows and cushions.

‘Does Namjoon like his new hair colour?’

Taeh’yung grins fiendishly at him.

‘He will.’

Namjoon seems resigned to his new purple hair, not having enough arms to even attempt to fight the hair application as Taeh’yung once again displays his uncanny strength. Sk’jin sits on top of the water-cells, fixing his own hair and staining it a warm shade of brown with careful skill.

Jimin is chuckling in a low voice as he carefully applies the applicator on Yoongi’s faded blue hair. Yoongi’s eyes are just closed and Hoseok wonders if he’s fallen asleep. Jungkook watches with fascination, eyes wide as though disbelieving that some paste could completely transform hair colour in a matter of seconds.

‘Wash!’ Jimin urges Yoongi, pushing him up and towards the collapsible sink to the side. Jungkook follows, eyes narrowed as he watches as though hoping to find some form of trickery in this hair-colouring trick.

But when Yoongi emerges with wet dark hair, expression blank, Jungkook’s jaw drops.

He touches the wet strands, then looks at his fingers. Head tilting back and forth sideways before Sk’jin calls him over, an indulgent smile on the Khol’isa’s face.

‘I’m gonna wash my hair out too, wanna watch?’
Jungkook all but flies to the Khol’isa.

Jimin dries Yoongi’s hair for him with a random stretch of cloth Hoseok is pretty sure was meant to be used in maintenance but it looked clean so he’s not going to judge. Tach’yung oohs at Yoongi, clapping his hands as he regards the Human with his now brown hair with obvious approval.

Namjoon gives him a tired look before he gets to his feet. He glances over at Sk’jin and Jungkook, worry evident in his gaze. But he looks away again before clearing his throat and makes an announcement.

‘Right- let’s clear everything away and start on-‘

Kai appears out of nowhere, making Jungkook leap backwards, Yoongi literally pushing Jimin down and under a table, and Sk’jin nearly jumps out of his skin. Before anyone can even remotely speak, the Dakaṣayaii spots Namjoon and asks: ‘You know Em?’

‘Uh-‘

There’s an awkward silence broken only by Jimin’s mumbling complaints as he gets out from under the table.

‘Yeah- wait how do you know Em-‘

‘Well. I think this just makes everything so much easier,’ Kai smiles and again its alarmingly contradicting with how he had appeared just up until a second ago. ‘I can take you to Em- she’s asked me to bring you when she realized that we both asked her for the same information! Oh- nice hair colour!’

‘Y-your Analyst was Em?’ Namjoon asks incredulously before pausing and adding, ‘Well, that makes sense.’

‘There’s also someone else who wants to meet you,’ Kai adds, ‘To talk about Bhumi.’

Jimin’s head snap towards them at this, eyes narrowing.

‘Who is it?’ he asks.

Kai looks surprised that Jimin would ask the question.

‘Someone who is interested in the mission- he would like to address the Captain of the mission personally. He has some knowledge regarding the planet.’ Kai replies evasively.

Jimin eyes him, eyes gleaming strangely and Hoseok can see how Kai stiffens at this, clearly uncomfortable with the way Jimin is looking at him.

‘I want to come,’ Jimin states plainly.

Yoongi and Jungkook both stare at Jimin in shock.

‘Um-‘ Kai begins.

‘No. If your friend is interested in discussing Bhumi, then he will want to meet with Jimin,’ Namjoon says at once, a serious look on his face as he exchanges looks with Jimin who nods in agreement.
Kai pauses, then he nods, as though he too received some form of approval.

‘Okay- let’s go,’ he raises his hand towards Namjoon.

‘Right now?’ Sk’jin demands. ‘But-‘

‘No this is good,’ Hoseok says quickly. ‘We can leave sooner than later this way.’

‘Agreed,’ Namjoon says before adding, ‘Hoseok you’re in charge now. We’ll be back soon hopefully.’

Sk’jin looks like he’s ready to argue but Jungkook stuns all of them by reaching forward to pull at Namjoon’s empty sleeve.

‘Come back?’ he whispers nervously. ‘Will you come back?’

‘Yeah- yeah I will,’ Namjoon replies, using his good hand to ruffle Jungkook’s hair, the latter only flinches slightly but he’s smiling slowly at that. Then he walks over to Kai and takes his hand.

Kai and Namjoon vanish into thin air.

It’s something Hoseok doesn’t think he could get used to.

Jimin adjusts his beanie over his head, as though preparing for some trek. He looks serious and determined, his expression almost stately as he prepares himself. This was a Jimin who governed and watched over his people.

It was easy forgetting that, when Hoseok is used to seeing Jimin in normal garb, laughing at Taeh’yung’s and Sk’jin’s banter, eating alongside a silent Yoongi and joining in conversations easily in the Kitchens.

Jungkook starts to look confused, glancing around at all of them, clearly reading the atmosphere and feeling strange himself.

Taeh’yung is quick to distract Jungkook, displaying once again, a surprising level of awareness and forethought as he drags the young Vicitra upwards claiming hunger and a promise of good food! Hoseok suppresses an involuntary shudder at what constituted as good food for the Vicitra.

Sk’jin heaves out a heavy sigh before heading out of the Bay, still holding his hair-dye in his hands. Hoseok sits back down to attach the new water-cells before he realizes he’s an unwilling and ignored audience member of one.

‘Jimin.’ Yoongi’s eyes are wide, pupils darting about, clearly very stunned and unable to really react to any of this properly.

‘I’ll come back,’ Jimin says as he places the fabric around Yoongi’s neck to catch stray drops of water.

‘Don’t leave-‘ Yoongi’s hand darts out, gently holding onto Jimin’s hand. ‘I- I can’t protect you-‘

‘I need to find out,’ Jimin tells him gently, hand twisting in Yoongi’s hold just as Kai reappears. ‘We’ll come back.’

Yoongi’s hand tightens briefly before he lets go mechanically. He takes a step back, his movement rigid, as though controlling himself.
Jimin looks up and smiles at Hoseok before quickly leaning in to kiss Yoongi on his cheek, and then he’s gone.

Yoongi’s reaction is violently physical, jumping in shock and for a moment Hoseok wonders if he’s going into some form of panic attack.

But just as violently as that had started, Yoongi stills completely.

Hoseok waits a full minute before he attempts to converse with the Human.

‘Yoongi do you want to join Jungkook and Taeh’yung as they emotionally eat through the new food supplies? It might make you feel better,’ Hoseok offers.

Yoongi doesn’t look at Hoseok but there’s a tiny shrug of his shoulders, his eyebrows raising and he exhales slowly. Almost as though saying well, it’s not like there’s anything I can do is there.

And it’s the most alive action Yoongi has ever taken.

‘Do we have ice-cream.’ He asks.

‘Yeah we do,’ Hoseok grins and stands up. The water-cells could wait. ‘Then if you want, we can open a window and scream out of it.’
UNIVERSITY STARTS FROM TOMORROW I'M NOT READY AND THIS SEMESTER I HAVE MATH AND THESIS TOGETHER

Good news is that my sister’s surgery was successful!

And not so good news is I don’t know when I can update the next chapter. It will most definitely be this month though don’t worry. I just don’t want to say a date and not deliver, but I will update this month!!!
i’m sorry if this chapter is a bit slow and dialogue heavy, but it’s to start setting up for the upcoming chapters!!
It’s been a month since university started for me, and after scoping out my schedule, my classes, caring for my sister, and figuring out the feel of my thesis, I have realized that I won’t have the time or ability to update ADEGU for a few months

T_T

ADEGU is a complex story and the ideas I have for it need careful planning and writing and with this semester, I don’t think I’ll be able to deliver what I want to write, and what you deserve to read too! I have this entire story plotted out, however, there are finer details that are important and greatly necessary to the characters and their development and their relationships.

I was battling this decision, and I tried so hard the past few weeks but I wasn’t able to find any time to clearly and calmly think through the complex writing I have for ADEGU.

So I am very VERY sorry T_T

I feel terrible, this is the first time since I’ve ever started writing that I’ve had to state that I would be going on a hiatus for a few months.

As an apology of sorts, I’ve finally completed the moodboards I’ve been working on since early this year for the boys in ADEGU, now that Jungkook is here, I can add him to it as well!

So please check it out here!!

Also, if anyone is interested to know, that even though I won’t update ADEGU for a while, I have 2-3 one-shots for Namjin, Yoonmin, and another one partially finished which I will put up in the next few weeks! But after that, I will be pretty MIA from the writing world, seeing also as my other on-going fic is in the process of ending

T_T

Again, I’m so sorry to have to go on hiatus, writing was and will always be my escape from UNIVERSITY WORK AND PROJECTS OH GOD, but now I don’t have the time T_T I know that this fic doesn’t have a lot of readers but each and every one of you and your comments made my day and made writing such a joy!! Your comments inspired me to be better and because I want to give all of you the full potential of what ADEGU is supposed to be, I beg for your patience until I finally have the time to do it justice and make all of you proud!! I want you all to read this to completion!!! So I will NEVER abandon this fic!!

Please feel free to message me about anything!! Come scream at me on tumblr or twitter!

When I come back to write with a vengeance I hope to still see comments from all of you ^_^
It’s…strange.

Not because it felt foreign, or because it felt uncomfortable.

It felt strange because for that single moment, for that fraction of a moment- time seemed to still and open, a solid and corporeal existence of reality itself, woven and formed from starlight and music, had appeared.

And for that fraction of a moment, Jimin felt as though he could look into all of Time.

Time has always been strange. There was a measurement yes, but it was always based off of a conduit of light that shone upon a location of existence, creating night and day. Time itself was immeasurable, its existence a strange thought that could not be sensed- yet could be seen in the strangest of ways.

Time wrapped itself around everyone- Time layered over skin, over hair, over molecules, over atoms- Time layered itself over Life and Death and Darkness.

And to his surprise, Time was younger and smaller than Jimin had expected.

Younger, smaller…and inexpressibly alive.

But that moment is gone, and Jimin is no longer inside the Lobby in the Užkulisai, but instead he finds himself inside a wide and strangely squat dark room. It’s excessively large, and what at first appeared to be pillars were thick constructs of wires connecting ceiling to floor, spreading out like roots into the floors. The room is dark but tiny blinking lights guide Jimin’s eyes and sense of perception in this dimness. The only clear bright area is at the very center where large panels of glowing screens hang, forming a strange chandelier like construct, and in the very center stood a Being.

He was dressed entirely in white, his hair dark, and his feet bare above the coils of wires.

He looks away from the screens and through the holographic projection, meets Jimin’s gaze.

‘Navvula! Let me out! Please! Don’t do this!’

It hurts.
‘We will not be apart from our home – if she dies then we will die with her.’

It’s too much- there’s too much noise- a wild pulse, hands slamming against an encasement- and the overwhelming song of anguish.

‘But this is my home too! You’re family!’

‘Thank you.’

His eyes suddenly seem ringed with silver, light of thousands of lifetimes shining bright and Jimin cannot breathe- he can only wait-

‘I hope you find your home.’

‘This is JD,’ Kai says and with a jolt, Jimin only just realizes that Namjoon was standing there too.

‘Are you all right?’ Namjoon asks worriedly.

He can breathe just fine- the sounds are gone- the anguish, the sorrow, the pain- it’s gone.

‘I- yes,’ Jimin replies, surprised to find himself sounding so normal despite what he just felt. He looks away from the tall Kutsoglerin to look ahead again to find the Being still standing there, unmoving.

‘Is he the one who wanted to speak to us?’ Namjoon inquires.

‘He is,’ Kai nods before gesturing and walking ahead before he explains. ‘Em is at the other port, JD wanted privacy.’

Namjoon nods to that, glancing about the place before saying, ‘It’s been a while since I’ve been here.’

‘Oh! How long?’ Kai asks, interested.

‘Over a decade?’ Namjoon ruminates, ‘They all look the same, so I’m gonna guess not this floor.’

Jimin doesn’t pay much attention to their small talk. He’s unable to look away, unable to un-see who- what he was looking upon.

Jimin’s sight has always been a combination of what he can physically see, and what his Soul can see. What exists in the eclipsed light of two separate existences intersecting.

Time is layered over everything. And sometimes, Jimin can see this- a layered intersection between two existences eclipsing.

And over JD, Time erupted in chaotic warped waves- a complex and impossibly layered thickness that seemed to cling to him, wanting to pull him down.

And this isn’t the first time Jimin has seen this.

The Being, JD, waits for them, hands crossed behind his back. Upon closer inspection, Jimin notices that his shirt isn’t pure white, but a soft light grey in colour instead. He has no clear expression on his face but he didn’t appear aggressive or conniving. There is no hostility, no suspicion- there is only waiting.

‘How long?’
JD doesn’t respond immediately before he replies in a language he had feared he would never hear again.

‘Too long.’

It’s strange.

JD is old- a heavy weight of age, time, and a clear and profound pain seemed to blanket him. His Soul however-

‘I see snow,’ Jimin replies back in the heavy tongue of the Megibīyan. ‘Soft snow- your…your Soul is filled with snow.’

JD blinks a few times before his expression softens, the slightest hint of a smile on his face. Jimin passes through the holographic projections and stands before the strange Being.

‘The darkness of Nothing stained me- followed and surrounded me,’ he says simply, ‘But I found Light.’

He doesn’t explain any further, but Jimin can definitely feel it clearer now.

‘It’s beautiful.’

‘He is,’ JD agrees before asking, ‘Who are you?’

‘I am the Yemenifesi Ch’inik’eti, the Fate of Menigišiti,’ Jimin replies, ‘By birth, my name is Jimin. You have information about Megibīya?’

‘I know it as Bhumi,’ he replies and adds in a tone that hints at something gentle, ‘We were waiting.’

It’s strange; because Jimin is suddenly filled with dread, filled with pain, and with anguish. This Being had been there. He had been in Megibīya. Here was another living Being, with intact memory and awareness, with full knowledge and memories of a reality that was shrouded in mystery and obvious conspiracy.

‘Waiting for what?’ Jimin manages to whisper.

‘I was waiting for rescue- they were waiting for their Home. But it would seem that I found their Home- after all this time.’ JD answers.

Jimin doesn’t realize that he’s fallen to his knees.

‘How- how long ago?’ Jimin’s entire body shakes. He’s vaguely aware of Namjoon saying something but he doesn’t step in. And Jimin is grateful for that.

‘I can show you,’ JD says, kneeling down in front of him.

‘How?’

‘Would you like to Sleep?’ JD asks him, extending a hand.

Dread fills him again, apprehension and fear.

It’s strange.
Because JD’s Soul was filled with snow, just enough to cover him anew. But past that, beyond the secure and gentle shield of snow lay a darkness as pitch black as space, and as wounded as the white existence that had entrapped Jimin.

Jimin is afraid- but he needs to know.

Raising his hand and placing it in JD’s, Jimin takes a quiet and careful breath before nodding.

‘Show me.’

Jimin is once again momentarily displaced.

Gone is the dark and strangely squat room. Gone are the coils and coils of wires, the holographic screens. Namjoon and Kai aren’t there either- it’s only Jimin, and JD.

The hallway they’re in is lit with a soft white light that filters down from trees to high above for Jimin to see, the walls on either side disappearing into a misty void far above. There are piles of soft snow around the ashy wooden floors, the same as what Jimin could sense but now can see for sure. He fights the urge to kneel and touch it.

There are doors on both sides of the hall that seems to go on quite endlessly. They’re all identical- a grey grained wood, with silver handles make up the closed doors. Identical, but Jimin knows- can sense they’re not the same.

‘Where are we?’ Jimin asks, looking at JD to address him.

In this clear light, he can study this strange Being clearer.

He looks…quite ordinary.

There is nothing that stands out remarkably, nothing to give way to the fact that he exuded an extraordinary amount of sheer presence – one attained through unimaginable pain- but also, through indescribable love. JD’s lack of immediate expression and character is similar to Yoongi’s- an almost blank mask covers their faces.

But the clear difference comes from the fact that JD was sure.

Jemin can sense pain, anguish, hurt, confusion- but he can also sense love, adoration, loyalty, and a warmth that felt like a hearth. And this created that surety in JD’s eyes.

‘My memories,’ JD replies. ‘Rather than tell you what happened, I can show you, without fear of being overheard.’

‘How many know?’

‘Only those who matter.’

‘Then why are you showing me?’

JD doesn’t answer, instead just pauses for a while before he asks quietly, ‘Who are you?’
He’s asking him for more than just his identity. There’s more to the question.

There was obviously more to JD, more to who he was, where he came from, and what he knew. The same way Jimin was just simply more.

‘I don’t know how I’m here,’ Jimin begins quietly, his voice reverbs down the hallway quietly, almost endlessly. ‘I know I died- or I think I did- and…-and everyone died too. There are so many things I don’t understand- how Megibīya is involved, what the Red Evil were truly doing there. How they were in design with the GLA- everything is unknown to me I-’

The mounting frustration and anxiety he had been facing ever since waking up finally seemed to break loose out of him. He had done well in containing it; the lack of information, the vagueness of everything, the fear, the stress- as someone who used to be the Fate and, in essence, the guide of a whole System of living planets and their unique species and races and individuals, Jimin found his current situation straining and aggravating.

But he’s been trained and taught and tutored- not to mention vastly experienced in all matters involving crucial infrastructures ranging from within governing systems, to that of combat training groups- and Jimin knew that the best tactic, as an observer and as someone who didn’t want to appear as a threat but only as a neutral party, was to never ask questions.

Questions lead to suspicion, it lead to discomfort. Because questions either birthed truths, but it mainly spawned lies upon lies. So Jimin learnt how to sense, to feel, to read the answers presented to him, only without words.

So he had let the crew within the Užkulisai be as they were, simply watching them in their state without pushing question or agenda. And it frustrated him beyond words- especially before he could understand directly what they meant. And now with his broadened range of understanding, Jimin was able to even more clearly realize just how much of a mess everything was.

‘I’m afraid,’ Jimin confesses. ‘Afraid of finding out why. Afraid of how- I read the reports, I listened to the trials and meetings and-…the Red Evil was using my technology- they were using the same technology I have leant to my ship. And…-’

‘And Bhumi didn’t possess this technology?’ JD inquires.

Jemin shakes his head.

‘It means they were able to enter my System, and steal our technology. Or it was given to them.’

JD doesn’t move, doesn’t say anything.

‘Bhumī, or as I knew it, were aware of the Universe beyond their planet- but from the way you speak, it is as though they were supposed to be hidden.’

Jemin pauses at this, wondering how good of an idea it was to speak to someone he didn’t know about something so secretive that he hasn’t even told the Beings responsible for taking him back. That he hasn’t even told Yoongi.

‘My System is a unique one,’ Jimin finds himself saying, ‘We are hidden from view- hidden from physical sight, as well as scans and signals- we are invisible- and we have existed like this for as long as memory and history goes back.’

JD nods once to his statement, a little delayed. It reminds Jimin painfully of Yoongi and his lack of social etiquette and understanding.
‘We were aware of course, that by completely hiding ourselves, we were erasing a large expanse of space- and without an explanation, a vast expanse of space that has no history of black-holes would be suspicious and would garner attempts at observation or study,’ Jimin continues. ‘We were lucky to an extent at first- we…have a complex system- and that made it difficult for the GLA to find us during the earliest phases.’

JD nods to that again.

‘As our technology expanded, so did theirs. Which is why we made it appear as though the our sun was a particularly violent pulsar- spewing radioactive light and waves that contained but terrifying levels,’ Jimin explains briefly. ‘It would be reason enough to explain any difficulty in being able to observe our system or attempt to set up a channel. It would also be enough to put away any Being from attempting to enter the area.’ He pauses for a moment, looking down the hallway though not really seeing anything. ‘We knew that we still needed a way to observe our surroundings- we needed to be careful. We also needed to study what lay beyond. Isolation, regardless of its intention, will never allow for growth.’

At that JD seems to almost smile, nodding once in agreement again.

‘So we allowed Megibīya to extend past our barriers- make it appear to be a primitive planet. There is not a lot of room for growth in Megibīya- the only areas that can be inhibited that aren’t part of the ocean is small,’ Jimin looks down at his feet, snow sparkles at him faintly. ‘It was only meant as a gateway- a way to observe, a watch-tower.’

‘The GLA never took her in,’ JD states.

Jimin nods, ‘She was not important enough…but...we were.’

JD’s expression changes a little, a shadow crossing his face.

‘The Yisheng sensed us beyond the radioactive signals spewing from our system- they saw…they saw past us.’

‘How?’

‘By chance,’ Jimin says carefully. ‘We had another planet, like Megibīya, that existed just a little past the borders of our protection. She was called Akramana.’

The light in JD’s eyes flicker.

‘It was by chance…but also a flaw,’ Jimin confesses. ‘Our system of protection sometimes waned, sometimes created gaps- and Akramana was the planet that was second furthest in our system. We were always careful- we could somehow time when these gaps would appear, we would make sure to have them sealed, to reinforce these areas. This is how the Yisheng found us- but they never made it past Akramana- and they could only see us there- when we allowed. It’s how we signed the treaty.’

JD can obviously tell that there are parts of this story that Jimin isn’t telling him completely. But he doesn’t push.

‘Do you trust it?’ JD asks instead. It’s not condescending or filled with scoff.

‘The treaty or the GLA?’

‘The treaty, the GLA, your people.’
Jimin shudders.

‘Of course,’ he replies instantly. ‘We- we have our way. We are aware of lies, we sense them-’

‘You have thought about it,’ JD cuts in quietly. ‘You realized that there was a possibility.’

Jimin cannot answer.

Of course he thought about it.

It was one of the first things that entered his mind.

The GLA were tricky of course. They had other plans, other tricks, attempts to break the Treaty, or to create a better one where they could profit off of them. But as far as Jimin knew, they had all been united in the belief that this Treaty was the best deal for them. That what they possessed in their system was far too risky to risk.

A small shuffling sound momentarily shakes Jimin out of his stupor.

For the first time, Jimin sees an actual smile on JD’s lips. He’s looking down the hallway and Jimin follows his line of sight.

He immediately falls to his knees, snow drifting off around him, a wretched gasp escaping him.

She’s no more than 11 sols.

‘Anda,’ JD greets the young Megibīyan.

Jimin’s body shakes, his breaths shallow.

She looks at him curiously, her yellow eyes large and innocent. She’s wearing a tunic like smock, a little dirty around the hem, the sleeves rolled up to her elbows. It reminds Jimin of the nightgown he had when he was younger.

*My daughter, my child, my family-*

‘Can you find the door?’ JD asks.

She nods shyly, smiling at the two of them before turning on her heel and running off.

‘W-who is she?’ Jimin manages to ask, attempting to calm himself.

‘Her name is Andamaina,’ JD replies taking a step forward and stooping down just a little to hold his hand out to Jimin. ‘She is the adopted daughter of the Captain, and of Navvula.’

Jimin knows this name- has heard it-

‘Navvula! Let me out! Please! Don’t do this!’

‘We will not be apart from our home – if she dies then we will die with her.’

‘They died,’ Jimin whispers quietly.

‘But this is my home too! You’re family!’

‘Thank you.’
‘I hope you find your home.’

They all died.

JD doesn’t respond, hand still extended down. Jimin bows his head, lowering himself until his head touches the snow on the ground.

He cannot beg for forgiveness. He cannot expect to be forgiven.

The only thing he could do now was to know.

Small hands pat his head and Jimin’s head shoots up at once. Andamaina stands before him, as real as JD, just as alive-

His hand meets thin air instead of the hands before him.

‘Her name means egg,’ Jimin says quietly instead, drinking in the sight of the young Megibīyan.

*Her name means daughter, child, family-*

‘It was- it was a common name, one of endearment, of love, care,’ Jimin continues.

*Her name means abandoned-*

‘Lead the way Anda,’ JD says gently.

The little girl takes a few skipping steps down the hall, turning around, clearly waiting for them to follow her. Jimin takes JD’s extended hand and pulls himself up to his feet. JD doesn’t move yet, but instead levels him with a careful look.

‘Where we are going is dark and remote,’ he states simply. ‘This will hurt.’

Jimin nods in understanding.

‘This is the pain I allowed to happen,’ he declares, ‘- it is only right if I bear it myself.’

Only pausing for a second more, JD leads the way.

Anda smiles brightly and runs ahead, her small feet creating echoes around the hallway.

‘Why is she here?’ Jimin asks after a while.

‘I couldn’t let go,’ is all JD says.

‘For how long?’

‘For too long.’

They walk in silence, following the pitter patter of bare feet before them. Pausing some ways ahead, Andamaina beams at them and opens a door, stepping inwards and disappearing.

‘JD...’ Jimin begins carefully, pausing before the door, feeling and smelling the rain that was falling behind it.

JD stops, waiting for Jimin to continue.

But Jimin remains mute- not sure what to say.
‘You have arrived,’ JD says quietly. ‘You have arrived and that is all they would have wanted.’

The door opens completely and Jimin feels the lightning before he sees it, before he hears it.

A mighty sky roars above him, thunder cracks the heavy clouds, lightning echoes in light, casting illumination just enough to show how impossibly thick the storm was above them.

Lightning strikes the sandy shore Jimin finds himself in, bordering a dark storming ocean to one side, and a tall forest to the other side.

Jimmn doesn’t recognize this shore—doesn’t recognize the skies, the planet.

‘Where are we?’

‘At the beginning,’ JD replies.

‘Of?’

As though answering Jimin’s question, there’s a burst of movement from the clearing in the trees and another version of JD steps out.

He—he looks alive. He looks strong, young, untouched by death, by Time, by lifetimes of pain unimaginable. He bellows with the wind, clearly delighted. Jimin finds himself smiling in response—the joy and excitement he exuded was infectious.

Momentarily, Jimin forgets that JD is there. The real JD. So when he crosses ahead of him, a figure in white so alike yet so painfully different from what was clearly his past self-Jimin jolts back to reality.

‘Is this your home?’

‘It was,’ JD replies looking around. ‘It is the planet of K’arishkhali, wrought from lightning and storms.’

As though in response to that statement, the sky thunders and a bolt of lightning hits the sandy beach. Jimin surmises that maybe the younger JD was here looking for fulgurite. There’s another thunderous clap but this time it’s not natural.

A familiar transporter breaks through the shockingly low clouds that broiled over the stormy ocean and crashes into the sandy shore, wet sand flying up in arcs. Jimin knows the make of this ship. Remembers the decisions made to purposefully design and equip Megibīya with outdated GLA machinery, combined with their own skill and resources. They needed the perfect cover for their gateway—not too conspicuous, yet not too old so as to fail in defending itself.

‘Hey! Is anyone hurt? Don’t worry! The coastal guard will be here!’

JD’s voice rips through the storm and Jimin finds himself looking at the scene closely. The transporter was what they called a scout-pod, travelling ahead of the mothership. They were incredibly strong and durable, and with this sort of storm, Jimin knows that they would have kept the transporter at very high security settings. He almost wants to tell JD it was futile to attempt to open the strong casing that protected the pod. Instead he watches as past-JD frantically searches over the ship for any source of entry.

Inside Jimin spots a few figures, seated firmly and securely—momentarily knocked out from the shock of the crash. This would also have been their first time leaving the protection of Menigişiti.
Jimin wonders if JD’s giving up as he runs away from the pod. But Jimin is mistaken because JD rushes towards a parked hover-transport and he’s extracting something from the storage unit. Rushing back into the stormy beach and crash-site, JD skids across the sand before he’s fumbling around the front window edges, clearly hoping to breach a gap between the reinforced glass and melded metal.

‘Move away from my ship!’ a voice hisses.

Both past-JD and Jimin whip around at the voice.

Jimin has to hold himself back from taking leaping steps to barrel into this strong figure. To hold him close and cradle him safe, to make sure that no more harm would befall his children.

To hold him away from what Jimin knew would be death and hopelessness.

‘Hey whoa ok, I was just checking to see if you guys were ok!’ JD replies stammering, his arms sticking up into the air as he sits up.

Standing in front of him with a bleeding head was a species of Being he couldn’t identify.

The Megibīyan were a tall and strong species, their biology shaped by the unique genesis of their planet. They appeared menacing, but Jimin knew them as some of the most gentlest Beings within the Menigišiti System. The planet had a small population, and the continuation of their species was a complex process. Yet despite all of this, they volunteered to be the gatekeepers, to watch over the gateway.

The Megibīya Wenedi had valiantly led them through their empty planet- hope dying before their very eyes. Jimin still carries them in his soul, in his heart.

‘What were you trying to do?’

‘Woah ok let’s not do something we will both regret!’ JD is shivering in the rain- fear, adrenaline, the cold. ‘I was just trying to extract the window pane so that I could help your crew – they don’t look so good right now.’

Jimin can already tell from the way he studies JD, that he believes him.

‘Hurry up.’

JD is skilled. Jimin is awed by the swiftness, adaptability, and precision with which he worked. By the time he’s done, the rest of the Megibīyan inside have woken up. Jimin watches with a sense of wonder as they regard JD with care, but also with a sense of respect. All 4 inside the pod step out into the rain.

They were beautiful.

Beautiful and lost and alone.

And Jimin can do nothing to rewrite this.

‘How did you do that?’

‘Do what?’ JD looks wary, understandably so.

‘Take my ship apart so quickly, this ship is not your planet’s make.’
It wasn’t supposed to be the make of any sort of known planet.

‘Uh well,’ Jongdae mumbles. ‘It’s um – I’m a Mechanical Engineering student?’

Jimin almost giggles at the amused expressions on the faces of his- of his…-

The startling reality of their future from this point hits Jimin hard.

When this had happened, had he already left for Megibiya? Had he already arrived at the gateway only to find it collapsing, the gatekeepers slaughtered, their death bleeding red into the sky?

‘But yeah, um, the coastal guard will be here to help you guys out mor-‘

‘What?’

‘The coastal guard-‘

‘How long will it take for them to get here?’

’10-10 more minutes?’

‘We should take him back- he should know what to do.’

‘He’s young- he’s too young. We will not take him from his home.’

‘We will not keep him. Only until it is over. Then we can return home- back to our Mother.’

Jimin hadn’t noticed how the rain had seeped down to his very soul, falling through him and drowning him in the ignorance he had been blinded with.

I abandoned you.

‘You will fix my ship.’

‘What?’

‘My ship. You’re going to fix it.’

‘Hurry!’

They tell JD the simplest of truths, the bare minimum of who they were. Jimin watches with similar confusion with the way JD not only integrates himself into the Megibiyan but somehow just seems to belong.

Language becomes a barrier for JD and the Megibiyan, but there are few who can communicate and translate.

The children love him at once- following him with confusion and excitement.

‘He looks like our Heart- like our Mother,’ they giggle amongst each other.

Jimin’s heart breaks beyond repair.

They share laughter, hot food, warm blankets, and the joy of childish games uniting any people together.

Jimin catches their names here and there. He carries their names deep in his mind. And each laugh,
each smile, each joke they make at each other, carves the syllables of their names deeper into his heart.

Navvula reminds Jimin of the Megibīya Wenedi Yyna. Both are fiercely loyal, devoted, strong. And like Yyna, Jimin could not hold her last breath within him.

‘Well guys, um, have a safe trip?’

They’re back on the beach. The mothership repaired and running better than ever.

‘If this is his home, why does he look homesick?’ Navvula asks no one in particular.

They leave, and Jimin is almost in shock. He knows they could see it. He knows that they could see how JD had left his heart back in the mothership. But they leave, and JD is alone on the stormy beach.

They stand together for a long moment, staring at the clouds, willing them to come back. But it’s late now, and Jimin knows that JD, for all the good he’s done, for all the heart he poured out for people he did not know, deserved to go back home and be safe.

Jimin hears its song before he sees it.

‘It’s a lore in K’arishkhali,’ JD suddenly says, appearing beside him. Jimin had nearly forgotten that he was here too.

Jimin watches in awe as a magnificent shape forms in the clouds, taking shape and form of music beyond the stars. He has only ever known of it. Has only ever dreamt of it.

‘We call them Ts’iur Vachrobis,’ JD explains.

This was Time- this was Beauty.

Jimin wants to leap up, to touch the stars of its great chest, to fall into the depths of its song and let it take him away through the storm and beyond the light of the stars.

The sky around them darkens and Jimin realizes that this memory was dimming- that it was slowly fading into unconsciousness. In the strange shifting darkness that tries to take over, Jimin hurries over to past-JD, who was now kneeling, overwhelmed.

There are stars in his eyes.

When light reappears, Jimin finds himself in the ship again, with JD on a make-shift bed of sorts. Andamaina is here. Dressed in cleaner clothes, eyes curious as she watches JD with admiration and delight. She rushes out, and it’s as though the energy she exuded propelled JD to sit up.

‘Are you all right Jongdae?’

His name was Unyana- son, child, leader, orphan-

‘Yeah – what happened?’

Andamaina scurries over and sits on JD’s lap, the latter smiling down at her, a joy that Jimin recognizes as genuine and warm.

‘There was a strange sonic anomaly when we left you at the shore. We came back to see if you
were all right and then you passed out.’

Recollection crosses JD’s eyes.

‘If you feel better then we can take you back-‘

‘Can I stay?’ Jongdae asks suddenly.

Jimin holds his breath, waiting for both the answer and the question.

‘This is your planet, where you belong – do you not cherish her?’

‘I do – she is my home. I think she wants me to go with you.’

‘You should have stayed,’ Jimin whispers quietly.

‘Why would I leave my home?’ JD replies before opening a door to the side.

Jimin follows quietly, leaving the small room behind him and instead enters an area that looks like it could be the Bridge of a ship.

They had arrived at a familiar place- this was

‘-Grisial,’ Jimin breathes out. ‘They came so far.’

‘Grisial was once a place I could not think about without pain,’ JD reaches a hand out as though to touch the crystals in the distance.

‘And now?’

‘And now I see only beauty.’ For a moment there’s a faraway look in his eyes, a light shining from within not unlike the Grisial crystals themselves.

‘According to what the Captain told me at the time, we are now a year since I joined the crew,’ JD clarifies.

‘A year?’

Had they felt it? Had they felt the decay and death of their planet?

‘He told me that 13 ships escaped-‘

Jimin cannot weep anymore.

Megibiya was not a large planet with a large population- but they had a fair number of population that had been carefully maintained and blessed. 13 ships would have barely amounted to the population living in a town.

How many had he let down? How many had he abandoned?

‘None of the other ships had survived,’ JD continues to tell him.

Jimin is numb, the light of the glittering crystals before him seem to mock him.

‘There is information you might find of importance.’ JD says quietly. ‘A smaller ship similar to the one that crashed on the shores of my country had survived long enough to be picked up by a GLA Patrol Unit outside the System of Axudar. They were allowed to stay there while the GLA
investigated the matter.’

‘It has been many years,’ Jimin whispers.

‘It has. But they had carried our message back to the GLA to tell them that we would return to Bhumi.’ JD pauses a moment before adding, ‘We did not see them again. We assumed that they would join us in Bhumi.’

A strange creeping sensation crawls down Jimin’s back.

‘I am not saying that there is hope,’ JD tells him plainly. ‘It is something you could look into.’

Jemin nods quietly, looking away from the Grisial crystals and closing his eyes. His eyes burn, a sensation that spreads through and burns into his brain, painting everything a horrendous and familiar red.

‘They knew,’ JD speaks.

When Jimin opens his eyes he finds himself inside a hallway that is wrecked apart with chaos, panic, screaming sirens, and a glaring red light that comes from a planet Jimin knows is supposed to be a muted soft brown, with vast expanses of light blue, ringed with violet towards the edges that gives way to the midnight blue of space beyond.

This- this was-

‘They knew that they were coming back to die.’

There’s a sudden burst of movement as JD appears behind them, attempting to run into the Bridge ahead. But Unyana stops him, standing close to the entryway.

‘Captain!’ JD looks a little older here, his hair longer.

Jemin weeps with Unyana- weeps for the planet dying, weeps for the homes destroyed, weeps for the families bound to a fate of darkness.

‘I can’t take it-’ Jimin gasps out, breath coming out in choked exhales.

Navvula appears, attempting to rush and gather JD away and down the hall. But JD moves past the two, rushing into the Bridge that is stained red.

Jemin can see the once beautiful planet, debris floating around it- forming rings like a protoplanetary disc and it-

‘How did we not see,’ Jimin chokes out.

‘No! I have to stay here and help!’ JD yells.

Or was it Jimin crying out the words.

*Let me stay* let me stay let me stay-

The very air trembles and Jimin knows he cannot stay.

‘What did the message say?’

‘*The Panel sent this,* Tsirin pulls up the message for all of them to see. ‘*They sent it directly to me,*
Before Jimin can ask what she meant, the message pops up, a video that’s static and blurred, the audio grainy and filled with background noise. It was the Yisheng Ndica, who had been able to understand them, a gift, no doubt, from their abilities as a Yisheng. Yishengs were called S’wezete in Menigišiti. But none had been born for over a millennia.

‘I hope you can receive this message,’ the Yisheng Ndica declares, looking unsure and worried. ‘We received a strange signal from a planet close to your System, from a planet the GLA calls Bhumi. We’re not sure if this is part of your extended System, but reports of great destruction, and a reported “cleansing” has taken place there. We have already sent out our forces to observe the situation. This is the message sent, and I hope you can clarify this for us. If this is simply my over-thinking, please correct me. If not, I am making my way to Akramana now, and we can discuss what to do.’

Tsirin immediately plays the message sent.

It’s incredibly fragmented and filled with excessive noise. However, words can be made out, and the Megibīya Wenedi both pale, their black eyes widening. They were tall and hulking, their skin texture rough and almost stone like even in colour. Their eyes were jet black, with a sort of yellow-ochre star shaped iris at the center.

‘-ing. We are leaving-…hips have left with the women and childr-…tayed behind to divert-…. coming-….rong and many I cannot expla-…T’S HERE. THEY’RE HERE. WE NEED TO LEA-…. ything is red….it is evil-….’

The message breaks off to play another section. This one a different voice.

‘-just a few of us have escaped. We beg of you. Please help us-….hips flying out but are being hunted-….ping to the closest system we can find- ….is evil. They are evil- … hat is it. It came and made the sky red-….everything was bleeding- nnot escape-‘ the message falls silent for almost 10 whole seconds before there’s a burst of static and then suddenly the message is crisp clean and clear: ‘-it appeared out of nowhere. They knew our home. They were able to overcome our defenses. My Heart, they are here to bleed us dry.’

He cannot stay because he was too late.

‘No!’ He screams alongside JD. ‘I MUST help!’

Navvula is stronger than them- the Megibīyan were exemplary fighters, who had a powerful strength they only used when needed. They were always able to overpower Jimin when he trained with them, chuckling at him and lightheartedly teasing him about his height.

‘You do so much already,’ Navvula speaks gently. There is resignation and sorrow in her voice. But there is also acceptance.

‘You have saved the ship so many times – and in turn saved me. Saved my husband. Saved every life in here.’

They’re at the emergency capsule launch unit.

The ship tilts dangerously and the lights go off.

Navvula takes advantage of this and shoves them into an emergency capsule.
‘Navvula!’ They scream, slamming their fists against the capsules cover. ‘Let me out! Please! Don’t do this!’

‘We will not be apart from our home Jongdae – if she dies then we will die with her.’

‘But this is my home too! You’re family!’ they scream, his vision blurring fast with tears.

His own pulse is the only sound he registers.

He sees Navvula smile at him as she places her palm on the small square of glass.

Jimin reaches up to keep his palm there as well.

‘Thank you Jongdae,’ she says quietly. They can barely hear her.

‘I hope you find your home.’

They are thrown out into space.

He watches in cruel motion, not 10 seconds after he was launched off the ship, as the mother ship explodes in a silent scream of bright lights that rips through the galaxy.

*Family*

*Love*

*Abandonment*

Their capsule is caught in the explosion and they’re flung into the orbit of Megibīya where her gravity pulls them to the surface.

Jimin feels a dreadful sense of returning home as everything around him turns to a blissful dark.

By the time Jimin wakes up he finds himself inside a medical unit and he wonders if it was all a dream but when he’s face to face with the Beings he knows as the Omhlophe, inside a building that is clearly of Megibīyan architecture and construct, Jimin screams until he’s sedated.

‘This is where I died.’

Jimin doesn’t know if he said it, or if JD- no, Jongdae, said it.

But he’s no longer in the tiny medical chamber. The Omhlophe are no longer gathered around him, the white of their clothing and masks stark against the red.

‘I was later rescued by the GLA,’ Jongdae continues to narrate, quietly guiding them outwards and into a broken landscape Jimin recognizes immediately. He watches as massive ships fly in, all of which he recognizes as the ones the GLA Panel had arrived in. And around the larger ships are smaller ones- ones that Jimin recognizes as the same type Yoongi and his team had flown in with.

The memory is short, warped, hazy. But Jimin recognizes the forms of those transporters and with what he’s learnt from his unfortunate stay in Ynqaba, and what he’s learnt so far- from what he’s learnt of Yoongi- combined with his own experiences, the haze begins to clear.
‘Do you know how long you were here?’ Jimin asks as the memory fades, darkness slowly creeping in from all sides. Jongdae shines, the white of his clothes clear and contrast as the darkness morphs and shifts into a dark room. Jongdae walks over to a seemingly normal wall and opens a door, light flooding.

Jimin notices how past-Jongdae is sitting in the corner of the dark room that is a strange accumulation of wires, frames, metallic structures with no clear meaning or form. He also notices how Jongdae’s eyes are foggy, a clear indication that he was blind.

‘Too long.’

‘What happened here?’ Jimin asks, still unmoving though he jumps a little as Navvula reappears from the shadows, grinning as she speaks in echoes to Jongdae.

‘Hallucinations?’

‘Wishful thinking.’

Jimin finally manages to move, finding strength when he sees Andamaina smiling at him from behind Jongdae’s legs.

‘This was long ago,’ Jimin comments, feeling a strange sense of calm in him. ‘How are you here?’

‘The same way you are,’ Jongdae replies as they step out. He closes the door behind him and Jimin feels lighter. ‘More or less.’

Jimin stares at the floors, his feet startlingly clean. He had expected to see his feet covered in grime, soot, blood, and maybe even entirely burnt. It was strange.

‘You asked about these Beings you referred to as the Omhlophe - I believe you saw them back in there?’

Jongdae nods at once, ‘Is that all you remember?’

Jongdae nods, looking down to gently pat Andamain’s head.

‘They were also there- on that ship, run by what we call the Akramanese.’ Jongdae says carefully before adding, ‘We were mistaken about their name?’

Jimin nods, hesitating a little as he says, ‘The Red Evil- I don’t…the Akramana are not-…were not-’

‘You do not have to tell me all- just that I am glad this confusion was somewhat solved,’ Jongdae tells him kindly.

‘You won’t be able to find more information on them,’ Jongdae continues as he starts to walk up the hallway again.

‘What do you mean?’

‘She was able to find some information-Em, your Captain’s information analyst. I was also looking into it before you arrived,’ JD states simply before saying bluntly, ‘You need to be careful.’

‘What do you mean?’ Jimin asks carefully- this wasn’t just a warning regarding his safety.

‘The Omhlophe were indeed involved with what you refer to as the Red Evil.’ JD explains. ‘They
were what I believed based off of evidence discovered in the remains of the Akramanese mothership, as well as extensive investigation conducted by the GIU, that they were Beings, not too different from the way the GI are born.’

Jimin can’t help the sharp inhale he takes.

‘I may be wrong, and this is all conjecture, but I believe that when the Red Evil inherited the idea of re-genesis from the Yishengs, they attempted to recreate all species as a whole. The Omhlophe are most possibly, survivors or a result of these recreations. The same way the Yishengs created the GI, the Red Evil created the Omhlophe.’

‘They were referred to as the pure ones,’ Jimin quotes, remembering what had happened.

‘There….I am correct to assume that you know, what the Human in my ship is?’

Jongdae nods once. Jimin feels the skin on his face pull a little from where his tears had overflown. It feels unfamiliar that he had wept- because now, now-

‘I am also correct to assume that you know much about the eggs- the Or Tanks of Beings grown by both the Yishengs and the Red Evil?’

Jongdae nods again.

Jimin pauses before he decides to simply tell JD all he knew from Ynqaba. Everything from the eggs, the talk between Namjoon and the others, what Jungkook had told them about his past.

‘There were more- I know it. Not just Jungkook- based off of what I heard the Collectors say. Even the GI made appearances there considering they had their uniform in stock with them.’ Jimin concludes. ‘I do not believe that what you have said is conjecture- but perhaps one of the many truths we can now see.’

‘We have never been to Ynqaba or that region- but we were in a nearby region in the past,’ Jongdae comments, looking thoughtful.

‘Do you have it?’ Jimin asks quietly, carefully.

‘Have what?’

‘The mark. On your back?’

‘I had many marks,’ Jongdae tells him quietly, looking up as a shower of snowflakes fall about him afresh. ‘But I was made new again.’

‘What-…who was here?’ Jimin pauses at a blank stretch of wall.

‘You can feel it?’ JD asks, turning to glance back.

‘I recognize it. Or at least…’ Jimin now recognizes it. He’s not sure why but he doesn’t want to touch the wall despite how much his hand was itching too. He feels a small pull on his pant-legs, finding Andamaina behind him, shaking her head at him. Jimin takes a step back.

‘It called itself the Original Nightmare,’ JD says quietly, ‘Another failed creation.’

He could feel the echoes of it back there. He could feel the echoes of it in Sk’jin.

WHY ARE YOU HERE-
‘You’ve met it?’

‘No- no, just…just missed it,’ Jimin whispers.

Jongdae is looking at him curiously but doesn’t press for answers.

Memories were to be respected after all.

‘How do you do this?’ Jimin asks as he looks behind him at the endless hallway. This was not just some memory vault- everything in here breathed life.

In every sense of the word, this was all of Jongdae.

‘It’s not with everyone,’ Jongdae tells him as they approach the final door. ‘Not everyone can come here.’

There’s a quiet giggle and they both glance back, spotting Andamaina by one of the doorways.

‘How did you know I could come here?’ Jimin asks as they stop before the first door. Or was it the final one?

‘Time is strange,’ Jongdae says quietly, slowly reaching up to touch the surface of the door before them. ‘And we have lived through Time that existed beyond itself- a reality that does not exist here. And as those Beings, we carry that Time in us.’

Jongdae places his palm over the door and it seems to glow. Jimin can feel soft cool touches on his skin, like snow falling over him.

‘They all do,’ Jongdae continues. ‘Those who were born of that ship- those created from that Time; we all carry it in us.’

‘Can we return to that Time?’

Jongdae shakes his head.

‘It can come to you, repeat itself over and over- appear before your eyes; the way they always appeared before me.’ Jongdae removes his hand before reaching for the handle.

Jimin thinks back to the dark room, where Jongdae sat, unseeing but filled with want as Navvula’s laughter echoed around him.

‘You cannot return to it, but perhaps you can look at it.’

Now, Jimin realizes what the strange calm is.

‘Will I be able to return after I have looked?’

Jongdae has a melancholic expression in his eyes, ‘You will, but you don’t know what you might lose there- or what you might bring back.’

‘You brought light,’ Jimin comments, looking around and adding, ‘-and snow.’

Jongdae looks around, the melancholy replaced with something akin to pride and devotion.

‘I like it,’ Jimin smiles. ‘Your present is so…so full of light.’
‘I found my Light,’ Jongdae looks at him, a small smile on his face as he opens the door. ‘And I will follow him for as long as he will let me.’

Waking up was like falling asleep. The door that had previously been closed opened and Jimin is staring at a dark ceiling covered in wires. There’s some movement and a familiar figure appears above him.

‘How long were we sleeping?’ Jimin’s body feels heavy and lethargic. His limbs feel limp and oddly rubber like.

Namjoon smiles at him before reaching down to help him sit up.

‘Almost exactly 18 hours- enough for Taeh’yung to call over 500 times,’ he chuckles and then sighs as though exhausted.

Jongdae doesn’t look surprised by this information and sits up, his movements small and contained as he rolls and flexes his shoulders from having been stationary for so long.

‘I’ll tell them you’re up,’ Namjoon steps back. He looks tired but there’s a gleam in his eyes, a sense of grim satisfaction as well as though he learnt something new.

Jimin looks about the place, almost surprised to find everything startlingly normal and real.

‘Memories are incredibly real, Jimin,’ Jongdae says quietly, almost startling Jimin with the usage of his name. ‘But you cannot linger in them.’

Before Jimin can ask Jongdae to clarify, Kai appears, grinning easily at them. Clearly he’d spent some time with the others as he greets Namjoon with familiarity.

‘Are you done?’ Jimin asks instead, looking up at Namjoon.

Namjoon smiles wryly with a nod towards someone to the side and says, ‘We were done a couple of hours ago.’

‘Ah…so, did you ha-ha-have fun?’ Jimin stammers a bit with Standard, having felt so at ease speaking one of his native tongues.

Namjoon chuckles under his breath while someone snorts, clearly amused. They must have investigated more on the matter Jongdae had told him previously. Jimin sits up properly and takes a look around.

The other Being in the room is…interesting, to say the least.

Her soul felt similar to that of an Android’s life-force. But just a tad bit stronger. She’s wearing many robes- not the type Sk’jin liked to wear, but what appeared to be thick textured fabrics that swathed her oddly formless body. Jimin can’t be sure if she’s facing him or not. Extending from her short hands are long extensions that seem to move all on their own, with no sense of direction or purpose.

‘This is Ems- our Information Analyst,’ Kai introduces with a wave.

Ems waves her long fingers in greeting, not moving from her place that Jimin realizes is the center of this entire space.

‘Hi princeling- good nap?’ she asks.
Jimin flushes, not sure if he would be rude by correcting her name for him. Instead he chooses to nod and says, ‘Thank you for having us-‘

’-eh, ransacked as per usual. Always taken for granted- you leave me and then show up and then cause all of this ruckus I am sick of being used like this-‘

‘No, Ems, come on-‘

‘It’s not like that Ems-‘

Both Namjoon and Kai begin at once, though they both look amused as they placate her with gentle praise and flattery. A hand appears before him and Jimin looks up. Jongdae is already on his feet, looking not quite as illuminating as he did when they Slept. Taking a deep breath and bracing himself, Jimin takes Jongdae’s hand and stands on his feet.

There was still a lot he didn’t know, and what he knew now wasn’t entirely verifiable. But in his heart he knew.

‘Is everything good?’ Namjoon asks.

Jimin nods and says, ‘Everything is good.’

He knew what he had to do now.

Kai skips over to them with a bright smile and hands Jongdae a Comm-Device that the latter reaches for at once.

‘I guess it’s time we get going,’ Namjoon smiles and nods at Kai and Jongdae.

‘Yeah! Get the fuck out of my house!’ Em calls from her position, ‘Stop sucking up my air!’

‘It’s not like you really need it!’ Namjoon barks back with amusement.

It’s nice seeing Namjoon here- somehow lighter, in his element, feeling at ease because of how grown he was into this sort of environment. This sort of setting probably felt most like home to him.

‘Who wants to go first?’ Kai asks.

Namjoon raises his hand after a quick look at Jimin who nods.

‘Let’s go.’

Kai holds his hand up and the moment their hands meet they both vanish.

‘Time is not what we believe it to be,’ Jongdae tells him quietly, ‘You carry another Time within you, and by returning to it, you might find that things have changed.’

‘I know,’ Jimin replies, not surprised that Jongdae already knew what he was going to do.

‘Be careful,’ Jongdae finally looks at him, his eyes clear and electric, ‘Trust no one.’

Jimin almost jolts at his words. He briefly wonders what happened that Jongdae’s eyes had once clouded over in permanent blindness.

‘What-‘
‘Belief, hope, redemption—these are things we all have, it is a common force within all of us. But where it comes from, where it is born, are all different.’ Jongdae tells him quickly, ‘Some are born from pain, some are born from fire—some are born of desperate promises.’

Kai returns, smiling as he holds up his hand respectfully.

Jongdae steps back, his gaze still holding Jimin’s.

‘Jongdae—’ Jimin tries.

Kai looks between them, clearly wondering if he should step away.

‘Trust only what you See,’ Jongdae takes another step back. ‘Trust only what they are born of.’

Returning to the Užkulisai, Jimin almost feels a strange sense of disassociation.

He had been born into this ship, and what he saw, what he heard, what he knew, was born of this ship.

But in this moment, after walking through Time and Memory, he almost doesn’t recognize it. He knows he’s in the Lobby of the Second Level—but at the same time, it feels entirely unlike itself.

‘Are you okay? It does take some time to adjust,’ Kai says kindly just as Jimin hears loud yelling and thundering footsteps.

‘Yes,’ Jimin smiles up at the Dakaṣayaii, ‘Maybe dizzy?’

‘That happens,’ Kai chortles as he steps aside just in time because Taeh’yung dives into the air, a bright wide grin on his face and Jimin has braced himself to fall back onto the floor but it never comes. Because instead he’s not standing, instead he’s been scooped up and away, and the sound of something heavy painfully landing on the ground fills the air.

Of course it’s Yoongi.

‘I wasn’t going to hurt him—’ Taeh’yung wails from the floor just as Jungkook appears, Sk’jin behind him looking very amused. ‘-I missed him-’

‘Are you all right?’

Yoongi’s voice is quiet and meant only for him.

Jimin looks away from Taeh’yung’s wails, Kai’s high-pitched chuckles, and Sk’jin’s teasing comments to address the Human who had quite literally plucked him away from Taeh’yung’s well meaning greeting.

He almost forgets, that Yoongi had recoloured his hair.

Since the moment Jimin had awoken, Yoongi has had blue hair, fading into a odd washed out sky blue. But now it’s dark, a little dry, and painfully familiar.

It’s not just the hair.

It’s not just Yoongi.

The walls behind him, the sound of Taeh’yung’s whines, Sk’jin snorts, of the conversations, the sounds of the ship—everything is familiar and just-
‘I am,’ and Jimin surges forward, wrapping his arms around the Human in a tight hug. ‘I missed you.’

Now that he was back, Jimin feels it. How much he had missed Yoongi- and how now, seeing him and having him in his arms, finally settled the disassociation. He pulls away gently, smiling at a slightly wide-eyed Yoongi.

‘Literally- that was quite the hit and miss,’ Sk’jin snorts as he leans against the wall while Jungkook shuffles forward, keeping a distance between himself and Kai as he approaches Jimin.

‘I’ll get going now then- thanks for the food and stories,’ Kai smiles, nodding at Sk’jin who graciously returns the nod with a flip of his now dark hair.

‘Kai- please wait,’ Jimin stops the Dakaṣayaii before he can teleport.

Kai pauses, a questioning but open expression on his face.

‘One minute,’ Jimin says as he quickly darts into his Cabin ignoring the cramps on his legs from having slept too long. Inside, he rummages inside the closet before finding what he was looking for. Finding an appropriate soft-clothed stretch of cloth, he wraps the smooth Grisial crystal the size of his thumb in the cloth and quickly makes his way back to Kai and the others.

The Dakaṣayaii still looks at him questioningly but doesn’t refuse the small bundle and takes it in his hand.

‘Can you give this to Jon-JD?’

‘Of course,’ Kai smiles. ‘What is it for?’

‘For- uh- for beauty.’

Kai doesn’t seem remotely confused by his reply and instead smiles and nods.

‘Okay then-‘

‘JONGIN DON’T LEAVE!’ Taeh’yung pounces on the Dakaṣayaii, long arms wrapping around Kai like restraints.

‘Tae please-‘ Sk’jin walks over again, looking comically exhausted.

‘Hey, next time we can go visit the others, how about that?’ Kai struggles to speak as he rights himself with the help of Sk’jin who watches with a smile akin to a strained mother. ‘When you’re all done and safe with all of this yeah?’

Taeh’yung brightens up at this.

‘Of course! And when you see Baek again, tell him he’ll be proud!’ Taeh’yung lets go and stands up straight, taller than the Dakaṣayaii even though he had successfully made himself look inches shorter. ‘I did a great thing!’

Kai chortles and agrees easily.

‘And! And! Kiss Cheimi for me?’

A strange look passes Kai’s face before he huffs out a laugh and with a funny smile says, ‘I don’t know about that- but I’ll see.’
Taeh’yung just grins and waves his long arms in farewell.

‘Good luck,’ the Dakaṣayaii says, nodding at them. ‘Be careful.’

Sk’jin smiles and bows his head gracefully.

And just like that, the Dakaṣayaii vanishes.

‘That’ll always look a little creepy,’ Hoseok comments before adding, ‘Welcome back Jimin.’

‘Thank you,’ Jimin smiles, looking up at one of the cameras up on the ceiling.

‘Are you hungry?’ Sk’jin asks, clearly in a much better mood from the last time Jimin saw him. ‘Made a bunch of food. Mainly Human because remember Kyungsoo? He’s a really good cook- apparently he’s head-chef of his ship.’ He cackles a moment before adding, ‘He gave me some recipes.’

‘Eat?’ Jungkook asks, looking hesitant but also pleased. He’s nervous, Jimin notices, and immediately recognizes why. Giving Yoongi’s hand a gentle squeeze, he reaches over for Jungkook who immediately ducks under his arm.

‘Yes! Eat!’

Jungkook smiles brightly at him and it’s almost enough to break Jimin’s heart again.

He had such a beautiful soul- so young, so gentle; bruised but healing, scarred but healing. If there was any reason to do this, then it would be for Jungkook.

For Jungkook and the others out there just like him.

‘You met him didn’t you?’ Taeh’yung asks, voice low in his ears, his tone downright gleeful as he studies Jimin’s face. ‘You have some snowflakes on you.’

‘I did,’ Jimin smiles.

‘He’s great,’ Taeh’yung grins.

‘Who is?’ Namjoon asks, reappearing from his Cabin, dressed in new clothes and looking a little more awake.

‘Me,’ Sk’jin says pointedly and adds, ‘Because I’m an amazing cook.’

Jemin is almost worried that Namjoon might take offense. He’s not overreacting in the slightest because Namjoon and Sk’jin have fought over less. But instead Namjoon rolls his eyes good naturedly and says, ‘I’m sure you are.’ And it doesn’t sound condescending.

Jemin is reminded of Jongdae’s words and realizes the accuracy in them. Was it because of the Time they shared, that he just knew about it, or if it was just a lucky circumstance- but something tells Jimin it wasn’t luck.

The same way Jimin could see the snow, the same way he could feel the dry sand of a parched and forgotten desert, Jongdae had obviously been able to feel them.

Namjoon’s resolve, his drive, his existence was born from pain.

Hoseok’s motivation, his need for redemption, for something to take away what he wrought with
his hands, was born of fire.

Sk’jin’s chaotic spirit, his strained resolve, his guilt, was born of broken promises.

They all had something, a reason that though right here, right now, appeared identical- the reasoning, the personal meaning, and expectations they all had were vastly different from each other’s.

Different from Jimin’s.

Jimin trusts them all. Trusts that they will do what they say.

And now he knows.

‘All right, now that we’re all here- I can begin,’ Namjoon announces.

‘You never stopped, how do you begin if you don’t stop?’ Sk’jin mumbles from the Kitchen counter. Namjoon rolls his eyes again, and it’s not heavy with irritation or annoyance. It’s almost friendly and Jimin is confused. He looks at Yoongi for an answer but the Human just gives him the tiniest shrug and directs him towards a chair at the table.

‘Hobi?’ Taeh’yung calls out loudly, making Jungkook flinch a little at his volume.

‘I’m here!’ Hoseok announces as he makes his way down the stairs. ‘Just making some adjustment with the autopilot.

Outside, Jimin notices how they’re still in Grisial. It pains him now to look at it. Knowing what he knew now- this was no longer a place of bright lights, of beauty and wonder.

It was now a place of disappointment, sorrow, and loss.

Jimin moves away from the chair Yoongi had pulled out for him, and instead taking the Human’s hand, guides them to the other side of the table, putting their backs to the view of the window. Yoongi doesn’t say anything, but simply follows.

Jimin eases himself on the kitchen stool, fighting the urge to slump onto the counter and just sleep. He’s exhausted in more than one way but he’s filled with a sense of renewed realization. He feels movement next to him and Yoongi has adjusted their seats so that he sat behind Jimin, angling himself so that Jimin could lean on him.

‘Thank you,’ he breathes out, leaning back.

Yoongi’s hair is dark, and with the way he was looking at him, it makes him remember Jongdae’s words.

‘Memories are incredibly real, Jimin. But you cannot linger in them.’

‘Did something happen?’ Yoongi asks quietly, taking his hands into his own. He studies their hands as though his life depended on it.

‘I saw Dreams- more Dreams,’ Jimin explains quietly as Sk’jin begins to loudly complain about how no one took his cooking seriously and was taken for granted.

‘Sk’jin’s dramatics aside,’ Namjoon clears his throat after taking an indulgent sip of tea. Sk’jin huffs mightily, but it’s more for Jungkook’s amusement who grins delightedly at the way Sk’jin was acting.
It warms Jimin’s heart.

‘Now that we’re all here and we’re almost at the edge of Grisial- I think we need to re-adjust our plans and put together new information.’ Namjoon announces. Jimin would have smiled at the serious and slightly staged manner in which Namjoon spoke, as though trying to mimic other captains or leaders during meetings.

‘First of all, I was able to find out a lot of information about Ynqaba, as well as the Yisheng ship that crashed there, but is apparently still in existence in the Pomoč Nebula.’

Namjoon slides his NaviLet towards the center of the dining table and taps over the surface. Two holographic images take form. One from the footage recorded by the Užkulisai, the other from the official GLA archives of the previously mentioned ship.

Buried and covered in decades of rubble and erosion, the massive ship still bore a vague semblance to the perfectly functional model on the right.

‘These are models that were in existence before the new ones came out. They’re still used in areas that are a bit more harsh- for example the Pomoč Nebula,’ Namjoon taps at the screen and a map of the Pomoč Nebula appears in a swirl of cosmic clouds an stars. ‘There’s a massive pulsar in there, and so the Yishengs are watching over the evacuation of the 8 exoplanets there. It’s been in operation for almost a decade now.’

‘Is there more to it?’ Sk’jin asks with a wry smile. Namjoon snorts around his cup of tea before nodding.

‘So much,’ he states, ‘When we first looked it up, we initially thought it might have been under Yisheng Amme’s control. But it isn’t- it’s actually under Yisheng Ndica’s control.’

‘But he died,’ Hoseok frowns, ‘Right?’

‘Nothing official,’ Namjoon rolls his eyes. ‘But definitely out of commission-’

‘Dead!’ Taeh’yung beams in confirmation, hands holding up “v” signs.

Everyone stares at him for a second before they all just take his word for it, without question.

‘All right then, so if it’s a dead Yisheng’s ship, whose is it now?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘All Yisheng property belongs to the Yisheng Headquarters- or at least, it used to before. But now, all Yishengs and especially all uh, gone Yisheng property belongs to the GIU,’ Namjoon shrugs one shoulder and says with a short laugh, ‘This is under K’mara’s watch.’

Hoseok whistles low.

‘Of course because it’s GIU, we can’t really get into their archives, they’re separated from the GLA,’ Namjoon continues. ‘K’mara couldn’t get the GI, but she could get all of the Yisheng property. We all know how massive the GI motherships are- but with additional Yisheng ships under their command- they’ve taken most of the Yisheng’s power and influence.’

‘But that means it’s basically impossible to access their information,’ Hoseok frowns. ‘We can’t figure out what or how this duplicate came to form when the original happens to be in Ynqaba.’

‘No, but the GIU is still under the GLA to an extent- they need to give up their information anytime the GLA sees fit,’ Namjoon replies, ‘Basically anyone under the GLA employment can
ask for information.’

‘So…you faked an ID?’ Sk’jin asks dubiously.

‘No- I didn’t have to. Because our new comrades at the Stravechi Nava decided they wanted to aid the evacuation in Pomoč and sent an inquiry. The GIU had to give them all of the information, and Kai was of course, kind enough to pass it all to us.’

Hoseok grins at that.

‘So needless to say, Kai and his crew members were able to access some data,’ Namjoon emphasizes lightly. ‘And now we know this.’

He taps a few times and the model of the Yisheng ship shows clearly.

‘This model was made 45 sols ago- past the time of its intended manufacture. From the information based off of this model, production was stopped 80 sols ago. There is of course no reason to recreate an older model, especially if you already have a new one that’s better.’ Namjoon nods at the model again as it slowly spins. ‘Also, this was not manufactured in Tayi- it was manufactured in the System of Axudar.’

Jimin almost jolts out of his seat.

This is the place Jongdae had mentioned to him. He had said it might still hold some matter of importance to this mission- might still hold some answers. But it had been so long ago.

But maybe now- maybe now it wasn’t so.

‘This is an extremely interesting System,’ Namjoon continues, ‘It’s actually a System that we had planned out as a stop before getting to Bhu- uh, Megibīya. At least one of the locations in our many routes to get there. But I guess considering all of our routes have the same risk as well as benefits- we could actually go here.’

‘What else is there other than this ship having been made there?’ Hoseok asks as he indicates towards the holographic ship with a sausage-skewed fork. Jungkook watches the sausage with wide eyes, mouth already filled with food. Hoseok deposits the sausage on Jungkook’s plate, making the latter blush a little, ducking his head in thanks.

‘This might be a stretch- and it also might seem a little…’ Namjoon pauses, clearly thinking of the correct way to word it, ‘-vague. But we found something that seems to connect Axudar with Megibīya.’

Everyone’s eyes naturally flicker towards Jimin and he thinks it’s justified if he looks shocked.

‘There’s a myth- a lore of sorts in Axudar,’ Namjoon begins and he adds with his hands held up as though to block any form of accusation or disbelief. ‘It’s called the “Eclipsing Travellers”- and it’s based off of their astrological beliefs.’

Jimin feels distinctly uncomfortable.

‘What is it about?’

He’s always surprised by how normal he sounds despite feeling anything but.

‘Like all planets- their view on the cosmic sky is simply a selective view of the universe from their
orbit around their sun- and for many millennia they’ve always documented and observed a few stars- or unidentified cosmic bodies – from their System.’

‘Menigišiti,’ Yoongi comments before Jimin can.

Namjoon nods, ‘I believe that’s what it is- we calculated and projected their images and documentation of the stars and yes- it fits nearly perfectly with where Megibïya is. And if as Jimin had suspected before, if his System did sometimes lose their camouflage ability, they would have been able to see the light of their sun- creating a rather eclipsing effect of visibility to observers.’

‘You think this is where maybe all those years ago, they were able to find Jimin’s System?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘It’s a possibility. Axudar has 3 habitable planets and they’re all a part of the GLA. For a long time. And not just that, but Ndica was born there.’ Namjoon says carefully as he taps on the screen and a planet appears instead of the ship. ‘He is a native of the planet of Kaitûtei. And I don’t want to… imply anything, but they are the original founders of one of the scientific boards that supported the Theory of Digitized Souls.’

Hoseok and Sk’jin’s expression changes.

‘That explains a lot about Ndica,’ Hoseok comments under his breath.

‘So I’m guessing this planet is very open to “scientific experiments and research”?’ Sk’jin asks lightly.

‘Very open is putting it mildly. They linger just below the “illegal” line in terms of research. Of course they’re careful with it- and well, for the past few centuries that Ndica was alive and was Yisheng, the amount of illegal activities surrounding their “scientific endeavours” has been reduced. Of course that might just be because of Ndica’s influence, but it could-’

‘-could also be that he covered it all up,’ Hoseok completes, leaning back on his chair as he thinks. ‘I’ve never been to Axudar.’

‘Well that’s because Kaitûtei is under GLA Environmental Protection,’ Namjoon states clearly.

‘What the fuck is that?’ Sk’jin asks in disbelief.

‘My question exactly,’ Namjoon replied, ‘But we didn’t have to look far- it’s actually a protection given to certain planets that have specific weather slash environments that are stagnant in their natural state- like maybe a magma-based planet, on a completely frozen tundra like Helada.’ He taps on a planet that looks more like a white chiseled marble than a planet. ‘You cannot go mainly for your own safety. Only with special permission or if you have a native returning back.’

‘Please tell me one of us could pass off as a native,’ Sk’jin asks, staring blankly at Hoseok at that.

‘He can’t,’ Namjoon laughs. ‘But it won’t be needed. Actually, I have new identities created for all of us. And this is where Kookie will be able to help. Only if he wants of course,’ Namjoon adds quickly. ‘We can do it without Jungkook’s agreement.’

‘I want to help,’ Jungkook states immediately.

‘Kookie honey you don’t even know what it is,’ Sk’jin says at once, directing a glare at Namjoon.

‘He doesn’t have to do anything of that sort. We’re not going to give him up or anything. Axudar
has two other planets- one of them houses, quite convenient to Ndica and his fellow conspirators plan of domination, a center for taking in refugees or Beings who have lost their planets.’

The familiar dread returns in full force in Jimin’s stomach. He realizes he hasn’t been able to eat a single bite since Namjoon started speaking.

‘This is Kaitütei’s neighbouring planet, they’re quite close actually- Māhanga. It’s one of the… craftier planets in the System- and this one is not protected by the GLA.’ Namjoon smiles, evidently pleased.

‘Craftier how?’ Hoseok inquires as he leans in, studying the planet on display.

‘It’s one of the leading planets in bio-engineering and research in Android technology. They’re not always mentioned, because the public generally assumes all of this research is based in Tayi but-’

‘-it’s a larger community.’ Sk’jin frowns. ‘It's a large scientific research community. Because Tayi is clean- well, it’s clean because we assume the Yishengs are clean. No research can actually always be ethical-’

‘-it can,’ Jimin and Taeh’yung say at the same time.

Sk’jin frowns at this before deciding not to argue it and he continues, ‘-so most of the “darker” aspects of research are kept elsewhere. So I’m guessing Māhanga is one of them.’

Namjoon nods, ‘So that’s where we’ll be going. Our claim is that we discovered Jungkook when we were raided by pirates. We managed to escape, and Jungkook here is a stowaway. And like every trading company would when they find a stowaway, they bring them back to a center where they won’t be questioned about their legal or illegal activities.’

Hoseok nods to that before asking, ‘I don’t want to be a party pooper but-‘ Taeh’yung sniggers at that, ‘- I know it’s important we understand more of what happened to better prepare for what we might find but. How is this exactly related to our mission.’

Namjoon nods at that question, as though agreeing to it. ‘That’s why I said that it might be a little vague. But we know for a fact that Yisheng Ndica was part of the Panel that was part of the GLA envoy that negotiated with Jimin and his System. And from what we say in Ynqaba, it’s safe to say that Ndica had also approached that area and now it is how we last saw it. Also, we found Jungkook there,’ he smiles at the young Being who smiles back. ‘-the connection is too clear.’

‘By going there, what do we hope to find out that we cannot access through the archives?’ Hoseok asks again.

‘Again, based on our past experiences- with not just Ynqaba, but with Pompa, with Orvan- there is more than what we are simply given or shown in the archives. And all of this information- things we considered secret regarding things like the Alliance, or how there was a massive war and take over in an entire System – or even Jimin’s System. These are all things that we never could find in database. But things that were glaringly obvious once we got there.’ Namjoon tells him earnestly. Jimin notices how Sk’jin is watching Namjoon, a strange look in his eyes as he studies the Kutsoglerin.

‘What about Yoongi?’ Hoseok asks.

Yoongi looks like he wants to ask ‘what about me?’ but Namjoon seems to know exactly what he meant.
'We dug into it of course. We dug in deeper into Yoongi’s past record. But what I had been able to find was all that was available. Even with 3 of us digging through- we also found no notification, no single indication of the existence of the GLA group he was part of. There are a lot of communities under the GLA as well as Venture Unit, GIU that have smaller sub-organizations that fall under the similar description. But they’re all either under the Venture Unit or certain Divisions of the GLA like Planetary Relations, or even the Division of Technology and Development. But there was none that fit Yoongi’s description despite there being recorded footage of Yoongi’s trips.’

‘What about the GI? How does that narrative fit in?’ Hoseok inquires.

None of Hoseok’s questions were meant to be condescending or questioning Namjoon’s research- but rather as a means of making sure that they were able to do all they could to secure their safety.

‘Of course from what we know from the Gaia Case, Ndica wasn’t directly involved in the creation of GI- but that doesn’t mean his information wasn’t given to his fellow Yishengs when they were still debating or finalizing their plans of a takeover. What we can learn about what they do- can maybe give us an insight to how it could have influenced the design the make- how they could have possibly been conceived,’ Namjoon adds with a look at Yoongi. ‘It may not answer anything. But if we’re able to see the roots-

‘-if we can go back to the inception of this technology, to where it was born, then maybe we have a better chance of understanding it,’ Yoongi concludes.

Namjoon nods to that while Sk’jin also seems to be in agreement.

‘And Tlun’hla was, even by their standard, rather fanatic in his beliefs regarding his own divinity and superiority.’ Namjoon adds, ‘This can also give us insight-’

‘He was really into it,’ Taeh’yung comments randomly, ‘When they questioned me about my abilities they thought I would have been useful but I was too wild to control.’

There’s pin-drop silence in the kitchen.

‘They what-?’ Namjoon near-screeches.

Hoseok’s jaw drops to the ground, and Sk’jin closes his eyes as though pained by what he was looking at.

‘Yeah- it’s why I was put in Teronko’ng Prison until Kai, and Baek, and-’ Taeh’yung pauses suddenly before continuing, ‘Until I was rescued!’

‘They locked you up?’

Taeh’yung shrugs as he eats again, ‘I think they said something about me being too powerful to kill? But they didn’t want me about? So they put me in prison. Also I didn’t really like them. Worshiping some old alien like it knew everything and was right-’ Taeh’yung rolls his eyes, ‘- doesn’t allow for personal growth you know? Absolutely no character development.’

Too powerful to kill?

There was no doubt to Jimin that Taeh’yung possessed in him something far older, far more powerful, and far darker than anything he could hope to even understand. But if the Yishengs dared not try to touch him…
‘They found you after what you did in Ymir?’

Taeh’yung nods, ‘I think they thought I might be able to help. Wasn’t interested- sounded boring.’

It’s with a shared shiver with everyone around the table that Jimin is grateful that Taeh’yung was the way he is.

‘It feels risky,’ Hoseok says slowly. ‘But I see exactly what you’re getting at.’

‘We won’t do it even if a single Being on this table doesn’t agree.’ Namjoon tells them all again, repeating what he said before. ‘We will only continue if everyone agrees.’

‘What do you think?’ Yoongi asks quietly from the side.

‘Oh right- was there anything interesting you had with your meeting?’ Hoseok asks. ‘With the person who had information about Megibiya.’

Sk’jin raises an eyebrow at him in question as well.

‘He just…’ Jimin pauses, looking down at the spoon in his hands. The handle is lightly hammered, creating a textured pattern in multi-facets across the cylindrical surface. On it, he can see multiple reflections of everyone around him.

‘How many Yoongs do you see?’

‘He just showed me his past,’ Jimin says looking up, ‘What happened to him, how he met my people. How he died.’

No one asks questions, still waiting for Jimin to continue.

‘I saw a lot- I…felt a lot.’ Jimin looks down again, hand gripping the spoon. ‘I am still trying to understand what I saw. I need more.’


Jimin glances around at everyone on the table before lingering on Yoongi who is starting down at his hand, gripped around the spoon.

‘More Dreams.’

★

Sighing quietly to himself, Jimin shrugs on his clean shirt, ignoring the way his skin still felt a little damp. He tries not to look at himself in the mirror too much but he can’t. Now with what he had seen.

It’s strange.
Because the way Time blanketed and weighed JD, impossibly layered and heavy, a strain like an elastic bond stretched to its limit.

Jimin sees it every time he looks into a mirror.

He pats his bare head dry, the scars and bruises nearly almost all healed and gone. Carefully, he pulls the soft fabric beanie over his head. When he steps out of the little en-suite, Yoongi is there by the desk, standing straight and nearly lifelessly. His only movement is to blink as he looks at Jimin, as though waiting for him to say something.

Jimin makes his way over to the desk, looking out of the window for a moment before tapping along the surface of he HUD and dimming the thick reinforced glass to drown the light. Instead a soft nightlight illuminates the room.

Yoongi slowly takes his hand, making Jimin look away from the dim window.

Jimin can’t look at Yoongi.

‘What did you see?’

Yoongi waits patiently as Jimin takes a while to construe his words.

In here with Yoongi everything feels incredibly raw again. Was it because Yoongi had been there? Or was it because of the possibility that Yoongi knew more than he was aware?

Or because Yoongi knew more than he wanted to remember?

‘I was blind,’ Jimin manages to get out. ‘That was what I saw. I was blind.’

Yoongi’s other hand reaches up and angles Jimin to face him.

‘It was not your time,’ Yoongi says quietly, his gaze never moving away from Jimin for a second.

That doesn’t explain anything- neither does it really answer anything. But strangely it means something to Jimin.

Yoongi takes his hand away from where he was gripping the edge of the table and places it against the side of his face. He closes his eyes, sighing out quietly.

Jimin’s never really noticed it this clearly but Yoongi has thick lashes. They’re sweeping to the side, creating a sharp outline over his eyes. Leaning in, Jimin quietly kisses Yoongi’s closed eyes.

There’s another sigh and Yoongi reaches blindly for Jimin’s other hand. Placing his hand in Yoongi’s, Jimin laughs quietly as Yoongi raises it to the other side of his face. Then suddenly he pulls back, surprising Jimin as he stands in front of him. He laughs breathlessly when Yoongi leans in close to wrap his arms around him, lifting him up onto the desk and leaning in closer.

‘I missed you,’ the Human says quietly, eyes still closed, soaking in on the feeling of Jimin’s hands on his face.

Jimin gently draws his thumbs up and down Yoongi’s cheeks, leaning forward on the table so that he’s pretty much sitting at the very edge to be closer to the Human.

‘I think I’ve missed you forever,’ Yoongi whispers. ‘Before I Woke up, before I Knew- I’ve always missed you.’
It’s back again but twice as painful- it’s a physical palpable pain and it’s a unique heartbreak unlike anything Jimin has ever experienced before.

‘And I just- I don’t know-’ Yoongi’s eyes are still closed, but his brows furrow a little bit.

‘You don’t know what?’ Jimin asks, voice cracking to a whisper.

‘Why does it hurt?’

‘W-what hurts?’

‘Everything- everything hurts-…when you touch me-’

On instinct Jimin tries to pull his hands away but Yoongi holds onto them, the furrow between his brows deepening. He steps closer as well, close enough for Jimin to acutely feel the warmth of his body against his own.

‘-when I hear you, when you laugh, when you kiss me, when you look at me.’

Yoongi opens his eyes, arresting Jimin’s gaze, making it impossible to look away.

‘But it hurts more when you don’t- and…I don’t-…why-’

Kissing Yoongi is easy. It feels natural. It feels right.

And the way Yoongi holds him, the way he seems to want to never let go. And Jimin holds him just as close, not realizing that he was crying until Yoongi’s fingers reach up to trail up after their movement. They pause, lips still touching, sharing their breath in the dim cool darkness of his Cabin.

‘Something has changed,’ Yoongi states in a low voice as he pulls away. ‘What did you see when you saw him?’

‘You know him?’

‘I saw him before.’ Yoongi replies. ‘I saw them, and it was confusing.’

Yoongi is looking at him as though he’s realized something. Jimin wants to ask, but he doesn’t know how.

‘But not anymore,’ Yoongi whispers before kissing him lightly again and whispering against his lips, ‘What did you see?’

‘I saw a lot,’ Jimin closes his eyes. ‘And I have so much more to see.’

‘Dreams?’

‘Dreams.’

‘Whose dreams?’

Jemin opens his eyes, looking down at Yoongi.

‘Yours and mine.’

‘How?’
‘I- I want to try something,’ Jimin tells the Human.

‘What is it?’ Yoongi asks

Jimin holds his hand up, palm up.

‘I think there is- there is something, that only we know,’ Jimin says quietly. ‘Something that…only we can know- only we can find.’

‘What is it?’

‘I don’t know- but I want to find it. I want to know why-‘

Jimin thinks back to Andamaina, back to Navvula, back to his people- who all returned to Megibiya, holding onto the idea of hope- of their Home.

He thinks of what he has learnt from Namjoon, from Hoseok, from Sk’jin, from Taeh’yung.

He thinks of the GLA, of the Yishengs, of the Treaty, of the Panel that were headed to Akramana- he thinks of his sister.

And he thinks of Yoongi- of the blurred faces from his dreams and memories- of his past so intertwined with Jimin’s very existence.

‘What can I do?’

Yoongi offers no hesitation, no apprehension.

‘Lead me where you will, and I will follow.’

‘Would you like to Sleep?’
(Author’s Notes)

Okay you know what
From the last time I updated
There’s been so much
That’s happened
I can’t even begin to explain???? Or describe my emotions????????
I just?!?!??! Really!!!?!?!?! Love!!!?!??! Bts!!!?!?!!! Bless my children forever
Please everyone!! Tell me how you’ve been! Tell me what you think of this chapter!!
I’ll be updating this month and a bit into next year!! I also have this small personal
project I’ve had since early this year and it’s a yoonmin 6-chaptered fic and I’ve
written 2 chapters already appx! I also got!!!!!!!
OMG GUYS I GOT COMMISSIONED TO WRITE A FIC??????????????
IM SHOOK????????????????????
LIKE
WHAT????????????
So yeah
A yoonmin fic hehehehe
ALSO MY THESIS WENT GREAT MY PROFESSORS APPLAUDED ME AFTER
MY FINAL PRESENTATION FOR THESIS 1
I NEARLY FUCKING CRIED
I WAS SO EMOTIONAL
For anyone interested my thesis is original 3D visual development for a VR game!
*coughsitsactuallyyoonminfromadegubutalteredtofitavideogamemyprofessorshavenoideaitssbasically*
*gunshot noises*
I’ve been
Love shot
*gunshot noises*
Watching MAMA tonight was the biggest mistake of my life
I CAME HERE FOR A GOOD TIME AND GREAT PERFORMANCES
AND
AND
HOBI AND JIN OUT HERE MAKING ME SOB- LIKE CHEST-PAIN SOB, UGLY
SOB
Actually I didn’t cry because I am A HARD HEARTED BITCH but I did tear up and
my throat closed up and I couldn’t breathe
How did y’all fare?
He wants to sleep. He needs to sleep.

So when his back finally curves into the softness of his mattress, Yoongi is already shutting his eyes. A delicious sense of relief, rest, and peace engulfs him. He breathes out slow, slipping into the depths of a welcomed darkness-

‘Yoongi?’

Jolting up, heart racing, Yoongi sits up, back against a tall and wide tree. The air feels red, the sky red, the sunrise just barely reaching through the leaves to shine on them.

It’s unsettling to see them like this. It’s strange to see them here, and not look at this from there.

Yoongi watches himself, unsure how to process this. Unsure how to process that there was another Yoongi there- that there was another Jimin there.

‘This is your memory- our memory,’ Jimin tells him quietly from next to him.

His hand is in Jimin’s, following him from the dark of his unconsciousness and into the red light of his memories- no, of their Dreams.

‘How are we here?’ Yoongi asks, turning about inside the forest before looking down at Jimin. The soft beanie he’s wearing is stained a dull reddish hue, the light around them washing them both in a strange filter of colour. ‘How are…how are you doing this?’

Jimin looks away from them, away from where they’re now crouching outside the broken walls and terrifying heights of the tower built into the windy mountain side.

‘Is this the first Dream you had?’ Jimin asks, the eclipse in his eyes brighter than before. Somehow the light of the red sky above doesn’t colour Jimin’s gaze and Yoongi finds himself staring, just drinking in the brightness of a light untainted and pure.

‘No,’ Yoongi replies after a long while. ‘I saw Yoongi’s sister. I saw Earth.’
‘Take me there,’ Jimin asks him, squeezing his hand.

‘I don’t know how.’ Yoongi replies honestly.

‘Then we’ll find it,’ Jimin smiles, guiding him into the door that lead into the tower.

It’s disconcerting, Yoongi supposes, seeing himself (or the original Yoongi at least) on the floor. This is what it had looked like to Jimin. The entire situation feels new to Yoongi, looking at it from a different perspective.

‘I think- I think here,’ Jimin says softly, kneeling besides his other self.

Yoongi isn’t quite sure how to process this, but he too kneels.

The other Jimin is speaking too, but somehow it’s almost as though he can’t hear him. Can’t understand.

The Yoongi on the floor is ghostly white, but he’s attempting to smile.

There’s a confusing moment where Yoongi is looking at this scene, but at the same time he’s living it; Jimin’s face is drawn, his spirit broken, and all he wants to do is hold him-

Jimin takes out a small glittery hair clip and hands it to him.

Yoongi takes the clip and puts it on to his hair with shaking hands. Jimin is quick to help him, gently setting it into his matted strands. Jimin looks terrified and heartbroken. And Yoongi is a little selfish because he wants to see him smile.

So he strikes a pose, a terrible one in fact. Jimin is crying, tears sparkling down his cheeks, nodding as he tries to smile. He says something, as though indulging Yoongi in his little fevered attempts to create a lighter atmosphere. It makes Yoongi laugh, and this in turn makes Jimin smile for real. His eyes crinkling, smile wide enough to push up his cheeks.

‘Sunshine,’ Yoongi holds his hand out towards Jimin, confident that he would take it.

Jimin is quick to take his proffered hand, and instead of just holding it, presses it to his face.

What Yoongi would do to have this for the rest of his life. To feel Jimin like this- close, intimate, and so precious.

But Yoongi would disregard all of that, if it meant Jimin could be safe. If it meant he could return home, away from this place, away from this disease, away from all of this pain.

‘Yoongi.’

Yoongi is startled to find himself looking down at the scene he was living just moments ago. He was…he was not on the floor- this was different. Jimin was not looking down at him, tears overflowing from his eyes.

Jimin is standing next to him, and in his hand is the small clip.

‘Look at me,’ he says quietly, turning and standing before Yoongi, blocking the scene behind them. There’s a rushing sound of the wind and Yoongi wants to turn, wants to watch even though he knows what’s about to happen. But Jimin lifts his free hand, palm curving to fit the side of his face and holds his gaze.
‘Take me to your first dream,’ he tells him as the room floods with the sound of red - the sound of death, of loss. He feels Jimin’s hand taking his own, a small object pressing into his palm and then -

_The sun is shining._

_It’s warm. Maybe a bit too warm. But there’s a gentle breeze that blows about occasionally and the sweat on his skin cools. He fights the urge to yawn, instead opting to stretch his arms over his head. He blocks the sun with his hands for a while, rings of light burst through his fingers, light splitting into spectrums of colour for a fraction of a second._

He can breathe. He was no longer on the floor, no longer collapsing as death converged upon them.

‘Earth,’ Jimin exhales quietly, looking around the memory with an awed expression.

‘Don’t look at the sun! You _know_ that the eclipse is going to take place soon- do you want to fry your eyes?’

‘Yoongi,’ Jimin points upwards, ‘Look.’

And then he smiles at him and when Yoongi blinks, Jimin’s eyes are reflecting in the sky above.

‘Just dream-’

He snorts, rolling his eyes and looking over to the side. He was in the process of dozing off, pretty sure he was about to start dreaming but _noooooooo_-

‘So hand me those glasses and stop complaining.’

‘GUYS! HEY GUYS! COME OVER HERE AND CHECK THIS OUT!’ a loud voice yells.

‘Please control your sister’s volume settings I swear to god the entire neighbourhood can hear her.’ Amic groans next to him.

‘Just because she’s AI doesn’t mean she has “settings” what the fuck-’ Yoongi grimaces at his best friend.

‘Don’t tell me you didn’t ask your parents for a remote control for her settings-’ Amic asks, reminding Yoongi of his naïve assumptions as a child.

‘I was _five_ let it go-’ Yoongi groans.

‘I SAID COME CHECK THIS OUT YOU ASSHOLES-’ she screeches from the other end of the patio, making both Yoongi and Amic nearly fall off of low reclining chairs.

‘WE’RE COMING FOR FUCK’S SAKE CONTROL YOUR VOLUME-’ Yoongi screeches back.

‘Siblings indeed you both swear so much-’ Amic chortles as he makes to stand, his lanky long arms grazing the extended ceiling over the patio.

‘Shut the fuck up-’ Yoongi replies without any malice.

The floorboards are warmed by the sun and they’re dry under his bare feet. It’s a lazy afternoon and the urge to nap is slowly overtaking his senses. God knows he’ll need more sleep after they leave Earth, he just wants to store up on all the sleep he can possibly get now. They walk over to where Chaewon was waiting for them, a small telescope in her hand, and a screen in the other.
‘Finally- come check this out!’ she beckons them over hurriedly, nearly losing the screen in the process.

She just turned 13 last week and to celebrate turning into a teenager, she decided to chop off a majority of her hair, leaving it into a silky rather bushy bob of a cut below her ears. They had to salvage her hair, seeing as she had taken to the scissors herself. Their mother nearly had an aneurism at the sight of badly butchered hair and rushed her willful daughter to the salon to somewhat make it look better. She had a sparkly little star-shaped clip on her hair, pulling it back behind her ears that were recently pierced as well. He remembers buying the clip for her from an accessory store from the Mars Docks. It was made in Earth, but she still freaked out nonetheless.

It made going to the Mars Docks worth it.

She points enthusiastically at the floor. They had a large tree outside of their apartment unit facing one of the many parks that was grown and maintained in the Settlement Arc. Sunlight was pouring through the canopy of leaves and the floor was riddled with crescent shaped lights.

‘Isn’t this amazing?’ she asks, eyes wide and filled with awe.

‘It is,’ he admits before he adds, ‘Don’t let mum hear you swearing – she’ll blame me again.’

‘We both know she swears more than the two of us- besides, you aren’t even here long enough for me to learn your “wicked ways”.’ She rolls her eyes.

‘Yes well, I’ll be gone soon enough so you’re saved from my influence for another 7 years.’

She suddenly looks sad.

‘I’ll be 20 by the time you come back- that’s not fair.’ She frowns. ‘I’ll be old.’

‘If you think 20 is old what do you think I am?’

‘-ancient.’ She giggles.

‘You’ll be taller than your brother no doubt-ouch!’ Amic chimes in with a grin.

He takes a seat next to her on the ground, ruffling her hair.

‘You’re talking as though you won’t message me every other day and like we won’t see each other through calls.’ Yoongi’s chest constricts when he says that, knowing what will have to inevitably happen.

She sighs, leaning into Yoongi with a shrug.

‘Next time we meet I might even come to Tayi and surprise you.’ She grumbles as Amic shuffles about the grass that bordered the patio, clearly giving them a moment. He had been incessant about Yoongi spending as much time with his family as possible. But Yoongi didn’t want to raise suspicion. Not that he never spent time with his family, but going out of his way before leaving for what his mother and sister assumed to be further studies to just spend time with them would undoubtedly raise suspicions.

‘Yeah?’ Yoongi manages to reply, sounding quite normal despite how his throat felt tight.

‘Yeap- and I’ll be better than you- just wait.’
He laughs, throwing his head back. He had no doubt about. At 12- no, 13, Chaewon was already showing signs of exceeding Yoongi in nearly every field he excelled in while growing up. And he can trust in knowing that Chaewon would never do the things he did, and would never do the things he was going to have to do either.

‘It’s a deal.’

‘We should probably get going if we want to watch the eclipse properly.’ Amic calls as he squints up at the sky.

‘Do we have to- I mean, it’s not that great of a thing-‘ Yoongi scowls, wondering what was even so special about the solar eclipse. Honestly he’s seen enough flying in and out of planets.

‘Don’t be a spoil sport and move your ass- am I right?’ Chaewon says with a huff, looking at Amic for support.

‘He’s right.’

Some best friend he was.

Yoongi huffs out a defeated laugh.

‘Fine- gang up on me then.’

The best place to watch the eclipse according to the local Settlement paper was at Level M3 Dock. Which is why Yoongi, Amic, and Chaewon go to Level M4 because there would be less people. Not a lot of people stare at Amic, though his height does garner a lot of attention from children who gawk, thoroughly impressed. And Amic, being the show-off he was, stands straighter, making his strides longer, more arched. He stops when Yoongi and Chaewon give him unimpressed looks.

‘You’re both uncannily similar,’ he mumbles, arms crossing and lifting his nose to the air.

Quite suddenly, Chaewon takes Yoongi’s hand.

‘Can’t you, I dunno, like take leave or something.’ She says, not even looking at him as they walk towards the Dock. They all decided to walk instead of take the tram, wanting to stretch their legs and avoid traffic.

‘I don’t think that’s possible?’ he laughs.

‘You know what I mean,’ she huffs irritably, blowing her hair out of her face.

Yoongi wasn’t always one to talk about his feelings as they put it. But then again, his sister was the same. It was probably a result of how their mother was. And it still hurt Yoongi that Chaewon couldn’t grow up in a house where she didn’t have to double-think her actions or words just in case they triggered a reaction from their mother. Yoongi was already used to it, but he didn’t want Chaewon to have to go through it. He tried his best but with all the meetings and conferences he had to attend in the Mars Docks recently, he was unable to shield his sister.

How could he try and prevent it when he wasn’t even there?

‘I’ll see y’all in a bit- you’re both too slow and I refuse to third-wheel emotional family stuff.’ Amic announces.

‘Then get the fuck out of here,’ Yoongi responds without missing a beat.
‘Language!’ he wags his finger at him before shuffling backwards though not before giving Yoongi a subtle but significant look.

The Min siblings both flick him off, making him cackle at their identical reaction. He draws some attention to himself as he skips up ahead, gangly form bouncing all over the place with surprising weight for someone so slight.

‘Still not used to seeing others here,’ Yoongi comments, watching the way the crowd parted to let him through, gaping after him with some awe.

‘Well- not ones that look like him,’ she replies with a small laugh.

‘Take care of mum while I’m gone.’ He says quietly after a while, his chest tightening even more.

‘You don’t have to tell me that,’ she mumbles, still refusing to look at him.

It was definitely a family trait.

He feels bad about having to do this. But this was a rare opportunity after all- not everyone was offered the chance to join the Raksane Tayi Scientific Research Panel. And their mother had insisted- lecturing him with a bewildered tone at his hesitation to accept. But that had been during one of her better spells- when she was more herself than whatever it was she had turned into now. And even though he knew that he would be light-years away, this would create a better future, establish a better future for his sister.

But the worst part of it all was that none of it was even true.

He understands the need for secrecy, the need for complete cover-up and the lies he had to tell his family for this. This was for their safety. He regrets nothing.

The only thing he regretted from all of this was knowing that Chaewon would have to grow faster than other children her age. That she wouldn’t be allowed many of the experiences that she would normally go through for a girl her age. That she would have to give up so much not out of necessity but out of obligation and love. That was always the worst- knowing that you would hate yourself for not doing it. And he knew that all too well, because that was what he was doing now.

And what he was going to do, was beyond himself, beyond his family- this was about all of Life.

‘Did you go see him?’ she asks quietly as they climb up some of the stairs leading to Level M.

‘No,’ he replies before lying easily. He thinks of the tiny square cement wall with their family name inscribed on it in the Settlement’s cemetery. ‘I will when I come back.’

‘That’s…that’s so far away.’ She says quietly, waiting a moment as a horde of teenagers rush past to catch a tram.

‘You’re starting school and trust me, it won’t feel too long.’ He grins as he bends down to hug her, more for his own comfort than anything else. ‘Remember? I’m ancient, I know how school will be.’

‘Try to come back as quickly as you can.’ Her voice is wobbly, like it was about to break.

Yoongi tries his best to not break down, to not fall on his knees and tell her everything.

‘I will.’
Their walk to the Dock is quiet, hands held. Yoongi, in a brief moment of panic, wonders if Chaewon knew something was off. Wonders if she could just sense that Yoongi wasn’t telling her everything. But he knows it’s his own guilt, his fears, his insecurities.

His training had more than enough taught him how to lie, how to maintain and continue fabrication- how to live a lie.

Amic is already there, holding in his hands 3 hand-made paper and plastic goggles. It was funny how despite how much progress Earth and Humans experienced, they still somehow stuck to old and outdated traditions. Amic senses their quiet mood and respectfully doesn’t say anything as he passes them the goggles. They make their way through the Dock, which is thankfully not crowded.

‘It’s starting,’ Amic says as he slides the goggles on. Yoongi is pretty sure he doesn’t strictly need to wear it, but is only doing so to not stick out.

Yoongi slides the uncomfortable goggles on and looks up.

It takes a few moments before his eyes can focus and it shows up clearly.

‘It’s beautiful.’

It is. It’s beautiful.

It’s a force of nature.

Something meant to happen despite all odds or despite what anyone would have ever imagined.

An occurrence that would defy all logic.

‘You’ve seen it at least 3 times already.’ Yoongi manages to sound wry.

‘Doesn’t stop it from being beautiful- and it’s gonna be another 56 years before the next one shows up on this side.’ His sister replies.

‘Do you know old you’ll be in 56 years?’ Yoongi chuckles.

‘Yeah- do you?’ she challenges, making Amic snort.

‘I’m too aware.’

The lights shift- a strange tint fills the air and everything turns quiet. If he listens close enough, he guesses he’d be able to hear the sound of the wind outside the Arc and the sound of the massive turbines keeping them afloat. Instead he listens to the sound of her breathing.

He’s seen the eclipse one too many times for it to be anything interesting or new. But the look of awe and fascination on her face makes him feel like it was worth coming up all the way here just to be part of her memory. After all, this did make a pretty cool event marker in his timeline.

It was almost destined- a sign that this was supposed to happen. That what he was about to do, was already preplanned, already eclipsing the decisions and choices he could have ever made.

Yoongi feels like this is where he would have been regardless of all the choices, mistakes, decisions.

‘There’s that story- about how the moon and the sun are lovers- you heard that before?’ Amic asks as he removes his goggles, looking straight up at the eclipse.
‘Yes! I read a story about that!’ Chaewon replies excitedly.

‘Back in my planet- it’s actually a part of one of our religions you know?’ Amic doesn’t even blink, looking up at the slowly forming eclipse, a strange look passing his face.

‘Oh! That’s kinda cool!’ Chaewon jumps a little.

‘Cataclysmic more like,’ Amic snorts, looking normal again. ‘Literally everyone wanted to get married during the eclipse- it was like, good luck or something. Like how no matter what, the moon and sun would always find each other- the married couple would always find each other too.’

‘But that’s cute,’ she argues, adjusting the goggles properly.

‘I mean I guess, but it’s like, such a common thing you know? My parents did the same.’ Amic rolls his eyes and gets distracted by the sight of a food stand opening to the side of the Dock. Yoongi is half sure it’s illegal to do so but it made good business for the day.

‘Finally it’s empty- be right back!’ Amic waves and lopes his way towards the hotdog stand, something that never failed to delight him for some reason. Yoongi briefly wonders if he should get Amic a keychain with a hotdog on it or something.

‘Do you think it’s possible for the eclipse to last forever?’ Chaewon asks out of nowhere, still looking up at the sky as a dark wedge starts to form in the sky.

‘I’m pretty sure the reason why people like the eclipse so much and freak out about it is because it’s temporary and doesn’t happen frequently,’ Yoongi replies wryly. ‘It’s why we’re all out here despite having seen it happen so many times.’

‘No I meant-‘ she stops for a while, still not looking away. ‘What if time froze? And all we ever saw was this- like, what would that be like?’

Yoongi doesn’t reply, his throat blocked, his chest curling in on itself. He can’t speak, and it seems as though Chaewon wasn’t really looking for an answer either. So he chooses to look up as well, watching as the dark wedge grows bigger and bigger, fully covering the sun in a matter of seconds. The sky turns a strange dim shade and there are gasps and sounds of exclamation.

A flare erupts through the sky and the brightness of it all ingrains itself into Yoongi’s mind. The ring of white fire glows and every time he blinked it beamed at him.

The world is transformed under this light- under this sky- and the entirety of time seems to pause, to allow them to witness this known cosmic beauty for just a few seconds longer- just a few heartbeats longer. Just long enough for him to feel as though he was breathing at the same pace with everyone gathered around them. To feel as though he were looking at the same sky with everyone- to feel the planet sigh at the sight of the eclipse.

‘It would be just like this.’

‘Yoongi?’

Yoongi looks down, surprised to find himself still standing by the edge of the Dock that was almost empty now.

‘Are you okay?’ Chaewon is looking down at him in worry while Amic hovers, holding a bottle of cold water in his hands.
'What happened?' Yoongi manages to get out.

‘You collapsed,’ Chaewon frowns, biting her lip in worry. ‘Uh- vertigo?’

Amic is carefully studying him as he hands him the bottle of water.

‘I- yeah, I guess.’ Yoongi sits up, not feeling nauseous or anything. What had happened? He glances up at the clear sky, the eclipse is over.

‘Let’s go home.’

Chaewon still looks worried when they get home. Yoongi manages to somewhat placate her by telling her it was probably fatigue and a heat stroke. He wasn’t exaggerating; it was a warm day and he was pretty tired.

She prescribes him with a nice cold shower and announces that she was going to make a refreshing vegetable broth for dinner (precooked and bought from the store but she still considered it cooking).

Yoongi does take that shower and oddly enough feels better. He doesn’t jump when the bathroom door slides open and Amic stands there, leaning on the door.

‘Are you sure you’re okay? It’s not the treatment is it?’ Amic asks, nodding at Yoongi’s back.

Yoongi twists a little to look at his back in the mirror over his sink.

The dent on his back was just a side-effect of the mandatory treatment he was having to undergo for their mission.

‘If you’re not feeling it, then it probably isn’t,’ Yoongi replies as he pulls on a shirt. Amic absentmindedly reaches for his own back, feeling at the dent there. Then he looks behind him, as though making sure Yoongi’s bedroom was empty.

‘You can still back out,’ he tells him. ‘You don’t have to do this.’

‘Pretty sure I can’t anymore,’ Yoongi snorts as he grabs his shaver. ‘Besides, can’t leave you alone.’

Amic doesn’t roll his eyes or make a snide comment about how he’s the one taking care of Yoongi instead.

‘Yoongi- you have a family- you have important Beings in your life who need you.’ He tells him carefully. ‘We’re not even sure about what we’re doing. How can you just…how can you just agree to this?’

Yoongi raises an eyebrow at Amic in the mirror as he says, ‘I could say the same to you.’

Amic just frowns at him.

‘I know what I’m doing- what I’m getting into. We both do.’ Yoongi says before he activates the shaver. ‘We both know the risks.’

Amic doesn’t look appeased by this.

‘Are you having second thoughts?’
‘I have many thoughts,’ Amic replies before asking, ‘Don’t you?’

‘Of course I do. None of this really adds up.’

Amic looks at him with a slight frown.

‘…are you actually thinking of doing this just because you want to find out more about it?’

Yoongi doesn’t reply immediately, intent on finishing his shaving job. When he finishes, setting down the shaver, he turns around and looks at his best friend.

‘After dinner, wanna take a walk?’

Chaewon is not happy that Yoongi is going for a walk. Because it was his own code for saying he was going out for a smoke and Chaewon heavily disapproved of it. But she relents though she makes it very clear that she’s not pleased, giving him side-eyes throughout the meal while Amic is distracted by a classic Disney film she put on for entertainment. Yoongi makes a mental note to buy her ice-cream as an apology.

‘Why won’t you tell them?’ Amic asks as they exit the Min household unit. This was one of the older Settlement Arcs and the housing units were aligned and put together much like apartment units though in this case formed whole houses with their own small gardens. The newer Settlement Arcs were designed better and provided you with more space and privacy while still maintaining the same measurements. But according to Yoongi’s mum, the Min’s having been living here for 8 generations already. Moving was out of the question.

Yoongi is also sure that there are no wonky paths that were once maintenance/construction paths entirely forgotten that lead out into odd heights across the Arc, most of which he discovered as a teen.

Yoongi finds himself shrugging.

‘It doesn’t feel right.’

‘None of it does,’ Amic nods in agreement.

They walk in continued silence, looking about casually, appearing for most of the part, like two Beings enjoying an evening stroll. The sun had already set but the sky was still alight.

Amic follows Yoongi through some questionable paths and up a few maintenance ladders until they physically leave the core Atmoshield surrounding the Arc. The air is thinner but still breathable, and the wind is a lot harsher here. Yoongi has always liked high places like this, secluded and lifted higher than most of the living spaces in the Arc. The narrow gap between two walls widens slightly before giving way to a shelf that overlooked the domes of the Settlement Arc, providing natural light within the structure below.

‘Nice,’ Amic comments as Yoongi takes a seat close to edge, his feet dangling over the open space, resting his arms on the bannisters. Amic takes a seat as well, leaning back a little on his arms and appreciating the view.

‘So what’s up?’

Yoongi pulls out a packet from his jacket, pulling out a cigarette and then lighting it up.

‘Have you told your parents?’ Yoongi asks as he huffs out a long stream of smoke.
Amic shakes his head, ‘Of course not.’

‘Maybe you should,’ Yoongi shrugs, exhalng as he sheds the pretense he’d been keeping up.

He feels old- stretched out almost. His skin is thin, his sight edged with white. But he refused to give in. Not now.

‘What are you saying?’

‘I’m saying we might not come back from this.’

Amic turns to look at him sharply.

‘What are you talking about?’

‘The corps,’ Yoongi shakes his head, knowing he has to be careful. ‘There’s something else.’

‘Of course there’s something else. We joined this knowing there was something more, it’s why you’re lying to your mother and sister.’

‘It’s not just what Yisheng Ndica said,’ Yoongi mumbles over his cigarette. ‘I looked into it.’

‘You don’t trust the Yishengs?’ Amic frowns.

‘It’s not that I don’t trust Yishengs,’ Yoongi replies, exhalng smoke again. ‘I don’t trust anyone with that much power. You see…’ he pauses, looking over the huge clear domes. Deep within the Settlement lights start to appear, and the cities within the Arc start to light up.

‘Humans we’re…we’re not the most durable or intelligent of species in the Universe.’ Yoongi comments dryly. ‘We’re also not exactly the most daring type.’

‘Is that an off-hand way of saying you’re really brave.’

Yoongi knocks Amic’s leg with his foot.

‘But if there’s one thing, we’re excessively paranoid- call it our past and what we’ve learnt from it. But it’s safe to say a lot of us learnt from history. And we still have loads to learn.’ Yoongi pauses, tapping the cigarette to flick off the ash. ‘But if there’s one thing- we don’t trust power, and we don’t trust politics.’

‘The Yishengs are not political,’ Amic frowns.

Yoongi snorts, ‘Sure. But they’re powerful. It’s almost religious, the way they’re revered in the Universe.’

‘What are you saying?’ Amic frowns. ‘If you don’t…I mean that’s an odd thing to say considering you know, you are Human, and your sister is AI.’

‘Again- I’m not saying I hate Yishengs or that I distrust them. It’s just there are…things I don’t trust.’

‘You can’t say things like this so casually,’ Amic says after a few seconds. ‘It’ll get you into trouble.’

‘I already got into trouble.’ Yoongi says carefully.
Amic freezes at that.

‘Are you going to finally tell me why you didn’t come back that night in Mars last week?’

Yoongi crushes his cigarette, tucking the remaining stick back into the packet.

‘The corps isn’t real. Not just in a “Roswell” kinda way either.’

‘Roswell?’

‘Back in history, there was a military air-force base called Roswell- people thought it was a headquarter for alien investigation and where the government of that time stored alien technology,’ Yoongi explains.

‘Was it?’

Yoongi snorts, ‘No- just a normal air-force base. Rumors floated all over the world about that place, making people want to investigate it. In the end nothing came of it, and when we were busy looking at places we thought were suspicious, we never saw the real threat that was growing.’

‘And that’s what you think this whole thing? A threat growing while we’re bothered about the realness or meaning of the “corps”?’ Amic asks.

Yoongi shakes his head before he says, ‘I’m pretty sure that what we’re doing at the corps is somewhat legitimate in regards with the Alliance- I’m just not sure how much of it is what they say it is, and how much of what we do is actually meant for the purpose we’re told, or what we’re going to do is actually for the mission statement.’

‘So we’re not actually working... against the Alliance... but for the Alliance?’ Amic words his question carefully.

‘I don’t know it’s just-’

Amic waits for him to continue, not saying anything.

‘I think we’re part of the threat,’ Yoongi says slowly. ‘Right now, the main narrative of concern is in the form of the Alliance, and also the non-GLA Systems and planets- the potential threat they have against the GLA, the technology they don’t want to share, the resources they don’t want to share. And like the Raksane Tayi Scientific Panel, the GLA is creating commotion in one area to sidetrack from the main threat.’

‘So you’re saying that the GLA is doing this? What could the Scientific Panel actually even do? It’s all just old and baseless rumors,’ Amic counters though he’s not arguing, ‘Things like digital-souls can’t even be real.’

‘Logically of course we know that- so why would there be so much coverage and rumors flying about?’ Yoongi shoots back, looking over at the high clouds but not really seeing them. ‘It’s being used as a distraction while the real threat grows.’

‘Which is?’

Yoongi looks over the skies, not seeing but knowing that all of Earth lay below and before him.

‘Before Earth went through the Age of Revelations, it was already collapsing in on itself,’ Yoongi tells Amic. ‘The warning signs were there of course, but most people were distracted by other
things hyped up news networks and old databases. The things they were distracted by appeared important only because it was made to appear important. All of Earth was dying and despite it having reached a complex level of communications most people were not aware of what was happening. All of this was a distraction from the real problem at hand of course. And that distraction worked well, because it drove Earth into the Second Age of Darkness and effectively killed themselves in the process.’ He exhales, feeling his pulse heighten at a frightening pace. He’s never said this out loud to anyone before. ‘The same way the Yishengs will effectively kill all of the Universe.’

Amic’s expression doesn’t change. He only closes his eyes.

Yoongi continues on.

‘Last week, well- for almost a year now, I’ve been doing research- been looking into what we’ve been doing and- and nothing makes sense.’ Yoongi’s hands start to shake but he can’t control it. He doesn’t try to hide them either. ‘All I know is that similar to the way the Venture Unit takes up criminals and trains them as part of their agency, the Yishengs do a similar thing where they take individuals they believe are particularly loyal to them- or more accurately, to their power. Which is quite…quite extreme if you think of how everyone across the Universe treat the Yishengs- they are easily the most respected, and most revered of Beings, without question. Even Systems that refuse to take part in the GLA are still open to visits from the Yishengs.’

He almost feels breathless the more he speaks.

‘There are many powerful Beings who are like this, pawns of the Yishengs- working for them, under them-‘

‘-but for what?’ Amic interrupts. ‘You’re talking about this but I still don’t know what the purpose of any of this is-‘

‘Earth didn’t need to be rescued,’ Yoongi says abruptly. ‘Earth could have survived, could have started on her own if the people in power just stopped.’

‘Stopped what?’

‘Stopped wanting more- they wanted everything. Power is addictive and blinding and they were-‘

‘-are you saying the Yishengs are going power crazy?’ Amic looks incredulous.

‘It’s more then that-‘

‘Where’s your proof?’

Yoongi closes his eyes.

‘I- I don’t have proof but-‘

Amic stands up abruptly.

‘You need to clear you mind,’ Amic tells him, turning and clearly making to walk away. ‘You need to-‘

‘I met Yisheng Amme last week in Mars. That’s why I was late.’ Yoongi states bluntly. ‘She caught me snooping around the facility after the ships had left. She got me to tell her everything.’
'What- she’s not supposed to be here- she’s not part of this,'

'I told her everything I couldn’t stop myself- my suspicions, what the Yishengs were doing, what we were supposed to do-’ Yoongi hasn’t moved. But neither has Amic. ‘I thought she would kill me- I don’t know, or have me sent to Teronko’ing but-’

Amic takes a step closer.

‘She told me that what I felt was right. That what I thought was correct. She said that there was something wrong- something incredibly wrong with what was happening with what we were doing.’ Yoongi vividly remembers the tall Yisheng, cornering him in the dark of the lab where Yoongi, Amic, and approximately 50 others had just finished the final part of their medical treatment to ready them for their “corps” mission.

He had felt compelled to tell her everything, and it was probably due to her abilities.

‘You’re not wrong. But you’re not all right- after all, what can be right, when everything is wrong?’ she had said.

‘Why are you here?’ Yoongi had asked breathlessly.

‘Earth is special,’ she had replied. ‘There are special souls born there- strong, ancient, and more powerful than what any of us can see.’

‘What are you looking for?’

‘I’m looking for answers, Yoongi. And maybe you can find them for me.’

‘So you’re telling me, that Yisheng Amme has now more or less, given you a secret mission within our own secret mission, to report back to her, about this secret mission?’ Amic summarizes.

Yoongi nods.

Amic sits down again.

The night sky creeps up on them, the pale yellow light from the the domes below colouring the misty clouds above. Yoongi can just about make out a few stars overhead.

‘She looked at my back,’ Yoongi says quietly. ‘She didn’t recognize it. She doesn’t know why we have it.’

Amic’s hand twitches, almost as though trying to reach back for it.

‘You still went through with it. The final phase was after that night. You still sat through it.’

‘Because I need to know,’ Yoongi replies firmly. ‘I need to know what they’re doing.’

‘And what if you find out? What will you do then? What does it do for you?’ Amic asks.

‘The problem with Earth,’ Yoongi says slowly, ‘Was not that those in power were out of control- it was that the population who lived at that time wouldn’t do anything.’ He glances at Amic as he says, ‘And I don’t want to be that- I don’t want to do nothing when I can see so clearly as to what is happening. Not when I’m actually a part of that problem.’

The sit in silence darkness now completely taking over.
‘I’m not…asking you to join me. Or anything. But you’re my best friend. And this…what we’re about to do…is not something I want you to see-’

‘…you’re an idiot,’ Amic supplies unhelpfully, ‘An idiot in thinking that I would back out. Now that I know- I know that I should stick with you so you don’t get caught by unsuspecting creepy Yishengs.’

There’s an incredible rush that takes over Yoongi. The tightness in his chest lessens and the air around him feels lighter.

‘Amme isn’t that bad.’

‘Are you into multiple arms or something-ow-!’

Yoongi smacks him across his arm.

‘So…what do we do now?’

‘I reported to Amme about every procedure we underwent while we were at the Scientific Panel, the Yisheng Headquarters, as well as on Mars,’ Yoongi replies at once. ‘I told her about the mission we’re following to Axudar.’

‘What was she even doing at the Mars Docks?’

‘She said she was looking for answers,’ Yoongi says slowly. ‘I’ve seen her in the meeting rooms with Yisheng Ndica and the head of Planetary Relationships, for those weekly meetings they held in the Yisheng Headquarters earlier this year.’

‘Isn’t that the meeting where the GIU are also included? With K’mara?’ Amic asks with a shudder, ‘The Khol’isa are creepy.’

Yoongi nods in agreement.

‘So…what, do we wait for Amme to say something, or do we just…do we just continue?’

‘I don’t want to trust anyone,’ Yoongi replies immediately. ‘And I don’t trust anyone either.’

Amic nods to that.

‘I was looking into Axudar as well and honestly this whole Bhumi mission sounds really vague to me.’

‘You and everyone else,’ Amic mumbles. ‘Shouldn’t this be handled by the Venture Unit? Or even by the Yisheng motherships?’

‘There’s some sort of treaty involved,’ Yoongi thinks back to the mission briefing. Everyone had looked confused at their mission statement. His captain even more so, eyeing Yisheng Ndica with question.

‘Do you think we’re being sent in there as…as a distraction? Or as bait?’ Amic asks carefully.

‘A distraction or bait for what?’ Yoongi emphasizes. ‘There’s nothing in Bhumi. There’s nothing happening in that area. Apparently there’s a pulsar, but that would mean calling for the evac-plans. And that’s by the Yishengs.’

‘I guess we’ll really have to just go and figure it out.’
They still in silence for a while longer before they both turn away from the edge and head back downwards.

It’s quite late and Amic waves goodnight as he creeps into the guestroom. Yoongi wants to refrigerate the ice-cream he got for Chaewon and redirects himself to the kitchen. To his surprise, the lights are on.

‘Hey ma,’ Yoongi smiles at his mother who had just finished making some tea it would seem.

‘Honey, what have I told you about smoking?’ she reprimands at once. Yoongi’s not sure how she knew. He wasn’t close enough for her to smell him. Maybe Chaewon complained while he was out.

‘Nervous I guess,’ Yoongi replies rather truthfully.

She was having a good day. A series of good days in fact.

Although her depressive state hasn’t been as bad as they once were. Yoongi is still careful though.

‘Do you want some tea?’

‘Amic is always telling me to drink more tea,’ Yoongi laughs under his breath as he nods.

‘And rightfully so,’ his mother gives him reprimanding look that’s more fond than anything else. ‘Is everything all right though?’

Yoongi wishes he wasn’t caught off-guard. Wishes he could have stopped the look of guilt spreading so evidently across his face. But he can’t. And his mum is watching him with a careful expression.

‘I’m just worried about the inner-politics stuff,’ Yoongi manages to get out. ‘Everything is always somewhat-’ he waves his hand about. ‘-somewhat all related.’

His mother nods in understanding, though she doesn’t look like she truly believes Yoongi’s reason.

‘Your father used to complain about the same thing,’ she smiles before saying in a more somber tone. ‘But then…he said he would have no right to complain if he didn’t do something about it.’

‘Sounds like dad,’ Yoongi smiles over his cup.

‘And I’m afraid it sounds like you too.’

The lamp overhead is a circular glowing orb reflecting off the steaming surface in his cup. His own reflection eclipses the light in a thin band.

The curvature of the Earth is pale blue only for a fraction of a second before it turns bright gold. He feels himself jolt in his seat, gravity returning to the ship. If he concentrated enough, he would be able to see the Settlement Arc from here. But he doesn’t.

It was difficult saying goodbye. Knowing that it would be a long while before he returned. And despite everything, Yoongi has to return. Even though in his core he knows he may never return. He has to.

Because he needs to see.

How much would it change. How much would still remain the way he remembered?
Would he still be able to get his favorite coffee from the small café across the school compound?

Would he still be able to run up the stairs of their house, knowing, out of sheer habit and reinforced behavior, to skip the 6th step because no matter how many times they fixed it, creaked ominously every time you stepped it.

Would the lily ponds around the Arc Square still look fake, and would he always go and pinch their leaves just to make sure they were real?

Would the air outside his favorite spot to relax and smoke on the wind-turbines still smell a lot like cat-piss, laundry detergent, and engine fuel?

Would Chaewon still scold him for smoking? Would she still remain the same?

Would their mother still remember him? Or would she forget him too, lost in her sorrow and pain.

He looks away from the view to his right, and instead to his left.

Amic is already flat out asleep, mouth slightly open, snoring lightly. He wants to roll his eyes and maybe put a small piece of candy or something inside his mouth so that he would sort of choke. Not in the sense of wanting to kill him or cause him harm- of course not. Just for the sake of revenge because that’s what he did to him once.

Needless to say now would be the perfect time for revenge. But he doesn’t.

Instead he rearranges his neck so that he won’t get cramps.

He looks back out again and his breath gets caught in his throat. To his horror, he finds himself choked up- eyes starting to burn. Unsure why, but he just knows that this would be the last time he would see this view again.

He knows he’s being irrational- that his emotions are getting the best of him. But at the same time he allows himself this small moment and repeats his sister’s words in his mind, taking the warmth of her voice, the joy in her eyes, and the beauty of the sorrow of the moment into his memory. To remember it forever. It’s all he can do to keep Yisheng Amme’s voice out of his mind, quietly asking him for answers.

‘You’ll see it again.’ Amic says from the left quietly, as though he’d been awake the entire time. ‘You’ll come back before you know it.’

He doesn’t reply, just nods once.

Would he still be able to count the flowers in their garden?

‘We have to.’

Their mission is not until a few months. And during this time Yoongi keeps to date with family, always making sure to send some small trinket from the markets at Tayi. She had a growing collection of hair accessories from a large variety of cultures and planets. She’s decided not to study to apply for the Tayi School of Science and Technology like Yoongi did, but rather study something to do with anthropology. It makes Yoongi feel better, knowing that there would be no chance of her ever being taken up into this field he found himself in.

When the time comes for them to depart for their mission, flying first to Axudar for a few hours, and then to Bhumi, Yoongi and his team decide to wash off any nerves they have at an eatery not
too far from their living facilities.

Amic is already snoring despite only having a single glass. Yoongi, by some drunken miracle, finds a gravity-lift and hauls his best-friend onto it and pushes them back to their rooms.

The thing about Raksane Tayi was that it never really slept. And so somehow it feels like days never come to an end- but somehow go on continuously. It’s strangely tiring to Yoongi. He just wants to be able to see the coming and going of day. To see obvious and clear indications of day and night. He wants to be able to see the sunrise.

Yoongi is really drunk. But it’s not enough to erase his thoughts.

If anything he’s freaking out even more, the alcohol doing nothing to minimize or lessen the panic building in him.

‘You have walked past your street, Min Yoongi.’

Yoongi’s reaction is a second delayed and so is his scream.

Yisheng Amme stands directly ahead of him, towering over him in a vision of simple robes that were supposed to come off as approachable and humble. But Yoongi only experiences acute fear. He stumbles backwards but he’s caught by Amme (one of her many arms) and set to stand up right.

‘You need to be more careful,’ she scolds lightly.

If Yoongi wasn’t drunk and scared of out his mind (as a result of being drunk) he would have found Amme’s behavior comically normal.

‘Most Humans are allergic to alcohol- it’s why you turn red so quickly, your body is working against it,’ she sighs the same way an older sibling would at their younger sibling for being annoying. ‘Amic here on the other hand…he’s just a light-weight.’

Yoongi breaks out into hysterical chortles.

‘Let me help you back,’ she says, waving one of her many (Yoongi’s pretty sure she doesn’t have 8 arms but he can’t be sure he can really count right now, considering he lost count of how many shots he had an hour ago) arms and helps Yoongi push the gravity-lift with Amic on it.

‘What are you doing here?’ Yoongi manages to ask, proud of himself for wording himself right and for not screaming again.

Amme was honestly just a little creepy and being drunk was not helping him.

‘There’s a lot that’s happening,’ she tells him in her oddly melodic voice. ‘A lot that has come to my attention thanks to your information. I wish I could repay you for what you told me. But Time is not always on our side.’

‘Time is a social construct,’ Yoongi hiccupps. ‘Fuck time.’

‘Indeed,’ Amme sounds a little amused. Or was that sad?

‘I spoke to your Captain. I hoped to alert her. But it seems to me there is already someone who has noticed.’ She tells him conversationally. ‘I am sorry.’

‘What for?’ Yoongi finally looks up when Amme pauses. They were outside the entrance to their living quarters. Amme stands right outside the vicinity of the surveillance camera at the gateway,
Yoongi realizes.

‘I am sorry I cannot save all of you.’ Amme tells him. ‘I will do what I can from now to save others.’

Yoongi really doesn’t know what Amme is on about. But he sort of shrugs and replies, ‘You can’t save everyone- you’re not god or something.’

Amme’s eyes (too many in Yoongi’s drunken state) gleam at him from the dark.

‘No we’re not,’ she replies, taking a step back her voice echoes oddly as she says, ‘Hold to your memories, Min Yoongi. Let them save you.’

Yoongi doesn’t remember any of this when he wakes up the following morning. Instead he hastily rushes into the shower, his mind strangely empty and his body moving as though on muscle memory.

Amic looks terrible as per usual after a night out drinking. Thankfully they had the forethought to pack before hand and all they had to do was wear their uniform, grab their bags, and pray they didn’t forget anything.

Amic groans next to him inside the Transporter that is slowly lifting in the air to dock inside the Yisheng mothership, leading them out of Tayi and into warp.

Yoongi sleeps for half of the journey and when he’s awake, manages to make one more call.

‘Something is strange.’

Yoongi startles out of the bed he’s sitting on, waiting for Chaewon to pick up the call, nearly falling over when he-

‘J-Jimin-?’

The name is almost foreign on his tongue and he doesn’t recognize this Being before him- but he’s reaching for him, hand stretching forward, eclipses in his eyes-

_Eclipses are dangerous don’t look into them-

He looks away immediately but that’s a mistake. Everything around him flickers violently- the Transporter warps in and out of space, the patio from Earth resurfaces, the red air of Megibīya swirls around him forming into the robes that hung off of Amme’s tall and thin structure and everything bursts into purple glitter and-

‘Yoongi?’

With a small cough, Yoongi finds himself inside red-lit forest of Megibīya. His fingers feel at the texture of the hair clip he kept safe in the cigarette pack in his inner pocket.

Chaewon had done something like this before.

Sneaking in objects into his bag as though making sure that by some brotherly duty, Yoongi would always return home to give it back to her. She started doing that ever since he moved out of their home to study at a university in the neighbouring Settlement Arc. And Yoongi always came back home to return it to her.

Jimin too was far from home. He had illustrated via hologram what his planet looked like. What
brought him all the way here?

Jimin looks down at him expectantly, worry in his eyes. Yoongi’s been coughing more than usual too.

The past few days were tough. What with the tension between each Being, the fear, the confusion.

‘Hey sunshine,’ Yoongi’s smile isn’t forced and this unknown Being’s presence is soothing to the pain in his chest. ‘What’s up?’

Jimin points towards the back, gnawing at his lower lip in worry.

And this was something else added to all of the strain in the team.

A strange illness seemed to be slowly taking over a few of them. Fatigue, temporary loss of senses, fever, chills, racking coughs, and labored breathing. But it went past these symptoms.

There was something else about this illness.

And Amic was one of the victims.

‘There’s something more- I think there’s something more.’ Amic had whispered to him just a few hours ago. ‘All the ships that came before us. We should have seen them. And the ones that were supposed to come after us. They’re not here.’

‘I know,’ Yoongi wiped at his face, his hand felt heavy.

‘Do- do you think they’re getting rid of us?’

‘What?’

‘The corps- all of us. Do you think they’re getting rid of us?’ Amic asks, his eyes glazed with fever and pain. ‘I think- I think they’re...they’re replacing us-‘

‘Hey, it’s okay,’ Yoongi tried to placate his best friend.

His eyes look past Yoongi, a strange glassy clear quality to them.

‘Just remember, Yoongi. Remember-‘

The fever was a strange bout of deliriousness that came and went. Everyone reacted differently but it seemed to have the same strange effect on all of them. But what was extremely disturbing was the source of their pain.

It wasn’t headaches or general body pain.

Amic twitched and writhed like his entire back was on fire.

The same thing happened to Yoongi too. His back would crawl, his skin feeling as though it were peeling. But it never was too extreme for him.

This was effecting all of them. Except for Jimin.

Jimin was definitely not part of any of the other groups. He hadn’t been wearing their uniform, and he couldn’t speak Standard either. Jimin gestures, placing his palms together and under his head to mime sleep.
‘Sleep,’ Yoongi nods. ‘I’ll stay up- it’s my turn to watch.’

Jimin looks back to where the team were huddled around, eyes sharp but weary. He seems to make up his mind and sits next to Yoongi instead. A few moments later, Jimin’s head makes its way to Yoongi’s shoulder.

‘Sleep.’ Yoongi whispers quietly, peering out into the forest and ignoring the way his back burns. ‘Jimin sleep.’

Jimin nods into his shoulder wordlessly, a hand creeping around his forearm slowly, as though hoping Yoongi wouldn’t notice.

To reassure Jimin, and also to experience what it felt like, Yoongi gently brushes through Jimin’s silver-gold hair. Jimin leans in even closer at the contact, his hand now fully holding onto his arm.

‘I’ll be here when you wake up.’

* *

Namjoon recognizes the Being easily.

Hoseok would have recognized him too.

If you were immortalized for stabilizing the technology for harnessing and converting energy from black-holes, anyone with a standard GLA education would know exactly who you were. Of course images of the Being only known previously as Chen was included in the massive memorial wall within the Venture Unit Headquarters. It was indescribably strange to see him alive- not just alive but also involved in all of this.

‘You recognize him?’ Kai asks as they step back, watching the two approach each other.

‘Of course,’ Namjoon replies, watching as Jimin approaches Chen, or JD as Kai had introduced him. ‘Who doesn’t?’
'Thought I saw a ghost the first time I saw him,’ Kai laughs quietly.

They don’t seem to be talking. Just simply looking at each other. But for some reason Namjoon knows that he needs to keep quiet- not disturb them. Kai doesn’t seem bothered or fazed as they maintain a respectful distance. Then quite suddenly, Jimin falls to his knees. Namjoon can’t see his face but can tell that Jimin wasn’t feeling good.

‘Don’t,’ Kai tells him quietly. ‘The reason why JD wanted to talk was because of Bhumi- I’m guessing your friend is related to all of that?’

Namjoon nods slowly in reply, unsure what to think or do when Jimin raises his hand and JD takes it.

Rather abruptly both of them sort of tilt and with the strangest of motions, that appeared both extraordinarily fast but entirely slow, they both lift up off of the ground and settle on the ground on their backs.

‘What the fuck-’ Namjoon frowns, attempting to approach the dimly lit area.

‘Wait-’

‘Pa- it’s okay,’ Taeh’ yung chimes in, ‘Let them sleep.’

Namjoon slows down, still moving towards the two who were apparently “asleep”.

‘Is this normal?’ he asks, gesturing down at JD and Jimin.

‘I mean- I guess?’ Kai shrugs, giving him a winning smile.

‘Of course it’s not,’ a familiar voice snaps at them from a close distance. Moving in the shadows, Ems appears, shifting along the wire strewn floor and not sparing them a glance before settling into a lowered circular dais, surrounded in a wall like fashion with screens all around.

‘Everything that takes place here is not normal,’ she barks before saying, ‘And you don’t even have a gift on you. How nice.’

Kai gives him a shifty smile which Namjoon returns with a shrug of his own.

‘I don’t expect it from Namjoon but Kai,’ she exhares as though disappointed.

Namjoon’s not sure if he should be offended or not.

‘I’ll be right back,’ Kai sighs heavily, vanishing before his sigh could end.

‘What happened to you anyways,’ she asks, still not sparing him a look, the slender fingers of her hands spreading and crawling along the wires, joining her to the entirety of the GLA database. She literally had every single information and data under her finger tips.

‘Got into trouble,’ Namjoon replies as he glances down at his arm.

‘Will that be a problem?’

‘I don’t think so,’ Namjoon answers as he walks over. ‘Where can I start?’

‘The floors yours.’
'How generous,' Namjoon mumbles, lowering himself on the floor.

'I already have things you can look into,' she informs him, 'Here use this.'

A large folding screen slides over towards him and Namjoon picks it up, propping it up on a few of the many coiled wires.

The first thing Namjoon sees are complete tabs on every single individual of his team.

‘You did research on all of them?’

‘What do you think? Of course I did,’ Ems retorts as though offended. ‘Pretty sure you did too but I thought I’d put my spin on it.’

‘Thanks,’ Namjoon makes sure to save it for later.

‘You have interesting Beings in your team,’ Ems comments before Namjoon can even begin to start checking the other connections on the screen.

‘I’m aware,’ Namjoon sighs.

‘I don’t know what you’re doing but I think I have a pretty clear picture. Seems convenient doesn’t it?’

‘Tell me about it. There’s no way this is gonna end nice.’

‘Is that why you’re here? To try and make it end nice?’

‘Define nice,’ Namjoon looks over at where Jimin and JD are. ‘Everything is just really weird.’

‘Well, your Khol’isa isn’t nice.’ Ems remarks, drawing Namjoon’s attention.

‘What do you know about the Khol’isa?’

Ems sighs heavily before asking, ‘You mean what do I know that you don’t know?’

‘I guess.’

‘Nothing more than what you know if I’m being honest,’ she shrugs. ‘The Khol’isa with you is unique to top it all of. He ain’t like the others.’

‘What- more like K’mara?’

Ems snorts, waving a few long fingers as though flicking him off.

‘K’mara is prime example of what the Khol’isa are like. Your incomplete Khol’isa is a mess.’ Ems pauses before she says, ‘Read up on him when you have time.’

‘Thanks, I will.’

‘Also, just my opinion but I’ve never trusted the Ngfy’widan.’

Namjoon frowns, ‘What? Like, their whole species?’

‘Sure. Added with the Venture Unit.’

‘Pretty sure you said that about me and my whole species,’ Kai declares, reappearing to the side
with an armful of neatly packed food items. ‘I come with gifts and sustenance.’

‘You and your species are a menace,’ Ems mutters.

‘She says that about everyone,’ Kai rolls his eyes as he sits next to Namjoon, a screen sliding over to him. ‘What can I do?’

It’s not that Namjoon doesn’t trust Kai. He just doesn’t want to widen the group of Beings involved in this situation. Granted, Kai and his ship were probably in the whole situation before Namjoon was made aware of the whole ordeal.

‘You can go through this,’ Ems replies instead, saving Namjoon from having to come up with an answer.

They sit in silence together, the only sound comes from Namjoon and Kai who occasionally shift in their seats to adjust themselves. Ems is completely stationary as usual, combing through data as she literally becomes a part of the archives.

There’s a lot of information- broken data and corroded files that need time to rewrite and reprogram. It feels beyond right to be back here. Namjoon has missed this. Even though he’s short-handed for now, he’s still in his element and for once, the strain building in his mind lessens enough for him to feel as though this was just part of his normal life pre-mission with the Užkulisai.

‘Well,’ Ems suddenly says, breaking the silence. ‘Ynqaba, or the Reformist Union as they now call themselves, has a very colourful past. Not just your standard politics-gone-wrong kinda way but more in a played-middle-man-for-the-Alliance kinda way.’

The Alliance was involved?” Namjoon raises an eyebrow as Kai looks up from his screen with interest. He remembers the way Khonen had told them that the Alliance was dying. This directly links back to the Omhlophe and Namjoon isn’t sure how.

‘Yeah…’ Ems pauses before sighing and saying, ‘Here- you guys look, Kai- you might find it interesting too.’

Kai immediately springs into action, opening the file on his screen and frowning immediately.

‘The Alliance? But why are these Yisheng ships?’ Kai asks before he pauses, expression turning stony. Namjoon checks the files too. They’re heavily encrypted data, somehow obtained from planets around and from Ynqaba, of news outlets reporting the incidents in the System there not even 20 sols ago.

‘This is all pretty recent,’ Kai mutters under his breath.

“ALLIANCE TO HEAL PLANETS: CORE-MEDICATION DELIVERED FROM TODAY” the headlines read. Namjoon pushes the encryption and reads the article as it recovers.

“Isbahaysiga Alliance Committee Members have finally come to an agreement with the Planetary Society in Ynqaba regarding the Core-Implants. The Core-Implants have been designed to heal and sustain our planets from within. “Air filtration devices are on their way to the atmosphere and the citizens of Ynqaba will soon be breathing clean air once more,” Supreme Committee Leader declared from the motherships. He has continued to encourage Ynqaban citizens to join the academic and medical program to educate themselves on the steps being taken to heal our planet. “By learning, we can enable a secure future with our children,” he emphasizes. “You can soon be a self-sustaining and flourishing planet- let the future generation guide you to a better place”.”
As many as 45% of the population of youths have joined the academy aboard the motherships and have shown great improvement according to relatives and friends. They are to participate in the research to heal our planets, and will learn how to guide us back to light, and into purity.”

For a moment, Namjoon doesn’t understand what he’s seeing.

The image that clears up after the article is clearly depicting a Yisheng mothership. In fact, it’s identical to the one that crashed and had been made into a dwelling place by many surviving Ynqabans. But why was this called the Alliance mothership?

‘Pa!’

Namjoon jolts in his seat.

‘Sk’jin’s UV bed has arrived!’ Taeh’yung inform him cheerfully. ‘We can pick it up when we arrive at Pit 18.’

‘Okay thanks Tae,’ Namjoon replies, catching his breath. He almost forgot that he was on line with the ship. ‘Is uh, is everyone okay?’

‘We’re all good!’ Taeh’yung happily reports. ‘How’s Chim?’

Glancing over to the side Namjoon finds Jimin still on the ground, lost in sleep.

‘Good- still…sleeping?’

‘Okay!’

Mind going blank for a moment, Namjoon thinks back to Ynqaba. It’s not the most pleasant of memories, but he carefully combs through his memories.

‘I think it’s safe to say that the Yishengs, possible Ndica or Tlun’hla were involved with Ynqaba and were using the Alliance as cover-up.’ Kai says slowly. ‘None of these articles mention the term Yisheng- but there are a few smaller articles here regarding religions and temples being set up in honour of the Alliance Committee members. Some of them are negative though. There’s an article here about protests regarding something called “Core-Medication”.’

‘The merchants took their lives, they said they were thieves trying to deceive. They took away Yoongi’s helmet and clothes; to put with the others. I am sorry.’

‘Others? They said there was more?’

‘In store.’

Did the Yishengs use Ynqaba and her neighbouring planets to grow and keep the GI? While under the pretense of “healing” the planet. The System was not a part of the GLA and it was far away from credible GLA Systems- the closest being Ymir but considering Nuqtai, a pirate stop, was right there- any chances of discovery by actual GLA organizations was pretty low.

Namjoon cannot find any more information past these bits and pieces of articles and reports. There are a few other things left to check, but their dates all abruptly end some 25 sols ago.

‘Is there anything else from Ynqaba?’ Namjoon asks.

‘Did you go through everything?’ Ems asks.
‘Yeah?’

‘Then no.’

The people of Ynqaba seemed to recognize and were familiar with the GI uniform. So much so that they had them in store with them. Yoongi had mentioned how he would travel undetected and unchecked using Yisheng Transporters and passes- was this infiltration that bad.

Then of course there was Jungkook.

This was a clear indicator of the presence of “eggs”. Was Jungkook supposed to be part of the GI? What caused the Yisheng ships to crash? Namjoon wishes he had been able to get closer, to better study and analyze the crashed ship- better understand how Jungkook had gotten there. Wish he could have had a more direct contact with the Ynqaban-

With a jolt of electricity rushing through his body, Namjoon realizes that there was someone who was definitely exposed to the Ynqabans in a completely different way than they did.

Sk’jin.

Something had clearly happened. He had clearly found something- or heard something. But he can’t…he can’t get Sk’jin to talk. He was clearly not eager to do so and trying to get Sk’jin to do anything just meant never getting anything done with a lot of anger, sarcasm, and snide comments. He was going to have to be careful.

‘Pretty interesting stuff,’ Namjoon comments over the line. ‘We’re getting good information.’

‘What’s up?’ Hoseok asks immediately.

‘Well, for starters, Ynqaba’s history is pretty standard,’ Namjoon comments, going through everything else he had read. ‘They started off like most growing planets- spending more resources than they had, capitalist governments taking over until there was no return. Stuck between two evils they chose war.’

‘What’s the other evil?’ Hoseok asks.

‘Starvation,’ Sk’jin supplies easily. ‘Somehow they think dying and fighting in a war, to suffer something palpable and feel like there’s an enemy is a meaningful choice. Of course it’s not. There was no need for war, but it was better than starvation. They would rather run out to a field and get shot down than watch each other starve- then they can blame everything on the war- blame everything on the enemy.’

It’s silent for a long minute.

‘Also an easy way to get rid of the population,’ Namjoon continues carefully as he clears his throat. ‘Ynqaba’s neighbouring planets actually purged many of their countries to survive.’

‘Sounds great,’ Sk’jin intones in an almost bored voice. ‘Bet the Yishengs wept.’

‘Cry they did,’ Namjoon comments dryly as he glances over at some of the smaller headlines regarding the coverage. He was going to have to be very careful with how he approached this. So he whistles low as he murmurs out a report sent back to the GLA by the Yisheng Directory.

‘Cry they did…and they sent a Yisheng ship. In fact they sent a few.’
Namjoon pauses a while as he reads the report properly, waiting for any form of reaction. Mainly from Sk’jin. But he gets a little distracted as he actually pays attention to the decrypting file.

‘According…’ he pauses, glancing at the source and title of the file. ‘-according to the official mission report by the Yisheng Directory and mission leader Ndica, they went with six ships. And those ships…’

He hears Hoseok make a bemused expression as though scoffing.

Quickly entering the ship codes into the GLA database, Namjoon waits all but 5 seconds to locate them all.

‘-2 are still in use, the other 4 are no longer in service.’ Namjoon reads through their locations- the 4 that were no longer in use were docked in Tayi, waiting to be upcycled into new models.

‘We know where one of those is, where’s the other one?’ Hoseok asks.

‘The System of Axudar,’ Namjoon closes in on the location before sending it to Ems to check. He hears her curse him out.

Kai huffs in amusement.

‘What?’

‘That’s where Ndica is from.’

‘Well well,’ Sk’jin comments wryly. ‘How interesting.’

‘So the Yishengs did send ships to Ynqaba and the other planets. But how did they even crash? Were they attacked? Seems unlikely,’ Hoseok asks.

Namjoon waits an appropriate amount of time before saying, ‘I think it’s fair to say the reason why Ynqaba is the way it is- is because of the Yishengs.’

There’s a very heavy silence over the line.

‘If it was headed by Ndica, then it’s clear that he was there not as part of the Yisheng mission. But to further his own plan for domination.’ Yoongi says quietly. ‘Ynqaba was probably used as a cover. To distract from what they were really doing there.’

‘And what would that be?’ Hoseok asks.

‘Considering we found Jungkook there- and how Jimin said that they had GI uniforms with them, something that could also be related to the GI possibly.’ Namjoon tries in an off-handed manner.

‘What’s in Axudar?’ Sk’jin asks instead.

‘Checking,’ Namjoon looks over at Ems who really does flip him off this time.

‘You’re not being subtle.’ Sk’jin suddenly says, ‘And despite being an agent, Hoseok really lacks subtlety too.’

Namjoon grimaces- he doesn’t want to push Sk’jin.

‘Hey, Sk’jin.’
‘What?’ Sk’jin snaps.

‘Would you have told us?’

It’s quiet over the line. Namjoon doesn’t clarify what he means, but it could mean anything at this point. Whatever Sk’jin decided to answer with, Namjoon would take.

‘I should punch that idiot Long Huon for having such a big mouth- kid could never shut up,’ Sk’jin mutters. ‘And I’m fine- I at least have all my limbs.’

‘I want to know what he meant,’ Namjoon tries not to scowl at the memory of Zitao, the tall Long Huon who gave him the most disregarding look Namjoon has ever received in his entire life.

‘There’s not much to say. I’m not supposed to be alive you know? I guess in that sense all of us fit that category- but me more than you all.’ Sk’jin pauses before snorting, ‘Not saying I’m special.’

‘Oh you definitely are,’ Namjoon chuckles.

‘If you’ll stop flirting got some information on Axudar here,’ Ems cuts in, her voice unimpressed and monotone.

Kai hastily disguises his giggle into a cough.

‘How much time do you have?’ Namjoon asks, almost conversationally as he opens the files on Axudar.

Sk’jin couldn’t stand being serious- it was as though he abhorred any form of formal discussion, feeling the urge to disrupt protocol. It made him testy, and difficult to converse with. If Namjoon needed answers, or better yet, any form of truth from Sk’jin, he would have to meet him where he was most comfortable.

Not face-to-face, and incredibly off-hand.

Sk’jin doesn’t immediately answer. He was probably caught off-guard or contemplating what sort of answer to give.

‘Enough time to see this shit of a mission through.’

‘Is there-‘

‘No, Namjoon. There isn’t. I don’t need you looking into anything either. I don’t want you to.’ Sk’jin interrupts firmly.

‘All right.’ Namjoon acquiesces.

‘I’m going off line. I need food.’ He declares, excusing himself out of the communication line. Sighing, Namjoon guesses he might as well check up on what’s going on in Axudar other than the fact that Ndica came from there.

He’s not expecting, however, to be familiar with the coordinates.

‘Yoongi- could counter-check these coordinates with the ones we set up for our trajectory?’

‘Which trajectory?’ Yoongi asks immediately.

‘All of them. You good?’
Yoongi’s answer comes a little late, ‘Yes.’

‘Yoongi was nodding,’ Taeh’yung explains randomly.

‘We have these coordinates in 4 of our trajectories mapped out to enter Megibīya,’ Yoongi reports. ‘The System of Axudar.’

‘Thanks Yoongi,’ Namjoon frowns as he looks at the information on the System.

It was very close to where Megibīya was. And it was also where Ndica was from.

‘You guys know anything about Axudar off the top of your heads?’ he asks out loud.

‘Isn’t it affiliated with the Raksane Tayi Scientific Panel?’ Kai remarks, not looking away from the screen. ‘Pretty sure there’s like, some sort of branch there.’

‘Scientific Panel- more like private funders for the Alliance,’ Ems snorts from where she was. ‘Axudar is a pile of shitty scientists shitting together.’

Both Kai and Namjoon turn to eye her.

‘What? Like you didn’t know?’ Ems snorts again. ‘All of these organizations are ultimately funded by the GLA or the Venture Unit in one way or another. Idiots from Axudar are the ones who created us. Think about it- it’s so much easier for the Scientific Panel to get away with things if they just did what they wanted to do through the Alliance.’

All of this hits a little too close with what Namjoon has seen from the very start of this mission. And the further Namjoon digs in, the closer everything ties in.

From the Yishengs in Ynqaba, to the Alliance, all the way to the GI in Tayi- and now the Scientific Panel in Axudar- everything that seemed unconnected somehow was all tying in on each other.

And in the center of it all- was not just Jimin. Not just Yoongi.

It was all of them.

Digging into Axudar was complicated and time consuming. But when he actually gets to the core of it, Namjoon feels as though he’s hit the jackpot- Axudar was steeped in the whole debacle about Digital Souls as well as on leading research regarding cloning before it was completely outlawed and banned. No wonder Ems felt so passionately about the System. But Namjoon has now gathered enough information to see through their next step in their mission.

Kai wakes up with a jolt, looking extremely dazed. Namjoon hadn’t even realized the Dakaṣayaii was still there.

He’s not sure how long he’s been sitting here now- considering there’s no way to check up on time. He just knows that Taeh’yung has randomly butt in through the Comm to just talk nonsense and ask about Jimin who was still asleep. Stretching a little, though he didn’t really need to, Namjoon saves some of the more important files onto his own NaviLet from Ems’s screens.

He pauses a little as he saves the tabs on all of his crew members. Ems had even found information on Taeh’yung. Even on Yoongi though he’s pretty sure it’s information from Earth that he already found. Still, it was good to keep in case Yoongi wanted to know more.
Yoongi had said that he wasn’t Yoongi- that he didn’t know who he was.

Yoongi- or actual Human Yoongi, had a sister, that much they all knew at this point. But what happened there? What had she been told?

Namjoon does a quick scan within the tab, searching for reports or articles or recordings that had anything to do with Humans dying on a mission for the GLA. Humans as a whole didn’t participate in a lot of GLA activities such as excursions or “dangerous” missions. If they worked for the GLA it was normally as part of the diplomatic and or research department between Earth and Tayi. Before Earth was destroyed, they had been working on a very important and for some strange loophole in the system, illegal development that would benefit Earth’s environment. It had been called “Pollen”, if Namjoon remembers it correctly, and they were in the process of having it legalized in the Yisheng Directory.

Finding nothing, Yoongi goes back to Yoongi’s family. Finding them was easy; there weren’t a lot of Humans, and there weren’t a lot of Humans with the family name Min living in that settlement.

Her name is Chaewon and according to the legacy archive, was an AI. She was a member of the “Historical Archive Committee for the Milky Way”. According to the report she had 3 children: and one of them was named Yoongi. The family tree indicates that the eldest son, Min Yoongi, had been LIS. Or Lost in Space, as they termed all GLA officers who lost their lives in their duty for the GLA. It’s all that’s been mentioned in the legacy archive.

To Namjoon’s surprise, the family tree was still alive. They had survived Earth’s destruction.

He saves this information to give to Yoongi when he gets back.

He purposefully saves Sk’jin’s for last.

He wasn’t sure when Jimin would be waking up (a weird thought that would worry him but Taeh’yung, despite his constant questions, had assured him that Jimin was all right) and he knew he wouldn’t be coming back here for a long while. Making himself comfortable, Namjoon opens the tab on Sk’jin.

He thinks about what Sk’jin had said in his Cabin, looking incredibly old in the warped starlight.

‘You’re just like him.’

He says and it’s almost accusatory. ‘What curse is this? This has to be a curse or some other bullshit.’

Sk’jin turns forward again, fuming under his breath.

‘Who was he?’

‘My best-friend,’ Sk’jin answers quietly. ‘My best-friend, my right-hand, my moral-compass, my laughter, my promise. Spaces I fucking hate him.’

‘Ems.’

‘Hm?’

‘When you dug up info on my team, were you able to dig up known associates?’

‘You didn’t find them yourself?’ Ems asks, not looking away from the many screens before her.
'Of course I have,' Namjoon rolls his eyes.

‘But?’

‘But you’re better?’ Namjoon grins.

‘Suck up.’ she scoffs before saying, ‘Everything you could possibly need is in there.’

Namjoon is about to turn back to his screen, ignoring the way Kai yawns widely, stretching out as though to nap when Ems calls him again.

‘I found something interesting about your Khol’isa.’ She says.

‘Not my Khol’isa,’ Namjoon grumbles.

‘Semantics. I’m highlighting that interesting bit.’

Namjoon grumbles in reply again as Kai starts to snore.

‘He had one of the largest networks in the Underverse,’ Ems says. ‘Pretty impressive I gotta say. Your Khol’isa was doing well for himself.’

Namjoon doesn’t bother correcting her anymore.

‘He was famous, but…respected. There aren’t a lot of images of him outside of the GLA criminal records archive. He was extremely careful with how he managed his network.’ Ems sounds like she’s praising Sk’jin. ‘Found a few captured images still not entirely corrupted. Here.’

Namjoon checks the newly highlighted files on his screen.

‘Seems like the GLA and the Venture Unit attempted to contact him several times. To use their information and data to tackle the Alliance.’ Ems hums a bit before saying, ‘Here- this might be of interest.’

‘You think he might be involved?’ Kai asks in a sleepy tone.

‘We’re all involved,’ Namjoon frowns as he runs the files through his own reader. The files are images, short moving clips, and what appeared to be recorded logs suspected to come from Sk’jin’s pass-cards. The first file to read is an image and Namjoon leans in closer. It takes some time, cleaning up, but it’s quite obvious.

It’s clearly Sk’jin. And Namjoon wouldn’t say he looked young per se. But somehow…just…-

Sk’jin was undeniably a beautiful Being. There was a delicate beauty to him that in many Systems would be considered almost unnatural. But that same beauty held such power and something ancient. And in this single short recording seemed to encompass all of it better than what Namjoon remembers seeing Sk’jin now.

He’s turning back, eyebrow raised as though in amusement, hair sweeping past his forehead and delicate crystal horns.

It was true, Sk’jin now seemed entirely incomplete and it was even more obvious after seeing this footage.

He’s laughing at something someone says, reaching over to hook his arm around his. The unknown Being doesn’t turn, instead hunching a little as though laughing as well as he leans into Sk’jin. The
other Being in front of them seems to be giving a snide remark of sorts.

Namjoon goes through the list of known associates, narrowing it down to the most updated list, just a sol apart from Sk’jin’s disappearance from any record across the Known Universe. He cross-references the list of known associates and their criminal record images with the records Ems had managed to retrieve from the Venture Unit Core when she’d been looking up information on Hoseok. There’s a lot in there and Namjoon isn’t exactly expecting anything to pop up. Which is why he’s surprised to find a match with facial recognition.

A Venture Unit agent, not unlike Hoseok or Kai in fact.

His name is Ahadi, and he was a native of the planet Mwenzi. The information on him is limited, as all Venture Unit agents tend to be so in the archives. There is an added information that he was a defected agent, and was on a wanted list for collaborating with pirates.

‘Hey- looks like you,’ Kai suddenly comments through a yawn.

Namjoon frowns at the comment, looking over Ahadi carefully. He doesn’t see the resemblance.

‘It’s not just like- facial. You two…just feel the same,’ Kai shrugs before standing up and stretching loudly.

‘You’re just like him.’

Namjoon saves all of the files.

By the time they’re back on the Užkulisai, Namjoon feels a lot more confident. While what he believes to be true aren’t 100% backed up, he firmly believes that they were headed in the right direction.

‘We won’t do it even if a single Being on this table doesn’t agree.’ Namjoon repeats himself. ‘We will only continue if everyone agrees.’

‘What do you think?’ Yoongi asks Jimin who had kept quiet throughout the discussion.

‘Oh right- was there anything interesting you had with your meeting?’ Hoseok asks. ‘With the person who had information about Megibiya.’

‘He just…’ Jimin pauses, his gaze fixed on his hand.

‘He just showed me his past,’ Jimin replies slowly, his words coming out carefully, ‘What happened to him, how he met my people. How he died.’

There was a lot to explain surely, but Jimin looked like he didn’t know how to explain what he saw. And that was understandable. The very idea that someone, outside of this immediate group, outside of Jimin’s System, had been a first-hand witness to what happened to the people of Megibiya.

‘I saw a lot- I…felt a lot.’ Jimin says in a quiet manner. ‘I am still trying to understand what I saw. I need more.’


Jimin looks around at all of them. His expression is a strange combination of determination, sorrow, and resolve.
More Dreams.

It’s evident that no one knows what Jimin means by this exactly.

‘So we’re headed for Axudar then, I guess?’ Hoseok asks, breaking the silence over the table. Namjoon looks around at everyone in the table as they all nod in agreement.

‘Okay great,’ Sk’jin declares. ‘Who’s gonna do the dishes because it sure ain’t gonna be me.’ Namjoon and Hoseok volunteer in the end. Yoongi, Namjoon realizes, has never washed the dishes and always manages to vanish when it’s time to clean up.

‘Did you find a place that can deliver for your parts?’ Hoseok asks as he stacks the plates into the UV cleaner while Namjoon waits to rinse them.

‘I did, should arrive around the same time as Sk’jin’s UV bed,’ Namjoon nods and adds, ‘Made sure it would be discreet but not in a way to attract attention. Due to the fact that this is a mining zone, replacement parts for androids and even certain types of cyborgs are kinda frequent. So it won’t stand out too much if I order in bulk under one of the Pits shipments.’ Hoseok nods his approval.

‘What do you think Jimin meant? By dreams?’ Hoseok asks.

‘Honesty I don’t know,’ Namjoon replies honestly. ‘It’s like there’s a different meaning for him. For them- Jimin, Yoongi, Sk’jin, Taeh’yung. It’s like there’s several meanings to it and I’m never sure which one they’re referring to.’

‘Oh to have some clarity,’ Hoseok exhales dramatically before snorting and adding, ‘Never seen Yoongi so agitated. He even cracked a few jokes you know? It was weird as fuck.’

‘Worried?’

‘Panicked more like,’ Hoseok sighs. ‘I don’t think he quite knows how to grasp… emotions.’

‘Do any of us really know how to though,’ Namjoon asks back.

‘Good point- I guess he just doesn’t know how to express it.’ Hoseok corrects himself.

‘He’ll learn. He’s already learning. He’s better than when we started.’

‘He’s…I don’t know if the word is improved but yeah I guess. More so when Jimin woke up.’ Hoseok points out as he unloads the slightly warm dishes into the soapy sink.

‘Don’t chip the plates!’ Sk’jin yells from the Lobby where he’s reclining majestically, feet up on one of the cushions. Taeh’yung and Jungkook are engaged in some sort of weird game of chase.

‘You look better,’ Hoseok comments randomly.

Namjoon’s not sure what Hoseok means by that. After showering he had glanced at himself and didn’t notice anything changed.

‘Thanks?’

Hoseok just laughs in response.
'How’s Sk’jin been?’

A small furrow forms between Hoseok’s eyebrows. He takes his time to answer, washing his hands thoroughly first.

‘He’s being careful,’ Hoseok explains. He sounds uncertain. ‘Not just…not just action-wise. The way he’s speaking, the things he’s saying.’

‘Careful with us?’

‘Hm- careful with himself. Jungkook being here has changed a lot of things. I think like all of us, he’s processing the meaning of what we’re really getting ourselves into.’ Hoseok states thoughtfully. He gives Namjoon a searching look before asking as he wipes his hands, ‘You dove in on us didn’t you?’

Namjoon doesn’t bother denying it.

‘Honestly there’s not much to find. Found stuff that Yoongi might be interested in,’ he adds.

Hoseok smiles wryly at that.

‘Guess you know all there’s to know about us then.’

In truth there wasn’t much Namjoon could find about Hoseok. Or at least the issues that mattered. For instance the history with his father. Because Namjoon was so closely involved with the case he knew that Hoseok’s father had been one of the many Beings across the Universe who were in league with the “rogue” Yishengs and their attempt to, more or less, take over the Universe. Hoseok obviously had no clue as to how his father had been roped in- had no idea of how it happened, when it happened.

While the Gaia Trials revealed thousands upon thousands of Beings like Hoseok’s father, not much could be done as they were not directly involved in anything particularly illegal. Trying them had been difficult. But from what Namjoon knew from the trials, they were all recruited by someone just like them, believing in the supposed “higher calling” or Yisheng morality and undisputed belief in their supposed divine supremacy.

These Beings were as diverse as it could possibly be. From GLA officers from every department to pirates to tradesmen to normal citizens- this massive collection of Beings all keeping an almost public secret together had nearly managed to entirely upheave the entire Universe.

Namjoon’s not sure how he ends up with Sk’jin in the Bridge as the others decide to sleep. Jungkook is there too, head on Sk’jin’s lap but he’s asleep so it feels like it’s just the two of them. They don’t speak. But it’s not uncomfortable or anything. There was just no need for conversation, and Namjoon was just going through all the files and reports he had saved for his later perusal.

‘So tell me,’ Sk’jin suddenly calls from where he was sitting for the past few hours in complete silence. ‘Do you have any questions for me?’

‘You knew that the Venture Unit sent an agent to infiltrate your network right?’ Namjoon asks, not even pretending. It was better to be direct with Sk’jin anyways.

‘They sent a lot.’

‘But one stayed.’
‘One stayed,’ Sk’jin nods in confirmation.

‘The Venture Unit wanted information, access, your network- so that they could get to the Alliance?’

Sk’jin rolls his eyes, neon red flashing.

‘That’s what they say. They just say that to use agents for their will- most of them didn’t know they were being used for other purposes.’ Sk’jin says with a distasteful expression, screwing up his face.

‘Do you think they would have ever tried to recruit you for what the Yishengs were planning?’

Sk’jin doesn’t look at him, but stares out straight into the light display before them.

‘I suppose so. Never worked out of course.’

Clearly it didn’t.

‘Well I suppose there are aspects to that-‘ Sk’jin starts but he pauses, turning his head around to look at the entrance of the Bridge. But Namjoon hears it too. Hurried footsteps up the stairs.

Jungkook starts awake too, probably catching on to the change in the air rather than the sound, eyes wide as he hunches in on himself instinctively.

Jimin appears at the doorway, breathless, face blotched with colour. He looks incredibly disturbed, his eyes wide, and his normally calm demeanor shaken.

‘What’s wrong?’ Sk’jin asks at once as Jungkook sits up, eyeing the Bridge as though looking for things that might jump out at him.

‘I- I saw-‘ Jimin breathes harshly. ‘I saw into his Dreams- I saw into his mind and-

‘Saw into whose dreams?’ Sk’jin asks as they quickly rush to Jimin’s side.

‘Yoongi-‘ Jimin looks confused and he says slowly, ‘I think- I think everything was done on purpose.’

Namjoon finds himself a little bit stunned, his reaction a bit slow.

‘His- his back was-‘ Jimin reaches for his own back.

Sk’jin makes a frustrated sound but before anyone can ask any question, Lisai’s smooth voice interrupts them.

‘Accelerated heart rate and brain wave function detected in Weapons Specialist Yoongi,’ the AI tells them. ‘He is experiencing a panic attack.’

Jimin immediately turns about, rushing out of the Bridge, closely followed by Jungkook.

‘What the fuck-?’ Sk’jin asks no one in particular.

‘Lisai prepare the Medical Bay-‘ Namjoon calls out.

‘Immediately, Captain.’
‘Namjoon what’s going on?’ Hoseok says on line but he’s already appearing out of his Cabin door, looking confused as he glances at them, rushing down the stairs and turning towards Jimin’s Cabin. But the door is already sliding open and for some reason they all halt to a stop.

Yoongi shuffles out, nearly tripping on his feet. He looks completely dazed, covered in sweat, gasping and clearly hyperventilating.

‘Yoongi-’ Jimin takes a step towards him, entering his line of vision.

Yoongi’s reaction is violent.

He literally falls, his legs giving out, but his entire body seems to lurch forward towards Jimin, gasping but no sound escaping him other than his harsh breathing.

‘Hey are you-’ Hoseok asks worriedly, stepping forward as well.

This seems to trigger Yoongi who seems to finally realize that they’re all there.

Then he really seems to lose it because he suddenly seems to gain a wild strength and he skids across the floor towards Jimin, grappling almost violently and holding the latter down, shielding him down on the floor, his eyes still completely wild.

‘What the fuck-’ Sk’jin breathes out worriedly, looking back at Namjoon in shock.

Taeh’yung appears, eyes wide and somehow pant-less.

‘What’s going on?’ he asks, palms already glowing as though instinctively ready to attack (!?!?).

‘Yoongi-?’ Jimin is trying to calm the Human down but it’s almost as though he didn’t seem to know where he was-

‘Oh fucking Spaces,’ Sk’jin breathes out, eyes wide as he takes a step back.

Sk’jin takes a step back but Jungkook takes a step forward, snarling viciously as he crouches down.

And Yoongi’s reaction is to press back even more, shielding Jimin. His face is turning a strange colour and Namjoon can tell he’s about to pass out- he was hyperventilating too much and-

‘-stop-‘ Yoongi manages to wheeze out- ‘-go away-! NO!’

He screams, his veins painfully clear at his throat and around his temples. Jungkook snarls, ready to pounce and Sk’jin is trying to reach for him before he can leap.

But Yoongi falls backwards, a pair of arms wrapping around him that immediately goes up to his head, palms flat on either side of his temple.

Jimin says something, the air around them rippling almost.

Yoongi immediately calms down, his breathing normalizing and his face turning less purple and more normal.

‘No- no-!’ Yoongi is still gasping out, scrambling for a moment before he sits up bit straighter.

‘Stay- stay away-!’

No one moves. Hoseok gives him a worried look, clearing asking what the fuck he had just woken up to. But Namjoon has no explanation. Taeh’yung for no known reason, has a brilliant smile on
his face. Sk’jin looks incredibly worried, a frown on his face as he clutches onto Jungkook’s shirt to keep him close.

‘Yoongi?’ Jimin’s voice is sweeter than usual; softer.

Namjoon guesses he’s using some part of his ability.

But Yoongi does stop mumbling weird string of words and nonsense that compromised of “no”, “stay away”, and “stop”. It’s extremely worrying and Namjoon doesn’t know what to make of it.

But then Yoongi is scrambling again, turning around and crouching before Jimin as though shocked to his very core.

‘How-’ he chokes out.

Jimin has a very very controlled expression, but Namjoon can tell easily that this control could break any time.

‘How are-‘ Yoongi raises his hand and then lowers and then raises it again. He shuffle stiffly towards Jimin on his knees before he’s touching his face. Jimin takes his hand in his own, eyes never leaving Yoongi’s.

‘Are you real?’ Yoongi whispers.

He was clearly in shock.

Sk’jin makes to move forward but Hoseok raises his hand and so does Taeh’yung who is watching the whole scene unfold like it was some form of movie.

‘Real-‘ Jimin whispers back. ‘I’m real-‘

‘Sunshine?’

Yoongi’s shaking and careful touch changes to something desperate as he falls into Jimin, his entire body shaking.

‘He’s going into shock he might- he might collapse,’ Sk’jin says worriedly, still holding Jungkook back who is equal parts confused, angry, and shocked.

‘I’ve seen this-‘ Hoseok says suddenly. ‘Yoongi has done this before- in Ynqaba- he wasn’t- he wasn’t himself-‘

‘I think he’s finally woken up,’ Taeh’yung comments from where he’s sitting luxuriously on the couch.

‘What do you mean?’ Namjoon manages to finally speak, looking back at where a shaking Yoongi is still clutching onto Jimin, tucking him into his own form as though afraid of losing him.

‘Yoongi,’ Taeh’yung grins with a nod towards the Human. ‘He’s Awake.’
(Author’s Note)

I forgot to mention this last author’s note but
Can we all scream and cry
About
Mono
Tell me your favorite song
Mine is Moonchild
There is a way this song moves me- if I listen to it unprepared I can cry any time
I’ve always felt better, at night
When I was younger and living in my home country I used to go to the rooftop and just sit outside because I felt, idk, a lot more hopeful because the night to me was that moment of rest, that moment you know regardless of whatever happened that day or will happen tomorrow, its where you can just breathe. And moonchild really touched me at an emotional level. Also I don’t think there’s any need to mention how much I love the night sky and how much I love space, and all things cosmic, so this song feels indescribably hopeful to me. Namjoon to me feels like someone who is beyond artistry, its like he’s able to create something beyond what would be described as art. You know? It’s like he creates something almost spiritual
Also Namjoon is my moonchild end of story he is moonson
Im gonna cry
Brb
Also when he collabed with Nell I wanted to cry because I’ve listened to Nell for like, a long time, the first song I heard from them was “recede” and it’s still my favorite Nell song
Check it out if you haven’t!
And yes. Yoongi’s sister in this is Gowon from Loona. I heard that they’re cousins (or at least from the same family tree) so I thought, you know what, yes. I love Loona, and I love Gowon, so yes. I’ll do it.
‘Yoongi,’ Taeh’yung grins. ‘He’s Awake.’

They don’t move from where they’re standing. Only Taeh’yung makes a move by sitting down, reaching out to pull Jungkook closer to him. His attitude is carefree and not surprised by whatever was happening now.

But Hoseok finds himself experiencing déjà vu with what he was witnessing.

When he had entered the broken Yisheng ship back in Ynqaba to follow after Yoongi, he had come across the Human in the midst of a crazed massacre. The Human had behaved oddly, moving as though he had no conscious control over his body. He hadn’t recognized Hoseok and had attacked.

The same panic, the same confusion, the same wild look but intensified was now fully manifesting before all of them.

‘H-how-’ Yoongi’s voice breaks, coming out in gasps as his body tries to go into panic, but Jimin is clearly doing something, gently calming him down. ‘How are you- how are you here- how did- how did this-‘

Yoongi suddenly darts about, still shielding Jimin with his body.

‘Stay away-!’ he heaves out. ‘Don’t- don’t-!’

‘Jiminnie,’ Taeh’yung suddenly says quite conversationally, ‘I think it’s too much for Yoongi right now.’

Jimin looks heavily conflicted, his arms keep moving from holding Yoongi back, to cradling his head.

‘I think he should sleep-‘

‘NO!’ Yoongi screams, ‘STOP IT STOP LEAVE THIS PLACE STAY AWAY-‘

Jimin seems to make up his mind, eyes shining with unshed tears as he places his palms over Yoongi’s head with a determined look. The Human’s eyes roll backwards, his body going limp, instantly falling unconscious. Jimin holds him up quickly, arranging him to a more comfortable position.
‘What in fucking *Spaces* was that all about?’ Sk’jin demands at once, stepping forward to look down at Jimin.

With a strength that shouldn’t be surprising anymore (but Hoseok doubts it because Jimin didn’t particularly come off as physically powerful) Jimin picks up Yoongi in his arms.

‘Please follow me,’ is all he says, walking back to the Cabin Yoongi had burst out of.

Sk’jin gives him a confused look and Hoseok can only return it in kind. He had been asleep when Lisai’s voice rung through the air. And while the others didn’t need to know, he had already armed himself, watching the surveillance screens to locate any possible location of disturbance.

But his TeorSers and Heliords were already packed away when he realized it wasn’t an alarm of danger.

They all follow Jimin back into his Cabin, identical to every other Cabin in the Living Quarters. Hoseok notices how the window has been darkened so that no light entered. Jimin puts Yoongi down on the bed while Taeh’yang immediately makes himself comfortable on it, stretching himself out next to the unconscious Human.

The Cabin is a little small for 6 fully grown adults and one larger than average fledgling. But they make do, waiting expectantly for Jimin who takes a seat on the floor beside Yoongi’s pillowed head.

‘When I met JD, the Being who had information about Megibīya- he showed me his Dreams,’ Jimin begins slowly, carefully choosing his words.

‘What do you mean by *dreams*?’ Namjoon asks from where he’s leaning against the door.

‘Memories,’ Jimin explains, ‘But…they’re not memories of *now*,’ he waves his hand around in a wide circular motion. ‘It’s- it’s memories of living…of living in a time past.’

‘We just call ours nightmares,’ Sk’jin mutters quietly next to him.

‘So…so JD showed you his dreams? Of Megibīya? How?’ Hoseok asks.

‘You were sleeping- but how can you share consciousness?’ Namjoon asks as well.

Jimin looks at Sk’jin for some reason before glancing at Yoongi’s sleeping form and saying, ‘I think it’s because – because we existed in a different…different *time*. A different existence- and we can,’ Jimin thinks hard, words forming slowly as he tries his best to use words that would best explain what he wanted to say. ‘A different realm, we slept in that realm, where time is different, and so…so we can go back and show each other our dreams.’

He gives Sk’jin a pleading look, one that Namjoon follows back up to the Khol’isa who sighs and says, ‘I know what he means. Maybe it’s not the same but- but sometimes, I guess you could say you’re caught in limbo. Or at least existing in a way somewhere that’s…that’s not where *this* is, you know?’ Sk’jin waves vaguely.

Hoseok can get what they’re trying to explain. Theories about extra-dimensions, of alternative realities and parallel worlds have existed and floated around for as long as the notion of *reality* has existed. And while Hoseok is sure that, fine, maybe in *some* way, there are other dimensions that do exist. But they’re normally in the realm of theoretical science that studies energy and waveforms and black holes. The Universe- or the Known Universe was large, but Dark Space as they called it, was larger and unexplored. The possibilities were endless. But Hoseok has always been of the mind
that what existed in his immediate reality was much more important than the hypothesis of something that was unknown.

But maybe that should change now, considering everything he’s been through and what he’s seen.

‘Based on the Ga-Ga-ya Case reports,’ Jimin says carefully pronouncing the word by their syllables, ‘The Red Evil was born as a result of the Yisheng’s unwanted- um, rejected experiment. They dispose of them,-disposed of them in black holes. But they returned.’

Hoseok finds himself nodding alongside Namjoon, confirming Jimin’s statement.

It was an easy way to get rid of evidence. Easy but dangerous. The Yishengs made good use of their powerful ships and approached black holes to rid of their rejected experiments. As a result, the Akramanese, or the Red Evil, were born.

‘Time is different, changed, altered near black holes,’ Jimin continues. ‘And it’s…they are a part, of existing there.’

‘So…these dreams are…existences within black holes?’ Namjoon asks carefully.

Jimin shakes his head.

‘It’s similar- but what remains in our minds- no,’ he pauses, looking over at Yoongi again, ‘What stays in our souls, our Dreams, through that existence, is what connects us.’ He looks up, smiling briefly at Sk’jin before saying, ‘I could look into your Dreams, and you could look into mine. Same with Jungkook.’

Jungkook looks around with wide eyes.

‘And me!’ Taeh’yung waves his hands upwards. ‘But for your own safety, best not to.’

Hoseok doesn’t even want to question that, even though Jimin and Sk’jin seem to nod in agreement at Taeh’yung’s statement.

‘So you looked into Yoongi’s dreams?’ Namjoon asks slowly, ‘No- you looked into his past? Who he was before.’

Jimin nods.

‘I asked him if I could. I tried to do what JD did. And I could link our existence, the Time around us and…I could see everything,’ Jimin looks troubled. ‘I think- I think there was a big plan, a very big…attempt, to break into Menigišiti by the Yishengs…and the GLA.’

It takes a while before Jimin is able to fully tell them what he saw, his voice sometimes cracked as he maintained a neutral tone, telling them Yoongi’s past; or at least Human Yoongi’s past.

‘Ammee was there,’ Namjoon is sitting now, elbow on his knees as he frowns in thought, ‘Obviously she didn’t know what was going on. But she had her suspicions. But you said she was part of the Panel that approached you?’

Jimin nods.

‘Yoongi and his friend already had the marks down their backs,’ Hoseok begins, ‘It means that it wasn’t a result of the Red Evil- or even of the GI.’

‘It could have been before the GI was properly formed,’ Sk’jin points out. ‘The GI have been a sort
of urban myth for about 5 to 6 centuries right? Maybe they were pre-GI candidates? I think it’s safe to assume the rest of his team all had the same mark.’

‘There’s no point guessing or assuming all that,’ Namjoon says making Sk’jin give him an incredulous look. ‘I think it’s safe to say that Yoongi, as in Yoongi from the past, has somehow…woken up, or has…come back?’ he tilts his head as though in doubt of his own words. ‘And if he’s still…awake, so to speak, we can ask him details.’

‘True, but I don’t know how well he’d react to being here. He was in shock,’ Sk’jin points out adding with a sniff, ‘Besides, based on his experience, I doubt he’d trust to tell any of us.’

‘He’ll tell me,’ Jimin says with certainty. ‘He’ll trust me.’

‘It might be difficult for him to remember,’ Hoseok supplies. ‘We don’t know how much he will remember. Or how much of it is accurate- there were gaps in the memories according to what Jimin told us. Wouldn’t it be better if Jimin tried to uh, tie their minds again?’

‘They’re different,’ Taeh’yung quips up, mindlessly braiding Yoongi’s hair. ‘I don’t think this Yoongi will know how to Dream.’

‘Does it matter?’ Sk’jin asks with a curious expression, ‘It’s still him.’

‘Different, but same,’ Taeh’yung shrugs. ‘There was a pause, but it’s catching up now.’

‘But you said this isn’t the same Yoongi right?’ Namjoon asks carefully, ‘So how does he remember? How does…how does he know?’

‘Different but same pa,’ Taeh’yung explains, frowning a little before raising his palm, light forming at his finger tips. Neon green lined triangles form and twist just a little above his fingertips. He holds up his thumb, the triangle rotating slowly, the shape aligned and balanced. His pointer finger is also illuminating another triangle, but the lengths are different. And it goes on. All the triangles are different lengths and sizes. ‘Different but same.’

‘Well okay if that’s the case,’ Sk’jin says, breaking them from their trance. ‘What about Amme. She was there in Jimin’s system, and she was there snooping around in Mars, talking to Yoongi. And we all know she was the one who pretty much raised this Yoongi after the Gaia Case. What was her purpose in sending Yoongi to all of this? Was it because she knew him before, that she thought sending him here would trigger his memories? Or is it because of how Jimin was apparently in their possession before they decided to sneak him into the ship on our way to his home-system? What’s the connection?’

Sk’jin had a very good point.

And now with this “awakening”, it made sense that Yoongi was added into the mission. Amme had met and spoken to him in his past, and then she clearly recognized him when she saw him again. She was able to put two and two together, that whatever strange mission Yoongi was a part of, headed for Megibiya, was connected to how he was here today.

All of this was connected to the Gaia Case, but also at the same time, went much further than that. This went to the genesis – where it all started. What did Jimin’s system have to do with the Red Evil? Why were they there, and why were the Yishengs there, sending supposed GLA teams by the dozens to secretly investigate planets. And just who were the Omhlophe and why were they still here, what was their objective? Why were they after Jimin?

As individuals, they weren’t able to really make sense of what they knew, who they were, and
what they were really supposed to do. However, by combining all of them together, by connecting them all like this: Namjoon, Sk’jin, Yoongi, Jimin, and himself- maybe they would be able to understand what had happened, how it happened- and most importantly, why it happened.

‘I think we need to first wake Yoongi up,’ Namjoon says steadily, ‘I mean, is it safe? He didn’t look so good.’

‘Should be fine!’ Taeh’yung says as he grins at Jungkook, having hovered the triangles over to the young Pravasi M’hanun who was obviously delighted by the floating lights.

Namjoon raises an inquiring eyebrow at Jimin who also nods though it’s a bit hesitant.

That was understandable- Jimin hadn’t expected this reaction from Yoongi, that much was evident. But he’s also worried about what could be revealed- seeing as his System was clearly very deeply affected by all of this.

‘I think, I think just me,’ Jimin says quietly as he sits up and onto the bed. ‘I think, it might be too much. For all of you to be here.’

Namjoon nods in understanding though Sk’jin frowns a little.

‘I can keep line open,’ Jimin says, understanding Sk’jin’s expression immediately.

‘It’s fine,’ Namjoon replies at once, ‘We don’t want to invade your privacy.’

Sk’jin gives Namjoon a brief irritated look.

‘Will you be safe?’ Hoseok asks.

Yoongi had tried to attack him in Ynqaba, and though he clearly recognized Jimin, you couldn’t be too sure.

‘I’ll be safe,’ Jimin replies with a nod. ‘Yoongi is safe.’

‘Be careful,’ Sk’jin tells him quietly as he leaves, tugging Jungkook along gently.

Jimin nods and smiles at that.

Namjoon also leaves and Hoseok follows. Taeh’yung is the last to leave. He says something to Jimin who nods slowly, lips pressed in a thin line as he listens to Taeh’yung.

The Zhak’gri is last to leave and the door to the Cabin closes shut.

‘What did you say to Jimin?’ Hoseok asks, pausing for the Zhak’gri to approach him.

‘That we shouldn’t linger in our memories too much,’ Taeh’yung beams at him before hugging him suddenly and eyeing him directly, ‘He’s carrying the weight of the dead, it will crush him.’

It’s such a final statement- such a strong declaration that it almost takes Hoseok’s breath away.

‘You shouldn’t do it too,’ Taeh’yung adds before he takes his hand, turning it so that his palm faced up. Taeh’yung kisses it, a small peck that somehow immediately cools his hand. ‘How else will you carry yourself?’
Jimin kneels beside the bed.

When he woke up almost an hour ago, he hadn’t expected this to be the result. In fact, when he woke up- he expected Yoongi to wake up too. But the Human hadn’t stirred, only slept on, breaths deep and slow. Jimin hadn’t detected anything unusual so he had hurried off to find the others. The past 2 days were filled with too much information, too much of everything.

He fiddles with the Comm Device on his earlobe and decides to deactivate it. He had offered to share the line but now it felt too…he’s not sure if he wants the others to overhear. Not when there was so much.

Not now, when Yoongi’s soul was suddenly and rapidly aging-

Jimin breathes out slowly, clearing his mind.

The pain in his chest is slowly building. He’s afraid of what will happen, afraid of what he will have to live with. He’s afraid that everything will go wrong- he’s already lost so much, seen so much.

He already didn’t know so much of what was happening, of what happened in the past.

But this.

With Yoongi.

This was too close.

Exhaling out, he quickly places his palms over Yoongi’s temples. It’s not even a second later that Yoongi jolts awake.

Jimin shuffles back a little, changing his posture to hold Yoongi down if he started thrashing or yelling. Yoongi is panting, sitting up and looking around wildly before he spots Jimin on the floor. Or maybe what happened before was a fluke and-

‘Sunshine-‘

Yoongi is off the bed and nearly slams them both onto the ground as he barrels straight into Jimin.

His entire body shaking, Yoongi is holding him but there is no strength in his grasp- it’s almost as though he’s afraid.

‘Is it-‘ he pants out into the crook of his neck. ‘Is this real. Is this real- I- please tell me please-‘

His voice is strained, pleading and begging.

‘Real,’ Jimin says as steadily as he can, ‘Yoongi, it’s real. I’m real.’
His whole body shakes, convulsions starting from the core of his chest and outwards. Jimin’s neck is damp.

‘You’re safe—’

Yoongi’s entire body flinches, his grasp tightening around him.

‘We’re safe,’ Jimin whispers, arms reaching around Yoongi to hold him close, hands rubbing soothing circles over his back. ‘We’re safe, Yoongi, we’re safe.’

The convulsions shift into shivers, and Yoongi genuinely breaks down, sobbing in earnest into his neck.

‘I’m here,’ Yoongi gasps out, ‘I’m- you’re here and—’

Yoongi’s pain, his fear, his relief—his bliss— Jimin feels all of it, pouring out of the Human at an overwhelming rate. His soul is strained—like a blight overwhelming all living things, fear and pain spreads through and Jimin would burn himself to rid of it if he could.

‘I’m here,’ Jimin whispers, voice cracking and his eyes blurring. ‘Yoongi, I’m here, I won’t go, I won’t go.’

They stay like that for what feels like hours. Yoongi’s hold doesn’t loosen, just shifts as though incapable of realizing that Jimin was real— and that he was there.

‘There’s—’ Yoongi chokes out, his words stuttering like he had so much to say but didn’t know how to say, what to say first. ‘There’s so much- I don’t- I’m— I’m me? But I- sunshine how did- who- who was I- I can see you- you came for me- I -…it hurt, I saw you, you came for me and—’

Yoongi heaves a breath.

‘These are- there are not—’ Yoongi makes a frustrated noise, ‘Sunshine I don’t understand- I- why is this- is this really me? How- how many- how many Yoongi’s do you see—’

Jimin shivers— could Yoongi remember what happened so far? What happened before?

‘It’s too much—’ Yoongi gasps, words breaking, his breaths coming out in sharp pants. ‘It’s—sunshine I can’t—’

Moving quickly, Jimin moves them, turning a little so he can properly hold Yoongi, never breaking from their original position where Yoongi is pressed into his neck. His movement seems to startle the Human, making Yoongi press in all the more, and Jimin could almost believe that their hearts were beating into each other. He gently runs his hand through Yoongi’s hair, carding through the strands gently, humming quietly under his breath. He whispers words of calm, of serenity into the tune he hums, gently rocking them in a lulling manner.

Slowly, each second slipping past faster than Jimin can comprehend, but stretching out infinitely all at once, the tenseness in Yoongi’s form relents.

‘I could hear you sing,’ Yoongi whispers after a while, voice almost sleepy. ‘I could hear your voice, all around me— they took the light. They took the stars, the sun— they took you—’

He stops, unable to speak, throat restricted. Jimin continues to card through his hair; his position on the floor is weirdly angled but he can’t find it in himself to move. Yoongi’s weight on him, his warmth, his presence; Jimin feels as though he’s drinking it all in, like a flower does with sunlight.
'They took you and I couldn’t follow-‘ Yoongi chokes out. ‘I tried- Jimin I tried so hard to come back-’

‘You’re here-‘ Jimin’s voice wobbles and he can’t be bothered to try and stabilize it. ‘You’re here and- and I’m here. You came back.’

Yoongi finally pulls away, just a little, arms still holding Jimin but he searches for his eyes.

‘I’m real,’ he breathes out, almost inaudibly.

Jimin nods, his forehead bumping against Yoongi’s.

‘How?’

‘I-…’ Jimin’s breath catches on his throat as Yoongi uncoils one arm to bring his hand up and lightly touch his cheek. He seems to marvel at how he’s able to touch him. He turns his face into Yoongi’s palm, making his fingers brush over his lips as though to physically show Yoongi the words he was speaking.

‘I don’t know,’ Jimin whispers as he also reaches up to gently touch Yoongi’s face.

Yoongi closes his eyes immediately, a choked sigh escaping him. His eyelashes are clumped from tears, the skin on his cheeks a little taut from where the tears have dried.

‘Don’t stop- don’t-‘ Yoongi whispers shakily, ‘I- I’m so scared-‘

Jimin pushes them up slowly, sitting up slowly as he strokes Yoongi’s face, leaning in to kiss his closed eyes.

Yoongi gasps at every touch, shaking a little again but this time it’s not because he’s going into shock. His hands form fists, scrunching up the fabric of Jimin’s shirt.

‘I- I’ll fade- don’t please-‘ Yoongi pleads. His words are slurred and thick, breathless as he tries to regain his sense of self, to ground himself. And Jimin pulls him in, his touch an anchor, a guard, holding Yoongi above the fear of disappearing. He pulls Yoongi even closer, his own fear and worry threatening to overwhelm him. Yoongi’s mind, his soul, his heart- they were screaming—

Shutting out the pain, Jimin softly presses kisses over Yoongi’s face, his fingers carefully brushing along his hair and down to his nape, lightly outlining the shape of his ears.

‘I-‘ he hiccups out as Jimin presses a kiss close to his mouth. ‘I said- I promised you-‘

Jimin hums in response, lips still pressed to Yoongi’s cheek.

‘I said I would always find you,’ Yoongi stutters out and there’s disbelief and awe in his eyes, a sense of confused panic but at the same time, an intense relief. ‘I found you.’

Jimin smiles as Yoongi opens his eyes. He doesn’t look terrified anymore, his eyes no longer glazed with madness and fear.

‘You found me,’ Jimin nods, their noses brushing.

‘I found you again sunshine,’ Yoongi gets out, ‘You-…god you’re beautiful- I found you.’

‘Welcome back,’ Jimin whispers before leaning in to press their lips together.
Yoongi and Jimin exit the Cabin almost an hour later. Yoongi still looks like he’s not sure how he’s there. He’s clutching Jimin’s hand like a lifeline. Parts of his hair is wet, as though he had just washed his face—messily at that too.

‘Uh-‘ Jimin starts, as though to call their attention even though everyone’s been waiting on silent edge for them to come out. Sk’jin had wanted to ask ‘you think they’re doing the do in there’ but Jungkook was there. Also neither of them look at all rumpled enough to have done anything. He would also be disappointed if they did because that seemed a rather short period of time in that context.

And though Sk’jin has stooped low to make untimely jokes, he’s not going to stoop as low as to crack a terrible innuendo before an innocent Being. He did however wiggle his eyebrows at Namjoon while nodding at Jimin’s Cabin direction. Namjoon had just frowned at him first, then a few seconds later he sighed heavily, looking up at the ceiling as though in prayer.

Ha! Jokes on him, prayers didn’t work out here in Space. Too many black holes around. Sk’jin keeps this joke to himself, grinning in a suppressed way that Jungkook notices almost immediately. He smiles at him, beaming as though he too enjoyed Sk’jin’s joke despite never having heard it.

‘Yoongi!’ Taeh’yung stands up—more like bounces up, arms waving as he shuffles forward with a bright grin and tackles the Human into a hug.

‘Oh god-!’ Yoongi’s eyes bulge out, his expression is pure comedic gold.

It’s also frightening to an extent because Sk’jin has never seen Yoongi express like this. Hoseok seems to be blinking hard, as though checking to see if his sight was all right. Out of habit, Sk’jin grabs at Jungkook’s shirt to hold him back. Something that was necessary around Yoongi because the Pravasi M’hanun was always inclined to somehow attack the Human. Something that makes Sk’jin cackle internally and hopes that one day, Jungkook can deck Yoongi off of his feet.

For purely entertainment purposes of course. Not that Sk’jin was nursing a grudge against the Human. Not at all.

‘Hi!’ I’m Taeh’yung,’ Taeh’yung holds his fingers up in a ‘v’.

‘Oh- uh, peace,’ Yoongi also holds up his hand in a ‘v’ sign before saying, ‘I know who you are.’

Taeh’yung pauses, eyebrows up before he says in a confused voice, ‘But I don’t think I’m old enough to know you?’

‘No as in-‘ Yoongi interrupts, ‘I remember. I remember…everything?’

Jimin smiles and nods, looking at everyone in turn as though to say ‘see? Cool isn’t it?’.

‘You remember-‘ Hoseok begins before Yoongi interrupts again.
‘Hoseok- you’re an ex-agent for the Venture Unit. You helped me through a panic attack in Ynqaba before I blacked out,’ Yoongi reels off, his voice though monotone, is coloured with a range of emotions that Sk’jin has never heard coming from the Human. There’s also that accent with his Standard- similar to the accents in the other Humans Sk’jin has encountered. ‘Namjoon, you’re an information analyst. You gave me your specialized medication in the fight- my fight in the Arenas back in Pompa.’

Yoongi turns to meet Sk’jin’s eyes and he’s surprised at what he sees.

Looking at Yoongi before was as informative as gazing into an endless black well. Sure it was deep and there was probably something somewhere in the depths. But now, Sk’jin can read Yoongi just as clearly as he can everyone else. He can see his emotions, his reactions- and most of all, he can see with clarity exactly what he thought of him.

And Sk’jin, as clear as daylight, can read distrust, suspicion, and to Sk’jin’s confusion, fondness-?

‘Sk’jin. I nicknamed you asshole.’ Yoongi says bluntly. ‘I also…-’ he pauses, expression turning similar to how it normally was, and now that Sk’jin sees this he realizes that it’s anger. ‘-you left Jimin.’

Okay so maybe it wasn’t fondness.

Jimin seemed inclined to explain, but Sk’jin is not here for that sort of thing. But apparently neither is Yoongi because he continues on.

‘And we met before, when you were…’ Yoongi actually blanches, eyes widening a little, ‘-when you were uh, different.’

Sk’jin is slightly affronted at Yoongi’s reaction. Sure he didn’t look all that pleasant when he was a weird entity stuck to Zitao’s mind but that didn’t mean he should react like that.

‘We met officially at the Mars Dock,’ Yoongi says to Taeh’yung who beams at him nodding in agreement, ‘But before that I saw you at the Yisheng Directory.’

Taeh’yung claps his hands over his face in exaggerated shock.

Yoongi looks down at Jungkook who eyes him warily.

‘You…want to fight me?’

Jungkook also looks confused before he nods, hesitantly.

‘You’re carrying all the memories of Yoongi- of the other Yoongi- you know this makes me uncomfortable. Also, what happened to him?’ Sk’jin asks. He’s curious, and also he’s somewhat attached to the Yoongi he gradually got to know and who left him for dead in Ynqaba.

Sk’jin thinks that he needs to rethink what he wants in a basic relationship.

‘It-’ Yoongi pauses to think. He stares down at his hand, entwined with Jimin’s, as though it was helping him ground himself into this reality. ‘I remember everything- but…but it feels as though it was a dream. Like-…like everything I know- what I saw, what I-‘ he blanches, ‘-what I did…it’s like waking from one of those really extensive dreams, you know?’

It’s really weird hearing Yoongi emote in his speech.
‘You remember everything? Like, everything?’ Taeh’yung beams, taking Yoongi’s other hand and swinging it.

‘If that’s the case then maybe take a seat and explain to us your weird trip to Bhumi, the mark down your back, who you were working for, and what you were hoping to achieve,’ Sk’jin reels off.

Jimin looks ready to argue while Namjoon looks like he’s about to call for a time-out, but Hoseok cuts speaks out faster than they can react, speaking clearly and in what Sk’jin calls his no-nonsense-we’re-on-a-mission voice.

‘I agree with Sk’jin. We need to figure things out, and with you here, we’ll be able to clear up what is missing from our collected information. Seeing as you remember what happened with uh, GI-Yoongi, Human Yoongi can give us the backstory we’re missing.’

Jimin still looks a little unsure, looking over Yoongi in worry. Which was understandable but they had missions to complete while figuring out everything at the same time in order to understand what the purpose of their initial mission was.

Spaces this was tiring.

‘Um-’

‘We know about what happened, a little vaguely, about what happened before you left for Bhumi,’ Hoseok begins, ‘So I guess we’ll ask some questions, you fill us in on stuff- if there’s anything more, then please feel free to add to it.’

Sk’jin snorts at that.

Yoongi nods at that, shifting on his feet a little before saying, ‘Uh- maybe we should sit. My uh, feet hurt.’

An odd thing really, Sk’jin isn’t sure why Yoongi’s feet would hurt now. But after going through a particularly terrible moment in life before “dying” and waking up centuries in the future would probably mess you up a lot. Sk’jin has a strong feeling that Jimin was doing something about that, keeping Yoongi calm and not making him feel overwhelmed.

They sit down and Sk’jin notices how Yoongi winces. Jimin seems to notice too, eyeing him worriedly but not wanting to shift attention during an important discussion.

‘Okay so, first- why were you headed to Bhumi?’ Hoseok asks immediately.

Sk’jin sees how Namjoon sits a little further, watching the discussion a little away, his NaviLet across his lap as he leans back, eyes only on Yoongi.

‘When I was first recruited, it was through an aptitude test of sorts,’ Yoongi begins after a moment where he readjusted his hold of Jimin’s hand. ‘It was like every other organization recruitment test. I was chosen from my batch of fellow graduates from the Tayi School of Law and Security alongside Amic-’ he pauses briefly before continuing, ‘-alongside my best friend. We were told it was part of the aptitude test all graduating students go through- it was conducted by Yishengs.’

‘Oh, you mean like the apprenticeship tests?’ Namjoon inquires, ‘Not all schools have it, but there are a few that are overlooked by the Yishengs- Android Studies with the Daskalos apprenticeship, Medical Practices, that sort of thing- it’s not really a test on your knowledge, rather just…well, just being scanned by the Yishengs to see if you’re a good Being or something.’
Sk’jin would slow clap if the moment was not so serious. The Yishens really manipulated their status and the trust the Universe had in them. Sk’jin knows not to judge many by just the few- but this really took the cake.

Yoongi nods as he says, ‘All Beings that graduate from Law and Security have to go through the test. Apparently I had excellent results, and was asked to join a special training program created by the Yishens. It wasn’t too different from other special programs- I also didn’t have to make any payments for it either so in all honesty I was keen on doing it.’ Yoongi shrugs and adds with a (terrifyingly normal and relatable) small smile, ‘Gotta save up all you can, right?’

Jungkook looks just about as weirdly disturbed as Sk’jin felt.

‘The program was almost a sol long- Yisheng Ndica began the program under the Directory as a means of training and providing skilled Beings with additional set of skills to be used for when we finished the program. We were meant to be part of an organized unit established and directed under the Yishens to scout and observe potential threats.’

‘That’s the same as what the Venture Unit is doing though,’ Hoseok says, ‘Weren’t you suspicious from the start?’

‘Truthfully no,’ Yoongi shook his head, ‘The Venture Unit are shady as fuck- even more so in the past. There was a period of time where agents frequently turned or went rogue. News of it was all over the Universe.’

Sk’jin feels, rather than see, Namjoon’s gaze on him at Yoongi’s words.

‘We would be forming a specialized Yisheng corps- working for them, guarding and guiding them through non-GLA territory.’ Yoongi continues. ‘It made sense to us- the GLA basically had the Venture Unit for this sort of reason- and the GIU in themselves were an organization made entirely out of specialized units and groups.’

‘They sold it in a way that it trumped an ethical misbalance,’ Namjoon sighs, ‘The Yishens knew exactly what they were doing, and how to do it.’

Yoongi nods in agreement.

‘What sort of training did you participate in?’ Hoseok asks.

‘As part of our training, we did extensive physical and mental training. We were also given physical treatment- our disclosure agreement stated that it was part of the training, to undergo physical therapy required for our physical training. We travelled a lot to different planets and Docks – we never stayed in one place for too long.’ Yoongi answers, ‘It was the same as most training programs that I knew of.’

‘Is the therapy how you got the mark on your back?’ Hoseok inquires.

Yoongi nods, shifting unconsciously.

‘The Yishens-in-training would oversee the process. We would sleep over a bed, the center of it had a gap and we would lay over it,’ Yoongi reaches for a screen and with one hand activates the holographic composer. He constructs a quick layout of something that roughly resembles a Medical Bed.

‘We would be put to sleep for the process,’ Yoongi frowns a little before he continues, ‘And I know that you would think this was…stupid of me. Of us. To do something like this with blind
faith and trust. But…but it was the Yishengs – and it was just-one of the training facilities was set up in the Mars Docks, and that was close to home-‘

‘Not your fault,’ Jimin says quietly. ‘Not your fault.’

Yoongi pauses, watching Jimin and listening to every single word intently. Clearly Human Yoongi was not over Jimin’s existence the same way GI Yoongi seemed to live in permanent awe.

‘There’s no need to feel guilty over something you couldn’t have possibly even begun to conceive as probable,’ Sk’jin states bluntly, ‘No need to dwell over it.’

Yoongi nods slowly.

‘Did they every tell you what it was? The medical procedure?’ Namjoon asks.

‘We were being scanned- records of our physical and mental wellbeing were all logged in. At first it was weekly- then it became monthly. The mark used to fade at first, but then it stayed on for much longer.’ Yoongi answers, ‘We underwent the procedure for almost a sol. It didn’t hurt- but it was…heavy. I felt like I was always somehow connected to that bed.’

‘Was the training conducted in groups or individually?’ Hoseok asks.

‘Both- sometimes we would have group training- both physical, practical, and technical. I specialized in technology and development. And as we were trained to work as a unit, we each played roles within our given unit. So most times I was assigned and given hardware to program, break apart, or repair. I was the “tech” guy in the unit- others specialized in bio-engineering, some in terraforming, others in weapons.’ Yoongi explains, his hand that wasn’t in Jimin’s hold clutching at the edge of the couch, fingers turning pale with the strength he exerted.

‘What about the mission you were given?’ Hoseok asks, ‘Was it classified or were you told?’

‘We were told a version of it,’ Yoongi frowns, shifting a little where he sat, ‘As part of our official first mission, we were assigned to observe and record Bhumí, a planet according to our mission statement, was being evacuated because of its sun- a pulsar going out on control. We studied the planet in detail based off of the GLA’s previous observations. We were told that the other Beings who were in training had also gone on before, building a communications tower that would allow us to send and inform our findings back to base. We were instructed to board our ships into the Yisheng’s ship and undock at a safe distance. As it was not a GLA registered planet, we couldn’t record official reports- we would also be cut off from any official channels.’

‘Sounds like most recon missions from the Venture Unit,’ Hoseok supplies with a thoughtful look.

‘What made you suspicious?’ Namjoon asks, ‘This was before the mission started. If you were suspicious, why go at all?’

Yoongi chews on his inner cheek, a deep frown forming between his brows.

‘Like everything, we were sold an idea- fed a propaganda,’ Yoongi replies slowly, ‘Corruption was blatant at the time- especially in Systems outside the GLA, or as we were lead to believe. The Alliance at that time was at its most powerful- rampant and almost boastful. Rumors of bioengineered Beings born from experiments who were deadly and powerful, created by the Alliance in collaboration with the non-GLA Systems. There was a lot of fear- not to mention suspicion of corruption within the GLA- that they were instigating and investing in this. It made us, the Beings who felt as though we knew something feel responsible to do something. And this was an effort created by the Yishengs- or at least just by Yisheng Ndica. Yisheng Tlun’hla who was the
representative of that time had even come to oversee our training and give us his blessing- we believed it was for the betterment and restoration of safety and peace in the Universe.’

They all wait in silence, waiting for Yoongi to continue.

‘That’s what I believed in,’ Yoongi goes on, looking across the room to gaze out at the view outside as he huffs out a small chuckle, ‘I believed in it with my whole chest.’

Jimin smiles, his eyes tracing over Yoongi’s face.

‘We were in Šerdesas a few weeks before heading over to Mars for our program. Mars was the final destination for our program- and if we qualified the final check-up, we would be mission-ready. We were in the Yisheng Directory for the medical treatment and therapy at the lower levels. As I mentioned before, we normally fall asleep somehow during the treatment; but this time I – I was woken up.’

‘By?’

‘I don’t know- I thought they were a Yisheng first,’ Yoongi says slowly, his brow furrowed in thought. ‘And I – the memory is…I don’t know why it feels *glitched*- like there are words that he spoke to me- but all I really remember were lights.’

Namjoon and Hoseok both tilt their heads at the same time, their expressions serious.

‘And it-‘ Yoongi coughs, hand coming up to cover his mouth. He looks at his palm, as though he was expecting blood. But the cough comes and goes just as quickly. He clears his throat, blinking fast for a second before he continues. ‘I think the voice asked me questions.’

‘Do you remember?’ Taeh’yung asks, eyes wide with eager anticipation.

‘Uh- the Yisheng or…that Being asked me if I was Human- I think I replied that I was,’ Yoongi frowns. ‘I asked…him? I asked *him* who he was, he just…said “I am”. And then he said “brother, wake up”.’

‘What did this Yisheng look like?’ Sk’jin asks, leaning in a little.

‘I-….like I said, I’m not sure how accurate this memory is- it was excessively bright- and static-like almost. But … I don’t know if I’m projecting but…I felt like it was Human.’

Taeh’yung makes a sound of awe, shoulders bouncing a little as he beams.

‘There has only ever been one recorded Yisheng in all of Earth’s history,’ Namjoon declares at once, looking down at his screen. ‘Apparently worshipped as a God in Ancient Earth. But then was later killed.’

‘He came back,’ Yoongi says almost absentmindedly with a small shrug.

‘Religion aside, did this uh, Human Yisheng say anything else?’ Hoseok asks, steering the conversation back on track.

‘No- I just, very abruptly woke up and-‘ Yoongi reaches at his back, feeling under the collar of his shirt. He shudders, eyes closing as though recalling something. ‘There was a long black pipe-like device that was…*sewn* into my back. I was also not in the room where I was originally put into. I had a distinct impression that I was- I was underground-?’
Yoongi stops, his expression is confused and a strange cough comes out of him again. That’s when Sk’jin notices how tense the Human is, his legs, arms, posture.

‘Hey you okay-?’

It’s as though his question triggers Yoongi and he shivers, face twisting into that of pain as he hunches over, collapsing onto the floor.

‘Yoongi-!’

‘Hurts-’ Yoongi manages to gasp out through grit teeth. His entire body convulses, his hands immediately going to his head, fingers curling into locks of hair.

‘But the tabs don’t show anything-‘ Namjoon looks beyond confused.

‘He’s in pain-‘ Jimin cries out, slipping into his own tongue.

‘Get him to the Bay now,’ Hoseok orders, hunching down and gesturing to Jimin.

They both pick him up, lifting him between themselves with ease. Yoongi is clearly trying not to thrash, whimpering as he’s moved.

Sk’jin is about to follow the others down as well but he’s pulled back. Looking back, Jungkook is still there, eyes wide and expression hesitant and worried.

‘What is it?’ Sk’jin asks, turning to properly face the young Being.

‘I- I’ve seen that-‘

‘Seen what?’

‘Yoongi’s pain.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Mother-, to darling, she had it too.’ Jungkook tells him quietly. ‘Ma said that she had too much in her head. Too many thoughts at once.’

Sk’jin keeps quiet at this sudden revelation.

‘Mother that looked like me?’

Jungkook nods.

‘How many times did it happen?’

‘Not many. Sometimes she would sleep. Sometimes she didn’t know us. Know me.’ Jungkook looks worried, ‘Is Yoongi like mother?’

‘I think so,’ Sk’jin replies.

‘Will it happen to me?’

‘I- I don’t know,’ Sk’jin suddenly feels an intense need to cry.

Jungkook doesn’t seem put off by the answer and nods.
When they arrive downstairs, Yoongi is strapped down to one of the Medical Beds, his hand gripping Jimin’s in a deadly grip.

‘I don’t understand,’ Namjoon says quietly to Sk’jin the moment he’s close enough. ‘His tab doesn’t show anything unusual- just his heart-rate has gone up. His brain waves are a mess but it’s nothing-…nothing that’s a result of something happening to him physically.’

Yoongi is gritting his teeth, face pale, looking away with a scrunched up face as Hoseok administers the pain medication.

‘It’s always hurt,’ Yoongi breathes out, answering a question previously asked. ‘I- I don’t think I’m used to it.’

Jimin’s expression is pinched, clearly thinking about how much GI-Yoongi endured. How much he was made used to.

‘I thought it would go away- I guess,’ Yoongi sighs out, pain clearly receding as the medication streams through his blood. ‘I guess I don’t have the same endurance.’

‘You cannot do what you did in your dreams,’ Hoseok smiles, clearly enjoying the company of a much more vocal and emotive Yoongi. ‘Feels like you can, but doesn’t always carry through.’

‘Some things do,’ Yoongi says under his breath, glancing briefly at Jimin, his grip no longer violent.

Human-Yoongi also lacked subtlety.

‘It’s mostly…well, it’s mostly in your head,’ Namjoon taps at the NaviLet with a frown. ‘You’re not experiencing pain in the tabs- but your reaction is as though you are. It could be delayed- or you’re experiencing an echo of…of something that happened before.’

‘Like phantom pains?’ Yoongi asks, his breathing evened out by now.

Namjoon nods hesitantly. ‘I’m not sure if I’m being honest. But I guess we could say that.’

‘A Yisheng-…‘ Yoongi pauses before rolling his eyes, ‘Wow, this sucks.’

‘I think I know what’s happening,’ Sk’jin says, drawing attention to himself. ‘Jungkook just told me that his mother, a Khol’isa who was obviously born from an “egg” like himself, used to go through the same thing. His other mother told him and his siblings that she had too many “thoughts”- I’m guessing this is the same thing Jungkook witnessed.’

Jungkook nods at that, but quickly looks down in embarrassment as everyone turns to look at him.

‘What did you remember?’ Jimin asks quietly, reaching with his other hand to gently brush Yoongi’s sweaty hair off of his forehead.

‘When I woke up, I was in a different room. And I know this room because that’s where-‘ Yoongi looks down at himself, confused.

‘Does it coincide with your memories as a GI?’ Hoseok asks.

Yoongi nods.

‘I was inside a small room- I couldn’t move much because of the, uh, the stuff on my back. But I got up and I could look through a small opening on the door. And it’s the same as the one I saw-
GI me saw when…’ Yoongi shudders, pain evident in his features. He takes a few deep breaths before he pushes himself to continue, ‘It’s the same area- only a little changed with fewer…fewer tanks. But it was the same. Some of the tanks were empty- some had- some had small organs I think- or maybe…-maybe they were some form of growing zygote, I- I can’t be sure. All the tanks were lined it made me feel- feel really sick. I sensed movement and- and I didn’t want to get caught so I went back to the bed.’

‘Did you fall asleep again?’ Hoseok asks.

‘No- I was awake the entire time I- I thought they’d notice but they didn’t. I didn’t open my eyes so I don’t know who took me away and how we even got there.’ Yoongi replies. ‘After that I knew without a doubt that- that something was wrong.’

‘How did you come to conclude your suspicions? About the Yishengs,’ Namjoon inquires.

Yoongi stares blankly at nothing in particular for a while before he answers, ‘I think I had a dream.’

‘What dream?’ Taeh’yung asks quietly.

Yoongi is quiet, suddenly going extraordinarily still in a way that was familiar. And without warning, blood suddenly pours out of both of his nostrils.

‘Yoongi-!’

His eyes roll backwards before he slumps forward.

‘I think there’s too much for him to process,’ Namjoon says quietly as Jimin, Hoseok, and Taeh’yung carefully guide the Human back, cleaning at the blood around his face quickly. Jimin is clearly doing his best not to panic, lips pressed down tight, eyes wide, hands slightly trembling as he wiped at the blood.

‘Too many thoughts,’ Jungkook says before he swallows thickly and says, ‘Can I move?’

It’s funny for a moment when Namjoon blanches (as well as he could considering his biology) in the realization that the smell of Yoongi’s blood was making Jungkook’s mouth water. Sk’jin and Jungkook move backwards, stepping out of the Medical Bay. Jungkook presses his nose into the back of his shirt, inhaling through the fabric. Absentmindedly Sk’jin reaches up to stroke at his hair.

‘I think it’s safe to say that we were asking too much,’ Hoseok says as he scans Yoongi again, just to make sure. ‘He should rest.’

Wearily, Yoongi opens his eyes.

‘Yoongi?’ Jimin leans in to look down at the Human.

‘Hey sunshine,’ the Human replies groggily. ‘I keep…-I keep blacking out. Reminds me of… reminds me of last time.’

Jimin’s face is troubled, his expression controlled as he fights within himself.

‘Safe- safe here,’ Jimin smiles, ‘We’re safe here.’

‘I swear I don’t always faint,’ Yoongi grins before looking over at all of them, ‘I’m sorry- I don’t- I
don’t know how much I can handle and really remember without…” he gestures weakly.

‘We pushed you,’ Hoseok says, waving aside his apology. ‘We’ll take this one at a time, recover your strength- like training all over again.’

Yoongi heaves a heavy sigh, ‘I’m too old for this.’

He looks at Jimin, evidently trying to lighten up the mood. But Jimin looks stricken.

‘Jinnie.’

Sk’jin nearly jumps, not having noticed how Taeh’yung had walked over to stand by him.

‘Fuck- what’s up?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘I think we need to call Zitao again,’ Taeh’yung says with a small frown. ‘Yoongi’s memories-what happened to him. I think it’s connected with them- with him.’

‘The timing is wrong,’ Sk’jin frowns.

‘Time is infinite and Time is continuity. Time Is and Time Was and Time will Always Be.’ Taeh’yung replies before giving Sk’jin a serious look, ‘We need to.’

‘I’ll talk to Namjoon about it- it needs to be a collective decision,’ Sk’jin replies before adding with a look at Yoongi and Jimin who are now talking quietly, smiles on their faces. ‘Also, he needs to rest before we ask any more questions. We still have some time.’

Taeh’yung looks over at the two before nodding, reaching back to gently pet Jungkook’s hair as well. He smiles, but it’s not his usual kind of smile or grin.

Jungkook curls into his back, fists forming on the fabric of his shirt. breath hitched and moving away from Taeh’yung; and Sk’jin’s hair stands on end, his pulse suddenly accelerating as he looks at Taeh’yung out of the corner of his eye.

‘Who are we in Time?’

Yoongi drifts off to sleep; a strange limbo of being somewhat awake but completely knocked out. Namjoon still cannot explain what was happening to the Human. His vitals and stats according to the health-tab were, overall, extremely normal and stable. His system gave no indication towards pain- if Namjoon had to really define it, he would say Yoongi was experiencing phantom-pain.

Namjoon himself was no stranger to phantom-pains; he lived with it until his pain became the norm for him. Until pain no longer registered as something uncomfortable- but rather just…- just a way of life.

Was this Yoongi experiencing the pain GI-Yoongi had experienced? Or was this, in some strange way, the pain he endured when he had been his whole-self?

Yoongi stirs again, eyes twitching and moving rapidly under his eyelids. His pulse spikes, the frown on his brow deepening. His hands reach about- moving desperately as though looking-
‘Yoongi!’

Jimin reenters the Medical Bay, having left to use the toilet and to freshen up. He rushes back to the Medical Bed, instantly joining his and Yoongi’s hands together. Yoongi doesn’t wake up, but he does calm down just as quickly as he had panicked. Jimin is saying soft quiet things, a soft tune to his words.

Namjoon is about to step out of the Medical Bay when Jimin looks up to give him a desperate look.

‘I’m so confused,’ he says quietly.

Namjoon nods in agreement with a small sigh.

Jimin glances back at Yoongi, mouth opening a few times as though to say something but stopping.

‘We can figure things out,’ Namjoon tries, ‘We’re all going to try and figure this all out.’

‘I think- I think there is something changed with Yoongi,’ Jimin whispers quietly, voice strained as though unwilling to voice his words out, fearful that by uttering them his statement would come true.

‘What do you mean?’ Namjoon inquires.

Jimin looks down at their hands, his breath coming out a little shaky.

‘Y-Yoongi…his soul was different,’ Jimin whispers, ‘His soul was different. Young, but old- un-lived. When I woke up. It was him but…it wasn’t him.’

Namjoon leans against the wall inside the Bay, nodding for Jimin to continue.

‘When I first met Yoongi, in Megibīya, his- he was young,’ Jimin smiles briefly, ‘Young and strong- and-…and he was so strong-’ his voice wobbles and for a moment Namjoon is worried Jimin might break down. But Jimin clears his throat, hastily wiping at his face with an awkward shoulder shrug.

‘Is this still him?’ Namjoon asks gently.

‘It is but- but he’s old-’ Jimin pauses, clearly wondering how to explain himself. ‘This is Yoongi. Yoongi I met- Yoongi who was young, strong- Yoongi I felt die- I couldn’t…-I couldn’t keep him here-’ he holds up their clenched hands to his chest. ‘I lost him and- he found me again. But- but it’s wrong.’

‘Wrong how?’

‘Because his soul is not supposed to be here,’ Jimin tells him quietly. ‘His soul is not supposed to be here and now it’s- it’s catching up.’

Namjoon guesses his expression isn’t one of understanding so Jimin hastens to explain, his eyes jumping around the Medical Bay as though looking for visual cues to help him.

‘If I- um,’ Jimin tries out carefully. ‘As a-an example, I were to freeze uh, a bottle of water for long amount of time, never touching it, never opening it. And then after a lot of time, I brought it out of the freezer, into uh, hot room and it starts melting.’

The visuals in Namjoon’s head does not consist of a water bottle and ice melting. But instead he’s
filled with a sense of dread. Maybe he’s not really sensing the depth of what Jimin’s words meant in terms of Yoongi’s condition and what that meant for him, but the fear and pain in Jimin’s eyes are profound enough to put things in perspective.

‘But how is he still here? If Yoongi died-’ Jimin’s hands tighten over the Human’s hand, ‘-then how is he here?’

‘I don’t know,’ Jimin whispers before adding, ‘I don’t know if I want to know.’

Namjoon won’t claim that he knows Jimin very well. Call it his paranoia or instinct, but it almost felt like Jimin knew something but didn’t want to say it. Out of fear that it would be true.

Namjoon doesn’t remember much of his culture- all he remembered was pain, death, and the metallic stench of his own blood. But sometimes he feels as though he does remember certain things- and Namjoon isn’t sure how much of it is wishful thinking or just fanciful dreams. Little random information- like never planting grain on twice burnt fields, never approaching a body of water when the wind was low but the leaves were flying, always to bury eggs into a new land as an understanding that sometimes the growth of life meant the destruction of something else, to always pay respect to an eclipse, and to never speak out loud your nightmares or they would come true. It’s something that’s strangely stuck to him; a weird reason why often times Namjoon believes he never wanted to tell the Yishengs what had been done to him after Kutsoglera was rescued. To him, as a child, what he had witnessed, what he had felt, had all been one horrendous nightmare. And now that he was awake, he doesn’t want the pain he felt and the death he suffered to be real.

‘Is there something…- something Yoongi said that…that means something to you?’ Namjoon asks carefully.

‘I’ve-…I’ve seen into his memories,’ Jimin replies quietly, suddenly looking exhausted. ‘I’ve seen into his dreams, nightmares- seen and felt them as my own. And I think- I think Yoongi was…was very close. Too close, to something.’

‘Is this about what he saw in the Yisheng Headquarters?’

Jimin nods, lips pressed tight into a thin line.

‘The GI were stored under the Yisheng Headquarters,’ Namjoon informs Jimin, ‘The entire facility was stored there- it’s how they got away with it.’

‘But how?’

‘What do you mean?’ Namjoon asks.

‘When…we I was in Dream. Dreaming, with JD, I saw Megibīya, I saw what happened to her. She was destroyed,’ Jimin whispers, voice trembling, ‘And…JD was there, until…until he was rescued. JD was there, after what happened to Yoongi.’

Jimin carefully tells him what he saw when he had been asleep, dreaming with JD. It’s evident that he’s telling him a very abridged version, his voice forcefully stony as he recounts the journey of the Beings he couldn’t save.

Jimin struggles for a few seconds before saying carefully, ‘Yoongi…he was taken by the Red Evil. They took him away, stole him. And he was with them – I too, was with the Red Evil.’

Namjoon nods, wondering where Jimin was headed with this.
'The GI...they were made, by the Yishengs,' Jimin says slowly, eyes pleading for Namjoon to understand what he was saying. 'Yoongi is not GI.'

If Namjoon had hair the way most Beings did, they would be standing on end over his skin.

'Bu-'

'I saw them take Yoongi so how-,' Jimin says desperately.

Jimin was right.

And now suddenly Hoseok’s words made sense. What Sk’jin had said before was correct too.

Out of this entire mission, Yoongi’s presence was the one that was unexplainable. His entire existence was unexplainable. But maybe now they were finally headed for an explanation.

'-so how did Yoongi end up with the GI?' Namjoon finishes Jimin’s question.

From what they knew, the Red Evil, or the Akramanese according to the Gaia Case, were entirely removed and separated from what the Yisheng were trying to achieve. While the Red Evil followed through on the Yisheng’s twisted ideology for the Universe, they were creating their own somehow much more advanced version. So there was no way that what the Red Evil had created could have made its way to the Yishengs.

'Yoongi said that none of the other GI’s could handle the Android core- that almost all of them are currently in a vegetated state,' Namjoon says slowly before something clicks and he looks up at Jimin sharply, 'You were able to understand Standard after you wore Yoongi’s helmet.'

Jimin nods to that before he says quietly, 'When I woke up, when I heard, when I understood, when I saw into Yoongi’s memories, I kept asking myself- why wasn’t I killed? Why don’t I have the same mark? What did they want from me? What do the Omhlophe want from me?'

His questions come pouring out, as though finally unrestrained. As though he was overwhelmed and now he had to let it all go.

'How did all of this happen?'

It’s not just a question or a request. Jimin sounded like he was begging.

'He’s not supposed to be here,' Jimin says in a broken voice. 'He’s not supposed to be here and this is my fault.'

Namjoon shifts uncomfortably, not knowing what to say.

'...will he be all right?' Namjoon asks carefully.

Jimin shrugs.

'Will you be all right?'

Jimin looks surprised by the question, staring down at his hands for a while.

Yoongi was connected to Jimin beyond what they could possibly imagine. And Jimin was connected to all of this in a way they couldn’t clearly understand. But regardless of all of that, Yoongi and Jimin were bound together. And Jimin knew this. Yoongi knew this too.
‘I have to be.’

Yoongi stirs, his brows furrowing before his entire body shivers.

Both Namjoon and Jimin stop, looking down at him with anticipation. Slowly, Yoongi opens his eyes. It takes a couple of seconds before he’s completely awake.

‘Hey,’ he manages to say groggily. ‘How long have I been out?’

‘A couple of hours,’ Namjoon responds. ‘How are you feeling.’

‘Dizzy. A bit floaty,’ Yoongi replies though he’s looking at Jimin. ‘m’kay.’

Namjoon steps away, leaving the two together, knowing that they needed each other to heal, to understand, and most of all, to know.

On his way to the Bridge he comes across Jungkook at the stairs.

‘Hey, you okay?’ Namjoon asks the youngest.

Jungkook looks at him with wide eyes, blinking a few times before saying, ‘Worried.’

‘About?’

‘Jin,’ he whispers.

‘Jin? Why?’ Namjoon asks, crouching before Jungkook on the stairs. Jungkook leans back just a little. Namjoon wonders if Jungkook can sense it too, the same way Taeh’yung and Jimin could.

‘He’s…he scared?’ Jungkook tilts his head as though unsure of his words.

If Namjoon was being honest, they’re all a bit scared.

‘He’ll be all right,’ Namjoon tells him. ‘Don’t worry okay?’

Jungkook nods before asking carefully, ‘Are we lost?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘It feels confused,’ Jungkook replies, waving his hands a bit.

Sk’jin was right.

Jungkook was very intelligent. He was perceptive and easily understood what was going on. There wouldn’t be much they could do to protect him the way they would want to. But somehow there was something reassuring in all of that.

‘I…we’re a bit lost,’ Namjoon confesses. ‘We’re trying to find our way, but I think we all know where we’re supposed to go.’

‘Where are we going?’ Jungkook asks.

Well they were headed to Axudar, but Namjoon knows there’s more to this question.

‘We’re going to find answers,’ Namjoon replies.

Jungkook nods to that and gives him a small smile, ‘Okay.’
Namjoon’s about to continue to head up but pauses again before addressing the youngling.

‘If at any point you don’t want to go with us,’ he begins, making Jungkook turn around to look at him. ‘Just tell us, okay?’

Jungkook doesn’t reply immediately, processing Namjoon’s words with a small frown before he nods.

‘Okay.’

The Bridge is empty, dancing white lights making the entire place look like it was moonlit underwater.

Namjoon takes a moment to really think things through.

They were close to figuring things out. They were close to understanding what happened- but there was something they didn’t know. Something hidden from them, a moment in time that would explain so much.

There was so much more to the Omhlophe, the Yishengs, the Red Evil. So much more to Yoongi, to Jimin.

Taking out his NaviLet, Namjoon makes a rough timeline of events that lead up to all of this into the notes for the Captain’s Log.

He knows that it starts with Jimin, and with Megibïya. They had a treaty with the GLA, which included K’ma, alongside a Yisheng they knew for a fact masterminded the whole fiasco of the Yisheng takeover. During this time, Yoongi had been undergoing treatment that lead him to have the mark on his back. Amme was made known of what happened, and then Yoongi made his way to Megibïya, where he then met Jimin.

And this is where Namjoon pauses to carefully think. It was indeed Yoongi who was there. Human Yoongi was physically there, overwhelmed by the Red Evil, and as Jimin had said, his soul taken.

But then later, the GLA had come to Megibïya. A second time, as though to check on it.

Almost as though they came back to simply check on some results.

Was this where they found Yoongi? Was this where they took him back, with the other survivors left behind by the Red Evil? But why would they take them back? Who was responsible for taking Yoongi back, and keeping him with the GI?

This was where it got the most confusing.

When the Yisheng’s were creating the GI, they had clearly started by experimenting on non-suspecting Beings. The myth behind the GI started less than a millennia ago and the timeline checks in there. But how they’re connected was hazy at best.

A thing that strikes Namjoon as being creepy was the comparison of how the Omhlophe were like the GI.

There’s a strange discomfort with that statement and Namjoon can’t shake it off. The few times he came across them back in Pompa were unnerving and distinctly unnatural. How were they created?

But his main question leads back to the mission.
What did the Secret Jury really want with all of this? What did they really want to achieve? It was evident that each member knew something more, they wanted something different. Lmiura had said so herself.

Namjoon doesn’t want to stake claims by stating that there were Beings on that Jury that could be trusted. But he almost feels the desire to confront one of them about this. Surely there must be an explanation, some agenda that they should reveal now. Because at this moment Namjoon just feels like they’re hurtling across into something immeasurably dangerous and consuming.

Of course this idea would immediately be shot down.

First, very loudly and vehemently by Sk’jin. Then logically and rationally by Hoseok. Yoongi would also be against the idea.

Out of habit, Namjoon continues to fill in the Captain’s Log he normally filled in to send back to the Jury. Maybe later he would go through all of his Logs and maybe he’ll be able to make something out of it. But for today, he would just let it be.

* *

Jimin carefully helps Yoongi settle on the Medical Bed, making the Human lean his weight on him. Yoongi just sort of smiles at him, as though just a little amused, a little awed.

A little lost.

‘I can move on my own,’ he says though he does nothing to move away.

‘Just help-ing,’ Jimin smiles before asking, ‘Any pain?’

Yoongi blinks a little before his expression is just a bit confused.

‘I don’t know,’ he replies, honesty and confusion evident in his tone. ‘I think it hurts, but I don’t know where.’

Jimin wills his panic and fear down.

‘Jimin wants to see the liveliness and sheer strength of Life shining in the Human’s eyes again. He wants to see that familiar smile, hear that lilting voice as he laughs or cracks an obvious joke or smart response.’

It’s all back. Jimin’s wish had come true. But this isn’t what he meant when he had made that wish.

Speaking to Namjoon just now somehow felt like he was really putting a stamp of sorts over this entire situation. A stamp that really confirmed his fears.

‘Hey- it’s okay,’ Yoongi says, taking his hand. ‘I think I just- I just need time to recover.’
But that was the problem. Yoongi was in Time.

Yoongi seems to translate his silence into something else and stiffly pulls his hand away from Jimin’s. But Jimin is quick to take his hand back, suddenly feeling flustered, and he too instantly drops Yoongi’s hand.

It’s almost awkward. A strange shyness creeping over Jimin even though he knows there’s really nothing much to be awkward or shy about. They were just holding hands.

He’s done more than hold hands before. He’s done more than hold hands with Yoongi. But why was he reacting like this?

But he’s not alone.

Because Yoongi is also a little awkward. A smile on his lips, eyes darting trying not to blatantly stare, trying not to reach forward to just touch-

Tightening his metaphorical belt, Jimin reaches out, both hands extended before him. And automatically, Yoongi’s hands reach out as well, fingers entwining, an awed look laced with relief flooding the Human’s face.

‘You’re real,’ is all he says.

It makes Jimin want to curl in on himself. Or curl into Yoongi he’s not sure.

Back in Megibīya, with the language barrier, with their impending doom lingering over every second of their movement and existence, Jimin was never directly made aware of this.

And maybe he’s held Yoongi’s hands, has kissed him, held him in his sleep; but it wasn’t exactly this Yoongi. It’s weird referring to Yoongi like he was two Beings. Jimin isn’t sure how to approach the topic.

‘It’s like I know you,’ Yoongi says, staring down at their hands, his thumbs rubbing circles over Jimin’s knuckles. ‘I see you in my mind, I remember your actions, your words-‘ he pauses, his ears turning a little red. ‘-your touch. And I-‘

Yoongi is clearly having the same thoughts.

Yoongi of course remembers everything that has happened. Remembers how Jimin had rushed out of the ship to reach him as he fell on the Pompen arena ground. Remembers how Jimin had taken his hands and put them on his face, as though to familiarize the Human. Remembers how he finally called him sunshine. Remembers kissing him, remembers the soft touches, the quiet whispers of reassurances.

‘You’re mine. And I’m yours.’

Jimin remembers how it had been before, when Yoongi was regaining his memories, how he had collapsed. It was a sense of déjà vu but it wasn’t at all reassuring.

‘I don’t know…-it’s like I have to reintroduce myself,’ Yoongi smiles.

Jimin can do that. He could do that.

‘Hi,’ Yoongi smiles, lips turning up in a shy grin as he glances down nervously before looking up again, lips pressed tight as though hoping to look not so nervous.
Jimin can’t help but giggle, body shaking as he quietly mumbles out, ‘Hi,’ as well.

‘Yoongi,’ the Human grins, pointing at himself.

Jimin can’t help the almost painful grin on his own face as he points at himself and says, ‘Jimin.’

‘Your majesty,’ Yoongi says with a teasing grin, tugging a little at Jimin’s hands. Jimin can feel his face burning as he protests.

*But the look in Yoongi’s eyes haven’t changed.*

Jimin slips his hands out of Yoongi’s and reaches up for the Human’s face.

Yoongi’s eyes close immediately, breathing out slowly. Jimin carefully maps his face, fingers tracing over his features gently.

Yoongi’s hands reach up blindly, mimicking Jimin’s hands as he too maps his face carefully. Jimin leans into Yoongi’s palms the same time the Human does, his lips pushing against his palm.

Yoongi’s fingers playfully pull at his earlobes before reaching under his beanie.

‘I remember this- this was my memory,’ Yoongi whispers quietly. ‘He-…we were so angry. He lost it, I think- I think it broke him. It broke me. I- we thought we lost you again.’

Jimin’s eyes burn.

‘I felt torn, wretched; I saw your hair and it- it broke me,’ Yoongi’s voice breaks into a whisper. ‘I lost myself- I was so *so angry.*’

His fingers are gently reaching under the beanie, feeling at the fuzz that now overtook Jimin’s scalp.

‘I’m sorry,’ Yoongi whispers. ‘He- we’re sorry.’

‘We?’

‘I don’t know how to say it- but it’s- it’s…he’s…’ Yoongi pauses, opening his eyes to look at Jimin. ‘I know what he feels. He knows what I feel. And – it’s strange.’

Jimin can agree to that.

‘I sometimes heard you- like you were speaking right to me,’ Yoongi continues. ‘You told me I didn’t have to try so hard.’

*‘It’s all right if you don’t remember- you don’t have to try so hard,’ Jimin whispers- hoping that though Yoongi couldn’t hear or understand his words- his Soul might. ‘You’re here; that’s all I want.’*

‘You don’t have to try hard,’ Jimin repeats.

‘But I do,’ Yoongi shrugs, lowering his hands and placing them over Jimin’s wrists. ‘I have to. I want to remember, to know. To understand. To help you go home.’

Jimin lets out a shuddering breath.

He had made a promise. To Yoongi, to himself, to everyone else on the ship.
He had whispered the promise to Yoongi, just days before they had made agreements to the Omhlophe to exchange Jimin for Hoseok. He had promised to give Yoongi a home.

But now that Jimin thinks about it, how can he keep this promise when he can’t guarantee anything? With everything they’ve been seeing, with everything they’ve uncovered.

Yoongi shivers suddenly, his body twitching. Jimin steps closer in an instant, his arms looping around the Human. Yoongi’s eyes are pinched shut, his lips pressed into a thin line, sweat suddenly breaking out on his forehead.

Jimin helps him lay back down on the Medical Bed. Yoongi’s breaths are short delayed pants, his hands trembling a little. Jimin wants to hide him, protect him, cover him, never let him go.

‘Sunshine.’

Jimin’s breath hitches.

‘There’s something wrong with me,’ Yoongi states simply, voice strained with unknown pain. ‘I know you know it.’

‘Yoongi-‘

‘You’re looking at me like that again.’ The Human says quietly, opening his eyes and finding Jimin’s. He smiles a little.

‘What?’

‘Back in Bhumi- I mean, Megibīya,’ Yoongi says quietly. ‘When they came for us one by one, and we were falling sick. You’re looking at me like that again.’

Jimin’s voice is stuck. His mind empty yet filled with a heaviness he cannot shake off.

‘Tell me,’ Yoongi asks gently, ‘Please tell me.’

‘I don’t know,’ Jimin manages to get out, ‘I really- I really don’t know.’

He’s not even aware that he’s crying until Yoongi reaches over to gently wipe them from his face.

‘Don’t cry sunshine, please don’t cry,’ he whispers.

Jimin takes his hand, pressing it against his face as hard as he could.

‘I’m-‘ Jimin manages to get out, ‘This is my fault.’

Yoongi is confused, his eyebrows furrowed. He tries to sit up but he’s clearly too dizzy.

‘This is my fault,’ Jimin whispers.

Now that he’s said it, it’s almost as though he can’t stop. Can’t stop what he thought he could carefully keep away, can’t stop the guilt, the pain, the sorrow- all the lives he ruined.

With everything that’s happened, with the memories he saw, the lives he lived through JD’s memories, through Yoongi’s memories. Watching his children, his people; all yearning for home, yearning for a return- knowing that they would be returning to their deaths. Watching how evil was allowed to endure, allowed to spread- all because of their ignorance, their trust-
‘It’s my fault,’ Jimin chokes out into Yoongi’s hand.

He feels arms around him, a weight pressing into him; unsteady and dizzy but trying so hard. It makes Jimin cry harder.

‘I-I thought I could- I could do this and not-‘ Jimin heaves, his voice muffled against Yoongi’s chest. ‘I’m just- I’m just hurting everyone- hurt- hurting you-‘

‘You don’t hurt me,’ Yoongi tells him simply, ‘You don’t hurt me.’

Jimin holds him tighter, unable to stop his breathless sobs.

‘You’re not alone. You’re not alone- I’m here. I’m back, I won’t leave you,’ Yoongi whispers continuously. ‘We will understand this together, we will fix this together. You’re not alone, I won’t leave you.’

Jimin hears a quiet sound at the door and notices a worried looking Jungkook peaking in. Jungkook quickly ducks away, having been caught.

‘We’ll make this right. We’ll understand, we will figure it out,’ Yoongi whispers to him quietly.

Jimin closes his arms around Yoongi, holding the Human against himself. He catches sight of Jungkook’s hair poking past the frame of the door.

It was foolish to think he could go on without feeling the brunt of the past crashing down on him with every step he took into a present he helped destroy with his ignorance. Maybe he couldn’t fix what has happened, what was happening.

Maybe he wouldn’t be able to give Yoongi that home he promised.

Jungkook looks inside again, eyes wide, innocent, alone. Looking for an existence untainted and safe.

‘I promise,’ Yoongi says softly. ‘Just stay with me’

‘I promise,’ Jimin whispers back with a small smile.

Jungkook blinks at him before smiling just a little and ducking away again.

Jimin pulls away just a little, coming face to face with the Human. Yoongi wipes at his face, a smile on his face.

‘I’m happy,’ he says unexpectedly.

It’s incredibly different to the wide range of emotions Jimin was experiencing at that moment. Happiness was not one of them.

‘Happy?’

Yoongi smiles, ‘Yeah.’

‘How?’ Jimin wants to know.

‘I missed you so much,’ Yoongi tells him. ‘It was so…so empty.’

How did that lead to happiness?
‘But now-‘ Yoongi breathes out, gazing straight at Jimin, his eyes shining.

He smiles as he breathes in.

‘I’ve come back. I’ve come back, and I won’t leave.’

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After a solid 8 hours of sleep, Yoongi does look better. And it’s a collective decision not to question him or push him just yet. Taeh’yung’s words resound in his head, but Sk’jin wants to wait until they’re closer to the edge of the Grisial Pits. They were close now, the gleaming asteroids no longer heavily clustered but a little more sparse. There were more ships about as well, providing Jungkook with plenty to be distracted by.

Taeh’yung and Jimin were in the Medical Bay where Yoongi had slept. They weren’t talking- but something was clearly being discussed between the two of them and Sk’jin isn’t sure what it’s about. When he walks past they both look at him. Sk’jin strikes a handsome pose, jauntily throwing his hair back at them. Taeh’yung cackles while Jimin lets out an involuntary snort.

‘We got all of our deliveries waiting for us,’ Hoseok says. ‘We go, stop, pick it up. And head out.’

‘Sounds good to me,’ Sk’jin says as he climbs up the stairs to the Bridge and nearly walking into the Ngfy’widan himself and upsetting the tray of tea in his hands. Hoseok is quick to help him balance, hand coming up to steady the tray.

Not a single drop of tea escapes the cups.

‘Watch the Bridge?’ he asks as he shoots past.

‘Sure thing,’ Sk’jin calls back walking into the Bridge.

Yoongi was there, looking out of the windows before he turns quickly, expression hopeful. It quickly changes to something else- annoyance, most likely, before it settles into a neutral look.

‘Some tea?’ Sk’jin offers the tray up.

Yoongi looks at the cups for a moment before asking, ‘Will you poison me?’

‘I am not you,’ Sk’jin grins.

Yoongi makes a funny expression at that before nodding his thanks and taking the cup. He doesn’t question why there are 4 cups on the tray.

‘Besides, if I wanted to kill you- I wouldn’t use poison. Not my cup of tea,’ Sk’jin raises an eyebrow, tweaking it up and down.
Yoongi sighs before he mumbles, ‘You’re not even a dad.’

‘I beg your pardon?’

Yoongi just shakes his head.

‘So— how you holding up? You okay?’ Sk’jin asks before sitting himself down at his designated station.

Yoongi takes a sip before he speaks.

‘There’s a lot to process,’ Yoongi replies, staring at the cup of tea in his hands. ‘I— like I said, it feels like a dream and— I know it’s real, but it’s—’

Sk’jin nods in understanding. He’s experienced this sort of disorientation more than he would care to admit. Being a Khol’isa was a pain in the ass.

‘I’ve… I know I’ve done some terrible things and— Yoongi frowns, ‘—I know that… it’s not me— but it is?’

Sk’jin gets that too.

It’s silent for a while. Human Yoongi wasn’t much of a talker either it seemed. Though of course it was exponentially more than GI Yoongi.

‘But— but sometimes I am sure it is me; it does feel like me.’ Yoongi says quietly. ‘It felt like me when I saw Jimin’s hair in Ynqaba. In that place. It felt like me. And I just… I just know it was me.’

Sk’jin carefully studies Yoongi. Like this, there was… there was something changed in him, distinct from how Yoongi was before. His posture was, frankly speaking, rather bad. He had a funny walk— almost waddle like. His whole mannerism was different.

But somehow, it almost felt like a starker version of GI Yoongi.

‘He read a lot,’ Yoongi chuckles quietly, ‘He read self-help books. Books on mannerism, body language, social skills, conversation skills… I can still feel that confusion. I don’t know how to explain it— I don’t know how— how he could live with it. I’m barely able to hang out to now as it is. I don’t… know what to think of… his thoughts?’

‘GI-Yoongi?’ Sk’jin specifies.

‘Yeah,’ Yoongi makes a face, ‘It’s odd— I know how he feels. I feel it. I know he felt me too. Actually like this I feel a bit like Jekyll and Hyde.’

‘What’s that?’

‘An old story from Earth,’ Yoongi sighs before stopping, ‘God, it’s gone. It’s all gone.’

Again, Sk’jin can really relate.

‘For a moment I wanted to cry,’ Yoongi laughs humourlessly, ‘But I just got over it so fast— it’s—’

‘Don’t dwell on it,’ Sk’jin says as he stretches, ‘Trust me. It’s best that you don’t.’

Yoongi gives him a searching look before nodding, ‘Yeah, I’ll try.’
‘What’s the story about?’ Sk’jin asks, re-crossing his legs.

‘I don’t know the details of the story but—it’s a thriller fiction—horror at the time,’ Yoongi explains. His voice drawls a lot, Sk’jin notes. ‘The main character is Dr. Jekyll and he runs these experiments on himself—he drank a serum or something, and he would turn monstrous—change form and kill people. They called him Mr. Hyde. It’s basically a precautionary tale about misleading personalities, being two-faced, that sort of thing.’

‘Riveting, maybe I should read it.’ Sk’jin says in earnest. ‘So, does that make you Jekyll?’

‘I feel more like Hyde,’ Yoongi says quietly, ‘I’ve always felt that…that we have always been Hyde.’

There’s a small noise from the stairs outside the Bridge, making them both pause in their conversation.

‘Well, if I know anything about stories, that sort of self-esteem will never win you the love interest,’ Sk’jin comments, pausing the cup of tea near his lips. ‘It’ll get you killed.’

‘What is this, personal experience?’ Yoongi snorts.

‘Didn’t live long enough for it to happen,’ Sk’jin replies wryly.

Yoongi gives him a questionable look, which was justifiable considering everything.

‘What are your thoughts on all of this?’ Sk’jin asks, blowing lightly on his cup of tea.

‘This?’

‘You know—this whole “mission”’, Sk’jin says with a shrug. ‘I think you can tell from your memories you weren’t very talkative. Violent sure, talkative? Not really.’

Yoongi gives him a blank look before saying without a hitch, ‘I still have the urge to punch you.’

Sk’jin rolls his eyes.

‘There’s a lot that’s…missing,’ Yoongi says carefully as he shifts the cup in his hands, turning the warm object over in his hands. ‘Information, memories, truth.’

‘Truth? Someone is lying?’ Sk’jin inquires.

Yoongi gives him a look to which Sk’jin responds with his own look.

‘I have never lied a single day of my life,’ Sk’jin scoffs, ‘And unlike your prince, I don’t claim to not be able to lie. If I lie, I’m honest about it.’

Yoongi’s brow does a funny twitch.

‘You know I’m right. Jimin knows something, or at least has the idea of something about all of this. But he won’t say it.’

‘Speculations and theories can be vague and sharing them can cause panic,’ Yoongi replies sharply, ‘Maybe Jimin—’

‘Spare me,’ Sk’jin sighs out, ‘Your prince is hiding something we know. He’s hiding a lot of things, and honestly I’m not above getting to the bottom of it.’
‘He’d kick your ass you know this,’ Yoongi replies with a heavy frown.

‘Yeah but he won’t kick yours,’ Sk’jin points out.

Yoongi looks offended, ‘I’m not going to coerce him into telling me something you have no evidence of-’

‘I know you won’t, but you should,’ Sk’jin carefully intones.

‘Why should I,’ Yoongi demands, looking irritated.

‘Because you want to know too,’ Sk’jin replies simply, ‘You want to know.’

Yoongi rolls his eyes.

Sk’jin studies the Human for a while before saying, ‘Is it some form of genetic thing amongst short-lived species to be overwhelmingly obsessed with having purpose and meaning in their lives?’

Yoongi looks at him questioningly.

‘Yoongi, you joined an extremely suspicious organization and event that knocked you out for night on end, from which you woke up with an indent on your back so excuse me if I think you’re probably ignorantly idealistic and incredibly thick-headed. Based on these two facts, and seeing as how it seems to be a fashionable trend the past few millennia, I think we both know you’re going to definitely ask Jimin about all of this one way or another.’

Yoongi looks like he wants to argue, but the sound of Namjoon and Jimin entering the doorway and crossing over into the Bridge interrupts them.

‘Also another thing,’ Sk’jin begins seriously and in a quiet tone. Yoongi leans in as though to hear everything as clearly as he could. ‘Be safe and keep the fucking to a minimum–’

It’s absolutely delightful to see Yoongi’s face turn bright crimson, eyes widening, mouth gaping before he splutters out a ‘Jesus fucking Christ-!’

‘Anyways, you should find a balance,’ Sk’jin says as he leans back, grinning at Namjoon and Jimin as they reach the Navigator’s Mast. ‘Balance your Hyde and Jekyll – the best of two worlds, right?’

Still red in the face, Yoongi nods slowly to that.

‘Best of two worlds.’

Namjoon’s not sure why Sk’jin was cackling to himself and why Yoongi was red in the face as he and Jimin approach the two. Knowing Sk’jin though, he’d rather not know.

Jimin lets out a quiet ‘hehehe’ as they get closer, looking amused and thoroughly fond. He walks ahead a little faster, skipping down the one step, hands raised up towards Yoongi. Whatever his concerns were, Jimin was doing a good job of not showing it around the Human.
‘Sure, ignore me,’ Sk’jin says dryly.

‘Sk’jin!’ Jimin laughs, turning to laugh at the Khol’isa. ‘Didn’t ignore!’

Sk’jin feigns a dramatic heartbreak and walks over to the Mast.

‘You’re getting along nicely,’ Namjoon comments, ‘Weren’t you three stuck in a weird who-kills-who-first contest?’

‘Nonsense, we’re practically best-friends,’ Sk’jin says with a fabulous flip of his now dark hair.

‘Good changes then?’

‘I suppose, but if one thing hasn’t changed- look at that,’ Sk’jin snorts, nodding towards the side of the Bridge he just left.

Yoongi and Jimin are talking quietly, hands held as they gaze out of the large windows, looking out as Grisial clears out enough that the rest of space can be seen, coiling around the large asteroids like a black river.

And Namjoon begrudgingly admits that yeah, one clear thing hasn’t changed.

‘Spaces he’s really in deep isn’t he?’ Sk’jin sighs, his tone nearly disgusted but mostly just amused.

‘Hey, in a sense it’s super romantic.’

Sk’jin coughs weirdly, thumping at his chest.

‘I can’t believe you just said that without a hint of irony,’ Sk’jin gasps out.

Namjoon rolls his eyes, settling the NaviLet back into the main slot of the Table a little clumsily with one hand.

‘So the stuff you need is there too?’ Sk’jin asks, not making a single move to help Namjoon.

‘Yeah- everything we need has arrived,’ Namjoon replies. ‘We just need to pick it up and we’re 3 stops from Axudar.’

‘I wanted to discuss something with you- actually Taeh’yung mentioned it to me,’ Sk’jin says without preamble in a serious tone, ‘He wants to contact Zitao and the others- regarding Yoongi’s memories- I mean his past.’

‘What about his past? Which part?’ Namjoon asks at once.

‘I think it’s about what he saw in the Yisheng Directory,’ Sk’jin replies, glancing over at Yoongi. ‘How he mentioned his dream.’

It’s true what Hoseok had said about dreams in regards to the other members on board the ship.

‘Sometimes I don’t think any of you are actually real,’ Namjoon finds himself saying. ‘You, Taeh’yung, Jimin, Yoongi- you all feel…different.’

Sk’jin snorts, rolling his eyes and pointedly looks at his mangled arm, ‘You’re not any better sweet-cheeks.’
Namjoon rolls his eyes too- it wasn’t an easy thing to explain.

‘I guess...’ Sk’jin suddenly goes on, ‘-I guess it’s because we are.’

‘Different?’

‘No,’ Sk’jin looks over at Yoongi and Jimin, ‘Not real.’

Not sure why but Namjoon reaches over to pinch Sk’jin right at his neck.

Sk’jin literally screeches.

Both Yoongi and Jimin jump at the sound, eyes wide as they turn to stare.

‘What in the fuck-’ Sk’jin hisses, grabbing at his neck, ‘You have one working arm and that’s what you decided to do?!’

‘You’re all real enough to me,’ Namjoon says as seriously as he can. ‘You’re here aren’t you?’

Sk’jin tenses- his posture stiff, expression frozen on his face. And for a brief second, his frame seems to shake before he relaxes again. Now that Namjoon has realized how incomplete Sk’jin is, he can’t un-see it.

‘Sure,’ he replies with a shrug.

‘Has Jungkook…’ Namjoon begins slowly, thinking back to his conversation with Jimin, and then with his conversation with Jungkook himself. ‘Has Jungkook mentioned anything else about his mother? Or even about himself?’

Sk’jin frowns a little as he shakes his head.

‘Just that his mother went through the same thing as Yoongi.’

‘Has he experienced it? Did he tell you?’

‘He hasn’t. He asked me if he would,’ Sk’jin says quietly, ‘I said I didn’t know.’

Namjoon had no doubt in his mind, that Jungkook was created by the Yishengs. But he had been found by his mothers in Ynqaba, and raised probably since he was a baby or very young infant. But his mother, the one that looked like Sk’jin- was she GI? Or was she created by the Red Evil, the same way Yoongi was?

‘You’re not going to experiment anything on Jungkook,’ Sk’jin suddenly hisses in warning.

Namjoon splutters in his haste to hiss back, ‘No one is going to do anything like that!’.

Sk’jin doesn’t look the least bit apologetic as he says, ‘Yeah well, just warning you. Or I’ll behead you in your sleep.’

‘Why would you even think that?’ Namjoon demands.

Sk’jin clearly doesn’t feel the need to reply and instead says, ‘I know you’re looking for answers-to figure things out. It doesn’t always end well for the innocent.’

‘I think I can say this on behalf of everyone on the ship that we would never allow anything bad to happen to Jungkook.’ Namjoon frowns.
Sk’jin gives him a briefly annoyed look, like Namjoon was being intentionally dense.

‘Well, things are gonna become really difficult if this is how things are going to be. And I wasn’t just talking about Jungkook.’

Before Namjoon can ask Sk’jin what he means, Taeh’yung appears, waving brightly at them before skipping over to Yoongi and Jimin.

‘Yoongi! Explain this to me!! I think it’s from Earth and I wanna know how to play it!’ Taeh’yung requests, bending his knees a little as though to look shorter, holding up a screen to the Human’s face.

‘Oh- yeah sure-’

Yoongi reaches up for the screen and next second it’s broken in half, crushed silicon bits cutting into his palm.

‘Oh-ouch-’ Yoongi hisses, eyes widening at the sight of his hand.

It’s silent for a solid second before Taeh’yung *screams* dramatically, hands flailing as he crouches down on the floor. Yoongi is sort of dazed while Jimin quickly takes his hand, holding it high while carefully removing the bits and pieces.

Namjoon hears Sk’jin sigh before he quickly moves too, reaching around his station to grab a medical kit.

Yoongi is easily stitched up and Taeh’yung refuses to let go of the Human’s (not injured) hand as means of an apology. Jimin is hovering, worry evident in his expression while Yoongi squirms in his seat, clearly dazed.

‘I think Yoongi is gonna have to train his strength or something,’ Sk’jin sighs heavily as he returns to the Navigation Mast, sitting heavily in Namjoon’s seat.

‘Yeah, I think Hoseok will be good at that.’ Namjoon replies tiredly and before Sk’jin can change the topic again, he asks, ‘What do you mean by things will be difficult?’

Sk’jin glances over at the doorway to the Bridge just as Hoseok walks in, followed by Jungkook. Then he looks around the entire place, a heavy sigh falling from his lips before he says, ‘Because we’re all liars.’

‘How much time do you have?’ Namjoon wants to ask again, eyeing the Khol’isa out of the corner of his eye. But he knows all he’ll get in return of his inquiries will be lies.

It was a bit ironic really.

‘I got some interesting news,’ Hoseok announces as he approaches.

Namjoon diverts his attention towards the other only Being onboard who didn’t speak in riddles the entire time.

‘What is it?’ Sk’jin asks, making himself comfortable in Namjoon’s chair. Namjoon doesn’t bother attempting to drag the Khol’isa out.

‘Some pointers about Axudar,’ Hoseok begins before he slides his screen into the slot beneath the Navigation Table.
Taeh’yung skips over to drape himself heavily over Sk’jin who huffs out at the sudden weight.

‘The 3 live-in planets are going through a sort of political reform,’ Hoseok explains as he deftly taps across the Navigation Table, activating a holo-projection. ‘The major countries are attempting to pass a System Constitution regarding a clause that regulates inter-planetary immigration.’

‘What does that entail for us?’ Namjoon inquires.

‘Not a lot- this doesn’t have to do with non-System travellers, but with the planets inside Axudar,’ Hoseok explains. ‘The previous political uh, *supremacy* governing the laws within Axudar as a whole recently underwent a sort of reform.’

‘That sounds like it could be a major issue, is the GLA supervising?’ Sk’jin inquires as Hoseok pulls up countless articles and reports of the issue in Axudar.

‘Yeah, that’s the thing, they aren’t.’ Hoseok replies as he nods at the reports, ‘These are records I’ve pulled from local news reports as well as discord forums on their local channels from the sources Namjoon brought back.’

Namjoon makes a mental note to thank Ems again.

‘So what are they trying to do?’ Jimin asks, a small furrow appearing between his eyebrows as he eyes the reports and headlines across the holo-projection.

‘The 3 planets all have separate and regulated channels of distribution, immigration, and import/export,’ Hoseok explains, ‘Though systematically born from the same protoplanetary disc, the 3 planets all have widely varying elemental foundations, making certain ecosystems within the separate planets quite delicate.’

‘That’s quite common for most planets with more than 2 habitable planets isn’t it?’ Sk’jin inquires.

‘Yeah but it’s never to the point of it being toxic,’ Namjoon supplies, ‘Is that what it is?’

‘It is,’ Hoseok nods, ‘But the reason why this has all started is because they believe they’ve invented a nullifier, that balances the elemental balance between all 3 planets to equalize or something along that line.’

‘That sounds like a whole lot of bullshit,’ Sk’jin snorts.

‘It’s not,’ Jimin says randomly, ‘4 centuries…um- some time ago, in my System, we reduced the acid-acid-ty of a region.’

‘I mean, terraforming in that level isn’t too surprising,’ Sk’jin shrugs, ‘But this is core-deep. Planets can’t just switch permanently. It’s probably some money-scheme.’

Hoseok nods to that, pointing at some of the articles, ‘That’s why there’s a lot of protests.’

‘Is it serious?’ Sk’jin asks looking flabbergasted that an issue like this would actually be taken with serious regard.

‘I’m afraid it is- so the planets are going through a lot of hostility, and many institutions that revolve around the Scientific Panel has been compromised,’ Hoseok exhales. ‘This includes our idea about the refugee center in Māhanga.’

‘So what do we do then?’ Sk’jin inquires, evidently relieved that the plan including Jungkook
would now be unemployable with these new discoveries. ‘Should we stick to our previous trajectory into the Koitz Pulsar?’

‘We could- but-‘ Hoseok grimaces, gesturing at the holographic projection.

‘But this is actually relevant,’ Sk’jin sighs with a grimace. ‘I see it. This is genuinely important to our understanding. It’s too close to everything. We actually do need to go to Axudar and dig about.’

‘But maybe we don’t have to go in directly,’ Hoseok emphasizes. ‘We could go close by- not even directly into Māhanga or the other planets. Just to get information.’ He taps on the holograph and pulls out the whole System map. Tapping on one of the orbiting planets in the outer rings, Hoseok expands a pale green gas-planet.

‘This is a trove,’ Hoseok explains, as he makes a ring around the planet, highlighting 4 satellites, ‘Convenient and easy to access for the inhabitant and immigrants in Axudar.’

‘I wasn’t aware that the moons were habitable,’ Namjoon frowns as he studies the projection. ‘They’re not, it’s all Atmoshield,’ Hoseok explains before he expands one of the satellites, ‘This is the most frequented. With the highest amount of immigrant channels, as well as highest ratings of disappearances and pirate movement in the area.’

‘Now they’re just being cocky,’ Sk’jin grimaces as he leans back into the chair again, ‘How the GLA just turned a blind eye wow-‘

‘This might be risky to go here,’ Hoseok tells them frankly, ‘But-‘

‘-but our disguise will be more effective,’ Yoongi finishes his sentence. ‘Places like these hold all sorts of information if you know where to look. Hoseok you could-‘

‘-yeah probably find a safe-house and see what information other agents have saved there,’ Hoseok nods at once.

‘We might actually be able to pick up on more information there than in Māhanga itself,’ Namjoon says thoughtfully.

‘I was thinking that too. Besides, if there is a need to go to any of the 3 planets it might appear more organic by flying out from here instead of heading straight to Axudar,’ Hoseok concludes.

‘I was thinking that too, we should put it up for vote.’ Namjoon looks around the Table at everyone, ‘Is everyone okay with this plan?’

Taeh’yung nods vigorously while Sk’jin gives a single nod. Jimin nods, albeit hesitantly, while Yoongi echoes him. Jungkook hastily nods when he’s looked at, still surprised that his vote was being counted.

‘Captain?’

‘I’m in approval with the plan,’ Namjoon replies.

‘So it’s a green from everyone,’ Hoseok announces. ‘Of course we will have back up plans in accordance to any possible issues that arise. We’re gonna reach Pit 18 in 15 minutes, let’s prepare for that.’
'I’ll handle the transactions,’ Sk’jin volunteers at once, ‘Seeing as the PSC has been been exposed, we need to be more careful about who can be potentially spotted at ports and docks.’

‘PSC?’ Hoseok raises an eyebrow.

‘Yeah, the *Pompen Suga Carnage,*’ Sk’jin winks at Yoongi who blanches visibly at the mention of it.

‘Right yeah- Sk’jin and I will handle that part,’ Hoseok says hastily. ‘Everyone else just stay inside. There could be couriers and we don’t need anyone recognizing us.’

‘Sk’jin is pretty recognizable,’ Yoongi states.

It’s funny seeing Yoongi respond like this.

‘Am I?’ Sk’jin asks, eyes flashing red, making Yoongi narrow his eyes at him.

‘And pa will finally get his hand back!’ Taeh’yung announces as he lifts Namjoon’s non-functioning one.

Jungkook does a little cheer and then stops promptly, turning red.

As they disperse Sk’jin makes to sit up, groaning under his breath, clearly complaining.

‘What’s wrong?’ Namjoon asks, wondering if the Khol’isa had some issues with their plan.

‘My back hurts,’ is the answer he gets.

‘Well…we’ll get the UV Bed in like, 10 minutes,’ Namjoon says in what he hopes sounds like an encouraging tone.

‘Ah I wish everything was solved with a bit of UV,’ Sk’jin snorts getting up and waddling very much like an elderly Being.

‘Maybe try religion,’ Namjoon snorts at the very notion of it.

‘Prayers won’t save you here,’ Sk’jin grumbles.

‘Too many black holes,’ Namjoon replies absentmindedly as he claims his seat.

Sk’jin honest to goodness chokes.

*'

Sk’jin looks like he could really use that UV Bed any minute now. He did look healthy, but there was a clear restlessness in him that Namjoon hopes can be settled with the UV Bed.

The Hangar gate opens and the filtered light from Grisial is somewhat healing but not enough. At least that’s what Sk’jin had mentioned in passing. Pit 18 isn’t very populated, but that was just a matter of opinion. There were a lot of ships about, with maintenance crew and couriers flying about in auto-lifts and docks, whizzing overhead in a uniform manner. One of them settles down close to their landing strip and the workers start to undock.
'Here comes our goodies,' Sk’jin actually rubs his hands together in glee.

Hoseok is in complete disguise, stepping past Sk’jin to exit the ship to the platform. It had caused a bit of a ruckus when Hoseok had transformed, because Lisai alerted them of an intruder being on board. It was a security measure Namjoon and the others deemed necessary, especially when they were landing.

‘That’s actually a lot more than I expected,’ Hoseok comments, ‘Maybe an extra hand-‘

‘Don’t be insensitive towards Namjoon,’ Sk’jin gasps.

‘I’ll go,’ Jimin offers at once but Namjoon shakes his head.

‘You three stay here,’ Namjoon says with a slightly warning tone. Taeh’yung gives him an all too innocent smile in response and Namjoon knows not to trust in it.

He comes across Jungkook who is crouched just outside the doorway of the Hangar, listening to the movements outside. Namjoon gives him small smile and pats his head as he walks past.

Hoseok and another courier are hauling in some of the bigger crates and Namjoon goes to help them at once.

‘Sir, could you check and sign the roster?’ one of the other couriers asks, handing Sk’jin a clipboard. Namjoon keeps behind the crates, helping but still staying out of sight. You couldn’t be too careful after all. Hoseok walks out again to get the other crates and Namjoon wonders why the couriers don’t just bring the lift towards the ship. Namjoon begins dragging one of the large crates, that clearly contained some large part for Sk’jin’s UV Bed towards the wide doorway to the Lobby inside.

‘Oh that’s wonderful,’ Sk’jin grins, arms moving elegantly as he takes on the clipboard, checking the contents.

‘If you could-‘

There’s a sharp and sudden snarl and a blurred movement streaking past Namjoon followed by a horrific crunching sound that resonates through the Hangar.

The next thing Namjoon sees is Sk’jin sprayed with blood, and Jungkook crouched on the floor, head lowered onto the courier’s neck.

‘Jungkook-‘ Sk’jin gasps, nearly falling backwards, the clipboard slipping from his hands.

And before it hits the ground, one of the other couriers appears at the opened hangar gateway. The clipboard strikes the ground and the carrier leaps across, charging straight at Sk’jin who is too slow to react-

A hot flash of light streaks past Namjoon’s ears and hits the carrier straight in the chest, throwing him out of the Hangar. Yoongi sprints past, TeorSer in hand as he dodges Sk’jin and Jungkook on the floor and fires almost randomly at something outside. Namjoon drops the crate and rushes after the Human to find Hoseok pushing off one of the couriers, and to his horror finds that the Ngfy’widan was bleeding.

‘Get back inside now!’ Hoseok roars as he starts running back towards them but he’s tackled harshly, causing him to skid across the landing strip. However, Yoongi is quick to move and he’s on the assailant, firing neat and clear shots. But the assailant dodges every single shot and in a
strange move lifts Hoseok up before him like a shield-

Yoongi instantly stops firing and Hoseok manages to grapple his assailant, disarming him. Yoongi sprints out towards Hoseok at once but is waylaid by two couriers.

‘Sk’jin get the ship at green now!’ Namjoon orders as he runs to the emergency panel to the side, ‘Jungkook get inside now-‘

‘Oh? This is interesting,’ Taeh’yung says before there’s a wave of green that physically pushes past Namjoon, making him falter.

But the effect on the couriers who were on Yoongi and Hoseok is much stronger, flinging them off physically into the air.

Hoseok wastes no time in sprinting back. Yoongi waits for him to reach him, TeorSer raised because their assailants are already getting up.

‘Sk’jin get us flying now!’ Namjoon orders, quickly glancing at the Khol’isa who is still in a state of shock. Namjoon aims and fires, taking one of the assailants who was standing out. He hears Sk’jin and Jungkook rushing out of the Hangar. They’ve caught attention now, the entire area in a state of shock, ships clearly trying to move away, alarms triggering and lights blaring.

‘Lisai pull up the ramps, shut down all points of entry except for the main Hangar gate,’ Namjoon orders, glancing down at the body of the courier on the floor, his neck a mangled mess of flesh.

‘The security measures are shutting down the gates,’ Jimin reports in panic as Namjoon waits on edge for Hoseok and Yoongi to run back in. ‘They’re sending patrol units.’

Namjoon fires again, catching one of the 2 remaining assailants in the leg but it’s not stopping them from rushing towards them.

Hoseok and Yoongi jump in just as the ramp starts pulling in and the ship starts to lift off the ground.

‘Lisai full power on shields and start engines for warp,’ Sk’jin orders, his voice shaky.

Hoseok is bleeding from an attempted stab wound to the chest. But he clearly dodged, a gash cutting him across the side instead. Yoongi isn’t injured but the moment he’s close enough he blurts out, ‘It’s them-‘

A figure in the courier uniform suddenly vaults in, taking Yoongi down with him just as the ramp closes in and the gateway seals in.

This was not good; they couldn’t fire their TeorSers inside the ship. But the assailant could.

He’s kicked off by Yoongi but the assailant recovers with startling speed and in a quick motion slides and darts under the Spardyti and slithers off and away into the doorway out of the Hangar.

‘We have a hostile inside the ship-!’ Hoseok yells, the three of them rushing out of the Hangar.

The Lobby is empty and they all pause. Namjoon realizes that Lisai has not alerted them for a foreign invader on board the ship.

‘What?’

The ship tilts a little bit.
‘Lisai close the Bridge now-‘ Namjoon orders as he follows Yoongi in sprinting up the stairs. Hoseok stays in the Lobby, his posture crouched as he scans the area.

‘Scan for invading body-‘ Namjoon begins to order but the sound of a body being physically thrown to the floor urges them to move faster.

There’s a horrified gasp and the sound of someone falling backwards.

Yoongi all but flies up the stairs.

The assailant is on the floor, face turned away from them, body motionless. Jimin is standing over him, eyes wide and hands shaking.

‘Jimin-?’

Jimin jumps violently, his entire body shaking, his eyes wide with horror and shock.

‘I- I don’t-‘

Hoseok runs up, panting as he asks, ‘Did you get him-‘

‘Yoo-Yoongi I-‘ Jimin sobs, shaking rather violently.

‘Jimin what-‘ the Human quickly makes his way to Jimin, quickly but gently pulling him aside but Jimin is shakily pointing to the body on the floor, making strange choking sounds.

Namjoon quickly darts forward, kneeling down and pulling the still-breathing assailant in the courier outfit onto his back. Namjoon instantly stumbles back.

It’s Yoongi.

There’s a sharp intake of breath from Hoseok behind him.

‘What-?’

Jimin is shaking, hands curling into his beanie, his breaths are heaves, distraught, agony, and confusion on his face. But Yoongi is there, right next to him, holding Jimin protectively, eyes glazed over in shock.

‘What the fuck-‘

The ship rocks, making Namjoon lose balance. Hoseok steadies him, his eyes never straying from the unconscious body on the Lobby floor.

‘What-‘

Namjoon cannot believe his eyes.

There was no mistaking it.

This was Yoongi.

‘How-‘, Yoongi begins faintly, ‘How many Yoongi’s do you see?’
UNIVERSITY
FUCK
THIS
IT’S THE LAST SEMESTER AND IM GRADUATING
HOPEFULLY
BUT FUCK IT
this update took 9876545678 years and i am sorry
This comeback
I don’t know how to express it guys
Ive never felt such pure joy from a single song
This whole album is amazing but-
This song
This song has such a powerful happy feeling to it and I felt like my entire soul was
drinking up the pure joy and energy it had
I felt young
I know im not old but you know, living on this earth just ages you mentally and emotionally. But this song really came and just slapped some youth into me
I just love the lyrics so much? A boy WITH love?? That’s amazing.
Tell me the small things you do?? Teach me?? A star that makes the ordinary extraordinary??
What a wholesome and wonderful song it really just makes me so incredibly filled with joy
I love them so much
And Halsey
I just love her so much
She fits in so perfectly
It’s not a strange addition or even just a ‘oh I guess we should feature someone and stick them to a certain part of the song’ kinda thing but she was there, singing, harmonizing, and dancing in the mv it was adorable. This is the cutest sweetest most wholesome thing
What a blessing this whole comeback
Jimin watches fondly as Yoongi teaches Taeh’yung a game called “Monopoly” from Earth. After treating the cuts in his hand, Yoongi had taken one look at it and huffed out a laugh. They then cleared an area on the floor and settled down with a new screen to project a “board” onto the floor.

‘I hope we don’t fall apart over this,’ the Human had said.

Yoongi told Taeh’yung that the best way to learn would be to play it for himself. It’s funny watching them argue over fake holographic money because Taeh’yung insisted that Yoongi was cheating while Yoongi made wild straight-faced explanations over why and how he was not cheating.

Yoongi was definitely cheating.

Jimin opted out from playing, wanting to simply watch Yoongi.

This was nice.

Watching him as he once was, a normal simple Human just enjoying his life, no immediate threat over them, over him. Just a sense of normalcy and—

Yoongi looks up at Jimin, a sort of suppressed smirk on his lips as Taeh’yung struggled with decisions regarding the game. His gaze softens, and Jimin can nearly hear his exhale, as though it was out of Yoongi’s control. As though just looking at him made Yoongi lose his breath.

It makes Jimin blush, he can feel it growing and spreading on his face. He looks down at their holographic board instead and concentrates at a little rectangle named “Pall Mall” instead.

He chances a look up at Yoongi again after a while, and he’s already pointing at something Taeh’yung is asking him. But his face is a little flushed too.

Jimin glances over at the surveillance projections above the Navigation Table.

Sk’jin felt unwell and Jimin isn’t really sure about this device about UV rays, but he trusted that the others seemed to think that it might help. So he tries not to think too much about it. Besides, it was impossible to discuss anything with Sk’jin most times. He only seemed to open up to Jungkook. Or at least seemed to let his guard down with the young Being.
Speaking of Jungkook, he was sitting outside the Hangar, knees up to his chest and randomly drawing patterns on the floor with a finger. Hoseok with a completely new disguise is exiting the ship, his gait changed, shifting his weight forward almost in a sluggish manner. Hoseok didn’t just have the ability to change his appearance, but also to completely take on a whole set of mannerism and attitude.

Namjoon and Sk’jin were exchanging words, some form of “friendly” conversation though most friendly conversations didn’t come with hidden jabs and passive aggressiveness. It sort of makes Jimin want to laugh and pull at his hair all at once.

‘Yes! I got a hotel! Banker! Give me a hotel for Leicester Square!’ Taeh’yung throws his arms up in the air.

‘That will be 7750 pounds dear customer,’ Yoongi replies as he reads the holographic card.

‘But I don’t have 7750 pounds!’ Taeh’yung gasps, holding up his money as though to show Yoongi.

‘Well I guess you can’t buy a hotel,’ Yoongi sighs sympathetically.

‘You’re cheating me!’

‘It literally says 7750 pounds here,’ Yoongi grins with amusement as he turns the card over at Taeh’yung who wails dramatically.

‘Come on, you can throw the die again, you hit doubles.’ Yoongi tells him kindly, nudging him with an extended foot.

‘Oh right! I like this rule!’ Taeh’yung grins as he rolls the holographic die again.

Yoongi glances up at him again. He doesn’t have a full blown out smile on his face, but there’s a sort of lazy up-turn of lips- more on one side than the other. It’s achingly familiar but entirely foreign as well.

Jimin smiles back and walks over to go sit on the floor as well. His knee lightly nudges against Yoongi’s, the Human’s hand twitching as though to reach out for him.

Jimin nearly responds in kind, but remembers that, oddly enough, this Yoongi was still not familiar with him the way GI Yoongi was familiar with him.

Jimin wants to reach over and take his hand, but he’s not sure how to. Or if he could.

‘Okay! I think I would definitely like to buy May Park,’ Taeh’yung announces, holding up the exact amount of money needed to buy this May Park. ‘Here is the money banker.’

‘Understood,’ Yoongi nods, taking the holographic money slid over towards him. Taeh’yung watches with an exaggerated pout as he watches his money count go down, the sum turning orange as though to depict the level of financial danger he was in. Yoongi, Jimin notes, has a tidy light blue-tinted sum of money.

‘Congratulations, you are now the proud owner of May Park,’ Yoongi tells Taeh’yung as he hands Taeh’yung the appropriate card. Taeh’yung claps as he carefully coordinates his cards according to colour.

‘It used to be a major tourist area back on Ancient Earth,’ Yoongi says conversationally. ‘Most of
Earth was transformed into one major conservation site. When we moved up to the Settlement Arcs we decided to never move down. It was also unsafe for a long time, we just had to let...let things run its natural course. Let things return to its natural order.'

Jimin and Taeh’yung listen carefully.

‘And we adapted, living in the Arcs was a new start. Made us feel better- felt separated from the mess we made.’ Yoongi snorts before saying, ‘Humans aren’t the best at accepting their mistakes. We tend to ruin ourselves in the process of ignoring what we did wrong.’

Jimin doesn’t realize how hard he’s clenching his fists.

‘But yeah- May Park was a really fancy place. Supposedly very good property. “Old property” type y’know?’ Yoongi snorts, ‘The past- like, the past Past, normally visualized that area with really snobby people.’

‘Am I snobby now?’ Taeh’yung’s jaw drops.

Yoongi laughs, ‘Nah- I think you’re fine kid.’

‘Kid?’ Taeh’yung seems to preen at that.

Jimin finds it funny. Because he knows Taeh’yung is older than all of them, with the exception of Sk’jin. But even so, age was a strange concept for someone like Taeh’yung- he existed in layers of Time within himself.

‘All right- seems like I got myself into jail,’ Yoongi sighs dramatically as he pushes his token, a small pointy eared creature with a long tail, over the board on a square that said ‘JAIL’ in thick letters.

‘I arrest you banker!’ Taeh’yung gleefully shouts. He’s about to reach for the die again when Taeh’yung’s eyes suddenly glaze over and Jimin feels it almost immediately.

A hollow ring resonates in the air, an echo, a mirage- a calling-

‘Jungkook-!’

‘Fuck-!’ Yoongi jumps up, eyes wide as he looks at the surveillance footage where suddenly there’s blood on the Hangar floor and Sk’jin is down, Jungkook covering him bodily.

‘Stay here both of you!’ Yoongi calls out as he sprints out. ‘Get the ship ready to fly out now!’

He exits the Bridge before Jimin can call him back, before he can regain his voice. He turns to face Taeh’yung who has a curious expression on his face, already eyeing him with some interest.

‘GET BACK INSIDE!’ Hoseok roars, their Comm Devices crackling at the sudden noise.

‘I don’t like this-‘ Jimin manages to finally say as he watches Yoongi swiftly run past Namjoon, Sk’jin, and Jungkook, ‘I don’t-‘

‘You’ll only find out if you look. I already told you,’ Taeh’yung tells him, his expression blank as he gazes at some point beyond the Bridge. Jimin rushes to start up the ship, issuing the request to un-dock as he’s seen Namjoon do many times.

‘Request- requesting green for take-off!’ Jimin calls out before he rushes off the Navigator’s Mast and calling out, ‘Lisai! Autopilot now!’
‘Understood.’

‘Sk’jin get the ship at green now!’ Namjoon is yelling, ‘Jungkook get inside now-‘

‘Oh,’ Taeh’ying’s eyes gleam bright green, an unsettling smile growing on his face, ‘This is interesting.’

He waves a hand, a wave of green expanding out of his palm, the lines of copper over his skin glowing briefly.

‘What-‘

‘Due to security breach detected in your area, we are shutting down all docks and ports.’ A voice tells him over the Navigation Table. ‘

‘You’ll be able to see now,’ Taeh’yung says just as Jimin starts to run out. He doesn’t give it much thought, his mind abuzz and his pulse in his ear.

‘The security measures are shutting down the gates,’ Jimin hurriedly reports as he runs down the stairs. ‘They’re sending patrol units.’

He nearly collides straight into Jungkook and Sk’jin.

Jungkook’s face is splattered in blood, his mouth bloody his teeth still bared, but his eyes wide in fear. Jimin quickly reaches to the young Pravasi M’hanun and pats his head, willing calm into him. He looks over Sk’jin as well- and despite being splattered in blood, he looked uninjured and fine.

‘I’ll get the ship moving-‘

‘I’ve order the autopilot-‘

‘-good-‘

They all hear it the same time.

An almost imperceptible shift in the air- a chill travels down Jimin’s spine as they all look down the stairs to the Lobby below.

‘Go,’ Jimin pushes them up. ‘I’ll see-‘

Jungkook looks like he’s ready to go down instead.

‘Jungkook- protect Sk’jin- ship needs to go,’ Jimin tells him urgently and Jungkook nods, following Sk’jin up.

‘Lisai full power on shields and start engines for warp,’ Sk’jin says shakily as he enters the Bridge.

‘We have a hostile inside the ship-!’ Hoseok calls out and Jimin readies himself, taking sure steps down- feeling hearing the empty hollow ringing almost as though it was calling out to him-

The figure nearly rushes into him but Jimin is expecting them and he’s ready, his palm raised, feet lifting just a little from the floor –

A face – too familiar – too close, too precious, too close-

Jimin stumbles back onto the floor, his heart stopping as the call abruptly ends, the hollow erased
and Yoongi is on the floor, eyes rolling back as he crumples, overwhelmed by the order to stay down.

No no no no no no no –

‘Jimin-?’

Jimin jumps at the voice- Yoongi is wide-eyed, worried, watching and approaching him-

‘I - I don’t-,’ Jimin’s throat constricts. Namjoon is there too, he’s watching the Being- Yoongi on the floor with apprehension.

‘Did you get him-’ Hoseok bursts in.

‘Yoo-Yoongi I –‘ Jimin chokes out, unable to look away from the floor.

‘Jimin what-‘ Yoongi guides him away gently, but Yoongi has to know they all have to know-

Namjoon quickly darts forward, kneeling down and the Yoongi on the floor onto his back.

Namjoon instantly stumbles back and Hoseok pales, his breath sharp.

‘What-?’ Namjoon asks, barely able to understand.

Jimin can’t stop shaking, an intense sense of confusion, of fear, of guilt-

‘Yoongi knows something is wrong with him, doesn’t he?’ Taeh’yung had asks rather conversationally when they were cleaning up the Medical Bay.

Jimin had tried not to appear as though his words had effected him.

‘I think if you’re passing out all over the place randomly then yeah, I’d assume something was wrong with me too.’ Jimin didn’t mean to sound snappy.

‘You know what I mean. He can feel it can’t he? He can feel his soul-‘

‘-don’t-‘ Jimin pleads, his voice lowered to a whisper. ‘Please don’t.’

Taeh’yung doesn’t say anything for a while before he asks, ‘What will you tell him if he asks?’

‘He already did. And I – I told him I don’t know-‘ Jimin frowns at Taeh’yung facial expression.

‘That’s the truth- I don’t know what’s going on! I can’t understand-‘

‘It’s because you don’t want to see.’

‘Don’t say that-!’

‘We do not bring death. We bring life-‘

One of it steps forward suddenly, bending down at a strange and impossible angle. It raises its hand until it wraps around Jimin’s head.

Jimin is locked, unable to move. He’s slowly lifted into the air and the light around him is being pressed down- it’s painful, as though a great weight was bearing down on him, compressing him, threatening to crush him to his very core.
‘Would you like to see life?’

Jimin raises his hands, stretching and reaching until the tips of his fingers touch the Red Evil on its face.

It’s cold, strangely wet, and ancient. 

Jimin is flooded with pain— not his own, but not of the Red Evil. There is pain— from a Universe of Memories that has been forgotten and abandoned. A Universe of life that once was—

And a Universe of obsession.

‘Can you see it?’

Jimin is staring into its eyes, unable to blink away or speak—

‘You will see it. Like the rest of them.’

Jimin drops to the ground, reality rushing back around him in harsh lines and sounds—

‘You will see it.’

Yoongi block his view momentarily, and Jimin clutches on to him, grounding himself, taking deep breaths that sound more like gasps.

‘What the fuck—’

The ship rocks, and Jimin is sure that they’re all talking— that they’re all saying something—

‘How—,’ Yoongi’s voice reaches to him as though through a deep ocean, ‘How many Yoongi’s do you see?’

The ship shudders once more—

‘They’re trying to lock us in—!’ Sk’jin yells. ‘They’re not allowing us to move—’

There’s a horribly loud sound and bright light explodes outside of the kitchen window.

‘We’re being fired at—!’

‘Hoseok—!’ Namjoon calls out and the Ngfy’widan is already sprinting upwards, clearly headed for the Bridge to take over.

‘We need to first get the fuck out of here— we’ll take him away and lock him in. One of the Cabins will do—’ Namjoon begins to order, reaching down to grab the other Yoongi by the ankles when he starts awake, his foot meeting Namjoon’s jaw and kicking him away.

Namjoon spins as he falls to the ground heavily.

Yoongi is already on him, grappling him and forcing him down to the floor, making a sickening sound as something cracks. But neither of them appear to express any pain.

For a horrifying moment, Jimin cannot differentiate them.

Their movements are incredibly fast, and with the speed with which they fought, Jimin can see no open window to move in to take down the other Yoongi without touching his Yoongi. He could
take them both down- but he’s afraid to do anything to unbalance his Yoongi- to further trigger-

‘Do you see it now?’ Taeh’yung asks him.

A flare of anger bursts through Jimin; anger, frustration, sorrow, pain, guilt-

Moving fast and swift, Jimin circles the two engaged in hand-to-hand combat and following the coloured blur that was his Yoongi, mimics and shadows his movements just enough to slip his hand in, slamming up against the other Yoongi’s chest.

They all crumple to the ground just as the ship is hit with another bolt of something. Namjoon is half-crawling, half-getting up towards them, his expression disoriented. Yoongi holds down the other Yoongi down to his own body, using himself as a restraint as the other Yoongi twists in his hold with uncanny dexterity freeing one arm but Jimin is there, throwing himself over and placing both his palms over the other Yoongi’s temples.

There’s a terrible white pain bursting on his side but he ignores it as he forces this Yoongi to look at him.

’SleEP-
0110100100100000011101110110001011011000101001011000011000000111011101101101 coils around him, harsh, powerful, limitless. An even darker blackness broils and coils somewhere, reaching out and pulling him out with no care and onto a tiled floor0110100100100000011101110110001011011000101001011001011001000100000011101116
he’s standing up in a rather dull empty space, some form of bedding raised off of the floor and a black01101001001000000111011001011000110100101100101100011000110100101100100010000001110111t charged to a single port against the wall01101001001000000111011001011000110101100011010110010110001000011101110 bedding glows faintly and on it is a black uniform he goes to touch it and the bed is somewhat warm but not enough011010010010000001110111011010010110001101110001011011001011001000100000011101111 he wears it a heavy shadow weighing him to the floor and submerging him completely as he dawns on the helmet before he 01101001001000000111011101101100011010110001101110010110001000011101101101 out into the long narrow hallway with identical doors and a figure stands before him silhouetted against the rectangle of light at the end011010010010000001110111011011000110101100011011100101101100010000100000011101111 he opens his mouth, the words formed and ready as he says01101001001000000111011101101100011011010001101100011010110010110010001000000111011101101110 !!

Gasping for air, Jimin resurfaces back into a violence of light amidst a high pitch-scream he cannot place. Away from the confusion of sight built on numbers and codes, suddenly everything is blurred and too stark. Everything rushes around him in a whirlwind of sound, lights, voices, and pain.

‘JIMIN!’

The 01100100011100101011000001101101010000110110110101101011011010110110101101101011011010110111111011111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111
There’s a flash of light, of heat, and then dreadful cold, and Jimin is overwhelmed with nausea as he suddenly feels like he’s floating.

_Something was not right_

‘Hey! Jimin!’

It’s Namjoon.

‘Hey I’m moving you away from here’

The sound of aggressive scuffling followed by another explosion-

‘Help-’ Jimin struggles to say, nausea threatening to overwhelm him as his pain intensifies. ‘Help- Yoongi- stop him-’

‘Shh hey look focus on my voice stay calm it’s-’ another explosion and there’s blinding light.

There’s another massive explosive sound and this time, Jimin knows something is wrong, metal is shrieking and something thick and heavy shatters.

For a brief moment, Jimin wonders if he’s falling.

Wind whips around him violently, his body lifted and tugging towards something and his ears are ringing louder than the noise around him. A hand grabs him again and he knows it’s Namjoon. He stops falling but he’s still spinning, images created in numbers and codes rush and blend around him forms and shapes he recognizes but doesn’t understand collapsing as they exponentially maximize into strings of light.

‘Activating emergency door K12,’ Lisai’s voice announces pleasantly over the din.

‘YOONGI LET HIM GO-!’ Namjoon suddenly roars over the sound of the rushing sound and Jimin’s whole being freezes. Grounding himself, concentrating on the hand that’s anchoring him Jimin apologizes to Namjoon for the invasion and-

The Lobby is in chaos, things are flying around haphazardly in the air before being abruptly sucked in through a massive tear broken through the kitchen window towards the end of the ship. The damage is unusual- difficult to explain because it’s almost as though there was an explosion from within the ship.

Grisial is glistening around them in soft white rhythmically pulsing in neon red for the emergency they were causing. And outlined against this is Yoongi and the Other Yoongi.

A weight tugs on his hand and Jimin glances down only to see himself, his side drenched in blood, legs dangling as they pull up higher away from Grisial’s gravitational pull and into space. Jimin, or Namjoon, is using his body as an anchor, flat against the wall that borders the gap between the Lobby chairs and the massive dining area.

‘The emergency walls over the window is compromised- it’s probably jammed I can’t shut it down-’

Yoongi, the side of his face splattered in blood, is holding onto the one of the support beams outside the Cabin hallways. He has a deathly grip on the Other Yoongi, his face impassive and
staring intently at Jimin.

‘YOONGI LET HIM GO!’ Jimin/Namjoon roars. ‘DROP HIM NOW-‘

‘HE WON’T- HE WON’T LET GO-‘ Yoongi roars back.

Jimin can see how Other Yoongi is not letting go.

‘He’s after me-‘ Jimin says but Namjoon splutters out ‘-what the fuck-?!’

The Other Yoongi uses Yoongi’s arm as a sort of momentum builder and swings himself to the side before grappling to a lower beam.

Yoongi nearly loses grip at the sudden detachment but quickly rights himself.

‘Pull us up-‘ Jimin gasps as Namjoon gasps out ‘-oh Spaces-!’ but doesn’t question it and begins reeling Jimin in.

‘WE’RE NEARLY OUT OF THE ATMOSHIELD YOU GUYS NEED TO MOVE FAST-!’ Sk’jin yells.

Namjoon grunts, able to use only one arm as he hoists Jimin up, his body twisting and leaving bloody skid marks over the normally shiny and smooth floors.

The Other Yoongi is scaling up the sides of the Cabin walls, using the indents of the doors to pull himself up. Yoongi catches up instantly, latching onto the Other Yoongi’s back and twisting him off the wall.

Jimin/Namjoon scream as the two Yoongi’s hurtle off the wall, colliding with a horrifying crunch against one of the support beams and separating mid-fall and falling straight towards the kitchen, towards the gaping broken window. But Yoongi manages to grab hold of one of the kitchen chairs, bolted to the ground near the table. The Other Yoongi has also managed to grab onto the kitchen island, his foot grabbing hold of one of the cabinet handles.

‘Sk’jin activate the emergency gateway NOW-!’ Namjoon yells as he pulls Jimin’s body all the way over to the side of the wall.

‘Yoongi-‘ Jimin/Namjoon calls and there’s another flash of light.

‘Fuck! Hold on tight-!’

Then rather oddly, the Other Yoongi stands up straight on the side of the kitchen island, watching them all rather blankly.

‘Hey-!’ Yoongi yells, arm reaching out.

From both the ceiling and the floor, thin but reinforced walls close in over the kitchen area in sections. One right above the island, separating the Other Yoongi from the open kitchen window and from Yoongi.

‘Stop!’ Jimin/Namjoon screams but the Other Yoongi steps off, falling straight through the broken kitchen window and into the rushing white of Grisial below them.

The emergency gateways close snap and the pulling force stops immediately.

Jimin and Namjoon let go of their hands
Jimin heaves breath into his lungs, the world around him still ringing but not as bad as it was.

‘Get to a secure place we need to warp out now-!’

Hoseok’s command is cut harshly when the whole ship violently jerks to the side. Jimin feels himself swerve on the floor. He can’t get rid of the numbers and codes flying past him, making up the sight he was seeing he tries blinking it out but it’s overwhelming him.

‘HOSEOK JUST Warp US OUT NOW!’ he hears Namjoon roar just as hands find him.

‘Jimin!’ Yoongi’s voice cuts through the numbers and suddenly Jimin can see clearly- can see Yoongi clearly. Pale, shaken, blood splattered his skin broken over his forehead and cheek, smudged blood still wet on his lips his nose- Found.

There’s a terrible groaning sound and rumbling as the whole ship’s direction physically changes and Jimin feels himself falling again. This time Yoongi holds him close, wrapping his arms around his torso and using his legs to steady them against the corner of a wall. Namjoon slides right up against them-

Terror and a strange sense of realization dawns on him as he gasps for breath, he just needs to-

‘Yoongi-!’

Yoongi holds him closer, eyes wide as he tries to check on what injuries Jimin might have.

‘Yoongi they found-!’

They lurch violently, steadied only by Namjoon who grabs them and anchors them to the wall.

‘Something’s wrong we’re falling-‘ he gasps as he situates himself next to them. ‘We need to get ourselves into the Lobby seats- are you both okay-?’

‘TAEHYUNG DON’T-!’ Sk’jin suddenly screams.

The hair on Jimin’s neck stands on end and the air screams as everything turns neon green.

Sk’jin is quick to move out of the cockpit when Hoseok comes hurtling in. He seats himself next to the Ngfy’widan though, ready to co-pilot with him if needed. He docks the NaviLet to his side, readying himself for every and anything.

He’s still shaking but he immediately checks on Jungkook who was secured on one of the footstools close to Sk’jin’s station at the Communications Board. Taeh’yung was rather excitedly reacting from where he sat in the front, where Yoongi normally stationed himself. Sk’jin had maneuvered and literally shot their way out of the attempted forced lockdown the Grisial Forces were trying to overwhelm them in. Sk’jin wasn’t the best at piloting fighting-grade ships but he
hasn’t lived this long without having any experience. He’s shot down countless security drones before and this was no different, not with a ship this strong and stocked. It was only a little alarming that the default weapon Yoongi had assigned to the Užkulisai was the level 2 proton missiles. But then again, it wasn’t too surprising considering this was Yoongi after all.

‘Ship model Užkulisai-02 we are ordering you to stand down immediately or you will be forcefully-‘ Sk’jin cuts their Comm just as a random ship suddenly appears before them, having just pulled out of warp.

‘Fuck-!’ Hoseok curses as he redirects the ship harshly, jerking them against the safety restraints of their seats. Taeh’yung lets out a cheer in front of them. Sk’jin quickly ducks around the chair to check on Jungkook. His eyes are wide, face smeared in blood. He doesn’t look too bothered by the incident taking place immediately but rather stares down at his hands a little blankly. Sk’jin wants to reach out but now was neither the time or place.

The lower wing of the just warped in ship grazes over them but luckily due to their shields doesn’t cause any physical damage on them. The map of their location lightly beeps, a soft red spreading over the NaviLet screen.

‘Drones approaching we need to get out now-‘ Sk’jin reports immediately as he pulls up their defense set up again. ‘-before confusion and panic hits-‘

‘-this isn’t confusing and panicky enough?!’ Hoseok demands as he turns sharply and nearly collides into a ship that was clearly confused about wanting to fly off or land.

‘Beings panic and don’t think straight in situations like this- they’ll freak out and get themselves killed!’ Sk’jin snaps. ‘This is just the start of it we need to get the fuck out now!’

‘What do you think I’m trying to do!’ Hoseok yells back as he manages to get them higher. ‘Namjoon is the intruder down?’

There’s no reply from the Kutsoglerin.

‘A fucking intruder what the fuck are they?’ Sk’jin demands as he sets targets on the restraint-drone sent by the Grisial Forces. He can’t believe that an intruder got in, not to mention Lisai didn’t even alert them about it.

‘I-‘ Hoseok is concentrating on flying them but his expression is strangely blank, worry settling on his brow that exceeded the immediate stress he had about their very current and fatal course of action. ‘Yoongi.’

‘What about him? He didn’t get hurt did he?’ Sk’jin demands as he sets off the small projectiles after the drones.

‘No he’s- it’s I think other GI.’

‘Other GI-?!’ Sk’jin is momentarily distracted but doesn’t have time to question him when a ship tries to warp out and instead just crashes through a few other hovering ships and straight into a massive Grisial crystal asteroid.

‘What did I say- panic,’ Sk’jin says through grit teeth, looking away from the bright and brief explosion as whatever ship and her crew obliterate themselves. They narrowly dodge another ship as a wave of new drones fly in. But that’s only a cover, because as Sk’jin aims and fires, out of the explosion a wave of large projectiles, definitely not under the Grisial Forces grade flies at them.
The shield around the Užkulisai ripples as the force of it shakes and causes a few lights to flicker.

‘It’s not enough to take out the shield,’ Hoseok grits out.

‘Jimin!’

Sk’jin twists around again, catching sight of Jungkook who was staring at the projections of the ships surveillance. For a brief moment, Sk’jin wonders if his eyes were failing. It would make sense to an extent, seeing as his entire body seemed to be failing him at the moment. But it’s not the case (just yet, Sk’jin thinks scathingly) because his eyes aren’t tricking him.

Yoongi is on the floor, holding down against himself another Yoongi who was being pushed down by Jimin who was basically sitting on this other Yoongi’s chest, hands on his head.

‘Namjoon where the fuck are you?!’ Sk’jin screeches before adding, ‘Jungkook, stay- you need to stay here!’

The young Pravasi M’hanun was halfway getting up, the security straps straining against his chest and shoulders.

‘This isn’t the Grisial Forces,’ Hoseok gets out as they suddenly dip low, Sk’jin grabbing the edges of his seat out of instinct. ‘This is too strong-‘

The attacks are concentrated in one area specifically.

‘But it’s not going to cause any damage on us-‘

‘-not from the outside but from the inside-‘ Hoseok gasps before he’s practically yelling, ‘Yoongi he probably has a device on him-!’

This time the explosion that shakes their ship isn’t contained and doesn’t just cause some lights to flicker.

‘Large detonation detected from Level 2 Kitchens Area K09 to K21.’ Lisai reports. ‘Breach detected. Air levels fluctuating, gravity compromised.’

There’s an angry shriek of terror from behind them- it’s Jungkook. Sk’jin already knows that the youngest of this pathetic excuse of a crew was already undoing his security so he yells out, ‘Lisai emergency gateways for the Bridge entryway now! Close the gateways for area K09 and it’s surroundings as well!’

There are angry thudding sounds as Jungkook tries to break down the emergency gateways with his fists.

‘Kookie!’ Taeh’yung skips towards the Pravasi M’hanun and for a panicked moment Sk’jin thinks he’s going to let him go. But instead the Zhak’gri gathers up Jungkook in his arms, uncaring for the flailing and animalistic growls of anger coming from him.

‘You can’t get hurt,’ is all Taeh’yung says, ‘My small baby.’

He deposits him back on the same chair and straps him back. To Sk’jin’s intense alarm, Jungkook is unconscious.

‘What the fuck did you do-!?’ Sk’jin yells as Taeh’yung arranges Jungkook comfortably.

‘Keeping him safe,’ Taeh’yung says as he stands up straight, flexing his arms a little before turning
to beam as Sk’jin though his expression falls as he looks at Sk’jin with a small frown, ‘Hey- you okay-?’

‘What is that?’ Hoseok suddenly asks.

Sk’jin looks towards the direction Hoseok is gawking at as they manage to somehow pull above the main destruction zone. The drones can’t follow them this far out of Grisial’s natural gravitational pull, that too with so much destruction going on. Sk’jin tries not to think about it.

Just beyond the Atmoshield surround all of Grisial are relatively small but powerful looking ships— not trade ships or cargo ships or passenger ships.

No.

These were clearly designed to be used in battle or for offensive attacks.

‘We need to get out of here now- and for fuck’s sake, Lisai seal those breaches,’ Hoseok orders again.

‘Emergency gateway K12 is jammed.’ Lisai replies pleasantly.

‘Fuck-’ Sk’jin curses, ‘The emergency walls over the window is compromised- it’s probably jammed I can’t shut it down-‘

‘We’ll need to section areas off-’ Hoseok grunts out, fervently eying the incoming barge of assault ships.

With a sense of intense dread Sk’jin pulls up the surveillance projection on the kitchen area over his docked NaviLet.

The damage is insane. Whatever device the other Yoongi had must have caused some major damages, allowing the missiles from the outside to finally caused sufficient damage and causing the window area to loosen. And the rest was taken care of by Grisial’s natural gravitational pull and the speed in which they were flying.

‘Lisai what emergency gateways are functioning right now?’ Sk’jin demands. ‘Standby to activate on my command!’

‘Analyzing and ready at your command.’

Jimin appeared to be unconscious, saved from being pulled through the opening by Namjoon who had managed to lodge himself on the Lobby wall. Yoongi and the other Yoongi are in a strange stance where it’s like they’re hanging onto each other.

‘Yoongi please keep a distance from the other one I’ll close off the emergency gateways and seal up the breach-‘

‘HE WON’T- HE WON’T LET GO-‘ Yoongi yells over the Comm.

‘I need to take us back in they’re going to see us too easily and we can’t warp without the breach being sealed-‘ Hoseok is saying, taking the ship back to the chaos-

‘Are you fucking crazy?’ Sk’jin demands, reaching forward to stop Hoseok mid-action. ‘Those are civilians- innocent traders and workers who are caught mid-attack because of us!’

‘But we can’t make it! We need to get out and we need to warp but we can’t-!’ Hoseok spits out,
eyes widening in either disbelief or apprehension or stress or all three Sk’jin can’t rightly tell.

‘Keep going straight we’re not going back to just use innocent Beings for our fucking shield again-!’ Sk’jin hisses, physically taking over the controls as he gets out of his seat and practically shoves Hoseok off. ‘Move your ass to the weapons and take those fuckers out what the fuck do we have this fucking ship for if we can’t fucking use it??’

He’s either said the right thing or Hoseok is just in shock, what with the double take he gives him before he does what he’s told.

An onslaught of very powerful detonations fall over them in a powerful rain of bright lights, with nerve wracking alarms going off as their shield starts to take on too damage.

‘We can’t afford to fall back to the primary shield Sk’jin I fucking hope you know what you’re doing-’ Hoseok yells from the front.

‘Just fucking shoot shit down!’ Sk’jin snaps back as he dodges a ship that carelessly tries to warp past them. ‘Idiots you fucking idiots- WE’RE NEARLY OUT OF THE ATMOSHIELD YOU GUYS NEED TO MOVE FAST.-’

Instead of going straight up or back down to the chaos, Sk’jin pilots the ship to turn, away from the oncoming barrage of assault ships and above the chaos they caused.

‘Sk’jin activate emergency gateway NOW-!’ Namjoon orders out of nowhere.

‘Now you choose to appear you fucking-’ Sk’jin grumbles as he takes the NaviLet in one hand. ‘Lisai activate the emergency gateways over uh- area 15 to 19!’

‘Sk’jin incoming!’ Hoseok yells. ‘Fuck! Hold on tight-!’

They had been so distracted by what they were leaving behind, and what was on their side, they completely missed the massive and all too familiar white ship approaching them from above.

‘How are they here?!’ Sk’jin hisses as the Omhlophe ship fills up their view above. ‘Fuck fuck-’

‘Get to a secure place we need to warp out now-!’ Hoseok roars as the ship jerks with another massive attack on their side and to Sk’jin’s incredulity jumps out of the weapons mast and clammers over to the cockpit again.

‘Sk’jin give me the NaviLet now!’ Hoseok orders harshly.

‘Spaces what the fuck-’ Sk’jin splutters before handing Hoseok the NaviLet and taking over the controls again. ‘Hoseok for fuck’s sake this isn’t the time for research-’

‘HOSEOK JUST WARP US OUT NOW!’ Namjoon yells over the Comm.

‘Lisai get us to warp now-!’ Sk’jin orders but suddenly everything turns quiet.

And Sk’jin immediately knows why.

‘We are at green. Warp in 10 seconds-’

‘Well, this isn’t nice,’ Taeh’yung says as he walks past the cockpit, the air around him humming, tiny flecks of neon green lights sparking up. He’s walking casually, not flinching as more missiles are launched at them. Taeh’yung stretches his hands upwards, his head tilting just a little as though in thought.
Something massive slams into them, causing both Sk'jin and Hoseok to jerk forward heavily, barely able to gather themselves.

The Omhlophe were not firing at them- they were pushing them down with their ship, back into Grisial at startling speed.

‘This is not nice,’ Taeh’yung says, eyes gleaming, grinning widely.

‘TAEH’YUNG DON’T-!’

The Zhak’gri brings his hands together in a clap.

* *

‘Kookie!’

Jungkook looks up from the lump of wet grit and sand combination he’d been lumping together into a block at his anu.

‘Yeah?’

‘It’s about to rain! Come inside okay?’

‘Okay!’ Jungkook yells back. His siblings had already gone in, but Jungkook was waiting.

Thunder erupts in booming roars overhead, he can feel its force in the wet lump before him. His sister Okanaat couldn’t play clay-bits with him, her skin too sensitive. She was older than him, but was much smaller, and Jungkook loved chasing after her with the clay-bits, shrieking on top of their lungs. He would never hurt her of course, but it was fun running around when the weather was nice.

‘Jungkook! Kookie! Anu’ll get mad! You better come in now!’ Okanaat calls from the inner entrance, swathed in extra protective clothing. Jungkook is happy he doesn’t need to wear the extra protective clothing.

‘I know Oka- I’m just waiting for ama!’ Jungkook explains.

‘It’s gonna storm!’ she argues over the sound of thunder, ‘You know ama won’t risk travelling with a storm like this. She’ll get back after it’s over.’

‘There’s still some time,’ Jungkook argues back. ‘Don’t worry, I know when I have to come in.’

She grimaces comically at him and Jungkook pretends to throw the lump of clay-bit at her. She giggles and shrieks, running back inside. Lightning forks through the sky, followed immediately by thunder that shakes the black gritty dirt around him. The larger pebbles on the ground seem to jump up at the sheer force of it.

‘Kookie!’

The thunderstorm is getting louder, and Jungkook guesses that ma would probably wait the storm out. It was smarter of course. Living here, Jungkook knew the rules and safety precautions very well. Stay away from the storms, stay hidden, and always watch for anu and ama.
'Jungkook!'  

Jungkook blinks, surprised to find the rain falling on him- it was supposed to hurt; it was supposed to burn his skin but it doesn’t. He sees her coming towards him, the soft hues of her hair damp, but glistening in a *spectrum of light* like his mum used to say. The elegant glass-like horns twinkling at him, gentle red eyes gleam at him through the curtain of rain.  

‘JUNGKOOK!’  

He gasps awake.  

The safety straps that had held him to the footstools drops him and Jungkook wheezes, his chest felt strangely tight, his head pounding. His instinct is to hit his head against the floor, to startle himself awake. But both Jimin and Sk’jin have told him many times not to do it again. Instead to stay down, breathe deep and slowly, and allow his mind to clear. Still crouched on the ground, Jungkook allows himself to take some time, despite growing panic, and breathe deeply.  

Safe, you’re safe Jimin’s voice whispers to him from the depths of his mind, reassuring him. You’re safe here, you are home, okay?  

The buzzing in his mind recedes, the ringing in his ears quiets, and the tightness in his chest loosens a little. Finding strength in himself, Jungkook finally looks up from the smooth floors of the Bridge.  

It’s lit dimly- almost the same way it did right before dawn near the cave entrances. Jungkook pushes himself off of the floor and carefully stands up, his ears straining to hear something; anything.  

He doesn’t even get to take a step forward when the whole ship shudders. It wasn’t something within the ship. This felt like how it did when an earthquake used to hit. Something bigger, something more powerful and *bigger* was shifting. That’s what ama used to tell him. Something beyond the control of their abilities and or actions. Sometimes even beyond their understanding.  

Something was shaking the ship. Something was shaking his home. Again.  

When his eyes adjust to the light, Jungkook just about makes out the shapes of Sk’jin and Hoseok still secured in the cockpit. He’s about to rush over, but he hears something.  

A deliberate something trying to be quiet, something inside his home.  

Jungkook drops down immediately, rounding about and around the Navigation Table, crawling on all fours close to the ground as he makes his way to the sealed Bridge doorway. It’s still sealed shut, and Jungkook can hear- can *sense* movement behind it. And it wasn’t anyone he knew. This was not someone from his home.  

He swiftly glides back to the Navigation Table, tapping on the surface Namjoon had explained to him only a few days ago.  

‘Lisai,’ Jungkook whispers, ‘Bridge, doorway, surveillance.’  

‘Bridge doorway surveillance on screen 7.’ Lisai’s voice chimes in pleasantly.  

Jungkook flinches when a bright projection of the surveillance camera outside the Bridge doorway lights up next to him. He looks around quickly, making sure again that it was just him (awake) in the Bridge before looking back at the bright projection.
Standing outside the sealed doorway is an eerie standing form, dressed fully in black, a hand on the doorway.

It’s upsetting, and Jungkook doesn’t know why.

There was something wrong about the figure. Something *familiarily wrong*. Jungkook can almost smell the putrid air of his cell from Ynqaba.

‘Lisai- find Jimin.’ Jungkook orders quietly, glancing again at Sk’jin and Hoseok.

‘*Jimin is located in the Second Level Lobby.*’ Lisai replies, another projection lighting up.

Jungkook feels himself flushed with hot anger, watching as another black-figure attempts to extract Jimin out of what appeared to be Yoongi’s tight, but unconscious, grip. There’s another figure that’s in the process of lifting Namjoon off of the floor.

Jungkook is helpless. He doesn’t know what to do. He’s sure there are security measures of *some sort* in the ship. But he doesn’t know what they’re called, or how to use them, or what to say to use them. Namjoon and Hoseok had both taught him how to call for and ask Lisai questions but he didn’t have time to try. He couldn’t risk Sk’jin or Hoseok inside the Bridge, which was clearly strongly protected. There must have been a break-in somewhere, that these black-figures were able to come inside.

*Taeh’yung.*

Jungkook remembers the Zhak’gri’s arms holding him back, his lips against his temple before he fell into darkness.

‘Lisai- where is Taeh’yung?’

‘*Taeh’yung cannot be located.*’

Jungkook can’t make out what it was he was looking at outside of the massive windows- just a strange hazy light that pressed in on from every direction.

The whole ship shudders again.

Jungkook watches the surveillance again, as Jimin is fully extracted from Yoongi’s grip and made to lay back on the ground.

‘Lisai, how many…how many intruders?’ Jungkook asks carefully, remembering the words Sk’jin and Hoseok had used before.

‘*Three non-crew Beings detected inside the ship.*’ Lisai replies coolly. ‘*3 more detected outside.*’

He couldn’t let them leave. Not with Jimin, or Namjoon- even Yoongi. He couldn’t let them leave.

The black-figure outside the Bridge is still there. And this time they’re holding up a device of sorts. Jungkook doesn’t know what it does, but he can guess that it might be used to do some damage to the gateway protecting the Bridge.

‘Three- and three,’ Jungkook whispers under his breath. ‘Six.’

‘*Surprise is your best weapon,*’ Yoongi had taught him. ‘*No amount of training can teach you to expect a surprise.*’
‘How do you do it?’ Jungkook had asked, panting on the ground from being easily flung about by the Human. Jimin had watched nervously at first, but Yoongi wasn’t hurting him— he was showing him how to best use *himself* as defense. How to become a weapon.

‘If you don’t exist,’ Yoongi had said quietly, ‘Then no one can see you.’

The ship shudders again, the tremors stronger than before. There were things he couldn’t control— things bigger than himself that he had no chance against. Things he definitely didn’t understand.

‘You can’t defend yourself against something that doesn’t exist.’

But *this*.

This he could definitely try.

‡

‘This is where we started to understand.’

‘Understand what?’

‘That something was wrong.’

‘We?’

‘You did, before I did. Before you realized it. And I did, after I became you.’

‘This is the same place.’

He’s standing in a long dimly lit hallway. Doors lined the walls nearly endlessly on both ends. But the door he’s facing is open, the walls inside lined with shelved drawers reaching the ceiling from the floors. He knows where he is.

‘It is,’ he says as he steps inside. ‘It’s almost the same isn’t it?’

Yoongi nods.

‘You said there was a dream,’ Yoongi continues, ‘Should we try and remember?’

‘Yeah,’ he replies in agreement. ‘I don’t know how much I can remember. It’s too much already.’

‘I’ll help.’

‘Do you know what’s going on? With…well, with us?’

‘I think we both know what it is,’ Yoongi replies quietly. ‘But not just yet.’

Yoongi nods in agreement, ‘Not yet. Jimin has to go home.’

Yoongi smiles at that, ‘When Jimin goes home, what do we do?’

The door opens quietly, the handle turning without his hand.
‘We protect it, of course.’ Yoongi replies, waiting for the door to fully open, a faded line of white expanding over Yoongi, pushing the black ash that was once his uniform off of his skin, leaving him bare.

Yoongi takes a step out of the door, the wires on his back trailing behind him endlessly until they vanish into a massive circular pit. He looks around; he’s inside a massive globe, white and dully lit. The walls start moving, circling in their form until they pause at random before the walls start to faintly glow. Yoongi looks down at his feet and only then realizes he’s trailing something black and soot-like.

‘Is it our home too?’

Yoongi looks up, facing what felt like a multitude of his own reflection. But he knows it’s not a reflection.

_How many Yoongis do you see?_

‘We’ve been lost,’ Yoongi tells him. ‘Is this what it feels like?’

Yoongi looks around, finding an almost endless multitude of himself watching him, waiting for him.

They were waiting for him.

‘This?’

‘Is this what being _found_ feels like?’

The white walls flicker, distant images through the blurred clouds illuminate the kitchen in his house, his mother’s back to him as she laughs about something. Chaewon is shelling peas next to him as he dices up a massive bowl of potatoes. Their laughter colours into the sunrise as Amic stretches, groaning in protest of ever thinking that hiking through the hill parks of Šerdesas was a good idea. The lights dim and the sunrise rapidly shifts to an endless ruddy glow, and the eclipse watches him with worry.

‘Yoongi?’ Jimin holds up a hand towards him.

‘I-…’ Yoongi holds his hand up, realizing that an endless multitude of hands rise up in unison behind him.

‘Is this what being _found_ feels like?’

He’s on the ground, not inside the Užkulisai, but somewhere strangely contained. There is an echo in the air, exponentially increasing the soft pads of feet moving closer towards him. But it’s drowned out by the strange booming, making the ground he was on groan in an alarming way.

Yoongi opens his eyes only to come face-to-face with the blank gaze of what could only be a GI agent, TeorSer aimed straight at his head.

The blast of the TeorSer singes his hair and burns at his scalp as he rolls over, kicking his feet in a swinging motion to catch the agent on their shin. His heel makes contact and there’s a scuffling sound. Launching himself onto his knees, Yoongi flips forward, hooking the TeorSer between his arm and torso, the next shot passing through under his arm behind him. With his free arm he angles his elbow to jam straight into the opening of the helmet.
There’s a horrific wet cracking sound that comes when his elbow makes contact with the agent’s nose, their body jolting in pain and shock, momentarily losing momentum and strength. Yoongi ducks low and heaves the agent over his shoulder, falling backwards with their combined body weight crushing the agent’s neck.

But Yoongi is far from safe, when another agent appears, TeorSer aimed and-

There’s no where Yoongi can hide- no where he can duck- it was obvious that the agent had been watching for a while, waiting for this moment where Yoongi’s balance, his speed, and his momentum would be concluded from the initial fight.

But the shot never lands.

A blurred shape leaps from the ground, fans of glistening dust spreading out behind it like impossible gossamer wings. Amidst the white sheen of the blurred Being, a crimson mouth is open in an animalistic roar, bloodied claw-like hands extending forward like a predator who has planned and hunted their prey, waiting for the precise moment to attack.

Jungkook takes down the agent, a blurred frenzy of limbs, blood, fine dust, and ripping sounds shred the air, echoing the horror over and over. Yoongi is finally able to give a quick study to his immediate environment. The Užkulisai appeared very dead, surrounded by a large rubble of Grisial crystals, a very fine dust of said crystal still lingering in the air, making it difficult to see. Grisial was a mining facility for most part of the massive asteroid discs that surrounded the main planet. Had they crashed into one of the mining facilities? The massive tunnel they had apparently crashed into seemed pre-tunneled, with small light-sources embedded into some of the smoothened rock and crystal walls. Grisial crystals were such excellent conductors of light, that this small amount was all that was needed to cast decent illumination inside this massive tunnel.

By the time Yoongi manages to get to Jungkook, the agent is very dead, and Jungkook, at closer inspection, is very bloody.

Before Yoongi can even get a word out, Jungkook spits out a wad of something from his mouth and quickly says, ‘Jimin and Namjoon! There!’

He points down, away from the ship and upwards towards a tunnel of sorts, twisting away and upwards.

‘What about the others?’ Yoongi hastens to ask.

‘Sk’jin and Hoseok inside, not awake,’ Jungkook explains in quick short sentences. ‘Taeh’yung I don’t know.’

‘What-’ Yoongi’s first instinct is to head after Jimin and Namjoon, but the question remained what even was going on and what happened. Time was not on their side, and at this moment only Yoongi and Jungkook were awake and functional. Yoongi would have to think rationally and calmly.

‘Communication down,’ Jungkook tells him worriedly, the lower half of his face down to his chest soaked in blood. ‘Or not answering.’

If no one was awake to answer of course there would be no communication. How did they even get here in the first place?

‘I think- I think they’re here,’ Jungkook tells him, spitting something out again.
‘They-?’ Yoongi pauses, watching Jungkook. Dread weighs heavily in the pit of his stomach.

‘The…-I don’t know- something bad. Something, something bigger.’ Jungkook struggles to explain, ‘Something bad.’

Yoongi makes up his mind.

He’s not sure who would issue the GI agents to move against them. But he knew for a fact that the Omhlophe were a bigger threat at this moment. And if they were behind this, if they were responsible for where they were, they needed to get not only the ship with Jimin’s tech out of there, but also take Jungkook away.

The GI had also been clearly ordered to kill only him. Namjoon had been taken along with Jimin, and Yoongi guesses the others would have been in the list too if it hadn’t been for whatever Jungkook did to the GI agents who were headed to collect Hoseok and Sk’jin.

Even though it goes against what he wants to do, he grits his teeth and turns to head back inside the Užkulisa.

‘Yoongi-!’ Jungkook hastens to hurry after him. ‘Jimin-!’

‘We need to get out before they come,’ Yoongi grits out, rushing into the Hangar where another body, bloody and mangled lay under the Spardyti. ‘Lisai, close the Hangar gates! Run scans on damages, are we green for take-off?’

‘Yoongi!’

Jungkook grabs and shoves Yoongi against the wall, teeth bared, white stained red. His eyes are wide and nostrils flaring. Yoongi’s feet dangle feet above the ground, Jungkook’s stained hands too close to his neck. Hands that have clearly ripped through at least 2 throats in the past hour. Lisai is replying back, but Yoongi can’t exactly concentrate.

‘Jimin!’ Jungkook repeats, clearly frustrated and panicked, unable to really say anything.

Yoongi quickly releases himself from Jungkook’s brute strength of a hold against the wall and restrains the young Pravasi M’hanun.

‘We need to plan this carefully! The last time something like this happened I moved with no care or attention but with only Jimin in mind-‘ Yoongi says through his teeth, struggling against Jungkook, ‘-and as a result Sk’jin nearly died!’

Jungkook stills.

‘Jimin is strong-‘ Yoongi doesn’t know if he’s reassuring Jungkook or himself, ‘And Namjoon is there. They took him because they needed him. He won’t be harmed. But they- that bad thing you were talking about. They can hurt him. Can hurt us, can hurt you. And we need to get out now.’

Jungkook stops fighting, just panting hard.

‘Trust Jimin.’ Yoongi says quietly, ‘Trust Namjoon- they’re more than capable of taking care of themselves. We cannot leave Sk’jin and Hoseok here with the ship.’

After a long second or two, Jungkook nods. Yoongi lets go of him, still a little wary, but Jungkook doesn’t react.
‘We’re gonna get the ship out, and track Jimin and Namjoon,’ Yoongi tells him as he starts to make his way further into the ship, hating himself with every step he took away from where his entire soul was screaming at him to go.

‘How?’ Jungkook asks, following up behind him.

Namjoon was definitely not going to be amused.

‘Poison.’

* *

Namjoon finds himself gaining consciousness at the most inopportune time.

He’s inside a ship that isn’t the Užkulisai. In fact, this felt more like a Transporter. Jimin is next to him, although he’s been made to lie down. There’s something strangely gentle about his placement.

There’s a pillow under his head, a blanket of sorts covering his lower half, and his soft beanie folded next to his right hand. While what could only be a GI agent is finishing up and sealing the TissuePlast layered over the stab wound Jimin had on his side. Namjoon absentmindedly thinks it was a good thing that the injury had miraculously avoided all of Jimin’s internal organs.

There’s a dull sort of acceptance with what was happening. But that didn’t mean he didn’t have questions or was completely pliant to the events unfolding before him.

Namjoon finds that he’s not exactly restrained. He has the safety straps over his torso, but those were more precautionary as well as required for taking a flight in a Transporter anyways. There aren’t many windows, only the ones over at the cockpit, as well as a small square one on the door to the side. It’s white out, and Namjoon can’t pinpoint if they’re in space, or in some strange underwater facility. The lights coming through the windows are oddly rippled and keep changing in strength. They couldn’t be in warp; Transporters like these could go around space at normal ranges and speed, but they were not built for warp.

The side of his head felt heavy, and his jaw definitely sore from where the second Yoongi had kicked him (once) almost into unconsciousness. There was definitely no underestimating the strength of the GI. Which is why Namjoon does nothing, makes no movement, and tries his best not to even seem awake.

There are 4 GI agents. None of them speaking, but all moving as one. The one that was checking on Jimin stands and makes their way towards the back, going through a medical kit of sorts. The other three are at the cockpit, backs turned to Namjoon and silhouetted against the white light.

His Comm Device is still attached to his ear; an oversight or intentional, Namjoon can’t tell. He obviously can’t just call the Užkulisai without alerting the GI agents around him. Or they simply switched it off. Speaking of GI agents.

Yoongi isn’t here.

But Namjoon is 100% sure he was there with them up until the moment after Taeh’yung did something, and the whole ship was violently thrown. Namjoon doesn’t remember what happens
after that, but the heaviness of his head suggested there should be some form of pain resulted from hitting his head hard.

He glances up again only to find the GI agent already looking at him. It’s the same one who was treating Jimin. They approach him with the kit and at this point there’s no point pretending to be unconscious. He sits back, hands balling into fists instinctively. He’s not sure what to expect, but it definitely isn’t a stretch of tissue plast and a packet of his medication.

The helmet and black uniform entirely covers the Being up, but exposes only a part of their face. Namjoon can just about make out strangely grey rough skin, stretched over wide features. Their eyes are blackish, with dirty yellow specks in the center for a pupil. They’re tall too. Helmeted head brushing the top of the Transporter. They reach past Namjoon’s head, still maintaining eye-contact, and extract a small tube of water. They then hand it over to Namjoon, along with the pills.

Namjoon wants to study the pills, but he’s reluctant to look away, apprehensive of what would happen if he looked away. But the Being is the first to break eye contact, simply placing the bottle and pills on the adjacent seat before opening the TissuePlast to use.

‘Who- who are you?’ Namjoon croaks out before clearing his throat.

Predictably there is no answer.

Instead the Being just goes about, placing TissuePlast over the visible cuts and scratches on his face. Then they hand him the pills and the tube of water again, and watch.

Without any words, Namjoon understands that this Being is not going to go away unless Namjoon takes the pills. The packet is still sealed, the pills don’t look tampered with: of course all of this means nothing because they could very well have been tampered with and simply repackaged in the exact same style. And while the agents all seemed to be rather passive, Namjoon knows what they’re capable of and doesn’t want to be physically handled to take the pills.

Either way, they were now here at this point, and Namjoon can see no foreseeable means of escape. So with his good arm, Namjoon takes the pills and tube of water.

He doesn’t feel anything out of the ordinary, which if the pills were really his actual medication, wouldn’t be alarming.

All of this suspicion and anxiety was not good for him.

The Being moves away, taking the tube and empty packet and disposing of it. It seemed odd to find GI agents doing such oddly normal tasks. It was like watching Yoongi during the first few weeks. Except more extreme. Because once the agent’s tasks were “completed”, they just sat on one of the seats. Absolutely still, almost robotic, as though awaiting orders.

‘Were- were you ordered to do this? Who issued your mission?’ Namjoon asks again, knowing that the whole prospect of getting information from them was useless. If they were worse than Yoongi, then they were not going to give them any information whatsoever.

Namjoon glances down at Jimin, still very unconscious, and hopes he would wake up. He thinks back to the others and entertains the possibility of them not being alive. But if that were the case, why was he alive? If they only wanted Jimin, why not kill him off too? Or was he needed for questioning? Or to be used against Jimin for questioning? Wouldn’t Yoongi be a better candidate for that? Not just because of the nature of his and Jimin’s relationship, but the fact that Yoongi is GI. Or maybe he would be too stubborn, too GI to give conclusive answers and explanations.
What had Yoongi said about the GI? They operated based solely on the missions handed to them, and for the completion of said mission. So was getting him and Jimin out purposeful?

And what happened with Taeh’yung? That bright light could have only been the Zhak’gri. What had he done? And where was he? Surely he couldn’t have been knocked out or injured. Namjoon’s seen what he can do.

The Transporter takes a sharp turn, causing Namjoon to sit back, steadying himself. The white light fades in intensity, and Namjoon can just about understand where they are.

Grisial had massive mining networks within mountain-like asteroids, mining deeper into the core of the crystals to extract the purest forms of the coveted crystal. Something must have happened and the Užkulisai must have crashed through one of the mines. This was going to be terrible for communications. Maybe that’s why they didn’t bother removing their Comm Devices.

Namjoon thinks back to what Jimin had said to him. About how Yoongi himself as a GI didn’t make sense. How it didn’t add up with the timeline of events, with the facts they had, and with the information they obtained from various sources. Were these GI agents here “like” Yoongi, or were they different too?

He also thinks about what Sk’jin had said about contacting the Long-Huon Zitao and his ship again.

They were clearly missing something here. And it was definitely something from the time after Yoongi and his team were sent to Megibīya, and before the GI urban myths started to really take off. But there was no way they could get this information because that was a timeframe of almost 8 centuries – if they were even right about the timing at all.

Namjoon is jolted from his thoughts when the whole Transporter is sent careening off, the view outside blurring into streaks as they spin violently. He hits his head again, and Namjoon is acutely aware that he’s definitely sustained some form of head trauma. The Transporter rights itself, the GI agents methodically reposition themselves, and the Being who had given Namjoon the water and medication positions themselves at the door before unlocking a hatch to each side of the door.

This was no ordinary Transporter, Namjoon surmises as the agent pulls out two mechanical joints that attach in the center to create some form of launcher. The agent, despite being of quite a hulking built, moved with a very strange lightness the exact way Yoongi did. They release the door and without so much as aiming or preparing themselves, they start to fire.

It’s uncannily reminiscent to Yoongi’s seemingly blind actions- but somehow even stricter in its chaos.

The energy source being used to fire what appeared to be electronic charges burns bright orange, glaring through the misty white air outside the Transporter. Namjoon’s not sure what they were firing at, but it’s clearly taken care of. All of the noise is also clearly enough to disturb Jimin, slowly waking him from his unconscious state.

Namjoon’s not sure what Jimin had done before, somehow occupying his body, a strange awareness and control over his entire body that didn’t seem or feel invasive.

It’s terrifying, when Namjoon thinks of it in hindsight, what Jimin had done. Namjoon couldn’t even struggle against Jimin’s sudden takeover because he couldn’t even feel him, or sense him.

A voice that sounds annoyingly like Sk’jin’s smugly whispers something along the lines of ‘I told
you so, little prince is hiding who he is and what he can do’ in the back of his mind.

But Namjoon has bigger things to worry about, as per usual, like the danger he was in, as per usual.

The GI agent closes the door and pushes back the latches, locking them back into the wall just as Jimin’s eyes open. He looks more than disoriented, his eyes unable to focus, head lolling about, a strained groan sounding deep from his throat. And in this moment, Namjoon notices how Jimin’s Comm Device was still activated.

Jimin had a higher ranking than everyone aboard the ship, his authority code stronger, and of the highest priority. Maybe- just maybe, he could do something.

The agent pauses and then kneels before Jimin, a strange display of worry. Either that or Namjoon was just projecting the other GI agent he personally knows into this one.

‘Y-Yoongi-‘ Jimin groans out, ‘-I’m-‘ he chokes out a string of disconnected words as the agent simply watches from where they’re kneeling.

‘He’s in shock,’ Namjoon spits out, thinking fast.

The agent turns to look at him.

‘He’s in shock- can I- can I go to him? I can help,’ Namjoon asks.

There’s no reply from the agent. Namjoon hesitates, the sounds of Jimin hyperventilating getting louder. It wasn’t a terrible case or too worrying, but Namjoon could use this to his advantage.

‘You need to get him somewhere right? He’s going to suffocate like this,’ Namjoon tries again. He’s not restrained, but he doesn’t want to push whatever leniency they had given him by approaching Jimin. ‘You will fail your mission if I don’t help him.’

This seems to do the trick and the agent stands up, making space for Namjoon.

He quickly releases himself from the chair with his one working hand and kneels next to Jimin. He bows close, using his good arm to balance himself by placing his hand right next to Jimin’s head. He angles himself, blocking the agent’s view as Namjoon deftly taps at the hoop-like device.

‘Hey- Jimin,’ Namjoon isn’t of course just here for the Comm Device. The hyperventilation, though not entirely life-threatening, had to stop.

‘Jimin, it’s Namjoon- I’m here, you’re okay,’ Namjoon realizes he’s probably not the best at this. ‘Listen to me- my voice, listen to my voice, just try to breath with me okay?’

He’s not sure if Jimin can hear him but he’s gonna try.

‘Inhale,’ he says as gently as he can, ‘Exhale.’

Jimin is struggling, his eyes opening and closing at random, as though unable to hold onto consciousness. He repeats this a few times, now even more worried as Jimin doesn’t seem to be planning on calming down any time soon.

‘Jimin- hey listen-‘ Namjoon tries, rearranging himself and with a slightly hesitant hand brushing through Jimin’s short hair. ‘Hey listen to me- you’ll be all right, you just gotta wake up okay? Just open your eyes- look at me.’

Jimin’s eyes struggle to open to look at Namjoon.
‘Good,’ Namjoon holds the eye contact, ‘See? It’s me- it’s just me, we’re fine.’ Namjoon switches how he kneels, balancing himself only on his knees as he places his hand over Jimin’s chest. ‘Breathe with me okay? Just breathe with me.’

It gets better, though Jimin can’t seem to both open his eyes and breathe properly at the same time. His eyes are closed, hands formed into tight fists. Sweat beads on his forehead, faint vein appearing around his temple, the tendons on his neck are strained. It was almost as though he was in some form of terrible pain.

‘What hurts?’ Namjoon asks as he removes his hand from Jimin’s chest. ‘Are you hurt somewhere?’

Namjoon sees the faint gleam of the Comm Device. Someone was listening. Their communication signals were being received back by the Užkulisaí.

‘You’re safe, okay?’ Namjoon says, angling himself again to block the Comm Device from view. ‘You’re just in a Transporter, with some agents around, we’re safe. We have medical supply. See? They’ve bandaged you up already. You’re important aren’t you? Little prince right?’

That was as much as Namjoon dared to say without explicitly announcing where they were, who they were with, and if they were very injured. He just hopes it’s enough for others back on the ship to understand and create a plan to come get them.

‘Yoongi?’ Jimin asks faintly.

For a bewildered second, Namjoon wonders if Jimin was replying back to the Comm Device. He’s temporarily exasperated that the others would try to expose their channel by communicating back. But his worries are for nothing when he notices the light from the Comm Device completely give out, indicating a complete failure in the channels. Jimin’s eyes open slowly, still a little disoriented, looking around for the Human.

‘Yoongi’s fine,’ Namjoon lies. ‘He’s just not here right now. He’ll come and get us out. He’ll come back for you.’

This clearly seems to make the most sense to Jimin because he scrunches up his face a bit before opening his eyes properly. He’s still not 100% there, but he appeared more lucid than before. His breaths still came out harshly, but the pace was less brutal and more even.

‘He did,’ Jimin whispers, voice scratched and croaky.

Namjoon’s first instinct is to get him water, but seeing as they were not-

A small tube of water and a hand holding it moves past his head. For a moment, Namjoon had forgotten that the GI agent was behind him.

‘Oh uh, thanks-‘ Namjoon is saying as he takes the tube from the GI agent who moves away to stand over behind him, dirty yellow eyes watching him with absolute no regard whatsoever. He opens the tube and holds it up to Jimin to let the latter drink but Jimin isn’t looking at him.

Jimin’s eyes are wide, whatever colour he had on his face is completely gone, his mouth open mid-choked gasp.

‘Hey wait- uhh I think they’re okay-‘ Namjoon tries at once, hoping Jimin won’t go back to hyperventilating. But Jimin doesn’t even seem to notice him, and instead with a strange strength
and desperation, Jimin actually sits up, eyes still not looking away from the agent who does nothing to acknowledge or react to Jimin.

‘Wh-what-’ Jimin croaks out, shaking hands undoing the safety bands over his lower body before shakily standing up. Namjoon immediately stands as well, arm stretched out to catch Jimin if he fell. But Jimin staggers the few steps between himself and the GI agent and crashes into the (very tall) Being. Before Namjoon can even react or think of a way to get Jimin out of this clearly dangerous situation that could be regarded as some form of attack, Jimin reaches up with shaking hands and shoves off the helmet from the agent.

Namjoon does not recognize the species the Being belongs to. The greyish dull textured skin, almost stone-like, he had seen previously wasn’t just limited to their face, but all over a bald head too.

‘Yyna?’ Jimin whispers, hands shaking as he gently touches the Being’s face.

The agent does nothing to stop Jimin, simply watching him.

‘Jimin?’ Namjoon tries, arm still reaching out to catch him just in case he fell.

‘Is- is that you?’ Jimin’s voice is starting to break, the last of his words barely above a whisper. ‘Yyna, Megibiya Wenedi, min hre thei em? Min la hria em?’ Jimin asks, his tongue shifting to his melodious native language. ‘Ii ni taktak em? Ka Yyna i ni taktak a mi?’

‘Jimin?’

There’s a sudden high-pitched whistling sound and Namjoon moves instinctively, grabbing Jimin and forcing them both to crash down onto the floor.

Everything roars- oppressive heat, immediately replaced by biting speeding winds, and the sound of metal screaming rends through the air. There’s a brief second when, to Namjoon’s horror, he feels himself being lifted into the air, as though the whole Transporter was falling, but something shoves both him and Jimin down again.

There’s another roar, heat licks at his face and Namjoon hears Jimin’s scream momentarily before they slide violently over the floor and crash into netting placed over the open-cargo space at the end of the Transporter.

They’ve clearly stopped moving. They must have been hit, and the pilot managed to get them somewhere. The weight trapping them on to the floor lifts and Namjoon pushes himself up, his damaged arm uselessly swinging and nearly making him slip. But Jimin helps him up.

The crash had clearly woken him up completely- no look of disorientation or confusion in his eyes. Now instead his eyes are wide, disbelief and sorrow- and a strange euphoria echo in his eyes.

The agent that had been pushing them down to the floor is standing and moving about already, unlocking the latches again before opening the doors to the Transporter again and firing.

The Transporter rocks as its hit with a barrage of fire. But it only last a scant few seconds before the agent clearly takes down whatever was firing at them. There’s movement from the front as the three agents at the cockpit move as though one, the units of the cockpit shifting and lifting, making way for a section of the nose of the Transporter to eject out into defense post.

Something had hit them before, and it had torn open a side of the Transporter hull near the cargo space to the back. Namjoon isn’t sure what to think of these GI agents, or of the Beings attacking
them from outside. But clearly they were coming from one direction, away from the ripped metal behind them.

‘Jimin!’ Namjoon whispers tersely, nodding towards the opening.

Jimin looks at it, understanding immediate in his gaze. But he doesn’t move. He looks back instead at the GI agents.

‘Jimin!’ Namjoon says more urgently, ‘We can get out now-‘

‘They came back to me,’ Jimin says instead.

‘What-?’

‘They-…’ Namjoon can almost physically feel the absolute horror that washes across Jimin’s face as though it were his own.

‘They’ve come back. Because of me- it’s because of me.’ Jimin whispers. ‘I can see it now- I can see it-‘

Namjoon tries to pull Jimin back but the latter won’t budge. He turns to look at Namjoon, eyes glossed over with unshed tears.

‘It’s me.’

Something very powerful and very large detonates, physically moving the Transporter some meters. The agent at the doorway flies backwards, landing heavily on their back.

‘Yyna!’ Jimin gasps and to Namjoon’s absolute horror, darts forward to the fallen agent. One of the other agents at the front leaves their post at the front and begins to walk towards the doorway and abandoned firing post.

Jimin doesn’t even get to make it to the fallen agent, stopping short as he catches a glimpse of the gangly and tall GI agent. This one wasn’t even in the standard GI uniform of full black with helmet. Rather he was wearing the same faux uniform the Second Yoongi had been wearing- the same Grisial uniform.

‘Amic?’ Jimin stumbles forward, walking past the open doorway towards the tall Being.

‘Jimin-!’ Namjoon rushes forward to grab Jimin away, but the other GI agent, Amic, as Jimin had called him, is faster, pulling him away from the open doorway just in time.

But Jimin doesn’t even register his close-call, hands grabbing onto this Amic, clearly somewhat losing his mind as he keeps repeating that name. There’s a ring of familiarity to the name that Namjoon, at this current moment, cannot rightly place.

And now there was an open doorway for certain death (or injury) between Namjoon and Jimin. But clearly none of the danger they were in meant anything to Jimin who seems to be possessed with a strange energy. He suddenly lets go of Amic and rushes to the cockpit, skidding to a halt as he looks at the GI agents in a strange state of hysteria.

Amic, or whatever his name is, is undoing some other latches next to the already open ones at the doorway. And Namjoon isn’t sure if these Beings were here to help them, or if they were here to take them away back to the Special Jury because that seemed to be the only viable and reasonable explanation. If anyone had control over the GI now, it would be the Special Jury. And they
couldn’t go back. Not with what they knew now, and the evident harmful intention they seemed to harbor upon the outcome of this mission. The risk was too high. But so was whatever was attacking them from outside. Either way Namjoon makes his decision to just plan along the way. He reaches for the latches to the wall, fingers digging into the small jutting tabs to extract and pull out other weaponized devices. Amic doesn’t stop him, doesn’t even look at him.

Whatever this Transporter was, it was custom built and designed to maximize on strength, artillery, function, and durability.

*A ship that's the equivalent of a GI agent* Sk’jin’s voice unhelpfully offers him in the back of his head.

It’s difficult doing things one-handed, especially when most of the weaponry required both arms.

**Bold of them to assume every Being has two arms**- Namjoon wonders if the amount of times he’s hit his head has lead him to hearing Sk’jin’s voice unwarranted.

In order to completely pull out the weaponized mechanical arm that connects to the already mounted launcher at the doorway, Namjoon needs to pull at the safety tag to release it. But being one arm short, finds himself in a predicament. But a slightly smoking black-uniform covered arm reaches past him and tugs at the tag. The arm releases, and Namjoon twists the arm and locks it down to its charged position before locking it into the main central frame.

The GI agent that Jimin had called Yyna steps past, still smoking a little from the effects of the explosion that threw them off, and heads straight for the doorway. Namjoon is not here for whatever suicidal attempt this is pulls the agent back.

There’s a tiny look of surprise on the Being’s face, but Namjoon doesn’t have time to explain.

‘Hey you! Amic or whatever, use that canon and aim for the ceiling! Create a veil!’ Namjoon orders.

Amic pauses for the slightest second before following Namjoon’s instructions.

‘And you- just stay put until we get sufficient cover and then you can go crazy on the launcher okay?’ Namjoon asks, putting up his functioning arm and hand to form a thumb’s up.

Yyna, the GI agent, looks down at his thumb’s up before mimicking it.

‘Oh Spaces you’re just like Yoongi,’ Namjoon breathes out as Amic fires a bright short burst of laser.

The air seems to erupt with light, but Namjoon can see without problem, momentarily worried with the way Amic looks away, eyes shut as Yyna’s helmet visor lowers. Jimin has ducked down, palms over his face to protect his eyes from the sudden explosion of light.

Yyna takes the position before the launcher and fires a fiery orange bolt of energy that makes the whole Transporter shudder. The sound that resonates the air is hollow and sonorous, followed by ominous creaking.

The light is still bright when Namjoon darts past Yyna towards Jimin, pulling him up to his feet.

‘Jimin we need to go come on-’ Namjoon says urgently close to Jimin’s ear.

Suddenly, the lights in the air shuts down- sucked away with a rapidity that makes Namjoon
question whether or not the lights had even been there in the first place.

The initial faint light from outside the windows aren’t even there, and the Transporter is only lit with the faint blue emergency lights on the floor.

There’s one last detonation from something Amic has fired and the silence that follows is almost louder.

‘It’s them-‘ Jimin whispers softly, ‘Namjoon it’s them-‘

The Omhlophe? But how did they find them so quickly? How did they catch up-?

‘It’s me,’ Jimin whispers again. ‘They came back to me.’

‘What do you mean?’ Namjoon asks, turning around to properly address Jimin.

‘Remember- remember I said,’ Jimin swallows. ‘-I said that Yoongi was not supposed to be here.’

Namjoon nods, ears straining for any sounds from outside the Transporter.

‘It’s- it’s because I was not supposed to be here,’ Jimin tells him tenuously, ‘I am the Fate of Menigišiti, that’s how they did it, that’s why the Red Evil came to Megibîya- they wanted me. They’re all tied to me.’

Things were falling into place, but Namjoon is a little overwhelmed to piece them together. All he knew right now was that they needed to get out of here.

‘Hey- Amic, Yyna?’ Namjoon looks back behind him, ‘I don’t know what’s going on- but those guys outside cannot, under any circumstance, get to Jimin. So we need to get the fuck out right now, otherwise your mission will fail, got that?’

Yyna and Amic simply look at him.

‘Namjoon-!’ Jimin tries to intervene.

‘Jimin, I don’t know what you’re trying to say- and honestly we don’t have the time to go over it either,’ Namjoon huffs out, reaching for the latches on the wall to check for more weapons they could use. ‘But we need to get out, we need to get you out.’

‘I’m-‘

‘Jimin- think of what we’re supposed to do,’ Namjoon says firmly, bending down a little to be eye-to-eye with Jimin. ‘We have to go to back to your System. We need to fix this. We need to solve this. Right? For that guy, for JD’s sake, for your people’s sake- for Yoongi.’ Namjoon takes a step back, ‘For Jungkook.’

Jimin looks down, the faint blue lights from the floor creating silver lights across the short scruff of his hair.

‘Remember what you said? That you would be responsible for Jungkook?’

Jimin nods faintly.

‘We will figure out what all of this means, once we get the hell out of here.’ Namjoon restates, ‘I don’t know if you can say something, or do something, to get these guys to at least help or something- but please, we need to get out. We need to rejoin the others.’
Jimin nods, still looking down.

Namjoon sighs out before gently patting Jimin’s head.

‘I know this is a lot. But we need to first get out.’

Jimin nods once more, a bit more determined than before.

‘Okay- can I get a report on the numbers outside?’

‘9 unidentified Beings outside,’ one of the agents tells him monotonously from the cockpit.

‘Uh- right, what’s the condition of the Transporter?’ Namjoon asks again, sort of surprised to get a response.

‘Inoperable for flight. Engines for land-gear are still functional.’ Another agent from the cockpit reports, her voice as equally monotonous.

‘What exits are available?’

‘Three. Two past the unidentified Beings, and one going back.’

‘Then we go back,’ Namjoon orders. ‘Does this Transporter have faceted-shields?’

‘Yes.’

‘Concentrate shields to the front, and to the back. We reverse backwards,’ Namjoon orders as he guides himself and Jimin towards the cockpit. ‘We make it back to the Užkulisai which will at least be more fortified than this Transporter.’

No one moves.

Letting out a frustrated groan, Namjoon looks to Jimin who appeared to be somewhat dazed, his actions just a little slow.

‘Jimin?’ Namjoon nods towards the two Beings at the front of the cockpit.

Outside the windows, the mist is clearing in the dim light, and Namjoon can clearly see the white outlines of the Omhlophe waiting for them.

It’s unnerving, they don’t seem to be making a move. Just waiting for them to do something. It’s unsettling, and Namjoon can’t dwell on thoughts about making mistakes. They had to do something, and this was the best thing they could do under these circumstances.

He just hopes the Užkulisai is functional with functioning crew members.

Jimin looks up from his hands, and as though processing what Namjoon had just said nods and with a hesitant look speaks.

‘Nineti, could you take us back?’ Jimin looks at the agent at the central steering station.

The agent doesn’t move for a moment, before they start transferring the shield-facets to the front and then the back. Namjoon breathes out in relief.

‘I didn’t want to see,’ Jimin says quietly without preamble over the sound of the Transporter starting.
'See what?' Namjoon asks as he fiddles with his Comm Device

'That this is my fault,' Jimin replies, and he doesn't wait for Namjoon before he continues on, 'Nineti is one of my Guards. I lost him in Megibiya- he never returned from the rain. And that is Amad'la, Yoongi’s captain. The tall one is Amic, Yoongi’s best friend. And the other is the Megibiya Wenedi Yyna.'

Namjoon doesn’t know what to say.

Jimin gives him a hollow ghost of a smile as they start to move.

'They’ve all come back to me.'

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Chapter End Notes

(Author’s Notes)

GUESS WHO IS BAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAACK
Me
Congratulate me
I have ended my BFA in CGI. It is done. I am Educated™ and highly (lol) employable
These future studios won’t know what hit them
I am very sorry for the hiatus and not being able to write in so long T_T not writing was honestly depressing I can’t even begin to explain
But I didn’t forget ADEGU at all, in fact I was slowly adding to it on my commutes back from university and planning and carefully righting the wrongs to make it right (ehe) and I think we can go back to, not exactly weekly, but like, 10-12 days updates again. I’ve had a million writing ideas as well and the taekook au I had written since 2017 HAHAHAAHAHAHA KILL ME will hopefully be released this coming August.
It’s funny that now I’ve started writing, bts has gone into break.
WHICH IS GOOD.
GOD
I LOVE BREAKS
I LOVE HOLIDAYS
LET THEM REST
Let me rest too because idk have you guys felt that thing where you’re so used to the
anxiety and stress of university that once you’re done you don’t know how to do
anything.
This might be tmi but if I didn’t go to university I would be constipated im not kidding
I had insomnia, anxiety nightmares, night-terrors, strange cravings and then feeling
like throwing up at the sight of food. But it’s been a bit like a month where I’ve started
sort of getting used to it and I feel, mentally and emotionally, like a new person
Makes me realize how shit university is as an experience for anyone mentally
BUT AYO I’M BACK I MISSED WRITING THIS AND IM SORRY TO ANYONE
WHO WAS WAITING I AM BACK
Also ive changed the tags a bit because I’ve been seeing a lot of people post about
being more clear with tags and I don’t wanna cause anything negative to people
reading my fic
BUT ANYWAYS PLEASE ENJOY
also here's the link to the binary code translator if you want
http://www.webestools.com/text-to-binary-converter-txt2bin-bin2txt-online-encoder-
ascii-secret-code-binary-encoder-text.html
Waking up to Jungkook’s blood smeared face is not something Sk’jin wants to experience again. He has a nagging feeling that it might become a frequent reoccurrence though. His hearing is delayed, strange echoes forming as Jungkook says something. But his words are warped, underwater almost. But then Yoongi appears behind him, disheveled and stressed and shoves a small device under his nose.

A powerfully acrid and sharp odour hits Sk’jin and he jolts awake.

‘-what the fuck-’ Sk’jin hisses just as Hoseok too jolts awake, arms up over his face in a defensive stance at once.

‘How long have I been out?’ Hoseok demands at once, unbuckling himself and tapping across the dashboard of the cockpit. Sk’jin envies his immediate awareness and ability to pretty much get his shit together.

‘Jin?’ Jungkook is still hovering over him, eyes fearfully wide.

‘I’m okay- I’m okay whose blood is that?’ Sk’jin asks, not really wanting an answer. Why did Jungkook look like he singlehandedly depleted blood-bank?

‘Strange Beings,’ Jungkook whispers, helping Sk’jin to sit up as Yoongi and Hoseok move about, almost as though sharing the same mind without having to say anything. Must be an agent thing. ‘They took Jimin. And Namjoon.’

‘What-?’ Sk’jin balks, the Omhlophe ship flashing in his mind. ‘What the fuck-‘

Wait- Yoongi had been with Jimin and Namjoon. What was he doing here?

‘Hey-‘

‘No time to explain- we need to get out,’ Yoongi says tersely as he briefly stands at the cockpit, the projectors activating with displays of their engine stats.

‘Lisai map an exit out asap,’ Hoseok calls, pushing past Yoongi to take up his seat. ‘We need to get going before the Omhlophe get to us.’

‘So it was them?’ Yoongi asks, pushing Sk’jin up and away from the cockpit (not unkindly) and taking Sk’jin’s seat instead. Jungkook helps Sk’jin, hands hovering around him as though ready to catch him.
‘Kookie, what happened?’ Sk’jin asks as he takes the youngling to the side, sitting at his usual station by the Communications Board. He notices blood splatters arching over the side of the Bridge doorway.

‘Woke up,’ Jungkook explains, crouching down, head close to Sk’jin’s knee. His eyes dart around on the floor nervously- he was feeling guilty. ‘You and Ho-Hoseok were not awake. Black uniforms came for Jimin. They came for Namjoon. They tried to come in here. But um, big door blocked them.’

Sk’jin encourages the youngling to speak, brushing his fingers through clumpy and blood-clogged hair strands. His fingers smear, rusty and sticky.

There’s a hollow and distant boom- almost like thunder. Sk’jin looks out of the windows, but only the continuous white dust and white expanse of the Grisial asteroid they were in stretches on.

‘But they used something bright- like fire, to come inside- I- I stopped them. Not all. Couldn’t stop all. Too many, too fast; but they were trying to leave.’ Jungkook explains, leaning against Sk’jin’s knee. ‘They took Jimin, and Namjoon outside. Into vehicle- one took Yoongi, tried to kill him.’

They took Jimin and Namjoon, but not Yoongi? They tried to kill Yoongi?

‘Yoongi woke up- he stopped one. And- and I want to go after Jimin. And Namjoon,’ he whispers quietly, glancing towards the cockpit. ‘But- but Yoongi said no.’

Sk’jin’s eyebrows go up.

‘He said. We need to get out first. Jimin is strong.’

Was Jungkook complaining about Yoongi to Sk’jin? Was this what it felt like to be a parent with two kids who constantly bickered?

‘You did very well,’ Sk’jin tells him gently, ‘You protected me and Hobi. Thank you.’

Jungkook ducks his head, shoulders curling.

‘Sk’jin!’ Hoseok calls, ‘Can you head to the core? The charges have misaligned.’

‘Got it!’ Sk’jin replies, gently patting Jungkook to move to the side. He grabs a screen that had a minor crack and skidding on some drying blood, exits the Bridge.

It’s a blood bath.

Blood is smeared across the walls and steps leading downward. There were bodies here, and someone had clearly dragged them out. Probably Jungkook, considering the amount of blood on him. There was even blood on the ceiling. The stench is the worst in the Lobby, where literal pools with actual chunks of what Sk’jin can only hope is fabric are spewed across the floor. Sk’jin ignores this and heads lower down. The bloody graffiti is less here, but in all honesty, any amount was troubling either way.

He’s distracted from the carnage when he hears- he feels a distinct tremor vibrate through the air again. Well, that couldn’t be good.

The engines room is massive with minimal space to walk around in- a change from the usual style of manual-based engine-rooms where there was more space to walk around in. Sk’jin darts about, grateful for the fact that it didn’t feel warmer in here. That was always a terrible sign.
Some paneling had fallen out, hinges wide open, locks knocked out of their magnetic systems. An entire ventilation system had popped out; but Sk’jin doesn’t have the time to look over that one in specific.

‘Which section?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘-T-UZ-05006’ Hoseok replies almost immediately, his voice crackling a little. Damn Grisial and the way it fucked up communication channels.

The labels are clear and easy to read. Almost instantly, Sk’jin finds the correct charges. The main anodes had popped out of their sockets, wires dangling out, small sparks forming. Sk’jin frowns as the sparks pop on his skin but he’s quick to reattach the anodes back.

It would take a while, Sk’jin knows, for the realignment to recalibrate. So he props up the screen on one of the lips of the panels.

‘Lisai, pull up surveillance rolls,’ Sk’jin orders.

The screen instantly floods with rectangles of footage from all over ship. Sk’jin quickly rewinds the footage from the Bridge.

It’s definitely the GI. The black uniform was really telling. So there were more Yoongi GI agents. This was disturbing in more than one way. He watches as Jungkook activates and opens the emergency doors over the Bridge, catching the agent outside the door by surprise as he leaps onto him. Of course the blood was intense; Jungkook catches the agent by the neck, clawed hands pushing the helmeted head of the agent backwards, exposing the neck. They fight- more like grapple. Jungkook takes a few punches and jabs- but his strength is no joke, as he catches a fist and twists it in a way that clearly pops the whole hand out of the socket.

Just how much had Yoongi taught him? This wasn’t just raw instinctual fighting- there were calculated moves involved as Jungkook centers his weight on the chest of the next agent he launches himself at.

He’s also incredibly quiet. Sk’jin can barely hear any sounds other than that of bodies falling. The GI agents were quiet as they fought- no sounds of pain or exertion.

And Jungkook.

Jungkook was inherently a predator.

A predator cornered in his home.

Sk’jin has to fast-forward through the blood bath. Pausing only to watch as the GI agents take Jimin, Yoongi, and Namjoon outside of the ship. However one of them branches off the main unit headed for a parked Transporter, similar to the ones that had been firing at them earlier. That agent takes Yoongi to the side, placing his unconscious body down.

The others leave, clearly escaping Jungkook’s incoming carnage. One final one is installing a device inside the Hangar panels- Sk’jin pauses the footage, zooming in to check on it. Sk’jin tries a variety of angles, but he can’t make out what it is. Then the agent closes the panel and exits.

‘We’re gonna start the ship soon- Sk’jin maybe move out of the engines-room?’ Hoseok suggests.

‘Yeah okay-‘ Sk’jin frowns as he takes the screen and begins moving out. Not that the engine-room was a dangerous place to start off with.
He watches as Yoongi defeats the agent attempting to essentially assassinate him, but is caught exposed when the remaining agent raises their TeorSer at the Human.

Sk’jin hadn’t even noticed Jungkook who had crawled out from one of the other exits to the side, shifting under the thick Grisial crystal dust.

‘Something’s wrong-’ Hoseok is saying. ‘The engines won’t start-’

‘Is something else misaligned?’ Sk’jin asks, exiting the footage where (to Sk’jin’s immense satisfaction, Jungkook has Yoongi in a painful lock against the wall) back to the one in the Hangar.

‘I can’t tell what it is- there’s something blocking the charges-’

Sk’jin hurries back out into the Lobby and straight to the Hangar.

‘I’m gonna try and override the block- Lisai could you-’

The air crackles and sparks, Sk’jin’s hair stands on end and a bright light cracks through the Hangar doors- forks of powerful burst of electricity singes through the air.

Sk’jin immediately drops down, the screen cracks and sparks in his hand. There’s a burning sensation on his earlobe and he hastily swipes at it. The Comm Device cracks in the middle, tiny sparks erupting all around it.

Those fuckers. They planted some form of electrical-charge in the ship that would react to the engine-activation. The Užkulisai was now definitely out of order.

The lightning show abruptly ends, only a few sparks here and there. Even the emergency lights aren’t working.

‘For fuck’s sake-’

‘Jin-?’ Jungkook’s soft whisper cuts through.

‘Yeah- I’m here Kookie- are you okay?’ Sk’jin asks, sitting up and leaning back on his haunches.

He feels a hand carefully touch at his shoulders. If Sk’jin wasn’t mistaken, the Pravasi M’hanun could see very well in the dark.

Looking up, it’s only just a little disturbing to see a pair of glowing orbs.

‘Hey, let’s go to the Medical Bay?’ Sk’jin says as he stands up, grateful for Jungkook’s hand on his shoulder. It was helpful in this stifling darkness. ‘We can activate the lights in there- the Medical Bay should still be functional.’

‘Okay,’ Jungkook replies quietly.

In this quiet and dark, the thunderous and (was it Sk’jin or was that sound getting closer?) booming sounds are clearer.

‘What is that?’ Jungkook asks as they make their way across the Lobby. Sk’jin is distinctly aware of stepping on something soft and wet and he internally grimaces.

‘I don’t know Kookie- has it been going on?’ he asks. His eyes were adjusting and he’s able to make out vague outlines. This used to be a piece of cake for him before. Not that he flat-out had night-vision, but he could still sense and make his way around. Even if it meant that the red light of
the Bloodmoon was illuminating everything.

Sk’jin does not like this sudden disorienting darkness.

‘Yeah…’ Jungkook trails off, ‘Like the shaking of the ground.’

‘Planetary tremors? Yeah- but we’re in an asteroid,’ Sk’jin says quietly under his breath.

The Omhlophe ship had pushed them off, using their mass to basically crush and grind them through clusters of massive asteroid.

He had tried his best to steer them out- Hoseok had tried his best.

And Taeh’yung-

\textit{Taeh’yung’s hands come together in a clap, bright light erupting and the force of the Omhlophe ship lifts off. In horror, Sk’jin can only stare as Taeh’yung floats up in the air- the air pulsing in vibrant green.}

\textit{A loud sonorous echo forms out of the Zhak’gri’s mouth as he speaks.}

\textit{The Omhlophe’s ship charges at them again, pushing and pushing and with movements that were too slow, too graceful, Taeh’yung gently floats towards the windows. Sk’jin can’t see his face; can’t hear what was happening over the blaring alarms of the ship losing its shit as it crashes through massive chunks of asteroids and crystals.}

\textit{And in a sudden forceful tug, as though all the air in the Bridge was being sucked out: Taeh’yung steps through the window. Ripples of green light emerge from him, forms unlike Taeh’yung’s outline shape and solidify.}

\textit{There’s laughter in the air- ancient, cruel, and just.}

\textit{The Omhlophe ship suddenly pulls away and Taeh’yung rockets after it, an explosion of green light echoes from him- and all the crystals and asteroid gleam in horrific neon green before Sk’jin succumbs to the pressure and force of their fall.}

Sk’jin finds the Medical Bay’s independent power source, lighting up the room just in time to shed light on Yoongi who was standing by the doorway. Sk’jin has stopped jumping at the sight of Yoongi appearing out of nowhere, but Jungkook’s reaction is to hiss.

Yoongi doesn’t even spare Jungkook a glance and instead passes Sk’jin and starts opening the Bay’s mainframe.

‘We can channel the anti-matter back-up into the engines enough to get us out,’ Yoongi explains. ‘It will buy us time before we can start the ship back up but we have to move-’

The thunderous boom is definitely closer this time. And Sk’jin’s gut tells him it’s headed for them.

They all stare at each other.

‘Well then hurry up,’ Sk’jin orders. Yoongi goes back to the mainframe and after a few tense seconds, the emergency lights come back on and so does Sk’jin’s screen.

There’s another thunderous sound. But they all ignore it as Yoongi continues to fiddle with the mainframe.
There’s the sound of footsteps and they all turn as Hoseok rushes towards them from the darkness outside the Lobby.

‘We need to go now~’ he declares, NaviLet in hand (of course Namjoon did something to his personal NaviLet that piece of shit) that was still somewhat functional. ‘Grab Jimin’s stuff – we’re taking the Spardyti and heading out. We can’t stay here~’

‘We can’t leave the ship,’ Sk’jin counters immediately; watching in confusion as Yoongi pauses a moment before nodding and heading out, ‘What the fuck do we do on the Spardyti? We’re defenseless and incapable of going anywhere without the Užkulisai!’

‘It’s going to take too long to fix her- and there’s no guarantee we can do anything about fixing it- not without Namjoon,’ Hoseok takes Jungkook by his arm, pulling him out into the Lobby.

‘Hoseok- how do we even get out of Grisial?’ Sk’jin demands, following him out towards the Hangars.

‘We just need to get out of here first,’ Hoseok replies, taking them towards the parked Spardyti. ‘It won’t take long starting her up.’ he pauses to give Sk’jin the NaviLet. ‘Delete all of the systems. Namjoon’s built in a purge.’

‘Wait-‘ Sk’jin splutters, taking the nearly useless NaviLet before it dropped to the floor. Yoongi reappears with a bag and he steps towards the panels where Sk’jin knows they’ve stored most of their hand-held weaponry.

Hoseok is already inside the Spardyti, while Jungkook crouches at the doorway, unsure as to what to do.

The thunderous sound is now just above them and the sound of what Sk’jin can only assume are crystal chips rain down on them.

‘Sk’jin, Jungkook, get in please,’ Hoseok says tersely, ‘And Sk’jin- if you could-‘

Sk’jin hesitantly looks down at the NaviLet.

This felt wrong. But Hoseok is right- he’s always made strikingly good points and his ideas have nearly always worked out for the best.

As Lisai wasn’t operational, and also intentionally not included in the purge-control Namjoon had designed, Sk’jin manually types in his commands into the NaviLet.

It’s then when he notices that there was a message waiting at the channel-line. Before setting the purge, Sk’jin downloads the call and activates the purge.

There’s another crackling sound, but it’s brief, and all the lights dim slowly just as the Spardyti headlights flood the Hangar.

‘We’re set- everyone in now!’ Hoseok orders as the engines hum, the vibrations of the Spardyti rumbling under Sk’jin’s feet. Yoongi moves away from the panel, bag stocked up with every possible device he could carry on him. Sk’jin steps inside, feeling a strange sensation as though he had forgotten something important.

Yoongi throws the bag in behind Sk’jin and goes to manually open the Hangar gates.

‘Safety straps on?’ Hoseok asks as they back out slowly, the sound of the Hangar opening behind
them. Sk’jin checks over Jungkook behind him and secures himself.

‘Okay we’re going to have to follow out-‘

Thunder and chaos falls down all around them in an explosion of dust, sound, and light.

The whole ship is jerked violently, tipping over.

‘YOONGI!’ Hoseok yells over the din. Sk’jin can’t see past the dust and light.

The ship stops rolling, and before Sk’jin can tell if he was upside down or upright up, Hoseok is already driving them out in a burst of dust.

‘Yoongi-!’ Sk’jin gasps out, ‘What about Yoongi-‘

The walls of the asteroid they were deeply embedded in fold and crack as a large strange ship pierces through the thick crystal walls. Below the triangular face of the front of the ship are gigantic discs.

‘If that thing hits us-‘ Sk’jin pants out.

The large ship, the same white as the Omhlophe ship is oddly flexible- strange joints along its main body curving in a way no ship that size should be curving. It’s bigger than the Užkulisai. It easily dwarfs their ship. The dust masks the rest of the gigantic slithering ship, most of it still inside the walls of the crystal asteroid.

Something from the underbelly of the ship unhinges and Transporters the size of the Spardyti spill out. Understandably, Hoseok picks up speed, turning them away from the overwhelming curving Omhlophe ship.

Sk’jin doesn’t know what Hoseok was planning. If they were not careful, they could very well drive out of the asteroid straight into the unforgiving vacuum of space. And yes, while some of the biggest asteroid around Grisial could be considered moons in most Systems, Sk’jin is pretty sure they shouldn’t be careless in their navigation even though they want to escape.

‘Yoongi-!’ Jungkook yells, pointing out of the still open doorway.

Sk’jin looks around just in time to see the outline of the Human sprinting in another direction through the dust.

‘Did he not see us-?’ Sk’jin gapes but his question is answered as one of the Omhlophe Transporters drives straight in Yoongi’s direction.

Sk’jin’s skin is crawling.

They were all separated now.

Hoseok is cursing, ‘Sk’jin- Lisai had mapped out the asteroid- it’s in the NaviLet- get us to the nearest Deck.’

‘Why would we go to any of the Decks?’ Sk’jin demands over the sound of the Spardyti speeding through dusty caverns of crystal. ‘It’s manned by living Beings-‘!

‘Just get us to a Deck!’ Hoseok yells, pulling up more speed as he makes a sharp turn upwards into a smaller tunnel.
Sk’jin grits his teeth, tapping along the NaviLet before pulling up Lisai’s inventory of information. The downloaded message is still there but Sk’jin doesn’t have the time to look through it.

The map is complicated and extensive and multilayered.

Sk’jin hurriedly keys their tracker into the map and its immediately followed by a small blinking orange dot deep in the 3D map.

‘How far?’

‘We’re really deep inside,’ Sk’jin grits out as he scans for the closest Deck. ‘I think we crashed through the side- we’ll need to make our way downwards.’ He pauses a moment as he studies the map, making an outline with this finger through the maze. ‘Take the second left tunnel after this turn.’

‘They’re not attacking,’ Jungkook says quietly from behind him.

Sk’jin looks around and yeah- the Omhlophe are following them but they’re not making any moves to fire at them.

Obviously the Omhlophe ship is outside, just waiting for them to flush out and then pick them up. It also dawns on Sk’jin that they’re not trying to kill them. Not quite. Jimin wasn’t with them- Sk’jin’s not sure if the Omhlophe can tell or not. But they’re not taking any initiative to fire at them.

‘Here?’ Hoseok asks.

Sk’jin double checks the map.

‘Here!’

Hoseok turns sharply, taking up down in an extraordinarily steep tunnel that expands out into a massive cavern.

It’s honestly terrifying.

‘Hoseok I fucking swear I hope you know what you’re doing,’ Sk’jin hisses as they reach flat ground when he has a sudden idea.

The cavern is clearly used for storage. There are mechanical parts all over, from massive engine turbines to drilling heads the size of the Užkulisai. Great things to create as obstacles.

‘They’re gonna try and move around us-‘ Hoseok is saying but Sk’jin is already grabbing the bag Yoongi had thrown in, chalk full of weapons.

‘Take the central tunnel!’ he yells as he shifts through the many items.

And Sk’jin finds more than an armful of detonators and explosives. It’s disconcerting to see the amount of small but powerful weapons they really had in store. And also very reassuring. Sk’jin unlocks himself, first pausing to signal Jungkook not to move as he makes his way to the back.

Pocketing the explosives and picking up a simple launcher, Sk’jin pulls down at the rungs from the roof. Climbing up he pushes at the small hatch, unlocking and opening it up.

The wing whips past his head, dust trailing behind them. His eyes are not happy with the speed, the dust, and the wind. But Sk’jin simply attaches the launcher over to the lip of the hatch, ducking
just in case the Omhlophe fire at him.

He attaches an explosive, twists the face of the launcher to the side and fires.

The dust inside the cavern ripples. Gravity wasn’t very strong in here, causing the very light dust particles to swim rather than simply fall to the ground.

The massive propeller Sk’jin had been aiming at flies through the air, one of the wings crashing right into one of the Transporters.

‘WOOO!’

Sk’jin jumps, not having felt Jungkook creep up behind him.

‘Jungkook get down-!’ Sk’jin hisses but Jungkook is working behind him, arms noodling through to add an explosive he picks out from Sk’jin’s pocket.

‘Oh Spaces-‘ Sk’jin grimaces as Jungkook fires, giggling next to his ear as the dust ripples again, massive arches of fire and smoke and shrapnel rain through the air behind them. Another Transporter is taken down.

‘You know what- fine, you take care of this. Don’t be too excessive-‘ Sk’jin orders as he climbs down, making space for Jungkook to take up the spot.

‘Middle tunnel?’ Hoseok asks, briefly turning his head around as Jungkook lets out another whoop of delight followed by a loud explosion.

‘Yes,’ Sk’jin deadpans, strapping himself in and grabbing the NaviLet.

‘We need to regroup,’ Hoseok is saying as the Spardyti speeds through a narrow gap and then shouting, ‘Jungkook! Left!’

‘JUNGKOOK LEFT!’ Sk’jin screeches.

‘LEFT!’ Jungkook yells back followed immediately by the sound of the launcher and 2 seconds later something exploding.

‘Thanks!’ Hoseok yells.

‘THANKS!’ Sk’jin screams.

‘WOOO!’ Jungkook hollers back.

‘Grisial won’t allow tracking- not through electronics at the very least-‘ Hoseok is saying as he climbs up towards the gigantic openings over at the top of a mound. A beautiful vein of pure crystal almost like water branches through overhead, shedding light down at them.

‘We don’t have a Jimin-antenna in the form of Yoongi so we can’t find Namjoon or Jimin,’ Sk’jin loudly grumbles back as they make it out of the mound. There’s a final explosive sound that followed by massive cracking sounds.

Sk’jin looks around through the tiny opening towards the back. Jungkook had fired at the top of the tunnel they had just burst into, causing the opening to collapse.

Jungkook himself reappears, closing the hatch as an afterthought, his hair standing on end and covered in white-dust. He looks overly pleased, a bright twinkle in his eyes.
‘Good job kiddo,’ Hoseok nods from the front. ‘We’ll have some time to buy now.’

‘There’s no way of getting to the others,’ Sk’jin frowns, ‘Not unless we are all outside of Grisial’s perimeter and with some powerful scanners. That’s only if Jimin and Namjoon still have their Comm Devices even on.’

‘And Yoongi.’

‘And yes, Yoongi,’ Sk’jin repeats, rolling his eyes.

‘Yoongi said we can track,’ Jungkook says suddenly, still looking very thrilled and pleased.

‘What? Not all of us have his Jimin-radar-’ Sk’jin begins but Hoseok groans from the front.

‘Oh for fuck’s sake did he poison us again!!?’

* 

It’s incomprehensibly unsettling to have the Omhlophe following them like this. No one says a word. Jimin seems to be lost in his own thoughts.

‘They’ve all come back to me.’ He had said.

Namjoon frowns at his words. He wants to press Jimin for an explanation. But he’s not sure how much of what Jimin had to say should be overheard by the GI agents.

‘Do you think you can ask them who sent them?’ Namjoon asks instead. They seemed to respond the best to Jimin, listening to his words, moving to protect him. The GI were entrusted to Lal Haenoon of all Beings- was he responsible for this? Was he somehow able to wake the GI from their vegetative states?

Jimin looks up from where he sat, blinking once, twice, before reacting.

‘There is no one who sent them.’ Jimin says quietly. ‘They came because they found me. They heard me.’

They found Jimin? Namjoon mulls over the words, carefully thinking out his question as he keeps an eye on the Omhlophe behind them.

‘Why do they want to find you?’

Jimin looks at the GI agents one by one before exhaling slowly.

‘Menigišiti is not an ordinary System,’ Jimin tells him, ‘We are…old, very old. We are considered one of the First Children.’

‘First Children?’ Namjoon frowns. He’s never heard that phrase or term before.
‘The First Children, born in the new darkness of space. Born and delivered from the gap between - …of Continuum- Life and Death,’ Jimin says slowly. ‘Taeh’yung is one of the First Children.’

Namjoon is definitely uncomfortable hearing that. Taeh’yung’s civilization predated history itself. The Zhak’gri predated the concepts of Yishengs- this was a remote and deep dark space, past the realms and understanding of the Known Universe. Is this what Jimin was referring to?

‘The First Children scattered, some were lost- Time expanded with their life, and continued in their death. It continued on; each star burst into life in their power and light. Rebirth – in a cycle of continuation until…until they spread out, diminished.’ Jimin looks down at his hands. ‘But in Menigišiti, there was no spread. Just…just a single division. We are the Heart, and the Fate, of Menigišiti. We are reborn, anew, but the same- to continue to protect, to watch, to nurture.’

This is a lot to take. Namjoon glances at the GI agents but none of them seem remotely interested. But Namjoon knows he wouldn’t be able to tell either way.

‘In Menigišiti the Heart and Fate continued to stay. The Heart mothered life, and Fate bound them together- a cycle of creation, continuity, and peace.’ Jimin looks up again, his eyes no longer vacant or lost in thought. ‘How can you be lost, if you are bound to the fate of being found?’

Namjoon eyes the GI agents for a while, trying to add up his thoughts, the data he’s collected, Jimin’s words, what he’s seen.

He looks past the GI agents and at the Omhlophe.

‘And what about them?’

Jamin looks around, eyeing the Transporters following them.

‘I…I don’t know,’ he frowns. ‘But they are too close.’

Suddenly their Transporter swerves violently. Namjoon belatedly holds onto the straps attached to the walls of the interior.

Another Transporter has burst out after them.

‘What the-‘

Jimin is still turned in his seat, a frown on his brow as he watches the Omhlophe.

‘What is it-?’ Namjoon asks at once.

Jimin opens and closes his mouth a few times, blinking hard.

‘Namjoon I think-‘

A Transporter rams at them from another side, bursting out of nowhere.

Namjoon and Jimin strain painfully against their seats as another Transporter rams at them from another side.

‘Fuck-!’ Namjoon curses, holding onto the side of his chair as they spin momentarily before crashing against a rather thin crystal rock wall.

They don’t even have time to recover, they’re swarmed by the Omhlophe on every side. It’s absolutely nightmarish as the white-robed figures in identical masks move in unison, gathering and
appearing out of the dusty air around them.

Namjoon hears one of the agents, Nineti, Jimin had called him, attempting to start up the Transporter. But it’s not working. The one called Yyna is headed for the doorway but Jimin is getting up, his hands reaching out to stop the tall agent.

‘No- let me,’ Jimin says as he releases himself from the seat to stand. His eyes seem to radiate light, the air around him lightening.

Jimin’s power was not showy or elaborate. There was a quiet strength- a gentle and warm touch.

*Deceptive,* Sk’jin’s voice provides unhelpfully in his head. *Like I said, can’t be trusted.*

Namjoon wants to ignore Sk’jin’s voice in his head but he had raised a very good question. One that they had all somehow chosen to ignore. Or were they enticed to ignore it?

Namjoon remembers how Jimin had gently urged the truth out of one of the Omhlophe’s third-party deliverers Khonen back in Ymir. How easily, without any show, without any display of power.

‘They are white, and they are young. They come from everywhere,’ Khonen replies simply, yawning again. ‘They are the Universe, and the Universe is them. When they told me this, I wanted to laugh. But they weren’t joking.’

‘What does that mean?’

‘It means they are from the Universe,’ Khonen replies with a small laugh. ‘And now they just want to live and create.’

‘Jimin wait-’ Namjoon holds Jimin back. ‘I don’t think this is a good idea.’

Jimin only pauses a while before releasing his arm from Namjoon’s hand.

‘Just trust me,’ Jimin says softly. ‘Please.’

‘What do you mean-?’ Namjoon makes to stand but he’s surprised when Nineti holds him back down. Jimin gives him a small smile of thanks.

‘Jimin-?’ Namjoon is beyond confused.

‘I will make this right,’ Jimin says as he quietly walks towards the doorway. ‘I will fix this.’

Yyna opens the door, little curls of dust falling through, sparkling in a spectrum of colour as the light that radiates from Jimin grows stronger.

It reminds him of the first time they encountered Jimin in Pompa. The golden radiance of a soothing light, encouraging rapture, wonder, and tranquility. He sees the way the GI agents suddenly seem to lapse into a strange trance, their heads hanging.

‘Jimin what are you doing-‘ Namjoon gasps.

Jimin steps out, light moving with him and before he can even say a word, he disappears in a flurry of white robes.

Then as though all of them are snapped out of it, the GI agents look up, awakened from their strange trance.
Spaces, was Sk’jin right about Jimin? Namjoon thinks rather despondently to himself. He purposefully knocked out the GI agents.

But he didn’t do a thing to Namjoon.

The lights in the air seems to flicker. There’s a sudden explosion of sound as Yyna opens fire alongside Amic. But the Omhlophe don’t pay them the slightest bit of attention. The figures are moving in swarms within themselves, their motion centered around one focal point.

It was obviously Jimin somewhere in there. Namjoon struggles out of Nineti’s grip, cursing as he makes his way to the door, grabbing one of the TeorSers stacked inside the interior panel. He tries to find Jimin through the scope. But tracking the movements of one small individual amongst a sea of swarming Omhlophe is impossible. Namjoon can sense their movement, the direction they were headed.

There are minor eruptions of something- a few of the Omhlophe flung out of the tight crowd as it goes further away.

*Jimin was leading the Omhlophe away on purpose*.

Namjoon freezes mid-thought- staring out into the ocean of white robes.

‘*They’ve all come back to me.*’

Could it be?

They had all discussed it, theorized it; the GI were created by the Yishengs and the Omhlophe could be some for of creation by the Akramanese/Red Evil. But how did these two separate creations link to Jimin? And where did *Yoongi* fall into this category? How did he fit in?

And what did the Omhlophe want from Jimin?

Judging by how the GI were behaving, they had no intention of hurting Jimin. Or even himself. Yoongi was…well, *Yoongi*. So what about the Omhlophe?

Their apparent random appearance in Pompa may not have been random at all.

‘*They’ve all come back to me.*’

Maybe they were specifically looking for Jimin. And they found him. Looking for him with the same determination and strange devotion that bordered discomfort when Namjoon thinks too long about it. *Where did the Omhlophe even stay?* If the word of the Beings in contact with Sk’jin’s “friend” Zitao were to be trusted, they worked *for* the Akramanese/Red Evil. But the Akramanese were gone, destroyed alongside Earth. What were they doing now that their creators were gone? *They* had been the ones to take Jimin, as well as Yoongi’s whole team back in Menigišiti. Had they escaped the fate of their creators?

What did they want with Jimin? What did they want with him?

Something clicks in Namjoon’s mind as he eyes the white robes lessen in number, gliding past the Transporter.

Or maybe they were trying to *take him back*.

‘Oh for fuck’s sake,’ Namjoon shakes himself awake, cursing as he fires at the closest white-robed
figures. ‘Nineti! Get this started we need to go after Jimin now!’

Namjoon, for the second time in a span of a few minutes, is pulled back before he can jump out.

‘We need to go after him!’ Namjoon is bewildered as he rounds up to stare up at Yyna.

Yyna says nothing while Amic closes the door. Nineti is rustling with something and the Transporter starts.

‘Okay good, we’re up and running again. Let’s go get Jimin come on,’ Namjoon yanks his functioning arm out of Yyna’s grip and sits down again. The swarms of Omhlophe are disappearing into the misty dust.

Nineti does indeed start up the Transporter, but instead turns them around.

‘Uh-’ Namjoon is trying to work out what he’s missing here. ‘Jimin is that way?’

They just drive downwards continuously before turning right sharply.

‘Hey- what are you doing?’ Namjoon calls out to the front.

‘We were waiting in the light,’ Amic tells him from the back. ‘And in the light, we heard him.’

‘We will be found,’ Nineti says as they drive up rapidly. ‘We will be found again.’

‘Then let me out?’ Namjoon tries. ‘I don’t need help uh, being found.’

He’s suddenly apprehensive now that Jimin wasn’t here. Why were they taking him away? Weren’t they clearly here for Jimin?

Namjoon spies what can only be an exit, clear light that wasn’t a refraction is evident outside of this medium sized opening.

Fuck is this what Hoseok felt like when he was kidnapped.

It’s silent for a while before Yyna speaks.

‘Namjoon, child and survivor of Kutsoglerin, help us, children of nowhere, and teach us to survive.’

Yoongi is at a great disadvantage.

He’s on foot, in unknown territory, visibility was absolute shit, injured, and he was being pursued.

These were not GI agents. These were not GLA officers or even GIU officials. Yoongi has no experience against something like the Omhlophe.
But he has a head start, and he’s not entirely defenseless.

It doesn’t feel right. Even more so now than ever. The GI helmet he collided into after falling out of the Užkulisai was still splattered in blood and slightly too large for him.

I don’t like it.

That makes two of us, Yoongi thinks as he slips it on. The white noise is filtered out immediately, his vision clears up with startling clarity as the visor cuts through the dust. He wipes at the blood splattered over the front, his feet never stopping. At least the thick layer of dust is great at absorbing sound. The strange shrieking sounds of metal on rock and crystal ring behind him.

Something is missing.

Yoongi darts through the dust, ducking low and scooping handfuls of the dust and throwing it over his clothes. He’d been dusted before, but he could definitely use some more camouflage-

Something is missing.

‘What’s missing?’ Yoongi hisses out.

His hand grips the device deep inside his jacket pocket. It’s weighs monumentally against his chest. If he could get to a location, or even back to the Spardyti, he could definitely set the device to activate it. Would it work on a screen? Would it work on any transporter with a basic shield system? This was a massive mining asteroid from what Yoongi can tell. Even though these tunnels were already excavated, that didn’t mean there wouldn’t be machinery or transporters of some sort around.

If this had been his own helmet, he would have been able to get a scan of his immediate vicinity at least. He sticks close to the walls of the large tunnel, ducking past and around large chunks of crystal rock strewn all around.

I can’t hear it anymore.

The sound of a Transporter behind him gets louder and louder, closer and closer until Yoongi is flat out running, zipping through the many fallen crystal rocks.

‘Hear what?!’

It’s a dead-end ahead; and Yoongi spies a tunnel curving away to the other side, past the Transporter.

Abruptly stopping and doing a complete 180, Yoongi sprints back, cutting past large crystal rocks, the dust in the air parting in ripples around his movement. He hears the Transporter closing in again and when he briefly glances back, notices that there were two individual silhouettes cutting through the dust behind him.

Taking a leaping run up, Yoongi vaults up onto the fallen crystal rocks. His chasers leap up as well. Yoongi knows this is a risk- he was exposing himself over the rocks here, but he needed clear shots as well.

3 shots.

Yoongi picks up his speed, running over a particularly steep crystal and leaping off just as he turns to face behind him. Unsheathing the previously hidden slim short-range TeorSers in his pockets,
Yoongi aims and fires thrice each.

One of his chasers, a grey silhouette in this white dusty mist falls back, arching in the air and falling back to the ground. The other dodges down and under the rocks.

Yoongi lands on all fours on the sandy floor before he takes off again, sprinting forward and maintaining a low height.

He’s expecting that jump from around the corner as he cuts across an open space, edging closer towards the tunnel opening. The lights from the Transporter chasing him illuminates air and illuminates his chaser.

The same dirty white robes- the same odd mask- and an unshakeable odour permeates its movement as it strikes at Yoongi. But Yoongi dodges, whatever weapon the Omhlophe was using is sharp, white, and creates sparks as it makes contact with the crystal rock. Yoongi pockets one of the TeorSers and in a ring of light ignites the Heliord he had quickly snatched up from the weapon’s depository.

Their blades clash, light erupting in waves through the heavy dust.

*Fall back-*

Yoongi barely just manages to duck as a secondary blade, thin and small like a scalpel hisses through the dust and air. Yoongi lowers himself, swinging his Heliord under himself as he switches it off before reigniting it mid-thrust upwards.

He’s only able to catch the mask of the Omhlophe, the material cracking at the contact and chipping.

Yoongi’s side flares up at the strain but he shoulders on. He rolls over on the dust, the Omhlophe following him close. The thin sharp scalpel like knife slices at his visor and to Yoongi’s horror is actually able to land a deep cut over it.

*Lunge*

Yoongi lunges, catching the Omhlophe as it lunged towards him. But Yoongi doesn’t carry him backwards- only shoves it back immediately followed by swinging the Heliord forward.

The blade cuts through the air, dust rippling back as the blade sears through the white robes and cracks the mask and hood.

Hair unfurls, a pale textured skin appears and- the face behind the mask is startlingly normal. Dark un-lidded eyes expressionless, as though it had no matter to them that Yoongi had now pushed through. Yoongi can’t place the species but this was no extraordinary Being.

This was raising questions in the back of Yoongi’s mind.

*Not now. Run.*

Yoongi bolts past the Omhlophe even before she can hit the ground.

The Transporter bursts over his head, skidding to block his path towards the tunnel that would be too small for it to enter through. But Yoongi takes a running leap and vaults over the Transporter, skidding over the rooftop and down into the tunnel.
The tunnel is steep and goes downwards. Angling his feet and praying the soles on his shoes can withstand the friction he was about to subject it to, Yoongi takes a running start because angling his feet and he slides down the tunnel at tremendous speed.

There are massive gaping cracks along the side- and Yoongi spots the Spardyti inside a massive cavern, zooming through massive machinery and tech.

The Spardyti is firing at the masses of Transporters chasing after them. But Yoongi can’t watch just yet- his tunnel was about to run out and looking back, he notices 3 figures following him down. Letting his speed carry him, Yoongi bounds through the tunnel he slides into. His legs were definitely starting to feel sore, but Yoongi cannot stop. If that cavern was some form of store- there had to be another place here- some form of control room or log-room.

He was definitely running blind. He has no idea what to do if he comes across a dead-end.

A shiver of terror runs down his spine when one of the Omhlophe turns the corner, speeding behind him with terrifyingly long and spindly limbs that cut through the dust and its robes. A bit of hysteria and panic edges Yoongi further on.

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Can’t hear.

He couldn’t run forever. He needed to find a place where he could take his chasers out. He first needed to get rid of the long-legged Being chasing him.

He exits the tunnel into a decent sized caravan that stretched on either side of him in a slight slope downwards. Above him are stalagmites of low-quality crystals, glassing and sharp. Yoongi turns mid run, crouching down and letting his momentum drag him downwards. He fires even before the Omhlophe appears at the tunnel opening.

But his calculations are correct because just as it appeared as though the shot would uselessly fire against the crystal rocks, it lands squarely in the center of the Omhlophe’s chest.

It flies backwards, nailed further by Yoongi’s second and third shot.

But it’s not enough to bring it down as it pushes itself up, a silent and deadly speedy spider-like Being leaping down the slope at him. It almost makes Yoongi giggle hysterically as the long limbs flail before positioning itself like a projectile straight for Yoongi.

Yoongi lifts his TeorSer but it’s not to aim at the Omhlophe diving at him, but at the stalagmites above him.

Large shards chip off and plunge downwards, impaling the Omhlophe right before it gets to Yoongi.

Yoongi doesn’t pause to rest, quickly ducking out as his shot brings down more than just a few stalagmites. Large shards of glassy crystal chip and fall about, cutting through the air like serrated blades. Just as Yoongi ducks out of the cavern he sees the other two entering.

I think I can hear it-

But before he has the opportunity to sprint into the tunnel- the Omhlophe Transporter bursts through; the light is nearly blinding and would have definitely been fatal to Yoongi had his eyes not been shielded. He narrowly escapes being run over.

The stalagmites are still falling, now with the sudden emergence of this powerful Transporter
setting off tremors in its wake. More dust flies through the air and chunks of glassy crystals rain down. One nearly hits him and Yoongi has to quickly fall back, making him lose his balance, falling straight onto the ground. He’s about to get up, shoot past the freshly fallen massive stalagmite when he’s nearly waylaid by an Omhlophe shorter than himself. Yoongi’s not sure if it’s just luck but it sprints past him where he stood along the side of a dark rocky crystal.

And it just stands there. Almost as though it was listening to something. Like something was calling it.

Still.

Yoongi breathes out, ears pricked and eyes darting.

The Omhlophe is just standing there.

Don’t move.

The order is so powerful. So strong. That even when the Transporter bursts through, headlamps passing over Yoongi where he was crouched against the crook of the massive chunk of crystal rock, he stays still.

Listen.

His body tenses, ready to take on whatever came after him as the doors open.

But instead the short Omhlophe just gets in, shortly followed by the other who walks past where Yoongi was crouched and into the Transporter.

LISTEN.

Yoongi knows they saw him. Yoongi knows they saw him. But they just ignore him and the Transporter drives off back the same way it had burst in.

Yoongi remains still for a solid 2 minutes before he shifts just a little, righting his muscles.

Quietly, and carefully, Yoongi sits back up properly, leaning back on the crystal rock that had nearly ended him.

Why had they suddenly stopped?

The dust settles surprisingly quickly, further camouflaging him.

Listen.

‘To what?’ Yoongi asks out loud, coughing a bit as the pain on his side catches up. His legs were ready to cramp. He doesn’t think about how just at the edge of something- his consciousness maybe, a world of pain was ready to ignite his bones.

I will follow.

‘Lead, and I will follow,’ Yoongi whispers, eyes closing as he says it, gingerly feeling his side.

I can hear it again.

‘Hear what?’
‘What-‘ Yoongi takes a moment to breathe properly, leaning back to gather himself.

He can’t really hear anything other than the pounding in his ears and head and his harsh breaths. But there’s an odd settling feeling deep inside him. Was this just him feeling it, or was it-

‘You said something was missing,’ Yoongi breathes out. ‘What was it?’

‘And now it’s back?’

Yes.

Yoongi quietly and carefully stands up.

‘We need to get back. Need to reteam.’

Follow. Listen.

‘I’m trying- I really am.’ Yoongi takes a long exhale, rolling his shoulders a little. He was definitely going to bruise heavily. But it’s not as though he can really sense it. There was that continued numbness in him- a result of the fact that Yoongi himself, didn’t really have control over his own body.

I am used to it.

It’s unsettling, Yoongi knows, but necessary.

His body, his mind: they were functioning off of a strange and fragile symbiotic agreement.

It won’t last.

‘I know,’ Yoongi huffs out as he sprints out in the same direction the Transporter had left in. ‘We’re gonna have to pull it together. Just a little longer. We can do that right?’

For him.

Yoongi doesn’t run, but instead proceeds forward in a steady jog.

It’s easy enough following the tracks of the Transporter.

‘Is this the correct way?’

Yes

Yoongi still hunches low as he continues following the tracks. They lead upwards, in a rather steep slope of gently falling dust and rolling bits of crystal pebbles and shards. Yoongi takes leaping strides upwards, feeling himself slip down a little despite his lunging steps against the dusty smooth slope. He’s just at the top when he slips a little. To balance himself he grabs hold of the edge of the slope, his side colliding against the curved walls. The device in his pockets dig into his ribs, the handles of TeorSer thudding dulling against it.

It lets out a small beeping sound, startling Yoongi a little. He’s never heard the device make a sound before. Climbing out of the steep slope, Yoongi rights himself, leaning on the crystal rock
wall for a moment, adjusting the items he was carrying.

His fingers brush against the device. Jimin’s System’s technology.

‘You know I’m right. Jimin knows something, or at least has the idea of something about all of this. But he won’t say it.’

‘Speculations and theories can be vague and sharing them can cause panic. Maybe Jimin—‘

‘Spare me. Your prince is hiding something we know. He’s hiding a lot of things, and honestly I’m not above getting to the bottom of it.’

This was supposed to hide them. This was supposed to completely remove them from being tracked.

So how did the Omhlophe find them so quickly? Or as a matter of fact, even the GI?

How were they able to track them all the way here to Grisial?

And why were the GI here?

Yoongi knows. He knows what happened. Has seen their vegetative states, walked past their unconscious forms. He knows of the other agents who had survived, who were out of the Raksane Tayi at the time. How they had reported themselves for study and containment. They had been less than 20.

He remembers trying to Awaken them, the way he had been.

His body shivers.

We cannot forget.

Yoongi can see their faces in his mind. Vacant and dormant eyes; Beings of every species, from every corner of the Known Universe.

Quite suddenly, Yoongi turns and slides all the way back down the slope.

Why?

‘I’m trying to figure something out.’ Yoongi mutters, backtracking back to the cavern with stalagmites.

The crystal dust particles were quick to cover the previous scene of battle because it’s almost as though nothing had happened. But Yoongi isn’t deterred; he quickly sifts through the thick layer of dust around the area of one of the many fallen stalagmites and finds what he’s looking for.

The Being crushed under the stalagmite with the uncanny long limbs almost seemed preserved by the crystal dust.

Not this one.

Yoongi nods to that, eyeing the body one last time before heading through the tunnel he had skidded all the way through. It’s a steep climb, and with the lack of traction, takes more time than Yoongi can actually spare. But he needed to find out. Needed to make sure.

Breathless, and the numbing gnawing ache under his bones attempt to surface into his
'I know,' Yoongi mutters as he carefully treads back into the atrium filled with massive crystal boulders. ‘Should be around here I hope.’

Clearly he’s not the only one looking for the bodies of the Omhlophe. Because of them stands there, clearly ready to take the body of the Omhlophe Yoongi had defeated some time ago.

What takes Yoongi by surprise is what they were doing.

Hand raised into the air, head bowed, the Omhlophe stands before the body of their fallen kind in a stunningly familiar goodbye.

This was the Yisheng farewell.

They lower their arm to their chest, hand forming a fist over where the heart should be anatomically.

‘And when you find yourself in times of trouble or woe, listen to the music from the stars and let them guide you with their wisdom, Memory, and Time.’

Those were Amme’s last words to them before they departed for this mission.

The Omhlophe leaps into action- apparently aware of Yoongi’s quiet presence but not bothered enough to attack out right. Instead bent on performing the farewell ritual.

Yoongi ignites his Heliord and charges straight.

He’s panting by the end, kneeling on one knee over the bleeding corpse of the Omhlophe. It’s strange- it didn’t feel like a fight.

He hesitates a moment before he rolls the Omhlophe over onto their front.

‘Fuck, I’m sorry,’ Yoongi whispers as he unsheathes a short knife from the side of his boots and cuts open the thick white robes.

Whoever Yoongi had just defeated was a species he wasn’t entirely familiar with. Ridged scaled that were larger and flatter grew over the shoulders, decreasing in size down the back. A back that was dented down the center just like Yoongi’s.

Just like Jungkook’s.

Just like the other GI agents.

‘Fuck,’ Yoongi breathes out. He eyes the other corpse for a second before making up his mind. He carefully rolls the other Omhlophe over to their chest as well and does the same to their robes. Scarred from previous battles, but just like the other Omhlophe, their back is dented down.

Yoongi gets on his feet and before he knows it, he’s pushing up the visor of the helmet. Standing at the center point between the two corpses, Yoongi takes his hand and raises it up, then closes it over his chest.

He’s not sure why. But this felt right.
He lowers his hand from his chest. A sudden shiver runs down his neck.

Listen.

Yoongi stops, head turned slightly to look behind him.

Past the cavern, Yoongi knows is the Užkulisai. He knows the strange Omhlophe drilling-ship is there too. But something else was also there. Something-

‘Jimin.’

Keeping the walls to his right, Yoongi weaves his way through the crystal rocks and boulders. The dust has settled and any sign of previous disturbances is entirely covered. It takes longer than Yoongi estimates to get back to the main cavern. The distance was much further than he had expected.

‘God I hate running,’ Yoongi absentmindedly mumbles to himself.

There’s a vague sensation somewhere in him that Yoongi identifies as judgment.

‘Oh shut up,’ he hisses again just as he arrives at the vicinity of the main cavern.

It’s quiet.

The Užkulisai is there, now almost white with the thick layer of dust on it. The Omhlophe drilling-ship is there too. The powerful headlamps are switched off and an equally thick layer of dust covered the ship too.

Would he be able to get back into the Užkulisai? They had planned on purging the entire system inside, and Yoongi can assume that Hoseok would have seen to that asap. But he’d still be able to fly the ship regardless. He would just need to continue to power the engines and basic systems through the anti-matter fuel supply in the Medical Bay. Not to mention if he used the device in his jacket, he would be able to render the ship invisible.

Well, invisible to most.

Listen.

Yoongi quietly stalks through the heavy dusty air. The air was concentrated here- probably due to the way the Užkulisai had crashed through the asteroid they were in. He stays low, ears pricked, eyes darting around the entirety of the cavern for any sign of movement.

The Užkulisai is right there- LISTEN-

Yoongi is tackled- a shape emerging as though camouflaged against the crystal rocks. White robes fluttering behind them like wings, Yoongi crashes down on the dusty floors. It’s not just one; Yoongi is picked up and thrown harshly back onto the floor by a second. It’s disorienting but Yoongi is able to count 4 of the Omhlophe.

The helmet protecting and encasing his head is ripped off and Yoongi accidently inhales the dusty air through his mouth.

There’s a strange realization as Yoongi feels himself being tossed again. These 4 Omhlophe had the chance to kill him just now. Or at least fatally injure him. They clearly outnumbered him. But they weren’t moving against him to kill him. There was something else-
Almost like some rag doll, Yoongi feels himself being hurled through the air, back colliding painfully against smaller embedded rocks on the floor.

But before he attempt to pick himself up, one of the Omhlophe is already doing that. And to Yoongi’s discomfort, he’s being held up so high his feet dangle. Definitely more than 2 feet above the dusty floors. He’s restrained- Yoongi dully realizes as he blinks dust out of his eyes. And sure enough the Omhlophe holding him has 4 arms. Twisting his body, Yoongi gets himself some space and brings his knee up and against the Omhlophe’s head. The grip on him is loosened a little, enough to yank out one arm and grab at the Heliord. He can’t ignite it without burning himself, so spinning the handle in his palm, Yoongi jams the handle straight through the strange mask over the face of the Omhlophe. Yoongi is dropped and his feet barely touch the ground when he’s tackled again. His head hits a few protruding rocks again, his vision sparking out in pain. He’s moving blindly but the Heliord makes contact as he ignites it before himself, slicing up at an angle. He shakes his head, clearing his vision in time to watch the 4-armed Omhlophe momentarily distracted as another Heliord, bright and powerful emerging through its chest.

There’s an unholy sound that fills the air as the Omhlophe scream- the pitch disturbing the dust in the air. And it’s not just the 4, now 3 Omhlophe in the cavern. At least 10 more emerge from the dust, all screaming as their 4-armed fellow Omhlophe collapses onto the ground.

Standing there in the center, the crystal dust swirling around him as though in time to some music Yoongi cannot hear but can feel, is Jimin.

A light radiates from him- subdued but powerful enough to make his clothes ripples as though moved by the wind. He’s holding two Heliords, the side of his clothes are smeared with blood. He looks up, not at Yoongi but at the gathered Omhlophe, all screaming at him. His eyes, that Yoongi knows are gentle, and filled with adoration, love, and laughter, burn ablaze.

_Never look directly at an eclipse._

Jimin’s movements are fast, the dust around his feet arches into fan-like waves as he spins. The Heliords slice through the air in wide arches, digging through the dust almost pointlessly but in an eruption through the ground the Omhlophe scramble out. To Yoongi’s horror, almost like ants escaping the pits of their earthen tunnels, the Omhlophe emerge from the dusty floors and walls.

Jimin is overwhelmingly outnumbered but he doesn’t seem to notice or care. Instead goading the Omhlophe out until no more were left to emerge.

Yoongi gets up to his feet only to be restrained back, 3 of the Omhlophe holding him back. They were using him as a hostage. They had planned this.

They could have killed Yoongi at any point. Right now too. But they were trying to draw Jimin back here.

This was- this wasn’t about anything else other than Jimin. The Omhlophe were after Jimin.

And they got him, by getting Yoongi here.

The Omhlophe surge forward in an attack at the same time, straight for Jimin.

Yoongi pushes against his restraints but their grip on him is relentless. He’s forced to watch. Forced to _witness._
'We won’t be found,’ one of the Omhlophe tells him, voice uncannily conversational as it had been when they had contacted them to discuss Hoseok when they had abducted him. ‘We will not be found.’

‘Is this what being **found** feels like?’

Jimin is an exemplary fighter. His movements are almost unconventional. There’s a fluidity and strength in him, twisting and passing through throngs of the Omhlophe – his movements and steps are calculated, aware, lightning-fast. And with each second the light around him seems to pulse brighter.

The Omhlophe scream in unison in long bursts of extended howls. The cavern echoes it back, dust falling all the more like strange rainfall.

Sparks erupt as Jimin’s Heliords make contact with some of the Omhlophe.

They scream even louder, the sound piercing Yoongi’s ears till everything is muffled and all he can hear is his own pulse, his own scream as they leap through the air, falling over Jimin and collapsing over him.

In a soft glimmering eruption of liquid light, the mound of Omhlophe’s fly through the air. The crystal dust dissipates, almost as though evaporating as Jimin levitates through the air, a radiance of light erupting around him.

It reminds Yoongi starkly of what he had witnessed in Megibīya. Jimin had flown through the air just like this, his voice like distant thunder and song pushing back the terror that had been taking them one by one.

When Jimin lands back on the floor, the dust further dissipates, leaving the pure crystal rock floors exposed. The Omhlophe seem to struggle against Jimin although Yoongi feels nothing. Even the ones restraining him seem to struggle. He takes advantage of this and twisting his arm free, reaches for his TeorSer.

Knocking out one of the 3 with the blunt end of the TeorSer. Yoongi spins on his knees, firing at extreme short range right through one of their masks. The remaining one knocks the TeorSer out of his hands but they lose balance as another eruption of light ignites through the air. Yoongi is able to take advantage of this, removing his other TeorSer and firing twice in rapid succession.

Positioning himself, Yoongi aims at the masses of the Omhlophe who don’t seem to care much about him- all throwing themselves in screaming synchrony at Jimin as he takes them on in overwhelming rushes. Yoongi arms himself with both the TeorSers, firing in rapid succession at the Omhlophe.

They’re flung through the air- thrown back by the immense power Jimin exuded. Yoongi desperately wonders why they were not subdued- it had worked on the blood-thirsty crowd in Pompa. Why were they not subdued?

Jimin picks up his Heliords again- the blades spinning around him as he charges through the Omhlophe in a whirlwind of light, beauty, and terror.

There is a final surge of light- the ground shakes, and the Omhlophe cave in on themselves, their screams choked and the white of their robes staining with their blood as an overwhelming pressure crushes them.

The last of the Omhlophe is taken down by both Yoongi’s shot, and Jimin’s Heliord.
Jimin momentarily struggles to stand but gone is the light around him—his eyes no longer ablaze but wide and fearful as he stares at Yoongi. He drops the Heliords, arms stretching up for Yoongi—

Yoongi nearly trips a few times over the crushed bodies of the Omhlophe as he surges forward, the pain in his body moving past the numbing ache he had been pushing down.

They crash into each other, both of their legs giving out and they crumple in a heap on their knees.

Jimin is shaking in Yoongi’s arms, his hands shakily touching him as though afraid of what he would feel. Yoongi’s not even sure if he was using the proper amount of strength—he’s not sure if he’s crushing Jimin but as though his body was going through some form of shock, he can’t help but shake against Jimin too.

‘Yoongi—’ Jimin chokes out, face pressed into the crook of his neck. ‘Yoongi I’m—’

‘I found you- I found you,’ Yoongi whispers, his shaking hand running through the short strands of Jimin’s hair. ‘I’m here—’

Jimin pulls, eyes shining briefly before they close and his lips are on Yoongi’s.


Yoongi kisses him back with the same desperation.

Their breaths are harsh against each other’s mouths. Chests pressed close, shaking hands and arms shifting and curling over each other.

‘I’m here,’ Yoongi repeats against Jimin’s mouth. His eyes are still closed, tears leaking past. ‘I’m here.’

Jimin’s hands shake as he raises them to gently hold his face.

‘Yoongi,’ he whispers.

Something was wrong.

‘What is it? What’s wrong?’ Yoongi asks, his voice still a whisper.

‘I see it now,’ Jimin tells him shakily. ‘Taeh’yung was right. I didn’t want to see it. But now I can’t pretend.’

‘Pretend what?’

Jimin’s thumbs gently rub his cheeks. He smiles shakily but it’s sad.

‘Will you be able to forgive me?’ he whispers.

‘What are you saying?’

‘I have- I haven’t explained everything truthfully to you. To anyone.’ Jimin says quietly, his hands slipping from around Yoongi’s face. ‘But I can’t hide it anymore. And I cannot pretend.’

‘What is it?’ Yoongi presses, taking Jimin’s hands in his.

Crystal dust falls around them again, in a haze of light and mist that seems to stretch time as Jimin whispers, ‘You are…you are bound to me.’
Yoongi doesn’t understand.

‘I am yours.’

‘I am yours,’ he whispers but Jimin shakes his head, looking up at him with purpose.

‘You are bound to me, the way the others like you are bound to me.’ Jimin whispers almost inaudibly. ‘You were created to be bound to the Fate of Menigišiti.’

‘What does that mean?’ Yoongi asks.

‘I’m sorry,’ Jimin says quietly before kissing him gently, hands raising up to place over his temples.

It’s a sudden and very strong reaction. Yoongi pushes Jimin away, hand slapping against his chest as he deflects his hands away from his head.

Jimin falls backwards, eyes wide.

‘Did- did you just try to knock me out?’ Yoongi asks breathlessly, standing up feeling shaken to his core. ‘Were- were you trying to leave?’

Jimin blinks rapidly a few times before he says in a broken tone, ‘They’re here because of me. They’re here because they’re bound to me. They will come for me, again and again- and it doesn’t matter who is there with me. I don’t need the protection or the ship-’

‘-did you leave Namjoon?’ Yoongi demands, his voice softening as he takes a few steps forward.

‘They were- Yoongi, they were there,’ Jimin looks tiny, sitting on the clear floors. ‘Nineti, Yyna.’

‘What?’

It’s shocking to hear their names again- but somehow, deep down, Yoongi’s isn’t too surprised.

‘They were there. They didn’t know me. But they were there- because they heard me. And I couldn’t- I couldn’t save them before; and Namjoon was there and I couldn’t- I couldn’t let that happen to him,’ Jimin looks down, ‘The way I couldn’t save you.’

Yoongi kneels in front of Jimin again, taking his hands in his. Jimin’s head remains bowed.

‘Sunshine, look at me,’ Yoongi whispers against Jimin’s knuckles. ‘Please?’

It takes a moment, but Jimin looks up.

‘I said I would take you home. Promised, that I would take you home.’ Yoongi says, ‘I made that promise when we first met. And now, this time around, I’m going to keep it.’

Jimin is starting to shake his head.

‘You’re so strong,’ Yoongi says gently, ‘You’re so strong, and kind, and gentle, and beautiful.’

Jimin’s eyes close, tears clinging to his lashes.

‘Don’t tell me to leave.’
Jimin’s breath escapes him in shudders.

‘Yoongi I-’ Jimin whisper leaves him like a sob as he pulls his hands out of Yoongi’s, ‘-I can’t lose everyone again. I can’t lose you.’

There’s a sudden groaning sound, startling them both to their cores. Yoongi is quick to push Jimin down, covering him with his own body.

‘What-‘

‘It’s the driller,’ Yoongi whispers quietly. ‘It’s moving.’

‘There’s more-‘

The head of the drill-head ship splits open revealing a massive opening. Mechanical arms and rigs extend out, with cables and magnetized straps unfurling to wrap around the Užkulisai.

‘They’re taking the ship,’ Yoongi whispers.

Like a dinosaur from Ancient Earth footage, Yoongi watches as the massive drill-head reassembles as though it hadn’t split open to swallow whole a massive expedition-class ship.

They wait a while and no sound is heard, no movement seen or felt. Yoongi pushes himself off just little, looking down at Jimin.

‘I can’t promise you that you won’t lose me,’ Yoongi says quietly. ‘You cannot promise me I won’t lose you either.’

Jimin doesn’t look at him. His eyes are fixed where the Užkulisai had previously crash landed.

‘We both know it doesn’t work that way,’ Yoongi gently turns Jimin’s head to face him.

‘And I know, that there are things you cannot say. Things that you will have to do. Things I will have to do. And neither of us can control any of those things,’ Yoongi smiles, leaning down to bump noses softly. ‘If I could, we wouldn’t be in here, in some shitty situation where one of us is always injured or in pain- I mean, I could do with less of that.’

Jimin’s lips twitch as though fighting a smile.

‘We would be somewhere else, far away, just the two of us. A nice house, near some woods? Do you like lakes? Shore line?’

‘I like the ocean,’ Jimin answers after a few seconds.

‘Okay, near the ocean, a nice wooded area behind the house,’ Yoongi smiles, ‘It’s just the two of us there. A pretty place where you can watch the sunrise, and I can watch my sunshine.’

Jimin giggles, looking both embarrassed and amused before his face sort of twitches and the tears that were threatening to pour out finally do.

Yoongi carefully draws his fingers along the short strands of Jimin’s hair.

‘I know you want to protect me. Protect us, protect your planet, your people.’ Yoongi says clearly, ‘And you believe it is your duty. Just yours. But it’s not. If I am tied to you, or fated to you, or something like that, then let it be so- I don’t care.’
Jimin blinks rapidly, squeezing out his tears as though hoping to see better.

‘It doesn’t matter to me- if you are the Fate of Menigišiti for your people then,’ Yoongi shrugs with a grin, ‘I don’t think I qualify under that? I’m not a citizen from there.’

Jimin chuckles.

‘But I know that the way I am tied to you, the way I am yours is different,’ Yoongi whispers, wiping away the wet patches along Jimin’s face.

‘I am yours. I am not the Red Evil’s. I don’t belong to them. I am not the Omhlophe’s, I am not the GI’s- or the GLA, or the GIU. I don’t belong to the Fate of the Menigišiti. I belong to you.’

Jimin raises his hands, fingers gently tracing his features.

‘Yoongi.’

‘Yes.’

‘I’m sorry.’

‘I’m sorry too,’ Yoongi replies quietly.

Yoongi quietly gets up, pushing himself off of Jimin.

‘We need to get to the surface,’ Yoongi says as he helps Jimin up. ‘If the Omhlophe are gone- we have a better chance at regrouping.’

Jimin nods quietly.

‘I saw a cavern with mining Transporters on my way here- I think we can use one of those to get out of here,’ Yoongi continues. ‘We can use it to get out.’

Jimin nods again but this time he tugs a little at their entwined hands, stopping him.

‘Yoongi – I’m sorry I tried to-‘ Jimin breathes out in a choked way, ‘I should have- should have-‘

‘Shh,’ Yoongi presses his lips to Jimin’s forehead, ‘It’s too much.’

Jimin looks up at him, curious.

‘This is too much for you, and it’s okay to admit that,’ Yoongi says quietly. ‘You’ve just…woken up, here, out of your home, away from what you’ve known your whole life. This is… this is too much, and it’s okay.’

Jimin sort of blinks in a dazed way, surprised to hear it said to him almost.

‘It’s okay to be overwhelmed- you’ve…you’ve learnt so much,’ Yoongi sort of chuckles, ‘Kinda like how I did too; it’s too much, and that’s okay.’

Jimin looks small, lost, and in a way that is almost physically palpable to Yoongi, incredibly homesick.

‘Let’s get out of here first okay?’ Yoongi kisses his forehead, ‘Let’s find the others.’

‘And then?’ Jimin looks up, desperation in his tone.
'And then we go home.’

Jimin nods after a few seconds, his hand tightening around Yoongi’s.

‘We’ll need to move quickly. You’re still okay to move?’ Yoongi asks, taking small step back to look over Jimin.

‘I can,’ Jimin nods, clearing his throat and gives Yoongi a small smile.

‘Okay, let’s go.’

Sk’jin is still fuming under his breath.

Hoseok worriedly checks the windows and surveillance for any sign of the Omhlophe. But none appear again. This was unsettling. Why would they just abandon chase?

‘Grisial isn’t allowing me to broadcast a search,’ Sk’jin angrily spits out. ‘Not to mention, this NaviLet is still pretty bust and Grisial’s public channel is not pleased with having me snoop.’

‘We’ll get to a deck and it’ll be better-‘

‘Oh yes?’ Sk’jin snaps, ‘Get to deck and what? Get arrested? Or worse be swarmed by the fucking massive ship that literally fucked us into this asteroid?’

Sk’jin waves the NaviLet around hazardously.

Hoseok grimaces.

‘This is the dumbest thing we’ve done. And that includes everything we’ve done- which I might remind you, is not the best track record in the Universe!’ Sk’jin hisses. ‘Not only have we lost Jimin. Yoongi could be dead for all we know, and Namjoon is on his way to be recycled somewhere. The icing over all of this is that we’ve lost Taeh’yung- who has many times proclaimed his desire to explode moons. What the fuck are we going to do? Oh yeah! Go to the fucking deck-‘

‘Sk’jin please-‘ Hoseok grits out tersely. ‘What do you suggest we do? Go back inside and try to start up the Užkuliasi while that drilling ship lurches overhead? Go look for everyone else completely blind and defenseless?’

Hoseok can feel Sk’jin’s glare.

‘We need to get Kookie to safety,’ Hoseok bites out, only half-truthful in his reasoning. ‘The Omhlophe were in Ynqaba for a reason. From what we know of what Jungkook has said, and what we can surmise, they’re looking for the eggs and Jungkook could be one of those.’

There’s no response from Sk’jin. And maybe it’s a cheap shot- but it was effective. Sk’jin was clearly very protective over Jungkook. And well, Hoseok has been trained to use whatever he can in order to survive and succeed.
Because yes. Sk’jin was right. This was incredibly dumb. He was making an extremely risky move with a very small percentage for success. But if it worked out. Well, that was another worry to stress over later.

‘Left tunnel after this turn,’ Sk’jin announces.

He was still irritated, but mainly anxious. Hoseok mulls over the events carefully.

The GI agents found them. The Omhlophe agents found them.

Despite the fact that they were practically invisible, these two separate bodies of Beings found them. Hoseok did not doubt Jimin’s technology- he checked it many times over himself. Did the GI and Omhlophe have technology that could counter Jimin’s? Or were they able to track them using another method?

‘There’s a recorded message. Or at least an attempt at a call through the Comm that didn’t fully make it through but I downloaded it before I purged Lisai,’ Sk’jin comments, breaking the temporary silence.

Without preamble, Sk’jin plays it out.

The quality is shit, but Hoseok instantly recognizes Namjoon’s voice.

‘Jimin- hey listen…-hey listen to me- you’ll be all right, you just …- wake up okay? Just open y-…- look at me.’

Namjoon was clearly awake and uninjured. Maybe the same could not be said for Jimin.

‘See? It’s me- it’s just me…-we’re fine-…- breathe with me okay? Just breathe with me.’ Namjoon’s voice is distant for a while, the lines dying only to be replaced by white noise. ‘…mewhere?…- you’re safe, okay?’

Jimin was disoriented. Injured? Hoseok’s mind whirls.

‘You’re just in a Transporter, …- with some agents around, we’re safe-…- have medical supply. See? They’ve bandaged you up alr-…- re important aren’t you? Little prince right?’

The line cuts abruptly at that.

‘Little prince,’ Sk’jin repeats quietly.

Namjoon was trying to say something. This message was clearly sent, knowing that they would pick it up.

‘They’re both okay at least,’ Sk’jin frowns. ‘The GI didn’t hurt them. Treated them in fact.’

Yoongi sometimes liked to call Jimin your majesty. Referring him to a sort of royalty since the beginning.

‘Something’s up about the GI,’ Sk’jin says quietly. ‘Maybe… maybe not all of them are… are what they seem.’

‘What do you mean?’ Hoseok asks.

‘When… when I was there. In that place,’ Sk’jin’s tone is distant. ‘It was just Memory. There is something- something strange about what they discovered in that Akramanese ship- or Red Evil
ship—whatever the fuck you want to call it. There’s something different about them—and something different with the GI—and something very very different with Yoongi.’

‘Okay,’ Hoseok says slowly. ‘What are you theories—?’

‘—right turn and straight up,’ Sk’jin cuts across before saying, ‘Taeh’yung was telling me—that we need to contact Zitao again. But now that I really think about it, I’m not sure how much they can help.’

‘Why do you think that?’

‘I—. I lived with him. With them. For a while.’ Sk’jin says slowly, like he was carefully putting his words together. ‘And I think that they are as lost as we are. But…”

‘But?’

‘But I think they found each other. And they—they don’t want to lose that again.’ Sk’jin says, his tone delicate.

‘You’re saying we shouldn’t approach them?’ Hoseok frowns. The amount of information they were able to receive by one interaction had helped them in light-years of progress.

‘I’m saying that I don’t think we should pull them back into this, after what happened.’ Sk’jin says with a sort of finality in his tone.

‘Okay.’

‘Okay?’ Sk’jin sounds stunned. And rightfully so. ‘You know you’re being a little suspicious.’

‘Isn’t that the basis of our relationship.’

‘What relationship.’

‘Ouch.’ Hoseok snorts.

‘We’re almost there. I hope you know what you’re doing because you clearly don’t want to tell me.’ Sk’jin says, his tone edging on nervous.

Hoseok doesn’t reply, his skin prickling with anxiety.

‘Did you hear that—?’ Jungkook suddenly asks.

The tunnel behind them explodes in a burst of crystal shards, white dust, and force.

Sk’jin yelps out a strangled shriek, clearly very involuntary by how rapidly he shuts himself up.

‘Fuck—fuck—’ he curses.

It’s similar to the massive drill-headed ship that had burst over the Užkulisai in the caverns below. Hoseok curses alongside Sk’jin, desperately speeding up as the massive drilling head skewers the entire massive tunnel haphazardly like some injured beast.

‘Jungkook! Sit down!’ Sk’jin orders, ‘Those won’t scratch that thing!’

Hoseok can see ahead, their opening.
'Fuck-' they narrowly dodge a massive crystal rock that lands just feet behind them as they rapidly shoot up the dusty slope.

‘Fuck Hoseok get us out faster-!’ Sk’jin yells.

‘I’M DOING THAT-‘ Hoseok yells back, having to zigzag through the falling rocks as the drill-head collides heavily against the walls, disappearing for a short moment before bursting overhead too close for comfort.

‘Fuck fuck- I fucking hate this so much-’ Sk’jin is chanting under his breath. Hoseok’s not sure but he thinks he hears Jungkook exclaim out excitedly. Hoseok is vaguely worried for Jungkook’s idea of fun.

The drill-head dives down, right behind them, making them lurch forward in a surprising twist of events.

They burst over the edge of the tunnel opening and out of the dusty whirlwind they were trapped in, bursting out into massive clearing strewn with random mining gear and machinery. Hastily abandoned Transporters and Ships were strewn about. And looming over them against a chaotic mess of emergency lights, fragmented ships like shrapnel flung across the previously untainted beauty of Grisial, is a massive Yisheng ship.

‘Hoseok what the fuck did you do-‘ Sk’jin roars from the back. But Hoseok is a little too busy to answer as he sharply turns the Spardyti away from the dangerous spinning drill-head of the Omhlophe ship.

Two other drill-headed ship erupt out, all headed for them.

‘-s this Hoseok of the Užkulisai-02?’

Hoseok can feel Sk’jin’s accusatory glare against the back of his head.

‘No- this is Sk’jin, Hoseok is a little busy right now making up lies,’ Sk’jin hisses, ‘Pray, may I ask who this is?’

Hoseok grits his teeth, backing them and turning the Spardyti away from the drill-heads upwards past the tunnel they just exploded out of.

‘This is Amme, Sk’jin. It’s nice to hear from you again.’

‘You’re such a little bitch-!’ Sk’jin hisses before saying, ‘Yes, the same to you Yisheng Amme. I hope you are doing well. Fuck I hate you so much you fucking shifter! Enough of the pleasantries Yisheng- if you might, you know, help us out? I hope this was your fucking plan you fucking fuck-‘

‘If you would kindly lead them to me.’

‘What-?’

Hoseok cannot believe his eyes.

Standing towards the top of the massive crystal rock slope, the bright light of Grisial’s asteroids clustered all around her stood Amme.

Even from this distance her presence is overwhelming.

‘Fucking Spaces-‘ Sk’jin curses.
Hoseok steers them straight for the Yisheng.

All 3 drill-headed ships burst out, diving forward.

It’s the eeriest image Sk’jin has witnessed for a while.

Leaving behind her wake a surprised and slow fan of crystal dust, Amme darts forward, her many arms folded behind her.

‘She’s fucking firing herself at us-!’ Sk’jin screeches.

The lengths of the abilities and skills Yishengs had with their ability to channel or use surrounding life-force varied amongst themselves. The older you were as a Yisheng, the more powerful you became. And from what Hoseok knows, Amme has been around for a long time.

Just at the last second, Hoseok sharply steers them to the left just as Amme shoots past. The force of her speed shaking the Spardyti, and to Hoseok’s absolute terror, thin but deadly sharp sheets of crystals peel off of the surface of this massive asteroid in her wake.

The Spardyti swivels, coming to lurching stop just in time for them to witness the crystal sheets expand in size and speed, bearing down on the drill-head ships. Amme comes to an unnaturally abrupt halt and not a second later, the massive drill-head ships collapse in heaps all around her.

There’s a clawing hand around Hoseok’s shoulder, Sk’jin’s fingers digging into Hoseok’s collarbones.

‘So, wanna tell me why you fucking called Amme, the Yisheng to our location?’ Sk’jin snarls in his ear and it’s actually terrifying. ‘I always suspected that one of us might be in with the Special Jury- you played us really good Ngfy’widan.’

Hoseok really wouldn’t put Sk’jin past literally murdering him right now.

‘According to the timeline we were able to collect, we are missing information that only one Being could possibly have,’ Hoseok says calmly as Amme starts to walk towards them. The Yisheng ship slowly pulls up above her. ‘Amme was there with Yoongi. She clearly investigated Yoongi’s statement, his report. She was also involved with the Panel sent to treaty with Jimin’s System even if she wasn’t part of it. She was part of the delegation. I know this is risky Sk’jin- but trust me-‘

‘Why the fuck should I trust you?’ Sk’jin sounds so appalled at the very idea.

Hoseok turns his head slightly to look the Khol’isa straight in the eyes.

‘You can kill me later if this doesn’t work.’ Hoseok tells him steadily. ‘But for now, please… please believe me.’

Sk’jin doesn’t waver, doesn’t look away- doesn’t even blink.

A pair of hands gently pull Sk’jin back. Jungkook’s eyes are wide as he watches them.

Sk’jin doesn’t say anything when he follows Hoseok out of the Spardyti.

‘Also, I’m not in league with any members of the Special Jury,’ Hoseok adds.

Sk’jin doesn’t even look at him. Instead he stands in front of Jungkook, as though hoping to hide him from view.
Amme is terrifying tall in all honesty. Hoseok can’t quite shake off the strange primal fear in him whenever he looks at her.

The Khemsa were such a unique species- more predatory than anyone was comfortable acknowledging. Hoseok hasn’t had any experience outside of meeting with Amme when it came to her species. And he’s more than happy at that.

Jungkook steps out from behind Sk’jin to stare up at Amme, eyes wide as she approaches.

Three pairs of silvery eyes blink down at Hoseok.

He can’t help but shudder.

‘I received your message. I have come alone. Or-‘ one her arms gestures above her. ‘-with my personnel. You were difficult to find out here. A wondrous thing, being untraceable.’

*What? Amme couldn’t track them?*

‘I don’t trust you,’ Sk’jin spits out, eyes narrowed.

‘I am aware,’ Amme bows her bald head as though in apology. ‘We have not done much to gain the trust of the Khol’isa, let alone you Sk’jin of the Bloodmoon.’

Sk’jin’s eyes flare.

There’s a sudden cracking sound- sharp like thunder and somehow ancient sounding. But it’s not coming from below their feet like Hoseok was used to. Rather it seemed to echo out from all around them.

There’s a sudden violent flare of neon green- all of Grisial’s light turns bright green as a hollow voice rings out, shapes forming the voice.

‘**WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE-**’

Hoseok feels himself being dragged aside roughly just as Taeh’yung suddenly appears before them like a bolt of lightning, standing right in front of Amme.

‘What are you doing here little one?’ Taeh’yung asks, head tilted curiously.

‘I could ask you the same, the Fifth of the First,’ Amme replies, nonplussed by how the air is green.

As though in delayed reaction, the ground cracks seconds later, chips flying up around the two. The reflections on the shards show more than just Taeh’yung and Amme as the green light intensifies.

‘You’ve made Jinnie upset,’ Taeh’yung sing-songs.

Hoseok is alarmed at how the ground begins to vibrate and tremble. Sk’jin is pushing Hoseok and Jungkook behind himself.

‘Tae-‘ Sk’jin tries desperately, real fear pushing into his voice as he addresses the Zhak’gri.

‘Taeh’yung I’m fine-‘

‘Tsk tsk,’ Taeh’yung’s voice echoes, ‘I thoughthhhtt wwwweeeetttt aaaaaaauuuuuuuuuuuuuugggggghhhhttttt tttttttttttttt tttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttt
Taeh’yung’s voice echoes slow the same way his hands move slowly, veined copper and shining bright with shapes in vibrant green crossing all over. To Hoseok’s absolute alarm, Taeh’yung has actually stretched up to Amme’s height, his features lengthening.

A Heliord blade handle flies through and smacks Taeh’yung right against the side of his face.

The Zhak’gri’s head turns- his expression is wild- a grin unnaturally wide stretches over his face.

But almost just as suddenly, Taeh’yung returns to normal just as strangely as he had appeared before them.

Hoseok’s ears are ringing from the pressure, stumbling backwards from the strange seized restraint over his body.

‘JIMINIIIIIIEEE!!’ Taeh’yung squeals, running away and over towards the back.

Amme coughs, blood splattering through her slightly exposed glass-like teeth. Sk’jin is panting for air and Jungkook pushes past them, hurrying past them.

‘Where did you find him?’ Amme asks, eyes blinking out blood.

‘…here and there,’ Sk’jin pants out.

Finally gaining control over his body, Hoseok turns to find Jimin and Yoongi. Behind them a mining Transporter of sorts. They both look terrible, visibly coloured in blood and crystal dust. Taeh’yung has just dropped Jimin to hug Yoongi who doesn’t even try to fight it, eyes focused on Amme.

Jungkook reaches Jimin, hugging him tight, his face pushed to his neck. Jimin looks completely disheveled, even from this distance Hoseok can immediately tell his profound confusion at what he was witnessing.

‘You have recovered many odd ones.’

Recovered?

‘One of them was hand-picked by your lot so you can’t say much,’ Sk’jin snaps before adding, ‘Where the fuck is Namjoon?’

Amidst everything else, Hoseok had entirely forgotten about Namjoon.

As Jimin and Yoongi approach, with a lot of apprehension and confusion, it’s the first question Jimin asks.

‘Where is Namjoon?’

‘Oh Spaces how could we have lost that tall idiot?’ Sk’jin sighs as he slaps the NaviLet aggressively against his palm before angrily chucking it down on the ground.

‘I do not sense Namjoon here,’ Amme voices out quietly, adding to Jimin's increasing look of worry.

‘What? Pa?’ Taeh’yung looks so distraught and childish, and so entirely normal that Hoseok wonders if he had just hallucinated what he saw. But the cracks on the ground and the continued bleeding from Amme’s nostrils as well as bloodied tears were there to remind Hoseok of what just happened 2 minutes ago.
‘We can track him-‘
‘-did you fucking poison us again you squat bastard-‘
‘-we-…we should go-‘ Jimin says hesitantly. ‘It’s not…it’s not safe. Not here I-‘
‘Hey, listen you tiny punk-‘

‘Jimin believes with good reason that the Omhlophe are able to sense and track him,’ Yoongi says tersely, not looking at Amme. ‘We believe it’s how they got to us here.’

‘Oh for fuck’s sake why am I here-‘

‘It would be for the best if we leave aboard my ship,’ Amme cuts across, dabbing at her many bleeding points with the ends of her Yisheng robes. ‘I can take you where you need for the next step of your journey.’

‘What about Namjoon?’ Sk’jin demands. ‘Where the fuck is he? Weren't you with him? How are you here?’ he pointedly asks Jimin. Yoongi’s about to answer but Sk’jin cuts him off with a hand, ‘No- I’m asking Little Prince here. Where’s Namjoon?’

‘The- the Omhlophe over-number us. Me, Namjoon- and…and-the GI,’ Jimin stops, opening his mouth and then closing, before continuing on, ‘In short- short explanation, the Omhlophe only want me. Not Namjoon, not GI- not anyone. Just me.’

‘Oh Spaces, why is everyone so noble,’ Sk’jin hisses, slapping his own face, 'You fucking took off, hoping to draw those white-shits away from Namjoon right?’

Jimin's head is bowed but he nods.

Sk'jin grimaces.

'So Namjoon is with the GI? And they didn't hurt him?’ Hoseok questions, 'But they tried to kill Yoongi?’

Sk’jin lowly mutters, 'I'd try to kill Yoongi too.' but it's ignored.

'I believe it's better to have this discussion inside- I do not believe your presence can be explained nor can mine,’ Amme interrupts in. ‘We are also inviting speculation and observation by standing out here in the open. Namjoon may be quite safe, if what Jimin has said and sensed is right. We may be able to reconnect with him soon, he is after all, the best the GLA had to offer.’

Everyone just stands still, eyeing Amme with apprehension.

This is when you needed Namjoon.

Hoseok grimaces and nods, taking a step forward.

Amme bows her head towards them again before turning around. Her tail drags behind her, leaving faint marks alongside clawed prints. Again, this was very unsettling.

Hoseok walks after Amme, stopping only because the others hadn’t moved yet.

Grisial somehow looks less beautiful- tarnished almost, as though the effects of those who came here tainted it somehow. It makes Hoseok’s palm burn.
He’s about to open his mouth to say something, when Sk’jin begins to walk towards him.

He’s quickly followed by Jungkook, then Taeh’yung, Jimin, and then Yoongi.

‘Can’t we ask Amme to get the Užkulisai? I’m sure we could run repairs while we’re waiting inside that,’ Sk’jin says as he nods towards the massive ship above them. A smaller Transporter was waiting for them.

‘The Užkulisai was taken by the Omhlophe,’ Yoongi reports quietly from behind them.

‘The drillers they sent after us must have been a distraction,’ Sk’jin says quietly as they all huddle together and walk. ‘They took the ship and then left while the Yisheng was preoccupied.’

‘What about others?’ Jungkook asks quietly and nervously. ‘What about Namjoon?’

‘How are two Beings from the same group getting themselves kidnapped?’ Sk’jin complains under his breath.

‘He’ll be okay,’ Taeh’yung says with so much confidence Hoseok almost believes him. ‘I got too distracted. I wanted to play, and I didn’t notice those filths and their smaller ships.’

‘Filths?’ Jimin repeats, eyebrows raised up.

‘Hm!’ Taeh’yung swings his arms. ‘Disgusting stench. Blew them apart far away.’

Jimin blanches, his feet stopping.

Yoongi pauses too, hand reaching out as though to catch Jimin.

‘You what?’ Jimin breathes out, blinking rapidly, pulling his hand out of Yoongi’s, taking a step ahead.

‘Blew them apart,’ Taeh’yung grins, a hint of madness in his eyes.

‘That ship- that ship was carrying them.’ Jimin whispers, eyes wide as he stares at Taeh’yung in shock, anger, and horror. ‘Taeh’yung that ship was-‘

‘Do you finally see it now, little one,’ Taeh’yung asks, voice low. ‘Do you see what comes from losing yourself?’

‘I gave myself to the duty I was born into!’ Jimin snaps, eyes ablaze as he takes another step closer, ‘Do not speak to me of the responsibilities that I have shouldered from the reddened darkness that stole my children through the endlessness of their Memories!’

Taeh’yung is unmoving, his gaze unwavering and gleaming.

‘I did not lose because I chose to give it away, Zhak’gri, nor did I run away,’ Jimin hisses the words straight at Taeh’yung, ‘It was taken from me.’

The silence is thick with tension, a strange sparkling anger simmered in the air and Hoseok is not sure how much he was going to be able to withstand if both Jimin and Taeh’yung lost it.

‘It was taken from me, and then it found me,’ Jimin takes a step back, the air lifting, ‘And I will take it back.’

All of the anger then strips away from Jimin.
‘I do see it now,’ Jimin adds. ‘Will you help me?’

All eyes are on Taeh’yung.

‘I made a promise to help,’ Taeh’yung grins as though Jimin hadn’t just pretty much lectured him. ‘He would want me to stick with you.’

Jimin accepts this odd answer and nods, giving the Zhak’gri a small smile before they both walk towards Amme’s Transporter.

‘What in Spaces-‘ Sk’jin begins as Jungkook nervously shifts next to them.

‘Jimin said something to me,’ Yoongi says quietly out of nowhere, watching Jimin’s retreating figure.

‘He said I was bound to the Fate of the Menigišiti.’

‘Isn’t he that?’ Sk’jin asks as they walk towards the Transporter as well.

Yoongi nods.

‘What does it mean?’

‘I don’t know.’

Sk’jin exhales exasperatedly before walking forward as well. Jungkook follows him, not before shooting Hoseok a wide-eyed look.

‘It’s good to see you,’ Yoongi says out of nowhere.

‘Oh- you too,’ Hoseok replies out of reflex, a little too taken aback to say anything more.

‘I was going to call Amme myself. You did it before I could.’

‘What?’ Hoseok suddenly feels relieved. He had sent an emergency message to Amme through the NaviLet right before the Omhlophe ship had descended down on him. It was all he could think of.

‘I was thinking about it ever since—ever since I uh, woke up,’ Yoongi says quietly. ‘I think she’ll be able to tell us what’s happened during the time I was, well not awake.’

‘I really hope we’re right.’
Chapter End Notes

Author’s Notes

SO
It feels weird to have time to write
Like
What is this
Idk
And thank you to all the people who commented for the previous chapter ^_^
The upcoming chapter is gonna be, mildly put, eye opening and lots of ‘OH I SEE’
Things from AMULGOE will also be answered and explained!
But I am sorry to all my readers who are/might be confused. As a writer I always try to
make my writing clear with the plot and story, and while I do want to maintain a sense
of mystery and confusion relevant to the story and how the characters are feeling I
don’t want to completely leave any of you in the blind either. I will do my best in
writing even more now, and hope that it can be more understandable and still thrilling
and entertaining.
Also welcome back Amme, my favorite character design ever.
I hope you all enjoy!!
“Equilibrium” [noun]: a state of balance in which opposing forces of influences are balanced.

Chapter Notes

ambience here!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sk’jin has never been aboard a Yisheng ship before. He’s not pleased to be here either, and every fiber in his being is opposed to this. But not getting on board meant having to face whatever mess they had encountered, created, and accelerated in Grisial. And Sk’jin does not have the back-up, health, or support for that sort of thing. He is also extremely curious as to why Hoseok felt he could contact Amme of all Beings to come to their rescue.

‘I’m sure Pa is fine,’ Taeh’yung tells him.

‘I didn’t even ask,’ Sk’jin replies dully, staring out of the small window one last time at Grisial before they enter the massive Hangar awaiting them.

Another mess Sk’jin has no idea how they’re going to escape or even solve. He glances at Jimin who looks at the destruction scattered around the region of Grisial they have previously been in. He doesn’t look…-well, he didn’t look fine. Physically he didn’t seem injured. He seemed weighed down though. The determination that he had after his meeting with JD is gone, replaced only with what Sk’jin can very easily identify as guilt.

‘He’ll be fine,’ Taeh’yung repeats again.

Sk’jin can only glare.

Namjoon was the least of his immediate worry right now. And sure it was terrible that he was inconveniently kidnapped by a bunch of rogue GI agents who undoubtedly had some strange plans for him and-

Sk’jin frowns at himself.

Fine he was worried about Namjoon. He was injured and greatly under-handed (no pun intended) and was taken away by some very questionable Beings for unknown purposes. Of course Sk’jin is worried.
Not just about Namjoon but also about Jimin.

Sk’jin believed (still does) that Jimin was hiding something important from them. To what degree or extent Sk’jin’s not sure. But there was something definitely going on. But it’s always felt like Jimin had a firm grasp of what happened, what was happening, and what he was going to do. And now it seemed almost as though Jimin was entirely disarmed from what he thought was happening. And Sk’jin doesn’t know if he should find this discomfiting or simply a terrible possibility that they managed to overlook.

Sk’jin is also worried about Yoongi. There was something **definitely wrong** with the Human. Sk’jin’s not sure how to even address or think about Yoongi anymore. It was strange to think about him as two separate Beings. This wasn’t even like what he and Zitao had had anything to do with. Sk’jin is worried about Jungkook. Here was an entirely innocent Being, marked and labeled a threat as well as an anomaly—a Being of interest for nearly every single piece of shit involved in this situation. Yet here they were, merrily strolling their way inside Amme’s ship.

**This is incredibly stupid** a voice that sounds too much like Namjoon’s says.

Sk’jin is also worried about Yoongi. There was something **definitely wrong** with the Human. Sk’jin’s not sure how to even address or think about Yoongi anymore. It was strange to think about him as two separate Beings. This wasn’t even like what he and Zitao had shared— if anything it reminds Sk’jin of something that he is definitely not comfortable thinking about. Especially here inside a Yisheng’s ship.

Then of course there’s Hoseok. Sk’jin cannot for the life of him, fathom why Hoseok would choose to reach out to Amme. Not that they had many options within the Special Jury. Sk’jin shudders to think about what would happen if he reached out to K’mara. Probably would end up being poisoned for real unlike what Yoongi liked to regularly do to them. Definitely a shared trait amongst the strangest of aliens across the Known Universe.

Sk’jin remembers reading a passage from “The Six-Hands of Our Love” that read ‘**poison is the most romantic of weapons**’. Sk’jin doesn’t think Yoongi intended to woo any of them while lacing their drinks with rare radioactive atoms. And K’mara for certain had no inclination of romancing anyone who had the misfortune of having tea with her.

But back to the main topic at hand.

Of course Sk’jin doesn’t believe Hoseok is actually some informant. It’s actually an idea that Sk’jin has long abandoned. Not because he thinks any of them are truly worthy of trust, but simply because none of them were cruel enough to be informants in a mission of this magnitude. Cruel enough, or simply put, naïve enough.

Then of course there’s Taeh’yung. Sk’jin isn’t worried **for** Taeh’yung per se. Rather he’s worried what the Zhak’gri might do. There was that expected level of unpredictability the Zhak’gri possessed sure. But there was something incredibly unsettling about his actions recently. His announcement of having destroyed the Omhlophe ship despite the fact that they learnt from Hoseok about it carrying other “eggs”. And how Taeh’yung had lovingly called them his **babies**. He coddled and babied Jungkook, and even Yoongi.

The Transporter they’re in lands quietly, with a small jolt as it locks into the landing frame. They all stare at Hoseok as though waiting for his move. Hoseok does not look pleased to find himself as the replacement for Namjoon.

Amme exits first, her tall frame unfurling in a strangely stiff but fluid movement. To Sk’jin’s somewhat alarm, and Jungkook’s absolute awe, a strange slithery creature is waiting for the Yisheng and climbs up her frame, draping itself over her shoulders. It’s completely black, with deep red scales that in certain angles gleam ominously. Its milky-white eyes suggest its blind, but
Sk’jin would definitely not cross this creature. Clearly this was a creature native to the Khhemsa and was probably a (somewhat) tamed companion.

Somehow it felt weird that Yisheng’s would have pets. Especially ones that look like Amme. Sk’jin makes a mental note to rethink his personal biases.

Sk’jin automatically grasps both Jungkook’s and Taeh’yung’s collars before they can even take a step forward towards the now softly hissing creature. Both Taeh’yung and Jungkook give him some form of a sullen pout. Sk’jin feels the intense desire to box their ears.

‘If you will follow me,’ Amme gestures with one of her arms.

There aren’t a lot of Beings so far as Sk’jin can tell. Most of them were Yisheng-in-training, wearing the simpler versions of the robes Yishengs normally wore. Sk’jin notes that there are more androids than living Beings. Also a lot of CleanBots. Sk’jin is more than certain that Namjoon would’ve tripped over one.

*This is madness* a voice that sounds like Namjoon’s says very tiredly in the back of his mind. Sk’jin could do with less of this thanks.

For some reason, without even saying a thing, they walk in a way where Jungkook and Jimin are in the center. Hoseok takes the lead, while Jungkook walks right next to Jimin who is behind Hoseok. Yoongi walks a little behind Jimin, shadowing his movement and Taeh’yung is doing chaotic wide strides on the other side, randomly speeding up to say something to Hoseok or hold Jungkook’s hand. Sk’jin follows at the back giving Jungkook small reassuring (he hopes) smiles as they follow Amme deeper inside.

‘We will be headed for warp soon,’ Amme says from the front. ‘We will need to brace ourselves inside the lift.’

Hoseok turns, as though checking to see if they all got the news. Everyone nods back as though in affirmation. Hoseok gives him a pointed look and Sk’jin, instinctively, blows him a kiss. Hoseok actually smirks and winks back at him. If this had been Namjoon, the Kutsoglerin would have rolled his eyes or given him a really? look and Sk’jin would have probably continued to blow him kisses.

*Oh Spaces do I actually miss that idiot* Sk’jin grimaces at himself. Great, he has no outlet for his anxiety. Hoseok was way too fast thinking to tease, Jimin too sweet, Yoongi too…Yoongi, and Jungkook too innocent. And with Taeh’yung he might actually try to make-out with Sk’jin and that’s not the result he was headed for.

Sk’jin sighs, making Jimin look around in worry.

‘I’m sorry,’ he says quietly, taking a small step back to walk alongside Sk’jin. ‘I should have stayed with Namjoon.’

His head is lowered, his shoulders curled in. Just like Yoongi, he’s covered head to toe in Grisial crystal dust. He looks like the epitome of misery and hopelessness.

Sk’jin sighs again before bringing his arm around Jimin’s shoulders and giving him a small squeeze.

‘I’m sure he’ll be fine. What could they benefit from killing him?’

It’s probably not the best thing he could have said and Jimin is obviously not at all placated by this.
Even Jungkook seems to think this was not the right thing to say as he gives Sk’jin a wide-eyed look. Great, he was being reprimanded by the baby of the crew. Sk’jin sighs again.

Jimin’s shoulders seem to weigh down even more.

Amme doesn’t seem to be bothered by the heavy atmosphere that follows her into the wide seated lift. Everyone secures themselves in and Amme makes sure everyone is secured in before she also takes a seat back.

The elevator starts to move, and Sk’jin guesses they hit warp as the band of lights above the doorway quietly change from green to blue. It’s admittedly a heavy and awkward silence. No one says a thing, even when the strange creature from around Amme’s shoulders slithers down to the floor, coiling around their feet before stopping in front of Taeh’yung.

It coils upwards, gleaming body poised and great blunt head in level with Taeh’yung’s face. There’s a moment of panic when Sk’jin is terrified that either Taeh’yung or the creature will strike forwards. But there’s nothing. The creature lowers itself to the floor and makes it way towards Jimin before settling around his feet.

Jimin doesn’t really notice, though his eyes are on the floor, the top of his shorn head visible. He must have lost his beanie somewhere inside that fucking asteroid.

It’s a very painful 3 minutes before they finally come to a stop.

They all follow Amme out and into a large atrium. The massive windows are glowing faintly with filtered warp light. This somewhat makes Sk’jin feel better. Amme guides them to a great curved table with comfortable seats around it. She sits down and they follow her actions. Cups of ionized-water were already laid out at the table. Sk’jin notes that there’s an extra cup opposite his own. It’s not lost on Jimin either who eyes the empty spot next to him with diminished eyes.

‘I’m aware that you are all tired,’ Amme begins without preamble. ‘However, I believe it is better if we discuss matters at hand first before we set about to your recovery.’

‘Yisheng Amme,’ Yoongi says suddenly to everyone’s surprise, ‘You know me.’

‘I do,’ Amme nods her great head in an elegant manner. ‘There is a lot that I have to tell you. You, and everyone else here.’

‘You told me that this mission would answer my questions,’ Yoongi states.

There is no accusation in his voice, instead a sort of monotony Sk’jin is used to from GI Yoongi.

‘I did,’ Amme replies.

‘You said, “You are a Being with no direct goal or inhibition. By attending this mission you will make sure that the mission is a success- and that no one single member gains the upper-hand. These Beings have been brought in as pawns. To move about as their masters would.”’ Yoongi quotes, seemingly word for word.

It’s funny to think that Amme would have said that about Yoongi to Yoongi himself; especially with Jimin in the picture. Every single cell in Yoongi was inhibited by his dedication to Jimin. He was practically living for Jimin and nothing else.

Somehow this draws a shiver down Sk’jin’s back in a strange way.
‘You lied to me,’ Yoongi continues, ‘You knew Jimin would be here.’

Of course Yoongi had been Amme’s selection so she had known Yoongi quite extensively before this. This connection, amongst other things, was what made Sk’jin suspicious of Yoongi in the beginning. Of course that was long forgotten seeing how disgustingly whipped the Human was. It’s still odd having to hear it like this. Especially after somewhat knowing of Yoongi’s past, Amme’s apparent involvement with the Treaty between the GLA and Jimin’s System.

Amme turns her gaze towards Jimin. ‘Can you help me tell this story? It is not all mine to say.’

Jimin looks up at Amme briefly before looking at all of them around the table. He opens his mouth briefly then closes it.

He nods once, lowering his gaze and head once again.

There’s a loud slurping sound and all eyes turn to look at Jungkook and Taeh’yung, both with empty cups in their hands, wet mouths, and wide apologetic eyes at having been loud.

Hoseok reaches over and places Jungkook’s cup over the circle it had been placed in. The cup refills and Jungkook’s eyes nearly pop out of his head as he watches.

‘Let us begin.’ Amme announces.

Next to him, Hoseok sits up a little straighter, eyes focused and alert.

‘The birth of the Universe and of Life as we know of it now, started at the very center,’ Amme starts rather unexpectedly. Jimin seems to close his eyes. ‘Yisheng tore their way through–’

‘they ran away,’ Taeh’yung cuts in unexpectedly as he fiddles around with his cup. Without turning his head but simply glancing towards Amme he repeats, ‘Yisheng ran away.’

‘Yisheng ran away and came to a Being here,’ Amme corrects herself. ‘Here, Yisheng became here, and Here, he brought with him Continuum. Because with Continuum, there is no end.’

It is a cycle that exists beyond the realm of existence – beyond the realm of Matter and Time and Space. A cycle that Is. A cycle that is continuum.

‘And the First Children were born,’ Amme explains. ‘The First Children wove Matter through Time, pushed the Darkness into music and formed Space. The First Children began this cycle, letting themselves live the End so that they could form the Beginning anew.’

A cycle that unapologetically moves forward. Because where there is a beginning, there is always an end. Where there is an end, there is always a beginning.

‘All was well,’ Amme says quietly, ‘But not quite. The First Children Slept, their being seeped through the Matter that they wove, Time took them and pushed them into Darkness and into music, and then into Space. Life continued, and in Continuum they were reborn. Every single one of us are born of this Continuum. Evolving with Time, living with Darkness, dying with Music, together in this Space. And this Continuum continued, and we knew what it meant to be Alive. And Yisheng watched – the First Children slept, but Yisheng watched. Watched as the very fear they ran away from formed in this Continuum they had so carefully nurtured transformed into a continuation of disease, hatred, death, violence, and chaos.’

‘And Yisheng punished Continuum,’ Amme’s eyes turn to address Sk’jin. ‘Punished cruelly what was meant to live to a lifetime of nightmares.’
Sk’jin grimaces in reply.

She glances at Taeh’yung who was playing some sort of finger-flicking game with Jungkook over the table and says, ‘Punished cruelly the natural evolution of what would be to extinction and non-form.’

‘Punished cruelly the gentle harmony of a promise into hiding,’ she says almost tenderly to Jimin who still doesn’t look up.

‘The Universe wept and continued to push through. Because that was what was meant to happen. This is a Continuum and we live in this Cycle- what was will be again and what pain was born will be reborn again. Yisheng withdrew from this Continuum, leaving those who would take the name of Yisheng for their own to care for what could not be controlled anymore.’ Amme pauses, ‘The First Children, with the exception of a few, continued to Sleep as part of this Continuum- some simply remained, and some stole away to hide from the punishment of Yisheng. And so we lived, and so we continued, and so it went on and on. Continuum spread, grew larger, wider, stronger, and Alive. But the anger and pain of the Yisheng lived on in a few. And they gathered those who were likeminded, those who could be influenced, so that they could renew Continuum- to overwhelm the Known Universe in order to recreate it in the image of Yisheng’s original Dream.’

‘That’s how at one point, the GI were born, right?’ Hoseok asks with a small frown, ‘The Yishengs attempted to somehow not just recreate and clone all the Beings across the world, but also transfer their Life-force- their souls into a perfect recreation under their control.’

Amme nods.

‘They were not successful. You may think that this is a new attempt. A new venture. It is not.’ Amme states simply, ‘These attempts were made continuously by the many of the first Yishengs. Attempts that went terribly- some that made no results- or some that made results that could have ended in complete annihilation. In fact, the Zhak’gri were one of the first of many Beings who attempted this for themselves.’

Taeh’yung doesn’t seem to be paying attention, having somewhat dozed off for a while as Jungkook messes with his hair.

‘The stories are well known,’ Sk’jin supplies. ‘T’sayiti’k is historically known as cradle of Life of the Known Universe.’

‘It is the closest location to where we suspect Yisheng first came unto,’ Amme nods, ‘It is also the first System to completely die without Continuum.’

‘What does that mean?’ Sk’jin and Hoseok both ask at the same time.

‘One of the First Children purely created T’sayiti’k on their own. With no convention to Space, Time, Darkness, or Music, or even to the Yisheng as the others did,’ Amme explains, ‘T’sayiti’k was independent. Free. And of course, ruthlessly punished for this. But that was what held the key to Yisheng’s attempt to control Continuum. However, there was no way of finding or rebuilding what was already destroyed- no existence lived, that separated itself from the Continuum we exist in.’

‘Except for Menigišiti,’ Yoongi says quietly.

Amme nods.

‘Wait- so you’re saying, that Jimin and his System, is one of the…one of the First Children? This
doesn’t even make sense? I’ve never heard of the First Children before?’ Hoseok exclaims.

‘That’s because you only know of the First Children as maybe gods,’ Amme intones carefully before adding, ‘And they’ve always existed, in some way. In a different name. Or are reborn throughout Continuum as Yishengs.’

Hoseok doesn’t look appeased by this.

‘Or as some believe, the core of planets, the heart of stars – they have always continued to exist. They exist in things we cannot yet explain.’ Amme glances out of the wide windows for a moment as though pondering the depth of her own words.

Sk’jin can’t help but look at Jimin.

Was it surprising to find out that Taeh’yung was possibly one of the (some form of) First Children? Not really. In fact it made a lot of sense. But Jimin?

‘Yisheng’s dream of controlling and living in a Continuum that defied cruelty, death, and violence may sound like an idealistic notion- one that could be done,’ Amme continues, ‘This notion was sold and propagated to few, taking their utmost loyalty and devotion in believing their cause was the correct way. Many fell for this- Yishengs, officers, desperately struggling individuals and or leaders trying to save their planets, their species.’ Amme calmly folds her hands over each other. ‘Parents, fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, children- all worked towards what they felt was the truth to save their loved ones.’

Sk’jin doesn’t dare look at Hoseok at these words.

‘One of the many faults of this inherited dream was the continuous efforts in creating something new- in an effort of fulfilling this dream. You’re all aware of the hopelessly flawed Theory of Digitized Souls and the programs created and started in order to make it work. Most of you are all too intimately familiar with the repercussions of what it entailed. Programs like the Alter-Reality Expansion program which ultimately birthed what we label as the Akramanese.’

Sk’jin absentmindedly finds himself back in that ancient ship, distant echoes of a roaring shriek echoes around him, demanding WHY ARE YOU HERE?

‘This was also the program that ultimately was successful in creating what the Yishengs thought was the key to fulfilling this dream.’ Amme continues.

‘What?’ Hoseok interjects sharply. ‘You’re saying the Yisheng’s managed to create a Digitized Soul?’

‘Yisheng did. But the Digitized Soul that was created managed to lose themselves- falling away from what he knew would ultimately lead to the complete destruction of Continuum.’

‘He was beautiful,’ Taeh’yung supplies, eyes still closed, ‘Beautiful, tired- he just wanted to rest.’

Hoseok looks like he wants to ask questions but Sk’jin quietly grabs his arm with a small shake of his head.

‘We will probably never understand, or realize how it happened, what happened; and perhaps that is for the better,’ Amme concludes. ‘

‘How do you know any of this?’ Hoseok demands, ‘I appreciate the history lesson but this isn’t exactly explaining much of anything other than what happened within the Gaia Case.’
‘The Gaia Case was never properly concluded,’ Amme replies, ‘There was much that was left that needed answering, too much that was left unsolved- sorrow and horror that was too much to understand. But we who were all rooted in the case knew we needed to understand one thing. How exactly did the Akramanese come so close to this victory?’

‘Because they found us,’ Jimin says quietly.

‘When the Akramanese found “Bhumi”- that’s when they were able to make their way to victory? And that victory is creating digitized souls?’ Hoseok presses. ‘So the Akramanese were aware of what Jimin’s System really was? If this whole thing about the First Children shit is considered real.’

‘As an agent who was so closely involved with the Gaia Case and the main catalyst to expose the Venture Unit, I’m sure you were aware that the Akramanese were a discarded experiment conducted by the Yishengs who managed to resuscitate themselves?’ Amme questions though it’s more of a statement, ‘Would it make sense that the Akramanese are in fact, Yishengs who took it upon themselves to change and push themselves?’

This is definitely new information.

Even Yoongi doesn’t hide his surprise, the furrow between his brows deep.

‘The Akramanese were once Yishengs, turned and torn apart, alive only with one persistent goal in mind – to fulfill the dream. Corrupted in their Life-force, changed in every sense, but still living for one dream. And it was almost as though it was this change that allowed them to so closely nearly succeed.’ Amme pauses, rearranging her arms. ‘The myth and legend of the First Children was once popularly retold many many light years ago. And it was almost a holy scripture for those who followed the Yisheng’s dream. The Akramanese in their one-minded goal, searched for what they knew remained of the true First Children. And that is Menigišiti.

‘Wait- but we know that the GLA tried to approach them. And amongst them was Ndica who I might point out was the very Yisheng who lead this whole fucking GI operation,’ Sk’jin frowns.

Amme raises all 4 hands, the air shimmering briefly before a slit over the table opens and projects a thin light.

‘This is the dream of the Yisheng,’ she illustrates, a glowing green ring of light that pulses lightly. ‘And here is the twisted birth of the Akramanese.’ She extract a red ring of light from the green and places it opposite the green one. With one hand she illustrates out a pale silver orb in the center of these two rings. ‘Here is what they both want- a Digitized Soul, or a control mechanism that will allow them to alter and change Continuum in accordance to the dream. ‘In their individual journeys, each of these two created and destroyed and recreated what they hoped would fulfill this dream. And the most significant of these creations are the GI.’ Amme pulls down a simply black ring out of the green one. ‘Bodies, minds, and senses of carefully harvested Beings, multiplied, duplicated, and grown in hopes of fulfilling specifications and ideals of the perfect gathered Species.’

‘Noah’s Ark,’ Yoongi says quietly.

‘And this,’ Amme pulls out a white ring out of the red ring and places it opposite the GI ring. ‘This is the creation we now know as the Omhlophe. Realize that the Akramanese are the twisted and crueler versions of the Yishengs.’

‘They both seem about the same to me,’ Sk’jin says quietly.
‘You are right,’ Amme almost sounds sheepish. ‘But they each lacked what they were truly created for. The GI were no more than living bodies no more sentient than a simple cyborg. And the Omhlophe were too ruined by the chaos the Akramanese bred wherever they went. They could not find a way to instill the perfection of the dream they both sought after so desperately.’

‘This is from where the Yishengs before Ndica, following the myth and stories of the First Children, had the mind to nestle their harvest deep into the core of planets and Systems and even black-holes.’

A sudden rush of anger overtakes Sk’jin, his mind flashing with vivid images of Ynqaba, of Bhan, of Camat- of Jungkook.

‘How long have you known?’ Sk’jin demands. ‘You seem pretty well versed in all of this. How the fuck do you know all of this?’

‘Because I once believed in this dream.’

There’s an explosion of movement as everyone pushes out of their seats. Yoongi has Jimin behind him, bodily shielding him and quiet suddenly wielding double Heliods. Sk’jin finds himself being pulled away by Hoseok. Jungkook is crouched down, startled and terrified at the sudden change in atmosphere. Only Taeh’yung hasn’t moved, lazily eyeing Amme.

‘That is no longer my dream,’ Amme tells them patiently. ‘I would not see it happen.’

Somehow they all find themselves looking at Taeh’yung. He eyes them all as though confused and shrugs.

Jimin is the first to take back his seat.

Hoseok chooses the stand.

‘When I was first discovered, it was Ndica who brought me out of Khhemsa to train at the Yisheng Directory. It was here he taught me, he guided me. It was here he told me of the First Children, and of the dream. I believed in it- I believed in him. It was easy, to give into this utopia of a peaceful continuum, to exist without pain, without death, without suffering. Ndica continued to guide me, showing me his grander plans. But I was only told of how we could better the Universe if we could find a way to eradicate the root of pain. I was naïve and did not realize the extent of Ndica’s plans of controlling the Universe as we know it.’

Sk’jin can’t help but roll his eyes.

‘I understood the extent of his plans, once he took me to Axudar and told me the story of the Eclipsing Travellers.’

‘Like all planets- their view on the cosmic sky is simply a selective view of the universe from their orbit around their sun- and for many millennia they’ve always documented and observed a few stars- or unidentified cosmic bodies – from their System.’

‘Menigišiti,’ Yoongi had said quietly.

Namjoon nods, ‘I believe that’s what it is- we calculated and projected their images and documentation of the stars and yes- it fits nearly perfectly with where Megibiya is. And if as Jimin had suspected before, if his System did sometimes lose their camouflage ability, they would have been able to see the light of their sun- creating a rather eclipsing effect of visibility to observers.’
‘You think this is where maybe all those years ago, they were able to find Jimin’s System?’

‘It’s a possibility. Axudar has 3 habitable planets and they’re all a part of the GLA. For a long time. And not just that, but Ndica was born there.’ Namjoon says carefully as he taps on the screen and a planet appears instead of the ship. ‘He is a native of the planet of Kaitūtei. And I don’t want to… imply anything, but they are the original founders of one of the scientific boards that supported the Theory of Digitized Souls.’

‘Ndica believed that Menigišiti was the last of the First Children to exist in this Continuum?’ Sk’jin ventures to ask.

Amme nods.

‘It was difficult to find evidence, it was difficult to even track that region or study it. It took Ndica nearly over 8 centuries to finally find a way in. And it was almost an accident.’ Amme replies, ‘I was there when Menigišiti first opened to us- a life beyond the radioactive shield that none of us at the time could understand. And there we were able to find you.’

Jimin looks up briefly before looking down again.

‘Ndica tried his best to keep it a secret. But I knew he should not be allowed to undertake this.’

‘How awfully good of you,’ Sk’jin breathes out.

‘I contacted K’mara of the GIU,’ Amme tells them quite simply, as though this was not a big deal. So Amme and K’mara were definitely working together. Great, how absolutely comfortable and wonderful. If Namjoon were here he’d be throwing a fit.

‘K’mara immediately responded and appeared, and Ndica had no choice but to approach Menigišiti as the GLA would naturally when approaching a newly discovered System,’ Amme explains. ‘It might be worth adding, as a way of praising the Khol’isa, that K’mara was already investigating the hidden programs and agendas of the Yishengs.’

‘I take absolutely no credit in this,’ Sk’jin shrugs.

‘But were you not the one who exposed the connection of the Alliance with the Venture Unit?’ Amme glibly replies.

Sk’jin grimaces, ignoring Hoseok’s inquiring gaze.

‘The Menigišiti were not pleased to be discovered. They were not willing to sign with the GLA, and declared that they would never leave their System or attempt to reach out so long as the GLA let them be.’ Amme continues before addressing Jimin, ‘Is this correct?’

Jimin nods mutely.

‘Some centuries after this treaty was signed and the GLA left Menigišiti as it were, that is when I met Min Yoongi.’ Amme nods towards Yoongi. ‘He spoke to me, told me of what happened to him. I could not understand, nor believe what the Yisheng Tlun’hla was truly doing. The dream they shared not only divided their understanding and desires for the Universe but completely misguided each and every single one of them involved. The GI were never originally created to be weapons- Ndica, and the Yisheng Sstion had never intended for their usage to continue the birth of violence. I brought this matter forth to K’mara. And thus we started to work together to uncover the secrets of the GI, of the Yishengs, and ultimately of the Treaty.’
K’mara focused on the GI and the Yishengs- but I knew there was something more. I knew Ndica would not so easily lose what the Menigišiti System had to offer. But we were apparently too late to truly find out what happened. After meeting and talking with Yoongi, I discovered more of the GI program, and discovered the long history of their genesis. I was too late in stopping what I immediately knew was an attempt by both Ndica and Tlun’hlα to access Menigišiti when Yoongi and his selected team were sent to Bhumi. I do not think Ndica or Tlun’hlα ever suspected the Akramanese to appear there either.’

Jimin’s expression changes a little bit at that, as though confused. And Sk’jin has to work hard to control his own features.

Amme didn’t know.

Of course she didn’t.

Ndica had contacted Jimin and his System. Had told them that there was a problem, it was the reason why Jimin had even left his planet, rushing to Megibīya to protect his own. Jimin had said they suspected a trap hatched by the GLA to somehow trap them. It’s why Jimin had taken his sister’s place to approach Megibīya instead while she left to meet with Ndica on what happened. Suddenly a very cold weight drops heavily in his stomach

‘Ndica was the one who lead the late rescue to Bhumi- I managed to get myself there even though I was repeatedly denied access – I pushed through.’ Amme says gently, ‘It was there that we discovered the remains of a strange destruction- one we did not recognize before, but after that point would become frequent and synonymous to that of the Akramanese. And there I met you again Yoongi. Except you were…you were remade- remade and multiplied. And there were many others like you, in great massive recreations. I sensed such a strange creation within you- within the others- and this was when I realized that…that you were not born out of this Continuum.’

Jimin’s eyes close, as though hoping that what Amme said would simply be a dream if he closed his eyes.

‘What does that mean?’

‘All of my babies still have Memory,’ Taeh’yung interrupts, ‘Don’t make it sound like they’re aliens Amme.’

‘It means they’re not supposed to be here, not like this,’ Jimin says quietly before he continues, ‘What- what Amme has said is…is true. I believe it is.’

Everyone turns to look at Jimin, waiting quietly as he seems to gather himself to speak.

‘Menigišiti is an…is an ancient place,’ Jimin begins quietly, ‘We were born of the First Children. Hiding for safety, to protect her children. But Menigišiti sang to us, she sang and hid us within the Darkness- she spoke words of connection, of harmony, weaving us together inside. And we were born of her, created within her, connected and even if we were divided with our planets, lived as one, tied to her fate. Menigišiti wanted us to be free, to live as we wished. But she wanted to save us from what hid beyond the Darkness. And so the mother,’ Jimin says the word carefully, almost dissatisfied with it, ‘was born- our Heart that lived for harmony.’

‘And there was fate?’ Yoongi asks quietly.

Jimin nods.

‘Fate let us stay, drew us together,’ Jimin breathes out slowly, ‘Fate found us whole and safe.’
‘But you were taken from Menigišiti,’ Hoseok is trying to understand. And Sk’jin can understand why it’s difficult for Hoseok to really see what any of this meant.

This went beyond fantasy- this wasn’t some fictional entertainment wildly put together in a children’s story. This went to the heart of creation, where chaos and darkness were actual forms of power, emotion, and awareness. This was a magic that broke the laws of Continuum.

This was a place as ancient as Time itself.

‘When I was taken by the Red- by the Akramanese,’ Jimin says carefully as though it pained him. ‘I was not taken to be…to be duplicated. I was put into Darkness, so that those who were born and made out of-…out of Continuum would find me. And through me, would continue to live.’

‘They didn’t need a Digitized Soul if they had Jimin,’ Yoongi explains. ‘For those of us who were created, all we wanted was to be found. And…’

And Yoongi did, more or less, find Jimin.

‘So how was Jimin in your custody?’ Hoseok asks.

‘When the Akramanese came to Earth, and the Yishengs fought to counter them, their ship was rescued.’

Sk’jin remembers it. A rusty coloured ship the size of a small planet and shaped almost like one. He remembers how it shattered, with Earth dissipated into space dust around it.

‘And within it, unlike the others who slept there, we found Jimin at the very core.’ Amme explains. ‘I was charged by the Court to discover more. I didn’t have to look far. Because I remembered Jimin when I first went to Menigišiti with Ndica. This discovery of the beings created and harvested by the Akramanese was…it was beyond what any of us were expecting. When the Yisheng-in-training Anningan Yixing first brought to us the OrTank of zygotes, I prepared myself to expect something. But I could not fathom the extent of their creation- especially after discovering how much they made in such a short time.’

‘But they’ve been around much longer?’ Hoseok asks carefully.

‘But they only succeeded once they were able to take Jimin. What we found in their ship was what they had managed to create after they were able to form their own Continuum with Jimin in the center.’

Something clicks.

‘So that’s why those GI could find you?’ Sk’jin frowns. ‘But that doesn’t make sense- the GI were formed without any influence from Jimin-’

‘That’s because Yoongi, and some of the GI are entirely different from what you understand are the Galactic Inquisition.’ Amme explains. ‘When I arrived in Bhumi, and I found Yoongi, and others like him, Ndica was adamant in having them destroyed.’

Jimin visibly blanches at this.

‘We found 563 OrTanks. We believe the Akramanese must have left in a hurry, or they would not have abandoned their creations like this. ’ Amme says gently. ‘Ndica took them back to Tlun’hla and studied them compared to what we now call the GI. I was distrusted by Tlun’hla, and Ndica attempted to have me leave. I was banished by the Directory, charged with disobedience and
negligence of our oath. But before I was made to leave, I found my way below the Headquarters. When I discovered what lay right below my feet, I knew the difference. Because amidst that emptiness, amidst that void, a lingering memory existed in precious few forms.’

And there I found you. I could not save every single OrTank found in Bhumi. I took you, Yoongi, and 57 others before Ndica and Tlun’hla destroyed the rest.’

Yoongi doesn’t seem too disturbed by this information.

‘I was banished from Šerdesas, disgraced within the Directory. Tlun’hla attempted to have me killed. But I was able to make my escape. I found myself travelling far, following what records I could find of the mannerism and trajectory of the Akramanese, to find what they had done. I travelled to T’sayiti’k to attempt to find what I could. I tried to find and speak to the survivors from the Gaia Case.’

‘-don’t fucking touch them-’ Taeh’yung suddenly hisses, an animalistic look taking over his face.

‘I could not find them,’ Amme says, unperturbed. ‘All I had heard was amidst those found in Bhumi, other Beings who were not created by the Akramanese were there too. Beings who I believed were initially brought in and stolen in order to build and develop what we know as the Omhlophe. Ndica declared them hostiles - he sent away those who remained to Teronko’ng Prison,’ Amme concludes.

Somehow, this makes Taeh’yung giggle from where he sits.

‘Where are they?’ Jimin asks quietly.

Amme pauses a moment before she says, ‘Those created in your Continuum rest peacefully and undisturbed under the care of the Yishengs until they are ready to be found.’

Jimin nods at that.

‘What about these uh, non GI-GI?’ Hoseok asks, ‘What did you do?’

‘Amongst those who continued to be awake, only a handful remained somewhat alert. Many woke before Yoongi, their sense of purpose questioned. I allowed them to explore as they saw fit- many did not survive. Those who managed to understand, those who became, managed to gather the true GI to themselves.’

Yoongi looks at Amme with wide eyes at this.

‘Yoongi is different,’ Amme says with what Sk’jin can only assume is some form of smile. ‘How he awoke.’

‘-it was Zhoumi,’ Yoongi says almost breathlessly. ‘He gave me the Android-Core.’

‘Zhoumi was one of the unfortunate Beings caught up in the dream,’ Amme says, her tone regretful. ‘His curiosity was what ended up nearly killing him.’

‘Good riddance,’ Sk’jin scathingly says under his breath, his memory of the older Long Huon still fresh in his mind. Zitao’s distrust and fear bitter in his own throat.

‘It’s not only that,’ Amme continues to address Yoongi. ‘You came back.’

So the other GI- that other Yoongi who had invaded the ship in Grisial, they had no former
memory? But they had awareness?

‘Yoongi, after you awoke, after you came into realization and you came to speak to me, I took this time to study you.’ Amme says. ‘I wanted to observe your growth, your development. And I did this in proximity, as with the others like you, with where we kept Jimin.’

Sk’jin feels like this is definitely a very questionable experiment that definitely breaks a few protocols somewhere or another.

‘Your development rapidly increased with your prolonged exposure to Jimin- more so than the others,’ Amme explains.

Neither Yoongi nor Jimin say anything to do.

‘Wait- you’re saying only Yoongi has been the one to well, come back as himself?’ Hoseok demands.

‘You are correct,’ Amme replies.

‘What about me?’

It’s Jungkook who asks this. He looks apprehensive, fearful, but most of all adamant.

‘And about- about mother?’

‘Jungkookie is my baby,’ Taeh’yung says fondly, ‘Not like Yoongi – but like the others.’

‘They placed massive devices in the atmosphere, they altered the weather, changed the atmosphere. They drilled the surfaces of our lands, drilled deep into our oceans. They removed things, they put things- I still don’t know the full extent of what they actually did but…but slowly…’ Bhān sighs out slowly. ‘Slowly things just started to die.’

Jungkook was definitely created by the Yishengs. Essentially GI material. But he had been aboard the Yisheng ships that had come to Ynqaba under the pretense of bring aid. They had in fact been using Ynqaba and possible her core to somehow nurture their creations if what Amme said was to be believed. And as for Jungkook’s Khol’isa mother.

There was definitely something different with her. Especially based on what Jungkook said about her headaches and the pain she went through the same way Yoongi did.

‘We say we fought the Alliance and threw them down- but it was just…it was just timing I guess. Something went wrong with the ships- there was a temporary failure and over at Lowet, one of the ships actually detonated completely. So the leader went there, leaving behind the ship docked here. And for a while, we already knew something was wrong- we could already sense that they were bringing us harm. So many threw themselves forward, and they overwhelmed the ship. There weren’t a lot of them- those who came with the leader. So it was easy to overthrow their defenses once they got into the ships. One of them crashed not too far from here, and ended the experiments. But the effects still lasted. One by one, the Alliance was overthrown, and they were defeated.’

Bhān had misunderstood the Yisheng’s identity, seeing as Ndica used the Alliance as a cover-up for his actions. And whatever happened at Lowet could have somehow been related to the Akramanese. As Ndica never came back to Ynqaba after checking on Lowet, Sk’jin assumes the Yisheng must have fled and abandoned what was left for the Akramanese to take over. And the Akramanese sent the Omhlophe to gather what the Yishengs had abandoned scattered over those unfortunate planets.
‘Is there a relationship between the region of Ynqaba and the First Children?’ Sk’jin asks.

Amme pauses a moment, almost studying Sk’jin’s question.

‘The dead-space that borders the regions of Ynqaba and Ymir is different from what studies have gathered of other similar expanses of space,’ Amme answers, ‘We have no quantifiable evidence.’

Sk’jin grimaces at the memory of the Nightmare Planet. Jimin catches his eye for a brief second, clearly thinking along those lines himself.

‘It’s very old!’ Taeh’yung offers. Sk’jin is reminded of Taeh’yung’s “attempts” at creating life there in Ymir and suddenly the Zhak’gri’s actions don’t seem so random anymore.

‘So why are the Omhlophe after Jimin?’ Hoseok seemed to have a set of question that needed answering and he was going to do everything required to get those answers.

‘I think, if we can believe what we have observed with the behavior of the Akramanese reflecting that of the Yishengs, down to how they performed their operations and methods of creation, but in a twisted fashion; we can assume the Omhlophe have inherited the behavior of the Akramanese and are now attempting to get Jimin back,’ Amme replies.

‘But you knew this beforehand didn’t you?’ Hoseok presses. ‘You purposefully sent Jimin out with us, straight for Megibīya. So what really is the purpose of this mission?’

Sk’jin feels himself sitting up straighter at the question.

This was it. This was the main reason why they were here, in some twisted attempt at fulfilling a mission that was doomed from the start.

‘The Special Jury were originally tasked with the purpose of exterminating the Akramanese creation.’ Amme states.

‘What-?’ Hoseok exhales out.

Jimin’s eyes widen in horror as Yoongi sits, unmoving in his shock. Sk’jin is personally not too surprised to hear this.

‘The Court believed that the creation and existence of the Akramanese creations, as well as those of the GI are not only an unidentifiable and unpredictable threat to the nature of the Universe as a whole, but are also an unnatural existence that defies that norms of the Known Universe.’

‘A bit rich coming from the same organization that created the Androids and AI,’ Sk’jin sighs out tiredly. The hypocrisy just wouldn’t stop.

‘However, though there are those in the Jury who are in favor of this-‘ Sk’jin hears Hoseok snort derisively, ‘K’mara and myself believe that this should not take place. We were able to come to an agreement. That a special unit of Beings would find a way back into Bhumi, into Menigišiti where we would be able to return those born on that Continuum would be able to live in there.’

‘That’s quite risky considering Jimin wasn’t even awake,’ Sk’jin remarks.

‘We hoped it would be enough time and…’ Amme trails off a little. ‘Jimin, though in his state at the time, made no reaction or response to any of our attempts to reach him, reacted the most in the presence of those born in his Continuum. The same way Yoongi changed, Jimin reacted as well.’
Wow, the power of love, am I right? Sk’jin could snort. Fuck, he wished Namjoon was there so that he could have whispered it to him for a comedic reaction.

‘The Court really doesn’t know about this mission do they?’ Sk’jin questions.

‘No,’ Amme confirms. ‘They are adamant in destroying these creations.’

‘Is that why you couldn’t just warp out the entirety of their lot to Bhumi?’ Hoseok asks before he frowns, ‘Who really is watching over those OrTanks now?’

‘While the GLA are overseeing them in the Directory, the authority over them lies with the Court.’ Amme explains.

‘It’s been 5 sols now,’ Hoseok doesn’t look convinced in any way, ‘Why haven’t they gotten rid of them until now? Why have you just started this “mission” now?’

‘This is because the Court believed we could use these creations to benefit biotechnology progress in fields of medicine, military, and longevity.’ Amme explains patiently, ‘Ever since the Yisheng Directory lost face, the Court wished to reduce the GLA’s dependence on us. They believed that these new Beings would be able to-

‘-experiments, test subjects,’ Hoseok frowns.

Amme nods and says, ‘Lal Haenoon was able to prevent this from happening.’

Now that was certainly shocking.

‘Lal Haenoon and Xmi are working hard at the Courts to push the deadlines of their sentence to destroy the gathered OrTanks from both the Akramanese ship, as well as those who remain in the GI.’

‘What angle are they going for?’

‘They have said that they need to make sure that their destruction would not cause a reaction within our Continuum,’ Amme explains. ‘Which is why the Yishengs were tasked with finding this out. Therefore, it came under my care.’

‘That’s a pretty decent plan,’ Sk’jin says under his breath, somewhat mildly impressed. Maybe Haenoon wasn’t as shitty and slimy as he suspected.

‘So how do you plan, if we succeed and are able to get Jimin to Bhumi or something, to ship off a very large host of sleeping Beings?’ Hoseok presses. Sk’jin vaguely wonders if Hoseok’s always been like this, or if it was an agent thing, and if his officers were somewhat terrified of his drilling. Sk’jin’s only known Hoseok to occasionally give a comment or ask a question before.

This was very new and somewhat a breath of fresh air because Sk’jin is currently not at his best to make any inquiries.

‘The Jury has decided that K’mara and Lmiura will set up one of the GIU Motherships to bring them out of Tayi, under the guise of bringing them away from possibilities of causing a reaction to the living Beings in the System,’ Amme replies, unperturbed and not at all annoyed by Hoseok’s continuous questioning. ‘Chief Shn’ow will then stage a diversion that would then appear to overtake K’mara and Lmiura, when in fact they would then have the time to warp to Bhumi where I believe you will have the time to receive and bring them in.’
Hoseok frowns; and so does Sk’jin. That was an incredibly dangerous plan.

‘You do know that Shn’ow and S’ava are involved with the Alliance?’

Amme doesn’t react to that but simply nods.

‘Did Shn’ow’s diversion involved the Alliance in the form of Lal Haenoon?’

‘It did.’

Hoseok curses out loud while Sk’jin curses inwardly.

Well. That was what that was about then.

‘It would seem that your run-in with Lal Haenoon was an unfortunate situation we could not have predicted.’ Amme says rather lightly, as though they hadn’t pretty much messed up the diversion plan that would allow the eggs to be transported out of Tayi.

So that had been the plan. Shn’ow would pull his contact with Lal Haenoon and use the Alliance as a way to legitimately traffic the eggs, while looking as though the entire operation had been upstaged by some internal betrayal. Of course this sort of mass-shipment of illegal aliens would be up the Alliance’s alley – if anyone could do it with secrecy and with that quantity, it would be the Alliance.

‘So that’s why S’ava wasn’t there at the Jury?’ Hoseok questions, ‘He was setting up the situation with Haenoon- he was ready to take the blame for double-crossing the GLA in order to get the eggs out.’

Amme nods and says with a tone of regret, ‘Unfortunately, with what happened with Lal Haenoon, who according to his report sent back to S’ava and then to Shn’ow, believed that you had been an attempt to sabotage this mission – S’ava has had to flee.’ She pauses a moment to look at all of them. ‘We are aware that it is not the best of strategies, but we cannot operate at a deeper level as we would be discovered.’

‘Simplicity is the most desirable,’ Sk’jin finds himself quoting “The Six Hands of Our Love” yet again.

‘That is indeed true,’ Amme nods.

Sk’jin nearly laughs.

‘We were also a diversion weren’t we? You were all aware of the Omhlophe.’ Hoseok declares. ‘You wanted to send us off to drag them away from Tayi.’

‘That is true. We knew they were there, just beyond Raksane Tayi, still clinging to the ways of their creators, to take back what they believed was their responsibility.’ Amme explains. ‘We could not catch them. We could not attempt to communicate with them either. I was correct in my assumption that they would pursue you – their need for the OrTanks is only superficial. What they want is Jimin.’

‘It would have been nice if you told us from the beginning,’ Sk’jin frowns. ‘It would have really saved a lot of trouble for us.’

‘I did not trust the others,’ Amme tells them quite frankly.
'What? You and K’mara are like bffs,’ Sk’jin snorts.

‘We may have worked together,’ Amme acknowledges, ‘But that does not mean I would trust what she wanted to do. K’mara had an entire planet, Heiho, destroyed to eradicate the possible influence of the Akramanese that lingered there. K’mara is loyal only to an existence where she can continue to exist as she is.’

‘What are you loyal to?’ Yoongi asks.

‘I am loyal to Life,’ Amme replies.

There’s a sort of sticky silence that follows this and a very evident understanding between the entire crew that they were not particularly pleased with this answer.

‘Are you saying that there is a possibility that members of the Special Jury would find something to gain for themselves with the outcome of this mission?’ Hoseok is not saying it out loud, but considering their run-in with the Alliance, what they discovered about Van Seulgaan and his connections with the GLA, Sk’jin knows exactly what he’s referring to.

The Akramanese creations and remaining GI were literally perfect for the business the Alliance dealt with. Not only did the Court more or less declare these creations as non-species of this Universe, they did not qualify under the definition of a living Being, protected by the GLA. These creations were possible massive economic exploits.

Clearly this is exactly what Amme was afraid of.

Because despite everything- Amme was a Yisheng. Yisheng valued life, they valued existence. And while Sk’jin would only trust Amme as far as he could throw her (which would not be a lot), he could trust the fact that she would not see these evidently living Beings as possible business assets.

But Lal Haenoon? Or Chief Xmi, Chief Shn’ow, or even Chief Lmiura.

Sure Lal Haenoon and Xmi had thought up of a way for the Court not to immediately execute the eggs, but what if it was for an entirely selfish motive? What if they were simply looking for a way where they could ultimately benefit from the continued existence of the eggs?

Or even Lmiura. She had lost her partner/husband (?) in a situation from the Gaia Case involving the GI from what Sk’jin remembers digging up on her past. Could her sorrow manifested into something that could lead to the desire for destruction of these illegally and immorally created Beings.

Keeping them in the dark as they carried out this mission, from the true light of its nature so that none of the Special Jury members could gain an upper-hand at their own motives, had clearly been one that they all agreed to, to start them all of with a massive disability.

‘There is that possibility of course. Is it not why you called me instead of Lal Haenoon?’ Amme replies back to Hoseok’s question. ‘You’ve kept my contact saved- that too, the non-authorized channel that can only be accessed through a deep-dive.’

And Sk’jin grudgingly admits again that of course, Hoseok had been right in calling Amme out of everyone in the Jury to help them out.

‘So now I would like to ask Jimin, the Fate of Menigišiti, if he would be willing to take these creations in.’ Amme turns to address Jimin.
‘…what report has been made in regards to Menigišiti so far?’ Jimin asks carefully. ‘What happened after Megibīya was taken? After Ndica came to claim the rewards of his betrayal?’

‘There are no reports,’ Amme says, tone regretful. ‘The Treaty had already been in place, and no one was meant to approach or attempt to communicate with Menigišiti.’

Jemin shows no reaction to this, but only nods.

‘I see,’ he says before adding, ‘I will accept. They have found me, and I will lead them, if they are willing.’

‘We will need protection,’ Hoseok says immediately. ‘We will need a new ship. We cannot go to Menigišiti in a Yisheng ship, you know this.’

‘Of course. I have a ship outfitted for you that you may take and adapt as you wish.’ Amme graciously raises a hand. The glowing rings shimmer before twinkling away. The slit on the table closes shut seamlessly.

‘You will need to call out the Omhlophe at a GLA security level,’ Hoseok persists. ‘There is no point in trying to keep this under wraps. I’m sure they can be easily disguised as Alliance-members or fanatic-pirates. The Court would be more than happy to have them taken care of.’

‘I cannot make that call,’ Amme says carefully. ‘If I am to report it, I would be registered and implicated. My involvement in this meeting we are having right now would be exposed and I would be pulled out of the Jury.’

Hoseok frowns at that.

‘We can handle that once we get out of here,’ Yoongi says quietly.

Hoseok studies Yoongi carefully before nodding once.

‘I will take you to the Tyochi Binary System.’ Amme tells them. ‘We will arrive in 37 hours.’

‘Namjoon?’ Jungkook asks quietly.

‘We can begin tracking him,’ Yoongi tells him quietly before looking at Amme expectantly.

‘You will find all you need in your respective cabins,’ Amme replies, waving one arm to the side towards the other end of the massive space they were in. ‘You may take this time to rest.’

 Somehow everyone manages to roll their eyes, even Jungkook, at this statement.

There’s a short rather pregnant pause before Amme stands up.

‘If you need anything, please do not hesitate to ask.’

She walks away from the table, shortly followed the slithering creature that Sk’jin had forgotten had coiled itself around his feet. Now his feet were cold. Great.

Hoseok breaks the silence by collapsing on his chair and slumping forward on the table, forehead smacking on the surface rather loudly. Taeh’yung yawns loudly, stretching his body as his joints pop loudly. Jungkook watches them all apprehensively, unsure what to do. Sk’jin slumps back on the seat, closing his eyes.

‘Really wish Namjoon were here,’ Sk’jin finds himself saying.
There’s a hum of agreement from Hoseok.

There’s a small sound and opening one eye, Sk’jin watches as Jimin gets up from his chair and quietly walks away.

Yoongi is also getting up, clearly making to follow and before Sk’jin can stop him, Taeh’yung reaches over with his long arm and stops Yoongi.

‘This is a lot for him,’ Hoseok says without looking up. ‘It’s a lot for all of us- but most of all Jimin.’

‘Let him think by himself for a while,’ Taeh’yung smiles at Yoongi, ‘He’ll come to you when he’s ready.’

Hoseok sighs, groaning as he pushes himself up.

‘You know- that was a lot. But I think there’s something else. One final thing we’re missing.’

Sk’jin agrees.

‘And I think Jimin is thinking that too.’

‘What is it?’ Yoongi asks, still not sitting down.

‘I think Ndica was more involved with Jimin’s System than we can assume- more than what Amme herself has been able to find. She knows that too.’ Hoseok explains as he slumps back on the chair. ‘Let’s not forget our invisibility device- that’s straight out of Jimin’s tech. And it’s definitely not going to be some lose debris they just happened to find either. There was a very deliberate action taken when that device was used.’

‘You’re saying that someone from inside betrayed Jimin and his sister?’ Yoongi frowns. ‘But why?’

‘Because all Life is Continuum,’ Taeh’yung drags Yoongi back to sit down before yawning greatly. ‘And even if you hide, you will fall back into Time eventually.’

‘But their Continuum is different from what we know here,’ Sk’jin tiredly questions. ‘Isn’t it?’

Taeh’yung just gives him a lopsided grin, ‘Oh maybe it was for a while. But it will catch up. That’s what they didn’t understand- what an idiot,’ Taeh’yung chuckles before closing his eyes, ‘- they thought they could change Continuum. How could it when they were the one to bring everything they hated here?’

Taeh’yung snorts a little bit more and Sk’jin doesn’t bother trying to understand Taeh’yung’s commentary.

‘Hey buggy,’ Hoseok yawns, leaning his head against his hand tiredly, ‘Next time please don’t just dive out like that okay? I don’t care if you’re like, god or something- that was risky.’

‘Sorry,’ Taeh’yung makes a sad whiney face, ‘I got excited, and I was angry.’

‘I can’t-…I can’t believe you went after the ship like that,’ Hoseok says quietly. ‘Knowing what was in it.’

Taeh’yung just shrugs in reply, ‘It’ll be fine.’
None of them have the energy to argue or question that.

‘What do we do about Namjoon?’ Yoongi asks, changing the topic.

‘You can track him right?’ Hoseok asks, looking a bit more alert.

‘They won’t hurt him,’ Taeh’yung says again with that confidence. ‘Not with his connection to Jimin.’

‘But why would they try to kill Yoongi then?’ Hoseok inquires confusedly.

‘Because of his connection to Jimin!’ Taeh’yung replies with a thumb’s up.

‘Right-’ Hoseok frowns a bit as he pushes himself up from the chair. ‘Yoongi let’s go and track Namjoon. Amme said we’d find what we need in the cabins. Let’s go see what we have.’

Yoongi nods, sitting up and walking away with Hoseok.

Jungkook immediately moves to Hoseok’s seat looking over Sk’jin carefully.

‘Hey Kookie, you okay? No injuries right?’ Sk’jin asks, reaching over to comb through Jungkook’s hair.

Jungkook leans into his touch, exhaling quietly.

‘What will we do?’ he asks quietly.

Taeh’yung watches, blinking slowly as though sleepy though his eyes are alert.

‘We’re gonna go and get Namjoon,’ Sk’jin replies.

‘And after?’

‘Well- let’s see what Namjoon has to say after all we have to tell him.’ Sk’jin replies as honestly as he can.

With the true intention of the mission now waving across their face, it really makes Sk’jin have to rethink a lot of things.

Of course they would want to destroy the “eggs”. And of course these eggs were already somehow taken as a point of interest by the Alliance.

*Abomination*

Seulgaan had said that in reference to Jimin.

Sk’jin knows all too well the Tayian’s opinion of issues such as immortality and the continuation of life. It was not approved at all, and looked at as a force against the natural flow of Continuum. Against the natural flow of the Life-cycle.

But this was not a sentiment shared by a lot of the Known Universe. To an extent, from what they could see with especially Yoongi, he had essentially come back whole and complete. Though it would seem that Taeh’yung would argue that was not so. But this was the closest to immortality- to complete cloning they had gotten to. And this could only lead to a lot of issues the GLA clearly do not want to undertake.
The Omhlophe had called themselves the Pure Ones. These eggs were harvested, created with the purpose of being perfect. Of being the purest of their own species. Jungkook as an egg of the Pravasi M’hanun was not only a perfect specimen of his tainted and diminished population and planet, but a much stronger, clearly more intelligent, and all over the most likely to overwhelm and overtake his lesser species fellowmen.

Yoongi as a Human- one of the weakest species across the Known Universe, was an extremely powerful Being- not just in strength, but also in mind. His recovery and growth into a completely aware Being with what appeared to be two separate awareness within him? Forget Humans, no species could be this strong to withstand such pressure and absolute disorientation. Even Khol’isa, though their memories mapped far into the past well into regions of the darkest of history, lost parts of themselves with each rebirth. Sk’jin today was light-years different from the one even a millennia ago.

And what about a pure-blooded, perfect Khol’isa?

Sk’jin finds himself shuddering at the possibility.

The Court’s decision was also one of self-preservation. Did the Jury really decide (not all of them) to just merrily transport the hundreds of thousands of eggs to Menigišiti and just let them be? To keep them in Jimin’s care? In any way you looked at it, the whole concept definitely had a flaw-something hidden that Sk’jin can’t exactly pinpoint without drawing the worst conclusions in regards to everything.

Jungkook yawns, sharp strong teeth showing clearly.

‘Come on- we should go get cleaned up,’ Sk’jin says standing up. ‘Clean up, and then let’s go get some food?’

‘Food!’ Taeh’yung throws his hands up before he suddenly looks sad, ‘Oh no- the pudding. It’s all gone now.’

‘We can get you pudding here I’m sure,’ Sk’jin placates tiredly as he takes Jungkook’s hand and pulls on it. ‘We’ll all have pudding.’

Taeh’yung walks over to Sk’jin’s other side and takes his hand, swinging it a little. He hums a little under his breath as they walk when a sudden thought comes to mind.

‘Hey, Taeh’yung.’

‘Hm?’

‘When we were in Grezma, and you met Namjoon, did you…- was that just a random choice to come with us, or was it because you sensed Jimin when our ship pulled in?’

Taeh’yung hums thoughtfully.

‘It’s all combined,’ Taeh’yung replies with a nod, ‘I was actually given a tip-off.’

‘What?’ Sk’jin can feel his eyebrows shooting up.

‘I told you I have some insider information,’ Taeh’yung actually whines, as though hurt that no one took him seriously. ‘It was told about Seulgaan’s ship! And it was suspicious!’

Well- who would’ve known Seulgaan was actually working with the Jury. No one told them.
Sk’jin sighs at their intense bad luck.

‘Did you know? About how Jimin-’

‘Not exactly,’ Taeh’yung shrugs honestly, ‘It’s true- the babies are born of a different Time- not Kookie though! And especially because of how they’re connected with Jimin, it would be for the best to take them to Menigišiti.’

‘Or? What will happen?’ Sk’jin asks curiously.

‘They’re not supposed to be here really,’ Taeh’yung tells him simply, the same way Jimin had said it. ‘Time will crush them.’

‘Yoongi?’ Jungkook asks quietly.

Taeh’yung gives them both a surprisingly genuinely worried look.

‘It hurts,’ he says gently, ‘To exist when you’re not supposed to, when fate pulls you apart but your heart wants to stay.’

* 

They manage to track Namjoon’s location, not surprised that he was in warp. Their direction does not quite show *where* they’re headed, but Hoseok had said that they would probably follow them once they exit warp themselves. They’re not sure if the rest of the *eggs/GI/Omhlophe* could sense/track Jimin during warp. But considering the time it took for the GI and the Omhlophe to find them in Grisial, they could somewhat assume that they couldn’t keep track.

Hoseok had taken the tracking with himself, telling Yoongi to catch up on rest. They would attempt to recreate their communication channel from scratch in hopes of reaching Namjoon. He still had his Comm-Device so that was a relief.

But that had been about an hour ago.

Yoongi is bone-tired.

The water that runs down his body and pools around his feet before swirling away is strangely chalky. He’s used to the site of bloody water or water filled with gritty dirt- this was definitely a new experience.

_Do you think Amme could do something?_

‘I don’t know,’ Yoongi mutters, eyes closed as water hot to the point of scalding pours over him. It’s soothing against his tired and strained limbs.

‘I’ll go ask.’
There’s a feeling of apprehension- but not in a completely serious way. It makes Yoongi laugh.

‘This is how it feels when you skip out on house-duty and you need to face your mum for an inevitable lecture on responsibilities,’ he chuckles, reaching for the shampoo.

But the apprehension is almost equally shared. Yoongi wants to talk to Amme. But at the same time is hesitant because he’s not sure if he’s done the right thing.

Amme had mentioned how Ndica and the other Yishengs who followed that “dream” carefully selected and used select Beings for their cause. Was that what Yoongi was? An attempt to recruit him for something? Did all of the “recruits” have this mark on their back?

It’s sort of jarring, but at the same time, not too surprising, to think that there are other Yoongi’s out in the Universe. It’s not surprising, but Yoongi doesn’t know what to do with this information.

There had been the one who jumped into the Užkulisai- Yoongi cannot hope for much of his survival. That was not a jump easily survived unless he had some form of breaker to help him glide.

‘You’re bound to the fate of the Menigišiti.’

When Yoongi looks at himself in the mirror he’s a little surprised at how starkly he appeared before himself.

I am me.

The bruise at his side is spectacularly purple. There must be something within the Yisheng ship that somehow healed him simultaneously by just being inside there. Yoongi wouldn’t be too surprised by that.

Each cabin was a well accommodated room not unlike the Cabins in the Užkulisai, though somewhat more spacious and generally clean looking. There were no windows though, and considering the fact that these ships often brought refugees, trafficked Beings, and other stolen Beings out of their imprisonment, it seemed like a good reprieve to have them feel protected within a clean comfortable space.

Robes like the ones patients wore were already hanging up for him and Yoongi slips them on. They’re light, but warm, and incredibly comfortable against his skin.

He pushes his dirty clothes through the shredder with no remorse. The device he had snagged out of their make-shift circuit board attaching it to the rest of the Užkulisai sits innocently at the edge of his sink. He remembers the way Jimin had been so adamant in not explaining how the device worked. Had his stoic determination tinted with a sense of confusion, denial, and fear.

Listen.

Ignoring it for now, Yoongi steps out of the bathroom.

This is almost an exact reverse from last time, Yoongi vaguely registers in the back of his mind. Jimin stands at the doorway, looking a bit nervous and mainly concerned. He must have also showered and cleaned up- he’s also wearing the same spare Yisheng-set Yoongi was wearing.

‘I’m sorry,’ he says at once, looking down.

‘Why are you sorry?’ Yoongi asks.
‘I’m…-it’s my fault?’ Jimin sorts of shrugs, trying his best to look unaffected but it doesn’t work. Instead he looks helpless and as tired as Yoongi felt. ‘If it- if it weren’t for me- I just-’ Jimin sighs, hands restless as he pulls at his sleeves before dropping them before going back to picking at the hem of his shirt. He sinks down on the floor.

‘I’m so tired,’ he says in a small voice. ‘I’m so tired- and I’m…-I feel so lost.’

Yoongi goes and sits next to him, a little gap between them.

‘I don’t-…I don’t know what I should do,’ Jimin whispers from behind his crossed arms. ‘I don’t know what to do.’

Yoongi carefully places his hand on Jimin’s nape, gently squeezing before he guides Jimin to lean against him. Jimin goes easily, leaning against his side but still not looking up from his arms.

‘I wish I knew what to do,’ Jimin says, ‘I wish- I wish I knew what happened. Why all of this happened. I wish I could fix it. That I had done something different. That I hadn’t hid-‘

‘You couldn’t have known,’ Yoongi says quietly. ‘Sunshine, you couldn’t have known.’

‘-don’t-‘ Jimin shakes, ‘Don’t call me that- I can’t- and-‘ his words are barely comprehensible. ‘-I don’t- don’t’ deserve-‘

Yoongi pulls him closer, prying Jimin’s arms away from around his head and redirecting him. But Jimin doesn’t budge.

‘It’s too much-‘ Jimin covers his face, ‘It’s too much and I don’t know how I can-how I can fix any of this-‘

It breaks Yoongi’s heart as he watches Jimin break.

Jimin breaks the way an already shattered and glued together tile does. Resisting, straining all of its hold, desperately attempting to pull everything back together.

‘It’s too much-‘ Jimin chokes out.

Yoongi gently but quickly pulls Jimin between his legs. He brings their bodies close, cloaking himself around Jimin as securely as he could, wrapping him up as though trying his best to hold his pieces together as Jimin finally allows himself to break apart.

Jimin leans back against his chest as though he were falling. He feels small, confused, and overwhelmed in Yoongi’s arms.

‘I got you,’ Yoongi whispers quietly, pressing their heads together.

‘I got you.’

Jimin quietly sobs his heart out. Finally allowing himself to fully feel the overwhelming disparity of his situation, allowing himself to finally accept the fact that he had no way in really knowing what he could do. Accepting the fact that deep down, he knew someone had betrayed him. Betrayed his trust. And now, though he was guiding them to his home, Jimin could not tell if it even existed anymore.

‘Do you know-‘ Jimin whispers faintly. ‘-know what I saw? When I looked into the other- into his memories?’
‘What did you see?’ Yoongi asks, holding Jimin as strongly as he dared, holding him together.

‘I saw nothing but…-I saw only sight,’ Jimin faintly replies, ‘His sight- no acceptance, no understanding- just sight. Just a mission. But I could- I could hear it.’

‘Hear what?’

‘I heard music.’

‘It was- it was the only thing that was-…it was the only thing in his mind,’ Jimin says thickly, words breaking into barely audible whispers. ‘And I know it was me.’

Yoongi doesn’t know what to say.

There’s nothing to say.

Yoongi was probably incredibly exhausted. Fatigued beyond understanding.

From Jimin’s experience, Yoongi was an incredibly light sleeper. Awake before Jimin, always alert, already watching. It used to make Jimin a little shy, a little squirmy.

But asleep, Yoongi is still Yoongi.

His arms are wrapped around him, one hand pressed over his chest above his heart, as though attempting to hold it together for him. Bruises have coloured in during their sleep. Troubled sleep that has Jimin waking up feeling heavier, weighed down.

He can’t move- not because Yoongi is holding him or because he was still exhausted. Jimin almost feels like he can’t breathe.

For a moment, Jimin wonders if he’s even actually awake.

The sounds around him are not what he’s used to. He’s grown familiar to the sounds, the movement of air, and just the way everything seemed to exist around him inside the Užkulisai.

Jimin wonders if that was the reason why he didn’t feel quite comfortable enough to really sleep.

He doesn’t exactly remember getting on the low bed- he just remembers the way Yoongi held him.

Jimin is not foreign to the concept of incredibly difficult situations, or shouldering incredibly heavy responsibilities.

He has learnt, both theoretically and practically, the significance and weight of the actions he needed to make, or actions he didn’t make. He has seen firsthand, and experienced firsthand, the
pain of these decisions. Not just on himself, but on others. He has seen the consequences of mistakes he has made, of suffering and of death that has resulted as a direct reaction of his decisions.

And ever since he woke, a increasingly steady feeling of suffocation threatens to overwhelm him every single day.

It wasn’t so long ago, when he had walked down a separate Memory, directed and guided by JD who showed him so much. Somehow Jimin had managed to make himself believe he could do more- that he could return with purpose, with the ability to make things right.

He believed it- made himself have faith in the fact that he knew what he should do, how to do it, and where to go.

But now.

‘Do you see it now?’

Someone had betrayed Menigişiti.

Jimin already knew.

Already knew the moment he saw the refractive-shield cell, crafted and installed with intentional design.

And the very moment he knew it, he ignored it.

There was no way. There could be no way anyone would betray Menigişiti like this. This was clearly an attack- an invasion, a betrayal of their trust from the GLA who saw their weakened situation and struck.

And he believed in that.

Yoongi twitches just a little, a small furrow between his eyebrows that eases out a second later.

Yisheng, as Amme had put it, had punished them cruelly. And Menigişiti had hid.

Jimin knew of their Origins well- understood and listened to the ancient songs that sung of Nen’isht. How Nen’isht hunted their children, and Menigişiti hid herself, wound tight amidst a harmony of music, light, and quiet.

Menigişiti hid from her punishment, and within the space she made for herself, sung an existence she nurtured with all that she was.

But here he was now, bearing upon his back the punishment that awaited him once he was thrown out from hiding.

Punishment inflicted on Menigişiti for hiding- her children now lost, torn apart.

And this one was his own personal punishment.

Yoongi wasn’t even supposed to be here- not like this. Yoongi shouldn’t have even been there in Megibiya.

All of this was designed just for Jimin.
Just to punish him.

And Jimin didn’t even have the strength to acknowledge and accept the truth of his reality when it faced him so clearly.

Jimin cannot bear the disappointment in himself for failing like this.

For losing everything like this.

He cannot bear the pain that he knows he will have to face for what he will have to lose.

Carefully and slowly, trying his best not to wake the Human who so desperately needed rest, Jimin lightly presses his fingertips over Yoongi’s temples.

He doesn’t know what he’s dreaming of. But Jimin wants him to be at peace- even for this short bit.

It’s much more difficult for him now, to softly speak words of content and peace, allowing them to blanket over Yoongi’s mind when his own mind was a chaos of pain, regret, and guilt.

It hits him all over again.

‘It’s too much, and it’s okay.’

It was never just “okay” for Jimin. In hindsight, Jimin realizes that his entire life, he’s never once had the time, or the opportunity, or really— the encouragement to simply grieve for what he had to do.

Tsirin had always wanted to make their lives as normal as possible. When they had been born, siblings that were born to be the Heart, and the Fate, they had been taken away to be taught and watched over. But they had been different – Jimin remembers so fondly how Tsirin would sneak them away from their classes, from their tutoring. They skipped more than they attended.

They would sneak to the main cities where they travelled, immersing themselves in the true atmosphere of their host country or state. They would hold hands, getting into trouble everywhere. Jimin remembers being reprimanded nearly daily but it was like they never learnt.

But somehow that worked- because Tsirin never allowed themselves to be seen differently- to be addressed as anything different.

‘The Heart is always in harmony – the Heart always wants harmony,’ Tsirin would tell Jimin, giving him a knowing nod with as much dignity as possible whilst covered in mud and spectacularly sun-burnt.

Of course it changed slowly as time went on – they held positions that were looked up to. They had responsibilities to shoulder. And in these moments, in giving themselves so much for Menigišiti – it was almost as though they ceased to exist for who they were. A pair of siblings from Dis’bēti who enjoyed sweets a bit too much, who liked screaming wrong lyrics to ancient songs much to the scandalized horror of their instructors. And sometimes they forgot how heavy all of this was, just because they were born.

And even now, just thinking about it makes Jimin feel like he’s failed.

This was not how he was supposed to feel. This is not what he’s supposed to be thinking. He needed to be strong- he needed to know what to do. He needed to-
Jimin exhales shakily.

What did he need?

What did he want?

Yoongi seems to relax a bit more, his grip loosening just a little

What did Yoongi want?

Jimin thinks backs to the memories he had walked in, following Yoongi as he lived. Lived as he was supposed to- where he was supposed to. He thinks of seeing Yoongi for the first time, of how the sun shone as their eyes met and how Jimin just knew.

Jimin carefully studies Yoongi. He traces the features of his face. Beneath the bruises and cuts, Jimin finds small dots of freckles and natural discolouration. His cheeks were sunken, even as he slept. His lips are thin, though sometimes they pushed out unconsciously in a way that makes Jimin strongly believe that in his youth, Yoongi was probably a bit of a rascal. Very carefully, he puts his finger over Yoongi’s lower lip.

It almost felt like it was ages ago when he had so desperately kissed Yoongi- unable to even stand but just wanting to know it was Yoongi. Needing him there.

Regardless of how tired or deep asleep Yoongi was, no doubt even lightly touching his face was going to wake him up.

The weight of his fatigue hits Jimin anew as Yoongi regains consciousness.

Yoongi seems to quickly and quietly assess their surroundings before concluding that nothing was amiss. Jimin doesn’t take his hand away, instead taking the time to continue lightly tracing the natural slopes over Yoongi’s face.

Yoongi doesn’t say anything- apparently not disturbed by the fact that Jimin was randomly touching his face without any given reason.

Yoongi rearranges his arms while Jimin continues to map the features on his face. They’re closer, legs entwined, ankles hooked around each others. Jimin shivers lightly when Yoongi’s hand closes around his waist to settle on his back, his palm warm against his skin.

‘I always feel like I’m kissing you when things are…-things are not good,’ Jimin whispers. ‘Something is always…always wrong.’

‘I think any time I kiss you, everything is good.’

There is no hint of embarrassment or teasing in Yoongi’s tone. It’s meant only for Jimin to hear.

‘I had a dream,’ Yoongi readjusts his hand to reach up behind Jimin, palm splayed over the back of his head.

‘What did you see?’

Yoongi smiles.

‘You were laughing,’ Yoongi leans in, almost as though telling Jimin a secret. Jimin finally pulls himself together to look at Yoongi. ‘You were laughing, you seemed…seemed so young.’
Regardless of where they were, every time Yoongi looked at him like this, Jimin can’t help but feel a little shy, a little squirmy.

He wants to both push himself away and hide somewhere, and at the same time curl himself around Yoongi and not let go.

‘Young? How?’

‘Almost like…like a youngling- I was trying to catch up, you were going too fast.’

‘I won’t go,’ Jimin promises at once, earnestly.

Yoongi smiles again before he says, almost as though shy all of a sudden, ‘You’re so pretty.’

Jimin feels himself flush red.

Jimin has heard many compliments come his way. He’s not foreign to cheeky pillow talk, blatant flirtations, or the thrill of pursuing a young romance.

But it’s also never hurt him like this before.

Yoongi’s fingers quietly wipe under his eyes. And that’s when Jimin realizes he’s crying.

‘Don’t cry sunshine,’ Yoongi coos.

‘I’m not-‘ Jimin is about to deny it but it won’t stop.

Yoongi pulls him down, tucking him in close.

It’s not the same break down he had earlier- spiraling out of control. Because somehow instead of feeling himself suffocating, he feels almost a little lighter- a bit more normal.

Yoongi just continues to lightly stroke through his short hair, lips pressed to his skin.

‘Yoongi?’

‘Hm?’

‘I don’t know what to do,’ Jimin whispers.

It’s frightening, admitting to yourself the truth that you’ve ignored for so long.

‘I’m afraid.’ Jimin confesses quietly, ‘I’m so scared.’

‘Trust yourself,’ Yoongi dabs at his cheeks.

‘How-‘ Jimin sniffs before he looks up, ‘How can I- I just…-I’ve been -it’s cost me- so much-‘

‘Listen,’ Yoongi says simply, ‘Just listen.’

‘To what?’

Yoongi studies him for a moment.

‘In order to lie to yourself, you need to be aware of the truth,’ Yoongi says instead, to Jimin’s surprise. ‘And sometimes...’
Yoongi blinks a few times, expression unreadable before he gives Jimin a wry smile and says, ‘Sometimes it’s easier to lie – sometimes, in order to continue forward, you need to lie to yourself.’

It’s unsettling to hear this – with Yoongi’s fatigue hanging over him, pressing out against Jimin’s chest like an actual physical force.

‘So you need to just listen,’ Yoongi fiddles with his ear, careful around the side that was snipped along with his hair. ‘On Earth we have a saying, ‘Listen to your heart, but take your brain with you’. It made for really funny comic cards.’

Jimin’s not sure what about it was entirely funny, because it sounded like genuinely good advice worded in simple and applicable terms. But there’s a colour of mirth that erupts out of the cloud of fatigue that blossoms in soft hues around them.

It’s beautiful.

‘Listen to your heart,’ Yoongi places his hand over Jimin’s chest, palm warm and large. ‘And take your brain with you.’

Jimin takes Yoongi’s hand into his own trembling ones.

‘I can’t- I can’t feel my Heart right now-‘ Jimin confesses. ‘I can’t hear her.’

Yoongi doesn’t question Jimin’s exact meaning, but there’s an understanding in his eyes.

‘Then maybe for now, you can take mine.’

Jimin doesn’t realize how tightly he’s gripping Yoongi’s hand in his, or the fact that he’s somewhat forgotten to breathe. So instead he pulls their hands up and against his lips.

He can’t do that- he can’t take from Yoongi again.

‘Thank you for waiting for me,’ Jimin says against his hand.

Yoongi closes his eyes, gripping Jimin even closer to himself.

‘I’ll always come back to you.’

Jimin finds Sk’jin and Jungkook with Amme at a massive food-court. It was empty for now, but Jimin can imagine it filled with lost and broken Beings, being healed and fed, comforted from their pain and sorrow. Amme has her two hands on Jungkook’s head, gently holding up his head.

He can’t quite hear what they’re saying, but Jungkook doesn’t seem to be uncomfortable.

Sk’jin looks incredibly healthier. Jimin suspects that he’s just been healed, and it relieves Jimin to his core. Jimin’s not sure what sort of healing he must have had, because his hair is back to its
natural silvery-rose hue, and his eyes are exceptionally gleaming bright.

Jimin wishes he could have seen Sk’jin in his full Life.

How terrifyingly *beautiful* he would have been.

There’s a massive spread of food around him, and another similarly sized one opposite his that’s definitely a lot more raw, a lot more bloody. Jimin guesses it’s Jungkook’s.

Sk’jin gives him a small wave when he notices him approaching. He’s about to make some comment, expression turning teasing which turns to shock when Jimin hugs him tight.

The Khol’isa coughs awkwardly, arms stiff, shoulders raised, head angled back as though doing his best to keep as much physical distance as possible.

‘Thank you,’ Jimin says in a small voice.

‘Um- okay-‘ Sk’jin replies in a strained voice. ‘Sure, no problem.’

Jimin pulls away, much to Sk’jin’s obvious relief.

‘Come on – lets eat,’ Sk’jin says in his best gruff and indifferent manner. Jimin grins at this, giving him another hug that has the Khol’isa yelping explicit words.

Jungkook twitches a few times, his head turned at a clearly bad angle to watch what was happening. Clearly Amme takes pity on him and lets the youngling go. Jungkook cleanly vaults over the table and dives into Jimin’s arms.

*Had he grown taller?*

He’d definitely filled out because there’s more of Jungkook to hug than before. Jungkook sniffs rather aggressively around his neck and has a mild look of annoyance on his face.

‘What is it?’ Jimin laughs, ruffling his hair which had a wonderful softness to it now before pulling him into a headlock. Jungkook pretends to flail, a wide grin on his face.

‘Doing good?’ Jimin asks, cupping Jungkook’s face fondly. ‘Rested?’

Jungkook nods into his hands, eyes closed, ‘Good. Full.’

Jimin is pleased, lowering his hands instead to tickle the tall Pravasi M’hanun. Jungkook yelps, using his much longer arms to tickle Jimin back.

‘Please- no playing in the dining area,’ Sk’jin reprimands them over a mouth full of food. ‘Yisheng Amme, will you join us?’

Amme, to their collective surprise, seemed to enjoy a meal compromised entirely out of fresh, uncooked greens.

They don’t speak, just eat, occasionally pass each other items, or politely refuse items (especially from Jungkook). Jimin also realizes they’re not alone.

The *Yishengs-in-training* somewhat timidly approach them. There’s not a lot of them- only 5 so far as Jimin can sense in this immediate vicinity.

They’re *very* curious, but also *very* hesitant.
And Jimin can understand why. Here were 3 incredibly random, and very rare, species even by normal Universe standards.

Sk’jin eyes them with some amusement and after swallowing an impressively hot mouthful of a freshly roasted piece of meat, waves them over.

They all look at Amme who is extremely interested in telling Jungkook the wonderful benefits of a bulb-like vegetable and her eyes (all six) are glued to this little lesson. Jungkook, not too impressed by these vegetable, but also slightly intimidated, dunks the bulb into a rather milky looking stew, as though hoping it would help with the flavour.

The Yishengs-in-training sort of hesitantly sit around them, all beaming respectfully but very awkwardly. The silence is incredibly loud save for Amme’s continued vegetable lesson and Jungkook’s increasing disgust for anything not meat.

Sk’jin cuts the silence and asks without any embarrassment, ‘Does anyone have the latest installment in the “Six Hands of Our Love” series?’

This is apparently an excellent ice-breaker because this makes everyone laugh.

Jimin feels incredibly full, but he’s still exhausted. Sk’jin is laughing, an arm around one of the Yisheng’s-in-training as he narrates his experiences. Jungkook is also listening, sharing a big rather bloody joint of meat with another trainee who seemed to share a similar bloody diet.

‘Will you walk with me?’

Jimin finds that the question is directed at him. No one seems to notice or realize as Jimin nods and they both get up and leave the table.

They walk in silence together, the sound of laughter and voices behind them.

It's nice, Jimin thinks as he takes a moment to simply savour that feeling.

They pass the hallway that Jimin had come in through, and into the next one instead. Amme leads Jimin through it, taking a narrow pathway and Jimin, to his utmost surprise, smells something-

‘I enjoy a good garden,’ Amme tells him, breaking the quiet. ‘I also believe, it is a good place to find healing. Healing for your heart, your mind.’

Jimin nods mutely in agreement, breathing in the fragrance of wet soil, the slight sweet undertone of vegetation decomposing, and a general warm scent of foliage and flowers.

His eyes drink in the sight of lush growth and vegetation.

It almost felt as though he had been raw for a long while, now finally quenched and soothed as he takes deep breaths of air. He follows Amme to a seated area, large leafy tendrils fall from the beams overhead that support a clear dome, white with warp-light. It’s a massive enclosure, and everywhere Jimin looked, it was green and alive.

The strange creature that had waited for Amme at the Hangar earlier is there, coiled in perfect loops around itself.

‘I think this is a good place to speak,’ Amme says, folding herself elegantly and sitting down on the flat raised limestone slabs.
'We have not met formally prior to this,’ Jimin states, sitting down as well.

‘We did not. I only met your Council, and your sister,’ Amme replies in agreement. ‘I was aware of you, however.’

‘And I you.’

They sit in continued silence.

‘You said that there has been no report since Megibīya, otherwise known to the GLA as Bhumi was overtaken?’ Jimin inquires.

‘None that I am aware of,’ Amme answers, her arms folding neatly over each other. ‘The Treaty was clear in their agreement. It is my belief that when the GLA, lead by Ndica, arrived at Bhumi, it was under completely different reasoning.’

Amme didn’t know.

‘The GLA had received emergency calls from the borders around Bhumi, and as a result, attracted Ndica and Tlun’hla’s attention. The arrival of the Akramanese into Bhumi was one of complete surprise.’

Jimin is sure that’s not entirely the case.

‘When all of this came to my attention, and I was able to gather my resources and understand, to an extent, the details of what happened, I was unable to access or reach Bhumi or the area around it.’ Amme continues, ‘I believe this has to do with your camouflage system.’

Jimin nods.

‘I believed that perhaps it was a good sign. That the protection around your System still existed till now. That perhaps you were able to heal after all this time,’ Amme’s fingers lightly drum over her knees. ‘But perhaps I am naïve in thinking so.’

‘What have you learnt?’ Jimin asks, leaning in a little.

‘Axudar, as you have no doubt learnt from what I’ve been able to discuss with Hoseok, is close to your home System.’

‘Axudar is the closest System to Menigišiti yes,’ Jimin nods.

‘Hoseok has also reported that there are troubles within Axudar, troubles that have shut out the GLA from investigating,’ Amme pauses a moment before she continues, ‘Axudar is known to be the most forward in their approach towards researching the extent of how far the present physical mass of a Being can go.’

‘That is a polite way to describe an act of cruelty, Yisheng.’

‘There laws regarding the GLA investigation and regulation had previously been heavily edited and shadowed by Ndica, clearly to cover his own involvement in this specific “research”,’ Amme continues, unperturbed by Jimin’s comment. ‘While I understand the idea behind approaching Axudar to enter your home System, for these very reasons of not having the GLA so close by, I would advise you to be careful with what you might find there.’

Jimin studies the flaky sedimentation that formed the limestone he was sitting on.
‘I believe you know, deep down in your heart, that you have been betrayed from within,’ Amme says simply, not pulling back for remorse or sensitivity.

‘I cannot give you hope for this venture,’ she continues, ‘Not when you cannot find it in yourself to bring hope for yourself.’

Jimin slowly breathes out, lowering his head, eyelids heavy and burning, his chest aching.

‘You carry tremendous knowledge,’ Amme says, her hands reaching forward to raise his head up. Her touch is cooler than Jimin expected. ‘Tremendous knowledge, and the weight of those you have to let go.’

Jimin has never been in a position where he has needed to be healed before.

‘There are matters that you cannot bear – and that you should not bear,’ Amme continues, one of her long fingers presses over his temples and Jimin closes his eyes at once. A cool caress draws over his closed eyes, the burning stops immediately. ‘This has gone beyond what you can control, beyond your design, beyond your fate.’

‘Then what should I do? What can I do?’

‘You need to understand the limitations of your control,’ Amme tells him gently, ‘And understand that sometimes your control may limit you far more than what you thought.’

‘Follow your heart, but take your brain with you,’ Jimin whispers, ‘Right?’

Amme’s hands still for a while before she places them over his temples properly again.

‘The Known Universe has always seen Humans as a weak species,’ Amme quite randomly states, ‘Humans were deemed too weak, too fragile, too simple. But if anything, I do not think any of us should ever underestimate the strength of our hearts.’

Jimin opens his eyes, finds himself reflected in Amme’s silvery pairs.

‘Thank you,’ he whispers.

When Amme takes her hands away, Jimin’s body feels rested, the sore dull ache over his body ceases, the prickling pain behind his eyes abate.

He was still weighed, the emptiness in his chest still there – but Jimin feels almost as well as he did the day he first opened his eyes all the way back in Pompa.

Jimin smiles up at Amme.

‘You were born, with the blessings of the First Children,’ Amme sits back properly. ‘And you need not carry the heartbreak of punishment alone.’

Jimin nods, quite unable to speak.

‘You may stay here as long as you like,’ Amme says as she stands in her strangely fluid yet stiff way.

‘Thank you, S’wezete Amme,’ Jimin also stands, bowing in full courtesy as was the style of his home-planet.

‘That is a title I am unfamiliar with,’ Amme appeared to be smiling but Jimin can only see a lot of
teeth. It’s not discomfiting anymore.

‘Breath of life,’ Jimin manages to translate as accurately as he can.

Amme bows back, mimicking his courtesy and turns.

She’s almost about to exit the garden when something occurs to Jimin.

‘S’wezete Amme!’ he calls, jogging forward a little.

The Yisheng stops, turning to look down at Jimin.

‘May I ask you for a favour?’

* 

Jimin has his hand buried under the soil over the roots of a very unique fruiting plant when Yoongi walks in.

This is not exactly how Jimin wished Yoongi would have caught him. His sleeves are literally soiled, the area over his knees are streaked with clay, moss, and dirt from kneeling on the damp ground. Jimin wanted to study some plants and as Amme had basically given him permission to just stay here he did exactly that. He’s not sure how much time has gone by. He and Yoongi had separated some time ago, where the Human had said he was going to meet up with Hoseok to check over their new ship, and Jimin had gone to find food.

Jimin hastily removes his hand, disrupting the pretty roots and wincing a little before patting it back down and standing up straight, quickly wiping his hands on the side of his trousers.

‘Uh- um, hi,’ Jimin tries, failing spectacularly to be casual and as Sk’jin would say it “cool”. It’s also a little more than embarrassing because last time Jimin had pretty much wept about his hair. And because he wasn’t blind he knew how much Yoongi seemed to really like his hair.

It felt strangely odd, to ask Amme to “heal” his hair.

But it had been forcefully taken from him- an attempt to break him. And it seemed silly- it probably was, but being able to have his hair back.

It wasn’t just about vanity, or going back to a sense of familiarity.

This was about coming into acceptance- into being.

And Yoongi still hasn’t said a word, still hasn’t blinked. Still hasn’t moved either.

Jimin feels all sorts of jittery as he walks towards Yoongi. As he gets closer, it’s only then Yoongi blinks. Rapidly at that too. It’s only then that he also closes his mouth, as though realizing he’d been staring with his mouth open.
And this time, instead of just shying away, or trying to ignore how he felt, Jimin walks all the way up towards Yoongi (the Human’s eyes widening almost comically) and kisses him on the mouth.

The jitters completely ease away, but they all rush back at once when Jimin leans back again. He feels his whole face flush, stuttering out a sort of dismissive laughter but Yoongi is already leaning in again, a wide grin on his face.

Yoongi kisses him so adoringly, his hands cradling Jimin’s face as he kisses his whole face. Jimin can’t help but wheeze and giggle, a sense of delightful lightness taking over him.

‘Maybe Yishengs can start up a new industry with hair-related treatment,’ Yoongi chuckles, stopping to just admire Jimin’s locks.

He pushes Jimin a little afar, head angling around as though to really take in Jimin’s hair properly. It’s so ridiculous that Jimin can’t help but laugh, bending over with the force of his laughter. He steps back a little, angling himself as though hoping to catch different angle of light. Yoongi is laughing as well, eyes crinkled, a rosy almost healthy warmth in his cheeks. He looks healthier and Jimin guesses Amme had healed him too.

Jimin even turns around, twirling and shaking his head, laughing as he does so before he shuffles back towards Yoongi.

‘Nice?’ Jimin asks.

Yoongi doesn’t reply immediately, instead his expression changes from one of delight to something a bit more subdued- a bit thoughtful.

‘When I first saw you,’ Yoongi begins lowly, ‘I swear- god it sounds so dumb- I genuinely thought you were an illusion. A mirage- you just-’ he pauses to look away from his hair and back to him. ‘- you…I know I keep saying this but you’re really beautiful.’

‘Okay.’

Yoongi chuckles, he looks embarrassed. He steps closer, hands reaching out for Jimin’s.

‘I’m- it’s obviously- I mean it’s not just your hair, that’s uh, dumb, you know, or like, I’m not saying this superficially or anything uhh- I’m just, you know sometimes I guess I’m overwhelmed? I dunno I’m just kinda running my mouth off-‘

It’s so heart-warming seeing Yoongi like this. He’s so awkward, bashful, but so determined. It’s enough for Jimin to ignore the way he’s awkward and embarrassed.

Yoongi is still combing through his hair, caught in a strange trance that Jimin knows he can break. All he would have to do would be to gently push Yoongi a little, or maybe look away. But he doesn’t want to.

It’s overwhelming but in a good way.

He’s never kissed Yoongi like this- not when he feels like this. Not when he’s safe – not with this intent.

It’s almost as though they were in a different time, a different place.

‘I think any time I kiss you, everything is good.’
So Jimin is the one to lean in this time, one hand angling Yoongi’s head just a little and the other on his waist. There’s a sharp intake of breath from the Human. He leans in completely, chest up against Jimin’s as his hands settle on his hips.

They’ve never talked about it.

They’ve never addressed it.

It was just so-

*Inevitable.*

Jimin gasps, his body shivers. Yoongi swallows his gasp, soothing the shivers of his body with his own.

‘You’re everything I’ve wanted to feel,’ Yoongi mouths against his lips. ‘Everything-‘

Yoongi holds him so close – like he *needed* Jimin. Like everything he’s ever wanted was *here*, with Jimin.

And Jimin holds him back the same way.

There’s less kissing and just simply holding each other instead. And somehow here in this garden – everything was *good*.

Yoongi pants harshly against his neck, clearly trying to reign himself in.

‘Hey,’ Jimin whispers breathlessly, his heart still racing, his entire being lifted.

Yoongi is swaying them gently, the sound of their hearts a private symphony just for them.

‘Yoongi,’ Jimin says again, making sure Yoongi heard him. Yoongi kisses his neck in reply.

‘In that house next to the shore and the forest, I want a garden like this one.’

A few seconds later Jimin can feel Yoongi’s smile on his skin.

‘A garden?’ Yoongi says quietly, lips kissing the words into his skin.

Jimin leans back to look at Yoongi, humming in acknowledgment.

‘Hmm, not too big. I’m actually- um, not good. With gardens.’

Yoongi laughs, gums showing.

His laughter colours the air, soothing tones of the sky, and the clouds and-

‘You’re not?’

‘I was always teased about it,’ Jimin complains.

Yoongi chuckles quietly, the sound of soft waves lapping up against the shore.

‘What about bushes? Shrubs? Trees?’

‘I- I got scared. Discouraged,’ Jimin tells him like it’s a secret. ‘Didn’t want to make mistake.’
‘You could always try succulents?’ Yoongi offers, his breath settles, the intensity in his eyes slowly ebbing.

‘Suh- succulents-‘ Jimin repeats but his mind instantly gives him images that correspond to that.

‘They don’t need a lot of water. Or much care. They’re happier when you don’t bother them,’ Yoongi grins in a teasing way before he tucks away Jimin’s hair behind his ears. ‘We can keep a whole garden of them.’

‘Are they flowers?’ Jimin asks leaning his face against Yoongi’s palm. He places his own palm over Yoongi’s chest.

He ignores the strain, moves past the fatigue, the corrosion, the pain. Instead he feels the warmth, the gentleness, the strength, and the dedication that pulses there, deep in Yoongi’s chest.

Jimin already feels like he’s taken so much away from Yoongi.

Has stolen him away, from him.

‘Not all of them have flowers,’ Yoongi holds his free hand over Jimin’s hand. ‘But they would all bloom for you.’

They’re such…odd things to say. Almost childish – almost akin to something Sk’jin would read out loud from the books he enjoys reading. But there’s such a genuine tone – something almost poetic when Yoongi says it.

Yoongi tilts his head a little, a small smile on his face before he leans in to press a lingering kiss on Jimin’s forehead.

Jimin can hear the gentle sound of the ocean meeting the shoreline. The rustling of trees behind him. He can hear the sound of the water, he can feel the wind on his skin.

They’re both standing under a mild sky, feet wet as the ocean washes over their feet.

It’s warm.

Yoongi is warm.

‘Then maybe for now, you can take mine.’

‘We all need the sun to bloom.’
(Author’s Notes)

I feel like, this chapter might have too much in it- but I felt that it was time, not only relevant to the plot, but also for the overall reading experience, to explain things.

AND HERE WE ARE Y’ALL

God, I had this massive info-dump written up over the past 2 years in scratched out notes and msgs sent to myself through facebook, email, line msgs, and dm-ing myself things I shouldn’t forget omg

But it’s far from over really

Someone asked me how many more chapters for ADEGU, and I think, now? I think maybe 20 chapters more- or well, 19 chapters I guess. Putting us at all together 60 chapters.

Woo!

Anyways, writing about Jimin and his internal struggle was a sort reflection of our generation I feel. The immense responsibility we have, in light of global issues that both feel distant but at the same time too close to our immediate reality – of feeling useless and overwhelmed, like as I was writing it I asked myself ‘you okay, do you also need a Yoongi to hug you’ like bitch I wish, but yeah- what I’m saying is that, it’s okay to say that you’re not okay. And it’s okay to realize and accept the fact that you know, shit happens, shit will happen, and sometimes there’s nothing we can do about it. Jimin feeling like a broken but put together but broken again tile is a very accurate representation of how I used to feel during what I refer to as my ‘Mid-20’s-of-existential-and-emotionally-financially-strained-oppression’ fuck those were some terrible times. But a lot of the times, overcoming that comes with accepting the situation and not allowing that to be your identity. So yeah, GO JIMIN YOU POWERFUL LITTLE ALIEN BOY
See y’all next chapter
I’ll also be doing little illustrations of my OC’s!!!! so you guys can see what they’ll look like? I’ll update on my twitter and link here in the next update!
Also I am sorry for this massive chapter
This was Yoongi’s idea.

And Jimin is… Jimin is not happy with this idea.

He’s also a little miffed. Clearly Yoongi could be sneaky and had his own way of doing things. Jimin knew he couldn’t trust him after the Human cheated Taeh’yung in a childish game involving “hotels” and “taxes”. It almost makes Jimin smile but he’s trying to look as impassive as possible.

Which is difficult to do because Yoongi has the tendency of speaking with the slightest push of his lips, a soft drawl that drags his words in both a raspy and whiny way that’s hard to not be endeared by.

Or maybe because this is Yoongi. And because Yoongi’s idea is in fact, well thought out, and well planned, with good reasoning.

‘I don’t see why not,’ Sk’jin remarks from where he stands. ‘This is probably the safest place to try this. And to make sure both of you are safe.’

‘I don’t think we should tell Amme,’ Hoseok frowns, perched on the desk. He hadn’t spoken before, listening intently while he absentmindedly watched the screen tracking Namjoon’s movements.

‘We don’t- but she’ll be here in case something happens,’ Yoongi explains, ‘Also, Taeh’yung could help.’

‘I can!’

‘You don’t have to,’ Sk’jin cuts across firmly before adding with a serious tone, ‘Taeh’yung, I don’t think you should be exercising what you can do so freely or without warning like you did in Grisial.’

Jimin eyes the Zhak’gri, sitting on the floor against Hoseok’s legs. Jimin thinks for a brief moment Taeh’yung might argue, or flat out refuse.

But he just pouts and nods, as though reprimanded.

‘I won’t,’ he nods solemnly.
‘Won’t it hurt?’ Jungkook asks, and to everyone’s surprise, he’s asking Yoongi. With concern.

‘Life is pain-’ Yoongi begins in a deadpan tone but Sk’jin is quick to whack the top of his head with a stiff hand.

‘Stop being a dramatic bitch,’ Sk’jin snaps before he adds, ‘Jungkook’s right- last time you guys did this, no offence but this Human asshole came out.’

Yoongi is probably throwing up an offensive gesture which Sk’jin reflects back.

‘What Sk’jin is saying,’ Hoseok cuts in firmly, standing up straight after gently nudging Taeh’yung to the side, ‘-is that we don’t know what will happen if you try this thing again.’

‘Which is why we’re doing this in a Yisheng ship,’ Yoongi counters immediately. ‘We need to know more. And while I don’t think Amme has lied to us about what she wants to tell us,’ he makes a funny face at that, ‘I still think we need to find out more – and I know, I can feel that I still have… memories that are important, that I can’t remember-‘

‘-I agree with Sk’jin,’ Jimin says tersely, ignoring how Sk’jin says ‘see? Even the boyfriend thinks he’s a bitch.’

Before Yoongi can try to counter Jimin, his expression imploring, Jimin looks away and continues to explain.

‘The last time you tried to remember what was happening- what happened,’ Jimin corrects himself as he addresses the floor, ‘it hurt you- not just…not just physical pain- you-‘

‘-I know,’ Yoongi says quietly, ‘I know, but you also know this is important. We need to know.’

Every second Yoongi stayed here- every moment of Time he existed here, the erosion that stretched to the point of snapping. Jimin can see it so clearly- see the weight of it crushing Yoongi and he can’t cure it. Can’t stop it. But he couldn’t just allow something that would fast-forward the erosion before his very eyes.

‘We will time you,’ Hoseok states, ‘Let’s say we try to wake you in an hour-‘

‘-half,’ Jimin shakes his head, sighing out slowly, ‘Half an hour-‘

Yoongi gives him a small smile.

‘So, what,’ Sk’jin asks, looking displeased, ‘We just shake you awake in half an hour? What if that doesn’t work?’

‘Then Taeh’yung will try to do something,’ Yoongi looks across at the Zhak’gri expectantly as he adds, ‘You’re allowed to do that.’

Taeh’yung gives them an eager double thumb’s up.

‘If not, a bucket of water is always helpful,’ Sk’jin tries at an attempt to lighten up the atmosphere.

‘And if worse comes to worse, we call Amme,’ Yoongi concludes.

They had finished checking the new ship they were to use to replace the Užkulisai, making lists and notes on what additional items they would need to outfit it to their liking. That was when Yoongi called for their attention to announce this plan. To map out his memories like they had before- to see into places and thoughts Yoongi had once experienced and felt, to better piece
together useful information. And Jimin understands the importance of this, the rationale and logic behind it.

When Jimin looks up from the floor, he realizes that everyone is looking at him.

They were waiting for him.

Jimin does not want to do this. The first and only time they had done this, Jimin was under the impression that it would be safe. But all things considered, he had only worsened things for Yoongi.

So instead of saying anything, Jimin just nods stiffly.

He knows that he should do this— that searching through Yoongi’s memories would benefit them as a whole. But a part of him wants to take Yoongi, and hide him away forever, to keep him safe.

‘Okay great- so we just wait for you to fall asleep?’ Sk’jin fake yawns.

‘No- I can uh, I can start,’ Jimin still can’t quite look at Yoongi. He sits closer to the middle of the bed, all of them having gathered in Hoseok’s temporary room aboard the Yisheng ship. Yoongi also adjusts his position, coming to sit in front of Jimin, their crossed legs touching at the knees. Yoongi holds his hands forward, palms up.

‘Hey, we’ll be here,’ Hoseok says as he kneels before them, ‘We’ll wake you up in 30 minutes.’

Again, Jimin just nods.

He takes Yoongi’s hands in his, closing his eyes immediately but Yoongi nudges him with his foot.

‘Sunshine,’ he calls quietly.

Jimin just shakes his head. He knows it’s childish. But he can’t help it. His throat tightens, his eyes burning beneath the lids.

He hears Yoongi shuffle a little before there’s a press of lips against his forehead.

‘Sunshine, open your eyes.’

Reluctantly Jimin opens his eyes.

He’s in a narrow corridor. The walls unfinished and grey, their unending flatness only disrupted by equally spaced narrow doors all around. The lights are dim, but it’s enough to allow Jimin to see properly. The door directly in front of him opens, revealing stairs that lead downwards through a room lined with symmetrical clear cased cabinets and drawers, all containing rows and rows of compressed medication and chemicals. Jimin can’t make out the labels on the fronts of the drawers.

But his feet take him towards the door at the end of this strange anteroom, and through the doors he finds himself in a wide room, filled with OrTanks not too different from the one he had been in. They’re much taller, bigger— allowing whatever/whoever was growing in there the space they needed. And there are many of them— many Beings, in varying stages of growth, of age, of stages of development. Jimin walks past, a sense of disassociation settled in him, as though what he saw wasn’t surprising.

And maybe it’s because when he sees his own reflection, it’s because Yoongi is looking back at
‘This is a place we both know. A place that is…that has meaning. Of something.’

‘I- Hoseok asked him I think- it hurt you both,’ Jimin finds himself saying.

‘We want to know. We both do. All of us.’

‘I wish we didn’t-…we didn’t have to do it like this.’

‘You don’t hurt me.’ Is all Yoongi says.

The Beings inside the OrTanks all turn in their suspension, watching them with sleeping eyes even in this waking dream.

‘This way,’ Yoongi tells him, before looking away and guiding them towards the distant side of the room.

Jimin simply watches, there is no movement, no action from his side. He was simply observing. He was here to witness, and to understand.

‘Yoongi?’

‘Yes?’

Jimin doesn’t have a question really, just wants to hear his voice. And he says as much.

‘Just wanted to hear your voice.’

‘I’m always here.’

They reach a wall – which is odd because Jimin felt almost as though this current space somehow expanded infinitely. There are some doors here too. Widely spaced and different to the ones outside in the narrow hallway. These doors are well secured and had little windows, as though to look into.

Jimin looks in.

This one is empty, only what appeared to be some sort of Medical Bed. But it was different. With massive coils of wires draping downwards from the ceiling to the floor and up to the divided center between the two halves of the Bed. The space perfectly fits the size of the dent on Yoongi’s back.

Jimin makes his way through the side of the room, some of the rooms empty, some containing Beings, until he comes across a door that opens to him. He’s not surprised to find Yoongi asleep in there.

Like the others Jimin saw in the rooms, he’s shirtless, with a strap across his hips and shoulders fitting him into the bed.

‘He’s dreaming.’

‘What is he dreaming about?’

‘I can’t remember.’

‘Okay- we-….we can look.’
Jimin takes a deep breath, taking Yoongi’s lax hand in his.

‘That’s okay- it’ll be okay.’

Yoongi sounds unsure.

‘I don’t know,’ Jimin whispers back, surprised at the question- he had never thought about himself in this situation. ‘But we have to…’

‘I wish we didn’t – it will hurt.’

‘You don’t hurt me.’ Jimin manages to say.

‘I’ll be waiting for you.’

Arms wrap around him, breath against his neck, hair tickling his ears.

Jimin holds the arms around him, taking a deep breath.

‘This will hurt you I think,’ he whispers as he reaches out again to take Yoongi’s still hand.

‘You don’t hurt me.’

Nothing happens.

Jimin waits a few seconds, wondering what was wrong.

‘Yoongi-‘

Jimin looks around. He’s alone.

‘…’

Jimin jumps at the strange cut whisper.

This wasn’t Yoongi’s voice. This wasn’t…wasn’t a voice he knew.

The room is flooded with light – a powerful flash that fades just as quickly as it appeared.

‘Human?’

Jimin stumbles around, his wall hitting the back as the source of the unknown voice suddenly appears before him.

He’s slender, tall- maybe a little unhealthy looking what with the pale pallor of his skin and purple bruises under his eyes. He looks…he looks Human. But not quite. His eyes are large, hair a dirty blond that curls just a little. He looks…he looks like a sad memory.

He doesn’t seem all too solid. All too clear. A strange and faded projection almost.

Then suddenly, he looks up, straight at Jimin.

‘How are you here?’ Jimin asks, his throat strangely choked. He’s witnessing something absolutely
strange.

‘I am.’ His voice clear but soft as a whisper. ‘And he is.’

‘What are you doing? You- you’re the dream-’

‘-he is Human. As I once was.’

‘Was?’

‘She’s gone, isn't she?’

‘She?’

‘Earth...home. She’s gone.’ He looks thoughtful. ‘So that would be my end.’

‘What are you talking about-‘

‘You have to stay,’ he continues, looking straight at Jimin, ‘You have to stay, and you need to protect them all.’

‘I-…I will-’ Jimin finds himself promising. ‘I will-‘

‘It will hurt.’

‘I know-’ Jimin manages to say, his voice breaking midway. ‘I know it will-‘

He smiles, his eyes are beautiful- sparkling suddenly with light and life, ‘There is another lifetime. And you will meet and-’ The absolute hope, the strength of the promise: the pure love in his words.

‘-and I’ll be waiting;’ Jimin whispers faintly, the words coming out of them, spoken in harmony with this stranger. This other Human.

‘Who are we in Time?’ he asks before he leans down over Yoongi and putting his hand over his head, calls out, ‘Wake up brother, and be as you were, and as you are. You are Alive.’

‘I’ll always come back to you.’

Yoongi states it so clearly, deep asleep and unaware, before he starts awake. The restraints against his shoulders holding him back.

And for a moment, Jimin swears Yoongi looks straight at him.

Yoongi struggles for a moment before he pushes the restraints off of himself. With a strange tugging sound, Yoongi sits up, a long black wire attached down the length of his back. The skin doesn’t look inflamed, nor does it look irritated. It almost appeared natural.

Yoongi looks around confused, blinking hard as he tries to regain his sense of surrounding. Jimin watches the way he studies the Bed, his restraints, how he gently touches at his back. Yoongi isn’t the most lucid, but he’s trying his best. He gets out of the bed shakily, his legs weak and unsupportive. He makes his way to the door and Jimin also looks out.

It’s changed from what Jimin had walked through. They both reach out, their hand on the handle and they quietly push the door open.

It’s dim, the lights only coming from the OrTanks. The Beings inside are as varying as it was when
Jimin saw them in the future just moment ago.

Jimin doesn’t stray far from where Yoongi walks, just a few steps behind him. They circle the OrTanks, trying to understand what it was he was looking at. Jimin stops when Yoongi pauses to catch his breath, leaning against an OrTank when Jimin pauses to look at the Being inside.

Textured grey skin, hairless head, and if their eyes were open, they would be sulfuric yellow with dotted black irises.

What was a Megibīyan doing here, in the Yisheng Directory?

Jimin does not recognize the Being in there- but he knows very clearly the species from his own System. This was before Yoongi was taken to “Bhumi” – before the attacks were reported from Megibīya.

Yoongi jumps at a small sound, making Jimin duck down too. They quickly make their way back to the room Yoongi was kept in. Jimin watches with half of his attention as Yoongi puts himself back onto the Medical Bed, feigning unconsciousness as the door opens once more to reveal blank-faced Beings. Jimin can’t make their figures out- only senses their forms and shapes rather than see them. They pull Yoongi’s bed along, and Jimin follows after them at once.

This memory is blurred- the colours and lights shifting and glitching, as though the memory was just an adaption of sound and previous sight. As though Jimin were walking through a projected memory based on the sounds Yoongi was hearing as he feigned unconsciousness.

But suddenly, Jimin’s feet aren’t taking him anywhere. He was losing the memory Yoongi had kept- and Jimin can’t move. He can’t escape as the memory ends- and that’s when it hits Jimin hard.

This was Yoongi’s pain.

Some voices are thrown around here and there, the shapes around him contorting and shifting even more- the colours violent and the sounds sharp, piercing slowly through the OrTanks around them. The voices spike in volume and intensity and Jimin realizes it’s screaming- was it his own, or was this Yoongi’s?

Jimin stumbles against unstable bubbling floors, his feet unable to move.

‘Yoongi-!’ Jimin gasps out, the blurred forms pushing against him. Crushing him, bearing down in gnawing points down his back, against the top of his skull-

He’s falling- as recklessly and violently as light piercing the expanse of space, Jimin hurtles through stretched expanses of a singular moment of sounds, movement, and colour.

‘-ow many Yoongi’s do-’

A multitude of hands erupt, all reaching for him, desperation in their movements.

FOUND-

A massive globe-like space expands around him, cushioning his fall. Wires pour out of him- out his back, spreading like some vine all over and into hidden crevices under white large squared tiles. Suddenly the tiles clear and beneath the tiles are oceans of still movement- of Beings afloat in a dream waiting to awake into pain and waiting only to be found-
They open their eyes, hands moving to point at him, mouths opening to scream in pain-

‘Jimin!’

Jimin stumbles back into a dim hallway, but he doesn’t fall.

‘You’re all right- don’t-‘

His feet feel like they’re about to sink through the floor, to fall back into vortex of pain that pushed deep into his skin, through to his bones. The floor slips and Jimin slips from the hold he’s in but-

‘I got you- I got you!’ Yoongi is holding him- his voice, his presence- it pushes around, shielding him from the pain right behind those walls-

Yoongi’s face appears before him, eyes searching his own face as though for injury.

‘Listen to me- stay here,’ Yoongi orders him gently, ‘You’re safe here, there’s no pain here.’

Jimin’s ears clear from the high-pitched ringing he hadn’t even realized was there until it went away. His breaths are harsh. Gently, Yoongi lifts him from the ground- when did he even fall down? And helps him stand on his two feet. Looking down, the floors are a dark unpolished wood, quite black against his bare feet.

But he’s clean.

No blood, no gore- it’s jarring compared to the pain Jimin just went through. He expected blood to be everywhere.

And in the best possible way, Jimin is overwhelmed with the sheer intensity of how safe he feels here. In fact, all Jimin wants to do is sleep now. It was so comforting being in here- comforting, safe, loved.

‘Where are we?’ he asks, his voice almost sluggish.

Yoongi smiles, taking his hand and tugging him down the hallway.

‘This is where I come to get away from everything else,’ Yoongi explains. ‘It’s safe.’

‘Everything else?’ Jimin repeats, looking around. Behind him is a door, clearly the entrance door. Stairs lead upwards to one side, and there are 2 doors open to the side, revealing a small kitchen, and the other an office space of sorts with a couch pushed up against a window. There’s a soft yellow blanket draped over it, and a mess of items on the short table before it. The designs are simple, clean, and very distinctly Earthian.

‘Is this your home?’ Jimin asks quietly as his feet touch upon a soft rug laid down on the floor. To the other side, beyond the stairs are ceiling to floor windows, wide open, revealing an inky lavender sky.

It was just around dawn, before the sun was even pushing through the horizon. Jimin can spot rolling hills, mist lingering over fields scattered with trees. This felt like winter- or at least, winter right before spring.

He’s gently guided into a bedroom.

There’s a simple but heavy looking desk to one side, bordered by two slender windows. There’s a bed in the center, flanked by little tables. A comfortable chair to one side, and a door probably
leading to an en suite. But what catches Jimin’s eye is a yellow telescope to one side.

‘Is this your home?’ Jimin asks again, looking around at Yoongi who was sitting on the edge of the bed now.

‘For now?’ Yoongi looks a little sheepish as he continues, ‘Um, actually I, imagined this place up. I don’t know how to explain it but- but after that time you looked into my memories I just- this is a place I sort of come to. In my own head. Or something, it doesn’t make a lot of sense to me.’

But it makes sense to Jimin.

Because he’s been in one of these places before. Yoongi’s is smaller, younger – it’s just a single existence. And somehow this relieves Jimin.

The previous one was a long hallway, doors flanked on each side. Jimin can still remember the gentle air of fresh snow around him, falling from a ceiling high above, the thin branches of trees appearing through the mist.

‘It’s beautiful,’ Jimin smiles, coming to sit next to Yoongi.

‘I like to think of us here,’ Yoongi tells him, a smile on his lips, reaching for his hand.

Yoongi’s hands envelope his own.

Jimin looks around, a wide smile growing on his face.

‘I really like it here.’

‘No palaces where you come from, your majesty?’ Yoongi teases, gently shoving their shoulders together. Jimin shoves back, ears feeling hot.

‘It’s just…I really like it,’ Jimin says gently.

‘I uh, I think there’s a space for you here,’ Yoongi tells him, looking unsure. ‘It’s…I don’t know how to explain it. But I think, this place somehow exists in me, because of you.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘It’s…-’ Yoongi stands, ‘Come, I’ll show you.’

He leads them back out again, and up the stairs.

‘Somehow everything just- just came to be, exactly how it should be,’ Yoongi tells him as they reach the top of the stairs. ‘But this place—…I think it’s waiting for you. Or, I guess I should say, I was waiting for you.’

It’s a clear space, no wall on one end, opening up to a sky and what appeared to be a gentle sea stretching out far away. Soft clouds form in the distance, just a little edge with rosy gold as the sun approached rising.

Yoongi smiles as he looks around and then back at Jimin, ‘Yeah- I think we were just waiting for you.’

‘We?’

‘Hmm,’ Yoongi nods, looking around, ‘This was an empty house- it was just me, and then I came
to be, and it became more. And now, you’re here. A place that’s safe, and away from…well, away from everything else.’

This place. This house- this home. This was all Yoongi.

Yoongi as he was, an echo of what was, until he remembered- and the music of who he was, who he is, and who he will be reappeared. It took shape, formed into this place. This place that was all him. All Yoongi.

All for Jimin.

There’s a look in Yoongi’s eyes. Like he’s trying to tell him something but can’t bring himself to do it. And Jimin knows what he wants to say. But he can’t bring himself to say it either.

‘What do you think I should do here?’ Jimin asks instead.

‘You could always bring the sun up- though I think it’s already coming up.’ Yoongi looks around.

He looks fresh, young, and incredibly well. His hair is a little messy, like he just got out of bed. He’s wearing a soft sweater of sorts, a trousers with the cuffs rolled up a little though lopsided. His feet are bare and Jimin cannot see his scars.

There’s a gentle warmth that seeps through his clothes, and into his skin as Yoongi speaks. Turning, Jimin realizes that the sun has indeed come up. Walking back down the stairs, Jimin watches as the sun rises slowly.

It washes over him: warmth, strength, love.

It nearly chokes him up when he realizes what this meant.

‘Sunshine,’ Yoongi holds him close.

This is what it felt like to Yoongi. This was what he felt, looking at Jimin.

Yoongi exhales, as though finally relieved.

‘You’re everything I’ve wanted to feel.’

‘Do you think we should go back now?’ Jimin asks, after what felt like a gentle eternity, holding Yoongi in his arms, the warmth and comfort of their love all around them.

‘Not yet,’ Yoongi says quietly, his lips brushing against his ears. ‘I don’t-…I don’t want to let go just yet.’

Rain falls softly outside the windows, spectrums of colour colouring the sun-filled light streaming into the hallway. If Jimin listens closely, he can hear the sea upstairs.

‘I want to be selfish and keep you here,’ Yoongi confesses. ‘Want to stay here with you. But we- but we need to look again.’

The rain stops, but there are grey clouds hovering high above, waiting to break open again. The wind picks up outside, stray leaves fluttering across the wide window.

‘It hurts,’ Jimin manages to say. ‘You’re hurt.’

‘But you don’t hurt me,’ Yoongi says it like he’s teasing him. ‘You never have.’
‘But-’

‘How could this place exist, if you hurt me?’ Yoongi asks, leaning their foreheads together. ‘You can feel it, can’t you? This doesn’t hurt.’

Jimin closes his eyes, nodding, ‘Yeah- yeah I-’

Yoongi kisses him softly.

‘Just this one time-’

‘-this is the last time,’ Jimin declares, ‘No more. Not after this. No more. I won’t.’

‘The last time,’ Yoongi agrees before he kisses him one more time, ‘You’re strong. You’re so so strong, my beautiful sunshine.’

‘There’s no need for flattery,’ Jimin says wetly.

Yoongi just grins, leading him all the way down the stairs and then back to the bedroom. He guides him to the bed, crawling over him as Jimin’s back hits the soft blankets and pillow.

‘You’ll need to look past what I can’t remember. The blur, the lights, the sounds- you’ll need to push through.’ Yoongi explains, ‘You won’t see me, but I’ll be there with you.’

Jimin nods, unable to speak.

The lights from the windows cast clear shapes of light against the walls and ceiling.

‘Just the last time,’ Yoongi promises.

Jimin nods, holding his hands up to cup Yoongi’s face. Balancing himself on arm, Yoongi places his other hand over Jimin’s chest- above his heart. He opens his mouth to say something, but he stops. Instead he just smiles.

‘But I can come back here right?’ Jimin asks, almost fearfully.

‘It’s yours,’ Yoongi replies simply.

This time it doesn’t hurt.

Jimin finds himself inside a Transporter. It’s loud and from the way what he can see blurs, from how there appeared to be doubles of everything, Jimin recognizes that the night before Yoongi and Amic had headed out to Megibīya, they had truly drunk themselves into a steady stupor. It was a miracle he had somewhat managed to remember his meeting with Amme just the night before even though he felt it was somewhat of a dream.

Yoongi is slumbering in a state of half-sleep, half-lucidness. Amic next to him is completely knocked out.

His team are all there. Many of whom were also drunk.

Jimin wonders if they all felt that something was wrong.

‘-it’s not that-’ a voice breaks through the haze of sound and double-sight.

Jimin follows the voice, pushing through the drunken haze that shaped Yoongi’s memory.
'I'm sorry,' Jimin whispers quietly before he pauses a moment, hands lifted. A surge of light ripples around him and everything around him clears up.

It’s not a natural feeling. There lines too harsh, the finer details still lost- but the sounds clear up, the colours tone down a little, and most importantly, he hears the voices clearly.

‘-ut there’s nothing we can do about that.’

‘So you’re telling me we’re going to ignore the victims of what is evidently some form of planetary genocide, and we just stroll in?’

It’s Amad’la.

‘What I’m saying is that we have orders to follow,’ another voice says snappishly. ‘I’m flying us out to the border, then you’ll be heading down there.’

‘Just what am I leading my team into? They’re skilled yes, but they’re not experienced enough for a situation like this. What the hell kind of System abandons their own planet like this?’

‘Look- from what Yisheng Ndica and Sstion have said, there’s been some form of revolution within the System- some sort of coup d’état. They’re removing the main people in power and overturning everything.’

‘And with all due respect, but the Yishengs think we should go in now? Without any Yisheng to quell the situation?’ Amad’la sounds pissed. ‘I am grateful for their faith in me and my team, but this is not the time for it.’

Jimin can’t push through the forcefully sharpened and cleared up hallway into what is clearly the main Bridge. It’s fine- he can hear what was happening.

‘Look, Amad’la, I’m just as lost as you are in this okay- I’m just doing what I’ve been told, and telling you what I’ve been told. Actually, I’m telling you more than you should know.’ The other voice sighs.

‘So this trip is bullshit then. We’re being sent in to scout the leftovers of a genocide? Is that it?’

‘Yes and no. The Yishengs want to establish a way of getting in. Apparently the other way is too difficult, or at least they’re trying. The ones responsible for the coup are trying to help from inside the System but it’s been difficult.’

‘And why do the Yishengs want to interfere in something like this? Wasn’t there a Treaty signed over this place?’

The ship starts to distort again. Looking behind him, Jimin sees the way Yoongi falls deeper into sleep.

‘Yes but-‘

‘-this is incredibly shifty to me. As a higher commanding officer, I officially order you to turn this ship around and take us back to Tayi. I will personally speak to the Yisheng Ndica and Sstion if that’s what’s necessary-‘

Jimin concentrates hard, apologizing under his breath as he forces attention in this haze of a memory.
‘-that won’t be needed. Even if you outrank me, I have been ordered by Yisheng Ndica to take you all there- he outranks you. I am just doing my job. You should do yours.’

Amad’la suddenly appears in the doorway leading to the Bridge. Her eyes are angry, and also disturbed. She looks down into the chamber where the others were slumbering.

Her hands are held in a tight fist.

The ship is engulfed in darkness now, shapes crawling under each other.

‘Those are the orders.’ The voice repeats again.

‘What am I doing with this then?’ Amad’la asks, pointing at the device Jimin recognizes. The one that Yoongi had carried up the mountain side, struggling with his breath as he tried to hopelessly fulfill a mission doomed to fail. Everything is starting to leak colour and light.

Something starts to gnaw at Jimin’s skin.

‘You’re supposed to install it inside the tower located in the map. Apparently it will trigger a way to breach through the protective shields around the System.’

The ship lurches- and Jimin tilts forward violently.

He lands painfully on the floor, he feels himself coughing out blood.

‘-this feels wrong.’

‘It’s the orders. Are you questioning the Yishengs?’

‘No of course not I’m just-’

Jimin is thrown out of the ship.

He feels himself flung out, crashing through large sharp objects.

‘-IMIN!’

‘Yoongi-!’ Jimin gasps out, breath squeezing out of him- pain burning through his skin into his bone into his eyes in through his hair into his teeth and tongue-

‘Jimin!’

It’s not Yoongi.

It’s him again.

‘What-‘

‘Remember,’ he tells him with a beautiful smile, his hair light and golden. ‘You have to stay.’

Hands reach out for him and through the dark ocean he bursts through-

Jimin gasps for air as water drips down his hair, his face- he’s soaked in it.

Yoongi is also gasping, body shuddering from the sudden explosion of cold water. There is blood coming out from Yoongi’s nostril- from both of their own. The remnants of Yoongi’s pain burns under his skin and it makes Jimin cry out. And as though he knew- and Jimin suspects that Yoongi
knew exactly what it was- the Human lurches forward to hold him down on the mattress.

‘-I mean you could have warned us before you wanted to bone-’

‘-he’s in shock-!’ Yoongi gasps, spitting out water as he attempts to straighten and hold Jimin’s body down.

It’s only then that Jimin realizes he’s shaking violently, a strange choking gasp escaping him.

The pain he felt wasn’t his own- but it settled deep into his bones- straight into his very Soul.

‘Call Amme-’ Jimin hears Hoseok sternly ordering someone but there’s something heavy settling on his head.

Taeh’yung looks down at him, ancient lights deep in his eyes watching him.

Instantly his body stops shaking.

‘You saw him,’ Taeh’yung grins brightly, ‘You saw him.’

‘I did,’ Jimin whispers haltingly. ‘He-…he told me to stay.’

Taeh’yung gives him a smile though his eyes are sad. Jimin feels Yoongi carefully lift himself off, hands still gentle but firm.

‘I saw- I saw them- I saw all of them-‘ Jimin manages to say, finding that he could in fact breathe. He turns his head to find Jungkook watching him, fear in his young eyes. His muscles ache with the memory of pain. With the memory of waiting.

‘Do you want us to call Amme?’ Sk’jin asks, his voice surprisingly gentle.

Jimin shakes his head. Instead he looks up straight at Yoongi.

‘Thank you,’ he smiles.

‘For what?’

‘For taking me there.’

‘Okay this is very nice and all that,’ Sk’jin says irritably, ‘But can Yoongi stop straddling Jimin, there’s a literal child in our midst.’

Yoongi turns bright red and pushes himself off. Jimin feels Taeh’yung help him sit up before he’s pulled into a strong hug despite his soaked clothes.

‘We didn’t wake up?’ Yoongi asks, looking down at his clothes.

‘Actually I just wanted to splash you guys with water. For you know, general revenge.’ Sk’jin shrugs.

‘-you- general revenge!?’ Yoongi squints at Sk’jin, pushing his wet hair back.

‘So- what did you see?’ Sk’jin asks, ignoring Yoongi.

‘There- there was something I wanted to see,’ Jimin says, his body strangely disconnected from his own, a layer of pain still somewhat present but not fully. Is this what Yoongi felt the whole time?
‘Uh- Yoongi mentioned it- when he had first woken- and he was in that room, with the wires on his back-’ Hoseok nods in understanding, gesturing for Jimin to continue, ‘-and so I- I felt that it might be important and I think- I think Yoongi also thought that.’

Yoongi nods at that.

‘In that memory I -…’ Jimin pauses a moment, ‘I saw one of the GI OrTanks- this was, I am sure, the place where the Yishengs stay-’

‘-the Yisheng Directory yeah, that’s where the GI headquarters is,’ Hoseok agrees.

‘-and one of the OrTanks- maybe more, I don’t know- had Megibiyan inside,’ Jimin tells them.

And the meaning of this, the implications, clearly don’t fly over any of their heads.

‘I think we can say for sure that there’s something really shady going on- within whoever was involved in the Treaty,’ Sk’jin declares, ‘And maybe Jimin wasn’t made known about it-’

‘-I think it’s a little too hasty to say that Jimin’s System might have voluntarily done something-‘ Hoseok begins.

‘No,’ Sk’jin shakes his head, ‘Trying to think that Jimin’s System had nothing to do with this is not being optimistic but it’s being foolish. From what has been discussed, there is clearly some double-crossing going on, I will literally bet Namjoon’s working arm on this.’

‘Sk’jin is right,’ Jimin says before Hoseok can add anything more. ‘I believe that to be true. I saw- …I heard something.’

Jemin tells them about the voices in Yoongi’s drunken recollection. Almost word for word.

Hoseok looks uneasy but Jimin can see the way the former agent seems to also be adding things together. They all look uneasy, but at the same time none of them look remotely surprised by this information. It’s almost as though they always suspected it.

‘Someone inside- someone from inside your System, teamed with Ndica and Stsion- they were… they planning on something.’ Hoseok concludes.

‘We don’t know if they succeeded,’ Sk’jin says in a surprisingly comforting tone. ‘Let’s not forget that they didn’t account for the Akramanese to show up.’

Jemin nods.

A coincidence?

We do not bring death.

‘There’s definitely a compromise with what’s happened in your System. Do you think there was anyone who wanted a … a reformation, or to overthrow you and your sister-‘

‘-we’re not-…we’re in power,’ Jimin explains, his mind alight with lingering pain.

‘But you hold the System together don’t you?’ Yoongi says gently, ‘What is a home without those who live in it?’

It’s a resigned and calm acceptance. But it’s not one Jimin wants to claim.
‘It’s difficult to accept it,’ Jimin confesses, ‘It’s…it’s not something I want to be true. And I am hoping- I am…I am simply begging- that it isn’t true but- all signs point to there. And I-‘ Jimin glances at Yoongi, ‘I will listen to my heart. But I will take my head with me too.’

‘I don’t want to ask a painful question- or to cause panic,’ Hoseok begins gently, ‘But what if this is what we think it means. What would wait for us when we take you back home? If what has happened, has been caused as a result of your…of your System siding with the Yisheng Ndica-what would happen?’

‘Each inhabitable planet in Menigišiti is governed by their own method of rule, government, and belief,’ Jimin explains, finding it odd to explain something so well known within his System. ‘There are representatives who listen to the voices of their regions, or their countries, and who then bring forth this topic to the…the uh ambassadors of each planet. And all of these ambassadors bring these topic together as a council- and Tsirin and I listen to these um, topics.’

‘You’re like, a judge?’ Sk’jin asks with a quirk of his head.

‘No- or…yes.’ Jimin tries, ‘We do not control. We understand, we acknowledge, and we bless. We are the heart, the fate- we listen to all, we are united in our thoughts- all for the heart to…to beat through each planet- through all the people.’

‘That’s nice,’ Sk’jin remarks, without a hint of irony.

‘But you were…well, you were taken.’ Hoseok states bluntly, ‘What would happen with you gone? Would there be a replacement?’

‘The fate is born only after the existing one dies,’ Jimin explains simply.

‘But you…you need both right?’ Hoseok looks a bit confused before he asks, ‘I’m sorry to ask this but I don’t mean it disrespectfully, but if you don’t exactly make decisions- then what is your purpose or meaning?’

But Jimin understands this- knows what Hoseok is trying to ask.

‘Our…um, administrative?’ Jimin tries out, ‘Our administrative position isn’t…isn’t how most see it- with the same uh, political weight or even religious symbology as a lot of planets and Systems in the GLA. Menigišiti is built on harmony – and the Heart, and the Fate, balance Menigišiti to exist.’

‘What happens if the Fate isn’t born?’ Sk’jin inquires, ‘Like, say they’re born a few years late.’

‘That has never happened,’ Jimin replies. ‘We are always born the day they die. In a way, we are continuously reborn. The eclipse is constant, as is the continuity of light- we balance and maintain Menigišiti.’

‘So what would happen, if one or both no longer…no longer were inside Menigišiti?’

‘I don’t know,’ Jimin replies honestly. ‘I really don’t know. It’s never happened before.’

‘Well I guess we’re gonna have to find out once we get there,’ Sk’jin sighs dramatically.

‘Do you think this is something we should discuss with Amme?’ Yoongi asks as he moves to sit on the edge of the bed where it’s dry.

‘I’ll see what I can do,’ Hoseok volunteers. ‘I’m gonna try and check new angles of searching for information around Axudar as well- Amme has helped us out immensely- but that-‘
‘-that doesn’t stop her from being suspicious!’ Sk’jin chimes in with an all to bright smile, swinging his arms.

‘Are you both okay?’ Hoseok inquires carefully, looking over them both with a searching eye.

‘I’d like to get dry,’ Yoongi states rather monotonously.

‘Okay- if you’re both okay, let’s get working on the ship. I want us ready and out as soon as this ship exits warp.’ Hoseok claps his hands together twice.

‘God what a slave-driver,’ Sk’jin remarks though he’s getting up as well to follow Hoseok out. Of course he doesn’t stop there and adds, ‘No funny business you two- it’s not decent; not on a Yisheng ship unless that’s like your kink.’

Yoongi throws his wet shirt at Sk’jin with comic accuracy, the wet blob hitting the Khol’isa with a resounding wet smacking sound.

Out of nowhere, Jungkook tackles Yoongi. A playful growl in his throat as he pushes the Human down. Yoongi dramatically yells, flopping on the bed as Jungkook twists him around.

‘Spaces, I am so adopting him,’ Sk’jin grins from the doorway, throwing Yoongi’s wet shirt away across, landing close the closed bathroom door.

‘Everything good?’

Jimin looks around to find Taeh’yung still there, his expression somewhat thoughtful. Not in a way that made him look like those who came before him, their lives still existing through him and shining through him. This was truly Taeh’yung- thinking and watching and listening under his façade of playfulness and recklessness.

‘I think so,’ Jimin replies truthfully before adding softly. ‘It’s going to hurt, isn’t it?’

Taeh’yung isn’t looking at him when smiles, almost rueful, and definitely sad.

‘It will.’

So.

Obviously there is no avoiding a Yisheng.

Especially when you’re aboard their ship.

Doesn’t mean Yoongi isn’t going to try.
He’s not sure why he doesn’t want to meet with Amme, face-to-face, alone. There’s no actual reason – but that sense of intense trepidation is there and Yoongi tries his best to avoid the Khhemsə Yisheng as best he can. It was fine when she had healed him, because almost everyone else was there. He’s not sure why he’s doing this, trying to slip away.

It works for a total of 3 hours.

The ship that Amme had given to them was smaller than the Užkulisai, and less powerful. It was a pretty standard looking trade-ship. Definitely a lot more common and very easy to ignore amidst, say, a heavy traffic-route in Docks. There are only 2 levels, with the Bridge and cabin area on top, the Hangar and Engine room below. There was a small but equipped Medical Bay, the single Medical Bed making both Yoongi and Hoseok grimace a little. As a whole, the entire crew used the Medical Bed too often and seeing only one was a little worrying. But as Hoseok had eloquently put it ‘pick-pockets can’t pocket everything’.

But what the Laikin-X33 lacked in housing assets, it made up for in powerful anti-matter engines, and a high-grade protective shield equivalent to the one the Užkulisai had.

One of the first things Hoseok and Yoongi had done was to install the “invisibility cloak” as Yoongi liked to refer to it. The term seemed fitting and somehow had an air of reminiscence that he can’t quite point out. He knows that Sk’jin and Hoseok had their own terms for it but somehow they all understood each other when referring to the invisibility cloak.

They then re-installed and uploaded their system into this ship. It would take a little while to calibrate and they would be able to have Lisai working up in the Laikin as well.

Yoongi was now in the kitchen. Much smaller than the one in the Užkulisai and more so a storage area for food. Hoseok had said he was going to check up on the Bridge one last time, making a joke about allowing Yoongi the time to poison their stock again. Yoongi had snorted in reply but didn’t deny that he was about to do exactly that.

It’s saved them many times now and Yoongi doesn’t see why he should stop. After all, it was because of him they were able to still keep track of Namjoon. The Kutsoglerin was in warp-somewhere in between the space-borders of Lapho and Aquí. Neither of these interstellar regions rings a bell in Yoongi’s mind or recollection regarding his past or most recent excursions. Hoseok had surmised that maybe rather than heading for a specific destination, the GI and Namjoon were simply stalling until they were able to get Jimin’s location.

He scans the last of their supplies, satisfied that they had a large quantity of food specifically for Jungkook, when the hair on the back of his neck stands on end.

It’s not one of danger or alarm- but rather something almost primitive. As though a predator was lurking behind him. Carefully glancing back, he notices the snake-like creature that coiled around Amme, poised and center at the doorway leading inside the kitchen.

‘She won’t hurt you,’ Amme’s voice says as she makes her way up the rather narrow stairwell that circled upwards into the circular dining area.

‘I know,’ Yoongi replies, lowering the jar of salt and placing it back securely into its shelf.

‘This is not as spacious or comfortable as the Užkulisai,’ Amme says, slightly stooped over in the dining room. ‘I apologize.’

Yoongi indicates his own height and shrugs. Well, here she was. No point in trying to avoid her or
feel uncomfortable. After all Amme has seen him naked.

Most Beings are uncomfortable with nudity.

Yeah, no shit.

‘How does it feel?’ she asks.

‘That seems a bit vague,’ Yoongi replies.

‘How does it feel to be here again?’ Amme clarifies.

Yoongi pauses.

‘I don’t know really,’ he answers. ‘I’m-…I’m back and…I guess it’s…odd.’

‘Odd how?’

Yoongi gives Amme a wry look.

‘I died,’ he says simply. ‘Bluntly put. I died, and somehow, I’m here again, and it’s not…it’s not comfortable.’

‘What do you mean?’

Yoongi idly fiddles with the lid of the sugar jar. They had 6 different kinds of sugars- all extracts from different sources. The one for Jungkook came from the extracts of a large insect-like creature’s glands and it resembles honey. Except it probably had more questionable additives to it if it was catered for Jungkook’s species.

‘It’s like-…’ Yoongi is careful with his words. ‘I know I’m not supposed to be here. I’m not…I’m not supposed to be alive, here, right now. And it hurts.’

‘How does it hurt?’

Yoongi places the lid back on the sugar jar, making sure it was sealed and rightly poisoned.

‘Have you heard of this ancient text, it’s from Earth,’ Yoongi starts, ‘It’s this character, from an imaginary species called Hobbits. He possessed a uh, ring. Of power. And this ring, extended his life. And he described it…feeling stretched out. Like too much butter on a piece of bread. It sort of feels like that I guess- just…’ he ignores the pain lingering just beneath his immediate consciousness. ‘Uncomfortable.’

Amme doesn’t say anything. Instead she takes a seat, legs folding to one side under the table to accommodate their length. The snake-like creature slithers about, as though exploring the ship.

‘I feel like-’ Yoongi isn’t sure why he doesn’t want to say it out loud. Almost as though saying it out loud would permanently cement and ground his imaginations into reality.

‘I feel like I will break,’ Yoongi confesses as quietly as he could. ‘Did you know? That this would happen.’

‘I would not have reasoned this outcome,’ Amme replies. ‘When I first saw you again, in the forests behind the Headquarters, I felt as though your memory existed. But I imagined that it was because I knew of you before.’
‘I had memories- distant and un-remembered.’ Yoongi thinks back. ‘Was I always meant to be here?’

‘Fate has a strange way of guiding you,’ Amme places her hands over the smooth dark grey table top. ‘And though sometimes you may strive against it, fate appears within all aspects of who you were, who you are, and who you will be.’

Yoongi snorts a bit, ‘That really sounds a lot like some new-age bull.’

Clearly this statement is lost on Amme so she ignores it.

‘What you saw were not dreams, but memories,’ Amme explains.

‘When I asked you about memories, and about living, you told me you believed in Continuum.’ Yoongi states. ‘What did you mean by that?’

‘It means that what was, will always be, as a repetition, a rebirth, a continuation.’ Amme explains. ‘Yisheng had meant for hatred and death and violence to remain where they escaped from. What Yisheng didn’t know was that they brought it with them. And as Continuum grew with what they built, so did hatred, so did death, so did violence. We are life built on this Continuum, we are part of this Continuum that will go on, a cycle, a circle – who we once were, in some ways, will always be who we will be.’

‘But not like this?’

‘Maybe not for you,’ Amme is gentle as she speaks, ‘Maybe you are here, because you continued to follow fate.’

‘Lead, and I will follow.’

‘What about the others?’ Yoongi questions, ‘Those other GI? Or, well- the others from when you found us in Bhumi. Will they also remember? Will they also dream?’

Amme looks thoughtful, ‘I cannot make that statement. They showed signs of recognition, of connection to Jimin. But their reactions have never gone beyond that. Has Jungkook displayed these signs?’

‘No,’ Yoongi shakes his head. ‘He’s- he’s not like me. Or the ones from that ship.’

‘He was meant to be GI, was he not?’ It sounds more like a statement than a question, ‘He is young.’

Yoongi gives Amme a small smile at that before he says, ‘I saw the Omhlophe- clearly. They had the same marks down their backs.’

Yoongi is careful as he continues, ‘And…they seemed to honour their dead. I am not sure how much of it was ceremonial- or just…just projection from what they have seen. But it was the same as the Yisheng burial.’

Amme doesn’t say anything, waiting for Yoongi to complete what he had to say.

‘Are they why they Court is afraid, of the GI and the others from the Akramanese ship? That they will become like the Omhlophe? Inherit the dream that the Akramanese followed?’

Amme nods after a moment.
’Not all of them. But considering the strength of the GI, and the unknown potential the unborn from the Akramanese ship could possibly hold, I would say their fear is quite founded.’

’Jungkook is not like that though,’ Yoongi says quietly. ‘He was created differently, I know that, but considering... considering what he’s been through. He is... he is quite pure of heart.’

Amme nods to that, ‘We are all the same.’

’What do you mean?’

’What or who you are does not lead you to become either or.’ Amme emphasizes lightly. ‘Perhaps Jungkook is the way he is, because it is his choice. The same way Taeh’yung is the way he is, because he chooses to be like this. We cannot vouch for every single unborn, for every single GI.’

’The... they said something to me. Inside that asteroid,’ Yoongi recollects that moment with vivid clarity. ‘They said “we will not be found”.’

Amme tilts her head, looking curious.

’And-’ Yoongi pauses a moment, checking.

’I was found. I know, because this... this is what it feels like to be found.’

They remain quiet for a while.

’And I think- when we were in Grisial- when the GI came. There was... another me. And he seemed so... so void,’ Yoongi says heavily, ‘He looked like me. Probably sounded just like me. And he... all he wanted was to just reach for Jimin. To be found.’

’You don’t know why the Omhlophe, if they were created similarly to you, would not want to be found?’

’That and-... while questionable, the GI who came to Grisial, they did not harm Jimin. Nor did they harm Namjoon. In a sense- they protected him. But the Omhlophe- it seemed like they wanted to either overtake Jimin or... or kill him.’

’And what about you?’

’What about me?’

’The GI, those who came in Grisial- how did they react to you?’

Yoongi thinks of the end of the TeorSer aimed straight at him.

’They tried to kill me.’

’Why do you think they tried to do that?’

Yoongi shrugs helplessly.

’I don’t know how I can help with this,’ Amme says gently, ‘Have you told your crew?’

Yoongi shakes his head.

’You should. It would be better.’
Yoongi nods in agreement.

There’s a lot that could be said of it, a lot theorized; but it would all be conjecture. And at the moment, with everything that they knew, with everything that was falling into place, Yoongi was going to wait a while before he would have to disrupt this momentary calm.

‘Is there anything else you would like to discuss?’ Amme inquires, her tone soft.

It triggers a flash of pain. It was as though Amme was giving Yoongi time to tell her what they just did. Why his body was ringing with echoes of pain, pain shared with Jimin though briefly. Amme could probably sense it.

‘You understand,’ Amme intones quietly, ‘Don’t you?’

Yoongi knew that was what Amme had truly come to say. That was what she wanted to clarify with him.

Yoongi nods slowly, ‘I do.’

‘You know what will happen. I cannot heal you of it.’

Amme sounds sorrowful.

‘I know,’ Yoongi tries to give Amme a smile. ‘It’s-…I think it was obvious from the start.’

‘You cannot do what you and Jimin did,’ Amme tells him firmly, ‘It will kill you.’

‘It was a risk I was willing to take- a risk I had to take.’

Amme doesn’t ask for more- doesn’t press for what he saw. What Jimin saw.

‘Perhaps things will change, once you truly return,’ Amme begins tentatively.

‘More butter or less bread?’

‘Perhaps something entirely different.’

Yoongi lets out a small huff of a laugh, ‘Maybe.’

‘I am sorry,’ her remorse is evident. ‘I could not save you. Or your friend. Your crew.’

‘None of us really knew what was happening,’ is all Yoongi can say. And it’s true. ‘There’s no point in beating yourself up about it.’

‘What we have sent you to do,’ Amme continues as though she didn’t hear what Yoongi had to say. ‘What you are about to do – we cannot predict the outcome. We cannot begin to understand what waits for you. What you will uncover. What you will have to do. After what has happened, after Gaia, we cannot allow a repeat.’

‘But all life is Continuum, isn’t it?’

Amme looks down at the table at that.

‘What will happen, will happen,’ Yoongi sighs out, suddenly tired. Something gnaws at the base of his head, threatening to hurt him.
'Maybe. Maybe not.'

It almost sounds like a gentle rebuke. Yoongi doesn’t know how to answer in all honesty.

‘I don’t blame you,’ Yoongi tells Amme. ‘About what happened. About…about any of this. It’s not your fault.’

Amme genuinely looks surprised to hear this.

The silence continues for a while before Amme stands, her head brushing the ceiling a little.

‘We may not meet again- at least, not in this Continuum,’ Amme declares. ‘But maybe you can change that.’

‘If I do, why would I want to see you again?’ Yoongi snorts.

Amme’s smile is a little disturbing, what with all the glassy teeth on display.

The sound of footsteps approach them, climbing upwards. It doesn’t surprise Yoongi that it’s Jimin. He’s carrying with him an OrTank, probably with some additional supplies.

Jimin eyes both Amme and Yoongi with a little suspicion. It’s mainly directed at Amme though. But Amme seems to find it funny as she bows towards Jimin.

’S’wezete Amme.’ Jimin bows his head as well.

‘I was making my farewells,’ she informs Jimin who steps into the dining area as Amme makes her way out. ‘I will be at the Bridge if you seek me.’

She descends, her snake-like pet slithers out from the hallway that stretched the distance between the dining space and their own Bridge.

Jimin watches her leave until she disappears. Yoongi walks forward to take the OrTank from him.

‘What’s in this?’ Yoongi asks, squinting at the stamped words over the top. Some form of grain product. Honestly Yoongi’s not sure what Sk’jin thought would be useful for them.

‘Um- I believe Hoseok said more things for you to poison.’ Jimin gives him an amused look.

Yoongi chuckles.

‘Do you think it’s too small for Namjoon? Or even Sk’jin?’ Jimin inquires as he looks around while Yoongi opens the OrTank.

‘Who told them to be so tall?’ Yoongi acts offended, ‘Jungkook’s headed there too I think.’

Somehow, being aboard the Yisheng ship seemed to have boosted Jungkook’s health. Whatever effect being in here had greatly replenished and powered Jungkook’s health. He definitely towered over Hoseok now, having started off just a little taller than Yoongi. Jungkook tried his best to be as helpful, rarely really tiring as he hefted the heavier OrTanks over his shoulders with ease. Yoongi could see Jimin and Hoseok watching carefully. It didn’t help that Taeh’yung encouraged the youngling to carry him everywhere. But Jungkook seemed to view this as a form of exercise. Taeh’yung was often latched onto Jungkook’s back, happily swinging his feet while his ride lifted two heavy OrTanks with ease to and fro the Laikin and the store.

‘Are the Pravasi M’hanun tall?’ Jimin inquires.
Quite tall- some of their races grow up to 7-8 feet tall,’ Yoongi grimaces, remembering some he came across personally.

Jimin seems to be calculating that measurement, his head tilting upwards towards the ceiling. Yoongi reaches over to boop his nose. Jimin flinches comically, blinking rapidly as though shocked that Yoongi would do something like that.

‘I think Kook is still a while away from 8 feet tall,’ Yoongi chortles, opening a drawer to place some of the parcels from the OrTank inside. ‘But this place would definitely be too small for him then.’

‘It’s comfortable?’ Jimin smiles looking around and pointing at the upper cabinets with an amused look. ‘We can reach the cupboards easily now.’

Yoongi chuckles. Some of the storage in the Užkulisai was too high up for both of their smaller stature. Something Sk’jin made sure to tease them about, and something Namjoon always patiently helped them with if he was nearby.

‘We should be okay- it won’t be too long,’ Yoongi replies as he pushes the drawer shut, a tiny magnetic locking sound ensuring it was safely secured.

‘What did Amme say?’ Jimin inquires softly as he closes shut the cabinet he had opened for no other reason than to simply demonstrate his ability to do so now.

Yoongi mulls over his words a little before replying, ‘She wanted to ask how I was uh, coping I guess. Like, how I was adapting? Being back and stuff.’

Jimin nods, listening carefully.

‘I think she feels guilty- about what happened,’ Yoongi shrugs, pulling out a bunch of sealed liquid containers. He’s pretty sure some of them had blood-broths for Jungkook. ‘She wanted to apologize? Make peace I guess.’

Jimin clearly understands that something more had been said- something that Yoongi doesn’t want to repeat. Because his expression turns serious. Melancholic.

‘I’m sorry,’ Yoongi tells him quietly. ‘I know that- that you didn’t want to do that. To look in but-‘

‘-it was necessary,’ Jimin shakes his head. ‘It’s needed and it- it helped me too.’

‘How?’

Jimin’s eyes glaze over a little, looking at him with an expression that Yoongi can feel. And he knows- they both know.

‘You don’t hurt me, sunshine,’ Yoongi whispers.

‘I felt it,’ Jimin says, his voice fragile. ‘I still feel it.’

‘It’s not your fault.’

Jimin just shakes his head.

He looks small and tired again. But in a different way- in a way that Yoongi knows has something to do with him. Yoongi wants to change that- needs to change that.
He decides that using tactics from Chapter 4 of the “Small Talks, Medium Gestures, Big Effects” on diversions and how to change topics. He glances out of the tiny circular window over the main counter. In actuality, Yoongi is sort of struck with a strange nostalgic sense at some of the design choices inside the ship. They all felt sort of reminiscent of Ancient Earth submarines. With the circular windows, slightly tighter quarters and bunks inside the bare-minimum cabins.

Taeh’yung and Jungkook are outside. And for once Taeh’yung is not pressed up against Jungkook’s back, hitching a ride. But instead he’s aggressively flailing as though mimicking some dance. Jungkook is watching, wide-eyed, confused, but also sort of shuffling along to whatever Taeh’yung was so aggressively throwing himself into.

‘Ah- really feels like we have 2 kids aboard,’ Yoongi comments, nodding towards the window. Momentarily distracted from the change in topic, Jimin takes a few step to peer out though not before looking at Yoongi with some confusion.

He instantly starts laughing, curling his shoulders as though embarrassed.

‘Is- is that dance?’

‘It shouldn’t be.’

This makes Jimin laugh even more, leaning up against the counter to watch as Jungkook hesitantly shuffle-hops on his feet.

‘I think Taeh’yung is a bad influence,’ Yoongi starts seriously, ‘Imagine Jungkook at 8 feet tall, dancing in earnest like that-’

Jimin looked like he wanted to initially counter Yoongi’s remark about Taeh’yung, but he bursts out laughing instead.

‘I’m sure in some places it’s very beautiful.’

‘What are the dances like in your home planet?’ Yoongi asks, genuinely curious.

‘Uh- not like that,’ Jimin breaks out into giggles, pointing at Taeh’yung who was getting wilder and wilder. Jungkook is genuinely backing up now, though still doing a strange shuffling hop.

‘Earth has nice dances,’ Yoongi begins bravely, disregarding memories of struggling to stay on time to any beat. Having rhythm wasn’t always synonymous to staying on beat weirdly enough. Chaewon would scream when Yoongi and their mum did funny dance moves just to tease her.

‘Not like that?’

‘If you danced like that on Earth, you’d be arrested for public indecency,’ Yoongi snorts holding out both his hands. Jimin takes them without question, though he has no idea what Yoongi was about to do. Which, funny enough, Yoongi himself didn’t know what he was going to do. He rarely ever danced in a serious way.

‘Uh-’ Jimin cuts into his thoughts, making him realize that he was just staring blankly at their hands and not moving. Jimin’s cheeks are a bit flushed, as though somewhat embarrassed.

‘Right- you uh, mirror my steps.’

Yoongi steps on Jimin’s toes (bare) twice before they get the concept down.
‘I’d dip you, but I’m not at all confident,’ Yoongi says as he manages to take some basic steps forward, back, side to side.

‘Dip?’ Jimin tilts his head, amused by what they were doing.

‘Uh yea- it’s complicated,’ Yoongi huffs.

Jimin laughs, ‘Are you just making this up?’

Yoongi pulls an exaggerated offended expression, making Jimin apologize though it’s more laughter than anything else. So Yoongi spins Jimin out instead, cutting his laughter short.

‘I’m an excellent dancer by Human standards,’ Yoongi grins, making Jimin circle back before pulling him. It’s funny, because neither of them are remotely following a rhythm. Jimin is laughing, bright and clear, hair falling over his eyes in graceful waves.

‘People would flock to see me bust a move,’ Yoongi continues to make extravagant claims, pulling and twirling Jimin around in the small space. Jimin bumps into one of the counters in his enthusiasm to try and twirl Yoongi as well. ‘They’d say —wow look at Min Yoongi go—’

Jimin collapses against him, head thrown back as he laughs.

‘What? You think I’m joking?’ Yoongi teases, releasing their hands to hold Jimin by the waist as the latter bodily laughs against him. ‘On Ancient Earth, there was this guy called Mick Jagger- I had moves like Mick Jagger y’know?’

Jimin muffles his laughter against Yoongi’s shoulders as the Human does a funny dance move, weirdly shuffling his feet to some random tempo.

‘Stop stop-!’ Jimin wheezes, pulling him to a stop by wrapping his arms around Yoongi. ‘I believe you!’

‘Good- you should,’ Yoongi holds his nose up high smugly.

Jimin is giggling against him, his body warm and just shaking slightly. Yoongi slowly draws his hands up Jimin’s arms before moving downwards and holding him by his hips. They shuffle side to side, not really moving at all, but just swaying against each other.

‘This is like a waltz,’ Yoongi murmurs.

‘Waltz?’

‘Hmm- Human dance style,’ Yoongi replies. ‘A very lazy version.’

‘What does it look like?’

Yoongi thinks back to the clips from Ancient Earth.

‘Uh- it could be slow. It was considered elegant, classic- very romantic.’

Jimin giggles again, ‘Are you trying to be romantic?’

‘I don’t know- is this romantic?’

Jimin laughs again.
It’s hardly the place to attempt a show of being romantic.

‘Doesn’t dance need music?’ Jimin questions curiously, ‘Or Earth didn’t use music?’

‘I can hear music,’ Yoongi tells him softly, ‘It sounds...sounds like something from a distant memory.’

They take slow steps.

After a few moments, Jimin starts humming.

Yoongi brings Jimin just a little closer, feeling the melody rather than just simply listening to it. He hums along as well, a little slower, a little softer.

‘I think we should definitely learn how to do a dance and become the next galactic dancing stars—’

Jimin breaks from his humming, leaning away to crouch down on the floor but he loses his balance and falls onto the floor, breaking out into hearty peals of laughter. Yoongi makes waves with his arms, and Jimin is literally flat on the floor, wheezing as his eyes glimmer with tears of laughter.

Yoongi kneels down, still waving his arms, but now also laughing along with Jimin.

It takes a minute but Jimin manages to sit up. Their hands entwine almost immediately, naturally, instinctively.

‘What do you think?’ Yoongi asks, feeling a little breathless.

Jimin’s cheeks are rosy, his eyes shining, his smile and breathy almost squeaky chuckles infectious. Yoongi pushes back his hair, just simply drinking in all of Jimin as he was in this very moment.

‘I think that’s a great idea,’ Jimin beams at him, taking Yoongi’s hand back in his and kissing it. ‘We would be very successful.’

‘Successful because we’re so good, or successful because we’re so bad?’ Yoongi questions, taking Jimin’s hand and kissing it back.

‘Depends,’ Jimin’s expression is so fond, so adoring.

‘You’re beautiful,’ Yoongi says against Jimin’s knuckles. ‘Beautiful sunshine.’

Jimin is very quick to turn red, batting his hands away and shoving Yoongi back. He scrambles up to stand, rapidly talking in his own language, his name thrown in there occasionally.

‘Jiminie—’ Yoongi rasps out, laughter constricting his throat as he watches Jimin flail in embarrassment. There’s the sound of tentative footsteps and Yoongi isn’t surprised to find Jungkook peeking in, eyes confused and a tad bit accusatory when he regards Yoongi on the floor.

Somehow this makes Yoongi laugh even more and makes Jimin hide his face in his hands. Jungkook, the precious youngling that he is, looks even more confused.

‘Uh- Sk’jin says we should get ready?’ he says, eyeing the two with even more confusion and suspicion.

‘Okay- we’re coming,’ Yoongi grins. ‘Enjoyed dancing?’
‘Dancing?’

Yoongi just shakes his head in reply.

Jungkook continues to eye him suspiciously, unmoving here he stood.

Yoongi rolls his eyes to himself before he makes to stand. Jimin has lowered his hands, now giving Yoongi comic accusatory looks.

Yoongi holds his hand out, ‘C’mon sunshine, let’s go.’

Cheeks flushed, Jimin takes Yoongi’s hand.

They follow Jungkook out, pass the circular dining space. Jungkook takes the stairs in giant steps. It makes Yoongi want to snort at the display. Especially after Jungkook gives him an almost challenging look before disappearing.

Jimin gives him a questioning look. He’s still smiling, eyes still sparkling with laughter and mirth.

There’s also a look of expectation. The same look he had when they dreamt together.

For a moment, Yoongi is back there. In that soft comfortable bed, Jimin smiling at him, his hands on his face. Yoongi leans in to softly kiss his nose and then his lips.

‘You know I love you right?’

Jimin’s eyes widen a little, the eclipse bright and clear.

It’s soothing.

Yoongi remembers that day on Earth. With Chaewon and Amic. How the world is transformed under this light- under this sky- and the entirety of time seems to pause, to allow them to witness this known cosmic beauty for just a few seconds longer- just a few heartbeats longer. Just long enough for him to feel as though he was breathing at the same pace with everyone gathered around them. To feel as though he were looking at the same sky with everyone- to feel the planet sigh at the sight of the eclipse. He remembers with clarity the moment where he realized he would never return.

“It would be just like this.”

Jimin pulls him close and kisses him back just as softly.

‘I know.’

* *

Feeling better, both in body and somehow in mind than he ever has during the duration of this mission, Hoseok just hopes that this will last.
Their new ship is sturdy, and sure it’s small and they’ll have to find ways for all of them to properly fit in. He’s sure Jungkook wouldn’t mind sharing with Sk’jin and vice versa because they practically roomed in the same Cabin at the Užkulisai. Not that Sk’jin actually needed to sleep or anything- but it was still nice to accommodate each Being. Taeh’yung had gleefully stated that he would room with Jimin, which was somehow immediately and clearly shot down by Yoongi in a way that Taeh’yung found himself agreeing to rooming with Hoseok without realizing it.

Sk’jin had rolled his eyes so hard it was a miracle they didn’t roll all the way back in his head.

‘Welcome back Head Pilot Hoseok,’ Lisai’s voice calls clearly through the Bridge as Hoseok passes through the hallway and into the small Bridge.

‘Thank you- how are the systems? All good?’

‘All systems are at green, waiting for your orders.’

‘Great- we’ll be leaving in an hour. Start up communications channel after we dock out.’

‘Understood. Would you like to link up to previously cut-off channels?’

‘Only for Namjoon’s Comm Device- ignore the rest,’ Hoseok replies as he sweeps over the Bridge one more time. Sk’jin would take over the Navigation until they were able to get Namjoon back. Hoseok’s not sure how it was going to work out- but he’s hoping that the GI (???) that took him would be rational and would see no reason as to why they shouldn’t bring him back. Especially when coming back meant coming back to Jimin. At least that’s what Yoongi and Jimin himself had firmly believed would happen.

Hoseok wanted to be able to track the Omhlophe- to make sure of their location. But if they connect back to their channels in the Užkulisai it would mean that the Omhlophe would be able to track them down too. He’s hoping that with Namjoon back, they might be able to reverse engineer these signals so that only they would be able to receive and use it.

He walks out of the Bridge and into the hallway framed with 3 doors on each side. 4 cabins and 2 washrooms. It’s not what they got used to at the Užkulisai but Hoseok has definitely survived situations where this current living facility could be considered 5-Standard.

The hallway connects to the dining/kitchen and circling stairs that lead downwards to the Hangar area. Putting the Spardyti inside would be a tight squeeze, but according to Yoongi’s measurement they would be set.

It’s not surprising that Amme would not have any weaponry, defensive or offensive, in her ship. So while they’re fully recovered, they were severely lacking in any form of weaponry save for the ones Hoseok and Yoongi had managed to salvage and grab from the Užkulisai. They were definitely going to have to stock up and that was not going to be easy.

Scanning the dining/kitchen, Hoseok notes that everything has been prepped and cleared for taking off. On his way down, he comes across Jungkook. The youngling is snacking on a packet of what Hoseok guesses is some form of dried meat. Jungkook’s increased appetite was both heartening and worrying. Their storage capacity was smaller now, and with Jungkook’s very large appetite, they would have to be careful about stocking up and maintaining supplies. But for now he seemed very happy, eating nearly hour.

‘The Spardyti is here!’ Jungkook tells him at once, clearly being sent to summon Hoseok back down.
'Thanks Kook,' Hoseok smiles, ruffling at Jungkook’s fluffy growing hair. Hoseok remembers going through his own growth spurt, though it didn’t span a few days like it did with Jungkook.

Hoseok makes his way into the Hangar, Jungkook behind him. The gates are open and the ramps drawn down. Yoongi is inside the Spardyti, carefully steering it and positioning it to align correctly. Jimin and Taeh’yung are standing some ways outside, Amme next to them.

Sk’jin is nowhere to be seen but he had mentioned something about taking a nice bath before “shit inevitably goes down again”.

Hoseok and Jungkook exit the Hangar to allow Yoongi space to drive the Transporter in. Yoongi had taken over repairing it with the maintenance Androids in the Yisheng Hangar next to the one they were in. Yoongi didn’t touch up the exterior to change it- stating that its rather woebegone state was more than fitting and perfect for a trade-ship like their new one. It would better match their new identity as a small trading crew.

Hoseok makes his way towards where the others were now standing. Amme seems to be patiently listening to something Taeh’yung was saying, while Jimin watched/listened with a slightly confused expression.

‘Hoseok.’

Hoseok wonders if he’s imagining the relief in Amme’s voice as she turns her attention to him.

‘Kookie!’ Taeh’yung throws himself at the Pravasi M’hanun. Jungkook is clearly used to this, so he barely stumbles, doesn’t stop eating, and looks nowhere near strained by this additional weight. However Taeh’yung manages to kick the packet Jungkook was holding, so now dried meat bites were all over the floor. Jimin sighs like an exhausted parent and goes to clean up the fallen snacks off of the floor.

‘Is everything to your liking?’ Amme asks.

‘It is. Thank you again.’

‘I am grateful that you chose to come to me,’ Amme tells him, ‘I am glad you allowed me to be part of what you have discovered.’

‘I’ll be frank,’ Hoseok states bluntly, ‘We didn’t have a choice.’

‘I understand, but that does not minimize my gratitude. My eyes have been opened, my understanding and belief renewed.’

‘Well…I guess that’s good,’ Hoseok says somewhat lamely. He really wishes Namjoon were here, Spaced.

‘Be careful,’ Amme tells him quite suddenly. ‘I cannot testify for what information is available- especially in the region you are headed for.’

‘What do you know about Axudar?’ Hoseok tilts his head, eyeing the Yisheng carefully. As promised, he looked deep into Axudar when he had the time, changing his angle of searching for information. But he found nothing conclusive.

‘What we know about Axudar is what they want us to know,’ Amme replies, ‘The Universe is immense, Hoseok.’
‘Sure,’ Hoseok waves aside the excuse. ‘What were you doing there before you decided that Ndica’s way was not yours?’

Hoseok is not easy to fool. And Hoseok also knows that Amme knows that he would conduct searches on her past, her involvement. It wasn’t easy to find of course, but that didn’t mean Hoseok wasn’t going to try. He didn’t have Namjoon to help with the deep dive through the hidden archives available in database, but Hoseok made do.

‘Ndica was sure that he had come across a way to stabilize his work. I never knew what his methods were, or what he was truly creating with the GI. Not until it was too late and after everything that happened not too long ago.’ Amme replies, ‘But he was certain that the answers lay in the beliefs of his people.’

‘What’s that?’

‘Axudar has a complex history,’ Amme explains, ‘While most Systems are incomprehensibly diverse and unique within their own planets Axudar is startlingly uniform.’

‘That’s not too rare,’ Hoseok frowns. He’s sure that the Khhemsa were in fact, pretty uniform in their species diversity when it came to race and gender. Hoseok himself came from a species that had no defined racial identity or gender identity until the Standard was introduced and identification/classification was required.

‘It’s not,’ Amme agrees, ‘But Axudar was once a very diverse place.’

‘What happened? Ethnic cleansing? Genocide?’

‘Not exactly like that,’ Amme replies, ‘The reports on the topic are scarce, and unclear. This all happened in quite a short period of time.’

She sounded unsure, unclear.

‘Did Ndica truly manage to bind so many?’

‘Blinded, maybe, but we all chose to see what we wanted to see,’ Amme replies, ‘There is no excuse on my part.’

Hoseok can definitely understand that all too well.

‘Be careful,’ Amme repeats, ‘I do not mean this in the sense of imminent danger, or fatality. I worry what you might find or uncover once you venture deeper. Especially now that you understand so much.’

Hoseok nods to that.

‘I cannot do much in Axudar. Their new laws, established no doubt by Ndica in the past, and their arrangements- you will need to exercise care and caution.’

It’s Amme’s way of saying that she won’t be able to help. At least, not without alerting the entire Known Universe about what was happening. And while that could be covered up someway or another, the entire premise of their mission was definitely supposed to remain hidden regardless. Especially from the Court, and from a potential growing threat that Hoseok cannot rightly name. And it had nothing to do with the Omhlophe, or with the GI, or with anything they assumed would hinder their mission.
Something else was waiting for them.

‘Do you advise us against going to Axudar?’ Hoseok inquires. Because if that was the case, then Hoseok is more than happy to find another way for them to get to Bhumi/Megibīya.

‘No- I do not advise what you should or shouldn’t do,’ Amme replies. ‘I understand the choice to enter Axudar.’

Hoseok snorts under his breath, ‘I almost forgot you’re in the Jury. You want to know.’

Amme doesn’t deny this.

‘Well- I guess we’ll have to dive in head first,’ Hoseok sighs out just as Jungkook makes his way back, a series of CleanBots rolling after him and Taeh’yung as though pin-pointing the two as the messiest culprits. Jimin finds it funny, clearly, watching the Bots roll after the two with accusatory sounding beeping sounds.

‘Yoongi has finished parking and securing the Spardyti,’ Jungkook reports shiftily glancing at Amme as he addresses Hoseok.

‘Okay- we’re good to go. Well- Sk’jin needs to come back.’ Hoseok wonders how long a bath even took. ‘We’ll be taking off then Yisheng Amme. Thank you again for coming.’

Amme bows gracefully in reply.

Jungkook clumsily bows, Taeh’yung’s weight on his back making him misbalance a little. Before they can turn to leave, Amme calls the Zhak’gri by name.

‘Taeh’yung,’ Amme addresses the Zhak’gri.

‘Sup?’ Taeh’yung raises an eyebrow.

Hoseok thinks Namjoon would balk at Taeh’yung’s casualness.

‘Thank you for keeping the OrTanks safe,’ she says with a bow of her head. ‘My team are currently taking care of them, away from Grisial’s borders.’

Hoseok sees the way Jimin’s eyes widen at that, blinking rapidly as he stares at Amme and then at Taeh’yung and back again.

Taeh’yung just grins, two fingers sticking out to form a ‘V’ under one eye in reply.

‘You got it babe.’

Namjoon would definitely cringe.

Jungkook turns and walks towards their new ship while Jimin can’t seem to decide to stay or walk after the two.

‘What-’ Jimin breathes out, confused.

‘The Omhlophe ship wreckage was pushed away from Grisial’s borders,’ Amme explains, ‘Taeh’yung drove them far enough to fall into dead-space borders. They were carrying over 2000 OrTanks according to my first report. Investigations and extractions are underway as of 12 hours ago.’
‘He- he said he destroyed them all?’ Jimin whispers faintly.

‘There were no traces of the Omhlophe. The ship was dead,’ Amme explains, ‘But within their hold, we found the OrTanks safe and secure.’

‘Oh,’ Jimin smiles faintly, eyes filled with unshed tears.

‘He is the Fifth of the First,’ Amme says slowly, ‘Born of the First Awakening. He will see it done.’

‘See what done?’ Hoseok frowns at the words.

‘Continuum,’ Amme replies simply.

But Jimin just thanks Amme again, bowing elegantly in his own custom. There’s a commotion as Sk’jin reappears. Hoseok can practically smell him from where he stood. He did look very pleased with himself that was for sure.

‘Kids let’s get go in-!?’ Sk’jin ends up shrieking as he’s chased by Jungkook, goaded on by Taeh’yung who screams ‘CHARGE!!!!!!’.

‘Well- we should really get going,’ Hoseok reaches over to pull Jimin forward.

But Jimin pauses, turning to look at Amme.

Amme gazes down at Jimin, waiting for him to say something.

‘I will ensure their safety,’ Jimin declares. ‘For all life is equal, in all of Time, in all of Space.’

‘I am sorry,’ Amme sounds truly sorrowful, ‘That you have to bear the inheritance of such a great evil.’

‘I do not think it would have come to this, S’wezete Amme,’ Jimin trails off. ‘I am simply carrying out my retribution.’


There’s something soothing about the new ship. In a way Jungkook can’t quite explain.

He’s not sure what to make of Amme. He’s heard the term *Yisheng* enough to somehow relate it with something *bad*. Something cruel.

There’s a lot he doesn’t exactly understand.

But he’s clear on one thing.

‘Jungkookie! I think you should wear these!’ Taeh’yung bounds up to him.

Jungkook instantly tenses, readying himself to carry the Zhak’gri. And he’s not disappointed as Taeh’yung leaps through the air and grapples onto him. Taeh’yung isn’t heavy- he’s quite light for someone his height.
The door to the left of the hallway slides open, revealing Sk’jin. Jungkook sees the way Sk’jin frowns, eyes narrowing as he twitches as though to catch Jungkook if he were to lose balance.

‘Tae- please, we’re in a small space, it’s gonna hurt both of you if you fall and hurt yourselves.’ Sk’jin sounds exasperated, gesturing to the much narrower and shorter hallway.

‘Kookie won’t let me fall,’ Taeh’yung declares boldly, waving around some dark pajama pants with drawstrings. ‘Right Kook?’

‘Um, mm!’ Jungkook nods, holding his hand up to show Sk’jin a thumb’s up.

Sk’jin is not appeased.

‘All right guys, they’re gonna get out of warp in 10 minutes, and we’re good to go,’ Hoseok calls from his own room. ‘Everyone remembers what we’re doing?’

‘Getting out at the borders around the Tyochi Binary System,’ Sk’jin recites, ‘We stay long enough so that the GI-not-GI can get their sensory connection to Jimin-’ Jimin gives Sk’jin a comically affronted look, ‘-and to set up our channels. Then we detour around back to Māho-5 to grab some weaponry.’

‘And?’

‘And only you and Yoongi will be stepping out,’ Sk’jin makes a funny face, badly mimicking Hoseok’s voice.

‘Perfectly recited my dear,’ Hoseok replies back, sounding almost exactly like Sk’jin. It makes Jimin who was in the Bridge laugh.

Sk’jin sags a little, sighing, ‘Wish Namjoon was here.’

‘We’ll get him back soon,’ Yoongi says, appearing randomly out of nowhere.

They barely flinch now.

‘Great- everyone ready?’ Hoseok exits his room, pushing back his hair from his eyes as he scans all of them. ‘Comm Devices?’

Taeh’yung obliges and turns Jungkook’s head for him, showing off the new hoop attached to his ear, blinking a violet hue.

‘Okay- everyone settle down,’ Hoseok waves them all forward, ushering them towards the Bridge.

‘Sure I wish Namjoon was here so that I can tease him but why don’t we pull a democratic vote and appoint you our new leader?’ Sk’jin grins, jabbing Hoseok as he walks past.

‘Then I democratically vote myself out,’ Hoseok snorts. ‘Even though it’s temporary, this has been stressful enough for me to never want to do this again.’

‘Lone wolf,’ Yoongi mutters under his breath.

‘I don’t know what that means but I don’t think you’re one to speak Suga,’ Sk’jin smacks the Human on his back.

The Bridge just about fits them all. If they had even 2 more Beings (not counting Namjoon) they would have no seats. Jungkook drops Taeh’yung off to sit next to Jimin before making his way
next to where Sk’jin sat. The Communications Board was right next to the Navigation Table-nearly sharing the entire dashboard. The Bridge didn’t have distinct levels anymore, but just a single difference in the platforms. The lower and smaller platform seated the cockpit with 2 seats. Yoongi and Hoseok sat there. And directly behind, was the Navigation Table and the Communications Board. On either side were the footstools, narrower but still well structured.

‘Agent Hoseok, the Hangar will now decompress,’ a cool Android voice announces through the Communications Board.

‘Thank you love,’ Sk’jin replies back, ‘We’re all sealed Lisai?’

‘Ready for vacuum, green for warp.’

‘Temporary cap?’ Sk’jin twitches an eyebrow up at Hoseok.

‘Let’s undock,’ he nods towards Yoongi.

‘Everyone safely secured?’ Sk’jin calls out, glancing towards Jimin and Taeh’yung.

They both nod.

‘And in the tongues and dialect of all those who call this Universe their home, I bid you, my brothers, the blessings of one, the blessings of all.’ A voice- Amme’s – suddenly quietly chimes into their Communications Board. ‘And when you find yourself in times of trouble or woe, listen to the music from the stars- and let them guide you with their wisdom, Memory, and Time.’

‘Love you too!’ Taeh’yung trills as the Hangar gates open.

‘Deactivating magnetic strips,’ Hoseok announces.

The ship doesn’t jolt or shift, just simply gently hovers a little at an angle.

‘Pressure valves opening; beamers at 190 degrees,’ Yoongi quietly announces just before they quietly move through the Hangar and out of the gates. Jungkook can sense relief, as well as apprehension. A different kind of apprehension; a distinct unease and trepidation mounts as they fully exit the Yisheng ship.

‘I’m not in the place to say this,’ Hoseok suddenly says, ‘But if anyone wants to turn back and leave, you can. Yisheng Amme would take you in.’

No one says a thing.

‘Starting up Engines 1 and 3,’ Yoongi announces instead. ‘Setting 2.’

Sk’jin starts up one of the projections over the wide and tilted screen over the dashboard. Jungkook remembers Sk’jin sighing at it saying ‘this is some prehistoric set-up though’. It’s surveillance from the back of the ship.

The Yisheng ship is massive, even from distance they were starting to put between them. The edges start to faintly glow, its shape lingering in the form of dazed lights as it warps away.

‘We’re clear,’ Sk’jin reports.

‘Okay- Lisai reconnect with Namjoon’s channels,’ Hoseok orders at once, ‘Let’s start up our negotiations if we need to.’
‘I can speak?’ Jimin offers immediately.

‘Yeah- that’s a good idea,’ Hoseok nods. ‘Okay- all clear?’

‘Searching for connection.’ Lisai reports.

Sk’jin frowns a little, eyeing the projection over Hoseok’s dashboard. ‘It should have connected immediately?’

They wait, tension building palpably.

‘Failure to connect.’

‘What?’ Sk’jin glares at the projection, ‘How is that-‘

‘-it’s only possible if Namjoon himself has disconnected the lines,’ Yoongi surmises, ‘Or he was told to disconnect it.’

‘No- Namjoon has completely disconnected us,’ Hoseok shakes his head, ‘The channels can still remain open from either side so that if any of us were in a compromised situation, we could still use it for some form of communication. Namjoon and I designed it like that. He’s completely switched it off.’

‘But we’re still tracking him aren’t we?’ Jimin asks, his expression pinched with worry. ‘From the tea?’

‘Yeah we are,’ Hoseok frowns, starting up the tracking tab they had on constantly. ‘He’s still going through Lapho and Aquí.’

‘Okay- how about we use an open channel and try to connect to his location?’ Sk’jin suggests. ‘We could just, I don’t know, issue an announcement that Namjoon would understand. Or something the GI would definitely pick up on.’ He looks to Yoongi who pauses a moment before saying, ‘GI think only in terms of mission statement protocols. I don’t know what mission they’re following- if they have one. But it’s worth trying.’

‘Okay- we have 15 minutes here and then we need to get going,’ Hoseok says tensely, eyeing the view outside the Bridge. ‘Let’s not stay out here for too long.’

They end up staying a full long hour. Because no matter how hard they try, they cannot connect to Namjoon’s disconnected channels.

‘This metallic piece of shit-‘

‘-I don’t think it’s the screen’s fault-‘

‘-I was referring to Namjoon!’ Sk’jin snaps tiredly as Hoseok rolls his eyes.

‘What if we can’t direct this channel because our tracker is not actually there?’ Jimin suggests quietly.

‘What?’

‘What if this- is just a decoy?’ Jimin points at Namjoon’s tracker.

‘But that would mean they would have known about the shit Yoongi poisoned us with-‘ Sk’jin stops before squinting at Yoongi. ‘Is that shit you poison us with a sort of strictly GI thing.’
Yoongi genuinely looks upset as he nods, as though irritated that he hadn’t thought of it before.

‘Great- so, they’re misleading us?’ Hoseok huffs out noisily, ‘Doesn’t that mean they can track us back too?’

Yoongi immediately shakes his head, ‘Each isotope signal is unique when consumed. Namjoon’s is unique to his make.’

‘…how do you have his unique isotope signal?’ Sk’jin asks hesitantly. ‘Or any of ours.’

‘Biological samples-‘

‘-you’re a disgusting small-‘

‘But why would they go to this length to divert us?’ Hoseok questions, ‘Unless it’s-…I mean, I don’t want to say it out loud but-‘

‘-unless it’s something Namjoon himself did,’ Jimin says slowly. ‘The channel being cut off…he uh, he could research what Yoongi used in the tea. Learnt how to um, alter? Change it?’

Sk’jin frowns heavily at that.

‘Why would he not want to be found?’

Jungkook catches the way Yoongi glances at Jimin, the latter somehow very affected by this statement.

‘…or maybe this-‘ Hoseok looks hesitant.

‘Maybe he did it on purpose because he doesn’t want to come back?’ Sk’jin completes Hoseok’s sentence for him. He almost sounds gentle.

‘I don’t think pa would do that,’ Taeh’yung offers confidently from where he sat, cross-legged.

‘I don’t see why he would-‘ Hoseok begins to say but Jimin reaches out to place a hand on his arm.

‘We should trust him,’ Sk’jin says at once, ‘He’s smart, sometimes, and right now we should trust that he’s doing what he thinks is the best option for his situation.’

‘What do we do now?’ Jungkook asks quietly.

‘Let’s keep the channel open with Namjoon’s Comm Device in case he needs to contact us,’ Hoseok frowns, clearly thinking hard. ‘It’s a risk, considering the GI- and yeah I know you don’t think they’d try to harm us, but they did try to kill Yoongi.’ Hoseok adds more towards Jimin than anyone else. ‘However, we need to move on quickly. We’ve wasted more time here than I’m comfortable with.’

‘We continue onwards then?’ Sk’jin rearranges himself, securing himself on his seat again.

‘Yeah,’ Hoseok nods. ‘3 hours until we get to Māho-5. After this Jimin and I will continue to comb through the public surveillance footage in Grisial to locate or identify the GI and what transporters they used.’

The strain of tension and apprehension lessens a little as the windows turn white with warp-light. But everyone is clearly somewhat lost in their own minds. Jungkook doesn’t know how to feel. Doesn’t know what to do. He’s fidgety but he’s not sure what to do.
‘Kookie!’

Jungkook is startled from his stupor at the quiet whisper.

It’s Taeh’yung, beaming at him from the other end of the Bridge. He waves at Jungkook to follow him out.

Jungkook takes a look around the Bridge. Jimin and Hoseok are at the Navigation Table, both going through layers and layers of projections. Sk’jin is concentrating on something Hoseok is sharing with him over a screen.

Jungkook quietly gets up and makes his way to Taeh’yung.

‘Ah- they get so tense and stuffy so quickly,’ Taeh’yung grins, taking his hand and pulling him towards the kitchen area. ‘Let’s snack!’

Jungkook is never one to deny food so he nods.

Taeh’yung grabs an armful of food before pressing it all into Jungkook’s hold. He then grabs two packets of compressed blood and skips to the dining area. He impatiently taps the table, and Jungkook hastens to carefully drop all of the food there.

‘Here Kookie,’ Taeh’yung hands him one of the packets. Jungkook sits down, ready to just eat his way through his hoard when Taeh’yung asks him: ‘Kookie, tell me about your family.’

Jungkook swallows his mouthful of blood incorrectly and nearly sprays Taeh’yung with it. He manages to stop himself though, just some droplets escaping through his lips and shooting out of his nose. Taeh’yung clambers over the table to sit in front of Jungkook and uses his own sleeves to help him clean up.

‘Um-‘

‘Sometimes when I think of all the babies out there,’ Taeh’yung begins gently, ‘I’m sad that they’re alone.’

Jungkook had never experienced being alone before he was torn from his family. He grew up loved, maybe in an environment that was not the best for a child, but nonetheless he was protected, cared for, loved.

‘There are so many,’ Taeh’yung gently wipes under his nose. ‘And I want to tell them they’re not alone.’

It was hard understanding Taeh’yung. Not when he spoke with so many voices, so many faces, so many lives. But the Taeh’yung before him right now was just…himself. No echo of another, or the other, or them. This was just Taeh’yung as Jungkook saw him plainly.

‘And when we found you, when I saw you, I was so happy,’ Taeh’yung squishes his face a little before kissing his nose. ‘It meant that in some places, my babies grew up loved and cherished.’

Jungkook has now lived without his family for over 5 sols. In the darkness of the cave he was thrown into, he grieved, he broke, he felt himself die.

‘And seeing you, gives me hope.’

‘Me?’ Jungkook whispers.
Taeh’yung smiles before opening a packet of dried meat and handing a piece to him.

‘Yeah,’ Taeh’yung pops the meat into his mouth as well.

‘You…you saved the other babies?’ Jungkook asks. He’s meant to ask this of Taeh’yung from before. But he wasn’t sure how to address it.

‘I did,’ Taeh’yung looks pleased with himself, leaning back on the table on his arms, half the meat still inside his mouth as he chewed on it. ‘I just needed to take them far away enough for Amme to get them.’

‘Did you know? She was coming?’

Taeh’yung gives him a sly grin.

‘She was always close to us,’ Taeh’yung tells him as though it were a secret. It probably was. ‘She’s the smartest out of all of them.’

‘That’s…that’s good?’

‘Sure,’ Taeh’yung shrugs, ‘I guess it is. But enough of that- tell me about your family. I wanna know about your ama.’

‘Who looks like Sk’jin?’ Jungkook clarifies.

‘You don’t mind?’ Taeh’yung looks genuinely thoughtful.

Jungkook shakes his head immediately, ‘No. Wanna talk. About her.’

‘Tell me Kookie!’ Taeh’yung lies on his front on the table, and Jungkook knows Sk’jin would probably literally throw Taeh’yung off. He pushes himself up on his forearms, feet kicking in the air a little. Jungkook squishes the packet of blood in his hands, rolling the soft packaging between his palms.

‘She—she was pretty,’ Jungkook begins, not sure where to begin. He’s never—never talked about them. Never had to explain who they were, why they were there. Because they were his world- his life, everything.

‘She was tall too. Taller than anu,’ Jungkook recalls, ‘She would take turns with anu and they sca-scavenge.’

Taeh’yung nods in encouragement.

‘Sometimes she got sick,’ Jungkook whispers, ‘It’s- it’s similar to Yoongi. Her head would hurt. Sometimes she would—she wouldn’t recognize anu. Wouldn’t recognize me.’

‘How long did that last?’

‘Sometimes 2-3 days,’ Jungkook tries his best to recall as accurately as he could. But this felt long ago. Almost like another—something he didn’t live through. Like a story.

‘She always came back?’

Jungkook nods.

‘What about your siblings?’
Jungkook finds himself smiling.

‘Talgun was the oldest. He was very tall, and he had no hair,’ Jungkook giggles a bit. ‘He always helped ama when she left to scavenge. He was very strong but-’

It’s a distant memory. A nightmare he’s relived many times. Sometimes what happened is strikingly clear to him, and sometimes it’s blurred into a colour of motion and sound.

‘-but he was,’ Jungkook can’t speak. His throat tightens up at once.

Taeh’yung gently cards through his hair, not saying a word. Jungkook clears his throat a few times.

‘-when they came. It was storming,’ he begins to explain. ‘We didn’t hear them. Coming. And Talgun he was fast. He moved fast. But.’

‘It was an ambush,’ Taeh’yung whispers.

Jungkook nods, picking at the dried meat in his hands.

‘He- he fell. I was- I was so angry I-’ Jungkook’s hands shake.

‘You don’t have to tell me those parts Kookie,’ Taeh’yung offers gently, ‘Tell me happy stories? Stories you love. Don’t want to see my baby cry.’

Jungkook roughly wipes at his face, looking down as though to hide himself even though he knew Taeh’yung could see everything.

‘Uh- Talgun was the oldest. He made funny jokes all the time.’ Jungkook pushes through, ‘And Skezag was short even though…she?’

‘She?’

‘I’m not sure,’ Jungkook admits.

‘It doesn’t matter,’ Taeh’yung nods encouragingly. ‘Which ever is the best.’

‘Skezag was short, very big eyes,’ Jungkook widens his eyes as much as he can, remembering the way his sibling would sometimes playfully widen her blue-green eyes at them. Ama called her ‘-pond baby. Because they looked like rain ponds near the mountain basins to the south.’

Taeh’yung grins at the description, grabbing another packet of snacks and munching on it, drinking in every word Jungkook had to say.

‘And uh- Elsang was very dark, he had white hair, like snow,’ Jungkook excitedly remembers, like some forgotten detail in a dream, ‘-he would sometimes create sparkly cold bit when he sneezed. Or if he coughed. It was gross.’

Taeh’yung gives a tiny gasp, ‘Eastern Heladian.’

‘Is that…like me? I’m- P-Pravasi M’hanun?’ Jungkook recites the foreign name carefully.

Taeh’yung nods his head and says, ‘But we are all children, the same.’

‘Anu said that all the time,’ Jungkook recalls, ‘She said we are all the same.’

‘She sounds amazing,’ Taeh’yung’s tone is earnest.
'She really is- was,’ Jungkook doesn’t remember everything. Doesn’t know how much of what he saw was real, how much imagined, how much exaggerated. All he knows is that he was taken during a storm, and he never saw his family since.

‘Is that all?’ Taeh’yung asks gently.

‘Um- no-‘ Jungkook falters.

Sometimes when Jungkook was delirious with hunger, pain, and sickness, he would see Okanaat from the corner of his eyes. She would giggle, telling him to wake up before he missed morning grub.

‘She-‘ Jungkook smiles, ‘She was my favorite.’

Taeh’yung gasps dramatically, ‘You’re not supposed to have favorites!’

Jungkook giggles, making Taeh’yung lean in to nuzzle their heads together.

‘Thank you for telling me Kookie,’ Taeh’yung tells him sincerely. ‘What a beautiful family.’

Jungkook just nods, not knowing what to say. Instead he asks, ‘Um- could you tell me, about the story, that the- uh, Amme was talking about? About the, uh, Children.’

Taeh’yung makes a comic face of concentration, rubbing his hands over his temples.

‘Hmm, Kookie, my version is a little different from Amme’s- it’s not wrong, but it’s not right either.’ Taeh’yung says thoughtfully, ‘You know?’

No Jungkook doesn’t know but he nods.

‘What Amme said was sort of nearly the same but I guess I just lived it differently,’ Taeh’yung nods thoughtfully, ‘What did you want to know about it?’

‘I- I don’t understand what…what the Children are. Or Yisheng? I thought Amme was Yisheng.’ Jungkook asks carefully.

‘Ah! Okay, I will explain that part,’ Taeh’yung rhythmically taps the table surface excitedly. ‘Once upon a time, Kookie, this cowardly guy wanted to escape the chaos he created. He was mean, and he was dumb too, because he thought he could control what he helped created.’

‘He didn’t make the Children?’

‘He pushed them into form, directed them,’ Taeh’yung explains, ‘Many believe he created them on his own. But he didn’t. We always existed Kookie. But we came to form.’

Again, Jungkook doesn’t know what to think of that.

‘He was an asshole- all of us had to run away, hide, or we tried to fight back,’ Taeh’yung gives a nonchalant shrug. ‘In the end he won. But he never remained.’

‘Why is he called Yisheng?’

‘He’s the first. The first, and the Whole. The other Yishengs are just weaker versions.’ Taeh’yung explains. ‘They take Yisheng’s name as their own.’

‘Are…are there others?’
'Yisheng? Too many I think sometimes, but also, not enough.'

'And uh- the Children?'

Taeh’yung gives him a grin that’s a little dangerous.

'Not in the way we used to be,’ he replies easily. ‘Some changed, some sleep so deep they… they’re not in form anymore. But some are still here.’

‘How many?’

Taeh’yung lets out a long whining groan, squinting as he thinks hard.

‘I don’t know! A lot!’ he declares, ‘I’ve only met some so far.’

‘Is Jimin one?’

‘Ah-! Tricky question,’ Taeh’yung waggles a finger. ‘He’s born out of the wish of one of the Children. It’s very unique! And I don’t know enough to explain fully either.’

‘Ah…are you?’

‘I’m the Fifth,’ Taeh’yung replies cheekily. ‘Not quite one of the Children anymore.’

‘Okay.’

Taeh’yung laughs, squishing his face again before sitting up.

‘Don’t worry too much Kookie, I’ll protect you. We all will.’

‘But I want to protect you too? And everyone else?’

‘You can, and you will,’ Taeh’yung says with an emphatic nod. ‘But first, help me finish these snacks!’

Jungkook hadn’t mentioned it before.

He thought it was a natural thing, that everyone else could see it too. But now that he thinks about it, he’s sure that maybe only Jimin knew about it. Maybe.

Taeh’yung makes himself comfortable on the table, talking about how he’s tried blood before but didn’t think much of it, and how he did enjoy a form of it that was supposed to be alcoholic. He leans over the table to pick up a packet of something that fell to the floor. A

And all 5 of his shadows follow his movement, the slightest delay in movement, speed, visibility, and sound.

‘I think this is supposed to be really hot- let’s try this one Kookie,’ Taeh’yung sits up again, his shadows fall around him to form a single one again.

‘Okay!’
Sk’jin is bored.

Māho-5, unlike its name suggested, was the only dock of its kind to ever exist. It’s massive. What was once an already large dilapidated abandoned black-hole harvesting ship, was added upon and built upon for over 2 millennia. Why it was called Māho-5 was still unknown. When Sk’jin had been around, actively flying and living as a pirate, he was under the impression it was because the initial crew of pirates who took over the place were probably from a planet called Māho and decided to simply name the new not-exactly-illegal Dock Māho-5.

It’s a pretty boring place in general.

The GLA had of course, taken their claim over this site. But not too much as to put off pirates and other undesirables: they still needed their connections and Māho-5 seemed like an ideal place to put corrupted officials to benefit the powerful Beings who came here.

But according to Hoseok it had settled a little over the past centuries. But that had been because of the supposed way the Alliance had diminished. But knowing what they knew now, it was a little difficult to figure out what to really expect.

But as they close in, Sk’jin realizes how much it had expanded. How massive it was.

‘Okay this looks nothing like when I last saw it,’ Sk’jin points an accusatory finger at the looming massive rather spiky dock. ‘Like- what is that extension?’

There’s a massive bridge extending out…into nowhere? What for? Aesthetics? Was this what the Universe had come to now?

Hoseok doesn’t pay him mind, instead scanning through more footage they stole off of the private servers and channels across Grisial to find Namjoon. But they have no luck. And that’s not surprising. The GI existed for a very long time without being detected. And Yoongi had said so himself. Being GI just made you practically invisible.

‘Call us in,’ is what Hoseok says instead.

Sighing in a way that Sk’jin knew would probably get a reaction from Namjoon, he places the call. No one bats an eye at him and his theatrics.

‘You guys are so boring,’ Sk’jin complains loudly before their channel picks up.

‘Māho-5 operations- state your name, ID, and business.’ A voice calls out without any of the standard GLA politeness but with none of the default brashness of a pirate-dock.

‘Kosmon Trading representative Arin ID 9221-TA-033 requesting for 3 hours to restock fuel, get some maintenance, and restock on supplies,’ Sk’jin replies back smoothly, without his very elegant eloquence he normally put on for the GLA, and without his exaggerated enunciation and verbal flare as he would with pirates.

‘Permission granted- the Orange Bay is open for you,’ the voice calls back and adds, ‘Will you be taking the tax-bill?’

Hoseok nods from the front. A tax-cut was one of many codes for illicit shopping activities.

‘We will.’

‘Understood.’
‘Is that it?’

‘Yeap.’

‘Huh- things have really changed,’ Sk’jin comments to himself.

And no one hears him of course.

Glancing around, Sk’jin finds himself staring at Yoongi and Jimin.

Something had changed between them. Not in a negative way. Nothing of that sort. But something had definitely changed. It was almost as though they had…- well, in the best way Sk’jin can explain it. It was almost as though they were going through an argument, but had reached some form of reconciliation with each other and were now at peace with each other. That is of course, a hypothetical example, but there’s a sense of stability between the two. The desperation and fear they had despite being together all the time had abated.

And.

That’s nice?

Sk’jin frowns to himself in thought until Jungkook nudges him with a concerned face.

Spaces he was growing tall. Fast.

‘Kookie, do me a favour,’ Sk’jin asks, earnestness dripping from his voice.

‘Hm?’ Jungkook comes closer, crouching down next to his chair, head resting on the arm-rest. Sk’jin cards his fingers through the long strands.

‘Make sure you grow taller than Namjoon okay?’

Jungkook quirks his head to the side, clearly confused but still nods, albeit hesitantly.

‘Good boy,’ Sk’jin ruffles his hair one last time, making it fall over his eyes. Jungkook blows air out of his mouth, spitting hair out in comic protest.

‘Kookie should grow his hair out!’ Taeh’yung exclaims from where he’s sitting wrong on the chair, legs up on the headrest, his back on the seat of the chair. ‘And we can braid it up with flowers!’

Sk’jin thinks that fine, that’d look nice yeah, but he thinks Jungkook might protest. But he’s proven wrong when Jungkook nods eagerly at Taeh’yung and then at Sk’jin as though for permission.

‘Yes- why not, I absolutely approve,’ Sk’jin nods.

‘Kookie come here! Let’s look at flowers!’ Taeh’yung gestures for Jungkook to join him. Jungkook imitates Taeh’yung’s posture immediately on the next chair. Yoongi says something, too quiet for Sk’jin to hear, to Jimin who chuckles, shoulders bunching and eyes turning into crescents.

It’s a private moment almost, and Sk’jin feels just a little guilty for having witnessed it.

They land and dock with no problem.

Hoseok is up at once as soon as they’re clear.
He was definitely agitated. Which was understandable with everything that has happened. And now that they didn’t even know where Namjoon was, they had nothing to go for them about their lost Kutsoglerin captain.

Yoongi follows after Hoseok, quiet as a shadow.

‘Well I guess we just wait then,’ Sk’jin says out loud. Only to realize he’s alone in the Bridge.

Well, fuck, when did that happen?

Sighing out, Sk’jin slumps a little in his chair. This was boring. His other option would be to start stressing – and that wasn’t what he wanted. His own forced calm over their situation was pushing him into bored territories. And a bored Sk’jin isn’t always the best Sk’jin.

‘You want to really torture a Khol’isa? Bore them,’ is what they used to say. Maybe that’s why K’mara was involved in the GIU. Surely no boredom there.

‘Sk’jin?’

Sk’jin won’t admit it but he nearly jumped out his skin.

It’s Jimin.

‘Hello,’ he says rather lamely.

Jimin just smiles at him, his expression amused.

‘What do you want?’ Sk’jin manages, sounding a bit more in control of himself.

‘Just wanted to stay with you,’ is all Jimin says, taking a seat next to him.

‘Okay…’ Sk’jin squints at him before saying, ‘This is awkward.’

‘It’s not!’ Jimin says defiantly. ‘We’re just sitting!’

‘For a member of the royal family you’re really bad at lying,’ Sk’jin remarks dryly.

‘I’m not royal!’ Jimin practically whines, ‘And I can’t lie!’

‘Now that’s a lie,’ Sk’jin snorts.

Jimin huffs at him, sitting deeper into the chair, arms crossed over his chest.

‘A big baby is what you are. All of you are big babies,’ Sk’jin rolls his eyes.

‘Insect!’ Is Jimin’s retort.

It takes a few seconds before Sk’jin nearly chokes on his own breath, laughing out loud at the attempted insult.

‘In-insect!’ Sk’jin gasps out, leaning dangerously to the side as he catches his breath. ‘That’s a good one. Classic.’

Jimin’s face is twitching, like he’s trying to not laugh. It doesn’t work and he bursts out laughing. This makes Sk’jin laugh even harder.

They both stop for a moment when Jungkook comes to check on them, concern written all over his
young features. This triggers them both and they both burst out laughing again.

Jungkook warily steps back into the hallway, curious and confused orb-like eyes glowing dimly in the shadowy hallway.

They’re laughing so hard, Sk’jin nearly misses it the first time.

‘-k’jin! Fuck-!’

They both freeze.

Jungkook comes scrambling back in.

‘WHAT’S WRONG?’ Taeh’yung screeches, bursting out of his shared cabin in nothing but a towel, hair soaked and way too much bubbles and suds across his body for it to be natural.

‘Fuck-!’ Hoseok is cursing, he sounds a little breathless. ‘Fuck they’ve arrested Yoongi!’

‘WHAT?’ Taeh’yung screams again, towel falling off completely as he skids into the Bridge.

‘What-?’ Jimin’s is much more quiet, eyes growing round, panic visibly all over his features.

‘What the fuck do you mean-?’ Sk’jin demands at once before calling out, ‘Stop freaking out- get the tracking out onto the Table-’

‘-they’re arresting him for the fucking Pompen Arena-’ Hoseok hisses, suddenly whispering. Was he running and hiding? That meant the ship-

‘-you guys need to take off right now I’ll get back, turn on the Blinds- or the Invisibility Cloak- or whatever and just get out now-’

Jimin is already rushing downwards, followed by Jungkook.

‘How did they-?’ Sk’jin’s mind is rushing as he starts up the ship. Lisai is saying something but Sk’jin’s mind is too messed up. Taeh’yung, stark naked, runs over to the Communication Board, trying to make himself useful.

‘-his fights- the footage, they were released remember? They must have recognized him or something fuck-’ Hoseok curses, he sounds a bit more stable.

‘Uh- I think they’re headed for us-’ Taeh’yung says somewhat nervously, pointing out of the window. ‘Should I take care-’

‘NOPES!’ Sk’jin shouts, snapping himself to attention. ‘Okay- we’re taking off towards the border and-’

‘-it’s on!’ Jimin calls out.

‘-and you stay hidden! Jimin get back up and let’s give us a new license this is our shortest track-history with a license-’ Sk’jin exclaims exasperatedly as Jimin and Jungkook both come back in sprinting.

‘Everyone secure yourselves in!’

The officers rushing towards them seem confused, clearly using a tracker in their Comm Devices to locate them. But they can’t now. They could see them. But they couldn’t track them. And out there
in space, they were practically invisible.

Speaking of invisible-

‘-how did they see Yoongi?!’ Sk’jin demands as he flies them up and away from the dock, ignoring the emergency gates that were closing rapidly. He swiftly overtakes it without even stressing about it.

‘Yoongi is not literally invisible!’ Hoseok says in a normal tone. He was probably all clear, in new disguise, and now mingling with the crowd. ‘I’m gonna follow him and see how we can get him back.’

‘Great- feel free to get arrested too. Seems like a new trend,’ Sk’jin sighs.

‘Namjoon was kidnapped- there’s a clear difference,’ Hoseok retorts.

‘Same difference,’ Sk’jin finds himself grinning, much to Jimin’s alarm to his right.

Sk’jin just gives him a small wink as he sweeps them out into the dark outer borders away from Māho-5.

Now, it wasn’t boring at all.
Okay- so the past few weeks have been tough lol so that’s why the update is late
I’ve been feeling a very strange sense of uhhhhhhhh depression??? Despair?? I think
it’s a combination of what’s been happening in the world and also in my immediate
life with my fucking thesis group work exhibition and miscommunications and people
not working how they’re supposed to and expecting me to pick up all the slack. So I
just, sat myself down for a while to empty my mind and I am- here to write
Also!!! Namjoon will be coming soon I did not forget him!!! How can I when it’s his
BIRTHDAY!!!!
You know something funny
Most of my biases are born in either September or March. It’s a trend. Every
September and March I find myself retweeting birthday wishes on twitter or rebloggin
on tumblr
I hope this overly long chapter makes up for me not updating in like 3 weeks T_T
I most humbly apologize again *bows down to floor*
and 10 points to whoever can figure out who the blond dude is
“Constant” [noun]: a situation or state of affairs that does not change.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The general atmosphere, or the vibe (as the youths on Earth back in Yoongi’s time would put it), in Māho-5 was severely lacking.

This was, however, a much needed and welcomed change from the consistently terrible and terrifying ordeals they’ve had to consistently deal with and adapt to for quite a while now. Yoongi feels relaxed here, with a normal amount of shadiness, corrupt officials at lower rankings, standard looking non-threatening ships and Transporters with equally non-threatening and standard looking crew and members.

‘This is surprisingly relaxing,’ Hoseok comments, voice guttural and low in his disguise. Yoongi had to really go through his somehow very skewed and detailed memory to pinpoint Hoseok’s current disguise. It was also a very standard, and non-threatening species from Ghandhar, lanky and lean, slightly balding. Like this, Yoongi is almost reminded of Amic.

His chest constricts slightly, the knowledge that Amic was somewhere out there right now. That Amad’la was out there. That his entire rag-tag of a team could possibly be out there, right now. It’s not surprising.

It’s not surprising but at the same time Yoongi still finds himself reeling from the shock of it all. The same way he’s still somehow reeling from the shock of finding himself here, of finding himself aware and awake.

‘You okay?’ Hoseok asks, looking down at him, concern in his currently green beady eyes.

‘Just thinking,’ Yoongi shrugs in reply as they enter the market zone.

It’s a lot more crowded here and messier with stalls thrown up all over what used to be a massive hangar. Now instead the support beams crisscrossing the exposed floors and walls are used as support for granges and displays. Huge outlets connected with massive wiring and connectors braid through the floor and up towards the high ceiling at random. At least the lighting isn’t too bad in here.

‘Yeah, it’s all we can do now I guess,’ Hoseok remarks with a sigh. ‘Spaces, can’t this just be over already.’

Yoongi chuckles, dodging an overeager salesperson who was trying to sell some form of questionable oil-extract. He’s about to reply to Hoseok when something clicks in his mind.

‘-it’s not like Namjoon losing himself is helping-’ Hoseok grumbles, stuffing his 4 fingered-hands into his pockets, ‘-us with pacing our trajectory-‘
‘-Hoseok-‘ Yoongi says tersely, hair on the back of his neck standing when he realizes a few Beings around them were giving him inquisitive looks, as though trying to place his identity, his face.

‘-what?’ Hoseok looks back down again.

‘I- I uh, don’t mean to cause alarm but I think-‘ Yoongi is nowhere near comfortable with this. ‘-I think there’s-‘

A quiet but resounding humming alarm goes off, ringing down at them from the high ceilings of the hangar-turned-market. And then everyone is starting at Yoongi.

‘Hey-!’ someone yells, pointing at Yoongi. ‘Hey you-!’

There’s raised mumbling, more Beings staring at Yoongi and Hoseok.

‘It’s him!’ someone yells. Yoongi tries his best to ignore the voices and pointing and open-pointing but it’s impossible when everyone starts to back away, pushing themselves up against the stalls and granges, gawking at him.

Yoongi swiftly takes off his Comm-Device and shoves it at Hoseok.

‘I think it’s about Pompen,’ Yoongi quickly says, planting his feet firmly on the eroded metal floors, pushing Hoseok even more. ‘Get back to the ship.’

‘Fuck-!’ Hoseok curses before he nods and he’s backing away from Yoongi immediately.

‘Change as soon as possible-!’

A beam of light flickers all around him. It’s not the stunning-beam, it’s a scanner. Yoongi thinks of how he can bolt out of this situation. But his mind comes up blank- not without causing an even bigger problem or causing a disruption that could expose their location to Beings they can’t possibly protect themselves against or account for.

Don’t move. Don’t do anything.

So Yoongi doesn’t move. Doesn’t try to make a run for it. Not when everyone was staring at him. Not when everyone seemed to recognize him.

His body was tense, seconds dragging out to minutes and whole hours, it felt, until the security force of the Māho-5 Patrol Unit appeared.

‘Under the laws of justice protecting Māho-5, we do not tolerate or allow members of the Isbahaysiga Alliance to establish their presence within our borders,’ one of the officers states. A bunch of other officers are sprinting past, clearly trying to find Hoseok. Had they been watching them from before? How long has his face been sent out to the public that it was eliciting such an immediate response? What about the others? If they had his face, what about Namjoon, Sk’jin, Taeh’yung, and even Jimin?

It’s a small comfort, knowing that Jungkook wouldn’t be in the roster of supposed members of the Isbahaysiga Alliance. Was this retaliation? If so, from who? Had Seulgaan been alive, Yoongi would have initially suspected him. But considering what they knew now, and about how Seulgaan had in fact been a part of a much bigger plan alongside this mission, it couldn’t be anyone from the Special Jury. Or could it?
Long lance-cuffs are used to hold him down.

Yoongi knows it’s procedure- and to an extent, a rather smart idea considering his own horrific battle arena in Pompa. This was definitely a precaution Māho-5 was exercising smartly. Though again, if Yoongi wanted to break free, he most definitely could.

Too tired.

‘Yeah,’ Yoongi sighs as the lance-cuffs twist him around and make him kneel, arms twisted over his head. The cuffs then expand and twist from his wrists to latch around his throat. Another cuff is placed onto his ankles.

Great. They were going to use a lift to transport him around. Yoongi realizes he’s being captured via multiple screens despite the Māho-5 officers gathering around him to create a perimeter. Even though he’s very much indeed restrained, the Māho-5 officers still make use of the charged lances to move him and keep him down on the lift.

Yoongi doesn’t hear or see any other commotion.

Hoseok had clearly gotten away, and the others were probably immediately warned and were now out of the Dock.

Yoongi knows he could rely on them to get him out. There was no question about that.

But what could this entail for them? What could this twist into – Pompa had felt so long ago; trivial, at this point. But here they were, falling into a mess they thought they had long left behind.

The Māho-5 officers don’t seem to have any questions for him, simply taking him away. Voices and murmurs and pointed starting follow Yoongi all the way into what he guesses is the main station for law enforcers. This wasn’t a strictly GLA-standard division of spatial border law prison, so Yoongi’s not sure what they’re going to do now.

He’s taken all the way inside, down a narrow hallway and into a holding cell. It’s not a bad set-up, for a place like Māho-5. The walls are digitized, Yoongi can tell, and were designed so that lance-cuffs could slide through slots, making it easier for the officers to control their captive without having to step into the cell.

Even though he’s released, Yoongi’s arms, wrists, knees, and ankles are bound. He can’t do anything other than sort of weirdly slump on the ground. The lift he was transported in quickly slips out through the gaps in the wall.

No doors, no windows; the only light allowed in comes from the designated slots and gaps bordering the cell. There was no need for surveillance or added security for a cell like this one.

The thin digitized walls hum quietly around him.

There was no escaping this sort of prison cell. Maybe this was the only one they had, saved for dangerous, Teronko’ng Prison level criminals or berserking Beings.

It’s, funnily enough, the first time Yoongi has ever been in prison.

And instead of feeling despair, panic, or worry outside of well- outside of the mess that was, without exaggeration, his life, he feels a sense of curiosity.

Ah, so this is prison.
Yoongi could roll his eyes at himself.

Should he say something? There was an officer seated some ways outside his cell. But what could he ask? Maybe he could try and clarify why he was in prison. And how long he would be kept in here. And who he was probably going to be transported to. Would they try and send him back to Raksane Tayi? They would have scanned him by now and wouldn’t find any record of him. Unless somehow some sort of identification was created for him by the same Being/s who had him uploaded into the GLA’s version of a most-wanted list.

The taping and distribution of his arena must have very extensively gone through the major channels, if trading ship officers and crew members nearly immediately recognized him.

But maybe it wasn’t the recognizing part that threw Yoongi off. It was the fact that they actually took note of him to look at him. Like he was so physically present- a notion that he is unfamiliar with. A notion that would make his life difficult because Yoongi has relied so much in the fact that he’s been able to blend so easily into his immediate surroundings.

More awake.

Yoongi sighs.

His muscles are cramping from the awkward position. He’s weirdly hunched, and on his knees, making him have to balance himself constantly.

Tired.

Shuffling towards a wall and leaning gingerly on it, Yoongi exhales out a surprisingly tired breath as he supports himself. With some difficulty, he’s able to somewhat sit down in an only slightly uncomfortable angle.

He didn’t have to say it out loud. Didn’t have to confirm with anyone about it, or be told about it either. Yoongi knows that he’s treading a very thin line.

There’s more he wants to find out. More he knows they can search deeper into. More that he knows will help them see better, by first looking into the past, so they know what they’re about to approach.

The memories Jimin helped him revive amidst his past’s hung-over state was smudged but still understandable and incredibly telling of what they had blindly walked into. And Yoongi doesn’t want a repeat of that. Because with everything that was happening right now, this was a repeat of the past Yoongi does not want to relive.

But he knows Jimin will never agree to look deeper. Not after he’s experienced first-hand what it did to Yoongi. And though he knew that it was a terrible risk, and he was now suffering for it, Yoongi doesn’t regret it.

They needed to know, needed to understand.

A sudden spike of pain floods his body, coming and going quickly, but leaving Yoongi with a throbbing pain in his bones. It was getting easier to mask his pain, but every time Jimin so much as touched him, he knew Jimin could feel it too.

Sighing out slowly and ignoring the rather unsteady rhythm with which his heart beat, Yoongi closes his eyes.
If he concentrates enough he can almost hear it. Almost feel it.

The house used to be a prototype for homes from Ancient Earth, according to his middle-school teacher back on Earth. They would have field trips, taking them to various locations around the surface of the Earth to better understand their complex history. And there were many locations, rebuilt to look like what it once did in various points of history.

And though it wasn’t awe-inspiring or even remotely unique, the prototype of a simple “townhouse” somehow stuck with Yoongi ever since. And in a strange way, rematerialized into perfection in the recesses of his mind.

It was always raining, when it first formed, but now the sun shone through the windows, a gentle and steady sunrise just beyond the horizon.

‘How long did you build it?’

*I first thought of it in Šerdesas. It was raining then too.*

When Yoongi first woke up, all those sols ago, standing in Zhoumi’s apartment, the sound of the rain faint but all around.

*It was cold.*

Yoongi shivers a little, but he smiles a little, watching the way the room lit up in rosy colours.

*It’s warm now.*

‘You’re set?’

‘Yes,’ is Sk’jin’s irritated answer. ‘*This is the dumbest shit ever*.’

‘You know that the GLA never sends in single officers-’

‘*We could do this without involving Jungkook*.’

‘Yes but you also know that as both you and Taeh’yung are very much indeed part of the GLA’s wanted list for Level 1 criminal offence, I think it’s best we *do not* have either of you come out here?’ Hoseok sighs out, leaning against the wall of the Hangar along other maintenance Androids. ‘And no, we are not going to have Jimin out here either. That’s riskier than the two of you combined.’

Sk’jin makes an annoyed sound.

‘*He’s never done a space-run, there’s so many things that could go wrong*.’

‘It’s not a long distance and there’s no gravitational force to pull him down,’ Hoseok sighs again,
knowing that Sk’jin was only arguing like this because he was worried. ‘And he’s a natural—’

‘Just because he once defeated like 10 GI agents on his own doesn’t mean he can suddenly space-run all the way there for some fucked-up attempt at a rescue.’

‘But do we have any other option?’

‘I know we don’t. I’m just arguing because I don’t like this, happy?’ Sk’jin fumes, sounding like he was struggling before adding, ‘Taeh’yung please—’

‘Where did you get all of these uniforms from? And when?’ Jimin asks, not sounding as worried as Hoseok thought he would.

‘From Amme.’ Is all Hoseok says.

‘It means he stole them from Amme’s ship,’ Sk’jin explains unnecessarily. ‘Thank fuck Jungkook isn’t too tall yet—’

‘Does it fit him?’ Hoseok asks as he mingles with the Androids who immediately take off once a ship docks and lands. Hoseok watches as a patrol unit moves past them, not sparing him or the other Android a glance.

‘Yes. But just barely. He’ll be there in 30 minutes.’

‘Okay great.’

‘That being done, how are you convincing the Māho officials you’re actual GLA officers? There is no recorded ship docking in from the GLA to back you up—’

‘I know,’ Hoseok replies readily, ‘Yoongi is declared a member of the Alliance right? Meaning that the GLA wouldn’t necessarily want the general public or members of the general public to handle a case like this one—’

‘-because apparently the Alliance is dead.’

‘-exactly- so we’re going in as agents.’

‘You’re going in as yourself.’

‘Somewhat.’

‘A triple-disguise. Very effective. This plan is still stupid.’

Hoseok chortles.

‘Right. Jungkook looks too excited, gotta knock him down I ’spose,’ Sk’jin sighs.

‘Unconscious?’

‘What? No! As in, ground him, I dunno, less-enthuse him.’ Sk’jin exclaims.

‘Less-enthuse him. Gonna use that next time when I—’ Taeh’yung begins enthusiastically.

‘Please don’t finish that sentence. I’m too old.’

Jimin is wheezing over the line.
To everyone’s relief, Jungkook manages the space-run with an ease that even Hoseok is envious of. And to an extent, it’s not very surprising considering his species, his up-bringing, and where he grew up – his instincts were keen and sharp.

His enthusiasm was potentially eye-catching as the first thing he does when he literally crashes into Hoseok after making it past the Atmoshield is to whoop very loudly.

Hoseok quickly muffles him by slamming shut his visor again and shoving him into the Android maintenance room.

‘That was so fun!’ Jungkook says brightly, taking off his helmet and spacesuit with too much energy. One of the sleeves slaps Hoseok across the face.

‘Are you dizzy? Do you feel heavy?’ Hoseok asks, looking over the youngling with worry.

‘No! I’m fine!’ Jungkook bounces a little, clearly very elated.

‘That’s him knocked down,’ Sk’jin explains tiredly.

Space-runs were tiring, even with a good spacesuit. And for Beings who weren’t trained beforehand it was an absolute nightmare maneuvering the controls, knowing how much pressure to release in the compressed air-valves, how to time your transit through dead-space straight in through an Atmoshield.

But here was Jungkook, absolutely living and energized by the whole experience.

Hoseok remembers having to lie down on the floor for a whole hour, trying to recalibrate himself from the shock of going through dead-space and down into an area with complete gravity.

‘Here!’ Jungkook unties the large flat bag previously attached to his back and hands it to Hoseok. ‘It’s everything you requested for.’

‘Thanks Kookie,’ Hoseok immediately starts unpacking it.

‘Hoseok, you might want to check up on an issue headed your way- I mean, well, Yoongi’s way. It seems like they’re expecting a large Transporter for their dock.’ Sk’jin tells him tersely. ‘They might be transferring him somewhere else.’

‘Why the fuck are their lazy asses actually working on time?’ Hoseok hisses as he pulls out the uniform he requested them for.

‘Alliance shit makes Beings jumpy? I dunno,’ Sk’jin replies. ‘You’ll need to help Jungkook with the mask.’

Hoseok quickly strips himself off of the maintenance overalls, his skin rippling, hair darkening and lengthening just the slightest and forming a neat cut right under his chin. Jungkook is staring with wide eyes, watching with fascination as Hoseok does his utmost to bring the most change to his body as he can. It was a little more difficult to change into a distinctly feminine silhouette but Hoseok has long mastered the tricky bits. Most times, with most species, it was the physical attitude that mattered the most.

‘Pretty,’ Jungkook remarks with a wide grin. Hoseok rolls his now silver eyes in response.

Hoseok slips on the long skirt, forgoing the standard stockings for long socks (mainly because he hadn’t found stockings), and quickly pulls on the long blazer on top.
Most Yisheng ships were stocked with default uniforms for a number of official statuses for the purpose of (but not limited to) funerals. Does Hoseok feel bad? Not really.

His stock of useful uniforms, badges, and status-based equipment were all in the Užkulisai. He was simply restocking. In a very unconventional manner.

‘Do you have the IDs for me?’

‘Sending to the screens. With Kookie,’ Jimin informs him.

‘Let’s do your eyes,’ Hoseok pushes back his longer hair into a neat brush-like low pony-tail.

Jungkook immediately bends his knees a little so that Hoseok can help him drop the EDie into his eyes. It seemed like Sk’jin had carefully masked Jungkook’s very telling skin-colouring into something slightly warmer. And now with the silver EDie, Jungkook looks very much like a Tayian. A tall Tayian.

‘You’re clearly mixed,’ Hoseok remarks, looking over Jungkook one time over to make sure everything was set.

‘It’s okay?’ Jungkook looks a little nervous.

‘It’s fine,’ Hoseok pats his shoulders, ‘You won’t have to talk much. I’m acting as your superior, and in Tayi, a lot of them are pretty prissy about ranks.’

‘More like all of them,’ Sk’jin comments dryly. ‘Get moving.’

‘Ready?’ Hoseok asks Jungkook, the latter is nervously combing through his hair with his fingers, chewing at his lower lip, a small furrow forming between his brows.

He nods timidly.

‘Just remember, you need to act like you own the room you walk into. Like you’re meant to be there. None of this is new to you.’ Hoseok tells him. ‘Look disinterested.’

‘Disinterested,’ Jungkook says the word carefully, exhaling out and then nodding. ‘Okay.’

Stepping out of the maintenance room, Hoseok walks with purpose and aim, the small but sharp heels on his feet making clear clacking sounds.

They don’t speak as they walk out of the Dock and head straight towards the Māho-5 Keep. It’s not extensively large or very fortified, but after some research, Hoseok is sure that Yoongi is being detained in their singular digitized cell. Most small and localized prisons or keeps had at least one digitized cell since almost 5 sols ago. The GLA had made it a standard practice and legal requirement that all facilities made to retain and hold criminals should be outfitted with one.

Hoseok wonders now if that was a decision made in regards to the Gaia Case.

According to a very easy search into the Keep’s system, Yoongi was being withheld as inmate 3589901. His arrest and warrant was charged under Deputy Ferf Fanger, also the head of the Keep.

‘No sign of Namjoon,’ Sk’jin tells him quietly. ‘Or of the Omhlophe.’

‘We had a really big head start,’ Hoseok says quietly. ‘And if this works out, we can get out within an hour. Just get ready to cut the signal when they send out the report.’
The Māho-5 Keep is little more than just a glorified detention center for mainly going through messed up trade-documents, passes, and only localized crime or the occasional pirate messing things up. So it’s not surprising when Hoseok and Jungkook have to walk through a small crowd of Beings, all eager to catch a glimpse of the Alliance criminal.

Hoseok had been, admittedly, far too busy to really keep track on what happened after Pompa. And while Hoseok knew that Yoongi’s arena had indeed been distributed and widely viewed for that short period of time, hadn’t imagined that it would have been used to frame him, and them, as members of the Alliance.

Ammé had not mentioned this. Either she would have thought it was something they would have already been aware of, or she didn’t know about it herself. She wouldn’t be in the correct official position to be aware of information like this. But if it was connected to this mission, Hoseok is pretty sure that the Special Jury would have found out—especially considering the fact that Xmi, as Chief of the Galactic Security and Safety Department was in the Jury.

Hoseok had tried to pinpoint where and when their warrant for arrest would have been issued. It must have been fairly recent, considering they were not recognized in Grisial.

It was strange seeing his own picture, archived and retrieved from the Venture Unit, brought out and labeled alongside a warrant for instant arrest. He was ranking pretty high, with a heavy fine and sentence declared based on his supposed involvement with the Alliance. In order to obtain his original picture, you would need to have an incredible hold or authority over the Venture Unit archiving system.

Sk’jin’s picture is from a surveillance footage, Yoongi’s is from when his hair was still blue, and Taeh’yung’s was clearly taken from Teronko’ng Prison. Namjoon is also there, his picture taken from surveillance footage as well. There’s a blank image but with a general warning that this crew of old Alliance members were numbered at 6.

It’s all loosely based on the incident that took place in Seulgaan’s ship. The Tayian himself is not mentioned, and instead they’re labeled as a group of former Alliance members still actively working on trafficking.

This was a very strategic and quiet attack against them.

There used to exist a unique species of insects in Ngfy’wid. They gathered grain husks during the harvest, to use in their underground nest-mound during the winter to grow and collect fungi which their larvae would feed on to grow fully in the coming spring. However this was an incredibly risky move for the insects, as they were the primary prey for most of the local birds. But the insects had a defense mechanism, excreting poison onto their wings to fend off their natural predators. However in order to get close to their own nest-mounds, they would need to shed their wings.

It was a harsh sacrifice, but the insects would time themselves, shedding their wings close to their nest-mounds, letting go of the husks before they’re swooped out by their predators.

The autumn air would flutter with falling leaves, poisoned wings, and drying grain husks.

Hoseok can’t help but feel like their wings are being forcefully shed now.

Both Hoseok and Jungkook flash their fake (quickly and expertly made by Hoseok, further embellished by Sk’jin through legal systems), IDs over at the entrance once they make their way inside the Keep, the doorway guards allowing them entrance once they spot Hoseok’s rank.
They even respectfully curtsey.

‘Ah, a good start then,’ Sk’jin comments.

‘What the fuck?’ Hoseok hisses quietly, side-eyeing Jungkook.

‘So I stuck an Iris on him, need to keep an eye on things,’ Sk’jin replies blithely.

‘You saw me changing,’ Hoseok deadpans as they pause shortly in the anteroom before the main Lobby. This is clearly a pretty big ordeal, with the whole Keep flitting by around quickly, projections and screens blinking all over.

‘If it’s anything worth mentioning you look great in a skirt’

Hoseok doesn’t bother replying but does glare at some point around Jungkook’s chest. A harried looking pale Keep-staff approaches them.

‘Oh yes- oh, have you forgotten something?’ he inquires.

‘ Forgotten?’ Hoseok tilts his head, posture leaning forward and downwards. ‘I beg your pardon?’

The staff member visibly flinches, ‘Oh uh- please, uh, wait one moment, we’re quite in an uproar—’

Hoseok would feel bad for this unfortunate staff but he needs to get Yoongi out, then leave this place before the Omhlophe get to them, and find another place where they can restock weapons and supplies.

‘Who is the overhead of this Keep?’ Hoseok snaps as though he didn’t know.

Unable to really respond much other than plead at Hoseok with rapidly blinking eyes, the staff-member points towards the doorways past the service-cubicles.

‘Uh the Deputy Fanger is busy right now—’ he begins but Hoseok pushes past and makes his way straight towards the doors.

The staff, though admirable in their attempt to stop Hoseok, tries to stand in front of Hoseok to stop them from continuing forward. Before Hoseok can say anything, Jungkook steps forward and physically lifts the staff away. He hears a squeaking protest behind him but Hoseok ignores it.

‘Cold.’ Sk’jin comments dryly. ‘Just follow Hoseok Kookie, you’ve really made quite the impression on that staff.’

Hoseok ignores the calls and warnings from around the Keep and pushes through the doorway labeled “Deputy”.

The door, much to Hoseok’s satisfaction, bangs open.

The Deputy Fanger jumps in shock, glaring at Hoseok with all five thin long eyes momentarily before schooling her expression once she notes Hoseok’s uniform and status.

‘I am Officer Jeong and this is Officer Heenuen,’ Hoseok flashes his ID, and Jungkook does the same behind him with an added Tayian bow. Who the fuck taught him that? ‘From the Venture Unit Networking Division. We’re here to take the purported Isbahaysiga Alliance suspect.’

‘Not purported,’ the Deputy Fanger recovers, ‘Declared.’
‘Very well. The declared purported Isbahaysiga Alliance suspect,’ Hoseok clips back, ‘Inmate 358…’-‘

‘-9901,’ Jungkook completes from behind him.

‘-is to be taken in by Venture Unit agents-‘ Hoseok is ready to lay down their complete details, backstory of how they’re here, and even more evidence of their validity as law-abiding agents but the Deputy Fanger just snorts.

‘I’m sorry Officer Jeong,’ the Deputy practically sneers, ‘But inmate 358…’-‘

‘-9901,’ Jungkook completes.

‘-that.’ She scowls, ‘Has already been taken by your fellow visiting agents from the neighbouring port during the round up. Guess your competition is done.’

He hears SK’jin exhale with frustration. Hoseok manages to disguise his own frustration and panic with a glare at the Deputy Fanger.

‘Daily? You really stock up on them don’t you.’

She gives him an extremely irritated look.

‘Which prison are they taking inmate 358…’-‘

‘-9901.’ Jungkook offers again.

‘-9901,’ Hoseok nods, ‘where are they taking him?’

‘He didn’t have any identification or record. He’s being taken to the Cuab-D2 Detention Facility. Was this not declared to you by your supervisors Officer Jeong? If so, please do not insinuate any fallacies about my Keep.’

‘Wait- isn’t that-‘

‘Axudar?’

‘Yes,’ she smiles in a sour manner, ‘You may take this up with your Division supervisor I don’t care. Maybe you need to spruce up on your time management yes? Kindly see your way out.’

‘Very well- expect to see a memo tomorrow,’ Hoseok grits out through his teeth, acting out a defeated agent to the best of his abilities.

The Deputy rolls all 5 of her eyes.

Hoseok turns, his heels clacking on the floor while Jungkook quickly sides up next to him after bowing the formal Tayian farewell to the Deputy Fanger.

‘Was that okay?’ he asks very quietly, ‘Taeh’yung taught me?’

‘You were fine Kook,’ Hoseok says as reassuringly as possible as they march out into the anteroom. ‘You did well.’

Jungkook seems to sag in relief, rubbing at his face carefully. Hoseok catches sight of the unfortunate staff and hails him over with an imperious wave. The poor staff scurries over, sweat visible on his face but with a blush on his cheeks as he glances at Jungkook.
'Oh no Spaces this is so embarrassing.' Sk’jin groans. Hoseok thinks he can hear Taeh’yung laughing in the background.

'I need the schedule and navigation charts following the transfer of inmate 358-' Hoseok turns to look at Jungkook who is quick to add, '-9901’, his expression expertly schooled and also genuinely completely unaware of whatever effect he was having on this poor staff.

‘-immediately,’ Hoseok finishes.

‘O-of course-!’ the staff fumbles with his screen, nearly dropping it a few times before handing it over to Hoseok.

‘We won’t need to use Jungkook as bait anymore but clearly we’re gonna have few new options now,’ Sk’jin is saying as Hoseok quickly scans the schedule before him, memorizing the trajectory and time slots. He quickly taps along the details, not surprised to find Yoongi not registered as was the case with dealing with high-level criminals. Those would be registered and handled directly by the agents responsible for their arrest.

‘Who was responsible for the arrest of inmate 358-’

‘-9901.’

‘-and which Division or Department did they come from?’ Hoseok asks without even looking up.

‘Oh- uh, they were from the Venture Unit ma’am, I uh- I am uh, not versed on t-their uniforms.’ He stutters before weakly adding, ‘I’m new.’

Hoseok genuinely feels bad for this unfortunate staff.

‘Thank you,’ he says curtly, handing the screen over to the staff without an added glance and walking away.

‘What’s your plan?’ Jimin asks.

‘The Transporter taking Yoongi to Cuab will leave in 3 hours. There’s an hour delay and I’m guessing that’s because no one was expecting Yoongi’s level of warrant. They’re probably pulling up extra security. Sk’jin, could you look into Cuab first and foremost?’ Hoseok says as they walk through the main lobby and towards the doorway. ‘What sort of security system will they be employing? If we have 3 hours, we might be able to extract him from the Transporter without even leaving Māho.’

‘On it.’ Sk’jin replies as the doors slide open to allow them out.

Hoseok spies a pair of Venture Unit agents, uniforms a mess as they hurriedly push past the crowds, clearly clamoring to make their arrests. Hoseok remembers when he was just a greenhorn, taking up as much arrests and cases as he could. Staying near Docks and ports like this was always good if you were still training.

‘Is this the new style of internship?’ Sk’jin asks absentmindedly as Hoseok pulls Jungkook aside as the agents push aside the crowd and sprint past just as Hoseok and Jungkook duck behind the main crowd.

‘Guess that explains why there was activity in the Keep’s docks,’ Hoseok sighs. ‘Fuck, that was faster than I expected them to move. Is that too much of a coincidence or is that actually normal?’
Bad luck,’ Sk’jin replies immediately, ‘Māho-5 has daily round-ups, but it’s normally just local crimes and thieving. But I guess because of the level of Yoongi’s warrant, they called the agents themselves.’

‘Kook and I will head over to the Docks-first we need to know who are the arresting agents,’ Hoseok declares, ‘We have a decent time-frame, but we can’t allow Yoongi to leave Māho.’

‘What if we can’t?’ Jimin asks, his tone light.

‘I can get him out!’ Taeh’yung volunteers at once.

‘No,’ both Hoseok and Sk’jin say at once. ‘Buggy, we can’t – you can’t. We can’t afford to leave an obvious trail- not now, so close and soon to Grisial. We also can’t draw more attention to this than it’s already garnered. Yoongi is recognizably known as a criminal now, we can’t mess up.’

‘Fine,’ Taeh’yung audibly pouts.

‘If Yoongi is arrested, and we can’t get him. What will happen to him?’ Jimin asks tentatively.

‘Most likely scenario for a declared member of the Alliance he will be immediately sentenced to life-imprisonment in Teronko’ng Prison,’ Hoseok replies evenly as they move out of the crowd outside the Keep. ‘This is a high-level warrant issued by someone very high up.’

‘Will they be notified?’

‘They will,’ Hoseok replies, ‘They probably already know. It’s fair to say that the Jury probably know too. An envoy could be waiting for him at Cuab which is why we need to get him out of here now.’

‘Would it- in the long run, would it be safer, for Yoongi to be arrested?’ Taeh’yung asks out of nowhere.

Both Jimin and Jungkook make an affronted sound.

‘I don’t think Yoongi would appreciate being left behind,’ Sk’jin remarks dryly. ‘Unlike Namjoon, we’re going back for him.’

Hoseok grimaces, expecting some sort of retaliation or comment from Jimin but nothing comes.

‘How far is Cuab-D2?’ Jungkook asks as their tram pauses at a stop.

‘2 days in warp.’

‘How close is it to the main planets in Axudar?’ Hoseok inquires.

‘Less than 4 hours.’ Sk’jin replies before adding, ‘Okay- Yoongi’s arrest has been taken over from Fanger to two agents from the Venture Unit under Interstellar Patrols Sub-Division. Would it be safe to say that Haenoon or S’ava are behind this warrant?’

‘We can’t be sure,’ Hoseok replies, feeling a little more hopeful. This would make things easier for them, as Hoseok was more than familiar with Venture Unit protocol regarding arrests and transfers. ‘But we can’t rule it out either. Are you using the NaviLet? Can you find their IDs and-‘

‘-Hoseok please, I am way ahead of you. I’ve already found the two agents,’ Sk’jin retorts with a scoff, ‘I’m sending their IDs and complete data to you-‘
Sk’jin suddenly pauses.

‘What’s wrong?’ Hoseok asks with some trepidation.

‘We have around 3 hours correct?’ Sk’jin asks instead.

‘Yes?’

It’s silent over the Comm for a few minutes, during which Jungkook keeps giving Hoseok nervous looks. They’re close to the transit-stations now, the sound of the trams clear over the sound of the street and shops and crowds.

‘Hoseok- as an agent, were you ever accidently arrested during missions or infiltration tasks?’

‘Yeah?’ Hoseok replies with a frown and quickly adds, ‘We’re not going to have me arrested- I think it’s fair to say that the remaining Venture Unit agents who know of me won’t take too kindly to meeting me anymore.’

Sk’jin makes quick shushing sounds before he starts exclaiming, ‘Fuck- Spaces fuck- I am a fucking genius.’

Jungkook, clearly nervous and completely confused, grabs onto the edge of Hoseok’s jacket as though it will help him understand.

‘I think, Hoseok,’ Sk’jin begins rather ominously, ‘I think I know what we should do.’

Yoongi’s pretty sure 3 hours had not yet gone by.

He was shortly read his “rights” as well as his sentence, issued and collected from the Interstellar Patrols Sub-Division from the Venture Unit. Great, he was going to be taken straight back to Šerdesas at this point. He was told that he would receive his complete court-issued sentence in Cuab-D2, and then be taken to Teronko’ng. This was pretty standard and not at all surprising considering what he was being arrested for.

After his “rights” were read to him, Yoongi was left alone. He kept track, rather subconsciously, of the routine and schedule followed by the officers around him. In a Keep like this, it was probably connected to a private and very large, very near-by Dock that allowed them to secure and oversee all transfers of criminals and other legal activity. If Yoongi was going to have to go through his own escape, the best timing would be during this trip to the Dock. But there’s no way of knowing just how many officers, how many defense mechanism, and how many obstacles he’ll have to fight through with such a massive handicap on his physical strength and abilities.

Which is why Yoongi is surprised when an officer stands outside the digitized-wall, waiting for a doorway to appear to allow them in.

‘Inmate 3589901 stand back.’ The officer calls.
Yoongi rolls his eyes.

He couldn’t even stand.

The doors open to reveal one of the officers that had arrested him. He steps forward and to Yoongi’s complete confusion is released from the cuffs around his neck and knees.

The pain that follows the relief of being somewhat released is almost not worth it but Yoongi manages to bite back the groan of pain.

The officer takes a step back, still eying Yoongi warily. Yoongi instantly concludes that this officer has most definitely seen his arena footage before.

2 other officers appear at the doorway.

‘Follow me,’ the officer says, turning on his heel and walking out.

Yoongi is beyond confused but doesn’t show it.

He follows the officer out of the digitized-cell and is flanked by the two additional officers. And instead of taking him to maybe the regular prison cells, they simply walk past them and into the hallway through which Yoongi was brought in.

Yoongi walks past open windows.

I could literally escape right now what on Earth is happening? But Yoongi doesn’t act on this very easy option and instead follows the officer past the open-windowed hallway and downwards to the main offices. Just 20 meters to Yoongi’s left is the doorway leading outside. While his feet were cuffed, Yoongi knows at least 10 different ways of breaking free of those. He also has the strength to at least run out. But he doesn’t. Instead they enter the main offices, the two officers behind him stopping at the entryway. The officer in front of Yoongi continues to guide him straight towards a large doorway that looks a lot more imposing than the others.

This was probably where the Deputy stayed, Yoongi surmises. What was going on?

A hassled looking staff appears, giving Yoongi a nervous smile before shuffling forward first. The door opens and the staff goes through, standing by the doorway and waiting for Yoongi to enter while the officer stands just outside of it.

‘U-uh, in-inmate 3589901 p-please enter,’ he stammers awkwardly, nervously glancing inside the office.

Very confused, Yoongi enters the office.

The Deputy is sitting behind her desk, 2 of her 5 eyes glancing at Yoongi quickly. Yoongi also notices 2 other Beings in the office. He recognizes the uniforms as some Division from the Venture Unit and surmises that they were the agents who were now taking over his arrest. They study him carefully, as though surprised that he was a member of the Alliance. Maybe they never saw his arena footage.

‘Inmate 3589901,’ the Deputy says, all eyes focused down on the screen before her. ‘It seems like there have been some problems.’

She says it as though the word “problem” personally insulted her.
‘Please address him by his official given title Deputy,’ one of the agents says with a stressed smile while nodding at Yoongi.

‘Inmate 3589901 Agent Aydinliş Şig,’ the Deputy says dully, ‘It appears that we have been most unfortunate in disrupting your mission issued by the Venture Unit.’

Yoongi blinks a few times.

‘I do not have the authority to discuss my mission,’ Yoongi manages to say.

‘Yes well, how convenient,’ the Deputy drawls while the two agents stand, sweat visible on their foreheads.

‘We have tried out best, Agent Şig,’ one of them says with a nervous smile. Huh, a rookie. ‘But we’re afraid that due to the uh, warrant that was released, we cannot set aside the arrest unless it’s on Cuab-D2. We are very sorry-’

‘-please take this apology nonsense somewhere else,’ the Deputy cuts in sharply, ‘We will be doing our part that was expected of us when the arrest was first warranted and will be delivering Inmate 3589901 Agent Aydinliş Şig to Cuab-D2 and all authority that was granted unto me will be forfeit thereof.’

The agents are sweating even more so Yoongi steps in, starting to understand what was happening. He eyes the agents carefully, studying their appearances carefully.

Too tall.

‘As expected of the Deputy,’ Yoongi states, ‘I am relieved to find that the mission is not entirely compromised but my going to Cuab-D2 will delay my work. I don’t think I need to mention how that paperwork will go.’

‘You don’t need to,’ the Deputy yawns before nodding at the nervous staff behind Yoongi, ‘Evdos will take care of it.’

The staff smiles but it’s more of a terrified grimace. Yoongi feels very bad for this unfortunate staff.

‘And who the fuck had my ID warranted?’ Yoongi demands, rounding up at the two agents still anxiously standing.

‘We-! We’re sorry Agent Şig,’ the other stammers, ‘But we- we received an updated list after the Pompen Area was exposed- we- uh-’ she glances at the Deputy who is watching them with bored eyes and lowers her voice to a whisper, ‘-we were not made aware of uh- the level of your mission.’

Spaces, if these were the new agents in training the Venture Unit was doomed.

‘How long until we’re leaving?’ Yoongi grumbles.

‘The transfer-ship will leave in-?’ the Deputy looks at Evdos, the nervous staff with 3 eyes.

‘-at! In uh, 94 minutes ma’am!’ he stammers.

‘In 94 minutes,’ the Deputy echoes dully. ‘Then you all can do whatever you want. Evdos take the Inmate 3589901 Agent Aydinliş Şig to the waiting facilities-’
‘he’s not a prisoner you must-‘

‘-no agents, you must make sure that I receive the standard payment for hosting this clumsy fool who thought he could just waltz into my Dock and not know about the fuck-up of his own agency,’ the Deputy snaps, ‘-so sit back down. We’re here to discuss payment.’

The agents throw Yoongi helpless looks but Yoongi just ignores them, feigning annoyance at their incompetence.

They immediately start giving him some form of elaborate courtesy. Yoongi grimaces and turns away.

Evdos, the nervous staff, hurriedly moves aside so that Yoongi can walk through.

‘Uh- uh, his uh, cuffs-‘ Evdos coughs with an apologetic smile at the officer waiting for them.

The officer still looks at Yoongi with suspicion as he goes to unlock Yoongi’s cuffs.

Correct height.

For a brief second they hold eye-contact.

It would take less than 2 seconds.

The officer flinches away, back straightening and hand twitching for his weapon.

Yoongi wants to laugh and at the same time sighs at himself.

Maybe 1 second. It’s not Hoseok.

‘We-we are very sorry- uh, the Deputy is a busy person and uh, needs to consider a lot-‘ Evdos is saying, walking a little behind Yoongi as they follow the officer back.

‘-we are so sorry- we were not aware- I mean how could we be- of your mission with-‘ Evdos choked out in a whispered tone with wide eyes, ‘-the Alliance-! We are so sorry to have disturbed you and caused this issue by arresting you mid-mission – you must be so-‘

Yoongi tunes it out. Well, this was very well thought out. Was this Hoseok’s plan? Pretending that Yoongi was a Venture Unit agent pretending to be an Alliance member but being caught by accident in the middle of a mission was ingenious.

‘-and we’re so sorry we couldn’t let you go at once!’ Evdos is going on, ‘We tried our best! But our only option is to simply send you to Cuab-D2 but you will immediately released! Your agency will be sending in agents to guide you through the process.’

Yoongi’s ears perk up at this.

‘When will they be here?’ Yoongi asks.

‘U-uh, they should be at the transfer-ship when you get there!’ Evdos says, dropping his screen and quickly picking it up again. ‘Again we are very sorry!’

They reach the doorway for the cells and the officer steps in first, saying something to the officers inside. Yoongi makes to follow, feeling relieved now that he knew where things were headed.

‘Uh- agent Şig!’ Evdos calls out again, Yoongi looks around, one eyebrow raised.
'I hope you can catch some *sleep* at least,’ he says, his tone losing the frail nervous stammer, emphasizing gently. Yoongi pauses a moment to really look at the nervous staff. With a small wink, his large purple eyes briefly shift into very familiar yellow hues instead.

Yoongi could laugh.

Wasn’t expecting that.

Yoongi looks down, hiding his smile as he follows the officer towards the holding cells. There’s clearly a shift in the way the officers now regard him. Many look incredibly apologetic, others are rightly suspicious looking. But he’s taken past the holding cells which are surprisingly filled with a lot of inmates. Quite a lot of them recognize him almost instantly and those that didn’t are very quickly filled in on who he is.

This was beyond odd. They were going to have to be very careful in this last leg of their journey before they hit Menigišiti.

‘Agent,’ the officer nods, indicating him towards a waiting area to the side with long benches. ‘Would you like any refreshments?’

Might as well.

‘Water- and I need the washroom,’ Yoongi tells him.

The officer nods and indicates to the side where a mini-station was established. Two other officers sat in there, the entirety of the station covered in surveillance projections. The officer knocks on the partition and says a few words.

The officers inside look at him dubiously and with some fear. But they are nodding as well.

There’s a mirror in the tiny washroom. And Yoongi takes a few minutes to really look at himself.

He hasn’t changed much. There’s been no visible difference in his appearance since the first day he awoke, looking at himself in Zhoumi’s apartment.

He rubs at the marks still around his neck from the cuffs. They would probably bruise, and with no access to any medical-care, he won’t be able to prevent it either. Sighing Yoongi finishes up using the washroom, hair around his forehead damp from washing his face.

He’s left alone for most of the part of staying in the lobby with the exception of the two officers inside the station who are doing a terrible job at spying on him.

So, clearly, Hoseok and possibly Jungkook would be his “agents” from his “agency”. That would mean that they were able to forge or get somewhat almost entirely legal documentation to pull him out under an entirely fake identity. Hoseok being an actual agent with many decades of experience not only put them at an advantage for a plan like this, but also allowed them to use their situation as a way to get close to Axudar. If Yoongi is not mistaken, Cuab-D2 was very close to Axudar; Namjoon had actually mentioned it in passing to them when they were first building their trajectories.

Actually going to Cuab-D2 and pulling him out from there must mean that Hoseok and Sk’jin were confident in the documents and permits they were using. Clearly they tried getting him out from here, but the Deputy seemed to be the type to enjoy purposefully making things complicated.

Yoongi still finds it funny that he didn’t realize the nervous staff was Hoseok completely shifted.
It’s also slightly terrifying.

‘I hope you can catch some sleep at least.’

Yoongi shifts his position, making both the officers inside the station jump, eyeing him skeptically before he pillows one arm and closes his eyes.

It’s probably not something to boast about but at his current state, Yoongi could very easily fall asleep if he chose to do so. So it’s not a surprise to find himself opening his eyes inside a warmly lit room, the night sky filled with stars outside the open windows.

A cool breeze enters, the thin curtains fluttering a little. He sits up from the bed, feeling rested and safe.

There’s a short series of knocks and Yoongi quickly gets up, jogging towards the main door.

He’s only able to breathe out his name as he opens the door when Jimin pushes through quickly, arms wrapping around him in a secure and all-encompassing embrace.

Yoongi stumbles back a little, taken aback by the sudden hug.

‘Yoongi,’ Jimin exhales quietly, his body relaxing against his, as though finally at ease here in Yoongi’s hold.

‘Hey sunshine,’ Yoongi holds him all the closer, only realizing that Jimin was pushing them backwards when his back hits the wall under the stairs.

‘Sunshine-‘

Jimin kisses with a sweet sense of desperation.

‘You looked so tired,’ Jimin tells him softly, his lips brushing against his own. ‘And your neck-‘

Hoseok probably had an Iris on him, allowing them to see what was happening.

‘I’m okay,’ Yoongi kisses the words on the corner of Jimin’s lips, ‘I’m okay. It was just the restraining cuffs- it’s not serious.’

Jimin kisses his neck where his bruises were forming.

‘I’m sorry for worrying you,’ Yoongi says quietly as Jimin presses his lips against his throat. Yoongi closes his eyes, taking in this moment with a deep inhale. ‘Is everyone okay?’

‘Just- just one moment,’ Jimin’s words are barely audible, his grip around Yoongi tightening even more.

Yoongi cards his fingers through Jimin’s hair, his other hand slowly rubbing up and down his back.

After a few minutes, Jimin slowly moves back, blinking furiously and trying very hard to maintain a composed expression. Yoongi takes his hands in his, noting how cold they were, and kissing them.

‘You’re not hurt?’ Jimin asks, looking over him as though expecting to see his bruises.

Yoongi shakes his head.
‘Are you all safe? Were you able to get away?’ Yoongi asks.

Jimin nods, tugging at their hands and pulling them away from under the stairs.

Instead of taking them to the bedroom, Jimin takes Yoongi to the second doorway into a small but cozy room. It was supposed to a sort of reading room or study, with a low coffee table in front of a comfortable pale blue couch under a narrow but deep window. The table is littered with knick-knacks and decorations and from the ceiling a lamp, unlit, dangles down alongside a rather childish model of the Earth’s solar system.

They sit on the couch, Jimin’s legs folded up, his feet wiggling to push under Yoongi’s thigh.

He takes Yoongi’s hand and begins, ‘As soon as Hoseok alerted us, we pushed back past the borders. We made sure we would be undetectable.’

Yoongi nods, listening closely.

‘Hoseok stayed to watch and observe. We searched and the uh, list, it has you from the Arena, and Sk’jin, Taeh’yung, Namjoon, and me- but not my face,’ he says quietly. ‘Hoseok too but- but I guess, it’s okay for him.’

Yoongi smiles at that.

‘Jungkook is still safe?’

Jimin nods at once.

‘Hoseok and Jungkook tried to come and claim your arrest,’ Jimin tells him, ‘But there were others who came before you.’

Yoongi thinks back to the two agents being grilled by the Deputy.

‘So Sk’jin suggested that we should claim that you are an agent for Venture Unit, like Hoseok, but working to- against, Alliance, by pretending,’ Jimin gives him a small smile, as though pleased with the idea. ‘It took a while to make the correct uh, permit? And we could overpower your warrant.’

‘I’m guessing it was Hoseok who did it?’

Jimin chuckles a little, leaning in a little closer and just simply staring at him, as though there was nothing more he wanted, ‘It was Sk’jin. He’s very good.’

‘And old-‘

Jimin laughs, his body falling against Yoongi’s.

‘And uh, Hoseok used an official channel to issue this permit. It was…it was frightening,’ Jimin concludes, ‘We had to wait for the approval. Make it as of-official, as possible. Nothing strange, nothing messy.’

Yoongi nods in understanding and asks, ‘Who was Hoseok disguised as?’

Jimin laughs again, the stars outside sparkling with the sound of his delighted laughter. He’s laughing too much, unable to give an answer, his whole body leaning against Yoongi’s.

‘Sunshine-‘ Yoongi chuckles, ‘what is it? Who was the Being Hoseok disguised as?’
Jimin actually has tears in his eyes, trying to compose himself.

‘Okay okay,’ Yoongi adjusts his arms to wrap around Jimin, pulling him down with him as he lays back on the couch. Jimin’s laughter is quiet and Yoongi can feel it against his chest.

‘So I’m guessing Hoseok and Jungkook? Will be those agents Hoseok mentioned?’ Yoongi asks after Jimin has stopped laughing, his fingers finding a way to comb through Jimin’s hair.

‘Hm,’ Jimin hums in affirmation. ‘We uh- we had to stop their flight.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘A Transporter came with the guards,’ Jimin explains, his breath seeping through the thin fabric of Yoongi’s sweater. ‘Sent to follow you through to Cuab-D2.’

‘How?’

‘Uh- Taeh’yung,’ Jimin tells him before hastily adding, ‘Nothing bad.’

Well, okay then.

‘We could attach Laikin to their Transporter,’ Jimin tells him, ‘And the Transporter will go inside the transfer-ship.’

Yoongi frowns at that, ‘Does that mean you will be aboard during that time? Along with Sk’jin, and Taeh’yung?’

Jimin nods against his chest and says, ‘Can’t be seen.’

That sounded incredibly risky but at the same time Yoongi would’ve done the same too.

‘We will take you to the transfer-ship,’ Jimin explains, ‘after we reach Cuab-D2. You won’t go inside prison. Just in- in the uh, bay?’

‘Yeah, it’s called the bay,’ Yoongi nods, ‘It’s the area after the dock, it’s where the transfers would take place.’

‘Hoseok will be close by always. Cuab-D2 won’t take you,’ Jimin says firmly, ‘We will transfer you out immediately. We take the guards Transporter and abandon it, take the Laikin, and continue with out trajectory.’

‘Won’t whoever called for my arrest be notified?’ Yoongi asks, ‘Along with the warrant overturn?’

Jimin shakes his head.

‘They will know about the arrest- but Hoseok said, Venture Unit agents are different.’

‘Guess that’s also why the GLA didn’t trust them,’ Yoongi hums in approval.

This part was definitely true- while Venture Unit agents definitely had a romanticized and highly praised commercial aspect to their work, the GLA more or less hated them because the Venture Unit time and time again, messed up their arrests and warrants. And many times the Venture Unit simply exercised their power for fun, to rile up the GLA.

‘Then it seems like things worked out well?’
Jimin nods again.

‘Any news about Namjoon?’

‘Nothing yet,’ Jimin says in a small voice.

‘The Omhlophe?’

Jimin shakes his head.

They stay like that for a while.

‘You’re okay?’ Yoongi asks after a while.

‘Worried,’ Jimin replies softly.

‘Sorry I got arrested,’ Yoongi chuckles, fingers playing with Jimin’s ear.

‘They could see you,’ Jimin comments quietly, ‘You were so visible. So clear to them…even more than before.’

‘Yeah- it was weird,’ Yoongi confesses.

Jimin pushes himself up a little, balancing himself so that he could lean up against Yoongi. Yoongi shifts to accommodate Jimin better, their legs entangled.

‘I won’t let anything happen to you,’ Jimin tells him. It’s almost like a command. ‘I’ll protect you.’

Yoongi smiles up at Jimin, pushing back his hair and tucking the silky strands behind his ear.

‘I know,’ he replies. ‘Don’t push yourself too much.’

Jimin nods, leaning in to kiss forehead. ‘You too.’

‘I won’t,’ Yoongi promises, his hands curving around Jimin’s bare waist, pulling him down to lay against him again.

Jimin leans in with an open-mouthed kiss, hands sliding under Yoongi’s back.

‘I need to go back,’ he says quietly, lips still on Yoongi’s. ‘We’re going to dock inside the transfer-ship soon.’

Yoongi holds him tighter, pressing hard kisses against the side of Jimin’s head and then to his cheeks.

‘I’ll see you soon,’ Jimin promises, eyes closed as Yoongi gently kisses his nose. ‘We’ll come and get you out.’

Jimin pushes himself up and Yoongi makes to sit up but Jimin pushes him down.

‘Just sleep for a while longer,’ he says, brushing Yoongi’s hair back gently. ‘Rest a little more.’

Yoongi just nods, settling back into the couch.

Jimin unfolds the soft yellow blanket over the back of the couch on top of Yoongi. He kisses his forehead again before stepping back.
I’ll see you soon.’

Jimin steps out and Yoongi closes his eyes, listening to the sound of Jimin’s bare feet quietly padding down the hall and towards the front door. The door opens and clicks shut with a soft dry sound.

The solar-system dial hanging above him moves quietly, the sun model at the center glows faintly. The model of the Earth has its own small moon attached to it. Suddenly, Yoongi misses it.

Grabbing the blanket from around himself, Yoongi sits up and makes his way out. Quietly, as though he didn’t want to disturb the quiet of the night, he makes his way up the stairs.

It’s incomplete but a bit more fixed up. The floors are slightly worn, a light ash wood paneling covers the previously exposed floors. The walls are a clean and soft white though in this night light almost appeared a greyish blue. The walls are not closed up yet- but maybe that was intentional. Long white curtains of a soft thin material flutter, the smell of ocean clean and faint in the breeze.

Open before him is the ocean.

And above it high up, is the moon.

Yoongi sits down, his feet dangling from the edge of the open room.

This was an unfortunately complicated plan. A lot of it banked on Beings who were at officer levels to simply not give a shit about most procedures and policies. And while that was generally the case, being framed a member of a supposed long-gone and very vile organization that even pirates despised, would generally cause for more speculation.

Yoongi hugs the blanket around him tighter. The breeze picks up a little, the thin white curtains shifting a little more. If he listens closely, he can hear the stars singing to him.

‘Agent Şig.’

Yoongi sits up, squinting just a little as he regains his bearings.

He feels better rested even though that could’ve only been an hour, at most, of sleep.

The officer that had brought him here stands over him. Over at the end of the hallway now flanked with a lot of armed officers was a long train of inmates.

‘We will be heading for the Docks,’ the officer tells him.

Yoongi nods and stands up, discreetly stretching a little.

The officer guides him to stand next to the long line of inmates. Some of them eye him curiously, recognition in their eyes as they study him closely. Yoongi chooses to ignore them after a quick scan. They were mostly pirates it would seem. Probably caught over nothing more than simply being pirates.

He looks around at the officers, eyeing their height and stature, wondering which one would be Hoseok. Jimin had said Hoseok would always be close by.

He remembers infiltrating a transfer like this before. How he snuck in easily, simply switched uniforms, and quickly assassinated one of the inmates waiting the transfer-ship. Yoongi doesn’t know why he had to do it- but then again, most of his missions meant nothing to him other than
something that needed completing.

He makes his way to the end, at the front of the line of inmates in front of a large circular doorway. There was probably a lift or tram to take them to the Dock. Yoongi eyes the inmates and their restraints. The officers don’t seem too bothered by the very simple and rather flimsy cuffs on the inmates.

‘Agent Şig,’ the officer gestures to him to stand to the side just as the circular doors sink back a little before split rolling away to reveal a series of connected trams.

The officer guides the way forward and Yoongi follows. It’s after a moment or two the inmates follow in neatly. This was an oddly subordinate bunch of pirate inmates, none of them yelling or making a ruckus as they were wont to do. The Keep didn’t seem like such a terrible place that inflicted psychological suppression into their inmates as a lot of places unfortunately did.

As soon as each tram fills up, the doors lock up and pull upwards.

Yoongi stands by himself with the officer, clean rings of light falling as they rise up. The officer doesn’t say anything and Yoongi can’t sense anything out of the ordinary even though something was definitely starting to feel strange.

He can’t make it out though- unable to clarify if he was simply just reacting as a result of the fact that he was going to break out soon, and that this entire operation was based on his false identity as a Venture Unit agent unfortunately caught in a carelessly issued warrant.

Or maybe he was just overreacting.

The tram stops, and almost immediately a similar circular doorway opens up just as the rest of the connecting trams arrive and reconnect to form a long chain.

The Keep’s Dock is massive and so is the transfer-ship awaiting them.

It could easily house 3000 inmates in just the hull-area, Yoongi estimates as he looks up at the towering ship.

Cyborgs line up the path to the transfer-ship in a slightly curved path to a wide ramp leading up into the transfer-ship. Yoongi looks around and finds it rather sparse; there were few wide spread officers, each at their own station or overseeing something else.

Again, Yoongi tries to quell the gnawing feeling steadily growing.

It’s weirdly quiet for one- the pirates behind him don’t talk and their footsteps aren’t loud. Yoongi glances back. None of them have nervous expressions or were displaying any sign of anxiety, anticipation, or worry. They all looked extraordinarily calm- like this was completely normal.

Almost like going on a casual walk somewhere.

Yoongi scans the place again, wondering where Hoseok could be. Jimin had said they would be bringing in the ship his initial guards had flown to Māho. Were they already inside, were they waiting to be transferred in after all the inmates were sent in?

At the edge of the ramp a pair of cyborgs set up a fence with scanning poles, the lights on top of the scanners gleaming red.

The officer walks through first, the light gleaming blue. When Yoongi walks past, the lights turn
green.

He glances back, curious as the pirates behind them all file in neatly, walking past the poles.

The lights turn blue.

No one says a thing. It’s not exactly quiet- sounds of machines, engines, air-purifiers, humming electric fields; all of these fill the air with a white noise Yoongi is accustomed to.

The problem is that no one is really talking.

The main entry hull is high but not too large. There’s a gateway through which Yoongi walks through, following the officer. Inside it’s equally void of talking, with only cyborgs walking about.

Maybe this was a tactic employed by the Keep- to unnerve their inmates into sub-ordinance.

The gateway is quite long, each section kept open as the emergency doors lay deactivated until required. The main door at the end of the gateway opens to a massive hull transformed into a holding cell facility.

It’s loud in here, voices echoing about. It almost makes Yoongi feel better.

The cells are decently spaced and sized, separated by charged fields not too different from an Atmoshield. Rather than extending up too high, the cells are stacked at only 2 floors, with each cell having their own steep stairwell for access. This was space-consuming but a precaution that Yoongi understands. Clearly there are several floors; massive watch towers climb through what Yoongi counts at around 8 distinct floors within this hull only.

He follows the officer straight towards one of the towers.

He’s almost feeling all right, pushing his queasiness down, when there’s a steadily growing silence.

Looking back around, Yoongi frowns as he notices the silence spread as soon as the pirates behind him walked in.

He’s halfway towards the tower when he can’t help himself and asks, ‘What’s with them?’

The officer doesn’t reply.

After a few minutes, when the silence spreads even more, Yoongi hears it.

Whispering.

And then there’s clapping from somewhere. And it picks up, faster and quicker than the silence.

The whole area bursts into thundering applause as the last of the inmates file in.

‘As part of the procedure,’ the officer says as they get closer to the tower, as though the inmates inside the hull weren’t cheering loudly. ‘You will have to stay in the hull-compound. But you can stay in the Towers instead of a cell.’

‘I understand,’ Yoongi replies, not understanding. ‘Where are my escorts?’

‘Your escorts will come to collect you before the ship lands inside Cuab,’ the officer informs him.

The applause dies down a little.
The officer doesn’t pay any attention to their surroundings.

‘What’s going on?’ Yoongi asks in a quiet voice.

The officer doesn’t reply. But when they reach the elevator doors that will lead him up to the towers the officer says in a calm and neutral voice, ‘Agent Şig, I hope you follow all of the proceedings without any delay.’

The doors open and Yoongi steps inside after a moment of hesitation. The officer turns around and walks away, back towards the main gateway.

The doors close and Yoongi feels the elevator move up. He takes a cautionary step back, back closer to the wall.

I don’t understand.

Yoongi nods to that.

The doors open quietly into a typical watch-station.

Yoongi is not very surprised to find the watch-station only manned by cyborgs. Yoongi scans the room quickly. It’s shaped like a ring around the entrance; a way for the security to keep constant watch below. Yoongi steps around quietly, ignored by the cyborgs stationed at the dashboard at intervals. Yoongi steps closer to the continuous ring of windows that offered a good but narrow view of the hull below. He sees the inmates being led into their cells over at another row.

From the view on top, Yoongi sees how each cell is labeled with their row number. Taking note of the cells the inmates were being guided into, Yoongi finds the corresponding surveillance feed. One of the cyborgs opens a seat for him and then moves to another station. Yoongi sits down, not realizing that his legs felt a little rubbery and weak, and pulls up the surveillance projection.

One of the screens to the side displays the total fuel they were taking in, supplies that were being stocked up for this stop, and finally, number of inmates expected.

To Yoongi’s immense disquiet, the number of inmates remains 0.

He scans through the rest of the ship’s most recent changes in inventory, access, and arrivals. He quickly finds his own at the top of the list that finishes updating after the allocated timeframe for the gates to be open has passed. Only his admittance into the ship is documented with what he suspects is the fake identification Hoseok and Sk’jin created for him. Yoongi scans lower down on the arrivals list and finds nothing that indicates the arrival of the ship Jimin had mentioned to him. He scans the rest of the lists available to him but finds nothing.

Was this something Hoseok and Sk’jin were responsible for?

That didn’t feel right.

Jimin had talked about how they worked so hard on making the whole process as legal and as legit as possible. The reason why they didn’t bust him out of the Keep using Taeh’yung’s abilities (which would have definitely got them out asap) was solely so that they could maintain as much of a low profile as possible and not leave behind gigantic messes.

This didn’t feel like they were maintaining a low profile.

‘I would like to speak to the Bridge,’ Yoongi states clearly to the cyborg closest to him. ‘Which
For a moment it’s like the cyborg wouldn’t response. But then it reaches over to the projection Yoongi had been watching, collapses it and starts a new one. This opens a wide panel of tabs for him.

‘Thank you,’ he nods at the cyborg who ignores him too.

The ship lets out a small siren sound, a warning that they were exiting the Dock and about to hit warp.

Yoongi quickly finds the line for the Bridge.

Right before he places the call, he watches as the registered arrival of his admittance into the ship is neatly erased from the archive.

Yoongi pauses, finger frozen over the faintly glowing square labeled BRIDGE.

*They’re watching.*

Yoongi stops, retreating back a little. He doesn’t move from his seat, sits back and secures himself as the ship lets out another warning calling for warp preparations.

The familiar gentle tug at the bottom of his stomach signals that they’ve pushed into warp and several things happen at once.

All of the barriers in front of the cells blinks out, the dashboards in the watch-station all shut down, flooding him in a shadowy darkness, and the cyborgs all shut down at once.

The elevator door behind him opens, staying that way the same way a forced emergency categorized under evacuations would.

Yoongi pricks his ears for any sound approaching him. But there’s nothing. Watching out of the window, he notices how the inmates aren’t clamoring around to celebrate being freed or anything. They’re behaving as though this were a completely normal thing. But Yoongi knows it’s not. No transfer-ship of inmates were ever released from their cells like this.

The elevator quietly hums and turning, Yoongi watches as the lights inside the shaft blink innocently at him until an elevator comes down, stopping before him.

Inside are 3 Beings, clearly not officers or crew of this ship.

They seem to appraise Yoongi, looking over him carefully.

They’re not carrying any weapon- none that Yoongi can see anyways, and didn’t seem to be at all violent or aggressive. But then again, that has never stopped violence or aggression in Yoongi’s experience. Yoongi recognizes their species only vaguely.

While one was clearly a native from Axudar, the other to the left is definitely from Orvan, her arms have the tell-tale welts, the same as the ones Namjoon had on his own wrists. This was a Being who definitely escaped the cruel system of Orvan. The one who stood in the middle is much taller. His skin is a deep blue, thinly lined with faded and healed over scars, the hair on his face and head a slightly faded orange-red that indicated his age. His horns are well polished and maintained though one is very cleanly snapped off; the tip shifting in opacity and quality appearing garnet like. He wears a skirt like garment that extends just a little below his knobby knees and exposing the
hoof-like ends of his legs. Yoongi doesn’t note his tail that he knows their species possessed. He towered over Yoongi, having to duck a little to enter the room. Yoongi has only seen their species in passing, and it’s mainly because the Ožkan, like Humans now, had a very small and dying population.

‘Are you Agent Sig?’ he asks, his voice rumbly but oddly very nice. He speaks with a sense of authority- or at least seemed to stand with a sense of leadership.

_The leader. Behind this._

Yoongi doesn’t know why he would approach Yoongi, an unknown supposed member of the Alliance only recently declared agent of the Venture Unit, so openly like this.

‘I am,’ Yoongi replies.

‘You’re quite dedicated to bringing down the Alliance if you were willing to so change yourself in order to participate in the Arenas,’ the Ožkan comments- it almost sounds like genuine praise. ‘It is indeed unfortunate that you were caught after exposing the Pompen Arenas. That was a job well done.’

Yoongi only nods to that.

‘As you can see, there have been some changed made in the transfer-ship,’ the Ožkan tells him rather conversationally. ‘I do not think it will do anyone good to have you completely hidden in the dark for the next few hours considering we’re both headed to Cuab-D2.’

‘Is this an attempt to break open Cuab-D2?’ Yoongi asks.

‘It is,’ the Ožkan replies easily. ‘As you are aware, due to recent events that the GLA are doing their best to completely quiet down, pirates and others involved in the Underverse are being rounded up heavily. My crew were swept up in this affair as well, and I’ve been gathering them all back after I was able to break-free just 2 sols ago. The last of my remaining crew who are still living and imprisoned are currently in Cuab-D2, and after that I would have made them all safe.’

‘I see,’ Yoongi replies.

‘So understandably, you, an agent of the Venture Unit, being on board here, would complicate our plans,’ he states.

‘What about my escorts?’ Yoongi inquires, ‘Are they onboard?’

‘No escorting agents were picked up from Māho-5,’ he answers.

Yoongi’s stomach drops a little, a cold rush flooding him.

Where were the others?

‘Now while this could have definitely been ignored, and we could have kept you in the dark, albeit it being confusing as you noticed early on that some of the proceedings were not the standard protocol regarding inmate transfer under the GLA.’ The Ožkan crosses his arms, leaning his weight on one leg. ‘We could not choose to do so because we know that you are not agent Sig.’

‘I’m afraid you don’t understand,’ Yoongi replies smoothly, ‘I was unfortunately caught in the midst of my mission attempting to infiltrate the Isbahaysiga Alliance. My warrant was revoked and I am waiting for my escorts to come take me back to the Venture Unit for a reevaluation or a
complete reassignment. I believe my documents from the Deputy of the Māho-5 Keep was clear.’

‘While your documents were definitely very well made and definitely legal and followed the standard protocol of what to do if an active member of the Venture Unit is falsely captured during a mission, you and your Ngfy’widan friends made the unfortunate mistake of mimicking one of my shadows in Māho-5,’ The Ožkan explains kindly, almost patiently. ‘The staffer you knew as Evdos had been working for nearly 5 months at Māho-5 to work alongside Deputy Fanger in order to secure our plan executed today. Which is why understandably, when my shadow did not board the transfer-ship as was initially planned, and his last report back to me had been minutes before we were sent a memo from Fanger that we would be having an agent transfer to us. A memo that should never have been cleared because my shadow was supposed to make sure it wouldn’t pass.’

It’s very quiet.

There’s nothing threatening in the way the Ožkan addresses him, or as a matter of fact, even the two behind him. But Yoongi knows that he has to be very very careful.

‘So my confusion is that, if you are truly, an agent mistakenly arrested, why would you need to create fake documents to release you from Māho-5. You are not operating at a pirate level, because the access you have as well as expertise in handling this transfer suggests you are not a pirate.’ The Ožkan concludes. ‘And while this then begs the question, if you are in fact truly, a member of the Alliance and are currently escaping because whoever is controlling the Alliance in the GLA wants you back- you would not need this cover up of being an agent for the Venture Unit as for a mission this delicate and high-up, the GLA Chiefs still controlling the Alliance would simply have you permanently removed for exposing yourself in a very public arrest.’

The Ožkan is incredibly well-versed, leading Yoongi to believe he has been around as a possibly very powerful pirate in the Underverse for a very long time.

‘And again, while all of this is enough for me to ignore you as it does not directly effect us, and allow you to leave naturally as your release grant allows you to do so at Cuab-D2, I am unfortunately missing a shadow. And the two disguised as escorting agents who came aboard the ship have disappeared. Meaning I am sure I have 2, or more, undocumented and well-hidden Beings, no doubt your friends, somewhere aboard my ship. I cannot allow anyone to further mess up my plans. Which is why I would request you to contact your friends, and ask them to step out, to make sure that they have not alerted any authority of this venture.’

Yoongi is in no position to bargain. He knows this. And so does the Ožkan.

So far these pirates or whoever they were, knew of Hoseok and of Jungkook. But beyond that, everything was up for guessing. So that meant that at least, Sk’jin, Taeh’yung, and most importantly, not because he’s biased, Jimin was still hidden and safe.

‘While I can guarantee that I have no intention whatsoever in bringing harm or issues in your plans, what guarantee do I have that you will do the same for us?’ Yoongi gets out finally.

The Orvan just slightly rolls her eyes.

‘There is no guarantee. This depends entirely on your behavior during our trip to Cuab-D2. If you do anything to disrupt my mission, or attempt to inform any authority if they have not already done so.’ The Ožkan replies with a slight shrug.

And that’s more than fair.
Yoongi sighs internally.

‘Could I request that we be allowed to stay inside my designated Transporter during the duration of this journey. We will remain in lockdown until we arrive at Cuab-D2. We will make our scheduled leave, without any fuss, without any trouble. You will never hear from us again.’

The Ožkan seems ready for this and replies, ‘We have your ship under complete lockdown and you can only access it after we have made our complete landing within Cuab-D2. When you call your friends, you will be staying in the private holding cell upstairs.’

Yoongi inhales and exhales slowly.

Of course they could very easily dispose of Yoongi, Hoseok, and Jungkook. It would in fact, be quite wise to do so in an operation as risky and painstakingly executed. They were at their last leg, and right now Yoongi was posing a major risk for them.

But the hidden nature and secrecy that shrouds Yoongi and his being here alongside Hoseok and Jungkook were giving the pirates pause in taking immediate action. Just like them, they needed to be careful, not raise any alarms whatsoever.

If they did, in fact, kill off 3 highly secret agents working for either the GLA or Venture Unit, their entire operation would be exposed and revealed. And the kindest thing that could happen to them and all of the officers/high-ranking officials they clearly bought and bribed, would be imprisonment for life.

There’s not a lot of guarantee but Yoongi has to make it work.

‘I understand.’ he says, ‘How am I communicating?’

The Ožkan doesn’t say anything but just removes his own Comm-Device and hands it to Yoongi.

Of course, because Hoseok would have made sure to snitch one in order to hear what was going on.

‘This is Suga,’ he says quietly, ‘I have spoken to the authorities of this operation and have come to a deal regarding our safety and travel.’

‘No offence, how do we know this is actually Suga,’ a voice replies. Yoongi doesn’t recognize the voice and that’s not entirely surprising.

‘I like tea,’ Yoongi says.

‘Understood. Where and when do we meet?’ Hoseok shows no sign of discomfort or worry. But then again, Hoseok was a seasoned veteran in his field of work.

Yoongi gives the Ožkan a questioning look and the Axudari quietly says, ‘Lobby 3 of the 5th Hull.’

‘Understood.’

‘Please don’t carry any weapons on you,’ the Axudari adds.

Hoseok doesn’t reply.

The Orvan holds her hand out and Yoongi drops the Comm-Device back into her palm.

‘Well then,’ the Ožkan gives him a small smile. ‘I can’t say I’ve met a lot of Humans before.'
Especially ones that were born nearly over 15 centuries ago.’

The Ožkan steps aside and gestures for Yoongi to follow him. But he’s stuck, heart in his mouth.

‘We’ve been hearing a lot,’ the Ožkan tells him. ‘There’s been a lot of strange stories, a lot of strange sightings, a lot of strange packages, even stranger deals, even stranger Beings.’

Yoongi stiffly follows after the Ožkan.

‘I’ve always maintained that we stay clear from certain businesses,’ the Ožkan continues. ‘The Alliance being one of them. But in staying away, didn’t mean we ignored them. We studied them, learnt how to avoid them, how to stay clear from their dealings and plays. Their channels eventually lessened, what with the Yishengs involvement with creating the GI.’

Yoongi eyes the Ožkan as he leans against the walls of the elevator moving upwards.

‘The GI were considered a myth of course,’ the Ožkan says conversationally. ‘But it’s not much of a myth when one is sent to assassinate you.’

Yoongi can’t help it, glancing up at the Ožkan who gives him a shrug and half-smile.

‘That’s what happens I guess when you control half of the troves across the Underverse and refuse to cooperate with the Yishengs.’

That explained the authority this Being had.

‘The GI agent sent to assassinate me almost succeeded. As you can see, I didn’t escape unscathed,’ he points at his horn. ‘Had to do a lot of work to save this side of my head and face as well.’

That would also explain the faint lines connecting around his face, concentrating lower and disappearing into his beard.

‘This GI agent nearly had me, but I was luckily surrounded by my own friends. Two of them died. But in doing so, one of them managed to knock off his helmet.’

And suddenly, Yoongi knows where this was headed. Why the Ožkan hadn’t simply had him thrown out or killed.

‘This was 5 sols ago,’ he adds. ‘He was so close to killing me. Until he quite suddenly stopped— and after barely a second, he dropped dead. We could only watch when he seemed to dissolve.’

The elevator stops and the doors open after a second.

‘Of course I could never forget his face.’ The Ožkan says as he steps out. Yoongi follows after a strained second. They’re in an antechamber with several doorways.

‘Passive, no expression of aggression, anger, pain,’ the Ožkan pauses a moment before the doorway to their right. ‘And I went into hiding for a while.’

The doors open and it leads into a nice and simple looking lobby.

‘I never thought I would see his face again but,’ the Ožkan smiles at him as they walk into the lobby. ‘I guess I was mistaken.’
I am SO SORRY FOR NOT UPDATING IN SO LONG
I had a really bad writers block after my exhibition
I guess my exhaustion, strange relief with stress coupled together, anxiety waiting for my grades to finalize and be released, all sort of dog-piled over each other in a weird mess that blocked my creativity and writing abilities.
But I am back!! And I think I can go back to the every 10 days updates again T_T
And yes, the room that yoonmin were in is indeed, the room from serendipity
As well as the open space above the stair case.
If you wanna see what the rest of the rooms and house looks like, I made them as part of my thesis project in 3D you can check them out here:
It’s my artstation its also me promoting my work in general

haahahahahahahahahahahahahahahaa anyways
Im also happy to announce that I’m working on a commission for yoonmin!!!! I’ve already started on it and it’s gonna be chaptered!!
Even after all these centuries, the channels he had once shown Sk’jin were still the same and unchanged. It further fortifies Sk’jin’s plan in his mind.

“You want to do what?’

‘This will work,’ Sk’jin repeats, ‘Trust me, this is the only way we can get Yoongi out of the Keep.’

‘That happens?’ Jungkook asks sounding confused.

‘A lot.’ Hoseok answers, ‘But it’s a complicated process. I’ve also gone to collect agents out before, so I know the protocol, but it’s always been surprisingly legal. And I don’t know how long it will take to create a permit credible enough to use for this situation.’

Jimin seems to be thinking the plan over carefully, a furrow between his brows. Taeh’yung is sitting upside-down on the seat next to Sk’jin, looking bored knowing he wasn’t allowed to participate in anything.

It’s quiet over the line but Sk’jin knows Hoseok is going over his plan in his head. It has to work.

It should work.

Because this once happened to Ahadi.

Before Ahadi had his unwanted title of “intern” somewhat lifted from him after proving his loyalty, he had been unwittingly arrested by the Venture Unit for being a known member of Sk’jin’s pirating network.

It had been a joke for months after he was released a short 7 hours later. Sk’jin remembers hysterically giggling, ears burning red from the force of his laughter. Even Ti looked red around the face, as though trying not to laugh. Ahadi would just sigh and stare out of the window or at some point on the floor, as though hoping he could be in prison instead of where he was right then. They even once baked him a celebratory platter with “CONGRATULATIONS ON NOT BEING THROWN INTO PRISON FOR 3 MONTHS” in bright violet. The jokes eventually died out, though Ahadi formally had “Prison Expert” written on his footnotes for his ship ID right under “INTERN”.

And while Ahadi was definitely an agent sent in from the Venture Unit to infiltrate his network, and therefore all of his documents and permits had been definitely legal, Yoongi was not. And that was where they would have to be very tricky and careful with how they arranged their transaction
of the whole situation.

And while Hoseok was definitely a member of the Venture Unit, an infiltrating agent with a resounding reputation, he was a startlingly straight-forward and honest Being. And so his way of planning, was sometimes too straight-forward and honest when it came to a situation like this that involved not just himself as an Agent, but as a Being carrying with him the guilt of his past so interlaced with the present and its outcome.

Sk’jin lived most of his life living an extremely topsy-turvy lifestyle maintained by taking topsy-turvy actions and methods. And if this wasn’t an extremely topsy-turvy situation, then Sk’jin is no pirate Captain. Well, ex-pirate Captain.

‘Okay- we’ll need to create the warrant and evidence of his agency with the Venture Unit-‘

‘I’m on it,’ Sk’jin replies at once.

‘I was going to do it-‘ Hoseok says at once.

‘Trust me. I got this. All I need to do is issue a memo from a very high-ranking office to overpower the warrant that already exists.’

‘How do you know any of this? It doesn’t make sense.’ Hoseok sounds disgruntled. And cute. It makes Taeh’yung grin, watching the Iris footage with a gleeful grin.

‘I have my sources.’

‘I’m literally your source though? Right?’

‘Venture Unit agents are never truly removed from their status in the Unit Archives regardless of what’s happened, you know this,’ Sk’jin says lightly.

Jimin looks at him at his words, his eyes showing an understanding for something Sk’jin can’t seem to really pinpoint.

‘Okay.’ Hoseok says after a moment. ‘Make sure you don’t forget the order overturn for the agents that are already here.’

‘Of course,’ Sk’jin smiles.

‘Kookie and I are going to station ourselves above the Keep’s main Dock.’ Hoseok adds. ‘We’re gonna scout the Docks and access some of the Keep’s systems just in case.’

‘Thanks ma’am,’ Sk’jin grins, eyeing the live-footage through the Iris they stuck on Jungkook before he left. Hoseok grimaces in the general direction of the camera, rolling his eyes.

‘What can I do?’ Jimin asks at once.

‘Nothing much just yet,’ Sk’jin replies honestly as he waits to connect to the Venture Unit via the channels Ems built especially for them and ones Namjoon reinforced and saved for potentially using later. ‘Sorry Cap but gotta take over your stuff for‘while.’

‘You’re stealing pa’s stuff?’

‘Borrowing,’ Sk’jin corrects before adding, ‘Please sit up straight, you don’t need all that blood rushing to your head.’
Taeh’yung pouts, mumbling under his breath.

Up into this point, and even during their stay inside Amme’s ship, it always made Sk’jin uncomfortable every time they dug through database or any archiving channel through the ones Hoseok or Namjoon either built or borrowed. Each Being had a signature or style that if picked up once, could easily be traced and or spotted if you knew what you were looking for.

And ever since speaking with Amme and understanding what the Jury were doing all along (and Sk’jin is more than sure that what Amme had told them was definitely not the whole picture and possibly even lies) Sk’jin’s paranoia has spiked through the metaphorical ceiling.

And while some (mainly Namjoon) would think it was too extreme (which was a funny thing for an Information Analyst like Namjoon to think) to assume that the Jury, and also the fucking Court, would do their best to track them via their interpersonal characteristics and or work-tactics, Sk’jin thinks it’s best to be precautious anyways.

And it was useful being presumed dead for so many centuries and having lived one of the most infamous yet completely hidden lives in the Underverse for many many centuries.

‘Stop worrying so loud, it’s disrupting me,’ Sk’jin says conversationally to Jimin who hasn’t budged an inch from where he was sitting, eyes a little wide as he stares at the floor.

‘I’m sorry,’ Jimin replies quietly.

‘Here, why don’t you do this for me,’ Sk’jin hands Jimin another screen, ‘Can you find out who in the Keep is responsible for handling and approving orders sent to and from the Deputy? If things go to shit, we’re gon’need ‘nother way to send in our permits and shit.’

Jimin takes the screen and follows Sk’jin’s request.

‘Me?’ Taeh’yung asks, shoving his head and twisting his body in a weird angle so that he could pillow Sk’jin’s lap.

‘Here, follow Jungkook and Hoseok through the Iris, be an extra eye in case we miss anything or they get spotted.’

‘That sounds boring,’ Taeh’yung complains but does it anyways, tilting the projection so that he could still watch it from where he was awkwardly situated.

‘Is the Laikin all right?’ Hoseok asks, ‘I know you can’t be scanned or spotted, but is everything holding up?’

‘Yeah we’re good,’ Sk’jin replies absentmindedly. ‘Hobi which Division is higher than Interstellar Patrols Sub-Division? Or which would be a better choice?’

‘Go straight for the Infiltration Division. Most Docks and Keeps authorities recognize that as being pretty serious.’ Hoseok replies after a short minute. ‘The Chief should be someone from Tayi.’

‘It somehow always is,’ Sk’jin sighs.

‘We’re at the Docks.’ Hoseok reports, the muted sounds of some gateway opening audible through their Comm-Devices.

‘Okay,’ Sk’jin replies absentmindedly, quickly opening a tab for the surveillance footage from the
Dock but minimizing it to the side tabs.

‘Wow-‘ Jungkook says quietly, ‘It’s so big.’

Sk’jin spares a glance at the Iris feed and notes that yes, that was indeed a very large transfer-ship.

‘It just docked 30 minutes ago,’ Jimin informs them. ‘It has 4300 inmates. Waiting for the Keep inmates numbered at 64, not including Yoongi.’

‘Thanks.’ Hoseok replies, ‘We’re gonna station ourselves behind the control towers, near the station panel-rooms.’

It’s 30 minutes later, and Sk’jin is almost done with this permit that would allow them to take Yoongi out of the Keep and simply vanish him (they’ll think of what to do after that point) from the clutches of this disastrous attempt at restocking their defenses when Hoseok groans in annoyance.

‘What- what is it?’ Sk’jin asks at once.

Taeh’yung, who was doing a bad job of pretending not to be asleep, sits up and says, ‘Oh no!’ as though on reflex.

‘Fuck- just intercepted a call- the two idiot agents from the Sub-Division called in extra guards to guard Yoongi’s trip to Cuab.’ Hoseok hisses, ‘It’s a standard escort-ship with 12 guards. They’re 10 minutes away.’

‘Fuck- fuck-‘ Sk’jin curses, nearly throwing his screen away. ‘What the fuck do we do? Even if we send in the permit, this lot will still arrive-unless we can issue an order to them to make them turn back around-’

‘I’m running now-‘ Hoseok hisses as he adds, ‘Kookie stay here for now-‘

‘What are you doing?’ Jimin demands.

‘Find me those two agents- are they at the Keep or are they staying near the Immigration Centers?’

There’s a panic flurry of 3 pairs of hands rapidly going through scanners, surveillance feeds they stole and snuck into, and running the IDs of the agents through every possible source possible.

‘They’re 5 levels above the Keep!’ Taeh’yung yells. ‘I’m following them!’

‘Hoseok don’t tell me you’re gonna take down these 2 agents in broad daylight-‘ Sk’jin warns.

‘Gonna try and get to the agents and take them down and hopefully I can reissue the order, Sk’jin send out the permit to the Keep right now-‘ Hoseok confirms as he darts away from the view of the Iris as Jungkook helplessly stands awkwardly in the narrow panel-rooms just next to the controls tower in the Keep Docks.

Muttering under his breath but seeing the validity of Hoseok’s actions, Sk’jin immediately sends in the permit, waiting with increasing anxiety for the approval from the Infiltration Division. It’s momentarily funny to Sk’jin that they would be infiltrating the system developed by the Infiltration Division. It just went to show how much nothing was truly safe or secure.

It had been scarily easy enough, what with the channels Ems had provided them, further extracted
and expanded by Namjoon and Hoseok, and with the access Sk’jin created, to find a list of agents from the Division who were undercover. Sk’jin selected an agent who was currently in the red-status as MIA as Yoongi’s cover-up.

Jimin is holding his breath, staring at the screen in front of Sk’jin as though willing their permit to obtain approval.

‘Jimin- who is responsible for the transfer of orders to and from the Deputy?’ Hoseok demands, sounding out of breath.

Jimin jumps a little before quickly replying, ‘It says Junior Constable Evdos.’

‘Find their location-‘

‘Junior Constable?’ Taeh’yung looks thoughtful before adding and reminding everyone that he could see through Hoseok’s shifted form, ‘Oh I see Hobi- oh…’

‘-the two agents are already inside -‘ Hoseok pants out, cursing under his breath. ‘-find that Being- I’ll take them down.’

‘He’s not going to kill anyone,’ Sk’jin adds, mainly for Jungkook’s and Jimin’s benefit before glancing down at the screen in Jimin’s hand and snorting, ‘Or maybe Jungkook can just convince him to do it for him.’

Jimin looks scandalized while Taeh’yung laughs boisterously as he scans the Keep’s surveillance for the nervous but surprisingly ranked Evdos.

‘I can help!’ Jungkook says earnestly.

‘No- it’s fine. This is fine. Actually if I can-‘

‘Oh! I see him!’ Jungkook exclaims. ‘He’s headed for the- he’s headed here.’

‘Oh-?’ Sk’jin manages, what was the Junior Constable doing in the Docks?

‘Kookie go seduce him!’ Taeh’yung squeals at once, tossing aside his scanner and making the projection from Jungkook’s Iris larger, ‘Show off your strength the kid clearly has muscle kink-‘

‘Wait-‘ Hoseok tries but Jungkook is moving already, the Iris shaking before its sensors work and provides an almost clear feed of Jungkook’s view. And making his way out of a gateway and through the narrow hangar to enter the main Dock past the control-towers is the Constable Evdos. He’s on his screen, mouth moving as he speaks to someone.

‘Excuse me!’ Jungkook calls out.

The Constable Evdos looks up, and Sk’jin doesn’t know why but something feels off.

‘Oh- o-oh,’ he blinks rapidly, suddenly shrinking in his height. ‘Y-yes? How can I help you?’

‘I’m lost,’ Jungkook lies and it’s not the best nor is it the worst thing he could say, ‘I forgot to sync my Comm-Device and I’ve lost contact with my supervisor. Can you please show me the way back to the Keep?’

Sk’jin realizes that Jimin and Taeh’yung have both leaned in so close their hair brushes against Sk’jin’s ears as they watch anxiously.
Constable Evdos looks around, just a strangest hint of both annoyance and fluster evident in his
features before he nods. Then he nods again, shrinking into himself again and holding the screen
tight to his chest says, ‘Of course uh- Officer-?’

‘Officer Heenuen,’ Jungkook replies, doing a bow again. And it’s a tad bit overkill but the
Constable seems to flush a little more at that.

‘What lift is Kookie headed for?’ Hoseok asks.

‘One sec-‘ Sk’jin answers, ‘We’re still not clear-‘

‘This is the hallway that will lead you up Officer Heenuen,’ Evdos says, gesturing to the end of the
hall Jungkook and Hoseok had previously come in from.

‘We need to keep him there-‘ Sk’jin warns but Taeh’yung excitedly says, ‘Kookie, do exactly what
I say!’ and smashes his hand over Sk’jin’s.

Sk’jin is very quick to bite back and Taeh’yung simply snaps his fingers, a small green triangle
holding down on his tongue.

Sk’jin very violently reacts while Jimin tries to placate him. Taeh’yung struggles against them
both, using his annoyingly long surprisingly flexible limbs to push them both down.

It’s surprisingly effective judging my Jimin’s expression of comic betrayal and shock.

‘Lean in and lower your voice like you’ve just woken up and say ‘I like to take the lead most times,
but I think I wanna see where you take me’!’

‘Jungkook-‘ Jimin’s eyes are wide with alarm at Taeh’yung’s over-the-top advise but Taeh’yung is
quick to shut Jimin up as well.

‘I like to take the lead most times,’ Jungkook says in a lower voice, leaning in maybe more than
what Taeh’yung was going for. And by Spaces does it work because Constable Evdos’s eyes widen
like plates, his face bright red. ‘But I think I wanna see where you take me.’

‘I- I uh-‘ that was definitely a very genuine stammer.

‘Walk him into the elevator, keep a half smile on and say ‘I haven’t seen much around the Dock, I
think you could change that right?’,’ Taeh’yung makes his voice all low and sleezy and Sk’jin gags
not because of the thing on his tongue but because he’s physically recoiling at Taeh’yung’s words.
Jimin has just closed his eyes, as though hoping to exit from this situation.

‘I haven’t seen much around the Dock,’ Jungkook repeats obediently, rounding up around the
Constable more like a predator would its prey rather than someone trying to be seductive but
apparently Taeh’yung calling out this Constable’s muscle-kink and possible something else was
pretty on spot.

‘What the fuck is going on?’ Hoseok whispers.

‘Get him into the elevator!’ Taeh’yung cheers, ‘And just sort of reach out and touch on his sleeves,
very lightly-!’

There’s a small spark of light and Jimin lunges to grab Taeh’yung’s Comm-Device out of his ear.
Sk’jin feels the block on his tongue lit and they’re both on Taeh’yung at once.
‘Ow! Ow! Ow!’ Taeh’yung cries out as they pile on top of him.

‘Hoseok they’re in- they’re in EV3- RT311 headed for the same level as the Keep!’ Jimin gasps out as he lunges for Sk’jin’s screen.

‘Got it! Thank you!’

‘Jimin- the elevator surveillance!’ Sk’jin bites out.

Sk’jin has a point to prove so he’s a bit more aggressive as he wrestles Taeh’yung to the floor, twisting him so that the Zhak’gri is on his front, arms twisted back.

‘Kookie- just keep him there until the elevator opens and Hoseok will come- turn his back away from the elevator door!’ Jimin orders while Taeh’yung whines in pain though he seemed to be enjoying himself as Sk’jin jabs him on his back with his elbow.

‘Got the surveillance-!’ Jimin cries out in relief.

Obviously Sk’jin is not doing this to really cause Taeh’yung any harm but he has a lot of feelings and energy to expel at the moment.

‘So, tell me, how long have you been here?’ Jungkook asks conversationally and Sk’jin is sort of impressed how Jungkook is taking this situation so easily. And it also makes him wonder about how much of nature and nurture really effects who you are as a species. Because fuck, the Pravasi M’hanun were aggressive and dangerous yes, but fuck could they be seductive too.

‘I uh-‘ the Constable stammers, glancing all around the elevator before clearing his throat and seemingly having an internal battle in his mind before he drops the screen.

This makes Taeh’yung look up and around from his place on the floor.

‘If we’re going to do this-‘ he does something to the controls behind him and the elevator stops.

‘I’ve always wanted to do something outside-‘

‘Oh Spaces an exhibitionist-‘ Taeh’yung remarks as though he hadn’t thought of that while Jimin screeches, ‘HOSEOK THE ELEVATOR HAS STOPPED-!’

‘Kookie listen to me,’ Sk’jin says very clearly as the Constable starts to strip. ‘Get really close and then knock him out-‘

For a moment Sk’jin worries Jungkook has most definitely gone into shock and is frozen over.

But something clicks and Jungkook takes a big step forward and lifts the Constable up, making him squeal in delight again before Jungkook, without much finesse or execution, hit Evdos’s head against the elevator wall.

‘I-…’ Taeh’yung raises both eyebrows as though in respect. ‘That was very entertaining.’

‘You don’t get to say that you little rascal-!’ Sk’jin hisses, pushing Taeh’yung down again but Taeh’yung just cackles and rolls them out of the cockpit and to the walkway to the side.

‘Uh- Jungkookie, are you okay?’ Jimin asks gently.

‘Uh- I think so. Why was he like that?’ Jungkook asks, genuinely confused.

‘It’s called kINKS OUCH!’
‘Stop blaspheming the baby like this-‘ Sk’jin hisses slapping Taeh’yung’s back aggressively. 
‘Jungkook restart the elevator please-‘

Taeh’yung stands up quite suddenly, lifting Sk’jin along with him.

‘HEY PUT ME DOWN YOU PIECE OF SHIT-!’ Sk’jin does not like to be carried around so easily, let it be noted.

‘Hoseok is there now,’ Jimin sounds both exasperated and amused.

‘You want me to put you down?’ Taeh’yung grins brightly.

‘GENTLY GENTLY YOU UNCULTURED BEAST I’M-‘

‘Shut up!’ Jimin literally yells at them, his voice very loud, ‘It’s a fucking ship!’

Sk’jin and Taeh’yung look away, staring through the window, both prompted by Jimin’s sudden cursing and also-

‘-oh yeah- that-‘

‘Guys what’s going on-‘ Hoseok sounds very done.

‘Ah- uh it’s the escort-ship with the extra guards-‘ Sk’jin says at once as he’s very gently dropped down by Taeh’yung. The light of the sizeable Transporter blinks at them from a close distance just after Māho’s warp borders.

‘We can’t have them come in just yet I’m going through this Constable’s screen and I still haven’t gotten the permit yet!’ Hoseok hisses, voice altering as he adds, ‘Kookie, take his clothes off and give them to me-‘

‘What-?!’

‘Okay I know you won’t agree but I think we could take them out-‘ Taeh’yung begins.

Jimin is already disagreeing but Sk’jin slams his hand down on the dashboard before him, ignoring the sharp pain. He was trying to be dramatic and pain that is self-inflicted but not for comedic purposes often ruined dramatic moments.

‘No- I agree.’

‘Yeah so- wait what?’ Taeh’yung looks at him with wide eyes.

‘You want to go intercept them right? Let’s do that. There scanners will be down, and as we saw last time, Maho doesn’t keep organic scanners. Let’s get you suited up and you can go-‘

‘-no!’ Jimin interrupts. Sk’jin is about to very exasperatedly explain this again but Jimin pushes forward, ‘Taeh’yung and I will go. We can’t knock them in-‘

‘-out-‘

‘-we need a cover. So I will go with Taeh’yung.’ Jimin concludes.

‘Oh- oh okay well then,’ Sk’jin mutters. ‘We’ll get you both suited-‘

‘No need!’ Taeh’yung grins before jumping up and over Sk’jin grabbing Jimin’s hands and pulling
him to stand up.

‘We’ll be back soon!’

Jimin quickly grabs his screen before Taeh’yung pretty much scoops him up, the air around him glowing ominously green and the floor below him shining in a neon green triangle before he cleanly sinks down through a shockingly clean cut triangular whole that seals up at once too.

‘Can you tell me what to expect.’ Hoseok asks in Evdos’s voice.

‘Uh- Taeh’yung and Jimin went to take care of it,’ Sk’jin says as he stands up to walk up to the window. He watches as a green streak of light getting smaller and dimmer vanishes in the general direction of the escort-ship.

‘I think Kookie should stay downstairs at the Dock to receive them, it would make sense like he’s reporting the latest developments, and Hoseok you go change Yoongi’s warrant and release terms.’

‘Got it,’ Hoseok replies as Jungkook adds, ‘Okay.’

‘We’re almost there~’

The escort-ship lights turn green for a fraction of a second, seemingly pausing mid-flight before continuing forward.

There’s no screaming, no shouting.

Nothing.

‘Okay it’s all clear.’ Jimin tells them with a small exhale.

Sk’jin doesn’t want to know or need to know the details.

‘Okay- for most of the part you can autopilot it to land~’

‘It’s okay. They will dock.’

‘Chim is controlling them!’ is Taeh’yung useful input.

‘I’m not controlling them~’

Sk’jin tunes them out in favor of Hoseok saying, ‘Okay- the permit has been transferred I’m going to the Deputy right now.’

‘Okay great,’ Sk’jin sighs, feeling like he’s aged a million years in just the past hour. ‘Fuck, can’t wait to not tell Namjoon any of this.’

*

Hoseok curls his shoulders in, hunching his back a little, and clutches his screen to his chest. The two agents Hoseok wants to very much indeed kick out of Māho-5 are apparently waiting

He knocks twice before the door slides open.
'Evdos, are you here to tell me about the permit regarding our Alliance prisoner?’ the Deputy asks, two of her eyes glancing at Hoseok.

‘Y-yes, I was-‘

‘No need for that, no one’s listening or here to hear it.’ Fanger says bluntly.

Hoseok has to take a moment to do some incredibly fast thinking.

‘Evdos was pretty evidently into some kinky shit and had no problem stopping an elevator out of nowhere to very boldly do something incredibly risky- his personality of being nervous was clearly a ruse-‘

‘It seems that the Alliance prisoner isn’t a member of the Alliance,’ Hoseok says, dropping the stutter, standing up straighter and making a motion of sweeping back his now honey-coloured hair. ‘There was apparently a mix-up at the Venture Unit- this is Agent Aydinliþ Şig. His mission was to infiltrate the Alliance.’

Deputy Fanger sighs, rolling all five eyes as Hoseok transfers the documents and warrants to her.

‘These fuckers mess up everything and don’t even realize the shit going on in Axudar,’ the Deputy drawls as she scrolls through without reading anything, ‘And the GLA has the gall to send us complaint reports about expending too many resources while I clean up the shit from Axudar for them. Assholes.’

Well, this was very interesting.

‘Assholes or not, they’re expecting us to release him,’ Hoseok throws in some irritation and impatience in his tone. ‘They’ve already changed the guard-ship to an escort-ship.’

‘Well that’s on them then- policy dictates we cannot release him unless it’s through Cuab-D2 but you know this.’

Hoseok just nods, pretending to scroll about on his (Evdos’s) screen. He spots a message waiting for him in one of the notification tabs but ignores it for now.

‘They want the Agent to be met with immediate compliance and release, as well as a redaction on his arrest from the Keep’s database,’ Hoseok rolls his eyes as well as he adds, ‘Idiot should have never just walked around without a care.’

‘Fine- we can take him out of the digitized-cell.’ Deputy Fanger exhales as though bored, ‘But no release. He’s already been registered for Cuab-D2, no chance in his release from us.’

‘Fuck- she’s right, fuck.’ Sk’jin curses. ‘I’ll find a way to rewrite that.’

‘You’ll take care of it of course?’

‘Of course,’ Hoseok sighs out.

‘If it’s going to impose a problem with the transfer-ship, of course we can always make some changes with some cost,’ the Deputy adds.

‘Well…this is interesting.’

‘That won’t be necessary,’ Hoseok states as dismissively as possible.
‘You might find something interesting with him, if he truly is an Agent for the Venture Unit,’ the Deputy continues, ‘Is that what this is?’

‘This is very interesting?’

‘You know I can’t say anything about it,’ Hoseok tries out, uselessly scrolling through his screen.

‘Fine,’ the Deputy rolls her eyes again, ‘I can practically sense those buffoons from the Venture Unit coming back to explain their mistakes. Go see to the Agent and explain the situation. If this is true then we can’t afford any cuts in our resources as a retaliation from the GLA or the Venture Unit.’

‘Got it,’ Hoseok nods, ‘I’ll bring him here? Might be better to hear it directly from the Deputy herself.’

‘I’m already on it, don’t have to tell me.’

Fanger gives him a snort, ‘A face to be angry at you mean- go on then Evdos, I know you have things to oversee.’

His screen rings up with an urgent message from the front desk, alerting him of the return of the agents from the Venture Unit.

Hoseok just shrugs with a lazy smile, ‘Should I send in the agents? They’re here.’

‘Oh yes, please do,’ Evdos grins widely, ‘Gotta get that Venture Unit units.’

Hoseok gives an appreciatively grin that he hopes is in character.

‘And bring the Agent while I grill those two idiots- he needs to witness the incompetence of his agency.’

Hoseok knows more than most about the incompetence of the Venture Unit. He was going to have to somehow warn Yoongi before hand on what was happening. After nodding at the Deputy’s request, Hoseok steps out.

‘Something’s up- I don’t know what, but something feels odd.’ Sk’jin says quietly. ‘I’m going through Deputy Fanger’s basic records right now- and for Evdos as well. So far everything is normal.’

‘Isn’t our fake identities normal too?’ Jimin asks.

‘Stop asking me uncomfortable questions Jimin.’

‘How’s Taeh’yung and Jimin?’ Hoseok asks instead as he walks up to the two agents, sweating and panting, panic clear in their features, clearly waiting for reprimand for their hasty actions for declaring an arrest of this scale.

It clearly was going to back-fire of them.

‘They’ve taken over the escort-ship,’ Sk’jin replies, ‘Don’t ask me for details.’

‘Hoseok, are you going to meet Yoongi now?’ Jimin asks.

‘Agents?’ Hoseok calls out nervously, ‘Uh- the Deputy would like to see you.’
They both gulp audibly, looking at each other nervously.

Not to judge, but Hoseok doesn’t think he’s ever been this nervous about anything before even as a rookie. Hoseok makes his way down to the station outside the holding cells of the Keep.

‘He’s going in a bit. I’ll tell you.’ Sk’jin says quietly before saying, ‘Fuck- it’s the Keep’s transfer laws- because Yoongi was already transferred over to Cuab-D2, unless we get them to make a statement we won’t be able to release Yoongi here.’

‘What do we do?’ Jungkook asks.

‘Does that mean we’re going to have to all go to jail? It’s kinda cool!’

The station is armed and manned completely. And technically, if Hoseok brings Yoongi out to this point, no restraints, Yoongi could 101% break out with no problem.

‘How long will it take to issue the release from Cuab-D2?’ Hoseok asks.

‘Finding out - one second- actually give me a billion seconds I’m exhausted-‘

Hoseok approaches the opening in the station and picks out an officer to address.

‘Um- I’m here for inmate 3589901- the uh, D-Deputy wants to see him.’ Hoseok stammers out, ignoring the second message pending for him on Evdos’s screen. It was clearly a personal line, and Hoseok wonders why you would mix personal and professional lines in this way.

‘We will bring him to the main interrogation room-‘ the officer begins, giving Evdos an unimpressed look.

‘Uh- it’s uh, his arrest has been revoked,’ Hoseok explains, showing him the screen with the doctored statement supposedly sent over by the Venture Unit.

The officer looks at the statement and then nods once.

‘He’s uh- he’s an Agent,’ Hoseok whispers, ‘He’s uh- VIB, please be careful.’

The officer sighs quietly before saying, ‘I will bring him to the Deputy.’

Great, Hoseok wouldn’t be able to speak to Yoongi until they bring him into Fanger’s office.

‘Hobi I have both good news and bad news.’ Sk’jin sighs. ‘The permit of release from Cuab-D2 will take 1 standard week. But if we submit our permits and release forms via the escort-ship crew, we don’t have to step into Cuab’s borders.’

‘What does that mean?’ Jungkook asks.

‘It means we take Yoongi out with the transfer-ship, go into the transfer-ship with the escort-ship, and before we enter Cuab’s borders, we can leave without even setting foot inside Cuab.’

‘…I uh, don’t understand can you explain again Jinnie?’ Taeh’yung asks sheepishly.

‘Spaces- okay so we have to get this escort-ship into the transfer-ship inside the Keep so that we have a way of getting Yoongi out.’ Sk’jin explains, ‘You and Jimin just leave them as they are, if that’s possible, and come back. We can follow them-‘

‘-we can stay inside the escort-ship,’ Taeh’yung says excitedly, ‘It’s big enough!’
‘I—okay I see the advantages in that.’

‘Also Jiminie can’t do anything if the escort-ship with our buddies go into warp!’

‘Well fuck okay then—’

Hoseok goes back to Evdos’s designated cubicle. It’s a neat space, without a lot of embellishments or items. It’s surprisingly bare.

‘Just a heads up- Yoongi is out of the holding cells. He’s coming down to the main area,’ Sk’jin informs him, sounding distracted.

‘Okay, thanks,’ Hoseok sighs out quietly.

‘Couldn’t Yoongi just bust out now- I mean, let’s face it- it’ll be easier.’

‘Sure,’ Hoseok agrees, ‘But it’s too loud. It’s too…- there’s a lot that can go wrong by doing something like that. It’ll be too public.’

‘More public than all of our faces being up on a criminal list?’

‘I think this goes more than that to be honest,’ Hoseok says quietly before he spots Yoongi.

‘Let’s hope Yoongi knows what to do.’

‘He will,’ Hoseok says firmly.

Upon entering the main office, Hoseok notices how the whole collective of staff seem to be visibly uncomfortable and scared.

‘He looks tired,’ is Jimin’s quiet comment.

Hoseok makes his way towards the officer guiding Yoongi in.

Tacking on a nervous smile and shuffling forward, Hoseok awkwardly gestures to Yoongi to follow him in.

Yoongi scans him head to foot, his eyes incredibly impassive. Hoseok’s not sure why but he’s never noticed the way Yoongi’s cheeks seemed to be sunken in, the grey under his eyes prominent. Or maybe the stark bruises all over his throat and wrists were just highlighting how worn out Yoongi looked.

‘U-uh, in-inmate 3589901 p-please enter,’ Hoseok stammers as awkwardly and nervously as he can while glancing inside the office.

Yoongi just looks at him, no expression or feeling in his actions or movement.

The Deputy glances at Yoongi quickly, assessing him. The two agents are incredibly anxious and Hoseok can only guess how the Deputy grilled them.

‘Inmate 3589901,’ the Deputy greets bluntly despite knowing Yoongi’s supposed real name, all eyes focused down on the screen before her. ‘It seems like there have been some problems.’

Yoongi’s entire demeanor shifts just a little. He raises a single eyebrow as though in question.

‘Please address him by his official given title Deputy,’ one of the agents requests, a sort of pleading
expression on his face as he nods at Yoongi.

‘Inmate 3589901 Agent Aydinliş Şig,’ the Deputy could definitely be annoying when she wanted, ‘It appears that we have been most unfortunate in disrupting your mission issued by the Venture Unit.’

Yoongi blinks a few times.

‘I do not have the authority to discuss my mission,’ Yoongi states gruffly.

‘Yes well, how convenient,’ the Deputy drawls.

The two agents are practically vibrating with anxiety.

‘We have tried out best, Agent Şig,’ one of them blurts out, definitely breaking protocol here and there with the blatant way they were addressing Yoongi as a definite undercover agent. They were both definitely going to fail and probably imprisoned for this breach. If it was real. They would be imprisoned however, because in the end they did set free a wanted Being but that would probably be for later and Hoseok feels tired.

‘But we’re afraid that due to the uh, warrant that was released, we cannot set aside the arrest unless it’s on Cuab-D2. We are very sorry-’

‘-please take this apology nonsense somewhere else,’ the Deputy interrupts, ‘We will be doing our part that was expected of us when the arrest was first warranted and will be delivering Inmate 3589901 Agent Aydinliş Şig to Cuab-D2 and all authority that was granted unto me will be forfeit thereof.’

Yoongi eyes the agents who have stood up, analyzing their appearances carefully. Good. Yoongi was definitely catching on that they were up to this.

‘As expected of the Deputy,’ Yoongi sounds different, ‘I am relieved to find that the mission is not entirely compromised but my going to Cuab-D2 will delay my work. I don’t think I need to mention how that paperwork will go.’

‘You don’t need to,’ the Deputy yawns before nodding at Hoseok, ‘Evdos will take care of it.’

The look Yoongi gives him is of pure pity and Hoseok is somewhat incredibly proud of himself for being able to so wholeheartedly throw someone like Yoongi off.

‘And who the fuck had my ID warranted?’ Yoongi rounds up against the two agents, irritation evident in his features.

‘We-! We’re sorry Agent Şig,’ one of the agents stammers, ‘But we- we received an updated list after the Pompen Area was exposed- we- uh-we were not made aware of uh- the level of your mission.’

The Venture Unit was doomed.

‘How long until we’re leaving?’ Yoongi grumbles.

‘The transfer-ship will leave in-?’ the Deputy redirects the question at Hoseok.

‘-fuck, 94 minutes-‘

‘-at! In uh, 94 minutes ma’am!’
'In 94 minutes,' the Deputy parrots. ‘Then you all can do whatever you want. Evdos take the Inmate 3589901 Agent Aydinlişt Şig to the waiting facilities—'

‘-he’s not a prisoner you must—'

‘-no agents, you must make sure that I receive the standard payment for hosting this clumsy fool who thought he could just waltz into my Dock and not know about the fuck-up of his own agency,’ the Deputy looks delighted, ‘-so sit back down. We’re here to discuss payment.’

The agents give Yoongi a pleading look, clearly aware of their most unfortunate fate awaiting them. Hoseok would feel bad but honestly at this point he’s somewhat numbed.

Yoongi does an excellent job at feigning (?) irritation and scoffs under his breath, turning away from the two agents that have honestly caused them all so many problems.

Hoseok guides Yoongi out, keeping himself hunched and stammering out, ‘Uh- uh, his uh, cuffs—‘

The officer clearly suspects Yoongi, not moving for a while but undoing his cuffs anyways.

Hoseok could roll his eyes at the stare-down they suddenly have.

Yoongi’s almost black-brown eyes are dull and seemed to hold a darkness that definitely sends a chill down Hoseok’s spine. And understandably, the officer flinches, looking away and his hand twitching as though to grab the stun-set TeorSer at his hip.

Right, time to change topics and get things moving.

‘We-we are very sorry- uh, the Deputy is a busy person and uh, needs to consider a lot-‘ Hoseok tells Yoongi as they start walking. ‘-we are so sorry- we were not aware- I mean how could we be- of your mission with—‘ Hoseok really pours the acting into his actions and words, ‘-the Alliance-!

We are so sorry to have disturbed you and caused this issue by arresting you mid-mission – you must be so—‘

Yoongi’s eyes are slightly glazed over, like he was bored, or was thinking of something else. And Hoseok can’t have that.

‘-and we’re so sorry we couldn’t let you go at once!’ He pushes, a little louder, ‘We tried our best! But our only option is to simply send you to Cuab-D2 but you will immediately released! Your agency will be sending in agents to guide you through the process.’

Yoongi glances back at him a little.

‘When will they be here?’ the Human asks.

‘Please tell Yoongi to get some sleep,’ Jimin says quietly, ‘He will understand.’

‘What?’

‘I can explain to him- just tell him please—‘

‘U-uh, they should be at the transfer-ship when you get there!’ Hoseok purposefully fumble-drops his screen in his hands, keeping Yoongi’s attention focused. ‘Again we are very sorry!’

They reach the station outside the holding cells and the officer steps in first, saying something to the officers inside. Yoongi is about to go in as well, and Hoseok calls him quickly.
‘Uh-agent Şig!’

Yoongi looks back, eyebrow raised.

‘I hope you can catch some sleep at least,’ Hoseok intones carefully, allowing the smallest shift.

The look of realization in Yoongi’s eyes is a delight to see, and as quick as it came, disappears behind a mask of uncanny indifference.

Hoseok scrambles back towards his office, ignoring the now call on Evdos’s screen.

‘Is that a call?’
‘Yeah?’
‘Okay.’
‘…okay?’
‘Yeap. Can you patch me through to that screen’s server?’

‘Didn’t I already?’ Hoseok asks in reply as he sets the screen down, while pulling out the smaller NaviLet Jungkook had brought over with him. ‘Connecting again.’

‘Thanks Evdos.’

‘This is exhausting,’ Hoseok sighs, straightening his back.

‘Yes, and technically you don’t have to be there anymore so be on brand and go philander with Jungkook.’ Sk’jin orders.

The line crackles with Taeh’yung’s high-pitched snort.

* *

Jungkook is just Being-watching from inside one of the empty storage-units above the main Dock when Hoseok reappears.

It’s more than a little odd seeing Hoseok in this disguise. The whole thing is fascinating and also terrifying. And while Hoseok could definitely not change his height, it was as though he knew how to carry himself and change his posture to basically fit into different heights and sizes.

Jungkook wonders if Hoseok would be able to change his appearance to completely match Sk’jin’s if he tried.

‘Hey Kook- everything okay? No one stopped by?’ Hoseok asks, voice shifting between his own and Evdos’s.

‘It was okay,’ Jungkook affirms. Sk’jin had scanned the place but Jungkook found this tucked away storage space, following his nose. The room in here smelled more like cleaning agents, chemicals, the cold of space seeping in through the Atmoshield and into the foundations of this Dock.
‘Okay great,’ Hoseok sighs, peering out of the narrow window for a second before unbuttoning his closely fitted uniform and exhaling as though relieved.

Jungkook has watched Hoseok change today more than he has in the duration of knowing him but this time it’s slightly unsettling because of what happened last time.

Jungkook does not ever want a repeat of what happened before and now that he’s had time to think about it, will probably have to talk to Taeh’yung about it.

Or at least ask Sk’jin to talk to Taeh’yung about it.

‘Okay- Jimin and Taeh’yung are stalling the ship so that Sk’jin can take the Laikin into the escort-ship,’ Hoseok repeats out loud. Maybe it helped him focus on the many things he needed to sort out and see through.

Sk’jin was mostly quiet after asking Hoseok to reconnect.

‘We’ll wait for them to come in, and we go as agents again,’ Hoseok concludes.

‘Yoongi was okay?’ Jungkook asks.

‘He didn’t seem too bad,’ Hoseok says after a moments pause, rolling up his sleeves. ‘Tired I think.’

Jungkook nods.

Yoongi has always appeared tired to Jungkook.

‘Okay we will need to get the transfer-ship to take in the escort-ship,’ Hoseok mutters, maybe more to himself than anything else. ‘This shouldn’t be too difficult- I’ll just allow the request as Evdos- the Deputy doesn’t seem to really bother too much.’

‘A lot of power,’ Jungkook remarks.

‘Yeah I guess,’ Hoseok says absentmindedly before propping up Evdos’s screen on the low table. His face was an unsettling combination of Evdos’s and his own and Jungkook doesn’t really know where to look. ‘Okay I’ve cleared the escort-ship, Jimin could you check and confirm the approval?’

‘I’m on it!’ Taeh’yung replies instead, ‘Jiminie is asleep.’

‘Ah- well, okay,’ Hoseok kinda shrugs, accepting the answer.

‘He’ll be up soon I think.’ Taeh’yung adds, ‘Okay- I’ve accepted the permit Hobi!’

‘Thanks buggy,’ Hoseok quickly scrolls down the screen, tapping along the surface before a tiny projection of a typer spreads out across the surface of the table.

Hoseok starts to quickly tap, fingers fast, pausing momentarily here and there to squint at the screen. This goes on for a while until Hoseok quietly exclaims under his breath.

‘Okay- I’ve secured the permission for the transfer-ship to accept the escorts,’ Hoseok reports, ‘Sk’jin, are you almost in?’

‘Uh huh,’ is Sk’jin’s somewhat distracted reply.
‘What do we do now?’ Jungkook asks quietly.

‘We’re going to have to wait for Jimin and Taeh’yung to bring the escort-ship in, then we go in to talk,’ Hoseok explains before he sinks down on the ground with a slight groan. His face is almost entirely his own now.

‘Is it tiring?’ Jungkook asks curiously.

‘What is?’ Hoseok blinks as though a little confused.

‘Changing, shifting,’ Jungkook clarifies.

‘It is in a strange sense,’ Hoseok answers easily, ‘When you’re you, right now, do you think about how you appear?’

‘Uh- no?’ Jungkook replies hesitantly.

‘Generally speaking- most Beings are not aware of themselves, the space they occupy, the lights and shadows that create them, that shape them and form them,’ Hoseok tells him slowly, ‘They have an idea of who they are- and there’s the idea of who they appear to be, depending on where they are.’

Jungkook nods hesitantly, seeing a slight similarity in what Hoseok was saying with what Yoongi had once told him.

‘But with us, with other Ngfy’widans, we don’t have that- we have no permanent shape or form-light and shadow is different for us- not for illumination purposes I guess,’ Hoseok makes himself more comfortable, leaning back against the wall. Jungkook crouches down as well, arms crossing over his mid-riff. ‘A lot of Beings say we shift, but I’d say we imitate. The louder you are, the brighter you are, the starker you are, the better we can impersonate you.’ Hoseok chuckles a little, ‘It’s why imitating Evdos was easy.’

‘Who would be difficult to imitate?’ Jungkook asks eagerly.

‘Yoongi,’ Hoseok says at once, ‘There’s nothing of him I can take.’

‘Who would be easiest?’

Hoseok laughs before he thoughtfully says, ‘I can’t choose- you’re all difficult to imitate I would say. Maybe Sk’jin though.’

‘I resent that you fiend.’

Jungkook suppresses his giggle while Hoseok rolls his eyes.

‘Jiminnie is awake!’ Taeh’yung announces.

‘Hey,’ Hoseok greets before adding tentatively, ‘Is everything okay?’

‘I’ve told Yoongi everything,’ Jimin informs them, ‘He knows everything now.’

‘All right that’s great,’ Sk’jin doesn’t exactly sound convincing. ‘Can you guys open the hangar gates for me quickly. Please make sure you’ve remembered to cut the live feed of any cameras inside the ship.’

‘Jinnie!’ Taeh’yung gasps as though affronted, ‘It’s like you don’t know me!’
‘Can you see?’ Hoseok asks out of nowhere.

‘See what?’

‘Taeh’yung,’ Hoseok clarifies, ‘Can you see all of him?’

‘Not always,’ Jungkook replies truthfully. ‘Sometimes I can see more, sometimes I can’t see any.’

Hoseok nods to that in understanding, looking thoughtful before he grins.

‘Actually,’ Hoseok chuckles a bit, ‘Namjoon would be easy.’

Jungkook grins at that.

‘Quite easy,’ Hoseok adds with a laugh.

‘Do you sometimes forget?’ Jungkook asks, ‘Uh- right now you’re just a mix – is that because you’re not concentrating?’

Hoseok nods, ‘It’s not physically tiring but it is draining in a strange way- you get used to it.’ He rearranges his legs, stretching his arms in front of him. He looks comically disproportioned with some of his features settling back to his own form. Hoseok wasn’t a very large person- he didn’t quite occupy space the way Namjoon or Sk’jin did. He wasn’t slender and lithe like Jimin.

‘Sometimes you forget, if you stay changed too long,’ Hoseok tells him, ‘It’s difficult to know who you really are, and when you need to change all of who you are all the time- sometimes you lose your face, you can’t remember.’

Jungkook remembers when he and his siblings would line up in front of any smooth reflective surface, looking at their faces and giggling at certain features. Sometimes his own reflection would blur, just outlines and forms smudged and erased- Jungkook doesn’t really remember what he looked like as a child.

‘Has that happened to you?’

Hoseok nods.

‘Did you remember?’

‘Sometimes it’s better to forget,’ Hoseok tells him with a shrug, slowly rubbing his hands together, ‘Sometimes it’s easier.’

‘Okay,’ Jungkook says quietly, understanding that there was something more Hoseok was saying in this moment.

‘Can you try to really do me?’ Jungkook asks, leaning in eagerly.

Hoseok grins before he gestures to Jungkook to sit closer.

‘It’s always harder, when you know the Being,’ Hoseok tells him, studying him closer. ‘It’s like what almost every culture, every planet, every Being says- first impression matters.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘When you saw Jimin for the first time,’ Hoseok says as he reaches up to feel at Jungkook’s cheeks and jaw, ‘What did you think?’
Jungkook thinks hard, trying to put to words everything that was going on in that dark wet cave he was imprisoned in for so many years.

‘Like sunlight,’ Jungkook replies honestly, ‘After the rain.’

Hoseok smiles at that, a strange blurring movement rippling over his skin.

It’s incredibly unsettling, watching Hoseok’s face deform- watching him grow into an incredibly unnerving and passable imitation of himself.

Jungkook exhales out, wondrous.

Seeing himself like this- it’s strange.

‘Hey,’ Hoseok says, sounding like what Jungkook guesses is his voice. But the smile he has is without a doubt, Hoseok’s own.

‘It’s strange,’ Jungkook whispers, ‘Strange.’

Hoseok, with Jungkook’s face grins and shrugs.

‘Wow,’ Jungkook breathes out again, reaching forward to touch at the red skin under Hoseok’s eyes.

‘It’s like you’re finding yourself handsome,’ Hoseok laughs, sounding like himself, his skin rippling again.

‘Is that what I look like?’ Jungkook asks.

Hoseok massages his face, as though quickening the process.

‘Yes?’ Hoseok replies, ‘Why?’

Jungkook just shakes his head.

‘Okay we’re in and settled,’ Sk’jin reports. ‘Hoseok?’

‘Yeah- we’re moving,’ Hoseok replies, standing up and peeking out of the narrow window. ‘You should be all clear to come in.’

‘Have you spoken to the Beings inside the transfer-ship?’

‘Not directly- the transactions based on what I’ve seen have all been through permits, reports, and other transactions between the Keep and the transfer-ship.’ Hoseok replies before adding, ‘I think this time it would be good if I go with Jungkook as Evdos again-’

‘-uh, no, go as the your first disguise.’ Sk’jin cuts through.

‘Wouldn’t it be better to go as Evdos?’ Hoseok frowns, pausing as he unrolls his sleeves, face shifting. ‘He was clearly headed for the transfer-ship before he well-’

‘-wanted to jump Jungkook?’

Hoseok gives him an apologetic look.

‘Yeah, well, I’m giving you my executive advise and saying go as your first disguise. It also makes
sense that you two would come down to check on the escort-ship.’ Sk’jin explains lightly.

Hoseok looks like he’s doing some fast thinking before he says, ‘All right. Jungkook- can you give me the other clothes?’

‘Thank Spaces you’re not Namjoon,’ Sk’jin sighs out. ‘Okay, Jimin and Taeh’yung are coming back in. We’ll be staying put in here if you need us.’

‘Got it- and just to be safe, can you send those two rookie agents like some sort of assignment- they might try to overcompensate and try to come check up on the transfer-ship or some shit.’

‘Got it. Oh and Yoongi is being moved now.’

‘Okay great,’ Hoseok is careful not to tear or rumple Evdos’s clothes as he changes. ‘We’ll need to go back and set him back up again. Gonna be hard to explain.’

‘Uh- will he be all right?’ Jungkook asks, not sure how much strength he had really used to knock out the poor Being.

‘He’ll have a headache,’ Hoseok tells him, ‘Might be pissed. But we’ll be long gone and you won’t look exactly like that anymore.’

Jungkook touches his face, remembering the light disguise he wore.

‘Is this much really enough?’

‘You’ll be surprised how effective the smallest change can be,’ Hoseok says as he starts pulling on the skirt again, nearly losing balance in the process, ‘Fuck I hate skirts.’

‘You look great in them.’

‘Fuck off Khol’isa.’

Evdos is still very much indeed unconscious and would remain unconscious for a lot, according to Hoseok who had take the opportunity to very quickly swipe at some questionable medical supplies he mixed around and shot into Evdos’s arm. They quickly dress him and try to keep make him as comfortable in this random storage unit. Jungkook apologetically pats what is undoubtedly going to be a very sore head before leaving the space.

‘Okay- same tactic,’ Hoseok tells Jungkook as they walk out into the Hangar where the massive transfer-ship loomed seemingly all around them. ‘Follow my lead, we’ll be okay.’

‘We’re coming in as well,’ Sk’jin reports as they head downwards to the main docking bay.

Right at the entrance, the blue of the Atmoshield gleaming at them, a sizeable ship enters.

‘We see you,’ Hoseok replies as they take an easy pace downwards, ‘All smooth?’

‘As smooth as my face.’

They step down onto the main docking zone towards the massive ship. Hoseok’s shoes echo through the massive Hangar.

‘It’s kinda empty isn’t it?’ Taeh’yung comments.

It was empty, Jungkook notes to himself as he glances around. Hoseok doesn’t comment though,
just walking straight to the transfer-ship. When they’re close enough, one of the smaller gateway entrances open next to the halfway lowered ramp leading into a very big space from what Jungkook can tell.

Standing at the gateway is what appeared to be some sort of officer within the transfer-ship. He’s quite tall, with dark green hair that’s incredibly long and intricately braided past his waist. His uniform is well pressed and neat, fitting him in a way that makes Jungkook highly aware of his own not quite excellent fitting uniform.

‘Good day,’ Hoseok calls curtly, standing to his full height and managing to look down at the much taller officer waiting for them. ‘I am Officer Jeong and this is Officer Heenum from the Venture Unit Networking Division. We are here to oversee the transfer procedure regarding Agent Aydınliş Şig and his false arrest.’

‘I am Officer Camil. We were expecting you,’ the officer nods as he holds up his screen with his almost fragile looking 4 fingered hands. At this proximity Jungkook notes how his wide eyes are a complex and ever-moving combination of green, yellow, and brown, ‘We assumed you would be taking him yourselves without the need to go to Cuab-D2.’

‘If we could we would,’ Hoseok explains as he holds up their identification tabs to be scanned into the system. ‘Apparently Māho-5 wants to make this more complicated than it needs to be.’

The officer laughs, displaying a neat double row of sharp teeth, quickly studying the IDs that were scanned. Clearly it passes through whatever check and the officer steps aside. ‘The escort-ship has been docked in the inner Transport Dock. I will be taking you there.’

‘Much appreciated,’ Hoseok replies, following in the officer.

The gateway opens to a simple antechamber with seats lining up the walls. Camil, their guide, leads them past it and into another longer chamber also lined up with seats. This seemed completely normal as Hoseok doesn’t seem to be too bothered.

‘Will you wish to lodge in our living quarters for the trip?’ Camil asks as they walk down the antechamber. Jungkook notices how it’s quite well organized and neat. There were other doorways leading in and out, making Jungkook suspect this was a frequented hallway that connected them to different areas of access across the massive transfer-ship.

It’s very empty.

‘I believe we have some issues to go over with the escort team,’ Hoseok replies as though irritated in advance. ‘Not to mention documenting this mess.’

‘I’m sure Māho-5 would be more than happy to arrange whatever you need from their side.’

‘I’m sure,’ Hoseok replies disdainfully.

They arrive to a large lobby, several floors high and several down, all connected via trams and a few escalators crossing over open space.

‘This is one of our main hubs,’ Camil tells them. ‘As the ship is quite large, we will need to take a tram to the inner Transport Dock.’

Hoseok only nods to that, glancing around uninterestedly.

Jungkook doesn’t know why but he finds it unsettling that such a massive space would have so
little Beings around.

So far, Jungkook has not come across a single Being.

While living conditions in Ynqaba were not ideal, and after he was captured he was forced into isolation, Jungkook was still very much indeed exposed to a few Beings here and there. Prisons or places of capture always had some form of patrol, watch-guards, that sort of thing.

So far Jungkook hasn’t even heard or sensed other Beings here.

And with a ship this large, surely, there should be a whole plethora of Beings. Even Grisial was jam packed at the docks or terminals they used to fly by.

Jungkook wishes he could ask questions but that would give them away. Was this normal? It didn’t feel normal.

‘Okay we’re getting the 72-0 tram,’ Camil tells them as they stop near a wide platform before saying, ‘Oh yes, I can transfer you the details of the tram network so that you can access all of our routes. For communication purposes, the public channel is open for you to use as you please.’

‘Thank you. Isn’t the tram network a part of the public channel?’ Hoseok asks.

‘It is, but the passes are not I’m afraid,’ Camil smiles ruefully.

Something about this makes Jungkook incredibly wary.

Hoseok simply nods, holding out his screen.

Camil nods graciously, his hair falling gracefully. Jungkook is strangely reminded of Sk’jin when he put on his charming hospitable persona.

Jungkook glances around as Hoseok and Camil discuss the public channel. He looks up at the massive space overhead, trying to gouge out why he felt uncomfortable.

The quiet humming of a tram approaching alerts Jungkook and he goes to stand back next to Hoseok.

‘Even though you’re only staying for a short period of time,’ Camil continues to say, this time nodding in a friendly manner at Jungkook, ‘I hope your stay here will be comfortable.’

‘That’s very kind of you,’ Hoseok states in monotone.

The tram doors open and it’s already occupied with 7 other Beings, similarly dressed as Camil.

Hoseok and Jungkook politely wait for them to exit but they don’t. Instead Camil gestures them inside.

‘Hoseok,’ Sk’jin sounds terse. ‘Something is wrong.’

Hoseok doesn’t seem fazed but simply walks inside.

‘Jungkook- be careful.’ Both Sk’jin and Jimin warn him before Sk’jin adds on. ‘They’re attempting to conduct a search inside the ship. But Jimin is handling that.’

Jungkook walks in last. The tram is quite spacy, with seating arrangements lining up the walls and slim narrow windows extending a little over the sloped roof down to the floor. There are hand-rails
and aisle-poles down the tram walkway. Hoseok is shown to one of the seats, between two other seated officers.

Everyone seemed normal enough, giving them both simple nods in greeting. Someone waves casually at Camil who gives them a small smile and nod.

Everything seemed incredibly normal.

‘This tram system reminds me of the trams inside the GUI mothership,’ Hoseok states randomly, making Camil do a brief double-take as though in surprise. ‘I quite prefer trams over lifts.’

‘Oh yes,’ Camil nods as the tram makes a clear beeping sound to alert the sounds of the doors closing.

‘I get to sit,’ Hoseok lets out a small laugh, ‘These are not the most comfortable.’ He taps his feet, forehead pinched slightly as though pained before leaning forward just as the tram moves forward.

Hoseok jolts in his seat, misbalanced and unceremoniously falling onto the officer to his right with a sound of surprise.

‘Ah, are you okay-‘

Camil’s eyes narrow, and in that moment Jungkook knows that they know.

‘*Jungkook get ready-*‘

Hoseok moves faster than Jungkook could have anticipated.

The Ngfy’widan lets his elbow fly, hitting the officer he had fallen against straight under their chin before rolling forward over their knees and landing on the floor.

Jungkook feels an attempt of restraints being pushed around him and for a brief moment, a wave of intense anger rushes him, flashes of collars being forced around his throat.

The spot on his head flares in heat and his vision spikes, turning sharp and hazy all at the same time.

With a loud snarl, Jungkook twists out of the restraints, snapping the magnetic bands before they lock into him. Someone attempts to jump on him but Jungkook throws them off, meeting the full swing of a baton to his thigh with full force.

It hurts but Jungkook doesn’t fall, instead grabbing the hand that held it and yanking the bearer forward, head-butting them with a resounding thud and throwing in a repeated and fast flurry of punches for good. Practically carrying their immediately unconscious form, Jungkook tosses them at Camil who is kicked back by a head-locked Hoseok. Camil falls back immediately and before Jungkook can get to Hoseok he’s waylaid by 2 others.

He blocks an incoming baton with his arm, using the momentum to redirect it before pushing his attacker down to the floor and rolling away to a crouch.

He leaps, following what felt right as he shifts weight, his feet kicking out to make contact with his oncoming attackers chest.

They crash down and Jungkook twists away, turning his fall to cushion his fall before he leaps up again, grabbing the aisle-poles and swinging himself around to vault through the long tram, aiming
straight for Camil who was just standing.

Hoseok flings his restraining attacker over his back, grappling her back down heavily and knocking her out instantly as Jungkook crashes into Camil, rolling with him until he’s sitting on his chest. Jungkook hears Hoseok taking on the last remaining officer with ease.

Camil is very dazed and closing in on unconsciousness. Jungkook decides to help him achieve that unconsciousness.

‘Jungkook get his Comm-Device-!’ Sk’jin orders at once, ‘Both of you hide at once get out of the tram.’

‘Fuck-‘ Hoseok hisses, his face shifting as he makes quick work of the unconscious Beings around them and grabbing their screens as well as smashing Comm-Devices under his heel.

‘How did they know?’ Jungkook asks, as he takes out the Comm-Device from Camil’s ear and hands it to Hoseok who quickly twists off the outgoing signal.

‘I think there’s something else going on,’ Sk’jin tells them quickly, ‘Something’s up- I can’t rightly figure it out every single document and procedure is correct and legal and there’s nothing wrong that I can tell-‘

‘Can you scan this place? Blueprint?’ Hoseok asks, glancing out of the flashing windows.

‘It’s too secure- I can’t do it without accessing a main port manually. If you can bring their Comm-Device here I think we can-‘

‘All right- we’ll come over,’ Hoseok says as he looks around the tram, ‘I think it’s fair enough to say that we will have a waiting party for us-‘

‘Yoongi’s being brought in,’ Sk’jin says hastily, ‘Fuck- fuck something’s really up. There should always be more officers and security when transporting prisoners like this.’

‘Kookie, grab their uniforms,’ Hoseok orders as he eyes the unconscious officers, ‘Find someone your size.’

Jungkook quickly strips Camil of his uniform, internally apologizing.

‘These are not-‘ Sk’jin genuinely sounds panicked. ‘Hoseok I don’t understand what’s happening. These are clearly not just prisoners. I can’t see what’s going on inside the ship, but I- these are not…I don’t think we’re inside a transfer-ship. I think we just- I think we’ve made a mistake.’

Hoseok doesn’t say anything, quickly removing his clothes.

‘Kook, we’re going to have to jump out of the tram before we get to the other platform,’ Hoseok says, eyeing Camil’s screen with the tram-network. They were closing in on a platform. ‘Will you be okay to jump?’

Jungkook nods, kicking off his trousers quickly.

‘Sk’jin, you guys stay put. The escorts should just behave normally- have they tried to inspect the ship again?’

‘We said they don’t have the permission to do so,’ Sk’jin replies quickly, ‘They might try to take us on by force but we could continue to hide.’
‘Can you do something about this Jimin?’ Hoseok asks.

‘It’s too many,’ Jimin replies helplessly, ‘Too many and- it won’t last long. Long enough. I’m sorry.’ He adds in quietly wretched tone.

‘It’s okay, it’s okay,’ Hoseok says quickly, ‘You’re right it’s too many Beings.’

‘What about Yoongi?’ Jungkook asks as he buttons his shirt up.

It’s very well fitting.

‘Fuck,’ Hoseok breathes under his breath, closing his eyes shut for a second before he says, ‘Right now we need to get out of this tram.’

Jungkook follows Hoseok to the end of the tram and he crouches down, slamming down the baton over a seemingly flat latch on the ground and making it pop up. Pulling it up, Hoseok reveals a small step and beyond it a blurred stretch of wires and tracks.

‘Okay this is good,’ Hoseok tells him, fully opening the latch. Someone groans. ‘There’s handles down on the side, make yourself as straight as possible and then let go, cushion your head.’

Jungkook nods, trying not to think too much about it.

‘It will probably hurt,’ Hoseok tells him, ‘But I’ll be there, a bit further okay?’

Jungkook nods.

‘Please be careful,’ Jimin tells them.

The air gets knocked out of Jungkook’s lungs the moment he lands heavily over lengths of wires and tracks. His senses are a little delayed and it takes him a moment to observe around him. The air is thinner here and it’s much colder as well.

His body hurts but it’s nothing too bad. Keeping an ear out for any approaching trams, Jungkook sits up quickly and begins sprinting across the track.

He finds Hoseok a minute later, still disoriented and wheezing. Jungkook picks him up and brings them to the side of the dark tunnels. A tram rushes past in a flurry of lights, wind, and sound.

‘Fuck- that hurt,’ Hoseok wheezes, eying him widely as he adds, ‘the M’hanun really are something else aren’t they.’

‘The ship is getting ready to leave. I don’t know what will happen in the tunnels you two but you need to find a place that will secure you when we hit warp.’ Sk’jin warns sharply.

‘There has to be a maintenance shed or unit somewhere,’ Hoseok says, shaking his head, blinking furiously, ‘Let’s go.’

They move quickly.

Hoseok’s sight is weaker than Jungkook so he takes the lead through the pitch darkness. The tunnels ring ominously time to time and they pause a few times, pressing close to the walls as another tram blasts past them.

In the dim Jungkook makes out a narrow doorway.
'Ready?' Hoseok asks breathlessly.

Jungkook nods.

It’s a manual door and Jungkook and Hoseok shoulder their way through in one go. Hoseok nearly loses balance as they step in to an unlit maintenance station.

‘You’ll have to move quickly- you can’t stay inside, they’ll trace the available entrances from that tram route.’ Sk’jin warns them as they quickly rush to the seats lined up on the side. It takes a few tries before they’re able to pull down the unused and old seats.

They manage to secure themselves in just in time.

The next 20 seconds or so are incredibly loud with how quiet it is, only Jungkook’s pulse interjecting the swelling silence with a steady pulse.

‘We’re out of warp.’

Hoseok lets out a deep breath as though finally allowing himself a short reprieve.

‘What do we do?’ Jungkook asks Hoseok, feeling a dreaded sense of hopelessness at the sudden strangeness of their situation.

‘We make our way to Sk’jin and the others,’ Hoseok tells him quietly as they unstrap themselves from the chairs. ‘We stay low. Keep your hair down.’

Jungkook nods, shaking his hair to fall more around his face. Hoseok goes through Camil’s screen, pulling up a map.

‘Can’t they track screens and other devices though?’ Jimin asks tentatively.

‘I’ve disconnected from the servers,’ Hoseok replies as he traces a path with his finger, ‘If you’re off-grid, it’s a whole lot more difficult to find a screen like this quickly. But don’t worry, we’re leaving this behind. I’m trying to find a route we can take without passing through too many open spaces.’

‘Is there a way the tunnels would connect you faster?’ Taeh’yung inquires. ‘You could hide better too? I remember sneaking into the GIU mothership and just living in their transit-tunnels for a few weeks.’

There’s a very loud pause.

‘You what now?’

‘I stayed in one of the GIU mothership transit-tunnels for a few weeks?’

‘Why?!’

‘I got a bit lost! And there were some interesting Beings meeting up in there all the time. Got to listen in on a lot of stuff.’

‘When was this?’

‘Uhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh-’ Taeh’yung drawls out for an obnoxiously long stretch of time, ‘I think like 15 centuries ago? Or—-wait, that wasn’t me.’
‘...okay?’

‘We could actually do that,’ Hoseok says under his breath, using two fingers to spin the layout into a 3D plan. The access tunnels are very small- and I don’t think they’re necessarily aired either. It would be difficult fitting Jungkook through them.’

‘What if we take this route and come out to this lobby?’ Jungkook asks, reaching over to poke the map as well.

‘This would work but we would have to cross over here,’ Hoseok points at a part of the map, ‘And I think this is where a check-point should normally be- see this?’ Jungkook leans in. ‘A crossway like this normally means an armed check-point with barriers especially in prisons, very easily triggered if you don’t have the correct passes.’

‘Then what about through this?’ Jungkook asks, eyes following a corridor.

‘Can you two please just move,’ Sk’jin groans, ‘You’re both sitting varaks at this point!’

‘What’s a varak-’

‘It’s a metaphor-’

‘This is Suga,’ Yoongi suddenly says through the Camil’s Comm-Device making Jungkook and Hoseok nearly jump out of their skins, ‘I have spoken to the authorities of this operation and have come to a deal regarding our safety and travel.’

‘Yoongi has just contacted us,’ Hoseok reports at once, pulling out the Comm-Device from his pocket and twisting it on to send out signals before holding it up close to his own.

‘What-?!’

‘No offence, how do we know this is actually Suga,’ Hoseok asks, his voice disguised.

‘I like tea,’ is the reply they get.

‘For fuck’s sake-’ Sk’jin complains but there’s a palpable relief in his voice.

‘Understood. Where and when do we meet?’ Hoseok asks smoothly.

‘Lobby 3 of the 5th Hull.’ An unknown voice replies.

‘Understood.’ Hoseok quickly changes the map, skimming through the tabs to find the mentioned level.

‘Please don’t carry any weapons on you,’ another voice adds.

Hoseok rolls his eyes.

‘We’re here,’ Hoseok indicates to the map, ‘This is Lobby 3 in the 5th Hull.’

‘That’s far from us,’ Sk’jin remarks before adding, ‘Fuck- they know everything about us then. But this doesn’t make sense- it would be easier to just kill Yoongi or not even allow him to talk to us.’

‘Well it seems we have no choice,’ Hoseok sighs out as he stands up properly, his form shifting to a Being Jungkook doesn’t recognize. ‘I would still rather not go as me if I can help it.’
‘We don’t know who we’re up against,’ Sk’jin says tersely, ‘Honesty can sometimes get you quite far.’

‘Sometimes it can get you extremely compromised, or do you need a reminder,’ Hoseok sighs out, wiping at his face. ‘Fuck.’

‘Should we come too?’ Jimin asks quietly.

‘No,’ Hoseok says at once. ‘Especially you Jimin, we can’t risk it.’

‘What happens if shit really goes down?’ Sk’jin asks almost conversationally.

‘You mean if we’re called in and immediately killed?’ Hoseok asks.

‘I was trying to be discreet but sure yeah. What do we do?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘Then get out. The Laikin is not as strong as the Užkulisaï but you can use the escort-ship- it probably has some form of defense mechanism. Just warp out.’ Hoseok says bluntly before looking around at Jungkook, ‘I’ll make sure you’re okay.’

Jungkook shakes his head adamantly, a wild protest trying to burst out of his chest.

‘No,’ Jimin says firmly. ‘It won’t happen. I won’t let it happen.’

‘You literally said-‘

‘I’ll make it work,’ Jimin sounds angry, ‘I’ll make it work. I’ll cover you- I’ll do it.’

‘Jimin.’ Sk’jin sounds tired.

‘If things look like they’re going to go bad, leave,’ Hoseok says firmly. ‘Taeh’yung? Make sure that getting out is done as safely as possible.’

The Zhak’gri doesn’t respond.

‘Okay- I don’t think we should leave whoever this is waiting,’ Hoseok sighs making his way to the door. ‘I don’t think there’s any point trying to hide or be sneaky.’

Jungkook nods, his skin crawling at the prospect though.

‘Please be careful,’ Jimin says quietly, ‘I’ll watch over you both.’

Jungkook follows Hoseok out into a dimly lit back corridor. It’s cold and quiet here, like it was rarely used. It takes a while but they exit the narrow walkways, stepping out into what reminded Jungkook of the Hangar from the Užkulisaï. It’s also empty but it doesn’t feel as deserted and unused as the corridors they just came out of.

Hoseok looks back at him, clearly thinking hard.

‘I’m coming with you,’ Jungkook says at once.

Hoseok sighs and nods.

It’s almost as though they knew exactly where they were.

A small group of Beings, not dressed in any uniform, well-armed and expecting, greet them at the
larger antechamber they exit into.

‘We are expected at the 5th Hull, Lobby 3,’ Hoseok says clearly, arms raised over his head.

Jungkook does the same.

‘Do you have any weapons on you?’ one of them asks though they’re clearly being scanned.

Jungkook shakes his head while Hoseok says, ‘We were asked not to bring any.’

‘Is there anymore of you?’

‘No,’ Hoseok replies as a few approach them, taking their screens and Comm-Devices. Jungkook tries not to react physically.

‘Please change to your true forms.’

Hoseok doesn’t say anything for a moment. There’s no air of hostility. None that Jungkook can sense anyways.

‘He’s not Ngfy’widan,’ Hoseok says at last, gesturing to Jungkook. ‘But he has paint and dye.’

Hoseok shifts, his hair settling back to its original colour, his face reappearing.

There’s no reaction to Hoseok’s shift.

‘Follow us.’

They’re not bound or restrained.

They miss the Iris still attached onto Jungkook’s inner shirt.

It’s silent all the way to the 5th Hull. Jungkook tries his best to remember the route they take, keeps count of doorways and rooms they walk past. They reach another tram-station.

To Jungkook’s surprise, a bruised and amused looking Camil is waiting for them.

‘You won’t try to throw someone at me again will you?’ he asks.

It’s not taunting or angry.

Jungkook doesn’t know what to say, unable to help himself as he tries to hide behind Hoseok.

The tram ride is also silent.

‘The uniform looks good on you,’ Camil comments from across the tram. Hoseok’s face is impassive but Jungkook can’t help but be confused.

‘…are you trying to jump me?’ Jungkook asks.

There’s a brief moment where everyone’s eyes widen before the whole tram is filled with laughter.

Jungkook can’t help but flinch back. Hoseok reaches out to keep his hand over Jungkook’s knee.

‘Just a compliment,’ Camil1780

laughs, shiny sharp teeth gleaming.

Someone is still cackling when the tram stops.
Hoseok and Jungkook follow Camil out and at this point Jungkook can’t keep track of where they are. Every place looked exactly the same and was strikingly empty.

Camil takes them over to a lift and it’s a short ride upwards, Jungkook thinks, before the doors open and they immediately spot Yoongi.

Jungkook once had a rather complicated view of Yoongi. And until now, it drew reactions from him whenever he saw Yoongi too close to Jimin. Or when Jungkook could smell Yoongi on Jimin.

Some strange urge inside him wanted to keep Jimin away from Yoongi. When he explained it once to Sk’jin the Khol’isa had just grinned, looking amused.

‘Ah, to be young,’ he had said.

Jungkook still doesn’t get it.

But right now, he wants nothing more than to check and see if Yoongi was all right.

He looked like he could barely stand where he did. A strange fragility to him that makes Jungkook’s stomach clench.

Or maybe he was just hungry.

Yoongi doesn’t react outwardly upon seeing them so Jungkook does his best to remain impassive.

There’s already a small group of Beings waiting for them with Yoongi.

The Lobby is a decently wide space, with comfortable but clean looking seating arrangements. Yoongi looks like he was waiting for them to arrive so that he could sit down at the circular table where the others were sitting.

Hoseok walks over, Jungkook following shortly.

There’s all together now 21 Beings in the Lobby that Jungkook can see and count. Like Namjoon once told him, it was always best to assume you were being constantly watched and surveyed.

‘Ah! You must be Suga’s friends.’

The owner of the voice stands and turns to look at them. He’s tall, skin a dark blue with a great beard and horns like Jungkook has never seen.

‘You’re not GI I think?’

Jungkook does his best to stay impassive.

He gestures to them to sit down.

‘I simply wish to talk,’ the Being tells them. ‘I won’t hurt any of you. I just want answers.’

‘Uh- you guys want water?’ Camil asks, thumbing behind him at a small refreshment station.

Neither Hoseok nor Jungkook respond.

In all honesty Jungkook is thirsty but he’s not going to say anything. Camil shrugs and goes to the refreshment station anyways.
‘So-‘ the blue-skinned Being doesn’t even begin to speak when there’s a loud blaring alarm.

Everyone jumps at the sound.

‘What the-‘

Jungkook feels himself being pulled back by Hoseok. And there’s a bright green light that Jungkook is incredibly familiar with and bursting through the table as though covered in green flames is Sk’jin.

‘What the fuck-‘ Hoseok gapes but Sk’jin isn’t looking at them, looking instead straight at the blue-skinned Being.

Jungkook feels himself being pushed back as the Beings inside the room raise their TeorSers, ready to fire.

‘Ilya?’

It’s a whisper, almost inaudible.

Jungkook feels something against his temple. Looking to the side, Camil has a TeorSer set to the side of his head while 2 others stand behind Hoseok, TeorSers aimed at him too. Looking around Yoongi has been pushed down on the floor, several TeorSers aimed at him too.

‘Ilya is that you?’

The green light around Sk’jin fades.

He’s not holding any weapon.

‘Ilya- it’s-…it’s me-‘ Sk’jin’s eyes are desperate, wild, and he’s on top of the table, just staring at the-

‘Jin?’

The blue-haired Being looks stunned- scared almost, as though he was seeing a ghost.

‘No- no?’ he breathes out, eyes wide.

‘You remember me,’ Sk’jin’s voice shakes, ‘You remember me-‘

He collapses on the table, one arm reaching out and to Jungkook’s shock the blue-haired Being actually reaches out with both hands.

‘What the fuck?’ Camil asks out loud, mouth wide open as everyone seems to be thinking more or less the same.

‘H-how are you alive?’ he sounds breathless, looking up at Sk’jin with wide eyes.

‘I-‘ Sk’jin looks like he’s about to cry, ‘You’re grown. You’re grown-‘

“What happened?”

Strong and coarse hands carefully touch Sk’jin’s head, fearful almost.

‘I-‘ Sk’jin manages a strangled smile, ‘I lost them-‘
‘Um-cap?’ Camil calls out hesitantly.

‘Fuck- I uh-‘ Sk’jin stammers, looking at them. ‘Ilya this is-‘

‘Do you know them?’ he asks, looking away for the first time to look over at them.

‘I uh-‘ Sk’jin clumsily gets off of the table and Ilya helps him at once, looking at him in complete awe. ‘They’re with me- it’s-‘

Ilya gestures briefly and the pressure against Jungkook’s temple vanishes.

Hoseok rubs at his shoulder, sitting up on his knees before taking Jungkook’s hand and standing up. Yoongi sits up, but doesn’t move to stand. He watches with a confused expression.

‘It’s a complicated story,’ Sk’jin says quietly, also unable to really look away, just staring at this Ilya. The red in his eyes sparkle almost, little flecks of light gleaming off of his eyelashes.

He was glowing.

‘Will you tell me?’ Ilya asks desperately, ‘I don’t understand what- how you’re here I just-‘

Sk’jin looks conflicted, his emotions so clear and apparent across his face.

This felt incredibly raw and unreasoned- somehow so different to how Sk’jin portrayed himself at all times.

‘Sk’jin,’ Yoongi calls quietly from where he’s sitting.

Sk’jin looks away from Ilya, looking at Yoongi almost as though he forgot the Human was there at all.

‘You can tell him,’ the Human says quietly, sitting back with a small grimace, ‘He knows a lot.’

Hoseok’s head snaps back around, eyes narrowed a little, clearly thinking hard.

‘Jin? What is it?’ Ilya looks serious.

‘I-…’ Sk’jin says almost breathlessly before he smiles- he truly smiles, hands reaching up to cup Ilya’s face. Then he lowers his voice in a rather mischievous and carrying whisper as though he was talking a child, ‘Should we have a secret meeting?’
(Author’s Notes)

If anyone follows me on twitter you will be very aware of my very loud and vocal appreciation and love for Hideo Kojima and his stories/games and just his story as a human being in general (disclaimer I have not played any of his games I am an admirer of who he is as a person and his creativity) and his new game Death Stranding Please go watch the launch trailer And listen to the soundtrack because that is eXACTLY WHAT I’VE NEEDED AND WANTED
And if you want to cry while listening to a song Listen to BB’s Theme from Death Stranding and please join me and weep That being said I recently received an unusual msg on AFF from I guess now an ex-reader telling me they were basically disappointed in me for what I liked/reweeted on twitter and liking bts too much and im????????????? Clearly stated in my bio I am multifandom???????????? I like and retweet a lot of diverse group content???? Like if you don’t want to see it, unfollow me or just mute me???????????????? Why message me about it???????? It seems so weird????
BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY EVERYONE PLEASE CONGRATULATE ME I AM AN EMPLOYED™ HUMAN BEING I am now officially Junior 3D Modeler I can breathe in peace Also because I’m not original Camil looks somewhat like Mingyu from Seventeen
There’s a strange pleasantness, Jimin finds, in the way he can just about sense the movements, actions, and movement within the ship.

‘Did you know?’ he had asked Taeh’yung.

‘I mean- not like this. But sure,’ the Zhak’gri had just shrugged. ‘It feels cozy.’

Jimin makes sure that the escort guards fall into a very deep sleep before locking down their assigned cabins.

He had waited with baited breath, hand digging into Taeh’yung’s arm as Sk’jin appeared before these unknown Beings.

Sk’jin had made a strange sound- a choked sob that was almost inaudible.

His hands were shaking, lifting up to the screen where this Being was talking to Hoseok.

‘Jinnie?’

Sk’jin stood abruptly, turning to Taeh’yung and saying in an incredibly monotonous voice, ‘Take me up there.’

Taeh’yung had squinted at Sk’jin, a small comic pout forming on his lips before he just happily agreed, ignoring Jimin’s questions. And in a flurry of green flaming lights, an added effect just for being dramatic, Taeh’yung sent Sk’jin off upwards, triggering all sorts of alarms.

‘He knows him,’ Jimin had breathed out, watching with pain that wasn’t his own.

Taeh’yung had just smiled, looking pleased.

‘It’s a family reunion!’ the Zhak’gri exclaimed, ‘I love those!’

He then also left, green neon lights blinking in his wake as he ran out through the walls with a delighted throaty giggle.

That had been almost an hour ago and Jimin was waiting for Jungkook to come down and take him back up. Sk’jin was talking with Ilya, the Being whom he had recognized from a life he thought
died with him.

There was a sense of confusion for a while. This crew whose plans they had inadvertently walked straight into with their own chaotically put together attempt at escape.

Understandably, they’re not immediately allowed to wander as they will, and with Ilya and Sk’jin discussing matters somewhere else, Ilya’s crew had requested that everyone be brought up to Lobby 3.

Yoongi had immediately volunteered but again, understandably, had not been allowed to do so. Instead Jungkook is allowed to accompany a few who would come to collect Jimin and take him up to Lobby 3.

They did, however, allow their communication channels to go up and reconnect once more. Hoseok hands Yoongi his Comm-Device and Jimin is surprised to find himself tearing up.

‘Yoongi?’

‘I’m here.’

Jimin exhales out in relief. Even though it hasn’t been a day since Yoongi was arrested, and they’ve been able to keep a pretty constant surveillance over him, and despite coming together in their home, Jimin almost feels like it’s been weeks since he’s been able to be with the Human.

‘I’ll be coming up soon,’ Jimin tells him as he goes out of the ship to stand by the entryway by the escort-ship hangar ramp. ‘Do you need anything from the Užkulisai- uh, Laikin?’

Hoseok had requested for some of his clothes to change into. Jimin had packed a small bag with some of Hoseok’s clothes (found mostly in Taeh’yung’s storage space) as well as for Jungkook.

‘No. They’re taking me to the Medical Bay,’ Yoongi tells him.

Panic strikes through Jimin, ‘What? What for?’

‘Just for the bruises, sunshine,’ Yoongi sounds like he’s smiling. ‘I really hate cuffs.’

‘Okay,’ Jimin replies softly before adding, ‘What do you think?’

‘Of?’

‘Of this? Of everything? Of Ilya?’

‘I don’t know,’ Yoongi breathes out quietly, honestly, ‘But I think- I think he knows a lot. More than we expect. Maybe more than we know.’

Jimin had thought that too.

‘He’s seen me before.’

Jimin’s breath is stuck in his throat.

‘What?’

‘He’s seen me. Or- or another me. Another of me, a GI- he was sent to kill him. But Ilya was able to survive- on time. It was around the same time as when the Gaia case was exposed, and the Yishengs were found guilty for their involvement. That GIs that were active were all killed. And
that me- well, he was killed too.’ Yoongi sounds—-he sounds tired. ‘He knows about the GI- and the Yishengs, their involvement. Maybe we can find out some more things- things that Amme didn’t tell us. Didn’t want to tell us.’

‘Yeah, maybe,’ Jimin replies back softly.

It’s quiet for a while.

‘Any news about Namjoon?’

‘No,’ Jimin tells him, his hand gripping on the NaviLet from the Laikin. ‘I- I don’t know where he is. He’s- it’s like he’s lost.’

‘We’ll find him,’ Yoongi tells him gently, ‘We’ll find him. Or- or maybe he’ll find us.’

There’s a sound down the docking hangar and Jimin straightens up a little, his feet shuffling a little on the cold metal.

‘I think Kookie is here,’ Jimin tells Yoongi, ‘I’ll see you soon.’

‘Okay,’ Yoongi says and adds with a small laugh, ‘I could do with some sunshine right about now.’

Jimin can’t help but laugh, looking down. His cheeks push up with the strength of his breathless laughter, warming over a little.

‘Yoongi.’ Jimin says in an admonishing tone.

‘Hm?’ Yoongi sounds amused, a little smug.

‘You’re funny.’ Jimin relents, catching sight of a massive doorway opening quietly. A familiar figure appears, already bouncing up and down at the sight of Jimin.

‘I try?’ Yoongi chuckles, sounding almost sleepy. ‘I like hearing you laugh.’

‘You don’t have to try so hard,’ Jimin tells him, fingers fiddling a little.

It’s so familiar but so new, the way Yoongi makes him feel.

‘You make me happy,’ Jimin says quietly.

Jungkook is sprinting forward, grin wide and arms waving. Behind him is the Being named Camil. To Jimin’s surprise, it’s only the two of them. Jimin had half-expected at least 4 more Beings to accompany them up. Especially considering how Jungkook had fought them all in the trams.

Camil looks very intrigued as he squints at the escort-ship, probably wondering how exactly Sk’jin, Taeh’yung, and Jimin hid within in despite being scanned so thoroughly. He catches sight of Jimin as well. He looks shocked- a strange look crossing his face that Jimin can’t rightly identify from this distance. It’s replaced with a thoughtful look as he says something quietly, the Comm-Device in his ear blinking, not looking away from him.

‘Jimin!’

Jimin steps down the ramp, holding his arms out for the young Vicitra. And Jungkook rushes to him, a wide grin on his face as he hugs Jimin as though it had been more than just a few hours of being apart.
‘You did so well,’ Jimin says as he looks up, his hands cupping Jungkook’s face. ‘Were you nervous?’

‘A little,’ Jungkook admits as he takes Jimin’s hand, following close but also practically shielding him from Camil who is now suppressing a smile, his expression perfectly normal.

‘Hello, I’m Camil, I guess you could say I’m the Communications Manager?’ he adds.

‘Jimin,’ he answers in kind.

‘I came along so that you both won’t get lost-‘

‘-won’t get lost-‘ Jungkook says at once, frown on his face, puffing up his chest.

‘-a temporary guide just in case,’ Camil corrects himself as Jimin picks up the bag with Hoseok’s clothes in it.

Jimin just smiles, ‘Please take us up.’

Camil points at the ship, ‘Anything to declare?’

‘They’re asleep.’ Jimin replies.

‘…I mean I guess?’ Camil frowns a little before adding, ‘Cool with you guys if we send in some people to check?’

‘We can’t say no at this point,’ Hoseok chimes in, voice a little distant as though speaking right into the Comm-Device Yoongi was now wearing.

‘Of course,’ Jimin nods.

‘Great,’ Camil points behind him, ‘Let’s go! Transfer-ships are a little tricky, but you’ll get used to it.’

‘Not staying,’ Jungkook scowls as he takes the bag from Jimin.

Camil just laughs.

It doesn’t take too long. The silence is only interjected with Camil making small talk and Jungkook being very offended by everything which only amuses Camil even more.

The Lobby now has more Beings than before, which confirms Jimin’s theory that they had been aware of something being wrong, leading them to hide away while they uncovered what was happening.

And up here, Jimin can very keenly sense their numbers in this large ship.

And that strange pleasantness makes sense here. Up here, Jimin can feel it better. It feels safe.

Warm, almost, as though those who gathered here found themselves home.

Camil just gives them a shrug and walks away towards a bunch of Beings sitting at a table with a wave and nod. Jungkook quietly tugs him forward past the Beings and towards the end of the Lobby. It’s clearly where the officers or officials would have stayed- Jimin briefly wonders where they are now. It’s obvious that this crew, Ilya’s crew, has been here for some time considering how familiar they were with the layout, using the controls within the ship, and overall confidence with
how they moved.

Towards the end of the Lobby Jimin finds Hoseok standing outside of what is clearly a row of Medical Bays. He smiles at them, waving them over. He’s still dressed in the Venture Unit agent uniform and gratefully accepts the bag Jungkook hands over to him. Looking past Hoseok directly into the Bay behind him, Jimin catches sight of a pair of legs, kicking just a little.

‘Says he doesn’t need any meds,’ Hoseok rolls his eyes at Jimin with a tired sort of smile. ‘Only managed to keep him in there because I threatened him.’

‘I’ll see to it,’ Jimin smiles before adding, ‘Where’s Taeh’yung?’

Hoseok rolls his eyes with so much force it’s a surprise they haven’t rolled back permanently.

‘He heard something about a “storage” cargo within the prison,’ the Ngfy’widan snorts, ‘Said he needed to go shopping. I think like, 15 of them are watching over him.’

Jimin just laughs, shaking his head.

‘Well, we’re gonna go get changed,’ Hoseok nods his head at Jungkook to follow him.

Jungkook squeezes Jimin’s hand and nuzzles against his temple before following Hoseok into another Medical Bay.

Stepping into the Medical Bay, Jimin doesn’t quite know what to expect.

But Yoongi was clearly waiting for him, sitting patiently, leaning forward a little with anticipation. And the moment Yoongi sees him, he exhales as though in relief, making to stand at once.

He looks fragile.

It hadn’t even been full day and yet-

Jimin stops him from standing, just quietly rushing over to place his hands on his shoulders and make him sit back down on the raised Medical Bed. There’s an already open medical kit next to him, but it’s a very basic one with some pain numbers, inhibitors, and patches.

Yoongi takes his hands from his shoulders, holding them to pull him in close until their foreheads touch.

‘Do I really?’ he asks quietly, thumbs rubbing along his wrists.

‘Hm?’

‘Do I make you happy?’ Yoongi asks, looking up.

Jimin smiles, twisting their hands a little so that he could lace their fingers together.

‘You do,’ Jimin confirms in a hushed voice before adding, ‘I’ll be happier if you take some medicine?’

Yoongi gives him a look of disbelief before laughing, leaning back on the wall.

‘Okay,’ the Human closes his eyes, ‘Hit me with your worst you fiend.’

‘Not a fiend,’ Jimin laughs, kissing Yoongi’s hands before taking a step back to look for a kit.
‘Fiend,’ Yoongi watches him with barely open eyes, ‘Using my weakness against me.’

‘I’m being smart,’ Jimin shoots back as he opens a drawer and finds it neatly lined with medical kits. He takes one out and walks back to Yoongi who draws his legs up, folding them comfortably, leaning forward just a little. He takes the kit from Jimin, opening it up on his lap.

‘Does anything hurt?’ Jimin asks.

Yoongi just shakes his, just watching him.

‘Help me,’ Jimin chides, ‘I can’t help you if you don’t tell me.’

Yoongi grins- that sort of lazy, gum-showing grin, shoulders bunching a little as though delighted at every single thing Jimin did.

‘I make you happy.’

Jimin’s heart clenches, eyes burning, threatening to tear up. He reaches up to push back Yoongi’s hair and kisses his forehead.

‘Do I make you happy?’ Jimin whispers, trying his best to keep his voice steady. ‘There- all of this. You can’t say that I haven’t caused- that I’m not the root cause of so much…so much sadness, and so much pain.’

Jimin takes out a bunch of serums and solvents, not really seeing them.

Yoongi doesn’t move, just watches Jimin’s movements for a while until he runs out of things to do.

‘Before I first saw you,’ Yoongi says, tone light, ‘I was confused, things didn’t make sense to me. We knew something was wrong, something beyond our understanding was taking place- something terrible was happening.’

Jimin looks away from the kit and up at Yoongi. Yoongi is glancing to the side, eyes a little glazed over.

‘I knew something was wrong. We all did. But when I saw you I thought-‘ Yoongi smiles, his eyes focusing on him, ‘-I thought it all made sense.’

‘How?’

Yoongi unfolds his legs, dangling them again a little, wiggling his toes.

‘I knew that everything- all of this, leads to you.’ Yoongi nudges him with his knee, ‘Not because I think it’s your fault. But because I believe in you. We all did; we all do.’

‘We?’

‘Amic, Amad’la,’ Yoongi smiles, ‘Hoseok, Sk’jin, Taeh’yung, Jungkook, Namjoon.’

‘I- I don’t think Sk’jin really-‘ Jimin begins, a strained laughter pulling at his voice.

‘This is not your fault sunshine,’ Yoongi sits up a little, nudging Jimin with his feet to stand closer, ‘Believe in yourself. Follow your heart.’

Jimin nods.
‘And you do,’ Yoongi pulls at his shirt, fiddling with the stitching a little, ‘You make me so happy. Everything makes sense now. With you.’

‘I wish I could say the same- about- about the uh, making sense part,’ Jimin clarifies.

‘It’s because I listen to my heart,’ Yoongi tells him simply, taking Jimin’s hand up to his chest. ‘Maybe you should listen to it too.’

‘Then maybe for now, you can take mine.’

Jungkook comes jogging in, a pleased look on his now clean face, clearly more comfortable in his own clothes (a combination of Namjoon’s and Hoseok’s clothes), holding a large bowl of food in his arms, followed by Taeh’yung, who also has a large bowl of food in his arms.

Jungkook has a complex series of facial expressions switch across his face. His eyes narrow at the bare distance between Yoongi and Jimin, a small frown with the way Yoongi is holding Jimin’s hand to his chest, and his nostrils flare with the way Yoongi is holding his shirt. But then he catches sight of the medical kit opened next to Yoongi and it switches to one of concern.

‘Oh! Medicine?’ Jungkook shuffles forward curiously. ‘Yoongi sick?’

‘No I’m not kiddo,’ Yoongi looks amused, also having witnessed Jungkook’s expressions. ‘Heard from Hoseok that you did good down at the trams.’

Jungkook looks pleased but tries not to show it too much as he just huffs, nodding shortly as he stuffs his mouth with food.

‘Want some?’ Taeh’yung offers his bowl of food that looks much more cooked than Jungkook’s, and smells nice.

‘No it’s-‘ Yoongi starts but he’s met with 3 different glares and silently accepts the food Taeh’yung had brought with him.

‘So- this place is cool,’ Taeh’yung says, jumping up next to Yoongi to steal bites of food as Jimin takes out repair serums for the dark bruises around Yoongi’s neck. ‘There’s like, a flotsam upstairs- mainly stuff that belonged to the inmates and stuff like that. Hoseok says that if things go well? We might be able to actually stock up on weapons from here.’

‘Sk’jin knew him from a long time ago,’ Yoongi says, leaning in a little and stretching his neck to allow Jimin to dab the cool gel over his throat. ‘It seems like it’s not just any casual acquaintance either.’

‘Like family?’ Jungkook asks, voice muffled.

Yoongi smiles, leaning back and saying, ‘Maybe. Sk’jin’s been around for a long time.’

Jimin dabs the serum over Yoongi’s throat liberally as Yoongi glosses over some small snippet of information regarding Sk’jin’s past to a transfixed Jungkook, only pausing to accept food that Taeh’yung has decided to spoon-feed him.

Jimin gently pushes down at Yoongi’s collar, exposing more bruises but these look old. Old and permanent- like they’re beyond healing. Not wanting to linger too long, Jimin pulls Yoongi away from the wall a little, shifting to the side to dab the serum on the back of his neck, where the bruising has broken and swollen. It’s healed over a little by itself, but one look tells Jimin it needed disinfecting as well.
Beneath the fresh bruised and broken skin, Jimin follows a heavily layered and old series of bruises, scars, and tissue damage that has permanently discoloured Yoongi’s skin.

The scars on his face were faint; only very visible at certain lights or angles.

Jimin cleans the open wound and dabs what most would consider an excessive amount of serum over it. Taeh’yung hands him some tissue-plast and Jimin carefully places it over some of the exposed wounds.

Jungkook takes to mimicking Jimin and starts working on Yoongi’s left wrist, applying the serum over the bruises. His large eyes concentrated, studying Jimin’s methods carefully.

Jimin gleefully smiles at Taeh’yung when Yoongi ruffles Jungkook’s hair in thanks, and the latter tries to look offended even though he leans into the touch.

Yoongi looks embarrassed to have so much attention on him, with Taeh’yung feeding him despite his protests of being full, and Jimin and Jungkook tending to his wounds. His face is flushed, and his ears red.

He’s still flushed when Camat enters the Bay, one eyebrow raised high as though amused and also intrigued, before he says, ‘Well- Ilya’s calling for a meeting in the Conference Room. Let’s go?’

‘Cool! Will there be food?’ Taeh’yung asks enthusiastically.

‘I mean I don’t see why you can’t take some in? But I think it might be upsetting with the smells and all for some Beings,’ Camat says thoughtfully.

Taeh’yung seems to agree, making loud agreeing sounds before he slaps his hands together.

‘Fruits?’

‘Okay-?’

Taeh’yung grabs Jungkook and they are a blur as they zoom out, Camat’s hair whipping about as he turns his head to catch their movement.

‘Need help? More meds?’ Camat asks, looking between Jimin and Yoongi. ‘Or is it like, Humans kinda look like this?’

He gestures at all of Yoongi who huffs out a small laugh.

‘Uh, we’re okay,’ Jimin replies. ‘Thank you.’

Camat nods and steps out.

‘Do I really look that bad?’ Yoongi asks, brushing back his hair as though to fix his appearance.

Jimin cups Yoongi’s face between his hands, squishing his cheeks a little and making Yoongi’s lips pucker.

‘Handsome,’ Jimin declares.

Yoongi rolls his eyes. They look bloodshot, the skin around his eyes almost transparent.

Yoongi shakes Jimin’s hands off of his face by shaking his head, hair flying about, ‘Don’t worry too much about it sunshine, nothing some sleep won’t cure.’
‘When we leave, you should sleep,’ Jimin agrees, ‘For- uh, 14 hours, 20 minutes.’

‘14 hours and 20 minutes?’ Yoongi chuckles, ‘Oddly specific.’

‘You must.’ Jimin says firmly, helping Yoongi get out of the Bed.

‘Okay, I pinky swear,’ Yoongi extends out his smallest finger to Jimin.

Jimin sort of blankly looks at it in confusion. Yoongi chuckles like it’s the funniest thing and takes Jimin’s hands, motioning for him to hold out his smallest finger and then hooks them together.

‘Human thing,’ Yoongi explains, ‘It’s a pinky promise.’

‘Okay?’ Jimin laughs, swinging their hands.

Yoongi raises their hands and his other one, stretching a little, face wrinkling as he shudders a little. He exhales, rolling his shoulders back a little.

Even when he stands he looks heavy, tiredness weighing down on him, his skin a little dull looking- different from the healthy glow he had from Amme’s ship.

‘Just a bit tired,’ Yoongi tells him, as though reading his thoughts. ‘Just wanna sleep now.’

Jimin doesn’t say anything, nodding and then applying the remainder of the serum on his lips and then leaning in to kiss Yoongi lightly.

Yoongi just laughs under his breath before saying, ‘Fiend.’

*  

When Sk’jin finishes talking, Ilya is silent, the dried tear tracks down his face pulling a little at his skin around his cheeks, parts of his beard a little matted. Sk’jin stays quiet for a while, allowing Ilya to take in the vast amount of information Sk’jin basically threw at him.

He told him of what happened in the Nightmares, of the faceless tormentor, of Zitao, of Taeh’yung. He tells him about the Yishengs- of what happened to Earth- of the Digitized Soul. His mouth is dry, jaw hurting but he can’t stop.

He tells Ilya of how he came to be; incomplete and cold and his vision dripping in red- the light of the Bloodmoon tainting his eyes. He tells him of K’mara, of the meeting, what was assigned to them. He tells him of Jimin, of Yoongi, of the GI.

He tells him about going back- of seeing all of them. Cold empty eyes watching him through the leaves of the dense forest trees.

Sk’jin tells Ilya of the Omhlophe. He tells Ilya about Ynqaba- doesn’t leave out a single detail- doesn’t gloss over the nightmare he awoke to.

He tells him about Jungkook, how he touched his temples, eyes large and trusting.

Sk’jin talks about Namjoon- how he was now missing, taken away by the GI. He tells him about what Amme said to them as they left Grisial.
Sk’jin tells Ilya of the still dreaming, still sleeping Beings- their whole lives filled only with shared dreams and voices, whispers of life, death, light and dark all around them. How the Court would have them completely eradicated because they were scared.

And in return, Sk’jin feels light. Lighter than he’s ever been.

Ilya had been a fledgling- a child last Sk’jin saw him. He remembers his voice, small and high insisting on saying goodbye at the door as Sk’jin slept, unknowing and knowing.

He remembers soft voices reporting to him almost every night at the doorway. He can almost see those familiar warm eyes, dimpled smiles.

Sk’jin blinks a few times and instead takes this moment to simply observe Ilya.

He feels a clear sense of pride as he looks over the Ožkan, warmth spreading through his chest.

He had just been a fledgling, all gangly thin limbs, clopping after his mother, spreading laughter alongside the other children. He had once led an ambush on Sk’jin in his bath.

They nearly flooded his living quarters and Sk’jin had knelt on the damp floors alongside 8 other fledglings, enduring a lecture on acceptable behavior from 18 parents, and Nambike.

He had been fresh-faced, bright-eyed, his horns small; he hadn’t even gone through his first shedding.

And here he sat.

Fully grown, aged, lived and breathing. Sk’jin can see the faint scars of aged bruises, wounds, burns. His hair is well maintained, his beard trimmed and neatly oiled, a symbol of pride of both age and position in the Ožkan culture. His horns are fully grown, with minimal damage save for the very clear and evident break dealt by another Yoongi GI.

K’mara had told him- but Sk’jin would have never assumed- or even hope that Ilya would be here- clearly in a position not too different from the one Sk’jin himself had occupied.

Ilya had briefly told him of what happened, how he had recognized and kept Yoongi as a result. Yoongi himself had told Sk’jin that Ilya knew. And Sk’jin couldn’t help pour his heart out to the Ožkan who used to once balance on his shoulders, grabbing onto Sk’jin’s own horns for balance.

‘It’s not-’ Ilya begins, pausing for a moment before he leans back. ‘-this doesn’t exactly come as a surprise to me. We knew about the Yisheng’s involvement in- in, well, what exactly we were not entirely sure- contextually that is. Theoretically we had a lot of ideas. The Alliance was always transparent to us. But this…what you’re saying about this place called Menigišiti- about Bhumi. And about going to Axudar?’

Ilya looks worried.

‘Is there something you want to warn me about?’ Sk’jin inquires.

‘Someone from the Yisheng Directory- most probably Ndica based on what you’ve said, wanted me dead. That’s when they sent another of the Human, Yoongi, for me.’ Ilya says instead. ‘It’s because I got too close to Axudar.’

‘I know that something is different about Axudar.’ Sk’jin acknowledges. ‘But I-’
‘It’s not just about something being different or bad- it’s obvious that they’re not doing the most ethical things there it’s just-’ Ilya looks uncomfortable. ‘In this family, many come from Axudar, or were in Axudar. And our current proximity- which if you really think about, isn’t that much- gives them great discomfort.’

‘Why?’

‘Something is wrong there,’ Ilya tells him slowly. ‘There is something that moves there- something that sets even the gravity there against time- against space itself.’

Sk’jin feels dread chilling down his spine, the empty smooth skin above his temples burning.

‘I followed Nambike’s direction- her guidance, her wisdom,’ Ilya says after a long moment, breathing out slowly, ‘After she died, and I took over, I took us deeper- hid us more. Because we came too close to something too big.’

‘The Yishengs?’

Ilya nods.

‘The eggs- it’s been some 20 sols now- they’ve become quite known throughout the Under Verse. It’s not always large OrTanks with fully formed Beings- sometimes they’re cases of embryos. Specialized containers or compressors of tissue samples- and the same way you described what you learnt in Ynqaba, OrTanks with Beings inside.’ Ilya leans forward, elbows on his knees. ‘But it was- it was difficult to find them- or even hear about it. Only some very few pirating networks knew of it. And they would vanish- whole pirate clans- disappearing. The same way planets and moons and sometimes even whole Systems would vanish.’

Sk’jin knows about this- he’s read Zitao’s reports in the GIU.

‘And what you’re saying about the Omhlophe- this is not a secret in the Under Verse to many. A strange organization who will pay a lot for the New Borns is known under many names, pseudonyms and under different disguises. But they have only just started gaining some form of recognition in the past few decades- even more so now, which makes sense I guess,’ Ilya scratches at his jaw, thinking hard. ‘At first we didn’t really pay much attention to it- of course attempts at recreating the Alliance or something similar to that- it would make any pirate who knew about New Borns want to use that and profit themselves. But…when pirate networks started vanishing, and moons and planets followed- even my troves didn’t know what was going on,’ Ilya confesses. ‘It didn’t settle well with me. And that’s when I met him.’

‘Who?’

Ilya thinks hard, a harsh frown line deep and dark on his brow.

‘There’s someone you should meet,’ Ilya says quietly, ‘He’s like Jungkook- and…I met him 15 sols ago.’

‘Who is he?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘He’s family now,’ Ilya smiles, ‘A bit like how Nambike was.’

Sk’jin nods in understanding.

Nambike frequently stepped out, an agent in her own right, scouting the territory, networking and placing fences at every turn. Sk’jin often said that it was Nambike who held everything together.
‘We’re meeting with him in Cuab-D2.’ Ilya replies, ‘And I think it would be better if you just meet him. Especially for Jimin. See him.’

‘Why?’

‘Because you need to understand why going there, going to this place Jimin is from, is a bad idea.’ Ilya says carefully. ‘This is something Jimin himself needs to hear the most.’

‘We- we can’t stay for long,’ Sk’jin begins, faltering. ‘Like I said, Namjoon is-’

‘-Yoongi is not the first of the GI to wake up,’ Ilya tells him gently, ‘There have been others before him.’

‘What?’ Sk’jin gapes.

‘The ones who took Namjoon- they’re the ones who are slowly waking- and it’s-…it’s not right.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘You can see it, can’t you? With the Human,’ Ilya asks gently. ‘I know that- we call them New Bornts- like Jungkook. They are made and born whole- individual. Perfect almost.’

Sk’jin nods to that.

Of course they knew of the key differences between how the GI were made and born in contrast to how Jungkook and the other eggs from the Akramanese ship (or the Omhlophe ship) were born.

‘They’re not meant to be alive really,’ Ilya says carefully, gouging Sk’jin’s reaction.

It makes Sk’jin think.

‘Other- other than the one sent to kill you- you’ve met another, haven’t you?’ Sk’jin asks in wonder.

‘You need to talk with him- hear it from him,’ Ilya repeats as he shakes his head. ‘What Amme told you- it’s not a lie. But there are things that are missing in what she’s told you- or maybe she doesn’t know better either.’

‘We can’t stay in one place for too long,’ Sk’jin says firmly, ‘What I’ve told you about the Omhlophe- they’re bent on hunting us down- bent on taking Jimin. The moment we reach Cuab we have to leave-’

‘And follow your plan to Axudar?’ Ilya shakes his head. ‘Jin, please listen to me- I understand why you want to do this- why Jimin wants to do this. Why all of you want to do this.’

‘But?’

Ilya shakes his head, ‘It’s too unpredictable- it’s too close together. What happened to Jimin- his System, with the Yishengs- and with those creatures- and with what’s happened- what is still happening now in Axudar. It’s too close Jin.’

Ilya stops suddenly.

‘I remember the time- that time, when we lost you,’ Ilya says softly.

Sk’jin’s throat is suddenly too tight- he can barely swallow.
'I remember the panic- the anxiety. I remember Nambike nearly going mad- how everyone worked endlessly for sols and sols- how any sign, any news- any false sighting or exaggeration was explored, investigated. I remember the uncertainty- the fear, the panic,’ Ilya exhales slowly. ‘And Jin I’m-‘

‘I know what you want to say. But I won’t allow it. I can’t. The others will want to move- and I don’t want to repeat myself all the time but Ilya- the Omhlophe,’ Sk’jin says at once before Ilya can say another word, ‘I won’t- I can’t allow them to follow us to you- or for the Jury to find you-‘

‘We can protect you,’ Ilya says firmly. ‘Let me protect you-‘

‘-Ilya, you know that it won’t-‘

‘Let us take you to Bhumi at least.’ Ilya pleads. ‘Forgo Axudar- ignore it, go straight to Bhumi I don’t see why you can’t.’

‘Ilya I don’t think-‘

‘-or stay.’

Sk’jin closes his eyes, red pulsing around him in aching forms.

He feels Ilya taking his hands.

‘It’s like you’ve come home, after so long,’ Ilya squeezes his hands. ‘Stay here, stay home.’

It even smells the same here.

‘You were lost for so long- with the others. It’s like you’ve all come home again.’

Fuck.

‘You once said- you once said you wanted to buy a moon,’ Sk’jin is hiding in the narrow hallway again, Ilya’s tiny hooves making small sounds against the floors. He can hear his quiet chuckles, endeared and fond tone as he replies to Ilya.

‘Can I come live in that house too?’

‘Don’t you have a house?’

‘This is my house- but I think I want another one too.’

‘Because you wanted a house for your mum,’ Sk’jin opens his eyes, staring down at their hands.

‘I didn’t buy her a moon,’ Ilya chuckles quietly, ‘I did buy her a nice place to stay, in Ghandhar, away from the GLA, she was safe and happy for the rest of her life.’

Sk’jin breathes out slowly before he makes up his mind, ‘I’ll go meet him. We will listen to what he has to say. I don’t make the decisions anymore- at least not in this crew- but maybe you can explain, Jimin, or at least Yoongi, will definitely listen.’

Ilya nods, reaching for his screen and taping on it a few times as he says, ‘I’ll ask them to come to one of the Conference rooms, I’ll talk to them.’

‘It might take a while to convince them- or not,’ Sk’jin laughs dryly.
‘I remember being told you could persuade anyone—anywhere,’ Ilya tilts his head, almost a little teasing, but the worry in his eyes is clear.

‘I’m not—I’m not the same anymore,’ Sk’jin whispers, touching his temples with a shaky hand, ‘Who you remembered—who you saw, I’m just—’ he shrugs, ‘I’m nothing now.’

‘I wouldn’t say that,’ Ilya says gently, ‘Nambike wouldn’t say that. Ti wouldn’t. We both know Ahadi would never say that.’

Sk’jin’s vision blurs.

‘I’m just trying now,’ Sk’jin can barely speak.

‘To do what?’

‘Keep my promise,’ Sk’jin whispers.

‘To who?’

Sk’jin blinks away his tears, his vision returning.

‘To myself, I think,’ he explains. ‘Hopefully, once I keep it, I won’t have to make another one.’

‘Is that why you’re doing this?’

Sk’jin nods.

‘Will you make me a promise?’ Ilya asks.

‘I don’t—’ Sk’jin presses his lips down hard, ‘Yeah.’

‘When you have finished keeping your promise, come back home.’

Sk’jin nods mutely.

‘I’ll try.’

‘Okay,’ Ilya smiles. ‘Maybe you can be my lieutenant.’

Sk’jin laughs, reaching forward to smack Ilya.

‘What a kid,’ Sk’jin teases.

‘Not all of us get to maintain our youth,’ Ilya snorts, ‘The other day I got breathless after climbing up the rafters. Camat still brings it up and asks me if I need the SkelPort.’

‘He seems like a handful.’

Ilya snorts, ‘Camat’s been here since he was a near baby. His father was close to Nambike.’

Sk’jin smiles.

He wishes he could have seen her one last time.

‘Is there anything you want?’ Ilya asks as they stand up. Sk’jin can’t find it in himself to let go of Ilya’s hand just yet.
Sk’jin pauses to think.

‘And while this is not just a ploy to have you stay for just a bit longer in Cuab-D2, I can effectively help you stock up on everything you will need from their supplies instead.’ Ilya chuckles.

Briefly, his eyes sparkle the way they used to. The way Sk’jin remembers.

There’s laughter outside, filtering in faintly.

For a moment Sk’jin is alive again.

He’s alive and happy- taking steps around the ship, antagonizing Ti, chasing after Ilya and the other fledglings, walking alongside Ahadi.

For a moment, Sk’jin is home.

He glances out of the windows. He spots Hoseok, talking to someone as they look down at a screen. Yoongi and Jimin are walking out of a Medical Bay, hands locked together. Taeh’yung rushes past, looking pleased with himself. He’s shorty chased by Jungkook. He’s laughing brightly at something Taeh’yung says, hands filled with some sort of fruit.

‘I have a favour to ask of you,’ Sk’jin says quietly. ‘If that’s all right.’

‘Anything.’

Hoseok steps into the Conference Room where Sk’jin and Ilya were already waiting for them.

The table in the center is circular and at the center of it, a massive and powerful multi-network projector.

So far it’s only them, and Camat and two others who were clearly ranked high in this massive pirate-network. They observe each other, expressions carefully schooled and neutral.

It was the only explanation as to what they were.

They controlled a vast majority of troves across the Known Universe and the Under Verse. This was no small network of small criminals.

No this was a highly elaborate, extremely skilled network of Beings creating a system they controlled without alerting the GLA on their activities.

As an agent, Hoseok was well aware of many pirating networks- as a member of the Venture Unit it was required to use these networks for your own benefit.

And networks like this- the ones held and maintained like this, were the ones that frightened the Venture Unit the most. It’s the reason why Sk’jin had the reputation he did.

Most times, pirates were not feared for their petty crimes (or often times heavy crimes) but rather of their anonymous networking. It’s why the Venture Unit always made it a point to incorporate themselves into every single one they could find, powerful or not, big or small.
And this network, is not one Hoseok was even aware of.

Troves were, in most cases, controlled regionally by specific clans or networks or bands. But to control nearly half of the troves across the Universe?

Either Ilya controlled half of the known existing pirating networks out there or was terrifyingly respected by other pirates.

And Hoseok doesn’t know which one to believe in.

Hoseok takes a seat next to Sk’jin, followed by Jungkook. Yoongi and Jimin follow next but Taeh’yung walks over to where Sk’jin is sitting and in an angle that looks painfully, slumps over the back on Sk’jin’s chair, hands filled with some sort of fruit dangling in front of the Khol’isa’s chest, bending weirdly in an attempt to feed him.

Ilya looks amused and gives Taeh’yung a smile. To which the Zhak’gri responds with a blinding smile that’s slightly stained purple and a constrained salute that sends bits of fruit flying about.

“So- this is Ilya,’ Sk’jin begins, gesturing to the Ožkan. ‘Ilya was like a son to me. I trust him wholeheartedly.’

Hoseok finds himself narrowing his eyes.

‘I know I haven’t given all of you the best reasons to always trust me-‘ Sk’jin begins.

‘-is Evdos all right?’ Taeh’yung asks, slapping his fruit-juice covered hands over Sk’jin’s mouth.

Camat, who was sitting next to Ilya looks around with wide eyes before he nods.

‘Cool- okay so I’m just gonna say this,’ Taeh’yung blurts out, expression surprisingly serious, ‘Everyone here is tired. I honestly don’t want to have another depressing sit-in discussion like we had at Amme’s ship again. And we all just wanna find pa. So unless there’s something new to be discussed or heard, I would like to kindly suggest everyone to scurry up.’

Hoseok spots Camat mouthing ‘scurry up’ with a questioning look on his face.

‘Are there any changes to our plans?’ Hoseok asks instead before anyone can say anything.

‘There won’t be if that’s what you decide,’ Ilya speaks up.

Sk’jin just sort of leans back, looking both tired but somewhat elated. He watches Ilya with an awed expression, as though truly disbelieving of what he was looking at.

‘Sk’jin has told me everything-‘

‘-everything?’ Taeh’yung squints at Ilya. ‘Even about Jiminnie and the other babies?’

Hoseok sees Camat mouthing ‘babies’ with a questioning look again. The Being next to him elbows Camat hard.

‘Yes, I’ve told him everything,’ Sk’jin replies patiently. ‘Like I said. I trust him. And he knows what we’re talking about.’

‘And I have a proposal.’

Hoseok leans back. He catches sight of Jimin from the corner of his eye.
His expression is perfectly neutral, with no reaction on his face.

‘I have been told about what you want to do in Axudar - about what you would like to investigate there, and ultimately find your way back to Se Jimin’s System,’ Ilya nods at Jimin. ‘I’m aware that you want to be able to use his System as a safe haven for the New Borns across the Universe.’

Camat and the two others look surprised at this. Surprised in a good way, or at least that’s what Hoseok thinks.

‘However, from what we know of Bhumi, and the other planets around it or the space in the region - we would not recommend approaching the zone,’ Ilya explains. ‘And we would not advice you to step close to Axudar - especially not with a New Born with you.’

Ilya nods at Jungkook who shrinks back just a little.

‘Has Ndica corrupted his home System with his leech-craft?’ Taeh’yung scoffs, ‘What trash.’

This completely different tone of statement makes Ilya and the others do a double take at the Zhak’gri.

‘My proposal to you, is that you ignore Axudar - do not step any closer than you already have at Cuab-D2. And instead, allow us to help you go all the way to Bhumi instead.’ Ilya proposes. ‘This is where you have to ultimately go - our current ship is more than capable of taking you there in a short period of time, as well as offering you genuine protection against these Beings called the Omhlophe. We can take you in a way that hides you from the GLA.’

This was probably the most secure, and the most ideal proposal any of them have ever heard. And it would be so easy to accept.

Because side-stepping Axudar completely would have no change or effect on their trajectory. They could simply use another port or Dock to refuel if needed - travelling to Axudar itself was not critical to their trajectory - but it was necessary to their mission. One of the reasons why they had chosen Axudar was because of its distance from the GLA.

‘I am also aware that you need to restock on supplies,’ Ilya presses on. ‘Rations, food, weapons - every and anything. We can supply you with what you need.’

‘But?’ Yoongi inquires.

‘There is no but,’ Ilya replies. ‘However, as someone who understands what you’re going to do - and who understands the situation very well, I would like to request you something.’

Ilya turns to address Jimin.

‘What is it?’

‘There is something of great importance that you need to be aware of,’ Ilya begins carefully. ‘Something that - considering what has happened to you, you have been made blind to - or possibly, been purposefully hidden from you.’

Jimin frowns at this, leaning in closer, a look of uncertainty in his eyes.

‘I am aware of your position - where you stand. I am sure that as someone trying to return to their System, to return to their home which is in a state of so much unknown resolve and uncertainty, you would do everything in your ability to understand more before stepping forward, to prevent
any unnecessary danger befalling those who support you.’

Jimin nods to that, fidgeting just a little.

‘Waiting for me at Cuab is my left-hand. This is the last leg of our expansion as well as bringing the last of our captured family back home,’ Ilya informs them. ‘He is a New Born- raised and escaped from Axudar.’

‘Oh!’ Taeh’yung exclaims, ‘Like Jungkookie?’

Ilya nods, smiling at Jungkook before looking back at Jimin.

‘I understand you want to be on the move. And that you are missing your captain. Allow us to help you. To give you protection, and help find your Captain. Do not go to Axudar- just stay a while longer. It would not take more than 2 hours of your time once he’s back inside the ship.’ Ilya states, ‘And if you do not wish to meet with him, and would like to leave immediately, I cannot keep you- we will help you restock with what we have here, and you may go as you please. But please- please do not go to Axudar.’

This would be a massive leg-up, if Hoseok was being honest. And from what he’s been hearing about Axudar, he understands why they would be warned against it.

‘We can step out for a while, if you wish to discuss this amongst yourselves,’ Ilya says as he stands up. The other 3 stand with him. ‘But I would highly encourage and press this before you.’

He addresses Jimin directly again, a sort of sad smile on his face.

‘I know what it’s like- to lose so much, to be displaced.’ Ilya says gently, ‘I know what it feels like, to want to protect family- home. Please stay, and let us help you.’

With that they step out of the wide room. It’s quiet for a while as Taeh’yung settles in Ilya’s chair, hoisting his feet up to keep on the shiny table.

‘New Born?’ Yoongi repeats quietly, hands crossed over the table. ‘They’re more scattered than we thought.’

‘I wouldn’t be surprised if they were everywhere,’ Sk’jin says quietly before exhaling out slowly. ‘What do you guys think?’

‘What about the Omhlophe?’ Yoongi asks, ‘I’m not underestimating their warnings or advice- in fact I’m-’ the Human pauses, ‘-we do not bring anything good with us.’

‘It’s what I said to him,’ Sk’jin replies tiredly, ‘He has heard of the Omhlophe- but under different names. They’ve been around for a while, only some networks know about them, but I’m guessing that these networks were eradicated once their use was met. Wouldn’t be too surprised, a lot of them were destroyed in the past decade especially.’

Hoseok can testify to that without even having to do any research. When the Akramanese, or the Red Evil, had really started gaining traction and swept through the edges of the GLA, they left in their wake death, destruction – all as a cover-up for what they were truly doing. It wasn’t surprising that the Omhlophe were the pawns sent out, setting up discussions and orders within pirating networks so that they could carry out their dirty work. And once it was done and completed, all they had to do would be to scourge the network and they were free.

‘He’s-…he really wants us to meet his left-hand.’ Sk’jin says slowly, ‘And he’s- he’s like
Jungkook looks up, eyes wide as he listens intently.

‘Born and raised and escaped from Axudar,’ Hoseok mumbles quietly, ‘Amme had also been… strange- regarding Axudar.’

‘JD told me,’ Jimin says quietly staring at the shiny table surface, ‘About Axudar. Namjoon also, had said that.’

‘What do you think we should do?’ Hoseok asks Jimin.

Jimin looks up for a moment before looking down again.

‘Ilya said- said I had to know something,’ he says carefully, ‘I- I know that there is something. Something very very-’ he stops, ‘I know that something happened, that connects Axudar, to my home. That connects all of this, all of what happened- to me, to Yoongi, to the GI, the Yishengs- even to Sk’jin. All the way to Jungkook and I-’

No one speaks.

‘I don’t want to- I will not bring harm- to others because of me,’ he declares. ‘Grisial was- many bad things happened. Ynqaba too. And this is your family.’

He looks up at Sk’jin.

‘I do not want anything bad to happen to them.’

‘I think-’ Sk’jin stops before he smiles a little, ‘I think they’re fully aware of the dangers. Of what can go wrong. They were not giving this offer just as a- just freely.’

‘What about Namjoon?’ Jungkook asks quietly. ‘They said they can help?’

Admittedly, that was incredibly tempting. To have half of the troves on your side to help you out was a massive boost to their whole mission. It’s one Hoseok would eagerly jump any other day.

But right now.

Everyone seems hesitant.

‘I think we should see what Ilya’s talking about- his left-hand,’ Taeh’yung chirps in.

Everyone except Taeh’yung.

They all look across at him.

‘I mean- I feel like that seems logical?’ he shrugs, ‘It’ll be interesting to hear what he has to say about Axudar! And Hobi! You didn’t find anything about Axudar in your search right?’

Hoseok nods.

He had done an extensive search on anything related to Axudar. He even found information on Amme’s trip there but nothing really concrete about the System itself.

‘Isn’t it best if we find out what’s happening first? Right? Right?’ Taeh’yung eagerly presses.
'Namjoon would probably agree at once,’ Jimin says quietly.

‘Can we not talk about him like he died and we’re discussing his wishes and or actions in some
reminiscent way,’ Sk’jin drawls out.

Understandably, none of them want to say anything more.

Hoseok quietly breathes out. Just like how he had to take over at Amme’s ship, he was going to
have to step up again.

‘We should do it,’ Yoongi announces quietly instead, his tone firm firm.

‘Yeah! Like I said!’ Taeh’ying agrees immediately, sounding a little petulant.

‘But-’

‘Cuab-D2 is a massive prison- they’re well protected not to mentioned completely stocked. While
the Omhlophe are a formidable and powerful force- they’re not going to be willing to expose
themselves likes this so soon after Grisial.’ Yoongi reasons, ‘And they’re in control of a lot of
troves- saying you have half of the troves across the universe is not a small number. If anyone can
spot Namjoon anywhere- because I know GI agents make stops for re-fuelling or stocking up or
something. If we can pinpoint their location to a region or something.’

‘Okay,’ Jimin nods in agreement. ‘Okay- let’s…let’s stay and hear what his left-hand has to say.
We will- we will think of what to do after that?’

Jimin looks hesitantly at Sk’jin who nods wearily.

‘Hobi?’

Yoongi is looking at him, clearly waiting for any additional comment.

But honestly Hoseok is a little blank.

This was a strange place to find themselves in- this whole thing was like some wild ride through
close-cluster asteroids. Sometimes they were rushing- running all over some Dock, infiltrating
stations and offices. Sometimes they were escaping with their lives.

Hoseok almost feels like he’s at his limit with how much he can bear.

That, and he was also incredibly exhausted, and with what Ilya was offering them? He just wants to
agree, side-step Axudar, and just let Ilya take them all the way to Bhumi.

‘We listen to his left-hand, and based on what he has to say, we take our next step regarding
Axudar.’ Yoongi offers.

He’s met with agreeing nods from everyone.

‘Yeah, okay. That sounds good, let’s talk to this guy,’ Hoseok nods in agreement as he stands up,
‘I’ll go get them.’

‘Wait-,’ Jimin calls, also standing up and addressing Sk’jin.

Sk’jin raises an eyebrow at him.

‘Do you want to stay?’
Sk’jin’s expression is impassive.

‘Ilya is family to you,’ Jimin begins, ‘Right? So- so, will you stay?’

‘I’m seeing this mission through-‘

‘Do you want to stay?’

Sk’jin grimaces a little.

‘I have things to see through,’ Sk’jin states clearly. ‘Meeting Ilya does not change that.’

Jimin presses his lips down in a thin line as he nods.

They tell Ilya of their agreement and the Ožkan looks a little appeased.

‘We’re about 45 minutes from Cuab,’ Camat informs them. ‘Guess we’re gonna have to brief you all on what’s about to happen and how it’s about to happen.’

Hoseok nods to that, sitting back down.

‘We’ve been working on this for about, give or take, 7 sols,’ Camat explains.

Hoseok wants to gawk.

Seven whole sols. How have they been operating with this level of secrecy for so long? Hoseok catches Sk’jin’s proud smile as he listens.

‘Leading up to the past few sols, pirates were rounded up heavily- obviously there were normal reasons to this,’ Camat vaguely gestures with his hands, rolling his eyes, ‘But also because the Yishengs were attempting to blame pirates for the shit they were pulling, as their initial decoy in the shape of the Alliance, was giving out. A lot of our numbers were taken in- and with how close we got to what was going on- with the Yishengs and their involvement with the New Borns as well as the GI, we had to, so to speak, pack up and leave for a while.’

‘After the failed attempt to assassinate Ilya, we dove even deeper and stayed quiet- we only operated as infiltrators more than anything. We suffered heavy losses in terms of assets and regions of course- but we’ve been able to retake and control our main territories,’ the Orvan adds. ‘The last thing we wanted was to be in their radar.’

‘Of course, this was difficult to do,’ Ilya admits, ‘Especially when you have both the GIU and the Venture Unit attempting to find an angle on you- the interns flooded us.’

Sk’jin chuckles at that.

‘But we’ve been employing their tactics on them for a very long time now,’ Camat grins as he sets down his screen to the reader-slot on the table, ‘We sent our own interns. Which is why our troves-’ the holographic projection lights up and expands over the large empty space within the circular table. ‘-include mainly GLA Docks, Ports, prisons and jails, and even officers within main Šerdesas.’

The map is incredibly extensive and encompassing. Hoseok is not surprised to find countless well known Venture Unit troves listed and mapped in this display.

In fact this was absolute perfection.
They were employing tactics perfected and developed by the Venture Unit, where most of the agents were ex-pirates, criminals, and high-ranking offenders, and using it against them by sending in the most unsuspecting Beings.

Hoseok wonders how many of them he’s worked with or has come across.

‘We lost contact with many of these places- but we’ve been adding and getting them back now,’ Ilya explains, ‘And our next stop at Cuab-D2 is one of our final major troves.’

‘And this is where your left-hand is waiting for you?’ Yoongi asks.

Ilya nods. ‘He got himself arrested and has converted Cuab-D2 as his own trove, you could say. That’s where we found Evdos actually.’

Sk’jin suddenly laughs at that, before hastily disguising it as a cough.

‘How long has he been there?’ Jimin asks.

‘3 sols now- a little after Ilya here nearly lost his old head,’ Camat grins, nodding at the Ožkan.

‘But we’ve been in regular contact- especially the past 2 or so sols,’ Ilya ignores Camat the same way Hoseok has seen Namjoon ignore Sk’jin.

‘Is there anything we need to be aware of?’ Yoongi inquires. ‘How much of Cuab is really under your-’

‘-Cuab-D2 is ours,’ the Orvan emphasizes lightly, ‘All arrangements made from Cuab are made by us. Our only hiccup throughout this year has been because of your arrest.’

Yoongi grimaces.

‘Oh yeah, by the way, cool fight! Big fan!’ Camat grins, holding both hands up as though cheering. ‘You’ll find a lot of fans here!’

The Axudarian also gestures brightly, as though very pleased to meet Yoongi.

Yoongi looks comically disturbed while Jimin laughs quietly.

‘If it’s all right with you,’ Hoseok pipes in, addressing Ilya, ‘Can I ask you to look into something?’

‘About?’

‘You have interns nearly everywhere, including Šerdesas.’

Ilya nods slowly to that, eyes narrowing a little.

‘We would like to know who issued and verified our arrest orders,’ Hoseok states clearly. ‘I’m sure that from what Sk’jin has told you, the secrecy of our mission, regardless of the intention and or perspective of the Special Jury and those involved, is of utmost importance. Having our faces broadcasted in such a public and wide setting, clearly sets us back in our attempts at secrecy jeopardizing this whole mission. We are so close to finalizing this- what happened back in Māho-5 was not just some minor mistake or carelessness on our part- but an obvious and unknown attempt to sabotage us in an extremely public way.’

Ilya nods a little before he glances over at Camat who says, ‘Sweet! Can do!’ throwing in a cheery gesture.
'We’re also working on tracking your captain,’ Ilya adds. ‘But the GI have always been tricky to track,’ he smiles wryly at Yoongi who gives a sort of dismissive shrug of his shoulders, ‘-and if they don’t want to be found, and are going to lengths to misdirect you by taking your isotopic trackers on the wrong trajectory with what could be the help of your captain himself, then honestly I’ll be frank and say it could be close to impossible especially if it needs to be done quickly.’

Sk’jin nods to that.

‘We’ll be at Cuab in 30 minutes I’m guessing,’ Camat slides his screen out of the slot and holds it up to look at it closely, ‘Is there anything else you guys need? Or want?’

‘The escort guards,’ Jimin says at once, ‘Um- they’re asleep. Right now. But I don’t know, what we should do.’

‘Ah- right,’ Camat makes a funny face before looking over at Ilya.

‘It would be fish-fishy to just kinda remove their memories,’ Jimin adds slowly, ‘I don’t- it’s not ideal-‘

Camat mouths quietly ‘fishy?’ while squinting at the Axudarian next to him who just rolls his eyes in response.

‘Leave them to us,’ Ilya states, ‘We’ll make sure that they are sent back without any harm.’

Jimin nods gratefully to that.

‘So does that mean you’ll allow us to help you reach Bhumi?’ Ilya asks.

‘We want to hear your left-hand speak first.’ Jimin says after looking around at them, as though for support. ‘While our plan is definitely to head into Axudar, we want to be completely informed about it first, and then decide our next step.’

Ilya doesn’t look too pleased, his mouth twitching a little. But he doesn’t press the subject any further.

Amme had neither been for or against the idea of going to Axudar. But the Yisheng had a different angle to why she would want them to go there in the first place.

This was the first time someone who knew most certainly the same or even more than them, was advising them not to go to Axudar.

And Hoseok does not know how to feel about it.

‘Okay, so if that’s that- then I guess we just wait until we get on board to Cuab,’ Camat announces. ‘If it’s okay with you all, can I get Hoseok and uh, Yoon-ki?’

‘Yoongi.’

‘Yoon-ki.’

‘…yeah that’s fine.’

‘-yes, Hoseok and Yoon-ki to come with me?’ Camat says, looking pleased as he stands.

‘What for?’ Hoseok asks as he stands.
‘Well, if we’re gonna restock and shit, I need the pilot and weapons specialist?’ Camat shrugs as he waves his screen, ‘I mean, that’s what your ship registry says.’

Yoongi chuckles under his breath as he stands up, ‘Well that didn’t take you very-’

The Human pauses suddenly, smile still frozen on his face before every single bit of colour drains from his face, his eyes roll back, and his knees give out.

Jimin catches him before he can hurt himself, eyes bewildered and scared though he refrains from expressing himself. Hoseok stands up but Sk’jin grabs his wrist and keeps him back.

‘Woah- is he okay-?’ Camat exclaims, jogging around the table.

‘This is the second time,’ Sk’jin says quietly from next to him, still seated, ‘When you were taken- this happened to him.’

‘Will he be all right?’ Hoseok asks tersely as Jimin and Jungkook put him down on the floor carefully, the Vicitra is clearly shaken and afraid. Taeh’yung is not helping Camat understand as he wails, throwing his arms up dramatically. Sk’jin lets go of his hand.

‘He’ll wake up,’ Sk’jin says, to both Hoseok and Ilya, ‘He’s tired.’

‘How long has he been awake?’ Ilya asks, sounding gentle.

‘5 sols?’ Sk’jin replies, ‘Give or take.’

‘That’s quite long,’ Ilya says softly, a sadness in his eyes. ‘Too long.’

Sk’jin doesn’t respond to that and he ignores Hoseok’s little nudge as well. Hoseok wants to know what Ilya meant by that.

‘Set up one of the internal Medical Bays,’ Ilya tells the Orvan who nods at once, eyeing the situation with concern. ‘Jaen, make sure we’re all set up with the Bridge.’

The Axudarian, Jaen, gives a short nod before walking out.

‘Will he be okay? Is it because he’s Human?’ Camat asks Hoseok as Jimin carries Yoongi out carefully, following after the Orvan who leads them out through the other door. Jungkook and Taeh’yung follow them like children (albeit being taller than both of the Beings they were following), with the latter clinging to Jungkook’s sleeve.

‘I don’t know,’ Hoseok replies honestly before exhaling out slowly, thinking about Sk’jin and Ilya’s comments, ‘But Taeh’yung is there, so if anything was wrong, he’d know.’

This wasn’t something everyone knew apparently- something Ilya, and potentially this other Being, Ilya’s left-hand, knew about.

Camat looks dubious as he asks, ‘Is Taeh’yung the healer?’

‘Uh- sure,’ Hoseok answers. That was an easier explanation to give than anything else.

‘I uh, guess it’s just you? But I mean, a Venture Unit agent should know about weaponry, am I right?’

‘You did a lot of research?’
‘Enough,’ Camat grins, his many teeth very clean and bright. ‘Also a big fan by the way!’

‘I- wait.’ Hoseok squints up at Camat. ‘-based on what?’

‘Checked up on you! Really cool record! Also, I mean what happened in the tram was really cool. Chest is still burning by the way- though I guess I have the Vicitra to thank for that.’ Camat replies with an amused huff of a laugh as he touches his chest rather gingerly, ‘He’s gonna make a really good fighter soon.’

‘Sure.’

Hoseok would honestly really like it if Jungkook could stay away from all and any of this. But there was of course no denying his natural abilities.

Camat’s grin widens and he just gestures for Hoseok to follow him.

At the doorway Hoseok looks back, catching sight of Sk’jin talking to Ilya, his expression shockingly light. He’s saying something, and Ilya seems to be commenting, throwing in a gesture with his hand that Sk’jin takes into his own, not even seeming to realize what he was doing. His eyes are vibrant, bright- but somehow it makes Hoseok strangely melancholic, a pain seeping into his chest that he can’t rightly identify.

‘So anyways, we have with us a very very nice range of automated blasters powered by these really nice and small solar packs that don’t cause a single dent in your shields,’ Camat explains, maybe a bit too excited about weapons. ‘Also maybe you want some new shit for your Medical Bay? Like, can’t have your small folks fainting around?’

‘Yeah, I guess,’ Hoseok agrees, glancing towards where the “small folks” had gone off into.

‘Don’t worry,’ Camat says reassuringly, ‘Our facilities offers some of the best medical services- if your friend Jin needs a UV room, we have it perfectly set up. Though it was originally designed for just one Being to use per session, don’t see why two won’t fit!’

‘I don’t think anyone else would need it,’ Hoseok replies with a confused frown. Maybe Taeh’yung would want to join in- you could never tell with Taeh’yung.

Camat instead raises his eyebrows, opening his mouth before he stops himself and says, ‘You’re right!’

Hoseok does not know what to think of any of this.

‘Camat!’ someone calls him from across the lobby.

‘Aye?’

‘The in-mates are getting antsy- Ilya told me to redirect it to you?’ they say, voice quieter as they approach them.

Camat groans.

Right- that was a question that had passed Hoseok’s mind earlier but in light of things (as was tradition now), he had bigger varaks to fry.

‘You’re still housing in-mates?’

‘I mean yeah?’ Camat looks like it’s the most obvious answer possible. ‘We couldn’t just get rid of
them? They’re taking up the cells in the innermost cells. The original guards are also there. Not together! Separate cells and sections of course!

He laughs as though it’s the funniest thing he’s ever heard.

‘What will you do with them?’

‘Transferring at Cuab. We’re giving the original guards and remaining staff a chance to stay or go.’

‘...go?’

‘Yeap.’

Hoseok is not sure he really wants to know the details but he presses on anyways.

‘As in you kill them?’

Camat looks horrified.

‘What?! No! Spaces, fuck?’ Camat exclaims, arms crossing over his arms as though to protect himself from Hoseok. ‘Any single Being with a working brain understands what it means to have a complete take over like this- the implications are pretty clear!’

Of course- one of the reasons why Sk’jin was so successful in what he did was not because of his use of violence, but his absolute refusal to acknowledge his power despite blatantly using it in every front.

And that was terrifying. Because if anything, Sk’jin was known for being absolutely unpredictable.

And clearly, Ilya was following in his footsteps, and perhaps adding even more to Sk’jin’s legacy, Ilya was doing the same, using the immense power and authority he governed, to completely take over massive pre-existing GLA-based networks.

As an agent, had Hoseok come across Ilya’s work and had been given the choice to stay or have a questionable leave, he would have chosen to stay as well.

It makes Hoseok think about the many failed attempts of sending Venture Unit agents to infiltrate Sk’jin’s network. He feels a sense of comradery towards those unfortunate Beings.

‘Right,’ Hoseok amends, ‘You just hear and see a lot when you’re in the field.’

Camat makes a sound of agreement, nodding along slowly, ‘Yeah I guess that’s understandable- it’s always good to approach a situation expecting the least and hoping for the worst.’

‘...sure I guess?’ Hoseok grimaces.

‘Okay so I guess we can do the restocking and stuff after I settle shit downstairs- wait not, upstairs, ugh my memory,’ Camat whines, ‘Lemme just go take care of this. I’ll see you after we settle in Cuab.’

Hoseok would argue, but they were very much in the hands of an extremely powerful organization in the midst of one of the largest network expansion operation Hoseok has been made aware of. They would have gotten rid of them very easily had it not been for Sk’jin.

It was something you learnt very early on if you were a part of the Venture Unit.
Kindness towards one Being could potentially mean inexcusable cruelty towards another.

Hoseok is very aware of what would have happened had they not had Sk’jin with them so he treads carefully. So he just nods, knowing full well that Camat knows that Hoseok can’t respond otherwise.

Camat gives him a friendly wave and jogs off- only to stop, smack his head, and jog off in the other direction.

Hoseok back-tracks, making his way back to where he saw Jimin and the others disappear off to. The Medical Bays in this area was clearly meant for the officers- basically for the non-inmates aboard the ship. It’s spacious, and contained every possible medical supply and equipment you would need in the absence of a Yisheng. There’s a few other Beings around- one lounging on a Bed down the Bay, reading a screen with great interest, several pipes connecting to her from a long tube like machine that was glowing faintly. There’s a small group of uniform-wearing healers, all talking amongst themselves as they ran some form of analysis. There’s also another Being, clearly very hung-over by the windows. There’s a large bucket next to his Bed, just ready for use.

Hoseok spies the portable UV-Bed. It was close to the surgery booths, and was clearly designed for frequent use. And it certainly did appear to be used frequently.

He finds the others huddled around a Bed, Yoongi is awake and he looks terrible.

But he’s saying something, making the three around him laugh.

Jimin is the first to notice him.

‘That was fast?’ he questions, walking forward to meet him.

‘Some problems with the inmates,’ Hoseok explains before looking Yoongi up and down, ‘You okay?’

Yoongi just shrugs, leaning back as he subconsciously mimics Jimin’s movement. Hoseok doesn’t think either of them are purposefully doing it, but their hands automatically link, fingers entwining, leaning into each other’s space.

‘Just tired. Took some medication, feeling better though.’ Yoongi gives him a small smile as though to reassure him.

Hoseok ignores Ilya and Sk’jin’s exchange echoing in his mind.

‘The healer is cool!’ Taeh’ying adds, ‘She was very quick with her diagnosis! She also gave me these!’

Taeh’ying is holding a handful of colourful candy- the kind given to children to calm down, laced with the slightest bit of sedatives. It was surprisingly legal.

‘That’s really nice buggy,’ Hoseok pats Taeh’ying on the back, wondering how many he’d need to consume to knock him out and commends the healer for thinking fast. Clearly, Taeh’ying’s dramatics were not appreciated. ‘Don’t eat them all at once.’

Taeh’ying nods rapidly, settling down on the Bed to sit near Yoongi’s feet.

‘Where’s Sk’jin?’ Yoongi asks.
‘Still talking with Ilya,’ Hoseok steps closer next to Jimin, lowering his voice, ‘I think they’re catching up.’

‘Will they let us go?’ Jungkook asks nervously, eyes wide.

There’s a sort of strained pause shared between Yoongi, Jimin, and Hoseok before Yoongi says, ‘Yeah- we’re just gonna stay a bit to listen to some guy and then leave.’

Jungkook looks a little placated, nodding.

A small alarm rings before a cool voice announces, ‘Exiting warp in one minute. Please secure yourself immediately for your own safety.’

Taeh’yung flings himself over Yoongi, who lands back with a choked ‘oof’ as he declares, ‘I’ll keep us secure.’

Yoongi grumbles but doesn’t bother trying to remove the Zhak’gri off of himself and instead pats his head a few times. Jimin just laughs as he takes a seat, pulling Jungkook with him and making sure they were both secure on the footstools by the surrounding walls.

Hoseok glances around one more time, watching as some of the healers secure the hung-over Being on their Bed before securing herself to a footstool attached to the walls.

‘Exiting warp in 20 seconds.’

They’re all nervous- with the exception of Taeh’yung who was spread over Yoongi’s grumbling form. Nothing had gone according to plan- though it was worth mentioning that they didn’t really have that much of a plan to start off with. But all of this was starting to really get out of hand.

And with Namjoon gone, and with the high chance that the Omhlophe could track their location, they were thrown into an extreme situation where they really couldn’t make any straightforward decision.

And honestly, Hoseok is expecting a mess as soon as they exit warp. It wouldn’t be the first time and it certainly would feel like it made sense to do so. But instead everything turns out well, their safety straps retract back to the footstools and walls, and an announcement that everything was clear and green is heard.

‘I wish I could see what was happening,’ Yoongi says from under Taeh’yung. ‘Somehow- it’s like I understand what’s happening. I see how Ilya, how Sk’jin used to work, how this all exists- but at the same time it’s like I can’t really visualize it.’

Hoseok nods in understanding, glad that someone else was feeling the same in a sense.

Honestly, Hoseok would like to take the Laikin, and just jet off. Taeh’yung would be able to get them out, surely, and just leave all of this behind. But seeing Sk’jin the way he was reacting- somehow so alive, and with what they were offering to them regarding- well, regarding everything to do with their mission, Hoseok was staying put.

‘Hey,’ a voice behind them calls out. It’s one of the healers Hoseok had seen from earlier. ‘Your stats say you’ve stabilized and your overall physical functions seem to be normal. You can leave the Bay if you want, but I would suggest resting for a little while longer.’

‘Thank you-’ Yoongi begins, pushing Taeh’yung away but Jimin steps in, hand firmly clamping down on Yoongi’s shoulder and pushing the Human back down says with an extremely polite
smile, ‘Yes, we will be resting for a while longer. Thank you very much.’

The healer gives Yoongi an amused look before nodding and walking back to her team.

Yoongi seems to decide that arguing or questioning Jimin’s actions would be detrimental to himself so he just stays down and says, ‘Fiend,’ instead.

Jimin gives Yoongi an unimpressed look and gestures for Hoseok, as though for support.

‘You should rest. Leave the Laikin to me-’

‘-and me!’ Jungkook says stoutly, standing up to full height, looking as intimidating as he could. Hoseok briefly wonders if Jungkook is posturing, as though attempting to compete with Yoongi.

‘-uh, and you just,’ Hoseok pauses, wondering how to phrase his words, ‘-rest. Take a break for a while.’

Yoongi nods, looking a little dejected at being ganged up like this. But honestly if he was going to just collapse like that out of nowhere, then it was best the Human just stay here, where he could fall back into the Bed and receive immediate medical service.

‘What about Sk’jin?’ Jimin asks. He was still thinking along the same vein as when he had posed those questions to the Khol’isa. And Hoseok gets it.

With what happened in Ynqaba, and before that too at that nightmarish planet, Hoseok understands why Jimin felt the need to show Sk’jin this way out. And even though Jimin wasn’t necessarily the authority of this rag-tag team, this mission was built on delivering him to his home-system. And Jimin knew this.

Which was why, this was his way of telling Sk’jin, that he didn’t need to go any further than he wished.

‘I was-,’ Jimin pauses, frowning a little as he considers his words carefully, ‘-I feel like he chooses to leave because he believes he doesn’t deserve to stay.’

‘It’s his decision,’ Hoseok tells him gently. ‘We don’t know what he’s really thinking- how he’s thinking of things. This is a great surprise to him. Maybe he will change his mind later- let’s just let him be for now.’

Jimin nods to that, still looking upset about the whole thing.

The light outside the wide windows suddenly dim, making the lights inside the Bay automatically adjust, before turning extremely bright. The windows shift in their tint, filtering the bright lights and allowing them to see clearly.

Cuab-D2 was a massive structure. Similar to every other GLA-based prison, this was long and flat though with considerable space to allow docking of every sort of transporter-ship. And despite knowing that they were here safely, that everything was being worked out perfectly well from within Cuab with Ilya’s network, it’s still unsettling to come across a prison of this scale.

In many ways, it was easy taking over prisons. The GLA didn’t want to afford sending off real living officials and officers, and Androids could be compromised if not careful. Cyborgs were an expensive upkeep, depending on what region you established the prison in. So taking over a prison, especially if you had enough of the same network members gathered in one with a plan and agenda, you could take over easily enough.
'Cool!' Taeh’yung exclaims, jumping off of the bed (with a grateful groan from Yoongi), and rushes to the window. Jungkook shuffles, eyes darting about, eager to go check the view but also adamant in standing his ground.

‘Come on,’ Jimin smiles up at the Vicitra, ‘Let’s go look?’

Jungkook beams, nodding quickly and making his hair shake about as he takes Jimin’s proffered hand.

‘Yes, leave the sick one behind,’ Yoongi says in monotone, though he looks amused as Jungkook looks back, a sort of pleased look on his face.

‘So now you’re admitting that you’re unwell?’ Hoseok asks, stepping closer to inspect Yoongi’s stats on the attached screen to his Bed.

‘Never said I was not unwell,’ Yoongi quips back, sitting up slowly as though he was dizzy. ‘What do you think about Axudar and how no one seems to be really giving us any real answers about it.’

Hoseok sighs out, pushing back the screen before sitting on the Bed and twisting himself a little to face the Human.

‘I’ll be honest I really don’t know,’ Hoseok says simply, ‘I genuinely don’t know.’

‘Do you think they’re trustworthy?’

‘Is anyone trustworthy? I mean, if you had a choice between saving me or Jimin, I know who you’d choose, and that’s the basis in which I trust you.’ Hoseok gives him a shrug. ‘Trust isn’t a thing here. It’s just what you can or can’t gain from your interactions.’

‘What do they have to gain from us?’

‘Potentially a lot. Think about it- they didn’t kill you immediately,’ Hoseok replies, ‘They know about the GI, they know about the Gaia Case. Even about the Omhlophe.’

‘So they’re just watching?’

‘Probably listening too.’

Yoongi looks down at his hands and then at the screen next to his Bed.

‘Damn, I just gave them my whole medical record.’ He says dryly.

‘It’s understandable I would be doing the same,’ Hoseok sighs out, ‘It’s not personal.’

‘It is for Sk’jin.’ Yoongi corrects him, ‘Probably for Ilya too. It became personal after he decided that he wanted to keep me prisoner.’

Yoongi definitely had a point there.

‘What about this guy he wants us to meet? Someone from Axudar itself. Any ideas?’ Yoongi asks him, looking away to follow Jimin’s movements across the Bay.

Taeh’yung seems to be telling them some sort of story, pointing and motioning around the massive prison they were slowly flying past. You could probably see Axudar’s star from here.

‘If he’s one of the eggs- New Borns, as they call them. Then it would be an interesting insight,’
Hoseok admits. ‘Jungkook was raised, in a way, protected from his own birth, protected from the greater horrors of how he came to be. Which is why he didn’t know so much about anything.’

‘His mothers clearly did,’ Yoongi says thoughtfully, ‘And one of them could have potentially been like me- or somewhat similar to my situation.’

‘And maybe this guy is like that-,’ Hoseok says before he pauses. Yoongi looks at him, eyebrow raised.

‘What is it?’ he asks.

Hoseok doesn’t know how to relay the information, or well, words exchanged between Ilya and Sk’jin regarding the Human. Should he?

‘Did you hear something? About others like me?’ Yoongi asks, his expression neutral, his tone simple. ‘Or was it about me?’

‘I think Ilya has definitely done a lot of research- regarding the GI, the eggs- and everything else in between,’ Hoseok says carefully, turning a bit more and leaning in a little, ‘He said that you’ve been awake for a very long time. Too long, he said.’

Yoongi doesn’t look surprised or upset about the implications of Ilya’s words. Instead he just nods, as though in agreement.

‘Yoongi,’ Hoseok begins softly, ‘Do you know what he meant by that?’

Yoongi just shrugs a little and with a small huff of a laugh says, ‘It could mean a lot. Or nothing. But-...’ he looks up, holding his full attention.

‘Hobi, you know don’t you?’

Yoongi’s expression is open and honest.

‘Sk’jin knew of course. He’s- in a way, similar to me. Taeh’yung always knew. It’s why he’s decided to stay- gotta save his babies one way or another or something. Namjoon’s probably guessed it too. And Jimin-‘ Yoongi looks down finally. ‘Jimin knows too. But he doesn’t want to accept it I guess.’

Something ignites inside of Hoseok.

A sort of anger- not at Yoongi- far from it. But anger at their situation, at their circumstances. Anger at what they’ve each individually had to face, had to carry, had to bear.

‘Maybe I’m with Jimin in this,’ Hoseok gets out. ‘Because I don’t-.’

‘I’m dying.’

Hoseok closes his eyes, breathing out slowly.

‘We all know this.’ The Human says it so nonchalantly. Like this was an irrefutable fact. ‘You can’t deny it. Look at me.’

Hoseok wishes it wasn’t true.

But it was so clear to him- stark in his memory from just the other day.
How sick and unwell Yoongi appeared.

And maybe that was what he always looked like- maybe that was how others saw him. And it took Hoseok a few hours of not seeing Hoseok face-to-face to realize just how…faded, the Human appeared. It didn’t help that he had been healed by Amme previously, so the contrast in Hoseok’s memory is undeniable.

‘Denial is a river you won’t be able to find on a map.’ Yoongi grins, cackling quietly under his breath, as though he wasn’t just making light of his own mortality.

Hoseok thinks he’s missing some sort of cultural reference here and allows Yoongi to have his moment.

‘Yoongi!’ Taeh’yung yells as he runs towards them, ‘I’m trying to tell them about the emergency shafts inside prisons and how they’re designed to shoot you out into space because in a state of emergency, space is safer than inside the prison for most officers but they won’t believe me!’

Jimin and Jungkook both stand some distance away, looking incredibly skeptical at this shockingly true bit of information about the architectural designs of prisons.

‘Ah- it’s true,’ Yoongi nods while Taeh’yung gives the two behind him a ‘see?’ expression. ‘You can see the chutes- they’re normally located at every other interval.’

Yoongi carefully gets out of the Bed, quietly waving off Hoseok’s attempt to help him.

Jimin watches him with an expertly poised expression. He’s still laughing about Taeh’yung’s actions and antics, still engaging with Jungkook about teasing the Zhak’gri, but it’s pretty clear to see, if you knew what to look for.

Hoseok leans back on the Bed Yoongi just vacated and dully wonders if he should just shoot himself up with every other supplement available there. Though he’s quite sure Human-based medication probably wouldn’t work very well on him.

He sits up when the main doors to the Bay open and it’s followed by the sound of a bunch of Beings exclaiming tiredly before Camat shuffles in, looking exhausted. He’s splattered in blood, and as he steps closer to Hoseok, smells strongly of smoke.

Camat sighs tiredly, as soon as he’s close enough and throws himself on the Bed, the screen in his hand nearly falling to the ground. Hoseok quickly pulls up his feet and legs.

‘Um-’

‘Hey so, how do you handle Vicitra’s,’ Camat asks forgoing any greeting, voice muffled against the mattress.

‘What? Why?’ Hoseok glances back around at Jungkook who was standing behind Jimin and Yoongi by the window, gazing at the view around them as Taeh’yung attempts to be coercing one of the medical staff into giving him some sort of marker-stylus.

‘One of the inmates- a Vicitra, she’s really tough to handle and like, we don’t want to knock her out all the time, you know?’ Camat sighs tiredly, wincing a little as he stretches across the bed, turning on his side. He leaves a few smears of blood over the pristine sheets. ‘She’s gotten herself injured because she fought like, 20 other inmates. I’ll be happy to drop her off in Cuab to be honest.’

‘Oh-’ Hoseok grimaces. ‘Jungkook isn’t- well, he was not raised by Vicitra’s- or by any other
Pravasi H’manun.’

‘Oh?’ Camat looks surprised. ‘That’s cool? But like- any tips? We have her sedated at the Bay there treating her injuries.’

A shiver runs down Hoseok’s spine.

‘Don’t worry- like I said, sedated and she’s cuffed,’ Camat makes a funny face, ‘Wish we didn’t have to but damn, they’re unpredictable.’

‘I guess- well, it seems like that’s the best approach?’ Hoseok shrugs before adding as he gestures to the windows, ‘So- all clear?’

‘Oh! Yeah- we’ll be docking soon. Inmates caused a slight delay, but we’ve got them under control now.’ Camat says confidently before looking around and asking, ‘You seen Ilya?’

‘Uh- no.’ Hoseok replies, ‘Maybe still with Sk’jin in that conference room?’

Camat winces as he sits up before he exclaims, ‘Ah! The other reason I came here!’

He hands Hoseok the screen he nearly dropped when he flopped onto the bed.

‘This your captain?’

Hoseok quickly scans the footage given to him, feels his skin prickle as he watches a very short but clear clip of Namjoon walking by himself down a crowded and cramped alley. He appeared fine- no injuries that Hoseok could tell, but it ends when the Kutsoglerin turns the corner into a doorway that sticks out into the street. But before he does so, and Hoseok doesn’t know if it’s just the quality of the footage or the lighting, but it was almost as though Namjoon looked directly at the camera.

‘That’s him.’ Hoseok feels breathless. Finally, they had confirmation that Namjoon was well.

‘Interesting- that’s from Lowet,’ Camat informs him.

‘Lowet?’ Hoseok repeats, his mind reeling, ‘Wait- are you sure?’

‘Seems like it- or maybe he’s gone already? This was from like,-’ Camat taps around the screen a bit, ‘-yeah, almost 2 days ago.’

Lowet was Ynqaba’s neighbouring planet. And Namjoon was back in that region? But why? Why would the GI take him there? Again? And he was walking all by himself too- no one else around him, just casually walking.

‘Anyways- we’re still looking. We don’t really have much of a connection in that area, but Ymir was fine- so we were able to get access through Nuqtai as well.’ Camat tells him.

‘Nuqtai not yours?’

‘Ilya doesn’t like that region; specifically Ymir and the surrounding borders,’ Camat tells him, ‘Says it’s not good memories.’

That was where Sk’jin had disappeared. Of course for Ilya, and for the others left behind, that area would hold nothing but sorrow, confusion, and regret.

‘Well- gotta go get the boss. He hates being called that.-’
‘-if you’re gonna meet Ilya you better fucking clean up!’ the healer from earlier yells as she jogs past, holding a few items under her arms, ‘You know the rules!’

‘Ugh- hygiene first I know!’ Camat yells back before turning to face Hoseok, ‘Be honest with me, how bad do I look.’

‘You could do with a shower.’ Hoseok replies bluntly, ‘Maybe two.’

Camat sighs, ‘Fucking Vicitra’s- well, maybe not yours, but ours.’

He pushes himself up and stands with a groan, waving at Jungkook who was watching suspiciously from where he stood next to Jimin.

‘Hehe, he’s cute,’ Camat grins and adds, ‘It’s gonna take an hour or so I think for things to get moving. Do you guys plan on just chilling here because that’s fine too.’

Hoseok nods. He’s not sure what to do.

‘Just make a list of things you need or want for your ship, and I think either give it to me, or to Ilya- whoever you see first,’ Camat says, nodding at the screen he had brought in. ‘Sorry I can’t help- duty calls. Well, hygiene.’

Hoseok nods with a slight grimace, still unsure how to feel about any of the Beings aboard this ship. Out of curiosity, Hoseok follows after Camat and peers out of the Bay doors. There’s a bunch of Beings outside, nursing some small injury, looking a little woebegone. The doorway into one of the Bay is opened and on the Bed inside, strapped onto the Bed with full restraints and cuffs is a still blood-covered Vicitra, knocked out, a few pipes and wires sticking out of her.

It’s such a shocking difference between this Vicitra and Jungkook.

Jungkook was all large curious eyes, soft wavy hair, goofy but shy grins; most definitely a child in many regards, just forced to adjust to a life that was incredibly cruel and harsh to him.

And this Vicitra- even unconscious, just exuded a wild and dangerous energy to her.

‘Hey- what did he want?’

Jimin is standing behind him, looking curious and concerned. He looks past him, through the doorway. It’s not long before he catches sight of the Vicitra.

‘Same species?’ Jimin asks, glancing back surreptitiously at Jungkook.

Hoseok nods, ‘Unconscious. So nothing to worry about.’

Jimin nods hesitantly.

‘We have news of Namjoon,’ Hoseok informs Jimin, quickly walking back to the bed and grabbing the screen Camat left behind.

‘What?’ Jimin’s expression is of intense relief. ‘He’s alive!’

Hoseok nods, giving Jimin a tight smile as they walk towards where the others stood. Yoongi was already watching them, clearly catching on that something important was being discussed.

Everyone’s reaction is of relief as they watch the short footage. But it’s immediately followed by confusion at his location.
‘We should get Sk’jin,’ Taeh’yung says randomly, ‘Should tell him.’

‘I mean of course,’ Hoseok begins, feeling a bit confused. And almost as though saying his name out loud summoned him, Sk’jin appears through the Bay doorways, looking genuinely happy and lighter than ever, Ilya next to him.

‘Ah- feeling better already?’ Ilya greets Yoongi. His eyes have that strange but profound sadness to them again as he looks at the Human.

The Human nods and says, ‘I am- thank you for offering the Medical Bay.’ And adds without any further preamble, ‘They found Namjoon.’

Sk’jin’s expression morphs rapidly, eyes widening as he takes the screen from Hoseok.

‘Where-?’

‘Lowet,’ Hoseok answers, watching as Sk’jin visibly balks at the information, fingers stiff around the screen edges. ‘2 days ago.’

‘Lowet- Lowet, why?’ Sk’jin mutters, blinking rapidly, attempting to school his expressions. Ilya seems concerned but doesn’t comment.

‘It’s difficult getting any form of access for surveillance in those area, if you even get them at all,’ the Ožkan says instead, ‘There aren’t a lot of places that transmit signals or transmissions that can actually be picked up on unless they’re incredibly local.’

‘So you’re saying this was purposeful?’ both Sk’jin and Hoseok ask at the same time.

‘It’s possible. What are the chances that your captain would appear in one of the very few transmittable frequencies from that System?’ Ilya gives them a small smile as he pauses at the frame where it looked like Namjoon was looking straight at the camera, ‘Maybe he was hoping to send you a message. To tell you that he was all right.’

‘What a dick,’ Sk’jin grumbles under his breath, thrusting the screen back at Hoseok as though the footage had offended him.

‘Don’t be mean about daddy!’ Taeh’yung exclaims, his tone nowhere near innocent.

Sk’jin splutters, raising his hands to cover Ilya’s ears as he hisses, ‘Shut your fucking mouth I know you’re doing it on purpose you little shit!’

Taeh’yung ducks behind Jungkook, cackling under his breath as Sk’jin released Ilya’s head, the latter grumbling about not being a child anymore.

‘Is there any report or progress regarding what I requested?’ Hoseok tries.

Ilya predictably shakes his head, smoothing out his hair as he says, ‘This will take a while I’m afraid.’

Hoseok figures it would. Especially if whoever issued the order took the precaution to cover up their steps with the knowledge that they would try to find out who did it.

‘We came here so that we could go up towards the Bridge, my left-hand will be coming in soon, and I thought it was best to go up to the Bridge for privacy.’ Ilya announces, ‘But if you’re more comfortable being in here, then that’s fine too.’
Yoongi shakes his head at once, ‘Don’t like being confined to the Medical Bay.’

Ilya nods and gestures for them to follow them out.

‘Should I carry you Yoongi?’ Hoseok hears Taeh’yung offer the Human. It’s followed by an amused snort and guesses the offer is declined.

As they walk out of the Bay, Hoseok doesn’t know why but he’s worried Jungkook might see the Vicitra inside one of the other smaller Bays. But to his relief, all the doors are closed and several inconspicuously placed, but well armed, Beings stand near the doorway, chatting amongst themselves.

‘You don’t need to oversee?’ Jimin asks, addressing Ilya. He looks genuinely curious, looking around the slightly emptier than before Lobby area.

‘Jaen is keeping track of everything,’ Camat replies reassuringly, ‘He’ll bite my head off if I try to intervene. Says I’m too disorganized.’

‘This situation is painfully familiar to me,’ Sk’jin chuckles.

Ilya laughs as well, eyes twinkling.

The difficult thing was it was difficult to think badly or suspiciously of Ilya as a Being, especially with how he was now with Sk’jin.

Hoseok puts it out of his mind for now- there was no way of figuring this out right now, and making understanding Ilya’s networking system and the depths and lengths of their plans would make it difficult for them to leave safely considering they were at their mercy.

Taeh’yung skips ahead, jovially linking arms with both Sk’jin and Ilya, chatting nonstop. Hoseok slows his steps a little, allowing Yoongi and Jimin to walk ahead, followed closely by Jungkook, and he brings up the rear.

Hoseok tries his best to shake off his uneasiness. It wasn’t helping- especially Jungkook who is clearly confused by the heavy contrast in attitudes towards this new situation. Obviously Jimin is just somewhat relieved to have Yoongi out of immediate danger, able to get medical help at any given time. Sk’jin seems to be completely immersed, almost in a trance with how he looks at Ilya.

Hoseok redirects his thoughts to Namjoon.

That was, though he had no direct evidence to claim it as true, a clear indicator directed straight at them, to show he was doing all right. Hoseok pauses the footage at the clearest shot.

He’s dressed in a different thick jacket, the hood up his head but his face is clear. There’s a sort of patch over the side of his face, covering the exposed side of his face. His movements were not hurried or scared- he seemed completely fine. Were the GI taking care of him? Were they forcing him to do something for them?

Why Lowet?

Why would the GI take him there of all places?

‘Worried,’ Jungkook says quietly as he pauses to walk next to Hoseok. ‘About Namjoon.’

‘He seems fine,’ Hoseok says as reassuringly as he can, moving away from the footage and pulling
up a list to note down all of the supplies the Laikin would need come their next step. ‘Not injured, see?’

Jungkook nods grimly, looking serious. Maybe he was feeling the same too.

‘Hey,’ Hoseok reaches over to ruffle the rapidly growing Vicitra’s hair, ‘It’ll be okay. We’ll get Namjoon back, and we’ll be okay.’

Jungkook takes his hand instead, squeezing it.

They have to go through 3 separate lifts, a tram, and another lift to get up to the main Bridge. The view from here offers them a high angle over the massive prison below. The length of it extends so far, the most distant headlamps on the communication towers blink faintly at them like the stars around them. The massive solar-sails that stretch beneath the whole structure gleams in amber hues, giving the prison a strangely gold-lit appearance from below.

There’s a lot of traffic over one side of the prison, a section of their Docking terraces glowing blue as the Atmoshield works to support the artificial atmosphere. As part of the security, most prisons operated this way, with a very strict regulation following the Atmoshield as inmates had the tendency of escaping out of prison, believing that the Atmoshield outside would protect them as they waited for whatever escape ship was coming to get them. This worked for a while, until the GLA simply designed every prison to never actively operate Atmoshields until issued or ordered by the officers inside the prison.

That lead to many painful and fatal escape attempts, several (many) messy court hearings and trials, and now this was the official standard. At least everything had somewhat stabilized, and no more news about prison sections losing their internal Atmoshield settings collapsing came out.

Though it did wonders to really minimize criminal activity for a while.

The Bridge is huge, at least 50 Beings at their stations. Hoseok spies Jaen near the Navigation Table. She turns around and holds up her hand, 4 fingers held up. Ilya nods and points them to a staircase that lead downwards to a wide and open meeting room.

‘He’ll be here in 4 minutes,’ Ilya says as he sits down, tapping on the table surface twice and similar to the way the table at Amme’s ship had produced tall glasses with water, a few mismatched metallic mugs pop up, filled with a clear pinkish-looking liquid that smells like flowers.

‘Nice,’ Yoongi comments, taking the cup and inhaling the fragrance.

This obsession with tea was definitely a little worrying.

There’s a lot of noise filling in slowly from upstairs, in the Bridge. Ilya is already smiling, looking towards the stairs as he stands again.

Hoseok notices how Jimin is nervously fidgeting. Out of nowhere, Taeh’yung suddenly stands and exclaims, ‘No fucking way!’ Yoongi spills his tea at this exclamation, eyes wide as he looks around worriedly. Jungkook shrinks a little, wincing at the growing noise that’s clearly cheering and sounds of joyous greeting.

‘We get excited,’ Ilya laughs, ‘It’s been quite a while.’

Sk’jin smiles up at the Ožkan, looking entirely at ease and just generally incredibly content.
Hoseok exhales out slowly as footsteps approach.

‘Ilya?’ a voice calls out.

The Ožkan walks around to the staircase, smiling brightly. The footsteps are louder and Hoseok stands to greet this Being Ilya had insisted was so important for them to meet and talk to.

And clearly, judging by everyone’s reactions, no one was expecting this.

He’s fairly tall, smooth fair skin and hair that has clearly been freshly coloured a dark shade. His eyes are a bright neon red, hypnotic and powerful even from here.

And the horns atop his temples, double-helix, clear and well-maintained, tinted rosy-shades, refracting light around him like a halo.

This was a Khol’isa.

A New Born Khol’isa.

‘Jn’young,’ Ilya hugs the Khol’isa with a strength that would hurt most. ‘It’s good to have you back.’

‘Spaces, it’s good to be back,’ Jn’young, the Khol’isa smiles beatifically, actual tears in his eyes.

Hoseok is instantly reminded of K’mara. Not because she’s practically the only other Khol’isa he knew other than Sk’jin, but because of the sheer pure strength of Khol’isa characteristics he exuded.

It’s a horrifying and tragic contrast to Sk’jin, who was undoubtedly such an incredibly beautiful Being but it’s so clear now.

And Yoongi’s words from earlier make it horrifying clear why this contrast was so evident now.

‘I know it’s kinda out of the blue but-’ Ilya pulls away and steps aside as Sk’jin gets up, ‘-honestly I’m still in shock myself but-’

‘-oh!’ Jn’young exclaims softly, looking at Sk’jin, eyes wide. ‘Sk’jin?’

Sk’jin seems a little flustered but it’s not enough to snap him out of his own shock of seeing Jn’young. Of knowing what this Khol’isa now represented for every other Khol’isa across the Known Universe.

This young Khol’isa steps forward, a genuine bright smile on his face as he regards all of Sk’jin with awe and respect.

‘Ah, wow a famous Khol’isa who isn’t K’mara, this is amazing, I’ve heard so much about you-‘ Jn’young smiles, his eyes turning into crescents as he walks over to greet Sk’jin who is still gawking at this elegant Being.

He definitely did not lack any of the characteristic Khol’isa suaveness or charm. He’s dressed like the others, but somehow, as was with Sk’jin, there’s an added air of elegance and regality even to the simple space-suit, partially opened to reveal normal crew-wear.

‘You- you’re not born of the Bloodmoon,’ Sk’jin manages to get out. ‘Are you?’

Jn’young just smiles and shakes his head. He opens his mouth to say something, eyes flitting
around the room to glance at everyone but then he stops.

Ilya moves quickly, grabbing Jn’young by his shoulder with a firm grip, keeping him in place as colour drains from the Khol’isa’s face, eyes widening in what could only be horror before it settles a little. As if he knew this was going to be reaction.

‘You-’ Jn’young stares at Jimin, a strange sort of intense hatred passing over his face.

Both Yoongi and Jungkook stand, their bodies tensing as though prepared to jump at any sign. Jimin flinches a little, but doesn’t look away, standing his ground.

‘What-,’ Jn’young glares around at Ilya, ‘What are they doing here?!’ he demands with a hiss.

‘He’s not from Axudar,’ Ilya says calmly. ‘He’s not one of them.’

‘He’s one of them-!’ Jn’young hisses, pushing Ilya’s hand off of his shoulder, taking a step back, ‘How dare you bring him aboard knowing full well-‘

‘Jn’young-’

The Khol’isa throws another horribly withering glare at Jimin before turning on his heel and storming out.

‘What is he talking about,’ Jimin asks, his voice clear and steady, hands in tight fists. ‘Please tell me what he meant by that.’

Ilya sighs quietly.

‘Jn’young, as you could tell, is a Khol’isa. But he was not born the way Sk’jin, or even K’mara was born. Not under the Bloodmoon,’ Ilya begins, sitting back down. Sk’jin still looks stunned, eyes wide and not really blinking a lot. ‘He’s a New Born- much like Jungkook. He was created, in a sense, by what Sk’jin referred to as the Akramanese. He is unlike the GI, created by the Yishengs- he is awake, but like Jungkook here, he’s always been awake- he never had Dreams.’

‘Why did he-‘

‘The Akramanese had many ships- many places that they went to. The Yishengs came across one such ship- there was, from what we have been able to piece together and understand, a great clash between the two at one point close to Axudar. Ndica kept what the Akramanese could not take with them as they fled. And amongst them was Jn’young,’ Ilya continues over Jimin’s questions. ‘Ndica had this great loot- but he didn’t know what to do with them. But with this discovery, this unsuspecting battle, they were able to find a hidden system.’

Jimin sits down again, eyes unmoving from Ilya.

‘You can guess now what they found,’ Ilya smiles bitterly. ‘Who they found. What the records say about the Treaty was not quite what it was- Ndica was able to convince them, the Verktaë, as Jn’young calls them, to help them in their crazy schemes.’

‘You’re saying- you’re saying that Menigišiti, Jimin’s home System, collaborated with Ndica, to create the GI?’ Hoseok asks, his own tone sounding hollow to his ears.

Ilya nods.

‘Jn’young was, for too long, a subject for experimentation,’ Ilya continues. ‘When they could not
obtain what they wanted from Jn’young and the others like him, they changed their experiment to sport. But what they managed to extract from their “studies”, the Beings in power in Axudar were able to use to transform and change, to “better” themselves, with what they found, in collaboration with these new friends.”

Of course- Axudar was where the entire hypothesis regarding immortality, regarding the foundation of the experiment that later entrapped Sk’jin and his crew- and considering what Amme had told him about the Beings within Axudar.

‘Jn’young was in many ways, one of the luckier ones- it took him a long time to figure it out, but the Khol’isa in him was strong.’

This must have all started after Jimin was taken by the Akramanese.

‘He got out,’ Sk’jin whispers, ‘He was able to get out.’

Ilya nods.

‘He doesn’t talk about it, but he lost a lot.’ Ilya explains. ‘When he got out- he tried to help the others that were there- but he couldn’t.’

‘When- when was this?’ Jimin asks tremulously.

‘Jn’young says that according to the older ones that were there, the estimation is that it was going on for almost 8 centuries.’ Ilya replies. ‘Jn’young himself is only around half of that. And I found him just 15 sols ago- and I-’ Ilya stops, ‘I admit I did it because of you,’ he looks at Sk’jin. ‘It felt right to do so and I – it was so much more than I could have anticipated. What we were able to understand, what we found out.’

‘This is why you won’t go to Axudar, why you won’t let us go,’ Sk’jin says softly.

Ilya nods and he looks at Jimin, addressing him directly.

‘When I first saw you- even after Camat reported to me of where you came from, and from hearing what Jin had to say- I almost couldn’t stop myself from ordering you to be immediately killed.’

Jemin lowers his head.

‘I’ve seen what happened, seen and heard and felt Jn’young’s pain,’ Ilya says softly.

‘It’s not his fault,’ Yoongi suddenly hisses, leaning in front of Jimin as though to protect him, ‘He knows nothing of this! Stop blaming him for something he didn’t know and didn’t have any control over! He’s innocent in all of this-!’

‘I know,’ Ilya interrupts calmly, ‘You were blinded, Jimin, but I think you have been able to put the piece together haven’t you? You’ve been able to guess what truly happened.’

Jemin nods mutely.

‘Why didn’t you say anything?’ Hoseok demands. ‘Why didn’t you just tell us?’

‘Because you need to hear everything from Jn’young himself.’

‘He clearly doesn’t want to talk to us,’ Yoongi states flatly, ‘We heard enough from you. We’ll be taking our leave-’
‘Yoongi-‘ Sk’jin says with a warning tone but Jimin stands up, gently pushing Yoongi to the side.

‘If Jn’yong is willing to speak to me, I would like to hear everything he is comfortable telling me,’ Jimin sounds resigned but there’s a determination in his tone. ‘I made a promise, that I would make right what was wronged. To the best of my abilities- I will make things right.’ The rings of light that make the iris of his eyes glow bright. ‘I am the Yemenifesi Ch’inik’eti of my people- the Fate of the Menigišiti, and what my people have wronged, I will make right.’

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Chapter End Notes

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(Author’s Notes)

MERRY CHRISTMAS YA HEATHENS
So.
Hi
I am first of all
Extremely sorry for this late update
I’ve been trying my best to keep a schedule to write but, it’s been tough.
Also yes this is indeed Park Jinyoung from Got7
Anyone who knows me
Will know
Of my uh, feelings, regarding this, Park Jinyoung of Got7
And I was like, he would make an absolutely perfect, Khol’isa, like omg have you seen the man because hahahahahaahahahahahahahahahahahahahahaaaa its not like he haunts my dreams or anything of the sort hahahahahahahahahahahsaveme
So yeah! But the next update I am MAKING SURE TO UPDATE ASAP I have a good number of holidays coming up so I will!!!! Make sure to update more frequently
I hope this isn’t too depressing right before Christmas *nervous laughter*
ALSO THE NEXT CHAPTER IS GONNA BE GREAT IM JUST THROWING IT OUT THERE
And also once more
I AM SORRY FOR THE LACK OF NAMJOON I SWEAR ITS WORTH IT
This chapter is a bit slow so I apologize T_T
Yoongi is pleased that at least, not everyone could directly see him.

But he had to be purposeful. Had to really caution and move himself in a specific way.

The room is nice- not too different from what Ilya had set up for them, clearly expecting them to stay aboard. And Yoongi wouldn’t mind but they, he,- all of them really, had things to do and complete. There’s just one major difference- there was no bedding set up.

He’s lucky Jn’young doesn’t shoot him immediately the moment he spots him sitting on his couch, inside his locked room, walking out half-naked and still damp from a shower.

‘For fuck’s-‘ he curses, before stopping still and inhaling deeply, closing his eyes.

‘Sorry to intrude,’ Yoongi greets the Khol’isa, not at all apologetic.

‘Get out of my room,’ Jn’young snaps, ‘I have nothing to say to you or to that Verktaē- how he’s managed to veil Ilya’s eyes I-‘

‘I’m not here to represent Jimin or talk on his behalf,’ Yoongi cuts across, unmoving. ‘I’m here because I would like to know more about Axudar, your experience, and why Ilya is adamant we do not step foot in Axudar.’

‘By all means, return the Verktaē to where he comes from, not my problem,’ Jn’young spits out, still unmoving from where he stood. ‘Besides, what’s in all of this for you? Why are you even here?’

Yoongi stands up, noting how Jn’young’s posture changes slightly. Following his body angle, Jn’young was probably aiming for the hidden TeorSer behind the clothing cabinet to the side as it was the closest. Well, good luck to him because Yoongi already removed every single hidden weapon in the room.

He turns, and lifting his shirt, literally exposes his back to Jn’young.

‘This explains nothing and gives me absolutely no explanation even more now as to why you would be with the Verktaē,’ Jn’young spits out though his expression is a little troubled. Yoongi shrugs, pulling down his clothes to cover himself again. But Jn’young’s staring at him, eyes studying his exposed skin for a while.
'You’re one of the GI,’ Jn’young remarks.

‘I am,’ Yoongi nods.

‘You’re incredibly aware.’

‘I am still me, I am GI, and I am still Yoongi, of Earth, despite dying in Bhumi over a millennia ago,’ Yoongi replies, sitting back down again.

‘…you’re one of the Regurgitated?’ Jn’young questions.

Vividly, a memory from Earth flashes through his mind. Taking a quiet moment near the rafters, and a few stray cats walking about.

‘I don’t know what you mean by that,’ Yoongi replies honestly before adding, ‘Ilya told us a shortened summary of what happened to you. I would like to know more details from you.’

‘I have nothing to tell you,’ Jn’young states bluntly. ‘Go ask that Verktaë- he’ll know everything.’

‘Jimin is innocent in this.’

‘I don’t care what you think- he’s veiled your eyes, the same way they veil everyone’s eyes,’ Jn’young walks about his dresser, picking up a few random bottles. ‘He’s veiled Ilya’s eyes- how I don’t know-‘

‘Jimin has done nothing,’ Yoongi repeats again, ‘We are trying to understand what happened, why it happened-‘

‘Listen,’ Jn’young snaps, not looking up from the slender bottle he held in his hands, ‘I don’t care for lies and deceit-‘

‘I’m not lying- and neither is Jimin,’ Yoongi states again, ‘If you would like to check and see, I am sure that the Khol’isa have ways of making sure that they are not being lied to.’

Jn’young looks up at this, expressions shrewd, eyes gleaming neon red for a second. Yoongi does his best not to look away on instinct.

‘I just want answers,’ Yoongi tells the Khol’isa. ‘I want to understand.’

Jn’young doesn’t say anything, still staring straight at Yoongi in that uncomfortably sharp way. Yoongi doesn’t add anything else, doesn’t even move. After a very long minute, Jn’young looks away. He pats stuff over his skin, fingers carefully brushing through his hair, around his horns, shaking the back for excess water.

He stands a few minutes later, removing his outer-robe and coming to sit in front of Yoongi.

Honestly the staring game is getting a little boring but Yoongi will do what needs to be done. Jn’young gives him an amused smile- one that, objectively thinking, Yoongi knows is attractive. He’s been living with a Khol’isa for a while now and he understands the way they move, the way they react.

‘…you’re not uncomfortable?’ Jn’young asks.

‘…should I be?’ Yoongi replies back.

‘…nakedness normally makes Beings uncomfortable.’
‘…I don’t know why *your* nakedness should make *me* uncomfortable?’

‘…I suppose so.’

‘…”

A few minutes later, Jn’young is dressed up in flowy trousers and a neat robe to wrap around his torso, flowing out just a little below his hipline to create an elongated silhouette.

‘Please follow me,’ Jn’young gestures elegantly to Yoongi before leading them out of the small room into a doorway Yoongi honestly had no idea existed. Jn’young looks back just a little, a coy smile on his face.

‘For some privacy.’

Definitely hereditary.

It’s clearly his sleeping chamber- it wasn’t very personalized so Yoongi guesses it was set up for him by someone else. He spots a few crates stacked up to the side, clearly filled with the Khol’isa’s belongings. Next to the comfortable bed is a lounging chair that Jn’young immediately occupies, leaning back to make himself comfortable. There’s a footstool of sorts near the low tea-table before it. The door closes behind him and the lights dim.

Jn’young’s eyes are hypnotically glowing in the dim light setting.

‘Well,’ Jn’young gestures in a manner that’s so reminiscent of Sk’jin and K’mara, Yoongi nearly rolls his eyes. ‘I am always down for some quality story time, tell me why you’re here. Or better, tell me what the Verktaë told you to make you stay.’

Yoongi grimaces at the Khol’isa, unable to help himself as he takes a seat. It’s not comfortable.

‘I could show you instead,’ is Yoongi’s reply.

Jn’young squints at him.

Yoongi immediately looks away. Instinct flares in him.

‘If you want me to trust you- you’re going to have to trust me.’ Jn’young says curtly.

‘You may have not met any other Khol’isa before but I’ve met more than is necessary, I’ll be honest,’ Yoongi says as he meets Jn’young’s burning eyes again, with more determination.

‘K’mara yes? I’ve heard a lot about her,’ Jn’young looks amused, leaning in a little closer, studying Yoongi in detail.

Yoongi shrugs, allowing himself to relax.

‘How do you intend on showing me?’ Jn’young tilts his head a little. Again, objectively, Yoongi can see how this could be seductive. It’s a little amusing to witness. Again.

Yoongi reaches into his pocket, his movements slow, so as to not alarm the Khol’isa.

Yoongi knows Jimin would not want this. It’s the reason why he removed his Comm Device, why he asked Taeh’yung to cover for him. The Zhak’gri hadn’t exactly given him a response, but it felt right to alert him first.
Yoongi takes out a small bell, still attached to a strip of fine fabric, the edges just a little frayed from when he yanked it out of Sk’jin’s sleeve.

Placing it down on the low table, he says, ‘If this is what it takes for you to believe me.’

Jn’young stares at the bell, eyes shrewd and calculating.

Yoongi’s knees hurt a little from sitting at this awkward height for too long. Damn, Khol’isa’s and their ability to make you uncomfortable even in the most petty of things was definitely a trait that was imbedded in their genetics.

Jn’young gets up. Walking to the end of his room where a sort of dresser was set up. Jn’young studies his face for a moment in the mirror.

‘Do you like tea, Yoongi?’ Jn’young asks his reflection.

Yoongi nearly rolls his eyes again.

One of the influences, major influences, he’s had regarding his interest (some would say morbid obsession) with tea was because of how he saw K’mara use it.

It’s not surprising that Jn’young, a Khol’isa, would employ the exact same tactics despite having never met his own species before.

‘I love tea,’ Yoongi replies, knowing full well how monotonous he sounded.

Jn’young snorts. It’s elegant when he does it, the same way Sk’jin was elegant despite how crass he could get. Jn’young’s back is turned to him as tiny tinkling sounds echo about the room.

He’s not sure how long he can stay here without alarming the others- mainly Jimin. He’s banking on Jimin’s distraction to buy himself time to do this.

Jn’young returns with an elegant platter, a teapot with 2 teacups in it. Yoongi would like to pause and admire the cups but he can’t afford to lose time.

If this goes according to his plan- he would only have 5 minutes at most before Jimin could sense something was wrong.

Jn’young smiles charmingly at him, placing a cup in front of him.

‘I hope it’s to your taste.’

Yoongi looks at the teacup, reminded once again of K’mara and her office at the Mothership. He also realizes how the lights have dimmed even more, the haze of the room thickening without his realization.

Jn’young’s eyes gleam at him in this purplish haze. Looking down at the cup, Yoongi sees the reflection of a reddened moon.

‘Aren’t you going to show me?’

Jn’young’s cup is to his lips, only his eyes revealed.

Yoongi takes the cup and gulps down the entire tea in one go.
Sk’jin knows that the others don’t trust him.

And he’s fine with it.

He wasn’t expecting Ilya’s crew to accept him.

It’s funny how Sk’jin finds himself with this situation- was this what it felt like to be an intern?

It’s, funnily enough, a refreshing change in pace.

Not when this information regarding Jimin and his apparent connection to Axudar and what was happening/happened there. Ilya keeps giving him sheepishly apologetic looks and Sk’jin wants to say that he doesn’t need to feel responsible.

At least unlike his own intern’s experiences, Sk’jin had one Being who believed and trusted him.

‘Tell me about Māho,’ Sk’jin says instead, as he and Ilya find themselves back at the Bridge.

There’s a reversal in how things were now, Sk’jin notes with some fondness. Instead it was now Sk’jin who was trailing after Ilya, asking questions at the speed of light. And it was instead Ilya telling Sk’jin his stories from the past, recalling comedic but just dangerous enough to be exciting situations with a glint in his eye.

‘Other than the fact that Evdos has been very embarrassed and is incredibly angry?’ Ilya wheezes while Camil struggles to maintain a straight face.

‘Māho is the closest Dock to Axudar that’s also completely free of its hold,’ Ilya tells him, crossing his legs up on the chair. Sk’jin does the same too. ‘Every other Dock within Axudar’s general parameter is a part of their network.’

‘I heard that Axudar has a sort of center for taking in political refugees- I think in Māhanga?’ Sk’jin inquires, remembering Namjoon’s words.

Ilya grimaces, giving Sk’jin a knowing look.

‘It’s a cover,’ Ilya states simply, ‘Māhanga is actually where Jn’young escaped from. And Māho is where he managed to escape to.’

‘So your hold over Māho is because of Jn’young?’

‘More or less- he was living in the depths of Māho for a couple of sols, reevaluating, studying, observing- he explained how useful it would be to have Māho on our side.’

‘How did you do it?’
‘The Deputy Fanger,’ Ilya grins, ‘She’s been leading Māho for nearly over a century. She refuses to listen to Axudar- and she’s under no obligation to do so either actually. She can’t be bought, bribed, blackmailed.’

‘Then what did you do?’ Sk’jin asks, intrigued.

‘Nothing,’ Ilya says honestly, ‘I don’t think there’s much negotiation or persuasion needed when you can see, all too clearly, what Axudar is doing.’

‘She’s been there before?’

‘She’s picked up enough Beings like Jn’yong to put two and two together.’

‘There’s more like him- more like Jungkook,’ Sk’jin breathes out. It’s not surprising really- Sk’jin’s already reached that conclusion a long while ago- but the fact that this seemed strangely common now is enough to make him worried. The fact that Ilya was so aware of it all, that the whole crew inside the ship would be so familiar with it –

‘What does that word mean- the one Jn’yong used to call Jimin,’ Sk’jin asks before repeating it carefully, ‘Verktaë.’

Ilya sighs quietly, ‘It’s a term from Axudar- it means hidden sight or sullied eyes.’

*Never look directly at an eclipse.*

‘I’m guessing Jimin’s not the only one with eyes like that then?’ Sk’jin says carefully.

Ilya seems to be pondering for a while, a furrow between his thick eyebrows.

‘I wish you would just believe me- just trust me,’ Ilya says quietly. ‘We can take you to Bhumi. I don’t think you have to enter Axudar to understand.’

‘It’d be great if Jn’yong could tell us everything so that we can make that decision,’ Sk’jin replies with a shrug before reaching over to take Ilya’s gnarled hands in his own, ‘Like I said, it’s not my decision to make.’

‘If it were?’

‘If it were,’ Sk’jin winks with a smirk, ‘I think it’s safe to say Nambike would be so done with me.’

Ilya laughs, suddenly looking child-like, and Sk’jin is so so fond.

Ilya is still smiling, looking down at their hands, before he says, ‘Jimin is different- his eyes… they’re not like the ones Jn’yong calls Verktaë.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Jimin called himself the Fate of his people,’ Ilya says, ‘Of his System.’

‘I honestly don’t know how that works, but yeah, he says he’s the Fate, and that his sister was the Heart. Something about this being the way it always is in his System,’ Sk’jin tells him.

‘A lot of times- most times- most Beings fight fate,’ Ilya says thoughtfully, ‘They fight fate, they make their own destiny- things like that.’

Sk’jin frowns a little, getting an inkling of what Ilya was saying.
‘Is what we consider order, or peace, or unity, the same if the decisions taken are made by fate?’ Ilya asks carefully. ‘Even if this order, this peace is something that has been known for a long time- that has been followed for the length of life itself- all minds evolve, all hearts evolve- what if they wish to control their own fate?’

‘Can’t you tell me?’ Sk’jin asks breathlessly, ‘Tell me what happened.’

Ilya exhales carefully, opening his mouth to speak when his Comm Device sparks up with lights. The same is echoed for Camil, and everyone else aboard the Bridge.

Sk’jin senses, more than anything else, a strange ripple in the air.

‘What is it-?’ he’s asking when Jimin bursts inside the Bridge, eyes bright and filled with fear. Alarmed, Sk’jin stands up and makes his way towards Jimin but he was clearly not here for him.

‘Where is he?’ Jimin demands.

‘What-?’

Jimin is addressing Ilya who also looks equally confused. Sk’jin notices how Camil is casually standing, ready to intervene. He senses again, rather than sees, the way every single TeorSer in the room was now aimed not only at Jimin, but also at himself.

Sk’jin is not offended in the least.

‘I can’t- I can’t find him-’ Jimin exhales out, ‘I can’t find him where is he?!’

‘Jimin who-‘ Sk’jin tries.

‘Yoongi!’ Jimin says forcefully. ‘I can’t find him! He’s here! But I cannot see him!’

Hoseok and Jungkook appear at the doorway, expressions wary, posture strained.

‘We can search for him-‘ Ilya begins, his voice calm, gesturing subtly to the others to stand down. But Jimin is not appeased in the slightest.

He takes a step forward and immediately Sk’jin knows something is wrong.

The light around him is soft. His hair moves as though a gentle breeze were combing through his strands- a breeze of starlight, and sunlight. His movements almost seem slow- but they’re weighty.

‘Where is he?’ he asks, his voice soft but at the same time echoes throughout the shockingly dark Bridge. To Sk’jin’s horror, everyone in the Bridge seemed to be in a state of awe- as though struck by some godly sight.

Taeh’yung appears out of nowhere, enveloping Jimin in what appeared to be a gentle embrace but the ripple of power that rockets out of them is clear enough to show how this was no gentle embrace.

‘Shh,’ Taeh’yung murmurs softly. ‘He’s doing what he thinks is best.’

Jimin’s light dims and he’s suddenly pushing Taeh’yung off.

Next to him, Ilya falls to his knees, breathing harshly.
‘Ilya-!’

‘I’m fine-!’ he gasps, already struggling to stand up.

‘Where is he?!’ Jimin rounds up at Taeh’yung.

‘He’s gone to talk to Jn’young,’ Taeh’yung is holding him in place, ‘Give him time-‘

‘He doesn’t have time!’ Jimin pushes Taeh’yung but the Zhak’gri doesn’t budge.

Jimin glares up at Taeh’yung.

Sweat trickles down Sk’jin’s back. He sees how Hoseok pushes Jungkook behind him.

A hand pulls him and Sk’jin realizes how Ilya is pulling him back.

‘Move,’ Jimin says in a quiet voice.

‘Give him time,’ Taeh’yung repeats, ‘He knows what he’s doing.’

Jimin exhales shakily, ‘Move.’

Taeh’yung shakes his head.

Sk’jin doesn’t know what to expect. But he’s not expecting Jimin to punch Taeh’yung across the face.

Taeh’yung falls heavily, a comically offended expression on his face as he hits the ground. There are confused exclamations everywhere, the sounds of TeorSers charging up, and questions rising up. But Jimin is already exiting the Bridge.

‘Fuck- fuck-!’

Sk’jin darts out after Jimin, already being tailed by Jungkook.

‘What’s wrong-?’ Hoseok asks at once.

‘Jimin can’t find Yoongi and I think that idiot Human has gone and done something that’s going to get himself killed-‘Sk’jin hisses.

‘He’s stretching himself too thin-‘Ilya is panting behind them.

‘You- you know what-?’ Hoseok stutters out.

‘I know what you’re talking about,’ Ilya confirms, ‘I’ve seen it before, heard of it-‘

‘But- oh fuck!’ Hoseok curses, stopping, ‘Where is Jn’young’s room?’

‘Follow me,’ Ilya says tiredly.

‘What was he thinking-‘Hoseok hisses, clearly upset as they jog after Jimin and Jungkook.

‘He wants answers,’ Sk’jin sighs, already able to interpret Yoongi’s actions and choices, ‘He knew that he was the only way Jn’young would listen-‘

‘I would have talked to him,’ Ilya argues, ‘-I would have been able to get him to talk.’
’I think Yoongi didn’t want to wait,’ Sk’jin says quietly, eyeing Jimin’s slight form ahead of them. ‘Besides- you know Jn’young- do you really think he would want to speak to Jimin at all?’

Ilya doesn’t say anything, a grimace on his face.

’But this is risky-‘ Hoseok argues, genuine concern in his yellow eyes.

’It’s an extremely sure way of getting Jn’young to listen and talk,’ Sk’jin states bluntly. ‘It’s what I would’ve done.’

Ilya gives him a worried and pained look.

’Jiminie!’

Taeh’yung blurs past them, an echo of green in his wake.

’He can’t do this again!’ Jimin yells, ‘You know this and yet-!’

’He knows this too!’ Taeh’yung stops Jimin, his expression reprimanding as he towers over Jimin. Sk’jin hears Ilya gasp, grabbing Sk’jin’s arm in a painful way, stopping him from jogging forward.

’What-?’

’Where are you finding these Beings?’ Ilya asks, his eyes wide, pupils narrow as genuine fear seems to strike him. In a way Sk’jin has been desensitized to Taeh’yung and his chaotic and terrifying ways.

’He’s fine,’ Sk’jin says as reassuringly as he can. ‘He won’t do anything.’

It’s not exactly a promise Sk’jin can definitely make or keep, but it would have to do for now.

’Jimin,’ Ilya calls. ‘I’ll take you to Jn’young’s quarters.’

Jimin looks away from where he’s staring down Taeh’yung. The Zhak’gri has a downtrodden expression, small pout forming on his lips, arms swinging despondently. Jimin ignores him and walks back towards Ilya.

’Follow me,’ Ilya says, gesturing towards the right, ‘I’ll take you up.’

Hoseok and Jungkook follow after the two. But Sk’jin waits, holding his hand out for Taeh’yung to follow.

’Did Yoongi ask you to cover him?’ Sk’jin asks.

The Zhak’gri nods, put out as he takes Sk’jin’s hand.

’Why did you agree?’

At that Taeh’yung expression shifts just a little, eyes gleaming with a strange light.

’I want to see it too.’

The wait in the lift is painful. Jimin’s eyes are glazed, staring at a point in the air before him. Jungkook is extremely stressed, holding Hoseok’s hand in a painful grip while the Ngfy’widan keeps giving Sk’jin questioning looks. Ilya, and Camil who had in the last second, shoved himself inside, are both staying quiet. Camil is openly carrying a TeorSer but no one really seems to be
paying any mind.

When the doors open, Sk’jin doesn’t need to know which doorway they were headed to.

There’s a sickeningly familiar red gleam that seeps through the spaces of the slightly open doorway down the hallway.

Jimin is already sprinting. Sk’jin makes to follow but, again, for the nth time today, he’s held back. To his surprise it’s Taeh’yung.

‘What?’

Taeh’yung isn’t looking at him, instead looking down the doorway.

‘Jinnie I don’t think you should go inside.’

‘What?’ Sk’jin feels slightly offended, he pulls his arm out of Taeh’yung’s hold. ‘Let’s go!’

Taeh’yung doesn’t say anything, doesn’t move or make to stop Sk’jin as he rushes into the now open doorway of what was clearly Jn’yong’s personal and designated living quarters.

The reddish light is concentrated towards an adjoining room, the doorway of which is occupied by Hoseok, Camil, and Jungkook.

Inside the air is misty, and Jimin is holding an unconscious and startlingly pale and lifeless looking Yoongi in his arms but it’s difficult with Jn’yong and Yoongi’s hands trapped together-

Ilya is trying to pull them apart.

‘Let go!’ Jimin yells, tugging Yoongi away with a strange rendering sound as their hands come apart. Almost immediately, the mist seems to fade away as the light slowly ebbs back to its natural cool tones.

Stepping inside, Sk’jin immediately feels strangely weighted- as though he were stepping into water.

‘Yoongi!’ Jimin is dragging Yoongi away towards the doorway, away from Jn’yong who was panting as though he just ran a marathon. Sk’jin notes the empty teacups on the low tea table.

‘What did you do to him-!’ Jimin hisses, eyes burning bright as he directs his confusion and panic at the other Khol’isa. Sk’jin steps further inside despite feeling heavy, trying to help Jimin lift Yoongi by grabbing his feet.

To Sk’jin’s horror, Yoongi’s eyes are open- still focused on Jn’yong, hand still reaching out for the Khol’isa.

‘Oh fuck-!’ Sk’jin curses, ‘Get him out of here!’

‘Jn’yong-!’ Ilya is trying to shake the younger Khol’isa off.

‘I- I don’t know-‘ Jn’yong is stammering, clutching his head in pain, unable to look away from Yoongi, his other hand still raised up too as though he was unable to put it down.

‘Hey- hey, look away-‘ Sk’jin moves to block Jn’yong’s line of sight from Yoongi he knew what was happening and Jn’yong wasn’t old enough- wasn’t trained, wasn’t born with the knowledge of what this meant- Sk’jin takes Jn’yong’s hand and tries to push it down when-
Jn’young tears his gaze away and looks up at Sk’jin, eyes aflame—light from a lifetime past burning bright and—

With a delayed gasp, Sk’jin plunges straight into the Bloodmoon.

*“I promise you,—that I’ll make everything right again when I come back. I’ll even be the fuckin’ hero if that’s what’s needed.’

Remember me. Remember me.

I’m afraid.

Remember us. come back

It’s dark and empty.

Please remember us. come back

come back

Is there more than this?

Don’t leave us.

Do I … do I have a place there?

come back

Don’t leave me.

come back

You came back.

‘No- no I’m not-‘

-it wasn’t as though they could stop, they just chose not to…

…and I started laughing because how could anyone be so incredibly idiotic I mean what possibl-

-as already starting to yawn, I feel guilty bringing her here, should I change the ven-

-is that- wait who are you? I’ve been seeing you in my dreams-

....is that…is that you? Are you…are you god? A … spirit? What are you-

‘You don’t know me.’

‘I do. And I will make you see it.’

‘See what?’

‘You.’

-ve to help me please I don’t know where I am what is going on I cannot live here this isn’t right please I just want to go home-
-will they even recognize me? do you recognize me? I have no home to go back to- no planet- she was destroyed she was bled and left to die I have to go back to her…

…come back so that I can tell you I don’t forgive you for being so brave.’

…do you hear that sound? Is that what music is supposed to be? I don’t remember anything? Am I alive?

‘No please I can’t-‘ Sk’jin can’t breath can’t see can’t speak-

He was back in here back again and he can’t- he has to leave he can’t be here again. He knows that if he looks closely, he will see forms and shapes- he will see their dreams, memories, and an emptiness that was simply waiting.

A soft song starts to play- the voice echoes from past the darkness that lay between stars, undiscovered and cold.

And now Sk’jin knows this song. He knows this melody now.

There’s shuffling footsteps- sounds of someone desperately trying to speak, desperately trying to connect- it’s more than just one- there’s more than just one, Sk’jin can sense it now-

‘You’re alive- you’re all alive,’ it’s his voice- Sk’jin remembers hearing it so clearly- remembers the words so clearly- ‘You’re all living, and you were born into this Continuum.’

The white starts to fade, and red seeps in instead.

‘No- no-‘ Sk’jin closes his eyes but there’s no way he can un-see the stain. He could do this- he could break out of this all he had to do was-

‘That’s so insulting- was real handsome ‘fore, y’know? I was a motherfucking prince aight?’

The red darkens but before him Sk’jin sees it. Sees himself.

Somehow strangely short, but in a way that suggested he was entirely folded inwards, the Being is floating, encased in crystal like ribbons that should have been beautiful but instead seemed stained and inlaid with an impossible amount of blood, biological fluids, and half-formed organs. The neon red eyes glare at him through the strange misshapen form-

‘Khol’isa.’

‘In the flesh- well, some of it.’

Sk’jin moves as best he can- he’d spent so long in here, he knew he had to get out- knew he couldn’t let the Bloodmoon stain this place through him and he reaches forward as further as he can, straight into his eyes-

‘Wait-’ he tries to stop Sk’jin.
‘Spaces, what now?’ Sk’jin snaps.

‘What about them?’

‘What ‘bout them?’ Sk’jin retorts.

‘What- what about them?! They’re Beings! They’re alive! I can feel them- their thoughts and memories and-‘ Sk’jin wants to sigh but he’s also curious.

‘You could feel ‘em? What’chu mean?’ he had been alone in here for so long. Unable to speak, unable to flow into their memories as they did with one another. Because Sk’jin wasn’t supposed to be here. He was supposed to die. But he didn’t, and so he lingered.

It had all been an accident.

‘Like- I can sense them- I see their,- I dunno, memory or something-‘

‘Ain’t my problem and frankly not yours either,’ but Sk’jin doesn’t have time to entertain this Human, he’s here to get him and that Long-Huon out.

‘There are tens and thousands of them in here! Maybe even millions! We can’t abandon them here-‘ The Human is horrified, terrified.

‘Ain’t our problem.’

So Sk’jin grabs him hard, making sure the Long-Huon is latched on as well and ignoring the Bloodmoon below him, reaches upwards.

‘Hey! I got them out! They’re here!’

Pushing through what felt like a cloudy haze of compressed red, Sk’jin breaks out of the condensed air and into an endless white space that is bitterly familiar.

‘And I’ll miss you too.’

‘Fuck-!‘

Sk’jin hates it here. Hates it to his core. At least he was in an area where he could think on his own, and not possibly drown and lose himself. There’s a heavy weight on his head.

‘Spaces fuck not again,’ Sk’jin curses, reaching up to rub at his temples when he’s met with something more than just hair. Something so achingly familiar, forcefully made foreign to him, and now just- just back.

His stuttered breaths echo around him, the white air around him moving in accordance.

‘What-?’

‘Hey! Help me!’

Spinning around quickly, Sk’jin finds himself staring across at Jn’young. The young Khol’isa is waist deep in the white mist, weighed down by something as he tries to lift himself up. Sk’jin, confused, rushes forward.

‘You should know how to get out-‘ Sk’jin begins but the younger Khol’isa has his own questions.
‘How are you here?’ Jn’yong asks, eyes wide, confused and lost, staring at his horns.

‘Long story what’s wrong- ‘ Sk’jin asks but once he’s close enough he sees it.

Jn’yong is holding onto Yoongi. The Human’s face is horrifyingly blurred, only his hand clasped in Jn’yong’s is clear.

‘Fuck fuck-‘

Sk’jin tugs, reaching down to grab onto Yoongi’s hand clasped in Jn’yong’s unrelenting grasp. But it was nearly impossible. Yoongi’s head lolls back, his eyes disappearing into the mist, mouth slightly open.

‘He’s such an idiot oh Spaces why is he such an idiot- ‘ Sk’jin complains, exhaustion seeping into him as he does his best to pull.

‘I didn’t- I didn’t know- ‘ Jn’yong pants, sounding wretched and as exhausted as Sk’jin felt. ‘I didn’t know he was-‘

‘It’s okay- or I mean, I’m saying it’s okay just- ‘ Sk’jin gets out, kneeling and positioning himself properly, doing all he could to help Jn’yong up. ‘Here, hook your arm around me and I’ll reach down-‘

Jn’yong wraps an arm around his shoulder and reaching down, Sk’jin grabs Yoongi’s wrist. It’s cold.

‘Okay I’m going to try and-‘

‘How did are you here?’

‘Uh- followed my memory from when I was last here?’ Sk’jin pants out, tugging as hard as he could. Yoongi’s hands are like ice.

‘You’re-?’

‘No- fuck, I was never really here- nor there, it’s- it’s complicated, I’m not an egg, New Born- whatever- ‘

There’s a ripple of light through the white space.

‘What was that-?’ Jn’yong looks around nervously, ‘What was-‘

There’s a sense of anticipation- of excitement, of arrival.

Of being Found.

‘It’s probably someone coming to help us now that he’s straightened his head out- ‘ Sk’jin says tersely, tensing as he exerts his whole strength. The light ripples again and there’s a sigh that rings throughout the mist.

Jimin sinks down towards them in a halo of light, illuminating the white space with warmth and dimension, as though the spaces around them finally found direction, as though they could finally stop waiting.

As though they could finally just rest.
He reaches past Jn’yong and Sk’jin, levitating above them as though afloat in this white mist, and without much effort, pulls Yoongi out.

‘I’m sorry-’ Jimin gasps out, holding Yoongi’s still unconscious and still blurred form close to himself. ‘I’m so sorry.’

Jn’yong, still panting, very confused, glances around at Sk’jin. And Sk’jin, with complete grace and dexterity, reaches forward and smacks the young Khol’isa right between the horns.

‘Ouch-!’ Jn’yong hisses, ducking away, maintaining distance.

‘What were you thinking,’ Sk’jin scolds at once, ‘This is not some simple mind manipulation or persuasion you should have known it wouldn’t be safe to do this-!’

‘I didn’t know,’ Jn’yong retorts his expression genuinely disturbed, making his way to stand up before hesitantly approaching Jimin who was carrying Yoongi in his arms, crouched down as though to completely hide and cover the Human. ‘How is he here?’

‘Because I walked here once upon a Dream,’ Jimin replies in ways of explanation, carefully looking over Yoongi as though to check for injuries.

Sk’jin remembers Amme’s words, of how they had found Jimin in the center of that ship, all the eggs or as Ilya refers to them, New Borns, connected endlessly to him.

Jn’yong looks at Sk’jin as though for an explanation and Sk’jin just shrugs. Honestly, he’s too old for this.

‘Why isn’t he awake?’ Jn’yong asks, looking worried as he stares at Yoongi.

‘For someone who was determined to be unhelpful, you sure did take the initiative to do something incredibly dangerous,’ Sk’jin comments.

‘He came to me-’ Jn’yong begins, defensive and also panicked.

‘-he’s not supposed to do this anymore!’ Jimin says quietly from where he’s crouched. ‘You- he was nearly-‘

Sk’jin looks back to where Jimin had come through, and where Yoongi had nearly sunk into.

Remember me.

‘Hey come on,’ Sk’jin says as calmly as he can, approaching Jimin, his tone soothing, ‘You got to him. You got to him on time-‘

‘He doesn’t have time,’ Jimin says quietly, eyes never leaving Yoongi’s face. ‘He doesn’t have time anymore and I can’t- I can’t ask him.’

‘Ask him what?’ Sk’jin carefully places his hand over Jimin’s shoulder, squeezing gently.

‘I can’t ask him to stay,’ Jimin whispers.

He’s not crying, no tears in his eyes. But his sorrow is profound. The mist around him stirs with agitation, with helplessness, the melody of this eternity shifting to one of sorrow.
Jimin’s sorrow.

Jn’young doesn’t say anything, just watching the two with a sort of curious wonder in his eyes.

It’s silent.

Maybe for Jn’young and Jimin.

But for Sk’jin, he can’t un-hear what this place sounded like. His eyes burn as the Memories of this endlessness weep.

‘What did Yoongi show you?’ Jimin asks, adjusting Yoongi in his arms and with a free hand gently pushing his hair away from his face.

‘He- he…’ Jn’young sighs out slowly, ‘He showed me what the GLA did to him, what the Yishengs Ndica and Tlun’hlá operated under the guise of developing a secret corps unit, how he first spoke to Amme about his suspicions. He showed me what he overheard, what you helped him clarify from his memories, and how he landed in Bhumi, how he met you and how- how he was taken. He showed me the red evil-and how they took everyone. Taking them apart. He showed me the- the way he awoke, showed me how he found you again, and how he truly Awoke. He…he showed me a lot of you.’

Jimin finally looks away, looking up at Jn’young.

‘I’m sorry,’ the young Khol’isa says hesitantly, coming down to kneel by Jimin. ‘I misread you, and who you are.’

Jimin shakes his head. ‘Do not apologize, I am probably worse than what you thought. What you think.’

Jn’young looks confused, looking to Sk’jin for answers. But Sk’jin just shrugs.

Welcome to the fucking club where nothing makes sense.

‘And what about you?’

‘What do you think pupa? It’s like I said,’ Sk’jin replies back, ‘I existed here, there, nowhere, every where else- a continuous nightmare you could say.’

Jn’young mulls over his words, studying Sk’jin carefully.

‘Then how are you-…’

‘Out and about?’ Sk’jin asks for clarity, making Jn’young nod. ‘I’m here because I made a promise.’

Sk’jin doesn’t want to elaborate, and Jn’young doesn’t ask for further details.

‘What did you show him?’ Jimin asks, looking back down at Yoongi. He looked a little better, a little more clear, and less blurry.

To Sk’jin, Yoongi reminded him of a blurred memory. The colours somewhat still there, the form and shape outlining a general idea, a resemblance.

But fading slowly, surely.
Desperately clinging onto remembrance.

‘I- I haven’t-‘ Jn’young begins hesitantly, biting at his inner cheek, eyebrows furrowed, hand twitching as though remembering a past pain. ‘-it was too- too painful to continue and so I thought I would- I would bring us through here and-‘

‘It doesn’t work like that for Yoongi,’ Jimin says quietly, still gently stroking Yoongi’s hair, ‘He’s different- he’s-…he’s bound to me.’

‘Yoongi isn’t…’ Jn’young pauses a moment, clearly trying to sound as sensitive and polite as he could. ‘I’ve never…I don’t think I’ve ever really looked into anyone like him before- it’s just-‘

‘Could you show me?’ Jimin asks quietly. ‘Show me what you would have shown Yoongi.’

Jn’young is still hesitant. He glances over Jimin with what could only be deep rooted and conditioned hatred, suspicion, and distrust. And if what Ilya has been hinting at was only just the surface level of what had happened, what was still happening, then it wouldn’t be easy for Jn’young to simply address Jimin without any malice whether intentional or not.

But the Khol’isa glances down at Yoongi instead, staring hard.

‘It’s probably hard for you to believe in Jimin, even Yoongi- but do you really think I would be here if this was not something we truly believe is necessary?’ Sk’jin suggests quietly.

Jn’young falters, gaze lowered to the misty floors. Sk’jin doesn’t look too close, he can sense them all around, watching, listening, sleeping, dreaming, gathering around Jimin’s position.

Then he seems to make up his mind. He gives a short nod, stepping forward.

‘I don’t know- what will happen to Yoongi um- if he comes with us,’ Jn’young says regretfully, extending his hand out towards both Jimin and himself.

‘I’ll take him up,’ Jimin says with a nod of understanding, ‘He- he could do with some sleep.’

Neither Jn’young nor Sk’jin know how to react when Jimin stands, Yoongi in his arms, and quite suddenly, as though it was always there, a doorway appears some ways behind him.

It’s a little ajar, and opens a little more, as though welcoming Jimin in.

Neither Sk’jin nor Jn’young make to follow after Jimin, but they do look in through the gap.

It’s a small house. A home.

Sk’jin recognizes the aesthetic as distinctly Human. This was Yoongi’s make- his design, his space.

It’s dimly lit inside, just a few lamps switched on in the room down the entry hall they were looking into.

It looks comfortable, lived in, and cherished.

Sk’jin can hear the rain.

The bedroom door is slightly ajar. They watch as Jimin places Yoongi down on the bed. He lifts the blanket over him, tucking him into bed.
‘Yoongi is not like the GI, who have no memories- essentially just biological replicas of the original with no link to their previous life,’ Jn’young declares, ‘And he’s not a New Born, nor is he anything else made by those Creveni- but I can tell that- and though I’m quite sure, that he’s one of the Regurgitated, it doesn’t seem to…seem to really explain much of who he is as a whole…’

‘The ones who took Namjoon- they’re the ones who are slowly waking- and it’s-…it’s not right.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘You can see it, can’t you? With the Human. I know that- we call them New Borns- like Jungkook. They are made and born whole- individual. Perfect almost.’

Sk’jin nods to that.

‘They’re not meant to be alive really.’

‘You’ve met others like him- Ilya mentioned this.’

‘I don’t know how similar they are with each other- but, from what I saw, and what Yoongi showed me he’s- he’s been alive, for too long.’

Sk’jin looks away from Jn’young and back at where Jimin is brushing away Yoongi’s hair from his face, saying something quietly even though Yoongi wasn’t responsive.

‘I think there’s something we’re all missing- and maybe we can all come to understand why all of this happened, why all of this is happening,’ Sk’jin replies, stepping away as he notices Jimin slowly exiting the bedroom.

‘I don’t like vagueness and miscommunication,’ Jn’young declares.

‘Wow, would have never guessed with your behavior,’ Sk’jin replies dryly.

Jn’young sends Sk’jin an unimpressed look.

‘The Creveni that you mentioned- who are they?’

‘I think you know them in a different name,’ Jn’young says after a short pause, ‘But they were the ones responsible for what happened to the Human’s planet. What Yoongi showed me from his past in- in Bhumi, what Jimin refers to as the Red Evil.’


A plague in its own right, the effects of which they were still seeing even though it was eradicated.

‘And what is “regurgitated”?’

Jn’young gives him a curious look, ‘Yoongi didn’t know the term either- you’ve never heard of it?’

‘Would I ask if I knew?’

‘It’s what I was talking about,’ Jn’young sighs out, ‘You’re aware then- of the GI, that the Yisheng created them. More like clones and replicas than anything else.’

Sk’jin nods.

‘Then there’s the ones that the Creveni created- to an extent- at least for me, they’re all New Borns.'
We’re all New Borns.’

‘All right…’ Sk’jin frowns.

‘The only real distinction we can see, is like with all living creatures and creations,’ Jn’young explains, ‘We are not always born to singular fate.’

Jimin looks at them from across the hallway, listening to their words.

‘The GI are the way they are because the Yishengs who created them, who molded them crafted them the way we know and expect of them – that is all they have known, that is all they are made to know.’ Jn’young says simply, ‘But the New Borns- most of us, some of us, a few of us- we are born different- we are Lived different.’

‘How long did it take for her to wake up?’

‘Wake up? No- I broke the OrTank.’

‘…you what?!’

‘I broke the OrTank- I was worried- I didn’t know what she was encased in, how long it would last, was it in fact poisoning her? I didn’t know- so I broke it. And she woke up an hour or so later. And since then I’ve raised her as my own. We can’t go live in the ports, because the Collectors will want to take her. Some of the patrol units know about her- but they think she’s just deformed- maybe mutated. That’s not exactly uncommon here.’

‘Jungkook- he’s- I guess according to Ilya- he’s a New Born too.’

‘The young Vicitra?’ Jn’young inquires.

Sk’jin nods, ‘We found him in Ynqaba. We believe the Yishengs were there-’

‘He was intended to become like the GI then?’ Jn’young interrupts. ‘I’m different- I was created by the Creveni, and then taken by Ndica into Axudar.’

‘But-‘

‘In essence, your youngling Jungkook and I are the same. We can both be called New Borns. In fact, so can the GI, and all the creations of the Creveni.’ Jn’young explains.

‘But Yoongi-‘

‘-is one of the Regurgitated.’ Jn’young answers, ‘I know that sounds- unpleasant, but it is what it is.’

‘What makes Yoongi different?’

‘He was created but…for lack of a better word, he was not incubated after his creation. He was not sent long enough into void, this space here, to completely…well, to lose himself- it might differ,’ Jn’young adds thoughtfully, ‘Hence the term regurgitated, - he was swallowed, but never digested properly I guess.’

Sk’jin makes a disgusted expression, but it made sense, if you thought about it. All of the eggs, those New Borns- all of the GI that were contained in those OrTanks, all of the Beings growing and sleeping within the Akramanese ship- they were held in those states for who knew how long.
But Yoongi.

According to Amme, she was able to rescue just a handful of them before Ndica had the rest destroyed, after discovering them in Megibīya, not too long after the Akramanese took in Jimin.

‘With the true GI, and with what the Creveni made. But from what Yoongi showed me- he was created by the Creveni, and then he was abandoned, taken in by the Yishengs instead.’ Jn’yong looks thoughtful before he adds, ‘It’s probably after that Ndica took hold of me from the Creveni.’

Sk’jin’s mind is abuzz, ‘Is that why- is that why he remembers so much of his past? Why it’s almost as though he has two separate…identities, within him?’

Jn’yong nods, adding with regret, ‘When I was in Axudar, I saw quite a lot of them- the Regurgitated. And it- they never lasted long.’

Sk’jin can’t help but glance inwards.

Jimin isn’t looking at them, instead he’s looking down at Yoongi’s sleeping form, now completely whole and no longer blurred.

‘What happened to them? What did- what did they do in Axudar?’ Sk’jin asks quietly.

Jn’yong just shakes his head, glancing away from the doorway and actually stepping back. ‘I never saw for myself, but I don’t think- I don’t think it would have ended well.’

‘But- but you? And Jungkook-‘

‘I’m not Regurgitated, it’s why I have no- no connection or memory of the Bloodmoon, as the Khol’isa call it.’ Jn’yong explains, ‘And for Jungkook-… you’ve known him longer. What do you think?’

‘He was born Awake,’ Yoongi had said about Jungkook. ‘He was raised.’

‘But he’s the same,’ Taeh’yung had replied, ‘Same.’

‘Maybe same, but different.’

Jimin steps out, closing the door behind him that somehow was never there in the first place.

The sound of the rain disappears along with it, like a faded memory.

There’s a lot to think of- to digest, with what Jn’yong just explained to them. Sk’jin understands why Ilya had insisted that they hear it from Jn’yong.

Jn’yong doesn’t say anything, but just extends his hand out to Jimin. Jimin takes it without hesitation. Jn’yong then reaches for Sk’jin’s hand.

‘Uh-‘ Jimin begins hesitantly.

‘No princeling, I’m coming too,’ Sk’jin waves aside Jimin’s obvious worry that Jn’yong immediately catches on, retracting his hand just a little. But Sk’jin grabs it quickly. ‘Let’s get going pupa, time is of the essence is it not?’

Jn’yong grimaces, still very handsome regardless, and nods.

The white of the mist collapses almost immediately, the air forms shapes and boundaries so
quickly, expanding in mass and time around them.

They’re in a crowded street, Transporters zipping around carelessly, Beings crossing the road here and there with no regards to the incoming traffic around and above them.

Ah, typical city behavior.

‘Welcome to Axudar, more accurately, welcome to Prime-T One City, in Kaitütei,’ Jn’young announces, ‘Notable Beings from Kaitütei is of course, the Yisheng Ndica, our favourite Yisheng in the whole Known Universe, ah, may he rest in peace.’

It’s a typical street, nothing noteworthy or amazing. It was just a normal street.

At least for Sk’jin.

There’s a gasp from Jimin. Sk’jin follows his line of sight upwards, towards a massive billboard jutting out of the edge of a tall building.

It’s a typical advertisement. Flashy edits, and then a few highly stylized models who are apparently enjoying whatever ointment they put on their skin as they rub their very naked bodies with glee and relish. Sk’jin doesn’t understand why something like this would illicit a reaction like a gasp- he highly doubts Jimin is a prude. But then the models are replaced by someone who is clearly a spokesperson or representative.

And that’s when Sk’jin feels his own gasp erupt out of him.

The Being who has replaced the models is tall and slim, elegance in the way they move their six arms. Their skin is a fresh light sapling hue. They had no hair, the crown of their head expanding fan-like behind them. If Sk’jin had to guess, he would assume that the shape would change according to each Being in the species. But he doesn’t have time to think about it because-

‘As you can see – we can give you your youth back- not just the physicality, but the strength, the feeling, the sensation- and most of all, selective memory that allows you to relive your life to the best of what it was!’

Twin solar-eclipses were looking down at him.

Immediately, Sk’jin stares across at Jimin who is beyond confused.

If Sk’jin remembers right, only Jimin had these eyes- he was born with them, displaying his rank, his title- his calling.

The billboard continues to play the ad, and Jimin can’t tear his eyes away. He stares and he stares.

‘It’s not the same,’ Jn’young says conversationally, ‘I don’t think it is. Look closely.’

Paying attention back at the advertisement, Sk’jin concentrates. The language is warped- Sk’jin can hear how he doesn’t understand it, but at the same time, as this is Jn’young’s memory, he understands Jn’young’s understanding of it. His memory of it.

The Being with Jimin’s eyes continues to speak and Sk’jin squints, studying this Being’s features.

‘It’s here.’

He feels a finger lightly stroke across his temple.
And Sk’jin sees it.

Faint marks- surgery incisions.

‘Verktaē.’ Jn’young says, ‘Hidden eyes, sullied eyes.’

The advertisement changes back to the beginning, back to the models who are dramatically aged, and in a flash, their forms changed to the younger ones. This time when they turn, Sk’jin notices the long dent down their backs.

‘This is wrong,’ Jimin whispers. ‘This is wrong.’

‘Come with me,’ Jn’young says.

Sk’jin tears his eyes away from the ad.

Jemin is still staring, watching as the Verktaē appears again.

‘That’s—. . . .that’s a Be’iji- a native of Be’i, the fifth sister-planet of Menigištiti,’ Jimin says, dazed, tone almost monotonous. ‘The Be’iji they— they cannot…they can hear lies. They can hear falsehoods and—’

‘Jemin.’

Sk’jin forcefully turns Jimin’s head away, forcing him to look away.

‘I think you need to stop thinking about what you once knew,’ Sk’jin says firmly. ‘What you once believed in. What you thought was the truth, what you thought made sense, what was once infallible. You need to leave that behind— you’re not in that lifetime anymore. You’re here. And here everything is different. And we need to understand how, and why.’

Jemin inhales shakily before exhaling slowly. He nods, taking Sk’jin’s hands that were on his face and squeezing them.

‘Come with me,’ Jn’young says again.

Jemin doesn’t let go of Sk’jin’s hand and he can’t rue him that.

When he really thinks about it. Thinks about the state of Jimin’s mind— how he woke up after so long, and having all of this shoved at him, having the knowledge that his very existence was the cause and reason behind so much destruction and death. Knowing that your System, your planet, your own people, those you thought you knew— how all of that meant nothing, how none of that represented what you thought you knew so well. Knowing that the Being you love is hopelessly tied to you, and the fate you hold — and knowing that that was the very thing that was slowly killing them.

He squeezes Jimin’s hand back.

‘I’m glad you’re here,’ Jimin tells him quietly as they follow Jn’young down the crowded street.

‘What does it mean?’ Sk’jin asks quietly. ‘What…what do your eyes really mean?’

Jemin looks ahead, lips pressed into a thin line before he takes a deep breath. ‘As the... as the Fate of my people- the Yemenifesi Ch’inik’eti, I represent the Fate of Menigištiti, and all those who live there.’
'You represent the decisions, the path- what should, what shouldn’t happen?'

Jimin pauses before he shakes his head, ‘I- it’s not like that. I never make decisions, I just- I advise, I listen, I just-’

‘A lot of times- most times- most Beings fight fate. They fight fate, they make their own destiny-things like that. Is what we consider order, or peace, or unity, the same if the decisions taken are made by fate? Even if this order, this peace is something that has been known for a long time- that has been followed for the length of life itself- all minds evolve, all hearts evolve- what if they wish to control their own fate?’

‘What does it mean- if someone else has it?’

‘That wasn’t- that wasn’t the real one it was- it was wrong,’ Jimin emphasizes, looking up at Sk’jin, ‘Was it because I left Menigišiti? Was another born to replace me immediately this- it’s never happened like this before and-’

‘-look here.’ Jn’young calls, pausing to a stop a little ahead of them.

Jimin turns pale.

There’s another advertisement, this time it’s closer down on a display near an intersection. Going around and past a few other Beings on the street, Sk’jin practically drags Jimin closer, a cold sensation hitting his stomach.

It’s not too surprising- he’s been able to put two and two together.

Every time Jn’young, or even Ilya, spoke about it, though brief, Sk’jin always had the feeling that they were referring to more than just one Being- more than just one Being with the same eyes as Jimin’s.

And in this advertisement, shot and edited to look like some sort of interview, is a native Axudarian, asking questions to a group of 4 separate Beings. There’s no volume, and Sk’jin guesses it’s some form of tabloid media, just showing a brief rundown of what was happening for an episode to be broadcasted later. They seem to be having a light-hearted chat. All four of the interviewed Beings have the exact same eyes as Jimin.

Stunned into silence, Jimin just stares.

‘They called them Eclipsing Travelers,’ Jn’young explains, leaning against a high streetlamp, ‘Brought here by Ndica, to help Axudar be united and whole, to put aside their differences, and embrace oneness.’

‘Hoseok had mentioned this,’ Sk’jin frowns, ‘And even Namjoon- during their research, and from information from Amme- about how Axudar had…maybe undergone some sort of very intense reformation regarding…well, I guess regarding the way they look?’

Jn’young smirks at that, ‘That’s a very polite way of putting it. And also not quite exactly that.’

Sk’jin glances around the street, looking closely at the Beings around them. None of them looked all too strange, for their own species at least. Or, in Sk’jin’s perspective of them at least.

‘I think in order to explain this more, and before I show you more about myself, I should explain Axudar and…and what they believe in.’ Jn’young says thoughtfully. ‘It’s to to…not to really excuse them, or an attempt at empathy because,’ Jn’young snorts, ‘I lived the means of supporting
their beliefs and if I could destroy every single one of them I would.’

There is no exaggeration in Jn’young’s tone- no attempt at a statement made just for shock-value; Jn’young held absolutely no qualms about doing what he says he wants to do.

‘Axudar has three livable planets in it,’ Jn’young starts out, reclining elegantly against the lamppost. ‘Each planet clashed against each other over resources, who held the “correct” beliefs- all of that usual stereotypical topics that cause conflict across the Known Universe. But here in Kaitûtei, they took things a little- let’s say they took things a little too far.

‘As you know- Axudar as a whole has always long held…theoretical studies quite high, regarding the topic of immortality.’

‘It’s where the whole nonsense behind Digitized Souls first came up.’

Jn’young nods.

‘While the planets within Axudar all had their differences- they all craved one thing.’

‘Immortality?’ Sk’jin scoffs.

‘The ability to choose,’ Jn’young explains. ‘You’re aware that Kaitûtei is under the GLA protection for Environmental Protection right?’

Sk’jin and Jimin both nod.

‘Actually, all of Axudar is placed under this protection- and not just as a cover up- but genuinely because the System of Axudar is actually very fragile, and the Beings within it, the original natives,’ he nods at the television at the interviewer, ‘they have incredibly short life-span, and are incredibly sickly. They naturally live just a short 50 Standard sols.’

Sk’jin is taken aback by this. There were a lot of planets and Systems that did indeed have Beings with short life-spans, but this was incredibly low.

‘It’s actually- maybe it’s not a coincidence, but you’re familiar with Gaia- Earth, where Yoongi is from correct?’ Jn’young asks.

Both Sk’jin and Jimin nod hesitantly at this.

‘In the past, Earth too had an incredibly short life-span, by Standard measures anyways. But that was in the past, before the GLA “rescued” them and integrated them into the Known Universe. As a result, Earth was rescued, her Humans restored, and now they’re able to live longer, become stronger- and all of that good stuff. Similarly, Axudar had reached that breaking point Earth did so many millennia ago.

Over population, pollution, depleting resources – Axudar nearly ate itself in order to survive.’

‘But Axudar has long been a part of the GLA,’ Sk’jin frowns. ‘No System under the GLA would go through such a turn without the GLA knowing and, despite their faults and greed, the GLA would attempt to move in wouldn’t they?’

‘Unlike with Earth, Axudar staged their own apocalypse,’ Jn’young explains. ‘It purposefully corroded itself, broke its own people, essentially tore down and stripped the Beings of Axudar into nothing more than hollow and empty shells, simply waiting for anything that could save them.’
‘Is that when Ndica made his move?’

‘I think… I think it has a lot to do with what Ndica himself wanted to do- his own beliefs, his belief that this Universe was meant to be a certain way.’

‘Ndica did this to his own System?’ Jimin asks harshly.

Jn’young nods and adds, ‘Much worse has been done, for far less.’

Sk’jin knows all too well what the Yishengs had wanted to do with the Known Universe.

‘And so he came in- much like a long awaited hero coming to rescue the helpless,’ Jn’young explains. ‘He turned the Beings of Axudar against the GLA, by orchestrating a good near millennium of absolute horror over Axudar, making it appear that the GLA had abandoned them. And he claimed to bring life, to bring healing- it was all just, just simple GLA tech- terraforming equipment, nurseries and incubators- the means to regrow Axudar, replant resources, develop and fund tech and equipment for fuel and energy – because despite being such a forefront in developing technology, Ndica bled his own System dry in order for him to control it.

Axudar became his petri dish to experiment in.’

‘Of course,’ Jimin says softly, ‘Starve someone long enough, and they will eat anything given to them.’

Jn’young nods, ‘And then with the help, no doubt, from Tlun’hla, who had a very big hand in the development of the GI, brought their twisted beliefs into Axudar and forever changed the way all of Axudar would simply choose to be.

‘Already in the past, the Beings of Axudar would indulge in all sorts of attempts to elongate their lifespan, to extend their existence, to live more than they could – they cursed their fate, only allowed to live such a short period when they believed they had so much to give, so much to do, so much to know- this hunger they had surpassed any hunger they would have, and it was what Ndica and Tlun’hla fed into.’ Jn’young pauses, looking down for a moment before adding slowly, ‘He was able to convince the Beings of Axudar to allow Ndica to do as he wished – to introduce this new technology he had developed and strengthen the people. Of course this was all simply a very vague reenactment of what happened on Earth- the Axudarians were able to live longer- and this was already a sealed approval from the mass public for Ndica to do as he wished.’

Not only was Ndica a native, but he was a Yisheng, blessed with long life, and the very ideal the now starved and depraved Beings of Axudar craved to become. Of course they would follow and listen obediently.

‘It was during this time when they first made contact with the Verktaë,’ Jn’young narrates. ‘But nothing would come of it for a long while, until one day it did.’

‘Was there a reason? A cause?’ Sk’jin asks, glancing down at Jimin who is quick to ask, ‘When did all of this happen?’

Jn’young looks uncomfortable as he says slowly, ‘I do not know, how much of what I say you will believe when I say this but- but time does not function the same way we understand it, in Axudar.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘As I mentioned before, Axudar has some of the lowest life-spans, right?’
Sk’jin nods slowly whereas Jimin’s eyes widen as though in realization.

‘This doesn’t necessarily have to do with their physical capacity as living Beings, but rather the state in which their System exists.’

‘That’s the stupidest thing I’ve heard,’ Sk’jin announces, ‘Time is the same- it’s linear and will continue to be so.’

But Jn’young shakes his head and so does Jimin.

‘What do you mean by shaking your heads,’ Sk’jin scowls at both of them. ‘You’re saying Axudar exists in a different time frame?’

‘I think- Sk’jin I think,’ Jimin says carefully, ‘I think Axudar might have been, a place where the First Children once were.’

‘Great not this First Children bullshit again-‘ Sk’jin huffs out.

‘So- I can’t give you a straight timeline- because...because it doesn’t add up,’ Jn’young explains carefully. ‘But Ilya tried to add it all up together- and though I could be wrong, I believe this all happened nearly 1300 sols ago by Standard measurement. But for me- for me it was no more than 2 centuries ago.

And once the Verktaë and Ndica collaborated, and with the discovery of the Creveni and what they were doing by creating New Borns, Ndica was able to use his own System to develop and grow his own New Borns. Obviously a lot did not work out- but once he stabilized, once he was able to obtain more of the Creveni’s creations from Bhumi, he and Tlun’hla were able to start working on the GI.’

‘He was so sure of himself- with the Verktaë he was able to bring in not just a beloved legend long believed in Axudar, to life, but he was able to stabilize his System.’

‘What do you mean?’ Jimin asks breathlessly.

‘It’s not like the whole of Axudar thought that Ndica was their hero, or in some Beings case, their God- many did not like Ndica and where he was going with Axudar- but after the Verktaë came, it was almost as though they were simply subdued and lulled into a singular state of oneness- of being united.’

A very bitter cold feeling settles in Sk’jin’s stomach. He looks at Jimin, remembers what he had done, just within the hour, at the Bridge, how all the Beings aboard and nearby simply stood in awe of him, in complete subjugation.

‘And Ndica was able to recreate, in a sense, the control he believed in so much- the power he craved, the ability to manipulate; in the belief that any of this had to do with peace or unity. He was able to do it in Kaitütei-‘

‘-how- how can you make an entire planet just believe-‘ Jimin starts but he stops, clearly understand how it was done. How it could be done.

Because if Jimin were to look at it- if anyone were to look at any sort of belief system- the answer lay there. It was simple. Too simple.

Jn’young gives him a lazy smile, ‘And it didn’t stop there- all of Axudar quickly fell into this state of delusion. And now the Beings in it live a strangely charmed life you could say.’
‘Are they- are they being controlled?’ Sk’jin asks, ignoring how Jimin looks sharply at him.

‘Not exactly controlled no,’ Jn’young shakes his head, ‘They’re…in an elevated state. What they choose to see- their eyes veiled. They could banter with each other, have minor arguments over the taste of food, preferences of summer and winter- but they do not exist beyond anything more than that.’

‘And so what do the Verktaë have to do with this?’ Sk’jin inquires, ‘Are they the ones responsible for living like this-’

‘I wouldn’t say they’re all responsible for this,’ Jn’young shakes his head. ‘While the Verktaë are responsible for a lot of wrong- they’re here in Axudar simply because they too, like those in Axudar, wished to go against their fate.’

Sk’jin can’t find it in himself to look at Jimin.

‘What do you mean by that?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘What I know, what I came to understand- all of this was learnt from when I pried into the minds of the Verktaë, and into the minds of some other Beings who either aided Ndica and Tlun’hla, or even a few Axudarians,’ Jn’young explains without hesitation. ‘So what I did with Yoongi was not the first time I had done it.’

Sk’jin can’t help but glare at the other Khol’isa. Now was not the time to prove oneself.

‘Every time I looked into the minds of the Verktaë, of why they choose to be there, of why they wanted to come to Axudar, what was their purpose- their memories only ever lead to once source-,’ Jn’young looks at Jimin almost apologetically at this, ‘- a large courtyard, filled with all sorts of Beings, all of whom I recognized as being Verktaë but- but that was when I knew their eyes were not always like this,’ Jn’young taps across his temples, ‘-and at the top of this courtyard stood 7 pairs of Beings, behind them a large OrTank of sorts, and within it encased a naked Being.’

‘What- what did she look like?’ Jimin asks, words strained, hands forming fists.

‘How –how did you know-?’ Jn’young looks bewildered.

But Sk’jin is putting it together now and it feels all too familiar.

‘Her eyes were always closed,’ Jn’young says gently, ‘Sometimes she wasn’t clear in the memories- but always, the ring of light on her forehead was clear and bright.’

‘Tsirin,’ Jimin whispers, hands trembling nearly violently, painfully gripping Sk’jin’s hand.

‘I think you saw his sister,’ Sk’jin explains in answer to Jn’young’s questioning look.

Jn’young truly looks regretful.

‘And?’ Jimin asks forcefully, ‘What else was in this memory?’

‘A few of the 11 pairs would speak, but the clearest thing any of these memories could conjure was one of them saying ‘we will break from our fate of hiding- we will control our fates from this day’.’

Jimin exhales shakily before he sinks down to his knees.

Jn’young looks incredibly uncomfortable.
Sk’jin is tugged down too, his hand still clasped in Jimin’s shaking one.

There’s nothing Sk’jin can say.

It was clear.

Ndica managed to take control over Jimin’s Council, or at least a majority of them as Jn’young had mentioned 7 pairs; from what Sk’jin remembers Jimin telling them, the Great Council consisted of 11 pairs of representatives of every existing planet is Menigišiti. Ndica had planned on taking Jimin, to use him much the same way the Akramanese used him to create and “incubate” their eggs. And while that plan was thwarted by the appearance of the Akramanese, Ndica clearly got hold of his sister.

If his sister, the Heart of their System, was anything like Jimin, then being able to use her to gain complete and utter control over all of Axudar would be child’s play.

What could Ndica have said to the Council to make them break their System like this?

‘They changed their eyes, they said, to symbolize their control over their own fates,’ Jn’young adds hesitantly. ‘And the scars are a reminder of how they were once simply following blind faith.’

Jnim is shaking, the air around them shifting visibly. Jn’young instantly stands straight, looking around with wide eyes.

‘Uh-‘

‘It’s him wait-‘ Sk’jin nods at Jimin before crouching as low as he could to address Jimin carefully. ‘Jimin- hey kiddo, breathe with me here okay? There’s nothing you can do about this-‘

‘-where did I go wrong?’ Jimin asks, his voice monotonous. ‘Where did I go wrong, what did I do wrong.’

Sk’jin looks around helplessly.

He knows what Jimin is feeling- maybe not in the same scope, but he knows.

When he lead his network, so many centuries ago, in a time that felt like a lifetime ago, he did his best to organize and bring stability to the many Beings who followed him and worked for him. And sometimes things didn’t work out- sometimes it was his fault, sometimes it wasn’t- and Sk’jin always pondered over what he did wrong- what went wrong.

‘What did I do, what did I not see?’

Jn’young is increasingly agitated by the chaos around them as the Prime-T One City starts to violently warp, no longer under Jn’young’s control or even within his memory.

Suddenly, Jimin looks up, straight at Jn’young.

‘Show me-‘ Jimin says, ‘I need to see her- I need to see what you saw in their memories I need to see-‘

Sk’jin feels himself being pushed aside as Jimin seems to teleport before Jn’young taking the Khol’isa’s face in his hands.

‘Please show me-‘
Jn’young hesitates before his eyes focus, serious and intent.

The floor falls below Sk’jin and he’s surprisingly not in a heap on the stone floor.

It’s a beautiful place. The sky clear and wide above, the sun just about right and warm. There are tall hills, the peaks of white snowy mountains to the west, and a wide ocean to the east.

But the details are blurred. Because this wasn’t Jn’young’s true memory- but rather a memory of a memory, faded and washed. But it doesn’t stop Jimin, pushing through the crowd.

He fit into this memory- like he belonged. Jn’young appears next to him, his expression disturbed.

‘It seems that there was some sort of coup planned,’ Jn’young says quietly as Jimin stops before the raised courtyard, unable to move on ahead as the memory blurs terribly. ‘To take him and his sister out.’

Sk’jin nods, sighing quietly under his breath. Even from here, Sk’jin recognizes the OrTank- it was greatly similar to the one Jimin was in, but slightly larger. The form inside is blurred, but the ring of light is not.

Sk’jin can make out rippling hair, blurred arms and legs.

‘Why would they do this?’ Jn’young ponders quietly.

‘Because,’ Sk’jin says quietly, ‘A lot of times- most times- most Beings fight fate.’

Jemin turns around to look at them, eyes wide and glimmering with unshed tears.

‘Is what we consider order, or peace, or unity, the same if the decisions taken are made by fate?’ Sk’jin quotes. ‘Even if this order, this peace is something that has been known for a long time- that has been followed for the length of life itself- all minds evolve, all hearts evolve- what if they wish to control their own fate?’

* *

It was raining when Yoongi was finally able to get himself together.

He remembered being carried in, being placed on the bed, having a hand as warm as unexpected sunlight caress his face, push back his hair.

He remembers voices, discussions, answers, questions.

He gets up, reaching over to switch on the lamps because it was dark out. The floors are cool under his bare feet. He walks to one of the tall windows and pushing aside the curtain looks out.

The sky is stormy and dark, the rain steady but not overwhelming.

The lamp switches off again and Yoongi goes to switch it on again. Somehow it’s not upsetting that the lights keep switching off. But the warm yellow of the light reminds Yoongi of Jimin.
He switches on all of the lamps in the bedroom before stepping out into the dark hallway. Here he switches on all of the lamps again, noticing how one by one, the ones in the bedroom switch off.

Quietly, the sound of a door opening draws his attention.

Looking around, he notices how the front door is now open.

A soft white light spills out of the doorway, illuminating the hallway faintly.

The lamps start going out in the hallway as well.

Yoongi takes a step forward towards the door, drawn to the soft light.

He had been in there before- out there, somewhere there. Just moments ago.

But- but Jimin had brought him back in here.

The lamp next to him gives out and somehow, Yoongi automatically switches it back on. When he looks up again, the door is closed again, and all the lamps are switched back on.

He looks back at the door, pausing momentarily before turning his back to it and returning to the bedroom.

Ilya had called in the medics to be at standby.

So they’re the first Beings Yoongi sees when he wakes up.

He’s quickly checked over, while Camil loudly asks him ‘Yoon-ki how many fingers am I holding up?’ in the background. He’s still in Jn’yong’s inner chamber, and to his surprise, Sk’jin was slumped over the low table, along with Jimin and Jn’yong.

No one wanted to move them- so Jimin, Sk’jin, and Jn’yong were allowed to just slump awkwardly over furniture, their hands all grasped together.

Yoongi himself had woken up some hours ago, much to Hoseok’s obvious relief, Ilya’s confusion, and Jungkook’s tears he wouldn’t owe up to. Taeh’yung is there to tell him what happened, and why Sk’jin was also added to the mix of unconscious Beings.

And now that team of medics waited outside, while Yoongi, Hoseok, Taeh’yung, Jungkook, Ilya, Camil, and Jaen are gathered in the inner room.

It had now been over 5 hours of just waiting, but no one made a move to step away. Yoongi had explained what he showed to Jn’yong briefly. Hoseok was obviously mad at him, more worried over mad, but the “mad” part was showing a bit more.

Yoongi had awkwardly apologized which made the Ngfy’widan somehow more upset, making him swear to him to never ever do something like this again.

Yoongi hastily accepted.

There’s the slightest twitch of fingers- whose, Yoongi is not sure, but their grasped hands fall apart, with an alarming loud snapping sound and everyone is panting for breath, falling over away from each other as though repelled.

‘I feel like I’ve drunk something from Zu’ruitok,’ is the first thing Sk’jin groans, even before opening his eyes. The medics are very quick to bring him a bucket, an anti-nausea shot, and several
facial wipes, all in that order.

Jn’young is much better- just disoriented, but already being held up by Ilya, closely watched over by Camil who beckons over a medic.

Yoongi reaches Jimin first. Careful with how he holds him.

Jimin is shaking, heaving as he clutches Yoongi’s hand, falling over as though losing all sense of direction, perspective and balance. But Yoongi is there.

‘Hey I’m here-‘ Yoongi pulls him closer, grounding Jimin to his own body, ‘I’m here sunshine, I got you.’

Jungkook stands, torn between Sk’jin and Jimin. He makes up his mind, crouching down to Sk’jin and almost inconveniently nuzzling into the Khol’isa. It makes Sk’jin smile, wrapping an arm around the younglings head, saying something in a low voice.

One of the medics approaches Jimin, scanning him quickly. If the medic team is confused, they don’t show it. After Jimin is cleared, Hoseok immediately steps in.

‘What happened?’ Hoseok asks, crouching down.

Jimin takes a few steadying breaths.

Yoongi wishes he could just give Jimin a short reprieve- a time to just breathe. Rather than answer questions, forced to understand what he had no part in, forced to come to terms about the nature of what happened, and what was happening. He almost wants to tell Hoseok to just give Jimin a moment to recover- a moment to just simply be.

‘My System-‘ Jimin gasps out, ‘My people- they-‘

His face crumples and he blindly pushes his face into Yoongi’s shoulders, whole body shaking as he sobs, tears soaking Yoongi’s shirt wet.

‘Hoseok-‘ Ilya calls quietly, looking down at Yoongi and Jimin briefly with worry.

The Ngfy’widan walks over quickly.

‘Oh, Chim,’ Taeh’yung says quietly, also kneeling down to gently pat Jimin’s head, face still buried in Yoongi’s chest.

Yoongi doesn’t say anything, just holds Jimin close to himself.

He glances across at Sk’jin who was being supported by Jungkook.

He looks worse for wear, fatigue evident in his eyes. He’s gingerly touching his temples when he catches Yoongi’s gaze. He looks at Jimin, and then back at him, his expression grave.

He feels an arm around him, noticing that it’s Taeh’yung who’s hugging them both with his long arms.

‘My babies,’ he says softly, smiling at Yoongi in a gentle manner.

The medics leave the room after they’ve cleared everyone. They hesitate a moment before making their leave with a nod from Camil.
Hoseok is standing with Ilya, listening to Jn’young who was speaking earnestly, cradling a bottle of ionized water in his hands. The Ngfy’widan is nodding, expression serious as he listens to Jn’young explain what he must have shown Sk’jin and Jimin.

Not for the first time, Yoongi wishes he could simply leave. Simply leave, take Jimin with him, and go somewhere far away, where no one could find them, where no one could touch them.

Somewhere so far away, that grief could not touch them, guilt could not stain them, and loss could not burden them.

Yoongi wishes he could just pick Jimin up right now, take a Transporter, and simply leave.

But he knows he can’t.

Because in the end, Yoongi knows Jimin would not go.

And Yoongi promised, that day, so long ago, that he would find Jimin.

And wherever Jimin went, Yoongi would follow.

Face still splotched, hands still shaking, Jimin sits next to him, hand in hand, as he, Sk’jin, and Jn’young finish speaking.

‘Is there a way of knowing,’ Hoseok begins hesitantly, ‘If your sister is still…still there?’

Jimin shakes his head.

‘We can assume that with the way Jimin was contained in that OrTank, his sister should be similarly positioned,’ Sk’jin theorizes. ‘It’s safe to say, considering how Axudar is still functioning the way it is, that she should still be there. That is to say if Tsirin is at all in Axudar.’

‘Based on what Jn’young has to say, and with what Jaen can confirm about Axudar, I would say she is still there,’ Ilya says worriedly and adding, ‘But does that mean that your System, Menigišiti, is now completely exposed?’

‘If it were, we would know,’ Camil comments, to which Hoseok nods.

‘Even if the gateways are not functioning, Menigišiti will still be hidden,’ Jimin replies.

He had cried his heart out, crumpling against Yoongi. But after a few moments, he was able to pull himself together again, straighten out his expression, and ready to discuss. Yoongi wishes he could give him all the time he needed to just allow himself to feel, to truly just take a breath.

Jimin was strong- but he didn’t always have to be strong. And Yoongi wishes he could give Jimin that, give him time to no longer feel the need to be strong.

‘Our gateways simply stabilize what was already existing in Menigišiti- the gaps appearing in our shield will be unpredictable, however, and we wouldn’t be able to control it or cover it.’ Jimin further explains.
‘How many of the Verktaë live in Axudar?’ Hoseok asks.

‘Nearly more than half- and that’s just in Kaitütei, I don’t know about the other two,’ Jn’yound replies easily. ‘It’s- it’s as though they live there for their amusement, watching the Axudarians live their elevated state- like they feel a sense on control.’

‘They think they are controlling their fates by indirectly controlling the “fates” of the Axudarians,’ Jaen says bluntly, ‘My father was one of the Axudarians who refused to listen to Ndica- he escaped with our family before things got worse. Before everyone lost themselves.’

‘Does that mean- does that mean Menigišiti is empty?’ Sk’jin asks sharply.

‘I highly doubt everyone would simply follow-‘ Ilya begins but Jimin shakes his head.

‘If they used Tsirin the same way they used me to connect the fates of the Red Evil’s creations to me, then our people would have followed Tsirin- or at least followed what they were lead to believe,’ Jimin says steadily. ‘Our people- we are all tied together in our beliefs-‘

‘-beliefs that they clearly wanted to overthrow,’ Camil remarks from where he was sitting.

Jimin scowls a little at that.

‘There’s a ship, Ndica’s ship that is the center of Prime T-One – you could say all of Prime T-One was built around and for this ship.’ Jn’yound explains, cutting in, ‘And from what I was able to understand- this is the ship that came in and after that, as Jaen calls it, everyone simply lost themselves.’

‘We can assume that this ship carries Tsirin then,’ Hoseok remarks, arms crossing, ‘And as Kaitütei is the “protected” planet- it makes sense that this is where the center of control would be, so to speak.’

Jaen nods at that, ‘Māhanga and Blidra have an ever lower population count than Kaitütei did in the past- besides, from what I remember my father telling me, Māhanga was where all of the crazy shit started with experiments and all that.’

‘If you don’t mind my asking,’ Yoongi interrupts, ‘What were the eggs, the New Borns, used for in Axudar?’

Jn’yound gives him a wry smile.

‘Ah yes,’ he says lightly, ‘We got into trouble before I could show you clearly.’

Yoongi grimaces at that.

‘In Axudar, us New Borns made excellent subjects for experimentation. Especially once we were awaken- Ndica made it his absolute mission to understand how the Creveni made us- he did a lot, I can spare everyone the details. But it was just not Ndica and his crew of equally delightful Yishengs, but also the Verktaë who would come in and look at us.’ Jn’yound narrates, ‘They found us all extremely fascinated- and somehow, they seemed to hate us a lot. And I never quite understood why- but then when you showed me into your memories,’ Jn’yound looks across at Jimin and says, ‘I think it’s because they associated us, the New Borns, with you.’

‘Because the eggs- I mean New Borns, created by the Akramanese, were influenced by Jimin?’ Hoseok says carefully, ‘Because they’re tied to him, to his “fate”.’
Jn’young nods, ‘I guess you could say the GI were born because of us New Borns caught up in Ndica’s mess.’

‘We- we won’t be able to enter Menigišiti without alerting Axudar,’ Sk’jin says slowly, ‘Any hopes of trying to get the New Borns from Tayi to Menigišiti is just- just impossible.’

‘It’s why they set you on this mission,’ Ilya surmises, ‘Because they can’t act on it themselves.’

‘Is there a way of securing Menigišiti?’ Jaen asks Jimin.

‘It’s- it was already as secure as it could be,’ Jimin corrects himself, ‘So I don’t know how- especially if my people…if they left because they no longer wanted to be there, to no longer live as they did-‘ Yoongi squeezes his hand, ‘-and we still don’t know if- if anyone remains. If they all just left- or if some remained but that-‘

‘-seems unlikely,’ Jaen says bluntly with a shake of her head, ‘There is no coup, no takeover, where those in opposition are ever just allowed to live as they choose. Not in cases this extreme. Had my father not escaped with us when he did- we would have been killed, like so many others who did not run, who could not run.’

Jimin nods to that, his jaw set hard.

‘So what is it that you plan on doing?’ Ilya asks after a few seconds of silence.

Hoseok glances over at him and then at Sk’jin.

‘I think we should get Jn’young here to the Medical Bay for a thorough check up,’ Camil announces, getting up, ‘And Jaen needs to return to uh- the Bridge?’

Jaen is unimpressed before she too nods.

‘You’re more than welcome to stay with us,’ Ilya says, ‘We want to help you- this connects all of us more than you think we care to admit. But it is, and we will help in every way we can. Please remember this.’

Sk’jin looks pained as he nods, smiling a little late at Ilya.

‘If you need me, I’m at the Bridge- come on Jn’young, there’s a few issues that have been reported to me that I need you to look over from Cuab.’

‘I thought Camil was offering to give me a thorough check up at the Medical Bay?’ Jn’young raises his eyebrows, a smirk on his lips before addressing them, ‘Feel free to chill here- have some tea!’

‘You guys are so gross,’ Jaen says with a toss of her head, exiting the room.

Sk’jin watches after them leaving, a look of longing in his eyes.

They wait a while before Hoseok sighs heavily and says, with his face pushed into his hands, ‘Spaces, can all of you please not do dumb shit like this ever again? Please? Like, for my sake, I’m prematurely aging from stress here.’

Sk’jin laughs, leaning back to completely lay down on the thickly carpeted floor, ‘Mine wasn’t intentional Hoseokkie.’

‘I’m sorry,’ Jimin apologizes in a small but sincere tone before elbowing Yoongi.
‘Especially you!’ Hoseok says fiercely, looking up from his hands. ‘For fuck’s sake you couldn’t have waited and-‘

He stops talking, looking up and inhaling deeply. He was clearly not done with being mad at them.

‘Uh- I’m sorry too?’ Taeh’yung adds tentatively while Jungkook, extremely confused, also apologizes.

Hoseok looks 2 seconds from crying.

‘Okay so let’s plan,’ Sk’jin hurriedly announces from the floor, one foot kicking Yoongi.

‘What do you think has happened?’ Yoongi asks quietly, ‘To Menigišiti?’

Jimin fiddles with his hands, shoulders down, expression much more free. It makes Yoongi feel good- knowing that Jimin was allowing himself to express more to not just himself here, but to everyone else gathered in the room. Like he felt safe, comforted with the five of them here.

‘With Tsirin gone, and with me here- we did not…we did not die,’ Jimin says carefully, ‘And I have no idea- what will happen- what has happened, because it has never happened before. If we died- then another would be born, on the same day. But we- we’re still here.’

‘You believe your sister is alive?’

Jimin shrugs, eyes watering at once and saying with a wobbling and breathless voice, ‘I don’t know- ah, I didn’t want to cry again-‘

Five of them immediately offer Jimin some form of tissue or face towel.

This makes Jimin laugh, nose running, face wet. He takes the one Jungkook pushes at him and wipes his face.

‘We do not know what state Axudar is in, and knowing what we know now- it’s too risky to try and go there,’ Hoseok says, frowning hard as he thinks. ‘It would be incredibly risky showing up with not only Jimin, but with Jungkook and Yoongi.’

‘And we have no idea what’s up with Bhumi- I mean, Megibiya,’ Sk’jin corrects himself, ‘Or all of Menigišiti as a matter of fact.’

‘But- but your sister…’ Hoseok says slowly.

Jimin exhaled out slowly.

‘I don’t- I don’t know what to do.’ Jimin admits.

‘The people of Axudar- the Axudarians, they made their choice to live in this state,’ Sk’jin states bluntly, ‘I know that sounds harsh- but we’re not responsible for what has happened there- for the choices they have made.’

Jimin nods to that, closing his eyes.

‘But if you want,’ Sk’jin says slowly, ‘And you want to check on your sister- because again, at this point we can’t claim to understand how things work in your System- what it means to have both of you, outside of Menigišiti- and if you want to find a way, back to your sister-‘
Jimin shakes his head, eyes still closed.

‘I- I want to go to Megibīya,’ Jimin says, his voice stable, opening his eyes to look at all of them. ‘But we do need to find a way in,’ Jimin says his words carefully, ‘With what we- with what we’ve been seeing, and now that we know from Jn’yong’s past, and with what Amme told us- the eggs, or New Borns, they deserve a safe place to be kept, to grow in time, or to sleep, and- be allowed to live how they wish to.’

Jimin looks at all of them, ‘I know this is- this is a difficult task, none of you, owe any of these Beings, the New Borns, you don’t owe them anything. And if you wish to leave-‘

‘-so going to Axudar is completely out of any hypothetical plan then,’ Sk’jin drawls across, ‘I think heading to Bhumi will actually be a reasonable step forward.’

Jimin frowns down at Sk’jin but the Khol’isa pays him little mind.

‘Agreed,’ Hoseok jumps in, giving Jimin a small apologetic smile, ‘We can choose a separate trajectory- it might take a little more time, but given our condition, we have no choice. We can choose this spot in order to observe further into Menigi’siti, as well as see what has been happening in the general space-area.’

‘Yeah!’ Taeh’yung jumps in to agree with violent nods, ‘It will be interesting to see! And if we return Chim to Megibīya, who knows what we might be able to see?’

‘We can get you home soon then,’ Hoseok smiles at Jimin who finally gives up his attempts at trying to make them leave the mission again. He looks sad, but at the same time, strengthened. Yoongi squeezes his hand gently again.

‘What about Namjoon?’ Yoongi asks.

‘Well, according to Camil’s last find, he’s still in Lowet.’ Hoseok replies immediately.

Sk’jin grimaces at that.

‘Kookie, what do you know about Lowet?’ Taeh’yung asks the Vicitra.

‘Um- not a lot,’ Jungkook replies hesitantly, ‘Always fighting with Lowet.’

Hoseok grimaces at that.

‘Tae- do you think Axudar could be one of the First Children?’ Sk’jin asks swiftly.

Taeh’yung pouts thoughtfully from where he’s sitting, ‘I don’t know Jinnie, I’ve never been there. None of us have really. Why?’

‘It’s what Jn’yong said,’ Sk’jin explains, rolling over to lay on his front, pushing himself up on his forearms to address the Zhak’gri. ‘He said that time is not exactly, in sync, with the rest of the Known Universe.’

‘Ah!’ Taeh’yung exclaims with a nod and says, ‘Some places are like that!’

‘What- no they’re not,’ Sk’jin argues at once.

‘Jinnie! They are!’ Taeh’yung crosses his arms, glaring down at Sk’jin.

‘Axudar is not close to any blackhole,’ Hoseok says slowly, looking between the two, ‘I mean in
‘Not a theory,’ Taeh’yung shakes his head, ‘This does happen! You don’t have to be near a blackhole for this to happen!’

‘I’ve never heard of this-’ Sk’jin begins but Hoseok cuts across, ‘Okay but that aside- does Axudar being one of the First Children in anyway effect or influence what happened?’

‘It would make sense as to why Axudar as a whole was so obsessed with Menigišiti?’ Yoongi offers, ‘They had a whole myth- a creation story, and folklore generated from just a singular and rare celestial occurrence- to the point where the Axudarians didn’t question Ndíca when he brought the “Verktaë” in.’

Hoseok nods to that in agreement.

‘Do we- do we accept their offer?’ Jimin asks tentatively.

Sk’jin immediately stiffens.

‘Ilya has a lot of power backing him up- a lot of connections, access,’ Hoseok lists off on his fingers, yellow eyes looking down at his hand but not really seeing, ‘-we could really boost our efforts, our time, our resources, by accepting his help.’

‘But?’

‘But,’ Hoseok smiles, ‘I don’t think I would feel good coming in between another family with this mess, no matter how closely connected they feel.’

Taeh’yung coos, reaching over to pat Hoseok on the head, which he dodges without much effort. Sk’jin seems relieved by this answer.

‘But would they agree to our refusal?’ Jimin looks at Sk’jin, ‘Ilya is family to you, he wants- he wants to be with you.’

Sk’jin gives him a small shrug, ‘Ilya is a grown Ožkan, and more than that, Nambike and his mother raised him, he will understand.’

Jimin nods slowly to that.

‘Okay then I will start setting up a route to Megibiya, maybe something different, from the others we had set up,’ Hoseok announces. ‘And as usual, we will keep the line open for Namjoon.’

Everyone nods to that.

‘Spaces, I’m hungry,’ Sk’jin groans as he sits up, immediately aided by Jungkook. ‘I think I also want like, a 5 hour bath-‘

‘When do we go?’ Hoseok inquires.

Everyone stops a moment.

‘I know it’s important we leave soon,’ Hoseok clarifies, ‘But at the same time, I want it to be done with all of us in good health – the two of you especially.’ He points at Sk’jin and then at Yoongi. ‘I think it’s safe to say we could get all of our provisions we need from here, but I need all of us to be in good form.’
‘Ilya is leaving Cuab in 2 days,’ Sk’jin offers from the floor. ‘We can- we can leave the same time.’

‘Are you sure?’ Jungkook asks a little nervously, ‘Um- it’s the, those white robes- they- they can follow us and-’

It’s a sticky silence, one that has everyone looking at each other for an answer.

‘I told Ilya about them,’ Sk’jin informs them. ‘I think- I think he’s more than prepared to do what is needed if they appear again.’

‘Maybe they won’t show up at all!’ Taeh’yung adds in cheerfully, ‘They suffered pretty large losses!’

‘Thanks to you,’ Sk’jin says in a low voice.

Hoseok thinks this out carefully before nodding, ‘Yeah- yeah. Two day; that’ll hopefully give us time to complete everything.’

‘And see if it’s possible to get the info on who the fuck issued our arrest warrants at a Universal scale,’ Sk’jin scowls, standing up. ‘But first- I think Jimin and I will go talk to Ilya. Tell him our plans.’

Jimin nods to that at once and adding, ‘Warn him about the Omhlophe – if he won’t take the risk-’

‘-which we don’t blame him for-’

‘-then we leave at once.’

Everyone nods to this.

‘I’ll go get us food!’ Taeh’yung volunteers.

‘Great- Yoongi, Kookie and I will go over the Laikin, prepare for this new plan.’ Hoseok adds, stretching a little as he stands up.

‘Should we uh- maybe clean up the place a little,’ Jungkook asks from where he was sitting, looking around the indeed, quite messy room.

Yoongi almost does not want to, just out of pure pettiness. But he nods anyways.

It doesn’t take too long to straighten out the room. They didn’t know where what went, so settled to neatly lining up misplaced objects near the wall or over the cleaned low table.

‘How much did you hear?’ Jimin asks him as they step out into the hallway, bringing up the rear. Yoongi is tired, they were all tired, and he’s grateful that Hoseok brought up the plan to have them rest first.

‘About the Regurgitated?’ Yoongi inquires, watching with some amusement as Jungkook offers to carry Sk’jin who was dragging his feet.

Jimin nods.

‘There’s a reason why Chaewon used to say that we were a family of cats, not dogs, despite having Holly.’
Jimin looks a little confused but he’s smiling, as though feeling the fondness in Yoongi’s voice. But he stops Yoongi for a second, tugging at his sleeve, allowing the others to walk further ahead.

‘Please- I really mean it,’ Jimin whispers shakily, ‘Please don’t do that again.’

‘I’m sorry sunshine,’ Yoongi takes his hands in his.

‘When I reached for you- your hands were cold and I- I thought I was going to lose you I-‘ Jimin stops, ‘Please, please- please.’

‘I won’t,’ Yoongi promises, taking his hands up to kiss them, ‘I won’t, I promise I won’t. Not again, I promise you.’

*

Ilya was not in the Bridge, and Jaen had explained that he was dealing with some issues within Cuab itself with Jn’yong. But that he would be back in a few hours. She had readily accepted some of the requests Hoseok had, and Camil had appeared to take the Ngfy’widan to the main storage cells to retrieve what they would need for the long journey.

Camil still gave him impressed smiles and cheering motions every time he saw him, and has said ‘big fan!’ at least 15 times by now. Yoongi is still uncomfortable that’s he so recognized. A few of Ilya’s crew do a double-take when they see him, expressions of both wariness and awe mingling in their gazes.

Yoongi and Jungkook met up with the two during their descent to the hangar, pushing a few gravity-lifts stock-pilled with fuel cells and chargers.

Yoongi immediately persuaded and got Jimin to sit on the lifts. Jimin had protested at first but eventually gave in, relief in his expression as he sits down.

Sk’jin point blank refused. But that didn’t stop him from complaining every few hours much to Yoongi’s mild annoyance and Jimin’s amusement.

‘I fucking hate this,’ Sk’jin complains for the 7th time in 15 minutes as they walk down the extended hallways bridging a few hangars together.

‘I’ll carry you?’ Jungkook offers.

‘I am not that old,’ Sk’jin grumbles but he fondly ruffles the Vicitra’s hair. Jungkook is clearly still very worried. ‘Okay how about you go set up for me? Honestly my arms are useless right now.’

Jungkook nods very seriously grabbing the lifts he was tugging along, quickly sprints ahead to reach the Laikin.

‘I’ll be down in about 10 minutes. Taeh’yung could you please stop hogging all of the food, everyone thinks we’re starving you or something-‘ Hoseok complains mildly.

There’s just a throaty giggle from Taeh’yung’s side.

‘What do you think they’ll do with the guards?’ Jimin asks from ahead of him as he squints at the
escort ship now separately parked to another section of the hangar.

‘Return them?’ Yoongi offers, eyeing Sk’jin who shrugs unhelpfully.

‘I was just thinking,’ the Khol’isa says, stepping back to walk alongside Yoongi.

‘That you’re tired?’ Yoongi drawls.

‘Shut it Human,’ Sk’jin rolls his eyes, ‘I’m always tired.’

‘Sure.’

‘I preferred you when you talked a lot less than this,’ Sk’jin grumbles.

Jimin laughs, throwing his head back.

‘I was just thinking, and I bet my left lung that the ship in Kaitūtei is the same ship we found in Ynqaba,’ Sk’jin says.

‘It most probably is,’ Hoseok agrees, ‘I was thinking that too…do you think that’s why Namjoon’s in Lowet?’

Yoongi glances at Sk’jin who was carefully schooling his expression.

‘Maybe,’ Taeh’yung offers unexpectedly, ‘Ynqaba, Lowet, the planets there- a lot happened to them, and maybe Namjoon was taken there so that he can figure things out.’

‘You don’t think he’s being held at ransom?’ Jimin asks suddenly, looking truly aghast.

‘Don’t worry, we’ll pay for his metal ass any price,’ Sk’jin says before changing the topic, ‘Taeh’yung please stop eating and please bring me my food already.’

‘But it’s so tasty!’

‘And I would like to experience that too!’ Sk’jin argues, ‘Do you know how tired I am?’

‘Just take a seat,’ Jimin laughs.

‘I’m not that old,’ Sk’jin scowls, making a show of walking around ahead. Jimin just giggles at the Khol’isa. Clearly their relationship had improved. It makes Yoongi smile.

By the time they’ve arrived at their hangar, Jungkook bounds out of the Laikin, pleased with himself.

‘I set up for you!’ he declares, shiny eyes directed at Sk’jin who fondly pinches cheeks.

‘I feel better already,’ Sk’jin replies, ‘But I think it’s only fair if I help you guys out anyways.’

Jimin vocalizes his agreement, jumping off lightly.

‘Not heavy stuff!’ Jungkook points aggressively at the small crates piled up to the side.

Sk’jin raises his hands in mock-surrender and walks over to the pile. Yoongi guesses it contains the hollow vacuum cells the Laikin required for stabilizing manual-flight in-planet.

Straining his neck a little to look over the piled crates and looking outside, Yoongi can just about make out the edge of the end of Cuab-D2. The hangar doorways are all open glimmering a faint
blue to indicate the Atmoshield that covered the entire ship. Yoongi guesses they were transferring goods to and fro at the hangar levels down here.

‘Sleep after this,’ Jimin states.

Yoongi chuckles, leaning forward on a crate with one arm and resting his head on it. ‘You or me?’

‘Both,’ Jimin says firmly, ‘This time I think 32 hours, 11 minutes.’

Yoongi laughs, standing up straight to lean forward and kiss him lightly. ‘32 hours, and 43 minutes.’

Jimin narrows his eyes comically as though contemplating, walking backwards, while Sk’jin yells, ‘Stop flirting and get a lift here thanks!’

‘Sounds good,’ Jimin declares primly, ‘I will hold you to that.’

‘Can’t wait.’

‘I SAID STOP FLIRTING!’

Jimin laughs, walking over towards the stacked lifts over on the other side of the hangar.

Looking around, still grinning, Yoongi finds Jungkook crouched at the side doorway to the Laikin, eyes like faintly glowing orbs, watching him.

It would be a rather terrifying sight to be sure, but Yoongi can’t help but chuckle.

‘Come on Kook,’ Yoongi gestures him over. ‘Let’s bring in the heavy stuff.’

Jungkook slinks all the way back in, eyes narrowing even more.

Yoongi cackles to himself.

Sk’jin complains every time he brings in a load of crates to the side, Jimin laughing next to him.

There’s a slight tremor under Yoongi’s feet, and the ship seems to tilt a little. They all pause, looking around suspiciously.

Nothing happens, though Sk’jin’s lift manages to float down some ways into the hangar.

‘Wow thank you artificial gravity for inclining along with the ship in my time of fatigue-‘

‘Sk’jin, if you’re tired, I can do it myself,’ Jimin wheezes, leaning against one of the halfway stocked lifts as Sk’jin catches up to one of the 2 that had floated away.

Yoongi feels the slightest tremor again- the hair on his nape standing on end.

‘You reach my age one day and you’ll know exactly what I mean-‘ Sk’jin yells from over his shoulder as he walks over to one of the lifts merrily floating away from them. ‘Even gravity is against you-‘

Jimin laughs, reaching down to pull at the small brake-lever at the edge of the lift when-

The lights flare red, immediately followed by a carrying wailing klaxon sound. The ship shudders violently- reminiscent of a planetary tremor.
Then almost violently, a familiar faint orange ripple of an emergency Atmoshield erupts before Yoongi, between him and Jimin and Sk’jin.

Jimin’s eyes widen just the slightest meeting Yoongi’s, his smile turning confused for a moment and-

The darkness of space has always frightened Yoongi. Some primal fear deep within him, stirring at the sight of such an endless darkness, spewing in every direction.

And now it starkly contrasts Jimin- light flaring strangely around him, through his hair,- and Yoongi recognizes it as the Atmoshield flickering out from behind Jimin, the shield guarding the large open entry to the hangar now a gaping entrance.

Briefly- just for a fraction of a second before, in an instance, the light with all of its warmth, its joy, its laugh- pulls away into the endlessness where Yoongi cannot follow.

*
Author’s fucking notes

I just realized in the last chapter I wrote Camil’s name as Camat instead I AM SO SORRY
I HAVE CORRECTED IT THOUGH
I have
So many emotions about
MotS: 7
Im saying it now
Moon is my song
The fact that Kim Seokjin™ wrote the lyrics
The very same Kim Seokjin™ who performed one of the most pure, the most heartbreaking songs known to man kind “tonight”
Also as a massive Caravaggio fan, I cannot but say version 3 is my favourite and I am going to buy that
And I am sorry about being so weird with my writing schedule I just- yeah, time is
Time is a bitch
also to anyone confused with how the chapter ended-
basically something happens, to be revealed, and that causes the outer Atmoshields surrounding he ship to glitch and go off, sucking out sk'jin and jimin into space
BUT APPARENTLY SHADOW IS A WHOLE MINUTE LONGER THAN THE VIDEO????????????? AM I??????????/ GOING TO SURVIVE THAT????????????????
SHADOW KEPT ME ALIVE DURING THE WORST TIME OF MY JOB IT REALLY KEPT ME GOING I SWEAR
'I preferred you when you talked a lot less than this.'

Jimin laughs, automatically making Hoseok smile.

'I was just thinking, and I bet my left lung that the ship in Kaititei is the same ship we found in Ynqaba.'

'It most probably is,' Hoseok answers as he brings over a new lift, 'I was thinking that too...do you think that’s why Namjoon’s in Lowet?’

‘Maybe,’ Taeh’yung offers unexpectedly, ‘Ynqaba, Lowet, the planets there- a lot happened to them, and maybe Namjoon was taken there so that he can figure things out.’

‘You don’t think he’s being held at ransom?’ Jimin sounds extremely worried.

‘Don’t worry, we’ll pay for his metal ass any price,’ Sk’jin scoffs before he yet again changes the topic, ‘Taeh’yung please stop eating and please bring me my food already.’

‘But it’s so tasty!’

‘And I would like to experience that too! Do you know how tired I am?’

‘Just take a seat,’ Jimin laughs.

‘Hey, so what do you think?’

Jaen waves her hands over a few open crates before her as Hoseok gets closer. The Axudarian had said she would help Hoseok out with what he needed. Hoseok knows that anyone else could do it, and that technically he didn’t need to be “helped” but that they were doing this to keep an eye on all of them. And honestly Hoseok is not offended or at all surprised.

Safety precaution.

Hoseok squints at the models presented before him.
‘I mean, version 0.3 isn’t that different from 0.2 to be fair,’ Jaen tells him with a serious expression. ‘I think there’s just an added benefit that it’s lighter than the 0.2 but that’s it.’

‘So you’re suggesting there’s no real difference and I might as well choose any because it’s just-’ Hoseok shrugs.

Jaen nods in agreement before closing the crates where the ion-beam based blasters were stored. ‘I guess it’s just personal preference at this point.’

‘How much lighter are the 0.3s?’

‘About 500 strams,’ Jaen explains, ‘It’s not that big, but I guess, familiarity?’

‘I guess so- dunno if Sk’jin or Yoongi will have something to say about the new ones so might as well take the 0.2s.’ Hoseok sighs. Sk’jin was not at all hesitant in complaining about anything if he chose to and Yoongi could sometimes get rather anal about stuff. So Hoseok would much rather avoid any of that and takes the version 0.2 with him.

‘Wise decision,’ Jaen nods seriously before slapping the top of the crates, ‘No offence but why are all Khol’isa rather bitchy about everything?’

‘Oh? Jn’young’s the same?’ Hoseok chuckles and somehow everyone in the nearby vicinity snorts.

The storeroom Jaen had brought him to was very much not just a storeroom but rather a massive atrium that must have been some sort of inner-hangar at one point but customized to become this spacious and very stocked warehouse filled to the brim with every type of device, tech, weapon, and parts Hoseok would ever need for the Laikin. Camil had brought him down so he could take his pick, but asked Jaen to take over after a brief talk with Ilya.

It’s spacious, and with wide windows that extended the some 25 meter high walls, lined over with walkways and bridges that zipped overhead.

‘Oh definitely a Khol’isa trait,’ Jaen mutters but it’s not out of malice.

‘Jaen! Did you guys want the projectile-launchers?’ someone asks from the back, waving around a disc like object.

Jaen turns around to raise an eyebrow at Hoseok.

‘Sure- why not,’ Hoseok shrugs, ‘Maybe it’s something Yoongi would enjoy.’

Jaen yells back an affirmative before asking, ‘How’s it, working with a GI? If you don’t mind talking about it.’

Hoseok gives it a few seconds before replying, ‘Different.’

‘How so?’

‘I guess- they adapt to your methods very well,’ Hoseok explains, thinking back to every circumstance that brought Yoongi and himself together in a situation where they needed to cooperate, be it a fight or tactical decisions. ‘They made incredibly excellent support systems but they’re also somehow unpredictable- like you don’t know do what they think or, calculate you should do, and they take over completely, alter what’s about to happen in their way, with no regard.’
'To others around them?'

‘No- with no regard to themselves,’ Hoseok gives Jaen a small grimace, ‘The GI believe they’re dispensable- at least, a lot don’t believe themselves as being really alive- they don’t realize, or at least were never taught, or lead to believe that they are alive. It’s why you could say Yoongi’s choices in what he does are so reckless – the GI mindset, or maybe lack of it, makes them put the mission ahead of themselves over anything else.’

Jaen nods thoughtfully to that.

‘I don’t know about other GI though,’ Hoseok adds as he pushes the last of the crates over onto his lift, ‘This is just- just what I know from working and living with Yoongi. And he’s a bit different, so honestly- maybe other GI are different.’

‘There’s not a lot around,’ Jaen comments.

Hoseok thinks back to Grisial and shrugs, ‘Maybe.’

‘But hey at least you’re-‘ Jaen begins but stops.

Hoseok looks up, a little alarmed at how everyone in the warehouse had stopped their actions, pausing as they were clearly listening to something.

‘What’s wrong,’ Hoseok asks carefully, hair on the back of his neck standing on end.

In a blink, there are TeorSers aimed at him from all directions. Jaen is still listening intently, hand raised up, ready to give a signal. Hoseok notes how her feet change positions, her body tensing to drop down or move away at an instance.

The next few seconds are incredibly tense; Hoseok has a crate full of weapons before him, but he’s surrounded from almost every single direction. He might be fast but the likeliness of him dodging 21 separate shots from 21 different angles was incredibly unlikely.

‘Hobi?’ Taeh’yung asks, a curious lilt to his voice.

‘Tae don’t do anything-‘ Hoseok says at once in his best steady voice when there’s a slight tremor immediately followed by a sharp yet muffled ping sound that makes everyone flinch, hands cupping their ears. Hoseok quickly rips off his Comm Device, taking a few steps back, arms still raised when Jaen points her own TeorSer at him, eyes suspicious.

And without warning, all the doors into the warehouse open wide. A few of the others around the vicinity quietly shift away.

‘I don’t know what’s going on-‘ Hoseok says immediately but before anyone else can say anything else, the lights flicker and there’s a clear loud klaxon and the whole ship shakes, making Hoseok take a few steadying steps.

‘Jaen!’ someone calls from the back.

‘What is it?’

‘The outer Atmoshield is out! Internal communications is down-‘

There’s a shuddering and violent explosion- arcs of light spreading outside the windows, causing items inside the warehouse to fall over.
Hoseok’s mind is reeling- what did this mean? Had the Omhlophe gotten hold of them but that didn’t make sense- internal communications would mean someone had direct access to the systems within the ship, this couldn’t be done from the outside. And judging from the sound from earlier, Jaen is still glaring down Hoseok who still has his hands raised.

‘This is not us,’ Hoseok shakes his head, speaking directly to Jaen, ‘I swear to you-‘

‘-Jaen!’

Voices run towards them, and rushing towards them is Camil.

‘Stand down!’ Camil yells as he approaches them.

Almost all at once, everyone lowers their TeorSers, questions thrown about.

‘What is it-’ Jaen demands at once.

‘There’s been a breach- I don’t know what’s happening but Ilya and Jn’yong are compromised-‘

‘-what?!’

‘-someone or a team, something from Cuab have taken over they’re inside here too-‘ Camil explains hastily, ‘-they’ve targeted the Atmoshield and internal communications we need to bring those back up-‘

‘-which unit?’ Jaen asks immediately, waving her hands to the back.

‘-how could they get in?’ someone asks but Camil is quickly handing Jaen a screen.

‘Internal communications maybe down, but we can still access the network,’ Camil tells Jaen.

Hoseok quickly readjusts his Comm Device.

‘Tae? Yoongi? Guys- can you hear me?’ he calls out, stomach falling at the silence.

‘We need to set up the internal communications asap,’ Jaen declares while Camil nods, worry etched all over their features. ‘If the internal security is compromised, that means the cells are all open too.’

Camil nods worriedly, teeth clenched.

‘There should be security defenses that should protect the-‘

There’s a loud thundering sound, followed by more arcs of light outside the windows.

‘What the fuck is going on?’ Jaen hisses, eyes wide as she looks around.

‘Cuab,’ Camil shakes his head- ‘-I don’t know how many- or who- but there’s something wrong with the arrangement Jn’yong made-‘

‘-how? That’s never happened before Jn’yong has never made a mistake before-‘ Jaen looks confused.

‘I don’t know!’ Camil looks agitated, wiping at his face.

‘Where’s the internal communications motherboard?’ Hoseok pushes in, ‘If we can’t fix it via the
network- someone needs to manually restart it.’

Camil nods to that, ‘It’s not too far from here, Jaen–’

‘Yeah I’m on it – where’s E’nid?’

‘She’s with the second Bridge,’ Camil explains, ‘I left the first Bridge to Varin he’ll keep it stable.’

‘Varin?’ Jaen frowns but doesn’t get to say anything more when another explosion shakes the whole ship.

‘Why are there explosions?!’ someone demands.

‘They’re trying to unhook us apart,’ Camil explains.

‘But the lower regions–’ Jaen begins, looking confused.

‘Jaen- please, communications need to go up- I’m going down and try and get to Cuab- the Transporters are still up and running?’

‘Yeah- yeah, but we need to set up evac now,’ Jaen orders, ‘Let the kids out.’

Hoseok’s stomach drops again.

‘Got it- I’ll raise the alarm- I’m sure they’re all headed for the trams right now.’

Jaen nods before saying, ‘Hoseok- could you come with me?’

‘I need to-’

‘-we set up communications and you can talk to your friends- we need this done asap,’ Jaen reaches over and grabs Hoseok, ‘Dro’thna, do you still have those short-wave Comms.’

‘Yeah!’

‘All right- grab those, distribute them, and Camil tell me when you get to the Transporters if we haven’t managed the communications yet.’ Jaen issues orders.

‘Got it,’ Camil nods, grabbing one of the Comms that’s tossed to him. ‘And stay low- the cells are unlocked- all of the passages are unlocked we don’t know who else is out and about.’

Jaen frowns at Camil before nodding, ‘Yeah- got it- good luck.’

Camil nods and lops off, a few others following as he beckons them.

The ship shakes again, the lights blinking.

‘Fuck,’ Jaen’s grip on Hoseok’s wrist tightens.

Up until now, Hoseok has been silent- unsure what to say or do- his thoughts swirling, worry overwhelming him. Where were the others? Were they safe? And what about Taeh’yung? He would have somehow made it a point to maybe burst through, wailing in exaggerated worry at one point.

‘Come on- we need to set up the internal communications back on again,’ Jaen lets go of his wrist and nods towards the other end of the warehouse.
'I thought all of the prisoners or, I dunno, all of the cellmates in here were like, with you?’ Hoseok inquires in confusion as he follows after Jaen.

‘Dro’thna! You and Marda and Gyl stay here, set up a barricade up until we can get security running again!’ Jaen orders, ‘Sylna, you and Mir check up on E’nid on the second Bridge- take the vent-system.’

‘The vent system?’ Hoseok looks down at the two small species Sylna and Mir.

‘Don’t let anyone see you two- just check on her, keep watch.’

‘Jaen-.’

‘And the others! Make sure evac goes smoothly! Stick close-,’ Jaen starts walking, and Hoseok follows immediately, ‘-and keep low!’

Jaen doesn’t look back to see if the others listen but she doesn’t have to because everyone moves at once. She catches a Comm thrown at her and she hooks it to her belt at once.

‘Uh Jaen-’ Hoseok wants to, if he’s allowed, fuck, to go down to check on the others. But he doesn’t have time to say anything because as they round up the corner to a hallway, Jaen turns swiftly, her knee striking Hoseok on his thigh, a fast and hard fist knocking the air out of his lungs and an arm hooking swiftly around his throat, a TeorSer aimed straight into his lower-back.

‘Who are you working for?’ she hisses.

‘No one!’ Hoseok grits out, winded and not at all ready to his chagrin for this attack.

‘Someone has been setting this up for a long while and you just enter like this with absolutely no-‘ Hoseok manages to twist away but not to strike back but to face Jaen.

‘I am not a part of whatever is happening,’ Hoseok grits out, surprising Jaen because Hoseok was now putting himself at a much more vulnerable position like this, the TeorSer digging under the sternum. ‘You heard why were came here- if you trust Ilya, and Jn’young, then you’ll know that this has nothing to do with us.’

Jaen’s glare pierces through him.

‘Someone is working in the inside, against us,’ she says tersely.

‘I gathered- and I would much rather not be a part of this, take my team, and leave as quickly as I can,’ Hoseok manages to get out.

Jaen doesn’t move, her knee still painfully pressed into his thigh.

‘I know you’re worried,’ Hoseok tries, ‘I know that this- this betrayal, is confusing – but please think about it- how could I – or any of my team members, be a part of this?’

Jaen’s expression doesn’t shift but she takes a step back and Hoseok gasps for breath, thigh burning.

‘You’re right,’ she says evenly, ‘Let’s get going to fix the motherboard. Do you need a moment?’

‘No,’ Hoseok wheezes, stretching his leg, ‘Just my leg is numb.’
Jaen rolls her eyes, ‘Venture agents.’

Hoseok only sort of limps for a few minutes, straightening his muscles as best as he could. He didn’t need this injured pride to cause him problems later.

‘If someone fried the internal communications, wouldn’t they need access to the Bridge or a NaviLet?’ Hoseok asks as they pause a moment in a hallway while Jaen checks the hallways.

‘They would,’ Jaen replies tersely before waving Hoseok forward.

‘Why are you sending me to cover you when I have no weapon of my own,’ Hoseok hisses, unmoving.

‘I’m not sending you to cover me are you insane?’ Jaen splutters, ‘I’m just saying the coast is clear lets move our asses!’

Grumbling, Jaen moves out first.

‘Oh Spaces are you apologizing by letting me go first?’ Hoseok realizes, glaring at Jaen’s head, ‘Why do I always get stuck with emotionally constipated Beings-’

‘-shh!’ Jaen hisses, stopping suddenly before a dim hallway that lead out to one of the larger atriums Hoseok and Jungkook had been brought to by Camil when they first entered the ship.

They step back into the hallway, crouching down, and peaking over.

There’s hurried footsteps and in a second, a horde of prisoners sprint across the opening.

‘Fuck,’ Jaen whispers. ‘Fuck- what is this- how are they up here so fast?’

‘Aren’t all of the security measures gone?’ Hoseok whispers, watching as what could be a horde of maybe 100+ prisoners sprint through, already armed. ‘Doesn’t that mean that the elevators and lifts would be compromised? Especially if you don’t have a pass?’

‘Yeah,’ Jaen sounds worried, ‘Someone is controlling this from the Bridge.’

Hoseok thinks of E’nid, the Orvan who sat at their meetings and who was in charge of the second Bridge.

‘Doesn’t this mean they can watch everything through the surveillance?’ Hoseok asks worriedly, eyeing the cameras around the place.

‘I’ve been worried about that too,’ Jaen replies evenly, ‘But it’s more than possible that all of surveillance has been shut down, because who ever is doing this, knows that if we have surveillance, we’ll be able to counter whatever attack this is.’

There’s another shudder.

‘Fuck,’ Hoseok glances around as the lights flicker.

‘They’re gone,’ Jaen whispers, ‘Stay low, keep quiet.’

‘I know,’ Hoseok grumbles, following after the Axudarian.

‘The trams are still working,’ Jaen comments as they get closer to the hallway opening, the sounds of the tram filling up the air. ‘This was extensively preplanned.’
‘If this is someone working from the inside, they knew they needed the numbers to overtake all of you,’ Hoseok ruminates, ‘The inmates is a good idea- a good distraction.’

Jaen doesn’t say anything, still disturbed. Hoseok looks out into the atrium, ducking back as a small group still remained.

‘I don’t want to bring anyone down,’ Jaen says, ‘We still don’t know what’s happening, so I don’t want to make any mistakes until I can get communications up, and I can talk to Ilya or Jn’young.’

‘Okay- we move without casualties,’ Hoseok nods.

‘Here,’ Jaen unclips a small stunner from inside her jacket pocket. ‘It’s not loud.’

‘Thanks,’ Hoseok studies the small stunner before pocketing it.

Jaen looks around for a second before standing up straight, ‘They’re all gone. We need to get across the atrium.’

‘Are there any spots above us?’

‘Plenty- we’re going to have to be casual- not raise suspicion if anyone’s keeping an eye,’ Jaen says, trying to catch a look overhead from below the entryway. ‘There’s none opposite.’

There’s the sound of hurried footsteps down behind them. It’s not close, but it’s not very far either.

‘Okay- we step out- walk easy,’ Hoseok states.

‘Guests first,’ Jaen gestures with a nod. Hoseok rolls his eyes and steps forward, walking easily with a normal gait that wasn’t alarming but not too relaxed either. He hears Jaen walking behind him.

Hoseok thinks they might be in the clear as they reach the middle of the atrium, but the floors rumble faintly below their feet and before they can plan, the trams in the station to the side start filing in.

‘Fuck!’

Jaen instantly takes off, her body lowering.

Hoseok follows almost immediately and not a second later, there’s the sound of TeorSers firing behind them.

The floor chips, the walls beyond them crack and chip as TeorSer fire hails after them. Diving and slipping down the floor, Hoseok and Jaen manage to dodge into the hallway, protected briefly.

‘Shit shit- what the fuck-’ Jaen curses, fumbling to stand as Hoseok gets to his feet as well.

‘How far are we?’ Hoseok pants out, keeping in time with Jaen as she sprints down the hallway, as quietly as they could.

‘Take left, but we use the vents,’ Jaen pants out, ‘Will you fit?’

‘I don’t – how would I know?’ Hoseok exclaims just as something fires past their legs.

They run faster, sliding as they turn the corner to the adjacent hallway.
‘Why is it so empty around here?’ Hoseok demands, not that he’s complaining, ‘And what did you mean kids?’

‘Families-’ Jaen pants out, ‘Not all of us- but a large number of us and our families are here- but we’re all staying in the living quarters above- closer to the 5th Bridge.’

‘What about evacuation?’

‘Pods and transporters,’ Jaen replies at once.

‘This is dangerous-‘

‘-we know,’ Jaen hisses back before stopping abruptly, ‘In here.’

There’s a barely visible hatch that Jaen pushes her fingers through, grabbing the lip and pulling down to reveal a narrow chute.

‘Great okay- you might actually fit,’ the Axudarian mumbles, hurriedly lifting herself into the opening. ‘There are rungs- but they’re small.’

Hoseok more or less shoves her in faster before climbing in himself.

He follows Jaen downwards, nearly stepping her hands a few times, making her curse him out in her own tongue.

They keep going down and Hoseok wonders how long it’ll be because his thigh was really hurting but he wasn’t going to say anything about it.

‘Wait-‘ Jaen suddenly whispers. Hoseok stops immediately.

And Hoseok hears it. Sounds of movement within the ducts.

‘I’m going to slide down once we reach that opening there,’ she whispers quietly, ‘Cover me.’

Hoseok would glare at Jaen if they were in eye-level but he can’t so he grunts in response instead, looking down to an opening waiting for them. They go down just a little bit more, before Jaen taps on his shin and she moves across the duct, balancing herself with great agility and strength with bare hands and carefully placed foot holds across the ribbed metal that made up the duct. Hoseok lowers himself even more before hooking his knees carefully around a few rungs.

Jaen hands him her TeorSer and with a nod, drops down.

There’s sounds of sudden movement and a frightened muffled shout. Hoseok drops down as well, hanging upside down, TeorSer aimed straight into the side opening of the duct, aiming straight at-

‘-wait Hoseok!’ Jaen calls out from below.

Hoseok’s finger is off the trigger.

‘Jaen?’

It’s a young looking boy, Axudarian just like Jaen. He stares at Hoseok, eyes wide, hands up where he’s crouched. Behind him Hoseok spies more Beings- children, possibly.

‘Brena?’ Jaen cries out, climbing up quickly.
‘Is that Jaen?’ a voice asks.

Hoseok immediately lowers the TeorSer and pulls himself back up properly just Jaen climbs up to the proper height.

‘Why aren’t you evacuating?’ Jaen demands, briefly hugging the young Axudarian.

‘They’ve locked in the living quarters,’ someone way in the back explains.

Looking in, Hoseok spies around 15 Beings.

‘Shit-,’ Jaen curses, eyebrows pinched. ‘Which way are you taking them?’

‘Down, and then to the front, towards the evac pods,’ Brena says with a confident nod.

‘Are there others who went ahead? Or behind you guys?’ Jaen asks.

‘A few ahead, some more behind us- but,’ a head pokes out, ‘Jaen- I don’t understand.’

‘Yeah well, neither do I,’ Jaen sighs out, ‘But make your way to the evac pods- but be careful- it might be under surveillance. You all have Comm Devices right?’

Brena nods and a few others behind them.

‘Can any of you use it?’

‘No,’ Brena shakes his head, ‘They all went down inside the Quarters, but the inmates could talk to each other.’

Another network? Hoseok frowns. Jn’young would have made certain to shut down any network within Cuab, that meant whatever was happening, was definitely being operated from within this ship, while Ilya and Jn’young were not in.

‘Okay hold on to those, we’re going to go set up the network for communication again, here take this,’ Jaen hands the young Axudarian her short radio Comm. ‘You can contact Dro’thna with that if you’re close enough, but make sure that it’s only him and the others okay?’

‘Jaen- what are you saying?’ someone in the back asks.

‘I don’t know- but please be careful, stick close,’ Jaen calls before giving Hoseok a look, ‘We’re gonna get going, but you guys go forward first.’

Brena nods and climbs out as Jaen climbs up a little, sharing the rung with Hoseok.

‘Will going to the motherboard help at this point?’ Hoseok asks.

‘I don’t know but we should do it anyways,’ Jaen looks troubled, ‘This was extensively preplanned.’

‘Could you set up another communications network within the ship with the preexisting system?’ Hoseok questions.

‘Yes but that would have to go through Ilya or Jn’young to have it pass. Not to mention me, Camil, and E’nid. Otherwise we’d be able to detect it at once. We keep it tight, secure.’

By the time everyone is moving down, Jaen nods towards the tunnel.
'If we go through that, and then down, we’ll drop down into the floor above, and we can access the gravity-lift to go down,’ Jaen explains.

‘Don’t you want to take them to the evac? I can handle setting up the communications line, and I need to get back to my team,’ Hoseok asks, nodding down at the group below them.

Jaen gives him a face, ‘No offence but I am on edge right now and I need to make sure things are going how I want them to and need them to, you are more than free to fuck off after we get out of this duct.’

Hoseok sighs, ‘Lead the way.’

It takes 10 minutes of crawling, during which the whole system of pipes shudders in the most worrisome way twice, before Jaen pries open a hatch quietly and slowly.

Hoseok’s legs are cramped and he’s sure he’s covered in dust but there’s no time to discuss as they adjust their eyes to the dark hallway.

‘Did the power give out too?’

‘ Seems like it,’ Jaen whispers, ‘You’re good?’

‘I’m fine,’ Hoseok replies.

‘Okay- we’re not far from the gravity-lift,’ Jaen nods forward, ‘Stay quiet and—’

‘-keep low I know,’ Hoseok snorts. Even in the dim light, Hoseok can see Jaen’s glare.

Practically tiptoeing across, Hoseok follows Jaen down an uncomfortably wide hallway. He feels too exposed in this dark stretch of space.

‘There,’ Jaen whispers. ‘No one’s around.’

It’s an uncomfortable minute as they turn the corner, hurtling down the dark hallway, feeling as though something followed them at their very heels.

Jaen leans all the way back in the lift, breathing out slowly as they descend. Hoseok hands her back the TeorSer which she takes with a nod. The door opens and they wait a few seconds before stepping out straight into a sudden onslaught of light and the clear sound of TeorSers powering up.

Blinded, Hoseok winces, turning his head quickly, and raising his hands above his head.

‘Jaen?’

‘E’nid?’

The lights are lowered and Hoseok’s eyes adjust again. There’s sounds of footsteps and the Orvan Hoseok knew as E’nid steps forward, watching both of them suspiciously until the two short Beings Jaen had ordered to spy on E’nid appear.

‘It’s okay!’ they tell them instead. Looking around Hoseok notices that Jaen has the TeorSer aimed straight at E’nid. ‘We got her out- she was being attacked in the second Bridge by Varin,’ Mir exclaims quickly, running up to them.

‘Why is he here?’ E’nid nods at Hoseok who still keeps his hands up.
For a brief second, he wonders if this was what it felt like to witness his own team’s mess from an outsider’s point of view. To an extent it was nice knowing everyone had rather messed up teams and issues with trust.

‘Jaen,’ Sylna, the other one next to Mir speaks up, ‘Jaen we’re okay- it’s okay.’

Slowly, Jaen lowers her TeorSer and then completely lets go, exhaling shakily.

‘Hey- hey, it’s okay,’ E’nid says soothingly, approaching the Axudarian and embracing her. ‘We’ll figure out what’s happening.’

Hoseok looks around, finding a small crew of 8 Beings all together. They all look at him with some wariness which, again, was justifiable but also Hoseok is getting tired of this.

‘We’ve been trying to fix the motherboard,’ E’nid tells them, eyeing Hoseok briefly before deciding not to question him, for which Hoseok was infinitely grateful.

‘Yeah- that’s why he’s here- said he can fix it.’

‘Oh?’ E’nid looks over at him and gives him a once over. ‘Oddly convenient.’

Hoseok really tries not to roll his eyes but he can’t help it.

‘It’s fine- he’s fine,’ Jaen says dismissively and it’s oddly touching despite the flippant tone.

‘Can we go?’ Hoseok tries his best not to sound agitated, ‘I need to find my team members- two of them are not exactly very healthy and I can’t have another one go missing or worse.’

E’nid regards him for a second before nodding.

‘Go ahead, Vla is already trying his best but none of us are actually trained for this,’ E’nid gestures down the dimly lit hallway. Jaen also makes to go with Hoseok but she’s stopped by E’nid.

‘We need to talk,’ E’nid says quietly before glancing at Hoseok, ‘It’s a kinda of only members of this ship discussion.’

Honestly Hoseok just wants the communication channels to be up so he nods. But Jaen stops him, handing him her TeorSer.

Hoseok gives her a nod of thanks before hurrying down the hall. He follows the faint orange light from a doorway. Looking in he finds a hassled looking trio of Beings that are vaguely familiar. They had been at the Bridge, Hoseok remembers, some hours ago.

‘Hey- uh, E’nid said I could come and check this over.’ Hoseok introduces himself.

One of them looks at him carefully before nodding and walking past, clearly to clarify for himself. So Hoseok just stands there, fiddling with his Comm Device. With a start, Hoseok realizes he hadn’t even noticed a fourth who was armed with a heavy TeorSer up on the coolers to the side.

He clearly needed to get his shit together. But honestly, Hoseok was having difficulty thinking straight. There was too much to think about, too much to consider- not only did he not have any background information on the hierarchy present in the ship, or the relationships of the Beings aboard it, or their connections- Hoseok can’t evaluate and judge this situation because he had no information to run off of. That, and not to mention the others were in danger- a sort of danger Hoseok could not predict.
Clearly this situation was happening because someone was planning to overthrow Ilya’s network. Whether it was planned from within, or in league with another force from outside, but clearly someone was trying to take over Ilya’s powerful and secret force. And they had been planning it for a long time too. And regardless of how they were planning this, it was obvious that the appearance of Sk’jin, Yoongi, Jimin, Taeh’yung, Jungkook, and himself- was completely unplanned, not even possibly imagined. So now in this situation, with a strange and unplanned crew of 6 unknown Beings, one who seemed very deeply and closely connected to Ilya, whoever was conducting this, would have to be very careful with how they operated.

Anyone could be connected to this- anyone could be in on it.

Hoseok now had to be careful, not just regarding their own situation and their plan, but also with balancing his way out of this situation and securing the others along with himself. But the first thing he needed to do would be to set up the damn communication line. Footsteps approach again and the Being who had stepped out reappears, he gives the other three inside a nod and Hoseok steps inside.

‘What’s going on?’ he asks, crouching down to look at the exposed motherboard.

‘We can’t breach the firewall,’ one of them replies, shuffling to the side to allow Hoseok to look in. ‘Whoever shut this down had access to the NaviLet. But seeing as the Bridges have been compromised, it’s all up in the spheres.’

‘Right,’ Hoseok sits on the floor, setting down his TeorSer, ‘Is this the screen you connected to connect in?’

‘Yeah- but- our Navigator was killed,’ the other one says tersely from his perch above head. ‘We’re in charge of the coolers- not the communication channels.’

‘Got it,’ Hoseok nods, ‘Okay if I take over?’

‘Have at it,’ they shrug.

Hoseok takes a deep breath and begins. This was when Namjoon would be priceless.

‘We ran diagnostics,’ one of them says, ‘But there’s nothing that stands out.’

And yeah Hoseok notices that too with a grimace. If the network had simply been easily switched off through the main Network, then it would be a simple matter of just switching it back on. Even this small team could manage that.

‘Maybe the network has been branched off to several frequencies,’ Hoseok surmises, reading through the diagnostic the others had ran.

‘That’s not possible- there’s no separate frequency. We all share the same single unit- Ilya said it’s best for transparency and also for sharing data across the network faster.’

‘Well-’

There’s a sudden shower of TeorSer blasts.

‘Shit- no, stay here,’ the one next to him orders, ‘Fix this- we’ll go check. This isn’t the first time.’

Hoseok wants to run back and check but he knows he needs to get the communications fixed.
‘I’ll stand here,’ one of them says as he puts himself near the doorway as the others rush past.

There’s another burst of TeorSer, and some shouts- muffled voices and talking.

‘What’s going on?’ Hoseok asks over his shoulder, eyes scanning over the screen carefully.

‘Not sure yet- I hear talking.’ He replies slowly.

Hoseok manages to get past the firewall just as the Being by the doorway lets out a sigh of relief. ‘Hey it’s okay!’ he calls out, ‘It’s just the others, I’ll be back in a second.’

Hoseok nods but it’s unseen.

It becomes quiet after a while and the sound of footsteps approach, breathless pants following soon after that sound familiar.

Camil appears, squinting in the dark.

‘Hoseok?’ he calls.

‘Here- I’m here,’ Hoseok calls back.

‘Oh thank fuck,’ Camil pants out, ‘Wouldn’t know what to say if something happened to you guys. How’s the motherboard?’

‘Setting up,’ Hoseok replies before facing the open motherboards again, ‘Is everything okay? What happened?’

‘Yeah- came down with a few others to back you guys up – and we came across some inmates coming down here – there was some confusion, but we’ve cleared it,’ Camil explains, looking at the motherboard as well, ‘How can I help?’

‘Where’s Jaen?’ Hoseok looks back briefly.

‘There’s been a massive breach with the cells- I think more inmates are closing in so Jaen and E’nid are holding up the barrier for now,’ Camil explains, closer, Hoseok notices a fresh welt on his forehead.

‘What happened?’ Hoseok asks, eyeing the injury.

‘Wasn’t paying attention,’ Camil replies, ‘Singed by a TeorSer blast.’

Hoseok nods as he hands him the light, ‘Here, point this over.’

Camil takes the light and points it at the motherboard.

‘Any word from Ilya? Or Jn’yong?’

‘No- none, the way downwards is blocked- our hangars are compromised, the emergency Atmoshield just barely managed to protect the others working down there – we’ll need to go into Cuab to find them-‘

‘-fuck,’ Hoseok mutters, ‘-fuck, that’s where the others are.’

‘-what about the other one? Taeh’yung?’
‘I think he’ll be fine,’ Hoseok says, ‘Honestly least of my worries to be honest. I’m worried about Jungkook and Yoongi.’

‘Ah, the Vicitra and the Human? How come?’

‘Well, you saw Yoongi- he’s not good with stress right now,’ Hoseok tries not to remember their conversation too much, his chest twinging. ‘And Kookie is- well, he can be volatile if he’s confused.’

‘Sounds like he could be dangerous. To himself and others.’

‘Yeah- but-!’ Hoseok finally gets through and into the main terminal network. ‘Oh, got it.’

‘Great, when can we get up and running.’

‘Once I remove the barriers-’ Hoseok pauses, looking at the screen. The network was working, the signal sending out clearly. There was nothing wrong with the network. ‘What-?’

A sense of dread runs down Hoseok’s back.

‘I’m genuinely sorry you got caught up in this.’ Camil says quietly.

Hoseok knows no matter how fast he moved, no matter how quickly he took action- it wasn’t going to work.

The bright heat of the TeorSer overwhelms him.

###

Jungkook watches Yoongi and Jimin from inside the Laikin.

Jimin’s eyes glow softly, smiling at something Yoongi was saying.

He smelt happy.

He also smelt scared most times.

Scared, hesitant, anxious-

When Jungkook was captured, taken away from his mothers, his brothers and sisters, he waited and waited. He wasn’t sure what he was waiting for.


But he knew he was waiting – and it wasn’t as though he thought he would never stop waiting. In fact, Jungkook knew that whatever he was waiting for would come to an end- be it because he himself would die, or whatever it was he was waiting for would finally come for him, whether is was good or bad, and that would be it.
Jungkook cannot describe it- cannot define it into a single word.

It combined everything all at once- hope, fear, sorrow, joy, anger, helplessness, bliss; it was all there, and it surrounded Jimin like a thick cloak. And it grew in weight, every time he spoke to Yoongi. His cloak weighed down on him – never crushing, but never allowing him to push it off.

And Yoongi.

‘I SAID STOP FLIRTING!’

Jimin laughs, turning around to help Sk’jin. Yoongi watches after him, resting his head on his arms, smile on his lips.

As though feeling his stare, Yoongi looks around, not at all surprised to find him there.

‘Come on Kook,’ Yoongi waves him over with an amused smile. ‘Let’s bring in the heavy stuff.’

Yoongi smelt of death.

Jungkook pushes himself on all fours before crawling backwards with a quiet sigh. There was really no way of finalizing his thoughts over the matter- not when Jimin didn’t want to address it. Not when Sk’jin couldn’t answer his questions, changing the subject. Not when Taeh’yung answered in multiple voices, bringing the cold of a time long lost into the air around him. He tried asking Hoseok but – but clearly they were all in the same footing about this.

Jungkook really wishes Namjoon would return soon.

Why was he in Lowet? Jungkook has never been to Lowet, but he’s heard of stories- second-hand stories and accounts of the planet, and how it was equally, if not more terribly, ruined.

Just as Jungkook gets his hand over the lift he had brought in, he hears it before he feels it.

A clear, distinct sound of something rupturing- below his feet, far from him, and then the ship shivers.

‘Um-‘ Jungkook automatically finds himself crouching into himself.

‘Wow thank you artificial gravity for inclining along with the ship in my time of fatigue-‘ Sk’jin complains outside, and Jungkook feels himself let go a little. Was that a normal occurrence?

‘Sk’jin, if you’re tired, I can do it myself.’

Jungkook turns, lift forgotten as he rushes towards the door when the whole ship shudders again but it’s much more faint- softer, further away, but just as potent. And then-

‘You reach my age one day and you’ll know exactly what I mean-‘ Sk’jin is exclaiming loudly ‘Even gravity is against you-‘

The lights flicker, turning red followed immediately by the sound of klaxons making Jungkook leap to his feet, shooting off towards the doorway. There’s a flare of orange light that erupts and highlights the interior of the Laikin before it softens, causing Jungkook to squint at the abrupt changes. There’s a strange screeching in his ear- it’s coming from his Comm Device, he realizes, but he charges forward, crouching down to gain more speed and momentum, skidding out of the Laikin over the ramp just in time to catch sight of Yoongi, sprinting forward.

Sk’jin and Jimin are nowhere to be seen and Jungkook doesn’t understand it wasn’t even a minute
since he had gone in- hasn’t been more than just a minute-

Yoongi is screaming- screaming loud and desperate- his hands reaching out forward desperately- desperately before him straining hard and-

There’s nothing but space, nothing but the dark of space stretching out endlessly and Jungkook can’t think straight- but he can’t let Yoongi run forward he was running straight towards the opening and-

Jungkook barrels straight into Yoongi just as all the lights go out.

They fall heavily and with a lot of force, sliding across the floors a good distance before coming to a stop. Jungkook’s not sure what Yoongi was trying to do- a bout of madness? So Jungkook holds the Human down, the stench of death overwhelmed by anguish.

‘No-!’ Yoongi screams, breathless his voice broken and coarse. ‘NO-!’

‘Yoongi!’ Jungkook shakes the Human, helpless, unsure what to do. ‘Uh- Hobi! Please I don’t know what to do!’

There’s no answer.

‘Yoongi where is Jimin? Where is Sk’jin?’ Jungkook shakes the Human again.

‘Shit- shit fuck-’ Yoongi’s hands are shaking as he lifts them to grab onto Jungkook’s wrists.

‘Fuck- Jungkook- fuck, this-‘

There’s footsteps running towards them, a large number. Jungkook stands up immediately- maybe that annoying tall Being, Camil, was back to check on them.

‘Please don’t run,’ Jungkook pleads to Yoongi who was clearly in some sort of strange manic state. He turns to face the approaching footsteps and finds around a dozen Beings approaching them, all armed.

Had something happened? Jungkook is instantly nervous, taking a step back at the weapons.

‘Um-‘ Jungkook tries, ‘Um- what’s happening-?’

He’s shoved to the ground just as the approaching Beings set fire.

Jungkook recovers quickly, grabbing onto Yoongi’s hand that’s dragging him forward until he’s able to keep up with the Human as they dive back inside the Laikin.

‘Lisai activate shields!’ Yoongi orders at once, ‘Track Jimin and Sk’jin’s locations immediately-‘

‘Hangar compromised,’ Lisai replies just as TeorSer fire echoes all around them, causing the Laikin to shiver very very slightly. ‘All docked ships are on lockdown as per order issued by the Bridge.’

‘What?’ Yoongi hisses, moving fast and recklessly, pushing past Jungkook to get into the Laikin’s hangar where the Spardyti was.

‘Yoongi what’s going on-?’ Jungkook asks desperately, unsure what to feel, what to do.

Yoongi stops at the doorway, eyes wide and his face bloodless, mouth slightly open as though unable to speak.
‘Yoongi,’ Jungkook tries again, quickly walking over to stand in front of the Human.

‘Stay inside the ship.’ Yoongi manages to get out. ‘I need to- I need to go and get Jimin and Sk’jin I need to-‘

‘-where did they go?’ Jungkook asks though he has a terrible suspicion- a terrible feeling about the answer-

Yoongi pales even more, shaking his head furiously says, ‘I don’t have time- just stay in here, don’t let anyone in try to contact Hoseok and Taeh’yung-‘

Yoongi rushes into the Laikin hangar and jumps into the Spardyti.

‘Cover me when I get out- there’s some launchers over there that we just got in you can use them right?’ Yoongi asks, shutting the doors shut behind him, his voice echoing out. Jungkook hears more TeorSer fire being shot at them, feels more footsteps approaching.

‘Yes- yes I can-‘ Jungkook is stuck, body agitated in wanting to do something, he’s not sure what Yoongi was doing was right or wrong or-

‘Jungkook please-‘ Yoongi begs from the inside, shaking hands covering his face before he grips down onto the dashboard before him, dark eyes wet as he looks down at him from the inside of the Spardyti. ‘Please- don’t leave the Laikin, wait for the others.’

Jungkook just nods.

‘Get back inside after I get out of the Hangar- close the gates, go to the Bridge, activate the defense protocol and don’t go out, do you hear me? Don’t leave the Laikin.’

Jungkook nods furiously as he picks up the heavy launcher, activating it.

‘All right- I’ll be- I’ll be back-‘ Yoongi chants under his breath, the Spardyti starting up.

Jungkook crouches down by the hangar doorway as it opens- Yoongi doesn’t seem to wait, pushing forward almost immediately when there’s enough space. And Jungkook straightens up a little, lifting the launcher up to balance on his shoulder just like Hoseok taught him-

But he’s sent flying back in a flurry of heat, white light, and pain.

Jungkook doesn’t know how long he’s knocked out- but it’s not too long judging by how there are small shrapnel around the ground inside the Laikin hangar still on fire, the Spardyti upturned and tilted against the entry of the Laikin. Jungkook hears shouting, feels the Laikin tremor even more.

His senses screaming at him, Jungkook crouches on all fours, taking a moment to check for any injuries other than the familiar burn on his skull.

There’s a loud sound- like something ramming against a solid metallic surface. It repeats again and the door to the Spardyti bursts through, letting out a huge pillar of smoke, and Yoongi leaps out, armed only with a single Heliord that illuminates the smoky air a chilling blue before he vanishes with the light.

The smoke unravels fast and thick, already obscuring the visibility of the massive Hangar, only illuminated by the new orange Atmoshield. Ears pricked, Jungkook steps out of the Laikin hangar, crouching down to place his palms over the ground, concentrating more on the vibrations of the floor over any other sense.
A figure runs across Jungkook and with no calculation or thought, Jungkook leaps up, bringing the unknown Being down. Jungkook disarms the Being, driving his elbow down harshly into their chest and forcefully rolling on the ground with them. Armed with a TeorSer that felt hot in his hands, Jungkook crouches low to look closely at the Being he had just taken down. He doesn’t recognize them- and he can’t tell for sure if they were there to help him or not- but right now Jungkook feels the same way he did back in his cramped and damp prison cell.

He needed to survive.

The smoke is thick and visibility greatly reduced.

There’s some shouting, but it’s cut off abruptly in a flash of blue like lightning striking through thick dark thunder storms. Jungkook sticks close to the side of the Laikin, ears and nose alert. The sound of the Heliord rings towards the back, and footsteps, quiet and many, approach him. Jungkook throws the TeorSer straight across before leaping up, grappling quietly over the grooves of the Laikin and lifting himself over to one of the turbines, laying low.

Two Beings, crouched low, armed with TeorSers slowly walk by.

‘I saw someone here,’ one of them says.

‘We need to get rid of the strays,’ the other says lowly, ‘Can’t risk it.’

‘Aren’t there supposed to be 4 of them down here? I only saw two.’

‘Can’t be sure- maybe they were unlucky, got pulled out-‘

Their voices fade out and Jungkook takes a slow quiet breath, he’s about to crawl out of the turbine when they return again. Jungkook crouches further in.

‘-mil said we need to make sure that the GI is eliminated – he’s taken care of the weird tall one.’

‘He didn’t seem dangerous though-‘

‘-heard he’s one of the Zhak’gri,’ the voice is closer, ‘they’re unpredictable and incredibly powerful, they’ve put him down.’

Anger and fear burns hot through Jungkook and he’s moving before he realizes it.

He drops down on all fours, making no sound right behind the two walking past. And just as there’s a shout ahead, a flash of blue that illuminates the strange orange darkness, Jungkook springs into action.

‘Kookie, you gotta learn how to focus that strength,’ Taeh’yung offers from the side as Jungkook falls on the ground, Hoseok looking guilty having just thrown him down deftly. ‘Concentrate and think of where you wanna punch! And punch there hard and fast!’

Jungkook draws back his body as he slides forward on his knees before twisting around his waist, elbow striking across the back of knees. Twisting around the gasping and falling Being, Jungkook uses them as a shield before propelling himself up, knee flying up and coming across with an echoing thwap as he jams it straight into the other Being’s chest.

Jungkook makes quick work of the two, his breath escape him in hot hisses. But he’s not left alone for too long as another set of Beings converge around him. Jungkook doesn’t pause to think, doesn’t pause to calculate-
‘You’re not a fighter like Yoongi, or like Hoseok, if anything, you’re more similar to Taeh’yung- he doesn’t stop to think- he just acts out of instinct, and that unpredictability is what makes him so volatile,’ Sk’jin tells him, brushing his hair after his sad shower where he had lost spectacularly to Yoongi during a lesson, the lights of Grisial casting strange liquid shadow around them. ‘It’s good to know how and where to strike, but it’s also good to know that most Beings who are going to come at you are either trained to do so in a certain way- if you move in a way they’re not used to, you will have the upper-hand.’

Jungkook lets his body move how it wants- he takes Yoongi’s actions, Hoseok’s focus, Taeh’yung’s words, and Sk’jin’s guidance and Jungkook moves.

His would be assailant’s eyes widen in horror as Jungkook shoots forward towards him, mouth open in a snarl that tears right through his throat in a hot shower of blood, staining Jungkook’s sight a bloody hue. He hurls the still screaming assailant, blood gurgling out of their throat in wide arcs, straight into the next approaching Being. Jungkook chases after their falling forms, pale bloodied hands shooting out to wrap around a screaming head that abruptly stops after Jungkook slams it down hard. A TeorSer shot is fired at him, the heat of it passing over his back. But Jungkook twists away, scuttling onto all fours again and running towards the still firing source in a dizzying zigzag through the dark orange air until the last bright light of the TeorSer just manages to illuminate his snarling bloodied face to his assailant.

Her scream is short-lived.

Jungkook swiftly runs back towards the Laikin, hands feeling down on the ground, the faint tremors of approaching feet, pausing slightly in worry and fear.

There’s another loud and worrying blast of the klaxon, and for a moment, the black of space outside is brightly illuminated. Jungkook squints, turning his head away- but it’s in this moment that a burning hot pain cuts through his shin.

Immediately falling to his knee, Jungkook raises his arms up before his head instinctually- and just on time as a heavy and strong kick sends him down to the floor. There’s another TeorSer shot fired at him- he has two assailants; one further and probably on a higher ground with a TeorSer. And the other skilled and trained.

A cold and painfully familiar glint of metallic light slices the air before him just as Jungkook manages to back away. His assailant was carrying some sort of blade.

Jungkook immediately sprints, leg searing, towards the crates Sk’jin had been stacking up just some time ago. His shoulder burns as a TeorSer shot just barely misses him.

He couldn’t stay back here for too long- he was cornered, possibly planned so that he could try and hide in a place like this.

The floor, the air, the whole ship shudders and the space outside is illuminated again. But it’s enough to illuminate the crates and enough to remind Jungkook of what was inside.

He quickly pries the crate open, leaving bloody smears. He pauses, feeling the ground, feels footsteps approaching, quiet, faint. Making quick work, Jungkook picks up the vacuum cells stored inside. They were light but fit excellently in his hands. Pushing his fists through them, Jungkook grabs a few more until they stack up on his arms. Then grabbing the lid of the crate, nimbly climbs up the stacks of crates before throwing a vacuum cell hard and fast over to the edge, towards the orange Atmoshield. Almost immediately, a TeorSer shot fires through the air and Jungkook pinpoints its location, hurling with his whole strength, one of the cells with deadly force.
Jungkook’s not sure if his aim was true but there’s no more shots fired at him as he leaps over the crates and straight at the stealthily approaching assailant.

There’s sparks as the blade of his assailant meets with his cell-covered forearms.

And just as Jungkook suspected, this assailant was geared fully- unlike the others that came after him. This Being was dressed in a sort of armor- covering their body head to toe, clearly geared to specifically fight Jungkook and maybe even Yoongi.

His assailant has two thin and cruel looking blade, the air around it slightly shimmering. Jungkook doesn’t recognize what type of weapon it was, doesn’t know what will happen if he’s touched by it – so he keeps his distance.

The whole ship tremors again and his assailant darts forward.

His assailant would be formidable to most- but Jungkook has fought almost all of his grown life. He was trained by some of the most skilled and unorthodox Beings – has watched them fight.

Jungkook lashes forward as well, the blades of his assailant coming down strong and hard against his covered arms as he pushes through, head butting his assailant. They stagger backwards but it’s momentary before it swipes, almost futilely, the air between them. Jungkook doesn’t have time to wonder over what this meant as he follows after his assailant.

But suddenly his eyes, nose, and throat burn up severely. He can’t help it, his eyes water- throat constricting and nose instantly blocked.

Gagging, Jungkook keels over and he’s immediately kicked down. He falls to the ground, skidding to a stop dangerously close to the orange Atmoshield.

He’s barely able to dodge the blade that comes down to his chest, twisting away on the floor, barely able to track the movements of his assailant over the sound of his breathless gags. His foot makes contact with something- probably his assailant. But his foot is pushed and grabbed the opposite direction, making him spin hopelessly onto his back as a weight pressed down on his chest.

Jungkook tries to push them off but it’s hopeless, knees pressing down on his arms. Letting out a gargled scream, Jungkook bares his teeth at his assailant, desperate as the Being brings down the sharp blade but it never touches him.

Like lightning, blue flashes through the smoke, a blade striking through like thunder and a shower of blood immediately raining over Jungkook.

A very blurry looking Yoongi appears before him, manic worry etched all over his blood splattered face.

‘Come here, come here- come on kiddo, we need to wash that out of your system-‘ Jungkook feels himself being pulled up and dragged almost. But relief washes over him as he allows himself to lean a little more into the Human. Jungkook can’t see but he suspects they’re back inside the Laikin and he’s left to stand up against the wall as Yoongi moves about.

It’s after a few seconds of silence, punctuated by Yoongi’s movements and some more tremors around the ship, that something is sprayed over his face. Jungkook flinches but he accepts it, taking the bottle pushed into his hand and raised to his mouth.

His sight clears up, though his eyes don’t stop streaming.
Yoongi looks completely ruined, blood soaking his clothes in multiple places, eyes wild, agitated where he stood.

‘You’re okay?’

Jungkook manages to nod.

‘Others will come we need to get moving- we need to get another ship, find Jimin and Sk’jin,’ Yoongi says hurriedly, taking a step back and looking at the still smoking Spardyti. ‘You stay here, hide, tend to your wounds and—’

‘No,’ Jungkook shakes his head at once, his voice raspy and throat raw.

‘Jungkook please don’t argue with me right now—’ Yoongi isn’t even looking at him as he rushes about inside the hangar, ‘—I need to go out there and look for him I can’t leave him I can’t—’

Yoongi collapses to his knees, unaware of his surroundings, arms and hands still moving as though he was looking for something.

Jungkook crawls over, his leg burning.

‘—I can’t leave him I can’t—’ Yoongi repeats.

‘I’ll go with you- I’m going with you,’ Jungkook is hesitant at first but he wraps his arms around the Human. ‘Let’s find them together, we’ll find them.’

Yoongi lets out a strange shuddering sob before he’s nodding, gripping Jungkook’s hand around his shoulder.

‘We need to get a ship- a Transporter,’ Yoongi is saying.

‘The next door Hangar,’ Jungkook says at once, standing up, ‘That escort ship is there—’

‘Fuck- those guards would be in there—’ Yoongi curses, ‘—but I think Camil had them moved—’

Outside, the blue of the Atmoshield flickers on, and the lights flicker back on again. Both Yoongi and Jungkook pauses, looking out through the smoky air.

‘We move fast, quiet,’ Yoongi says tersely, still looking out. ‘We cover each other.’

Jungkook nods.

Yoongi approaches one of the walls of the hangar and bangs his fist on it, a handle popping out. Yanking it down, there’s a shelving unit inside with just a single Heliord and one small TeorSer. Yoongi throws him the TeorSer and pockets the Heliord next to the other he already had.

‘Do you hear anything outside?’

Jungkook shakes his head after a few seconds of carefully straining his ears.

‘Okay- I have a feeling they’ll be back soon,’ Yoongi says, heading for the hangar opening.

‘What is happening?’ Jungkook asks, standing close and behind Yoongi.

‘I don’t know—’
'is it them? The Omhlophe?’

‘No,’ Yoongi shakes his head, pausing to look around outside carefully. ‘If it were them this would
be turning out differently- I think there’s some sort of assailing unit from Cuab- probably in league
with someone within Ilya’s crew.’

Jungkook doesn’t know what to make of it but he remembers something.

‘I heard some talking- they- they uh, they said they had to take us down- that um, Taeh’yung- he’s
been um-’ Jungkook’s voice shakes, cracking all over the place.

Yoongi turns around, his eyes dark and strangely distant as he says, ‘He’ll be okay- it’s Taeh’yung
right? He’ll be fine, you’ve seen him.’

Jungkook doesn’t know if Yoongi is trying to reassure him or himself but he just nods.

‘We-,’ Yoongi takes a shaky breath, ‘We’ll be okay.’

They step out, their movement silent through the slowly dissipating smoke. Yoongi gestures
forward towards one of the connecting tunnels to the other neighbouring Hangar. Moving fast and
low, Yoongi and Jungkook slip into the tunnel. But something uneasy stirs in Jungkook, so he
reaches out to stop Yoongi just as the power gives out again before flickering on again.

‘What is it?’ Yoongi asks, barely a whisper.

‘I- I don’t think we should go through here,’ Jungkook replies, looking down the connecting
tunnel.

Yoongi pauses to look down as well before looking out behind them.

‘We’re in the corner here,’ Yoongi says quietly, ‘We need another ship- we can’t go back around,
we run straight forward- no stopping.’

Darkness falls over them again.

Gripping the TeorSer in his hands, Jungkook nods just once, ‘Okay.’

The lights flicker out again but return again. The ship tremors, the ground vibrating as they
hurriedly move along.

As they continue on, Jungkook can’t help but look back. And in that blink of light Jungkook
catches sight of a tall sinewy figure down the tunnel they had just gone through.

‘Yoongi-!’ Jungkook stops the Human from moving.

‘What is it?’

‘I- I saw something,’ Jungkook replies quietly.

They’re greatly disadvantaged- stuck in the middle of a hallway where they could be easily
cornered from both sides.

There was no returning back to the Laikin at this point.

‘Then we move ahead-’ Yoongi is pulling forward but he stops too, as the lights flicker and the
figure down the hallway is apparent.
And closer.

In the darkness, Jungkook can make out the outline of the Being.

Tall, strong, sinewy- Jungkook notes pale skin, bloody looking fingertips, bloodied eye sockets-orb like glowing eyes in the dark- a sharp grin on her face as she regards Jungkook like prey.

‘It’s- it’s the Vicitra- the one from the cells below,’ Yoongi says, pulling Jungkook backwards and away.

And in that moment, Jungkook makes up his mind.

‘I’ll take care of her,’ Jungkook says tersely, ‘Please- please find Jimin and Sk’jin- please find them.’

Yoongi pulls him back.

‘She was purposefully sent here,’ Yoongi says, speaking more to himself. ‘She was sent here on purpose.’

‘Yoongi go!’ Jungkook removes his arm from the Human’s grip and hands him the TeorSer. ‘You need to get Jimin and Sk’jin- there’s no time!’

The Human blinks rapidly, mouth opening and closing a few times before he stops. His hands shake, fists against his side before he nods, turning to look him straight in the eye.

‘Don’t expose your back.’

And with that Yoongi sprints out down the tunnel.

Jungkook looks back at the other Vicitra. Now much closer again.

She was taller than him. Full grown, experienced, deadly, and sent here with one single purpose.

Jungkook has done his research on his own species as best as he could. Sk’jin hadn’t wanted him to read in too far, a worried frown over his forehead as he read with Jungkook.

‘Cannibals?’

‘Not all of them- it’s just an exaggeration of something that happened long ago.’

‘They sometimes killed their younglings in fights?’

‘War, pride, arrogance, fear- all of these kill without discrimination.’

‘Why?’

Sk’jin had struggled to answer, pausing as he ate. The Yisheng in training were listening closely to their conversation as well, their expressions filled with some sort of apprehensive anticipation.

Looking back, Jungkook notices how Yoongi slows by the entrance, looking back one more time. Jungkook isn’t sure if the Human can see, but he smiles, trying to appear as reassuring as possible. Yoongi quietly slips out and Jungkook looks back around.

The Vicitra, his own species and kin, stands not more than 10 meters from where he stood his ground. Her hair is pushed back, shorter than Jungkook’s own. There’s a bruise in the crook of her
elbow- as though she had been administered too many invasive shots. She’s roughly dressed, as though she took whatever she could find. Jungkook isn’t sure if she’s definitely here for him, but he’ll try anyways.

She smells like hunger.

‘I-‘ he starts. She looks surprised, head tilting just a little, listening. ‘I don’t know who you are.’

She raises an eyebrow at that, ‘You don’t have to.’

Her voice is soft and deep.

‘But you’re the first of my- of my species that I’ve met,’ Jungkook continues.

‘I know,’ she replies, ‘You’re one of those that they call New Born here right? One of the *eggs*- it’s what the Alliance calls you.’

Jungkook nods.

‘You’re supposed to be better than me,’ she says, eyes squinting a little, ‘Supposed to be stronger, better, faster – but I was watching you.’

Jungkook feels shivers down his spine.

‘And you’re not,’ she states calmly, orb like eyes watching him in the dark. ‘You’re just a youngling.’

‘Are you here to kill me?’ Jungkook asks calmly.

‘I am.’ She confirms.

‘Why?’

‘Why not?’

‘War, pride, arrogance, fear- *all of these kill without discrimination.*’

‘Why?’

‘Why not?’

Jungkook barely has time to defend himself as the Vicitra strikes forward – hard and fast.

It’s overwhelming- she’s incredibly fast and vicious. But Jungkook knows this isn’t it- this wasn’t the hardest she could hit him, the fastest she could knock the air out of his lungs – she was taunting him, playing with him, pretending to give him a feel for her strength and speed.

Jungkook manages to put distance between himself and the other Vicitra. She’s grinning at him, not even breathless, whereas Jungkook is panting, pain pulsing all over his body from her quick jabs and punches. She gives him time to catch his breath, watching with amusement.

When Jungkook stands straight he’s somewhat a bit more better prepared for the second time she dives at him. He counters her arms- manages to, painfully, block her knee that flies for his head, but is unable to avoid the blinding smack of her head against his own.

His vision turning white, and momentarily losing track of where he was, Jungkook stumbles
backwards, falling back against the wall and sliding down as his legs give out under him.

He’s shaken by the sound of TeorSer shots firing off the direction Yoongi had gone.

He launches to his feet faster than the Vicitra was expecting – Jungkook knows his speed could potentially outdo Yoongi’s- so he uses the element of surprise; rather than running straight towards the Vicitra, Jungkook runs past, ducking under her sweeping arm at the last second and twisting sharply, runs for the wall using it as a lever, twists midair, swinging his feet backward and connecting heavily with the Vicitra.

The Vicitra only falls to one knee, a sound of surprise coming from her.

Jungkook falls but he purposefully stays low, crouched low as he slides closer on his knees, his elbow connected to her bent knee and with a resonating sharp crack, dislocates it completely.

But Jungkook is too close- she doesn’t seem to notice her knee being dislocated as she grabs Jungkook around the throat and slamming him down to the ground.

But Jungkook is oddly prepared for this- he’s gone through his exact maneuver with Yoongi in the past. So he swings his legs and hips upwards, locking the Vicitra’s heads between his legs and twisting his whole body to the side.

She automatically lets go and Jungkook grabs her hands, rolling them on the floor.

Jungkook knew that if he had asked, he would have never been allowed to watch it. But he had secretly watched Yoongi’s fight – the one from the Pompen Arena.

It had been horrifying- but educational.

Because while Yoongi and Hoseok both taught him practicality and technique- watching Yoongi’s fight had taught him how to be brutal effectively.

He twists the Vicitra’s arm out of the socket- this time causing her to definitely scream in pain with this dislocation. He throws his weight on the arm and reaches down, hands grappling her head-

But she physically throws him off, and Jungkook lands awkwardly to the side. He doesn’t have breathing time even, when she catches his foot and swings him clean off the floor and against the wall.

Winded, Jungkook stands as quickly as he can, hand slipping on the walls of the curved tunnel as he balanced himself. The Vicitra pops her arm back in and is reaching to pop her knee back but Jungkook is not an egotistic Vicitra, trying to prove her strength and dominance.

Jungkook is just trying to survive- and when you tried to survive, it meant no showy gestures and or displays of haughtiness.

He jumps up- it’s not with a lot of strength, but it’s enough to cause the Vicitra to reel backwards, disoriented as Jungkook lands a blow straight to her chest, and then another to her probably incredibly sore shoulder. He lunges forward, pushing her against the wall again and yanks at her arm, twisting it over his shoulder and throwing her over his back down to the floor.

Her fingers catch around his face, nails dragging down. Roaring, Jungkook crushes down on her arm, falling haphazardly before hearing another terrible wet crack, lower down the Vicitra’s arm.

Jungkook doesn’t manage to roll away, claw like hands grabbing at his hair.
Out of instinct, Jungkook grapples with the hand on his head as it jerks him closer to the Vicitra who roars in his face.

In a strange tangled mess on the floor, with Jungkook struggling on his back, the Vicitra swings her leg over and down, catching Jungkook on his side. His vision blinks out as pain erupts faster than the cracking sound that fills his ears. Then the fingers in his hair tighten and his hair rips out, a searing burn spreading over his scalp; the pain serves to clear his sight and he manages to push himself off the ground and away.

Jungkook nearly twists his own wrist, getting caught in a gap on the floor he hadn’t seen or noticed before. A quick look shows that wires ran under the gap- some sort of outlet ran up around the hallway.

He stands, adjusting himself, looking down quickly and noticing more gaps around the floor. He hears an increased rate of TeorSer shots coming from where Yoongi had gone into.

A sudden kick aimed right at his chest sends him flying back.

He’s closer to the end of the hallway now- the lights from there providing better illumination. Jungkook stands quickly but his side is burning- his breath short and unstable. The Vicitra is holding her mangled arm, already turning purple along the elbow.

She looks mad- and Jungkook wonders if he does too.

Jungkook shuffles back and the Vicitra, laughing, lunges- and then her foot is caught in the same gap, making her momentarily lose her balance, knee bending and turning in.

Unsure what prompts him to do so, Jungkook leaps forward, arms wrapping around her torso and shoves her straight into the wall before using his momentum swing his elbow forward.

It meets her jaw with a resounding cracking sound. She blocks his other fist but she can’t use her other arm to block his knee swinging upwards, catching her right under her ribs. Bowled over, Jungkook raises both hands in the air above his head, clasped tight and brings it down over her head.

But she in turn barrels into him, throwing him to the wall but it’s weak. And Jungkook bounces right back, raising his knee and sending her flying to the side as he swings it across her head.

There’s an explosion from the Hangar ahead-

‘-Yoongi-!’

The Vicitra roars, pushing herself off the floor and lunging at Jungkook. They both fall down, Jungkook taking her weight. But he curls his legs inward and kicking them out before him, launches the Vicitra off of him. Rolling around as quickly as he could, breath caught in his throat no matter how hard he tried to breathe. Jungkook stands up, instantly dizzy and his vision swimming before his eyes.

There’s roaring behind him and-

*Don’t expose your back.*

Spinning quickly, Jungkook catches the Vicitra’s extended hand- fingers like claws reaching forward as though intending to rip through Jungkook’s back.
Jungkook twists away and around, making the Vicitra fall through the air and landing onto the floor heavily. Her fall misbalances him, but Jungkook only falls to one knee. She swings her leg back, nearly clipping him on his head, but Jungkook manages to dodge it and grab her leg, pushing it down against the natural bend. This causes the Vicitra to shriek in pain, body twisting upwards to counter the unnatural way Jungkook held her leg. And then Jungkook lets go to twist his arm around the Vicitra’s throat. Then twisting his whole body with hers, Jungkook falls backwards.

The ringing in his ears is only just louder than his struggling pants.

It’s only when he pushes off the Vicitra’s body from on top of his that he notices that was bleeding steadily from his side.

The whole ship seemed to tremble violently, more flashes of light ahead.

Jungkook is closer than he thought. He can see the escort ship— but there’s no one around— either that or—

His breath rattling in his throat, Jungkook manages to stand— but only for a second, before slumping on the wall.

He hears TeorSer shots again, but now Jungkook is not sure if it’s actual TeorSer shots or just his mind.

‘Y-Yoongi—’ he pushes one foot forward before he ultimately slips into silence and darkness.

*'

‘I’m genuinely sorry you got caught up in this.’ Camil says quietly.

Hoseok knows no matter how fast he moved, no matter how quickly he took action— it wasn’t going to work.

The bright heat of the TeorSer overwhelms him.

But it never hits him.

Camil gasps in pain, breathless chokes.

Hoseok turns around quickly, pushing backwards to see Jaen and E’nid both holding the ends of some sort of rope, the other end around Camil’s throat. But Camil is pushing against it, fingers digging under the rope.

‘Hoseok!’ Jaen hisses.

Hoseok punches Camil across the knee, bringing him down before easily knocking him out with a swift uppercut.

Jaen and E’nid let go of the rope, panting. In closer inspection they’re both injured.
‘What happened-?’ Hoseok manages to get out.

‘We don’t know,’ Jaen says immediately, ‘But this asshole is behind it- and I’m bringing his ass down to Ilya and Jn’young before I take his head off myself.’

‘Can you fix it?’ E’nid points at the motherboard before calling out behind her, ‘No- we’re good-caught the bastard.’

‘There’s nothing wrong with it- it’s something Camil himself probably did,’ Hoseok frowns at the unconscious Camil at his feet. ‘The network is running fine- it’s the Comm Devices I think.’

‘Best believe it’s what I do best,’ Hoseok grumbles, attaching the Comm Device to his ear before saying in perfect imitation of Camil’s voice, ‘The motherboard situation has been taken care of.’

‘Took you long enough – we’ve sent down the Vicitra to get the ones remaining at the Hangar. The weird one is still knocked out, we’re transporting him to one of the pods so we can get him out but Camil, there’s nothing coming from Axudar- are you sure that they said they would come here or we’re supposed to go to them?’

‘I got the message myself okay, I know what I heard and what they said- they’re coming here. Fucking Verktaë and their weird sensing abilities- they said they would definitely come because this was a “welcome home” party.’

‘Camil? What next now?’

‘Evdos should be meeting us soon shouldn’t he? Fucking bitch got distracted and now we’re here-‘

‘Hey Camil- we managed to get Ilya and Jn’young inside Cuab- Jn’young’s out so there’s no danger there-‘

‘-wait guys- Camil what’s wrong-‘

Hoseok’s mind is reeling as he quickly shuts off the speaker.

E’nid looks horrified as Jaen looks like she’s about to collapse.

‘He’s- he’s dealing with Axudar,’ she says with a trembling voice, ‘They were going to take us- all of this, all of us- to Axudar-‘

‘Evdos was in on this- he was-‘

The others gathered around outside and a few inside have looks of shock and disgust and fear.

‘We need to get to Jn’young and Ilya,’ one of them says, ‘We have to get them out-‘

‘-this can’t be just Camil masterminding doing all of this,’ E’nid says at once, ‘If we can track down everyone else-‘

‘Clearly Evdos is in this too- those voices-‘ Jaen begins hotly, her anger palpable as she shakes.

‘-if you can get me one of the NaviLets or get me to the Engine Rooms with the core-structure, then I can reverse this,’ Hoseok says at once, holding up the Comm Device, ‘-but I really really need to get to my team- they’ve-‘

Camil had talked to him about the Vicitra, had talked to him about the others- and Hoseok had just-
‘-they’re in danger, Camil arranged for them to be taken care of I need- where are the pods?’ Hoseok asks instead at once.

‘Your friend- Taeh’yung right?’ E’nid questions.

Hoseok nods, ‘If I can get to him- get him out and just- just check on him, get him to wake up, we’ll be able to fix a lot of things.’

Jaen looks at him incredulously but E’nid nods to that.

‘Okay- okay I’ll take you to the pods- and then we go to-’

‘no I got it- I’ll take Hoseok to the pods and get his friend out- then we meet up at one of the Bridges-’

‘-the fourth Bridge is closest,’ someone suggests.

‘One second,’ E’nid calls out, ‘Go through the stuff outside- pick out weapons, and other Comm Devices we can use. And then we move out carefully- we’ll put Camil in here and tie him up until we’re set.’

The others nod to that and quickly step away.

‘Jaen?’ E’nid calls out gently.

‘Wait- no I think-’ Jaen seemed to be trying to get her shit together which Hoseok relates to a lot. ‘Wait- we all head for the Bridge- there we can track all pods that are being activated- that way Hoseok knows which one his friend is in. And we can also do that- that reversing thing you said,’ Jaen gestures at Hoseok and the Comm Device he was holding.

‘Okay yeah-,’ Hoseok nods to that. ‘Okay- uh-’

‘I’ll go with Hoseok,’Jaen continues, seemingly getting a grip of herself, ‘If there’s too many of us going at the same time, it’ll be riskier- E’nid-’

‘-I’ll come too-’

‘-now is not the time-‘

‘-please-’ Jaen takes E’nid’s hand midway, squeezing it. ‘Just make sure the kids and families are okay-’

For a brief moment, Hoseok feels like he’s intruding on something private and he looks away, trying to give the two before him their privacy as best as he could.

‘Fine.’ E’nid sounds exhausted. ‘Fine I will-’

‘We’ll come get you guys- Brena and the others were headed for the 8th Pod Unit- I think they deemed it safest.’ Jaen isn’t looking at E’nid.

‘Okay- right I’ll take them up,’ E’nid says, also not looking up.

She leaves and Jaen sighs out, squatting down to push Camil over to his front. It’s a comically awkward silence.

‘Emotional constipation-‘
'Now is not the time!' Jaen snaps, ‘Give me that rope I’m tying this asshole up.’

Camil is well tied up, Hoseok makes no comments about Jaen aggressively tying the much taller Being up with more force than strictly necessary because, again, he relates. There was a lot to unpack here- what with Camil’s betrayal, as well as a lot of other Beings- including the wonderful Junior Constable Evdos (and Hoseok feels any guilt he had considering that Being completely evaporate), and Jaen’s own relationship with Axudar.

‘It’s quiet,’ Jaen comments as they pause in a hallway.

Hoseok agrees.

They come across bodies around the ground- but with no signs of struggle or clear battle. It was unsettling, what with the random tremors, and sometimes a few disembodied shrieks echoing down the hallways through the vents.

It’s an unsettling 10 minutes of quiet, more bodies, and more tremors when they reach a lift.

‘Okay we-‘ Jaen begins but they’re interrupted by screams and shrieks.

Down the hallway they had just come through and over to the other side, a massive hoard of Beings- still dressed in their prison uniform, run across- run away.

The lights flicker and there’s shrieking and then-

‘We should hurry,’ Jaen taps at the screen hurriedly, eyeing the long narrow dark tunnel uncomfortably. The elevator doors open, thankfully to an empty lift, and they step inside, placing themselves to the side.

As the doors close, Hoseok catches sight of a dark figure walking across the distant hallway.

‘Fuck- fuck that was close-‘

‘What’s going on?’ Hoseok demands, ‘Did Camil bring in like, I don’t know, some sort of special unit to bring down this network-‘

‘I don’t know!’ Jaen exclaims, hands up in the air, ‘I don’t know why- I don’t know how- I just don’t know!’

‘Hey shit fuck- there’s something wrong-‘

‘What do you mean? What are you talking about?’

‘They’re talking,’ Hoseok points at the Comm Device on his ear. ‘Something’s gone wrong.’

‘No one from the western wing is replying- I don’t know what’s wrong- is something fucking up our network?’

‘Camil said it was fine-‘

‘-for fuck’s sake- keep an eye out- you think you lot are the best fighters in this ship? You’re lucky we have these inmates to take the brunt-‘

‘-just make sure we hold steady until Axudar comes through-‘

The line distinctly shuts.
'I think they caught on that Camil has been compromised. My line is down. Also, apparently the western wing is down?' Hoseok relays, ‘No one is responding from there.’

‘The western wing is where all our Hangars are,’ Jaen frowns, ‘That seems odd-‘

‘They’re waiting for Axudar to pull through for them right now I think,’ Hoseok nervously fidgets.

‘Hey- I know you have a lot banking on this- and with your decisions regarding Axudar and shit- but I hope you know that at this point, we’re both on the same side, and I have no intention of going there, or being captured- so don’t worry- we’ll pull through. We get the NaviLet- you communicate back with your team, and you get the hell out.’

‘What about you?’

‘I’m gonna get Ilya and Sk’jin after this,’ Jaen tells him seriously, ‘Then I’m hauling ass- get to the pods, or grab a Transporter and warp out as quickly as you can. When we’re in a safe distance, I’ll alert the GLA.’

Hoseok nods slowly.

‘I don’t think Sk’jin would want to leave.’

Jaen pauses at that, looking up at Hoseok thoughtfully. But nothing more is said as the elevator doors open.

Carefully looking out, the hallway and atrium they open up to is clear.

Here too, a few bodies lay around.

‘Fuck- this is so weird,’ Jaen says quietly.

The lights are low here- just the emergency lights that shine a dim light. The Bridge doorway is open and the light in there is brighter.

‘I think we’re clear,’ Jaen says hesitantly.

‘I’ll go in first, cover me,’ Hoseok pulls her back. Jaen nods.

The Bridge is empty. The view from here looks down at the longer side of Cuab-D2, and Hoseok spies debris flying all over the space around it.

‘What the fuck-’ Jaen whispers low, walking up to the window, crouching low. Hoseok makes his way to the Navigation Table, the source of the light.

‘Wait Hoseok!’ Jaen calls out suddenly. Hoseok stops immediately, crouching down, staring around himself with wide eyes.

‘-what?’

‘The Communication network- it’s back on,’ Jaen looks confused. ‘I don’t understand- I thought you said-‘

‘-I did-‘ Hoseok frowns, looking down at the Navigation Table he hadn’t even managed to touch.

‘But-‘
‘Step away!’ Camil appears at the doorway, TeorSer held aloft.

Behind him are a number of Beings Hoseok cannot take down on his own, with just a single TeorSer, even with Jaen.

‘Camil-’ Jaen’s voice is a warning, low and angry.

‘Away,’ Camil is only looking at Hoseok, a strange curious expression on his face, ignoring Jaen. ‘Who did you call?’

‘What?’ Hoseok is confused.

‘Or is it the Verktaë with you? Is he doing something?’ Camil demands.

The inmates that came with Camil fill in. Their uniform is the same as the one from Māho-5. How long had this operation been running within Ilya’s network without detection?

‘Answer me, or I’ll have the pod with your friend in it sent out without any vacuum seal,’ Camil throws in, ‘Don’t think death by implosion is all too great.’

‘Camil-’

Camil doesn’t even look at Jaen when he fires the TeorSer at her.

‘Answer me-’

The lights go off, the Navigation Table switching off and bathing the whole Bridge in darkness. Hoseok ducks down- and there’s an uproar.

All Hoseok could do now was wait out the time between now and his death-

TeorSers fire off- the inmates are yelling and screaming- suddenly a body flops over the dashboard Hoseok had ducked behind, more crashing sounds over the Navigation Table.

Confused, Hoseok looks around- trying to find a way out- a way to communicate. He finds that Jaen is unconscious, bleeding out from her side. Hoseok crawls towards her as quickly as he can, TeorSer fire going off above him.

Another body flies overhead and Hoseok can’t pay it too much attention, he readjusts Jaen’s position onto her side that’s not injured. He had to staunch the bleeding quickly. He takes off his shirt, ripping it from the collar down when-

Suddenly quiet, Hoseok stops with the makeshift bandage. Pausing to listen carefully.

Out of nowhere, he’s dragged up, held up by Camil who pushes his TeorSer against his temple.

‘Tell your people to stand down,’ Camil hisses in his ear, ‘Or I will blow your brains out-’

There’s a very distinct clear sound of a TeorSer activation hum and before Hoseok can brace himself, Camil falls to a heap behind him in a flash of light and heat.

The lights flicker back on to full power, the Navigation Table switched on, and Hoseok twists around, hands still held up and-

An extremely familiar figure stood by the window, TeorSer still smoking slightly-
But no- something was different.

Taller, a little more built- a black uniform, matte and simple- a black helmet over their head.

The visor clicks upwards, revealing an expressionless face that regards Hoseok with a familiar yet different gaze before she says in an equally monotonous voice, 'Mission successful Captain Namjoon. Now securing Ngfy’widan Hoseok.'

*  

Sk’jin feels the tremor, move through the sole of his shoes, through his feet, to the back of his head. Before he can speak a word, everything is violently pulled away-

Sk’jin feels all of space and time slip under and over him- moving as fast and weightlessly as light. There’s nothing he can do- nothing he can hold on to- even his breath won’t escape his lungs- there’s nothing he can do-

He’s upside down- the stars below him, above him- all around him. He sees the ship- massive and lit in this endless space- the edges and surface riddled now with objects, Beings, dreams, memories- all pulled away from their place, slipping violently through space and time.

Sk’jin feels himself being pulled into a bright star, the lights wrapping around him- stabilizing him in this strange liquid formlessness.

And just as he feels his breath now trying to escape him, trying to rejoin that time and space it had once belonged to- something coils around him.

Something falls over his head- blocking his view and a pressure so great, so overwhelming, crushes out of him through his chest and-

‘-breathe! Breathe! Sk’jin you can breathe please breathe listen-‘

Sk’jin tries to breath but it’s too heavy it’s too heavy he can’t he can’t the can’t-

Ahadi smiles at him, warm brown eyes, dimpled smile.

‘Hey- you’re okay now- I got you okay?’

He’s shining, light bright around him, drawing him down but it’s heavy and Sk’jin feels too light and-

Sk’jin falls and falls until he’s not.

There’s voices around him. But he can’t hear what they’re saying- the voices are strange, pulling away, pushing in-
He can breathe— he can finally breath; and maybe he was loud because Ahadi appears. He smiles at him encouragingly— nodding, pushing the strange substance around him away and—

‘I’m cold- r-really c-cold-c-can’t m-m-move-‘

‘Shh- hey I got you, we got you, you’re safe I promise-‘ he’s holding Sk’jin close and it’s starting to become warm—

Sk’jin laughs breathlessly, amazed and awestruck. Ahadi was here— he was here! And was that a blanket around him? Was he in bed?

‘-dream?’

‘Jin? Hey- you’re awake, you’re okay-‘

‘How- h-how-‘

‘I tracked you the same way Yoongi does-‘

Something—...something wasn’t adding up— Ahadi didn’t know Yoongi.

‘-what-‘

Ahadi chuckles breathlessly, ‘Yeah he’s- his obsession with poison I guess-‘

The lights around him flicker—

‘They’re fine- they’re all fine,’ Ahadi assures him, ‘We got Jimin too- he’s fine. So is Yoongi- and Jungkook, we just got Hoseok and Taeh’yung-‘

Sk’jin thinks maybe he’s falling again. When he lands again he’s still there- in a bed. A Medical Bed. And Ahadi is still there— but, there’s something different about him.

‘You’re okay,’ he smiles, leaning in to kiss his forehead, ‘We’re okay, I promise you.’

‘I- I promise-‘

Ahadi grin, dimples broadening before he steps back from Sk’jin’s blurred vision and someone else comes closer.

Namjoon smiles with relief at him from where he’s kneeling, his skin is patched up over his eye, both arms present though one has no cover and was a matte metallic form.

‘What-‘

‘Got you just in time,’ Namjoon sighs out.

The light around him isn’t red, no Bloodmoon shone down on him here.

Instead it’s nice and mild.

Normal.

Gentle and soothing.

‘We thought you-‘ Namjoon struggles, ‘-but we got you in time and we’re heading in to pick up the others. Don’t worry okay?’
‘What?’ Sk’jin is suddenly exhausted.

Ahadi reappears as Namjoon steps back, his voice taking over.

‘We’re all set here. Just-’

‘I swear- get the fuck out, it’s normal,’ Sk’jin waves him off with a roll of his eyes despite being instantly nauseous in the process.

Ahadi just smiles, dimples forming deep on his cheeks before he leans in a little before he seems to reconsider and backs away.

‘I would like a goodnight kiss though,’ Sk’jin quips, attempting a wink.

Ahadi shakes his head, laughing low under his breath before he leans all the way in.

The lights overhead blocks Sk’jin from seeing Ahadi’s expression before their lips touch. Sk’jin only sees the familiar outline of the Mwenzini but he doesn’t have to see him to know that he’s smiling. He can feel it against his lips and it makes Sk’jin smile.

When Ahadi pulls back he is smiling down at Sk’jin with that same fondness, laced a little with exasperation and an expression Sk’jin isn’t entirely sure how to label. Instead he reaches up to feel at his dimples with a fond chuckle and pushes him off with a flick on his forehead.

‘I’ll see you when I’m beautiful again,’ Sk’jin laughs as Ahadi gets up.

‘Is that your way of getting me to tell you that you’re always beautiful?’ Ahadi asks, laughing as he looks back.

‘Is it working?’ Sk’jin has never heard Ahadi compliment him on his looks.

_Ever._

Ahadi stands by the doorway, dimpled smile on place, shaking his head.

‘You’re gonna have to work harder than that Captain, I have a very specific aesthetic.’

Sk’jin manages to lift a finger at him before the door slides shut.

Sk’jin continues to laugh under his breath as the room is slowly bathed in darkness. It starts to get heavy again, around him.

The Bloodmoon is faded, replaced instead by a serene night sky.

‘I-I promise-,’ Sk’jin mumbles out loud. ‘I promise you,- that I’ll make everything right again when I come back. I’ll even be the fuckin’ hero if that’s what’s needed.’
SO
WHO STILL WANTS TO SCREAM ABOUT MOTS:7
Let me tell you how this shit went down because the day the album dropped and the kinetic mv dropped I was FLYING OUT BACK TO MY HOME COUNTRY BECAUSE VISA ISSUES
My flight was at 4:30 but delayed to 5 so I thought I have time to watch the mv, download the album, and cry for 3 hours on the airplane this is great WELL IT WASN'T
Normally my data is really fast and good BUT SOMEHOW IT WANTED TO FUCK WITH ME AFTER THE MV DROPPED 4 o’clock here in Thailand is 6 in KST so I was seething, right at 4 my data goes shit, it takes me 45 mintues to download the album, and after maybe 1 hour I can finally watch the mv at 144p
I wanted to cry But I did download the album and Guys
Never fly over a sunset cloud filled sky over hills and distant citylines while listening to we are bullet proof the eternal That shit is not for the faint of heart because I WAS TEARING UP IN THE AIRPLANE IM NOT KIDDING And like I said last time MOON IS MY SONG Also the longer version of shadow i Didn’t think I could love shadow more But here I am No but really, we are bullet proof the eternal I just- I genuinely cried, there’s something about the song that makes me feel both incredibly uplifted and supported and comforted but also incredibly sad??????????????? Is this just me Please tell me Also surprise!! Namjoon’s here
SPEAKING OF NAMJOON
HIS VLIVE FROM TODAY AND WHEN HE TALKED ABOUT WE ARE BULLET

You know what
Im gonna go sit and think for a while
“Fleeting” [adjective]: lasting for a very short time.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Fuck is this what Hoseok felt like when he was kidnapped.

It’s silent for a while before Yyna speaks.

‘Namjoon, child and survivor of Kutsoglera, help us, children of nowhere, and teach us to survive.’

‘What-? No-!’ Namjoon protests but the Transporter suddenly picks up speed, forcing him to fall back into his seat, the safety straps folding over him immediately.

They burst out into the surface- they were so close- so close to escaping. There’s an immediate ripple of blue around the Transporter- they were going to leave.

‘They’ve all come back to me,’ Jimin sounded so helpless and lost.

‘Hey- we can go back and help-!’ Namjoon argues. Why were they leaving? Jimin was there- if nothing else, Jimin was literally back there- yet here they were, leaving.

Quite casually, Amic from the back, reaches forward and attaches another Comm Device to Namjoon’s ear.

‘Captain Namjoon of Kutsoglera.’

His voice is low, deep, and slightly guttural. Namjoon can’t place the accent immediately though there’s a familiarity with how he pronounces his name.

‘Uh-‘

‘Yisheng Amme has arrived to Grisial, at the request of Hoseok of Ngfy’wid. They will be secured.’

Namjoon twists in his seat, looking back, and sure enough, a massive and familiar ship approaches them, the light of Grisial behind it like some holy halo.

‘The Zhak’gri Taeh’yung, has pushed back the Omhlophe mothership, they will be retreating right now.’

Out of everything he’s heard today, that was the most believable thing.

Namjoon doesn’t know how to feel, watching the Yisheng ship get closer. Hoseok had called
Amme? When? Why Amme?

But then again, in a sense, Namjoon understands why. But he’s still anxious, his mind whirling with everything happening around him.

‘Jimin has found Yoongi.’

Oddly enough this makes him feel better.

‘We cannot do more.’

Suddenly, rage builds up in Namjoon and he’s not above being irresponsibly mad at his situation and everything that lead up to it, in a small Transporter, unarmed, surrounded by GI who were all very armed.

‘Who the fuck is this?’ Namjoon demands, ‘What the fuck were you doing- coming to my ship, attacking my crew, putting them in danger? What were you trying to achieve?!’

The line is silent for so long Namjoon almost feels awkward, what with the silence of the others around him and their absolute stoic mannerism.

‘I’m sorry,’ the voice says, ‘I will explain it to you, once you are here.’

‘No,’ Namjoon says firmly, ‘My crew, my team, is behind me, I need to go back, make sure they’re secure- I don’t know if you know this but not everyone there is particularly healthy or stable-‘

‘-we are aware that the Khol’isa is fading. We did not account for the New Born Vicitra to attack as he did- we did not suppose him to have the strength to fight.’

‘Is that supposed to make me feel better-’ Namjoon tries to sound harsh but- fading?

‘-and we know that our brother Yoongi is dying.’

Namjoon’s voice gets caught in his throat.

‘We are all dying.’

‘And is that why you tried to kill him?’ Namjoon demands, glaring at the other GI around him to no effect.

It’s silent for a really long time again. They’re getting close to Grisial again, headed for a lone and slightly distant asteroid, a faint blue around it to indicate the Atmoshield that protected it.

‘I will explain this all to you once you are here,’ the voice explains. ‘And maybe, you can guide us and make us found.’

Amic reaches forward and takes both Comm Devices on his ears.

What Hoseok went through was probably much worse than this, Namjoon ruminates as he sits back, unrestrained (save for the safety straps), free to move. Looking back, the Yisheng ship was now hidden by the Grisial asteroid they had crashed into, though Namjoon can still see the light it exuded from its beamers.

He finds himself wanting to ask questions, but he knows he’s not about to receive any answers. This was like having several Yoongi’s (from the beginning of their mission) and trying to get a
response from him. Except at least Yoongi was cooperative to an extent because he had one mission in mind, which happened to be the same one they all shared.

Speaking of which, Namjoon hesitantly tries a new approach.

‘What is your mission statement?’

It’s quiet for a long while, during which Namjoon is sure his question has been ignored. Grisial was getting closer now, Namjoon spies a lone port over the top of the asteroid they were headed for.

‘To be found.’

It’s Yyna who answers.

And that doesn’t explain anything so Namjoon guesses that he probably needs to figure out how to ask his questions. Fuck, this really was like getting to know Yoongi all over again except possibly with more than just one love-sick Human Being.

For one panicked moment, Namjoon wonders if somehow every single GI was also “in love” with Jimin. Logically that would be quite extreme but Sk’jin’s annoying voice tells him that he’s being idiot and that it was very possible that hundreds, thousands, millions, whole species and races could definitely fall in love with one single Being, or at least hold them up to high reverence and awe- that was basically what all religion was like.

Or stardom, Sk’jin’s voice provides, an annoyingly vivid mental image of Sk’jin perusing his screen, catching up the news behind actors who were going to act in a movie based on the Six Hands of Our Love book series that Sk’jin loved so much.

He remembers Jimin reading through a few chapters, only to laugh hysterically, face red, slapping Sk’jin repeatedly on his shoulder as the Khol’isa aggressively defended the book.

He’s caught Hoseok reading the third book in the installment and might bring it up later to blackmail the Ngfy’widan. Maybe use it against him when questioning him about why he would call Yisheng Amme.

Namjoon’s leg bounces nervously at the thought; what was his reasoning? Of all members of the Jury, Yisheng Amme was probably not the first choice. But that wasn’t because the other Beings involved were such trustworthy applicants either.

They land gently, the dock empty save for another Transporter identical to the one Namjoon was in, and a much larger, powerful looking ship behind it. The safety straps around him disengage and retract back, allowing Namjoon to stand up.

Clearly they’re expecting him to follow them, so Namjoon makes his way to walk behind Amic and Yyna. And then he’s just left to stand there.

Namjoon is empty handed and just—just standing. He squints a little, trying to find the asteroid he had just left- but they’re in orbit with the rest of the asteroid belt around Grisial, and Namjoon is no longer looking at the same expansion of space, the stars moved already as they slowly orbit Grisial.

Would Amme be able to overwhelm the Omhlophe?

The voice over the Comm Device had said that Taeh’yung had “pushed back” the Omhlophe
mothership. Great. Was that why Sk’jin had yelled and not minutes later, bright green erupted all around them?

What had Taeh’yung done? Was he all right?

Namjoon doesn’t feel strain on his muscles or anything like that, but he squats down, palm over his face as he takes a deep breath.

They needed that UV Bed for Sk’jin because he was clearly not well- now with this- was the Khol’isa all right? And Jungkook.

Was he safe? Namjoon curses under his breath, they should have really let him stay back, go with that Long Huon Zitao – he would have been safe, would have been able to leave this mess behind; a mess he wasn’t really involved in to start off with.

And what about Hoseok? The three of them had been at the Bridge when they crashed- and sure the Užkulisa was a powerful ship, but it’s not like the three inside were indestructible.

And then there was Yoongi of course.

What it must have felt like- to fight someone- to literally fight yourself – Spaces.

Namjoon sits on the ground, staring blankly outwards ahead. Wherever he was headed right now, he had no way of knowing what would happen to him, what the GI would do to him, or want from him. They had wanted Jimin but they let him go so quickly- it didn’t make sense.

An identical Transporter lands close to the one that brought Namjoon in. More GI step out, and this time in between them they’re carrying what are clearly body-bags.

‘Captain Namjoon.’

Startled, Namjoon looks around.

Amad’la is looking down at him, in her hands a bottle of ionized water.

‘We will be leaving now.’ Then after a fraction of a moment adds, ‘I hope you are not feeling unwell.’

Spaces, Namjoon wishes he had never agreed to Lmiura’s request and didn’t have to be subjected to the GI’s inability to convey minimal conversations.

Namjoon takes the bottle and manages a smile.

For sure he could try escaping. He’s pretty sure there’s some GI holding a very well aimed TeorSer at him from some point around the Dock at multiple-points. He might as well just go along with this mess and see what interesting thing he might have to learn. The Being he spoke to, well, that spoke to him, seemed very self-aware; similar to how Yoongi had been some time ago.

Spaces, had it nearly been a full Standard sol since they left Šerdesas?

Namjoon feels like it’s been at least, a whole decade. Certainly feels like he’s aged a whole decade, what with his skin falling apart and lack of a functioning arm.

Amad’la waits for him before leading him to the large ship. But she stops abruptly, nearly making Namjoon walk straight into her, fumbling with his bottle of ionized water.
He’s unsure what to do- he looks around surreptitiously and notes that everyone- every GI has stopped- almost as though pausing to listen to something. Then they all turn their heads in the same direction. And automatically, so does Namjoon.

Suddenly everything flashes a neon green- the lights of Grisial shift violently- protesting almost, every single photon of light changed and-

The sound crashes around him like real physical weight- the entire asteroid trembling.

‘WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE-‘

Namjoon gasps as the pressure releases, the neon-green fades.

‘Spaces fuck-‘ Namjoon realizes he’s on the floor. So are a few of the GI. He slowly makes to stand, squinting in the general direction of where it had come from.

That was definitely Taeh’yung. It had to be.

What was going on?

‘Captain Namjoon.’

‘Wait- wait I need to know what happened- I need to make sure they’re all right-‘ Namjoon protests immediately, shaking his head and taking a step back. ‘That was Taeh’yung- you maybe don’t know but he’s overwhelmingly powerful and that was him- I need to make sure-‘

Amad’la manhandles him so swiftly and so quickly, Namjoon has no idea how he’s ended up restrained completely, and tossed over her shoulder like he was some sort of luggage. The only part of his whole body he can move is his head.

Namjoon feels slightly offended and extremely intimidated. He didn’t need a reminder of the GI skillset like this, thanks.

‘-what?!’ Namjoon can’t even struggle- he’s bound so effectively.

As they walk past, Namjoon spots something.

There are 4 body bags, 4 helmets placed next to their heads. The fake uniforms that they were wearing are folded neatly next to them. He instantly recognizes the one the other Yoongi had been wearing. Namjoon can’t look away.

‘What- what about the others?’ Namjoon can’t help but ask, twisting his head around (the only body part he could move) to find that Amic and another GI don’t follow them into the ship, but are still by the previous Transporter, standing before the doorway.

He’s not expecting an answer, which is why when Amad’la answers, Namjoon is stunned into silence.

‘They will bring back our brothers and sisters,’ she replies.

Amad’la takes further inside the ship, passing the large internal Hangar, and into a lift. She places him down on his feet, and after a few awkward and strained seconds of silence says, ‘I’m sorry.’

Namjoon just sighs.

The elevator pulls them up to the Bridge directly, where other GI were already there, getting ready
for take off. They’re all wearing their helmets, so Namjoon can’t place a single one of them. It’s extremely unnerving and Namjoon has previously worked with androids that all look identical, not a single hair out of place.

No one says a thing to him and Namjoon guesses he might as well just.

Take a seat.

So he does.

Security straps instantly engage and he’s set in.

He’s fidgeting. He doesn’t stop fidgeting.

They leave Grisial and Namjoon can physically feel his stress level rocketing. If he had sweat glands, he’d be damp by now he’s sure.

He’s absolutely helpless in here- as they enter warp, Namjoon tries again.

‘Amad’la, please- I need to be here for them- I need to make sure we’re all safe.’

But he’s predictably ignored.

The Bridge washes out in white light as they hit warp and Namjoon knows now, with a depressing finality, that there’s nothing he can do about his situation anymore.

‘Uh-‘ Namjoon tries again after about 10 minutes, ‘Where are we going?’

He’s ignored.

Namjoon wants to throw a tantrum. Childish sure, but Namjoon thinks he’s allowed.

The security straps around him disengage but no one moves. For almost 30 minutes, Namjoon just sits still; he’s not sure if he can move or walk around. No one else aboard the ship has moved a muscle unless it was to make adjustments to the dashboards before them. There’s no talking, no AI voice in the air- Namjoon can’t even see anyone’s faces other than Amad’la’s.

Throwing precaution to the wind, Namjoon stands up.

No one spares him a second look.

Of course it wasn’t as though Namjoon would do anything dangerous- he’s comically outnumbered, missing a functional arm, most of his face falling apart, covered in a fine layer of dust that really clings to him, and weaponless.

Namjoon was not going to do anything and that was clearly apparent.

And even if it felt weird to do so, Namjoon turns, his back exposed to the Bridge, and exits the place. He’s somehow half-expecting himself to be manhandled again, bound and gagged and put in one place. But no one follows him, no one tries to stop him.

He finds himself in the level below the Bridge, a massive screen to one side to show the layout of the ship. Namjoon stands before it, still expecting some reprimand in the form of a harsh and well executed jab, or maybe even a stun-level TeorSer blast; something at least. But there’s nothing.

He studies the plans of each level. There are a total of 5 levels- the top most being the Bridge, the
level he was at divided into smaller segments, probably some form of meeting units, community points, the level below was the living quarters, Namjoon determines, judging by the neatly and equally divided rooms. The level beneath that is the Hangar and Medical Bays, and below that, the Engines Rooms.

‘Captain Namjoon.’

Namjoon jumps a foot into the air.

‘Fucking Spaces-!’ he gasps out, nearly colliding into the massive screen.

It’s one of the GI- one that Namjoon has not met before- she’s short, a stocky stature that is incredibly imposing despite her absolute lack of aggressive expression. She was definitely from somewhere in Ghandhar, which planet, he’s not too sure, and honestly at this point it didn’t matter anyways.

She blinks at him a total 3 times before she says, ‘I am sorry.’

‘Oh- I guess- I mean-‘ Namjoon stammers out, lowering his arm(s) that were crossed over his chest.

‘Please follow me, I will show you your room.’

Were they travelling a specifically long distance that he needed to be assigned a room? Was he expecting to sleep at some point, were they just going to fly about randomly? They would need to refuel though that could be anything between a month to 3 months depending on when they refilled the store but that could’ve easily been back in Grisial.

Namjoon follows the Ghandarian native down the next level.

He’s lead down the hallway, lined with narrow doorways at an even interval. They pass an intersection but keep going straight. At the very end, there’s a long and narrow window, the light from warped space illuminating the area.

The Ghandarian stops suddenly and with a small tap on the side of the door, it opens to reveal a neat and decently sized room.

‘We have prepared clothes for you. We hope it will suit you.’

Namjoon notes that there’s a confusing smell of cleaning agents, some sort of detergent, an a very awkwardly arrangement of semi-wilted flowers on the desk beneath the window.

‘Oh- uh, thanks,’ Namjoon manages to say.

The Ghandarian just stands there, to Namjoon’s absolute discomfort. Was he supposed to say something else?

‘Uh- this is, uh, very nice,’ Namjoon looks around the room, ‘If I uh- need something, how will I uh, contact...you? Someone?’

The Ghandarian blinks a few times before handing Namjoon a small and new Comm Device from some pocket on her black suit.

‘Great- this is great I will uh- go get cleaned up,’ Namjoon states slowly, rolling the Comm Device between her fingers. ‘This is uh, very nice, I uh, like the flowers a lot.’
Apparently that was what she needed to hear. The Ghandarian turns and leaves.

Namjoon quickly closes the door, and exhales out slowly.

Placing the Comm Device on the very recently made bed with possibly too many pillows, Namjoon takes a moment to crouch down on the floor and scream quietly into his hands.

After taking a few minutes to simply throw a small and quiet tantrum, Namjoon investigates his newly assigned room. The closet has a few clothing items. And yeah, Namjoon should probably change from what he’s wearing. The clothes are, unsurprisingly, his size. So he lays it out over the bedding. Checking the en suite, Namjoon notes the very brand new bottles of shampoo, washes, and soaps, and salts.

In the mirror, Namjoon makes sure that he checks all of his potential injuries— as well as preexisting ones that would definitely need some tending. His jaw where he was kicked would be swollen and bruised and discoloured if his body had been more organic. For now it was just uncomfortable, and a little lumpy. Would they allow him to access the Medical Bay? Maybe even if it wasn’t everything he would need, it would still be enough to at least wrap up his arm properly again because the bionic skin around his ribs, and damaged arm, was starting to flake. They had after all, given him the medication before— he’s still not sure what they were for, but he’s not noticed anything adverse or negative. But just because something didn’t react now didn’t mean it wouldn’t later.

The shower water runs white on the glossy floors for the first few minutes and Namjoon wonders just how much Grisial crystal dust actually got on him.

Clean and changed out, Namjoon stands awkwardly in his room. He’s not sure how to proceed. And at this moment in time, he’s not sure if he wants to put on the Comm Device either. He paces around the room a few times before slumping down on the bed.

He tries to organize his thoughts.

The GI had definitely come and attacked them.

Or did they?

With the Omhlophe so close, had the GI actually come to try and protect Jimin? And it all turned wrong? But it didn’t make sense because they definitely tried to kill Yoongi. But the other Yoongi hadn’t tried to explicitly target the others— simply attempting to take Jimin.

Namjoon looks around the room, evidently prepared with some semblance of care.

Had this all been prepared for Jimin?

He squints at the sorry flowers on the desk, mulling over his thoughts.

The voice on the Comm Device hadn’t really said much but Namjoon can’t help but theorize. Overthink, Sk’jin’s voice offers him primly.

The GI who had been there.

That wasn’t a coincidence that they were all Beings that both Jimin and Yoongi would recognize. There was a purposeful intention with who was sent out.
'Nineti is one of my Guards. I lost him in Megibiya- he never returned from the rain. And that is Amad’la, Yoongi’s captain. The tall one is Amic, Yoongi’s best friend. And the other is the Megibiya Wenedi Yyna.'

When those couriers had come in, they had no intention of attacking. Even when Sk’jin had been completely unguarded, completely defenseless, exposed – even Hoseok, who was outside. The only reason what happened when it happened was Jungkook’s reaction. It was only after that that the GI had attacked.

Was it in self defense? But that didn’t make sense?

But then again, the GI did not plan, did not think, the same way sentient Beings did.

Their attempt at taking Jimin back didn’t stop them from stabbing him, even though the blade had avoided every single vital organ.

It didn’t make sense- Namjoon remembers vividly the strange white noise filling his mind- strange visual sights embedded in numbers and processing that was definitely some form of computing through the strange connection he had shared with Jimin when both Yoongi’s were fighting each other. Was that what Jimin saw in the other Yoongi?

Was that the GI’s mindset?

Reading minds, was an obviously incredibly dumb saying because thoughts did not manifest into words that appeared in the mind just like that, as though it were some book or screen. Thoughts manifested differently- images, emotions, smells, senses – but what Namjoon had seen briefly- that had all been a simple form of binary that looked a lot like the processing core within Androids and their cores.

Yoongi had told them, a while back, that he had been administered with the Android Core, allowing him to somehow be aware.

How many of the GI were aware? Or trying to be aware? From what he read in the reports, the GI had succumbed to a strange state of comatose or had completely died out once their existence had been exposed. The Yishengs trying to get rid of evidence. But he knew that some had survived- that they were scattered- lost.

‘Remember- remember I said. I said that Yoongi was not supposed to be here.’

Jimin had been on the verge of understanding something.

‘It’s- it’s because I was not supposed to be here, I am the Fate of Menigišiti, that’s how they did it, that’s why the Red Evil came to Megibiya- they wanted me. They’re all tied to me.’

Was this some strange battle, between the Omhlophe and the GI, to somehow get Jimin?

Namjoon sits up slowly.

He wishes he could make sure, that the others were all right. Wishes he could see for himself- instead of being told so by some random voice.

He pockets the Comm Device and stands up. He takes his clothes, bundled up, and goes to look for some sort of cleaning room.

He comes across a sort of alcove, outfitted with several washers. He also comes across a
spectacularly bloody and naked GI who was clearly there to do his laundry. Namjoon pauses, not sure if he should continue forward. But the GI just looks at him, before opening one of the washers for him.

‘Uh- um, thanks,’ Namjoon manages to get out.

He looks at the GI as surreptitiously as he can.

He has bite marks on him, the side of his leg has a whole chunk of flesh missing, probably down to the bone- but it’s been covered with some sort of compressed sealed tissue-plast.

He’s also missing a few fingers and an ear, and unnervingly, an eye as well. Not to mention what are clearly nails, raking and tearing off chunks of skin and tissue, even through the GI uniform that no amount of washing was going to clean, Namjoon is sure.

Namjoon is terrified at the idea of the GI fighting someone who was clearly very very wild. Did this GI go against some sort of wild creature? He seemed to have barely escaped with his life.

The GI puts his dirty laundry away and simply walks away- more like limps, before disappearing into a room, leaving behind bloody footprints.

As Namjoon finishes up, making sure his adjustments were suited for his clothes, a few CleanBots arrive, cleaning and removing the bloody footprints.

Namjoon makes his way to the lower level.

Maybe he could…explore? Namjoon grimaces at himself. He needed to get to the Medical Bay at least, check to see if there was anything he could use. However, downstairs, he comes across an unnerving and rather comic sight.

The GI were scattered around the Lobby that connected the Medical Bays, as well as a small community kitchen of sorts, and a lounging area.

They’re all placed at random- almost like statues in a garden, or a clothing store. They’re all engaged in some form of activity. Namjoon counts around 9 of them, a few reading in one corner, some staring blankly at a screen with some sort of media entertainment playing on it, and the others are at the kitchen area.

No one pays him any attention and so Namjoon slips into one of the Medical Bays, hoping none of them will pop up to scare the shit out of him again.

His back to a wall, Namjoon looks around the Medical Bay and finds a few items here and there he could use. None of the items in the Medical Bay were specifically tailored or customized- they were at best, basic, but Namjoon can combine a few of what he’s found to put together something that could help him.

When he steps out, the GI are where he left them.

He eyes the fridge in the small kitchen and gingerly makes his way there. He feels very large, very loud, and very clumsy in this specific setting.

In the kitchen, there are 4 of the GI sitting around a table, plates in front of them, with cups and cutlery. Their helmets are off, and two of them are identical, Namjoon notes. He’s going to walk past them, straight for the fridge to get some ionized water which he’s sure should be stocked because no known living Being couldn’t survive without water.
‘This is delicious.’ One of them states.

There’s a long silence that follows and Namjoon sort of freezes. Were the GI actually…holding a conversation with each other? Out of their own free will?

‘It is.’

Namjoon wants to palm his face.

‘Captain Namjoon, would you like to join us.’

Or maybe they were setting up to invite him to eat. He does notice that there are 5 chairs, 4 of which are occupied.

‘I uh- don’t eat,’ Namjoon gets out weakly, grabbing a nice cold bottle.

He’s starting to get a little used to the blank stares but it’s wholly unnerving.

‘I am sorry.’

After 3 seconds someone else says, ‘We have no manners.’

Namjoon wants to knock himself out.

‘Our food is not good,’ one declares. ‘The precooked food ran out.’

Namjoon wishes he could give an appropriate response to this situation. Instead he just closes the fridge.

‘Because you are a fatso.’

Namjoon gawks, looking around the GI gathered at the table.

‘That is an insensitive statement, masked as a joke, which is humorous only to the jokester, because most Beings like to feel superior, be it mentally or physically, over their perceived peers.’

There’s a long pause.


‘That is a trash book,’ is the monotonous response.

‘Am I your perceived peer.’

‘Yes.’

‘Then maybe, I am indeed a fatso.’

‘Would you care for a drink?’ one of the two identical GI asks him.

Namjoon would like to leave. He’s also awkwardly holding several items in one good arm and one bad arm. He doesn’t know what to do.

‘It was precooked- it is delicious.’

‘Sure,’ Namjoon sits down, putting down all of his items on the table carefully. The silence is only punctuated by the sound of whatever media was playing on the screen in the lounge, and Namjoon
placing his stuff down.

Their food is a strange looking lump on their plates. Barely touched. No one says anything, just looking at Namjoon. He feels like they’re expecting him to say something.

‘So uh- you all tried cooking?’ Namjoon tries.

‘Database does not export cooking skills,’ they all reply in unison, startling Namjoon.

‘Right- right, uh, yeah,’ Namjoon coughs out, fiddling with some of the antibiotic bottles had with him.

‘This is a good drink,’ the one closest to him states, taking a jug from the center of the table, and taking the single empty cup (again, how convenient), and pouring out the contents.

It smells nice- fragrant and fresh.

‘It’s not poisoned is it?’ Namjoon jokes.

He’s met with blank stares.

‘That is a good joke.’ Is the delayed reply he gets.

‘Very funny.’

Namjoon is writhing on the inside.

He takes a sip of the drink and he has a feeling he’s being closely watched.

‘It’s really good!’ he says a bit too enthusiastically. And yeah it was a good drink, but it didn’t warrant that much enthusiasm.

For a moment, Namjoon really looks around the table.

Had they…set this all up…with the lumpy food, to create a sense of…normalcy? For him?

Because as far as Namjoon can tell, the GI over at the lounge have not turned a single page in their books. The media that’s playing is on its 4th repeat since Namjoon has sat down. And the food on the plates, other than that one single jug and cup, look like things taken out and pushed together into a bowl, and then divided. Namjoon notes that there is some raw meat poking out in some places.

Sk’jin would be crying right now if he were here.

‘So uh- what do you normally eat?’ Namjoon tries, because okay that might be an interesting topic because what did Yoongi eat before? He didn’t seem picky, eating any and everything Sk’jin, and sometimes, Hoseok made.

‘For some sols, precooked,’ they reply.

Sure there was plenty of precooked food available to find in Flotsams but the drink poured out for him doesn’t seem like the type you could buy at Flotsams. Not that Namjoon would be an expert but he’s heard Sk’jin complaining about precooked Flotsam food far too much.

‘But we finished our stock. Not enough.’
‘Yes. Miscalculation.’

Namjoon nods slowly.

‘Do not worry.’ One of them says, and with a delayed motion, raises one hand in a thumb’s up.

Namjoon politely excuses himself, armed with his items, before pretty much running back to his assigned room.

He clearly needed a nap.

And so he does. But Namjoon naps fitfully- he’s not prone to dreams or nightmares. He was definitely having some, but when he wakes up, panting from whatever nightmare he was having, he can’t remember what it is.

It had now been a whole 12 hours since Grisial and Namjoon is- well, he’s still very much agitated.

Downing another bottle of ionized water, Namjoon steps out, his mind set on the Bridge and finding one of the GI he recognizes, and try to get them to talk.

But he’s distracted by the slumped GI near the washers.

Concerned and unnerved, Namjoon approaches the GI.

It’s the same one from before. His injuries are sealed, though he appeared weak and verging on passing out. His missing eye is patched up, and the sealed compressed tissue-plast on his leg is leaking thin looking pinkish blood.

Namjoon acts on instinct when the GI slips on the pinkish blood around his feet, and quickly goes to support him.

‘Woah- woah okay uh-’ Namjoon helps him stand up right- his missing arm creating problems.

‘Okay- I’ll uh, let’s get you to your room? I uh- I’ll go get help?’

He can’t carry this GI up, what with one functioning arm. Also he’s not sure if physically carrying this Being around would be very good. He looks around the hallway, trying to see if there’s a camera around. He calls down the hallway, ‘Hey! One of- uh, he’s uh, injured! He needs medical help!’

The GI’s room door is closed but Namjoon follows the still fresh patches of pinkish blood smudged on the floors. Namjoon taps on the door, and it opens to reveal a dimly lit room, completely different from the one assigned to him.

There’s a lone single narrow bed- no blankets, no mattress. There’s some smudged blood down the side of the bed. The floors are very clean- a CleanBot rolling under the long bench to the side, as though just waiting for this GI to bleed out more. Would it completely absorb and clean up the GI if he died? Would the others even bother to check in on him? They certainly didn’t seem to care that this GI was practically eaten alive.

Namjoon carefully puts the GI down- this was weird. So weird.

‘Uh-‘ Namjoon helps him lay back down on the bed.

‘Laundry.’
'What?'

'Laundry.'

Namjoon sort of gapes for a moment before saying, ‘Okay I uh, I’ll see to your laundry- don’t worry about it.’

The GI nods once, making his eyes roll back with the effort before saying in a slurred monotonous manner, ‘Thank you.’

The lighting in the room dims and the GI lays still.

For one panicked second, Namjoon wonders if he’s found himself in a room with no surveillance and a dead GI but he notices that he’s still breathing, and that it was at a steady pace. The bed below him starts to glow instead and- was this a sort of Medical Bed?

Namjoon touches it lightly- it’s a little warm, there’s a slight vibration in the air around it. Namjoon’s never seen anything like this before.

He steps out into a clean hallway and towards the washers. He picks out the GI’s clothes, dried and very tattered, and takes it back. He tries to be as quiet as he can with one arm, folding the GI suit in a somewhat acceptable lump and places it on the bench. He also finally notices the helmet, a now somewhat iconic shape in his mind’s eye, resting on the bench.

Yoongi had lost his in Ynqaba, after Jimin fell with the slaver-ship. But according to what Jimin had reported, it was as though the entire uniform, helmet, and general existence of the GI wasn’t exactly unknown there.

It’s still covered in blood, and Namjoon is tempted to pick it up, and examine it. But something tells him that wouldn’t exactly be a welcome attempt.

He steps back out again and gets his own laundry. He should have expected the sudden appearance of Amad’la before him, arm(s) filled with his dried clothes.

‘Fuck- yes, hi, yes,’ Namjoon curses, looking down at the GI. ‘By the way uh you have an injured uh- Being, inside there- I’m not sure if he’ll be all right-’

‘Captain Namjoon, we are headed for Lowet and will be arriving there in 3 days-‘

‘We’re going where?!’ Namjoon demands, ‘And in 3 days-?!’

It had taken them about a week to get away from Ynqaba to Grisial- there was no way they were making 3 Standard days to Lowet, Ynqaba’s next-door planet.

‘Please take this time to rest, we will gather what you need. Please let us know if you are lacking in anything.’

Her speech is almost similar to how androids in the service industry would sound- except it lacked any form of welcome or brightness.

‘Oh yeah- yeah, sure, that’s uh, I’ll keep that in mind,’ Namjoon nods, still clutching his clothes to his chest.

Amad’la turns to walk away, her footsteps making absolutely no sound.

‘Wait!’ Namjoon hurriedly calls.
Amad’la turns swiftly.

‘I uh- I want to know, to see, if my crew are all right- I need to make sure.’

Amad’la just looks at him blankly for 7 whole seconds before she nods. Then she turns and walks again, leaving Namjoon slightly winded.

Then she abruptly stops and turning again says, ‘Please follow me Captain Namjoon.’

Namjoon quickly follows, just a step or two behind her.

‘He’ll be all right? The uh, injured GI?’

‘Yes.’

Namjoon is not at all reassured.

They go upwards to the Bridge again, and everyone is still there as Namjoon left them, helmets on, bodies unmoving. Amad’la guides him to the Navigation Table manned by two other GI who immediately step back one Amad’la and Namjoon approach.

Amad’la says nothing for a long while and Namjoon’s not expecting anything, just waiting for some information when she says, ‘This is a nice evening.’

Namjoon takes a moment to realize she’s addressing him.

‘Uh- yeah? I uh-‘ he looks around wildly, ‘I guess it is, in Standard Time.’

‘In Šerdesas, you will be able to see the Nvan constellation center of the sky.’

‘Uh- yeah.’

‘It is beautiful. But the story is a gruesome one.’

Yes, Namjoon is aware but he has no idea where this is heading.

‘Once upon a time,’ Amad’la begins flatly, ‘A vast interstellar asteroid fell through the sky, crashing down into a lone planet, bringing with it many strange and alien life-forms. And they mutated terribly- horrid worms and plagues – the Beings of the planet fell to it and were consumed as though by a flame from within. Until a great mind came forth and banished the alien life-form with water. What an excellent story is it not. Wonderful; it showcases the importance of staying hydrated.’ She then picks up (from where????) a bottle of ionized water and hands it to Namjoon. ‘Beware, the horrid worms.’

Namjoon loses it.

There are literal tears in his eyes as he laughs, leaning on the Navigation Table for support. Amad’la has no expression on her face but Namjoon wonders if this was meant to be some sort of ice-breaker, or some sort of attempt in making him feel better.

It takes him about 5 minutes to really get himself together and finally focus again.

Amad’la is clearly waiting for him to get a hold of himself and once he stands straight, she taps along the Navigation Table and with no explanation, pulls up a projection of a footage.

It’s been taken from afar, the quality just a little compromised but Namjoon can make out the
Beings in it. He notes Amme’s tall form, red stark against the white of the Grisial asteroid. And walking behind her are the others. None of them look visibly injured. They look disturbed, though— that much is clear. They’re hesitating, talking amongst each other. There’s no audio of course, but they seem to be holding some sort of debate. Whatever it was, it’s resolved and they follow Amme to her ship, lead first by Jimin and Taeh’yung, followed by the other 4 a little later.

Namjoon watches, with both relief (for their overall good health), and trepidation, as they enter Amme’s ship. The ship takes off and immediately sets out to warp.

‘What about the Omhlophe? Those white-robed Beings?’ Namjoon asks.

‘Their mothership was destroyed by the Zhak’gri Taeh’yung,’ Amad’la reports at once, ‘We do not know what happened to those within.’

That’s—…worrisome…? Namjoon nods hesitantly to that information.

‘The smaller ships were able to escape- they have taken your ship, the Užkulisai-02.’

‘Fuck-‘ Namjoon curses, ‘Fuck- they—’

Jimin’s system’s technology was inside the Užkulisai, would they have had enough time to remove it? Or would the Omhlophe have taken it?

‘Are they being followed by the Omhlophe?’

‘We cannot tell.’

‘Any idea where the Yisheng ship is headed?’

‘We are tracking them right now- and there appears to be no set direction.’ Amad’la replies.

Namjoon frowns at that.

‘Wait- how did you find us in the first place?’

Amad’la doesn’t reply.

Namjoon wonders if he’s going to get a delayed response but 5 minutes was a stretch, even for a GI.

‘So uh—can I get like a screen or something.’

Amad’la looks at him for an uncomfortably long minute and Namjoon guesses that’s a no but then she says, ‘That’s a good joke.’

Namjoon sighs and walks out of the Bridge. He finds himself walking down, to go check on the injured GI- the hallway is spotless so he can’t tell if the GI’s been out and about. Depositing his laundry in his room (Namjoon realizes he’s carried it all the way up and then then down), he tiptoes to the injured GI’s room, poking his head around the doorway after opening it.

The GI is still there, his chest rising slightly to indicate that he was still very much alive. Sighing quietly, he steps inside, eyeing the GI carefully to check if he was recovering or still somewhat the same.

His injuries, in the short span of time Namjoon had last seen him, has greatly improved. They’re also much clearer. Namjoon spies the bite-wounds. They’re not very large to suggest a large
creature mauled this GI. They’re also not elongated or multi-set- the bite size and ratio appeared very…anthropomorphic and that was honestly- unsettling.

Because unless this was one of the Omhlophe, then the only other option left was-

‘Fucking Spaces!’ Namjoon curses as the GI opens his eyes, intently looking at him.

‘Oh hey uh-‘

Namjoon’s never been good at this sort of thing. Also his most recent conversations with unwell or recovering Beings has not been the best examples.

‘-you uh, you feeling better?’ Namjoon winces at himself. At this point, who was he to judge the GI for their supposed inability to socialize. He might take as well take a leaf out of their books and just not talk at all.

‘Your laundry is there,’ Namjoon gestures behind him rather pointlessly. ‘It’s uh- clean. I mean, I guess you can’t wear it anymore.’

The GI just looks at him.

‘Well- I’ll leave you be to recover,’ Namjoon awkwardly pats the very naked GI on his least injured and bruised looking arm.

Backing towards the doorway, Namjoon gives a small wave before walking out completely into the empty hallway. Back inside his room, he notices several bottles of ionized water neatly arranged on the desk as well the en suite sink shelf, and inside the closet.

‘Great.’

3 excruciating days later, during which Namjoon witnessed the most terribly staged, attempts at a social gathering in the form of a birthday party (????), a barbecue that nearly set the whole kitchen on fire, an increased desire from all GI Beings to launder their clothes and walk around buck-naked, and very strange story-telling sessions that had abrupt and incomplete endings at best, and never ending conclusions at worst. Amidst all of this, Namjoon is very well hydrated and nearly crazy. It’s with absolute sheer relief that they arrive in Lowet.

Much like Ynqaba, Lowet looks desolate even from the stratosphere. But it’s desolate in a different way. Rather than blackened sand and painful looking mountains, Lowet has many shores, small clusters of land and a few hills, mossy in colour. Some areas were certainly greener- Namjoon had looked up Lowet after they had left Ynqaba, trying to understand more about the whole situation. He knows that about the same had happened in Lowet, war had raged the land, but due to the preexisting conditions of Lowet, had come out better than Ynqaba as the planet had been minimally occupied compared to Ynqaba.

Far below, muddy looking rivers pass through around hills, lined with woods or even a stretch of reed and grass.

Compared to Ynqaba, Lowet was doing quite well.
They land near a village of sorts—low and strong looking stone houses, decorated with dyed cloths and curtains, some of the rock-slate roofs lined with sturdy looking thick squat plants. It actually appeared quite nice, and the air was clean too, unlike Ynqaba with its acidic rain.

Clearly this was some form of fishing community, with the shore right there, boats lining up the dark grey shores.

The breeze from the ocean is almost overwhelming.

Namjoon pauses midway down the Hangar ramp—just strangely overwhelmed by everything around him. The GI step out, looking incredibly out of place yet they moved with familiarity and ease over the lumpy sands Namjoon has nearly tripped on a few times.

Clearly he’s expected to follow the GI as they leave.

He follows after them, leaving the overwhelming shores and towards the village. It’s a longer walk than Namjoon was anticipating and it’s weird walking over soft sandy paths because—...well, it’s been a while, if Namjoon is being honest. There’s short but sturdy looking shrubs, with feathery looking growth on the top, below dark grey-green hanging leaves that were quite glossy that grow around the village. Namjoon notes that there are work-baskets and tools to the side; were these shrubs harvested?

The land around the place isn’t too flat—there are some gentle sloping hills, with similar looking vegetation scattered about. But everything leans in into the flat and wide valley, in the center, the village. Namjoon spots a few of the villagers approaching. They don’t seem threatened, or threatening. In fact they appeared quite friendly and were waving with familiarity at some of the GI.

They wave back though it’s a little delayed.

They appeared somewhat anthropomorphic— not as harsh looking as their neighbouring planet’s species. Their skin is tan, and greatly freckled and spotted. Their hair ranges from washed greys, dusty ash, to very black (on the younger ones) to very light (on the much older ones). They’re all wearing clothes that are dyed a similar purplish colour—Namjoon wonders if they extract the dye from some local plant or sea-creature. They look at Namjoon with some curiosity but that’s it. Some of the smaller younglings wave at him.

Namjoon waves back though it’s a little delayed.

The village is neatly organized, with proper stone houses, and what was clearly a village square, with wells and water spouts. There are more Beings there—locals of the village gathered to collect water or beat their laundry against pumice like slabs set up on the floors.

The villagers are used to the GI, Namjoon realizes.

‘Hey! You guys back? Today’s dinner is at the Dskas’s house! We caught a good load of juru, it’s gonna be a good stew!’

‘Thank you, we will enjoy the juru.’ He hears one of the GI respond, a second late. A few give some slow thumb’s up, and the villager returns it with a wide laughing smile.

Was this where they got their precooked meals from, the ones they had refered to earlier on the ship? Namjoon twists and turns his head about, looking around this village. It’s a nice community—not much of any technology could be seen though there are clear wires that network sparsely around the place, mainly concentrating towards the center of the village where the open square
Namjoon hasn’t seen it, but he guesses there was some sort of hydro-based electricity mill somewhere towards the base of the hills, or possibly even redirected ocean water.

He follows the GI towards a stone hut no different from the others.

They all enter the stone hut, steps lowering to a slightly lower level. For a brief moment Namjoon is concerned about the architecture, if they were this close to the shoreline, would having houses under the shore-level prove dangerous if they had high tides? But judging by how old the stone houses looked, Namjoon guesses he’s not one to teach the natives of a land how to build their houses.

The wind picks up- gentle and soothing. It was warm- Namjoon wonders if they were in the summer-cycle for Lowet, or maybe even autumn judging by the plants.

Someone from the closest stone hut yells loudly- calling for someone from a window. They get a response in the form of a question- they’re not speaking Standard, so Namjoon doesn’t know what they’re saying. Someone walks past with a woven water-tight basket, hoisted over their shoulders on a long pole. One of the elderly is taking a slow walk, a walking stick in hand.

Talking voices approach him and Namjoon looks around- eyes widening as a few older younglings, carrying empty woven baskets, dressed in that similar purple hued clothing, are chatting amongst themselves, clearly making some jokes. There are 3 of the natives, and a Being who is clearly from Man’ibv, their skin bearing striking similarities to the Vitka’v, the flowers that bloomed only on their moon, and the flower that was their namesake in the Pompen Arena. And the other- the other is a Khol’isa.

Her hair is long, silvery pink strands tied away twisting in an experimental style around her horns. It’s clearly not secure, judging by how her hair falls around randomly in weird chunks. She appeared young- not the way K’mara or Sk’jin looked “young”- but genuinely like a youngling not much younger than Jungkook.

They don’t take much notice of Namjoon, merrily walking and talking, baskets swinging.

Of course.

This made sense. It made sense.

Jungkook had a whole family, siblings and a mother who were like him. There was a whole abandoned Yisheng ship in Ynqaba- and with what they knew from their research, clearly many of the eggs were left here in Lowet too.

But how and why were the GI here? Clearly living so casually in this village, where the villagers regarded them with complete normalcy. How did this come about? Were none of the GI in Šerdesas?

Hesitant for a moment, Namjoon begins to walk.

He’s not sure where he’s going, but he just…-he just needed to see. To just really take in everything for himself.

The cobbled paths around the village are clean and kept well. The houses neat, and well maintained. The local villagers sometimes walk past, and they don’t really seem too surprised to see Namjoon and his absolutely wretched appearance of one arm, exposed eye socket. Though a
few younglings stare at his eye with some form of awe that makes Namjoon uncomfortable and he hastens his steps.

He comes towards the edge of the village, close to the edge beyond which reed-like plants grew. Namjoon doesn’t recognize the species of plant but it appeared as though some form of grain grew on them. The grain still appeared green, not ready for harvest just yet. And further past the fields is a large cleared area, and standing in it are a small group of the GI, and a few of the locals in the back.

Namjoon steps through the field, the long narrow leaves prick through his clothes. Not sure why, he approaches the group. Once he reaches the edge, he stops there, looking around. The clearing was not empty as Namjoon had thought, but riddled at random with small mounds here and there. This was a burial site.

The sun was close to setting, casting long shadows of the GI, the villagers, and the fresh mounds just recently dug up.

Namjoon watches as the GI lower the last of the body bags he had seen before in the Hangar.

They raise their hands to the air, and then lower their closed fists to their chest, releasing it close and safe.

A Yisheng burial.

The locals seemed to have gathered to attend the funeral as well. They do the same, before bowing respectfully in their own cultural manner. They help the GI fill the grave, creating a domed mound on top.

A few of the villagers in the back carry with them some sort of plant in bunches. They’re greyish blue in colour, with faint white dots that were probably some bud, and place them over the mounds after the mounds are complete.

Namjoon looks around at the clearing.

He counts over 50 before it becomes nearly impossible. A few had those plants laid over the mounds, just a little dry, as though it hadn’t been too long since they were placed there.

Namjoon walks back, taking the same path to go back to the stone hut the GI had vanished into. The sun had set now, the pale sky above a gentle watery-blue, darkening slowly. The stone houses are faintly lit, and as Namjoon expected, a soft halo of light coming from the center of the village. Some of the houses have a gentle smoke rising from the side of their roofs and openings.

The stone huts are well designed in the inside- smooth clay lined the tunnel like halls and rooms and alcoves, textured with smooth dark pebbles on the walls and larger slabs on the floors. During the day, the place would be well lit, with many small openings everywhere, allowing light to stream through from above. But now instead there are lamps placed inside strategic cubby holes all along the walls, illuminating his path.

It’s bigger than he expected. The initial entranceway simply led deeper underground, expanding into quite a network of hallways and doorways. Namjoon doesn’t spot any of the GI. Instead he follows his nose, sniffing the air and following the smell of something being cooked, the faint smell of smoke from a fire.

Inside, Namjoon guesses is one of the GI though he’s not in uniform. He’s very tall, large built
that’s almost too much for this kitchen space. If Namjoon’s not mistaken, he’s the same species as Yyna, the GI Jimin had recognized, making him a native from Megibīya.

There are used dishes in a low stone sink to the side, the table has been set out for 2. More of that drink Namjoon had been served from the ship is there as well. The kitchen is well lit with lamps, embedded into the stone work.

‘Thought you got lost.’

The small scream Namjoon lets out is not one he’s proud of and he’s extremely grateful that no one (namely Sk’jin) was there to hear it. If he had a normal functioning heart, it would be pounding.

Because the Megibīyan turns a little to address him directly, his tone incredibly…*normal*? Not at all GI-like or awkward.

‘Almost sent out a search part for you.’

‘Uh-‘ Namjoon wheezes.

Great. 3 days with the GI and he too was now reduced to a socially awkward mess.

‘Come, let’s dine,’ the Megibīyan says, gesturing to the table and chair, clearly set out for the two of them.

‘Oh-‘ Namjoon recognizes his voice now that he’s gotten over the shock. ‘I spoke to you.’

‘You did,’ he replies, back still turned. He was doing something over at the low counter, but Namjoon can’t quite see what it is. ‘And I said I would explain everything once you got here.’

And just like that- every single emotion he was feeling, previously overwhelmed by the sheer oddness of living with the GI for 3 straight days, bursts out.

‘What the *fuck* were you thinking, sending the GI out like that, nearly *killing us all!*’ Namjoon seethes, stepping closer, ‘Yoongi- Yoongi nearly *died*- I’m not even sure if *any* of them are all right- I don’t know if they’ve been taken by Amme, and whether or not I will see them again! Sk’jin was unwell- we were just getting him some form of help- and you- those GI; *what were you even trying to do-?’

‘-Captain Namjoon, I will answer all your questions if you will allow me to explain everything to you, from the beginning,’ the Megibīyan says, finally turning around, and in his hands mugs of some sort of drink. He hands him one of the mugs. ‘Please sit.’

Namjoon neither takes the mug nor does he sit.

‘I would have come myself, had it not been for my health – maybe all of this would have been avoided and I would be able to explain everything to Jimin himself.’

Namjoon has no issue standing still for ages so he’s not budging. The Megibīyan simply shrugs and with heavy movements, goes to sit down. Though he places Namjoon’s mug down on the table first, before settling on the opposite side.

‘My name is Prat’tna, I am the Megibiyan Wenedi, member of the Great Council under the Yemenifes Ch’niik’eti and the Yelibi Inati of Menigišiti.’ He states, ‘I was with Jimin when everything fell apart.’
‘You- you were there, after receiving that message from Ndica?’ Namjoon frowns.

‘I was there for everything- from the beginning, even if there were things Jimin did not know- that were hidden from him.’

‘What do you mean?’ Namjoon frowns, turning properly to face Prat’tna better. ‘Things that were hidden from him? I thought he was like- I dunno, the leader of Menigišiti or something, alongside his sister?’

‘Jimin and Tsirin were not leaders- neither were those before them,’ Prat’tna states, ‘They are born, as the Fate, and as the Heart- this is what Jimin told you, yes?’

Namjoon nods and adds, ‘The Great Council is supposed to be basically, representatives of the 11 planets in Menigišiti right? Kinda like ambassadors or something.’

‘That is not quite correct,’ the Megibīyan says carefully, ‘Each planet had their own representative ambassadors of course- and each of them would report to the Great Council of course, but Menigišiti did not operate as one unified System, banded together under a belief of the Great Council- the ranks of the Fate and Heart had no operation or function for politics, religion, or economy.’

‘Yeah- Jimin said so- but what do they do if not that? I don’t understand,’ Namjoon frowns.

‘This was how it was,’ Prat’tna says patiently, ‘I have been the Wenedi for many many sols- too old. Seen too much, heard too much- understood too much. When Ndica first approached Menigišiti, I was there. The Wenedi who served before Yyna was also there. This was much before Tsirin or Jimin were born. We turned them away of course- Menigišiti spoke as one, and refused to join with the GLA.’

That much Namjoon knew of course.

‘But change comes, whether or not you like it, whether or not you want it- I’m sure, that the son of Kutsoglera, would surely understand this.’

Namjoon sits down.

‘At first it was nothing. Sometimes I would hear word from the Wenedi, their questioning of the position of the Great Council- this was not unusual- most of Menigišiti knew not who were in the Council-’

‘What? Wait- what do you mean?’ Namjoon interrupts, ‘How can they not know their own ambassadors?’

‘As I said- we held no position of politics, religion, or economics.’ Prat’tna says patiently, ‘We brought forth news, information, dealings, from our home planets before the Great Council, with no bias or prejudice.’

‘-wait-’ Namjoon holds up his hand, ‘-I was thinking about this before, and with Jimin claiming he did not, per se, lead the System with his sister- but,’ Namjoon squints at the Megibīyan, ‘-were you basically like informants, from your own planets, bringing them information?’

‘That would be more accurate, yes,’ Prat’tna says in a low rumbling voice.

‘Then- then what did Tsirin and Jimin do with this information? Surely they had power over-‘
‘-they had power yes,’ Prat’tna nods slowly, ‘And they spoke the truth.’

It clicks.

‘They were like- they were like lie detectors- or like, some sort of method of making sure each planet- each state, country, union, within the System, operated truthfully.’

Prat’tna nods.

‘That’s why Jimin always said he could not lie- that…that he could tell, when he was being lied to.’

Prat’tna nods again, ‘The same goes for Tsirin.’

‘They’re essentially the same then- what’s the difference between the Heart and the Fate then?’

‘Tsirin and Jimin listened in on every decision, every announcement, every development- anything that could effect the System possibly – and they would know when falsehoods were presented- when leaders and those who held power, would attempt something, would plan a method- and they would tell if it came from a truthful and purposeful place, meant to only aid, improve, or develop.’

Prat’tna explains, ‘Tsirin listened, as the Mother, the Heart- she understood every dealing, with the care, gentleness, and love, as a heart would. Jimin listened, as the future- as someone who saw what would happen, as someone who could understand the possibilities, the risks, the fate of what would come to be.’

‘But…but they made no decisions?’

‘No- they simply spoke the truth, and it was decided upon by the people, to choose their truths, their fates,’ Prat’tna explains.

‘That’s a lot of power.’

‘It was. It elicited a fair number of fanatic indulgences-‘

Namjoon snorts, rolling his eyes. This probably elicited something worse than what the Yishengs inspired.

‘-but it was always immediately quelled down by the Heart and the Fate- because they reminded them of what would happen if they were to tread down that path.’

‘What would happen?’

Prat’tna smiles, ‘You see it everywhere Captain Namjoon- do people not change, based on what they choose to worship, what they believe will bring them the most?’

Namjoon nods slowly in response.

‘Well- that’s how it’s always been, in Menigišiti at least,’ Prat’tna sighs out, ‘I’ve not exactly been around for too long to really understand the Known Universe, as you describe it.’

‘How long have you been around?’ Namjoon bites.

‘Just over 3 sols.’

‘How?’
‘In my case, I was woken up by another me,’ Prat’tna explains, ‘Who had been awake for about a sol before me. Probably the same time Yoongi started waking up.’

‘Uh- what about the other you?’ Namjoon asks hesitantly.

‘He died. He’s buried in that field you found earlier.’

‘Uh-‘ Namjoon doesn’t know where to start.

Prat’tna seems to notice and he gives him an amused grin- slightly terrifying in this low light because Megibiyans did not appear to be the most gentle of species; at least visually speaking.

‘Will the others wake up? The same way you did? The same way Yoongi did?’

‘Not always no- not all GI will regain who they once used to be.’

‘Why?’

‘There is no radical difference between what the GI are, and what the Red Evil created- like myself, like Yoongi, like so many of us here. The only thing that separates us really, is how long we were exposed to be tied to Jimin’s fate.’

‘I don’t understand that,’ Namjoon says bluntly, ‘Jimin had said something like that-‘

‘-he said we were all tied to him right? That we were all coming back to him? He’s not wrong- when the Red Evil took Jimin, he essentially died-‘

‘-but he doesn’t have that mark down his back-‘

‘-he was not remade- or cloned, duplicated, the way we were no- that would never work. Jimin was forced out of Menigišiti, his birthplace, where who he is, and everything he is, is fated to belong there- all lives living in Menigišiti, attached to his fate.’

‘So does that mean- does that mean after Jimin woke up, more of the GI also woke up?’

‘No- not the GI, the ones you call eggs- the ones the Omhlophe are after- they started waking up with rapid speed and frequency,’ Prat’tna explains. ‘Why do you think your mission was so randomly thrown together after 4 sols had passed since the Gaia Case?’

Namjoon shrugs.

‘Because Jimin was starting to wake up- starting to be responsive. And as a result, all of the eggs they had taken out of the Red Evil’s ship, started reacting to him too; so they didn’t want-‘

‘-they didn’t want all of those unknown clones, copies- those “unnaturally” created living Beings whose creation and life-force no one could predict; they didn’t want those waking up in Šerdesas. So they sent Jimin away.’ Namjoon completes, ‘Fuck- so it’s true, that the Omhlophe can sense Jimin? That all of you can sense him?’

‘Maybe not so acutely- how would they say it here hm? Gut instinct?’ Prat’tna rubs his jaw, his hands trembling just slightly. ‘I’ll explain this to you chronologically, and maybe you will see the whole picture that way.’

Namjoon leans forward and nods, paying full attention.

‘Before Tsirin and Jimin were born, there had been a sudden rise- sudden, but gradual at the same
time, of citizens who questioned and doubted the purpose of the Heart and the Fate,’ Prat’tna explains. ‘This was of course not unusual- you will always have this sort of reaction, it cannot, and should not, be quelled down.’

‘Should not?’

Prat’tna shakes his head, ‘Accountability comes in all forms, Captain Namjoon, and sometimes outlandish accusations and doubts can allow for self-reflection.’

Namjoon raises his eyebrows at that.

‘But this was different- because while most of these accusations normally came from politicians, religious leaders, economists and other forms of leaders, there was a sudden rise in change amongst the citizens. In a way, Megibīya was not effected by such commentary- we were also somehow too far,’ Prat’tna says slowly, ‘However, many of the planets, saw a spike in what we later referred to as the ‘Anti-Fate Movement’- where citizens did not wish to consult with the Great Council, and often sometimes voted against what they would say. This died down- they always did, and we never thought much of it afterwards- during this time, my previous partner, the Wenedi who served with me, had died. To replace him, Yyna was appointed. And some years later, Tsirin, and then Jimin, were born.

They were loved- adored, really- but a lot of this had to do with how the Great Council, the Wenedi, represented them to the rest of Menigišiti.’

‘You had to do some PR stuff then,’ Namjoon ruminates, ‘Change the way the citizens would see the Great Council.’

‘We did – this also was not a new tactic. Jimin was raised to follow this example- as was his sister; they were both trained to behave how we wanted the public to perceive them.’

‘And you’re saying you- and the other Wenedi- you brought them all of the information, the data, the news from all around the System,’ Namjoon scoffs, ‘You were just using them for your own gain.’

‘You’re right,’ Prat’tna sighs, ‘This was not how we saw it-‘

Namjoon lets out a dry laugh, ‘Sure it wasn’t. Seems like no where in the Universe is safe from greed and lust for power I guess.’

‘-and I was one of the problems- contributing to a lifestyle we thought- we believed was the right one because that was what we were lead to believe- by those who came before us, and before them, and much before any of that,’ Prat’tna stops for a moment to cough. His coughs are deep and dry, hollow sounding.

‘Are you all right?’ Namjoon asks hesitantly after Prat’tna’s coughing fit goes on for over a minute.

‘Of course not- I’m dying. Just like Yoongi, just like the Prat’tna who woke up before me. Just like every other who were Awoken.’ Prat’tna rolls his dirty yellow eyes as though Namjoon was being thick on purpose. ‘Tsirin and Jimin were part of the Great Council when things were starting to even out- some of the planets had gone through some internal changes regarding how they ran their policies, agendas; again, this was all normal. And then 7 sols after Jimin’s birth, we were attacked.’

‘But- you’re supposed to be invisible.’
Prat’tna nods, ‘Tsirin was only 8 at the time, and Jimin 7- they were both so young, the Great Council went ahead to check on the attack.’

‘Was this in Megibīya?’

‘No- in Akramana,’ Prat’tna shakes his head, ‘Something hideous- something deadly. Something that saw us. We immediately suspected foul-play. That Ndica, and his Panel, had to do with it. And it’s likely in a sense, that he was definitely involved in some way. Though not how he would have wanted. And it was the same evil that destroyed Megibīya, nearly 120 sols later.’

‘So- so they found you first. You had no dealings with them.’

‘None- and because of this, of course, with pressure from the rest of the System, approval to reach out to the Panel was sent out, only half-understood by Tsirin and Jimin at their age. We met the Panel in Akramana. They had heard of the force we had described to them. But had never witnessed it- they promised to keep watch – and to track them.

Ndica is good with words…he managed to bring the Panel and the Great Council into agreement to meet every decade. I voted against this- but I was ruled out. They returned as promised, bearing snippets of news, sightings- Tsirin and Jimin did not meet with the Panel until some 50 sols later–’

‘-what? Why?’ Namjoon demands.

‘We did not want to reveal our Heart or Fate to anyone beyond our System,’ Prat’tna says carefully- ‘We were also kept so safe- so secured, united within our System. I was just barely able to keep this suggestion- only just able to tilt the votes to my side; to simply have these discussions, and then later repeat what was discussed to Tsirin and Jimin.’

‘I’m guessing neither Jimin, and his sister, were pleased with this.’

‘Of course not.’ Prat’tna laughs though it’s more of a cough. ‘They studied the Panel for sols and sols until the next gathering. Jimin had agreed to stay back, under the request of his sister who understood my fears. So Jimin remained hidden for much longer- listening in on everything while Tsirin took over. At first I assumed all was well- maybe I was genuinely just paranoid. But then- the talks started, it started back up again- questions of the Great Council- of Jimin, of Tsirin – the citizens of Menigišiti were fearful; especially after that attack, but were also questioning why we would not leave. Why we could not.’

‘Why did you remain in hiding?’

‘We just always did- for as long as the Great Council existed- for as long as Menigišiti was alive, breathing, her children would remain hidden. That was always how it was- and that was why the Fate and the Heart existed – to keep it that way- a reminder that this was, and will always be, the only way we would survive.’ Prat’tna explains, leaning back and taking a rattling shallow breath.

‘We, the Wenedi, did what we could to find the source of this talk, of this strange unsettling rising wave of sudden bursts of aggression, violence- Tsirin was almost killed once, an assassin sent for her.’

‘What happened?’

‘She forgave him, spoke to him, and became her loyal advisor,’ Prat’tna smiles, breathing out, ‘We did a lot to…to inhibit them, in ways that went against everything they stood for. But so far it is safe to say, that they came out all right.’
Namjoon only allows the silence to stretch for a few seconds before he clears his throat.

‘The day we were alerted, I was returning back from the eastern regions, investigating some silent protest— it was a dead end, I discovered nothing and could report nothing—’

‘-did Jimin and his sister know?’

‘They did— of course they did. But from what they studied in their childhood, in the annals of our history, the writings and records and archives of their predecessors, they understood what was happening as simply a part of a cycle.’ Prat’tna replies immediately, sounding aggravated, ‘Of course they were upset— they wanted happiness, unity— things we taught them to value above all.’

The Megibīyan stops himself, breathing out through his nose slowly before continuing, ‘That day— Jimin volunteered over his sister to go to Megibīya— his sister had more experience dealing with the Panel in Akramana, and Jimin had long been fond of our home planet— he felt it his personal duty to come; and as a whole, they knew that if needed, Jimin was better for an offensive approach over Tsirin’s.

He chose to take his personal guards, the Megibīyan Wenedi, the Be’iji Wenedi, as well as a small team to fly, operate, and manage the ship we would be taking with us. Our plan was to approach Megibīya from the secondary gates— surrounding Menigišiti are gateways, openings controlled and maintained by cells designed to stabilize the natural resonance surrounding Menigišiti. We realized, that the outer cells past Megibīya were tampered with. None of us said it out loud— but the cells designed to keep the resonance stable was only known to a few— taught only to a few. This tampering meant someone was working from within. Yyna suggested that we repair what we could, and if the worst comes, they would be destroyed; destroying them means shutting off any entryway, any possible entrance into Menigišiti. Jimin and his Guards devised a plan that we would divide our units— the ones who stay by the cells at standby, ready to destroy the cells and close off any possible entryway while we went into Megibīya to scout. However, we saw that there was clearly no point the closer we got. Jimin ordered the cells to be destroyed, and shut off every possible gateway into Menigišiti— at least from the outside.

Megibīya was ruined— and it appeared to have been so, for much longer than what we could have possibly imagined. I couldn’t understand why or how we had not known— when we crashed…Yyna told me that we had to speak with Jimin— to tell him of what was possibly happening.’

‘What did she think was happening?’

‘That someone from Menigišiti, was attempting to expose us all, by using Ndica and his desire to exploit us.’

‘So you knew— you knew what he wanted to do.’

‘Not to the extent of what we know now,’ Prat’na shakes his head. ‘But I—…I never trusted him. Never trusted any of them in the Panel— the GIU Trifecta K’mara, or the younger Yishengs who were with him— was it some taught-instinct in me to regard outsiders as a threat clouding my judgment, or had I just known— because what they were doing, I realized, was what we— the Wenedi, were doing as well.’

‘Like looking in a mirror, no doubt,’ Namjoon comments wryly though his mind is whirling.

‘We crashed— into the Maw, and it took us nearly 3 weeks to reach the Crescent; everything had changed. The air, the sky, the soil— everything was changed and it did not feel like my home. Almost everyday we lost someone— and then we saw them— the Red Evil.'
And they stalked us- like a predator would its prey they hunted us, one by one. They took me the same time as 3 others- but they converged mostly on Jimin- and I have never seen him react like that- I have never seen him that angry, or that afraid. He Spoke to them- he used to voice of command, and of power, but it had no effect on them- and I was taken.

My first memory, if you can call it that, was to a small dark room, and a mission in mind. These memories, I realized later, were just recollections of actions I witnessed because I was the creator of those actions- however, what I did, where I went, what was asked of me; all of this only started to establish themselves upon me as actions taken by my hand, after I met myself.'

‘The you that woke before that?’

‘I was given an Android chip, it was attached to my Helmet, and since then, I started awakening. Slowly- but helped and aided by myself- by our shared memories, visions, and what the previous me, and before that, and so much many more before that, discovered and realized.’

‘Yoongi awoke because of that too,’ Namjoon frowns, ‘Who did that? Introducing the Android core?’

‘It was from Tlun’hl'a- is what I came to understand. Whoever administered the core to Yoongi knew what they were doing- though Yoongi…-his awakening wasn’t planned. After Tlun’hl’a discovered that some of us were able to relive our lives, they stopped more attempts.’

‘Why?’

‘Because it meant that they failed,’ Prat’tna grimaces at Namjoon as though he was being purposefully obtuse. ‘Their goal was to recreate the whole of Life, bound and tied to one motion of living-‘

‘-yes I know what the Yishengs wanted to do,’ Namjoon quickly cuts in.

‘This then became a method of ruling us out- in Axudar they call us the Regurgitated.’

Namjoon can’t help but make a face.

‘It’s fitting,’ Prat’tna gives him a lopsided smile, ‘It’s because for us, for the Prat’tna before me, for Yoongi, for every single one of us who was captured there in Megibîya, for the many others who were created by Ndica and Tlun’hl’a; we are the defects.’

‘How are you defected? What makes you defected?’

‘Ultimately what the Red Evil wanted to create, and what the Yishengs wanted to create was the same thing- a whole Universe of Beings living and controlled to a standard of what they thought meant living a real, full life, no sorrow, no loss, no war, no death- just existence.’ Prat'tna leans back slowly, grunting a little, ‘Both the Red Evil and the Yishengs recreated us, stripped us from who we used to be, remodeled us, almost the same way- it’s why we have that mark down our backs. And the longer we were created, the longer we stayed in their ships, the more we were stripped and reborn.’

‘But the ones in Megibîya- you were not there for long correct?’ Namjoon thinks hard.

‘We were not,’ Prat’tna shakes his head. ‘But after some time, you are lost- just simply gone; into an endless white realm, and then it sinks- it sinks to nothingness.’

Namjoon is aware of multiple religions and beliefs and cultures and their respective beliefs on
what came after death. Yet somehow, fear of the unknown, an entry into nothingness, signifying that *nothing* remained after everything in Life, was regarded with fear, and denied because non-existence seemed to bring the most fear in all Beings.

Yet Prat’tna seems to speak of this nothingness with reverence.

‘And what about those that stayed long in those ships? How would they know?’

‘The Red Evil seemed to be able to time them in their own fashion- their own technology. The tanks they were held in would open at the right time. But with the Yishengs,’ Prat’tna scratches at the side of his jaw, ‘Let’s say there was a lot of trial and error until Ndica and his Yishengs found us in Megibīya.’

‘Woah-’ Namjoon holds up his hand, ‘Ndica found you? In Megibīya? How?’

‘Obviously the emergency meeting set up in Akramana was simply a trick- what they wanted, who they wanted, was in Megibīya.’

‘They wanted Jimin- so that they could…tie his Fate, to the uh, eggs they created?’

Prat’tna nods, his lips pulling to a grimace, ‘But the Red Evil were there before they could get there- were long in Megibīya before they got there. It was not planned of course- the Red Evil left, what they needed was with them. However, many of what they created, they left behind; almost as a distraction. And then Amme saved us-‘

Namjoon is reeling, unable to speak at this information given to him.

‘-she saved many of us from a terrible fate Ndica and Tlun’hla had for us. She hid us under the Yisheng Headquarters with the rest of the GI- and yes,’ Prat’tna nods at him, ‘Amme worked for Ndica and Tlun’hla for quite a while. She was once Ndica’s apprentice. However, she…she had a change of heart- or mind, something,’ Prat’tna snorts again, ‘And Ndica banished her. I was sent to kill her. Well, one of me was sent to kill her.’

‘That’s-…that’s how you know. She awoke you- using the techniques she heard of from Ndica and Tlun’hla- using the Android chip,’ Namjoon says breathlessly.

Prat’tna nods, ‘I stayed in exile with her for many sols, I would return, sneak us out one by one- slowly- of course, not all of us could survive the harsh implant of the core. I died more than once- as did Yyna- even Yoongi. The one with you- he’s the only one in his copy that’s come this far, and that’s after Amme had said she would try to expose him to Jimin; of course this is after the Gaia Case. Since then, we never saw her again. I’ve never personally met her,’ Prat’tna gestures to himself, ‘What I know is simply memory.’

‘She always knew- she knew *everything.*’ Namjoon hisses out, ‘-wait, does this mean Hoseok knew about this-‘

‘The Ngfy’widan knows nothing- but he used his intuition and called for Amme- a good and wise choice. They will be safe for the meanwhile.’

‘Then why hasn’t Amme-‘

‘-because, the Special Jury is not just Amme, who is utterly compromised in her title and role as a result of her fellow Yisheng- her word has no weight. It would only serve to ruin the chances for everyone’s survival.’
‘Everyone- as in…’

‘As in yours, your team, all of the remaining GI, the eggs, the Artoo’ii, the New Borns, the Regurgitated- so many names for us.’ Prat’tna lists off the names, ‘Amme wants to save us, to take us somewhere, where the GLA Court cannot touch us, where we can live, without fear, without worry-’

‘The Special Jury wanted us to find a way, using Jimin, to open Menigišiti, so that we could take all of…all of you, and…basically contain all of you.’ Namjoon frowns, his mind reeling, ‘Is this because the GLA Court believe that you pose a threat?’

‘The GI are not helping us with our image control.’

‘No shit.’

Prat’tna throws his head back laughing.

‘I saw a Khol’isa out there- and another, I mean- not to mention Jungkook, who lived and was raised in, well, an environment as normal as possible considering Ynqaba- there’s so many of you just out there. Surely there’s no way the GLA Court could hope to round them all up, or in the worst case scenario, have them all killed-’

‘Then what do you think the Omhlophe are here for?’

‘What did you say?’

‘The Omhlophe- lost children of the Red Evil, used by the GLA Court to track down all of the lost eggs, and destroy them,’ Prat’tna looks at him like he’s being dumb again, ‘Why do you think they’re wandering about so freely?’

‘But- that doesn’t make sense the Omhlophe worked for the Red Evil, were created by them-’

‘The Omhlophe aren’t much different from the GI- created by the Red Evil to do their bidding- but they have more…more of themselves- in a strange sense, they’re almost childish, wild- with no sense of morality. Just doing what they were told-’ Prat’tna stops, sighing quietly. ‘So when the Red Evil were destroyed, they were suddenly found.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘And the GLA, made a collective decision, with the help of the Yisheng who were more than willing to comply, now that they had such a reputation to rebuild within the GLA, to calm the Omhlophe enough, to…come to a bargain.’

‘What bargain.’

‘That the Omhlophe would find the lost or hidden eggs- even the ones that the Yishengs lost and hid in countless planets and systems, and then destroy them,’ Prat’tna explains, ‘And in return, they would be allowed to be lost again.’

‘How do you know this?’

‘I kidnapped an Omhlophe?’ Prat’tna shrugs, ‘The response I got was not a verbal one- so I-’ Prat’tna gestures with his hand.

‘What’s-…what’s that I don’t get it-’
Prat’tna grunts with annoyance, ‘You know- that thing,’ he puts a hand over his head and then on Namjoon’s. To Namjoon’s absolute disquiet, Prat’tna’s hand could completely wrap over his head.

And okay, like this, Namjoon can guess enough.

‘Wait- I thought this was- this was just a thing Jimin and Yoongi could do-‘

But images from the ship, where Jimin’s mind shared with his own, flashes back in his memory.

‘-so that’s how I was able to understand much of what the Omhlophe were trying to do.’ Prat’tna continues to explain. ‘The Omhlophe also used other Beings- to retrieve their eggs from certain places-‘

‘Like in Ynqaba- we met, we met a pirate of sorts-‘

‘-they’re not pirates- the ones they hired in Ynqaba, and here in Lowet- they’re not pirates. Just unfortunate Beings, too poor, too desperate- the Omhlophe would promise medicine, cures, help. In exchange for the eggs.’

‘Here in Lowet too?’

‘Not for a while though.’

‘You’re protecting Lowet.’

‘We’re doing what we can- all around the Known Universe but we’re…there’s not a lot of us, as you can tell. And the past sol or so- we’ve started feeling…skittish I guess.’

‘Because of Jimin.’

Prat’tna nods.

‘Because…’

‘They’ve all come back to me.’

‘Because we are now found,’ Prat’tna smiles, relief in his tired and sickly features.

‘Where else- where else have you found the eggs?’ Namjoon asks carefully, hoping his face is a mask of neutrality. But he evidently fails.

‘When you escaped Ynqaba, the Omhlophe ship that had come after you was taken down by us. We were able to convince the Ynaqabans to fight them as well- the battle you had come across between us was because Ynqaba believed we were robbing them. We were able to convince them that it was the Omhlophe.’ Prat’tna informs him, ‘When we entered the ships we were able to retrieve the Eggs, and,’ Prat’tna gives him a small smile (or big, Namjoon can’t really tell with Megibīyan features) and says, ‘We found several Eggs from Kutsoglera.’

Namjoon’s can’t find it in himself to speak just yet.

‘They’re safe. Asleep. For a few more sols.’ Prat’tna tells him reassuringly. ‘You can go see them if you want. They’re safely hidden in the shoreline.’

Clearing his throat, more out of an act of normal social decorum than anything else, Namjoon continues, ‘You, as in the GI, you’ve been to Ynqaba?’
‘We have – to trade and deal for the Eggs from the Collectors there.’

‘That’s how they recognized the uniform,’ Namjoon says quietly to himself before asking, ‘How many of the GI are here? Or well, under your control?’

‘None of them are under my control- I simply guide,’ Prat’tna explains, ‘I think you’ll know this from experience but the GI are very chaotic despite looking so dormant.’

Namjoon rolls his eyes hard.

‘And in the past sol, they’ve become much more…reckless, much more…well, desperate I guess.’

‘To be found?’

Prat’tna nods, ‘What happened in Grisial- I cannot explain it- I cannot begin to explain to you, how the GI, who are not Regurgitated, but who are not like the Artoo’ii either- how they even begin to think. I can assure you that it was not intended for any of them to hurt you, or to bring harm to anyone-‘

‘-Jimin was literally stabbed-‘

‘I’m aware,’ Prat’tna says through gritted teeth, ‘But your Artoo’ii took care of many of us so-’

‘Um what-‘

Prat’tna stares at him, same expression that Namjoon was now getting used to.

‘The Pravasi H’manun youngling took down 6 of the GI sent to retrieve all of you to safety.’

‘Excuse me he was clearly defending himself and the-‘

‘-he strategically took down 6 of the GI, and Dehin, the Being you were clearly so worried about you kept visiting him in the past 3 days, barely survived the attack,’ Prat’tna snaps back. ‘He was also the first one to attack-‘

‘As his Captain I am very pleased that he was able to do so,’ Namjoon practically snarls back, ‘Clearly whatever approach you were attempting was an incredibly stupid one- of course our reaction was expected and you know what? It was justified!’

Prat’tna is panting a little, shaking his head at someone behind Namjoon. Living 3 straight days with no one but the GI has somewhat desensitized Namjoon so he’s not shocked to find 2 dark uniform, helmet-wearing GI right behind him.

‘Did you suffer losses? Yes you did- and I am sorry that it happened, but that doesn’t mean what we did was wrong,’ Namjoon huffs out, ‘You could have talked to us- what even was your plan? To send in GI dressed as maintenance workers and Grisial Crew, and then-‘

‘-the plan,’ Prat’tna glares, ‘Was to send in a few of the GI, and then be close enough to talk- we had already noticed the Omhlophe fast approaching, and I was preoccupied getting ready to deal with them, but they tricked us, coming to approach you head-on instead of where we were lead to believe-‘

‘-sure, and then what about Yoongi? That other Yoongi tried to literally kill him-‘

‘-he was GI,’ Prat’tna snaps, ‘The GI have their mission in mind- which was to bring back Jimin safely, and that mission’s success was thwarted by many threats and for the GI, for their logic, they
believed that Yoongi was the biggest threat!'

‘And stabbing Jimin-‘

‘-was a mistake! Not for Yoongi of course not- he was probably attempting to defuse-‘

Namjoon laughs but there’s no humor in his tone.

‘-you’re not saying you’ve never seen Yoongi- the one with you, do some extraordinarily ridiculous thing, or execute some action in a way that doesn’t make sense to you?’

Namjoon can’t cross his arms so he just makes a fist with one hand over his thigh. Yes- the GI were not known to do things in the most traditional or orthodox manner. Like how Yoongi had stripped down, nearly shot Sk’jin in the head, dismembered Hoseok, and deactivated the Užkulisai, just to tell them they were being spied on.

Namjoon has to be begrudgingly accept it.

‘Fine. But that doesn’t mean you’re allowed to blame me, or my crew, for your losses,’ Namjoon states bluntly.

After Yoongi had “woke up”, it was almost as though he spoke as two different Beings- which makes sense now in a way. Because the previous “Android core” activated GI had some form of awareness, and then the fully “woken up” past-life version slowly regained their consciousness, so to speak. So it added up that this Prat’tna, would argue this with Namjoon.

Clearly, Prat’tna is thinking this too.

‘So yes…’ Prat’tna breathes out before leaning back again, slumping a little, ‘As you can see- the way they think- the way we think- it’s not…acceptable, in many ways.’

Namjoon rolls his eyes again.

‘-which is why, this behavior would make others fear them- want to hunt them.’

Namjoon is still irritated but he nods, gesturing for Prat’tna to continue.

‘So having all of us, return, back to Menigišiti, where we can just remain, safe and found; this is what we want. And this is what, ultimately, the Special Jury want as well.’

‘So that’s it then,’ Namjoon can’t find it in himself to be surprised. It made sense. Of course Amme, and probably K’mara, knew that the Beings created by the Red Evil, and also by the Yishengs themselves, were just living Beings, the same as everyone else. Probably a few in the Jury thought this too- but many probably saw them as some unknown, unhinged, unpredictable threat. Which based off of the behavior clearly reported and observed during the Gaia Case, did not serve their cause.

‘So why haven’t you gone? Surely, you could go back- take back all that you can save right now- you knew that Amme knew about this. Clearly she’s somewhat trustworthy and as a Yisheng she would-‘

‘Captain, please- we’re in this mess because we believed the Yishengs were worthy of trust.’

Prat’tna interrupts. ‘I trust no one- outside of myself, of the GI- I trust Jimin- and his trust in you.’

‘All right- okay so you’re waiting-‘
'I did go,' Prat’tna admits. ‘I went to Menigišiti. I visited Megibīya. But I could find no way in. I scoured the whole region- there was no way in.’

‘How do you expect us to get in then? Because of Jimin?’

‘Somewhat, yes,’ Prat’tna nods.

‘What is it like?’ Namjoon asks somewhat hesitantly, this was after all, this Megibīyan’s home planet. ‘Is it empty?’

‘No- some pirates stop there- but not for too long. Megibīya is haunted you see.’

‘Haunted?’

‘You should know.’

Namjoon grits his teeth together. He hated this. You should know.

No one should know. No one should have to know.

‘What do you think happened after you fell?’

‘All of the locations I knew, and with some calculations by myself, Yyna, and many others who Woke up, we tried to find where we would be able to find our cells. We found none- could see none.’ Prat’tna explains. ‘I had thought, initially, that it was possible Tsirin and the Great Council ordered for all of the cells to be destroyed, shutting them all out.’

‘You thought?’

Prat’tna nods slowly, placing his hands over the table surface, a heavy frown etched over his stony-skinned brow.

‘But my theory- our theory...always felt incomplete. Like we were missing something.’

Namjoon waits as patiently as he can for a continuation. But clearly Prat’tna had stopped on purpose, because not a moment later, there is a burst of footsteps, several; small, young, headed towards them.

Several younglings burst through into the kitchen area. One was clearly a native of the village, soft brown hair, large grey eyes, very freckled skin, and a rosy mouth. The youngling is panting, their hands filled with some sort of fruit in bunches. The other youngling, maybe a little older, is definitely not a native. Namjoon can’t place where he’s from exactly- probably some place in the Milky Way. His hair is dark – nearly almost black. His eyes are also dark, the iris area smaller than that of the natives in the area. His skin is only lightly freckled- exposure to the sun as well as the breeze from the ocean nearby. But they’re babbling in the native tongue, pausing to only stare at Namjoon for a second before grinning up at Prat’tna. The Megibiyan chuckles, adjusting himself in his chair to speak with them. His accent is clear, but he nods along. Not too long afterwards, an older villager steps in, pulling in with them some sort of cart. They smile before looking a little surprised at Namjoon’s presence.

They say something- to one of the GI there. A few seconds later, the GI responds in kind. The villager just smiles and says in a little broken Standard, ‘Sorry.’

‘Ah- it’s fine, okay-‘ Namjoon raises his hand in a thumb’s up before addressing the GI, ‘I don’t eat- can you tell them that?’
The GI does translate and the villager nods, not surprised by this information, and hands Prat’tna a tray, saying something with a short laugh.

After a few more minutes, in which Namjoon is given some fruit as well, the villagers and the younglings leave.

‘Precooked food?’ Namjoon looks at the tray filled with a large portion of fish stew and some sort of grain.

Prat’tna just grins before digging in.

‘Guessing that youngling- an egg?’

Prat’tna hums, smiling a little to himself. The GI also take a seat, removing their helmets to eat.

Namjoon waits for them to finish eating. Which was a good thing, Namjoon guesses, he needed the time to process everything.

So in summary, basically, Menigišiti, like every other System in the Known Universe, had their own fair share of issues and problems. Jimin and his sister were some sort of filtering system, established for as long as the whole System existed- and the Great Council served to bring unbiased information from across their System. Clearly, after the Red Evil had attacked, and Ndica had been so closely involved with coming to Menigišiti, more unrest and distrust towards the Great Council rose up.

Was it too much of a stretch to believe Ndica had some hand in this? Even if he did not enter Menigišiti, he would still, as a Yisheng, be able to influence those around him.

He then staged the attack- but no one had expected the Red Evil to arrive, launching an attack on Megibīya. The Red Evil then took over, taking in Jimin and his team who flew out, and overwhelmed them. Not so long after, Ndica, alongside Amme, had discovered them, and Amme took some back to the Yisheng Headquarters and there, hid them. Yoongi was not the first to wake up- there were many before him. But he was most certainly the first Human to do so. Namjoon is pretty sure it’s because of Jimin. Amme discovered the way of waking them up- something she must have picked up from Ndica and Tlun’hla and their experiments by the sound of it. Of course it wasn’t the best method- and clearly not the healthiest either, judging by Prat’tna. And also judging by Yoongi.

And now they just- they just wanted to be able to live, away from the continuing barrage of questions regarding if they could be considered worth being allowed to live.

And with what Van Seulgaan had said- his connection to the Alliance; of course he knew full well. He had called them abominations. He wanted nothing to do with the Eggs; though he certainly saw the profit in them.

It makes Namjoon shiver slightly, at the possibility of what disgusting plans could have existed for the eggs- for those OrTanks extracted from that massive ship.

And the Omhlophe?

They wanted to kill the Eggs? Not hoard and save them as Khonen had expressed to them. Khonen had no cause to lie- of course not. He couldn’t. These were two conflicting accounts- maybe the GLA Court ordered the Omhlophe to have the Eggs destroyed, and maybe the Omhlophe were pretending to obey. If what Prat’tna said was to be trusted- the Omhlophe had no cohesive, no logical manner of thinking. Similar to the GI.
It was also what made them so so dangerous.

So did that mean, that strangely enough, the Special Jury, were in fact, looking out for this entire mission the whole time? But that didn’t really settle well with Namjoon in the slightest. Sk’jin would scoff at him, telling him that he should never trust anything anyone says.

There was also something else bothering Namjoon. Ever since he last left Ynqaba, ever since Sk’jin’s return from his capture in Ynqaba, and since Jungkook arrived.

‘Why were the Yishengs here? I mean at Ynqaba? What was the reason?’ Namjoon asks.

Prat’tna doesn’t stop eating, spitting out a long bone before he asks, ‘Have you ever heard of the First Children?’

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Chapter End Notes

(Author’s Notes)

Clearly I miscalculated how many words would be in this chapter so I split it into two, the second chapter will be coming soon in a few days!!!!!!!!!!!!
Social distancing and self isolation I think is incredibly easy for me for a variety of reasons:
1. Introversion
2. Hating to go outside in general
3. Its hot here in bkk and so naturally you just wanna stay where its nice and cool
4. Going out = having to spend money and that’s a big no for me because I am unemployed
5. Growing up in a country where curfews and strikes happened every other day
6. Being??? Lazy???
I just love staying indoors where my clean bathroom is available any time, I have wifi, my laptop, endless movies, no need to wear make up, just in comfy home clothes and I can walk barefoot? Perfection
Hows everyone doing with self-isolation and social distancing???
Also striking how people don’t wash their hands
Being a Germaphobe™
I always have dry hands from overwashing and disinfecting my hands, phones,
laptops- it’s like my time to shine has come
My time to shine where no one can see me because we’re practicing social distancing
Things are not too bad here in bkk, YET
though cases are definitely going up, and people are not buying out toilet paper or
panic buying shit YET
What about everyone else??
‘Uh, actually Jimin might have said something about it in passing but we did not have time to elaborate.’

‘The First Children are basically the first thing Yisheng created- entities of Time, Space, Existence – they created the Universe you could say, though it’s more a matter…well, the way hosts of bacteria would grow in discarded waste of another living Being.’

Namjoon grimaces at the description though the other GI seem to have no care.

‘But some places are, well, richer, better for bacteria to thrive in, so to speak,’ Prat’tna wipes at his bowl with a bit of bread, ‘And in these places, if you place the Artoo’ii, or the Eggs, as you refer to them, you get, supposedly, purer, stronger, better.’

‘So Ynqaba, Lowet- these places are, uh, blessed? By the First Children?’

Prat’tna nods, tearing another chunk of bread.

‘There are countless other places like this- that the Red Evil, the Yisheng, they were able to track down and host their creations, to let them grow. They clashed here, between Ynqaba and Lowet. The Yishengs had first taken Ynqaba, and the Red Evil took Lowet.’

Namjoon can’t help but think of the stark difference in result left behind by each separate party in each respective planet. Yishengs were considered good, bringer of life, healing- yet all Ynqaba had to show was black scorched dust for earth, acid rain for water, and pain for life. Yet here in Lowet, life appeared to be flourishing in its own way.

‘When the Yishengs found out about Lowet, they tried to attack- but of course the Red Evil would not back down- Yisheng Ndica ran away but the Red Evil were greatly destroyed too. You’ve noticed the difference, haven’t you, between the two planets.’

Namjoon nods.
'Lowet was lucky you could say,' Prat‘tna pauses, ‘Do you know what happens when a Yisheng dies?'

Namjoon does not.

‘Their Life-force is released,’ Prat‘tna explains. ‘And as we all know, Yishengs have this in plenty. So you see- as you know, the Red Evil once used to be Yishengs—’

‘what?!’

‘-and it’s the same, when the Red Evil die. Lowet was a poor planet, their lands ravaged with drought, famine, disease. And yet somehow, this is the best thing that could have happened to it,’ Prat‘tna continues. ‘And many of the Artoo’ii hidden here, by the Red Evil, awoke as a result. The Beings of Lowet, took them on as their own; generations here have lived, with the blood of Beings from species that would have never stepped foot in this System otherwise. Your Artoo’ii is one of them- well, unluckier ones in Ynqaba- we tried to bring them all back here as much as we could, but the Collectors are all assholes with their own pockets in mind.’

The one who brought us our food, the youngling with them, they adopted that Human youngling when he was born,’ Prat‘tna nods in the direction of the hallway. ‘The Beings of Lowet know that their population is low- and they accepted us too. I came here- we all came here, because many many decades ago, after Ndica left a mess here, Amme sought us, the ones who Woke up, and told us to stay here.

‘But you literally just said you don’t trust Amme why are you still here?’

‘Because we had nowhere else to go,’ Prat‘tna says simply. ‘But now, we might.’

‘But- the Eggs, they’re just living here- they’re a part of this community now aren’t they, I don’t think they would easily give up Beings they’ve adopted—’

‘-and not everyone is as lucky- look at your Artoo’ii,’ Prat‘tna interrupts. ‘There are so many like him in Ynqaba- some are lucky in their own way, making their living as part of the Beings there- some are sold, some are killed- some are traded, and most recently, sold to the Omhlophe. Not everyone is as lucky.’

‘How are you staying hidden?’

‘The water.’

‘The water? The ocean?’

Prat‘tna nods, ‘What is the primary rule for life to flourish?’

‘You need water,’ Namjoon frowns.

Prat‘tna just nods, as though that was the explanation Namjoon was looking for.

‘The most likely case, with the Artoo’ii, is they will be reported to the GLA Court, or the Venture Unit. And with how the GLA Court regards them, it’s best we can assume they will want them destroyed.’

‘So you want Jimin to find a way back into Menigišiti, and take all of the Eggs, maybe even the GI, everyone born out of this mess, and hide them in there?’
Prat’tna nods.

‘But you can’t find a way in.’

Prat’tna nods again, finishing his last bite of bread.

‘And this is the part where you say you want me to help,’ Namjoon asks bluntly.

Prat’tna nods.

‘Basically you now want me to tell Jimin all of this- I should tell you that ultimately our plan is to go into Menigišiti. You know that right?’ Namjoon inquires, ‘It’s what Jimin wants the most- to go back home.’

Prat’tna smiles at that.

‘I mean, if that’s it, then great. We can leave tomorrow- if you’re saying that, in a sense, Amme can be trusted, let’s get going, meet up with them, and get going.’ Namjoon is ready to leave now.

‘It’s not that simple.’

Namjoon huffs out, ‘Why not.’

‘Because Menigišiti will not allow Jimin to go home.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘When I said I looked for an entryway into Menigišiti, I said I felt like I was missing something.’

Namjoon nods, remembering.

‘We stayed there for over a sol, just searching. Because the cells are there just to stabilize the resonance that protects us- if you know what you’re looking for, then you can find an opening. But it was almost as though all of this was purposefully hidden, purposefully masked. And so we stayed until we found something.’

‘What did you find?’

‘A ship. Akaraman design, right at the outskirts of the borders, and behind it several cargo ships, of Axudarian design. They detected us, and gave me chase, a few Transporters on me. We lead them back to Megibiya. We were able to take them down. We went to investigate each Transporter-Axudarian, all of them. But one of the pilots was from Menigišiti.’

‘What?’

Prat’tna doesn’t add on, instead he reaches into his jacket to retrieve a small screen. He sets it down past his empty dishes, onto the stone table. Tapping a few times, a complete projection pops up.

The GI don’t pause as they eat, barely paying attention.

It’s a clear scan of a Being from a species Namjoon obviously does not recognize. But Prat’tna doesn’t bother to explain and instead expands on the head, turning the projection over so that Namjoon could see.

‘I’m guessing those markings are not native to this species?’
Prat’tna doesn’t even both to answer and instead opens the lids of the projection.

Namjoon nearly falls back from his seat, looking down at the dark eyes, a ring of light like an eclipse forming the iris.

‘What the fuck?!

‘I expanded my search. We went to Axudar.’ Prat’tna continues. ‘It wasn’t even difficult- entering any System undetected and safely was not an issue for us. But what we discovered it was just-.’

He extracts more projections.

‘Axudar is protected from the outside- a special GLA protection over it’s System, established by Ndica to hide what he was doing to his own people, and then later, with the help of Menigišiti, turning it into a prime example of what Yisheng wanted- what he had always wanted. A whole System simply living, controlled without knowledge, without understanding- just existing a perfect life.’

‘Ndica did this to his own System? Are they all Eggs-‘

‘-no. The Beings of Axudar are the way they are because they chose to be like that.’ Prat’tna explains heavily, sweating slightly as he leans back. One of the GI hands him some tablets out of nowhere. Namjoon eyes these with confusion.

‘Just some precaution,’ Prat’tna smiles, ‘It’s mainly to make everyone feel better.’

He dry swallows the pills. ‘Sometimes, eating is tiring- takes a lot to digest I guess?’ he coughs out a laugh.

‘When I further investigated Axudar, I found that out of the 3 planets, Kaitūtei was the root. Here, I found it nearly entirely occupied by those from Menigišiti- all of them, with their eyes changed.’

He swipes across the projections- images taken of a diverse group of Beings in extraordinarily normal settings- all of them, their eyes eclipses.

‘I don’t understand I thought this was- this just Jimin-‘

‘It is. This is recreated surgically, to symbolize that Menigišiti is taking control of their own fate.’ Prat’tna pauses before he adds, ‘The rebels call them Verktaë- tainted eyes.’

‘Rebels? In Axudar?’

Prat’tna nods, ‘Axudarians, some of the Artoo’ii who survived long enough to escape.’

‘So not all of Axudar is entrapped?’

‘It will be soon- Ndica’s death has thrown things out of loop for them. Ndica was meant to present Axudar as the ideal utopia, a System that could indeed work where the Beings were all happy, free, and no violence, no death, no “evil” existed.’ Prat’tna snorts, ‘But then he went and died.’

‘So then who has taken over Axudar? Clearly he was running all of the shots-‘

‘A new set of guides who call themselves The Great Council.’

‘You’re telling me that Menigišiti is basically running all of Axudar?’
Prat’tna nods, ‘And they’re pushing it further, beyond what Ndica had planned, pushing and creating their own fate.’

‘Was this Ndica’s manipulation? He did this, didn’t he? He took what was already happening in Menigišiti and added to it- this was a revolt- it was all staged,’ Namjoon says slowly, ‘This was all planned- to take down the Great Council.’

‘The Great Council was involved,’ Prat’tna shakes his head, ‘This couldn’t have happened without the Great Council being involved.’

‘But surely-.’

‘This was planned for a long long time. Ndica is not the sole Being to blame here,’ Prat’tna exhales out slowly, his sweating abating somewhat. Namjoon guesses his medication kicked in somewhat. ‘Out of the 11 Wenedi pairs, 7 were already involved-’

‘-you’re telling you didn’t know about this?’ Namjoon asks incredulously.

‘You can be as surprised as you want but I can tell you this- I knew nothing of any of this; looking for it within the Great Council?’ Prat’tna scoffs, ‘I wouldn’t have dreamt of it.’

‘You were too loyal to Jimin and his sister,’ Namjoon ruminates, ‘They knew you would inform them at once.’

‘Probably,’ Prat’tna sighs. ‘I spent 5 terrified months in Axudar- many of us were lost as we tried to escape. But in doing so, we were able to free many of the Artoo’ii Ndica had grown and used there- used mainly to further Ndica’s ambitions and twisted ideals. A few of them are here in Lowet- other villages, living a normal life. Some have banded together, to try and free the others still left in Axudar.’

The GI have finished eating, stacking up their bowls and dishes and sitting quietly.

‘I spent some more months, tracking and following the ships entering Menigišiti- we were able to infiltrate one of the ships- Yyna, well, another Yyna, had managed to enter; but I have not heard from her since.’

‘She never got out?’

‘The ship she was in never came out,’ Prat’tna explains, his expression tired. ‘We tried to find out what those ships were carrying- were they taking in things, or taking out things- but…’ Prat'tna gives Namjoon a sharp look, ‘You could say they’re a bit difficult to track.’

Namjoon ignores this and instead says, ‘So those ships have a way of getting into Menigišiti- meaning that clearly there’s a way of getting in- but only either with those ships, or with some tech developed within Axudar.’

Prat’tna nods in confirmation.

‘That’s why Jimin can’t go back in- why he won’t be able to take all of the Eggs in with him,’ Namjoon wipes at his face, leaning back on the chair and slumping a little. ‘And basically, you want to go to Axudar? And then stop whatever is locking Menigišiti down, in order to return home.’

‘That is ultimately, our mission. Yours too now.’
Namjoon closes his eyes- great.

‘How can we be sure, that by going into Axudar, into Kaitūtei, where the entire population of Beings from Menigišiti who clearly never want to go back, we will find a way to get inside Menigišiti?’

‘There is a Yisheng ship at the core of Kaitūtei- the same ship as the one that crashed into Ynqaba; you could say that this is the heart of everything- where Ndica developed his actions and plans, where this new Great Council now stay. I could never get close- but from what the Artoo’ii there told me, this was where everything started. Where everything starts and ends.’

‘Surely you can’t expect us to just casually waltz in-‘

‘What’s that?’

‘…what’s what.’

‘You just said it-‘

‘-waltz in?’

‘Yes.’

‘It’s- it’s a saying, I meant, just casually stroll in-’ Prat’tna makes an expression of understanding, ‘-into Kaitūtei, into this place that’s clearly going to be very guarded I’m sure. I’m pretty sure we could raid a ship- we have Taeh’yung, I’m sure a couple of ship should be fine seeing what he did in Grisial, and then use that ship, slip into Menigišiti-’

‘-we can do that yes,’ Prat’tna says tersely, ‘But…-‘

‘-but you want to know what’s in Axudar.’ Namjoon sighs out.

Prat’tna nods.

‘I want to understand why.’

The GI stand up, taking their dirty dishes and going over to the sink to wash it.

‘And you want Jimin to lead.’

‘Because I know he would want to know why.’

‘You’re just using him again.’ Namjoon feels a flare of protectiveness in him. ‘It’s why you chose not to go personally. Why you decided to have me kidnapped- be a middleman of sorts between the two of you.’

Prat’tna looks down, unable to speak.

Namjoon pushes his chair back and stands up.

‘Tsirin is there.’

Namjoon pauses.

‘His sister.’
Prat’na nods.

Namjoon curses under his breath.

‘Is she-…is she being used, the way Jimin was?’

Prat’nas nods.

Of course like this, Jimin would definitely want to go to Axudar. There was no doubt about it.

‘It’s late,’ Prat’na says, ‘You should sleep.’

Namjoons pretty sure it’s because Prat’na was verging on fainting judging by how fatigued he appeared. Regardless he nods. He needed a moment too.

He’s shown into his room, again set up with an odd arrangement of flowers. Namjoon feels bad for not being Jimin, who was clearly expected somehow. Namjoon steps out.

He needed fresh air.

Outside it’s quite late. The sky above dark, but the stars are clear. There’s a particularly bright streak to the north, and Namjoon guesses it’s the remains of the Ynqaban moon. Lowet had a very small and distant moon, shining down faintly in the form of a waning crescent. It’s peacefully filled with sound outside. The rush of waves along the shoreline, the reeds and plants in the gentle breeze, nightly insects, and talking voices filtering in and out at random from small stone windows.

Namjoon finds himself walking towards the beach.

The ship is still there. There are no lights shining aboard, but Namjoon’s sure the dark windows were watching his move. No doubt he was being tailed too.

He finds a spot, with some flat sediment rock jutting out to serve as a temporary seat.

Of course now, they would definitely have to go to Axudar. They could raid and take over and ship easily of course- but to what end? And how were things even run in Menigišiti anymore?

Would Jimin’s return be met with gladness, or would they protest, or worse attempt to kill him? Did the new Great Council effectively rule both all of Axudar and Menigišiti? Jimin’s return would definitely not be a welcome event.

So then what could they do?

The threat that the unborn Eggs carried with them was not unjustified if Namjoon thinks of it. The GLA Court had good reason to be doubtful and mistrustful. The Yishengs would not be able to prove or vouch for anything as it was them who ultimately orchestrated this entire mess in the first place. For the GLA Court and everyone involved, having the Eggs destroyed was an effective way of dealing with the issue.

But Namjoon cannot and will not allow it to happen. And of course it made sense, that the Jury, the GI, and anyone involved with this side of the situation, would want to have the Eggs safely taken care of in a place that, for all of living history, mostly remained completely hidden.

But now that could not be done, because well- who knew what was really happening in both Axudar and Menigišiti at this point.

The best line of action they could take would be to first split into two teams. The first would get a
hold of one of those ships entering Menigišiti, enter the System, and understand what was happening from within. Clearly, if ships were entering Menigišiti, some form of communication channel was available. This could be duplicated and applied to their own communications network. Then after establishing this, the second team would enter Axudar- preferably with more GI doing this, in order to infiltrate the System and into Kaitüei to investigate this Yisheng ship. Communication would be absolutely key in all of this of course- there was no underestimating how much this could go wrong.

Namjoon leans forward on his working arm; the Jury knew full well what they were sending them into. How did they expect them to be able to remotely succeed? Why not tell them the whole truth? Unless the Beings within the Jury didn’t trust each other.

Namjoon rolls his eyes at himself. Of course they didn’t. K’mara and Amme were both part of the original Panel that Ndica lead to have talks with Menigišiti in the first place. No one with a living and functioning brain would trust Lal Haenoon, and as for the others…Namjoon wouldn’t put their motives as being strictly moral or ethical. Even though Lmiura had scouted him for this purpose with what he believes were genuine intentions, she was not above suspicion or doubt.

There was genuinely too much to think about and trying to fit them all into one scope would be overwhelming, and at this moment- the Special Jury was not strictly important to them.

Namjoon barely flinches when he notices the GI standing a little behind him. He’s not wearing the helmet so Namjoon is able to recognize him.

‘Oh- hey, feeling better?’ Namjoon asks him. Dehin just looks at him, no expression, no response.

‘How are your injuries?’ Namjoon rephrases his question.

‘Improved.’

Namjoon is not expecting the next statement.

‘I like the ocean.’

Namjoon does a double take, eyeing the GI carefully.

‘It is nice.’ Namjoon agrees, ‘Did your uh, planet, have an ocean similar to this?’

‘It did.’ Dehin confirms.

‘So…are you awake?’ Namjoon asks carefully.

‘I’m not asleep.’

‘No as in-‘

‘I understood. It was a joke.’ Dehin’s face twitches funnily, as if he was about to laugh.

So he was awake. Slowly waking up. Or something along that line.

‘Um- I’m sorry about what happened- I guess? Sorry about your injuries.’ Namjoon offers. He’s not exactly apologetic, but he guesses it’s the polite thing to do.

‘It was a result of self-defense.’

‘Thank fuck someone else gets it,’ Namjoon mumbles before adding out loud, ‘Wanna sit and just
stare at the ocean? I heard it’s supposed to be soothing.’

Dehin looks at him for an uncomfortably long period of time before he sits down.

‘It is soothing.’

His tone had some emotion to it- Namjoon’s not sure if he heard right, or whether he was projecting, but he most certainly did.

Now it makes Namjoon think even more.

Yoongi was definitely unwell. There was no denying that. And his health issues starting spiking soon after what was no doubt his “Awakening” or “Waking” or something like that. Prat’tna had said he had died- or at least, another him had died many times before the one right now, and it didn’t exactly sound like every version of him that had Woken up had died because he had been killed by some outside action or force. It was almost as though Prat’tna right now was edging very close to actually just simply dying,

‘-our brother Yoongi is dying.’

Namjoon fidgets.

Just how long did he have? Was there a way of preventing this? Obviously maybe stop introducing the Android core to GI, regardless of whether or not they were regurgitated or puked up, it didn’t matter. Or maybe it did. Would Yoongi, knowing this, would he wish to go through with the Android core treatment to regain his previous memories, regain a sense of self-awareness?

Clearly Prat’tna seemed to think it was important for himself to do so.

Was there a way of saving them, with their intact and reborn memories? Because so far, no other GI or Egg, or whatever other name they have, has had a reaction like this unless they were somehow introduced to implementing the Android core. Yet they all seemed completely fine, normal- it was completely possible that for the GI, after some prolonged exposure to a “normal” society and environment, where they weren’t overwhelmed, they would potentially learn to adapt, slowly learn how to behave and be aware that they were living Beings with their own lives outside of a mission. The other Eggs, like Jungkook, and clearly so many others just within this tiny village, were living completely normal lives.

And yet, regardless, all of them were in danger from the fucking GLA Court it would seem. As well as the Omhlophe because these were two completely different stories he was getting. But either way, one thing for sure was that the Omhlophe were entirely not to be trusted and avoided at all cost.

‘You are stressed.’

Namjoon looks around at Dehin.

‘Uh yeah- just worried about-…worried about my friends.’ Namjoon admits.

‘Me too,’ Dehin replies, ‘I see them in my dreams.’

‘What do you see in your dreams?’ Namjoon asks curiously.

‘Many things,’ Dehin answers, ‘But mainly I see a red sky, rain, trying to be quiet- I see…I also see the beach.’
Definitely memories. Yoongi often spoke of seeing dreams, but not being able to understand it.

‘Do you see dreams?’ Dehin asks him instead.

‘Sure, but I don’t always remember them.’

‘Do you want to?’

‘Not really I guess. You?’

‘I don’t have a choice.’

It’s startling to hear it.

‘I’m sorry,’ Namjoon doesn’t know why he feels choked up but he does.

Somehow they end up staying out by the shoreline till sunrise. The fish-merchants wave at them, carrying wet-lanterns with them and docking on their small boats just as the sky lightens a little. They watch the boats take off, some sort of rudimentary engine propelling them forward over the gentle motion of the early morning water.

‘Guess we should be heading back-‘ Namjoon shouldn’t be surprised when he finds that Dehin is gone. Muttering under his breath, Namjoon gets up, brushing off sand from his clothes.

The early morning crowd are already up. A few smile at Namjoon when they notice him. The villager who had brought the food in the night is also there, outside of their home. They have their youngling strapped to their back, still sleeping. The Human youngling is also sleepy, but determined to be helping so was carrying a dust-pan of sorts.

When Namjoon makes his way back to the GI’s house (???) he finds it still as empty and lifeless as before. Looking around, he finds that there’s a living space past the kitchen area. But they’re all empty.

‘Prat’tna?’ Namjoon calls out.

No one answers him.

He’s thinking of maybe going back to the ship when he notices another villager with the same cart, but with different food. Clearly breakfast. He watches them ignore some doors, and knock on a few specific ones. He stays back until they’re done, waiting until they leave, before Namjoon makes for the doors.

Inside, in varying stages of eating and odd-dress, are a few of the GI. It isn’t until after the 5th door and 5th apology does Namjoon find Prat’tna.

He was clearly not well.

‘Good morning.’

‘Not that good for you,’ Namjoon says slowly, looking down at the large Being who looked strangely diminished. His skin which was already a grey ashy colour, is somehow pale and waxy looking. He has a breathing mask over his face. To the side of the bed is a medical set up just one step away from establishing a full Medical Bed.

‘I slept very well,’ Prat’tna defends himself, struggling to get up. Namjoon wants to help but
doesn’t know if it would be accepted. In the end, Prat’tna does manage to sit up.

‘I see that you didn’t.’

‘Couldn’t.’

‘Understandable- it’s odd isn’t it?’

‘…which exactly are you referring to.’

‘I guess…the normalcy of this place,’ Prat’tna heaves out, ‘I couldn’t sleep here for so long. Couldn’t…couldn’t be at peace it felt so wrong to be here. I felt wrong.’

‘And now?’

‘Now, it’s a dream- and I know I’ll have to wake up at some point.’

‘Right. About that,’ Namjoon crosses his arm over his chest, ‘Maybe you stop doing that.’

‘What?’

‘The whole waking up the GI thing. It’s clearly killing you- and the others. Why do it if it’s just to go through a shit memory lane,’ Namjoon asks bluntly, ‘Which then ultimately kills you anyways- also, how is that even working out for you?’

‘I did what I wanted to do- I knew I had to wake myself long enough to get to Jimin if he one day found me.’

‘…technically you found him.’

Prat’tna snorts at that and ends up coughing heavily and deeply.

‘How can you be lost, if you are bound to the fate of being found?’ Namjoon quotes quietly.

Prat’tna looks up at that, dark circles heavy even on his grey skin. He grins, teeth showing.

‘Hmm,’ he hums, leaning sideways on the bed post, voice muffled by the mask. ‘I guess that’s a good point.’

‘I can’t promise you that we will do what you want,’ Namjoon tells him bluntly. ‘You will have to tell Jimin yourself. Explain everything- what happened before he was born- how he was raised, about his sister- about Ndica. He’s been beating himself up for months now- he’s just-…’

Namjoon stops, ‘He’s so lost. Maybe you can help him find what all of this means.’

Prat’tna smiles in a somber manner, eyes closing as he takes deep breaths. The room starts to light up softly, the sun now fully up in the sky.

‘He probably blames himself.’

‘Are you happy about that?!’ Namjoon demands incredulously.

‘No,’ Prat’tna levels him with an angry glare before it softens, ‘That just sounds like him.’

Prat’tna pulls the table towards him, where a neat place of food waited for him. Next to the food is a screen which he first picks up and says, ‘Here- they are still inside Yisheng Amme’s ship,’ Prat’tna hands him the screen. ‘You want some tea?’
‘Oh uh, sure.’ Namjoon says absentmindedly, taking the screen eagerly and sitting down on the chair next to the bed. Were the GI all obsessed with tea what was with this tea obsession. He takes a sip and okay fine it’s nice but Namjoon doesn’t see all the hype about boiled water with some random vegetation steeped into it. Nonetheless he still accepts it because okay, it tasted nice.

‘How have you been tracking them this whole time?’ Namjoon frowns, looking down at the screen. Those were clearly not digital trackers.

‘Uh-‘ Prat’tna coughs into his cup of tea.

And it clicks and Namjoon wishes that sometimes, his brain would pick up on all of the signs.

‘Oh for fucks sake did he poison us again?!’

Prat’tna laughs heartily.

But it gives Namjoon some hope. This meant that they in turn could track him, and know he was doing okay too. Unless-

He looks at the tea cup he had just sipped from, before side-eyeing Prat’tna who puts his own cup down, reaching for his still steaming bowl.

‘Prat’tna.’

‘Each signal is unique to your Being, the isotope reading changes depending on the Being who consumed it.’

‘What-‘

‘We collected samples when we boarded your ship- at least we did, for all members of your crew save Taeh’yung. Not even a hair sample from him.’

Namjoon stops his mind from going to places.

‘What you’re drinking right now contains something to counter balance what Yoongi gave you-‘

Namjoon grimaces, putting his teacup down, ‘Can you GI please stop poisoning everyone around you this is not building trust.’

‘They would try to come find you.’

‘And I would very much like to be found,’ Namjoon says pointedly.

Prat’tna smiles at him, chuckling quietly.

‘Once they leave the Yisheng ship, we will approach them.’ Prat’tna informs him. ‘Your Comm Device is still activated and your channel to your ship’s operating system still on. You’ve done a good job with this.’

Namjoon begrudgingly accepts the compliment, his cup of tea very much indeed left alone now; although Namjoon suspects he’s been drinking the counter balance for the past couple of days already. It’s the thought that counts.

‘We would like to request that you switch it off.’ Prat’tna holds up the tiny device in his palm.

‘Why. If they track my location right now and find me here, it would probably be easier for me to
go there seeing as you probably wish to head in that direction. Also it’s not like your location is
hidden from Amme seeing as she directed you here,’ Namjoon frowns, reaching for the Device
though Prat’tna closes his palm.

‘Because the Omhlophe have your ship.’ Prat’tna states firmly. ‘And I’m not sure with how much
confidence you can state that your ship wasn’t entirely compromised, but I would much rather no
one is able to track you down here.’

That was a definite plausible risk. Even if the Užkulisai was completely shut down and Lisai
terminated within the ship’s network, being able to use the hardware present on the ship to recover
usable data to potentially track some form of remaining network was entirely possible. It would
take a very long time to do so, but Namjoon would rather not have the Omhlophe coming down to
this tiny village.

He nods at Prat’tna who unfurls his palm again, his hand only shaking slightly, and Namjoon takes
the device.

‘You can access it through the screen,’ Prat’tna informs him.

Namjoon nods, sighing a little and feeling bad for having to shut off what could definitely be his
last way of managing communications back to the others.

‘I’ve made arrangements, for you to see someone who can help you with your arm.’ Prat’tna tells
him.

‘Now that’s a risk,’ Namjoon says lightly, ‘Not a lot can fix this without triggering some sort of
alarm- not if the Jury and possibly the Court is out for me.’

‘You’ll be fine,’ Prat’tna reassures him before adding, ‘We weren’t going to bring you here
actually.’

‘I’m honoured,’ Namjoon says blankly.

‘But your arm- and face, I know what it’s like to operate handicapped,’ Prat’tna explains, ‘And for
whatever is going to happen in the near future, you’ll probably need both your arms. You need to
be armed.’

Namjoon all but facepalms.

Prat’tna guffaws at his reaction.

‘You can set out this afternoon and get there in a few hours or so by boat- but only halfway,’
Prat’tna tells him, turning around to level him with a serious look, ‘I don’t want to compromise
anyone from this village, but I don’t want to bring any attention to ourselves either. So you’ll take
the boat midway, and then before you reach the opposite banks, you’ll swim the rest of the
distance, and then get around.’

‘Oh yeah, sopping wet really won’t get me recognized,’ Namjoon rolls his eyes.

‘It’s not that I think the other villages and towns will so easily give up information, but talk is talk,’
Prat’tna tells him simply.

‘Yeah okay,’ Namjoon sighs, ‘Who’ll take me?’

‘I’m sure you’re old enough to go by yourself?’
Namjoon knows he shouldn’t rise up to the bait and he really does try. Prat’tna guffaws again.

Namjoon is given an air-tight, water-proof sack to keep his clothes and a screen, a local-network Comm Device, and a map and directions and he’s sent off on his merry way to the trading town across the channel. Namjoon is having some whiplash with this sudden freedom – was this some form of conditioning or manipulation, Namjoon really can’t tell. Technically he really wasn’t a hostage, no one was trying to harm him, and they were all ultimately working towards the same outcome if you looked at the whole picture.

But it still felt strange and Namjoon wonders if he’s just been living a high-stressed life for too long now.

The fish merchants don’t seem at all surprised by this voyage, they just smile at Namjoon and talk amongst themselves. They mime ask him some questions, with a few random Standard words thrown in enough for Namjoon to understand. It takes a little under an hour to get halfway through the channel.

Stripping off his clothes, Namjoon places them inside his water-proof sack. The fish merchants look at him with unabashed surprise. They seem worried, that he would fill up with water and sink.

It makes Namjoon chuckle. He shows them the hand-held water-propeller the GI had presented him with. It would allow him to zip through the water with no problem, even with one arm.

They would wait for him till nightfall, Namjoon just had to make it back on time.

The trading town is much bigger, built in a similar fashion but much more densely populated and with a slightly wider variety of Beings. It was always somewhat strange to be in a place that had almost no GLA influence. Also quite rare, but even places like Nuqtai was very heavily influenced by GLA-produced technology and mediums. But here: it felt incredibly alien. And even if no one was looking twice at him, Namjoon feels like he’s sticking out, like some glaring neon symbol.

He ignores this feeling and looks down at his screen, wiping away the water that drips from his still wet hair to the surface. He needed to head to the other side of the town. Typical. Of course he did. The fish merchants had asked/mimed him if he had any units on him, and no, Namjoon did not. They had pressed coins into his hands, insisting that it would be necessary. And Namjoon’s somewhat glad because he takes the local transport, a delightfully rustic but absolutely ingenious water-based transport-system running through the town in narrow water-channels. Namjoon climbs in, the sun warm through the woven fabric stretched above his head.

For one painful moment, Namjoon almost lets go of the very well contained, very securely held together contained overwhelmed emotion deep inside him. He grips the wooden hand rail before him tightly, clearing his throat quietly and breathing out slow.

But it hurts.

It hurts because everything reminds him of what he just barely remembers, the smallest snippets of joy before a lifetime of pain and anger and loss.

The conductor of the water-channel transporter walks along the wooden edges, a bag in their hands. Namjoon hands them a few coins, receiving a small token in return, with a number printed neatly on top. His stop was the 8th one, and he was currently in the 21st. Namjoon sits back, looking straight ahead, not trusting himself to really look around himself.

So instead he fiddles with the screen.
There was no limit to what he could do with the screen. Prat’tna had just handed him his own from
the room. Because of course, it’s sort of brilliant planning in a way. Namjoon can’t and won’t
compromise the safety of innocent Beings. Even if Prat’tna truly respected and cared for those
villagers, Prat’tna was ultimately in the end, a sort of politician. Of course bring Namjoon here was
carefully planned- for good reason.

Namjoon can’t believe he’s so easily being used by so many different Beings.

He really should have just stayed in retirement in Dziko, just been an ordinary Navigator, and
helped the Daonin retrieve items that were out of their short-reach.

It’s impossible to not look up. It’s impossible to just stare at the screen on his lap.

The transporter rocks a little at each stop, and Namjoon looks up, watching the locals either
clamber off or get in. It’s not possible to not compare- to not wishfully fantasize that this is what
Kutsoglera would have been like.

When Namjoon gets off on his stop, it’s with some relief.

His stop was clearly somewhere in a more mechanical zone. The stone huts here are covered in a
layer of dark soot, tall chimneys giving out wisps of smoke and the smell of heated metal wafts
along occasionally with the breeze. There are displays with parts here and there, modern
Transporter parts on display. It feels nice- familiar as Namjoon paces down the stone-paths. A few
workshop employees try to hail him but it’s not the annoying calls from Flotsams and Jetsam he’s
familiar with. There are even androids here, though they’re clearly from Ts’ets’kli which was
weirdly placating. And without a doubt, Namjoon knows he’s looking at a few fully grown Eggs-
integrated into the society here, part of the community. Some are easy to tell apart from the locals,
with their own striking features. Some blend in much more. But Namjoon knows what to look for.

Maybe retiring here would be nice, Namjoon ruminates to himself, allowing himself to somewhat
relax.

It’s short-lived because he immediately spots Beings who are clearly pirates of some sort. They
stand out starkly. They’re not doing anything wrong or being invasive, they were just in the area,
maybe waiting for some repairs they couldn’t afford in Nuqtaí.

Namjoon is instantly on edge.

This was probably normal. The locals didn’t seem to regard them with anymore attention than they
did with Namjoon so he just takes another way around to his location.

He finds the stone hut he was headed for. Nothing stood out about it from the rest. It was clearly a
cyborg repair store judging by the happy cyborg animatronic outside, waving merrily at random.
Crude, for sure, but it could work, Namjoon begrudgingly admits, sighing quietly under his breath.

‘You found the place.’

‘Sure did.’ Namjoon replies back, not surprised he’s being tracked. He wouldn’t be surprised if a
few of the GI were on his tail right now, watching his every move.

There’s no further response or comment, so Namjoon grits his teeth and enters the store.

It’s well lit, cubicles here and there with some locals concentrating on their task. One of them looks
up, blinking furiously because their eyes were adjusting. They speak a few words and then stop,
grimacing apologetically before yelling out a name.
‘Ka-Yee!’

‘Moe?’

‘Nameria stal’ na Kutsoglerin!’ the local yells and before Namjoon can register the surprise at being so easily recognized, a figure from the back steps past the oil-stained curtain hurriedly, eyes wide and pleased.

Namjoon hasn’t met another Kutsoglerin in a very very long time. For so many, it was painful to look at each other- for some it was needed comfort and reassurance.

For Namjoon…

‘Wow,’ he breathes out.

He’s shorter than Namjoon, stockier, and not too much of him was drastically changed.

Suddenly Namjoon finds himself being hugged.

After some random tears from the fellow Kutsoglerin, some happy yelling and the employees in the shop clapping and bustling about, Namjoon finds himself in the backroom.

‘Wow- it’s been a while since…well, since I’ve met another Kutsoglerin.’

‘I- yeah, same,’ Namjoon still can’t get over his shock. He has plans on punching Prat’tna, who cares if he was dying.

The other Kutsoglerin just grin, clearly delighted, looking all over Namjoon.

‘You look like shit!’

‘I- yeah, look I-’

‘-no! I meant, uh- wait, I haven’t even introduced myself!’ he slaps his forehead before extending it out, and then switching for his other arm instead, noticing Namjoon’s soon-to-be possible hand-shake predicament. ‘I’m Ka-Yee.’

‘Namjoon,’ he shakes Ka-Yee’s hand which turns into an extended handholding.

‘Am I being weird?’ Ka-Yee asks.

‘Uh-‘ Namjoon wants to say yes but he sort of understands.

‘So I’m guessing you’re here for repairs?’ Ka-Yee asks as soon as he lets go of Namjoon’s hand.

‘Yeah- uh,’ Namjoon squints at Ka-Yee, ‘Wait- how are you even here in the first place?’

Ka-Yee gives him a small shrug, ‘Wanted to get out of the GLA, if I’m being honest. I did what I could to repay…well, to repay for everything. But it was like living a constant reminder, you know?’

Namjoon nods slowly.

‘And well- I was in Ghandhar for a while, then moved to Svat as well- studied some in Cheimaros! That was great. I also moved around to Nuqtai as well but,’ Ka-Yee makes a face, ‘Too rowdy.’
‘And now you’re in Lowet.’

Ka-Yee nods, giving him a genuine smile, like he was genuinely happy to meet Namjoon.

‘And well, with my background, I just thought, why not have a cyborg repair shop? I worked with some very notable Beings in this field I’ll have you know,’ Ka-Yee beams proudly.

‘Oh I don’t have doubts I’m just-‘

‘-yeah I know,’ Ka-Yee’s mirthful expression shifts to a much more serious one, ‘I know.’

Namjoon guesses that he’s also being weird too. Just staring at Ka-Yee.

‘So, arm? And eye?’

‘Oh- yeah, yeah. Uh, long story?’

Ka-Yee throws his head and laughs.

‘No need to tell me- you must’ve been desperate to do something that dangerous.’ Ka-Yee nods at his mangled arm.

‘How long will it take?’ Namjoon asks with hesitation.

‘Well, lucky for you, till tomorrow evening?’ Ka-Yee tilts his head, squinting as he thinks hard, eyeing his arm and damages.

‘That’s- really fast.’

Ka-Yee wiggles his eyebrows, ‘I’m kinda guessing you’re in a hurry aye?’

‘Yeah- I uh, my team is waiting for me,’ Namjoon tells him, a rush of emotions hitting him hard.

‘Come on then, can’t keep the team waiting,’ Ka-Yee stands up, ‘Let’s get you measured. Give me your preferences. And are you stocked up on your pills? Because, again, you look like shit.’

‘I would really appreciate some,’ Namjoon exhales, trying to stabilize his voice.

‘I can give you a 2 weeks stock? A month too but you’ll have to wait a week for that.’ Ka-Yee stands up, patting his pockets and muttering about his keys.

‘I really appreciate it- just the 2 weeks is just great,’ Namjoon manages to say as Ka-Yee calls back a confirmation before slipping back out to the front.

Namjoon leans back, inhaling deep and long before crouching forward, head touching his knees, exhaling.

‘Hey…uh, you in pain?’

Namjoon turns his head a little. Ka-Yee is peeking in, concern in his eyes.

‘Just the usual, existential crisis I guess.’

Ka-Yee quirks an eyebrow before he laughs, ‘Yeah I guess that can happen.’

Namjoon is measured, giving his input when asked, but mainly just listening to Ka-Yee speak. Because his fellow Kutsoglerin talked a lot. He’s not sure if it’s because he’s met another fellow
specimen, but Namjoon just listens to this normalcy. Allows himself to feel like he was a simple normal citizen, coming in for repairs after some normal accident. Allows himself to feel like this was a normal life he could have had.

Maybe in another lifetime, maybe in another Time.

He leaves, carrying with him medication, and a much lighter heart. Ka-Yee walks with him till his transporter stop. He’s known around the place, occasionally waving in greeting to random stall owners or store-keepers.

Namjoon is in a daze as he returns.

But it’s a peaceful daze.

He takes his time, returning through the ocean water. The sun was close to setting, the water calm and the other fishing boats pulling in. Namjoon just floats for a moment on his back, watching the sky above him transform colour.

When he gets to the boat and the fish-merchants, they pull him in with their usual greetings that Namjoon was now starting to get a hang of and offer him drying towels, pouring him a hot drink.

At the shoreline, Dehin is standing there. Namjoon’s not sure if he’s waiting for him or not, but somehow it’s welcoming. Strangely endearing as well.

‘Hey, how are you today? Your health?’ Namjoon asks once he’s close enough.

‘Improving,’ is Dehin’s reply.

They help the fish-merchants carry back their equipment and help secure the ships. Namjoon helps as best as he can with one arm, picking up their methods quickly.

‘They have left the Yisheng ship,’ is the first thing Prat’tna tells him when he gets back to the GI stone house. He was sitting outside the stone house, a small pit dug up next to him where bits of dry wood and dried stalks were piled. He nods at the low stool by the wall for Namjoon to sit on. Dehin disappears into the stone hut with an awkwardly timed wave.

‘Where are they?’ Namjoon asks as he lowers himself down.

‘I believe they are headed for Māho-5,’ Prat’tna isn’t wearing the breathing-mask anymore. He looks a little better out here in the natural light. He holds his hand out and Namjoon takes a second before he realizes he’s asking back for the screen.

‘Māho-5?’ Namjoon frowns.

Prat’tna nods, tapping a few times before handing it back to Namjoon. ‘I’ll get the fire starting. They’re looking for you. They’re still opening the network connection, in hopes that you can connect back.’

‘I-…yeah,’ Namjoon mutters quietly, looking down at the tracker.

‘What did Ka-Yee say?’

Namjoon sends Prat’tna a glare before he replies, ‘By tomorrow.’

‘He’s very good at what he does.’
‘How long have you known him?’
‘A few sols- he has good friends here, many are Artoo’ii.’
Namjoon’s not surprised.
‘Does he know?’
‘Maybe. I don’t ask.’
‘What about the Kutsoglerin in the…in the OrTanks.’
‘I told him when we found them,’ Pratʼtna informs him. ‘I guess he thinks you’re here because of them.’
‘He’s not entirely wrong in a sense.’
Dehin steps back outside, carrying with him a lit flint. After some prodding, he gets a small fire going in the pit.
‘We can set out after your arm and other injuries are healed,’ Pratʼtna tells him. ‘The ship has been prepared.’
Namjoon nods, handing Pratʼtna back the screen.
It’s quiet after that, with no one saying a word. It’s quiet but- it’s so incredibly filled with sounds and noise.
And Namjoon just…just listens.

* *

Namjoon won’t admit it out right but he’s looking forward to going back into the town, meeting with Ka-Yee again. Maybe the lighter attitude he had was so drastically different that the fish-merchants found it a bit amusing. They wave at him as Namjoon dives into the ocean, and he waves back as well.
This time it’s not overwhelming.
Namjoon allows himself to just be a part of the town. Allows himself to be a part of this life he hasn’t experienced. Has never really been a part of.
Ka-Yee actually comes to pick him up at the stop. Greeting him cheerfully again and pulling him into a hug that Namjoon returns with less stiffness than yesterday.
Small victories.
‘Well- here it is,’ he waves his hand around in a flourish, ‘You’ll definitely need help with this
part- the face stuff I think you’re good?’

Namjoon looks down at the arm.

There’s definite elements of cyborg-based design, over the much more bionic and fluid forms Namjoon was familiar with. But it was wonderful.

‘This is amazing,’ Namjoon grins.

‘Come on you big goop, let’s get you armed,’ Ka-Yee wiggles his eyebrows at an alarming rate.

Ka-Yee tells him random stories- a flare of exaggeration, lots of voice-acting, and plenty of eccentric dialogue that Namjoon can’t rightly say were complete exaggerations.

‘Flex fingers?’

Namjoon does as he’s told.

‘Okay I’m gonna throw stuff at you and you’re gonna catch it,’ Ka-Yee stands up, looking for stuff to throw.

They run a few more tests and Namjoon feels lighter. Like a weight was lifted off of him though technically more weight has been added to him.

‘Thank you,’ Namjoon says again, looking down at his arm. ‘Thank you again.’

‘Pshaw!’ Ka-Yee waves a hand, ‘I’m just happy the skin-tone wasn’t too off.’

‘I’m quite sure I’ll have some comments but it’s fine,’ Namjoon rolls his eyes.

‘There’s always someone in the crew who will point something out,’ Ka-Yee sighs dramatically. ‘All right- let’s do that handsome face, sit sit.’

Namjoon would flush with colour if he could.

It does get late by the time they’re done and Namjoon no longer has a gaping eyeball rolling about. The faint line that showed where the skin was sealed was only visible in certain angles.

‘Is that an accident or like, cosmetically purposeful?’ Ka-Yee pokes at his dimple.

Namjoon swats at his hand, pulling away from the mirror, ‘Cosmetically purposeful, sure.’

Ka-Yee gasps comically.

‘I want to ask you something that is potentially risky, but is the safest way to somehow tell my crew members that I’m safe,’ Namjoon says after Ka-Yee brings them tall metallic tumblers of something frothy and cold.

‘Sounds like something dumb I could stand behind,’ Ka-Yee nods, a line of froth above his lip.

‘Is there a surveillance unit, preferably from the Underverse somewhere here?’

Ka-Yee grins, teeth showing almost devilishly.
‘You’ll come by to visit right?’ Ka-Yee asks as they walk down the market to the water-channel stops.

‘I want to retire here,’ Namjoon says honestly as he hands him back the hooded cloak he had borrowed. There was an eatery- the only eatery, down in the busiest part of the market, closest to the air-docking planes. Ka-Yee had pointed out the camera to him from a good safe distance. So Namjoon just takes one clear look directly into the camera, and then steps in, and leaves through the back entrance.

It was risky, but Namjoon had to do something. Something tells him he won’t be able to communicate with the others, for reasons he can’t be clear about.

‘Hey- you can be my apprentice,’ Ka-Yee snickers.

He hugs him again, a bit longer than his other hugs.

‘Keep yourself safe- don’t shred that arm, I won’t repair it, you hear me?’ Ka-Yee threatens.

Namjoon steps into the transporter with a small laugh, squeezing himself into the seats.

‘I’ll do my best.’

Namjoon waves until they turn down the channel.

Namjoon realizes he’s still smiling as they make their way back to the shoreline stop.

And maybe he was being too familiar, too carefree – but Namjoon had honestly forgotten the pirates he had seen the previous day. And here they were, standing so close to him.

And the problem is that, they’re looking straight at him, a hint of recognition sparking in their eyes.

Namjoon takes steps back, eyes averting at once, hoping beyond hope he’s not recognized. But how would he be recognized? From where? And how? He doesn’t make it more than 4 steps when his legs collide with small shapes, excited childish babbling filling his immediate surroundings.

Looking down with a sinking feeling, he finds the two younglings from the village, beaming up at him, babbling in their childish voices at him, clearly recognizing him.

Fuck.

‘Mėnulis! Saulės!’ the villager from the previous night is there, looking surprised to find Namjoon there and waving over their children.

The two younglings giggle- pushing themselves off of Namjoon’s legs just a little. They’re both amazed at the new arm, clearly wondering where this new attachment came from.

Namjoon’s senses prickle- he feels eyes on him and he knows he’s recognized. The local villager is saying something, laughter in their tone as they pick up the younger of the two off the ground, merrily making conversation with Namjoon. They’re clearly talking about his newly fixed face. The Human youngling immediately steps away as well, laughingly explaining something to the villager and pointing up at Namjoon.

Namjoon dares a glance at the pirates and his suspicions are confirmed.
They’re talking amongst themselves, not even hiding their reaction, pointing at him. Walking towards him. And then pointing at the villager.

The villager picks up on it almost immediately. Their stance changes, eyes narrowed at the pirates.

Fuck- fuck.

‘Prat’tña,’ Namjoon says in a low voice, hastily switching on his Comm Device receiver. ‘I think a few pirates have recognized me-’

Suddenly the villager yells something out loud, and with their free arm, points at the pirates. The youngling in their arms covers their ears and the Human youngling locks his arms around the villagers legs.

There’s an immediate reaction.

The shoreline stop quiets down drastically and everyone, including the Androids, stare at the pirates.

‘Captain Namjoon,’ the villager says quietly, nudging him with a free elbow before picking up the Human youngling with a bit of a struggle. Automatically Namjoon takes the Human youngling in his arms, and quickly follows the villager.

‘Come,’ they say, snuggling their youngling closer and pushing their head down, covering their sight. Namjoon does the same, looking back briefly and noting how the locals were making a ring around the pirates. Gone is the normal and quaint shoreline stop, replaced rather with a very serious tone.

The locals around them start to make a wall with their bodies, shielding them as they walk through.

‘What’s going on?’ Namjoon asks breathlessly, following the villager.

‘It’s normal.’

‘What?’

‘Sometimes, pirates, Collectors, try to come to Lowet, to take the Artoo’ii away. To try and buy them, or sometimes worse. They are simply protecting their own.’

‘I’m- I’m sorry, I should have-‘

‘This is not your fault. I was just about to tell you some new development.’

‘What’s wrong?’ Namjoon asks, anxiety creeping in. He holds the Human youngling closer as he hears faint shouting noises, the sound of fighting.

‘Yoongi has been arrested in Maho-5. There has been an arrest warrant issued for you, Sk’jin, Yoongi, Hoseok, Taeh’yung, as well as Jimin, though there is no picture for him.’

‘What are the charges?’ Namjoon demands but hastily apologizes to the villager who looks back in worry.

‘Involvement in the Isbahaysiga Alliance.’

Namjoon contains his curses, holding the youngling in a more secure manner as he walks briskly. That’s how those pirates recognized him.
Namjoon apologizes to the villager again once they get off the boat. He’s still carrying the Human youngling. But the villager just shakes their head.

He delivers them back to their stone-house. Dehin is there, waiting for him when he turns back around. They head back to the ship, already completely set up and ready to leave. Prat’tna is there, sitting on a gravity-lift, clearly intended to shuttle him about quickly. He looks displeased, as though he was shoved into it without his consent.

‘Who sent out the warrant.’

‘The GLA Court.’ Prat’tna replies at once. ‘The Special Jury has been compromised now. Amme was called back to Šerdesas. It’s possible that the members of the Special Jury will undergo investigation.’

‘Shit-’ Namjoon curses, ‘-what about the others? Where are they?’

‘Just around the outskirts of Māho-5. If I’m not mistaken, Hoseok has changed, and is currently still within the premise. Yoongi’s arrest has been registered, and the Venture Unit agents in the area are all headed there to pick him up.’

‘I need to contact them-‘

‘-the Deputy who controls Māho-5 is working for Axudar.’ Prat’tna tells him bluntly.

Namjoon gapes down at the Megibīyan.

‘All the more reason to call them and tell them-‘

‘-it is not just that.’

‘Then what is it.’ Namjoon demands. He had both his arms now, he was feeling very ready to punch a sick Megibīyan to get a screen and a communication line back to the others.

‘When I was in Axudar, I was able to discover a lot about how Axudar brought in so many living Beings to experiment on before Ndica finalized his creations. He brought in inmates from prisons all around the Universe. Cuab-D2 is a massive prison just 4 hours from Axudar by warp, and some 2 days from Māho. Cuab is one of the resource pools Ndica had control over. That was until after his death. But then, the Deputy Fanger of Māho took over. But she still sent over more of the inmates gathered there into Cuab.’

‘Are you suggesting we allow them, allow Yoongi to be arrested so that we can find a way in?’ Namjoon asks incredulously.

‘That is a way-‘

‘No!’ Namjoon practically shouts.

‘Fanger will not allow the GLA, or the Venture Unit, or the GIU to take Yoongi prisoner. She will
have Yoongi delivered to Cuab, and I am more than certain the others will follow.’ Prat’tna continues, not allowing Namjoon any time to protest. ‘According to surveillance, and by how the systems are run between Māho and Cuab, there will be no way to get Yoongi out of Māho without having to go through Cuab. We will wait for them there.’

‘And we can tell them that.’ Namjoon says with emphasis. He feels like he’s talking to a wall, yelling into space. ‘We can send out a message- maybe we don’t know their exact coordinates or network, but we can hone in on the general location of their signal to-‘

‘No.’

Namjoon gapes down at Prat’tna.

‘What is wrong with you we need to tell them-‘ Namjoon is so frustrated he wants to pull at his hair.

‘Because right now, the forces in Axudar are attempting to take over the largest and most extensive pirating network in the Underverse.’

‘I literally don’t care-‘

‘-which has taken over Cuab-D2 for the past sol or so.’

Namjoon frowns at that.

‘What?’

‘This pirating network is the reason why I was able to escape Axudar in the first place. The Artoo’ii who escaped Axudar, the ones who remained to help those trapped, joined with this network in hopes of being able to provide a channel or means of escaping.’

‘Then that’s great- if you know them, we can access their methods to enter Axudar, like you want,’ Namjoon frowns.

‘They have been infiltrated.’

Namjoon throws his arms up.

‘I believe that those who have infiltrated this network will undoubtedly be alerted of Yoongi’s identity-‘

‘Prat’tna I am literally begging you please, let me speak to the others and-‘

‘Namjoon why are not listening to what I am saying.’

Namjoon was going to do it. He was going to punch a dying Being.

‘Someone in your crew is betraying you.’

Namjoon laughs.

‘No. We literally went over this ourselves before. None of us are betraying each other you can’t say that,’ Namjoon says bluntly.

‘I will not allow you to call in to tell them anything because of their connection to Axudar,’ Prat’tna explains in a pained manner.
‘I don’t believe you,’ Namjoon states simply. ‘You know what, fine, you say you’re not going to allow me to call them- fine. You can stop with the bullshit.’

He turns away and walks in.

Fuming under his breath, Namjoon takes a seat inside the Bridge. Some time later, Prat’tna comes in as well.

With no announcement, the ship readies for take off, slowly lifting into the air. Namjoon spies the villagers in the distance, watching them take off.

‘I-…honestly sometimes I wish we had known nothing about what was out there,’ Prat’tna confesses quietly from behind him. Namjoon ignores him. ‘Sometimes I wish we all just- stayed where we were- remained ignorant, hidden and alone in our own planets, our systems.’

The ship pulls up beyond the clouds, entering space and pulling out of the sky until pale blue is darkened completely to black.

‘But it’s- it won’t be like that,’ Prat’tna says faintly, ‘because nothing will stop what’s out there, from finding us. From finding you.’

Ynqaba is a small circular light covered in a twinkling smudge of asteroids.

A sudden memory strikes him out of nowhere. A desperate and anguished voice, but delivered almost flat. Namjoon turns his back to the window abruptly.

‘What is it?’ Prat’tna asks.

Namjoon turns his back to the curvature of Lowet gleaming in the dark of space behind and all around them.

‘Just remembering something.’

Everything turns white as they pull into warp.

‘You should have left me here to live!’

*:

Just because Namjoon was explicitly not allowed to contact his crew, didn’t mean he wasn’t going to try. Namjoon is resourceful and honestly if he wasn’t surrounded by GI he would have succeeded in at least one of his attempts. However, his many attempts have no ultimately lead him to being tied down to one of the Lobby couches. The GI almost seem apologetic, even putting a blanket over his knees and a pillow under his head.

One of them even brings a cup of tea with a straw in it for him.

Namjoon is so frustrated he can’t even begin to express himself.

Again, he doesn’t understand how they’re travelling this fast. How were they making this many
lightsols in warp?

The GI sometimes let him out of his bounds, but then again, Namjoon finds every possible way of attempting to get his hands on a way of communicating with the others, including locking himself in a bathroom, accessing a wiring system that he knew was linked closely to a communications-network. The door is blown out and Namjoon is basically tied up again.

He’s followed to the toilet since then, and Namjoon accepts it because he did bring this on to himself.

He pointedly ignores Prat’tna, and the elder Megibīyan doesn’t try to reach out either. He’s updated on the progress of the others via screen, held by a GI agent, while he’s tied up.

They were now a little less than a day away from Cuab-D2 and at least Namjoon is allowed to research this “network” Prat’tna had mentioned.

And it is nearly impossible to find anything until Prat’tna sends him the appropriate files, probably a peace offering. Which Namjoon accepts but extends no peace, only sending the Megibīyan glares. It’s the most he can do right now, tied up like this.

Namjoon is not above punching a dying Being. Sk’jin would be proud.

Run by an Ožkan called Ilya, the pirating network in question was incredibly old, and incredibly widespread. It reminds Namjoon a little of Sk’jin’s old pirating network

It wouldn’t be surprising if they mimicked Sk’jin’s style. The Khol’isa was after all, incredibly infamous during his time, and much later on. There have since been many pirating networks that have attempted to mimic Sk’jin’s style.

This network, one that didn’t even have a name to them, was probably the most extensive and hidden one after Sk’jin’s own. Of course that was assuming everything he was looking at was complete. Namjoon’s sure that there must be more to this pirating network than just simply deep-core infiltration. According to the side-notes, through which Prat’tna was communicating to him with, Ilya was supposed to be assassinated by the GI because he was too close to the whole shit-storm mess. He survived it, and apparently since then, has been closely keeping a watch in this general area.

Namjoon leans back as comfortably as he could, bound as he was, on the Lobby couch. The GI who was holding up his screen lowers their arms, just sitting.

‘You probably don’t want to watch me think, staring blankly into the air,’ Namjoon tells them, ‘And as I am very bound, I don’t think you need to really sit here all the time.’

‘In case you try something fishy.’

‘Oh, that’s good usage of the word.’

‘…thank you.’

‘I do kinda wanna walk around though,’ Namjoon smiles his best, ‘Helps me process my thoughts.’

They bring him a sort of walker- a stretch of mechanics that rotates as he walks. Namjoon just sighs but gets on, fully bound save for his legs.
‘The GLA Court has sent a special unit to escort Yoongi back.’

‘Escort or kill,’ Namjoon asks grimly.

‘Probably the latter.’

‘Can’t we do something about that or would that ruin your chances of entering Axudar hm?’

He gets no response.

It was so infuriatingly frustrating. Namjoon does not understand this logic and honestly there was none. Either that or Prat’tna was not telling him something. Namjoon doesn’t even want to entertain the idea of someone snitching.

It was laughable at best, considering everything they’d been through together. It was absolutely impossible.

Namjoon gets off the walker with a huff.

‘Did you finish processing your thoughts?’

Namjoon just grimaces.

‘That was very quick.’

It feels like an insult somehow.

The next few days are the same. Namjoon is regularly tied up, straw-fed tea and other drinks, carefully given his medication, and during certain assigned hours, someone holds up a screen for him, and Prat’tna updates him on every notable activity.

Apparently Jungkook and Hoseok were doing an exemplary job pretending to be Venture Unit agents and had taken over the escort operation, and infiltrated Deputy Fanger’s entire department. The real escort ship sent by the GLA Court to “escort” Yoongi is by some miraculous work (from Sk’jin and Hoseok), legally obliged and authorized to only “escort” Yoongi back from Cuab-D2 rather than take him directly from Māho. And according to Prat’tna, the escort ship was also safely taken care of by both Jimin and Taeh’yung, and they were now, with their new smaller ship, hidden within the escort ship.

They’re halfway there, when Prat’tna tells him that the prison-ship docked in Māho-5 was now entering warp to head to Cuab-D2.

Apparently they’re not able to get any form of surveillance or footage from within the prison ship so Namjoon simply watches their individual trackers, their movements projected into a blueprint of the ship, painstakingly procured by Namjoon himself after he tutors 3 GI agents on how to get it.

‘We’ll be there in a few hours.’

Namjoon doesn’t even flinch at Prat’tna’s voice from somewhere to his right.

Right now, Namjoon was laying flat across a wide bench, the projection of the blueprint and 6 shining bright dots occasionally moving about it shining from a screen on top of his chest.

‘That’s great.’

‘I’m sorry.’
‘Uh huh.’

He hears Prat’tna sit down heavily.

‘We can’t get any activity from within the prison-ship, but we are able to get some look into Cuab-D2.’

‘That’s great.’

‘It seems that Cuab-D2 has been overtaken by the network lead by Ilya. His right-hand, Jn’yound, seems to have infiltrated the whole system.’

Namjoon read the name in Prat’na’s notes. Knows he was an Egg that escaped Axudar.

‘We have also picked up on transmissions being sent and received by the prison-ship to and from Axudar.’

This draws Namjoon’s attention.

He hasn’t seen Prat’tna since they left Lowet. And he looks worse for wear. His skin was almost loose on his frame; like he was sagging somewhat. His yellow eyes turning a strange murky and unclear colour.

‘Have you been able to intercept those transmissions?’

‘No. There’s also messages being sent from Māho-5 to the prison-ship. Those we have been able to intercept.’

The blueprint over Namjoon’s chest shifts, instead audio piping through.

‘Don’t take them lightly.’

‘I’m not. If anything you did- how the fuck could you allow something like this to happen-‘

‘how was I supposed to know?!’

‘Both of you keep calm- now is not the time. I’ve set up the timing perfectly- this will still work.’

‘What about the Zhak’gri?’

‘I’ve already set it into motion- we can’t draw any suspicion from him.’

‘And the GI?’

‘He’s almost dead- really giving out that one.’

‘The others?’

‘The Khol’isa is weak too. I’m worried about the Vicitra.’

‘Why not set ours onto him? He looks young- she’d be more than happy to take him on.’

‘And what about the Venture Unit agent? I’m telling you- he’s not one to overlook.’

‘I’ll take care of him. But first we need to separate all of them. Or get them down to the Hangars and we pull out the outer Atmoshield. We can get a few of them that way.’
‘But doesn’t Axudar want them?’

‘Axudar will get what they want regardless. We need to concentrate on getting the Zhak’gri out of the way, putting Ilya in Cuab, taking Jn’young out, and maybe take care of Jaen.’

‘What about E’nid, she won’t take this.’

‘Then we take care of her too.’

‘How are the communication lines?’

‘Ready to deactivate the hardware settings any time; but just a second, Camil.’

‘What?’

‘I’m genuinely concerned about the Zhak’gri. Will the medication be enough to knock him out?’

‘Yes- but make sure that whoever gives him the food has absolutely no idea. I can’t look at him without feeling like he knows what I’m thinking- he freaks me out.’

‘Can’t you just take him out-‘

‘Evdos don’t be an idiot.’

Namjoon feels himself shaking with anger.

‘After docking in Cuab-D2, this group of infiltrators from Axudar will then start up their coup, so to speak.’ Prat’tna tells him calmly as the audio cuts off and is replaced with the blueprint. Prat’tna taps along his own screen and the projection changes.

‘This lower area contains all of the inmates. Some of them are Ilya’s network- but most of them have already been compromised,’ Prat’tna explains. ‘This area is where all of the Hangars are. If we follow on their discussion, they plan on removing the outer Atmoshields around the whole prison-ship. This will also create a dense field of debris around them. Our plan is to exit warp the moment this happens- so we can shield our approach within the debris.’

‘And then what?’ Namjoon grits out.

‘I was going to ask you.’

Namjoon’s anger skyrockets. Sitting up, screen on his chest falling with a clatter on the ground, Namjoon rounds up to glare at the Megibiyan.

‘You want me to what?!’

‘What do you want to do?’

‘Contact the others now and warn them!’

‘The infiltrators from Axudar have already shut down all communication channels and have made it impossible to send in any-‘

‘Unbound me,’ Namjoon demands.

A GI who was probably always there appears and undoes Namjoon’s bounds.
Namjoon stands up and storms upwards to the Bridge and straight for the Navigation Table. He’s ready to throw punches if he’s stopped but there’s no need. The Table is empty and no one was standing guard over it. He grabs one of the NaviLets from the slot under the wide lip of the Table before he starts.

‘Make and model of the prison-ship we’re tracking?’

[CUAB_D2_RQ-0072-1]

It immediately pops up, along with the blueprint that had been projecting above his chest just a minute ago.

‘Network channel integration?’

[INTERNAL ROUTER NETWORK | MANUAL OS ]

Undeterred, Namjoon proceeds on.

‘What’s the name and make of the ship we’ve started using?’ Namjoon asks, barely acknowledging Prat’tna when he appears. It’s his breathing that alerts Namjoon more than anything.

‘Laikin-‘

Namjoon is already off.

‘Redirecting my Comm Device UZ_N_001 network to access Lisai OS, aboard the Laikin.’

The line connects immediately.

‘Fuck-‘ Namjoon almost drops the NaviLet. He also almost flinches, expecting to be bound up but it doesn’t happen.

‘Fuck- Hoseok? Sk’jin?’

The line is clear, but there’s no response. No one was connected to the Laikin. No one was aboard the Laikin at the moment so they couldn’t hear him.

But Spaces, does it make Namjoon feel better. If he could, he would take a moment to just take in this moment of assurance.

They were all right. Somehow this proved it.

He quickly strengthens the signal, redirecting and accessing the Communications Board. In less than a minute, Namjoon can access the surveillance footage from the Laikin.

It was empty, but he can access every single angle from outside the ship as well.

Namjoon takes a deep breath.

‘Okay- this is what we’ll do.’
‘They’ve just shut off their communications network for the hardware.’ Prat’tna reports, sounding utterly weak and faint, his voice nothing more than a raspy breath at this point.

‘Get ready to pull out of warp the moment they blast their Atmoshields!’ Namjoon orders, pulling himself through his space-suit, leaving it to sit around his waist for the moment before pushing his arms through.

‘Understood, Captain Namjoon.’

Namjoon stares down at the NaviLet, at the surveillance of the Laikin. He’s internally chanting that they don’t make it to the Hangars. Hoseok was in the mid-section of the ship, Taeh’yung higher-up. But Jimin, Yoongi, Sk’jin, and Jungkook were headed for the Hangars, clearly redirected there.

‘There’s something happening in Cuab-D2. It’s going to start.’

‘Wait-‘

Namjoon sees them.

It’s Jungkook first, running ahead, looking determined and pleased.

Had he grown? He had- his hair was longer too, his cheeks fuller. He looked-…he looked healthy, and happy.

A minute or so later, Sk’jin appears. Unlike Jungkook, Sk’jin appeared a little diminished- weighed down. He walked without any of his previous flourish- no extra flounce to his steps. And then Jimin appears, and behind him Yoongi.

Namjoon can barely look at the Human.

He looked drawn out, skin already paler than usual, his clothes hanging off of him strangely.

He can hear them speaking and for a moment he’s almost forgotten that he could speak to them now. Warn them to move.

‘H-hey!’ Namjoon yells. Jungkook was inside the Laikin’s hangar. ‘Jungkook! Kookie!’

The Vicitra can’t hear him from the Hangar. It was impossible. Namjoon works quickly; he would need to redirect the mic towards the Hangar. It shouldn’t take too long.

‘Namjoon.’

Sk’jin has stepped out of the safety-line for the emergency Atmoshield. And so does Jimin. Jungkook is still inside the Laikin- Namjoon could do this- he could do this-

‘Wait- I can do this- I can access it-‘ Namjoon grits through his teeth, ‘Come on- come on Jungkookie come on-‘

‘They’re sending in some sort of team from the back-‘

The NaviLet screen flares orange and in a blink, everything on the display changes- the view shatters and-
Namjoon watches with horror as the two tracking dots, Jimin and Sk’jin, are suddenly rocketing out of the blueprint, out into space.

‘Shit-!’

‘Pulling out of warp in one minute.’

Namjoon drops the NaviLet and heads for the end of the Hangar they were all gathered in. He quickly finishes up pulling up the space-suit on, the same as the other GI numbered at a neat 41, who were all gathered in the Hangar, waiting for him in separate units and teams.

‘Brief revision- calling each team!’ Namjoon yells out into the quiet Hangar, ‘Verbal responses are greatly appreciated understood?’

He gets a quiet chorus of ‘Yes, Captain Namjoon.’

‘Team 1!’

‘Make safe living quarters in the top-tier of the prison-ship. Contain inmate activity. No killing unless strictly necessary.’

‘Team 2!’

‘Contain cell-levels, gather and detain all inmates. No killing unless strictly necessary.’

‘Team 3!’

‘Subdue mid-levels- track all functioning Comm Devices. No killing unless strictly necessary.’

‘Team 4!’

‘Contain and detach Cuab-D2.’

‘Team 5!’

‘Find and secure all Laikin team members aboard the prison-ship.’

‘Good!’ Namjoon braces himself against the walls of the Hangar. ‘Nineti- you’re coming with me.’

‘Pulling out of warp in 5…4…3…2…1.’

Bracing himself, he grabs one of the extension-cords, tying it around his waist the same time Nineti nods and gives a delayed response to his order, doing a routine check of his body-jets. He hands him a space-gear helmet and Namjoon hooks it under his arm rather than wear it over his own head.

‘Suit 18-D ready for space-walk.’

‘Ready the Hangar for space-walk!’ Namjoon orders. ‘Teams 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 get ready!’

‘We’re almost clearing the debris- we’ll be on top of the prison-ship in 20 seconds.’

Namjoon counts the seconds down, hands forming fists. The ship vibrates several times but it’s nothing bad, the central gravity of the ship allowing them to stand and stay centered despite the obvious twists and turns they were taking, avoiding hurtling pieces of debris from the prison-ship.
‘Nineti will find Jimin,’ Prat’tna coughs out, ‘Find your friend.’

‘Hangar decompressed- ready for space-walk.’

Namjoon doesn’t respond as he and Nineti start their run down the de-compressed Hangar, leaping out of the protective Atmoshield.

It’s bone-shattering cold but it doesn’t hurt Namjoon- doesn’t do anything to him really- at least for this time being.

Below him the prison-ship is a dark blob, the stars illuminating its shape from below. An arc of light grows from the space between Cuab-D2 and the prison-ship, sharply highlighting the sudden expansion of debris rocketing from compromised Hangars, lining up the entirety of the prison ship.

The GI are already in formation, moving downwards towards the ship in several directions.

Nineti next to him activates the compressed body-jets at his ankles and hips, repositioning himself before shooting downwards straight to the sudden field of ring of debris. Namjoon follows suit, tucking the helmet under his arm securely.

‘1 minute Captain Namjoon, and counting. Please avoid the shrapnel.’

Namjoon would roll his eyes but he can’t- a massive Transporter, spinning desperately with the force that wrenched it out of its Hangar shoots straight at him. Twisting mid-space, Namjoon propels himself through the emptiness, using another large object, to essentially ricochet in the direction he needed to go.

‘35 seconds, you should be able to see him now.’

There’s another bright arc of light to his side- the massive field of debris around him bathed in a wave of white and-

For a moment, Sk’jin seemed like a cluster of stars- a constellation of ancient and distant stars forming his outline in the dark of space.

‘20 seconds.’

Dodging a few more still hurting debris and flotsam spiraling out of the ship behind him, Namjoon disengages the lock from the extension cable, thumb around the stopper to activate immediately once he secured the Khol’isa.

‘10 seconds.’

He’s drifting slowly, the force with which he had been thrown into space no longer wrapped around him, dragging him further into the dark of space. Namjoon suppresses the shudder of horror, images of the Khol’isa lost in the dark of space.

‘5 seconds and counting 4-‘

Namjoon stretches his arms out-

‘3.’

Sk’jin is frozen- icicles forming around his eyes, nostrils, mouth- a thin layer of ice builds around him, hair encased in it.
‘2.’

There’s another arc of light behind him—reflected in Sk’jin’s half-open eyes—and when Namjoon touches him, for a brief second, as the light fades away, it remains bright in the Khol’isa’s neon-red eyes.

‘1.’

Securing the extension-cord around him, moving as carefully and as quickly as he could, Namjoon secures Sk’jin to himself before pushing the helmet over the Khol’isa’s head.

The ice around his head and face dissipates instantly.

Namjoon waits a painful 3 seconds. And then Sk’jin blinks, eyes unfocused, but staring straight at him.

Namjoon wants to smile, wants to tell him that he’s okay—that he got him—

‘Namjoon-!’

A massive crate is hurtling towards them—Namjoon quickly shoves Sk’jin from himself, disengaging himself from the cord. Twisting in the boundless space around him, Namjoon rises upwards helplessly. There’s a massive slowly floating Transporter above him and setting himself up right, Namjoon pushes up against it, redirecting himself as he activates his compressed-jets.

Sk’jin’s eyes are still open—his fingers encased in a thin film of glittering ice twitch—shards of ice like diamonds breaking from his skin.

Making sure the Khol’isa was still secure, Namjoon twists the stopper on the cord, attaching Sk’jin firmly to himself, and reignites the body-jets, sending them shooting back through the debris.

He spies Nineti doing the same, just a little ahead—his form outlined by a faint glowing that Namjoon recognizes as Jimin.

‘All teams have entered,’ Prat’tna says faintly.

Namjoon is careful as he steps through the Hangar Atmoshield; Sk’jin’s previously stiff body falling apart in his arms. His weight nearly making Namjoon trip but he’s quick to upright himself. He spots the others waiting for them, Medical Beds brought down for immediate treatment.

Namjoon almost doesn’t blame them for not paying him much attention or mind as they gather around Nineti and Jimin, who was still faintly glowing. Namjoon rushes to place Sk’jin over the Medical Bed; there’s a strange rasping rattling sound coming deep from Sk’jin’s chest and Namjoon has to stabilize the Khol’isa immediately.

Carefully he pulls the helmet off; he’s surprised when Yyna comes to help him, placing the security straps over Sk’jin not a moment too soon because the Khol’isa starts twitching violently, his body going through shock—

‘He’s not breathing,’ Yyna tells him, voice monotonous and calm.

‘Sk’jin- fuck!’ Namjoon curses, ‘Sk’jin hey, breathe! Breathe! Sk’jin you can breathe please breathe listen to me—listen to my voice!’

Yyna is placing extracting a tube with a mask at the end from the side of the Medical Bed and
places it over Sk’jin’s nose and mouth. Sk’jin’s eyes are unseeing, covered in a strange film, the white of his eyes blotched and reddened, his skin bruised all over, but now reddened.

A few excruciatingly long seconds later, Sk’jin’s whole body arches upwards, pushing painfully against the restraints around him- eyes wide and rolled back before he crashes down, trembling and shaking worse than before.

‘Hey- you’re okay now- I got you okay?’ Namjoon knows it not much help- and that there’s nothing to do about it but he holds Sk’jin down; Sk’jin who was still ice-cold.

‘We need to bring his temperature back up,’ Namjoon says to Yyna who nods, tapping along the extended screen above the Medical Bed. Namjoon takes off the restraints as he grabs one of the blankets at the foot of the bed- he feels the mattress warming up gently.

‘I’m cold- r-really c-cold-c-can’t m-m-move-‘ Sk’jin stutters out faintly- barely audible. The strange film over his eyes slowly giving way as bloody tears began to leak out.

He throws Yyna the blanket before scooping the Khol’isa up in his arms- Sk’jin gasps out, hands grasping over Namjoon’s space-gear- earnestly crying now and Namjoon-…Namjoon feels his heart break.

‘Shh- hey I got you, we got you, you’re safe I promise-‘ Namjoon says gently, placing him over the warm blanket that Yyna quickly folds over the shivering Khol’isa.

‘He’s stabilizing,’ Yyna reports, ‘The scans are clear, he has not sustained any serious injury.’

Namjoon breathes out slowly, relief flooding him.

‘Jimin is stable,’ Prat’tna says with a faint smile, spooking Namjoon as he hadn’t heard him step closer. ‘He probably collided with something- it seems like he dislocated his shoulder, but he has no broken bones. He’s still unconscious.’

Namjoon nods, finally looking over to the other Medical Bed, where Jimin was similarly wrapped in a blanket, unconscious but also safe. The others gather around him, simply watching – were they relieved? Glad? Namjoon honestly can’t tell.

‘The Fifth Team have already been deployed- they are now securing Yoongi and Jungkook.’ Prat’tna tells him.

‘Good- what about Taeh’yung?’ Namjoon asks worriedly, looking around for his screen.

‘The Sixth Team is getting to him,’ Prat’tna tells him as he hands him his screen. ‘They should secure him in a few minutes.’

Namjoon nods, accessing the prison-ship’s surveillance again.

‘Hoseok?’

‘Team One is approaching. They will secure him, don’t worry,’ Prat’tna tells him reassuringly as he slowly and carefully kneels down before sitting on the floor.

‘Hey-‘ Namjoon frowns, kneeling down as well.

‘Tired,’ Prat’tna smiles, ‘Just needed to sit for a moment, was starting to get dizzy.’ He looks over to the side before calling out, ‘Take them both up to the Medical Bay- watch over them, link their
The GI don’t respond, only moving to obey the orders as they push the Medical Beds out of the Hangar with a gentleness that certainly did not match up with their emotionless brutality. The moment they’re out, Prat’tna falls back gracelessly, panting a little.

’Woah hey-‘ Namjoon crawls over quickly, looking over the GI with worry.

’We found him,’ Prat’tna smiles, ‘He’s safe- our Fate is safe- we are saved.’

’I’ll go get the oxygen tank-‘ Namjoon makes to stand but Prat’tna reaches out, missing as he attempted to grab a hold of Namjoon’s hand. He immediately pauses, turning his full attention to the GI.

’Ilya and Jn’young are both secured as well- Cuab-D2 has been shut down completely- the levels cleared.’ Prat’tna breathes out, yellow eyes fixed on a spot on the ceiling. Namjoon doesn’t need to check but he’s sure the Medical Bays were there.

’The prison-ship has been contained. The last of the inmates are being rounded up.’ Prat’tna grins, ‘Everything has gone according to plan.’

Namjoon tries to respond in kind, but he can’t, realizing what Prat’tna was doing.

’Let me go get the tank for you,’ Namjoon pleads, ‘Don’t you want to talk to Jimin? Tell him everything you told me yourself?’

He senses movement, rather than hearing it or seeing it, and Namjoon knows the others were gathering around them.

’I walked alongside my Fate for years and years,’ Prat’tna breathes out, ‘In waking, and in dreaming- and I know I will still walk with him, beyond what ties me down, beyond what lets me go-‘

’Come on-‘

’If I push on-‘ Prat’tna finds his hand, ‘If I push on, and if I am like this, before him, it won’t-…he doesn’t deserve this- I can’t- I can’t see him-‘

’But-‘

’He will know- of course he will,’ Prat’tna wheezes out, his words come out rasped, breathless, ‘But I don’t want him to see me like this. I don’t- I don’t think I could-‘

’Prison cells are all secured.’

Prat’tna smiles at him, ‘It is done then.’

’How- uh, how many did we lose?’ Namjoon asks carefully.

’8,’ Prat’tna breathes out, ‘You did the best you could- you did very well. The mission has succeeded.’

Namjoon doesn’t want to hear that right now.

’You have guided us well, Son of Kutsoglera,’ Prat’tna smiles, ‘Maybe we were wrong, to shut ourselves out from the beauty that lay beyond what-…beyond what we deemed worthy.’
Namjoon doesn’t know what to say. He can’t look away from Megibīyan. Sure he was held in a very weird hostage situation, and it wasn’t an ideal situation to be in- but Namjoon can’t help but be moved.

‘I’m…I’m sorry,’ Namjoon says helplessly. He doesn’t know exactly what he’s apologizing for.

Prat’tna snorts faintly, blood bubbles out of his mouth, ‘There’s no need- no need- I’m sorry. Please- please tell him-‘

Prat’tna’s breaths are fainter and fainter, incredibly shallow despite how his whole chest heaves.

‘It’s- it’s good. I can…I can rest too now…finally. I’m sorry…-‘

It’s there again- that look of reverence.

‘Will you make sure that- that the village-‘

Namjoon nods quickly, ‘Of course, of course I will.’

Prat’tna smiles, relief in his features.

‘Maybe now- maybe now, we are-‘

‘-you’re found,’ Namjoon manages to say.

Prat’tna’s smiles his last exhale, eyes looking up straight ahead.

The GI all around the Hangar raise their hands to the air, palm open before creating a fist and then holding it over their chests. Namjoon does the same.

‘Mission successful Captain Namjoon. Now securing Ngfy’widan Hoseok.’

Namjoon exhalas out slowly, lowering his arm before bending over, straightening out the Megibiyan carefully.

‘Link me to Hoseok and the others,’ Namjoon wipes at his face, sitting down on the floor, ‘Let’s get you all home.’
And! Here is a summary of every bit of information we can now combine together that we have so far learnt because I know this can get confusing and I am so sorry if I am not clear but I do want everyone to be in the same page- it couldn't fit in the authors notes:

1. The first children are the first creations of the original and first Yisheng who came to THIS universe in THIS dimension of time and space
2. The first children are not so much, living Beings but rather entities of life, death, light, darkness, etc. all combined- they are not like, “gods” of anything, but rather everything that Exists, with a living consciousness and stream of thought that has since the Beginning™ existed. They then, individually, created and streamed their thoughts into form and mass, creating planets systems stars suns etc, and in this stream of living thought, living Beings were born
3. The first of these living Beings, this area the Cradle of Life so to speak, is where Taeh’yung’s people are from- the way they live/exist/die is utterly different from how the rest of the living Beings after them live/exist/die
4. Not a lot is known about Taeh’yung and his history
5. The first children created other living Beings similar to Taeh’yung
6. Yisheng escaped his dimension of death, destruction, corruption and in this dimension wished to create a new universe where none of that would exist, where no death destruction all that shit wouldn’t exist
7. However Yisheng is an idiot and of course that can’t, because it would be same concept as saying “im a human and I don’t want to give birth to a human so im still gonna get pregnant but go to the moon and have a moonling instead” clearly you’re still gonna give birth to a human
8. So all of the first children were, in OG yisheng’s eyes, tainted, and their creations also tainted. So he went on a killing rampage. Many of the first children and their creations died, many were able to escape, many were able to completely hide. Yisheng soon stopped, and hid within himself and disappeared from Time and Space though he still continued to hope to find the answers of finding a way to create the “utopia” he desired
9. This “utopia” was a dream that was inherited by the other Yishengs, born as a result of the OG Yisheng wanting to continue his desires through this new breed of living Beings. Obviously not all Yishengs think like this but those who do/did tried their best to find a way to convert/change/rebirth all of Life so that death/destruction/etc would never exist anymore
10. This is how terrible experiments were born, including the one that resulted in Sk’jin’s ship crashing in the Nightmare Planet and of course most importantly the Red Evil who were experimented on Yishengs. They came back twisted and still looking for the same results- kinda like two sides of the same coin in a sense.

11. The Red Evil then created the Omhlphe, who like the GI, were kinda emotionless but faulty experiments used to carry out “crowd control” – the GI killed people who were starting to get too close to the truth (like how Ilya was supposed to be assassinated for getting too close to the Axudarian bullshit), and how the Omhlophe wiped out and destroyed escaping refugees from planets the Red Evil would destroy.

12. Back to the First Children, mengisiti is one of the First Children, who hid her creation within layers of resonance and water (because life exists only where water is) and in hopes that her children would live in safety, trust, and honesty, she split herself into two- the Heart and the Fate and since then they’ve been in hiding.

13. Axudar was of course effected by the First Children being so close- they almost understood that mengisiti was different unique and special – their obsession with immortality as a result of their own short life, influenced further by mengisiti’s closeness, and later Ndica’s assholeness, resulted in them being the way they are now. also potentionally a first children?? who knows, certianly not me.

14. The red evil were the first to discover a way of somehow permeating Mengisiti’s borders by finding a weak spot during mengisiti’s resonance phasing, Ndica hopped onto this and then pushed forward an incessant attempt to influence mengisiti because as he suspected, mengisiti was definitely one of the First Children.

15. Ndica, despite being the mass killer that he was, was in fact, very smart- he discovered that by exposing his creations to areas that could potentially be linked to the First Children somehow further developed them, giving them an actual existence and awareness. So he found “hot spots” in hopes of furthering his experiments to recreate all of life under this one singularity. He also later found that by exposing Beings close to the core of their planets worked similarly as all planets ultimately are filled with life. This was also why the Red Evil harvested planets and moons and systems, as a means of powering the Eggs they were growing inside their ship.

I hope
That uhh
Cleared things up

Chapter End Notes

(Author’s Notes)
Ayeeeee why do I do this to myself I ask, writing such wonderful characters and killing them off
hmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm
Also if you guys don’t know…uh, Ka-Yee is Jackson Wang’s real name and yes that’s
Jackson
Am I bringing in got7 into this mix, not exactly! but I also wanted to say STREAM 100 WAYS im proud of my boy also am I a lowkey jinson shipper who knows maybe I am I can’t say much ahahahahahahaha not but really I planned for this to take place ages ago but just recently decided that it should be Jackson because why the fuck not also it was his birthday
Jimin can’t get the door to fully close.

It keeps opening behind him, leaving a gap of white.
Frustrated, Jimin goes back to the door and holds it close.
Finally, after a few moments, it stays closed.
Exhaling out slowly, Jimin sags with relief.
He’s not sure why, but he doesn’t want the door open in any way.
Finally, he turns around to face the house. The floors are still shaking, the stairs and bannisters vibrating. The glass windows are shattered, glass on the floors, rain storming inside as thunder and lightning explode every few seconds outside. The door to the study is unhinged, leaning dangerously against the doorpost in a precarious position. Inside, the white curtains have been flung open, the window forcefully opened as though a great wind blast through. The little decorative items everywhere are on the floor. Jimin steps in, the broken bits of glass cool under his feet. He picks up the model of the solar system Earth belonged to and hangs it back up. The little sun model in the center flickers faintly and after a few seconds glows again. Jimin shakes off the broken bits of glass on the soft yellow blanket. He removes the large chunks of glass one by one, each piece returning to its original place. Jimin takes time to make sure he gets every broken piece, returning it to its original place, until the window is repaired. He rearranges the small room to its original state- or at least as best as he could.

He moves on to the small kitchen, returning the broken plates to its original state, the pots on the floor back to the counter, pushing back the chairs that had been flung hard, the long window streaming in a mute light from the storm still raging outside. When he’s done with the kitchen, Jimin finds that the great windows by the stairs have repaired themselves, the storm ebbing just a little, no longer howling, screams of pain and anguish mingled with the wind.
The bedroom is halfway fixed- the windows repaired, but the furniture and other items in the room flung about.
Jimin fixes up the frames first—several hung up on the walls, all framing some random scenery. A forest bathed in early sunlight, a small city amidst clouds, the night sky alight with stars, a pale young moon just faintly visible over an unknown horizon, a grey shoreline with boats, a dim hallway lined with multiple doors.

Jimin straightens them out carefully before turning to the rest of the room. He returns all of the items on the desk back to their original position. He switches on the lamps, straightens the curtains, rearranges the cushion and blanket over the armchair to the side. He makes the bed last, fluffing up the pillows, dusting the covers and rearranging the blanket.

It’s cold, and Jimin shivers a little. He opens the closet door and inside he finds one single jacket. It’s the one Yoongi had worn back in Menigišiti. Jimin knows it well—knows the stitch of the fabric, the curve of the pattern making the sleeve. But it’s clean and comforting, and Jimin slips it on over himself.

It’s still raining, but it’s no longer filled with anguish and pain.

He looks around the room, checking to see if there’s anything he hasn’t fixed.

There’s a quiet yet clear clicking sound that echoes around the house.

It fills Jimin with fear.

Taking a few shaking steps, Jimin brings himself to stand by the bedroom doorway. A cool white light glows mildly, innocently, at the end of the hallway outside.

The door is open.

Frightened, Jimin is stuck. He stares and stares and stares.

Suddenly, he regains control over his body and he bolts. He slams into the doorway, shutting it aggressively.

He’s panting, hands shaking around the old-fashioned door handle that seemed to push against his hold, the doors pushing with a gentle and persistent force.

After several painfully stretched minutes, the door remains shut, no longer strained against Jimin’s hold.

He lets go slowly, but he remains close, distrusting of the door before him.

It remains closed.

‘Hey sunshine.’

Spinning, Jimin looks around wildly.

Yoongi sounded like he was right behind him.

‘Yoongi?’

There’s nothing more.

But the rain has now ebbed to a much more gentle shower, the clouds lifting.

Jimin walks over to the wide windows by the stairs, looking out into the open sky outside.

Warmth spreads from the tip of his nose, all the way down to his body. Jimin hadn’t even realized he was cold all over. A sense of relief washes over him, his shoulders lowering from their rigid and squared tautness.

He was okay. They were okay. Jimin realizes that maybe he’s unconscious.

He makes his way to the bedroom—maybe he would lay down, and wake up properly after a while.

He still didn’t know what had happened, why it had happened; he would need to be prepared, and he would need to be well for that. Nodding to himself, Jimin tucks the jacket closer around himself and opens the bedroom door wider to let himself in. He pauses, looking back at the main door.

‘Please don’t,’ he finds himself whispering.

It remains shut.
Yoongi had been cornered— a mass force of some form of specialized unit overwhelming his attempts at regaining control over the escort-ship. There’s a singular moment— one where he’s crouched behind the landing stabilizers of the escort-ship, TeorSer fire erupting all around him in a shower of sparks as it hits the ship above and around him – and he’s able to look out into the dark of space. Light erupts like delayed lightning outside, illuminating the massive eruption of debris and chaos spilled outside. Too much time had passed. He was too late— he was too…-

Something explodes behind him but Yoongi cannot bring himself to care for it. He looks down at his hands. His arm is bleeding— grazed by a shot from a TeorSer. His left leg has a long cut, someone had thrown something sharp at him, taking out one of his two Heliords. He has one fused out TeorSer, and one flickering Heliord. He was outnumbered, out-timed; Yoongi is lost.

He can barely see the opening to the tunnel that he had run out of, where Jungkook was fighting his fellowbeing to the death. It had been more than 10 minutes for sure, and no sign of Jungkook. Yoongi knew he didn’t have time— even then he knew he had no way of getting to Jimin. And now Jungkook— Another explosion erupts, screams ringing through the large Hangar. The orange Atmoshield is only faintly illuminated in the air, the lights of whatever explosion more than enough to really shine a light in the Hangar. The escort-ship shudders violently, shifting in its place, exposing half of Yoongi. But he can’t find it in himself to hide— to take cover. The dark of space yawns before him. There’s another explosion and amidst that, Yoongi can feel footsteps approaching him— heavy and uneven, running without much balance. The dark of space waits for him.

A rush of anger and anguish overwhelms him and Yoongi jumps to a stand, spinning on his blood-soaked knee to face his would-be attacker, Heliord ablaze before him. But the figure never makes it to him, doesn’t even get close. With the light of one final explosion that takes out the heavy-armored platoon transporter that had brought in the heavily-armed special unit team, Yoongi looks up at the GI who stood ahead of him, the body of his now dead attacker on the floor at its feet. The silhouette of the GI is painfully familiar.

‘Amic?’ The GI just studies Yoongi for a moment and then turns around and walks away. His breath returns to him in a deep and heavy gasp and Yoongi finds that his ears are ringing. There are more GI, walking about in a calm efficient manner, easily overtaking the specialized unit that had overtaken the Hangar. A sudden burst of energy overtakes Yoongi and the Human stands, sprinting back towards the tunnel. ‘J-Jungkook—’ Yoongi gasps out loudly, calling for the young Vicitra as he enters the tunnel. He finds the youngling close to the opening, slumped on the curve of the wall, pale and splattered heavily in blood. ‘Jungkook!’ sliding down to his knees before the youngling, Yoongi rushes to check his vitals. Shaking fingers at the Vicitra’s blood splattered throat reveals a steady pulse. His side is drenched in blood, the smell overwhelming. Looking around wildly Yoongi spots the
older Vicitra slumped in an unnatural heap on the floor some ways off. There’s a loud commotion in the Hangar where the Laikin was parked but Yoongi doesn’t pay it any mind. He needed to get Jungkook help- the Laikin had a Medical Bay that was still hopefully functional. Yoongi doesn’t understand what the GI being there meant- but the last time they had shown up, they had lost Namjoon, their ship, and any semblance of stability they had tried so hard to maintain.

Yoongi repositions himself, his breaths harsh in his own ears, to lift the Vicitra up. Jungkook was taller than Yoongi and was very heavy. Unconscious his weight seems denser, and with Yoongi’s physical state, he’s barely able to lift him. He hears calm footsteps approaching him but a sudden panic flares within him. Jungkook was like him, but was also unlike him and the other GI. What would the GI want with him, what would they do to him? Yoongi’s grasp on the youngling is desperate and with hysterical strength ignites his Heliord at whatever was approaching them. The footsteps stop almost immediately.

Somehow, Yoongi is able to move, clutching Jungkook close to himself, Heliord flickering on and off before him. He doesn’t realize he’s fallen until Jungkook tilts at an odd angle, making them crash into the wall to the side.

‘I got you-‘ Yoongi hysterically mumbles, ‘-Jungkook I got you-‘

He covers the youngling with his own body, abandoning his flickering Heliord.

‘-oongi?’

His mind in turmoil, Yoongi has one singular coherent thought: protect Jungkook. Jimin had protected the youngling against himself, against pain, brought him with him- they were both here because of Jimin. Both here as a result of Jimin’s strength, his heart; Yoongi would do anything to make sure Jungkook was safe. He had to- he needed to – because now Jimin was-

‘Yoongi!’

Yoongi snaps out of it.

Namjoon’s kneeling beside him. For a wild moment, Yoongi wonders if he’s hallucinating.

‘Yoongi- look at me,’ Namjoon’s tone is gentle. ‘Let Jungkook go, I need to take him to the Medical Bay.’

‘W-what-?!’ Yoongi can barely speak, throat constricted, vision blurred with both tears and black spots. Namjoon sounds like he’s underwater.

‘Let go,’ Namjoon says gently, ‘I’ve got him, I’ve got you too.’

‘N-Namjoon?’

Namjoon places a hand on Yoongi’s shoulder and then to the side of his head. He was real- he was real and he was here.

‘You’re safe,’ Namjoon tells him, ‘It’s safe now.’

With shaking hands and weak arms, Yoongi finally lets go of his hold on Jungkook.

His whole body still protests as Jungkook is carefully lifted onto a Medical stretcher that had been waiting for them at the side. Namjoon is fiddling with something in his pockets before he pulls out a few compressor shots. He’s gentle when he tears at the already damaged sleeve on Yoongi’s jacket, finding skin to press the shot. Yoongi barely feels it. Namjoon uses all 4 he had taken out and slowly, Yoongi’s head clears up of the dark fog, his sight clearing up, and the sounds around him clearing up. The spot where Namjoon had administered the shots was slowly burning.

‘J-Jimin-,’ Yoongi manages to choke out.

‘He’s fine- he’s in the Medical Bay too,’ Namjoon is resting a tentative hand on his shoulder. A new hand- attached to a new arm to his shoulder. Namjoon was fixed up. ‘So is Sk’jin- they’re both recovering, they’re not in danger.’

Relief washes over Yoongi in painful waves. Unable to stop, he curls in on himself, choking breaths escaping him unwarranted. He numbly feels an arm wrap around his shoulders.

‘Let’s get you fixed up too,’ Namjoon says quietly. ‘You need rest, come on.’

Yoongi’s not sure if he’s moving on his own accord but he’s standing up, his legs weak but not
‘The others are okay,’ Namjoon tells him, supporting him up to the point where Yoongi is barely walking on his own. ‘Hoseok is fine- Taeh’yung was drugged I think, but he’s fine too.’ They were fine. They were all fine.
‘What- what happened?’ Yoongi knows he’s not being specific.
What did happen? To Namjoon, to this prison-ship, why and how were the GI here?
‘The GI took me,’ Namjoon explains, maintaining an easy pace to not rattle Yoongi too much.
‘Back in Lowet- there’s a lot to discuss but not right now- first you all need to heal up-’
‘-you’re- you’re healed up too-‘ Yoongi slurs out.
‘Yeah- yeah I uh, I met another Kutsoglerin, he fixed me up.’
Yoongi’s mind is abuzz with questions but they disappear as quickly as they form. He can’t think straight, his mind settling from the utter chaos it had been thrown into.
They exit the long tunnel and Yoongi spots the Laikin, still smoking a little but no fire ignited anywhere. The Laikin’s Hangar gates are blown up and they’re definitely going to have to fix that immediately.
Next to the Laikin is a new ship- it’s massive, and it’s familiar.
‘Isn’t- isn’t that a Yisheng ship?’ Yoongi’s neck hurts, he can’t look up.
‘It is,’ Namjoon confirms, ‘Like you said, no one checks or registers Yisheng ships. No wonder the GI are invisible.’
Yoongi is lead inside, passing one of the GI who stood guard at the bottom of the ramp. But Yoongi doesn’t have time to pay attention. There’s a sense of dread, of curiosity, building up in him.
He’s half lifted, his feet barely touching the ground of this inner Hangar. He’s pretty sure he blacks out for a moment before he’s opening his eyes again just as Namjoon deposits him on a Medical Bed.
Looking around, Yoongi spots Jungkook in the Bed next to his. There’s a GI there, hands moving deftly as they track the Vicitra’s vitals, administering medication and stabilizers.
Namjoon pushes him back and Yoongi faces the ceiling.
‘Where- where’s Jimin?’ Yoongi manages to get out, head turning about.
‘The other Bay with Sk’jin,’ Namjoon informs him immediately, dragging down the scanner over the Bed just as another GI enters. ‘Were you hit anywhere?’
Yoongi shakes his head slowly.
‘I have to go- need to meet Ilya, and Jn’young,’ Namjoon tells him. He looks hesitant, unsure whether he should leave Yoongi be. But the Human just nods, waving a hand in gesture. The GI approaches them, clearly ready to take over.
‘I wasn’t- wasn’t badly injured, I’m fine,’ Yoongi tells the Kutsoglerin. Somehow it’s still strange to acknowledge that Namjoon was standing there before him but at the same time Yoongi can’t quite get around to really digest that information.
Namjoon nods, reaching into his pocket and retrieving a Comm-Device. ‘Until we can start rewiring every single hardware aboard this ship or issue new ones, we can use this.’
Yoongi fits it to his ear at once, rolling the other one off.
‘I’m going to go meet up with Hoseok, and then go meet Ilya and Jn’young,’ Namjoon tells him,
‘There’- there’s a lot to be said, shared-‘
For a moment, Namjoon looks at him with a scared expression. Not fearful of him, or afraid of whatever it was that he heard, but rather Namjoon looks scared for him.
He knew.
His time spent with the GI was probably a challenging but informative one.
Yoongi manages a small smile.
‘It’s okay,’ he says quietly.
Namjoon opens his mouth and then closes it. He does this a few times, looking uncertain, eyeing the GI in the Bay with them.
‘Namjoon. It’s okay,’ Yoongi tells him firmly, ‘We all know.’
He looks hopeless, sighing quietly for a moment before he nods again. ‘I’ll keep in contact, you can contact Hoseok now too, he has one of the Comms.’

Yoongi nods his thanks, fiddling with the Comm in his ear, twisting it till it gives a small click.

Namjoon pauses briefly, reaching over to squeeze Yoongi’s hand.

‘It’s good to see you again,’ Namjoon says quietly.

‘Yeah-‘ Yoongi swallows painfully, ‘Yeah, you too Captain.’

Namjoon just grins before he turns and exits the Bay.

The GI begins almost at once, no time wasted or lost.

It’s jarring, watching the GI work like this. Jarring, but also familiar. It was like watching a recording of yourself from a memory you weren’t quite sure you remembered having, or if the familiarity of your observed actions in the recordings ignited some muscle memory deep within you.

‘Hoseok?’

‘Yoongi?’ the Ngfy’widan’s voice is clear and relief instantaneous. ‘Fuck- fuck.’

‘You- you’re okay?’ Yoongi manages to get out, blindly watching the GI cut open a wide gap in his pant-leg to access his cut there. It’s not deep, but the angle was odd, pulling at his skin with each flex of his leg, making the cut tear apart wider.

‘Yeah- I’m- I’m fine but- what about Jungkook? He’s doing okay? He’s with you? Namjoon told me he has Sk’jin and Jimin in.’

‘Yeah- yeah he’s with me,’ Yoongi breathes carefully, closing his eyes as they start to sting. ‘He’s with me.’

‘Good…-good, Spaces, Yoongi I’m just-‘

‘Yeah- me too.’

‘Just rest up for now- and uh- I’m meeting Namjoon, and then…’

‘Yeah,’ Yoongi mumbles quietly.

Sitting up, Yoongi carefully peels off his bloody jacket, whatever Namjoon had shot with him, probably some painkiller and inhibitors, was working very well. Only his body was sore in the usual way it was sore. The GI takes it away, pausing before the shredder-tube, glancing back at Yoongi as though in second thought. If Yoongi could see past the helmet he knows he won’t be seeing much of a reaction. So it’s mainly based on intuition that Yoongi just nods. There was no point in saving the jacket.

There’s a ripping sound to the side and Yoongi notes that the GI tending Jungkook is surgically removing the Vicitra’s very heavily bloodstained clothes. He’s sustained some serious injuries; injuries that would definitely scar heavily. His attention is drawn away when the GI tending him comes back with some neatly folded clothes that were definitely freshly laundered. Yoongi briefly wonders why they had spare clothing like this about, and where they were keeping it. The GI keeps it at the foot of the Bed before stating in an unnervingly familiar voice, ‘I need to seal your leg and arm injuries.’

Yoongi peels off the rest of his clothes, sitting nearly naked as his skin is disinfected and cleaned before his wide open cut is sealed, a generous and even coating of growth serum patted all over. ‘We’re the same.’

Yoongi is startled by the voice.

The GI doesn’t continue.

What did he mean? That they were both GI?

But his answer is given when the GI pulls up at the sleeve of his own uniform, revealing skin that’s so bruised and scarred, it was nearly impossible to tell what his original skin colour could’ve been. But Yoongi knows him. Knows that his skin colour is a warm tan, and if his helmet was taken off, a pattern of darker skin would be decorating his facial features in his native race’s cultural practice. Malkr had once explained to him that they had this pattern imprinted into their skin from birth, with their cultural patterns from each “tribe”. It meant something, a representation of something significant. But Yoongi wonders if he would still have them as he was right now. He was one of the first to be taken by the Red Evil in Megibīya.
‘Yeah- we are,’ Yoongi nods, ‘Thank you Malkr.’
He gets no other words from Malkr as he works on Yoongi’s injuries. The GI working on Jungkook’s injuries is still there, still working with no pause.
‘Is he all right?’ Yoongi asks.
He’s not sure if he’s going to get a reply but the other GI replies, ‘The Pravasi H’manun recover and repair much faster than most living Beings.’
That didn’t answer Yoongi’s question directly, but it sort of did anyways. Yoongi is aware that the response was probably not qualified by most conversation standards as an adequate one; nonetheless it makes sense to him.
Yoongi studies Jungkook’s vitals from his Bed, and notes with relief that he was indeed stable, and that he was definitely going to be making a speedy and complete recovery.
Malkr completes cleaning up Yoongi’s wounds and binding his injuries and sealing them by handing him over a few tablets and pills. Yoongi remembers these; some far locked away memory from when he was barely gaining a conscious awareness.
He wonders if these might help.
He dry swallows them before pushing himself to the side of the Bed and carefully standing. He walks over to Jungkook, his side no longer drenched in blood but neatly sealed and contained, his skin shiny with serum. His brow is smooth, no indication of pain. But Yoongi notes with a quiet sigh, the dark circles around the youngling’s eyes.
The GI attending him is still working on his leg, but there seemed no need for any alarm.
Turning around, Yoongi is not surprised to find Malkr gone. He steps out of the Bay, finding himself in a sort of large lobby. It’s empty, with no real indication of it being lived in. The décor and placed items seem very staged, at least to Yoongi, but there’s also a sense of satisfaction as he looks around.
Balancing himself by placing a hand on the wall, Yoongi trudges along the length of the lobby towards the other Bay. The doors are open, probably intentional, and Yoongi quietly peaks inside, finding two occupied Beds.
Sk’jin is horrifying pale, bruises deeply embedded all over his body and up to the sides of his face, the corners of his mouth, and around his eyes. The colours are so vivid; angry almost, strained as though attempting to burst through in purples and reds through his skin. But his vitals look normal too- stabilizing all though he’s placed within an encased Pod-Shield rather than just laying over the Bed. They were probably trying to stabilize his temperature; the Khol’isa generally had a high tolerance for weather-based fluctuations and or extreme conditions, but Sk’jin was different.
Jimin looks marginally better. The bruises developing around him aren’t as vivid- but they’re deep and blossoming, creeping up his neck from the bit of his revealed chest.
While Sk’jin was definitely cared for and tended to, Jimin was placed almost meticulously. The pillow under his head is different- handmade almost. There’s also a jar of some sort of weed placed on the sliding shelves beside the Bed.
There’s a clumsy sort of attempt- one that Yoongi is able to recognize.
He walks over to Jimin, feet cold on the smooth shiny floors.
He looks uneasy; restless even in this unconscious state. Carefully, Yoongi brushes back Jimin’s hair- a little matted and clumped up, away from his forehead. Tentatively, he drags his thumb over his cheeks.
With an abrupt, slightly choked up sigh, Yoongi leans up against the Bed, careful as he places an arm over Jimin’s chest and touches his forehead against his.
‘Hey sunshine,’ Yoongi whispers quietly.
The restless movement under Jimin’s closed eyelids stop- his chest rises, inhaling slow and long, before exhaling quietly. The tautness, almost imperceptible, dissipates.
He presses a light kiss on the tip of his nose, his hand properly cradling the side of Jimin’s face. Taking a few more long and shuddering breaths, Yoongi pushes out the terrified images of Jimin being hurled out into space. He pushes out the overwhelming fear that had consumed him. Taking Jimin’s hands in his, Yoongi presses kisses over the bruised skin before placing them down
Quite suddenly, the whole air hums, the ship just ever so slightly vibrating, and Yoongi knows that the engines are running up again.

Looking away from Jimin, Yoongi glances out of the Bay. It was empty. Frowning a little, Yoongi makes his way out and down the way he had come in. Down at the inner hangar, Yoongi notes the absence of any living Being, just some storage-crates and repair kits pushed up to the side of the walls. The hangar gates are open, so Yoongi has a clear view of the main Hangar they were in.

Outside, the stretch of space framed by the massive gateway is busy with movement and light. Yoongi watches the debris outside for a while longer before he notices the pain in his feet. And like some Earthian domino effect, the rest of his body follows and Yoongi takes a deep breath. ‘It’s all right,’ he tells himself, ‘Just a little longer.’

With one last look outside, Yoongi turns and freezes where he stands.

The Hangar which had been empty was now crowded with the GI. They stand, simply observing him- or no, Yoongi doesn’t think he’s being observed.

It was almost as though they were waiting.

There’s around 20 of them inside the Hangar; they must have been ordered to stay back to keep the ship in check just in case of emergency.

A strange memory like a dream resurfaces and-

‘How many Yoongi’s do you see?’

The visor clicks upwards, revealing an expressionless face that regards Hoseok with a familiar yet different gaze before she says in an equally monotonous voice, ‘Mission successful Captain Namjoon. Now securing Ngfy’widan Hoseok.’

There’s a pained groan from Jaen and Hoseok is scrambling towards the Axudarian. Her body was shaking violently, eyes open but unseeing as they roll back at random. Quickly, Hoseok rips out the holster strap from around Jaen’s hip and pries her mouth open before setting it between her teeth. She immediately chomps down, her neck strained, muscles taut and rigid. ‘She’s in shock- hey! You got a med-kit on you or something?’ Hoseok yells at the GI.

Of course this Being was a GI. No other Being in this Universe could so uncannily take out a whole room of armed Beings with that level of efficiency and deadliness without a single injury on themselves.

She doesn’t move, and Hoseok’s not sure if she’s heard him. Cursing under his breath, and very confused at the sight of the GI here and now, it takes a moment to realize that the GI had said Captain Namjoon.

‘Are you speaking to Namjoon?’ Hoseok swivels to look up at the GI, ‘I need to talk to him.’

The GI blinks once before producing a small Comm Device from a hidden side pouch on her thigh and hands it over to him.

Hoseok immediately puts it on before turning his attention back to Jaen, sweat beading profusely
on her brow.
‘Hoseok?’
He’s not ready, Hoseok realizes, to hear Namjoon’s voice.
‘Hey- hey I-‘
‘Fuck.’
Hoseok exhales, kneeling down on all fours, fatigue seeping into his very core.
‘You’re all right?’
‘Yeah- yeah I am-‘ Hoseok has to shake himself, he had an injured Axudarian here, he needed to be on top of the situation and he needed to- ‘and you?’
‘Yeah I’m-‘ Namjoon lets out a small short laugh, ‘Yeah I’m fine. It’s uh-‘
‘I-‘
Hoseok can’t get it in him to say anything just yet.
He hasn’t felt overwhelmed like this in a long time. He wishes he were knocked out- incapable of doing anything except to maybe get better. He’s exhausted.
‘I have an injured Being here- I need to get her treated immediately,’ Hoseok finds himself saying. He can’t not do anything right now.
He’s been running like this for so long- he couldn’t just stop. He had to keep running.
He doesn’t even finish speaking when the GI crouches down, pulling out a small tube from her inner pocket, somewhere in the uniform, and presses one end against Jaen’s hip. The Axudarian arches up from the floor, eyes bulging out before settling down, breath escaping her noisily and smoothly.
‘Are you injured?’ Namjoon asks, seemingly having gotten a hold of himself during this stretch as well.
‘No injuries- just confused,’ Hoseok tells him as the GI makes adjustments on his bandages he had strapped over Jaen hurriedly. ‘Namjoon I don’t know where the others are I lost contact-‘
’S-k’jin and Jimin are with me, I’m landing inside soon- right next to the Laikin, I think that’s where Yoongi and Jungkook are.’
‘-and what about Taeh’yuung I haven’t seen him at all-‘ Hoseok rushes to say, leaning back onto the Navigation Table as the GI calmly stands and makes her way to where Camil is slumped on the floor. He wasn’t dead- Hoseok can see his chest moving with every breath he took.
‘he was drugged I think, I don’t know how, but I know his location too, the GI are bringing him down from the pods-‘
‘-fucking Spaces-‘ Hoseok looks up at the ceiling, propping his arms up on his knees. ‘Were they trying to rocket him out of the ship?’
‘Seems like it.’ Namjoon answers, ‘Hoseok, you’ve met and talked to Ilya, the Ožkan commander of the network?’
‘I have- he’s-…yeah I have,’ Hoseok replies, unsure how to explain Ilya’s background history with Sk’jin and whether that was immediately relevant or not. ‘Why?’
‘And the Khol’isa, Jn’young?’
‘Yeah,’ Hoseok frowns, ‘Why?’
‘What are they like?’
‘Oh- I don’t…I don’t know if I’m being honest- they were open to us but that’s-…that’s another story, but what’s the context of your question?’
‘I need to talk to them- Jn’young is injured I hear, so is Ilya but he’s better- waiting for either one to stabilize enough so I can talk to them.’ Namjoon explains before adding, ‘We can’t stay here for long.’
‘What do you mean?’
‘It’s highly likely that Axudar is headed this way- we need to leave Cuab at once.’
‘But-‘ Hoseok looks down at Jaen’s injured form, at the floating debris littered outside like some massive asteroid field.
‘I’ve already made arrangements to go back to Māho,’ Namjoon sounds urgent, ‘I sent some of the GI to handle the situation there and keep it in lockdown for us-‘
‘-but the ship-’
‘-I’ll be talking to Ilya, ways to clear up the debris enough for us to leave,’ Namjoon tells him, he sounded like he was moving, ‘And I’m not sure how much of what he knows- though considering his connection, maybe not in a personal level-‘
Hoseok is not too surprised to hear that Namjoon knew so much already.
‘He knows- he knows almost everything –um, he’s well, a friend of Sk’jin’s.’
There’s a sort of stunned silence for a while before Namjoon speaks again, ‘Was he a member of Sk’jin’s network in the past?’
‘He was a child- one of the rescued Beings who lived aboard Sk’jin’s ship for a long while,’ Hoseok explains, ‘Namjoon it was-…it’s almost as though Sk’jin thought of him as a son.’
It’s quiet for a while.
‘I’m guessing in a sense convincing him might be easier than I expected then.’
‘If we’re in danger from Axudar then definitely yes.’ Hoseok replies.
‘Right- okay, I’ve been told that Yoongi has been found, as well as Jungkook. I’m going to go check on them first,’ Namjoon tells him. ‘Another team will be approaching you soon. It seems that Ilya’s recovered enough- I need him to authorize the GI aboard the ship- tell his crew that we’re- well, they’re safe.’
Hoseok has so many questions.
The last time the GI had made their appearance, Namjoon was kidnapped and Yoongi was nearly killed.
‘All right I will-’ Hoseok jumps a little, noticing 3 other GI now standing to the side. ‘Fuck okay yeah the team is here.’
‘All right- they’ve been ordered to follow you. They’re taking Taeh’yung down to the Medical Bay I’m guessing that’s where you’ll be headed?’
‘I can come to you- if you’re going to meet with Ilya-‘
‘I think- fuck, I don’t know what-‘ Namjoon pauses, clearly thinking hard, ‘No I think stay with Taeh’yung, we still don’t know what’s happened to him- his vitals were all over the place according to the report sent to me. He’s stable, but I don’t know what they did to him.’
‘All right,’ Hoseok nods once before he stands up, wincing as his body protests the movement.
‘I’ll go get buggy. What do I do with Camil here?’
‘He’ll need to be interrogated no doubt-‘ Namjoon stops abruptly. ‘I found Yoongi and Jungkook.’
‘Are they okay?’ Hoseok demands immediately.
‘Shit.’ Namjoon curses softly.
It’s quiet for a while, and Hoseok waits on edge.
‘Yoongi? Hey, Yoongi,’ Namjoon sounds gentle, like he was trying to wake someone from their sleep.
Jaen groans slightly and Hoseok immediately makes his way over to the Axudarian.
‘Yoongi?’
‘Hey, Jaen, can you hear me?’ Hoseok leans over, looking over the Axudarian’s face for any signs of great distress.
‘Yoongi- look at me,’ Namjoon’s tone is gentle. ‘Let Jungkook go, I need to take him to the Medical Bay.’
Hoseok can’t help but imagine the worst.
‘Let go. I’ve got him, I’ve got you too.’ Namjoon sounds impossibly gentle. ‘You’re safe. It’s safe now.’
‘Is she stable?’ Hoseok asks the GI who was treating her.
There’s a single nod.
‘He’s fine- he’s in the Medical Bay too. So is Sk’jin- they’re both recovering, they’re not in danger.’
‘Which Medical Bay are you taking Taeh’yung, the Zhak’gri?’
‘Medical Bay 17-4N,’ one of the newer GI informs him.
‘Let’s take her there too- are the injured being taken care of?’
‘They are,’ the GI answers, albeit awkwardly late.
‘Let’s get you fixed up too,’ Namjoon says quietly. ‘You need rest, come on.’
‘When can internal communications go up?’
‘Unknown for now.’
Great, Hoseok nods tersely to that before gesturing at Camil.
‘Tie him up, he’ll need to be treated for his injuries, but keep watch over him constantly. If he wakes up, report to me or Namjoon.’ Hoseok states.
‘Understood.’
‘The others are okay,’ Namjoon sounds like he’s addressing a child, ‘Hoseok is fine- Taeh’yung was drugged I think, but he’s fine too.’
‘We head straight for 17-4N,’ Hoseok announces, ‘If possible, bring all who need to be treated here, or at least close by.’
There’s no response but Hoseok really isn’t expecting one from the GI. ‘Lead the way.’
Two of the 3 GI produce collapsible stretchers, and in a matter of minutes, have both Jaen and Camil on them. Hoseok walks directly behind the first duo who were carrying Jaen between the two of them.
Hoseok takes a look around- he’s able to at least differentiate the inmates from the local crew- but amongst them, who were involved in Camil’s backstabbing schemes? And how much of it was done because of a true belief in what Axudar wanted, and how much was out of necessity and threat?
Working and living as an agent meant not asking yourself questions like these, but Hoseok can’t help but wonder why. They all knew, clearly, from having Jn’yong aboard their network, and from Ilya’s experiences; yet why would Beings outside of Axudar, so firmly side by an act, by a belief that so evidently lacked morality and went against ever existing principle?
What lead Camil to side with Axudar, when he was in the same crew as Jn’yong, as Jaen who was from Axudar. Even E’nid would prove an exemplary example of how wrong Axudar was in doing what they did, were still doing; E’nid escaped the mandatory class-slavery in Orvan and was living proof.
But Hoseok can’t ask that- not when he’s lived it; not when he’s existed within this very situation, hoping he was on the right side, believing he was on the right side, but coming out of it still aflame for the actions he took.
The GI pause, nearly making Hoseok walk straight into one of them.
‘What’s wrong-’
There are hurried footsteps- several, approaching them. The GI were clearly waiting for a signal from them.
‘Secure Jaen and Camil if things fuck up,’ Hoseok orders, ‘I’ll cover you.’
There’s no acknowledgment of his orders but Hoseok walks past, not before grabbing on of the TeorSers from the GI. He stops at the corner, listening closely. The footsteps pause- cautious before turning a corner. But suddenly the footsteps sprint- rushing around the corner in a huge surge.
E’nid is there, a large TeorSer in her hands, ready to fire as a few others stand behind her. There’s a stretched second of confusion- E’nid recognizes Hoseok, but she’s looking at the GI with fear and confusion.
‘Stand down!’ Hoseok orders at once, throwing down his own TeorSer. ‘E’nid- stand down!’
E’nid hesitantly obeys, and signaling to the others to stand down. Hoseok notes how a few other Beings poke their heads around the corner.
‘What’s going on?’ she asks breathlessly.
‘These are the GI,’ Hoseok explains hurriedly, ‘They’re here to help, they came with my captain-‘
‘-the missing one?’
‘-yes, and Jaen is here- but she’s injured-‘
E’nid’s eyes widen, looking down at the stretcher with fear.
‘She’s all right but we need the Bay-’
E’nid is hurrying over, nearly tripping on her own feet as she stumbles to kneel by the stretcher. ‘She’s all right- she’s all right- but E’nid- look at me,’ Hoseok says hurriedly, kneeling on the other side of the stretcher. E’nid looks up with tears in her eyes.

‘I’m sorry, but I need you to tell the others that the GI are here to help- and to make their way to the 17-4N Medical Bays, or at least the North wing section right now,’ Hoseok tells her in a clear and calm voice. ‘We are not safe here, and we’ll need to move soon. But we need everyone to stay together, make sure no one is lost- at least until communications are up.’

After a few seconds, E’nid nods, blinking away tears. ‘Yeah- yeah I got it- we have short-radio communications and-‘

‘Okay- get that up and running, repeat what I said,’ Hoseok tells her firmly but gently. She takes a deep breath before looking over to the side, calling the others who were with her. Hoseok stands up, looking over to the surviving crew. They look confused, but put together. Of course, this was Ilya’s crew, and they would know what to do, would manage to stand their ground.

‘Is he dead?’ E’nid’s tone is cold. She’s gesturing to Camil’s knocked out form.

‘No,’ Hoseok shakes his head, ‘We need him for interrogation.’ She nods to that, giving him one last hateful look before turning her attention back around. ‘All right, everyone split up- let’s spread the news quickly and reconnect in 4N.’

They swiftly disperse in small units; efficient, quick, and alert.

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‘E’nid stays on the other side of the stretcher, keeping pace as soon as the GI start walking.

‘What happened?’ she asks after a while.

‘Camil shot her,’ Hoseok explains.

She moves so quickly, Hoseok can barely see where she’s moved to. But she’s on top of Camil’s stretcher, hands gripping around Camil’s head in a horrifying grip-

E’nid is barely there for more than a second before the GI calmly remove her, without dropping Camil’s stretcher.

‘E’nid!’ Hoseok quickly takes over restraining the Orvan, pulling her still struggling form away from the GI.

She’s strong, but Hoseok has the upper hand. He’s also trying not to hurt her.

‘We need to interrogate him-‘ Hoseok grits out, twisting her just enough to stop her from struggling, but not enough to actually hurt her. ‘-please, I know how you feel- E’nid listen-‘

‘We came across more- more-!‘ she can’t say it properly because she can’t fathom it either, ‘We came across them- the others and I just-‘

She starts to cry, crumpling down.

‘They didn’t hesitate- they didn’t even stop I knew them- I knew all of them and they didn’t-‘ Hoseok carefully lowers her to the ground, kneeling beside her.

‘They even- we stopped a whole unit headed- headed for the living quarters upstairs and-‘ she coughs, barely able to get her words out. Hoseok carefully reaches for her shoulder, patting her there before squeezing gently. He looks over at the GI and nods down the hallway. They move in unison, making their way down the hall.

‘Why- why would they do this?’ E’nid asks.

She’s not expecting an answer.

‘I understand,’ Hoseok says quietly.

He feels E’nid looking at him.

Hoseok curls his hands into fists, fire smarting his palms. Hoseok understood- all too well. He understands their confusion, their paranoia, the way every single action simply tugged at the floor beneath their feet.

It’s how he’s been living his life for the past 5 sols.

‘Hoseok?’

‘Yeah- I’m here,’ Hoseok replies at once, ‘I’m still moving up towards the Medical Bay.’

‘Okay- I uh, I’m coming there to pick up Camil.’
‘Why? I’m taking him up to the Bay,’ Hoseok answers.
‘There’s been some reported attacks,’ Namjoon tells him carefully, ‘Ilya’s crew- I think their confusion and panic is driving their judgment right now. The GI broke the fight apart but 2 of Camil’s crones died as a result and we need to interrogate them.’
‘I get it,’ Hoseok looks at E’nid who was wiping at her face, gaze determinedly pointed downwards towards the floor.
‘Okay- I’m coming over to meet you and your team. All still good?’
‘Yeah, I guess,’ Hoseok stands, extending his hand down to the Orvan who takes it, standing up as well.
‘I just left Jungkook and Yoongi at the Bay aboard the GI ship,’ Namjoon tells him, ‘Jungkook has a very fast recovery rate, of course, but he’s been really badly injured.’
‘How bad is it?’ Hoseok asks as E’nid takes a moment to communicate over her short-radio as well.
‘We found him on time,’ Namjoon explains tersely, ‘Yoongi was….’
He trails off for a while.
‘You were aboard Yisheng Amme’s ship.’
‘Yes, how do you know?’
‘The GI told me,’ Namjoon answers, ‘And from what the GI told me…Amme was involved for quite a while.’
‘She was,’ Hoseok confirms, turning the corner in the hallway. The GI are some ways ahead, already slowing down for them to join them. Down towards the end of the hall Hoseok sees a lift. ‘The GI also told me about…and from what Yoongi said to me, it seems like he knew too.’
‘Knew what?’ But Hoseok has a good feeling he knows what Namjoon is referring to.
‘About Yoongi- and others potentially like him- not just as GI or- or as an Egg.’
‘Yeah- I uh- Yoongi told me.’
‘Oh.’
‘Is he….is he awake?’
‘He is. I gave him a Comm- you can talk to him- he should connect to the network now.’
‘I will.’
‘I’ll see you soon.’
They catch up to the GI while E’nid is still talking, listening intently over the slightly static sounds.
‘Hoseok?’
‘Yoongi?’ Hoseok closes his eyes- relief flooding him, uncaring he was walking blindly. ‘Fuck-fuck.’
‘You- you’re okay?’ is the first thing Yoongi asks him.
‘Yeah- I’m- I’m fine but- what about Jungkook? He’s doing okay? He’s with you? Namjoon told me he has Sk’jin and Jimin in.’ Hoseok can barely contain himself. They stop before the lift, the GI accessing the screens. ‘Yeah- yeah he’s with me,’ Yoongi sounds carefully monotonous. ‘He’s with me.’
‘Good….good, Spaces. Yoongi I’m just-‘ Hoseok finds a wall and leans against it.
‘Yeah- me too.’
‘Just rest up for now- and uh- I’m meeting Namjoon, and then…’ Hoseok breathes out quietly, turning when he feels a hand on his shoulder. E’nid gives him a supportive look before nodding towards the opening lift doors. ‘Yeah,’ Yoongi mumbles quietly.
The lift is silent.
‘Are they always this motionless?’ E’nid asks, looking at the GI, ‘I know they’re here, but somehow it’s just-‘
Hoseok lets out a small snort, ‘Yeah, I live with one, so I know what you mean.’
‘Do you get used to it?’
‘You get used to not getting used to them I guess,’ Hoseok answers honestly.
E’nid, who looking down at Jaen chuckles a bit.
‘Your captain is coming in?’
‘Yeah- they’re rounding up Camil and his… I dunno, his crew? Put them somewhere uh-‘
‘Safe,’ E’nid says dryly.
‘Yeah.’
E’nid nods to that.
The lift stops, the doors opening to a surprisingly clean and undamaged hallway.
‘We’re in the North wing now,’ E’nid tells him, ‘We shouldn’t be too far from the Medical Bay-‘
There’s a weird shudder that erupts around the ship.
E’nid gasps, immediately moving low, towards Jaen’s stretcher and redirecting the GI towards the wall, gesturing at them to crouch to which they comply.
There’s a strange chorus of voices, yelling so loud it reverberates through the air in a familiar tone.
‘Oh fuck-‘ Hoseok manages to say before the air sparks bright green in furious dizzying succession and a sloppy, very uneven triangular emptiness opens up on the wall and ceiling, dropping in Taeh’yung right before them.
The walls and floors ripple with a strange force, erupting into strange triangles and pyramids jutting out before collapsing immediately. Explosions of mold like moss spread and disintegrate into ash, the strong stench of ozone burning through the air, making Hoseok’s eyes water. There are bursts of strange growth erupting from the edges and corners of the hallway, briefly overwhelming Hoseok before dropping away from him like ash.
Taeh’yung stands in a haze, as though the air around him couldn’t quite contain him.
He’s screaming but there’s no audible sound; he’s standing utterly still, but everything seemed to be hurtling around him in a daze of lights and shadows. The ground ripples from where he stands, neon-green eyes locking down on the stretchers.
His mouth opens, a bright light shining so bright it’s almost painful.
Hoseok has never felt fear like this.
‘Taeh’yung!’
Hoseok pushes against the force and weight of the air- and somehow this seems to jar all of reality around them, the walls and ceilings righting itself.
Then Taeh’yung groans, pain evident in his voice as the strange light dims and Taeh’yung falls to one knee, clutching his head in his hands.
E’nid is peddling backwards, grabbing the stretcher with Jaen in it, as though to pull her aside, pushing ash away from her face.
Taeh’yung looks wild, his eyes ablaze and his movements unclear and loopy- he’s clearly still not all there, his movements swaying violently. But he keys in on the movement, eyes narrowing into a glare that petrifies E’nid where she was crouched over.
But then he dismisses her, before his gaze lands on the stretcher to the other side.
‘You-!’ Taeh’yung points over in Camil’s direction, his movements simultaneously too fast and too slow- each swaying motion reveals another form another shape-
Taeh’yung lets out a shriek- high pitched and many layered- several voices screaming. He dashes himself against the wall, as though to set himself right. The wall dents, forming deep craters.
‘Buggy-‘ Hoseok immediately steps forward, arms raised up towards the Zhak’gri but Taeh’yung retches violently, making Hoseok peddle back in alarm.
Taeh’yung coughs, whacking against his chest as he heaves. The shadows pulling around him are shrieking, curling and writhing around him.
‘What-?’ E’nid is breathless, watching with fear.
Taeh’yung hits his head again, the copper lines around his skin flickering in light, neon green flickering around him in a way that made Hoseok’s eyes water.
‘What did you do to me??’ Taeh’yung roars at an unconscious Camil before retching again.
Footsteps approach from behind them and Hoseok doesn’t want anyone to intrude in on this moment.
‘E’nid- I’ll take care of this- you take Jaen- I’ll calm him down-‘
E’nid is alarmed, torn between needing to stay to keep an eye on things but also take Jaen up to the
Hoseok barely registers the appearance of the additional GI, only noticing them because of the Being who comes with them.
Namjoon appears, eyes wide as he takes in the sight before him.
‘Namjoon-
Everything abruptly stops, and Taeh’yung turns to face the Kutsoglerin, suddenly looking very much like a child.
‘Pa!’ Taeh’yung’s voice is wobbly, his lower lip trembling before his whole face scrunches up and he bawls, flailing a little before barreling into the Kutsoglerin.
Namjoon looks a little overwhelmed before he hugs the Zhak’gri back, a smile on his face.
‘Hey buggy,’ he says gently. ‘You’re not doing so good?’
Taeh’yung groans thickly, a choked sob stuck in his throat as he leans against the Kutsoglerin with his entire weight.
‘E’nid,’ Hoseok calls the Orvan away from the strange reunion, ‘Take Jaen up, the GI will help you.’
E’nid nods hesitantly before standing up on shaky legs, still eyeing Taeh’yung with both fear and confusion. Straightening up himself, Hoseok walks over to the two.
Namjoon adjusts the Zhak’gri, easily picking him up and walking towards Hoseok to meet him halfway. The Kutsoglerin smiles at him.
He looks good- his eye healed, his arm fixed and new. There’s determination and steadiness in his eyes and Hoseok…- well, Hoseok also wants to slump against him in tired relief.
‘Do you need me to carry you?’ Namjoon asks gently as the GI stand in formation around them, one of them approaching Camil’s form to cuff him. ‘We’ll go to the Medical Bay all right? Get you fixed up?’
Taeh’yung ropes his arms around Namjoon’s shoulder, nodding into his neck. Some of the GI take Camil with them and walk off back towards where they had come from.
‘This is almost like how when we first met, right?’ Namjoon grins down at the Zhak’gri.
‘It is,’ Taeh’yung wails in multiple voices.
Namjoon grins at Hoseok.
He can’t help but smile back.

Namjoon deposits Taeh’yung on the Medical Bed, the Zhak’gri’s arms still wound tight around him. Hoseok thinks that if anyone else were to be on the receiving end of this embrace, they would be wincing in pain. But Namjoon is being very gentle and even pats his head a few times.
There are random bursts of weird lights, walls and floors and anything around Taeh’yung erupting into echoing triangles before immediately collapsing into its normal state. Even Namjoon’s arms ripple in specific patterns, but the Kutsoglerin doesn’t notice or mind it much.
There were a lot of confused Beings gathering and waiting for some sort of explanation. E’nid had gathered a majority over to the other side of the massive Lobby, clearly communicating what had happened.
Hoseok nearly throws an instinctual punch when he feels a hand on him.
It was one of the GI, holding up a compressor-shot.

‘Oh I’m not injured,’ Hoseok grimaces, taking a step back but he’s nonetheless administered with it.

‘I think this is illegal,’ Hoseok frowns, wrenching his arm out.

‘You’re tired,’ Namjoon tells him, ‘They’re probably giving you a booster.’

Hoseok rubs at his arm, finding himself on the other side of the Bed where Taeh’yung was throwing some kind of kiddish fit.

‘What’s going on Namjoon?’

Namjoo sighs, ‘I’ll explain on the way to meet Ilya- I should get going.’

He wants to go with Namjoo. He’s not sure if he should though. Because as Hoseok looks down at Taeh’yung who, poor thing, did look very uncomfortable and unwell; he feels a sense of responsibility to watch over the Zhak’gri. They’ve never been in a situation where he’s been remotely unwell.

‘I’m fine!’ he pouts, as though reading Hoseok’s mind, ‘If you want to leave me and I die, it’s okay Hobi.’

Hoseok just barely stops himself from rolling his eyes. Taeh’yung seemed fine.

There’s a quiet cough from behind them and Hoseok turns to find the Medic that had been there when they had brought in Yoongi to the other Medical Bay. She smiles tentatively, looking somewhat disheveled, before saying, ‘Hi, do you require any assistance?’

The doors warp, the opening of the doorway shrinking into a triangular shape before readjusting itself. The Medic jumps back, eyes darting all around.

‘Oh- yeah,’ Hoseok nods, standing aside to gesture to Taeh’yung, ‘We don’t know what happened and uh-’

She nods, walking in carefully before looking over Taeh’yung critically.

Taeh’yung grimaces comically, coiling inwards and turning away from the Medic. The floor around him ripples like water, making it impossible to step up any closer.

‘Taeh’yung,’ both Hoseok and Namjoo say sternly.

The Zhak’gri groans and straightens up again, the floors levelling. Now the ceiling ripples instead, occasionally sending down a shower of ash at random.

‘Can you tell me how you feel?’ the Medic asks, pulling down the full body scanning apparatus from the domed headboard of the Bed.

‘Like shit,’ Taeh’yung sniffs, not looking at the Medic.

‘Tae,’ Hoseok lets out with exasperation.

‘Fine,’ he relents with a mighty frown, ‘I feel like I’m falling apart. My tummy really hurts, my head is all over the place and-’ he burps mightily, ‘I don’t like it.’

‘We think he ingested something that’s making him like this,’ Namjoo tells the Medic. She nods in understanding before addressing Taeh’yung.

‘We will probably need to pump your stomach,’ the Medic tells Taeh’yung gently, ‘To make sure we know what it is you ingested. We’ll need to follow up with something to flush your system too.’

‘That’s gross,’ Taeh’yung whines.

The Medic talks to Taeh’yung like he’s a youngling. ‘You’ll get better that way, and you can eat nice tasty food again.’

‘Okay,’ Taeh’yung pouts.

Namjoo is squinting at his readings as the scanner finishes its job.

‘All okay?’ Hoseok asks, reaching over to pat the Zhak’gri’s head.

‘Yeah- I mean I guess,’ Namjoo shrugs, ‘We’ve never had any data to compare with when it came to Zhak’gri’s, so-’

‘I’m feeling better,’ Taeh’yung declares, in an eruption of triangles that warps his Bed and the Medic into a brief liquid state.

The Medic falts back, hand over her chest, eyes wide and incredibly pale.

‘Sorry,’ Taeh’yung winces.

‘We’ll come see you again okay buggy?’ Hoseok smooth’s out Taeh’yung’s hair, ‘Just concentrate
on getting better.’
‘Is everyone else okay?’ Taeh’yung asks, looking up with big eyes.
‘Yeah, they’re okay,’ Namjoon answers, reaching for his own Comm Device and putting it on Taeh’yung’s ear. ‘Everyone is getting fixed up and resting, so you do the same while Hobi and I get us to safety okay?’
Taeh’yung nods before he points at his cheek expectantly.
Namjoon gives him a blank look, clearly confused.
Snorting, Hoseok leans in and presses a kiss on the Zhak’gri’s forehead. Taeh’yung beams, a ripple erupting from him happily. Namjoon just grins before leaning in to kiss his cheek as well.
‘See you later Hobi! Daddy!’
‘Oh for fuck’s sake,’ Namjoon grumbles as they exit, accepting a Comm Device from a GI who appeared to have been in the Medical Bay with them the whole time.
‘I think that whole situation was set-up for that purpose,’ Hoseok chortles, turning back to wave at Taeh’yung who was still laughing. ‘I need to stop by a Bay for a moment.’
Namjoon nods in understanding.
They walk all around the large Lobby, ignoring the looks thrown their way. Looking inside a few random Bays, Hoseok comes across E’nid and Jaen. The Axudarian was still knocked out, but she seemed to be out of immediate danger judging by the relief in E’nid’s face. She spots him and gives him a small smile.
‘Could I borrow a radio?’ he asks her quietly.
E’nid nods and throws him her own.
‘We’re going to go meet up with Jn’young and Ilya,’ he tells her.
‘When can communications go up again?’
Hoseok turns to Namjoon who says grimly, ‘They used a simple but effective method to shut down the network- it’s just a matter of how quickly you’re able to redistribute new Comm Devices and launch a new channel.’
‘We’ll work on that,’ E’nid promises, rolling her shoulders a little as though readying herself.
They leave and make for the exit-way again. The Beings close to Taeh’yung’s Medical Bay move away as more lights erupt at random, matter and space rippling into triangles and other formations.
‘What do you think they gave Taeh’yung?’
‘I was thinking about that,’ Yoongi chimes in quietly.
‘Hi. Bug.’
Hoseok catches Namjoon’s lips twitching, as though repressing a smile.
‘The GI used to administer bioware, anticore, against some of our missions,’ Yoongi continues to explain, ‘It was a way to either strip them of their species-specific abilities, or in some cases, cause what seemed to be a completely natural systematic breakdown within them, with no trace, no cure.’
‘I heard of that,’ Namjoon frowns as they exit the Lobby, ignoring the stares sent their way again.
‘The Red Evil used a similar method, but-’
‘—but it eventually wears off!’ Taeh’yung chimes in with an added groan.
‘The GI headquarters had a lab full of them.’
‘If that’s the case, it wouldn’t be surprising that someone working for Axudar would have access to it,’ Namjoon frowns, ‘But how did this group have it on hand?’
‘Unless they were expecting Taeh’yung?’
‘unlikely,’ Hoseok shakes his head, ‘I overhead them talking a few times, they were not ready for Taeh’yung- and whatever they used on him wasn’t exactly full-proof.’
‘It’s possible they had some things to use- potentially against Jn’young,’ Namjoon theorizes, ‘He would pose the highest threat in this situation- other Beings aboard the ship too, possibly.’
‘And of course, Axudar would have the anticore for a Khol’isa,’ Hoseok frowns before he asks, ‘Yoongi- how many types of anticore even existed?’
‘Every possible kind.’
Namjoon grimaces at that.
The stop in front of the lift Hoseok and E’nid had come up in.
‘Are we in danger right now,’ Yoongi asks, ‘From Axudar. This was planned with them, so I’m thinking they’re expecting some form of communication with them.’
‘Yeah, that’s why I want to get us out of here as quickly as possible,’ Namjoon explains, ‘I’d rather not be taken to Axudar like this.’
‘What do you mean?’ Hoseok asks but then the lift door opens and a bunch of injured Beings are being escorted out. A few of them look at Namjoon and Hoseok with a hint of fear and confusion, but don’t stop.
They wait until they all exit, before entering the lift themselves. Hoseok counts 4 GI with them. He does a double count just to make sure he’s not overlooking anyone.
‘When I was in Lowet, I met a Being named Prat’tna,’ Namjoon explains, ‘He was like Yoongi- in the sense, he remembered who he was.’
‘Another baby who woke up?’
‘Yeah, and he wasn’t the first of himself, to wake up,’ Namjoon continues, leaning back on the lift walls, ‘Another him woke up before, and before that too.’
‘How many of him were there?’
‘Apparently he’s the last,’ Namjoon frowns, arms crossing over his chest, ‘He was one of the uh, ambassadors, from Bhumi, Megibīya, he was with Jimin when they landed. He was taken by the Red Evil, but left behind and saved by Amme.’
‘So what Amme said was true,’ Hoseok frowns a little, taking the opposite wall and leaning against it, ‘What does this have to do with going to Axudar?’
‘Because according to Prat’tna, you cannot enter Menigištiti- Megibīya yes, but not Menigištiti.’
‘He tried?’
‘Yeah,’ Namjoon nods as the lift stops. They descended much lower down the prison-ship. The hallway looks more like a large maintenance shaft than anything else. ‘He was with other GI, going around the region in hopes of finding an opening for almost a whole sol, when he came across Axudarian ships, and ships whose make came from a planet within Menigištiti.
‘They detected Prat’tna and his team, and chased after them. Prat’tna was able to bring them down into Megibīya, and overtake them there,’ Namjoon continues as they walk down the long shaft.
‘Most of the Beings within the Transporters and ships were Axudarian- but one of them was from Menigištiti.’
‘Were his eyes changed?’
Namjoon gives him a double take before nodding.
‘Prat’tna took the Yisheng ship and entered Axudar with no problem,’ Namjoon continues as they reach the end of the shaft to find a small tram network. They stop by the tracks. ‘The only way to enter Menigištiti would be to take a ship made from there. But it’s not just that too- stealing a ship shouldn’t be too hard and-’
‘-and we wouldn’t have to even go to Axudar. But you want to,’ Yoongi states.
‘I do- and I think, maybe after I tell Jimin my meeting with Prat’tna, maybe he will also want to go to Axudar.’ Namjoon ruminates.
‘Jn’young gave us a pretty clear and accurate description of what happens in Axudar,’ Hoseok tells Namjoon, ‘We concluded that we wouldn’t go to Axudar. It’s too dangerous for both Yoongi and Jungkook, not to mention Jimin himself.’
Namjoon nods to that, a deep furrow forming between his brows. An open tram appears around the corner, on it a GI was already sitting, steering the tram.
They clamber inside, a slightly tight fit, Hoseok’s knees pushed up against Namjoon’s.
‘But the root problem isn’t necessarily in Menigištiti,’ Namjoon explains, ‘If we are able to take the eggs, the New Borns, whatever you want to call them, and put them in Menigištiti, if Axudar is still able to access the whole System, they’re still in danger.’
Hoseok grimaces at that.
‘You can’t expect us to solve whatever issues are going on within Axudar, or to hope that things
will work out enough by somehow bringing Jimin back to them,’ Hoseok argues, ‘They basically revolted against Jimin and his sister, throwing them over to gain control over their fate or something.’

‘There’s nowhere to hide,’ Namjoon states bluntly, ‘I don’t know if you know this but the Omhlophe are in a sense, working for the Court-‘

‘What?!’

‘-and they’re being used to track the eggs, have them destroyed,’ Namjoon scowls, ‘They’re also the ones who put out the arrest warrants for us.’

‘That makes sense,’ Yoongi drawls. ‘We’re technically failing the mission the Special Jury had to beg for- failed already, I’m guessing, though it could be said that there was no hope for success to start off with.’

Namjoon’s scowl grows heavier as he says, ‘But we can do this.’

‘How?’ Hoseok demands, ‘We obliterate all of Axudar? Because that seems to be the only singular way of doing so-‘

‘No,’ Namjoon says firmly, ‘Prat’tna said that the heart of the issue was in the depths of a Yisheng ship buried in the core of Kaitūtei. He said that a mimicry of the Great Council that once served Jimin and his sister, and others like them in the past, is controlling and pushing Ndica’s work.’

Namjoon pauses, ‘His sister is there.’

‘We know,’ Hoseok sighs out, leaning back a little as the tram picks up speed, going up an incline.

‘And what does Jimin say about that?’

‘Well, we didn’t know about the whole not being able to go inside Menigišiti part of this Axudarian narrative,’ Hoseok scowls, ‘But Jimin felt that the threat posed over both Yoongi and Jungkook would be too high- also, it’s highly likely that Jimin would not be welcome at all.’

Namjoon nods to that.

‘We will need to discuss this as a team.’ Yoongi says quietly, ‘With Jimin. With Sk’jin, Jungkook.’

‘And me!’ is a warbled addition. ‘I’ll be better soon.’

‘Of course buggy.’

The tram stops at a landing, a door partially open at the end.

The doorway opens into a short tunnel before turning and opening up into a massive and extended hangar. This was not a landing hangar, but rather a storage one, with massive stacks of cargo freights lining up high and long. There’s a lot of commotion, some sort of construction going on. The moment they clear out of the cargo stacks, Hoseok finds a wide and open view of Cuab-Ds. Cuab-D2 was massive. The connecting bridge that held the prison-ship to Cuab was shattered- most of the debris from this massive construct was what littered this overall region. There are a few bright emergency Atmoshield bubbles extending over certain sections, with repair-bots and maintenance-bots crawling all over the area. A few Beings were running about, operating machinery as they hurried to secure the area as best they could. Hoseok concentrates and spots the GI here and there.

They don’t stop until they make it about halfway, a makeshift sort of resting spot/medical center set up inside an empty cargo freight. The GI stood there as well, a few moving along quietly and administering medical aid.

Towards the edge of this makeshift encampment, Hoseok finds the Beings they were looking for. Jn’young, the Khol’isa has his arm covered in tissue-plast, the side of his face shiny with serum. He looks tired as well, his knuckles bruised, the cut on his lip semi-healed. He mainly looks angry that he was in that state- something that Sk’jin would definitely display. He’s eyeing the GI warily, but he doesn’t comment.

Hoseok nudges Namjoon and nods subtly towards the Khol’isa. Namjoon gives him a small nod in return. Hoseok doesn’t see Ilya anywhere just yet.

Jn’young catches sight of them almost immediately. He stands carefully, studying them openly.

‘Jn’yong,’ Hoseok greets the Khol’isa. ‘This is-‘

‘We spoke,’ he announces without preamble, eyes narrowing a little as he studies Namjoon.

‘Namjoon?’
Namjoon stops to a stand before the Khol’isa, ‘We did.’
‘You rescued us,’ Jn’young says bluntly. ‘Potentially as a side-effect of rescuing your team. We are grateful.’

Namjoon only hesitates for a moment before he replies, ‘I am sorry we did not get here sooner.’
Jn’young just shakes his head a little in response.
‘Where’s Ilya?’ Hoseok inquires.
‘Not too far,’ Jn’young looks around, jumping a little as the GI move in unison through the crowd to find the Ožkan. ‘You said there were things that needed to be discussed?’
‘Yes.’ Namjoon nods, ‘We need to leave as soon as possible.’
Jn’young frowns at that.
‘What is your reasoning?’
‘The group of Beings who have infiltrated and attempted to overthrow your network work for Axudar.’
Jn’young’s expression is stone-cold.
‘What is your evidence?’ he asks evenly.
‘Camil attempted to kill both Jaen and E’nid,’ Hoseok tells him at once, ‘Jaen was shot, she’s being taken care of right now. E’nid is with her. You can communicate with her if you wish.’
He hands Jn’young the short-radio device.
The Khol’isa snaps it up at once before walking away, speaking into the device in a low voice.
Hoseok finds an overturned OrTank and sits on it.
‘Sk’jin just woke up,’ Yoongi says quietly. ‘But he’s gone back to sleep again- or at least, uh, knocked out.’
‘Jimin?’
‘Still asleep.’
‘Jungkook?’
‘Asleep.’
‘Yoongi you should rest. Please get some sleep- we’ll figure things out,’ Namjoon tells him.
‘Okay.’

Hoseok rolls his eyes and Namjoon grins.
Hoseok spies Jn’young approaching them, Ilya limping next to him. The Khol’isa is still saying something, Ilya nodding as he listens, a stony frown on his face.
‘They’re here.’
‘How is he almost like Sk’jin’s son?’ Namjoon asks, watching the two approach them before standing up properly.
‘He was a child before Sk’jin was trapped in that planet,’ Hoseok explains, ‘He was continued to be raised in Sk’jin’s network even after a majority of them- he later took over, after Sk’jin’s… successor? Died.’

Namjoon nods thoughtfully to that. ‘How was Sk’jin’s reaction?’
Hoseok sighs out, ‘What do you think?’
Jn’young and Ilya approach them close enough for them to stop talking. Hoseok gives them both a short smile while Namjoon turns to face them. Ilya looks at him with wide eyes- a spark of recognition, of confusion in his gaze.
‘I’m Namjoon,’ he introduces himself, ‘We spoke, albeit briefly.’
Ilya nods to that, ‘You said there was something important that needed discussing.’
‘There are several matters at hand that do need to be discussed and looked into thoroughly,’ Namjoon explains, ‘But first and foremost, we need to leave this region as quickly as possible.’
‘What are your reasons?’
‘The perpetrators of this mess are involved with Axudar, with what they call the Great Council in Kaitūtei- whatever they were attempting to do, it was done in collaboration with Axudar,’ Namjoon explains. ‘I don’t know if, or when, Axudar would be coming here, if at all, but it is very likely that they would have reported Jimin’s presence here.’
‘I overhead them speaking,’ Hoseok adds, ‘While I was with Jaen and E’nid, and we uncovered
Camil’s involvement, I was able to use his Comm Device to listen in on their conversations. Apparently they had heard nothing from Axudar since the last time they communicated, but only said that they would definitely be arriving here.’

‘If you want to secure your network, your crew, we need to leave now,’ Namjoon urges, ‘I do not know what forces they would bring- what they might try to do, but we need to leave this region.’

‘Where do we go from here then?’ Ilya inquires, still making no move or suggestion that indicated he would be taking Namjoon’s advise.

‘Back to Māho-5 for now,’ Namjoon explains, ‘While there are other perpetrators there, the one you call Evdos, and the Deputy Fanger- I had some of the GI sent out to take care of them,’ Namjoon informs them.

There’s a twitch in Jn’young’s brow.

‘Maho-5 should at least provide us with some temporary safety, and time to repair, plan further ahead,’ Namjoon explains quickly, ‘But for now, I need you to send out the orders to clear up the debris outside, enough for us to warp safely- your people are already setting up a way to install a new communications network and distribute new Comm Devices.’

Ilya doesn’t say anything, clearly thinking through what Namjoon has said. Then he gives a short nod before turning to Jn’young.

‘The ship is armed with short-range canon, lets clear up the area to leave.’

‘It would take about an hour,’ Jn’young says more to Namjoon than Ilya.

‘The GI will help- please give them the coordinates and passcodes to access the weaponry aboard this ship,’ Namjoon indicates to one of the GI who was standing not too far from Ilya. Both of them jump a little, not having seen the GI there.

‘We will get ready to leave in an hour,’ Ilya declares as he holds up the short-radio, ‘All crew members who are capable report back to your Bridges, everyone else make sure we are secured. Shut down areas that are unstable and or not ready for warp- all injured report to E’nid.’

The crew is effective. They move immediately, taking action as the more capable ones help the more injured ones. The most capable ones remain to seal entryways and secure the compromised storage hangar.

‘What about Cuab?’ Hoseok nods towards the massive prison.

‘There’s nothing we can do for now,’ Jn’young says in a neutral tone. ‘They were already in league with Axudar. I saw to it that they would not speak again.’

The gleaming red hue of his eyes are icy and cold, a dismissive attitude that would make most shiver.

‘I also think you will like to know that among others, Camil has been restrained and contained,’ Hoseok tells them, ‘We will need to interrogate him.’

A sour look overtakes Ilya’s features briefly before he nods.

‘Once we are settled and ready to leave,’ he states.

Namjoon nods before adding, ‘To get the truth from him, I would like to suggest we ask Jimin to interrogate him.’

Hoseok eyes Namjoon carefully.

‘That sounds like a good idea,’ Jn’young says in agreement. ‘Where is he?’

‘He was in the Transporter Hangars when the Atmoshields were deactivated,’ Namjoon says before adding, ‘As well as Sk’jin.’

Ilya’s expression falters, eyes wide and pupils shaking, ‘Is-‘

‘He’s all right,’ Hoseok quickly explains. ‘He was found in time- he’s resting.’

Ilya breathes in, closing his eyes briefly before nodding in thanks.

‘E’nid tells me that she’s going to be able to set up a new network within the hour before we take off,’ Jn’young adds.

‘How are they all here?’ Ilya asks, nodding at the GI.

Oh right, Hoseok has temporarily forgotten that Ilya had nearly been assassinated by one of the GI.

‘They were looking for Jimin,’ Namjoon explains, ‘They want to go back home.’
Ilya looks puzzled at this, as does Jn’young.
‘Don’t the GI live, or well, report back to Šerdesas?’ Jn’young asks hesitantly.
‘The GLA Court wants to have them, and every other egg, New Born, whatever you want to call them, destroyed,’ Namjoon states bluntly, ‘Taking them into Menigišiti and protecting them there, away from the GLA, is our plan.’
Ilya and Jn’young glance at each other briefly before Ilya says, ‘We will first begin the process to leave, and then, when Jimin has regained consciousness and his strength, we shall carry out interrogation. And I believe it would be prudent, to then come up with a plan to help the GI, as well as the New Borns.’
Namjoon pauses a moment before he nods.
Ilya and Jn’young walk away, and Namjoon turns to face Hoseok.
‘That went smoother than I anticipated,’ Namjoon breathes out slowly.
‘I believe Ilya is just trying his best to do what he thinks is right.’
‘Doing what he thinks is right, versus what is right, and whether anything is right are completely different things,’ Namjoon rubs at his neck as though massaging out some ache though Hoseok knows it’s a practiced moved carried out by most Kutsoglerin to integrate themselves into most society and not be mistaken for Androids or cyborgs.
‘What do we do now?’ Hoseok asks.
‘We help out.’ Namjoon explains. ‘We need to get out of here as quickly as we can.’
They don’t take an hour- in fact everything is cleared up and set-up by 30 minutes. É’nid had set up a new network, and was halfway through distributing new Comm Devices for everyone. A majority of the debris was cleared just enough for them to pass through. The Atmoshield around the prison-ship is brought back and reinforced by Namjoon, Jn’young, and a few others in the Second Bridge.
Hoseok, Ilya, the GI in Māho, and Yoongi manage to create and pass a whole new GLA approved trajectory for the prison-ship, so that their return would not be questioned or raise flags. The GI also report back to Namjoon that after following the network Camil had used to communicate with Evdos, they were able to track all of his crones in Māho and rounded them up, including Deputy Fanger.
Hoseok and Namjoon make their way downwards back to the Transporter Hangars after they hit warp.
‘I won’t feel safe unless we’re somehow on the move,’ Hoseok confesses to Namjoon. The Kutsoglerin nods in agreement.
They also left so that Ilya could address his network. There was a lot to be discussed, a lot to explain; and Namjoon and Hoseok had excused themselves mostly out of respect, but also because they didn’t exactly have all the time in the Universe either. It would take 3 hours to get back to Māho, and they would need to reform a lot of their ideas, plans, and ultimately, establish their main objective for this mission. Ilya asks them to tell him when Sk’jin wakes up.
Apparently Taeh’yung had somehow, in a weird woozy drugged state, had managed to make his way down to the Hangars.
Hoseok had thought about taking down the others food, but Namjoon had said it wouldn’t be necessary, as they had food in stock aboard the GI ship.
It’s an absolutely stunning ship- sleek and chrome, but with a minimal understated design. The Laikin is in a sorry state next to it, its hangar gates gaping wide and covered in black marks indicating something had ignited and exploded there.
Hoseok doesn’t see the GI in here. Either they were all about the prison-ship, helping where they were designated, or hidden somewhere Hoseok can’t see. Namjoon leads them inwards, and Hoseok spies a gently lit Medical Bay towards the side of the living lounge area.
‘Do you plan on using this ship from now on?’ Hoseok asks, studying the place. This was much much larger than the Laikin, and probably twice as large as the Užkulias as well.
‘Yeah,’ Namjoon nods, ‘It’s able to enter Axudar without detection, and-’ Namjoon stops, looking around with an irritated scowl, ‘Did you know that Yisheng ships have a faster warp core?’
‘Oh- oh?’ Hoseok does a double take at the Kutsoglerin. ‘But-‘
‘Yeah! It’s approximately 30% faster than the Standard,’ Namjoon continues walking ahead, ‘It’s how the GI move around so quickly.’
‘Does Yoongi know?’
‘Maybe,’ Namjoon says darkly, ‘Or maybe it just slipped his mind.’
Hoseok snorts at that. That sounded plausible.
They quietly approach the Medical Bay, looking inside to find an amusing but heartwarming scene.

Jungkook is curled up near Sk’jin’s feet, a small pipe still stuck into the crook of his elbow connecting to a clear compressor still halfway filled over his head. He’s resting his head on Sk’jin’s thighs, who was completely knocked out. The bruises on his skin are painful to look at. Taeh’yung is stretched out over both Medical Beds, his feet propped up near Jimin’s torso, his upper body resting at what could only be an awkward angle on Sk’jin’s Bed, one hand resting on Jungkook’s hair.
Yoongi is there too, sitting on a low comfortable looking chair by Jimin’s Bed. It looks like he pulled it out from the lounge area. There’s also the remains of a meal next to him.
To Hoseok’s surprise, Yoongi seemed to have actually taken their word and taken care of himself. He also appeared showered and washed, wearing clothes Hoseok has never seen before, in purplish hues.
‘The moment he woke up, he just stumbled there,’ Yoongi tells them without preamble, pointing at Jungkook. ‘He’s all right, he’s on a very high dosage of medication- just sleeping it off I guess.’
‘And buggy?’ Hoseok walks over to adjust the lanky Zhak’gri. This angle was surely terrible for his back. Or maybe he was actually comfortable?
Yoongi actually snorts.
‘He stormed in- all flashing lights and shit,’ Yoongi sighs as he points at the ceiling above them where the metal has rippled in triangular patterns, ‘I thought he would break me in half.’
Hoseok laughs at that.
‘What about you?’
Yoongi just shrugs in response before turning to address Namjoon.
‘So- wanna start with what happened when you got kidnapped?’
Namjoon snorts, walking over to the wall and pulling down a bench. Hoseok walks over to Yoongi and sits on the floor next to him, leaning back on his chair. He’s surprised when Yoongi squeezes his shoulders, albeit briefly.

Taeh’yung lets out a funny snoring snort, making them all pause, glancing over at the Kutsoglerin. Taeh’yung sits up at an odd angle, his eyes still hazy but he was no longer acting out aggressively. Instead he smacks his lips a few times, before turning over and snuggling into Jimin’s Bed, sandwiching himself into the space there.
Namjoon just grins, sitting back and says, ‘You guys go first and tell me what happened in Amme’s ship.’

* *

When Jimin wakes up, he’s in a world of muted pain.
What he remembers most keenly is the cold, the overwhelming crushing force pushing through
him, the glare of the orange Atmoshield, and Yoongi’s smile.
His throat feels incredibly dry and scratched.
He tries to speak, to alert someone that he’s awake.
Someone appears before him- he’s not sure who it is, but he can’t tell who it is.
Something is pressed against his lips and Jimin realizes a little late that he’s being given water. In
his eagerness to drink, he coughs and splutters, his body lurching forward in a whirlwind of
dizziness and pain. His throat feels better, but the pain has settled into his lungs now.
Feeling like he couldn’t quite breathe in enough air, Jimin heaves.
He can’t see- everything glares at him with too much brightness. His vision jumps in sharp glaring
colours.
Then everything goes black again, just the faint electric hum of the lamp next to the bed. The room
is hazy, but he can tell that it’s still dark out; it wasn’t raining anymore though. The lights of the
room are enough to illuminate the familiar shapes. Exhaling, Jimin turns on the bed, reaching out
to the space next to him, his hand finding-
Jimin opens his eyes to find Sk’jin watching him from his own Bed.
Sk’jin looks battered, but he seemed awake. At least much more than Jimin himself.
‘Wh-what-’
‘What happened?’ Sk’jin completes his question, voice barely audible, ‘A shit load.’
Blinking hard, Jimin breathes in and out in a deliberate manner. The ringing in his ears that he
hadn’t noticed before was quieting slowly. He opens his eyes once they’re faded away. The lights
are incredibly soft, the opening past the doorway nearly entirely dim, but Jimin can just about
point out floor lights.
He doesn’t hear anything- just a familiar hum of being inside a ship. The Medical Bay did not look
familiar- neither like the one in the Laikin, or the Užkul, or the prison-ship.
‘Where are we?’ Jimin sounds weak even to himself. What had happened to him? This was such a
strange feeling.
‘We’re back in Māho,’ Sk’jin tells him in a strained coarse voice, ‘Finally getting that fucking UV
bed, can you believe it?’
‘What happened-’
But a shudder of pain overtakes Jimin- it’s a combination of strange cramps, hunger, and nausea.
‘Oh Spaces, is that what I sounded like?’ Sk’jin is saying.
Jimin grips at the sheets around him, exhaling noisily.
‘Hey, at least try to sound a bit sexy-’
Jimin can’t help but laugh.
Jimin gingerly rolls his shoulders, finding that his pain was ebbing away the more he gained
clarity.
‘We also have a new ship,’ Sk’jin continues, as though Jimin was not in the midst of pain, ‘The GI
ship- or a Yisheng ship, one of them.’
‘What-’ Jimin turns his head over to look at the Khol’isa.
‘It’s best to just let Namjoon explain it I guess,’ Sk’jin sighs before he sits up carefully. ‘We have
shitty luck.’
Jimin laughs- more like wheezes.
‘No I mean it- especially the two of us- fuck, I don’t think anyone else has been flung out into
space like this.’
‘That’s what happened?’ Jimin asks breathlessly.
‘Yeah- the GI saved our asses,’ Sk’jin turns a little on the Bed, facing Jimin now.
Jimin makes to sit up but he can’t, his mind is all over the place- did Sk’jin just mention the GI?
‘Oh don’t be so dramatic,’ Sk’jin croaks, ‘The more you move, the better you’ll feel.’
Jimin can’t help but laugh again. Sk’jin is posing on the bed with the attitude of the healthiest
Being in the Universe.
‘You look like shit!’
‘Excuse you!’ Sk’jin gasps out, ‘Is that how a prince behaves?’
Jimin laughs even more, his body shaking at Sk’jin’s indignation. But it does work, moving does make him feel better. After a few long pain riddled minutes, Jimin manages to sit up.

‘I feel sticky,’ he declares with a croak. His hands feel weirdly numb and thick.

Sk’jin laughs, ‘Yeah I do too. I tried to get up to wash up at least, nearly collapsed. Kookie nearly cried.’

‘He’s okay?’ Jimin asks at once.

‘They’re all okay,’ Sk’jin tells him soothingly. ‘Taeh’yung and Jungkook went to wash up I think- can’t say if it’s separately or together.’

‘What about Yoongi?’

‘Who do you think gave you your new pair of lungs!’

Jimin doesn’t know what to think of what Sk’jin’s just said, but his expression must have been enough because Sk’jin hastily says, ‘Fuck, he’s fine, that idiot of a Human is fine. He only recently left the Bay like 30 minutes ago with Hoseok- something about a new model of blasters and weight issues.’

‘Why wouldn’t you say that?’ Jimin asks weakly.

‘Comedy,’ Sk’jin says darkly.

‘When—when did you wake up?’ Jimin hopes he’ll get a straightforward reply.

‘About 2 hours ago?’ Sk’jin shrugs, ‘Threw up for like, 15 minutes.’

Jimin wheezes, pain shooting down his body and ebbing away as quickly as it came. Something finally registers in his mind.

‘Namjoon?’

‘Yeah, in all his metal glory,’ Sk’jin rolls his eyes, ‘God, what a tale- I’ll leave that for him to narrate.’

There’s a sad expression in Sk’jin’s eyes as he says so, not quite looking him in the eye.

He’s finally able to sit up, goaded? Encouraged? By Sk’jin from his own Bed.

Clearing his throat, Jimin asks: ‘So. What—what’s next?’

‘We’ll be leaving soon, according to what Hoseok said.’ Sk’jin replies, watching Jimin struggle with amusement.

‘With Ilya?’ Jimin tries to straw together everything.

‘I don’t know what they’re planning,’ Sk’jin tells him honestly. ‘Ilya is…he’s facing something everyone in a pirating network fears the most. It’s something I’ve never experienced. So I…I don’t know.’

‘What happened?’

‘Camil, our excellent green haired companion, turns out is a low-life scum who works for Axudar,’ Sk’jin scowls, ‘He was betraying Ilya for sols it would seem, by how thorough he had managed to turn over the network- Camil, our friends Evdos and Fanger too by the way- not to mention around a thousand other crew? I don’t even know how many outside the ship’s current population are sided with Camil.’

Jimin’s mind is spinning.

‘With Axudar?’

Sk’jin nods, ‘They’re contained for interrogation right now.’ He hesitates for a moment, ‘They want you to talk to them, get answers.’

Jimin blinks a few times, hands gripping into careful fists as he flexes his digits.

‘How many would they like me to interrogate?’

‘You’re not surprised?’

‘No,’ Jimin replies honestly, ‘I would like to interrogate them.’

‘Namjoon says it’s very likely that Axudar has been notified about us- about you,’ Sk’jin continues, ‘It’s why we left Cuab so quickly.’

Jimin nods to that in understanding.

But I know that Namjoon has a lot to say to you…” he trails off for a moment, ‘I would summarize for you. Save you Namjoon’s flare for dramatic narratives.’

Jimin would roll his eyes if he could.
‘But…’
‘But what?’
Sk’jin looks up and lets out a small shriek.
Yoongi was at the doorway, his hair a little awry as though he had run here. They hadn’t heard him approach.
‘You shitty Human-’ Sk’jin curses.
Yoongi just quirks an eyebrow at Sk’jin before making his way to Jimin, an expression of pure relief on his face.
‘Ugh, my eyes.’ Sk’jin mumbles.
Jimin wants to hold his arms up, welcome Yoongi to him and hold him close. But his arms fail him, only his body lurching forward awkwardly. But it’s all right, because Yoongi’s arms are around him in an instance.
But Jimin is only momentarily relieved before pain shoots across his body.
Yoongi is apologizing as Jimin lets out a strangled gasp of pain, stammering words as Jimin tries to shake it off, teeth gritting down hard at the way his skin felt electric. Yoongi’s touch was always electric- but in a good way; this time it felt painful and uncomfortable.
‘Fuck, forgot to tell you that any added contact tends to feel like shit,’ Sk’jin remarks. ‘Nearly punched Taeh’yung when he hugged me too.’
Jimin hates it, hates the way Yoongi’s hands are hovering- he just wanted to hold him properly. But now a whole series of pain hits him, new senses overwhelming his body.
‘Sunshine I’m so sorry-’ Yoongi probably hasn’t even heard Sk’jin, crouched over in a weird angle over Jimin. It’s a combination of pain, laughter, and joy that makes Jimin reach out for the Human. He almost jerks away, afraid of causing Jimin pain.
‘You don’t hurt me,’ Jimin whispers to him. With some difficulty, he’s able to tug Yoongi closer just a little.
Taking the hint, Yoongi carefully climbs onto the side of the bed, allowing Jimin to lean on him, twitching with the way his body responded in spasms of pain. Yoongi stays still as Jimin adjusts himself against the Human, not daring to move an inch himself in fear of hurting Jimin.
‘Disgusting,’ is Sk’jin’s comment.
Jimin laughs, leaning back against Yoongi who carefully wraps his arm around Jimin’s back to support him up against his chest. From this angle, Jimin is able to study the soft but coarse fibered fabric of whatever it was that Yoongi was wearing. It felt soothing- the colour was wonderfully soothing.
‘This is a nice colour on you,’ Jimin tells Yoongi, exhaling and willing himself to let the pain just ebb away.
‘You didn’t even get a chance to look at me,’ Yoongi laughs.
‘I saw enough,’ Jimin lifts his head just a little to look around at Yoongi.
He looks exhausted; sallow. But there’s definitely a bit more energy to him, the hollow of his cheeks not too pronounced. And the look in his eyes still the same.
‘Spaces, please no making out,’ Sk’jin pleads.
Yoongi kisses his forehead above his eyebrow loudly. Sk’jin makes retching sounds while Jimin laughs, wincing a little at the pain from the contact. Yoongi’s arms fully wrap around him and relief blossoms through him.
‘You’ll be in pain for a while,’ Yoongi says almost apologetically, ‘Sensory overload- especially with things like touch- light too.’
‘Okay,’ Jimin feels better as his body adjusts to the new sensations outside of his clothes on his skin, and the Bed under him. He flexes his toes, pulling up his legs a little bit more before lowering them again.
‘So,’ Sk’jin says loudly. ‘What news from beyond the scene?’
Yoongi chuckles quietly, the sound soothing.
‘The prison-ship will require some intense repairs,’ Yoongi tells them, ‘Not just external damage- but in order to track and locate whatever Camil and the others have been incorporating into Ilya’s
network to benefit Axudar."

‘Is it bad,’ Sk’jin asks quietly.

‘It’s…we still don’t know what sort of damage he’s caused,’ Yoongi says hesitantly before continuing with some frustration, ‘Obviously time is of the essence here and—’

There’s hurried steps, the space outside lighting up a bit more and two figures approach them, coming into focus as Jimin blinks hard a few times.

‘Jimin!’ Namjoon and Hoseok are rushing towards them.

Yoongi scowls, grip around Jimin tightening just a little bit more.

‘Oh it’s like that,’ Sk’jin makes an amused face.

But before Namjoon or Hoseok can say anything, and before Yoongi tries to intervene, Jimin begins.

‘I’ll go in and interrogate the prisoners,’ Jimin states clearly, ‘Have they been approached before this?’

Yoongi exhales with annoyance.

‘No one has gone in to talk to them,’ Hoseok tells him. ‘Also I think it’s so that they don’t accidentally murder them.’

‘Accidentally,’ Sk’jin parrots with a snort.

‘He just woke up after being flung out into space,’ Yoongi says evenly, ‘At the very least—’

‘No I can do this,’ Jimin squeezes Yoongi’s arm, ‘I promise you- if I couldn’t do it, I would say so.’

Yoongi nods, looking down at Jimin’s hand.

‘Well, that was faster than I expected,’ Sk’jin groans, moving to dangle his legs over the bed.

Hoseok is quick to assist him.

‘Let me grab you both strollers,’ Namjoon quickly makes his way to the side of the Bay.

‘Are you sure?’ Yoongi asks quietly.

‘I am,’ Jimin squeezes his hand again, ‘I need to know and- and I think it is best, that we leave as quickly as we can.’

If Axudar knew that Jimin was with Ilya, it was without a doubt, that they would definitely try to come after him- or at the very least, try and harm him and the others around him. Jimin cannot risk that from happening. But he also needs to know more.

Sk’jin groans as he sits on the stroller, face pale with the effort.

Yoongi half carries Jimin to his stroller, uselessly piling on the folded blanket over his legs as Jimin takes a moment (alongside Sk’jin) to get used to his body moving.

‘Wish I had someone that carried me like that too,’ Sk’jin mumbles while Hoseok laughs and says, ‘You literally told me you didn’t want my help!’

Sk’jin chooses to ignore that and with a tap on the arm-rest of the stroller, floats away towards the doorway. Obviously Sk’jin had a bit more time to recover.

Jimin looks down at his arm-rest as well, trying to figure out the controls.

‘Where are Taeh’yung and Kookie?’ Namjoon asks.

‘Shower I think- and maybe they fell asleep again?’ Sk’jin muses, looking around outside with interest, ‘This is a pretty fancy set-up, fuck those Yishengs, I swear.’

‘I got you,’ Yoongi says quietly behind him, his stroller moving forward gently.

Jimin leans back, body coiling in momentary discomfort and a displaced heaviness settling over him.

It takes almost 15 minutes just to get to where Camil and the almost thousand others were being kept. It was quite convenient that they had prison cells to start off with.

This block of the cells which previously housed actual inmates, as well as the fake inmates that had welcomed Ilya’s returning crew from Māho’s containment facilities was emptied out and filled with a new sort of prisoner. The GI are here too, standing guard over the massive space. The ever changing surveillance feed shows the new inmates in varying degrees of fear, frustration, resignation, guilty pleas, and injury. A few were still in Beds, while some were nursing minor injuries. Namjoon and Hoseok tell him all of this as they further descend and Jimin is pushed out
The cyborgs that are stationed here have been decommissioned, seeing as their main function had been corrupted, allowing Camil to use them as he chose. Their seats are vacated, and instead Ilya and Jn’young are there, clearly waiting for them.

‘It’s good to see you awake,’ Ilya greets him when he’s pushed in, ‘I’m sorry to ask this of you so soon.’

‘I understand,’ Jimin replies at once, ‘I don’t want to waste time, and I want the answers myself. There is always time to rest later.’

Ilya just sighs out, nodding slowly. He smiles at Sk’jin when he’s pushed in as well.

‘Feeling better?’

‘Oh please, I used to do space-walks for fun before,’ Sk’jin replies blithely before addressing Jn’young, ‘Hey pupa, feeling better?’

Jn’young gives Sk’jin a flat look before turning in his seat to look back at the surveillance feed.

‘Camil is at cell 177-B,’ Ilya tells him.

‘Is there any question you want me to ask him directly?’ Jimin rolls his shoulders a little, sitting up straight and slightly stretching his back. His pain is minimal, and Jimin takes it as a good sign. Ilya hands him a Comm Device in reply. Jimin takes it and attaches it to his ear.

‘I’ll go with you,’ Yoongi says it more like a question.

Jimin shakes his head, ‘It’ll be better if I speak to him alone.’

Namjoon nods in agreement to this while Jn’young also gives his approval before adding, ‘Besides, Camil’s all tied up.’

Yoongi still goes with him all the way down the remaining tower, but he remains inside the lift. He presses a soft kiss on the top of his head, before tilting him back and kissing his forehead. Warmth spreads throughout his body from the spot.

‘I’ll be out here if you need me.’

Jimin floats ahead on the stroller. He doesn’t see any of the GI himself, but he’s sure that they’re there. He wants the full account of what happened, but he’s sure he’ll get that later. Sk’jin did say that there were things Namjoon wanted to tell him specifically and he can guess what it could potentially be.

The cells are entirely open to one side, showing the new prisoners inside but shielded by a powerful barrier. They all gawk at him, and Jimin senses fear, hostility, and paranoia radiating off of them. But none of them say a word. How they were able to hide their true intentions aboard such a highly secure and regulated network, with Beings who were constantly in the look out was a formidable and worrisome notion.

He stops at the cell numbered at 177-B. The protective barrier has been lifted already, so Jimin easily glides in. At the very center of the very square space, Camil is tied up on his Medical Bed. He’s still in the process of recovery. The Medical Bed lowers, and Camil stirs, eyes opening in woozy confusion. He spots Jimin a few seconds later just as Jimin parks himself at the side of the bed, meeting him at an eye level. Camil flinches when he recognizes him.

‘I have no excuse,’ Camil says at once before he can get a word in himself, ‘I had no choice.’

Jimin sits up a little straighter, adjusting the blanket Yoongi had put around his legs. He exhales slowly, the command of truth ready to be bestowed on the tip of his tongue.

‘You most certainly don’t.’
There’s nothing that distinguishes when Jimin uses his, frankly, strange abilities. Taeh’yung exuded physical power; power that distorted mass and space and possibly even time. It was visible, it could be felt, and there was a real wildness to it that immediately struck fear into anyone who saw it.

Sk’jin’s eyes flared red- the air turns hazy, and you’re impossibly relaxed. Or you’re constricted, unable to look away as everything pulsed red around you.

Hoseok was probably the most physically apparent, considering he changed every physical aspect of himself, sometimes no longer distinguishable from the Being he had shifted into.

But with Jimin there’s nothing to be seen.

The only reaction came from the Being he was addressing.

Camil relaxes instantly. His somewhat frantic gaze, his pulse, his breathing; they all even out. According to the statistics from the Bed running continuous readings on him, it was almost as though he was asleep.

‘That’s it?’ Jn’young asks, looking somewhat put-off.

Both Namjoon and Sk’jin snort.

‘Explain your connection to Axudar, and what you do on their behalf.’

Jn’young looks very unimpressed, giving them all a look as though asking again ‘is that it?’.

Hoseok leans in a little more, listening intently.

‘I was first approached 28 sols ago,’ Camil replies, eyes half closed, his words coming out just a little bit slurred but still understandable, ‘I was attending a deal on Ilya’s behalf in Šerdesas when I was arrested. I assumed it was because of my fake identity of a low-level pirate, and that I had caught some bad-luck as a random patrol had taken me. However, I was taken up to the Yisheng Headquarters instead, and I was in a meeting with Yisheng Ndica, and Yisheng Tlun’hla.’

‘28 sols,’ Ilya says quietly.

Sk’jin quietly reaches over, placing his hand over Ilya’s.

‘Camil had been arrested briefly- but we were able to bail him out of prison within a few weeks.’ He adds.

‘They told me that I was chosen to participate and help the Yishengs in their quest to finally make peace across the whole Known Universe. That Ilya’s network would be an important key, a channel, through which they would be able to facilitate this change. I told them I did not care for their actions. That if this were indeed something that could change the Universe for the better, why would they not implement it with the GLA or even the GIU.’

‘He’s smart,’ Hoseok sighs out, looking fatigued and sad. ‘Most pirates feel no obligation or debt towards Yishengs, they address and look at Yisheng with suspicion, unlike most other Beings.

‘What do you mean?’ Jn’yong asks.

‘This is what brought down the Venture Unit,’ Hoseok says evenly, his hands forming tight angry fists though his expression is anything but. ‘The Yishengs had a whole system working for them, of non-Yishengs, of Beings from all over the Known Universe who were in positions of power, authority, or influence.’

‘Like agents, officers, Directors, Chiefs-‘ Namjoon lists off, glancing over at Hoseok, ‘The Yishengs amassed and took advantage of the positively cultish-obsession and reverence most of the Known Universe had towards them and used that as a way to further their plans. Clearly, the Yishengs discovered your network, and believed that Camil would have been the best to approach.’

‘They simply wanted our help.’ Camil explains, ‘They could not enter or save Axudar they said, and wished for me to investigate on their behalf. I told them they had to make better lies, because the Yishengs are allowed anywhere, anytime; even non-GLA federations welcome them. And Axudar was the home System for Ndica. They dropped the act. Then they told me if I refused to do as they said, they would expose the network, expose my family, and have them all arrested by the Venture Unit.’

Ilya says.

‘They said I would only need to run them a small errand. And after I was done, I would be freed. I
did not trust their words- I would not. But I had no choice- I could not refuse.’
Namjoon recognizes this because Hoseok had lived through refusing this very choice given to
him.
Hoseok did what Camil could not.
‘I was warped and sent to Axudar. Ndica went with me, took me to Kaitūtei and we were greeted
and welcomed with so much splendor and joy. I could see all living Beings, alive and well, of all
ages – living happily in a unified system within this new world! Ndica had opened my eyes to a
new possibility of living! To a new hopeful way all of life could coexist, with no anger, no pain, no
fighting, no more hiding! But Ndica took me away, told me I refused this life, therefore I had no
claim to witness it. Instead he took me down. Away from the joy and unity. And I stood before the
Great Council.’
Namjoon stands up straighter, frowning deeply. He notices how Jimin’s expression changes but he
schools it quickly.
‘What did the Great Council say to you?’
‘They welcomed me, and asked me if would I complete my errand. I asked them what my errand
was. I didn’t know of any errands. Ndica did not tell me. They told me that my errand would be to
break the fates of the bound, the fates of those born in a ruthless cycle, misguided and lost, to bring
back the lost children, back under one heart. I said I didn’t–…I didn’t know?’
Camil sounds confused, his voice regaining some clarity. But Jimin sits up straighter, no other
action from him, and Camil slumps back.
‘What happened after that?’
‘They said that Ilya’s network would be able to bring to them all of these lost children. That they
would be able to set them free from their fates.’
‘Who were the Beings you spoke to?’
‘The Great Council.’
‘How many were there?’
‘I…it was bright. I could not see. But only 4 voices spoke to me- I felt that there were more.’
‘Will you show me?’
‘I don’t…’ Camil sounds confused but Jimin is already standing.
‘Jimin, I don’t think you should do this.’ Yoongi says immediately.
Namjoon catches sight of Yoongi hastening from his waiting spot towards Camil’s cell.
‘Jimin I don’t think you should-‘ Jn’young also adds hesitantly, sitting up straight.
But Jimin reaches forward, lightly touching Camil’s forehead.
It lasts less than a second and Jimin is recoiling, as though electrocuted.
Yoongi is there in a flash, pulling him back.
‘Are you hurt?’
‘No- it’s nothing I just-‘ Jimin looks confused, ‘I can’t see.’
‘What?’ Sk’jin gapes at the surveillance.
‘Just ask him questions for now,’ Namjoon says tensely, ‘Jimin.’
Jin mops, sitting back down again while Yoongi stands by.
‘What else did they say?’ Jimin sounds unsure, his expression uncertain.
‘They said they would give me time to think my answer through. And they let me go.’
‘That can’t be right,’ Jn’young frowns, ‘Beings who enter Axudar don’t just casually walk out –
even GLA officials visiting tend to undergo some level of…influence, so to speak. Especially if
you’re passing by Kaitūtei.’
‘Did they contact you?’
‘No- but when I wanted to find them again, they contacted me.’ Camil explains drowsily, ‘And I
knew I was ready.’
‘Why?’ Jimin sounds timid.
‘I was so tired,’ Camil hums, ‘I was so tired of…of how all of Life was doomed to a Continuum
that was so cruel, endless in repetition. I wanted to rest. I would see dreams, of Axudar- I would see
the unity, joy, tranquility and peacefulness of Axudar and my heart broke.’
‘Is that why you chose to- chose to obey the Great Council?’
‘I did not obey them- they did not force me to follow their law or authority- I chose this. Because I
wanted it.’

Sk’jin sighs, leaning back. Jn’young’s expression is grave.
‘I think it’s safe to say Camil was…for lack of a better word, brain-washed in the process of his
recruitment.’ Hoseok says calmly, ‘There are…few Beings in the Known Universe who are
capable of such persuasion. The Khol’isa are-‘
‘-not that powerful,’ both Sk’jin and Jn’young say in unison before Sk’jin explains, ‘We need
prolonged eye-contact, a trusting and weak mind, and mainly inhibitors. This is-…this is-‘
‘This is almost exactly like what Jimin can do,’ Hoseok says quietly next to Namjoon, ‘If the Red
Evil, or the Creveni or the Akramanese- whatever you want to call them, were able to stabilize
their creations by tying their fates to Jimin, what would Ndica be able to do with his sister?’
Hoseok exhales slowly, watching as Jimin asks a few more questions, ‘Prat’tna says that Tsirin is
there, and with what we all know, it’s highly possible that she’s being used by this Great Council to
be able to control Axudar to this level.’

Namjoon nods to that.

Hoseok opens his mouth to say something but he stops, looking down at his hands before he asks,
‘How many do you think they recruited like this? Beings who believed they made the choices they
did out of their own volition, out of…-out of what they believed was the truth?’

Sk’jin turns a little, eyeing them both with a sad expression in his eyes.
‘I don’t know,’ Namjoon replies honestly.
So many had worked to recruit officers and officials and Beings of every walk of life into Ndica’s
twisted vision for the Universe- so many had believed in it. But how many were truly in belief of
what they were told? And how many were like Camil.

It was terrifying to think about it. What the Yishengs did, or tried to do, all of that combined with
the destruction that came and followed the Akramanese/Red Evil – all of this was, in a way,
stopped 5 sols ago. However, what would happen with those who supported the Yishengs. Many
major officials and officers and Directors alike, or Beings in positions of power were exposed to be
a part of this network as a result of the Venture Unit’s purge- but how many still remained? And
how many were still trying to follow in on what Ndica, Tlun’hl’a, and other Yishengs before (and
Spaces forbid, after) them? Clearly Axudar was still attempting this by implementing Underverse
networks; they obviously struck gold by managing to get a hold of Ilya’s network.
This was another major issue that the Jury probably feared, and not knowing what to do, sent them
as scapegoats instead.

‘Did you inform Axudar that I was here?’
‘I did.’
‘What did they say?’
‘They said they would be ready to welcome you home.’
‘Were they prepared to come to Cuab-D2?’
‘Yes.’
‘Were you delivering your crew to Axudar?’
‘I was bringing them home. So that we could all live in peace and unison. And with Ilya’s network,
we would be able to branch out and connect us all.’
Jimin spends an additional hour interrogating Camil. He gets a full list of the Beings following Camil’s lead within Ilya’s network, as well as locations that were compromised within the safe-houses among the network’s hoard.

It’s with relief when Jimin is pushed out of the cell, leaving Camil to slumber again.

‘I think they’re using Tsirin to control Axudar,’ Jimin says at once, looking up around at Yoongi, ‘And I think Ndica meant to use her to fulfil his plans to cover the Known Universe in his will. As what the original Yisheng had wanted.’

Yoongi agrees to that, also knowing that that was exactly what the others were thinking too. When they heard of the possibility that Tsirin would still be alive, the likeliness of her being kept prisoner the same way Jimin had been kept, was definitely on everyone’s minds. This confirmed it.

‘I think I’ll be able to walk about now,’ Jimin says as they enter the lift. ‘It doesn’t hurt anymore.’

‘Yeah?’ Yoongi shuffles over to the side a little to look down at Jimin, ‘Maybe we can exchange places.’

Jimin laughs, taking his hands and kissing them. He looks up, his smile slipping just a little as his fingers entwine with his own.

‘Yoongi I-’ Jimin sighs out, stopping as the lift slows to a stop.

‘Later?’ Yoongi bends down swiftly, kissing Jimin’s hands in return. ‘We still need to sleep for uh, 28 hours.’

‘28?’ Jimin laughs, squeezing his hands before dropping them back to his lap as the doors open.

‘I think we deserve it,’ Yoongi smiles, walking back into the watch-tower room.

‘Hey,’ Namjoon smiles at them as they enter. ‘Feeling okay?’

‘Yeah, I’m okay,’ Ilya says as he walks towards him. ‘We uh- we have a lot to think about.’

‘Where do you plan on going?’ Ilya asks carefully, ‘You are more than welcome to join us, to recover and make sure you have all the information you need before you take the next step forward.’

Namjoon glances at Jimin before he replies, ‘We don’t want to endanger you-’

‘-what happened is hardly your fault-’ Ilya says firmly.

But Jimin shakes his head, ‘We can’t.’

‘We will be leaving Māho in a week,’ Ilya continues, ‘I have already begun contacting our posts and other branches. Some locations are completely overrun.’

‘What do you plan on doing?’ Ilya asks carefully, ‘You are more than welcome to join us, to recover and make sure you have all the information you need before you take the next step forward.’

Namjoon glances at Jimin before he replies, ‘We don’t want to endanger you-’

‘We can’t allow this to go on,’ Jn’young answers instead, ‘This is past trafficking- past what the Alliance were doing. We’ll put an end to what we can control.’

It sounds terrible- with no positive outcome. Challenging a belief so deeply indoctrinated within a Beings fundamental value or system at this scale- this was decades, centuries of conversion. It could not, would not be easy to undo.

Ilya nods to Jn’young’s words.

‘The damage is extensive,’ the Ožkan continues. ‘But we will do what we can. I will check our other infiltrators as well- see how we can possibly warn other networks.’

‘If it’s any comfort,’ Hoseok offers, ‘The Venture Unit would be quite willing to help, though for a
Ilya snorts, ‘Of course- we’re already housing a bit of interns, no doubt they’re raring to report back.’

Hoseok chuckles at that.

Sk’jin is quiet as they return back to the GI ship. He floats ahead of them, not quite paying attention to what was being said, but answering when called. Namjoon walks ahead to keep in pace with the Khol’isa, his voice occasionally carrying over as he talks to Sk’jin.

‘It’s funny seeing them not fight at every turn,’ Yoongi remarks to Jimin who blinks a few times before comprehending what Yoongi had said to him. He studies the two ahead of them while Hoseok snorts adding, ‘Give it a couple of days, I’m sure they’ll start fighting over some small non-issue again.’

‘Stop shit-talking me, I was thrown out into space,’ Sk’jin barks, not even turning to look at them. Namjoon on the other hand looks around, confused, clearly not possessing whatever ability Sk’jin had to sense the back-talk.

Jimin jabs Hoseok, stifling his laughter as Namjoon looks back a few times in confusion. Hoseok is covering his mouth with a hand, the other balancing himself on Jimin.

A while later, Hoseok jogs ahead to keep up with Sk’jin while Namjoon makes his way towards them.

‘We’ll be ready to leave soon,’ Namjoon sounds a little apologetic. He was probably discussing this with Sk’jin earlier, telling the Khol’isa what they had discussed when both Sk’jin and Jimin had been unconscious. ‘I’m ordering a number of the GI to stay here with Ilya, and the others to return to Lowet. Ilya says he can give them Transporters to return back to Lowet and other places.’

Jimin nods in understanding.

Namjoon gives him a brief look before turning to address Jimin again, ‘I uh, I met Prat’tna.’

Jimin does a double take, eyes widening before he schools his expression again.

‘Was it—was it really him?’

‘Um yeah, Yoongi and Hoseok say they’re called…regurgitated?’ Namjoon says carefully. ‘He um—’

‘-is he here?’ Jimin asks, voice filled with anticipation and badly repressed hope.

Namjoon can’t seem to help but look at Yoongi again but realization dawns on Jimin and he says, quietly, ‘Oh.’

‘He wanted me to tell you some things, and I guess, before we make any decisions of what to do next, we should all be in the same page about things.’ Namjoon says carefully.

Jimin nods, his hands in tight fists.

‘Uh,’ he begins, looking straight ahead, his jaw clenched. ‘Are there…are there more?’

Namjoon pauses a moment before he shakes his head, ‘It was just Prat’tna.’

Jimin studies him for a moment, and Namjoon looks away almost immediately.

‘I’m not too sure,’ Namjoon says hesitantly, ‘Prat’tna did say it was only him so far and uh— I met, one of the GI, he said his name was Dehin. He’s still in Lowet, he was uh, in a fight with Jungkook back in Grisial. So he’s uh, healing.’

‘Dehin?’ Jimin whispers, a smile on his face before it falls.

‘Yeah, Prat’tna called him that and…-well, I’m not sure how much he remembers, if he was exposed to the android-core or not…he did say that he had uh, dreams, I’m not sure how much of it is well—’ Namjoon looks at him helplessly.

But Yoongi knows what it means. Dehin had very recently been exposed to the android-core- his memories were resurfacing in a very abstract way.

‘He fought Jungkook?’ Jimin lets out a breathless wet chuckle, ‘Jungkookie is strong.’

Namjoon smiles at that, ‘Yeah he really is.’

Jungkook is awake by the time they get back. But he’s drowsy, a result of very strong medication and treatment he needed for his blood loss. He’s crouched by the doorway by the hangar, and he staggers upwards towards them. He first collides into Sk’jin, nearly tipping the Khol’isa backwards with a tight hug. Sk’jin is laughing, squishing the youngling’s face in his hands. Jungkook protests
but doesn’t move away immediately. Hoseok ruffles his hair as he walks past to get into the ship. Then Jungkook staggers towards them. Jimin stops and gets up, arms held up for the Vicitra who has unshed tears in his large eyes.

Yoongi and Namjoon both move fast enough to stop the two of them from crashing onto the ground. Jungkook has Jimin up in the air, his feet a good feet off the ground in his embrace. Yoongi worries, not sure if Jungkook was being too strong or forceful. But Jimin doesn’t seem to be in pain, just hugging the youngling back as fiercely.

Jungkook seems to sway a little, dropping Jimin who falls back against Yoongi’s chest, immediately secured.

‘You shouldn’t move around like that just yet,’ Namjoon grins at Jungkook who leans against him for balance. ‘Come on, I’ll carry you in?’

Jungkook beams brightly at that, face flushing slightly as he nods.

‘Namjoon’s new vow after getting back functional arms is to sweep Beings off of their feet,’ Sk’jin draws.

Namjoon barely staggers as Jungkook clambers onto his back, looking all too delighted at being higher up than everyone else. The youngling had grown a lot, but Namjoon was still taller by a bit. ‘I don’t think he’s carried Hoseok?’ Jimin laughs, taking Jungkook’s outstretched hand and swinging it at a strange height.

‘I wouldn’t mind,’ Hoseok chimes in.

Namjoon just rolls his eyes.

‘Good luck carrying us all,’ Sk’jin scoffs, ‘Some of us have dignity.’

‘I would never do such a thing,’ Namjoon laughs at Sk’jin who turns his nose up in the air in exaggeration. Jungkook’s feet kick a little, clearly delighted in having everyone up and awake, and also slightly woozy from medication.

Yoongi collapses Jimin’s stroller and follows them inwards. He returns it back to the Medical Bay and as he walks out finds Jungkook being lead away by Sk’jin while Namjoon and Jimin sit down in the kitchen area. There’s food on the table and Jimin is drinking steadily from a cup.

He says something to Namjoon who nods, sitting up a bit straighter as he retrieves his NaviLet. Jimin looks up, as though he knew Yoongi was there all along.

Yoongi gives him an encouraging smile.

Making his way upwards, Yoongi comes across Hoseok coming down.

‘Oh hey, is Namjoon downstairs?’

‘Yeah- uh, he’s talking with Jimin, I think to catch him up on things.’ Yoongi explains.

Hoseok stops.

‘Ah…well, I guess we uh-‘ Hoseok frowns, looking back up and down before saying, ‘I guess we just…find spare rooms?’

Snorting, Yoongi nods in agreement.

The long hallways are startlingly different from what they were used to. Hoseok tells him about the large motherships used occasionally by the Venture Unit, and also about their ever-moving old headquarters. Yoongi doesn’t have the heart to tell him that he knows each and every single ship Hoseok is telling him about, just nodding and listening. The ship was of course huge, but absolutely minute compared to the GIU motherships. They find Sk’jin standing in front of a large alcove with washers stacked up, nearly entirely naked except for a towel wrapped elegantly around him like some toga.

‘The Laikin is here right?’ the Khol’isa asks at once, ‘I need a new change of clothes.’

‘Yeah but uh, I don’t think you should be going around like that-‘ Hoseok begins.

‘Please,’ Sk’jin rolls his eyes, stuffing in his dirty laundry into the washers, ‘I’m a vision.’

Yoongi would agree normally but Sk’jin’s skin is splotched and bruised, and you couldn’t help but wince when you looked at him.

‘Your items are being brought up for you,’ a GI tells Sk’jin from behind him.

Sk’jin is so startled, his towel-toga nearly unravels at the sight of the GI. Even Hoseok jumps just a
little. Yoongi on the other hand, had already seen him approaching.

‘Ugh!’ the Khol’isa grunts, ‘It was annoying enough with that Human! Now there’s a million of you!’

‘They will be delivered to your rooms soon.’

It was still weird seeing them like this, after nearly being killed. Namjoon had explained that part of the story to him, but it still felt strange to Yoongi.

‘Ngfy’widan Hoseok, your quarters are right here,’ another voice behind them says. Hoseok doesn’t jump too much at this new voice. ‘Human Yoongi, this is yours.’

The new GI indicates to 2 doors they had walked past on their way to speak to Sk’jin.

‘Oh, thank you,’ Hoseok manages to get out.

Yoongi is not surprised to find that his room is basically a standard set-up for the GI. A bare space with a narrow table with softly glowing panels, a bench, and a uniform laid out on one side.

‘Wait,’ Hoseok frown, looking in over Yoongi’s shoulder. ‘Is there some sort of confusion?’

‘No,’ Yoongi smiles with a shrug, ‘I’m GI, this is what GI’s are used to. It’s our standard quarters.’

Hoseok frowns, looking at the table Yoongi has long used as a bed for as long as his memories of this life can go back.

‘That’s…’ Hoseok grimaces before looking at Yoongi, ‘You do know that that’s an autopsy bed right?’

It’s not too surprising when Hoseok points it out.

‘Come on, this isn’t right,’ Hoseok pulls Yoongi out of the room, ‘We can share.’

It makes Yoongi smile; touched that Hoseok would be offended on his behalf, be worried, on his behalf.

‘Or he can just use Jimin’s,’ Sk’jin pokes his head out of his doorway, giving Yoongi several exaggerated winks, ‘Why bother with separate rooms aye?’

Hand on one hip, Hoseok levels Sk’jin with an unimpressed look. But it does nothing to deter the Khol’isa, rather Sk’jin winks suggestively at Hoseok adding, ‘Or you could share mine Hoseokkie.’

Hoseok pretends to think about it before saying, ‘I don’t think you’re quite up to it just yet, maybe after you regain your strength.’

Sk’jin cackles, saluting Hoseok’s witty remark before disappearing through his doorway.

They discuss random inconsequential matters as Hoseok unpacks some of his belongings, rearranging his furniture and going around the space, inspecting air-vents and outlets.

‘It’s just a 500 strams difference?’

‘Yeah.’

‘What’s the point in making a new model?’

‘That’s what I was thinking.’

Sk’jin joins them later, showered and smelling strongly of freshly laundered clothes.

‘The GI are questionable but they have great taste in detergent!’

‘It’s the most effective in getting rid of blood and guts.’

Sk’jin does not appreciate the reasoning.

‘I’m starving, let’s go eat!’ he announces.

‘Is Taeh’yung still sleeping?’ Hoseok asks to no one in specific.

‘Yeah just checked in on them,’ Sk’jin replies, ‘Jungkook is with him too. They’re both knocked out.’

‘Getting better?’

‘Just a matter of the medication working,’ Sk’jin pauses before adding, ‘Will Taeh’yung recover fully?’

Both Hoseok and Sk’jin look at him.

‘I don’t know,’ Yoongi replies honestly, ‘I’ve only seen an anti-core being used once before on a Heladian. He made a full recovery after being administered with the corrective antidote.’

‘Taeh’yung isn’t exactly like most Living Beings,’ Sk’jin says slowly, ‘It’s possible if something were very wrong with him, he’d let us know, or he’d uh- well, show it?’
Hoseok snorts, ‘Neither of you were there when he first got around to consciousness, I thought I was going to end up being plastered all over the walls.’

‘We could ask the GI?’ Sk’jin asks hesitantly, ‘Maybe they have a uh, antidote thingy?’

‘We could,’ Hoseok nods, ‘If I can find one-! Fuck!’

A GI is standing by the doorway, a tray in their arms with bowls of some sort of soup.

‘How may I assist you?’ she asks.

‘Oh uh- well-’ Hoseok clutches at his chest weakly.

‘We believe that Taeh’yung the Zhak’gri was administered with some form of anti-core,’ Yoongi tells the GI, ‘It is possible that the anticore was not made for his species, so we do not know how to treat it. Could you run an analysis to check him for anti-core?’

Sk’jin and Hoseok squirm a little where they stand as the GI doesn’t say anything for a full 10 seconds before she replies, ‘Understood. Mission accepted.’

‘Spaces this is going to be really annoying to get used to,’ Sk’jin sighs before adding, ‘Again.’ Yoongi just pats him on the back.

‘That was the most insincere back-patting I have ever had the misfortune of experiencing.’

Downstairs is empty. Neither Namjoon or Jimin are at the dining table though their cups and other items are there. The Medical Bay furthest down the area is lit, however, and Yoongi makes his way there quietly as Hoseok takes a seat at the dining table and Sk’jin makes his way to the pantry at once.

The Medical Bay in here has been turned into a sort of temporary morgue. Yoongi knew that the bodies of the other GI who had died when they came in to control the chaos Camil had started were already removed and ready to be transported back to Lowet. But Namjoon had kept Prat’tna in this Medical Bay, mainly so that Jimin would be able to say his goodbye.

Carefully, not quite trusting himself to be sneaky anymore, Yoongi looks inside the Medical Bay. Namjoon is speaking, hand occasionally gesturing. Jimin is nodding, his expression sorrowful but there’s expectation- as though he knew all along. He’s looking down at the Megibīyan, tears still clinging to his skin. Jimin is gentle as he touches Prat’tna’s face.

Namjoon’s voice is low, and Yoongi can’t quite hear them but he doesn’t really want to. It felt like a private discussion- one that should be respected. Yoongi simply turns, putting his back to the wall and he waits. He can hear Sk’jin and Hoseok talking some ways across, the hum of the ship, the sound of his own pulse.

‘Yoongi?’

He looks inside carefully.

Jimin and Namjoon haven’t moved, but they’re both looking at him as though they knew he was there. He stands by the doorway, feeling a little sheepish.

‘The GI are done with what they need to do,’ Namjoon says, ‘We can leave now.’

Yoongi nods to that.

‘I’ll contact Ilya and tell him we’ll be leaving within the hour now,’ the Kutsoglerin adds, ‘I uh, think he’ll want to say his goodbyes with Sk’jin.’

Yoongi nods again, walking in slowly as Namjoon walks out.

Jimin doesn’t say anything until Yoongi reaches him.

‘He said he didn’t want to-…didn’t want me to see him like this,’ Jimin pats Prat’tna’s face gently.

‘I cherished his words so much- his, and Yyna’s- they were like family to me.’

‘Namjoon told you?’

Jimin nods.

‘I’m…I’m not surprised,’ Jimin says carefully, ‘Of course the Great Council would not always be neutral in how they…acted or relayed information. Of course they would try, to set a path, to set fate and the hearts of all towards a path they believed was correct. We knew that- Tsirin and I knew that…’

‘But?’

‘But I don’t know how we didn’t see it,’ Jimin confesses, ‘How we couldn’t have noticed that Ndica’s influence was not one where he was trying to gain our resources, or to try and join us to the
‘He masked his true intentions by playing up to your fears,’ Yoongi concedes.
Jimin nods, ‘We were very thoroughly played.’
‘What do you want to do next?’ Yoongi asks gently.
Jimin has his palm over Prat’tna’s forehead, the other hand over his chest. He didn’t appear to be thinking of what to say- Yoongi can sense determination and a finalization in the way Jimin carried himself.
His eyes were no longer glazed over with confusion, or denial, or betrayal. There was pain of course, worry- but there’s a resolve within him that both encourages Yoongi, but also slightly unsettles him.
Jimin leans down and kisses Prat’tna’s brow.
‘I just want to maybe sleep,’ Jimin confesses as he stands up straight.
‘For 28 hours?’
Jimin smiles looking around at Yoongi, shoulders hitching up a little as though to laugh but he stops, eyes caught on something behind Yoongi.
Yoongi also turns, breath hitching at the sight before him.
All of the GI are gathered just outside the Medical Bay, just watching them, in their complete uniform.
‘Oh-‘ Jimin breathes out, making to move but stopping himself. He clutches at Yoongi’s arm, hand sliding down to take his hand and Yoongi quickly intertwines their fingers. ‘I-’
Suddenly, the GI bow low to him.
‘Oh- uh, please don’t-‘ Jimin stammers out, taking a hesitant step.
They all immediately stand up, making no move to go away.
Jimin breathes out shakily, looking pained.
‘I…’ he begins quietly, ‘We have…we have finally found each other.’
It’s quiet, only faint sounds from the kitchen area is just barely audible.
‘And I will take you all home,’ Jimin’s voice is determined, ‘And we can all be…be safe, and well, and whole.’
‘Thank you for finding me,’ Jimin says quietly as he turns to look at Yoongi instead. ‘Thank you for waiting.’
The GI step away but Yoongi doesn’t pay too much attention, instead leaning in to gently touch his forehead to Jimin’s.
‘I will always find you,’ he whispers.
Jimin places his free hand over Yoongi’s chest, right above his heart.
‘You said I could…I could borrow yours?’
Yoongi nods, placing his hand over Jimin’s, barely touching it, still afraid of somehow hurting him.
‘Just for a while,’ Jimin whispers, ‘Can I?’
Yoongi nods, smiling faintly in a teasing manner as he says, ‘It’s yours. It will always be yours.’
Jimin looks like he’s trying not to blush, but also still maintain a serious expression.
‘You’re-‘ Jimin laughs a bit.
Kissing his forehead Yoongi ducks down to kiss his nose, and then lips as he pulls him in close very carefully, afraid of causing any discomfort.
‘I mean it.’ He says in a more calm tone, ‘My sunshine.’
Jimin’s eyes are shining right before he closes them, leaning in to kiss Yoongi.
‘Fucking Spaces-!’ Hoseok yells, making them both jump, eyes widening in surprise, looking around the empty Medical Bay.
There’s a mighty crash of what was definitely kitchen utensils and loud choking gasps. Yoongi and Jimin can’t quite make out what was happening until-
‘For fuck’s sake this is ridiculous!’ Sk’jin screams from the kitchen. ‘Fucking GI!’
There’s a heaviness in the air.
There always was, with farewells.
But it mostly centers around Sk’jin and Ilya.
They’re still talking, separate to the side while the Axudarian and Orvan Jaen and E’nid talk to Hoseok and Namjoon. Yoongi is speaking to several gathered units of the GI, voice inaudible.
‘You seem to have made up your mind.’
Jn’yong, like Sk’jin, and like other Khol’isa Jimin is assuming, looks impeccable despite being rather battered and bruised himself. He had sustained some serious injury, but he didn’t display any signs of pain or discomfort.
‘I have,’ Jimin nods.
‘Well, if that’s the case…’ Jn’yong trails off, ‘It won’t be easy.’
‘It won’t,’ Jimin agrees. ‘But I have to.’
‘It needs to work.’
Jemin smiles at the Khol’isa.
‘When it does, can I count on you and Ilya?’
Jn’yong gives him a charming smirk, ‘Oh, of course your highness.’
‘Ah, you heard about that,’ Jimin mutters under his breath.
Jn’yong just smiles in a pleased manner, eyes wrinkling in a mischievous way.
They all return back, one by one. Jimin waves at the GI, who all wave back belatedly. Some even salute Namjoon who splutters, waving back hastily before ducking in, clearly embarrassed. Hoseok laughs after him, waving goodbye at Jaen and E’nid.
Sk’jin is the last to enter, his expression carefully schooled and calm. He doesn’t say anything, just buckling himself into his new seating station at the communications board as they enter the Bridge.
It’s quiet as they prepare the ship for warp. There were a total of 7 additional GI aboard alongside them. Jimin wonders if this was to match up for the amount of Beings aboard this mission.
Sitting back on a footstool, Jimin leans back as the security straps unfold around him. Jimin only opens his eyes when he feels a hand over his own. Turning his head a little, he finds Yoongi looking at him worriedly.
Jemin smiles at him.
The light of warp fills the large Bridge.
There’s a small sigh of relief from Namjoon and Hoseok as they’re given a silent notification that they’re at green.
‘If anyone needs me, I’m working on my tan,’ Sk’jin says the moment the ship is also cleared at green.
The GI don’t answer of course, but Hoseok nods in understanding. Namjoon just looks over, watching as Sk’jin vanishes through the doorway for a while before he looks around over at where Jimin and Yoongi were sitting.
‘Jimin, you need to rest up too,’ Namjoon says after a while.
Jemin nods, smiling at Yoongi as he helps him stand though there’s no need. Jimin’s tired, his body
aching at random places, but he wasn’t completely invalid. But he won’t argue that he didn’t like it.

‘I really should go wash up,’ Jimin chuckles, looking down at his stained clothes. He still felt oddly grimy but there were things that needed to be done before.

‘I’ll bring you a new set of clothes?’ Yoongi offers, gesturing to the ones he was wearing. Jimin nods with a smile, reaching out to touch the fabric again. It felt comforting against his skin.

Yoongi hovers around him as he gets up, making Jimin snort at the display. Yoongi was probably still reliving Jimin’s pained reaction from earlier, which was why he was so careful around him. Jimin stops by a doorway before entering his own quarters as Yoongi makes his way in search for new clothes. The door opens quietly and the room inside lights up softly.

On the bed Jimin can just about make out two forms. Jungkook is snoring very quietly, while Taeh’yung blinks sleepily at Jimin, eyes gleaming a faint green at random.

‘Hey,’ Jimin smiles at the Zhak’gri.

‘Chim, I feel like shit,’ Taeh’yung complains, ‘My insides are funny.’

Jimin walks over to the sleeping pair, smiling to himself at how funnily they’re wrapped around each other.

‘Is this comfortable?’ Jimin asks, leaning in to properly place the blanket over Jungkook’s legs.

‘Super,’ Taeh’yung yawns.

‘Why are you here?’ Jimin asks, carefully sitting on the edge of the bed.

‘Kookie is young,’ Taeh’yung smacks his lips a few times, eyes closed, ‘He’s strong and-‘ he yawns quietly, ‘-it’s soothing.’

Jimin smiles at that.

‘We all like it,’ they say from the shadows, ‘Soothing.’

Jimin ruffles Taeh’yung’s hair.

Jungkook was still medicated, so he wasn’t too bothered by Taeh’yung’s invasion of his personal space. Maybe he liked it too- found the additional presence comforting.

‘We’re already moving?’

Jimin nods.

‘We’ll be in warp for a while- everyone’s safe, and we’re resting.’

Taeh’yung smiles at that, huddling in closer to press his face against Jungkook’s back.

Jimin backs away quietly, the lights dimming softly. Stepping out, he finds Yoongi waiting for him, a small folded lump in his hands.

‘They’re still sleeping,’ Jimin tells him. ‘I think they’re both going to need to sleep off their medication for a while, recover their strength.’

Yoongi nods to that before he says, ‘You should too.’

‘I think I was the one who told you that you need to sleep.’

Yoongi breaks out into a smile.

‘Just overheard Namjoon ordering Hoseok to go rest.’ The Human confides, ‘Threatened to carry him.’

Jimin smiles at that, ‘Delta sleep sounds good.’

‘It’s not,’ Yoongi says with so much comic seriousness Jimin’s not sure if he should laugh or not.

‘Here,’ Yoongi holds up the clothes he had with him. ‘Dug around, found these.’

Jimin takes them carefully, a strange sense of not wanting to contaminate the new clothes. It’s not like he was filthy or anything, but seeing the soft purple fabric makes Jimin want to regard it with some form of reverence. Like it was a piece of home he wanted to cherish.

‘It’s uh, it’s a nice fabric, comfortable,’ Yoongi says, making Jimin realize he’d just been staring at the clothes blankly.

‘Oh- oh yeah,’ Jimin is surprised to find himself somewhat teary eyed.

‘What’s wrong?’ Yoongi asks gently.

Jimin shakes his head, ‘It just-…they feel really nice?’

Yoongi just smiles.

‘I’ll take your other clothes to keep for wash,’ he tells him, guiding him away from Jungkook’s
doorway. ‘Sk’jin really likes the detergent here.’

It makes Jimin laugh.

The room designated for Jimin is similar to the one Jungkook, and now Taeh’yung, were using. It’s much more spacious than the one in the Laikin and the Užkulisai. And maybe because this was a Yisheng ship, it felt much more softer with the edges of the design, as though hoping to convey comfort and safety with the design for those who would use it.

‘Where’s your room?’ Jimin asks.

‘Oh uh-’ Yoongi pauses at the doorway. He doesn’t quite look at Jimin as he says, ‘Uh, I’m sharing with Hobi at the moment.’

A lot of questions go through Jimin’s mind.

‘The GI, when they uh, assigned and prepared the rooms they…well, I am GI, so mines just like the ones they use,’ Yoongi shuffles a little. ‘So Hoseok told me, I could share with him.’

‘Stay with me,’ Jimin says though it’s more of a question.

In the Laikin they had been sharing, though they honestly hadn’t had the chance of actually going about to sharing the space too much.

Yoongi nods a bit hesitantly, unsure where to look and Jimin feels bad.

‘I mean, um, if you want to,’ Jimin says at once, ‘I’m not- I’m not forcing you if you’re not comfortable.-’ No! Yoongi says quickly, ‘No that’s not it I uh-’

Jimin waits for an explanation but Yoongi is getting rapidly flustered before he holds his hands out and says, while addressing Jimin’s knees, ‘I’ll uh, take your stuff to wash.’

Jimin wheezes, his whole body shaking with laughter as soon as he recovers.

Was Yoongi shy?

Yoongi still isn’t quite looking at him, still holding his hands out. Jimin walks over to take his hands and asks, ‘Will you stay with me?’

Yoongi nods, ears bright red, fingers twitching a little in Jimin’s hold.

‘Yeah, uh, I will.’

Jimin laughs again, and Yoongi, still embarrassed hurriedly asks, ‘I uh, do you need help? Or like, uh, anything.’

Jimin turns his wrists upwards, showing Yoongi the seams of his cuffs. He’s about to make a joke, maybe something along the lines of some exaggerated account of how royalty never undress themselves but Yoongi beats him to it, fingers moving deftly to undo the fastenings there.

Yoongi looks up with wide eyes, realizing what he’d done, ready to take a step back, but Jimin holds on to his hands.

‘Can you help me?’

Yoongi flushes with colour and pales rapidly. Jimin is about to take it back before he nods, releasing a slow exhale, meeting Jimin’s gaze with a quiet determination that in turn makes Jimin flustered.

Slowly, Yoongi reaches for the collar of the light jacket around Jimin, unhooking the higher flap and flattening it away. This is completely different from when Yoongi helped him take off his clothes last time. There’s an unspoken but shared acute awareness of their actions.

Yoongi doesn’t stop; he slowly and carefully undoes the fastenings of his jacket, his breath fanning across Jimin’s slowly exposed collar and neck. But Yoongi doesn’t quite touch him, as though still afraid of hurting him. He tugs at the jacket and Jimin allows it to fall to the floor, the sleeves slightly catching on his inner-shirt.

Yoongi ducks a little, untucking his shirt from his trousers; he’s almost too slow, difficult to work around an activity without touching the person you were trying to help undress. So Jimin turns his head just a little, lips nearly brushing over Yoongi’s bent head.

‘I’m not hurt,’ he whispers quietly, ‘You can touch me.’

Yoongi looks up briefly, eyes darting a little all over the place, fingers fumbling with the fastening over his chest.

‘You don’t hurt me.’

Yoongi undoes the final fastening before standing in front of Jimin again. He looks at him. They’re
close. Slowly, Yoongi further opens the panels of his shirt, before pushing the garment off of his shoulders completely. He leans in, arms around him as he lowers the garment completely.

Jimin almost jumps at the slight and soft touch against his shoulder. Yoongi’s lips press lightly against his exposed skin, following along his collar as his fingers trail down his now bare arms as he pulls down his sleeves.

Yoongi’s lips are warm and soft against his throat.

The moment it comes off Jimin raises his hands to gently catch onto Yoongi’s shirt before pulling it upwards.

Yoongi starts slightly- looking taken aback, and endearingly shy, shoulders turning in just a little. ‘I- I’ve showered already,’ Yoongi says breathlessly.

‘Didn’t Ilya say hygiene was a priority on his ship? I thought that was a good rule.’ Jimin teases but he drops the hem of his shirt nonetheless. Yoongi quickly takes his hands in his, kissing his knuckles before murmuring against his fingers, ‘I’m scarred.’

Jimin’s chest twinges with pain.

‘And I’m not?’

The scars from where he was recently stabbed is still there, skin puckered but healed, discolouration slowly fading away but still apparent. His sides are bruised, a majority of his skin splotched and bruised.

Yoongi swallows, mouth opening and closing before he says softly, vulnerability heavy in his words, ‘You can touch me too.’

Jimin lifts Yoongi’s shirt off of the Human, and before he has time to say anything else, Jimin leans in to kiss the starting point of a long jagged scar that extended from Yoongi’s collarbone to his hip.

Yoongi’s skin is an expanse of every possible scar, bruise, and discolouration possible on a living Being. There are part of his skin that have sunk in a little from deep tissue damage, heavy scarring that discolours his skin from deep within.

Yoongi’s hands shakily rest on his waist, smoothing down to his hips, fingers slipping under the bands of his trouser. With slightly shaking hands he undoes the fastenings, allowing the trousers to drop to the floor. Jimin does the same, making Yoongi lean in, his forehead pressed down to his shoulder, breath escaping him shakily.

Carefully he reaches up to cup Jimin’s face in both hands and kissing the top of his head. Jimin reaches for his wrists, smiling at the Human.

Jimin has already been stark-naked before Yoongi- in the OrTank and previously after that as well. But there’s something different this time, as Yoongi offers him his arm for balance as Jimin kicks off his underwear. He shivers just a little, feeling Yoongi’s eyes on him.

It doesn’t make him want to hide- just makes him want to be closer.

Without a word Yoongi guides him into the en-suite and opens the shower cubicle, gently pushing Jimin in first directly under the shower square. He struggles a little with the settings before tapping on the in-built screen to the side.

They both jump when the water hits them. It makes Jimin laugh, shoulders curling in a little instinctively as he ducks under the water some more, pushing his hair out of his face. He feels arms curl around him tentatively, a body pressing up against him under the main stream of water. He leans back, taking Yoongi’s arms and pulling them around him in a tighter and firmer embrace.

And then slowly, Yoongi pulls him closer, exhaling quietly as though finally relieved to be holding him this close again. Jimin nuzzles back against the Human, smiling against his temple. They just stand like that, the water flowing around them in a soothing steady shower. For a moment, Jimin thinks Yoongi won’t be able to let go of him. But slowly, Yoongi lets go of one hand to run his fingers through Jimin’s hair.

Jimin closes his eyes at the gentle feeling.

‘You’re not in pain?’ Yoongi asks.

Jimin shakes his head with a smile.

‘It looks worse than it actually is, I mean it.’
Yoongi is incredibly gentle, washing his back and side carefully. Jimin smiles fondly at how Yoongi doesn’t allow him to even rinse off the shampoo from his own hair. Yoongi is quite systematic, dealing with one limb at a time. It’s funny how there’s not much embarrassment anymore, or hazed lust in his movements as he kneels down to scrub at Jimin’s feet. Yoongi was on a mission, and he was going to complete it.

He’s careful around the still fresh cut that somehow got onto his ankle with Jimin even realizing it. Yoongi even carefully washes his ears, making sure the water didn’t go in as he studiously concentrates on the back of his ears. Jimin shivers slightly, holding back a sharp gasp when Yoongi’s hand reaches between his legs. He leans his head onto the Human’s shoulder, eyes closed. It’s helpful that Yoongi is quite methodic, an almost impartial regard to this process, only concentrating on getting Jimin showered and cleaned.

It doesn’t stop Jimin from shivering, his right leg nearly giving way as Yoongi’s fingers drag through.

When he’s done, Yoongi is about to turn the shower back again but Jimin takes the soft padded scrub from him and switches their roles.

He’s embarrassed when Jimin does the same for him, hesitant, shoulders curling in a little, as though trying to hide himself from Jimin’s sight. Jimin doesn’t push it, but instead he leans in, taking Yoongi’s chin gently with his hand and kissing his nose and forehead.

‘I’ll get your back?’ Jimin asks gently.

Yoongi somewhat hesitantly turns around, showing his back to Jimin.

There’s a massive burn scar spread across Yoongi’s back, skin bumpy and pulled and gathered at random. Not even a day ago, he had seen the tops of his scars and old injuries. The layers of damaged skin is a heartbreaking sight.

Jimin mirrors Yoongi’s motions and actions, rubbing the shower-pad over his shoulders and down his back. The indent down his back is strangely not too scarred, and Jimin presses a light kiss next to it.

‘I was- I was so scared,’ Yoongi is almost inaudible over the shower. ‘I thought I lost you and I-’ Jimin stops, leaning in closer to listen.

‘I was-….I didn’t know what to do.’

Jimin leans in and hugs him tight.

‘Thank you for coming back.’

They finish showering, and Yoongi is methodic again as he helps Jimin apply some of the regrow-serum on his more intense bruises. Jimin kisses Yoongi around his face every time he can, making the Human wrinkle up his face, eyes fond.

Jimin combs through his hair with his fingers, and Yoongi closes his eyes, enjoying the sensation.

‘That’s nice,’ he mumbles, sounding sleepy.

Jimin grins, leaning in closer, their bodies almost touching, before kissing him softly.

He jumps a little, feeling Yoongi’s hand on his waist, returning his kiss slowly. Jimin wraps his arms around Yoongi, pulling him closer so they touch, skin wonderfully warm and soft.

‘Jimin?’ Yoongi presses a kiss to his neck, exhaling out slowly.

‘Hm?’ Jimin shivers. Yoongi doesn’t say anything immediately, instead taking his time to kiss his neck and throat.

‘Jimin,’ Yoongi whispers against his skin- he almost sounds like he’s pleading. With some difficulty, Jimin tilts Yoongi away from his neck to face him instead.

‘Yoongi?’

‘Teach me how to touch you.’

His voice is low, carefully level though Jimin can hear the restraint in his tone.

Yoongi touches him tentatively, fingertips gliding over the expanse of skin around his waist. Jimin knows exactly what he means. It’s almost funny, because Yoongi had touched him- every single inch of him in the shower and yet here he was, asking permission to touch him. But Jimin knows what he means.

‘Show me how to touch you,’ Yoongi pauses, sounding strained now, ‘Teach me how to touch you.
Jimin kisses Yoongi hard, pulling him closer, needing him closer. Yoongi reciprocates at once, his
gasp lost between their lips.

Hands tentative at first, move down along his body. But they gain confidence.
Yoongi’s touch is reverent; desperate, as though afraid he would never be able to touch him again.
‘I got you,’ Jimin manages to get out once they part for breath, ‘I got you-‘

Jimin feels himself being lifted, hands gripping around his thighs, and suddenly his back is hitting
the cool covers of the bed. He arches up to meet Yoongi, drawing him down quickly, his skin
aflame, his heart wild.

He pushes himself up a little to kiss Yoongi but the Human stops, hand clenched in a fist beside his
head on the pillow, a pained expression on his face.

‘Wait-‘ Yoongi’s eyes are screwed shut, swaying in an alarming way above Jimin.
‘What’s wrong-‘ Jimin asks worriedly, his pulse loud in his ears, looking all over the Human in
fear.

‘I- I’m-‘ Yoongi huffs out a laugh that’s embarrassed more than anything else, ‘I got dizzy.’
There’s a long pause where they’re both breathing heavily, not moving- not daring to move.
Then Jimin lets out a short laugh. He can’t help it. Then they’re both laughing, breathless and
dizzy with more than just temporary dip in blood pressure. They’re unable to move apart, their
bodies flushed with heat, flushed with want and need.
‘Think I might have, uh, rushed ahead too quickly,’ Yoongi mumbles, face red.
‘You’re okay?’ Jimin asks, unable to stop smiling, nuzzling against Yoongi’s red face.

Yoongi chuckles, eyes closed, trying to overcome his dizziness. ‘I just can’t- just can’t stop
touching you.’
‘I’m here,’ Jimin hugs him, pulling him down to rest against his body. ‘I got you.’

Yoongi exhales heavily, a low groan as he settles on top of Jimin, shivering against him. Yoongi
presses his ear over where his heart would be, listening and pacing himself. Jimin cradles his head
closer, kissing the top of his head. After a while, he turns them over, letting Yoongi lay back.
‘This is not what-‘ Yoongi breathes out slowly, less red in the face his eyes no longer hazy, ‘This is
not what I had imagined.’

Jimin laughs, straddling the Human and leaning down until their noses bumped. He takes Yoongi’s
hands, kissing them before pushing them up above his head, kissing his face gently as he brushed
his hair out of his face. He then gently rubs at Yoongi’s temples, making the Human close his
eyes.
‘Sunshine.’

Yoongi reaches up for him, hand cupping his face and drawing him down for a kiss.
They kiss slow, deep, allowing themselves to take a moment. Jimin traces down Yoongi’s jaw to
his neck and then chest. He blindly reaches and searches for his hands, taking them by the wrist
before placing his palms over his hips.
Yoongi sits up, never breaking their kiss, hands mapping downwards, gripping at his thighs,
tucking him even closer, sharing a gasp in the process before flipping them over. The bed is small,
so they nearly fall over. Jimin laughs, arms clinging around Yoongi’s shoulders as the Human
chuckles, sounding as wrecked as Jimin felt.

It’s difficult to move and coordinate when neither of them really wants to separate even if it’s for a
short period of time.

Yoongi touches him with such absolute purpose- as though storing every single sensation in his
memory, mapping and memorizing. Jimin is filled with adoration- his chest nearly bursting and he
speaks before he can really manage to bring together the words in his mind.
‘I love you,’ he sighs out.
Yoongi stops chuckling, his hands stilling. Jimin slowly realigns his legs, wrapping them around
his hips. Yoongi exhales noisily.
‘I love you so much Yoongi,’ Jimin smiles breathlessly.
Yoongi doesn’t say anything, instead moving slowly but surely, to wrap his arms around Jimin’s
torso, lifting him a little from the bed, kissing him slow as they sink into each other.
‘I love you, I love you-‘
Jimin swallows his words, tongue tracing each word, tasting Yoongi’s strained mumbles, until they’re both unable to do anything more than just breathe against each other’s lips.
‘You’re- you’re everything I’ve wanted to feel-’ Yoongi gasps out. ‘Everything.’
Jimin shivers almost violently, holding him, wanting him, needing him closer.
‘I love you so much.’
Jimin bares himself in every possible way.
And Yoongi is there to cover him, their bodies eclipsing.
‘I love you.’

Chapter End Notes

(Author’s Notes)

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Yeah so I can never really write full smut so *shrugs* though I guess this is probably the most explicit thing I've written.

WHO ELSE WENT THROUGH THE ENTIRE WEEKEND WATCHING BANGBANGCON?? BEST WEEKEND EVER

I've been having issues with my router.

It's been a while,

And as a result,

My laptop never connects to the wifi, my sisters laptop can do it, our phones can connect.

I thought it was my old laptops problem.

But I bought a new laptop in February and still no connection.

Turns out my routers fucked.

I was supposed to update this last week.

Clearly from my notes.

Sorry for this monstrosity but it piled on T_T.

Also I want to formally announce that when I say ILY it means I love Yoongi.

He has been just giving and giving and giving this month I have never been more blessed I love him so much.

Good news related to the fic I will update the next chapter faster!! As its been!!

Somewhat already written sigh

How's everyone holding up with quarantine?
Yoongi stretches, slowly waking from a deep and wonderful sleep. Warmth envelopes him; there’s sunlight on his skin. The air has a wonderful freshness to it- like the windows were opened right after rain- the air clean and faintly fragrant, somehow strangely familiar. The blankets are the right weight, his pillow soft and at the perfect height, and-

‘Yoongi?’

It’s followed by a small quiet laugh, and a hand gently cupping his face, while another curves around his waist. A warm weight settles down on him, and Yoongi adjusts his legs to accommodate this very welcome intrusion. Then, there’s a light kiss pressed to his chin.

‘Open your eyes.’

Yoongi just wraps Jimin closer to himself, pulling him down with his legs. Jimin laughs, balancing himself properly before he’s hovering a little above him.

‘Yoongi,’ Jimin says quietly, smile evident in his tone, ‘Open your eyes?’

‘Sunshine,’ Yoongi smiles back, reaching up blindly to touch Jimin’s face.

He feels Jimin move a little, repositioning himself until he’s cradling Yoongi’s head in his arms and kissing his face softly. Yoongi lifts his hands to smooth down Jimin’s torso, feeling the warm expanse of skin under his palms. He digs just a little under the ribs, making Jimin chuckle breathlessly before coming to wrap around his lower back.

‘Open your eyes.’

Yoongi takes a moment before he slowly opens his eyes.

The light of the sun is warm and rosy, the colour on Jimin’s cheeks are soft and delicate. The sunlight seems to catch every single strand of hair and with each tiny movement, Jimin is surrounded by a delicate wispy halo of fractured light.

‘Hi pretty,’ Jimin smiles.

‘Me?’ Yoongi mumbles out, feeling slightly dazed.

Jimin nods, his halo of light sparkling.
You should see yourself.’ Yoongi trails his fingers up and down slowly. Jimin flushes with colour, eyes darting about in an embarrassed way.

‘I think I can see it,’ Jimin tells him, almost bashful.

Yoongi grins, his hands a bit more purposeful, feeling the need to touch Jimin even more. He stops low on his back, fingers softly feeling the prominent dips there.

Jemin squirms just a little, face still flushed, playing idly with Yoongi’s left ear.

‘You have the dimples of Venus,’ Yoongi tells him, unable to look away. Jimin is still funnily bashful, but this gets his attention as he stops squirming and asks, ‘What’s that?’

‘These,’ Yoongi presses down a little bit on the spots. ‘Dimples on your lower back. On Earth, we called them the Dimples of Venus.’

‘I…I don’t think we have a name for them like that,’ Jimin lowers himself, disentangling his arms to lay on Yoongi’s chest, hands cushioning his chin. ‘I think in anatomy, yes.’

‘Venus was the Roman goddess of love,’ Yoongi explains, ‘The Romans were a very ancient civilization- they worshipped a ton of gods. And Venus, supposedly had these. It’s like, a sign.’

‘Of what?’ Jimin laughs, legs kicking up a little, feet in the air.

‘Uh, sexiness?’ Yoongi frowns in thought.

Jemin laughs, his whole body shaking Yoongi’s.

‘That’s funny,’ Jimin grins, ‘That’s so funny!’

‘Yeah?’ Yoongi brings his arms higher to wrap around Jimin properly, turning them over to their sides.

Jemin nods, still beaming at him as if he’s just so incredibly funny- like he was making him happy.

‘Good,’ Yoongi manages to get out, feeling oddly accomplished.

He brings Yoongi’s hand under his cheek, nuzzling a little as he smiles at him. It makes Yoongi’s chest strain with the outburst of emotions filling him up.

‘You’re…you’re really pretty,’ Yoongi gets out.

Jemin laughs again, twisting his face into Yoongi’s palm.

‘I’m being honest!’ Yoongi feels a sense of mortification but also he really doesn’t have much of a filter on him. ‘You’re very pretty- beautiful. Radiant.’

Jemin looks at him like he’s silly, but Yoongi can feel the heat of the colour that blossoms across his face again.

And Yoongi is feeling too much.

Everything is perfect around them.

The sun is shining into the room, the windows open and there’s a gentle breeze. The wood of the furniture gleam warmly, the potted plants and cactus are vibrant- cared for and tended. The books
in the shelves are worn from frequent reading, the frames capture precious memories- important memories. The long shawl flung over the couch to the side has covered snuggling bodies, with the lamps on the nightstands illuminating quiet and peaceful nights. The carpet by the edges of the bed are frayed a little from frequent trodding, and the wooden floors under the chair of the desk are scratched.

Everything is perfect.

‘This is…this is everything,’ Yoongi tells Jimin quietly.

‘What do you mean?’

‘This,’ Yoongi replies, ‘This is everything I could ever want.’

Jimin smiles at him- but it’s not the same beaming one. Rather it’s tinged with sadness.

‘I don’t want to go,’ Yoongi confesses.

The curtains sway slowly, a morning breeze stirring outside. Yoongi feels it on his skin seconds later, feels Jimin shiver a little. Yoongi pulls him closer, cocooning him in his arms before turning him completely over to his back.

‘I want to stay here,’ Yoongi says into his kiss, ‘Don’t leave, let’s just stay here.’

Jimin laughs, eyes crinkling as he says, ‘Yoongi we will have to wake up soon-.’

‘I could convince you to stay,’ Yoongi whispers against his mouth. Jimin’s hands which where bracing himself against Yoongi’s chest slowly track downwards, tracing invisible lines down his chest to his hips.

‘I think- I think you could very easily convince me,’ Jimin replies breathlessly as Yoongi mirrors Jimin’s hands, trailing his fingertips down Jimin’s chest, abdomen, and to his thighs.

‘Then stay here with me,’ Yoongi whispers, leaving a kiss on lips before lowering his head down to his throat.

Jimin lets out a soft gasp

‘Stay with me.’ Yoongi whispers against his sternum, littering kisses down his chest to the soft expanse of his abdomen and lower down.

‘Just stay.’

And Jimin- well, Jimin can’t say no.

Because he doesn’t want to leave either.

He wants to stay here- in this perfect little space- made just for them, built by them, made by them. He wants to live each moment of his life in this beautiful space where everything reminds him of Yoongi.

He wants this so much.

Also Yoongi is very convincing.
‘What’s that?’ Jimin asks much later, when the sun is no longer shining through their bedroom window but rather out in the hallway. The windows were now framing a tranquil blue sky, just darkening a little over the horizon, large tall clouds veined with liquid gold breaking up the blue.

Jimin can hear trees moving alongside a gentle breeze.

Yoongi’s hair is still damp from their bath, even though Jimin’s is thoroughly dried and combed through. Something Yoongi seemed to have a lot of fun doing, using a rather clunky looking device to direct hot air at Jimin’s hair. Jimin had sat at the edge of their bed, bare feet occasionally pressing over Yoongi’s as he stepped here and there, drying his hair.

Yoongi had taken to showing him some of Earth’s old technology. Jimin had been amused by the hair drying machine, and wanted to see others.

They’re at the kitchen, and Yoongi is showing something called a rice cooker.

‘It uses electricity to heat the water, that then boils the rice to cook?’ Jimin recites, looking into the unimpressive device.

Yoongi nods, grinning at him as though amused by his nonplussed expression. Jimin pokes his bare unmarked and unscarred ribs in retaliation, making Yoongi squeak. Yoongi hadn’t bothered wearing a shirt, and when Jimin had asked why, wondering if it was to tease him, he had instead said ‘everything in perfect in here, I want you to see me being somewhat close to that- in at least this way.’

Yoongi takes him back to the bedroom and sits him at the desk, pulling out little drawers and small boxes stored up in the many cabinets of the desk.

‘We actually didn’t use these anymore,’ Yoongi tells him, lining up some thin and slender tubes before him. They looked like some form of writing apparatus- not too different from what Jimin used as a child. ‘For a very long time- but they came back as novelty items I guess- a throw back?’

Yoongi finds a bottle of ink and some lose paper before unscrewing one of the writing apparatus and dipping in the shiny tip.

‘This is how you would write your name in one of the languages on Earth,’ Yoongi tells him, sitting down to share the seat with him.

‘What does yours look like?’

Yoongi indulges him and write out his own name.

‘This is my name in my tongue,’ Jimin takes the device- oddly lighter than he expected, and carefully pulls the characters of his name. ‘And this is yours.’

‘I like it,’ Yoongi smiles at the still shining letters, wet from the ink. ‘That’s pretty.’

‘That pronounces the Yoo in your name,’ Jimin explains. ‘What is this called?’

‘It’s a fountain pen,’ Yoongi replies.

‘Seems like an odd thing to recreate as a novelty item,’ Jimin ruminates.

‘There’s actually a lot of funny stories behind fountain pens,’ Yoongi grins at him, twirling the device around his unscarred fingers. ‘For a while, Humans were obsessed with hiding “weapons”
inside fountain pens. Like, I dunno, laser-pens, strong enough to cut through metal.’

Jimin laughs, looking down at the device.

‘Humans used to once use feathers as pens- this is a massive upgrade, a piece of history and culture,’ Yoongi holds the pen loftily. Jimin just laughs at Yoongi’s pedantic tone. He used this tone when he made up stories either to trick and confuse Sk’jin, or to tease Taeh’yung and Jungkook. He removes the pen from Yoongi’s hand and laces their fingers together instead, kissing Yoongi’s hand softly in the process.

They sit on that chair quietly after that; it’s not the most comfortable, but they’re both soaking in the normalcy- or at least, their attempt at normalcy. For a life they wish they could be living.

‘The sun’s going down,’ Jimin notes, the room dimming slightly and the skies outside the windows turning an inky blue. ‘You wanna go up and watch the stars?’

‘Yeah,’ Yoongi turns his head around to press his lips to Jimin’s temple. ‘Let’s go.’

Jimin stands up, stretching a little because that was a slightly awkward angle to sit in. But Yoongi doesn’t follow him just yet, tugging a little at their hands and making Jimin turn around.

Jimin just watches Yoongi as he switches on the small desk-lamp, wondering what the Human was up to.

‘Here,’ Yoongi takes his hand again, smiling to himself as though a little amused. He picks up the fountain pen again and angling Jimin’s hand, taps on his second last finger. Jimin holds it up a little higher than the others and watches with some confusion as he runs the tip of the pen around the circumference of his finger.

‘Are you giving me a…’ Jimin racks his mind for the correct word, ‘A tattoo?’

Yoongi finishes the slightly wobbly line and shakes his head, ‘It’ll wash off.’

‘What is it for?’ Jimin holds up his hand, wriggling his fingers to look at the black line, making an odd ring around his finger. He used to enjoy drawing markings across his skin when he was younger- something he did with his guards. A lot of cultures permanently stained their skin in this manner, but Jimin’s not sure what Yoongi’s purpose was in doing this.

‘Just a Human thing,’ Yoongi explains, looking far too pleased.

‘Should I do it too?’ Jimin smiles at him. Yoongi looked so pleased with himself; if this was a funny joke, he wanted to be part of it too. But somehow it makes Yoongi flush, scratching the back of his neck as he says, ‘Yeah, I guess if you want?’

Jimin dips the fountain pen back in the ink bottle and holds his hand out for Yoongi’s.

‘The same one?’

Yoongi nods, eyes twinkling.

Then, with a much steadier hand, Jimin draws the circle around Yoongi’s second finger as well. Yoongi takes his hand, with the marking, and kisses it lightly.

The smile on Yoongi’s face warms Jimin from the depths of his soul.

‘Is this some secret you want to tease me with?’ Jimin asks, nudging his shoulder against Yoongi’s
as they walk out of the bedroom.

‘Maybe,’ Yoongi grins, quickly ducking into one of the smaller rooms for that soft yellow blanket.

‘I should tease you with one too,’ Jimin makes a mock face of concentration. ‘I’ll do it once I think of it.’

Yoongi takes his hand again and they trek up the stairs.

The front door remains firmly shut, much to Jimin’s quiet and hidden relief.

They sit on the wooden floors, the missing wall opening up to a vast and starry night. And unlike in the bath, Yoongi pulls Jimin down to sit in front of him, reversing their roles. Jimin leans back, reassured by the strength that supported him. Yoongi wraps the blanket over them, enveloping them in this moment.

‘I love this,’ Yoongi whispers.

‘Yeah?’

‘Hm,’ Yoongi pulls Jimin closer, resting his chin onto his shoulder. ‘This really is everything.’

Jimin turns his head a little to kiss Yoongi’s cheek, wrapping his arms over the Humans.

They sit their in silence, watching the stars overtake the sky, the last of the sunlight ebbing away completely. If Jimin listens closely, he can hear the stars singing, the dark expanses between their light hollow and echoing voices of a past that memory clung to.

Jimin also picks up another sound- a hum; of a ship, movement of Beings in their vicinity.

‘Yoongi-’ Jimin says quietly, breaking the soothing tranquility around them and Jimin hates it.

‘I know,’ Yoongi says quietly, his arms tightening a little around him, ‘Can we stay until the moon comes up?’

Jimin smiles, watching the distant horizon past the gentle vast sea lightening up a little, the edges of the water turning silver.

‘Of course.’

They watch the slow climb of the moon, silver light glowing faintly.

‘It’s waning,’ Yoongi remarks as the moon is up in the sky, a reflection rippling the surface of the sea.

A sudden chill erupts down Jimin’s back.

‘It’s-…’ Jimin’s voice is stuck in his throat.

‘I like the shape of crescents the most,’ Yoongi continues, as though unaware of the weight of his words.

‘I wish it would always be just like this,’ Jimin whispers.

Jimin wakes up slowly. It’s much darker, the air more still and contained though just as cool. The distinct faint hum of the ship fills the air as well, instead of plants rustling in the early morning.
breeze. The space around him isn’t as dark as a starlit sky- no waning moon shining around him. There’s a weight on him- comforting; a weight Jimin now knows intimately, thoroughly.

Yoongi’s arms are wrapped just a little above his hips, his face pressed against the softest pudge of his abdomen. Jimin smiles down at the Human, moving his arms to properly cradle his head gently, fingers combing through his soft hair.

The scars were back. And Jimin wants to press his lips to them again to tell Yoongi he didn’t care- that he didn’t mind; that Yoongi was already so **so perfect**. The scars were back, and so was the tiredness, the strange *stretch* in the force that held Yoongi together-

Jemin pauses. Jimin pushes himself up higher, smile slipping from his face as Yoongi doesn’t stir. He couldn’t sense anything.

No strain- no echo trapped, there was nothing.

‘Yoongi?’

Yoongi shifts but it’s with a strange stiffness that Jimin recognizes, one that he has seen so many time-

‘Yoongi!?’

His hands are trembling as he shakes the supposedly slumbering Human- and that’s when Jimin realizes Yoongi’s skin isn’t warm. It’s warm where he’s sharing contact with him, but his back, his arms, his curled legs – they’re all cold.

‘Yoongi!’

Then, as though this was all quite normal, Yoongi stirs. The strange stiffness over his body melting away like vapor, he exhales normally, eyelids fluttering just a little before they open.

It only takes a long second for Yoongi to spring into action.

‘What’s wrong?’ Yoongi demands, crawling up towards Jimin as though to shield him with his body.

But Jimin can’t answer- his hands won’t stop trembling and his voice is stuck in his throat.

Yoongi seems to realize nothing is immediately wrong as he relaxes just a little bit, letting up his protective stance over Jimin just a bit.

‘Sunshine?’

‘*It’s waning.*’

‘You-‘ Jimin manages to get out, allowing Yoongi to pull away just a little, studying him with concern, touching his side where his bruises were still dark, as though wondering if he were in pain.

‘You didn’t wake up.’

Yoongi stops his quiet and quick check up of Jimin, hands pausing over hips. Yoongi doesn’t seem to know what to say.
‘Is it-…’ Jimin doesn’t move, doesn’t look away. ‘Is it difficult…to wake up?’

Yoongi looks away, hands slowly drawing away before he settles himself down next to Jimin again.

Then slowly, he nods.

‘Oh,’ Jimin exhales out shakily.

‘I won’t leave you,’ Yoongi says almost inaudibly. ‘I will follow, I will always follow.’

Yoongi finally looks at him.

‘Sunshine,’ Yoongi raises his hand and places it gently over Jimin’s chest, right above where his heart pulsed painfully. ‘I will always find you.’

Jimin knows what was beating in his chest.

Borrowed.

Given.

Jimin was going to be very careful- tender, and gentle.

* *

Jungkook wakes up with Taeh’yung draped over him.

‘Hm?’

He’s a little confused as to how Taeh’yung was here with him. But from the looks of it, and with some sniffing, Taeh’yung’s been in here with him for a while.

Jungkook feels better. He’s still tired, his body feels weak; but the fogginess of his mind is gone, and his stomach is growling. So that was why he woke up.

He flinches a little at the thought of food. But he remembers that he’s able to get his food anytime he wanted.

Carefully, not wanting to wake Taeh’yung or the restless shadows around them, Jungkook sits up. Taeh’yung lets out a small whimper, as though pained, before curling in on himself on the bed. Jungkook is gripped with worry. Taeh’yung didn’t smell sick- just…just weakened. Like putting too much water into his favourite bone broth. Jungkook pulls the blanket over Taeh’yung carefully,
tucking it under his feet the way Sk’jin liked to when he tuckkook in. After a second, he decides to flip the pillow Taeh’yung was using, allowing the cooler side to cushion the Zhak’gri’s head. Jungkook loves pillows, and he’s sure Taeh’yung would appreciate them as well. So he gathers some of the extra ones from around the bed, and puts it around Taeh’yung’s unconscious form.

‘Jungkook?’

Or at least Jungkook thought he was unconscious.

But Taeh’yung’s voice isn’t exactly coming from the Zhak’gri. And on second thought, it didn’t sound exactly like Taeh’yung either.

Jungkook had been too occupied in making Taeh’yung as comfortable as he could to notice immediately. The shadows have moved from their restless spots, gathering around him like solid statues of strangely ominous shadows just a little past his peripheral vision.

Jungkook is not spooked by moving shadows and shapes- he’s seen and felt worse than the possibility of blurred shadows and movements. But he knows these shadows aren’t just ordinary shadows- that there’s more to them. So he just ignores them for now, instead busying himself with adjusting the sleeves of Taeh’yung’s borrowed shirt that had rolled up uncomfortably high. Taeh’yung didn’t have any bandages or medicine on him, so Jungkook’s not sure where his injuries are.

‘Kookie?’

The shadows snap away, the air lighter, and this time it really is Taeh’yung.

Jungkook doesn’t realize he was so strained where he was kneeling. He exhales slowly, looking over at Taeh’yung. He’s just barely awake, eyes glinting in the low light.

‘Are you sick?’ Jungkook asks.

Taeh’yung nods, looking upset.

‘Can I help? Are you hungry?’ Jungkook asks, crouching low on the bed.

Taeh’yung just smiles at him, ‘No Kookie, it’s okay. I’ll be better soon.’

‘Are you sure?’ Jungkook asks as Taeh’yung unearths one hand and reaches for Jungkook’s hand. He takes it in his immediately, ‘Should I call Hobi? Are you sure you don’t want food?’

Taeh’yung smiles again with a small nod, ‘I’ll be okay Kookie. Thank you for taking care of me.’

Jungkook’s not sure if he’s done anything to really help Taeh’yung but he nods, albeit hesitantly.

‘I can hear your stomach,’ Taeh’yung grins, ‘Go eat. I’ll come join you later, okay?’

Jungkook nods before asking, ‘Are you uh, comfortable? Do you need anything else?’

‘No Kookie, thank you,’ Taeh’yung mumbles, eyes sparkling with tears, immediately making Jungkook panic.

‘Are you hurting?’ Jungkook asks at once, ready to yell for help.

‘No,’ Taeh’yung says thickly, squirming a little, ‘I’m so happy that you finally do love me now.’
Jungkook narrows his eyes at Taeh’yung before he laughs.

‘I told you you would love me,’ Taeh’yung pouts, ‘You were so afraid of me.’

‘I was afraid of everyone,’ Jungkook confesses.

‘Except Jiminie,’ Taeh’yung says, sounding very much like a child. ‘But now you love me too, so it’s okay.’

Jungkook grins down at the Zhak’gri, slowly getting off the bed so as to not jostle him too much. Taeh’yung was fine.

‘I think I love Sk’jin, Jimin, Hobi, and Namjoon a bit more.’

Taeh’yung gasps in mock horror.

‘Wait- but more than Yoongi?’ Taeh’yung’s eyes gleam, teasing him.

Jungkook pretends to think before he nods, his face flushing with heat at being so obvious.

Taeh’yung cheers.

‘But-‘ Jungkook hastens to say, fiddling his his fingers, ‘I uh, love all of you. Equally. Want to protect, all of you. Like family.’

He has no idea when it happened, but Taeh’yung is sitting up, kneeling on the mattress before him. He nuzzles into the side of his face, smile wide and fond.

‘Precious Kookie,’ Taeh’yung beams at him, ‘I would destroy the universe for you.’

Jungkook doesn’t know if Taeh’yung is joking or not but he manages to put him back to bed, tucking him in again. Taeh’yung is knocked out again by the time Jungkook steps out of the room.

He vaguely remembers the hallway, remembers walking about in a medically induced stupor of sorts. It was similar to how it was when his hunger used to get the better of him, back in the caves in Ynqaba. But here, he felt safe- knew that he was protected and watched over.

Shuffling on the spot a little, Jungkook sniffs the air a little before deciding to go down left in the hallway. He doesn’t hear anything.

Hesitantly, Jungkook makes his way across the hallway. He pauses a few times, fiddling with one ear where he normally had a Comm Device. He quells the urge to call out for anyone- not quite trusting his voice to be steady. There’s a stillness in the air that makes him a little uncomfortable despite knowing he’s safe. He picks up on faint hints of Sk’jin, Hoseok, Namjoon, Yoongi, and Jimin from different doors. But he can tell that no one is inside any of the doorways. He stops at the platform between stairs that either go up or down, a lift before him. He hears faint movement coming from downstairs and so he follows it.

He recognizes this Lobby. He had been inside the Medical Bays opposite where he was standing. One of the couches has recently been vacated, Jungkook notes. The Kitchen area was recently also vacated, plates and other utensils stacked up near the sink. Jungkook’s rumbling stomach redirectes him to towards the Kitchen and he looks around the pantry for something he can snack on for now until he can find the others. He finds a neatly stored tray of something that smells lovely. He’s not sure what meat it is, but Jungkook’s mouth is watering. He steps out of the pantry and comes face to face with an unfamiliar face, but a familiar scent.
This was one of the GI that had snuck into the Užkulisaši back in Grisial.

Jungkook’s vision shifts, everything blurring but the GI standing in stark detail.

He looks completely well, no hostility in his form. But Jungkook hadn’t sensed hostility in the GI when he fought them before. And Jungkook doesn’t know what to think of it- what to think of them. He doesn’t know what to do- he was aware that they would be here, in this ship; it was the GI’s ship after all. But Jungkook’s skin prickles, his pulse rocketing.

He has half the mind to attack, to take down this strange and unknown threat before him. But at the same time-

‘Kookie?’

Jungkook starts- his vision clearing. He stops growling from his throat- he hadn’t even realized he was doing it.

A wonderfully familiar form appears from behind the GI, wearing soft purple clothes, pink hair sticking up on one side, skin dewy as though just washed. Sk’jin looks a little concerned but he’s smiling fondly.

‘Sk’jin?’

‘Hey,’ the Khol’isa smiles at him, stepping around the GI. ‘Were you trying to eat the flank I was marinating?’

Jungkook looks at the tray in his hands, the handles bent under his fingers.

Sk’jin just laughs, taking the tray from him and pulling him to his side. Jungkook relaxes, only just noticing the GI’s retreating figure. He quickly pulls the Khol’isa into a tight embrace.

‘Come on Kook, I’ll make us something to eat okay?’

Jungkook sits obediently to the side as Sk’jin goes about grabbing a few large trays and pans.

‘Do you need to change your bandages?’ Sk’jin asks looking at him, ‘Any discomfort?’

Jungkook shakes his head. He had peeked into his bandages and patches of tissue-plast on his sides and legs. They were healing nicely, scabbing over in a healthy way.

‘Let me look,’ Sk’jin puts down the trays and walks over to Jungkook. He gently pries the bandages, prods along the sensitive slightly inflamed skin gently.

‘You’re healing up,’ Sk’jin smiles at him, patting his knee to tell him he could lower it now.

‘You smell like you were in the sun,’ Jungkook remarks, sniffing a little.

‘I was taking up some UV,’ Sk’jin explains, now hefting a massive leg of meat from the storage cells in the pantry. He retrieves a massive saw-like knife before neatly hacking through the thick meat and bone. ‘I’ll have this thawed and slightly seared, let’s render the fat a little.’

Jungkook nods enthusiastically, mouth watering even more.

‘Kookie?’

Jungkook jumps a little when Jimin appears, followed shortly by Yoongi. Jimin runs towards him,
bright smile on his face. Jungkook hops off his stool and quickly scuttles over to accept Jimin’s extending arms.

‘Feeling better?’ Jimin asks him, holding his face as though to check him for injury. Jungkook does the same.

Yoongi is smiling at him, reaching over to gently pat his shoulder before walking over to where Sk’jin was struggling with the massive leg of meat.

Jungkook vaguely remembers Yoongi’s worried face through a feverish haze. Remembers frantic and helpless eyes.

‘Is Taeh’yung with you?’

‘He was sleeping,’ Jungkook explains, ‘I think he’s okay?’

Jimin nods to that, ruffling his hair and saying, ‘I’ll go check on him then.’

Jungkook realizes that he has to bend a little at his back to allow Jimin to touch the top of his head now. When he shuffles back to his stool, Sk’jin has roped the Human into helping him.

‘We have more mouths to feed and I still only have 2 hands,’ Sk’jin is telling Yoongi who is grumbling under his breath. ‘Do you have something to say about this?’

‘Not at all,’ Yoongi mumbles, giving Jungkook a brief look of exasperation.

‘Here Kookie, you can snack on this for the meanwhile,’ Sk’jin hefts a similar tray from earlier to the table and Jungkook moves closer. ‘You haven’t eaten in a while, so go slowly, there’s still more okay?’

Jungkook nods, sitting down the same time 2 other GI sit down as well, making him flinch. Sk’jin jumps a foot in the air, cursing under his breath while Yoongi guffaws.

‘Is anyone allergic to anything?’ Sk’jin calls out, ‘Once I made my most amazing spectacular stew, and it had several leaves of zawntra in it, and a few of my friends caught the most terrible stomach flu.’

‘Your friends were most unfortunate,’ Yoongi quips.

‘You have no say in the matter Mr. Poisons-Everything-In-Front-Of-Him-Yoongi.’ Sk’jin singsongs.

‘Which has saved us many times,’ Yoongi retorts without pause.

Sk’jin looks like he’s about to throw his ladle at Yoongi.

‘No helmets at the table!’ Sk’jin points his ladle at the GI instead.

The GI remove their helmets after a delayed 3 seconds. Jungkook catches Yoongi glancing over at the GI, his expression saddening. Did Yoongi recognize them? Or was he just sad because there were other GI here, similar to himself, similar to Jungkook.

Sk’jin and Yoongi argue the entire time they’re cooking, throwing half-formed insults and snide remarks here and there. But neither of them seem to mind, looking amused and smiling when the other isn’t looking. It’s kinda funny, Jungkook notes.
Jimin and Taeh’yung return—Taeh’yung looking refreshed but still weakened, and Jimin with half of his clothes wet.

‘Taeh’yung slipped in the shower, so I had to help him,’ Jimin answers both of Yoongi’s and Sk’jin’s questioning looks.

‘Oh! Babies!’ Taeh’yung gasps, looking at the GI, wincing as he hurries to them and hugs them. ‘Precious babies!’

Sk’jin looks a little scandalized but doesn’t question it, instead heaving over a massive pot towards the table with Yoongi’s help. The GI are…well, unaffected, by this display of affection being heaved upon them by Taeh’yung.

‘Hey! Y’all at the Bridge who didn’t lift a finger to help! Come eat!’ Sk’jin yells, causing Yoongi to flinch, screwing up his face at the Khol’isa.

Jungkook watches with wide eyes as the GI pile in, without Sk’jin noticing. He’s not sure if he should warn him, but before he can, Yoongi throws him a small wink, handing Sk’jin a few bowls. On instinct, or at least with the flow of the whole thing, Sk’jin takes the bowls and starts ladling in the stew. It’s only when he takes the 9th bowl from Yoongi that he looks up in confusion.

Yoongi saves his the bowl of stew in Sk’jin’s hand as the Khol’isa jumps so much he splashes Jungkook, Jimin and Taeh’yung with some stew.

‘You did call of them,’ Yoongi points out.

Sk’jin actually does smack Yoongi with the ladle as Taeh’yung and Jimin laugh, wiping stew off of their clothes. This is when Hoseok chooses to drop in.

‘Do…I want to know what happened…’

Sk’jin levels him a look and says with a smile that doesn’t reach his eyes, ‘Everything is perfectly fine.’

‘Hobi!’ Taeh’yung makes himself small, arms held out to the Ngfy’widan. Hoseok grins down at him, walking over to cuddle him where he sat.

‘Feeling better buggy?’ Taeh’yung makes his eyes somehow larger, sparkling brightly, nodding in reply.

Hoseok reaches over to ruffle Jungkook’s hair, sitting down as well.

‘Namjoon?’ Yoongi inquires, handing out a bowl towards Hoseok and taking Jungkook’s in turn.

‘He’s coming down in a moment- I think as we’re all awake and I think, ready for a meeting, we can get some stuff sorted out; make sure we’re all on the same page.’ Hoseok replies.

‘Here Kook,’ Yoongi hands him back his much bigger bowl and Jungkook digs in enthusiastically. He didn’t necessarily like food that was too cooked, but Sk’jin had added some of the meat from before into the stew just for him, so Jungkook is very satisfied.

‘Ah, Kookie,’ Hoseok grins, ‘Makes me happy to see you eat so well.’

Jungkook looks down at his massive bowl, feeling a little flustered.
'Here,' Hoseok adds, holds out a Comm Device towards him, ‘Buggy, where’s yours? I gave you one earlier.’

Taeh’yung looks over his own bowl, smaller and with only the liquid of the stew in it, smiling apologetically at Hoseok.

‘We can track it later,’ Hoseok rolls his eyes.

‘It’s here,’ Namjoon calls as he steps out of the lift, 4 of the GI behind him. ‘Nineti found it upstairs.’

The GI in question walks over to Taeh’yung and hands him the Comm Device and accepts the bowl from Yoongi with only a 2 second delay.

Jungkook notices how Jimin watches after the GI, an openly melancholic expression on his face. He must have known the GI- at least, some version of him from the past. But as Namjoon sits down next to Jimin he gives him a small one-armed hug, making Jimin smile at him, his expression settling.

Namjoon sips on some blue-green drink that Sk’jin immediately denies making though no one asked as they eat their meal.

Hoseok is praising Sk’jin and Yoongi on the stew, while Namjoon is explaining something to both Jimin and Taeh’yung about an ingredient in the stew to their genuine interest. Yoongi keeps piling food into everyone’s plates, moving silently and quickly to the point where Hoseok stares at his bowl in confusion, unsure where the added food came in from.

Jungkook allows himself to fully encompass this moment- allows himself to breathe in everything, everyone. They were all together again- complete and whole.

Everyone seemed so much sure- either of themselves, or of something. Like they came to accept things- learned more, understood more- and with them, Jungkook feels stronger despite all of the bruises and wounds.

‘Kookie, you want some more?’ Sk’jin is already holding his hand out for Jungkook’s bowl.

‘Yes!’

Sk’jin is very much slipping into a food comma but well, meetings.

Jungkook is also not faring too well, slumping against Hoseok looking sleepily satisfied. Hoseok was right. Watching Jungkook eat so happily really was nice to see. Though the GI really did a number on the cooked food. But they were at least, unlike the other 6, willing to do the dishes.

‘This is most delicious,’ one of them had said to Sk’jin after he nearly screamed at her sudden appearance. ‘You are my favourite.’
Favourite what Sk’jin isn’t sure. But he’ll take it. Maybe he could use it to his advantage. Didn’t someone once say the way to a Being’s heart is through their stomach?

‘Sk’jin!’

Sk’jin blinks away his food-induced stupor, looking around to find that Namjoon is watching him with badly veiled impatience.

Clearing his throat and adjusting the waist of his trousers discreetly, Sk’jin asks, ‘Yes, sorry, what was that?’

‘We were discussing the anticore,’ Namjoon gestures to Hoseok. ‘Which I think, you’ll find very interesting.’

If he had any more energy, Sk’jin would have maybe rolled his eyes and maybe said something but he simply suppresses a burp, shifting his gaze towards Hoseok instead.

‘Our suspicions were confirmed,’ Hoseok states, ‘I was studying the anticore with the GI, and the one they used on Taeh’yung is most likely a Khol’isa anticore.’

This makes Sk’jin shiver where he sits.

‘Why is it effecting him so badly?’ Jimin asks worriedly, clearly holding Taeh’yung’s hand under the table.

‘The Khol’isa are old,’ Sk’jin states bluntly, ‘We’re one of the first species really- not as old as the Zhak’gri but-…but it makes sense that what would really destroy us, would wound Taeh’yung.’

‘Most anticore could take out a Human,’ Yoongi provides unhelpfully.

Everyone glares at him.

‘I-‘ Yoongi gulps nervously, ‘I meant- Humans are a young species, relatively speaking in terms of Standard and uh, well-‘

‘Yes, we get that,’ Namjoon grimaces at him, ‘Moving on- there is no Khol’isa anti-…anti-anticore here. And I don’t want anyone to experiment a dosage on Taeh’yung.’

‘Why are you looking at me?!’ Yoongi demands, looking affronted.

‘Listen, not all of us have a penchant for poisoning our team members,’ Sk’jin drawls out.

‘Hey-‘ Yoongi frowns but Hoseok cuts across saying, ‘No one is going to run hypothetical experiments – not even Taeh’yung himself.’

Taeh’yung looks sheepish.

‘See? Tell him!’ Yoongi jerks his thumb towards the Zhak’gri who doesn’t even pretend to look sheepish at this point.

‘We’re going off topic,’ Namjoon frowns, ‘Since Taeh’yung is now, unwell, so to speak, we need to make sure he recovers. And this has to be before we even think of going to Axudar.’

‘So, ultimately we are going then?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘We will eventually need to go to Axudar,’ Hoseok sighs out, ‘It’s only a matter of time- even after
meeting with Jn’young, and hearing everything.’

‘I think that was what the Special Jury ultimately wanted also,’ Namjoon frowns, ‘It might be the reason why the Court even agreed to it.’

Yoongi grimaces at that. He most likely doesn’t want them going to Axudar.’

‘But I think we should go to Megibīya first,’ Hoseok begins, ‘Here, we can test to see if Jimin can get us through- maybe Prat’tna wasn’t able to because well- he’s from Megibīya isn’t he? He’s not some…uh, royalty.’

Jimin looks comically unimpressed. ‘If Prat’tna has said that the entry points into Menigišiti are closed or at least, completely damaged, then there is no way for us to enter at random. We were protected by a naturally occurring energy radiated by our sun Yino, and the natural resonance that guided our planets in orbit. We developed technology that allowed us to have several entry points. Megibīya was a natural entry-point, as well as Akramana, but Megibīya was further away. The only reason why it was a natural entry-point is because it was too far from the strength of our orbital resonance to fully conceal. Akramana was fully protected, but Megibīya was constantly exposed,’ Jimin explains, ‘There’s no way of entering Menigišiti through Megibīya.’

‘I think we stand to gain a lot by going to Megibīya,’ Hoseok says gently, ‘I know it will be difficult- for the two of your especially, but a lot happened there, that we could discover and understand with our new found understanding.’

‘I’m not saying we shouldn’t consider going to Megibīya,’ Jimin says earnestly, ‘I’m just saying that if the entry-points are closed, and the only way to access it is using the ships from Axudar, because someone clearly had the Akaraman engineers rewire and change the cells we used to stabilize the entry-points.’

‘But what about Megibīya itself?’ Yoongi asks, ‘Would it be safe to go? Won’t they expect us? Camil had said they reported Jimin’s presence. They said they would be ready to welcome him home. What if going to Megibīya is a trap. And they’re waiting for us there.’

‘So uh- I have an idea actually,’ Hoseok begins, looking a little shifty as he says so. Both Yoongi and Namjoon squint at him suspiciously. ‘I am not saying we should do this. There are a lot of variables in this that are unaccounted for, that cannot be accounted for, and all of that. What if we-‘

‘-allow ourselves to be captured?’ Sk’jin supplies.

‘What?’ Namjoon looks at both of them like they’ve gone mad.

‘Listen- I’m not saying this is the plan,’ Hoseok grimaces, waving his hand in a placating manner that doesn’t help.

‘The Beings of Menigišiti revolted against Jimin and his sister,’ Yoongi states crisply, ‘They surgically altered themselves so that they could “take control of their own fates” – and now they are doing precisely that, knowing full well it was a result of cruelly sacrificing them to an unknown power in order to fulfill their desires!’

‘I understand what you’re saying,’ Hoseok says as levelly as he can, not even batting an eyelash at Yoongi’s stone-cold glare. ‘But I hope you understand that we have advantages that they don’t have. Advantages that Axudar does not have.’

‘What do you mean?’ Namjoon demands though he looks like he’s interested.
‘Like you said Yoongi, the citizens of Menigišiti certainly revolted against Jimin and his sister,’ Hoseok nods at Jimin, ‘They even went out of their way to alter their appearances- but they are not like Jimin or his sister.’

‘Hoseok-‘ Yoongi begins brusquely but Jimin stops him with a hand over his arm.

‘Jimin was able to completely bring a stadium of Beings- numbered at over 200,000, as well as the surrounding Beings into a dazed stupor.’ Hoseok says quickly, ‘We have Taeh’yung, although unwell, who could very much indeed destroy a moon if he wanted to.’

Taeh’yung brightens up at that, looking pleased with himself.

‘And we have the GI with us. Invisible and powerful- perfect for infiltration-‘

‘-I know what our skills are,’ Yoongi scowls.

‘And we have us- we know so much.’ Hoseok waves a hand around the table. ‘Am I saying this will be easy? No- am I saying we will be able to slide right into Axudar and get down to bottom of all of this just like that? No. What I am saying is that we can increase the chances of our success if we use what we have to our best advantage.’

There’s a long pause of silence.

‘What is your idea?’ Namjoon asks.

‘We move from Megibīya,’ Hoseok starts at once. ‘Like Yoongi said, it’s very likely they will be expecting us in Megibīya. In fact I’m sure that Axudar has some sort of outpost there, keeping watch over the planet. And from what we know, pirates like to occasionally stop here right?’

Namjoon nods.

‘It’s also very likely the point of exchange Camil had talked about during his interrogation,’ Hoseok continues, ‘Places where they would bring more “followers”, arrange meetings, even deliver and bring in more eggs.’

Namjoon nods to that, frowning a little in thought.

‘We run a stake out,’ Hoseok explains, ‘I don’t know how long it will take- but we wait for Axudar to appear. They might already be situated there- but we sneak in-‘

‘-also we do have the invisibility-shield,’ Namjoon ruminates.

‘Exactly,’ Hoseok nods, ‘If all of their systems have been changed, their security; their scanning system would too. And Jimin, you said it was old right?’

Jimin nods.

‘It’s unlikely that we’ll be detected,’ Hoseok explains, ‘We get in, stay low, and after scanning the place, we get Jimin to well, uh, hypnotize them. The same way he did with the escort agents that came for Yoongi. We stay there, kinda like parasites I guess, we run a reconnaissance right in the location while being there. We get into Axudar, right into the location we need to get into and-‘

‘Wait- there’s no guarantee that we will be going directly into Kaitūtei,’ Namjoon holds up his hand, ‘I suggest we use bait- and no,’ he looks at Yoongi, ‘I’m not talking about Jimin, or yourself. Camil clearly reported all of us back to Axudar. And they’ve probably done their extensive
research, no doubt through connections they most definitely have in the GLA.’

‘Then who do you suggest?’ Jimin asks.

‘Sk’jin.’

Sk’jin genuinely chokes mid-inhale, nearly hacking out his lung.

‘What?!’ Jungkook speaks out for the first time.

‘There’s something I haven’t told you guys before,’ Namjoon says evenly, ‘Something Prat’tna brought up.’

Jimin looks at him with uncharacteristic sharpness in his eyes.

‘Prat’tna was sure that someone in the team was reporting back to Axudar- or at the least, back to someone who is under the influence of the Yisheng’s doctrine,’ Namjoon explains.

‘You cannot be serious-’ Yoongi frowns, looking indignant.

‘And I believe it is someone from the Special Jury.’

Sk’jin stops coughing though his throat is still burning. Now that was a new take.

‘You’re saying that one of the Special Jury members-’

‘-yeap.’

‘-so any anonymity we could have is-’

‘-yeah.’

Hoseok frowns, pausing before he says, ‘Well, if that’s the case, then yeah, Sk’jin.’

‘I beg your pardon-’ Sk’jin splutters out.

‘Sk’jin was there- in that planet, taken,’ Jimin suddenly says, ‘He’s…he’s encountered so much, broken so many laws-‘

‘-it’s not that many-‘

‘-laws of nature and science,’ Jimin adds, ‘He has been there, and back again, intact-‘

‘-I wouldn’t say that-‘

‘-intact in many ways,’ Jimin corrects, ‘He also has good defense- he’s cunning, intelligent- but he’s also-‘

‘Unique,’ Namjoon finishes. ‘If any of us were to try and put ourselves into this situation, likeliness of being killed instantly is very high.’

‘But with Sk’jin- even if they know it’s bait, they will still want to check him,’ Hoseok finalizes.

‘This is all very flattering,’ Sk’jin frowns, ‘But I protest.’

‘In this idea,’ Namjoon says with emphasis, ‘If we use Sk’jin as bait, and we proceed to make ourselves unknown to the situation and sneak in- we have direct access straight into Kaitütei. I’m
sure the new Great Council would be very interested in knowing what he had to say- or well, you know, probing into his mind.’

‘So glad you’re all so considerate of me.’

‘Also let’s consider the fact that Jn’young was able to escape Kaitūtei,’ Hoseok adds, ’He’s a Khol’isa- he was able to overpower so many of them, learn what they knew and look into their minds, so to speak- I think they’d be very interested in having a Khol’isa with them, especially considering they had an anti-core designed specially for them.’

‘In this idea,’ Sk’jin emphasizes lightly, ‘What is the next step of action?’

‘We would infiltrate the area, using Jimin’s abilities,’ Hoseok says at once, ‘However if push does come to shove, Taeh’yung can step in.’

‘What if they try to kill Sk’jin,’ Jungkook asks angrily.

‘They won’t because the Beings who would be in charge of Sk’jin’s arrest would be under Jimin’s influence.’

‘You’re assuming Jimin can indefinitely and infinitely use his abilities,’ Yoongi frowns, ‘He has a limit- and we don’t know how long the journey to Axudar will take. He could be exhausted by the time we’re there.’

‘Like I said,’ Hoseok says loudly, ‘It was just an idea.’

‘I have an idea too,’ Taeh’yung declares, slumped over the table, chin balancing his head in what couldn’t necessarily be a comfortable position.

‘Uh- go ahead buggy,’ Hoseok nods at the Zhak’gri a little hesitantly.

‘Why not bring the fight to us?’

‘What?’

‘Fight?’

‘Yeah,’ Taeh’yung nods, ‘Everyone’s clearly in Axudar- that’s their stronghold. They know this place. But what if we do everything in Hoseok’s idea until the part where Sk’jin gets kidnapped, and we grab a ship, because their ships are the only ones that can enter Menigišiti. We go in, check the damage or what’s happened in here because I think that’s also important. Besides I doubt all of Menigišiti really revolted against Jimin and his sister- I mean look at Axudar, look at Jaen right? Then over there, Jimin will return, like a king-’

‘-not royal!’

‘-like a king returning,’ Taeh’yung beams, ‘Declaring his right to rule. He will then demand the usurpers to reveal themselves to him, to beg for his mercy, and have justice served onto them!’

There’s a deafening silence. And Sk’jin has definitely heard this before.

‘Have you been reading the Six Hands of Our Love Volume IV?’ Sk’jin grins at the Zhak’gri.

‘Yeah! It’s so good! The king did indeed finally return!’ Taeh’yung sits up right, looking excited. ‘I didn’t think they would be able to make it and-’
‘Trash novels aside-‘

‘You take that back right now-‘

‘You’ve never even read it have you! Don’t judge a book by it’s cover!’

‘-that’s actually a good idea too,’ Hoseok admits, ‘But the main issue is that-‘

‘-is that Kaitütei is a major issue,’ Jimin completes, ‘We need to understand what’s happening there- at this point, it’s not just about going back to Menigišiti, it’s become bigger than that. We need to know what’s happening within Axudar.’

‘We don’t have any reinforcements or help,’ Yoongi says at once, ‘Going in to simply hope for a possible chance isn’t a strategic plan it’s a death wish.’

‘Which is why they’re all still ideas,’ Namjoon says clearly. ‘We are just giving out ideas right now- what could be a good approach-‘

Sk’jin feels a hand reaching for his.

‘And no one is going to be bait if we can help it,’ Hoseok adds, looking at Jungkook. ‘These are just ideas we’re throwing around Kook, sometimes we need to-‘

‘-let the universe absorb our ideas, really manifest it so that it returns to us, fully formed,’ Taeh’yung waves his hands around.

‘We need to make plans and not all of them will be fully-formed at once,’ Namjoon concludes.

‘So…so we still don’t know what we’re going to do?’ Yoongi trails off.

‘Well right now we’re headed for Odgõti-32,’ Namjoon shifts in his seat a little to lean forward and tap on the NaviLet he had brought with him. ‘It’s about a day from here- well, I mean 16 hours I guess as our speed is different now.’

‘What’s here?’ Yoongi asks, squinting a little at the planet.

‘Nothing,’ Namjoon shrugs, ‘It’s harvest-planet, tourist spot though currently it’s out of season.’

Everyone looks at him like he’s crazy.

‘I don’t get it,’ Jimin says slowly.

‘Yeah, why aren’t we uh- I dunno, planning to get closer to Axudar? Or something?’ Hoseok keeps glancing at him as though wondering if what he heard was right and was expecting Sk’jin to confirm with him.

‘We’re all high-strung,’ Namjoon exhales. ‘And we need a break.’

He’s met with dead silence. Even Taeh’yung looks surprised.

‘A break?’ Jimin asks slowly.

‘Yeah,’ Namjoon looks 100% serious.

‘Uh, Namjoonie,’ Sk’jin clears his throat, ‘We appreciate this, uh, holiday, but y’know, we do have the Omhlophe after us.’
Namjoon nods like he knows.

‘Prat’tna told me that the Omhlophe suffered a major loss,’ Namjoon states, ‘It’s possible that this means that they’re unable to follow us much- or at least in large numbers.’

‘Isn’t that still a very high risk to take?’ Yoongi presses.

‘There was something Prat’tna said, but wouldn’t elaborate,’ Namjoon sighs. ‘Something more than what Jimin has explained to us before.’

Jimin looks taken aback.

‘You think Jimin’s keeping something from you? From us?’ Yoongi demands.

‘No it’s-‘ Namjoon sighs with exasperation. ‘I think there’s a lot that Jimin doesn’t know.’ He looks over at him, apologetic but adamant. ‘Things that were kept from him. Prat’tna explained to me how a lot was kept from him- and with the changes in their tech, how Prat’tna could not find any entry-point despite being from Menigišiti and being a member of the Great Council. Jimin’s explanation of water being a conduit for their technology makes sense- Prat’tna hid in Lowet by the water- near the shoreline and said they were not found. Think of that time when we were in Ts’ets’khli we were underwater, so close to the Omhlophe, but we hadn’t noticed, and they most certainly didn’t notice when Jimin was at the market.’

‘So you think coming to rest briefly on a 90% water planet would explain that? Tell me what is your reasoning for using all of us for whatever theory you’re trying to prove.’ Hoseok’s eyes dart up from where he’s studying the NaviLet projection.

Namjoon nods reluctantly.

‘That makes sense,’ Jimin says suddenly. ‘Water is a conduit yes, but one of the reasons why Menigišiti is the way it is, is because-‘ he pauses, thinking hard as though going through words, ‘- our sun, is a quasar- very ancient, very old-‘

‘Wait how are you even surviving if your sun is a quasar-‘ Hoseok looks bewildered.

‘But we are unique- different,’ Jimin explains, ‘The pressure our quasar sun exudes also generates massive quantities of water-‘

‘-uh.’

Even Yoongi looks surprised. But Taeh’yung suddenly perks up at this.

‘Wait- quasars are- they don’t generate water like that,’ Namjoon frowns, ‘Also, I think regardless of how hidden you are, I think we’d be able to pick up on the existence of a quasar in the area- and we would most definitely be able to see it. Even if it didn’t have the tails or heat rings.’

‘And you can’t, because of our orbital resonance with our quasar,’ Jimin says firmly.

‘Okay I am not doubting you,’ Namjoon says at once, ‘But you have to admit this is very strange- you can’t just live in a System that has a quasar for its sun! All laws of physics, everything we know for millenniums now, is against it.’

‘So are the existence of the GI but here we are,’ Yoongi mumbles.

‘Hey, listen, cloning has been a-‘
‘-let me rephrase, I, Min Yoongi, a Human who very much indeed did die many centuries ago, am here in front of you,’ Yoongi says clearly, ‘I think we are well past the stage of denying what seems to be impossible. Look at all of us gathered here.’

Namjoon sighs, nodding in acknowledgment.

‘That would mean Menigišiti has a very vast and high level of energy,’ Hoseok ruminates.

‘We do,’ Jimin nods, ‘We harvested the energy of our Sun to power our planets; from everything to our engines, machines, networks, medical facilities. We also powered our cells that held up our barrier around Menigišiti. The water it generated helped in acting as a conduit to spread across our System.’

‘So how does that have anything to do with the Omhlophe?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘Prat’tna said that in order for life to flourish, you need water.’

‘Well, I guess thanks for the basic lesson in science but,’ Hoseok frowns, ‘That doesn’t explain anything.’

‘I think it might,’ Yoongi offers unexpectedly. ‘The Omhlophe, if they are some strange version of the GI, well, technically we aren’t what most Beings would consider as living Beings. The Omhlophe could most definitely fall under that category.’

‘So you’re saying, that the Omhlophe are technically a weird living-dead species, unable to process the volume of water,’ Hoseok states slowly.

‘It’s a possibility if that’s what Prat’tna believed in,’ Yoongi shrugs. ‘They were never discovered in Lowet, despite being so close to Ynqaba. Lowet had plenty of eggs, New Borns, but the Omhlophe never did find them.’

‘Tae, you once told me that the Omhlophe were like us- but different,’ Namjoon address the Zhak’gri, ‘What did you mean by that, could you elaborate?’

‘Hm,’ Taeh’yung hum, leaning against Jimin. ‘I think it’s…- a twisted version of the Regurgitated I guess. That would kinda explain it.’

‘How?’

‘Yoongi remembers his past right? As in, well, his life until it ended in the hands of the Red Evil,’ Taeh’yung concentrates comically, his face screwing up, ‘But the Omhlophe in a way, had their lives begin in the hands of the Red Evil.’

‘That sounds like what Amme mentioned,’ Hoseok nods before asking, ‘Buggy, you seemed excited when we mentioned water, and the quasar, why’s that?’

‘Oh!’ Taeh’yung’s mouth opens into a perfect circle, ‘Hobi! That’s because quasars and blackholes and nebulas and supernovas are all the remains of the First Children!’

‘Oh- oh, I guess that’s…I mean if we accept this genesis as being true, it makes sense,’ Namjoon frowns.

‘How?’ Hoseok asks, bewildered.

‘The Known Universe is of course, very very old,’ Namjoon waves his hand dismissively, ‘In this
chaos of nuclear reactions and rapid destruction, quasars were frequently formed and peaked, combusting to form more stars, possibly whole galaxies too. Most quasars were able to witness now are in the process of imploding- it’s why the GLA vacates the surrounding areas to secure it.’

‘It’s also where that other Yisheng ship is currently located yes? Watching over an evacuation due to a blackhole?’ Sk’jin points out.

That was definitely something to think about.

‘I guess we should try then,’ Hoseok says slowly.

‘And any sign of danger, anything strange, anyone feels the slightly bit off, we leave at once,’ Namjoon adds hurriedly, ‘We just stay in warp for weeks if needed. We have enough fuel for that.’

‘Well, who am I to deny a good deserved holiday,’ Sk’jin sighs out. ‘Kookie has also never seen a beach?’

Jungkook shakes his head.

‘You’ll love it!’ Taeh’yung coos at the Vicitra.

‘If this proves to be true, and our stay is undetected, this could potentially be very helpful in being able to protect and save countless lives,’ Namjoon tells them earnestly. ‘With what Jimin confirmed, and with what Prat’tna said, and with what we know, Menigišiti could be a safe haven for every single egg, or New Born, or even the Regurgitated, to simply live in peace, without fear of the Omhlophe or the GLA.’

Taeh’yung gives a small cheer, throwing his fists in tiny motions around his head.

‘Great, a nice sunny retreat,’ Sk’jin breaks the silence, ‘Yoongi, we can work on a tan for you.’

Yoongi just barely stops himself from rolling his eyes, grunting instead in response.

‘So,’ Sk’jin stands up, looking around the table. ‘Does anyone want dessert?’

Even Jungkook groans in protest.

*

Sk’jin distributes some thick slices of syrup drenched sponge logs to the GI and pulls up a plate for himself before making his way up.

‘Amad’la! Could you open up Cabin 31?’

‘Of course.’ Amad’la replies, voice sounding muffled, no doubt due to this wonderful sponge log.

‘Bless you,’ Sk’jin smiles up at one of the cameras.

The doors slide open silently and Sk’jin steps right in. He ignores the table, chairs, and even the bed and instead with his foot slides open the door to the bathroom and barges in on Namjoon, uncaring for his very soapy wet naked state.
‘Hey, the new arm is really cool-‘

‘Sk’jin!’ Namjoon screeches- he actually screeches. ‘What the fuck-?’

‘I had some inquiries.’

‘Couldn’t it have waited until after I was done?!’ Namjoon demands, hiding further into his shower as though hoping to hide himself. ‘How the fuck did you get in?!’

‘You’re not hiding anything I haven’t seen- or well, imagined-‘

‘Excuse me?!’

‘-I mean I did take your lip virginity-‘

‘-what?! Get out!’

‘Fine,’ Sk’jin snickers.

After 5 minutes, during which Sk’jin is scraping the syrupy juices of his sponge log with his fork, Namjoon steps out, fully clothed, irritated expression on his face.

‘How can I help you,’ Namjoon grits out.

‘Wanna talk about the Special Jury,’ Sk’jin leans back to lounge on Namjoon’s bed. ‘Please, let us discuss theories with your sexy mind.’

‘Can you not,’ Namjoon wipes at his face, suppressing a groan.

‘Are you saying I can’t compliment you on your sexy mind?’ Sk’jin puts on an affronted look. ‘It’s the only time I’ve complimented you!’

Namjoon collapses on his chair, swiveling to face Sk’jin with a tired look in his eyes. There is a random twinkle to his eyes though, and what looked like a smile trying to pull on his lips. But not one of embarrassment or even amusement.

Sk’jin looks away and says, ‘So, care to share?’

‘It’s just speculations.’

‘I would like to speculate as well.’

Namjoon heaves a sigh and surprisingly comes to sit next to Sk’jin. Well, it was after all Namjoon’s bed, but Sk’jin is nonetheless still taken aback.

‘There’s a high possibility, considering our bad luck, the way this supposed plan set up by some of the most powerful, strategically cunning Beings, has been the shittiest thing thrown together; and it was obviously meant to be like that because they were already trying to comb each other out.’ Namjoon grumbles, ‘Not to mention their own desire to prove themselves to the Court- after all, this is a power-struggle. Beings like Haenoon who desperately want more power and trust from the Court, or even Amme who needs to now rewrite the entire Yisheng history- she knows this mission will be one way of doing that. To prove herself different and trustworthy from Ndica and Tlun’hla.’

‘Are you suspicious of K’mara?’ Sk’jin asks bluntly.

‘I won’t say I’m not,’ Namjoon replies honestly, ‘She was, after all, there for those meetings with
Ndica and the Great Council in Akramana. I won’t be surprised—considering she knew so much, was immediately ready for the Red Evil, so to speak, and invested in obtaining the GI under the guise of protecting them under the GIU.’

‘What about the others? S’ava, Lmiura, Xmi, Sh’nour – considering some of their connections with the Alliance— I’m pretty sure they also have a lot to gain from fulfilling this mission but also seeing it fail.’

‘I know it’s not any of us,’ Namjoon’s tone is frank, ‘We’ve been through this before and it’s obviously not any of us.’

‘Well, glad it took you being kidnapped to come to that conclusion.’ Sk’jin raises his fork in a toast, bits of syrup threading out.

‘I already did a long time ago,’ Namjoon scowls, reaching over to wrestle the fork and plate from Sk’jin and placing it on the floor. ‘But there is validity in what Prat’tna said. And after witnessing what happened with Ilya and his network. I think the problem here is that nothing ended with Ndica’s and Tlun’hla’s exposure. Sure, the Red Evil was destroyed— but they too were in the end, a product of something worse. Something that we now have the misfortune of having to somehow fix while being forced to cater to the whims of Beings all vying for a position of power they will most likely abuse in the future.’

Sk’jin can’t help but laugh, throwing his head back.

‘What?’ Namjoon huffs out but he’s not irritated or anything.

‘Nothing,’ Sk’jin lowers his legs from the bed, still laughing a little.

‘If you’re gonna make fun of me—‘

‘Ah Namjoonie, have some faith in me,’ Sk’jin stretches a little as he stands, ‘I was gonna say that despite what I say most of the time—‘

‘-all of the time.’

‘-someone once told me that optimism and believing in everyone’s capacity for goodness isn’t a sign of ignorance or stupidity,’ Sk’jin waves a hand flippancy, not looking at Namjoon, ‘We process and see the Universe differently, and that doesn’t make you wrong.’

‘Just say you’re happy to see me again,’ Namjoon laughs quietly as Sk’jin exits the room.

Sk’jin scoffs as he exits the room.

‘Hey! Aren’t you gonna take this back?!’

‘You have both arms now! Use them!’
Watching Jungkook’s eyes grow wide in awe, mouth slightly open as he runs around the Bridge to every single possible window to look at Odgōti-32 as they enter its atmosphere is worth the risk.

He keeps glancing back at them excitedly, as though asking if this was real.

And Sk’jin can understand Jungkook’s awe too. Because Odgōti-32 was indeed very beautiful. The water was mainly deep indigo, shifting to a softer blue around the pale sand shores. Massive water filtration units hovered over the waters, and a quick scan shows that they’re empty of living Beings. Namjoon had mentioned it was run primarily by cyborgs. And though tourists did indeed come to vacation here, there weren’t a lot who did. After all, there weren’t any universally appealing locations or spots to spend time looking at or experiencing. Most times they were educational trips, to understand water harvesting. But as it was approaching Odgōti-32’s winter season, and the harvesting machines were not functioning in their full power so as to not dry up the planet, no educational expeditions were around either. They nearly entirely had the planet to themselves, though Hoseok did find a few rare tourist groups who had come in for water-hunting, but they were on completely different islands, far flung from each other.

They purposefully choose an island that had limited fauna and flora, making it unlikely anyone would want to visit. The shores are clean, and the sand is a dullish-grey, gradually becoming coarser and larger, forming pebbles higher up towards the small rocky island.

Sk’jin finds himself nodding at Jungkook’s wide starry-eyed appeal, not sure how or why he’s become the one Jungkook (including Taeh’yung somehow) looks for to ask permission.

He hears Hoseok laughing behind him, taking his shirt off as he walks past, ‘I think I’ll teach him how to swim.’

‘You just want to show off your body!’ Sk’jin yells after him, adjusting the long-sleeved robe he had pulled on. It wasn’t cold, but dipping into bodies of water when it wasn’t the height of summer always lead to some form of clogged nose and Sk’jin would rather not.

Yoongi seems to be thinking along the same line, nearly entirely covered up except for his face. He had a towel over his head, like a hood, to protect himself.

‘Yoongi, like I said, we need to work on your tan,’ Sk’jin reaches over to poke the Human. Yoongi simply whacks his hand away (Sk’jin stops himself from hissing at the pain), arms crossing over his chest as though in challenge.

Jimin runs out with Taeh’yung on his back, giggling loudly like children, chasing after Hoseok and Jungkook, dressed in just some form of short-legged trousers.

‘Hey! Will you sink if we throw you in?’ Sk’jin calls out behind him where Namjoon was dragging a large rolled up…roll. ‘What’s that?’

‘Something everyone will thank me for,’ Namjoon says wisely.

The sun is wonderful on his skin.

The hue of the light is a bit amber, creating an illusion of warmth- but it was like sinking into a hot bath. Sk’jin feels like his skin can finally breathe- his bones easing, muscles finally relaxing. He looks up, tipping his head back.

The breeze is a little on the warm side but Sk’jin welcomes it. It smells like salt, and a bit like ozone, but Sk’jin is happy- he feels incredibly renewed.
'Good?'

Yoongi’s looking at him, a small smile on his lips.

‘Absolutely perfect.’

Namjoon had brought out a training mat, no doubt used by the GI. Speaking of the GI, they were standing at random, looking about as though confused though their faces showed no signs of emotion. Sk’jin could very well be projecting but when Amad’la approaches them and says, ‘What is the point of that?’ while pointing at Jimin and Taeh’yung, splashing water at each other while Hoseok demonstrates (on the sand) how to properly swim, Sk’jin thinks he’s rightfully projecting.

Sk’jin stretches himself out on the mat, snagging Yoongi’s towel from his head to throw it over his eyes and spreads his limbs out.

‘Can you at least-’

‘-no.’

Namjoon sighs but nonetheless manages to sit down somewhere.

‘Nineti! You have to carry me and we can defeat Jimin!’ Taeh’yung yells.

‘Is Taeh’yung trying to get the GI to get into the water?’

‘Yeap.’

Sk’jin snorts.

‘I wasn’t good with water,’ Sk’jin finds himself saying.

‘Yeah?’ Namjoon sounds just as surprised as Sk’jin feels.

‘Fuck, I hated oceans and seas and like, bodies of water that went down to a planet’s core, y’know? Like, what the fuck are you so deep for? I’ll fucking destroy you!’

Sk’jin can’t hear it, but he’s 100% sure Namjoon’s doing that thing he does when he’s trying not to laugh.

‘So what made you, uh, get over it?’

‘Eh- nothing special really,’’ Sk’jin flaps an arm. ‘Just stopped thinking about it I guess. Besides, once you hit space, the whole thing about something being vastly large and strangely empty but weirdly occupied kinda just stops being scary.’

‘That’s it?’

‘Yeap.’

Namjoon actually does laugh now.

‘Not everything is some cool reveal Namjoonie,’ Sk’jin stretches some more again, really enjoying the sun over him. ‘Realization and acceptance aren’t always paired with a dramatic flare.’

‘Heh,’ Namjoon wheezes, ‘Yeah, I guess you’re right.’
Sk’jin lifts the towel from his face a little to look over at Namjoon. He was holding the NaviLet in his hands.

The sun wasn’t just doing Sk’jin good apparently.

‘How was Lowet?’

Namjoon shrugs, ‘I told you already.’

‘No like…how was it,’ Sk’jin asks rather lamely.

Namjoon glances in his direction, looking surprised to find Sk’jin looking at him.

‘I’m not saying that you lacked empathy before,’ Sk’jin begins, ‘Spaces knows you don’t lack it; but it’s like, I guess you really were able to just, I dunno, live differently there, in Lowet.’

Namjoon looks out into the view, a serious somber expression on his face.

‘Yeah I guess. I mean, I met another Kutsoglerin and he was- I don’t know,’ Namjoon says hesitantly, ‘There was such a wonderful…energy around him. Like he was truly, genuinely, living his life- uncar ing of where he came from, how he came to be- or even why. He was just living- obviously he might have problems in his life, but-…there was just…a sense of, well I wouldn’t say purpose but-‘

‘-a sense of peace?’

Namjoon looks back at him.

‘Yeah,’ he nods, ‘I guess so, yeah.’

Sk’jin smiles.

‘Did you ever do that?’

‘What, find peace? I’m offended that you don’t think I’m peaceful.’

Namjoon let’s out a loud bark of a laugh.

‘No need to be harsh about it,’ Sk’jin pushes the towel over his eyes again.

‘So have you?’

‘I did,’ Sk’jin replies honestly. ‘But maybe not the same way you did- or well, the way you would want it.’

Namjoon’s clearly waiting for an explanation.

‘And I’m doing all I can to go back to it.’

The silence between them stretches for a while, and Sk’jin thinks that’s the end of their conversation but then Namjoon quietly says, ‘I’m sorry we had to leave Ilya so quickly.’

‘Ah,’ Sk’jin readjusts his position, crossing his legs at his ankles, ‘I’m guessing Hobi told you?’

‘Uh, Jimin did, actually.’

Sk’jin rolls his eyes. Of course Jimin did.
Once this is all done, I think Ilya will be more than happy to have you join him.’

Sk’jin doesn’t respond. He’s not sure how to, really.

‘In fact, I think I can promise you–’

‘No!’

Sk’jin sits up, whole body jolting with a shock of cold.

Namjoon looks surprised, eyes widening a little and leaning back a little.

‘I just- I meant, don’t make promises you’re not sure you can keep,’ Sk’jin gets out as evenly as he can. ‘It saves you the pain.’

Namjoon just nods, looking somehow quite young in this amber sunlight, air ruffling through his hair. Sk’jin gets up and walks away before Namjoon can apologize or do something similar to that. Instead he finds himself pausing in front of a few of the GI, carrying a strange variety of objects in their hands.

‘Uh- what are these for?’ Sk’jin nods at them.

‘In case someone drowns.’

‘I read in ‘Investigating Unknown Waters’ that one should always be prepared for the unexpected. And one of the unexpected things listed is dehydration.’ The GI holds up 4 bottles of ionized water.

‘I read in ‘Enjoying a Day at the Beach’ that it is important to protect your skin,’ the other says, holding up a very generous sized container of some sort of skin serum.

‘Taeh’yung told me to bring this,’ the last one says, holding up a massive inflatable colourful ball. Where did Taeh’yung even find that.

‘Well, that’s uh, very nice,’ Sk’jin manages to get out, too distracted to notice how Jimin and Jungkook were approaching him until it’s too late.

Sk’jin will deny screaming like that later as he’s tossed into the water.

Jungkook is hiding behind Jimin who was hiding behind a bewildered Namjoon.

Smiling his best smile, Sk’jin says in his best sweetest voice, ‘My dear fellow Beings, let me teach you a short lesson.’

Jungkook runs of shrieking, his speed unhampered by the wet sand. Jimin isn’t as fast, and he also had a guilty smile on his lips. Sk’jin simply picks him and shakes him a little before tossing him into the ocean as well, taking an unsuspecting Taeh’yung down with him.

‘Jungkookie! You can’t run forever!’ Sk’jin sing-songs.

Jungkook lets out shrieks of laughter as Sk’jin gives chase. There’s no catching Jungkook, but Taeh’yung and Jimin team up against the Vicitra and they’re able to tackle him to the ground. He’s able to push them off, which was slightly disturbing considering he had 3 fully grown Beings on top of him, but he squeaks and gives up, raising his hands up in the air. Hoseok walks over to rescue their youngest, wheezing tearfully because: ‘Oh Sk’jin, I wish I had captured your facial expression the entire time!’.
Exhausted, Sk’jin and Taeh’yung slump over to where Namjoon was still sitting, and still very dry. Though Taeh’yung takes care of that by throwing himself over the Kutsoglerin’s lap while dripping wet.

‘Are you sure you’re comfortable like this?’ Namjoon asks gingerly, holding his NaviLet up away from the soaked Zhak’gri. Taeh’yung is stretched over on his back over Namjoon’s crossed legs, arching very strangely, with his arms and legs extending out.

‘Super,’ Taeh’yung beams, struggling to look at Namjoon from his weird angle.

‘Can you not leave the NaviLet for one second,’ Sk’jin chides.

‘Who says I’m doing anything important?’ Namjoon shoots back at once.

Suddenly Taeh’yung gasps, feet kicking and connecting to Sk’jin’s shins.

‘You’re reading it!’ he proclaims, pointing at Namjoon.

‘What-‘ Sk’jin winces in pain, jumping back a little before it clicks. ‘Oh Spaces Namjoon are you reading the Six Hands of Our Love?!’

If Namjoon were capable of turning red, he would, because instead he stands up, rolling Taeh’yung off of his lap in the process and makes to escape. But Taeh’yung manages to trip him up and flops himself over the tall Kutsoglerin like some worm.

‘He is!’ Taeh’yung squeaks, poking at Namjoon as he wheezes.

‘Namjoon I cannot believe it took you this long to finally accept one of the best literary works of the Known Universe.’

Namjoon gives up and allows Taeh’yung to roll over him, accepting his fate, gripping onto his NaviLet like it could save him. They take a short lunch break, set up by the GI who recreate an image they used as reference from a book called ‘Outdoors Celebration: What To Do, and What To Avoid’. They almost feel guilty as they sit down to enjoy their lunch.

After their lunch, Jungkook pulls Jimin and Hoseok over to the wet shoreline to create lumpy shapes and forms out of the wet sand. Hoseok is simply indulging the two, while Jimin helps Jungkook by holding his palms out to create shapes or simply hold some large stones for Jungkook to pick from. Yoongi walks over and simply watches, picking up pebbles he thought were pretty and presenting it to the small group. Taeh’yung uses one of the GI as a pillow and completely knocks out, the shadows around him very faint and diminished under this warm light.

‘Is Jungkook creating a sand fortress for himself?’

‘Yeap.’

Jungkook was basically creating a dome of sand all around him, using a combination of wet sand and pebbles. Hoseok is giving him advise as he makes funny plates and bowls from the sand. Jimin was eyeing Jimin’s laidback form, a mischievous spark in his eyes as he lowers himself to say something in Hoseok’s ear. Hoseok throws his head back laughing, nodding in agreement to whatever Jimin had just said.

But they don’t immediately start whatever it is that they’re planning. Jimin walks over to Yoongi, sitting down by him. Hoseok seems to be relaying this information to Jungkook who grins gleefully, nodding very quickly.
‘Dessert?’

Namjoon is holding a bowl of fruits the GI had apparently brought out. Sk’jin only just barely jumps at the sight of them again, not having heard them.

‘Do you get used to the GI just going about like this?’ Sk’jin asks, taking the whole bowl.

‘It’s like getting used to Yoongi.’

‘Yeah but Yoongi is one besotted Human,’ Sk’jin rolls his eyes, popping a berry-like fruit into his mouth.

It’s incredibly sour, but immediately incredibly sweet as well.

‘My tongue has never been more confused.’

‘I bet I can make your tongue really confused,’ Taeh’yung mumbles sleepily. Sk’jin smooshes the fruit into Taeh’yung’s mouth and waits 2 seconds before the Zhak’gri is squealing. But Taeh’yung’s squeals are drowned out by Jungkook and Hoseok’s laughter.

‘I-…’ Namjoon has a funny grimace on his face- as though confused as to how to feel. Sk’jin looks back around and finds the GI stiffly imitate Hoseok, splashing him and Jungkook with sea-water. They’re still in their GI uniform, though without their helmets, expressions completely blank, and splashing water onto Jungkook’s and Hoseok’s sprinting forms.

‘This is slightly depressing,’ Namjoon groans.

‘It’s pure comedy,’ Sk’jin snorts. ‘I thought your sense of humor would improve after being kidnapped, but I am proven wrong.’

Namjoon gives him a bewildered look.

‘What? Won’t be the first time someone has improved and gained interesting characteristics after being kidnapped.’

‘Sk’jin,’ Namjoon presses his hands into his face.

‘Yes my dear?’

But Namjoon doesn’t comment, instead he’s shaking- shoulder’s visibly quaking.

Did…did he break Namjoon? Was he crying??

Namjoon is not crying- he was laughing.

Even Taeh’yung sits up a little to look at the Kutsoglerin.

‘Pa?’

Namjoon just shakes his head, groaning a little at himself maybe, ‘I always thought we were too different.’

And okay, Sk’jin wasn’t expecting that.

‘And it’s true,’ Namjoon smiles, reaching over for a fruit.
'You’re not even gonna enjoy that, give it back,’ Sk’jin slaps the fruit out of Namjoon’s hand.

‘But I think it’s nice.’ Namjoon just gives him a small wink, dimple forming deep in the process as he pulls away, attention shifting to his NaviLet.

Sk’jin looks away.

‘Oh, I want to be buried in the sand too,’ Taeh’yung mumbles, breaking the stretched silence that was suddenly echoing inside his head.

Sk’jin follows Taeh’yung’s line of sight and watches as Jimin, with the help of Hoseok, Jungkook, and the GI, now cover Yoongi’s laidback form in wet sand, making his outline look like a fish.

Yoongi is obviously complaining, but he’s doing nothing to break free even if he could. His head is pillowed on Jimin’s thighs and his previously protesting hands were being held by a laughing Jimin. Jungkook brings an armful of wet sand, plopping it over Yoongi’s weakly struggling legs.

‘My clothes!’ Yoongi can be heard wailing though there’s no real complaint in his tone. Hoseok is wheezing, slapping handfuls of sand over the Human.

‘This is nice,’ Taeh’yung mumbles again, turning over to his side to watch, as the GI strategically bury Yoongi under wet sand. ‘This was a good idea pa.’

Namjoon just grins.

‘Even if this was just a live experiment that if it fails would endanger us all.’

Namjoon glares at him.

Sk’jin laughs, leaning back on his arms.

But this was nice.

The sun, untainted and pure, shone all about them, as though some light of illusion allowed them a brief glimpse into a life much gentler and kinder than the one actively pursuing them.

And maybe Sk’jin finds beauty in it because of its fleetingness. He’s seen enough, witnessed many beautiful and unique sights, watched countless of sunsets and sunrises- seen endless stars and nebulas, watched the death of a star, the aftermath of a birth of a star- he’s witnessed whole lifetimes of so called “once in a lifetime” phenomenon.

And yet somehow, today- this simple and seemingly mundane day of simply stopping by a plain beach, is the most beautiful thing Sk’jin has ever lived.
So!!
Quasars are so cool!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
But the thing about the water stuff is technically theoretical both mathematically and in terms of theoretical physics
Is it a potential thing?
Sure
But so is nearly everything in the scientific community
The thing about water surrounding a massive space is something that has stuck to me since I once misread the Bible as a kid (yes! I was born and raised Christian but I do not identify as such anymore!) and I read about how a massive body of water surrounded the universe and i
Freaked out
I am massively hydrophobic
Like seriously
I cant look at videos of the oceans or seas or big bodies of water I Just Can’t™
And I used to be scared of space as a kid
So those combined
Traumatized me
But I thought, in story form as an adult, it’s pretty cool!!!
Also IU and Suga T_T
I am still not quite over it
Also as an animation student the music video was stunning, I loved it so much, it was done so beautifully those colours were amazing guys T_T two absolutely lovely and thoughtful people coming together to create something so beautiful, once in a lifetime event
I think I’m able ot set up a better schedule now for updating too! Around every 2 weeks, give or take a day or two! I wish I was able to update weekly like I used to before but T_T
ALSO SPEAKING OF BEING AN ANIMATION STUDENT
I made something!!!!! I recreated 10 BTS MVs in 3D using their iconic pieces/set design/lighting/aesthetics into cubes!! Please check it out:
Artstation
Tumblr
Twitter
Megibīya is a strange and beautiful planet.

The lands are brutal on this side, geographical masses formed and shaped by harsh unprotected heated UV rays, an already thin ozone layer barely filtering out the harmful rays from the surface of this orbit-locked planet. Massive curls and waves of ravaged earth arch high above them, broken and parched land, ravines plummeting deep into the core. Jimin told them that strange and unseen creatures lived deep down within the ravines, something Taeh’yung had been excited about. Namjoon had immediately banned him (and Jungkook) from attempting to make contact with the creatures.

Thick layers of clouds, a geomagnetic storm that was still raging on one side of the planet drape across in thick coils, blossoming on the side of the planet like some terrible portal. According to Jimin, that was never there before.

It’s incredibly difficult to maintain their speed adjustments so quickly after jumping out of warp.
after entering any planetary atmosphere—especially one this tough. But it’s almost a stroke of luck none of them were expecting. *To an extent.*

‘This is not going to be easy on you guys,’ Hoseok says tersely, steering them through vibrant splays of light that erupt with the force and weight of lightning. It’s strangely cushioning on their engines and warp-core. Entering the storm through the atmosphere from space would be relatively easy; simply allow gravity to take over. However, exiting would be difficult.

*‘Just get us through Hobi, I got this,’* Sk’jin replies calmly.

Something powerful breaks over the front of the Bridge, temporarily flooding the whole room with white light. Hoseok had been expecting this and they had already implemented filters over every window and gateway, but the light is still painfully bright.

‘Shields are still above 80%,’ Hoseok announces, ‘Our communications will be shitty.’

*‘Set up isotope-tracing map,’* Yoongi orders.

One of the GI next to Hoseok quickly taps one of the many tabs of the Communications Dashboard they customized to stand by Hoseok’s immediate reach.

‘Get the projections on please Yyna,’ Hoseok tells the GI who immediately obeys.

Immediately, 7 distinct coloured dots appear, surrounded by another series of dots in smaller forms. ‘Start mapping onto region-specified map—guys, 5 minutes.’

*‘Got it. We’re boarding now.’* Sk’jin replies.

‘The sun is still behind us,’ Hoseok reports, glancing over at the display spread over the windows where a tracker was scaling after the violent light spewing from the sun. ‘Reaching the canyons soon, I can see them.’

Flat and high canyons appear in the strange mirage filled stormy horizon ahead of them.

‘Magnetic surge detected,’ Yyna tells him, ‘Employing diverting tactics.’

‘Guys hang on.’ Hoseok calls just as they spin sharply, momentarily flung harshly as they descend the skies of Megibiya.

‘Initiate automatic equalizers on all systems,’ Hoseok orders, eyes still ahead, looking at the glimmering gold canyons. The front of the canyons facing the sun was always molten, according to Jimin. The heat in this area would be intense, but their transporters would be able to withstand it. ‘3 minutes!’

No one replies back but it’s fine.

He breathes out slowly, momentarily closing his eyes.

‘The geomagnetic storm extends past the canyons for 200 kilostreams,’ Yyna reports, ‘An additional minute in our current speed, stable enough for take-off.’

‘Thank you,’ Hoseok nods at the Megibiyan.

It was strange. She would be returning to planet she held no memory of, no connection; she would have to see what once was, in a life she once lived, out of memory and time.
'Geomagnetic storm ebbing out,' another GI reports from the back, manning the Navigation Table. '5 openings found, leading into the outer-most valley outside the Crescent Ridge.

'Okay, good,' Hoseok locks on to one of the gaps in the canyon, 'We’re going to use the central opening, everyone suited up?'

'We’re good.'

'We’re ready.'

'1 minute,' Hoseok glances at the dashboard to the side. 'Preparing defensive shields, decompressing the Hangars now.'

The canyons are massive. The closer they get, the more overwhelmingly large they are. Jimin had explained that this canyons were formed during the genesis of the planet by flowing magma, heated continuously by the spewing gamma rays expelled by their sun. And over the ages, the surface stilled, forming lofty structures of a primitive rage and fear forever preserved along this ring that ran across the planet.

It was easy to say they were still molten by looking at them- rock surface slowly eroding away into heated dust particles, sparking the air and the ship like a physical wall of friction. The walls glow fiery red and gold, heat mirages twisting perspective and depth. He hears Taeh’yung gasp out in awe.

'We’re in!' Hoseok calls, and even though the ship is not effected by this sweltering oppressive heat, Hoseok feels himself sweating.

'Atmospheric pressure stabilized,' Yyna reports.

'Great, perfect.' Hoseok slows their speed steadily, barreling past massive columns of rock and dust, cracking open to expose fissures of heated gasses, forcefully enough to split rock.

'Anything on our scanners?' Namjoon asks quietly.

'Nothing,' Hoseok replies at once. 'We’re clear. Give me 30 more seconds.'

Hoseok gradually steadies their speed, spinning briefly to avoid a massive expulsion of steam. He quickly rights them, staying just below the tops of the canyon and above the line of sunlight now far behind them.

'Ready?' Hoseok looks around to address Namjoon, Sk’jin, and Jimin on the surveillance feed to the side of his dashboard.

'Ready,' Namjoon replies while Sk’jin starts up the transporter.

'Yoongi? Jungkook?' Hoseok pulls up the second feed.

'Ready,' Yoongi replies back, also from inside a transporter, indistinguishable from the GI behind him with his complete GI uniform. Jungkook gives him a small wave from next to Yoongi, his helmet on his lap.

'All right. Opening Hangar gates in 10 seconds,' Hoseok taps over his dashboard, starting the countdown locally through their communications network. 'Buggy? You’re good?'

Taeh’yung gives him a thumb’s up from the weapons dock.
'This will work,' he hears Namjoon say quietly, not to anyone specifically. ‘Remember, we are already checking the marks up until now.’

Hoseok checks on their isotope-tracking map one more time just to be sure.

‘Hangar Gates 2 and 9 opening. Transporter 12-03 and TE-02 have safely undocked.’

Hoseok takes a short moment to savor on one of their smaller successes.

‘Transporter TE-02 stabilized and on route to our destination,’ Yoongi reports.

‘Transporter 12-03 stabilized,’ Sk’jin reports back. ‘We are also clear for our trajectory. Shields full and cabin pressure at green.’

‘I have your transporters online. Autopilot functions are ready at any moment for both.’

‘We’re halfway there now,’ Yoongi states. ‘Getting ready to dismount and switch to the HoverPorts.’

‘I’ve got us through the edges of the storm- are we on the scanners?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘No- you’re good,’ Hoseok replies, ‘Our heat signature will stick out from the environment soon. We’re about a minute from being detectable. Buggy, how are our defenses holding up?’

‘We’re good!’ Taeh’yung promptly reports back, kneeling up on his seat to grin excitedly at him.

‘We’re on the HoverPorts. Nothing on our scanners either.’ Yoongi announces quietly. ‘Getting into formation.’

‘All right.’ Hoseok focuses ahead, weaving through the large canyons and rocky pillars jutting out in dark burnt hues. ‘If anyone’s out here, they’ll be able to see us any minute now.’

‘Leaving the thermosphere,’ Sk’jin sounds tense. ‘I am seeing nothing so far.’

‘Found a landing point within the heat-waves; exiting the TE-02,’ Jungkook sounds slightly breathless but there’s an unmistakable excitement to his tone, ‘Following Yoongi’s lead now!’

‘Exterior temperature has dropped below the ship’s readings,’ Yyna states. ‘All scanners will be able to pick up on us now.’

‘It will be okay,’ Jimin tells them, his voice unwavering, calm, and sure. ‘It will be okay.’
By the 3rd day Hoseok is battling with a pretty bad case of jitters. Not because he’s nervous, or anxious- rather it’s the opposite.

Hoseok has never quite grasped the concept of a holiday.

He’s pretended he’s been on a holiday for several missions- acting the tourist, even participating in a guided tour, creating fake local crafts with believable enthusiasm of an ignorant tourist.

So he’s not sure what to do really.

He’s itching to grab his screen, discuss and plan- but even Namjoon was taking a break. His NaviLet opened to some trash novel series Sk’jin loved. Not that he was on it the entire time; Namjoon and Jimin were together more frequently than they were not in the past 2 days, seriously discussing things, making adjustments to projections Hoseok cannot define or make out. But they don’t ask for help or an opinion, so Hoseok doesn’t bother to ask. Jimin also took to speaking for prolonged periods of time with the GI. Hoseok had gone back inside to get his clothes dried after being dunked into the sea by Jungkook and Taeh’yung and had found Jimin sitting across from Nineti, neither of them moving or speaking. Hoseok hadn’t wanted to disturb, so he hadn’t approached them.

He’s not sure if others have seen it, or if this was supposed to be expected, seeing as Jimin did indeed know many of the GI present here. It would make sense if he tried to communicate with them.

So Hoseok approaches the holiday almost as though it were a mission. He would relax, soak up the sun, enjoy the water, enjoy food outdoors.

And so far he was doing a good job of it.

Mainly because he felt this was a good time to train Jungkook in some of the more random, but also missed opportunities the Vicitra would have otherwise never gotten the chance to experience.

Hoseok smiles to himself, remembering Jungkook’s reaction to the sea water. Teaching him how to swim was just an immediate natural chain of reaction. And Spaces does Jungkook takes to swimming with unnerving skill.

He also holds his breath for a worrisome length of time, making Hoseok, Sk’jin, and Namjoon nearly panic when the Vicitra doesn’t emerge 10 minutes later. Jimin, alarmed, takes to the water immediately, followed by Yoongi, diving under the calm waters. Hoseok spots Namjoon calling for the GI, all of them dropping their immediate task of fortifying a massive sand-fort and heading for the water when Jimin and Yoongi break the water.

‘Did you find him-?!’ Sk’jin calls hysterically, splashing forward hurriedly.

But instead, Yoongi is nearly doubled-over with laughter, leaning on Jimin’s shoulder, whole body shaking. Jimin looks like he’s unsure how to feel- a hesitant smile on his face.

‘Uh-‘

There’s a great splash some distance from the flatter shorelines and Jungkook appears for a moment before he sinks down again.
‘What’s happened?!’ Sk’jin demands, receiving a still laughing Yoongi with confusion. Then out of nowhere, Jungkook emerges, a massive bleeding and still struggling aggressive looking aquatic creature draped over his shoulders.

Yoongi is laughing even more, now supported by Jimin who just rolls his eyes, muttering under his breath in his own language, dragging the Human away with him.

Sk’jin lets out a loud squeak when Jungkook waddles over to them, big grin on his face, hair sopping wet. He looks incredibly pleased with himself.

‘Jin!’ Jungkook eagerly calls, ‘Look what I fought!’

Hoseok tries very hard not to laugh out loud as Sk’jin screams, wading backwards as quickly as he could, away from Jungkook holding the creature towards him. He collides into Namjoon who is laughing hysterically, but doesn’t move away as Sk’jin climbs up on him, trying to get away from Jungkook’s teasing.

‘Keep that away from me!’ Sk’jin shrieks, ‘Namjoon-! Namjoon hey do something! NAMJOON!’

Hoseok looks around, finding Yoongi and Taeh’yung in stitches on the sand as Jimin covers his face with his hands, shoulders shaking.

Ultimately, Jungkook stops his teasing and with a bright grin, proceeds to methodically kill the large aquatic slithering creature with a single crushing grip of his fists. Sk’jin is making loud retching sounds, pushing Namjoon to move away from Jungkook.

Jungkook takes his kill towards where Jimin, Yoongi, and Taeh’yung are, looking pleased. Taeh’yung is exclaiming at the colourful scales while Jimin does his best to praise the youngling. Yoongi is still laughing as he leaves the small group, heading back to the ship.

Hoseok stops Namjoon, nodding at the group, ‘Uh- I have a feeling they might try and cook that.’

Namjoon looks scandalized for a moment before he sighs in a resigned manner.

‘I’ll check to see if it’s actually edible and not like, poisonous or something.’ He sighs, walking over to where his NaviLet was.

‘Anything on our scanners?’ Hoseok asks, glancing up towards the sky.

‘Nothing,’ Namjoon replies, also glancing upwards.

‘I guess your theory is working?’

Namjoon shrugs. ‘I hope it is,’ he pauses a moment before asking, ‘Have you ever been to RY-522?’

It takes a moment for Hoseok to remember what or where that is.

‘Isn’t that in Fytikos?’ Hoseok quirks an eyebrow, ‘An asteroid?’

Namjoon nods.

‘Not personally- never really had any missions near Fytikos- it wasn’t necessary anyways. Cheimaros is no longer being threatened.’ Hoseok replies thoughtfully, ‘Besides, most of the regions in Fytikos are a no-travel zone.’
'So basically no one would be able to enter? Was it under the GLA protection?'

Hoseok wonders why Namjoon’s asking him all of this. He was an Information Analyst, he should know more than Hoseok. He nods in reply but also adds, ‘I mean, technically you can’t go in; but GLA protection statutes and sanctions aren’t always the most full-proof. There’s always a loophole you can get around. Most of the time it’s the Yisheng’s themselves that are the loopholes.’

Namjoon squints a little, still searching for the aquatic sea-creature but his mind is clearly somewhere else.

‘If you wanted to get into Fytikos, into RY-522, how would you do it?’

‘They’re under a biophysical protection system right? Class A?’

Namjoon nods.

‘Well, I’d find a way to have those protection systems lifted,’ Hoseok replies thoughtfully, ‘By persisting an evidence that declares that whatever is in need of protection within RY-522 is under threat and needs instant analysis. This automatically shifts responsible authorities who are funding and overseeing the protection to check up on the “threat” - they will then need to send in external analysts to reduce bias as protocol dictates. Depending on the level of threat, either the GIU or Yishengs will be sent to investigate. If it’s RY-522, it’ll most likely be the Yishengs. During that time, I slip myself into the gathered team. Always more tricky when it comes to the Yishengs if I’m being honest. But if it turns out well, I hitch a completely legal ride into RY-522.’

‘So there’s normally always some form of loophole we can take advantage of then?’

‘More or less,’ Hoseok replies honestly, wondering what Namjoon was getting at.

Namjoon nods slowly to that before he exclaims, ‘Ha! Got it!’

‘What?’

‘The creature,’ Namjoon grins, showing him his screen.

Turns out that the aquatic creature, the tafata, was indeed edible. Hoseok wonders if Jungkook somehow knew and as a result picked a fight with it? Like some instinct told him that this creature was edible and he could hunt it if he wanted. Or maybe it was because it presented a threat, as Namjoon scrolls down the information to find out that the tafata was in fact a deadly and speedy predator that often fed on much larger creatures for sport. Yoongi is uncannily efficient in deboning and filleting the aquatic creature, pointing out how he’s doing it to Jungkook who watches with wide eyes, absorbing the information. Sk’jin pales at the sight while Taeh’yung takes the colourful fins and scales, fashioning some off device for his head with it. Jimin watches, both amused and slightly disturbed.

Namjoon is clearly finding all of this extremely entertaining.

‘It’s like you missed us,’ Hoseok teases.

‘Huh?’

Hoseok laughs, watching as Namjoon realizes what he meant by his words, looking back at the scene before them.

But Namjoon doesn’t splutter or deny it. Instead he shrugs a little and gives a short nod.
'Yeah- I guess you could say that.'

‘Fuck, this place is…it’s different from what I remember.’ Yoongi says out loud.

‘You didn’t see these trees when you were here?’ Jungkook asks.

‘No- we were closer towards the cities- not this far out.’

Hoseok hasn’t seen trees this big before. Jimin had said that the vegetation towards the edges of the Crescent were massive. And he wasn’t exaggerating.

Some of these tree trunks were as wide and tall as the Department infrastructures in Šerdesas. The bark is stone like, oddly light, with thick veins of dark sap breaking through the layers at random. The leaves are browning and fall in a slow entrancing rain around them. Heaps of them fall, some branches swaying and snapping, heavy bouts of dust, greyish pollen, and ash-like particles gust about as well when they fall into contact with their shields.

‘Anything?’ Yoongi asks quietly.

Hoseok glances at the tracker to the side, watching Yoongi and Jungkook’s dots leading a stream of other dots behind them some 50 kilostreams away.

‘Nothing,’ Hoseok replies, glancing at Yyna who belatedly shakes her head. ‘We have nothing here.’

‘We’re getting nothing too,’ Namjoon adds, ‘I think we’re clear on starting up the geoscanners- clearly what the GLA has provided for “Bhumi” is incorrect.’

‘Nothing here too.’ Jungkook sounds excited.

He had picked up almost immediately on how to operate the HoverPorts. If they were that small, tracking their readings at the speed they were maintaining would be virtually impossible. They maintain a parameter around their trajectory. Hoseok is doing nothing to mask their presence- it would be difficult after all, with a ship of this magnitude.

‘It’s cool right?’ Hoseok asks Taeh’yung who hasn’t said a word since they broke past the canyons and into this strange dense colossal forest of gigantic trees. He had only stood, leaning over to the windows, palms placed on the windows, leaning is as though trying to feel the trees they flew by.

Taeh’yung doesn’t reply immediately, he’s unmoving where he stands.

‘Crescent Ridge city approaching,’ Yyna informs him. ‘Marked Keldana; a farming city.’

‘We can see it,’ Yoongi says at once, ‘Team B, scout the parameter.’

Hoseok brings the ship above the browning foliage slowly, pollen and dust wrapping around them
briefly like vapor.

The city, Keldana as Jimin had called it, is not large. The stout and heavy looking infrastructure are much shorter than the trees that slope down in height towards the valley. And past the thicket of colossal trees that shrink in height the further they expand out, the last of the canyons flatten out into massive step-like plateaus. The structures appeared carved in mimicry of the canyons they had flown past- brown and grey walls broken by sporadic outcrops of windows, doorways, balconies, and bridges. Even from this distance, it appeared completely desolate and empty. The living spaces seemed to form a semi-circle, with a massive space in between.

‘I can see you,’ Yoongi reports.

‘I see you on the tracker,’ Hoseok replies back before calling, ‘Sk’jin? You guys good?’

‘We’re out of the planet’s gravity-reach,’ the Khol’isa responds, ‘Namjoon and Jimin are realigning our navigation charts- you should also start receiving the geoscans soon. I see nothing so far.’

‘Nothing from here too,’ Hoseok looks at their scanners, ‘We’re gonna land as soon as Yoongi gives us the green light.’

He slows their speed even more, glancing around every scanner they had on.

‘Buggy?’ Hoseok calls the Zhak’gri, ‘Everything okay?’

Taeh’yung looks away from the windows, giving him a sad look.

‘No,’ he replies simply, ‘This is a sad place.’

Hoseok doesn’t know how to respond.

‘There’s nothing here,’ Yoongi tells them, ‘I’m putting Team B on a 25 kilostream radius patrol around us, I’ll meet you where you land.’

‘Got it,’ Hoseok replies before adding, ‘Buggy, take a seat?’

Taeh’yung goes back to where Yoongi normally sat and doesn’t say another word.

‘Are they watching?’ Hoseok asks, pulling them a little higher again, the small city of Keldana getting closer, the trees shrinking in size.

‘Yes,’ Taeh’yung sounds dismissive, but not towards Hoseok himself, ‘They’re afraid.’

‘It’s okay to be afraid,’ Hoseok sighs out, the HUD automatically adjusting to track Yoongi’s and Jungkook’s tracker on to the screen once they’re close enough. Yyna locks on to their locations, allowing their surveillance to zoom into their location and setting up a landing spot. ‘Being afraid is a natural response.’

‘But everything here is so unnatural,’ Taeh’yung mumbles.

‘The air is breathable and clean,’ Jungkook tells him, sounding like he’s reading, ‘Um- just dusty?’

Yoongi and Jungkook and a few other GI with them are astride their HoverPorts. They’re sleek, gravity-based engines running off on air-particle converter engines. They were incredibly quiet, undetectable as they lacked any fuel trace, and incredibly fast. They were a completely new model-
not available even to the Venture Unit agents. So when they found a stock of 50 HoverPorts in the Hangar stores, they put them to immediate use. Yoongi taught Jungkook how to use one in under an hour. Surprisingly, Namjoon took the longest and was deemed unqualified to handle it.

But Jungkook took to it easily, immediately joining Yoongi in their scouting mission.

The city they’re in is small, but eerily well-preserved. Evident remains of a normal life still remained, though incredibly faded. Empty and dead pots of plants line up balconies. Wooden sticks propping open windows for decades and decades still remain. Faded and tattered flags barely hang on to their poles, crumbling water towers and irrigation networks spreading around the city lay broken from time and lack of care. A sunken ravine has carved through some fallen buildings, where a water source had clearly leaked out a long time ago, breaking through the structures above it.

‘Sending you structural integrity readings,’ Yoongi says as they close in on the clearing at the center of the city. Remains of dead trees line up the clearing; what appeared to be crumbling statues line up certain areas, and at the very center, the ravine cracks through the grounds, creating a still and deep pool.

‘Did you catch that?’ Hoseok asks Yyna as he brings them right to the center. He doesn’t want the shelf they were landing on to crumble with their added weight, especially if an underground ravine was already expanding for Spaces knows how long.

Yyna nods, unaffected as they land in a city that would have had some sort of familiarity to her. But maybe it was good it didn’t. It was painful enough to hear Jimin talk about his home-system in the past-tense, a suppressed and desperate strain of hope in his tone.

‘We are receiving geoscans,’ she tells him.

‘Okay- let’s put that through into the Table, alert me when it’s completed.’

‘Understood. We are also clear to land.’

‘Great, okay we’re landing now Yoongi.’

Hoseok spots them below, moving to give the ship a good wide berth to land. He’s barely gotten them down when Taeh’yung immediately rushes out of his chair and sprints past. He doesn’t move with his usual eagerness, but rather with a somber determination. Hoseok makes sure that the ship is stabilized, locking it onto autopilot and follows after the Zhak’gri.

The air is cool, but a strange staleness lingered heavily. The infrastructure seems both heavy and fragile now that he’s outside. Looking around briefly, he catches sight of Taeh’yung’s lanky figure near the mouth of the ravine.

‘A search around the parameter indicates no sign of life,’ Yoongi tells them, ‘I’m going to have Team B expand their patrol.’

‘Got it,’ Yoongi looks behind him, catching sight of the HoverPorts drifting around the massive opening, keeping close to the ship but maintaining a good distance in the same time. ‘Are you guys all right up there?’

‘We’re fine- still headed for our coordinates.’ Sk’jin replies at once. ‘We’re halfway to the mark.’

‘All right, do you want me to patch the ship’s surveillance to you?’
‘No. It’s okay,’ Jimin replies back.

Taeh’yung squats down, looking down at the ground beneath him, and then around him.

‘Anything?’ Hoseok asks, not sure what he means by the question, or if Taeh’yung could possibly give him an answer that made sense.

‘It’s empty.’ Taeh’yung sighs out, placing his palm over the ground, weak echoes of green spread from his hands. ‘No life lives here anymore- this planet has been dying.’

‘So…-so that means Jimin was right?’

Taeh’yung gives him a sad look, standing up slowly.

‘I think this is something he knew in his heart the moment he woke up,’ Taeh’yung says thoughtfully. ‘But I think he was trying to deny it.’

‘So then…Menigišiti…’

‘Just ghosts,’ Taeh’yung looks around. The shadows around Taeh’yung flicker, the air momentarily stilling. ‘Angry, trapped ghosts.’

Hoseok feels a shiver run down his back.

‘Can you sense anything else?’ Sk’jin asks tersely.

Taeh’yung looks a little uncomfortable- mostly sad as he glances about the clearing. The water in the ravine is not very forceful but it at least fills the air with some sort of sound of motion. Something other than the still and deep crumbling of the infrastructure around them or the falling faded leaves.

‘It’s almost as though…’ Taeh’yung frowns, looking around and then back at Hoseok, ‘I saw this happen to Earth.’

Hoseok can practically hear his heart beating. He’s seen the footage in Court; watched, alongside so many others, the ruin and destruction of a planet home to millions. A planet rendered to nothing for no reason other than to display power.

‘But this is incomplete,’ Taeh’yung mumbles, ‘It’s why this is happening. This slow decay.’

‘Do you think it’s possible the other planets have faced the same fate?”

Taeh’yung shrugs, looking about and scuffing the floors with his bare feet. The shadows disproportionate around him flicker and bend.

‘What do they observe from this?’

‘Wrath,’ Taeh’yung replies at once, ‘Punishment.’

‘And what do you observe from this?’

Taeh’yung looks up, surprise in his eyes, flickering copper and green. He smiles a little before looking up, gaze pointed upwards.

‘I see that all life is Continuum.’
‘I’m getting a report that there is a small encampment in what appears to be a depository 150 kilometers from Keldana,’ Yoongi says suddenly, ‘It appears to be quite recently constructed according to observation. I’m headed there to investigate. Jungkook will remain here and receive the scans from our Irises.’

‘Got it,’ Hoseok steps away from the cracked edges of the ravine and towards where Jungkook was getting off his HoverPort, removing his helmet in the process.

‘Wow, Kookie’s gonna break a lot of hearts when he grows up,’ Taeh’yung remarks almost nonchalantly.

‘You stay the fuck away from him you ancient pole,’ Sk’jin snips in immediately.

Taeh’yung splutters a response, stomping bare feet on the ground. Jungkook gives them a brief confused look before handing his screen to Hoseok.

‘I don’t like how it smells,’ is the first thing he says.

‘Yeah, it smells stale,’ Hoseok nods in agreement. Taeh’yung stops explaining himself to Sk’jin and sniffs the air aggressively a few times.

‘Huh,’ he looks at them in mild surprise, ‘My nose is bust?’

‘Side-effect we did not foresee,’ Namjoon quips in at once, ‘Another thing we should make note of.’

‘They’re all laughing at me,’ Taeh’yung frowns behind him, his eyes glaring.

‘Ignore them,’ Hoseok pulls Taeh’yung closer so that they can all look at the screen together. ‘Are you getting this as well Namjoon?’

‘We are.’

‘We never used fuel in the form of wood,’ Jimin tells them, ‘We had abundant resources if we wanted, but harnessing our sun’s energy was so much more efficient. This depository was built to maintain and keep a balance on wood-rot among the trees. We always had Megibīya fully supplied for their energy needs. Megibīya had no actual use for wood as a material, other than for certain religious practices, hobby, or recreational crafts.’

Sk’jin snorts at that, ‘Recreational crafts- is that what the kids call it these days?’

‘But,’ Jimin continues, not acknowledging Sk’jin’s jib. ‘It appears to be fully stocked, and the trees in the zone have been felled, not naturally.’

‘It’s possible that it’s pirates,’ Yoongi says quietly, ‘We’re running a scan and examining the grounds before heading in.’

‘What do you guys think?’ Hoseok asks the two on either side of him.

‘Um, this planet was empty for a long time right?’ Jungkook asks, ‘No one to really guard. Trees were rare in Ynqaba, and the Kabans would hunt more for it- pay more for it. Trees like this,’ he looks around, eyes wide, head tilted all the way back as though trying to see every single tree around them, ‘trees like this would be invaluable in Ynqaba.’

‘Megibīya really is kinda a sitting varak,’ Hoseok mumbles, ‘You just need a good pilot and you
can get in, take what you need.'

‘Isn’t that what you thought about Menigišiti as a whole?’ Sk’jin asks no one in particular. ‘That now, it would just be one massive source of material and resources?’

‘It’s a possibility,’ Jimin replies evenly.

‘We’re clear,’ Yoongi chimes in.

‘All right, I’m pulling up all of your Irises now,’ Hoseok announces, tapping the side tabs to pull up all of their feed from Yoongi’s Iris as well as the GI with him.

The forest there is much more sparse- whoever was felling the trees were being sneaky about it. They took down the trees at every odd interval, spreading the loss of trees in a way that almost appeared natural if it weren’t for the fact that from ground level, the evidence was pretty clear. Whoever was doing this, wanted to avoid detection from surveillance above.

Towards the center lay a high mound of logs of varying size. Evidently old ones were at the bottom- cracked, dried, many crushed to flattened pieces of bark and fiber. Some are evidently much newer, the barks still intact and stuck onto the main wood core. There’s a sort of chopping device, rotted and faded heaps of wood shavings lumped to one side, some sort of fungi growing over them. There are small stone huts, many dilapidated, but at least 3 were still standing with their domed roofs still intact. Outside one of them, Hoseok spots the remains of a fire pit. It’s not new- maybe some weeks, possible a month or two old. It’s dry, the burnt wood hardened ash and charcoal. Around the huts the floors are paved with smooth flat stone slabs, dried weeds and roots piercing through. But the area before one of the huts has been cleared of the bigger roots.

‘I don’t think the Beings doing this are doing it um, legally,’ Namjoon ruminates, ‘It’s secretive, but they’re also trying to prolong this activity; like they’re trying to maintain it. It’s not done with confidence that there will be no repercussion.’

‘There are old tracks- transporter brakes,’ Yoongi crouches down, tapping gently on the cracked stone floors, showing distinctly familiar scorch marks from a transporter brake turbine. ‘Someone used to come here, land here. Live here, and take things.’

‘Could be pirates,’ Sk’jin ruminates.

‘Could you check inside the huts? Be careful though.’

They watch as Yoongi approaches the hut where the entryway has been cleared.

The door is barely hanging to a hinge, and inside there’s evident signs of struggle. But all the furnishing, the peeling plaster on the stone walls, the dried climbers that must have once took over the whole place are covered in dust and in a ruined state. It’s not old, but it’s not quite recent at the same time.

‘Something definitely happened here,’ Hoseok contemplates, ‘Not very recent.’

‘There’s no remains,’ Yoongi says quietly, scanning the hut and entering the back room and dark en suite as well. ‘I don’t see any evidence of a living Being being here.’

Suddenly, Jungkook’s gloved finger reaches out to the screen and taps on one of the other feeds. At the same time, Sk’jin curses under his breath.

‘Is that-?’
There’s a burnt mound, blackened and even after this time, somehow strangely damp as though still bleeding from what was placed there. The charred bits of wood are placed in a circular pattern, pointing inwards in varying lengths that quickly form a distinct pattern, like the rays of the sun.

‘Most of the Megibīyan cremated their dead,’ Jimin says quietly, ‘For both life and death came from fire.’

‘So this is a pyre.’ Namjoon states, ‘The customs of the Megibīyan- are they applied to the other dead who are not from Megibīya?’

‘No,’ Jimin replies, ‘It was only reserved for the Megibīyan- and-...this perfectly mirrors exactly how it was done. The placement of the pyre wood and-’

‘There’s another one,’ Yoongi cuts across shortly.

Hoseok quickly finds Yoongi’s feed, enlarging it a little. And true to his word, Yoongi comes across another circular pyre, the logs of varying lengths placed systematically here too.

‘There’s another not too far from it.’

‘Team B, spread out and find other pyres,’ Hoseok orders, ‘Report back on how many you find.’

It’s painfully quiet waiting for the GI to accumulate how many pyres they find because it doesn’t seem to end. The further they spread out into the trees of the forest, in nearly every direction, pyres spread across the ground. Many covered with years of vegetation.

‘What does this mean?’ Jungkook asks.

‘This is a graveyard,’ Yoongi announces, voice unnaturally level, sounding very much like how he did in the past. ‘These are all pyres. The wood was cut, to fuel the pyres.’

‘...maybe Prat’tna buried them,’ Namjoon says tentatively, ‘There were others before him- before Yyna, maybe this-’

‘It’s too many,’ Yoongi cuts across quietly, ‘There’s too many here.’

‘Can we run any samples on the remains of the ashes?’ Sk’jin asks sharply, ‘Rather than speculate, let’s make sure what we’re looking at is what we think it is.’

‘We can try to extract DNA prints from the ashes,’ Namjoon confirms, ‘Each living Being has a unique chemical make based off of their home-planet. If there is any sample that is foreign to Megibīya, it will show up.’

‘Team B, collect samples,’ Yoongi orders quietly.

‘It seems like it was done respectfully?’ Jungkook asks quietly, sounding unsure.

‘A sacrifice is always executed respectfully,’ Taeh’yung remarks as he steps back.

Hoseok’s hand tingles, heat licking over his palms slowly.

‘Hoseokkie, do you think you could check around the city?’ Sk’jin asks, his tone purposefully light.

‘What? Why?’ Hoseok looks back around at the crumbling city.

‘Great, not just the ones outside, maybe further deep inside- closer to the ravine maybe,’ Sk’jin
continues, ignoring his question.

He understands what Sk’jin is implying and Hoseok wishes he didn’t.

‘Team A, split up,’ Hoseok orders, ‘Drive by slowly- find any indication of recent activity around the infrastructures- check for areas with less weeds, or area specific erosion, water connection-things like that. Nineti, with me.’

Immediately, 6 of the HoverPorts depart ahead of them while Nineti approaches Hoseok. Hoseok quickly climbs up behind him. Taeh’yung is quick to scramble ahead with Jungkook.

‘Yyna- make sure you’re keeping an eye on all the scans,’ Hoseok glances up at the ship towards the Bridge.

‘Understood.’

‘Let’s split up and cover more ground,’ Hoseok orders, shoving his screen into his inner pocket. ‘Let’s go Nineti.’

The city is not large, but a lot of it was clearly suffering from erosion and lack of care. Massive cracks and veins ran up the chipped plastered stone walls, giving Hoseok the strong impression that any force applied would send the walls around them crashing.

‘Here,’ Nineti says suddenly a few minutes later.

‘Here?’ Hoseok looks about as they reach a crossroad. Evidence of stalls remained around the streets - possibly a smaller market area. None of the goods have survived but evidence of earthenware, what appeared to look like some form of OrTanks, and other display facilities lay abandoned around the area.

Nineti stops and Hoseok gets off.

‘Clear view of the clearing,’ Nineti informs him in monotone, ‘Shelter above.’

Hoseok glances up, spying a wide rocky shelf jutting out from the side of the canyons. He can hear the water streaming just some ways to their right.

He glances at the stocky stone-faced structures around him. Most of the doors are haphazardly flung open- some shut closed by more than just bolts and locks, but with age and decay as well. Hoseok squats down, looking down at the floors around the streets. It’s faint, but Hoseok knew what he was looking for.

‘Here,’ Nineti says again, crouched down, hand touching the ground before him in an almost gentle and respectful manner. ‘This drag mark is recent.’

The stone floors were naturally quite scarred and eroded, but Hoseok can spot serrations, paler than the outer stone face, scratching up in an unmistakable manner.

‘Something was dragged here.’ Hoseok remarks, ‘Team A, rejoin us at Nineti’s coordinates.’

‘You found something?’ Taeh’yung asks eagerly, ‘Because I was about to say we did too!’

‘If that’s the case, continue to check- we have a lot of ground to cover in this street itself.’ Hoseok nods at Nineti, pointing towards one of the doors at random, ‘Start with that one there- check to see if there are cellars, basements – even attics.’
‘Understood.’

Hoseok waits a minute before he spies two of the GI approaching on their HoverPorts before he ducks into one of the doorways himself.

The structure of the place is sound- mostly appearing to be carved straight out of stone and rock but with a smoothness that was definitely not natural. There’s a cleverness with the structure of the domed roofs that Hoseok would admire more if he had time. But just one look inside tells him there’s no possibility of someone living in here even in secret- not with the way most places are caved in.

He walks out and into the next doorway.

‘Yoongi, anything?’

‘We’re still finding more,’ the Human says. ‘There’s…there’s a lot.’

Hoseok knows he’s found something when he enters his 4th doorway and he finds tell-tale signs of TeorSer blasts scorch the walls.

‘There’s signs of struggle here,’ Hoseok reports immediately.

‘Here as well,’ one of the GI announces quietly.

‘Here as well,’ another echoes.

Hoseok stops, looking about the seemingly “normal” abandoned area.

‘Cellars,’ Jimin tells him quietly.

Hoseok looks to the ground at once. Visually he can’t tell anything apart with the inlaid patterns, clearly designed to keep hatches hidden. So he lightly taps his feet around, listening to the echoes. Right next to an archway, the echoes from his steps sound marginally hollow. Crouching down, he removes one of his gloves and traces his fingers along the stone patterned across the floor.

‘Press down around the edges,’ Jimin instructs him, ‘Near the walls, it should allow you to slide the panel off.’

Hoseok’s fingers immediately dig around the sides of the archway wall. There’s the faintest feeling of one of the stones being loose so he presses down on it.

The panel slides off so lightly, Hoseok has a hard time believing how seamlessly the hatch had been hidden in plain sight. According to Jimin, so much of Megibīya was a front. The whole planet pretending to be a slow-developing planet just somewhat out of it’s secondary genesis stage. Their infrastructure, architectural landscaping, exposed technology, and projected lifestyle was all to display an uninteresting façade to any who might be interested enough to visit. But their work with stone and rock was more than just phenomenal. According to Jimin, the Megibīyan could hide their lodgings and dwellings into solid rock faces with no one ever noticing. So it made sense that their cellars were so cleverly hidden. In fact, Hoseok doesn’t believe that they’re actually considered all that great by Megibīyan standard.

Inside, deep stairs open up to him.

Old stains mark up the surfaces and Hoseok’s stomach drops.
‘Head Pilot Hoseok, I have found more evidence that a raid once took place in here. How to proceed.’

‘Take samples,’ Hoseok orders, as he makes his way all the way down. It’s dark but his eyes adjust quickly. He makes out beds, bunkers, storage facilities- and they’re somewhat recent. Not more than some decades old.

‘Um, Hobi,’ Taeh’yung says gently, ‘I think we’ve…found something we need help with. None of you babies come here though!’

‘What?’ Hoseok takes a clear look around the place.

‘Please come,’ Jungkook requests, sounding somewhat pained. ‘Sending you the coordinates.’

Hoseok follows their coordinates- not too far from where he was, just a little deeper into the city. He catches sight of the GI quietly moving through each accessible stone structure. Hoseok picks up a brisk jog, stopping before what appeared to be an incredibly damaged and run down building. Jungkook’s HoverPort is outside, still humming quietly, ready to be jumped onto if needed. He can’t tell when the building must have fallen, but Hoseok forgoes that for now and enters through a crumbling doorway.

He’s not sure what about this place might have attracted Jungkook and Taeh’yung to search this place. The hallways, which were surprisingly intact the further Hoseok goes in, are dusty- no indication of struggles here.

‘Hobi?’ Jungkook calls out.

Following his voice, Hoseok steps into one of the doorways in the hallway and then once more through another doorway he thought would maybe lead to a washroom. But he’s mistaken. Instead the doorway turns sharply, stairs leading downwards. Jungkook is there at the bottom, his expression worried.

Quickly, Hoseok makes his way down.

‘What is it?’ Hoseok asks at once, ‘Why did you tell the GI to stay put?’

Jungkook just gestures behind him.

Once he reaches the bottom of the stairs, Hoseok first spots Taeh’yung, kneeling on one knee on the floor, hand reaching down before him. Around him lay corpses, decayed, aged, and preserved. Hoseok has seen Yyna, as well as Prat’tna’s images to easily identify the Megibīyan corpses. But there’s a clear difference separating the corpses; two of them are dressed in garments visually different from the others.

Taeh’yung answers his unasked question when he pulls his hand away, lightly grasping at the fragile fabric that wrapped around the corpse.

Even in death, after what appeared to be some months, the indent on the back of the dead Megibīyan is clear.

‘I found this,’ Jungkook says from behind him. ‘It’s just like the ones the GI use.’

Hoseok is handed a long handle- a Heliord, not unlike the ones Yoongi recently equipped himself with. In fact, it’s identical to the ones Yoongi was using- identical to the ones the GI were using.
‘What is it?’ Sk’jin asks sharply. ‘What’s wrong?’

Hoseok changes their communication channel, speaking only to the other 6.

‘We’ve found bodies of several Megibīyan, as well as the Megibīyan GI,’ Hoseok tells them quietly.

The silence is deafening.

Hoseok kneels beside Taeh’yung, observing the body of the GI before him. Then he hears Sk’jin sigh quietly.

‘We are at 500 pyres,’ Yoongi breaks the silence- sounding strained, ‘I’m stopping us before we get too far from the ship.’

‘Return to the ship,’ Namjoon tells him tersely, ‘Have the samples analyzed. And we proceed ahead to the next city.’

‘Buggy, Kook, do you think you could take the samples? For the GI as well as the Megibīyan,’ Hoseok asks as he stands up.

Jungkook nods before he hesitates and asks, ‘What happened here?’

Hoseok looks around the secret room, notices the cellar panel that has shifted slightly to reveal the way inside. He walks over, pushing aside the panel to reveal the stairs. There’s another body there across the stairs.

‘Something we wouldn’t have been able to stop.’ He replies simply before adding, ‘We’re headed back to the ship. Yoongi, could you tell the Teams to head back as well- I think we should move on to part 2 of this plan.’

‘Coming back now.’

* *

‘Where’s Yoongi and Jimin?’ he asks the two.

‘They went for a walk around the shoreline,’ Jungkook reports immediately, ‘I think they said they would collect dry flora for the fire.’

Hoseok smiles in thanks. He climbs up some of the stacked flat rocks about the shore, squinting around to spot Yoongi and Jimin. He catches sight of their small figures in the faint light of the dusk, and because he was looking for them, 2 of the GI some ways from them.

Yoongi had been looking better the past few days. It wasn’t just Sk’jin who seemed to improve by being out here. The Human appeared well rested, the dark rings around his eyes lessened though his skin didn’t seem to gain back any colour. Not that he had much of it before, but there’s a sort of permanent starkness to his skin that was clearly indicative that something was wrong. His entire Being however, seemed to have blossomed under the sun; he was much more expressive. Laughing,
smiling- even making dumb jokes, sharing stories and anecdotes, giving Taeh’yung and Jungkook
genuine and constructive advise on many topics, offering support to the two. Hoseok believes that
when Yoongi had been truly alive all those centuries ago, he must have been an incredibly fun and
grounding Being to be with.

It made sense that he would have reached out to Jimin the way he did when he first met him.

Breathing out slowly, Hoseok looks all about the island they’re on.

Overhead to the distance, one of the many water-harvesting machines that dotted the skies of
Odgõti-32 was drifting by. Great ventilation systems beneath the machines absorbed and filtered
the sea water, purifying it for export. It trails behind it great clouds of vapor. One of them had
passed overhead earlier that morning, their hair immediately turning damp and their skin dewy.

‘Hobi?’

Suddenly, Taeh’yung is leaning against his legs from where he’s plonked himself on the rock
surface.

‘Hey buggy.’ Hoseok leans down a little to ruffle Taeh’yung’s hair.

Taeh’yung takes a deep breath and exhales slowly.

‘Smells nice here,’ he remarks, twisting his arms around one of Hoseok’s legs.

‘Yeah, the air is nice isn’t it?’

Taeh’yung nods against his knee.

They stay like that for while.

‘Buggy, you’re okay with leaving right?’ Hoseok asks, looking down, ‘Feeling better or do you
think we should still stay?’

Taeh’yung looks up, eyes large.

His hair had grown out a little, the humidity and wind and sun browning the Zhak’gri’s hair and
curling it a little. His skin was tanned more than usual, the copper lines across his skin glittering
at random.

‘I am,’ he smiles, breaking the silence that was stretching after Hoseok’s question. ‘Don’t worry
Hobi, I know I’ll get better.’

Hoseok nods to that, though the stories he had heard from Taeh’yung himself as well as Sk’jin were
far from reassuring. But Taeh’yung didn’t seem too unwell or weak.

‘You’ll tell us right?’ Hoseok asks again, ‘If anything feels wrong.’

Taeh’yung beams up at him.

‘Of course!’

Yoongi and Jimin return, carrying with them armfuls of washed up and dried out flora. According
to Namjoon, while appearing quite barren above the water-level, the sea floors were teeming with
vegetation that supported a wide and diverse ecosystem. The flora that washed up were akin to
fibrous bark and made for great burning fuel.
Sk’jin tells them a few stories from his past life, stories that seemed too fantastical to seem real but at the same time, with conviction and detail that would be hard to make up. Hoseok even spies Namjoon attempting to fact-check Sk’jin’s stories. Jimin, Jungkook, and Taeh’yung seem to enjoy this the most- but not as much as the GI who crowd around them, listening to Sk’jin’s wild stories.

Sk’jin, who needed no sleep, walks around with the GI, beguiling them with narration that Hoseok is pretty sure were made up on the spot. The few GI who stay with them are, surprisingly, displaying their desire to hear the stories. And Namjoon, with a short laugh, dismisses them.

There’s no delay or awkward pacing as they all but run towards where Sk’jin gathers them all by a rocky alcove, now explaining in full detail how he crawled out of the digestive track of a ruul some 2000 years ago.

Long after everyone yawns out their goodnight’s, Hoseok stares blankly at the night sky above.

His mind is empty, but he can’t find any rest. Physically he knew he had to rest- not that the was exhausted, but sleeping was important. He wasn’t uncomfortable- he’s slept in worse conditions and he still managed to sleep well in those times too. He didn’t feel like he was in immediate danger- no anxiety niggling into his mind, keeping him up and alert.

He stays like this for almost 2 whole hours, attempting to at least physically rest his body by laying like this. But it proves difficult. Exhaling slowly, Hoseok makes his mind up and decides he should maybe find Sk’jin and keep him company. Or maybe he could go inside, check on things. Barely making a sound, Hoseok sits up.

‘Your hand is on fire.’

The fire pit they’re sleeping around is a low and small light- only embers remaining of the crackling fire they had going on some hours ago.

And in this dim light, instead of slumbering forms spread in a semi-circle around the pit, 4 figures are kneeling before the pit.

Hoseok has no weapon immediately on him. The GI were close by though. They even had 2 of them just past Namjoon’s lightly snoring form.

Hoseok has never seen these Beings before. But there’s a strange uncanny familiarity to them despite the fact that Hoseok does not recognize their thick layered clothing or the fact that he can’t even see their faces.

Hoseok tries to move, but realizes he’s somehow paralyzed- unable to do more than move his eyes about and blink. His fingers are stuck over the thin blanket that covered his legs, halfway pushing them off.

‘Your hand is on fire.’ They say again.

Hoseok is nowhere near the no longer aflame fire pit. But at their words, his palms start to heat up- an invisible flame licking over the skin there.

It almost feels wet in its heat.

Realizing he can still speak, though it’s hard, Hoseok asks quietly, ‘Who are you?’

He gets no answer and he also gets no reaction. Not from them, nor from the others around him or the GI. He’s pretty sure the GI would have sensed these intruders- pretty sure Yoongi would have
sensed them, even Jungkook. But they’re both asleep, on either side of Jimin to Hoseok’s left.

Taeh’yung is nowhere to be seen.

That’s when it dawns upon Hoseok. He glances back at the 4 kneeling before the fire. He still can’t see their faces- but he sees hands over knees. In this dim lighting, he can make out the shimmer of copper lines. Some hands are incredibly old and gnarled, others more delicate, slender, long.

‘Where’s Taeh’yung?’ Hoseok manages to get out.

‘We can no longer hear him.’ They say. ‘He can no longer hear us. Chooses not to hear us. It’s what he’s always wanted.’

Hoseok tries his best with his limited movement to catch sight of Taeh’yung but the Zhak’ gri is nowhere to be seen.

‘But he’s not scared, is he? No he’s not- he quite likes this I think. Really? Do you think so think so think so think so? It’s because he’s foolish- he knows we cannot continue this way; it’s not right. We cannot go.’

‘Go where?’

‘We cannot go there- they’ll see us, find us, destroy us. We cannot go.’

‘What will?’ Hoseok frowns at the figures, thinking hard, ‘The First Children? Is that what you’re afraid of? Of going to Menigišiti?’

‘It has been many many long lifetimes since the First. The Third should know when to hold their tongue, perhaps they would not have had to perish so young perish so young perish so young perish so young, allowing the Fourth more time to grow. But perhaps your grievances of the Fifth is because of what the Fourth refused to acknowledge by not listening to me. And-’

Hoseok frowns.

Was this...some astral-projection of a family argument?

‘Excuse me,’ Hoseok mumbles out, ‘But uh- I’d kinda like to leave.’

The figures turn their covered heads towards Hoseok and-

Hoseok is not a believer of the supernatural. He’s not afraid of “ghosts” or “echoes”- there were more frightening real things around the Universe. But he’s filled with a sense of terror at the sight of the heavily robbed figures. There’s a glaring blurriness to their forms, but the edges of their silhouettes seem to move constantly- almost like the surface of a body of water when it’s disturbed. If he wasn’t already frozen in place, he’d be paralyzed with a strange primal fear.

Because he can’t explain what he’s seeing before him and there is not explanation for it.

‘Your hand is on fire.’

Hoseok could roll his eyes. And he does.

‘You will be touched and stained by more than just fire. This is no easy feat- no easy step or idea you wish to fulfil- the others will be touched by more than fire. You will enter this place, and something more than fire will be waiting for you. Do you wish to be that sacrifice? Do you wish for the others to be that sacrifice? Isn’t that what she said to you that day your memory goes back to
goes back to goes back to goes back to?'

Heart in his throat, the smell of smoke, burning fat, sweat, incense clogs his nose and throat and his sight warps-

‘Get out of his head- I’m here.’

Another figure appears, materializing through what Hoseok can now tell is a wall of water. But that didn’t make sense. Hoseok was very much in bed-

‘You would not speak. The Fifth has a responsibility to this responsibility to this responsibility to this-‘

Water pours around them, shadows warp alarmingly and Hoseok realizes he’s very much indeed chest-deep in water. But that didn’t make sense? He doesn’t remember falling asleep- but he doesn’t quite pinpoint the moment he was truly awake either.

‘And that is why I’m going, haven’t I already said I would not do what any of you did? Leave us alone, stop interfering.’

A force is wrapped around him- like an elastic pushing through and Hoseok struggles- he wasn’t paralyzed mid-sleep; he was weighed down by the sea around him.

‘Do not stray from our path- you know we are only left because we were allowed to. We only watch, we only see- nothing more.’

A hand reaches for him and Hoseok gasps, breaking the surface of the water, air flooding into his lungs, burning his chest.

‘Then why don’t you do that and leave us alone?’

Taeh’yung is there, looking solemn and apologetic.

Spitting water out of his mouth and coughing a little, Hoseok realizes they’re quite far out of the shore.

‘I would make us steps, but I can’t right now,’ Taeh’yung tells him.

‘What did they mean you’re only here to watch?’ Hoseok asks instead, realizing that he had been mislead. He had been asleep- he had fallen asleep. But somehow he’d been redirected in his sleep.

Taeh’yung’s eyes are gleaming in the dark, rings of green that reflect briefly in the moving water around them. There’s a seriousness, a gravity to him that was somehow incredibly jarring to behold.

‘Tae?’

Taeh’yung blinks, looking like he’s been shaken from his thoughts.

‘I’m sorry they dragged you into this,’ Taeh’yung sighs, swimming over, hands paddling before him. ‘After Camil poisoned me, it was like I was disconnected from them.’

‘Them? Are they…are they like your ancestors?’ Hoseok reaches over to take Taeh’yung’s arm in his own, kicking his legs to allow them to float a little.

‘Hm,’ Taeh’yung nods thoughtfully, twisting around to float on his back. ‘I’m the Fifth.’
‘So I’ve heard,’ Hoseok also floats alongside the Zhak’gri.

‘According to them, we’re supposed to…supposed to just observe. I think fear of what Yisheng did in the beginning, the persecution and execution- it’s molded their fear, forcing themselves to live a life only of observation,’ Taeh’yung says leisurely, allowing Hoseok to pull him slowly towards the shore, feet kicking a little to keep balance in the sea. ‘The Khol’isa- they no longer remember what it was that drove the Bloodmoon. Most Yishengs do not remember the nightmare they used to live through in their sleep. Many of us no longer exist or are lost- and it’s out of fear.’

‘What are you afraid of?’

Taeh’yung turns his head, dipping a little into the water.

‘Oh, I’m not afraid,’ he grins, ‘I don’t want to be afraid like them anymore.’

‘That’s good?’

Taeh’yung laughs as he says, ‘It’s because we’re all here right now, out of fear. The Universe exists in fear- we always have. How could we not when we were born out of fear?’

Hoseok can see what Taeh’yung is saying, but he also strongly suspects that there’s more to his words.

‘And I don’t want that anymore. Especially not for all those babies out there- they don’t deserve to live with that fear,’ Taeh’yung looks back up at the sky. ‘I want to do something they have never done before.’

‘So…no more blowing up moons?’

Taeh’yung laughs, wiggling around in the water as though it were quite solid and squirms up to Hoseok, wet hair as dark as the sea water. For a fraction of a second, Taeh’yung encompasses the seas and starry sky above him, moving with them- or at least, they move with him.

‘Only if it’s necessary.’

Hoseok can accept that.

‘Why did they come after me?’ Hoseok asks instead.

‘Probably because you care the most,’ Taeh’yung chirps, now using Hoseok as buoy and making himself comfortable. It’s not physically taxing as the water naturally leads them towards the shoreline, Hoseok is barely kicking his feet.

‘Oh?’ Hoseok frowns in thought.

‘Also because you’re probably the most sane out of all of us.’

Hoseok splashes the Zhak’gri.

‘Namjoon and Jimin would resent that.’

‘So don’t tell them,’ Taeh’yung grins, eyes gleaming almost hypnotically.

‘You’re okay right?’ Hoseok asks again, feeling worry for the Zhak’gri. ‘You’re sure?’

Taeh’yung just grins before leaning forward to kiss him sloppily.
'This is why they came for you- you care the most.'

'Buggy…' Hoseok begins. He’s not sure how to even ask the question- if there even was a question he could formulate.

'It’s okay Hobi,' Taeh’yung flaps his hands over the surface of the water unhelpfully. ‘I’ve got it under control.’

Hoseok pats his wet head a few times before saying, ‘You don’t have to prove yourself to anyone or anything.’

Taeh’yung blinks in surprise up at him from where he’s propped his head up on Hoseok’s chest.

‘Who you are right now, how you’re here, where you are- that’s enough.’ Hoseok tells him quietly, ‘If you want to do more, be more- that’s up to you too. But…but trying to do something, just to prove something in the face of an antiquated belief that shaped a past memory-‘ shadows stir beneath them, shadows connecting past and around them from the depths of the water up to the skies and stars above, ‘-it won’t recognize the changes you have lived. It won’t see the truth of what you know now.’

Taeh’yung doesn’t say anything, the shadows swaying slowly around them. Instead he takes Hoseok’s hand, misbalancing their movement over the water and they both dip below the water surface. But Hoseok isn’t scared or shocked when they’re submerged.

The shadows around them glow a faint green, pulsing in time with what Hoseok guesses is Taeh’yung’s heartbeat.

Taeh’yung takes both of his hands, his hands cooler than the water around them.

It’s peacefully quiet down here.

‘I won’t,’ Taeh’yung says, though Hoseok doesn’t understand how he’s able to hear the Zhak’gri. ‘I won’t just stand by and watch anymore. I won’t let it burn us, won’t let it burn you.’

Hoseok’s grip involuntarily tightens in Taeh’yung’s.

‘I won’t just stand by anymore,’ Taeh’yung grins, ‘Not when I have all of you with me.’

When they break the surface of the water, the sky has lightened, and Hoseok feels a sense of being reborn.

* 

The next city is completely destroyed. It’s evidently not recent. The explosion that erupted here must have been devastating, seeing as a massive crater now lay at the very center.

Hoseok didn’t fly them too high up, maintaining a decent distance. He can spot Yoongi, Jungkook, and the other GI below, small dots moving to and fro wild and deadened growth. Landing them in the city below is a little tricky- landing right at the center of the crater felt too exposing, not to
mention strategically not ideal. He’s able to find a somewhat decent stretch of space not too crowded with jutting and broken rocks and structures, much bigger and elaborate than Keldana. They were now in what remained of one of the bigger cities in Megibīya named Saṃkrāna. There’s a massive growth and decay of wild-life here, covering the desolate city in another layer of melancholy and loss.

‘Yyna, take over the cockpit,’ Hoseok orders once they’re stabilized, ‘Watch the scanners.’

‘Understood,’ the Megibīyan replies.

Hoseok quickly makes his way down to the Medical Bay where they were running their samples. So far, every single sample Yoongi and Team B brought in were from Megibīyan sources.

‘Anything on the scanners?’ Sk’jin asks.

‘Nothing,’ Hoseok responds back at once as he steps closer to the slim window of the Medical Bay. ‘But we’re close to finishing the geoscans. And I’m watching over all of the samples we collected- from the city, as well as the pyres. What about you guys?’

‘Nothing yet. But it’s what we expected. We might be here for quite a while.’

‘Well- we’re still on track, right?’ Yoongi asks.

‘For fuck’s sake, yes,’ Sk’jin sighs, ‘Can you stop repeating Namjoon.’

There’s a snort from Yoongi’s side.

‘There’s…there’s something interesting here,’ Taeh’yung comments, a small frown appearing between his brows as he pokes his head into the Bay. ‘Can I go down and check?’

‘Go ahead,’ Hoseok nods, ‘Just be careful.’

‘I can come pick you up?’ Jungkook offers.

‘It’s okay Kookie!’ Taeh’yung coos, ‘I need to set up an environment where I’m not distracted by your handsome face!’

‘Taeh’yung.’

‘I’m complimenting him!’ Taeh’yung whines, briskly walking out of the Medical Bay.

On one of the Medical Beds was one of the GI corpses Jungkook and Taeh’yung brought in with them. Every single test they ran over it proved the GI to be Megibīyan. So now the pyres, the bodies, the obvious signs of survivors, the signs of struggle; they were all starting to fit in together.

The last of the samples are completed and everything comes out as they had anticipated, albeit regretfully.

‘All the samples are Megibīyan,’ Hoseok sends over the results to Namjoon’s screen. ‘Including the GI. The Heliord has no issue date or manufacturing stamp- but none of the Heliords on board this ship have them either.’

‘How about running an ion-sample on the metal?’

‘I did,’ Hoseok replies, ‘And it’s the same as the ones on board the ship.’
‘So it’s the same batch?’

‘Yeah,’ Hoseok pulls down the mounted screen attached to the Bay’s wall. He logs all of the records on a separate archive Namjoon had built for them, the main storage based with Lisai on the Laikin still stored in one of the Hangars. Then he deletes the readings, has the samples disposed of in the biohazard chamber.

‘Head Pilot Hoseok, the geoscans are ready,’ Yyna reports to him.

‘Thanks Yyna, send them to everyone’s screens please,’ Hoseok accesses the main drive on the Medical Bay screen and waits for the upload to complete.

‘Well, it’s certainly very different from what we have on “Bhumi” from the GLA,’ Sk’jin remarks, ‘Damn, is that a crater?’

The planet projection is incredibly rough and incredibly different from the somewhat smooth and evenly distributed map they had. Each sides of the planet not in the habitable Crescent appear terribly ravaged, and to one side, an unnervingly large and deep crater, like some deep ocean trench. The canyon range they had gone through earlier rings around the Crescent like a protective shield from the sun-lands, and to the other side, mountains and peaks spread like frost. There are areas of water, but small, and concentrating mainly in or around the borders of the crescent. Jimin had told them he had “landed” in the night-lands when he had come here; they had followed the irrigation system, pulling water from deep within frozen lakes, to supply into the Crescent. Yoongi had followed up saying that they had all been under the impression that what was happening was being watched and orchestrated by the GLA; they had landed somewhat safely, though their ship was taken down as a result of engine failure when entering the oddly polluted atmosphere.

‘I think that’s where the Red Evil shot down on the planet,’ Yoongi chimes in, ‘Based on simulations of what happened to Earth, and many other planets and moons, it looks the same.’

‘Then how is Megibīya still here?’

‘Because I arrived,’ Jimin replies, ‘They couldn’t afford to destroy the planet just yet. Then they continued to use Megibīya as a base long after until…until those who managed to escape returned. This would later alert the GLA, and that’s when Ndica, alongside Amme, arrived here to investigate what remained of the planet.’

‘I’m going to realign the markings you guys made on what we had and overlay it with the geoscans,’ Hoseok tells them, pulling up their previous maps. He quickly studies it, frowning as he notes how much geographic changes had occurred- not all of them natural either, seeing as craters even larger than the ones in Sarthkrama were spread out around the Crescent.

‘This is where I landed,’ Yoongi says, a spot illuminating some 300 kilostreams from their location, ‘This is where we believed we would be able to access the broadcasting signal to reach the GLA.’

‘So I’m guessing this area here, is Udāvana?’ Hoseok pronounces carefully.

‘Yes,’ Jimin replies, ‘If we’re able to find the remains of any GLA archives, it would be there. That is, if they have not been harmed.’

‘Yoongi, Jungkook, if you guys are done with searching the area, let’s move forward,’ Hoseok suggests, ‘I think we should head for Udāvana- we might get something more- it’s also not very damaged compared to the map we have from the GLA Jimin corrected.’
‘Hobi-um, can you give me some more time please?’ Taeh’yung asks suddenly.

‘What is it?’ Hoseok asks at once, swiping between tabs to pull up Taeh’yung’s location. He was either an incredibly fast runner or he was on a HoverPort/equivalent. Because he’s quite far from the ship, in a different direction from where Yoongi, Jungkook, and the GI teams were combing through the debris.

‘Um- I’m not quite sure yet- it’s been a bit difficult, but I think I can…hear something.’

‘Hear?’ Hoseok frowns, quickly sending the geoscans to Lisai for storage before grabbing his screen and exiting the Medical Bay. ‘What are you hearing?’

‘Dreams.’

Hoseok quickly pulls up the feed from Taeh’yung’s Iris. He’s walking through a dense wooded region that had spilt out of the surrounding forests with smaller and shorter trees. But the trees are all dead, fragile branches barely holding up to trunks. There’s an area that looks suspiciously crashed through, and even from here, Hoseok can pinpoint the form of a transporter wing.

‘Yoongi, double back to Taeh’yung’s position,’ Hoseok orders at once, ‘He’s found a transporter.’

‘On my way.’

‘Buggy, just stay put for a while yeah?’

‘Okay!’

‘Kookie, could you come get me?’

‘On my way!’

‘That’s not a Yisheng grade transporter,’ Sk’jin comments, ‘Looks like every other nondescript transporter a pirate would use.’

Hoseok hurries out of the Lobby and downwards to the Hangars.

‘It’s what I thought too,’ Hoseok replies, sliding down the rails of the stairs and landing firmly on his feet before jogging ahead to the Hangar doorways. ‘Yoongi, you almost there?’

‘Almost.’

Jungkook slows down before the Hangar doorway just as Hoseok exits. His visor is up, not liking how it was when his helmet was fully enclosed. Hoseok quickly hops on, balancing himself before tapping Jungkook once on the shoulder.

It’s quite the distance, and though there’s nothing to indicate any recent changes in the ruins, Hoseok isn’t surprised that Taeh’yung would have found something amidst the monotony of destruction that remained of what was clearly a once beautiful planet.

The woods are more like fallen forest brambles, layered over each other after centuries of growth and decay. The same stale odour permeates the air here too.

Jungkook stops where Yoongi’s parked his HoverPort. Past the brambles and fallen trees, Hoseok can make out both Taeh’yung and Yoongi.

‘Kookie- circle around the area, if the wing is here, the other parts of the transporter should be
around too.’

Jungkook nods, his visor still up. There’s an unnerving edge to Jungkook like this, dressed in complete GI gear, the bleeding red of the skin around his eyes stark against his pale skin and dark helmet.

‘Hobi!’ Taeh’yung waves both arms as if Hoseok couldn’t see them. ‘Here!’

Hoseok makes his way over what was a thin layer of dirt, covering the face of a vast building. Great rooks twist and break through windows, their flaking barks shedding a thick layer of dust everywhere.

The wing is large and crashed through a few trees, partially buried into the side of the building.

‘I think we should head that way,’ Yoongi says, pushing his visor up, ‘Judging by the damages to the trees around here- it’s crashed from this general direction.’

Taeh’yung nimbly jumps over roots and fallen tree trunks, leading the way ahead. He exclaims every now and then, pointing at eroded shrapnel and plating.

‘Here!’ Jungkook calls from ahead, sounding like he was somehow underground. They quicken their pace, passing through a part of the forest shaved off almost, with some great force. Trees were in disarray, their destruction like some arrow, pointing downwards until they come across a gaping hole, spread over two fallen buildings forming a trench where the rest of their mystery transporter lay, half buried in deadened vegetation and stone.

Standing on a collapsed staircase is Jungkook opposite them, holding one arm up and the other pointing downwards.

‘It’s the ship!’ he grins, looking pleased with himself as he pushes the helmet off of his head.

Taeh’yung gasps, immediately jumping down before either Yoongi or Hoseok can stop him. There’s a spluttering flicker of green, and Taeh’yung more or less drops the entire height of the Yisheng ship, exclaiming loudly in comical pain.

‘Idiot,’ Yoongi huffs worriedly, ‘You can’t do shit like that anymore.’

‘Sorry?’ Taeh’yung wails while Jungkook scales down the trench with envious ease, reaching Taeh’yung to check on him worriedly, grumbling in a scolding manner. ‘I got excited! It’s louder here now!’

The shadows around him flicker visibly, as though agitated.

‘I got the cable,’ Yoongi sighs, ‘It’s like babysitting teenagers.’ He adds, grumbling.

They secure a cable around a stone pillar, sliding down easily just as Jungkook calls out, ‘I found an opening!’ followed by a crashing sound.

‘Found or made?’ Yoongi sighs, sounding genuinely tired. Hoseok quickly studies the Human, noticing that his dark circles were back, eyes glazed a little as though he were running a fever. His lips are pale and chapped.

‘Are you hydrated enough?’ Hoseok asks, stopping Yoongi from following after Jungkook’s impromptu opening in the ship that Taeh’yung quickly dove into.
‘Yeah it’s just-’ Yoongi grimaces, ‘It feels strange.’

‘Being back here?’

Yoongi nods.

‘It’s kinda…it’s like remembering details of a dream you can’t quite remember clearly.’

‘If you need to go back, you should,’ Hoseok says firmly, ‘We’ve got this covered.’

‘I know,’ Yoongi nods, ‘I won’t do anything to push myself.’

Hoseok trusts that Yoongi would know when to stop himself- or say something.

He studies the ship buried in rubble and debris, some small roots twisting over the exposed areas.

‘It’s been here maybe a sol or two,’ Yoongi observes, ‘Hopefully, we can still access the Navigation Table.’

There’s a sudden sharp and piercing pitchy sound erupting in their Comm Devices, making both Hoseok and Yoongi wince, hands going up to the sides of their heads respectively.

‘What the fuck-?’

‘We’re here,’ Sk’jin suddenly says, his audio is filled with crackling white noise. ‘Spaces, fuck.’

‘Is it-?’ Hoseok and Yoongi share wide eyed looks.

‘Yes,’ Namjoon sounds awed even in static, ‘Shit, okay- okay, so far we’re on track-‘

‘Don’t fucking finish that sentence. Hobi, we’re-…fuck, I fucking-…Hoseok! We’re gonna be busy for a while!’ the line crackles sharply before fading in a way that would be worrisome if they hadn’t been anticipating it.

‘Got it- good luck,’ Hoseok shares a worried look with Yoongi who presses his lips together in a thin line.

Just as they predicted, their communication instantly drops, the lines cutting off abruptly.

Yoongi looks like he wants to say something, but he stops himself. Instead he exhales briefly before nodding towards the ship.

Inside the damage is quite extensive but contained. The transporter was strong- not just some easily obtained customized and easily disposable pirate-made one. It’s also quite big, which makes Hoseok guess that it might be a cargo-freighter instead of a transporter. It explained the wider spaces inside as well.

‘Doesn’t seem to have been disturbed much,’ Yoongi points out, ‘I don’t think anyone outside of us have been in here.’

It’s crashed at an angle, so Hoseok has to climb upwards to the cockpit.

‘If that’s the case-’ Hoseok begins, struggling a little to push open the doorway to the cockpit. ‘-then…yeah. Fuck.’

Still seated on their seats, two corpses are perfectly preserved. Yoongi is quick to activate the
lamps on his helmet, illuminating the place. The entire front of the cockpit has sustained immense
damage- the two main front-seats for the captain and co-pilot or Navigator have been entirely
crushed. But the two behind them are not too badly damaged. Hoseok steps forward to see if
there’s anyway they can directly access the cockpit’s main controls but it’s far too damaged to try.

‘You think we can access the Navigation Table from here?’ Hoseok nods at the two seats where
the corpses were still attached. Yoongi was carefully pushing them forward, checking gingerly on
their backs.

‘Pirates,’ Yoongi observes, ‘Both of them.’

‘According to the GLA, pirates *did* sometimes come by here,’ Hoseok ruminates, ‘But I mean, who
knows. I’ll try and access the Table, or their systems from here.’

‘Okay- I’ll check on the rest of the ship; see what Taeh’yung’s found,’ Yoongi nods, reaching up to
pop out his headlamp and handing it to Hoseok.

‘You’ll be fine?’

Yoongi doesn’t answer, simply slides down his visor shut.

‘I mean, you don’t have to be dramatic about it-‘

‘HOBI!’ Taeh’yung roars, a flash of green spreads around them, strange indents forming along the
metal in asymmetrical triangles. ‘YOONGI OH SPACES!’

They slide most of the way down, angling their bodies to maintain balance. The transporter is
longer than they had guessed too, further cementing that this was some form of freighter.

Jungkook pokes his head out when they break their slide on a heavily littered and very recently
broken through wall. Hoseok absentmindedly thinks that Jungkook’s strength had nowhere to go
except up and he’s happy they were the ones who found him. The Vicitra’s expression is a
combination of shocked, awed, and confused.

‘Tae’s found something,’ he tells them quickly, ‘And um-‘

They quickly follow him, bumping and sliding stiffly while Jungkook maintained perfect balance
on the tilted floors and walls before literally diving downwards into what must have been a vent-
shaft opening.

‘Why are they all jumping-‘ Hoseok grumbles but Yoongi keeps quiet, instead sliding down to the
floor and slipping in rather than jumping in. Hoseok mimics him, pausing a few seconds before
following him through the vent shaft.

It slides down before abruptly opening up into what must be the interior of a Megibīyan building.
The floors and walls are tilted too- but in a way where they’re able to walk though it’s mainly on
crushed windows and furniture piled up in chaos. Hoseok can see how the transporter broke
through the fallen buildings and debris, the lower half of the ship crushed and yawning wide open,
jutting through the stone wall.

They’re in some wide space, broken stone pillars holding up each individual floor aging and
cracked. The carvings on the stones are beautiful, repeating patterns forming shapes that felt
organic despite how geometrically accurate each cut line was. Yoongi is a little ahead of him, head
slowly moving around, looking over every detail carefully. How did Taeh’yung know to come
down here?
‘Here!’ Jungkook waves at them from close to the end of this wide space.

There’s a definite hollow sound to the place, Hoseok imagines there are several floors buried beneath them- a whole city crushed. What once were houses and homes now underground tunnels and caves.

Quickly, Yoongi and Hoseok make their way ahead, eyes wide and alert in this still darkness.

There’s a faint green light- characteristic of Taeh’yung in the dark, though much fainter than normal, and they’re able to make their way over quickly.

‘What is it?’ Hoseok demands once they’re not in yelling distance. But the moment they’re in not yelling distance, Hoseok’s eyes are able to adjust to the darkness around Taeh’yung, and sees very familiar outlines.

‘-those are…’ Hoseok falters, eyes widening. Almost instantly, Yoongi’s headlamp brightens, and Jungkook also follows, as though remembering he had that on him.

‘Yeah,’ Yoongi exhales out, eyes wide, ‘Eggs.’

Around 8 or so of the OrTanks they had found Jimin in are scattered onto the debris across the walls at this end. They clearly fell out of the ship when they crashed.

‘Shit- shit are they alive?’ Yoongi asks quickly, making his way to the closest OrTank, hands hovering in an unsure manner.

‘Um, yeah- but not all,’ Taeh’yung says in a small voice. There’s a flicker of shadows around him, one that everyone notices but no one says a thing. ‘3 of them are dead.’

Not all of the OrTanks contain a fully grown Being. And that’s what makes it more unsettling. Here, buried deep in the dark, growing and asleep away from thought or time. But not away from death.

‘We’ll need to take them back,’ Yoongi is saying, but Hoseok is piecing things together.

‘This is like Khonen,’ he tells them, ‘Khonen bringing in the eggs. Even possibly like Camil, considering where we are.’

Yoongi turns to look at him, ‘You think the Omhlophe have been here then?’

‘It’s likely, but I don’t think directly. Just pirates doing runs for money- but I think…I think it’s more likely that they were supposed to be here for a delivery.’ Hoseok looks around the place, ‘And they crashed.’

Hoseok looks at the eggs, feeling a sense of sorrow building in him. When he had been taken by the Omhlophe, he had, in his anxiety and worry, regarded the eggs he had been placed with as strange and alien. But now, the desire to bring them to a home builds stronger.

‘Is this where I was born?’ Jungkook asks. He doesn’t sound sad or disgusted. Instead he’s just curious. ‘Me, and my siblings, and anu?’

‘My babies,’ Taeh’yung smiles up at the Vicitra.

‘Not the exact same like me though, right?’ Jungkook asks, looking at the 2 fully grown Beings inside the OrTanks. ‘Do I have to fight them?’
‘No,’ Yoongi says quickly, ‘None of them are Vicitra, or any Being from Pravasi H’manun. It’s okay Kook.’

‘Okay- is this all of them?’ Hoseok directs the question to Taeh’yung who shakes his head.

‘Only them here, dreaming and singing.’ He replies, gently brushing his hand over the surface of the OrTank, he grins suddenly adding, ‘I think they’re happy we’re here.’

‘Yeah?’ Yoongi smiles at the Zhak’gri.

‘They’re not alone anymore.’

Hoseok squats down, wondering how they’re going to take the eggs out when Yoongi says quietly, more to himself than anything else.

‘We’re found.’

Chapter End Notes

(Author’s Notes)
This was not supposed to be this late an update
I’ve rewritten these up coming chapter 5 times and worked very hard on it because this
is the chapter that bookmarks the final leg of this au! I think we have about 20
chapters, give or take a few, until ADEGU is completed.
I also want to thank the people who are still reading this! It means a lot to me!!
And if anyone’s confused, the chapter is kinda divided into two timelines, you’ll see
why!
Btw does anyone else get headaches before its gonna rain or when the humidity is up?
I think it has to do with atmospheric uhh air pressure, and I always get headaches
before it rains and my lowerback starts aching though I still
Don’t know
If that’s because of my old injury
Or my terrible posture
Or both
Lowerback pain people in the house can I get a high-five
Hoseok doesn’t mean to, but he accidentally spies in on Jimin.

He’d meant to collect the “special jars of tea” Sk’jin had made, a glint in his neon-red eyes that suggested there were many reasons why this tea was “special”. So Hoseok had made his way towards the Kitchens, and close by, standing by one of the Lobby recliners was Jimin.

Of course it wasn’t odd to be inside the ship; Jimin could be here for a number of reasons. But he’s not sure what to think of Jimin quietly conversing, a NaviLet in his hands, with a projection above it. Hoseok cannot hear him over on the main communications line. He could be conversing privately to any one of them, but somehow, Hoseok knows he’s not.

‘-nderstand. I know this is not ideal. But I know what I’m talking about. I cannot ask you to trust me, but please trust that I want this to end.’

He must have sensed Hoseok because he turns around, eyes immediately finding him. Hoseok feels slightly awkward and misplaced.

Jimin doesn’t seem upset- nor does he seem guilty. Instead he looks strangely tired.

Out of everyone here, even Sk’jin and Yoongi who were improving so much by being here, Jimin seemed to be the only one somehow diminishing.

He says something quietly, NaviLet dimming and projection collapsing immediately. He gives Hoseok a small smile that’s honestly just weary more than anything else.

‘What’s wrong?’ Hoseok asks.

‘I was looking for something,’ Jimin tells him- Hoseok can’t tell if he’s lying or not. ‘But I can’t
find it.’
‘Can I help?’
‘It’s…I’m not sure how the security footage system works here,’ Jimin tells him honestly, ‘Do surveillance footage get replaced or discarded?’

‘No,’ Hoseok frowns, glancing up around them to look at the cameras placed about the Lobby. ‘They’re compressed and archived with the rest of the logs. If you’re having problems with it, maybe Namjoon can look into them for you?’

‘He’s already tried, but he’s unable to find any footage from the day before he returned to us at Cuab-D2.’

Now that was perplexing.

‘Uh- maybe because the GI didn’t want to leave any tracks of their activity? This is a Yisheng ship- if they were compromised, surveillance footage would be incredibly incriminating.’

‘It would be,’ Jimin nods.

‘Is something the matter?’ Hoseok asks again.

Jimin doesn’t immediately respond. Instead he pauses, hesitant and a little uncomfortable, which is a little odd seeing as Jimin always carried himself with assurance and confidence. He spoke with clarity and authority, no stammer or hesitance. But like this, he seems almost apprehensive.

‘What is it?’

‘When you found out about your father’s betrayal,’ Jimin begins tentatively, ‘How…how did you well, come to accept it.’

Hoseok understands Jimin’s hesitance.

But he has an inkling as to why he would be asking him this too.

‘I think you’ve accepted it already,’ he answers.

Jimin’s expression doesn’t change.

‘I think, more than anything, despite being shown the truth, and being told the truth, I desperately clung to the truth I believed in,’ Hoseok tells him honestly. ‘He was my father- the Being who raised me along with my mother. I loved him. He was the one who guided me through my training, telling me to always remember that regardless of what actions were taken, what words were being said and spoken, that every single Being in this Universe, held a belief unique to themselves; shaped by those around them, shaped by what they’ve seen, shaped by what they want to believe in, and by what they need to believe in.’

Jimin lowers his head at that.

‘And because of this, we cannot truly know who anyone is. We cannot always understand what they do, why they do it, and how they do it,’ Hoseok shrugs, ‘And I always thought, how ironic, how hypocritical it was of him to have told me that; to raise me like that.’

‘But?’
‘But it proved what he was saying,’ Hoseok leans against the wall, crossing his arms over his chest, hands forming fists.

‘So what do you then? After accepting that?’

‘You accept that your truths, your beliefs, are not going to be the same as everyone else’s,’ Hoseok says bluntly.

Jimin doesn’t even blink, staring down at the floor, clearly deep in thought.

‘And there’s no way in knowing if your truth is the correct one,’ Hoseok shrugs, his palms warm, ‘But there are things bigger than your truths, bigger than your beliefs- bigger than what is easier.’

Jimin nods to that, giving him a small smile and saying, ‘Thank you.’

‘Should I be worried about who you’ve called?’

Jimin just smiles at him, shaking his head.

‘I will explain soon- before we leave.’ He tells him, ‘I...- Hoseok, you know that you’re incredibly brave right?’

Hoseok can’t control the laugh he lets out. But Jimin doesn’t seem offended, he’s smiling too.

‘I don’t think most Beings considered what I did as being brave.’

‘No,’ Jimin shakes his head, ‘I’m not talking about your actions, or what you had to do.’

‘Okay?’

Jimin just grins, shaking his head again.

‘Hoseok! It shouldn’t be taking this long to get the tea!’ Sk’jin snaps over on his Comm Device.

‘I’ll get it!’ Jimin chirps, quickly sprinting past Hoseok towards the Kitchens.

‘I knew I could only trust you Jimin,’ Sk’jin responds.

‘Could’ve sworn you said you would only trust Jimin as far as you could throw him-’ Namjoon begins but never finishes his sentence. Jimin is laughing, grabbing the jugs with an amused smile on his face.

Hoseok glances down at the NaviLet Jimin had left behind. It’s still activated, he can make out the log of the call he had, the map he had projected on. It’s familiar as well, and Hoseok could easily reach down and check for himself.

Instead he turns around, going to the Kitchens and collects extra cups.

It’s not the only time he does accidentally walk in on Jimin randomly doing things by himself. Not that he wasn’t allowed of course. But it was still somehow odd. And Jimin never looked guilty but there was always an air of secrecy. One that Jimin did not invite inquiry to be directed at him.

Hoseok catches Jimin speaking to Dehin; but Dehin isn’t quite speaking like his GI self, rather he’s clutching his head, body stiff.

Hoseok catches sight of Jimin with the GI like this several times. But it’s not always the same as
with Dehin, or even Yyna, Nineti, Amad’la, Amic, and a few others. Some of the GI don’t seem remotely affected by what Jimin was doing. Later, he finds Jimin talking to Yoongi, the Human listening and nodding, a serious look on his face. They both spot him at the same time, and not wanting to look like he purposefully spied on them, Hoseok just smiles and walks away.

*

When they bring in the last of the OrTanks inside the ship, Hoseok senses a change in the air.

‘Storm is pulling in,’ Yoongi remarks from above him on the Hangar ramp, gaze directed upwards. Almost immediately, they hear the rumble of thunder, a flash of light breaking through the sky. Hoseok notes how Yoongi’s hair seems to rise up into the air filled with static.

‘Humidity has been pretty low though,’ he continues, ‘We might not actually get any rain- just electric storm.’

‘I think we continue on the ship then, being out in an electric storm with HoverPorts could be dangerous,’ Hoseok ruminates.

‘The trees could act as finials,’ Yoongi gestures to the forest before adding, ‘Anything from Sk’jin?’

Hoseok shakes his head.

‘We’ll continue on HoverPorts,’ Yoongi sighs out, ‘I’ll meet you there- so far everything is going along as planned.’

‘Does that make you uncomfortable?’

‘No,’ Yoongi pushes his visor down, his tone harsh but not directed at Hoseok. ‘Just afraid.’

‘Why?’

‘Because I don’t think any of us predicted that there could have been survivors here.’

Yoongi, Jungkook, and the GI teams on the grounds lead ahead. Hoseok brings in the ship, following slowly. This time, they’re flying over clear indications of settlement and towns, all of which are decimated and ruined- most places just stretches of rubble and dust.

About halfway, the storm arrives over them. There’s no rain, but the wind is harsh. Yoongi guides the others through the edges of the forest, where the trees shield them somewhat. Lightning branches out, lasting long and creating sparks all over their windows, occasionally causing glitches in their HUDs.

‘I’ve set the babies up safely!’ Taeh’yung tells him happily. ‘I’m gonna play them some music! Do you have any suggestions?’

‘Uh- I heard that the wind-tunnel music from southern Kl’ang tribes are supposed to be really helpful?’ Hoseok replies. ‘Someone suggested it to me, for nightmares and things.’
‘Did it work?’

‘Never got around to trying,’ Hoseok laughs, ‘Pull it up, maybe it’ll work for the babies.’

‘Okay!’

Hoseok glances at the isotope trackers. The positions of the gold, blue, and pink dots change all of
the screen, but it’s in a consistent pattern. It’s exactly like what Jimin said would happen, so
Hoseok tells himself not to worry; or give into the urge to send a rescue party.

‘Storm is changing from projected path,’ Yyna reports to him as another GI adds, ‘Head Pilot
Hoseok, detecting spike in atmospheric electric charges.’

‘All right, let’s reroute,’ Hoseok nods at Yyna, ‘Keep us on track for Udāvana, but let’s avoid any
unnecessary situations that might cause difficulty.’

‘Understood,’ the GI respond from their stations.

‘We’ve found what appears to be a road,’ Yoongi reports, ‘I think these were used to travel
through the towns, connect the cities through the forests- several go underground.’

‘According to the scans, there are no signs of collapse.’ Jungkook adds. ‘I’ll use the Blueprint to
map our way?’

‘Yeah, that’s a good idea Kookie, send it straight to Lisai.’

‘We’re gonna take it to duck from the storm.’ Yoongi tells him.

Almost on queue, lightning breaks bright, thunder erupting loudly.

‘Be careful,’ Hoseok warns.

Far below, he watches as Yoongi heads the teams and they disappear from the edge of the forest,
slipping under juts of rocks just as the clouds intensify, reducing visibility. Hoseok doesn’t want to
take them too low, directly under the storm, neither does he want to take them above because that’d
be too high. He maintains them somewhat just slightly above the main storm.

It would take them almost an hour at this speed to reach Udāvana according to the new adjustments
made on the map. His screen makes a small beeping sound, signaling Jungkook’s transmission.

It’s quite an elaborate network of underground tunnels, roads, and bridges. Like a network of veins,
the Blueprint maps out a clear path ahead.

‘Signs of struggle here too,’ Yoongi reports.

Hoseok quickly switches his active viewing tab to Yoongi’s Iris. They’re moving incredibly fast,
but Hoseok is quick to scrub through the feed, grabbing stills to pull up and project them overhead.
There are no bodies here, but the telltale signs of struggle, battles, and destruction are evident.

They were moving through a stretch of time that was undocumented, hidden, and forgotten.
Everything almost felt fake- like this was some form of simulation for a particularly terrible
training session.

Hoseok checks again on the other’s location- it was still glitching all over the place, but the
isotopes were still alight. He really hopes it works.
‘Hobi! I’m done! The music did help!’

‘Yeah?’

‘I think it’s calming them down, they say thank you!’

‘You can…hear them?’ Hoseok frowns, but then remembers how Taeh’yung had been able to speak to Jimin inside his OrTank. But then again, Jimin wasn’t quite like the eggs or the New Borns.

‘A little bit, it’s unclear, but feeling don’t need words!’

‘I guess so,’ Hoseok agrees, ‘Why don’t you come back up and we’ll-’

‘-fuck!’

There’s a worrying exploding sound, curses from Yoongi and yelling from Jungkook.

Hoseok turns his attention back to Yoongi’s Iris, momentarily relieved to find that he’s still on his HoverPort, no damages sustained to his being in his readings.

‘What’s wrong-’

‘There was a mine,’ Yoongi hisses.

‘Anyone hurt?’

‘No- but one of our HoverPorts is inoperable,’ Yoongi reports, getting off of his HoverPort. ‘I think this place was rigged. It might be a security measure.’

‘Or an alarm system,’ Jungkook adds.

‘I’m not detecting additional signs of life other than the teams,’ Hoseok reports back immediately.

Yoongi exhales noisily, clearly not liking how despite how things were going according to plan, this new revelation regarding clear evidence of survivors was heavily implying the reality of their biggest fears.

Of Jimin’s biggest fears.

‘It smells like…like sulfur,’ Jungkook says slowly.

‘That’s old,’ Hoseok remarks, ‘If they’re using sulfur-based explosives, it’s at best just small detonations. Loud, effective as an alarm and deterrent.’

‘I’ll reverse our isotope-tracker to pick up on sulfur. Depending on how old they are, they probably can no longer retain a spark. We’ll be able to detect each mine going ahead.’ Yoongi mumbles, inhaling deeply as though to ground himself.

‘Okay- but single file, slow,’ Hoseok warns.

‘What’s happening?’ Taeh’yung demands, hair wild, limbs flailing extra hard.

‘There were mines,’ Hoseok explains, ‘Down in the tunnels.’

Taeh’yung gasps, ‘That’s so cool!’
‘Just wear your Comm Device,’ Hoseok pleads, ‘It’s important!’

‘Right, right, sorry!’ Taeh’yung hastily reaches into every pocket into his clothing before digging out the small Device and placing it back on his ear. ‘I just wanted to be able to hear the babies without interference!’

‘Did you get anything from them?’

‘Hm,’ Taeh’yung reaches across Hoseok to hug Yyna, bumping his cheek against her stony one in greeting. ‘Not much? Hey Yyna, you okay? You look a little peaky.’

‘You sound unsure.’ Hoseok looks over the Megibīyan GI, wondering how she looked peaky.

Taeh’yung throws himself on the seat next to Hoseok, placing his feet up on the dashboard which Hoseok redirects away instantly.

‘It’s a bit more difficult to hear them now,’ he says in a matter of fact way.

‘I’m sorry buggy,’ Hoseok is sincere- he cannot imagine how it’d be to live life stripped of what made him Ngfy’widan; his very nature robbed of him, rendering him completely different.

‘I just have to relearn!’ Taeh’yung nods, ‘It’s important to sometimes forget, and then relearn what you thought you once knew.’

‘I guess you’re right,’ Hoseok smiles.

The change is slight- Taeh’yung was still most definitely his slightly chaotic self, but in an odd way, he seemed much more whole. And while the shadows around him were somehow much easier to identify, liquid like dark forms shape around the Zhak’gri, ignoring the principle of light sources, it doesn’t coat his Being. Hoseok no longer hears layers of voices in some of Taeh’yung’s words, doesn’t see someone else in his eyes.

He appeared, quite entirely himself. And it was almost as though he was relieved.

‘We’re finding more mines down here,’ Yoongi says quietly, ‘Some of them are inactive. We’re putting markers up on the geoscans just in case.’

‘Okay- we’ll probably arrive before you,’ Hoseok replies.

‘Yoongi keep an eye out for more babies just in case!’ Taeh’yung implores.

‘Um, we will,’ Jungkook replies in Yoongi’s stead. ‘Don’t worry, we’re being very safe.’

‘Thanks Kookie,’ Hoseok says gently.

‘Have we um, received any news from the others?’

‘No, but you’ll know the moment we do, okay?’ Hoseok replies, glancing back at the trackers.

‘Yeah! They’re okay- Jimin will make sure,’ Taeh’yung adds in his best reassuring tone. Hoseok’s not sure who he’s addressing at the moment, so he just activates the safety straps over Taeh’yung before speeding ahead just a little bit more.

Udāvana is smaller than Saṅkrāna, but larger than Keldana. It’s also surprisingly not too damaged. There’s evident signs of aging and natural erosion, but other than that, there’s no indication of destruction that isn’t a result of nature. Udāvana was a somewhat important site for them.
Not just because this was where Yoongi and his team found Jimin, but rather, the reason why and how Yoongi and his team landed so specifically on this spot. Although the GLA-port was indeed located there, it had long been known it was barely functional- just there for namesake. And yet Yoongi and his team landed so close to the GLA-port, the location they were looking for, and instead were lead elsewhere, deep into the valley that spilt downwards from Udāvana, surrounded by craggy mountains that are definitely different from the canyons they had first seen.

Jimin also said this was the narrowest section of the crescent- it was why it wasn’t developed too much. The new geoscans show them that the valley was more like wide shelves, layering downwards before squeezing in through the mountain ridges from both sides of the planet, the water sources from around the upper Crescent region pouring down to a massive and tall waterfall into lake below.

This was also the area where Yoongi and his team died. And where Jimin was taken, triggering a series of events that would forever tie all of their fates together.

Hoseok spots a location for landing; another semi-circle formed by the buildings and forests. This seemed to be a repeating architectural pattern in Megibīya. But the semi-circle clearing is not empty.

Their ship suddenly shudders, tilting too much to one side.

Alarmed, Hoseok quickly takes over the controls, maintaining the balance of the ship.

‘Whoa, what the fuck-’

‘Dehin?’ Taeh’yung sounds worried, ‘You’re…are you okay?’

The GI, who was unnaturally stiff seems to regain his movement, and instead simply nods at Taeh’yung.

‘Hey-’

There’s a sudden groan from Yyna, making Hoseok turn swiftly to look at the Megibīya GI in worry. But her expression doesn’t show much. For one wild moment, Hoseok wonders if he had imagined it. He quickly checks up on everyone’s stats, looking down their health tab. But there’s nothing showing.

Taeh’yung looks worried as he removes himself from his seat.

‘Preparing to land, Head Pilot Hoseok,’ Yyna reports, sounding absolutely normal. Hoseok wishes he could contact the others about this.

There are large boulders and stone pillars that have fallen due to age and or erosion, wildlife that bloomed and withered repeatedly, roots of trees piercing stone and earth. But to the side, creating a telltale imprint on the stone of a not so stable landing, is a GLA standard transporter-ship.

This model was not made anymore- but Hoseok has seen the type in many countless field mission reports of past centuries. This one was popular some 1500 sols ago.

It seemed too unrealistic to think that this ship could possibly be the very one Yoongi was in, coming into Megibīya. But at the same time, also possible. Hoseok wouldn’t be too surprised if it were. Taeh’yung walks over to the windows of the Bridge, his thoughts clearly somewhere else.

They land carefully, noting nothing out of the ordinary- at least in this Megibīyan standard.
‘Anything buggy?’

Taeh’yung looks uneasy, his gaze fixated towards the eastern mountain region. Far into the misty distance Hoseok spies the narrow and high mountain ranges meeting. Jimin had told them that these mountain peaks were once covered in snow— but they’re bare now. The forests and trees here are shorter and smaller, less brown and fading than the gigantic trees they had flown past.

‘I—…I’m not sure Hobi,’ Taeh’yung frowns, ‘But the others are not happy. Something is wrong here.’

Hoseok doesn’t know what Taeh’yung means by that, but he doubles on their scans, checking every single input from their sensors as well. There’s no suspicious difference in the readings; no alterations or changes that was strange. The only thing different here was the lack of damage. He keeps an eye on all the GI’s health tabs. Nothing was showing out of the ordinary. But to be safe, Hoseok tells the GI to stay inside instead. A lot happened in this planet, and though they had not foreseen such an unusual development of un-sureness regarding the reaction of the GI being here, Hoseok doesn’t want to take any risks.

‘The mines,’ Taeh’yung says quietly, ‘Maybe…maybe it was a way of keeping something out?’

Hoseok looks around the place they’ve landed in.

‘It smells worse here,’ Hoseok observes when they both step out. ‘Especially through the forest.’

Taeh’yung looks at the forest, a frown between his brows.

‘Is something wrong?’

‘I don’t know,’ Taeh’yung tilts his head, not looking away. ‘I think…I think there’s something in there— around this area too, but more in there.’

‘Should we move on? Check the Talvana area instead?’ Hoseok offers.

But Taeh’yung shakes his head.

‘I think…I think this is…’ Taeh’yung stops himself, frowning as he looks around at him at figures Hoseok cannot see. ‘Shut up!’

‘What is it?’ Hoseok walks up to the Zhak’gri, goosebumps erupting over his skin as the air shifts around Taeh’yung, movement of things Hoseok has seen once in a waking dream, unhappy and disturbed.

‘They say we shouldn’t be here,’ Taeh’yung replies.

‘We’re out of the tunnels,’ Jungkook tells them, ‘We found traces of fights, collapsed tunnels; I think the inhabitants of Udāvana might have run to the tunnels to stay safe— the network is very big and would offer many places to hide.’

‘We’ve found another transporter,’ Hoseok begins, making his way to the old vehicle.

‘Pirates?’ Jungkook asks, ‘The same style as the other one?’

‘No— I think this is much much older,’ Hoseok replies before saying hesitantly, ‘I think this might have been what Yoongi came down in.’

There’s no response from Yoongi.
‘We might still be able to extract information from the ship’s logs,’ Hoseok continues, ‘I’m going to investigate it.’

It’s appeared untouched since the day it landed, which was odd. Especially if pirates were flying in, bringing eggs quite frequently. And even more so if it meant that Axudar was also frequenting this place in order to retrieve the eggs. How they would overlook a transporter like this, not even hidden or camouflaged in anyway was strange.

‘Fuck!’ Jungkook suddenly cries out. ‘Yoongi!’

There’s a strange scratching sound followed by a crashing sound over the Comms. Hoseok hears Yoongi’s breath catching and exhaling sharply in shock and pain.

‘Hoseok- Yoongi just lost balance- he crashed to the side I don’t think he’s injured but-’

Hoseok quickly runs back to their ship, ‘Taeh’yung stay here- don’t go too far, Yyna, prepare the Medical Bay, Dehin, make sure we’re ready to leave the planet!’

He gets no answer- not even a ‘Understood’ from either of the GI.

‘I’m fine!’ Yoongi manages to get out- he did not sound fine, ‘I just- my head-’

‘Um- Hobi, it’s not just Yoongi- some of the other GI-’

Hoseok stops, retrieving his screen from inside his pocket.

‘I don’t think they’re okay,’ Jungkook stammers, ‘But the others-’

‘Let the unaffected GI bring in those who are compromised,’ Hoseok orders, rushing back to the ship before calling, ‘Dehin! Yyna-!’ he stops short, coming across two GI, keeled over on the floor, in a strange state of pain.

Hoseok suddenly remembers what happened to Yoongi when he had first recovered his memories. How his health tab hadn’t shown anything out of the ordinary.

‘Jungkook was Yoongi showing any signs of pain before this?’ Hoseok demands.

‘No!’ Jungkook replies quickly, ‘I didn’t notice anything any different it just- they all just reacted so strangely once we got out of the tunnel Hoseok I-’

‘Okay- wait, wait-’ Hoseok orders, running upwards and coming across a few of the GI on the ground, as though randomly knocked out while others were unaffected. ‘Take them back- back through the tunnel, away from Udāvana. I think this place is affecting them in a bad way.’

‘I want to see my ship,’ Yoongi manages to grit out.

‘You’ll see it through the Iris,’ Hoseok orders firmly as he gestures to the unaffected GI to help those on the ground. ‘Administer pain-diffusers, put them in their rooms to recover.’

‘I’ll take him in,’ Jungkook says sternly, as though speaking to Yoongi though he was addressing Hoseok, ‘There was an opening to a broken clearing before we hit the mines- we’ll set up there.’

‘All right- I’ll fly us out there,’ Hoseok gets to the Bridge, finding a few GI hovering awkwardly over some of the others, including Dehin and Yyna, who were slumped to the floor or dashboards in a strange grip of pain. ‘I’ll meet you there- can you send me coordinates? Hey, set them up in their rooms and administer pain-diffusers. Do this to anyone who isn’t well.’
‘Understood, head pilot Hoseok,’ they reply in unison.

‘Yeah okay,’ Jungkook sounds like he’s struggling.

‘You okay?’

‘Just- just Yoongi.’

‘Yoongi stop being difficult,’ Hoseok snaps as he gets into the cockpit before realizing something.

Taeh’yung wasn’t there.

‘Tae?’ Hoseok looks around behind him- no lanky Zhak’gri behind him. Where was Taeh’yung? Hoseok checks the scanner at once, finding his green dot in the geoscans map, putting him some ways ahead. Quickly getting out of the cockpit, Hoseok gets to the windows, wiping out one of the HUD tabs to see through.

‘Isolate Taeh’yung’s location and pull me a view to HUD unit uh, 15,’ Hoseok orders. The ships AI system pulls up a zoomed in view of the borders of the forest. Hoseok spots Taeh’yung’s figure some ways ahead, standing right at the edge of the forest.

‘Taeh’yung!’ Hoseok calls quickly, ‘Get back here!’

To Hoseok’s surprise, Taeh’yung does turn around- his expression grave, walking back towards him and the ship.

‘Okay- uh,’ Hoseok looks around at the empty Bridge, ‘Right, okay let’s fly out. Tae, tell me when you’re in.’

‘Almost there!’

Hoseok is only mildly alarmed that Taeh’yung was apparently a very quick runner.

‘Kookie? Everything okay?’

‘We’re moving,’ Jungkook reports back, ‘But um- what about the HoverPorts? Is it okay if we leave them there?’

‘We can get them back later,’ Hoseok replies, readying the ship to take off. ‘It’s not important right now.’

‘Okay! I made sure to lock them!’

Somehow it makes Hoseok smile at that.

‘I don’t like the forest,’ Taeh’yung says, making Hoseok jump. ‘There’s something wrong in there. Something bad.’

‘Is it- is it alive?’ Hoseok quickly pulls the Zhak’gri towards him, making him sit, ‘Everyone secure yourselves, we’re taking off.’

‘This is not alive or dead,’ Taeh’yung says seriously, leg bouncing as his feet tap nervously on the floor. ‘This is them.’

‘What?’ Hoseok does a double take at the Zhak’gri.

‘They left behind something in here,’ Taeh’yung tells him, ‘I can’t smell it right now, but I know
it’s them- it’s the same with the Omhlophe- but the way this feels, it’s stronger. It’s *them.*

*Red Evil, Akramanese, Creveni.*

Hoseok shudders, looking towards the still and misty forest. Despite it looking less forlorn and destroyed, Hoseok now understands why he had found this whole region unsettling. This was why Yoongi’s ship was still here.

‘Past the forest too,’ Taeh’yung tells him, gaze still towards the high ridges and peaks, ‘Past the mountains.’

‘I think we’ll need to change our plans now,’ Hoseok grits out as the engines start up, the whole air vibrating slightly, barely noticeable. ‘Once the others can communicate back to us- we will need to make a change of plans- we can’t stay here.’

Taeh’yung nods absentmindedly before mumbling, ‘We do not bring death.’

‘What?’

‘Just something I heard once before.’

Jungkook sends them their coordinates and Hoseok manages to find a landing spot that’s a bit of tight squeeze amongst the trees. He winces when a few fall from the force of their landing gear. He spots Jungkook by the tree line, his helmet and gloves off.

‘I’ll go help!’ Taeh’yung volunteers, spryly jumping up and speeding out of the Bridge in a flurry of limbs and fluffy hair.

‘Okay-’ Hoseok begins, getting up and cursing when he comes face-to-face with Yyna, and then Dehin who was making his way into the Bridge, ‘For fuck’s sake!’

Yyna, nonplussed, doesn’t say anything.

‘Hey, answer me honestly, how are you feeling?’

Yyna looks blankly at him before replying, ‘Not understood, restate your mission.’

Hoseok nearly throws his hands up in the air when Dehin speaks up, ‘Strange, head pilot Hoseok, I feel strange.’

‘Strange how?’

Dehin places himself at the Navigation Table before replying, ‘As though database was expanding too rapidly. My mind, my body- I was overwhelmed. Much like a glass filled too much, too forcefully.’

He looked drawn out- skin pale and slightly clammy.

‘Thank you for telling me Dehin. We’re staying here until we get back into contact with the others, make sure you’re tracking everything on our scanners.’

‘Understood,’ he replies.

Hoseok rushes down, catching sight of the GI from Team A and B milling in. But no Jungkook or Yoongi. In fact, no Taeh’yung. Hoseok makes his way past the GI walking in, following them in the opposite direction until he’s outside.
Yoongi is sitting. Taeh’yung squatted down next to him. Jungkook is standing before them, arms crossed and a frustrated look on his face.

‘I’m fine,’ is what Yoongi is saying the moment Hoseok is at hearing distance. ‘See the other GI? They’re fine too.’

‘You don’t *smell* fine,’ Jungkook argues, ‘Tae! You can see it right?’

Taeh’yung doesn’t respond, just looking at Yoongi worriedly.

‘I know what’s there,’ Yoongi says, looking up briefly at Hoseok and adding, ‘I’m not pushing myself- I’m not feeling any worse than before, we all know I’m not particularly at my optimum and being here isn’t the main reason behind it.’

Hoseok understands why Jungkook is frowning down at Yoongi because he wants to do the same.

‘What’s in there?’ Hoseok asks instead.

‘It’s where the Red Evil created us,’ Yoongi coughs out, his skin clammy looking. He removes his helmet to reveal matted and sweaty hair. Jungkook screws up his face, his nose scrunching. ‘Just some of us here are affected- notice how some of the GI aren’t affected? It’s because they’re fully “incubated”- it’s us, the regurgitated, who are having issues. Jungkook isn’t affected either.’

Jungkook scowls at that.

‘It’s like, like a part of their ship exists there- maybe more. If what Amme said was true, the Red Evil abandoned a lot of us here when they left. They overtook this planet for an extended period of time- so it wouldn’t be strange if they built something here.’

‘This is not alive or dead.’

‘Wouldn’t the Yishengs have taken what was remaining here?’ Hoseok asks, remembering what Amme had said though none of them really want to take any recollection of any story as 100% factual.

‘Just because they did, doesn’t mean it’s truly gone,’ Taeh’yung answers instead, ‘The forest feels wrong. You cannot do what they did, and let Time take over- not when so much Memory is linked to this planet.’

Yoongi nods, as though in agreement with Taeh’yung despite not having gone close at all.

‘Okay- I think I’m gonna go ahead with Kookie, and some of the other GI who are unaffected going into Udāvana,’ Hoseok tells them, ‘Tae, stay here with the others.’

Taeh’yung nods up at him.

Yoongi looks like he wants to argue but he doesn’t, looking frustrated, and for the first time, *afraid.*

‘It’s possible that the…whatever is left behind in the forest, has stopped anyone who would be interested in the ship to check into it,’ Hoseok tells the Human. ‘You can keep watch with the Iris- I’ll try and access the system, see if I can retrieve any logs. If you see anything of importance, let me know at once. But I can’t have you, or any of the others, compromised by being near this area without knowing what it is, and what it does.’
Yoongi nods to that, looking defeated.

‘Also- depending on what we do find in the forest, or past it into the valleys below, we might have to reconsider our plan.’

‘Even though it seems to be working out completely as planned?’ Yoongi inquires, shaking sweat off of his hair with shaking hands.

‘This was not part of any hypothesis or possibility,’ Hoseok nods towards where Udāvana lay. ‘We will need to discuss this with the others first. Warn them, and the others…and-’ Hoseok stops himself, looking down at Yoongi who glances upwards, ‘Maybe, it’s better for you, and the other GI to not be here- not just keeping safe at a distance, but to stay away.’

The tenseness of his body lessens a little, and Yoongi sighs out, giving him a stiff nod.

‘Yeah,’ he says quietly, ‘I think so too.’

‘Come on, let’s get you back inside- Tae, make sure he’s resting,’ Hoseok tells the Zhak’gri who nods eagerly.

‘Kook, I think we can walk down the distance, and pick up the remaining bikes.’ Hoseok tells Jungkook, ‘You’re good to go? Do you need to take a small break?’

‘No,’ Jungkook shakes his head at once, bouncing on his feet a little as though eager to get going.

‘All right, let’s make sure we have the updated map for the-‘

Then quite suddenly, there’s a small flash of light.

In fact, it was almost as though everything had stopped.

It was not very bright- and it wouldn’t have been so noticeable if it weren’t for the fact that every thing around them – the mountains, the ridges, the trees, the forest, the sky- was all affected. Then the strangest thing happens.

A subdued yet starkly visible ripple of light erupts high overhead- visible more in part because of how the clouds of the storm ripple with the force, practically banishing it in an overwhelming surge of power beyond comprehension.

‘Oh!’ Taeh’yung suddenly says, standing as though he couldn’t help it, eyes wide as he looks up. Around him, appearing in a form so alarming corporeal, are the 4 figures he had seen by the dying light of the fire from the beach. Everyone can see it- it’s not just Hoseok. He can see how the figures appear to be shock, their forms and figures crouched as though unable to help looking upwards, but still cowed with some form of fear or awe.

‘Tae-?’ Hoseok wants an explanation. ‘Yyna, prepare the ship to leave-‘

Out of nowhere, Yoongi suddenly grasps his arm, he’s shaking his head at Hoseok, telling him to stop.

‘Jimin,’ he breathes out, eyes wide and clear, shining with a light from deep within.

‘What do you mean-?’

There’s a blaring shrill sound emitting from their Comm Devices; so loud, Hoseok could swear it
nearly shattered their Comm Devices. Yoongi curses, ripping the Device off that won’t stop emitting the shrieking sound.

‘What is it-?’ Jungkook asks, hand over his ear, face scrunched up. But Hoseok is staring at Taeh’yung whose gaze is fixed upwards, eyes wide and a grin forming on his lips. He turns to look at them, and at the same time all the figures vanish.

‘They did it!’

And then suddenly- the sky seems to implode, all space flickering around and over them- the sun now clear and larger than Hoseok anticipated- bright plumes of light emitting from it in a way Hoseok identifies with quasars. But that’s not the only thing that changes in this reality implosion- a massive accretion disk, with hues of blue, rose, and gold wash over this new expanse of space.

‘Oh,’ Taeh’yung holds his hands up, his eyes glowing bright green, ‘Oh!’

These colours seem to extend all the way towards them but it’s faint-

The sky returns to normal, the clouds above them reappearing and filling with colour that now seemed extremely dull. It’s also very quiet and Hoseok realizes that he had been hearing- hearing singing.

‘Aw,’ Taeh’yung whines, looking at his hands, back to normal with a put-out frown.

‘Our communications are down,’ Hoseok realizes, touching his Comm Device. He turns back to look at the ship. All of the power in it was subdued as well. ‘Taeh’yung what was that?’ he demands, turning around to ask the Zhak’gri.

Taeh’yung just beams, hands clapping, ‘She’s beautiful!’ he exclaims, ‘So beautiful!’

‘What- who?’ Jungkook looks a little scared, and mostly confused.

Their Comm Devices suddenly crackle, making them all flinch. It increases in volume then out of nowhere, their lines clean up, their ship powers back, and all of reality around them seems to settle back down again.

‘We got it!’ Sk’jin suddenly exclaims, loud and clear in their ears. ‘It’s working! We’re on our way back!’

‘Oh-!’ Jungkook’s eyes are wide, an even wider grin on his face. ‘It worked!’

‘It’s done!’ Jimin exclaims- he sounded relieved, ‘Hoseok! Are we ready for the transmission?’

‘Yes!’ Hoseok starts, catching up quickly, ‘Yes it’s ready-‘ he fumbles with the screen, pulling up their long-distance transmission boosters. ‘-we’re connected and ready!’

‘Do it now,’ Namjoon orders, ‘Let’s fuck shit up.’

Hoseok taps lightly on the transfer initiation.

‘Jimin! Are you okay?’ Jungkook asks quickly.

‘I am, we all are,’ Jimin replies quickly, ‘Are you all safe? Has anything been triggered?’

‘No but um-‘ Jungkook glances at Yoongi a little hesitantly, ‘Um- some of the GI have become unwell.’
‘Is it Amad’la, I swear to Spaces I’ll drop-kick anyone who hurt her,’ Sk’jin threatens at once.

‘What do you mean?’ Jimin asks carefully, ‘Where’s Yoongi.’

‘I’m here sunshine,’ Yoongi replies, ‘It’s um- I think there’s something here, left by the Red Evil, and it’s been…not good for me, and some of the others.’

‘The regurgitated? Well, fuck, that’s not good,’ Sk’jin comments.

‘We’ve moved away from Udāvana for now,’ Hoseok quickly explains, ‘Jungkook and I are going to investigate a ship that I think was the one that brought Yoongi here. It might still have intact logs and-‘

‘What?’ Namjoon sounds amazed before adding, ‘Okay, screens back online.’

‘And, we found eggs here,’ Hoseok tells them, ‘Eggs- actual pirates, I’m guessing the same set up as Khonen had with the Omhlophe.’

‘Are- are the eggs okay?’ Sk’jin asks hesitantly.

‘Three of them were, well- didn’t make it,’ Hoseok hesitates, ‘We’ve brought them all back in, all 8 of them. Taeh’yung says that they’reokay.’

‘Taeh’yung,’ Jimin calls, ‘What’s wrong?’

For a moment, Hoseok forgets that the others were also able to see them through the Irises on their own screens.

Taeh’yung seems oddly frozen, frowning as he squints, not looking at anything. The air around him vibrates almost angrily, agitated somehow.

‘I…I don’t think they were here to bring death,’ Taeh’yung sounds far away.

‘What? What’s he saying?’ Sk’jin demands.

‘Hoseok- take Yoongi back further now-!’ Jimin asks frantically, ‘Please-‘

Yoongi sways very oddly- Jungkook reacts immediately, arms going up as though to steady him.

But Yoongi rights himself almost at once.

‘Yoongi-!’

But then, almost as though the strings pulling him upright were abruptly cut, Yoongi crumples to the ground.
‘I was thinking,’ Namjoon says to him conversationally after the sun has set, and the sky was slowly revealing a vast expanse of stars above them. The others were gathering up the vastly scattered ship itinerary while one of the GI had sighed and mumbled in a monotone ‘I hate mess’ to everyone’s amusement.

‘About?’

‘Axudar,’ Namjoon says slowly, ‘And also about how so many of Ndica’s disciples- those who believed in this twisted dreams he firmly believed in. We cannot say what happened during the Gaia Case was enough to quell those beliefs- seeing as how Camil seemed to be one of the countless Beings who was still following Ndica’s desires.’

Hoseok thinks back to the random questions Namjoon had asked him earlier that day.

‘What are you getting to?’

‘We’re greatly disadvantaged.’

‘That’s not new news.’

Namjoon rolls his eyes, ‘Yes. But what I’m saying is, we cannot possibly weed out who knows what, who believes in what, back with the Special Jury, or the Court even. Even within the GIU, the Venture Unit.’

Hoseok nods to that in agreement.

‘I’m…I’m just thinking things through,’ Namjoon tells him, ‘And I think…I think there’s something I want to do- which I think will increase the probability of our success- or at least, success of the mission.’

‘What is it?’

‘Ilya,’ Namjoon states plainly, ‘I’m considering sending him a rough idea of our plans.’

That made sense – Ilya was greatly involved, both voluntarily and involuntarily, with what they were trying to do.

‘If things don’t work out; we need someone to take care of the remaining eggs- ensure their safety. Ilya’s network, once they’re able to clear it out and secure themselves, would definitely be able to find more of the eggs, the New Borns, and provide them with security- or at least hide them away from the GLA Court.’ Namjoon explains.

‘Why didn’t you say something before?’

Namjoon hesitates, glancing over at Sk’jin who was listening to something Amad’la was explaining to him regarding the ship’s shielding system by the Hangar gateway.

‘I’m not sure how much Sk’jin would approve- or well…I’m not saying Sk’jin is incapable of looking past his personal feelings or relationship with Ilya in this matter- ‘ Namjoon hesitates. ‘I think it’s also because I uh-…Sk’jin is…’

Hoseok waits, studying their Captain carefully.

‘You don’t want to hurt him?’ Hoseok asks slowly. ‘You think that maybe, somehow, this will upset
Sk’jin?’

‘Not quite,’ Namjoon scratches at the side of his face, looking over to the sea instead. ‘I don’t know how to say it- I’m worried for him.’

‘In what way?’

Namjoon huffs out a small laugh before saying, ‘I almost considered plotting with Jn’yong and Jimin to somehow knock him out and keep him with Ilya.’

Hoseok squints at Namjoon.

‘Sounds like you’re the one who needs to get their personal feelings out of the way.’

Namjoon snorts, ‘It’s not like that. I just…don’t think that Sk’jin is doing any of this with—well—’

‘With the right intentions?’ Hoseok raises an eyebrow. ‘I don’t think any of us are doing any of this, or started any of this with the “right” intentions.’

Namjoon huffs out in frustration, glaring at Hoseok, ‘I know that- stop trying to put words in my mouth.’

Hoseok raises both hands up, shrugging.

‘The process with which Sk’jin is here, right now with us, and all that’s happened to him- it’s something we cannot explain or hope to understand- at least not the true extent of it.’ Namjoon tells him with a sigh, ‘I am worried that what he wants to do- or what he’s hoping to do and achieve, won’t be what he need.’

‘So what does he need?’

‘Sk’jin thinks he needs to fulfil a promise- to uphold something he wasn’t able to do in the past. Something, most likely the circumstances that lead to his strange death, stopped him from doing so.’ Namjoon pauses, ‘Sk’jin wants justification for being alive right now.’

‘You’re worried this won’t help him?’

‘I know it won’t,’ Namjoon grimaces.

‘Isn’t that his decision to make?’

‘I know it is,’ Namjoon frowns at Hoseok, ‘That doesn’t stop me from worrying about him.’

‘So you’re saying you want to keep Ilya informed- also as a way of possible back-up?’

Namjoon nods.

‘Have you discussed this with Jimin?’

‘He was the one who mentioned it to me,’ Namjoon huffs out a small chuckle, ‘I think he’s planning something.’

‘I mean...yeah,’ Hoseok nods slowly, thinking back to when he’d been talking to Jimin, ‘Is that why you were asking me those other questions?’

Namjoon nods again before stating bluntly, ‘Axudar is too big. There’s too much we don’t
understand- too much that’s suspicious and questionable. We cannot expect back-up from the GLA or the Special Jury- they would never want to invest in something so terribly risky- and for those who actually believed in Ndica and would want to continue to push his agenda, they will do everything they can to stop us.’

‘Ilya’s is the next possible force that could possibly counter what Axudar is trying to do?’

‘At least enough to help with the eggs and New Borns.’ Namjoon nods.

‘Well,’ Hoseok begins thoughtfully. ‘If this had been just a month ago, I think Ilya would have refused- alongside Jn’young, E’nid, and Jaen – but with how they have been effected, and with their own personal history, I think it’s safe to say they are probably making their own plans on how to tackle this force.’

Namjoon nods, listening intently.

‘I think we should definitely inform Ilya- as well as Jn’young,’ Hoseok says in agreement before nodding towards Sk’jin’s direction. ‘I also think, as this is an action that will directly effect our team and what we’re doing- Sk’jin should be informed.’

Namjoon sighs. It’s almost comical.

‘You want me to say it?’ Hoseok offers with a short laugh.

‘Can’t do that,’ Namjoon shakes his head, squaring his shoulders as he glances over at Sk’jin, who looks up at them, eyes narrowing with suspicion, clearly some heightened sense alerting him that he was being discussed. ‘As Captain I need to do this sort of stuff.’

Hoseok pats Namjoon’s shoulder.

‘Good luck.’

‘He’s not displaying any signs of actual physical problems,’ Hoseok sighs.

‘Is it the same as last time?’ Namjoon asks.

Hoseok pulls on his jacket, closing the front properly. He accepts the helmet from Jungkook as they step out of the ship.

‘Yeah, I think so,’ Hoseok replies, ‘Maybe this place, whatever is left behind by the Red Evil triggers the GI who are like Yoongi?’

‘The regurgitated?’

‘Yeah. Dehin had told me he felt like database was expanding too quickly,’ Hoseok repeats what he heard from the GI, ‘I think we might have to adjust our next steps.’
'Sk’jin was saying that too, but I think Jimin should come down and check on whatever this is first before we contact Ilya again.’ Namjoon ruminates. ‘Are you heading back for Yoongi’s ship?’

‘We don’t know for sure if it is Yoongi’s ship,’ Hoseok reminds him. ‘We weren’t able to show him the ship- he kinda got out of it before we could.’

‘Does he think it’s his ship.’

‘Yeah.’

‘To be honest I’m not surprised,’ Namjoon says, ‘But even if it’s not his ship, it would still be good to check into what that ship is, and if the logs are still available.’

‘Ready to take off, Head Pilot Hoseok,’ one of the GI reports to him.

‘Great, return to Keldana and stay there,’ Hoseok looks back to the ship, raising one hand up to signal them. ‘We’ll be back within 2 hours.’

‘Understood.’

‘Buggy?’

‘I’ll keep everyone safe! You both have fun! Protect each other okay Kookie?’

‘Okay!’ Jungkook replies as he pushes his own helmet over his head.

Hoseok had let all of the regurgitated GI remain in the ship, ordering them not to participate in any of the ship’s activity, having them under observation in the Medical Bays. Yoongi had taken it the worst, and though he had regained consciousness, was worryingly weak. Hoseok requests for two of the GI to go along with himself and Jungkook to investigate Yoongi’s ship. They would walk through the tunnel and up to the remaining 4 HoverPorts, and then straight towards where Yoongi’s ship (still debatable) was.

The Yisheng ship takes off, making Hoseok lower the GI helmet visor down to avoid the dust storm that picks up as the ship lifts off.

‘Okay, let’s get going,’ Hoseok waves one last time before turning around.

‘We should be getting there in around 2 hours ourselves,’ Sk’jin tells them, ‘We were initially planning on maybe scouring the Crescent but I think that can wait until after we check out Udāvana.’

Hoseok hops down the smaller and steeper cracks that have spread on the ground, revealing the tunnels below. Jungkook follows after him and takes the lead.

‘So,’ Hoseok begins, ‘How was it?’

‘Unusual,’ Sk’jin replies honestly, ‘I’ve never seen anything like it- I can’t believe how… extraordinary it all is. I’m not saying that it was good, but it was understandable that Ndica was so relentless in his pursuit for Menigišiti and what they had.’

‘Did Jimin say anything else?’

‘No. But I think there’s no way we can take it back now,’ Sk’jin laughs, ‘They will definitely notice.’
‘Like we planned?’

Sk’jin sighs, ‘Like we planned.’

‘Don’t worry,’ Namjoon laughs, sounding quite delighted, ‘They won’t know what else is going to hit them soon- the Underverse is already exploding- there’s no way this won’t get out of hand.’

‘Well, we will need to figure things out when we get there about that forest,’ Sk’jin interjects, ‘Which will make me happier because as per usual no one listens to me-‘

‘I listen to you!’ Taeh’yung complains.

‘I have never heard a more terrible or bold lie,’ Sk’jin scoffs.

‘Jn’yong is saying that he’s just received a report from inside Šerdesas that the Court is in a massive flurry. This might be a lot faster than we expected.’ Namjoon remarks.

‘Then it’s just their next move now,’ Hoseok replies, ‘Anything from the GIU?’

‘Nothing yet- but I don’t doubt K’mara already knows now.’ Namjoon replies.

‘Just as planned!’

‘Please,’ Sk’jin pleads, ‘I’ll hear this in my dreams.’

‘You don’t sleep,’ Jungkook chimes in unexpectedly, grinning goofily at Hoseok through his open visor.

‘This disrespect!’ Sk’jin exhales noisily, ‘Just you wait you muscular hulk, I’ll kick your ass when I get down there!’

Jungkook is evidently laughing, his shoulders shaking with laughter as he walks ahead.

‘They’re becoming much more stable now!’ Taeh’yung randomly reports, ‘Amad’la is also awake now!’

‘Does she remember…things from the past?’ Namjoon asks tentatively.

‘No, she’s just a little confused.’ Taeh’yung replies, ‘Dehin is the only one who hasn’t woken up. But he seems stable. Yoongi keeps falling asleep though- but he manages to wake up.’

‘Thanks buggy, you’re doing a good job.’

Jungkook grins at the way Taeh’yung pleased giggling fills their ears.

‘Is Taeh’yung very old?’ he asks, touching his Comm Device, isolating their channel for a moment.

‘Uh, yeah I think so,’ Hoseok confirms, ‘Not quite how we understand age or time I think.’

Jungkook seems to ponder this seriously before asking, ‘Not like how Yoongi is old right?’

‘Yeah, it’s different,’ Hoseok nods, ‘But even in that, you’re like Yoongi, but you’re not like him again too.’

‘Time is strange,’ Jungkook observes.
Taeh’yung updates them on the GI’s health status every 10 minutes or so. He also informs them when they arrive back to Keldana. Hoseok has one of the GI retrieve the transporter Yoongi and Teams A and B had used to first depart from the Yisheng ship when they had arrived in Megibiya.

Hoseok observes the tunnels- they’re wide, obviously used to quickly ferry items underground. There are tracks to the side as well on the domed ceilings. There are several alcoves, half-circles and quite deep. Clearly this place was once frequently used. Jungkook shows him where the first mine had been triggered. Hoseok can still pick up lingering traces of sulfur. It’s not a very powerful explosion, only chipping some of the already loose and cracked stones. It could very well have been a warning system attached later into this tunnel.

The tunnels are not exactly intact- deep crevices have formed through some of them, with some areas nearly entirely collapsed or caved in. Hoseok hears water coming through on one of the branching off tunnels. There’s a crevice so wide and deep they need to take running leaps to cross it. Hoseok realizes he’s probably least adept at it, seeing as how the GI cleanly make the jump, barely even running for momentum. And well Jungkook- he not only makes it over the crevice running on all fours, he lands quite a distance away, rolling onto the ground as he touches the ground. Hoseok just about makes it, grumbling under his breath at how Jungkook seems very pleased with his mark.

They avoid the other mines easily, though Hoseok wishes they could extract just one to examine the make of it. Hoseok could easily put together explosives if needed, but there were trained and known tactics and methods. By examining the mine, they would be able to at least reduce the number of possible explosive enthusiasts.

The HoverPorts are untouched where they were left behind when they exit the tunnels.

‘It’s not getting dark,’ Jungkook sounds confused, ‘Shouldn’t the sky have changed? The sun?’

‘Not here,’ Hoseok explains, ‘Megibiya is orbit locked- the sun won’t rise above that.’

They can barely see the sun now- hidden behind strangely twisting greyish clouds, covering most of the sky. The storm had eased somewhat, no more lightning suddenly flashing through the sky or behind the horizon.

‘We got the HoverPorts,’ Hoseok announces, ‘We’ll be at the transporter location in a few minutes.’

‘We’re not too far ourselves,’ Sk’jin replies back, ‘Damn, Yishengs really have been using their funds well haven’t they?’

Udāvana doesn’t feel different to Hoseok, but nonetheless it is twice as foreboding now that he’s here, and Yoongi and the other regurgitated GI are back in the ship. It makes Jungkook quite jumpy as well, his stance defensive the moment they get closer into the central clearing of the city, towards the aged transporter waiting for them there. They stop close by, and Hoseok stations the 2 GI to station themselves outside, and to keep a circling parameter around the ship, with their scanners to pick up on any activity.

Jungkook wheezes, shutting off his visor at once before he opened it properly. ‘It really stinks!’ he exclaims, exhaling forcefully.

Hoseok walks around the whole transporter first, observing the ship.

‘That’s it,’ Yoongi says quietly, ‘That’s the transporter we were in.’
Hoseok makes sure his Iris is stabilized, and that none of the straps over his jacket were blocking
the view.

‘I don’t see any visible traps or triggers outside- I’m running a scan just in case,’ Hoseok says out
loud, already retrieving his screen. Jungkook tails after him, imitating his steps and moves.

A few scans later, Hoseok doesn’t note anything untoward outside the ship. The entryway on either
side as well as towards the back at the hangar gateway is shut. After this long, Hoseok isn’t sure if
they can rely on the ship to still have a functioning gateway system. But it’s all right because
Jungkook is able to pry open the hangar gateway enough for both of them to duck inside.

Whatever power once fueled this ship was completely gone- the air is stale in here, not the way it
was outside, but in a way that suggested whatever air filtration was used here wasn’t functional
anymore for a long time. Hoseok taps on the side of his helmet, Jungkook following suit, and the
hangar lights up immediately.

Nothing seems touched or changed. The hangar, with many OrTanks and crates were still stacked
up, attached to their frames and lifts, secured with straps and magnetic locks. There’s suspension
tarps still draped over some areas, thick layers of dust over them. The floor, though metal, doesn’t
make a sound when Hoseok steps on it as a result of intense dust.

‘Nothing’s…nothing’s changed-’ Yoongi sounds dazed. ‘That’s the secondary hangar- further in,
through that partition-’ Hoseok steps forward and finds wide sliding panels, ‘-yes that one- that’s
the primary hangar. That’s where we stored our weapons, communication devices, and screens.
Past that is the seating bay that leads into the cockpit.’

Hoseok and Jungkook slide the doorway, waves of dust falling over them, and to their feet, a
strange sticky sludge spills over.

‘Gross,’ Jungkook wails, taking a step back.

The seating bay area is flooded in about a 2-3 inch deep layer of residual life-support chemicals,
air-filter mesh, and the main culprit, a burst pipe that probably siphoned out anti-inflammatory
agents during an emergency. Hoseok guesses that at one point, long after the transporter’s system
no longer could function or support itself, with strange changes of temperature, pressure, and
prolonged exposure to the strange nature of this planet, the transporter’s internal hardware-based
system simply eroded in on itself.

‘That was my seat,’ Yoongi croaks, ‘5th to the left from where you’re standing.’

Hoseok enters the seating bay, counting the seats. He tries to ignore how there are clear indications
of personal belongings still stored in the compartments below the seats.

‘Right next to mine, was Amic,’ Yoongi continues, sounding faint. ‘Fuck- we-…we couldn’t see
what entering the planet was like. We could only catch flashes of red from the cockpit- we didn’t
even know what we were getting ourselves into-‘

Hoseok stops at Yoongi’s designated seat. He can read a dusty 09-LW2 printed faintly on the
headboard.

‘Yoongi?’ Taeh’yung sounds like he’s trying to wake the Human.

‘-Hoseok I think you can pull out the storage compartments below the seats,’ Yoongi sounds
hopeful. Hoseok steps into the space before the seats, squatting down to look at the compartments.
09-LW2 is printed over it, much more clear and less dusty. But it’s congealed around the edges, and though Hoseok could have done it himself, he can practically feel Jungkook vibrating with eagerness.

‘Kook?’ Hoseok points at the compartment before stepping aside. Jungkook leans in, yanking with careful force, pushing aside the nearly solidified agents and liquid that’s coated the floors.

‘Thank you,’ he smiles at the Vicitra even though he can’t see it. He imagines Jungkook’s smiling back.

There’s a bag inside—still very well preserved, not a hint of dust on it.

‘Do you want us to bring Amic’s back?’ Hoseok asks gently, pulling out a thin but strong drawstring square from inside his pocket and unfolding it, holding it up for Jungkook to carefully place the bag inside.

‘I think, considering everything, you should bring back everything,’ Namjoon suggests gently.

‘Yoongi’s asleep again,’ Taeh’yung tells them quietly, speaking in hushed tones.

‘Kookie, could you get them and store them up?’ Hoseok asks, hanging the youngling the drawstring, ‘I’ll go to the cockpit and try and access the transporter’s systems.’

Jungkook nods, already squatting down to pull out the next compartment.

‘Amad’la might have something worth looking into,’ Sk’jin pipes in, ‘She was the captain of their squad after all.’

‘Like pa?’

‘Hardly—besides, we’re hardly a squad. More like a shit-show if anything else.’

‘Jinnie! Jungkook’s listening!’

‘A good shit-show—shit is good fertilizer, Spaces.’

Jungkook is cackling behind him.

‘The system should be accessible if there’s power left in the cockpit,’ Yoongi tells him, sounding incredibly weak, ‘But I think you might just have to extract the motherboard and core.’

Hoseok had been suspecting that. Besides, it was possible that the method of accessing this outdated system might be beyond what the screen he brought could do. The windows are covered in dust, not much light filtering in. Kneeling in the squelching thick liquid on the floor and trying not to think about how gross it felt, Hoseok places himself before the cockpit dashboard and removes a glove. He feels for a slight catch in the otherwise smooth panels of the dashboard before he’s able to activate a small jutting metal lip and tugs down on it. With some struggle, and kicking aside the thick congealed liquid that’s incredibly stubborn (and probably impossible to remove from his clothes), Hoseok pulls at the panels that folds away from the dashboard and onto the floor.

Thankfully, none of the congealed oozing liquid had made its way down into the motherboard below. He gets no additional information or instruction from Yoongi so Hoseok proceeds to carefully extract the motherboards out. Deeper below, the core still lay intact as well.
‘I’m done,’ Jungkook tells him.

‘And we can see Megibiya now,’ Sk’jin announces.

‘The sun is shining?’ Jungkook remarks, sounding a bit confused.

‘Hm?’ Hoseok looks up, finding that the Vicitra has finished removing all the items from the seat compartments and was slowly making his way towards the cockpit, pushing up his visor, squinting at the dusty window.

‘What do you mean?’ Hoseok asks, looking back. He can’t see past the thick layer of dust in the window, and there’s very less light coming through if at all.


‘Are you guys done?’ Namjoon asks.

‘I’ve found the motherboards and the transporter’s core’ Hoseok reports back, glancing around the cockpit for anything he might have missed, ‘I think this is enough for now.’

‘Outside!’ Jungkook reaches forward to tug slightly on his sleeve, sounding excited. ‘Something’s happening!’

‘What do you mean?’ Hoseok frowns, lowering his visor at once and retrieving the TeorSer on his back.

Jungkook just excitedly sprints ahead, his shoes making rapid squelching sounds.

‘Jiminie is here,’ Taeh’yung sounds excited, ‘This is so cool!

Hoseok steps out of the transporter, looking up just as Jungkook runs out ahead of him, exclaiming excitedly as he looks up to the sky.

They had been on the ship earlier when they entered the planet, stepping out of warp, straight into a geomagnetic storm. But now it’s different.

‘All right, coming in now.’

The skies seem to ripple, colours of the quasar they had seen before echo in soft waves and every single living thing, every single construct and mass and space on this planet seems to tremble and sigh, welcoming and relieved. The air shifts, the wind somehow pleasantly changed from the chilly and decayed taint that wrapped Megibiya in a gloom of grey and stagnancy. There’s a change in the scent of the air as well- like sun warmed leaves, presenting them with a hint of growth; of life.

‘We’ve entered back into the atmosphere,’ Sk’jin tells them, ‘We’re coming down to the ship.’

‘Happy to have you all back!’ Taeh’yung chirps.

‘Wow,’ Jungkook breathes out, looking around him quite excitedly. Even the GI look around, as though they didn’t understand what was happening, expressing confusion in their own way.

‘Let’s get going everyone,’ Hoseok calls, putting back his TeorSer and pocketing the motherboards and core inside his inner-pockets. ‘Kookie, you okay with the bags?’

Jungkook simply swings them all to his back and gives him a thumb’s up before reaching up to lower his visor when he stops- eyes widening, posture rigid.
Quite suddenly, there’s a rumbling sound that comes straight from the forest behind them.

Hoseok spins around, checking all over the forest front for any sign of movement, activity- but he notices nothing. There’s another rumble- like the air was vibrating.

‘Angry,’ Jungkook grits out, ‘But- but just…just afraid.’

Hoseok squints at the forest and then back at Jungkook.

‘Come on Kook, let’s get going.’

* *

There’s a strange light coming from the forest. Yoongi doesn’t remember how he got here, but he’s at the edge of that forest.

It reminds Yoongi of when he was last here.

Suddenly, everything is so much more brilliant. Like the missing colours of his memory now were able to reconnect.

But Namjoon’s voice isn’t part of the original memory so he knows something is wrong. But he can’t quite pinpoint where it’s coming from.

The whole air around him pulses, flaring red stains everything slowly, colouring his dreams from a past life he couldn’t quite grasp. His feet hurt; he wants to sit down so he does. The forest floor is not the most comfortable, and Yoongi ignores that he doesn’t remember how he was inside the forest.

He ignores all of that, because all he can think about is how much he doesn’t want to be here.

He was not home. He was not where he needed to be. This was not where he should be. Yet he can’t help but move forward, as though forced to complete this journey. As though he had to.

As though something were incomplete.

But he doesn’t want to- he couldn’t. This wasn’t the direction he was supposed to go- not through this same wooded red-stained stretch of space that would dissipate into a strange void of white nothingness.

No. He can’t do that again.

He had to go back home.

He thinks he can hear Jungkook’s voice. That was definitely Hoseok’s voice too.

Oh, he was so tired. So so tired. Maybe he can close his eyes for just a moment- maybe that way he can get back home, but-
Something shimmers at him from the side.

Turning his head to the side, Yoongi blinks a little at the sudden lightening of the air around him.

Jungkook’s voice, Sk’jin’s voice- they all fade away slowly. Instead, a familiar singing fills his mind. And Yoongi knows this song. He knows this voice.

And at that moment, sunlight breaks through and the entire clearing is covered in warm light and colour.

Their eyes meet, and Yoongi’s fear abates.

‘Sunshine.’

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Jimin wakes him up with a soft kiss.

For a moment, Yoongi wonders if he’s fallen asleep again, and he’s back there, in their home. Maybe Jimin did decide that they should just stay here – that Jimin is waking him up to watch the sunrise.

His hand brushes through his hair, and Yoongi leans towards it. He’s there, in their bed. When he extends his hand out, he feels another body, warm skin under his palm.

‘Yoongi,’ Jimin whispers, lips pulling away from his skin. Yoongi opens his eyes, leaning up to follow Jimin’s voice.

The sound of the sea gently lapping up against the shoreline is the first thing he hears. The sun isn’t out yet, but the morning light is just bright enough to illuminate Jimin’s hair, the slopes of his face.

He’s kneeling next to him, a small smile on his lips.

‘You want to go for a walk?’ he asks, head tilting a little.

They would be leaving today.

Everything they had discussed the other day comes rushing back. Jimin’s silences, his questions, and how he took the time out to speak to every single GI, their foreheads touching; maybe he would now tell him, explain to him.

Without answering, Yoongi sits up and takes Jimin’s hand.

Yoongi realizes that only Namjoon, Jungkook, and a few of the GI were still around the cold remains of the fire pit. He’s not surprised that Sk’jin wasn’t there, but he can’t spot either Taeh’yung nor Hoseok.

Helping him up, hand in hand, Yoongi and Jimin walk over to the sandy edges of the shore, climbing up some of the flatter slabs of rock.
They had been spending every dawn together, watching the sunrise. Yoongi doesn’t quite understand why Jimin does this. But he remembers this distinctly when he had been in Megibīya.

‘Why do you watch the sunrise?’ Yoongi asks after a while. Jimin tugs quietly at his hand and they sit down on the cool rock slabs.

‘Because after the winter, spring will always come,’ Jimin says softly, ‘After night, day is not so far behind. Nothing lasts forever- no darkness, no fear, no pain exists forever.’

Yoongi smiles at that, squeezing Jimin’s hand in his. Jimin’s finger still has the thin band of ink around it.

‘Even if the moon wanes, it will still appear in the sky,’ he whispers softly, taking up their linked hands and kissing Yoongi’s knuckles. Yoongi leans in to kiss his forehead.

The skyline that rests above the horizon is lightening slowly, hints of gold leaking onto tiny wisps of vapor and clouds. The direction of the wind changes, sending a slight shiver down Jimin.

‘I’m worried,’ Jimin says quietly. ‘And afraid.’

Yoongi waits for Jimin to continue.

‘I’m not afraid of doing this. I know what needs to be done.’ Jimin explains. ‘But there’s…this isn’t just an ordinary situation where it’s okay to simply not know to um, to wing it.’

Yoongi smiles involuntarily at the way Jimin seems unconsciously pleased at having grasped the metaphor.

‘I think there were things Prat’tna didn’t tell Namjoon. I scrubbed through the surveillance footage and- it had all been removed. Or at least, never recorded. I checked all of the files, and even though I’m not very good, I did learn a lot from Lisai. I could find nothing.’ Jimin tells him, his free hand fiddling with the edges of his shirt. ‘If Prat’tna wanted to show me, or tell me all of this, he could have.’

Jimin looks out, eyes reflecting the growing light spreading over the horizon.

‘What’s on your mind?’

‘A lot of confusion but-…based on what Namjoon has told me, from what he heard from Prat’tna, and how far the deception and control of the Great Council truly ran through Menigišiti.’

‘Do you suspect Prat’tna was involved in what happened?’ Yoongi asks, thinking hard about everything Namjoon summarized for them regarding his involuntary stay with the GI in Lowet.

Jimin nods slowly.

‘There’s no evidence for it of course- all though it might explain why he did not wish to speak in person,’ Jimin replies, ‘Which is why I- I asked the others, if I could look into their memories. I believed that it would work- as it does with you, because of how and where we are connected.’

‘What did you see?’

‘When-…when I touched the other…the other you- I saw into his thoughts and it was-….strangely empty. Only action- only recall. But I could still see what he had seen to that point.’

‘What was it?’
Jimin looks back around behind him before saying, ‘I think that…up until now, with everything we have heard, that we are being pushed to serve either one purpose, but both of which leading to destruction of a magnitude too big to comprehend.’

‘-you don’t think what Prat’tna or Amme said should be trusted?’

Jimin doesn’t nod, just tilts his head a little.

‘Trust and truths are tricky,’ Jimin says slowly, ‘If you believe one thing to be true, the life you live is your truth, but the life others lead is not your reality, therefore for you, it is not true. What are truths for you, Yoongi, may not be truths for me. What truth Amme witnessed, may not be the same for Ndica- or even K’mara. The truth Hoseok has lived is not the truth Namjoon has lived. What Sk’jin believes in, what he can trust in, is not the same as what Jungkook believes in- what he’s lived in his life.’

‘Is that why you always look uncomfortable when you say you can’t lie?’

Jimin nods slowly.

‘Because I might believe in what I think is true- like when I believed that Menigišiti…when I believed in Menigišiti. I might see into someone’s mind, and see their truth. But clearly, so far everything has been showing me that the truth I once believed in are now all lies, layered over each other, delivered to me as a truth.’

‘And that’s not your fault.’

Jimin shakes his head.

‘It’s not about fault or guilt anymore- it’s…regardless of what has happened, and how it happened- I have innocent Beings who need to be protected, and my home that needs to be…’

Jimin closes his eyes. ‘What if Menigišiti now believes that it has been freed? Who am I, to push my truth onto them now.’

Yoongi can’t answer.

‘I’m thankful for your approach,’ Jimin opens his eyes, looking around at Yoongi with a smile. ‘I do not wish to become someone who believes they are a savior, with memories of a time that has long past forgotten me- and enforce my past truths into a present that no longer needs or wants me.’

‘What if their truth is…what if their truth no longer becomes a home for you?’

‘Then we will find another way- for the New Borns- at the very least, we can try and stop the atrocity taking place in Axudar- with Ilya and Jn’yong.’ Jimin says firmly before he breaks out into a smile, fond and private. ‘I like our home.’

‘Yeah?’

Jimin nods, looking up and out over to the sea. He inhales slowly and exhales quietly.

‘I’m…if I asked you to…to remain here,’ Jimin asks quietly. ‘Would you stay?’

‘Only if you stay here with me.’

Jimin lets out a small choked laughter, though there’s no humor to it.
‘Yoongi I—’

‘I know.’ Yoongi whispers.

The sun is nearly entirely out of the sea, turning the endless stretch of water golden.

Yoongi hears them before he sees them and doesn’t turn to look as Jungkook and Sk’jin climb up the flat rocks. Jungkook scoots up close to Jimin, ducking down to rest his head on his shoulder. Sk’jin comes to stand behind them. A minute later, Hoseok appears, shortly followed by Taeh’yung, and then Namjoon.

Jimin stands up, inhaling slowly and deeply.

Then, turning his back to the sun, Jimin looks at all of them carefully.

‘As the Yemenifesi Ch’inin’eti, I was always sought after, to listen, to hear, to see and understand what was not said, what was not seen.’ Jimin doesn’t look away.

Yoongi stands as well, stepping back to look at Jimin properly.

‘There is a lot that was not said to me, that was not shown to me,’ Jimin continues, ‘And even now, this has become the constant in my life, constricting me, constricting us.’

No one says a word. The sun is now above the horizon, illuminating them all in what felt like an instance of trust, security, and unity.

‘I know how to fix this,’ Jimin tells them quietly. ‘Because I see it now. I have been able to see it all now. And I know how worried we are. How we all know that there is no way out of this. But I understand now. And I know I can fix this.’

‘How do we fix it?’ Yoongi asks.

Jimin takes a deep breath, looking at each of them with overwhelmed emotions.

‘You trust me?’ he asks breathlessly, the Fate of his people, lost and forgotten, broken in defeat inconceivable and unimaginable.

Yoongi’s heart swells; no one should have had this burden- decorative or performative; no one should have had to do any of this but here he was- lost. Lost, but trying to return to his people, trying to save those who would live lives in a future they cannot hope to have now.

Namjoon hands Jimin the NaviLet.

‘Thank you,’ Jimin is almost inaudible but everyone hears him clearly. ‘Thank you.’

‘Tell us what we can do.’

He taps a few times on the NaviLet, the sun rising above him, light emitting from his whole being. Then he holds up the NaviLet, allowing a familiar planet, reshaped and re-mapped appears.

‘The ending started here, in Megibīya. And this is where we will change that.’
I’ve been seeing a lot of people do virtual hangouts and I don’t think even virtually I’d be able to even look at any of the idols in the eye like Moonbyul has done it and every single video I see I’m like LWJGFHGLSDFHGLSDJFGDS and it’s not even me. There’s also gonna be one of jinyoung and hhahahahahaha that man hurts me so much I would never be physically emotionally mentally or spiritually ready to even be at a digital space with him let alone IRL I think I would genuinely just be Gone™. Once again T_T I am sorry for a delayed update everyone, I try my best to deliver fics at a somewhat consistent rate but Yeah. Trying to change your life and enter the next phase of your adult life in the most financially balanced way, balancing debt, trying to make things work with your super weak passport in this capitalist society, with a pandemic raging on is just a lot. I try my best to keep positive and to make things at a daily basis be fun and productive but damn, these weeks have just been terrible. Festa bangbangcon was super fun though and it really made my day!!! God I will never ever get over that Respect performance. How do I tattoo that into my eyelids. If
you guys watched it, which performance did you enjoy the most?

End Notes

This is the follow up to AMULGEO (A Misguided and Unnecessarily Long Galactic Odyssey to Earth). This story will follow the events of what happened in AMULGEO, taking a look into aspects of the GLA that weren't mentioned or illuminated, like the Venture Unit, the GI, and so on. Characters from AMULGEO will occasionally appear but you don't have to have read AMULGEO in advance to understand or enjoy this story. While it is a sequel, it doesn't follow the characters from AMULGEO so the storyline, though connected and part of the AMULGEO universe, has an entirely new storyline and, obviously, new characters. I've written ADEGU in a way where it can be read as a stand-alone fic.

And if you have read AMULGEO, you will know my style of writing- it's entirely plot-driven, with a lot of slow-burn with the ships, other relationships, and character introduction as well. So even if it is a YoonMin fic, the actual ship won't start up until later-an advance warning for anyone who might feel betrayed or impatient with the development of this ship.

And if you follow me on twitter or tumblr or have read my previous works, you will also know that I am multi-fandom and I love a variety of groups.

And additional disclaimer: I do not own BTS or any other group that might be mentioned in this fic. I do, however, own all original concepts in regards to storyline, plot, original characters, character design, and overall universe. Please do not copy or plagiarize. And if you find that my work has any resemblance to any other work, please tell me! I am against plagiarism so everything I write will always be completely 100% original unless stated otherwise in which case I will credit and put reference immediately.

And I am not a native English Speaker. So please forgive any grammatical errors you may come across! I also frequently switch between British and American spelling!

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