The Aliens You Meet

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The Aliens You Meet

by GoldenEmpire

Summary

The eight species living in the Cairn Galaxy have been at war for eighteen years. A delegation from a so-far neutral planet, Arossa, could steer the relations into a more peaceful territory. However carefully weaved plans crumble when the delegation is assassinated. The only hope for the war to end is an alliance with Fayaxiamen, a planet in another galaxy, but for that to happen two young children must be delivered back to Arossa for a marriage of utmost importance.

Their friend and loyal protector, Arch, embarks on this dangerous journey with the crew of 'Hannibal,' a warship with an exasperated, lonely captain, an angry Fox medic, an Omega whose not really meant to be there, and a prisoner who's definately not meant to be there. Their journey will not be easy, their guidance comes only from a sassy AI, a talking cactus and a voice somewhere back on Earth, telling them where to go. The fate of the galaxy rests in their hands.

This is a long-ass story about a bunch of gay guys on a spaceship during a war, trying to fulfil a mission. Loads of angst, romance, fantasy, world-building, gayness, sex, and even omegas!
I'm shit at summaries apologies. Take a peek anyway?
What Happened on Daliat

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

28th Mojal 1144 Exploration Era.

Daliat.

Eighteen years. Eighteen years the war had ravaged through the Cairn Galaxy, destroying ships among the stars, gnawing away at planets like locust in the ancient books salvaged from the original earth. For eighteen years the eight species living in the Galaxy had been murdered, died from starvation and illness, died from the cold or from the heat or from the poisonous fumes.

Today...today this would change. Because today is the day of the Conference on Daliat. In the eighteen years of the War one planet had kept its silence, refusing to attack, protecting only itself. Arossa, a tiny planet on the edge of the Galaxy, a peaceful, kind place where refugees were welcome, and warfare was not. And now even Arossa had broken its silence, and were sending a delegation to Daliat, the home of the Wurund, the ones who had started this whole bloody, interstellar massacre. The Wurund are not a peaceful species by any means, they are not negotiators, they are the Hitler’s and Stalin’s and Mussolini’s of this world. And yet even they have their curiosity, they want to know what the Calanthe King and Queen coming from Arossa have to say.

You remember the old Human saying? Curiosity killed the cat...

Daliat is a drab planet. Drab and grey with thin constructions spiralling into the sky, like skyscrapers. Even the sky is grey, from all the pollution, ships ricocheting through the smoke like bullets. Say what you will about the Wurund but one thing you can’t deny; they are the best ship makers in the Cairn Galaxy, which is why they are dominating space, and why it’s so hard for the war to end.

There is a parliament building in the heart of Daliat, a ragged castle, looking like a corroding, rusty coral reef, black pinpricks of windows appearing here and there. It’s not an appealing place, but neither are the Wurund themselves. To the Calanthe, the ‘beautiful’ species who move like air and defy gravity, the Wurund are ugly. Of course, the Calanthe are much too polite to ever say so but it cannot be disputed. They are tall, muscular beings, even their women, with grey scaly skin and pure-white eyes that dominate their eyes. They’re like reptiles with their movements, quick and darting, not unlike the ships they build. They also look like devils, with black horns sprouting from their bald heads. The Calanthe are like toys at their sides as they descend from their ship.

The King and Queen are led into the Parliament building and not for the first time they are glad that they had decided to leave their two young children on a different planet, not even for their safety, but
to spare them the horrors of this industrial, cold and cruel planet. They are taking a risk with this Conference – as mostly neutral, the Calanthe were the only ones who had a chance at meeting with this side of the war.

They come to an oval room, dim and unpleasant, with only a few small windows letting in cold shafts of light. Around a crudely made stone table sit the three leaders of the Shivanna Alliance. The two men present rise as Queen Beroe and King Eski are led in by the Wurund Guards.

“Your Graces,” the more humane man speaks, his voice hoarse as if someone had sandpapered his throat. He is a Charasean Alpha, that much is clear from his paper-white skin and large, pointed ears. Dressed in his rich crimsons and purples he looks foolishly out of place in this dark room, that is more a cell than anything else, “I am Vinh Navoy, the President of the Alpha’s in the war.”

“It’s a pleasure,” King Eski lies gracefully, inclining his head.

It’s complicated with the Charaseans. Their society is split into three; the Alpha’s, the Beta’s and the Omega’s. For longer than the war had gone on there had been controversy regarding the treatment of the Omega’s, who are regarded as the lowest of the low. Thirteen years ago the Omega’s finally stood up for themselves in what became known as the O Rebellion, so the Charaseans are not only in the Cairn War, but also have a Civil War tearing apart their planet, Tussa. The Calanthe knew exactly what kind of a man President Navoy was; cruel, merciless, a stereotypical Alpha in the worst sense, wanting only to dominate the Omega’s.

The eyes of the Delegation were more drawn to the more imposing figure in the room. A tall, male Wurund dressed in an ebony armour.

“Ohra comm. Daliat,” King Achadh A’rkania spoke in the guttural, rough language of the Wurund. The Calanthe delegation mimicked the Flynkon language with their much softer tongues. King Achadh, clearly amused at their attempt, clicked his massive, scaly fingers. A Wurund female, not much better looking than her King, came from the corner of the hall.

“I am the translator,” she spoke in crippled Fiala, butchering the airy and beautiful language of the Calanthe. Of course nobody would tell her that.

King Achadh barked something.

“My King welcomes you to Daliat. And asks you to sit,” for some reason it didn’t feel like a suggestion, but a command. Wearily the Calanthe sat on the cold, stone chairs as the translator continued to speak, “He also apologizes.”

“For the war?” King Eski asked. Achadh made a noise like a laugh and then told his translator something. The white eyes of the Wurund were unreadable, though Queen Beroe could see President Navoy shifting to the woman who was sitting at the table, not acknowledging the Calanthe delegation. A smile stretched on her face. She was Ishait, with dark blue skin and tiny eyes, her sclera pitch black. Her lithe body was clad in a long, black dress, her equally long hair tumbling to her waist in a mass of twisted braids that her extra pair of arms was twiddling with. She was Chivhu Kadoma, the Queen of the Dark Ishait, as they have come to be known. Queen Beroe didn’t like how she looked at her and her husband as they sat down, like they were prey. Everybody in the Shivanna Alliance unnerved her.

We made a mistake coming here, the Queen informed her husband telepathically. He reached for her small hand beneath the stone table.

We will go soon. We will take our children back to Arossa. He assured the Queen.
“No. The King apologizes for the murder,” the translator said. Queen Beroe could feel her skin tingle with nerves. Subconsciously her eyes slid to President Navoy, the Alpha responsible for the mass murder of his own kind, the Omega’s, back on his home planet, Tussa.

“The murder of the Omegas?” King Eski voiced his Queen’s thoughts. Now King Achadh smiled too, a pale and cruel twist of lips, horrifyingly similar to the one on the face of the Ishait Queen.

“No,” she hissed, prolonging the ‘s’ like a serpent, revealing her teeth, sharpened into deadly points. Queen Beroe couldn’t fight her flinch at the sight, “For your murders.”

The Calanthe Queen didn’t have time to make a noise as she heard swords being drawn. Her husband flew to his feet and the Queen reached for her heavy shoes, the only thing keeping her locked to the ground. Somebody grabbed a fistful of her hair and jerked her head back, and she felt the kiss of cold steel against her neck.

Shal 6th Yver, 1144EE (8 days later)

Ardath.

The Crew of The Ashinian was still in shock at the news that had come over the station-radio only days ago. King and Queen murdered. Ishait declared war on Arossa.

The peaceful Calanthe didn’t have the means to fight such power like the Shivanna Alliance. They were a small planet, almost not part of the Cairn Galaxy with how far away they were, protected only by a space-fleet. Everyone knew what happened the last time a pacifist species had war declared on them, eighteen years ago. The Vlassain on Golbahar were still under invasion, and they were the biggest planet, with four of their own moons. They had little weapons though, because they didn’t think they’d ever get attacked, just like the Calanthe. If they couldn’t defend themselves, how could Arossa hope to?

Cassius Albrektsen, commonly known as Arch, contemplated whether he should return to Earth 6.2 as after the message he struggled through The Ashinian, half a ghost, like the rest of the Crew. Unlike them he wasn’t Calanthe, he was Shif. He was a human, and both of his parents had been. However he was born on Arossa, his whole life he had been on Arossa and, most importantly, he was a Calanthe knight, through a through. He wouldn’t abandon his people. And yet...and yet...there was a place for him on Earth 6.2. If he wanted to ever return...if he ever wanted to save himself...

Whatever choice he had about staying or leaving disappeared when the next command came over the intercom mere hours after the information of the political assassination. Captain Vasiliko filled his crew in on the plan of action. Their recognisance mission in the space around Ardath was coming to an abrupt end because, as the closet Calanthe ship to Saarashik, they were to immediately go there, where King Eski and Queen Beroe left their young children, in the safekeeping of the Ubloit. Nobody asked questions – everyone knew what was at stake.

Arch, being close with the King, knew about his carefully crafted marriage plans between his young daughter, Princes Eilo, and a boy Prince from a different Galaxy. Although Intergalactic travel was banned as of the Barra Law, there were still plans of this boy – this alien boy – to come to Arossa and to marry Princess Eilo. This was key, as it would gain the Calanthe a strong ally against the Shivanna Alliance. The problem was, if Eilo and her older brother and heir to the throne, Rian, never returned to Arossa there would be no marriage. The Dark Ishait, the ones who had assassinated the King and Queen, were on their way to Saarashik to finish the job and ensure their invasion of Arossa went smoothly. The Ashinishian was the only ship that had any chances of intercepting the royalty before this happened.
The Karon Coalition between the Shifs, Omega Charaseans, Light Ishait and several other species wasn’t strong enough to protect a small, isolated planet on the edge of the galaxy. The Calanthe needed this marriage to happen.

The moment the Ashinian’s crew heard the new commands Arch made his decision – he would stay and fight. He was ashamed of his cowardly thoughts of returning to Earth 6.2. Arossa was his real home, and he had to defend it. He had seen Eilo and Rian grow up, two little, gravity-defying children about to be massacred. It was by pure luck that The Ashinian’s mission was so as close to Saarashik as it was. It seemed that some God was looking over them.

***

Arch was lying in the bottom pod in his Cabin. Above him, his friend snored loudly, the sound echoing off the bare steel walls of The Ashinian. Opposite Arch Carmona, a female soldier, was tapping away on a tiny pad, clearly too jostled by the week’s events to sleep. Arch could understand that; he himself was finding it hard to rest, even with the constant hum of The Ashinian’s generators attempting to lull him into the land of dreams.

The man got up from his pod and pulled on his boots. The soldiers had long ago grown used to sleeping in their uniforms, in case of an emergency.

“Where are you going?” Carmona asked, her face illuminated with a blue light from her pad.

“I need to clear my head,” Arch told her, and quietly walked out of the Cabin. The corridors of The Ashinian were brightly lit, forever creaking with mechanics hidden behind its smooth, steel walls. Arch walked, stretching and yawning, peering curiously out of the little circle windows on the walls every few steps.

They were breathtakingly close to Saarashik. The grey, industrial planet covered almost everything that Arch could see out of the windows, full of swirling smoke and flashing lights. They were almost there, Rian and Eilo were almost safe. Arch couldn’t wait to return home, to Arossa, where there was no sounds of space battles miles away to haunt you as you went about your day.

He almost made it to the control room when the ship suddenly lurched to the side. Arch was thrown violently against a steel wall, the breath knocked out of him as he crumbled to the floor. The lights flickered maliciously and a Calanthe soldier flew past, his feet not touching the ground.

“What’s happening?” Arch demanded as he struggled to his feet, but the Calanthian had already rounded a corner and disappeared. Arch pushed his dark brown hair from his eyes and took a deep breath. He could feel bruises forming on his back but ignored them as he hurried down the corridor.

The lights flickered once more and then went out. The ship groaned and lurched to the other side. This time Arch was prepared, and took the brunt of the impact on his shoulder.

Gritting his teeth and ignoring the pain the man pressed his face to the window. He could see a small fleet of ships gaining on The Ashinian, firing darts of neon red at the vessel. The Ashinian was firing back, but there was only one of it, and these ships were many, small and fast.

“Hash,” Arch swore in Fiala. The emergency lights flickered on, filling the corridor with a green hue. Arch swallowed as the intercom suddenly turned on, crackling with static.

“We’re under attack,” Captain Vasiliko’s distorted voice was heard over the hollow of The Ashinian, “All units to the suits. Mission priority is not to fight... collect the princ...abandon...” his words were broken off as the intercom gave out. Arch swallowed past his nerves and tried to figure out what to do. He was a soldier, yes, but back on Arossa he was never in a situation like this; the
worst he had to deal with was a scavenger ship too close to the borders. And now they were being shot at, on the surface of an alien planet.

The Ashinian lurched to the side again and Arch was thrown against the window. The ship was spiralling towards Saarashik at a dangerously alarming speed. There were no red flashing lights or alarms going off, no sounds of footsteps. The Ashinian was a huge ship and this corridor that Arch was standing on seemed isolated, apart from everything else. He felt alone, face pressed to the window. Is this how I die?

Arch was a strong man, but the strongest thing about him was his survival instinct. He pushed himself off the wall and ran back to the dorm, as hard as that was with the ship jerking every second. When he came to the door he pressed the open button on the pad next to it, but it flashed red.

“Warning,” the ship’s AI said in a dull, monotone voice, “contamination. Access denied.”

“Stars damn it,” Arch hissed to himself, and punched the button again, only to get the same response. Desperate, he pressed his face against the window at the top of the door, cupping his hands around his face so he could see better.

He wished he didn’t do that. He wished he hadn’t looked.

There was a jagged hole ripped in the side of the ship, the galaxy swirling outside, Saarashik flashing in the darkness as the ship approached. Most of the furniture had been pulled out of the dorm room, alongside Carmona and the soldier who had been sleeping above Arch. I was there only minutes ago, Arch thought in horror. And now the two were floating in space, dead from suffocation.

There was no time for more decisions; Captain Vasiliko had been clear – mission priority was getting Eilo and Rian back. Clumsily Arch went to the emergency panel located in the wall halfway down the corridor. He tried not to think about how easily a hole could rip here as well, how space could just suck him out, cause his body to collapse in on itself. Arch had never been scared of space – but he was now. The Ishait believed that the Galaxy was a Goddess named Quinae and as Arch fumbled for the emergency suit he couldn’t help but wonder if maybe they were right, and if the Goddess was now aiding the enemy ships.

He was glad when he pulled out the Khazma-Suit, which everyone called jokingly the Bubble Cloak, from the wall, compressed into a tiny square. It took Arch agonizingly long to open the square and then pull the see-through, plastic like material over his uniform, with the ships unpredictable movements. Nobody had come down the corridor for a long time, and Arch couldn’t help but wonder if they were dead. Lasers flashed outside every few seconds, so the attack was still happening, though Arch felt separate from it. He was lost in his own little world of pulling the see-through suit over his arms and legs, methodically, concentrating on the activity rather than his own fear.

When he had the suit over his head, he pressed the button against his wrist. Immediately the Khazma-suit inflated until it filled out the corridor. Arch was pushed up, floating in a net of anti-grav, surrounded by a protective layer. Well...he would see just how protective it was. Arch thought he was going to be sick as the world around him lightened as they entered the atmosphere of Saarashik. It was all happening fast, too fast, Arch didn’t have time to think. When he trained with the Salvagan Fleet they told him not to show fear. And yet those men over there had never been in a crashing, burning ship that was about to slam into the ground of some stranger planet. Besides, there was nobody in the corridor to see Arch’s fear anyway.

When he saw the ground approaching he couldn’t take it and closed his eyes, mouth open in a silent scream.
Arch was aware of his eyes being open, but he couldn’t seem to register anything else. He saw grey, and that was it, and heard a terrible ringing in his head. His body felt like jelly and he could still feel the phantom tremors the ground had made as The Ashinian crashed into Saarashik’s surface.

You need to move, idiot, Arch heard someone say, as if through water, and then realised it was him. He was speaking out loud. Struggling, feeling like he was in a dream, the man managed to sit up. He registered that the grey around him was smoke, curling around the Bubble Cloak. The Bubble Cloak saved me, Arch thought, and then burst out laughing hysterically, voice hoarse. He reached into his belt shakily and pulled out a dagger. With an easy swipe he ripped a hole in the suit, and it deflated with a soft hisssssss. Immediately Arch was assaulted by a cloud of smoke, and then by noise; the crackling of a fire, metal groaning, steam abandoning pipes, water dripping. And above all that the horrifying noise of silence. There were no moans of pain, no screams, no voices, no nothing.

Not feeling like laughing anymore, Arch carefully stepped through the smoke, hand stretched out in front of him. His palm caught on the ragged edge of a hole and he almost tripped on some rubble. He couldn’t see anything through the smoke, which stung his eyes and made his throat burn. Feeling lightheaded, the soldier covered his mouth and continued forward, until suddenly he was falling.

He landed on his back on cold, hard ground, and let out a groan of pain and surprise as the bruises he acquired earlier shot with pain. When his head stopped ringing the man opened his eyes, and the breath died in his lungs.

Directly above him was the smoking wreckage of The Ashinian. It was black, charred, parts of it still blazing with fire. The windows were broken, the metal twisted. Arch had fallen from a hole in the side of the ship, a ragged one that looked like a monster had bitten into it. Beyond it the man could see smoke, and the flashing of computers and wires that had been broken.

“Oh Gods,” he whispered in horror. Feeling like his knees would give out he managed to get to his feet and looked around. He was on some kind of desert, though it lacked sand, the ground grey and compacted. The sky was streaked with orange, as if a sun was setting somewhere, and obscured by the large clouds of smoke pouring from the corpse of The Ashinian like some weird, gravity defying blood, “Hello?” Arch called, voice scratching his parched throat, he turned in a circle but couldn’t see anyone, “Can anybody hear me?!”

In the distance he saw the wavering outline of a city.

Slowly, the soldier circled the ship, deciding he didn’t have any major injuries. He could be bleeding internally but he wouldn’t know about that until it was too late. For now he had other priorities. He was too afraid to go inside his ship, because he already saw enough outside. Arms ripped off, machinery splattered with blood, hands reaching for him from the rubble. The air smelled like death and burned meat. Arch walked with his hand over his mouth, and threw up when he walked past a body with a jagged piece of metal stuck into its side. The body jerked – a post-mortem response – and scared the living stars out of Arch. The soldier wiped his mouth and when he shakily straightened up again, there was a group of tall people riding some kind of animals approaching towards him with purpose.

In his panic Arch reached down and pulled a gun from the dead body that had just moved, and he held it up.

“Yumi!” someone called, in Fiala. That gave Arch pause; as far as he was concerned there was no Calanthe on Saarashik, and yet they had distinctively called ‘peace’ in his mother-tongue. Hesitantly, Arch lowered his gun just so as the creatures pushed through the spoke and came to a stop in front of
him.

The animals they rode weren’t truly animals, Arch noted. They were mechanical, made with overlapping scraps of metal, moving with fluidity that mimicked life. Their eyes were golden and blazing with electricity, and the one directly in front of Arch had two spiralling horns sticking out a foot in front of his body. A weapon.

The person on top of the creature jumped off, landing gracefully. It was a man much taller than Arch himself, with mechanical goggles over his eyes, dressed in a heavy armour. He wielded a sword.

“You’re Ubloit aren’t you?” Arch blurted, trying not to let his awe show. He had heard about the species living on Saarashik...though living probably wasn’t a word. The Ubloit were cyborgs, genetically engineered machines that were almost human-like, and yet not quite. They were soldiers, created for war. Arch’s measly gun couldn’t fight one, much less a whole group of them.

“My name is Captain Khivoy Cove,” the man in front of Arch said, in perfect Fiala, “Are you the Calanthe ship we have been awaiting?”

Hopelessly Arch glanced at the smoking wreckage and lowered his gun, dejectedly, “Yes, I suppose we are...were...”

Captain Khivoy regarded the wreck, “The Ishait ships that shot your vessel down had been destroyed,” he informed Arch, as if that would give him any comfort.

“Is there any way we could search the ship?” he asked, before he could stop himself, “There might be some still alive...” Arch didn’t believe that; he would’ve heard someone, and yet the only thing that followed him was an eerie silence.

“I will leave some soldiers to look through the ship,” Captain Khivoy nodded, and several of the Ubloit got off their mechanical animals, approaching the ship to look for survivors, “But you must come with me. The Prince and the Princess are awaiting you.”

Arch’s heart seized with hope when he thought of them; the two scared, trembling children on this planet run by machines. And yet they’re still alive...Do they know their parents are dead? Do they know they are in the middle of a war zone?

“I can’t take them back to Arossa,” Arch shook his head, “I have no ship.”

“We have clear instructions,” Captain Khivoy interrupted, “From the Queen Regent at Arossa.”

“Princess Ashia?” Arch guessed. She was the niece of Queen Beroe, the only one from the royal family left besides Eilo and Rian.

Captain Khivoy nodded, “The Regent has informed us that she needs you to return the children to Arossa in three and a half months, because that is when the Delegation from Fayaxiamen will arrive.”

Fayaxiamen. That’s where our hopes lie. Arch suddenly felt crushed with the responsibility that was being placed on him. Up until this point he had just been a simple soldier, and suddenly he was the safe-keeper to the heirs to the throne.

“We can’t get to Arossa in that time. It’ll take over a year,” he shook his head in dismay.

“It has all been taken care of,” Captain Khivoy informed him, “but for now you must come with me. The children await.”
The same day.

Calliban.

“You have one new message.”

“Not now Hothead,” Cylian Iliev gritted out as he jerked the shift board to the left. His ship, Hannibal, swung to the side in time to avoid the beam of light coming from the Ishait war-ship, thanks to its small size, “Fuck!” Cylian swore when the ship continued to follow them, “Get him Hickey!”

“I’m trying Captain!” the girl at Cylian’s back gritted, voice heavy with the Amablilis accent of her people, closing one of her black-sclera eyes behind her zoom-goggles that helped shooters on ships like Hannibal fight in space, where there really wasn’t much vision. Her purple and green hair tickled the back of Cylian’s neck but he was used to it by now, it was a feeling of comfort, knowing that Sohalia Shakti, his partner in crime, was at his back, “The sucker won’t line up!”

“Well then we’ll line up!” Cylian growled, and veered Hannibal back to the left. Hickey pulled the shift stick that was attached to one of the ship’s numerous canons with her pink hand and the Ishait ship imploded in a shower of sparks. There were no explosions in the atmosphere, and for that Cylian was glad.

“Another one down!” Hickey yelled.

“You have one new message!”

“For fuck’s sake Hothead!” Cylian shouted at the AI, “not now!”

“Captain, go up!” a high-pitched voice squeaked, coming from a little cactus sprouting pink flowers that swayed in a pot next to the brightly lit controls.

Cylian gracefully soured up and Hickey shot down an Ishait transporter, almost like she could read his mind.

“That’s the last one! Good job Akkie!” Hickey told the cactus, voice cheerful even though she had just shot down a ship with her own species on it. Not that she cared; the people that supported Queen Chivhu weren’t her people anymore, as she had told Cylian many times; they were enemies. Hickey undid her seatbelt and leaned in her chair to fiddle with the controls on one of the walls of the small, dark room. As Cylian lined up the ship with the planet in front of them the Ishait girl clicked some buttons. A bright yellow beam shot out from Hannibal, following beams from a dozen other ships hovering near Calliban. The beam hit the space between two moons on either side of Calliban, Gadina and Afnan, and the air shimmered with the electromagnetic field the two moons emanated, protecting their mother planet. They had been trying to break through it for a year now, with little success, their only respite from the tedious work being the space-battles.

“You have one new message.”

“I swear to Gods Hothead,” Cylian’s eye started twitching, “I’m gonna wipe your disk clean again.”

“It’s important dickhead.” The AI scoffed, and not for the first time making Cylian regret ever teaching him sarcasm. As the adrenaline drained from the man he stood up from his seat, and Hickey swivelled around in hers until she was dizzy.

“Fine, what is it?” the Captain asked in annoyance, pushing his goggles up into his auburn hair and going up to the controls, flipping off the energy generator for the weapons. Another battle was done,
but in a few hours there’d probably be another one. In his year of assaulting Calliban and trying to 
get through the protective barrier its moons created Cylian had yet to have a peaceful, calm day.

“There’s a message trying to break through from Saarashik,” the ship’s soothing, male voice 
replied.

“Saarashik?” Hickey asked, and she and Cylian exchanged a bewildered look. Usually their 
commands came directly from Earth 6.2, sometimes from Shoriah, but never from Saarashik.

“Is it virused?” Cylian asked, remembering the last time there was a virus on the ship, rendering the 
technology on Hannibal unusable. Cylian had then felt like Moses on the Ark from the book his 
mom read him as a child, crippled without the AI watching over them.

“No. It’s a command, but it’s gone through the base at home and then sent back with approval. 
Time stamp’s from earlier today.”

“Command from Saarashik?” Cylian frowned, “Alright, well, open it up.”

An image flickered in the centre of the small control room, which was cluttered with wires and 
generators, the most light coming from the huge window at the front, which showed a purple 
electromagnetic field spread over Calliban, pulsing like a heart. The pre-recorded woman that 
appeared in front of Cylian was not unfamiliar; he had seen her before on the Wire. She was the 
leader of the Ubloit, known as Mother Paire, her dark, almost black skin unmistakable.

“This is a message to Cylian Iliev, Captain of Beam Ship B72 ‘Hannibal,’” Mother Paire spoke, her 
voice monotone as common for the Ubloit, her eyes unwavering, “Your mission priority has now 
changed. You are required to leave the space surrounding Calliban and immediately head to the 
Charnovgrad Base on Saarashik, where you are required to pick up the heir to the throne of Arossa, 
Prince Rian Reo Dali and his younger sister Princess Eilo Essa Dali and take them back to their 
home planet. This is a government mission and is essential to the outcome of the war. Your orders 
are to deliver the royalty to Arossa in three and a half months. We are aware that it takes thirteen 
months to get from Saarashik to Arossa, that’s why you are required to stop at Woorud station and 
pick up a little...helper, by the name of Viridian Io Shatashah. The coordinates for the mission have 
been attached with this file,” Mother Paire paused for a second and then leaned in a little closer, “Do 
not screw this up,” she said, and then the message flickered and she disappeared.

Cylian and Hickey stared at where the hologram had been seconds ago with open mouths.

“Well then,” Hickey said weakly, reaching out to touch Cylian’s hand. It was important for Ishait to 
have physical contact, especially in times of stress. Lian squeezed Hickey’s hand.

“I suppose we better get a move on then,” he said, feeling a little lost. He couldn’t show it to his crew 
though – it was required of him to be the strong, unwavering leader despite the fact he wasn’t even 
twenty five yet.

“Told you it was important,” Hothead spoke, and if it was possible for an AI to sound smug, Hottie 
managed to pull it off. Cylian’s eye twitched,

“Shut it, smartass, and get me Lin.”

“She is currently taking a nap. Why am I not surprised?”

Cylian sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose, sure this interaction was giving him grey hairs. He 
gloomily looked through the window at the unwavering border of Calliban. Maybe this was for the 
better.
“Alright, get me Champagne.”

“Champagne is also napping.”

“Stars damn it, does anyone on this ship do their job?” Cylian growled. He loved his two mechanics, but sometimes their immaturity got on his nerves, “Get me Vega.”

“Captain!” Cylian heard the excited voice of his engineer over the intercom, “If this is about the bathroom incident-“

“It’s not about the bathroom incident, Vega,” Cylian said, trying to keep his temper.

Vega had been with him for three years. When he first saw her, a Beta Charasean almost eighty year old woman with most of her short hair grey and lips painted an offending red, he had thought she would be a sweet, calm addition to his ship. He was very, very wrong. Vega, despite her age, was the most mischievous, trouble-making five-foot shit Cylian had ever met. But he loved her, and she was a brilliant engineer. And she didn’t take naps when she was supposed to be working.

“Listen up for the damages to Hannibal,“ Cylian said, and nodded at Hickey. The pink haired Ishait pressed a button on the control panel and lines of writing appeared in the air. They were written in Amablilis, Hickey’s native tongue. Vega had changed it to that four months ago and conveniently didn’t know how to change it back, “and then go wake up Lin and Champagne and get them to fix it.”

“Uh, alright sweethearts,” Hickey’s black eyes scanned the writing as she flicked her wrist, scrolling through the information, “There’s a hole punched in the west wing, near the kitchen. Not all the way through though. The electricity in Uncle Plump’s room is blown, ‘cause of a fuse in the ceiling in corridor A...”

Hickey continued to read off the damages and Cylian looked out at the electromagnetic field again, shimmering purple. He tried to remember the last time he had gone back to Earth 6.2 and visited his mother. It had been a long time – since before the assault on Calliban began. He felt horrible for it, his mother wasn’t getting younger and he...he kept pushing her to the side as something less important than his work. In reality she was the only person he truly had in the world, besides his crew, and he couldn’t bear to lose her. When she dies you will be alone, you miserable bastard, Cylian thought to himself as he looked at the vast space stretching out in front of him, Hickey’s voice muting to a hum in the background. The thought that he would have another eight months at least, without so much as seeing her face pained him, but he had no-one to blame but himself.

“It’s easy to feel alone when you’re surrounded by nothing, isn’t it?” a quiet, high-pitched voice piped up. Cylian blinked and looked down at the swaying cacti at the steering-board. He smiled.

“Yes. I suppose so, Akkie,” he said.

Nobody knew about loneliness than the plant. He wasn’t really a plant, but a part of a dying species called Breos, a type of bacteria that moved throughout the galaxy and took possession of plants. Akkie sometimes liked to reminisce about the planet that the Breos once inhabited, how the planet had been a living thing thanks to them. But in a galaxy ripped by war they had no chance of survival – their planet was destroyed and now there was only a million or so of Breos left, scattered around the galaxy.

There were plenty of Shifs though, at least Cylian took some comfort in that. His kind had ruined six and a bit of planets, and yet they somehow managed to survive. He had a suspicion they wouldn’t die out for a while, though he didn’t know if that was a curse or a comfort.
He pressed a purple button and the beam from *Hannibal* abandoned the array of light hitting the electromagnetic field around Calliban.

***

Two weeks later *Hannibal* was breaking through the stratosphere of Saarashik. After hanging in space quite far from any planet for a while even Cylian felt a little intimidated. The ground came closer and closer, and so far all Cylian could see were sporadic clusters of cities, and not much else except grey ground.

“Not very pretty is it,” he said to himself as his seat-belt pressed snugly into his abs.

“No,” Achilles replied. He was the only other creature in the steering room with Cylian and was swaying to music the Captain couldn’t hear. Breos shared one brain so maybe somewhere, across the galaxy, one of his brothers or sisters was singing a song, “The Ubloit don’t need it since they are an industrial species, without even the need to breathe.”

Cylian fought the urge to make a face, “Yes. Thank you for that, Akkie,” he sighed and tapped his bare foot against the small rug that Hickey had thrown on the floor to make it more homey, “I suppose I have to put some shoes on.”

“Yes that would be goddamn fantastic, Cylian,” Hothead interjected smartly.

“Stop eaves-dropping you dick,” Cylian said, pulling on levers as *Hannibal* approached the ground. They were landing very close to the cluster of grey buildings that were the Charnovgrad base, “and tell everyone to prepare for any trouble.”

“If I can make a suggestion,” Akkie piped up, “I say only you and Greige go to meet the Ubloit. That way there will be no chance for tension, and Greige can protect you if anything goes wrong.”

“I can protect myself, Akkie,” Cylian said in annoyance, but he could see the point of the Breos, “Brace yourselves.”

“I’m bracing myself,” Hothead said sarcastically.

“Oh my stars I hate you,” Cylian said on one breath. He gritted his teeth as he evened out *Hannibal* in its descent. He could see steely dust kicked up into the air by the ship’s engines, and pressed the button that pushed out the stands. Achilles twitched.

“More to the left,” the navigator squeaked and Cylian slid to the left. Seconds later the ship shuddered gently as the stands touched the ground. Cylian exhaled and leaned back in his seat, watching the dust swirl outside the window, and then settle.

He saw shapes moving in the distance, through the dust, and squinted, “Oh-oh, I think we have company. Hothead get me on line with Greige.”

“Gotcha,” the AI replied, and seconds later a deeper, gruffer voice answered, “Captain?”

“Greige get ready to meet some Ubloit,” Cylian said, sticking his head underneath the control panels, where he found a pair of black boots among tangles of cables. He shoved the shoes on and then walked out of the control room, with the request to Hothead to keep the engines running, just in case, and make him a coffee when he got back.

He walked through the hallways of *Hannibal* hurriedly. It wasn’t the most formal of ships; some panels had been removed from the ceiling, revealing the vents and tangles of cables where
Champagne and Lin liked to rummage in their free time. On the hallway adjacent to the main exit the normal, bare white walls were plastered with all kinds of paintings that the cook, Huambo, liked to make in his free time. Cylian liked them, though he’d never admit it, because they made the ship feel more like a home.

Greige Vilaro was already waiting at the door, stoic and ready to fight as always. He was a big Ubloit solider, because he was manufactured that way. Despite the fact that he was a cyborg and there was a big part of him that was machine, there were clear signs of his age on his face. There were wrinkles around his eyes and on his forehead, and his black, slicked back hair was showing signs of grey. His face was scattered with scars, and one of his eyes were missing, making Cylian feel better about the pale scar next to his right eye that he had gotten some years ago during the failed attack on Daliat. A massive axe was at Greige’s back, and Cylian had seen firsthand the way the man could use it, and it unnerved even him. It would feel good to have such a man at his back during a meeting like this.

“All ready?”

“Yes Captain,” Greige nodded. Cylian brushed his hand over a panel on the wall and it slid to the side, revealing a hole in the wall. From the hole Cylian pulled out a laser assault rifle and slung it casually over his shoulder. The weapon was a comforting weight.

“Well, let’s get on with this, then,” Cylian said.

Greige pulled the hatch next to the door and it opened. The two stepped into the little space behind it and when the door closed behind them, making sure they didn’t let any oxygen out, even though on a planet like Saarashik it was unnecessary, and Greige pulled another hatch and the main door opened with a hiss, sliding open.

The two soldiers stepped out onto the planet. To Cylian it felt peculiar, since he had already been here once. He, infamously, was the only thing actually born on Saarashik, since his mother had come here in the time of her birth. As he looked over the grey, drab landscape he couldn’t imagine why out of all the planets she had decided to give birth right here. Even the air smelled stale.

The group of Ubloit coming from the military base were close now, and Cylian fought the urge to reach for his weapon. He was used to being a safe distance away from other creatures, with at least a couple metal walls and a hella lot of galaxy separating them. This was making him...anxious. He was momentarily distracted by the fantastical, famous mechanical beasts that the Ubloit rode on, but then he noticed that the few people at the front were not Ubloit at all.

On a horse-like creature with razor sharp teeth sat two children. The boy was maybe ten or eleven with pale blond hair and almost angry crimson eyes. His little mouth was in a tight line and his still-chubby arms were wrapped around a considerably younger girl sitting in front of him. She looked more oblivious then her obvious-brother, hair pinned up in a fantastical up-do, her pale pink dress looking out of place in this grey landscape.

The Calvary stopped a few feet away from Cylian and Greige, kicking up new dust. The man at the front, with goggles over his eyes and a spear in hand, jumped off.

“Captain Cylian?” he barked. Cylian nodded,

“Captain Khivoy. We are here for the royals.”

The Ubloit gestured to his people and they got off their animals to help the boy and the girl down. As soon as their feet hit the ground Cylian noted their heavy, chunky shoes, and remembered that the
Calanthe defy gravity. He almost shuddered; how can you live your whole life in shoes? Cylian hated shoes.

“My name is Prince Rian,” the little boy said, chin raised up, “and I am the future King of Arossa.”

Cylian bowed, feeling a little awkward doing so in front of an eleven year old boy. Next to him Greige did the same, his face remaining expressionless.

“Hello,” the little girl stepped away from her brother, “I’m Eilo.”

“Princess Eilo,” her brother corrected automatically.

“My name is Eilo,” the little girl said stubbornly, smiling adorably at Greige and Cylian, “Will you take me home?”

“Er...sure,” Cylian had never been good with children...or just people in general, “My name is Cylian, and this is Greige.”

“Pleased to make your acquaintance!” Eilo said happily, sticking two of her fingers out. Nervously Cylian tapped his two fingers against hers in a typical Calanthe greeting. With a start he realised why she and her brother were acting so differently. The girl was too young to know that her parents were murdered, but the boy...the boy knew. Cylian could see the pain in his eyes.

“There’s little time,” another person jumped off the mechanical animal. This one was a grown man, probably around Cylian’s age. He didn’t look Calanthe though, his tanned skin, brown hair and muscular frame indicating a Shif soldier.

“Who are you?” Cylian asked, immediately defensive. The man’s dark brown eyes turned to him and his brows furrowed.

“My name is Arch Albrekston, and I’m the escort of the Prince and the Princess.”

“We’re the escort of the prince and the princess,” Cylian clarified, gesturing at himself and Greige, and turned to the Ubloit Captain, “I wasn’t told we’re taking another person.”

“Arch is a friend,” Prince Rian said, voice cold, “He’s coming with us, and that is an order.”

Cylian was very tempted to tell him that he wasn’t his king, but then he remembered that this was his mission. He exhaled.

“There is little time,” the Ubloit leader said. Cylian looked at Greige.

“Your call, Captain,” the man said, unhelpfully.

“Fine,” Cylian snapped, turning to this Arch person, “Fine get on board. We need to go soon if we’re to make it to Arossa in under four months.”

“I thought we’re getting the Shatashah kid,” Arch said. Cylian frowned,

“Who exactly is this Shatashah kid?”

Arch smiled, clearly feeling like he had something to dangle over Cylian, “He’s a Time Maker.”

Vo 22nd Yver, 1144EE (2 Days Later)

Woorud Station.
Viridian Io Shatashah lifted two fingers of his left hand, eyes locked on the little mechanical ladybug crawling slowly across the table in his bedroom. Slowly, eerie pale mist started seeping from his fingers, like fog through cracks back on his home-planet. The Omega smiled to himself as the mist curled through the air, and enveloped the ladybug completely until Sasha couldn’t even hear the whirring of its mechanism. He felt the hair on the back of his neck stand up as the air was displaced in his bedroom and the mist was abruptly sucked into an invisible pinhole, disappearing in seconds. Sasha’s smile grew when he saw that the bug was gone.

He leaned back in his chair and looked at the shelf where all of his books were stacked. Sitting there, switched off, was the ladybug. The time maker high-fived himself, mentally congratulating himself. Time was a hard concept to grasp, even for someone as intelligent as him. Time Making was a practice almost extinct, the act of creating extra time for specific people or objects in space. It didn’t prolong your life or make you immortal, it just allowed you to do something in less time, while everything else continued around you at normal speed. The ladybug was where Viridian would’ve put it in a few hours, but it had made that journey in seconds thanks to the Omega’s powers.

The smile melted off Sasha’s face as he sighed, looking around his small bedroom. It was clean now, where usually it was cluttered with all his stuff. A bag was patiently sitting by the door, waiting for Sasha’s departure. Yes, he was leaving. He had come here first seven years ago, when he was ten. It seemed like a lifetime ago. Back then he had just been a Charasean escaping the civil war raging through Tussa, his home-planet. Now he was an Omega, going through heats, and he knew that what he was really escaping was massacre and slavery that happened to all the other Omega’s. He didn’t like to think about things happening on Tussa, it was too horrifying. As a Time maker it was easier for him to look forward in time, not back.

He stood up and straightened out his oversized sweater. It was an ugly sweater, he and all the other apprentices as the Station were aware of it. But Sasha liked ugly clothes, ugly clothes let him bled into the background. Stars forbid if he ever met an Alpha he hoped that they’d just look right over him because of the sweaters. The sweaters were protection.

Viridian walked over to the mirror hanging on the wall in the door and took a deep breath, looking at himself. A Charasean looked back at him; paper-white skin, pointed ears like those of elves from those books Gaita, the Shif girl next door, liked to read. Viridian’s ebony hair fell in messy waves almost to his shoulder. He self-consciously tucked a strand behind his ear and wondered if he should tie it up. He wanted to make a good first impression. He hated how young he looked, seventeen, skinny, moles dotted here and there, as if someone had sprinkled him with them. He used to want to put on muscle, to become big and strong. But Omega’s weren’t meant to be big and strong, they were meant to be easy to pin down and breed.

With a faint look of disgust in his blue eyes, Viridian turned from the mirror and went to his bag to check once more if he had everything he needed – his monthly suppressants were on top of the bag, just in case. He didn’t know if he was ever going to come back to Woorud Station. Technically both his studies as a Time Maker and an engineer were finished; there was nothing left for him here now.

“Viridian Io Shatashah asked to come to Exit B with his belongings,” the calm, soothing voice of the AI said over the intercom, and then repeated itself once more. Taking a deep, soothing breath, Viridian took his bag and slung it over his slim shoulder.

“Passeo,” he said goodbye to his mechanical lady-bug in his home tongue. He could take it with him but he preferred leave it to whoever would occupy this room next. Another young engineer to take the bug apart and put it back together, and to wonder about the names written on the bed frame. The previous night Sasha had added his own name to the already existing bunch. Viridian Io Shatashah 1137 – 1144.
He smiled at his name and then swiped his palm over the pad by the door. It opened with a soft *hiss* and Viridian walked through the familiar hallways. All of his friends were clustered by Exit B, a bunch of mechanics and engineers, come to Woorud to become the best in the galaxy. They threw themselves as Viridian when he appeared, almost tackling him to the ground.

“Don’t go!” Gaita wailed. Viridian patted her on the back.

“Come on now,” his mentor, Sarre, smiled, “let Sasha go. He has a job to do.”

“Promise you’ll come back!” one of the younger kids demanded.

“Now, don’t force him to do that,” Sarre shook her head. Viridian ruffled the child’s hair and then picked up his bag. Sarre, a good head shorter than him, wrapped her grandmotherly arms around him, “You take care, Sasha, do us all proud.”

“I will,” Viridian murmured in Faso, the language of the Shifs that everyone was supposed to know, hugging the woman and telling himself that this wasn’t goodbye. Stupidly he wished that Vorde, his best friend, was here to see him off. But the girl had gotten into a space-shuttle a month ago and with a short goodbye disappeared into the galaxy. She was the only other Time Maker Sasha knew, and they had given her this mission first, but she had refused. She could’ve made herself time, and could be on the other side of the galaxy for all Viridian knew.

“Well, time to go,” he pulled away from Sarre before he got too emotional, and shifted his bag on his skinny shoulder, “I’ll see you in a little bit,” he waved at the group of teary-eyed teenagers and kids looking at him.

Sarre passed him a face mask and Sasha pressed it over the lower half of his face. His breath came out loudly now, but at least he wouldn’t suffocate out on the walkway. Sarre squeezed his hand and then pressed the pad on the wall. A glass door slid open and Viridian stepped through it. As it slid shut the kids waved at him, and he waved back, wishing he could smile at them. The second the main part of the space station was sealed off the door at Viridian’s back opened. Taking a deep breath once more, the Omega turned around and walked out.

The walkway was a big part of metal secured with gravity nets, sticking out of the side of the space station like a knife handle, with a landing pod for ships on its end. With space stretching around him as far as Viridian could see he was in awe. Especially when a small, slick, sliver ship descended towards the station, its engines shooting out purple flames. In offending red it had *Hannibal* written on its side.

Viridian’s new home.

As it landed, the boy started walking towards it.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!
I know it's starting slow and complicated but it's just the prologue/introduction ish and will pick up soon promise.
If you like it, or if you just wanna show some love and support then please leave comments and kudos x
Vo 22nd Yver 1144EE (The same day)

*Hannibal.*

*Oxifian Antibiotics.*

Thane Shinin scribbled the name of the drug down in the air using his holographic pen, under a forever growing list, annoyed.

“What, can we go on a three month trip,” he grumbled to himself as he squatted back down on the ground and rummaged through the drugs cabinet in the medical bay, “Oh, is that a problem? No, of course not Captain, I’m sure we can get some supplies delivered! Oh wait, we’re in the middle of a war zone, there are no deliveries,” The Ship’s doctor slammed shut the cabinet and stood up, arms crossed over his chest. His fox’s tail flickered out, as it did every time he got agitated.

The origins of Thane’s species, the Vlassain, were a confusing mystery. Some creatures argued that the Vlassain came from a different galaxy, while others were sure that thousands of years ago Shifs mated with animals, creating this species over time. The Vlassain were human-like, the only things separating them from the normal Shif being their animal characteristics. These characteristics depended on which part of Golbahar a Vlassain was born on. Thane lived in the city, Baraseaca, and his whole family was characteristically fox-like. Thane himself was tall, with a lightly upturned nose, almond-shaped golden eyes and curly ginger hair that would never stay out of his face. Sometimes people told him that he moved like a fox, silently, but he could’ve been easily mistaken for a Shif...as long as his tail wasn’t out.

It pained him to think of his home, and generally of his planet, since it got invaded. So he didn’t. Instead he took out his un-Vlassain like anger on other things, like Cylian informing him they were embarking on a journey to the other side of the Galaxy without allowing Thane to re-stock on medicine.
The young man looked up at the bright lights that filled the medical bay. He couldn’t tell what colour they were since he couldn’t see colour (just like foxes, though he didn’t mind since he got amazing hearing, smell and night-vision in return), but they were still offending so Thane narrowed his eyes.

“Hothead,” he said.

“Yes Doc?” The AI replied immediately, its male voice smooth and comforting, though with an edge of amusement to it.

“Where’s the closest planet that sells medicine?” Thane asked, rubbing the bridge of his nose.

“Vartoughi.”

“Hilarious,” Thane said. Vartoughi was one of Golbahar’s four moons, and one of the two that were currently being occupied by the Wurund, “Somewhere where I won’t get killed for trying to buy some painkillers?”

“That would be Sousnan.”

“Okay, now we’re talking,” Thane sighed. Sousnan, another of Golbahar’s moons, although unoccupied still wasn’t on Thane’s ‘to go’ list. In fact he preferred to steer clear of his home planet; he didn’t want to see dead bodies and burning towns. The Vlassain were pacifist, but Thane very much wasn’t. He’d murder every stardamn Wurund and Dark Ishait that came in his way if he could.

Thane’s ears picked up the sound of footsteps near the kitchen, heading towards the medical bay. Ones were slow and shuffly, and through his four years on the ship the Vlassain learned the way everyone walked. This, without a doubt, was Vega, her old age heard in her steps. Somebody was walking with her, a little self-consciously and deliberately slowly to match Vega. This person Thane didn’t recognise.

“Well, that Time Maker kid is here,” Thane said, tucking his holographic pen behind his ear, “get ready for trouble, Hottie.”

“Trouble’s my middle name, but this kid definitely isn’t it.”

Vega came in first, her septum piercing glimmering in the bright lights of the medical bay. Despite her age showing on her face through wrinkles and bags, the Charasean woman oozed confidence and energy. She smelled like the leaves that the cook, Huambo liked to grow in the kitchen, and the weird lotion she got from Tussa probably fifty years ago, when she was still a beta Duchess and not on the run from the law, becoming Public Enemy Number One in the Cairn Galaxy.

The boy that she led in completely threw Thane off. The fox’s nose told him that he was Charasean just like her, but an obvious Omega. He was tall though Thane couldn’t really tell what his body was like because he wore the most atrocious oversized jumper, his long-ish hair falling into his eyes. He was smiling a nervous smile as Vega led him into the medical bay and there was something heartbreakingly delicate about him, like he could be easily snapped in half. The best way to describe him would be pretty.

But that’s not what Thane’s focus was on.

“...and here we have our wonderful medical bay!” Vega proclaimed, her Tussah accent strong despite the fact she hadn’t been back on her home planet in a long time, “And this is Thane, our brilliant doctor.”

“Nobody told me he’d be an Omega,” Thane said bluntly, and literally saw the newcomer flinch.
Vega’s smile melted off her darkly painted lips and she glared at Thane.

“Don’t be so rude!” she said, and swatted his arm weakly, “Viridian here is a wonderful addition to the ship.”

“I won’t cause any problems,” the kid – Viridian – said, almost anxiously. He smelled like herbs and shampoo. And *Omega*. It was one smell that Thane steered clear of.

“Do you have a mate?” Thane asked, knowing well that it was invading the Charasean’s privacy, but honestly right at that moment he didn’t care. A blush rose to the Omega’s cheeks.

“*Thane!*” Vega hissed.

“No,” Viridian looked away, as if the thought of having a mate unnerved him, “I...um...I don’t.”

“Great,” Thane swiped his hand across the ‘shopping’ list that had been hanging in the air in front of him, dispersing it, “We now have an unmated Omega on board,” Vega opened her mouth, probably to have a go at Thane, but before she could Thane spoke again, “Hottie, get me Cylian.”

“Oh no,” the AI said, dejectedly, but followed the command and a second later a gruff, “*Hello?*” sounded.

“What the fuck, Cylian?” Thane snapped.

“Oh give me a break, Thane,” Cylian sounded just as annoyed as the Vlassain, “I didn’t know he was Omega. And we don’t have other options.”

“There is *nothing* wrong with Omegas!” Vega huffed angrily, “Cylian don’t make me go there and reset your music playlist again you naughty boy.”

Cylian sighed over the intercom, “That’s who we get, get used to it,” he said, and clicked off.

Thane was fuming, “We don’t have options to facility his heat!” he said angrily, “We don’t have suppressants we don’t have doors that lock properly we don’t have *anything*.”

“I have suppressants,” Viridian said quickly.

“For a month, after that they expire,” Thane growled. This had been put in place years ago after several Omega’s back on Tussa tried to overdose on suppressants. After a month they were useless, and you could only buy as many as you needed for one heat, before restocking, “What are we going to do after?”

“I didn’t want to cause problems,” Viridian bit his plump bottom lip.

“We can stock up somewhere,” Vega took Viridian’s arm, still glaring at Thane like he was the devil incarnate. When the Fox looked at the Omega he saw that the kid was staring at his shoes, his hands gripping the straps of the bag slung over his shoulder...and he felt a little bad, “Come on lovely, I’ll show you the rest of the ship. Not everyone is as rude as Thane, I promise.”

She led the kid out and Thane slumped against the medicine cabinet and rubbed the bridge of his nose again. He needed to sleep, and yet sorting out the drugs was priority right now. Tiredly he got the list of necessities back up in front of him.

“That was harsh, Thane, even for you.”

“Shut up,” Thane snapped, “He’s just going to mess everything up.”
Cylian was on his fourth cup of coffee since they left Saarashik. He found it funny and a little peculiar how out of all the Earthian traditions that survived the destruction of six planets it was coffee that still existed. Out of all the drugs written about in history books, heroin, cocaine, alcohol, it was coffee that Shifs still drank. Humanity really did get addicted, huh. The Captain was determined to stay awake in case any other commands came through, but he also wanted to isolate himself from his crew, who had a million questions about their new mission. Questions that Cylian had no answers for. So he put Hannibal on autopilot and sipped his coffee as the ship soared through space, heading for Arossa. He had no idea how time making worked but the new kid, Viridian Io Shatashah, was supposed to start making them extra as soon as he got some rest.

Cylian hated that he was prejudiced towards him because he was an Omegas. As a Shif he always thought he supported Omega rights and yet having one on board...it was tricky. Omegas were said to be weak and vulnerable and went into heats and that all was a lot for Cylian to wrap his head around. Vega, who was the same species as Viridian even though she was a Beta, made it clear that the boy would cause no trouble and Cylian decided to trust her on that. It wasn’t like he could do much about it; Viridian was the only available time maker in their galaxy since the original person they asked disappeared.

“*You have one new message,*” Hothead said in a monotone, startling Cylian out of his thoughts and almost making him spill his coffee.

“Little warning next time,” the man scoffed.

“*Little warning,*” Hothead repeated, “*you have one new message, dickhead.*”

“From Saarashik?” Cylian asked suspiciously.

“Nope. Earth 6.2.”

“Another command?” Cylian straightened up.

“You know, if you’d just let me play the message for once instead of asking stupid questions then you’d know the answers.”

“Okay, okay,” Cylian waved him off, “At least tell me what kind of message it is,” the Captain hated surprises.

“*Live message. Radio transmission.*”

“What?!”

“*Just let me play the stardamn message, Lian.*”

“Fine,” Cylian put his coffee cup down and heard static over the intercom as Hothead connected him to whoever was trying to make contact.

“Welcome to your participation with the Galactical Space Traffic Control,” a voice boomed.

“Oh you’re kidding me,” Cylian sunk lower in his seat, “They pile everything on me and now the stardamned GTSC is on my ass too, fucking brilliant.”

The Galactical Space Traffic Control, commonly known just as GTSC, was a corporation working closely with government warships, as well as cruise ships. Their job was to guide vessels through the
galaxy, and they were employed if nobody knew how to navigate a ship, if a Captain died or if a ship was in uncharted territory. None of these applied to *Hannibal* so Cylian didn’t know why the hell this was happening.

“*Hello? Do you copy?*” the impatient GTSC voice sounded again. Sluggishly Cylian reached over and pressed the transmitting button on his control board.

“Cylian Iliev here, Captain of Beam Ship B72 *‘Hannibal.’*”

“*Hello Captain Cylian. We have been informed that due to a Time Maker being on-board for your mission you will be out of the space loop for some three months. You have been assigned a Lighthouse to guide you on your mission.*”

Cylian pressed the transmitting button, “Uh, no we’re fine, thank you.”

“I didn’t let that go through,” Hothead said disapprovingly, “This mission is crucial, just accept the guide.”

“I know the galaxy like the back of my hand,” Cylian said.

“But you don’t know time. Trust me Captain, take the Lighthouse.”

Cylian sighed and pressed the transmission button, leaving it pressed down as he leaned back in his seat.

“I accept the Lighthouse,” he said dully.

“You will now be connected to your Lighthouse,” The GTSC worker said. A Lighthouse was someone assigned to ships to literally talk them through space. The Captain felt like a cripple being assigned one, like he was bad at his job. Cylian heard a click, some static, and then a new voice came over the intercom.

“*Hello! My name is Ayvo Rasmussen and I will be your Lighthouse for this mission!*”

Cylian noted three things about the voice of his new, unwanted guide. One, he sounded young, probably younger than the Captain. Two, his voice was smooth and calming, and he spoke perfect Faso meaning he must’ve been a Shif. Three, he was obnoxiously cheerful.

“Hello,” Cylian said with no enthusiasm.

“Aw, cheer up!” the Lighthouse said, “We’re gonna be stuck together for the next three months so you might as well be happy about our meeting! I know I’m happy.”

“Is this your first time working as a Lighthouse?” Cylian asked, mouth twitching into a smile. There was a pause on the other side of the line and then a hesitant,

“Maybe. Is it that obvious?”

“What did you say your name was again?” Cylian asked, ignoring the Lighthouse’s question, leaning back and closing his eyes.

“Ayvo. *My name is Ayvo. *”

“Right,” Cylian took a sip of his coffee, “and what exactly is your job.”

“I’m going to guide you through the galaxy, keep you updated about the war and make sure you
“Great,” Cylian looked miserably at the empty bottom of his cup, “Well, I guess I’ll get in touch when our Time Maker wakes up in some eight hours, and then we can get a move on,” he reached for the transmission button to turn it off but Ayvo interrupted him.

“Wait!” he blurted, and then paused as if he regretted saying that. Cylian’s hand was hovering over the button, “I...I’m stuck here for the next two hours before I can go and rest, so...”

“So?” Cylian raised an eyebrow even though Ayvo couldn’t see it.

“So...never mind. You’re a Captain of a Warship, you’re probably busy.”

Cylian looked around the tiny control room, cluttered with empty coffee cups and desert wrappers, “Actually I might need your help,” the Captain said, mostly to humour the kid back on Earth 6.2 since he himself remembered being new to this whole war thing, and getting this ship and not knowing anything about what to do. He had been assigned Greige from the start, and the quiet giant helped him grow comfortable in the Captain’s seat of Hannibal. He wanted Ayvo to be comfortable in whatever uncomfortable plastic chair he was sitting in, back on Cylian’s home planet. He also had no desire to return to his cabin anyway since now he had to share it with that guard of the Prince and the Princess. Cylian didn’t do sharing, “Can you find out where on Sousnan we can get medical supplies?”

***

“This is your cabin,” Vega slid her hand over a door on the wall and with a gentle hiss it moved to the side, revealing a small room. Viridian nervously stepped in. There was a bed against a wall, with a shelf above it full of notepads, books and family pictures. A makeshift bed was made on the floor, so there was virtually nowhere to stand. A little oval window in the wall showed the swirling galaxy beyond the glass, “It’s small but I think it will be suitable.”

“Who does this belong to?” Viridian pointed his chin at the bed by the wall. Vega shrugged her stiff shoulders.

“No idea, lovely. Hickey arranged the room changes.”

“Vega, Champagne needs you in the engine room. Someone messed up the backup generator. Spoiler alert – it was Lin.” The voice sounded from the intercom. It was nothing like AI on Woorud station, this voice had tone and emotion to it, which was peculiar.

“That’s Hothead,” Vega smiled, “he’s our darling AI. Hottie, tell Champagne I’ll be with her in a moment,” she nodded at Viridian and squeezed his arm, “Get comfortable, lovely, unpack.”

“Petio-lua teto,” Viridian thanked her in Tussah. The old woman smiled and then shuffled off down the corridor. The Omega sighed and turned to the room. He stepped inside and slid his hand across the door, the way Vega had done, and it shut softly behind him.

Immediately a soft, gentle purple light came on in the room, only enough so Viridian could see what he was doing. Clearly the cabins weren’t a place of relaxation, but simply where the Crew came to rest. What were you expecting? It’s a Warship after all. Sasha put his bag on the bed on the floor and opened it. There wasn’t much he brought with him from Woorud. Over his short seventeen years Viridian had learned to travel light.

Still, he did have some clothes and some of his favourite ugly jumpers that he wanted to put
somewhere, and some books too. Suddenly he wished he had the mechanical ladybug with him, to remind him of home. Anxiously the boy looked around the room to try and locate a closet or any kind of storage space but couldn’t see anything.

“Uh...Hothead?” he asked nervously.

“Yes Viridian?” the voice answered immediately, startling Sasha a little. He wasn’t used to talking to AIs.

“Um, just Sasha’s okay,” Viridian said.

“How in the stars do you get Sasha from Viridian?”

The Omega couldn’t help but smile, “It’s from my last name – Shatashah. In the boarding school I went to on Tussa everyone was referred to by their surnames. So they started calling me Sasha.”

“Well, Sasha, what can I help you with?”

“Is there any kind of closet in this room?” Sasha asked, turning in a circle, his jumpers piled high in his arms.

“Press your palm against the wall to your left,” the AI said, sounding like it had said the same thing a million times before. Nervously Viridian did as he was told and a panel opened in the wall, revealing a sizeable compartment. He smiled.

“Thankyou,” he said to Hothead.

“Well if that isn’t the first time someone thanked me in a long time,” the AI said, sounding a little pleased.

Viridian started folding his clothes and putting them neatly into his ‘closet.’ As he did he wondered about the last twenty minutes he spent in his new ‘home.’ Hannibal was smaller than any other ship the boy had ever been on before, and the engineer part of him told him that it was because it needed to move quickly to get out of the way of enemy rays. The Crew...on them Sasha had mixed opinions. Hannibal was smaller than any other ship the boy had ever been on before, and the engineer part of him told him that it was because it needed to move quickly to get out of the way of enemy rays. The Crew...on them Sasha had mixed opinions.

The brief meeting he had had with the Captain, Cylian, had been rushed and Sasha hadn’t gotten a good idea of what the man was like, except that he was very tired and very stressed and very Shif. Vega was a pleasant surprise, not only was she a Beta sympathetic to the Omega cause, but she also treated Viridian as if he was family. She told him her life story, or at least a part of it, as she led him through the corridors of Hannibal. She was an escaped Dutchess from Tussa, wanted in the Galaxy. They exchanged stories of Woorud Station where Vega had also trained and taught some years before Viridian got there. And then there was Thane, the golden eyed, ginger haired, fox-like doctor who seemed to hate Sasha for no reason. His remarks about Omegas hurt more than the boy cared to admit, and he hoped he was just a bad weed in the bunch. He knew that there were other people in the Crew, ones he didn’t get to meet just yet, and Viridian could only hope that they were nicer than the Vlassain.

The door slid open behind him and Sasha jumped, turning around to welcome his roommate, and came face to face with Thane. Of course. Just his luck.

The Vlassain seemed genuinely surprised for a second, his almond eyes wide, his wet hair dripping water onto the towel wrapped around his tanned shoulders. The two were silent for a second, just taking each other in. Create yourself time, Viridian’s mind told him in panic when Thane’s eyes narrowed in anger, but before he could the Fox slapped his towel down on his bed. Despite the fact that he was maybe two years older than Sasha at most he was taller and bigger, and self-consciously
the Omega stepped backwards.

A ginger fox’s tail, the same colour as Thane’s hair, flickered behind him suddenly.

“What the fuck are you doing in my room?” the Fox seethed, eyes trained on Viridian as if he were prey.

“I was told I’m supposed to sleep here,” Sasha nervously gestured at the floor-bed he was standing on. Thane’s eyes narrowed further and his hands curled into fists. *Those fists could hurt me. Or pin me down.* Viridian took another tiny step back, his heart pounding. Thane might’ve not been an Alpha but he sure oozed that same aura, and suddenly Viridian didn’t want to share a room with him.

Clearly the Vlassain had a similar idea, “You’re not sleeping here.”

“Is there anywhere else-,” Viridian started.

“I’m not going to be taking care of you,” Thane snapped, “I’m not a stardammed nanny. Does Cylian think he can just force me to look after you ‘cause I’m a doctor? Fuck no.”

“I don’t need you to take care of me,” Sasha said, hating how weak and vulnerable he sounded. Thane hadn’t moved from the door, and for that the Omega was thankful.

“Hottie, get me Cylian,” Thane barked.

“No can do, he’s on the line with a GSTC Lighthouse.”

“Well tell him it’s important!”

*Your sleeping arrangements aren’t important, Thane. Stop being a little bitch and go to sleep, you get moody when you’re tired.*

Viridian’s mouth twitched into a smile which he tactfully covered with his hand. Thane glared at the ceiling.

“You’re lucky you don’t have a body Hothead, or I’d punch the living daylights out of you,” he looked at Viridian, “Stay right here. I’m gonna go sort it out personally,” and he turned on his heel and stormed down the corridor. Sasha exhaled.

“Thankyou Hottie.”

“There you go again, thanking me. I’m starting to like you kid. Don’t mind Thane he’s like that with everyone.”

“Who stole his cereal?” Viridian joked.

*His planet got invaded and his whole family murdered, I’m sure that’s enough to make anyone angry.*

Viridian felt his stomach drop. He forgot that Thane was Vlassain and that his planet was being occupied. He suddenly felt horrible, even though he didn’t say anything bad to the other man. He glanced at the family pictures he noticed before and saw that in all of them it was just a group of children. Orphan children. Viridian felt sick, suddenly he couldn’t stand to be in this room.

He went out into the corridor and blindly walked through, trying not to be sick. This was not what he imagined *Hannibal* to be. He started sprinting, feeling claustrophobic, knowing that there wasn’t anywhere he could truly go, not with space surrounding him at all sides. He burst into a room and
realised he was in a kitchen. His vision was blurry with tears so he couldn’t really take much in, all he saw was a wooden dining table. Feeling like his knees would give out; Viridian collapsed onto a wooden bench by the table and buried his face in his hands. He took shallow breaths to try and calm down, but the tears still tumbled from his eyes. He didn’t even know why he was crying – was he missing Woorud? Was he upset over things that Thane said? Was he crying for Thane? It was all confusing and complicated. Viridian thought that Vorde had made the right choice, turning down this mission.

He heard a rustle to his left and the boy sat up abruptly, scared that someone had caught him crying, and screamed, his self-pity replaced by fear.

A few feet away from him stood a Wurund. Two bone-coloured short horns curled from its grey, scaly, bald head. It’s all white, huge eyes were unreadable, its lipless mouth in a tight line. It was well over seven feet, with thin nostrils flaring as if it was smelling Viridian, and multiple piercings where the bridge of its nose would be. Crude black tattoos decorated either side of his face, and it just stood there as Viridian scrambled back off the bench, falling flat on his ass.

He looked around for a weapon because that was a Wurund and they would kill him, or worse, kidnap him and take him back to Tussa so he could be sold off to some Alpha-

Everything came to a screeching halt in Viridian’s head as his eyes skimmed over a little detail he had missed in his blind panic. The Wurund didn’t have any weapons on it, but what he did have was a pink cooking apron, several sizes too small. Viridian exhaled loudly, feeling like his body had suddenly turned to liquid.

“Oh stars,” he said and laughed in relief, “You’re Huambo aren’t you?” slowly the Wurund nodded once, “Gods they never said you were a Wurund. Sorry, not that it’s anything bad, you just scared me.”

The Wurund nodded again and his mouth turned into a grimace that might’ve been an imitation of the smile on Viridian’s own mouth. Huambo crossed the kitchen-dining room slowly, as to not scare the Charasean, and then loomed over Sasha like a mountain. He offered the boy a big, scaly hand and hesitantly Viridian took it. Huambo pulled him up with surprise gentleness, as if in his own massiveness he was aware of the fragile bodies in Sasha’s body.

“My name is Viridian Io Shatashah,” the Omega introduced himself. Huambo let go of his hand and stepped back, bowing quickly, “Can you...not speak?” Viridian asked.

“Oh boy,” the AI interjected.

“Sorry for the interruption,” Hothead said, “To clarify, Huambo can speak, but simply chooses not to...for religious reasons or something.”

Huambo shook his head, as if in exasperation, and the door to the kitchen burst open again. Viridian blinked in surprise and Huambo most likely would’ve done the same if his eyes had lids and he could blink. Standing in front of them was a soldier, dressed head to toe in a navy suit, with heavy boots on his feet and a laser rifle in his hands. His dark brown hair was pushed from his equally dark eyes and his weapon was trained on Huambo.

“No!” Viridian said, stepping in front of the Wurund, hands raised.

“Oh boy,” the AI interjected.

“He’s with us!” Viridian said quickly to the stranger, even though he had just met Huambo, “he’s the cook.”
The soldier slowly lowered his gun, but he didn’t look completely convinced, “Is that right?”

“Confirmed,” Hothead said.

“Oh,” the soldier shrugged the gun back on his soldier, “Apologies. I got a bit scared when I heard a scream.”

Viridian smiled a little, “My fault.”

The Soldier came over, “My name is Arch Albrektson,” he held up two fingers in a Calanthe greeting despite the fact he was clearly a Shif. Stars, he’s handsome, the Omega thought distractedly.

“You’re the guard that came on with the royalty,” Sasha remembered, tapping his own two fingers against Arch’s like he was taught at Woorud.

“And you are...,” Arch asked, greeting Huambo in the same way, their animosity put behind them.

“This is Huambo,” Viridian introduced the cook, who bowed the same way he had moments ago to Sasha, “and I’m Viridian Io Shatashah.”

Arch’s eyes widened, and he was tall enough that he had to look down on Sasha, “You’re the Time Maker,” he said in awe. Viridian smiled sheepishly, “Yes. I suppose I am.”

“That’s insane,” Arch cracked a charming smile at Sasha, “I never thought I’d meet a real Time Maker.”

“I’m nothing special,” Sasha shrugged and hugged himself. It felt weird to have someone mention him being a Time Maker instead of being an Omega. Huambo moved to the back of the room, where the kitchen was, separated from the dining area with a half counter. He started rustling about as Arch continued to gush over Sasha like he was the most wonderful thing in the world.

“And you’re an engineer too aren’t you? Wow, that’s amazing. Like really fucking amazing.”

“It’s really not,” Viridian said modestly. Before Arch could argue with him the door to the kitchen opened again and a small, blonde head poked its way in. The soldier sighed.

“Eilo I told you not to come in until I told you it was safe.”

“But you didn’t come and tell me!” the little blonde girl said, pushing the door open all the way and flew in. She looked like a little cloud in her puffy pink dress as she floated to the ceiling.

“Eilo!” Arch sounded like an exasperated father, “Where are your shoes?!”

“Rinon,” she said stubbornly in Fiala, which Viridian knew meant ‘no.’ Arch told her something in rapid-fire Fiala to which the little girl replied with sticking her tongue out at him.

“Hello,” Sasha said then and Princess Eilo looked at him, her pink eyes widening, “My name is Viridian, I don’t think we’ve had the chance to meet yet,” he held up two fingers. Eilo squealed and flew down quickly to tap her own two, chubby fingers against Sasha’s, and then to throw her arms around his shoulders and hug him tightly. The boy patted her back in surprise.
“She loves new people,” Arch said apologetically, “Especially new species.”

“I like your ears!” Eilo proclaimed, tugging on one of Viridian’s pointed ears playfully. The Omega winced in pain and Arch came to pull the girl off.

“No, don’t do that, that’s rude.”

“It’s alright,” Viridian laughed, self-consciously tucking a piece of his black hair behind his ear.

Huambo came from the kitchen, carrying four steaming mis-matched mugs in his large hands. When Eilo saw the Wurund she literally screamed in happiness and Arch had to forcefully hold onto her dress to stop her from flying right into him. Huambo put down the cups in front of Arch and Viridian and then Eilo managed to free herself from the Soldier’s grip. She plastered herself against Huambo’s face, seven feet off the ground, and then climbed around so her pink, chubby legs were wrapped around his neck, her chin resting on top of his bald head.

“Nice scarf,” Sasha said, and Arch snorted as he took his cup. Huambo did his little grimace smile again. Eilo seemed perfectly content to be the Wurund’s ‘scarf.’

“What is this?” Arch asked, taking a cup into his tanned hands. Viridian did the same and smelled the aromatic liquid inside. He felt warmth spread through him.

“It’s Kiyu. A sweet drink they make for the kids back at Woorud,” he whispered, feeling his heart clench in his chest. He looked at Huambo, who had a cup in his own hands, and had passed one to Eilo. It had a straw inside it and the girl rested it against one of Huambo’s horns as she drank happily, “Thank you,” Viridian said sincerely, feeling comfort from the drink. Huambo just inclined his head.

After an hour more with them Viridian came to the conclusion that Hannibal wasn’t a bad place after all. When he returned to the room he had to share with Thane he found the fox buried underneath the blankets on his bed, face turned to the wall, earphones in his ears, either sleeping or pretending to. Sasha’s bed was still on the floor so he assumed Thane’s argument with the Captain achieved nothing. The Omega climbed under the covers and faced away from Thane, and when he closed his eyes he was asleep in an instant, dreaming that he was floating through the galaxy, and it was as pink as little Eilo’s dress.
What Happened on Sousan

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ghi 4th Jeo 1144EE (12 Days Later)

Hannibal.

Cylian was started to get used to the glowing, pale, almost see through mist that enveloped Hannibal since Viridian first started using his Time Making powers. Being in a time bubble was peculiar to Cylian, like something out of a daydream, or like a warped reality. He felt like he was high or hallucinating on Strataorfs, like nothing was quite real.

Hannibal would be flying through the galaxy at normal speed...at least to Cylian it felt normal. He saw planets pass slowly, stars, other ships. Everything was normal. And yet when every twenty four hours Ayvo tuned in from the GTSC he’d inform him that only six hours have passed. It was insane but thanks to Viridian Hannibal was moving faster than light, to the point where only the ships connection to the GTSC kept them from going off the grid completely. They had been on this journey for only twelve days, according to the GTSC, but to the crew it had felt like a month and a half.

Honestly Cylian was thankful for Ayvo, more than he thought he would be. The Lighthouse not only prevented Cylian from flying into enemy territory multiple times, or from going into other ship’s routes or completely going off-course, but he also kept the Captain company. These days Cylian rarely ventured out of the navigation cabin; the Ship had too many strangers on it and he wanted to stay as far away from them as possible. He had his coffee to keep him company, and Hothead, and Akkie, and sometimes Hickey. And, of course, Ayvo’s voice, a constant in this maniac journey.

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Cylian was slouched in his chair, dead asleep. He was dreaming about being back in his little apartment on Earth 6.2, with his mother, Soyo, preparing him coffee impossibly slowly. Cylian sat at their little glass table and watched her, and it felt like it took her years to do each little step; put the teaspoon into the packet of coffee, pull it out, brush off the excess, pour it into the cup...outside the window seasons passed, it snowed, it rained, there was a laser storm, a fire, the sun and moon chased each other, colouring the sky, and his mother continued to make the coffee. Cylian saw his hands withering in front of him, becoming mottled with marks of an old man, and eventually becoming bones, only to crumble away to dust. His mother didn’t age.

Cylian woke up with a start to Ayvo’s voice, heart hammering.

“Good evening and welcome to your favourite radio show!” Ayvo said cheerfully, and Cylian
almost fell off your seat, “Your host tonight is one Ayvo Rasmussen, the best of the best-“

“I was sleeping, Ayvo,” Cylian interrupted grumpily, rubbing his knee, which he had banged on one of the processors.

“Oh. Sorry,” the Lighthouse sounded apologetic, “I forget that you’re not in the same timezones and stuff. What time is it on Hannibal?”

Cylian rubbed sleep out of his eyes and ran his hand over the stubble appeared on his sharp jaw line, “I have no clue. The clocks stopped working last week.”

“Last time I checked in they were still alright.”

Cylian winced, “When was the last time you checked in?”

“Twelve hours ago. When was it for you?”

“Two days,” Cylian sighed, and almost mentally added I missed your voice, before firmly deciding against saying something so...emotional and dramatic, “So what time is it on Earth?” trying to sound casual.

“Coming up to midnight.” Ayvo said, and yawned a little. Not for the first time Cylian wondered if this was a normal Captain-Lighthouse relationship. What little he knew about the job was that it was used simply for the Lighthouses to check in if there was a change somewhere in the route of the ship they were assigned to. But every time Ayvo wired in he stayed on for the full six hours, sometimes longer. Weirdly it started to feel to Cylian like they were pen-pals, especially since most of the time they talked about non-mission related things. Cylian wondered if it was inappropriate, and prayed nobody recorded their conversations.

“What’s the sky like on Earth?” he asked. It made him feel more grounded to know this, since stretched in front of him was just empty space, pinpricked with stars and planets that were much farther than they looked. Usually Cylian had time to rely on, knowing what time-zone was where, what time it was on each planet. Now he didn’t even have that, he only had Ayvo’s voice to guide him.

“Dark. Really dark. And cloudy. Can’t see any stars really...or it might be because of the ships. A bunch of them took off today to go help the assault on Calliban and there’s still streaks from their jets in the sky...I reckon you can see a lot of stars, since you’re always in space.”

Cylian smiled, “Yeah. Plenty of stars,” he said, looking out at the galaxy spread in front of him, glowing amber and gold as they passed a dying star. There are a few things you never get used to seeing, things that take your breath away every time your eyes land on them. Like the galaxy.

“I bet space is beautiful,” Ayvo’s usually cheerful voice softened now, and he sounded almost sad.

Cylian frowned, “You’ve never been?”

“Nope. Never once stepped foot off Earth. I know it’s crazy,” he laughed uneasily, as if expecting Cylian to think any less of him because of this. The Captain had to admit, it was a little peculiar.

“It’s not crazy. It’s just...,” Cylian looked mournfully at his empty coffee cup, “I don’t really know what it is.”

“Um, so...,” Ayvo clearly wanted to change the subject, “How’s the crew doing?”
“Last I checked they were okay,” the Captain shrugged even though he knew Ayvo couldn’t see him.

“Aw, c’mon. Give me a little more than that. What are the kids up to?”

“Running ransack,” Cylian sighed, “I hear them screaming and laughing all day. I just hope they don’t break anything.”

“And how are you?” Ayvo asked.

“I’m...” Cylian’s voice faltered, “I’m fine.”

“Something’s bugging you.”

“How can you even tell that?” Cylian snorted, spinning in his chair, his stomach feeling weird, as if someone’s tickling him. He couldn’t seem to sit still while talking to Ayvo, feeling like a hyperactive child.

“I just can. Tell me, I’m bored. Everyone else went to get lunch.”

“Why didn’t you?” Cylian wanted to steer Ayvo away from his earlier question. There was a pause on the Lighthouse’ side,

“I...I just wasn’t hungry.”

“You’re a liar, Ayvo.”

“So are you. What’s bothering you, Lian?”

Cylian sighed, but a part of him wanted him to pour his heart out to Ayvo, “My mother. I feel bad for not seeing her for all this time.”

“You never say much about her. Or about you at all. We have like five minutes before the others come back. Entertain me, tell me your traumatic back-story that made you decide to be a Captain of a warship at the tender age of eighteen.”

Cylian laughed, “Have you got my files up again?”

“Yup,” Ayvo said smugly, popping the ‘p,’ “You’re a handsome guy, Cylian Iliev,” the Lighthouse’s tone was light-hearted and teasing, but that remark weirdly made Cylian’s chest warm. Stardamn, he’s just a voice in space, why is he making me feel like an inexperienced teenager again.

“It’s unfair that you get to know what I look like and I don’t get to see you,” the Captain complained. It was true, countless times his mind wandered in the past month (or twelve days, depends how you look at it), about what Ayvo looked like – was he tall or short, skinny or muscular or chubby? Was his hair blonde and long or short and black, what were his eyes like? Cylian had so many questions, “Describe yourself to me.”

“No way, Cap,” Ayvo laughed, “you’re going to have to come visit me. The address is 14 Aelios Way, Göza, Aernya, Earth 6.2.”

“Oh I’m there,” Cylian rolled his eyes.

“Oh really? I just opened my door and all I saw was a firebug. Is that you? You don’t look like your pictures, I’m offended.”
“Stars, are you flirting with me, Rasmussen?” Cylian joked, and couldn’t keep a smile off his face like some idiot in a bar, happy that a girl was making eyes at him.

“I’m going to ignore that question as I am forced to insist you tell me about your mother.”

“Oh stars,” Cylian exhaled and leaned back in his seat, “I don’t even know where to start.”

“Start at the beginning.” Ayvo’s voice was soft again. Soft and intimate, as if he was standing at Cylian’s side, “How did she meet your father?”

Cylian’s mouth twitched into a smile, “A nightclub on Sousnan when they were eighteen,” Sousan was known as a place where many teenagers went for some time to let off steam, to party, fall in love, drink, and just generally go crazy, “Uh...it was a one night stand kind of thing, and he left the next morning. By the time she found out that she was pregnant with me he was in a different galaxy and she couldn’t reach him.”

“Stars, this just got dark,” Ayvo said.

“No, it’s alright. I never had any desire to meet him, or know who he is.”

“Should I grab some popcorn? This is starting to sound like a movie.”

“You’re hilarious,” Cylian said sarcastically.

“Sorry, sorry. Continue.”

“My grandfather...,” Cylian winced, remembering the man in the black hat that shadowed his face, standing outside their apartment every time he and his mother tried to settle on Earth 6.2, somehow always finding them, “he wasn’t the nicest of men, and my mother wanted nothing to do with him. To avoid him she left and went to Saarashik, and da-dah, out I came.”

“The glorious story of the only birth on Saarashik,” Ayvo mused.

“Yes. I suppose. Alright, now you tell me about you.”

“That wasn’t part of the deal mister. I don’t spill my life story.”

“Fine. Tell me anything then. Describe what you’re feeling,” for some reason Cylian’s heart started beating faster when he asked this.

Ayvo was silent for a moment, “I’m sitting alone in this really big, kind of dark-ish room. There’s these rows of screens on which everyone can track their ship’s progress and where we’re updated on everything that’s happening in the galaxy first hand. The screens are living off this blue light. We have these headphones we wear with a little microphone so we aren’t interrupted by anyone around us...except there’s nobody around me because they’re all at lunch, and I’m just looking at Hannibal, literally sprinting through the galaxy at this amazing speed, and time is crawling so slowly for me to make up for how fast you’re going. But at the same time I’m speaking to you, and in the weirdest way it feels like I’m there with you, like I’m seeing the galaxy through your eyes. It’s hard to believe there’s half a galaxy between us.”

Cylian’s throat felt tight. He didn’t know where to look so he stared at the galaxy outside the ship, “Ayvo I—”

“Champagne and Lin sprinting for the cabin,” Hothead cut him off, putting Ayvo on hold. Annoyed, Cylian was about to tell him to put the other man back on when the doors burst open and
Castory Yuú and Gridelin Micájá-Sirel barged in, as if the ship was on fire.

Castory and Gridelin, just referred to as Champagne and Lin, were probably the weirdest duo Cylian had ever seen. Champagne was a fifteen year old Vlassain, and Lin was a Shif almost twice her age. Champagne came from the forest, and was part racoon, with a dark, tattoo-like smudge across her small, incredibly dark eyes. Her skin was tanned, her black hair so frizzy and fur-like it had to be kept out of the mechanic’s face at all times. On the other hand you had Lin, who was a good head taller than Champagne, curvy, with long strawberry blonde hair in a complicated braid, coiling around her shoulder like a serpent, kept in place by a screwdriver. They looked like a comedic duet from the old sitcoms that Huambo liked to watch, but the look of panic on their faces was anything but humorous.

“What did you do?” was Cylian’s immediate question.

“It wasn’t us, it was Vega,” Lin said immediately, her pale blue eyes flying to Champagne for support. The younger girl elbowed her in the ribs,

“Not that, you idiot,” she hissed at her friend, before turning to Cylian, “Captain there’s a crack in the hydro pump.”

“And this time it wasn’t our fault,” Lin added, crossing her arms over her busty chest. Cylian frowned,

“Is it serious?”

“Not right now, but it will get worse,” Champagne shook her head, “We need to land somewhere so we can repair it. It’s impossible to do it while we’re moving.”

“It’s too risky,” Lin finished her sentence, “We need to get Viridian to stop using his powers and whatever and fix it as soon as we can or things will get bad and we’ll be stuck in space with no clean water, drinking each other’s piss-”

“Hothead what’s the closest planet?” Cylian interrupted her colourful description.

“Sousnan, we’ll be passing over it in approximately twenty minutes. In standard time that will be thirty seconds.”

“Right,” Cylian said, “Lin, go get Vega and make sure you know what you’re going to be doing once you land. Champagne, you tell Viridian he can stop using his powers for now. Hothead, inform Thane that he can now get his stardamn medicine so he can stop complaining now.”

“Gotcha, boss,” Lin saluted him and ran out of the room, Champagne following close behind her.

“I need to get back to Ayvo-” Cylian started.

“You need to steer us towards Sousan,” Achilles piped up. So far he had been asleep, but now the cactus was back to his normal swaying, “Autopilot won’t take us there.”

“I sent a message to GTSC already,” Hothead said, “You can talk to your boyfriend later.”

“He’s not my boyfriend,” Cylian grumbled heatedly, taking Hannibal off autopilot and shoving his goggles over his eyes. He could see planets in front of him, the massive, green bulk of Golbahar, surrounded by four of its moons. Cylian hated thinking that half of all he could see was taken by the Dark Ishait and with determination made for the crimson moon on the end, the closes to Hannibal, and the whole time he looked at the transmission button with yearning.
20 Minutes Later

Sousnan.

The ship let out a little shudder as it landed and Arch’s hands relaxed their white-knuckle grip on the belts keeping him in place. He found that he was now hysterically afraid of ship landings, after *The Ashinian* he just thought they’d crash again, and this time luck wouldn’t be on his side. He still couldn’t wrap his head around the fact he was the sole survivor of the big scouting ship, but couldn’t show his fear as *Hannibal* landed on Sousnan, not with little Eilo and Rian sitting next to him. Opposite him Viridian was buckled in, the rest of the crew spread out throughout the ship. Only Sasha’s little smiles kept Arch from having a panic attack. It would’ve looked peculiar – a man as big as Arch crying like a baby.

Over the past long, long twelve days Arch had learned much about this war ship, and its crew, but undoubtedly his favourite person onboard was Sasha. The seventeen year old was a good seven years younger than Arch, and yet he was smarter than half the people on the ship. Arch liked to sit and watch him create time for *Hannibal*, with that peculiar mist snaking out from between his delicate, pale fingers. He could tell that making so much time for something as big as *Hannibal* was draining the boy, though he never once complained, and nobody ever said anything.

“Smooth landing, eh?” he said now, smiling cheerfully at Arch.

“Yes, could be worse,” the Soldier admitted, hoping he didn’t look too pale. Eilo unbuckled herself easily and landed on the ground, her heavy shoes keeping her down. Her brother did the same, but with more grace.

“Can we go outside?” the Princess asked eagerly. Arch peered out of the window next to his head. Sousnan, every teenager’s wet dream, was a massive city, sky-scrapers raising high into the pink sky. It was the middle of the day and everything was quiet and deserted, no people visible from the landing pod *Hannibal* was resting on, but apparently that was normal since most of Sousnan’s occupants only ventured out at night, when the bars and nightclubs opened their doors.

“Better not,” Arch said, “We’ll only be here a while.”

“Allright listen up dipshits,” Hothead’s voice rang through the ship, “Captain’s orders – no time wasting, we’re getting in and getting out ASAP. No going to clubs, this one’s aimed specifically at you Vega, and no coming back onto the ship intoxicated, also you Vega. There are three main things we need to sort out in the next hour. One, Champagne, Lin and Vega you fix the hydro pump. Thane, you take Greige and do your medicine run. Coordinates of the closest medicine bay are on your pad. Cylian’s asking Arch and Uncle Plump to go on a scouting mission with him at Exit B in two minutes. Hickey you’re in charge for the time being, nobody else leave the ship – we ain’t no tourists. That is all, Namaste.”

Arch frowned. He knew Cylian didn’t particularly like him, that much was clear from the fact he hadn’t come back to their shared room for any of the nights since Arch first came on-board, so he couldn’t imagine why he now wanted him at his side. Still, he wasn’t about to question Captain’s orders.

“I have to go,” Arch said, reaching for the gun he always kept next to his bed and shrugging it over his shoulder.

“No!” Eilo wailed dramatically, throwing herself at Arch.

“Let me come with you,” Rian said, his chubby cheeks red, “I’m a man now, I can help.”
“It’s alright, your majesty,” Arch said, “It’s only a scouting mission and you’re needed elsewhere,” he pointedly looked at his sister, clinging to Arch’s leg. Rian nodded solemnly, “Yes. Of course.”

“Sasha, can you-,” Arch started.

“Course,” Viridian said, unbuckling and kneeling on one leg. He opened his arms, “Come on Eilo, Arch isn’t going far.” With a dramatic cry the little girl broke away from her Soldier and tumbled into Viridian’s arms. Arch smiled in thanks and then swiped his hand over the door, opening it.

He met Cylian and Ghazni Balk, commonly known as Uncle Plump or Plumpton because of his body mass, by Exit B. Plumpton was a native to Golbahar, and spent most of his youth on this specific moon. He was Vlassain, from the mountains, and bore startling resemblance to a bear. He was a large man and the parts of his skin that were visible were a deep brown, with thick, fur-like hair over the backs of his hands, and an impressive reddish-brown beard braided down to his chest. The man had small, beady eyes that somehow were full of warmth and comfort at all times. He was on the ship as a translator but now, with a hatchet slung across his back for emergencies, he looked almost like a warrior.

“Sajime, Arch,” the Bear inclined his head at the Soldier. He had a habit of welcoming everyone each day in their home tongue since he knew practically all the languages in the galaxy.

“Sajime, Plumpton,” Arch replied with a smile.

“Alright,” Cylian looked tired, as always, with shadows under his eyes and auburn stubble on his jaw. He had a gun at his back, and his long-range goggles on top of his head, even though he really didn’t need them in this situation, “We’re going to do a quick scout, talk to some Vlassain, find out anything we can to report to the GTSC-”

“Aren’t the GTSC meant to report this to us?” Arch asked, raising an eyebrow. Cylian sighed, “Just be on look out, alright? Make sure the Vlassainese are doing alright.”

“I’m sure they are,” Plumpton said proudly, “Sousnan was always buzzing with life, music heard on every street corner. But for that we’d have to wait for nightfall,” he winked.

“As appealing as that sounds we can’t stay here that long,” Cylian said, sounding apologetic that he’d have to be the one forcing Plumpton to leave his home without staying a while first, “We have a mission to accomplish.”

He opened the doors with a swipe of his hand, and moments later the three men were outside. They could see Thane and Greige disappearing into the buildings painted black a few feet away, on their hunt for medicine.

“It’s very quiet for a party planet,” Arch remarked as he gazed across the city that surrounded them like a weird kind of jungle.

“Like I said – nightfall,” Plumpton said, and they started walking. Cylian was at the front, with the other two following close behind. The Vlassain was excitedly telling Arch about the history of this moon in a hushed voice, though Arch was only half listening, his soldier instincts forcing him to stay alert.

As they ventured among the overpoweringly high buildings, with street signs inviting to bars, restaurants and nightclubs at almost every step, Arch started to feel uneasy. The air smelled stale, like
someone hadn’t breathed it in a while, and it was eerily silent. Not everyone was asleep...they
couldn’t be...as they carried on walking down the deserted streets the air took on a more mouldy,
fleshy stink until Arch had to fight the urge to cover his mouth.

“Something isn’t right,” Plumpton said suddenly, his bulky, flat nose turned to the sky as his nostrils
flared, “It smells all wrong. And it’s too silent.”

Cylian pulled his gun off his shoulder and Arch did the same. Plumpton reached for his hatchet.

“Be alert, don’t shoot until commanded,” the Captain said.

Arch’s heart started racing; this wasn’t what he expected when he heard of Sousnan. It was like the
life had been sucked out of the planet, and the hairs on Arch’s neck were standing up. His palms
were tingling where he was gripping his gun and only his training stopped them from shaking. They
rounded a street-corner with a sign above a shut doorway glowing neon pink and proclaiming
Oisokobos. The Bar of Dreams in Vlassainese. The windows of the flats above the club were black
and empty, there were no signs of movement. Rubbish littered the street; bags, liquor bottles, heaps
of clothes. Bullets.

The toxic smell suddenly intensified so abruptly that the three men stopped walking and covered
their mouths. Cylian coughed and Arch thought he was going to gag. In unison, without speaking
and risking inhaling the disgusting air, they pulled out masks from their belts and pressed them over
the lower halves of their faces.

“We follow the smell,” Cylian said, voice rattling and breathy through the mask. They made a few
more steps before the main street branched out into a side alleyway. Hesitantly, they turned to face it,
weapons raised, and Arch immediately regretted this decision.

Piled high in the alleyway were corpses.

They had been stacked up like slabs of meat, without any care, heads and arms lolling back against
each other. Some of their eyes were open, some shut, but all were bloodied, and most were
Vlassainese teenagers.

“Gods,” Cylian whispered in horror.

Arch couldn’t look away from the massacre. He saw a butterfly girl, her delicate wings torn and
bloodied. A monkey boy’s back was broken at a grotesque angle so he created a bridge with his
body, perfect for a girl no younger than thirteen to lay beneath him, eyes gouged out, staring at
nothing.

Arch bent over, ripped his mask off and threw up, body convulsing. Cylian turned away from these
horrors and closed his eyes. Plumpton, however, stepped towards the decaying bodies.

“Nesos, nesos,” he whispered brokenly in Vlassain. No. He reached his arms out towards the
corpses, tears running from his eyes into his beard. Arch watched hopelessly as the man fell to his
knees in front of the bodies and took a hand sticking out of the mass. It was such a small hand,
enveloped in Plumpton’s hair, big paws, “Esoidros,” he whispered, like a prayer. I’m sorry, and then
started wailing and rocking back and forth, “Teo, teo,” peace, peace.

“Uncle,” Cylian came to him and placed a hand on his shoulder, in his own awkward way of
comfort, though his face was turned away – he couldn’t bear to look at the bodies, “Uncle, we need
to go and warn the others.”

“They killed them Captain,” Plumpton whispered, voice raspy, “they killed all of them.”
The problem was none of them knew exactly who ‘they’ were. It could’ve been the Wurund, the Dark Ishait or even Charasean Alpha’s. Arch put his mask back on and lifted his weapon as Cylian helped Plumpton off the ground.

“Fuck,” the Captain swore, “Thane’s out there with Greige,” he put his wrist to his mouth, where Arch knew all the crew members had chips to help them communicate, “This is Cylian, Hickey – copy?”

Silence.


“Something’s happened,” Arch said.

“We need to get back, now,” Cylian turned to Plumpton, “We need to help them, they’ve most likely been attacked.”


He broke off running, not caring about anything. He did not lose his entire crew and save the Prince and the Princess from Saarashik just to have them murdered in cold blood on Sousnan. He ran faster than he thought possible, and heard the heavy steps of Plumpton and Cylian following him. When the ship appeared in sight again Arch’s blood ran cold.

There was a smaller ship next to Hannibal, Aubarikov scribbled messily on its black side. More importantly Hannibal’s crew was all kneeling on the ground outside the ship, with strangers pointing guns at them. Arch didn’t stop his run as he raised his weapon.

“Halt!” someone barked, and one of the strangers turned to Arch, weapons raised. It was a female Ishait, her sclera’s pitch black, her impossibly long white hair tied up. Her skin was coppery-yellow, dirty with soot and blood. She was dressed in a black uniform, with a lasered on plaque on her chest reading Opiania Baktra. Arch stopped running and aimed his gun at her in a silence showdown, neither of them blinking. This is what you were trained for, Arch told himself, hands steady.

The problem was behind her there were two more Ishait men, one without his left eyes with deep blue skin and blood-splattered clothes, the name on his plaque reading Kandahar Oxus and the other called Ohum Khan, much older, bearded, with mismatched eyes. They had their guns pointed at the Crew on the ground. Arch’s heart jolted when he saw Viridian, his expression terrified.

But the kids weren’t there.

“Put your weapon down or they all die!” Opiania yelled at Arch in perfect Faso.

“There’s more of us,” from behind him, Arch heard the furious voice of Plumpton. Opiania laughed.

“You have a useless hatchet, and two measly guns.”

“The hatchet won’t be useless once it’s buried in your face,” Cylian said, deadly calm. Arch couldn’t see his two companions but could feel their presence behind him.

The blue skinned Ishait, Kandahar, suddenly grabbed Hickey by her multicoloured hair and jerked her to her feet. She cried out in pain and Cylian jerked forward.

“Don’t move!” Ohum came to stand next to Opiania and pointed his own weapon at Cylian, while his partner pressed a small pocket-knife to Hickey’s throat. He stood so close that his leg was
touching the one of his companion – good, it meant that they were scared and needed physical contact. What wasn’t good was that Hickey looked scared too, “The traitor Ishait deserves to die for her sins. She bears the white marks of the usurper.”

He was referring to Hickey’s white tattoos which decorated her pink skin, the ones she got to show that she was fighting against the tyranny of the Queen and supporting her brother’s, Major Chegutu’s, government. Clearly these supporters of Queen Chivhu weren’t pleased with this.

“Weapons down or she dies now,” Opiania hissed. As if to prove her point Kandahar man pulled a white cloth from the pocket of his uniform. This made his female companion smile, “That cloth is drenched in Taraverya Gas – the moment he presses it to that filthy traitor’s mouth it will begin to melt her body from within, and she will die a slow, agonizing death.”

“Weapons down,” Cylian commanded when Hickey sent him a petrified look. Arch didn’t hesitate as he dropped his gun to the ground, and Plumpton angrily threw his hatchet next to it, so it embedded in the ground by the she-Ishait’s foot.

“On the floor, now,” Ohum pressed the mouth of his impressive, massive gun to Cylian’s forehead, mismatched eyes trained on the man, forcing them down alongside their Crew. Arch hurriedly knelt next to Viridian, and brushed the back of his hand against the boy’s in comfort.

“Where are the children?” he whispered, making sure to not get caught.

“Hidden,” Sasha murmured back.

Now that the relief of the royalty being safe was confirmed Arch’s fear was free to flood into him. His stomach clenched and his heart started pounding. He could taste the phantom coppery tang of blood at the back of his throat as the Ishait stood in front of the Hannibal crew, still holding Hickey captive. Thane felt that his only hope were the missing crew members – Huambo was nowhere to be seen, and Greige and Thane hadn’t returned yet. Their ship was too far to try and run for it. They were at the mercy of the Ishait for now, feeling hopeless.

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These strangers were fools for coming to Sousnan, at least to Evander Ámos. The Ishait boy (because despite being fifty six in Ishait years he was barely a grown man since he still looked like a boy) considered himself a fool also, for trying to steal their ship.

Evan had a long and colourful history that he preferred to never talk about, but how he ended up on Sousnan, looking on as innocent Vlassain teenagers were murdered...he didn’t really have an answer to that. Things weren’t always clear in his head; there were different galaxies Evan had visited, different weapons he had smuggled, there was his time on Idra, Golbahar’s prison moon, and the liberation by the Wurund, then it was the Nomand, and after him it was Steel Aurora, and now...and now it was Sousan and streets filled with decaying corpses. Memories layer on top of memories, memories that Evan would never erase from his head. He hadn’t done any of the killing himself, except for the people that tried to attack him, but he was starting to feel sick from the constant reek of decaying meat hanging in the air. This wasn’t what he signed up for.

This ship was his salvation. The Ishait would never allow him to leave, especially not the Aubarikov Crew. It made Evan yearn for his days as a smuggler, where he was free to do as he wanted, and when he wasn’t stuck on a planet full of death, and commanded to do things he took no pleasure in. If he wanted to be ruled he would’ve joined the army, and not become an illegal smuggler.

But this...this ship...Hannibal...this could be his ticket back into the galaxy. Evan was no pilot, but he
had a gun and a brain and he knew how to reprogram an AI to do exactly as he wanted. Maybe he
couldn’t fly the ship but the sky was big, and Evan would be alright as long as he aimed for the stars.
With the crew of this ship on their knees and entertaining the Aubarikov Crew, Evan had the chance
to slip away undetected. Nothing got those Ishait going as much as a Light Ishait, and that Major
supporter girl was probably going to be tortured and killed for her beliefs. Actually, they would all be
tortured and killed but at that moment Evan didn’t care much for some strangers.

They had idiotically left the door open and Evan had no trouble swinging himself inside the ship. He
was a lithe, graceful man and slipped in before anyone as much as thought to look over. He found
himself in a brightly lit white corridor and immediately reached for his gun in case there was
anybody still on board. He knew he had time – Opiania liked to play with the victims.

Slowly Evan crept through the hallways, purple hands gripping his weapon as his black-sclera eyes
scanned the ship. Although Ishait might’ve been regarded as ugly with their weirdly coloured skin
and eyes lacking whites, Evan wasn’t. Of course nobody had ever told him that but with his little,
upturned nose, wavy hair a few shades darker than the lilac of his skin and almond shaped eyes he
was quite a sight. At least he was a sight to the little girl who suddenly came around the corner, pink
eyes wide. Evan froze, gun raised.

He hadn’t expected there to be a child here, after all it was a war ship. He looked at the blonde,
chubby little girl just staring at him, in silence.

“Sajime,” she said. Evan frowned – he didn’t understand. Nervously he raised his gun a little.

“Who are you?” he asked, fully aware that his Faso was crippled at best. The little girl cocked her
head to the side, pale curls tumbling around her shoulders, studying Evan as if he were a rare animal.
It unnerved him even more.

“I’m Eilo,” the girl said cheerfully after a moment.

Everything clicked into place in Evan’s head. He swore to himself in Amablilis – out of all the ships
he could’ve stolen it had to be the ship that carried the children of the Arossa royalty that were
murdered on Daliat a little over a month ago. The Dark Ishait were crazy about finding this ship but
it seemed to be off the grid for the most part, and now Evan was standing right inside it, facing the
most desired person to kill by the Ishait...a little girl.

“Why is your skin purple, mister?” Eilo asked, clearly disregarding the weapon in Evan’s hands.

“It just is.”

“I like it,” Eilo said, and stepped forward, her grubby hands grabbing at the air, “It’s pretty!”
Evan took a disgusted step backwards, “You have a brother, don’t you? Where’s your brother?”

“Rian?” Eilo blinked, “I’ll take you to him if you’d like,” she stuck a hand out.

Apprehensively, and seeing no other option, Evan put his little finger in her grasp and she pulled him
along the hallways of the ship. His weapon was ready and loaded in his hand and he knew that
somewhere in the next ten minutes he would have to kill this little girl, and her brother too. The
thought made him queasy – it was one thing killing adults and teenagers and another murdering
innocent children. The Calanthe Princess led him into what looked like a kitchen merged with a
dining area, still unaware of the danger she was in.

There was a little boy sitting on one of the benches, dressed in rich crimson. Prince Rian, Evan
thought immediately. The blonde boy looked up when they entered, and his eyes widened in shock
“Eilo get away from him!” he yelled, and as the girl tried to step forward and away from Evan, the Ishait tightened his hand on her wrist and raised his gun. His hands were shaking. Rian got up but Evan pointed the weapon at him,

“Sit!” he commanded in his broken Faso. Wearily the young prince lowered himself back to the bench. Evan didn’t know what to do; they were children...but the Ishait’s religion, Quinae, argued that everything in life must be equal – in the end the life of a child is worth no more than one of a grown person.

Several things happened at once; Eilo started wailing horribly, struggling in Evan’s grip. Then a shadow fell over the Ishait, and before he could turn around his gun was ripped from his grip and pain exploded in his wrist. He gasped and let go of Eilo, who ran to her brother. Evan turned around in shock, cradling his hurt hand to his chest, and came face to face with a tall, furious Wurund, holding his weapon. His stomach dropped to the floor, and the next thing he knew was that the world went black.

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From a distance, Thane saw Hickey fall once more and winced inwardly, his heart aching. The Ishait that had his crew under gunpoint forced her back to her feet and hit her once more. Cruel, cold laughter reached the alley where Thane and Greige were squatting, out of sight. Cylian had tried to defend his best friend, but had quickly been forced to back down with a hit from one of the men.

“We can’t let this happen,” Thane whispered in horror.

“We rushing in won’t help anybody,” Greige’s voice was low, and rumbling. It reminded Thane of earth and soil and trees that grew for a thousand years on Golbahar.

“We need to get closer,” Thane said firmly. He wasn’t a fighter like Greige, or a strategist like Cylian, or even stupidly brave like Vega. He was just a doctor, but he knew that he couldn’t just let his friends get hurt. Thane was angry and cold and frustrated half the time but definitely wasn’t selfish. Greige nodded at his suggestion and, still crouched low, the two men dashed from the alleyway to a group of dustbins, overflowing with rotting garbage. The smell wasn’t as bad as the ones the bodies made in the alleyways. Every time Thane thought of that he saw red and felt his blood churn in his veins in fury. He wanted to throw himself at the Ishait and kill them for what they did to his people, but how many lives of his friends would that cost? Thane didn’t have enough meds and bandages and painkillers to fix them if that happened.

They came as close as they dared, so they could hear the Ishait taunting the crew. Thane’s tale flickered out in his anger and fear, and he had to forcefully keep it down as his eyes danced over the pale, sombre faces of his crew. Hickey was held up by two of the Ishait, her face purple and blue to match her hair, head lolling on her shoulders, slumped. She looked like she was unconscious and Thane was already calculating ways in which he would be able to save her life once they got back on the ship. Cylian had a little cut on his lip, his eyes full of cold fury, trained on the Ishait. Lin and Champagne had similar looks on their faces, but their hands were clasped together, as if they drew strength from one another. Vega, for once, was completely still, hand tucked into the pocket of her trench coat. Uncle Plump had tear tracks down his face, Huambo and the children were nowhere to be seen. Arch, the new soldier, was staring at the ground, and right next to him was Viridian-

And the Omega was looking right at Thane.

The Fox’s heart flipped. Viridian was watching him through his eyelashes The crew’s weapons lay
in a pile, out of their reach. Thane only had a pocket knife on him, and Greige’s axe would be no use against three enemies. Viridian wasn’t looking away though, which meant he must’ve had some kind of plan. Thane didn’t think he had ever been as concentrated on someone as he was on the Charasean in that moment.

Viridian lifted his hand, barely visibly, and fog curled from his palm. On his other hand he held up two fingers. The Dark Ishait were too busy violently beating Sohalia to notice.

“Get ready,” Thane said quietly, “Viridian’s creating two minutes for us.”

“Get weapons, kill the Ishait,” Greige murmured, always the soldier. Thane nodded once, heart pounding in anticipation. The fog crept towards them slowly, went around the trash cans they were behind. Thane shivered as it started to envelop him and Greige, his golden eyes located on the Ishait.

He saw time slow down physically, an outer body experience almost. So far Thane had only witnessed time making while on Hannibal, and then it was hard to see any change since everything inside the ship remained in the same time space. With only Greige and Thane being inside the time bubble everything felt peculiar. The blue skinned Ishait’s fist froze mid-air, preventing it from colliding with Hickey’s face. Everyone became like wax figures, not moving a single nerve. Even the air seemed to still, the little breeze that had swept Sousnan died away, the smell of decaying meat disappeared.

“Two minutes,” Greige reminded Thane.

“Let’s go,” the Fox jumped to his feet, snapping out of his daze. They ran for the group and nobody aimed any weapons at them or tried to kill them, nobody moved a muscle. Thane spared a few seconds to look at Viridian. He was frozen with his hand a little in front of him, eyes closed, but fog continued to seep through his delicate fingers. He really is something else, Thane thought distractedly and then ripped the laser rifle from the she-Ishait’s hands. Greige already disarmed the other two Ishait, and had pulled Hickey from their arms, setting her down next to Cylian.

“What now?” he asked, looking at Thane. The Fox’s hand tightened on the rifle in his hands. They were the good guys, it was time to tie the bad guys up together and leave them stranded on Sousnan, only to re-meet them again soon, and then heroically leave them at the mercy of a third party. Wasn’t that what always happened in the comics that Huambo read? Well, thank Gods that Thane didn’t really consider himself a good guy.

“Kill them,” he seethed and raised the gun.

The echo of gunshots let loose in between seconds passing ripped through the dead city. The sun had stilled its progress down the sky, and the space above Thane’s head remained tinted pink. The Ishait laid dead on the ground, unaware of their death, holes in their stomachs and chests oozing blood where the lasers had ripped through them. In that moment Thane became aware how dangerous Viridian’s power was – it could end lives without people even noticing. It could end a war.

His stomach flipped when time returned to normal and he exhaled a breath he hadn’t realised he was holding. The Crew melted back to life, eyes wide, gasping when they saw the dead Ishait corpses.

“Thane, Greige,” Lin got to her feet and shakily threw her arms around the two men, leaning against them as if her body couldn’t support her, assaulting Thane’s nose with the smell of strawberries and engine oil, “Gods, thank you.”

“Viridian did it,” Greige said, and Thane would’ve glared at him if he could. Lin pulled back,
“Thank you Sasha-,” she started and stopped. Thane looked over her shoulder and his stomach clenched.

Viridian was slumped against Arch, eyes closed, unconscious.

“What happened?” Thane demanded.

“It’s the time making,” Arch shakily stood up and hoisted Viridian up into his arms as if the Omega weighed nothing, “it drains him.”

Thane ran a hand down his face. The adrenaline was evaporating from him as fast as the fog from the air. Cylian mirrored Arch and took Hickey into his arms. He looked more exhausted than usual.

“Get these two to the medical bay,” Thane said, knowing he had a long twenty four hours ahead of him.

“Captain?” Champagne had her arm wrapped around Uncle Plump’s waist, the two Vlassain leaning against each other heavily, mourning the loss of their people. Thane wished for that comfort, but knew he had willingly pushed people away. He couldn’t go and embrace his species now, but he could fight to save a Charasean and an Ishait, “What are the orders?”

“In how much time can you fix the hydro pump?” Cylian asked.

“An hour,” Vega said, her mouth in a tight line, frown between her thin brows. Cylian nodded as if at least this was good news,

“Work fast. Everyone else get some rest, we depart in an hour. Arch and Greige, are you able to stand guard?”

“Of course,” Arch said, and Thane didn’t know why but the way he cradled Viridian to his chest irked him.

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Twenty minutes later Thane was back in the medical bay, with Viridian and Hickey stretched out on two of the three available beds. The guards were outside, the girls were fixing the ship and Cylian was dealing with the newly arisen problem; the Ishait prisoner. He didn’t want to kill him without knowing his aims, if he was Light or Dark, which was impossible with him unconscious, and also hoped that Sohalia would decide his fate when she woke up.

So far Thane had managed to stabilise her. He had bandaged her bruised and bloodied face with bandages, got her out of her uncomfortable clothes and into a soft night-gown, plugged in a drip with nutrients mixed with painkillers inside it. She looked like massacred with her face all in gauze but Thane was alright with that as long as she lived.

Viridian on the other hand was out like a light. His blood pressure, temperature and heart were all normal, and all the scans Thane ran on him came out showing nothing. He was just drained. He looked awfully small and fragile in that hospital bed, practically swimming in one of his ugly sweaters. Thane found himself wondering what he looked like underneath it, and hated himself for these thoughts.

He stayed in the infirmary until the ship started back up, watching the two sleep. But mostly he was just watching Viridian, and his evenly rising chest.

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“Cyllian? Gods, what happened?”

“You’re job is to warn me,” Cyllian seethed, barely containing his anger.

He was back in the Navigation cabin, the Galaxy spread in front of him, Sousnan and all its horrors fast disappearing behind them. He wasn’t truly mad with Ayvo, more like with the GTSC as a whole.

“The navigation said you landed on Sousnan but you wouldn’t answer and of our signals,” Ayvo said, and Cyllian could hear the anxiety in his voice.

“The Dark Ishait took over Sousnan,” the Captain said dully, “They murdered all the Vlassain there, it’s a bloodbath.”

“Gods, no,” Ayvo whispered in horror, “Gods...Cyllian, we didn’t know. The GTSC didn’t know...”

“Well now you do.”

“Is anyone hurt?” Ayvo demanded, “Are...are you?”

“No,” Cyllian subconsciously ran his finger over the cut on his lip. It stung, “I’m fine. I...,” he paused, and his voice softened, “I almost lost Hickey today.”

“Cyllian I...I don’t know what to say. The GTSC want a report but I...I need to talk to your properly, without them recording this. I’m logging off.”

“Alright,” Cyllian said miserably, because these days only Ayvo’s voice was a constant, and hearing it gave him a weird sense of comfort. He wistfully looked at Hickey’s empty chair, and then at the galaxy stretched in front of him. What a mess.

“You will be okay, Cyllian,” Achilles murmured, swaying in his pot, “There is always a bit of darkness before a burst of light.”

“Don’t get philosophical, Akkie,” Cyllian sighed.

“What I am trying to say is that nothing ends in darkness,” the cactus murmured, voice soothing, “the Vlassain on Sousnan are in a better, lighter place.”

“Cyllian you have a signal call coming through,” Hothead informed him. Cyllian rubbed his eyes – he didn’t have the strength to write a report right now.

“From who?”

“Unknown, it’s private. I’m going to assume it’s Ayvo.”

“Alright, I accept it.”

Seconds later the comfort of Ayvo’s voice returned, “This is my private number. I’m in the toilet calling you, if I get caught I’m screwed,” he laughed lightly. After a day filled with horrors Cyllian needed that. He wanted to see the smile that came with that laugh.

“Don’t get caught then.”

Chapter End Notes
As requested as thefoxcycle here is a little description of the main lads and their species 'cause I get that it can be a lil confusing.

Cylian is a Shif (so just human), he's 6'0, muscular with auburn hair, dark brown eyes and is forever not shaved.

Arch is also Shif, taller (6'2) and bigger than Cylian but not by much with dark brown hair and eyes and tanned skin.

Viridian is a Charasean Omega (everyone has white skin and elf ears), he has wavy black hair that just touches his shoulders, almond shaped blue eyes, moles doting his face and body. He's short at 5'6 and thin.

Thane is Vlassain (the half human half animal people), and he has characteristics of a fox, so an upturned nose and a tail that comes out when he's anxious. He has curly ginger hair, creamy skin and golden eyes. He's 5'11 and lightly muscled.

Evan is Ishait (so the whites of his eyes are black) has light purple skin, his iris is light green. He has dark purple, wavy hair, has a small scar across his nose and, like most Ishait, doesn't have a belly button or nipples. He's 5'10 and lightly muscled.

Hope this helps x
Shal 6th Jeo 1144EE (2 Days Later)

Hannibal.

Arch didn’t know Hannibal had a prisoner cell until it was his turn to look after the Ishait that had broken into the ship. Two days had passed since the crew had left Sousnan and the questions regarding the stranger onboard continued to pile up – Why did you try to kill the heirs to Arossa? – Who are you? – What were the Dark Ishait doing on Sousnan? – What is the Dark Ishait next move? - though there were no answers as the man remained unconscious. Hickey and Viridian were recovering fast, and the Omega promised to start making time again as soon as he got out of the medical bay.

Arch was worried; he didn’t want Sasha to tire himself out and pass out again. But right now he had bigger problems. Hothead informed him he was on prisoner duty so now the Soldier found himself in the tail of the ship, in a big, airy and dark engine room. It was an unpleasant place, but Champagne and Lin sitting in the corner, pouring over some mechanical thing with plenty of springs and wires, arguing, added some light to the otherwise gloomy place.

There was a box-like room in the corner, where Greige stood guard by the door. He inclined his head when he saw Arch approaching, something mechanical about the cyborg’s movements.

“Is he still asleep?” Arch asked in a hushed voice, coming closer.

“Yes,” Greige confirmed, “Thane came by earlier. Apparently there’s no reason for him to be unconscious and he should wake soon.”

Arch clasped the Ubloit’s arm as they switched places. The events on Sousnan had brought the crew closer together, and the Soldier started to really feel like he was finally part of the ship. That’s why as
he went through the door to the prison section of the engine room he was full of an unfamiliar anger. This creature had threatened the people on this ship, Viridian and, most importantly, the children. Arch would never forgive him for that, though he doubted the Ishait would want his forgiveness.

Arch found himself in a cramped, bleached room. There was a hard wooden chair leaning one wall, with belts in case of a landing attached to the walls on either side of it. One of the corners was cut off by iron bars, creating a miniature square cage. Arch heard the thrum of electricity and knew the black bars were charged with electricity; anybody who touched them would get shocked, an extra means of preventing the prisoner from escaping.

It was silent in the room, until in the engine room Lin and Champagne started playing some rock music, and its thudding came through the walls, muffled but bringing an aspect of life into the otherwise dead, bleak room. Arch had a gun on him as he approached the cell, finger on the trigger, curious as to who exactly tried to murder his Prince and Princess. He came as close as he dared and peered between the bars, the electricity making his hair stand on end.

The person lying on the ground was not who Arch expected, and he felt his anger seep out of his body, replaced by confusion and surprise. The man was more a boy really, with smooth, lilac skin and wavy purple hair. He was quite muscular, though not as much as Arch, his eyes closed and mouth parted as he breathed slowly. Arch had seen plenty Ishait in his life, but never a pretty Ishait.

Hickey was...exotic, in the best sense, with half her head shaved and her white tattoos, the Ishait on Sousnan had been vulgar and peculiar, borderline ugly. But this stranger, he was something completely else. Arch felt himself mesmerised as he looked at the male’s chest rose and fell, almost hypnotizing, with each breath. He looked harmless on the floor and it was hard to imagine he had threatened to murder innocent children.

*Murder innocent children.*

Arch hurriedly ripped his gaze away, irritated that he found the Ishait attractive, and anxiously glanced at the chair in the corner before collapsing into it heavily. It was hard and uncomfortable and Arch watched the cage, tense. He would’ve preferred to be with the kids and Sasha, but he knew Greige had to regenerate and rest, after all part of him was still human. After a few slow minutes of nothing happening Arch felt his muscles start to relax. The Ishait had been passed out for two days, there was no reason why he'd wake up now, on Arch’s watch.

The Soldier wrapped his arms around himself and leaned back in his chair, watching the body in the cage. The boy’s hand and wrist was bandaged, and there was a patch on his neck, delivering his unconscious body the nutrients it needed. Arch amused himself by counting the Ishait’s ebony eyelashes, and his blinking slowed down, his breathing grew deeper...

*He dreamt of a golden galaxy, shimmering in front of him like the spiralling towers of the palace on Arossa. He was weightless, body-less, floating among the stars as if he were a part of them. The concept of time did not exist.*

Arch jolted awake, feeling like he had been asleep for seconds, because someone was watching him. He had slumped in his chair during his rest and now sat up abruptly, narrowing his eyes at the offending brightness of the room. His heart jumped in his chest in a mixture of fear and shock when he saw the Ishait prisoner was awake and standing up, eyes trained on the Shif.

Automatically Arch stood up and reached for his weapon, even though there were a dozen high velocity bars between him and the other boy. Now the soldier could get a real good look at the creature who tried to murder the two children he was tasked with protecting.
Overall he didn’t look like a killer; his lips were too plump, his nose too button-like, his hair too long. But his eyes...his eyes were full of hate that made Arch shudder. The sclera’s were black, like all Ishait, and his irises were a pale green colour. They were staring at Arch and he was glad the boy didn’t have an extra pair of arms like some of his species did. The creature was standing dangerously close to the bars, like he wasn’t afraid of death. Arch didn’t know what to do – he and the boy were just staring at each other, silent. Should he ask questions? Should he shoot him? His hands twitched on his weapons as a thousand possibilities zoomed through his head.

Arch eventually couldn’t stand the overbearing silence, and the Ishait’s intense gaze on him. He opened his mouth to say something but the creature was faster as he hissed something in furious Amablilis.

“*Kosh sha ashoy,*” his lips curled back into a snarl, “*Hid haine ashitarasheau.*”

Arch’s heart started pounding and he raised his gun, pointing it at the Ishait even though all he was doing was talking. The boy continued to speak, fast and angry and probably spiteful though Arch couldn’t understand a word.

“Hothead, what is he saying?” he asked. There was no response. The Ishait laughed and Arch tightened his hands on his weapon. He hated this, he felt like he was weirdly vulnerable to the other creature even though he had the upper hand and could probably easily beat him if the bars between them ever disappeared, “Shut up,” Arch barked, afraid he was showing his weakness. The tone of the Ishait’s words changed, so now it seemed like he was taunting the Soldier, “I said shut up,” Arch strode up right to the bars in a surge of anger and adrenaline, and pointed the mouth of his gun at the Ishait’s forehead. The boy didn’t even flinch, but he stopped talking, his mouth stretching into a smirk. Arch wanted to hit him so, so badly, “Your body should be rotting in the vacuum for trying to kill the children,” he hissed.

The Ishait cocked his head to the side, “Would killing *you* be more suitable?” he asked, voice heavily accented. Arch blinked in surprise, not knowing the boy knew Faso.

“How can you live with yourself?” he demanded when his brain got over his shock and processed the creatures words. Arch’s weapon was still pointed at him.

“I follow orders,” the Ishait said simply, “Do you?”

“My orders were to protect those children,” he seethed, “I should kill you for jeopardising my mission.”

“And I should kill everyone on this ship for jeopardising mine,” the Ishait replied, clumsily copying Arch’s words. The Soldier felt his blood boil – he had never been a truly violent person but right now he wanted to rip the smirk off the Ishait’s face, see his teeth tumble to the ground, break that little nose of his.

The door to the room opened with a soft hiss and both the men’s heads snapped to it. Hickey walked in, carrying a plate full of Huambo’s delicious food, and a stack of papers. She stopped in her tracks, eyes wide when she saw the other Ishait up and alert.

“He’s awake,” she said in surprise.

“Unfortunately,” Arch grumbled, lowering his weapon and feeling stupid for letting the prisoner provoke him. The smile had melted from the he-Ishait’s face.

“Traitor,” he hissed spitefully. Hickey paid him no mind,
“I’ll tell Cylian he’s up. You probably noticed but this is the only room we haven’t wired Hothead to. We never had much use for it before,” the girl came over and kissed Arch’s cheek affectionately, to show her support. He had grown used to her easy physical touches. She passed him the plate, which smelled amazing. Arch felt satisfaction when he felt the he-Ishait’s eyes snap to the food with longing, “You may wanna know but Sasha is back on his feet and creating time again.”

Arch sat down in the chair and started eating the food, “That’s good. Make sure he doesn’t overwork himself again.”

“I’ll kill him soon, just like I will kill all of you, so it will not matter,” the he-Ishait snarled.

Hickey rolled her eyes, “His name is Evander Amos,” she said, holding up the stack of papers in her hand. Arch glanced from his food to the stack and then to the he-Ishait – Evander – before he looked back to his food, “The GTSC sent us all his files, took them a while but here they are.”

“So what did he do then?” Arch asked, glaring at Evander. The Ishait had moved to the back of his cell, arms crossed over his chest. He wasn’t smiling anymore, and didn’t look like he thought all of this was a joke.

“Born and raised on Calliban, doesn’t specify but at a very young age he got involved with illegal weapon smuggling to the West of Golbahar. In 1125 he was caught and sentenced to hard labour on Idra for fifty years.”

“Impressive,” Arch said sarcastically and Evander’s glare intensified. It seemed he hated people revealing his past, and the Soldier liked seeing his discomfort.

“There’s more,” Hickey filtered through the pages, “he was liberated by the Wurund and worked aboard a mixed ship, The Nomand, for an unspecified amount of time as a weapon maker. Then he switched to the Ishait Steel Aurora who smuggled weapons, once more,” she made a face, “he helped capture Sousnan, and that’s where he came on board.”

“Stars,” Arch looked at Evander in disgust, “I bet you’re proud,” he said, and Evander’s eyes narrowed. Suddenly Arch couldn’t stand looking at him, remembering how many people he most likely killed. He turned to Hickey, “Anything else happening?”

“Um, Cylian went back to your cabin,” Hickey sounded almost apologetic, “He said that you can take shifts sleeping in there, since you’re down here for now.”

Arch bit into a potato with a sigh, “That’s probably for the best.”

Evander hissed something in Ishait and Hickey narrowed her eyes at him, “He needs physical contact. If he doesn’t get it he will be weak and vulnerable, and then he’ll talk and tell us exactly what the Ishait’s plans are for Sousnan.”

“I will tell you nothing. I’d rather die that touch any of you,” Evander spat.

“That won’t take long then,” Arch smiled coldly, “your life isn’t useful to us.”

He thought he saw uncertainty flicker in Evan’s eyes, but he might’ve imagined it.

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It felt good to be back in his cabin, Cylian decided. As attached as he was getting to the navigation room, it had started to feel a little claustrophobic. It’s not that Cylian had anything against sharing a room with Arch specifically, it was just that he didn’t know the other man, and he was already
generally bad with people – he didn’t need anyone invading his privacy.

Laying alone in his bed, a chip in his ear, Ayvo’s melodic voice lulling him into a half-sleep state, Cylian realised how uncomfortable living in the navigation room had been.

“I still can’t believe your mother was arrested for illegal cloning,” Cylian was facing the wall, a smile on his face that he could never get rid of when speaking to Ayvo. He felt better now that he knew his and the Lighthouse’s conversations were private.

“I know, it makes for a great conversation starter. Sometimes I wish I could’ve known her, y’know. A cloning mother, how insane is that?”

“Yeah, insane,” Cylian hummed in agreement. If he closed his eyes he could almost pretend that Ayvo was lying next to him, just talking. He didn’t like to do it though, simply because he had no idea who Ayvo really was, and the idea of meeting him was a little unnerving. But to an extent it felt like Cylian had known him forever, maybe because he was trapped in a little ‘forever’ time bubble on the ship. He didn’t think he’d ever get used to Time Making.

“So...what’s been happening onboard? How’s the new prisoner?”

Cylian sighed, “He’s been awake for ages now, well to us he has, but he won’t say anything. Arch is determined to get something out of him – like how did the Ishait take over Sousnan without anyone realising.”

“I’m sure he’ll break. Just don’t...hurt him too badly, alright?”

“He tried to kill Eilo and Rian,” Cylian frowned. He heard the engine thrumming in the background, and classical music creeping in from Uncle Plump’s bedroom.

“I know. I just...I hate violence so badly.”

“Are you sure you’re not Vlassain?” Cylian joked, “You little pacifist. Is that why you’re not in the army?”

Ayvo went surprisingly quiet for a moment, “Yes. Yes, I suppose that’s why.”

“You never talk about yourself,” Cylian murmured, a little frustrated, “I’m really not very interesting.” Ayvo laughed, a sound that made Cylian’s chest warm. He had to admit, it was different talking with Ayvo in a control room where the GTSC recorded everything and Akkie and Hothead could hear their every word, as opposed to here, in the dark comfort of his bedroom, where it felt weirdly intimate.

“You are interesting,” Cylian argued. Usually he wasn’t a defender of humanity, but with Ayvo he felt weirdly protective, and set in his views that the Lighthouse was quite easily the most intriguing creature Cylian ever had the pleasure to speak to, “At least tell me how old you are.”

“Fine, I suppose a little detail like that won’t completely destroy the mystery I attempt to shroud myself in,” Ayvo joked and Cylian chuckled, “I’m twenty four.”

“No way,” Cylian’s eyes widened, “You’re my age?”

“Is that so surprising?”

“Well, yes, you sound younger,” Cylian couldn’t help but feel better that he wasn’t talking to anyone
underage, stars know why, “Tell me more about yourself.”

“Why are you so curious?” Cylian could almost see Ayvo’s smile from the way he talked.

“I guess I want to unveil the mystery. Describe your place to me, if you don’t want to describe yourself.”

“Yes, I can do that. Hmmm...let’s see. Next to my head there’s a massive window and you can see the river stretching out. I live right by the canal, and on the other side there is a little park with some trees and then Göza just stretches out, all lights and tall buildings. It’s kind of really beautiful.”

“I’m sure it is,” Cylian mused, thinking of Ayvo and not the view. He decided that someone with a voice like the Lighthouse would never be considered ugly to Cylian, no matter what he looked like physically, “Tell me more.”

“Am I putting you to sleep?”

“I could do with that. Keep talking.”

“If I didn’t know better I’d say you liked my voice,” Ayvo teased, and before Cylian could argue he continued speaking, “I’m sitting in my bed. It’s next to the window, and sometimes it gets cold, especially in the winter. But now there’s a nice breeze coming in.”

“What’s your bed like?” Cylian asked, before realising what a weird question that was. Ayvo clearly didn’t pick up on that though.

“Really comfy. I have so many pillows and covers, dunno why because I get so stupidly warm at night, I have to sleep just in my underwear basically,” he laughed.

A shot of warmth suddenly went through Cylian and the auburn haired man bit his lip. No, no, no, he thought desperately as he felt his nether regions stirring. Cylian wasn’t really a sexual person – sure he had a few encounters with women back on Earth, and a clumsy, incredibly awkward drunk intercourse with another man, but sex was never really his thing. He didn’t get aroused easily, which is why he didn’t understand why he was getting hard over Ayvo telling him what he slept in..or what he didn’t sleep in, more like. The boy continued talking though Cylian could barely hear him now. He closed his eyes to try and will his erection away but then he started imagining that Ayvo was lying right next to him again...

“Cylian?” Ayvo asked, since the Captain hadn’t spoken in a while. The way the Lighthouse said his name made Cylian shiver, and he hated himself for it. Subconsciously his hand dipped into the waistband of his underwear. He bit his lip again.

“Yeah?”

“Have you been listening?”

“Yeah, sorry. Keep going.”

“If you’re tired I can-“

“No!” Cylian said, too fast, “No,” he repeated, more softly, “Sorry. I just spaced out.”

“That’s funny, ‘cause you’re in space,” Ayvo giggled. At this point he could be talking about murdering innocent chickens and Cylian would still be turned on. His fingers brushed against his hard member and before he could even weigh the pros and cons to doing this to Ayvo’s voice, he
was already stroking himself.

“I know you didn’t really spend that much time on Earth, but here other creatures aren’t really that common. I remember the first time I saw a Wurund – I screamed. They were just so big and tall and muscular…”

Cylian bit the pillow so he didn’t make a weird sound that would freak Ayvo out. He zoned out and stopped listening to what Ayvo was saying, concentrating just on his voice instead. His mind started to wander as Cylian stroked himself, his engorged member throbbing in his palm. He thought about covering Ayvo’s mouth with his and stopping the continuous stream of words pouring from his mouth. He imagined Ayvo whispering things in his ear with that sweet voice, things that weren’t about his childhood, or his bedroom or what the sky looked like, but much filthier. He imagined that steady, cheerful voice becoming more breathy, high-pitched and desperate, little moans and cries that would spill from his mouth if only Cylian-

The man felt something in his stomach tense and suddenly he was coming embarrassingly fast all over his hand and sheets, face buried in his pillow, trying to not make a sound as Ayvo continued talking. Waves of pleasure rocked the Captain’s body until he slumped against his bed, exhausted.

He immediately felt horribly guilty, “Hey,” he interrupted Ayvo mid-word, head spinning, “I’m really tired. I think I’m going to go to sleep.”

“Oh,” Ayvo sounded disappointed, “Alright. I guess I’ll speak to you tomorrow...or in four days, in your timeline.”

“Yeah, I guess,” Cylian murmured, and went offline, faster than he probably should’ve.

Tuhi 8th Jeo 1144EE (2 days later)

Hannibal.

To Viridian it was refreshing to go over a month without a heat, at least it felt like longer than a month thanks to his Time Making. But, of course, all good things come to an end, he learnt that when the peaceful journey to Arossa was interrupted by their horrific landing on Sousnan.

And of course, Sasha’s heat was bound to come sooner or later. When he woke up on Tuhi, four days after leaving Golbahar’s moon, he knew the day was here. His stomach was all in knots and there was a thin layer of sweat over his body. Thankfully his heat had only started so it wasn’t too bad, though more than once he had already woken up back on Woorud well in the midst of his monthly curse, needy and in pain. A little anxious Sasha hurriedly took his suppressants and then spent a lot of time in a cold shower.

His heat became a dull thing in the back of his brain. He felt a little sluggish because of the medication, and really cold so he spent most of his day in bed, which was a blessing since he could rest while making time. He felt agitated and annoyed, but most of the symptoms of the heat had disappeared. However since Ayvo was confined to his bed on Thane’s floor for most of the ‘day’ the Omega in him had time to fantasise about the men onboard Hannibal, something Ayvo would never do in normal circumstances.

The Omega automatically searched for a big, strong Alpha to dominate him. Obviously his first instincts made him think of Huambo, Uncle Plump and Greige since they were the biggest. Normally Sasha would never look at them that way but his heat, even suppressed, made him want sex...badly. He quickly rejected the first two, however, because of their age as the Omega in him told him it would be harder to reproduce with them (Sasha shuddered at the thought of having children).
Huambo was also pushed aside because Sasha didn’t even know if Ubloits could reproduce.

That left the younger members of the crew for Viridian to daydream about as he laid curled under his blankets. He got an erection every few hours but if he left it alone it usually went down by itself, and it wasn’t painful, like it would be without suppressants. He was also as dry as Saarashik, which was a good thing. His mind seemed to wander to Arch and Thane specifically, Stars know why.

Of course Arch was easily explained; tall, muscular and handsome, he was the one who made Sasha feel most welcome on Hannibal. Viridian might’ve developed some feelings for him, nothing too deep just yet, and the way he handled Eilo and Rian made the boy think he’d be a great father. He couldn’t help but hope that maybe, just maybe, Arch was his mate. He could imagine their life; moving to Arossa, where Sasha would be safe from the Alpha’s on Tussa, starting a family together.

Thane was a different story. Although shorter and slighter than Arch he was still considerably bigger than Sasha. He was cold and unkind to the Omega though, avoiding him most of the time and being rude when they were forced to speak. But he had a roughness around the edges that made Viridian shiver under his blankets. He kept thinking of the Fox pining him down and having his way with him...Sasha hoped these thoughts were only fuelled by his heat and that he wasn’t actually attracted to Thane, who was a Grade A asshole. Even when Sasha was being treated in the medical bay Thane acted like he was little more than a piece of furniture and was a lot more attentive with Sohalia.

Things got even harder when Thane came to their cabin for rest. As always, he ignored Viridian as he got into bed. His smell aroused Viridian; even so far up in space he smelled like a fragrant forest. Sasha had trouble falling asleep when he thought about how close the other man was to him, how easy it would be to climb into his bed and nestle in his arms...but Thane would never allow that, he’d only push Viridian away.

“I can smell your heat,” the Fox barked, surprising Sasha and causing his heart to pound, “even through your suppressants. It reeks.”

That was painful. Viridian curled in on himself.

“Sorry.”
Rae 28th Jeo 1144EE (20 days later)

_Hannibal._

There was water dripping somewhere far, far away, its echo reaching Evander. Or maybe he was just imagining it – he wouldn’t be surprised. After days upon days of being stuck in this tiny room, taken next door twice a day to relieve himself, the man was beginning to feel like he was half dead already. Water seemed to haunt him, *drip, drip, drip,* like blood, constant, slowly driving him insane.

In the galaxy there are a few things that have no language; the sound of engines as a ship takes off from a planet, kicking up dust or discharging air as it lifts to one more adventure. The sound of a mother finding out that her child had perished in war, a wordless cry of heartbreak. The sound of blood dripping from bodies as they are piled up in dirty alleyways-

Evan’s eyes snapped open as he desperately attempted to chase away the image of all the dead Vlassain that he had left on Sousnan. _You did not kill them,_ he told himself firmly, though with each agonisingly slow hour on this ship he was starting to believe it less and less.

They had told him only twenty days have passed since his capture and yet it had felt like an eternity. There was a Time Maker onboard, Evan knew, and his talent was making the Ishait’s imprisonment a never-ending torture. White walls, white floors, the sound of water dripping. It wasn’t meant to be like this; Evan was supposed to find an honourable Ishait wife and have two children with her, live a life that agreed with Quinae and the idea of balance that his species believed in. He wasn’t meant to slowly be dying on this cursed ship, growing weaker and weaker as he was offered no physical touch, no comfort.

He hated his guards, and yet he had come to yearn for the presence of one of them. The cyborg man with his hair streaked with grey was silent, unmoving, like a rock. Earlier in his imprisonment Evan had screamed at him, called him a half-man and inhuman and all the other cruel things he could think of. And the Ubloit never budged, never even flinched. The other one – Arch, they called him – he provided Evan with a kind of peace. He was easy to read, his emotions always displayed on his face; he was angry, bitter, tired. And he was human, responding to Evan’s taunting beautifully. And yet even he didn’t give Evan the one thing he desired; to hold someone’s hand, to feel warm skin
beneath his fingertips. He wanted to touch and to be touched, to have the comfort of someone holding him.

He wasn’t offered as much.

“Calliban won’t take you, you know,” Arch told him one of the days that he was guarding him. Evan tiredly turned his head to face the soldier, “The Government got into contact with Queen Chivhu but she won’t ransom or negotiate for your release.”

“Why would she?” Evan’s cracked, dry lips stretched into a bitter smile, “She knows not who I am, and she has no use for me. I am but a smuggler.”

“And that’s all you ever will be. You’ll be forgotten soon enough.”

Evan laughed softly under his breath, “You Shifs with your threats. I do not care about being remembered, I want no glory. We are born from Quinae and in the end we return to her as stars, and we all burn bright. Do stars compete for who shines brighter?” he looked at the soldier who gave him a bemused look, “No. They do not. Only Shifs do.”

“All species do. That’s why the Wurund invaded Golbahar, because they wanted to dominate the Vlassain,” Arch snapped. Evan shook his head – riling the guard up was his last pleasure in life, even if it made energy seep out of him faster.

“The Wurund invaded for oil and coal and electricity and resources. They do not care for the Vlassain, they do not try and overshadow the Vlassain. They do not pick up their faces and wear them as their own. They seek only to preserve.”

“What about the Charasean Alphas then?” Arch demanded, bringing his chair closer to Evan’s electrical cage, “They want to dominate the Omegas.”

Evander looked at him for a moment, tired. His vision was growing blurry around the edges, but Arch’s face was clear. He was irritated but intrigued at once, his dark brown eyes staring at Evan intently. His hands were folded in his lap loosely; big, tanned, scarred and calloused from his training as a soldier. Evan yearned to touch those hands, to hold them for just a moment and remember what it’s like not to be completely alone.

“I stand corrected,” he said faintly, “Shifs and Charaseans are plagued by pride, and pride will kill them one day.”

“If you’re so smart,” Arch said, “then tell me, oh powerful one, what will kill all the other six species in our galaxy.”

“You try to treat me like a child, but you know I’m right. We all have flaws; the paranoia of the Calanthe will lead to their destruction. The murder of the Arossa delegation was their own fault – they walked into a trap without realising it, they sat at the table of the enemy and didn’t notice the blades hidden beneath it. They had been alone too long, they had lived among their own and trusted their own.”

“They were murdered in cold blood,” the violent tension in Arch’s jaw told Evan that he had struck a nerve, “And left behind two orphans. Don’t tell me it was because of paranoia.”

“There it goes again, your pride,” Evan’s eyes narrowed. He could feel blood slowing in his veins; they could feed him and give him water and look after his wrist but without contact he would wither and die like a plant. “You’re blinded by your protection of what is dead. Face it; the delegation made a mistake.”
“The Ishait committed treason,” Arch hissed.

“Did they?” Evander asked, “they never promised peace. They promised a negotiation. Wurund don’t negotiate, and the Ishait negotiate with steel and bullets.”

“Fine – enlighten me,” Arch growled, “What will kill the Ishait?”

“Nothing,” Evan closed his eyes, “We shall prevail long after you are dead.”

Arch snorted, “Now who’s prideful?” he asked, “You’re so full of it, Amos. You know what will kill the Ishait? Themselves. You and your stupid rules of marrying only your species. You’re an idiot if you think that after a time your kind won’t die out. How did the Vlassain and the Charasean come about? By breeding with other species. Your own hate will kill all of you.”

Evan opened his eyes and looked at the Shif, saw his anger. He was so tired that he himself could feel little more than complete and destructive misery, “We are stars in the sky. We will live forever.”

“Stars damn you,” Arch gritted out, “I hope you die a painful, horrible death for what you did.”

Evan knew the Shif didn’t mean it. As little as the Ishait knew about him he could see that deep down Arch was a good man, a good, honest, kind man. He hadn’t had innocent blood on his hands, his one duty in life was to provide and protect. He didn’t wish death upon anyone, even Evan, as much as he might pretend that he did, and for that the Ishait admired him. He himself wished death on this whole ship, and everyone on board. Even if that included himself.

Arch went to his little chair, crossed his arms over his chest and glared at Evan, as if he wanted to kill him with his eyes. At this point the Ishait couldn’t have cared less. He had never thought he’d be okay with slowly shrivelling up into nothing. Back when he was on Idra all those years ago, working in the desert as a prisoner for smuggling, he had been full of fury and will to live. He had wanted to murder his guards, to escape, he thought about ripping them to shreds each time he fell asleep on the cold ground and woke up at the brink of dawn. And now? Now he was simply tired. As the days dragged on and he sat in his cell he wondered what the point of fighting for life was; his planet was under siege, his Queen didn’t care about him, his grandmother, if she was even still alive, was planets away. If he were to escape he’d most likely return to smuggling – that was the only thing he was good for. Speaking with Arch helped him find some kind of unconventional peace; if he were to die he’d be among the stars and Quinae would welcome her into her Galactical arms. Maybe that was for the best.

Tiredly, Evan looked across the room at the guard. They stared at each other for a moment before the Shif looked away, unable to bear Evan’s gaze. There was a terrible kind of life in him that was in Evan years ago – he might’ve looked younger than Arch but he was much older. The Soldier was still ready to fight for anyone and anything that made passion and love bloom inside him. Nothing did that for Evan anymore, in the whole Galaxy he had nothing left fighting for.

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“...and then I-,” Ayvo was speaking and suddenly broke off. Cylian, who had been dopily staring at the space outside broke out of being lost in the man’s voice, blinked.

“What?”

“Uh...is Viridian creating time?”

“No,” Cylian frowned, “He’s resting. Why? What’s wrong?”
“There’s a ship approaching you,” Ayvo sounded a little nervous, “I can’t tell what kind, it’s smaller than Hannibal though.”

Akkie, who had been swaying in his little pot, suddenly went stiff, “Charasean crew,” he piped up.

“What kind?” Cylian asked anxiously.

“Cylian you need to avoid it,” Ayvo said, his tone matching the Captain’s.

“Three Omegas and a Beta,” Achilles informed Cylian. The Captain relaxed a little.

“Maybe they’re just passing by.”

“They’re too close,” Ayvo said concerned, “Cylian get out of there, wake Viridian up—“

“The UES Luna is trying to make contact,” Hothead informed Cylian, cutting off Ayvo. There were so many voices in the cabin that the Captain found it hard to concentrate on any of them. He could see a tiny pinprick miles away; the ship, heading for them.

“Hottie, get Hickey in here,” Cylian commanded, and took Hannibal off autopilot, “Inform Greige and Arch that there is a ship trying to make contact and to stay alert and have their weapons on them.”

“Roger that,” Hothead affirmed.

“Lian, the UES Luna is a government ship,” Ayvo said, a little more relaxed.

“Oh,” Cylian frowned, “What do they want?”

“Uh, not specified. They mostly check ships for any Wurund or Dark Ishait runaways or cargo and deal with them.”

“Shit, we have Amos onboard,” Cylian swore.

“Cylian, the UES Luna is trying to make contact,” Hothead said impatiently.

“Yes, yes,” Cylian waved the AI off as if he were a real person, “Put them on.”

There was a quiet click and then a female voice rang through the Navigation Cabin, “This is Annaba Bon, the Captain of UES Luna tasked with catching rouge Wurund and Dark Ishait. State your ship and purpose in this space.”

Cylian flicked on the ‘online’ button, ducking under the consoles to look for his shoes, having a bad feeling he’d have to go out and meet these Charaseans.

“This is Cylian Iliev, Captain of Hannibal, a warship on a mission to Arossa.”

“State your mission details.”

“Confidential,” Cylian said.

“I am asking permission to search your ship,” Annaba Bonn’s voice was cold and strictly professional, with no hint of emotion in it.

“Yes. Of course.”
Cylian shoved on his shoes and when he popped back up he saw a small, slick black ship approaching Hannibal at a rapid pace, its crimson lights blazing.

“Cylian?” Achilles piped up.

“Yes?” Cylian glanced at the cactus.

“You didn’t tell them about Evander Amos.”


Just then Hickey walked into the Navigation Cabin, eating a pot of extra spicy carashim peppers. Her normally pink skin was still mottled with a few fading purple bruises, and cuts littered her cheeks, though she didn’t seem to mind, just glad to be out of the infirmary, “You called?” she asked, her purple and blue hair pulled back in a low bun.

“There’s a Charasean ship docking in a little bit, they wanna search the ship,” Cylian told her, “Can you get everyone down in the main corridor?”

Only minutes later Cylian’s whole, anxious crew was gathered in said corridor. Lin was in her nightshirt, yawning and rubbing her eyes, having just woken from a nap. Next to her Champagne was trying, and failing, to rub engine oil off of her purple overalls, her whole face stained with soot, matching the black face marks around her eyes. Huambo was staying in the back, vague unease hanging about his massive shoulders. He had both Rian and Eilo by the hands – the boy looked nervous and worried, his pale eyebrows drawn in a frown, but his sister was blissfully oblivious as always, bouncing on her heels. Sasha was standing right next to Arch, both of them whispering to each other softly, while Thane was on the other side of the group, leaning on the wall, looking annoyed and unimpressed...as always. Uncle Plump was apprehensively standing by Vega, who seemed unbothered as she smeared red lipstick over her wrinkly lips. Greige came up to Cylian.

“What are the orders?” he asked, voice low.

“Stand down for now,” the Captain said firmly, “They come in peace, and want to search the ship. We let them.”

Greige nodded once.

“They’re at the door,” Hothead informed everyone.

“Open up,” Cylian commanded and everyone shifted into a more defensive stance. After Sousnan nobody was eager to let more strangers onboard. There was a hiss of the outer door opening and four figures in orange gravity suits stepped into the air-lock. As the first door closed and the second opened, the Crew took a nervous step back. Cylian stood his ground.

The figure at the head of the escapade reached up and took the orange globe that served as a helmet off their head, and the rest of the crew followed suit. They were all white as paper with pointed ears, like Viridian and Vega. The woman at the head had a red cloth tied around her short, aquamarine hair and a monocle over one brown eye.

“Captain Cylian?” she asked in her practiced, emotionless voice.

Cylian nodded, “Captain Annaba Bonn?”
The Charasean surprised Cylian by holding her hand out and shaking his in a standard Shif greeting. It made him relax a little, to see that she respected him enough to acknowledge his culture. Behind her were two more women, one very young, probably around Champagne’s age, with fiery red braids, and the other with dark pink curls and a material mask over the lower half of her face, symbolising that she was mourning the death of her mate. A man stood behind them – he had very narrow eyes and grey hair, though he did not look old enough for it.

“May we search the ship?” Annaba Bonn asked.

“Yes, of course,” Cylian inclined his head.

“Ikosim, Skikda,” the Captain turned to her crew and said something in Tussah.

The woman in mourning and the man broke away from the other two hurried down the ship, much to Cylian’s anxiety. He knew he had to tell Annaba about the Ishait in their cell but before he could she turned to his crew with a cold look in her eyes.

“I see an Ishait and a Wurund,” she said.

“Sohalia is a Light Ishait,” Cylian replied immediately. The girl with the red hair eyed Huambo up and down, “That’s our cook. He’s with us.”

“As far as we’re concerned there are no Wurund on our side.”

“Well this one is,” Cylian said firmly.

“Stand down, Cirta,” a faint smile played on Annaba’s lips, “I wish I could take your word for it Captain but I’m afraid I must take the Wurund onto Luna and examine him.”

“Papers,” the other Charasean – Cirta – barked at the crew.

“I forgot them,” Vega said, smacking her newly painted lips, while the others rummaged through their pockets looking for their identification papers.

“You can’t take Huambo,” Cylian said stiffly, “We have a key mission to Arossa-“

“I understand,” Annaba interrupted, “But this is protocol. All Wurund must be examined. He could be pretending he’s someone he’s not. We will return him to you after the scans.”

Huambo didn’t even react to her words. Cylian could feel himself getting angry, “Huambo had been with me for over a year now. If he had bad intentions he would’ve done something by now.”

“Or he’s waiting for the right moment.”

Cylian couldn’t think of another way to persuade the Captain but to tell her the truth. He leaned in and in a hushed voice murmured, “We’re transporting Prince Rian and Princess Eilo.”

If Annaba was surprised she hid it well, leaning away from Cylian, “I see,” she nodded, eyes darting to the two children by Huambo, “In that case I will make an exception and trust your word, Captain, that the Wurund is an ally.”

Cylian felt himself relax, “You have my thanks.”

“Captain,” Cirta turned to the woman, her eyes angry. She was holding up Lin’s papers, “This one has outdated genetic information from six years ago!”
Lin shrugged sheepishly, “I couldn’t get the re-drafted. We were...busy.”

“Their mission is priority,” Annaba said, “They are free to go.”

Just as Cylian was starting to think they would get away without any issues he heard shouting down the corridor and his stomach dropped to the floor. He closed his eyes briefly to gather himself and when he opened them he saw that his whole crew was tense. Arch had his hand on his gun, almost casually.

Down the corridor the two remaining Charaseans, Ikosim and Skikda, were pushing Evander Amos. Cylian hadn’t seen him in days and the Dark Ishait looked wasted away, thin and exhausted. The two Charaseans were pushing him along with long poles, careful not to give him the satisfaction of physical contact, his hands tied behind his back. He looked furious, his black eyes blazing.

“And what is this, Captain?” Annaba Bonn asked, voice like icy water running down Cylian’s spine. The man already knew anything he would say would be used against him; in his determination to defend Huambo he had forgotten about the bigger issue – the unsolicited prisoner onboard.

“He broke onto the ship at Sousnan,” he said, deciding the truth was better than lying, “and has been a prisoner since.”

Ikosim and Skikda stopped in front of the crew and Evander glared at all of them, before hatefully hissing something in Amablilis. Hickey flinched.

“Has this incident been reported anywhere?” Annaba barked.

“Yes. The GTSC had informed the Shif government.”

“What about the Ishait government?” the Captain asked, “It is their prisoner.”

“Queen Chivhu won’t negotiate and it’s near impossible to get a hold of Major Chegutu,” Hickey stepped in, saving Cylian’s ass as always, “The Ishait are dealing with a civil war as well as an assault on their planet. A mere prisoner wouldn’t be of value to the Major.”

“Well he is of value to us,” Annaba reached into her pocket and pulled out a tiny black object. When she slapped the air with it, it elongated into a black rod, and a ball of plasma electricity sparked at the end of it. The Captain’s face lit up in cold satisfaction when she saw Amos visibly flinch from the weapon, “We’ll take him aboard the Luna, where he will get what he deserves for the murders on Sousnan.”

“No!”

Cylian was surprised that out of everyone it was Hickey and Arch who jerked forward in defence of the prisoner. Cylian would’ve, personally, gladly rid himself of the burden that was Evander Amos...but something about these Charaseans really unnerved him. If you give power to someone who went through years of oppression they might use it for the wrong cause. Cylian knew that Omega’s suffered incredibly on Tussa, and could see that to them this could be a form of revenge – torturing one Ishait with a dubious background and not confirmed crimes. It seemed morally dubious to condemn somebody without evidence.

“He’s going to stand trial on Arossa,” Arch said, his voice weirdly powerful, like he knew exactly what he was saying. Even Amos seemed surprised by his sudden outburst, looking at him with big, confused eyes.

“Who are the Calanthe to dictate what happens to this creature?” Annaba asked, eyes narrowed.
“And who are you?” Hickey stepped in, “He should be trialled in court on Caliban. Only the Ishait decide the fate of the Ishait. But since that is...uh, inconvenient now, I say we vote about his fate.”

“Fine,” Annaba’s voice was hostile, “There is four to one as to his fate so far,” she said, gesturing at her crew gathered silently behind her.

“Two to four,” Arch said firmly, “He stays with us.”

“I say take him back,” Uncle Plump said, voice low and full of hurt. Usually he would fight for any life, but Cylian knew that what he witnessed on Sousnan broke him. Champagne nodded in confirmation, reaching out and squeezing her fellow Vlassain’s shoulder,

“I agree. If the people on Sousnan didn’t get a trial or justice then why should he.”

Lin bit her lip, “I guess...you can have him, I s’pose,” she shrugged and shoved her hands into her pockets.

“I say he stays!” Eilo proclaimed suddenly, making everyone glance at the two children. Her brother nodded in affirmation,

“The Calanthe can decide his fate.”

Arch sent Viridian a pleading look that didn’t go unnoticed by Cylian. Sasha send him a barely-there smile and nodded,

“I say he stays here.”

“That’s seven to five, Captain,” Annaba was clearly pleased.

“Six to seven. I want to keep the prisoner,” Cylian said, mostly because now he just didn’t want the Charasean to win.

“I also say he stays,” Vega said smartly, giving Annaba a superior look. She was of a higher status that the Captain, being a Beta to Annaba’s Omega, and though normally she wouldn’t make a show of it, now she used it to the Crew’s advantage, “So it’s a draw.”

“Greige?” Cylian looked at his guard. The Ubloit looked unsettled.

“They’ll torture him!” Hickey protested feverishly. Cirta glared at her,

“We’re back to the draw, Captain,” Annaba seethed, “We do not have time for this. Hand the Ishait over, he is of no use to you.”

“I vote he stays,” Thane said suddenly. Everyone blinked in surprised and looked at the Fox, who was still leaning against the wall, looking vaguely bored. Everyone knew he hated outsiders, so it was baffling as to why he would now vote to save Amos, especially knowing that he might’ve taken
part in the murders of Thane’s people on Sousnan. Cylian wasn’t about to question it though.

“Hothead – score,” he asked.

“Eight to nine,” the AI replied smugly, “We win, bitches.”

Annaba looked at Cylian for a moment, clearly calculating what just happened, her eyes full of cold fury, jaw tense. Everything was cold about the woman, she was like a planet frozen over. Arch casually took his gun out and slung it over his shoulders – despite the fact the action was careless it was a clear threat. Annaba could see that she could not fight the crew of the Hannibal – she and her Charaseans were outnumbered.

“What will happen to him?” she asked Hickey, voice cold once more.

“We will decide on Arossa,” the girl said, “But he is our prisoner.”

Annaba’s mouth was in a tight line, “Fine. AI.”

“Awaiting orders,” Hothead replied immediately.

“Code: XFRRF17355 – ship approved for further journey.”

“Coded.”

“Perfect,” Annaba Bonn turned to Cylian as her crew angrily shoved their bubble helmets back on, “You have made a mistake. The Dark Ishait are thieving, lying, scheming, pathetic little beings and he will be the downfall of you.”

“I’ll take my chances,” Cylian said, because he trusted Hickey and her judgement more than he trusted himself at most times. After all she was his right hand.

“Farewell, Captain.”

“Farewell,” Cylian replied, and this time there was no handshake. Annaba put on her helmet and turned away from the crew. Moments later she and her people were stepping through the door and disappearing outside, to climb back into their own vessel and disappear into the galaxy on their malicious witch-hunt.

The crew of Hannibal let out a unanimous sigh when the second door closed behind them. Cylian hated himself for thinking that Omegas in power were a terrifying thing.

**Joi 30th Jeo 1144EE (2 days later)**

**Hannibal.**

Arch clasped Greige’s forearm outside the prison room before stepping through the door. Evander was curled up against the wall among the electrical bars, his head resting against his knees, looking weaker than the last time Arch saw him, back when they were visited by the UES Luna (was that two days ago or six, Arch couldn’t concentrate on time anymore...)

After the whole showdown the Soldier had realised something very important – he didn’t hate Evander. Yes, he despised how the Ishait could get him riled up easily and knew exactly where his weak spots were and could read him like a message left uncoded. But if you hate someone you’re supposed to let them die. Arch had told Evander he’d kill him himself and yet when push came to shove he had stood up and defended the Ishait. Stars know why.
When Arch shut the door the Ishait looked up. There were dark circles under his already dark eyes when they locked dully on the Soldier. He didn’t say anything, but his gaze followed Arch as he sat down in his chair.

“Why?” Evander finally asked, voice hoarse, after a long silence that weighed down heavily on the Shif.

“Why what?” Arch asked, even though he knew exactly what.

“Why didn’t you let them take me?” Evander asked, and his voice was soft, its usual bite gone from it. Arch didn’t know whether it was because of the Charaseans or because he was just running out of energy, “You wanted me to die a horrible painful death. What changed?”

_Good question_, Arch thought bitterly, his jaw tensing, “Nothing changed. I still want you to die, which doesn’t mean that I want you to be tortured on some obscure ship. I want you to have a trial.”

“You want the satisfaction of seeing me fall, don’t you?” the Ishait mused, his thick accent merging into his words softly, “There you go again, you Shifs with your pride. What exactly do you want me to be tried for?”

“The murder of all those Vlassain on Sousnan!” Arch growled, starting to regret not giving Evander to the Charaseans. Just when he was starting to think there could be some feeling in this creature he had to go and destroy his hopes. Evander’s eyes narrowed.

“I killed no-one but those who tried to hurt me,” he said. Arch snorted.

“And I’m supposed to believe that?”

“Why would I lie?” Evander asked, and this gave Arch pause. The Ishait was looking at him, eyes tired, looking like halfway to the stars already. Why _would_ he lie? He seemed to have no regard for his own life, so saving it by such an absurd statement was...well, idiotic. It made Arch yearn to believe him.

“A trial will decide that,” he said firmly. Evan sighed.

“Yes, I’m sure the Calanthe are going to be very fair about trying a Dark Ishait, especially after that assassination at the Daliat conference.”

“I believe in the justice system,” Arch said, “and besides, I’m not the one deciding your fate. It’s Sohalia.”

That wasn’t completely true – after the _UES Luna_ left Hannibal’s side Cylian had pulled Arch into a corner and in an exasperated voice told him firmly he’s your prisoner now. _Yours and Hickey’s – but we’re taking him to your planet. You best look after him and make sure he doesn’t pull anything._ So now here Arch was, making sure Evander didn’t ‘pull anything.’

“How can you be alright with murdering innocents?” he asked, because a part of him still tried to find a redeeming quality in this creature.

“I wasn’t,” Evander said, leaning his head back against the wall of his cell, eyes closed, “that’s why I tried to take your ship.”

“And attempted to murder a pair of children?”

“I was _thinking_ about it,” Evander murmured, “I never actually pulled the trigger.”
“Then it wouldn’t have been an ‘attempt’ would it? What is with the whole ‘only Ishait judge the Ishait thing anyway?’ Arch grumbled.

“The Ishait are a superior species – we are the stars-“

“Gods,” Arch rolled his eyes.

“Do you want to know or not?” Evander opened his eyes tiredly. When Arch didn’t say anything, not wanting to reveal his curiosity, the boy continued, “The Ishait marry only the Ishait, we have no interest in other species. That Light Ishait; she’s a traitor for mingling with your kind.”

“Mind your tongue,” Arch’s eyes narrowed.

“It’s true,” Evander shrugged his shoulders, “The purpose of an Ishait’s life is balance. An Ishait man marries an Ishait woman and their aim is to have two children, to balance the scales Quinae holds.”

“Isn’t that a bit outdated?” Arch asked, wrinkling his nose. Evander seemed to hesitate.

“It’s what we are taught. It’s what I believe in.”

“So...you’re no curious about what other species are like?” Arch pressed, “What it feels like to kiss...a Charasean, for example.”

“What’s it to you?” Evander barked, suddenly defensive.

Hannibal lurched sideways with no warning and Arch crashed into the wall on the opposite side of the room, narrowly missing the electric cage. His chair exploded near him and the Soldier had to hold up his arm to protect himself from the shards.

“What’s going on?” there was a hint of fear in Evander’s voice. Arch’s heart jumped to his throat as the lights flickered dangerously overhead, the wall shuddering beneath him. For a second the Soldier was back on The Ashinian, alone in a hallway, not yet knowing he would be the only survivor of a crash. He felt the sticky tentacles of panic start clawing their way from his stomach, “Arch!”

Evander’s shout jolted the Soldier out of his building hysteria. He reminded himself that this wasn’t The Ashinian, this was different; they weren’t crashing.

“I’m going to check what’s happening,” he told Evan hurried as the ship creaked, it sounded almost like moans, “I’ll be right back.”

He sprinted through the engine room. Lin was in the corner, burrowing into a metal box with something that made sparks fly everywhere, Vega at her side, while Champagne was standing, looking up at the ceiling and arguing with Hothead.

“I don’t care! Pull us out, the generator won’t hold! We’ll be without power-“

Arch didn’t stop to ask them any questions; there was a tense, panicked atmosphere in the room and the girls were already frantic enough. Instead he barrelled into the hallway and charged down it, weaving through the corridors until he exploded into the navigation room. Cylian and Hickey were both at the consoles, their goggles on their noses, pulling on levers and shouting over each other.

Arch’s stomach dropped when he looked out of the window. In front of them, instead of the normal tranquil galaxy pinpricked with stars and smudged with clouds, there was darkness. It was such a penetrating black that Arch felt queasy. A swirling rip in space in front of them...and Hannibal was shooting right for it.
“What in the stars is happening?!” Arch demanded. Hickey glanced at him over her shoulder.

“Something’s wrong,” she gritted through her teeth, “The engines aren’t working, we’re getting pulled into Janna11.”

Janna11 was the only black hole in the Cairn Galaxy. Seven years after the start of the war in this part of space, eleven battles took place, raging for three years. They were led, among others, by an Ubloit Commander called Janna, who sacrificed her and her ships in the battles. So many explosions and stray laser bullets caused a rift in space and a black hole was created, named after the leader. Officially it was to be avoided, unofficially after the passing of the Barra Law which banned intergalactic travel, it was one of the few ways to teleport. Problem was, you’d never know where you’d end up, which was why this situation was an issue.

“Can’t you pull back?” Arch asked.

“Don’t you think we’re trying?!” Cylian snapped, and as if to prove his points the engines roared outside, struggling against the pull of Janna11.

“Captain, a bug onboard is causing this. In Exit B,” the little cacti on the board quivered in his pot.

“Located,” Hothead informed them, “A gravity bug, it’s making us have a larger mass than we actually do, which is why we’re being sucked in.”

“Where the fuck did it come from?! The stardamned Luna crew, they must’ve sabotaged us-“

“No,” Akkie piped up, “It was back on Sousnan. I felt an energy shift then.”

“And you didn’t say anything?!” Cylian demanded, “Shit, Hottie get Vega to fix it!”

“She and the girls are trying to keep the generator going or we’ll be without power. Remember, Moses, the Ark, manual handling, all that good stuff.”

Cylian swore, “Get them to switch the lights off, and get Vega to get rid of the bug.”

“Cylian it’s too late,” Hickey sounded panicked. The black hole loomed closer and closer, and it got scarily darker with each second. Arch swallowed and took a step back, feeling like he was going to be sick with fear.

“Hottie, do the emergency broadcast.”

“Ladies, gentlemen, dear crew-members. We are currently being sucked into Janna11 but have no fear,” as Hottie spoke Arch backed out of the room; he didn’t know what to do, so he decided to return to Evander and make sure he didn’t magically escape, “Strap in, the worst that can happen is we’ll explode into tiny pieces,” Arch started running back the way he came, “Just kidding, there’s no oxygen in space, we can’t explode. But we can die. The lights will now go off.” as if waiting for his cue the lights shut off with a soft click and the emergency LED green bulbs flickered on. Arch swallowed as he ran back the way he came, feeling like he was on a completely different ship, “Make sure you’re secured to a solid surface, we will most likely be spat out in a different part of the galaxy. Pray to your Gods and enjoy your trip!” Hothead finished cheerfully as Arch sped through the dark engine room, sparks still filling the air from the corner, and barrelled into the prison room.

Evander was up against the bars, his hands wrapped around them. The steady thrum of electricity that Arch had grown so used to subconsciously was gone. The Ishait looked like a ghost in the dull green light, his face all in shadows.
“What’s happening?” he asked hoarsely.

“Nothing, we’re fine,” Arch blurted, because his first instinct was to make sure people weren’t scared. However just then Hannibal shuddered and the emergency lights flickered. Fear sparked in Evander’s eyes and Arch could see his hands tighten on the metal bars.

“No we’re not,” the Ishait whispered fearfully and the ship jolted again. Arch’s stomach flipped uneasily and Evander squeezed his eyes shut and started murmuring what the Soldier assumed was a prayer under his breath in a trembling voice. Arch had never seen Evander this afraid through all his time on Hannibal.

“We’re going to be alright,” Arch said, on instinct reaching out and pressing his hand over Evander’s. The Ishait startled and tensed, eyes wide, and the Shif realised what he had just done. He knew he should get to the belt on the wall and secure himself to make sure he didn’t crash through the room if anything happened, and yet he couldn’t remove his hand. Evander stared at him, his mouth parted in shock. His skin was soft and warm under Arch’s, and he tightened his grip on the boy, “We’re going to be alright,” he repeated.

When Hannibal started trembling, probably entering the black hole, Arch sunk to the floor, pulling Evander down with him. Their fingers had somehow slid together, and now their hands were clasped in the gaps between the bars. Evander leaned against the wall inside the cell and continued to pray under his breath and Arch stroked his hand, wondering what in the stars he was doing.
What Happened on Earth

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ghi 1st Aillill 1144EE (1 Day Later)

Earth 6.2.

“Apologies,” the voice of the female AI rang through the headphones, “The ship you are looking for cannot be located. Ensure the configuration is correct or try again at a later time.”

Ayvo pulled away from his desk, ripped his headphones off and threw them at the screen in front of him, “Starsdammit,” he whispered to himself, exhausted and worried. The man buried his face in his hands, elbows resting on the desk in front of him as he took deep, calming breaths. Well, they were meant to be calming anyway...

Ayvo Rasmussen was not a worrier. He was a blonde, pale, freckled, always smiling man who looked much younger than his twenty four years. But he felt like in the last hours he had aged millennia’s and felt nothing but worry.

It had been four hours since he had lost contact with Hannibal, and, if Viridian was still creating time, that would mean that the crew had travelled the same distance a ship would make in sixteen hours. They could be anywhere, or nowhere at all. They had disappeared in Jana11, Ayvo couldn’t deny that, couldn’t lie to himself, couldn’t pretend they had somehow avoided the black hole and taken a different course that pulled them off the grid. Ayvo Rasmussen was an eternal optimist but even he couldn’t find anything positive about this situation; Hannibal was gone.

And it was all Ayvo’s fault.

Well, no. It wasn’t. There wasn’t anything the Lighthouse could’ve done to prevent the ship from being engulfed by the black hole. In the end he was just a voice, and he had tried his best to direct Cylian and the crew away from Jana11, and had failed.

The thought of Cylian made a shot of pain go through the human’s heart. He squeezed his eyes shut against his palms, trying to keep his tears at bay. It was unnatural for him to not hear Cylian’s voice in his ears, the familiar, comforting, low, hoarse voice that got Ayvo through his boring days at work. Normally the man would’ve gone home ages ago, and switched to his personal equipment to talk to Cylian. And now he couldn’t, because the man and his ship were completely off the radar.

The best course of action; accept that the ship is lost and move on. But Ayvo couldn’t imagine being assigned to a different ship now – his heart was part of the Hannibal, a little dot on a map of the galaxy, moving at the speed of light, and the voice of the auburn-haired Captain miles and miles away.
“Ayvo,” a head popped up on the next cubicle. It was Arachiosa, the old Shif woman with silver hair who was currently the Lighthouse of a cargo ship going between Earth 6.2 and Calliban, supplying the ships participating in the assault with food and medication. She was smiling sadly, deep lines in the skin around her mouth, “You should get some rest, darlin’.”

“What if they come back online?” Ayvo asked, swiping at the screen in front of him, scanning the map of space for the familiar ship speeding past. It was nowhere to be seen. Arachiosa gave him a pitying smile.

“There will be someone here, darlin’, to track them if they appear. But you’re no help to anybody if you’re not rested,” she said, and there was something patronising in her voice, as if she thought Ayvo foolish for believing that Hannibal might still be in one piece somewhere. Plenty of people have jumped through Jana11 and survived, Ayvo told himself as his shoulders slumped, and plenty haven’t...

In the end Arachiosa was right; Ayvo was exhausted. He wanted to fall asleep and forget about the whole thing, if only for a couple blissful hours. He sighed and rubbed a hand down his face and then reached into the pocket of his uniform, pulling out the little ball that helped him steer his wheelchair.

“Goodnight,” he told Arachiosa, and she smiled that pitying smile at him. He was used to those smiles – people tended to look at his wheelchair, hovering an inch over the ground, and see him as a cripple before anything else. When Ayvo was nine he got ill with the Eafal Disease, which made him lose circulation in his legs; for some time his muscle still grew, but eventually his legs became dead weight. He couldn’t move them, walk or stand. And he hated it, simply for the fact that it defined him – he was Ayvo, the boy in the wheelchair, and had to fight his whole life to be something more. Even here he was still Ayvo, the Lighthouse in the wheelchair.

Now he slid his thumb over the ball in his hand and his wheelchair sped through the rows of cubicles, each person inside tracking and talking to their own ships, in hundreds of places in the galaxy. Ayvo felt hollow without Hannibal, without a purpose. Without Cylian. Ayvo never thought it would be possible to fall in love with someone’s voice, but every time he went back online to talk to the Captain he felt stupidly head over heels, like little spaceships were flying in his stomach.

And now that Captain could be dead. Maybe that was for the better – what fool fell for a voice anyway?

Ayvo waited outside in the warm summer night for a space cab, and gladly floated his wheelchair into one when it stopped outside the GTSC headquarters.

“14 Aelios Way,” he recited to the cab driver, a grumpy looking Vlassain that resembled a frog down to his green, warty skin. As the ship soared through the air of Earth 6.2 Ayvo pressed his forehead against the window. Humongous trees loomed on either side of him, bright with lights guiding the way of pilots, and rows of ships flew in clean lines through Göza, the main and only city on the planet. Since ruining six planets Shifs have finally learned to preserve one so the city didn’t look very metropolitan at all; there were no billboards, no advertisements, no skyscrapers with bright lights. Everywhere there was green, though now reduced to black thanks to the dark skies, and this greenery clawed its way up buildings, enveloping them in trees and flowers.

14 Aelios Way was a quiet neighbourhood by a clean, beautiful river with fish splashing through the water all day and all night. Ayvo paid the cabbie and floated out onto the little pathway right in front of him small, cozy cottage. The tiny garden in front of his home was blooming with summer flowers: Purrs which looked like flames, crimson and amber and gold, Chanuas, the deep purple flowers with whisker-like leaves that swayed in the breeze and shot out to catch insects from the air, scarlet Saldaes which grew on bushes of blue leaves and created the sweetest scent in the air. The garden
was overshadowed by a large Bangala tree, whose branch pierced through the attic of the cottage. The house had been built around it, and now the silver leaves swayed in the night breeze, luminous in the light of the large moon in the sky. The beautiful pink and lilac flowers had bloomed when the sun sank behind the horizon and released a breathtaking, lulling twinkling.

Ayvo locked his gate and floated down the cobbled pathway to his two storey, tiny cottage. It was made in the traditional Earthian style, of stone and wood, and not of metal like most constructions nowadays. Ayvo let himself inside and locked his door before wheeling himself through the small hallway to a cozy living room with a fireplace, artificial fire burning inside. There was a hole in the ceiling and Ayvo came to a standstill directly below it. He tossed the ball in his hand upwards and a circle of blue lit up around him. Gravity disappeared for the eight seconds it took Ayvo and his wheelchair to fly through the ceiling to the second floor.

Normally the man would eat, shower, relax, speak to Cylian. But now he had no strength for any of that. He stripped to his boxers with some trouble and a lot of wriggling, the way he normally did, and then opted to put a t-shirt on, feeling weirdly cold ever since Hannibal disappeared. He turned the gravity off in his bedroom and pulled himself into his bed before switching it on once more. He was used to these long processes to do things ‘normal’ people took for granted.

Ayvo laid on his side in his bed and stared out of his window at the glimmering river below. The hopeful idiot he was, he reached over and put a pair of headphones on, plucking into his web device and logging online.

“Welcome to the link web,” a voice of an AI rang from the earphones. Ayvo nervously played with the cable of the device as he lay in his bed motionlessly, his heart pounding with hope, “Please state your name and the name and number of ship or address you are searching for.”

“Ayvo Rasmussen, asking to make contact with Beam Ship B72 ‘Hannibal,’” he murmured into the device.

“Searching,” the AI replied, voice calming. Ayvo squeezed his eyes shut and exhaled shakily, hoping, hoping... “Apologies, it seems that ship does not exist in this galaxy. Check the number and name and try again.”

Ayvo’s stomach dropped and when his eyes opened again they were wet with unshed tears.

“Thank you, sorry for the i-inconvenience,” he told the AI, though he didn’t have to, and went offline.

The boy sniffled, and pressed the heels of his hands to his eyes. There was no point crying – it wasn’t like he even really knew the crew, or Cylian. He saw a picture of the man, heard his voice every day, but that was it. The stupid fantasies that Ayvo had come up with, about how maybe, just maybe, he and Cylian could be something more than friends crumbled to pieces. He doesn’t even know that I’m disabled. And I don’t even know if he’s still alive. It's not like we’d ever even see each other in person.

Instead of sleeping Ayvo opted to do something equally as pointless, at least in his opinion. He first prayed to the Ishait Quinae, the galaxy itself. He decided that was important since Cylian was somewhere out there, in one galaxy or the next. Ayvo clasped his hands together and squeezed his eyes shut, a tear rolling down his freckled cheek, asking Quinae to guide Cylian back home.

His star sign was the black cat, he was supposed to be unnoticed and unbothered, and although he was the first he definitely wasn’t unbothered. As the cat his life was meant to be full of shadows – maybe this was simply what it was, a shadow over his life, the loosing of the ship and the people he
cared for. His disability was a shadow – the family that had adopted him was loving but numerous, they had no money to cure the disease that crippled his legs. A constant shadow, a constant reminder. Maybe that’s why Ayvo prayed.

He prayed to the six Gods of Shoaeken, each representing a different reincarnation of one soul. If Cylian was dead, Ayvo wanted him to be reborn. He prayed to Tanavarvie, the raven of destiny, to lead Cylian down whatever path was set for him. He prayed to Toliara, the butterfly of life, to protect Cylian’s beating heart, to keep him safe, if it was still possible. His tears started falling faster and breath came out more laboured and he couldn’t remember any of the other four Gods. Ayvo reached for a pillow and pressed it over his face, trying to calm his sobbing. He hadn’t known Cylian, and the Crew might not even be dead, and yet the man cried nonetheless.

When he finally calmed down his eyes felt heavy and he was exhausted. He knew he’d have trouble falling asleep though, so like an idiot he once again reached for the headphones and shoved them on. He took a deep breath as he went back online, already knowing what he was going to hear.

“Welcome to the link web...”

_The same day_

**Hannibal. Somewhere in the Arda Galaxy.**

The day has been...chaotic. Well, for everyone except Sasha that is, because he was finally allowed to stop creating time – something he was more than glad about.

Earlier they all had a meeting in the dining room after Cylian finally figured out that Jana11 had spat them out on the edge of the Arda Galaxy, not that far from Cairn. Then proceeded the heated debate about what the course of action should be; Cylian was determined to get back on course while Hickey argued that since they’re already in Arda they should just go to Fayaxiamen and conduct the wedding there, something both Arch and Greige disagreed with as that would mean going against orders. People had been shouting over each other, the noise rising to the extremes.

It was quiet now, everyone returned to their posts while Cylian locked himself in the navigation room with Hickey and Greige and tried to make a decision. Sasha had spent the better time of the hour with his nose glued to the window in his and Thane’s cabin (thankfully the Fox wasn’t there), watching the unfamiliar galaxy unfurl before him in awe. There were clouds of beautiful green and azure dust that glowed from within. It was quite mesmerising. And it was silent. No sounds of space battles, or imploding ships, or laser beams, or warships starting for planets...this galaxy was shrouded in peace, something Sasha was unused to.

Huambo and Uncle Plump were taking care of Rian and Eilo after the traumatic experience of teleporting, so for the first time in weeks Sasha was truly alone, and at peace. It would’ve felt good if it wasn’t for the guilt that maybe it was his fault that everything had screwed up, though Lin had assured him that wasn’t the case earlier, when they shared some Ikori fruit in the dining hall. There had been a gravity bug on-board, but they had removed it, which didn’t really help now that Hannibal was lost, with no idea where they were going.

Jana11 didn’t exist in the Arda Galaxy. According to Hothead Hannibal had simply appeared among the stars out of nowhere, which on one hand was a blessing and on the other a curse for they could not attempt to try and jump back to Cairn through the black hole. Viridian was glad for that though – teleporting was definitely not a nice experience.

“How’s it going?”

“Sasha?”
Viridian broke away from the window at the sound of the AI’s voice, “I’m here.”

“Cylian wants to speak to you.”

“I’m on my way.”

Sasha had never been to the navigation cabin before and now found it weirdly...cramped. It was a small room with generators and other heavy metal boxes that the engineer labelled in his head as laser storage, filters, coolers and gravity boxes, were stacked up on walls and even the ceiling, glimmering with little multicoloured dots and stung with wires. The console was littered with empty cups of coffee and snack wrappers. There was a mountain of machinery on one side, and a great window at the front, showing the same landscape that Viridian had just seen from his window.

Cylian’s chair swivelled around so the Captain could face the Time Maker. He looked like he seriously needed some sleep and his normal five o’clock shadow was starting to look more like a full beard. The man pushed his goggles into his auburn hair, keeping it out of his tired eyes.

“I don’t know what to do,” he admitted in a hoarse voice. Sasha blinked, taken aback by this declaration of weakness. Cylian always seemed so strong and sure and now...now he looked lost, “We’ve lost contact with the GTSC, Jana11 is gone...the only way I can think of returning to Cairn is to generate a huge amount of time and somehow getting back on track without wasting time and completely destroying the mission,” the man looked at Viridian pleadingly, and the Charasean hated how much he relied on him in that moment, “Do you think you can do it?”

Sasha didn’t want to disappoint him, and yet..., “No,” he said quietly, eyes dropping to his feet, “I’m sorry, it’s too far I can’t make that much time alone.”

Cylian exhaled, “Alright. Thank you anyway. You have done a good job on this ship.”

Done not doing – Cylian had clearly come to the conclusion that the mission had failed; they wouldn’t get back to Cairn in time to deliver Eilo and Rian to Arossa before the delegation from Fayaxiamen.

“Would you be able to do it with another Time Maker?” a high-pitched, shy voice piped up. Cylian’s eyes snapped to the cactus swaying in the pot on the console and Viridian’s eyes followed his.

“I...yes. I think that would be possible,” he said hesitantly.

“I detect another Time Maker nearby.”

Viridian’s eyes widened in shock, “No way.”

“There is a ship flying not far by – Star Exploration Hub 782212 ‘Bird.’”


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Bird docked on the pad that had extended from Hannibal’s side. It was a tiny ship, with outstretched wings like the ancient animal it was named after, painted all the colours of the rainbow. Everybody crowded into the main corridor to eagerly await the mysterious Vorde Starigrad, the Time Maker of the Arda Galaxy.

Viridian was nervous. He and Vorde used to be best friends back at Woorud Station, but she had abandoned him months ago. It made him anxious to think that originally it was her that was meant to
be the Time Maker on Hannibal... and it brought up thoughts that Sasha didn’t want to have. What if they see her and want her to be their Time Maker more than me, and they send me back...?

He wanted to see Vorde, to speak with her if only for a little while. She had been his best friend after all, she knew him in and out...or at least she did, what now seemed like years ago. Viridian heard the hisssss of the doors opening and his heart dropped. Subconsciously he took a step back while everyone surged forward. He heard Cylian, welcoming the newcomer, but his voice sounded muffled and far-away, the crew started introducing themselves, a multitude of voices, all weaved with different accents. And then her voice rang out, as sharp as a bird’s beak.

“Where’s Sasha?”

She was always like this – blunt, straight to the point, she didn’t care about trampling on people’s feelings, always said how it was. And Viridian always appreciated her for it. The crew parted and he saw her once more and his body was filled with warmth and comfort because finally, finally there stood someone who truly cared for him.

Vorde was a Vlassain from high up in the mountains. Her pale skin was tinged with blue, her narrow nose hooked like a bird’s, her eyes were pitch black, her feather-like, multicoloured hair pulled out of her face. She looked fragile, small and delicate, bones pressed against her slightly see-through skin, just like a bird, complete with two powerful wings tucked into her back. When she saw Sasha a smile appeared on her thin lips and warmth flooded those dark, detached eyes.

“Sasha,” she said, and it was a breath of relief. They fell into each other’s arms without a word, clinging onto one another. Sasha didn’t care that they had an audience as he let out a shaky breath, holding onto his best friend like a lifeline. She rubbed his back and clutched him close and everything about her made the tension seep out of the boy. She felt like home.

“I’m sorry,” she said, pulling back, “if I knew they were going to make you do this then I would’ve never left.”

“No, no,” Viridian said feverishly, grabbing onto her bird-like hands, “It’s fine. I...I like being here.”

“Except we’re not meant to be here,” Cylian stepped forward, looking apologetic for interrupting the touching reunion, “we’re supposed to be in the Cairn Galaxy.”

“It’s a long story,” Viridian summarised, catching Vorde’s confused look, “But we need your help, we need to-“

Vorde interrupted him by placing a hand on his shoulder and squeezing gently, “For you I’ll do anything I can, brother, you don’t have to explain.”

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They were only left alone for a moment, a moment to talk about months of events. They were in the navigation room, and Cylian had gone to get coffee. Minutes seemed a measly reward for so many weeks apart.

“Why did you leave?” Viridian asked the second the door slid shut behind Cylian. Vorde shook her head as if her thoughts were too much.

“It’s...complicated, what we do.”

“Tell me about it,” Sasha smiled. Vorde reached out and took his hand.
“It weakens us, yes, but...,” she bit her pale bottom lip, “Sasha, it kills us. If we create too much time it will be the cause of our deaths.”

Sasha smiled sadly, “I know.” Somehow he had always known.

“I couldn’t bear to make that sacrifice and now they’ve made you...,” Vorde shook her head once more, something incredibly bird-like about the movement, “but you can’t turn back now. Have you found a mate?”

Viridian pulled a face, “No.”

“Well, have you got suppressants?”

“No,” Sasha said, “but it’s alright, I have time before my next heat, we can make a pit stop.”

“Make sure you do,” Vorde seemed a little more relaxed. Sasha frowned,

“Wait...are...are you not coming with us?”

“I have things to do, here in Arda,” Vorde said, eyes darting to the side, guiltily squeezing Sasha’s hand. The boy felt his heart plummet to the ground, “I will create time for Hannibal off my own ship, while you work on here. That should be enough to get you back.”

“I...I thought you would come with me,” Viridian said, unable to keep the bitter disappointment from his voice. The Bird reached up and stroked his cheek,

“I’m sorry, brother,” she said softly. Sasha nodded, feeling a hand closing over his throat. There was so much he wanted to tell the girl, so much to ask. And yet there was no time. Cylian came back into the room,

“I hope you know that by doing this, by travelling intergalactically,” he turned to the two Time-Makers, who probably made a humorous pair – a bird-like girl and an elf-like boy in an ugly jumper, “We’re breaking the Barra Law.”

“There’s no other way,” Sasha said simply.

He tried not to cry in front of everyone when he said goodbye to Vorde, but there were still tears pricking at his eyes as he held her in his arms, maybe for the final time. Minutes later it was almost as if the girl had never been there, the last of her smell lingering in the main hallway. Cylian was communicating with her over the intercom as Sasha sat in the seat next to him, the one usually reserved for Hickey, ready to ‘do his thing.’ His thing that would eventually kill him. He probably shouldn’t have been as calm about that as he was. Everything was a bit of a mess in his head, and he needed time to work it out.

“Ready when you are,” Viridian heard Vorde’s voice over the intercom. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He could feel Cylian’s eyes on him.

“Now,” he said.

Mist curled out of his hands, and he went into a trance. When he made time from the outside he simply saw things disappear and reappear wherever they would be hours later. But when he was in the object that he was making time for, it was like a surreal experience. He concentrated on his power as the world turned to a blur around him. He became enveloped almost in a bubble as the mist crawled to curl around Hannibal rapidly. Viridian wasn’t aware of people or things, or stars or planets. He was just aware of time, its soft breath brushing his cheeks and hair a breeze ruffling his
ugly sweater as time zoomed past him, as he defied all laws.

To him, no time and all the time in the world passed by simultaneously. While in his bubble time wasn’t a palpable thing that could be defined by hands ticking by on a clock, it was merely something made up by creatures to help them pretend they had a leash around a concept they didn’t themselves understand. Making time...it’s like the old saying, I’ll make time for you...no, you will simply move your meetings and your job and your lunches and dinners around to leave a slot for someone. This, this is really making time, or conforming to a concept made up by humanity millions of years ago.

The mist was rapidly sucked out of the air and Hannibal jerked, before coming to a slow floating lull. Viridian opened his eyes, though he didn’t recall closing them, and let out a breath when in front of him he saw a familiar galaxy stretching out.

“You did it,” Cylian said, a little bit in shock, and reached out to clasp Viridian’s shoulder, eyes firmly trained on the window. A jolt went through the Omega. His body always felt weird after time making, all tingly and numb...but this time something was wrong. Oh stars what if I’m dying? The boy thought, feeling his throat close up again in panic. Cylian’s touch burned, “Hothead where are we?” the Captain asked as Hannibal slowly flew towards a little grey planet, with two rings of debris around it, slowly circling a bigger, golden planet.

“We’re by Ardath. I suggest we take a landing on Qinae’s Junkyard.”

“Yeah, aren’t the Omegas on Aghamora?” Cylian asked, looking at the small, grey planet.

“Aye, hopefully they ain’t anything like the UES Luna crew.”

“I think I’m going to get some rest,” Viridian said faintly, feeling a pulse of heat go through him. He tried not to think about what that meant, it was too early for it, he still had time... Cylian frowned.

“Are you alright, kid?” he asked, reaching out again. Subconsciously Sasha flinched away from his touch.

“F-Fine,” he stuttered, “Excuse me.”

He had never run to his cabin so fast in his life.

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Viridian didn’t know why his heat had come early. Maybe it was exhaustion, or the Time Making, or intergalactic travel, or stress, or all of it. Making so much time for Hannibal had drained him. Whatever the reason was, it was bad. Sasha had no suppressants, no time to prepare, he had no Alpha.

Right now he was curled up on Thane’s bed, whimpering as his body was enveloped in a nauseating heat that made Viridian want to simultaneously throw up and have a cock shoved up his ass. He was a virgin, he had no idea about mating, especially with someone outside of his species. Because realistically there were no Charasean men onboard. No, no, no, Sasha told himself desperately as he gripped at the covers beneath him, determined not to touch himself, I don’t want them to have sex with me.

His head was spinning, skin burning. No matter how much he tried he couldn’t breathe properly. No matter how many times he went through his heat, each time was just as bad as the last. It was terrifying to have your body want someone to touch you when your brain is telling you that none of them are your mate. Viridian had gone and made it even worse for himself by lying in Thane’s bed,
but the second he had come into his cabin he knew he couldn’t have it any other way – the smell of the Fox was too strong, pressing down on Viridian. He smelled like musk and a forest, and like a dominant male, which was exactly what Sasha needed right now.

The boy pressed his face into Thane’s pillow and inhaled and another shot of painful desire went through him. He bit his lip and whimpered, his toes curling and hips grinding down against the bed. Sasha wasn’t thinking straight. His member was hard in his pants, straining, a wet patch already forming from the precum, while his thighs were sticky with slick that gushed out of Viridian every few minutes; a natural lubricant to make it easier for someone to take advantage of him.

The boy was afraid. Of course, back on Woorud his heats made him panic and get scared, but here...here it was so much worse. As much as he liked to pretend he knew the men onboard Hannibal he didn’t really, he didn’t know how they’d react to him, didn’t know who he could trust. He knew Thane would have to come back to the cabin sooner or later and the thought of the Fox finding Sasha like this, on his bed, the thought of seeing his handsome face twist with disgust made the Omega want to cry.

He tried to roll off, to get off Thane’s bed and not get any of his slick on it, but his bones and muscles wouldn’t cooperate. He was helpless, shaking, shivering, face flushed, dizzy. He had never been intoxicated but he imagined this was what it was like. He swallowed past the dryness in his throat and felt his most intimate parts clench around nothing, yearning for something to be pushed inside him. He had no idea how long he lied in the bed. He had never gone through a heat without suppressants, he had no idea what would happen – apparently the longer you tried to abstain from sex the worse it got until the pain was unbearable.

Not much time could’ve passed since Thane didn’t come back yet, but Viridian was already in pain. Thane... his mind started wandering, though he tried to keep it rooted. He thought of the man’s hands as they dragged over Sasha’s body when he checked him after the Sousnan incident. At the time it had seemed perfectly innocent and uncomfortable to the Omega but now, with his mind clouded by his heat, he couldn’t help but imagine the hands returning, touching him in all the right places, quenching the horrible fire burning inside him.

Sasha whimpered, grinding against the bed, imagining that it was Thane’s hard body that was below him and not the blankets. He caught himself in the act and guiltily stopped, flipping onto his back and panting for air. He couldn’t go on like this. He had tried previously, back at Woorud, to chase his heat away with his own hand and his own fingers but it never worked – he needed someone else, he needed an Alpha.

“H-Hottie,” Viridian gasped, eyes squeezed shut as he tried to gather his composure.

“Are you okay? You don’t look so great.”

If Sasha’s face wasn’t already perfectly red he would’ve blushed, “C-Can you g-get A-Arch p-please?”

“That’s not a good idea-“

“Please,” Viridian bit his lip, “I-I need him. D-Don’t tell anyone e-else. A-And turn t-the camera’s o-off.”

“And for you, kiddo.”

Viridian must’ve lost track of time. His mind went blank for ages, and he pressed the side of his face into the pillow, his hands gripping the sheets on either side of his head. He needed someone to take
The door slid open and Sasha was assaulted by Arch’s overpowering smell, strong enough to make him let out a moan. The man stood in the doorway, a look of vague concern on his face as his warm, brown eyes landed on the mess that was Viridian. His mouth parted a little.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, voice unsteady.

“M-My heat h-hit,” Sasha stuttered, barely able to think straight with the pheromones rolling off of the man. He was pleased though, because there was arousal in Arch’s eyes, as well as fear and uncertainty.

“Where are your suppressants?” Arch demanded, stepping into the room. Sasha pressed himself into the bed more and let out a shaky whine,

“G-Gone,” he gasped, “A-Arch please-“

“What do you need?” Arch asked, “I don’t-“

“Hurts,” Viridian whispered, on the verge of tears. Now that Arch was here and wasn’t touching him the pain just amplified. Helplessly, the Omega stretched out his hand. He saw the internal battle flickering in Arch’s eyes as he hesitantly closed the door and stepped closer, taking Viridian’s hand. Immediately the boy hauled him forward, forcing Arch to fall right on top of him.

The Omega didn’t feel anything except an explosion of white hot need when Arch’s body connected with his. He gasped, head falling back against the pillows as he ground up into the Soldier’s solid warmth. His hard cock pressed into the man’s thigh and Viridian’s every other breath became a moan. His arousal was growing; he grabbed Arch’s hands and pressed them over his body,

“Take me,” he whimpered, “P-Please, A-Arch-“

“I...,” Arch licked his lips nervously, hands sliding down to Sasha’s waist, “I don’t want to hurt you...”

“I n-need this,” Viridian panted, opening his eyes to look at Arch pleadingly.

Almost shyly the Shif leaned down to kiss the Omega. Sasha arched up in anticipation, wanting the man’s mouth on him more than anything. However when their lips brushed together everything came crashing down around Sasha.

His body literally flinched away from Arch and his head snapped to the side, his heart throbbing in his chest. His hand shot out before he even knew what he was doing, and he shoved at Arch’s chest, pushing the surprised man away.

“Sasha-,” the man started, clearly confused and hurt.

“G-Get away from me,” Viridian panted. His head was spinning, he felt sick, and the only thing he was sure of was that he didn’t want Arch to touch him. His mind was screaming at him to find his mate, his body craving for him, but Sasha was stuck in a metal tin in space and his mate could be anywhere... he was vaguely aware that he was hyperventilating.

“Sasha, look at me!” Arch insisted, reaching for Viridian, who cringed away.

“G-Go a-way,” he gasped. The man climbed off the bed, much to Sasha’s relief. He must’ve said
something but the boy couldn’t hear him, his heart pounding in his ears. The door slid shut and Arch’s smell disappeared.

Viridian slumped against the pillows, his whole body tense, shaking uncontrollably. There was a thin layer of sweat over his body and he desperately wanted to pull his sweater off, but had no strength to do so. He was surprised he was even able to push Arch away... why he had done that anyway? Now the warmth and pain inside him was increasing so badly that Sasha curled into a little ball, burying his face in his knees, and started crying. The tears offered no comfort to the boy as his arousal continued to grow, with no way to escape.

The sound of the door sliding open made Sasha curl up on himself even more – he didn’t even want to see who came in, he didn’t want anyone to see him like this. But then there was suddenly a hand on his knee, pushing his leg down. Viridian gasped and tried to back up, but there was nowhere to go and as he looked up he saw Thane leaning over him.

Everything smelled like a forest after it rained and Sasha hadn’t even realised. He felt his anxiety and panic seep out of him, just a little.

“You’re on my bed,” Thane said, but he didn’t sound angry or annoyed the way he usually did. Instead his mouth was soft and his eyes softer still, making Viridian melt. Where Thane’s hand rested the horrible pain was gone, replaced instead by a comforting, pleasurable warmth. Viridian shivered and stared at Thane, open mouthed, unable to do anything else. He was completely frozen, “Where are your suppressants?” the Fox asked, still unnaturally kindly for him. Arch must’ve called for him after Sasha threw him out.

“They’re gone,” Viridian mumbled, and then let out a little cry as a shot of pain went through his already weakened body. He felt a throbbing in his abdomen and another wave of slick gushed out of his hole. He felt disgusting and pathetic, letting Thane see him like this. He could only imagine what the Fox was thinking about him right now...

“This is exactly what I was worried about,” Thane murmured, more to himself than to Viridian. Without warning he grabbed Sasha’s leg and pulled, forcing the boy to slide down the bed and lie down with a squeak. Then, not even hesitating, the Vlassain swung a leg over the Omega.

“What are you doing?!” Viridian gasped, voice an octave higher than usual, “W-Why are you-,” he pushed at Thane’s chest, not knowing why he was so damn scared all of a sudden.

“Hey,” Thane grabbed Viridian’s wrists. Behind him his fox’s tail flickered, showing his anxiety and making Sasha feel slightly better, “I’m not going to hurt you,” the man’s voice was low, and almost sensual. It made Sasha’s knees feel weak, “I’m just going to kiss you, alright?”

It was a sentence Sasha didn’t think he’d ever hear from the Fox’s mouth. His hands were still pressed against Thane’s chest, the redhead’s hands wrapped around his wrists. Sasha was aware that his eyes were full of unshed tears and that he must look like an ugly mess right now, in a gross jumper and soaked through pants. And yet when his eyes slid to Thane’s mouth the only thing he wanted was for the Fox to kiss him, to claim him. The feeling was so much stronger than it had been with Arch.

Thane pressed his mouth to Sasha’s. Everything was quite fuzzy in the boy’s head but he wasn’t repulsed at the Fox’s kiss, not like he had been with Arch. In fact, he felt the opposite. Sparks seemed to erupt in his stomach, but they didn’t burn painfully like the rest of his body did. Thane’s hands were on either side of his head, and his mouth was slow and seductive, exactly what Viridian needed.
Barely able to think straight through his heat, the Omega allowed his eyes to flutter shut. He didn’t trust Thane, he didn’t like Thane, and yet he was submitting himself to the man completely. His mind eagerly chanted *mate, mate, mate* at him, and the boy gave himself up, his hands dropping from the Fox’s chest to lay limply on the bed. Thane was confident but not forceful; his hands slid over Viridian’s body slowly, over his chest, his ribs, stomach, hips, thighs, as if he wanted to feel his every bone and dip and crevice.

Viridian himself was completely lost in the kiss as it grew more heated. Thane nipped at his bottom lip invitingly and Sasha opened his mouth without even thinking about it, allowing the Fox’s tongue inside, to explore and lick, nudged at Viridian’s own tongue until his sluggish, overheated brain told him to respond. Thane left him breathless and aching, his whole body pulsating with the need for the man to have his way with Sasha.

Thane’s big hand splayed on Sasha’s thigh and the boy trembled like...well, the virgin that he was. His legs parted on their own accord and Thane easily slid his own leg between, his mouth never leaving Viridian’s. The Omega was running out of air but he couldn’t bear to break the kiss. It was filling him with desire, overpowering the pain and replacing it with pure, hot want.

Thane’s leg pressed against Viridian’s straining erection and the boy’s head fell back with a wild cry as he felt a shot of white hot pleasure go through him. The tips of his fingers felt numb and his vision was blurry around the edges as Thane gently ground his leg against Viridian’s crotch, making him shake to his core, his hands clawing at the Fox’s back as the redhead kissed down his jaw line, creating a little pathway.

“O-Oh stars,” Viridian mewled, burying his burning face in Thane’s shoulder as he started to rock back against his leg, the combined friction from the movement as well as the fabric of Viridian’s pants rubbing against his erection was making it hard for him to think about anything other than the pleasure he was feeling. His hands tightened on Thane as invisible knots tied themselves in his stomach, threatening to let lose any moment.

Viridian was panting, clinging onto the Fox like a lifeline and the doctor held him tightly, having pulled his jumper to the side to kiss down his neck and along his collarbone, letting Viridian rub himself against him hopelessly, moaning quietly. The Omega’s breath hitched when he suddenly felt everything inside him tense and his cock twitch, filling his pants with come that mixed with his slick and slid down his leg.

The orgasm had come so suddenly that Sasha barely had time to react, and now he slumped against the bed, panting like a man who had ran across a desert, flushed. Thane looked down at him with eyes darker than normal, but otherwise his expression was unreadable. Seeing him above him made Sasha’s legs quiver. His cock remained hard as a rock.

“I-It’s n-not gone,” he whimpered in disappointment, as heat started creeping back up his body. He felt stupidly sensitive.

“No, you need to come at *least* six times,” Thane said quietly. It was dark in the cabin, the fluorescent lights dimmer than Viridian remembered, making the man seem more fox-like. The thought of having to come so many times made Viridian sick. He was still hopelessly aroused and pressed half his face into pillow to hide his tears as his body convulsed in the aftershock of his orgasm, “How are you feeling?” Thane asked.

“I-Hot,” Sasha whimpered, “A-And it h-hurts...,” the boy reached out and grabbed the Fox by the shirt, pulling him closer so he was perfectly nestled between Viridian’s legs, “P-Please,” the boy panted, feeling like he had a fever, his whole body burning, “I-I want...I-I need...,” his toes curled as a shot of pain went through him and he bit at his bottom lip to keep quiet, hard enough to bleed.
“Hey, hey,” Thane leaned down, “Don’t do that,” he swiped his tongue gently over the Omega’s bleeding lip. Viridian shook and wrapped his arms around Thane’s shoulders, dragging him down for a hungry, desperate kiss.

He didn’t know how to kiss, but in his state he didn’t care. He sloppily moved his mouth against Thane’s, who responded and took easy control over the kiss, easing Viridian into the pillows and making him melt once more. It just felt so right to have the man slotted into the Omega. Sasha was sure he was losing his mind as Thane reached down and grabbed the bottom of his jumper.

“Let’s get this off, alright?” he asked, surprisingly calm and comforting. Sasha barely had the strength to nod. When he felt the garment slip over his head he was relieved – his sweaty body was hit by cold air and Thane’s golden eyes dragged over him like he was some dessert on display. Then suddenly his hand was trailing down Viridian’s chest, just lightly enough to tease him and Sasha arched into his touch, lips parted to let out desperate breaths. He grabbed Thane’s hand and flattened it against his chest before forcefully pushing it down, until the redhead was cupping his erection.

“Viridian,” Thane said, almost like a warning, eyes clouded.

“Please,” Sasha begged, “P-Please, please, please, please,” and suddenly he was blabbering in Tussah and he knew Thane had no idea what he was saying. He must’ve understood something though, because his big hand slipped into Viridian’s pants and pulled out his hard, leaking cock, wet from Sasha’s previous orgasm.

Sasha closed his eyes, unable to keep them open. He felt like he was going to die as Thane’s hand slid up his length, thumb gently running over the slit at the top. Viridian didn’t even have the strength to moan, only little, needy, breathless gasps falling from his wet, swollen lips. Thane didn’t mind, or care, as he started to stroke the Omega, smearing the come over his member. He didn’t even have time to speed up before Viridian orgasmed again, all over the man’s tanned hand.

Sasha’s cock remained painfully hard.

The Omega buried his face in his hands, “O-Oh stars, teto,” he swore in Tussah, “I-I can’t...T-Thane I can’t...”

“Shhh,” Thane pulled his hands from his face and looked down at him, “Tell me where to touch you.”

Sasha shook his head stubbornly, his mind swimming. He didn’t even think any other emotion than arousal existed, “P-Please-“

“Tell me,” some of Thane’s usual harshness was back.

“D-Down there,” Viridian panted, barely conscious of what he was saying. His dark hair was falling into his eyes, spread on the pillow, his pale skin shining with sweat.

“I’m not going to fuck you,” Thane said, a little coldly. Pain shot through Sasha and he let out a sob, curling in on himself. Thane forcefully pulled him back to his earlier position and without warning ripped the boy’s pants off.

Viridian didn’t like that; he wanted Thane to be soft again, to look at him in that way that made his stomach turn to a stormy cloud, full of electricity. But as Thane pushed Viridian’s legs up and onto his shoulders the Omega inside the Charasean preened – this is what he needed, for Thane to dominate him, to take charge.

The Fox’s fingers found Sasha’s soaked hole and if the boy wasn’t so needy he would’ve shied
away from the hand. But as it was he just wanted something inside him and in his eagerness his thrust forward and accidentally took two of Thane’s fingers right inside his wet entrance. The Vlassain’s eyes widened and Viridian cried out, back arching and toes curling.

“Shh, shhh, shut up,” Thane hissed, but didn’t withdraw his fingers.

Viridian’s vision was going in and out of focus, he couldn’t concentrate on anything other than the digits inside him. His hole clenched around them subconsciously, he didn’t mean to, but somehow he dragged them deeper inside himself. It didn’t hurt, in fact it felt so, so good that Sasha wanted to pass out.

“M-Move,” Viridian panted, reaching between his legs to grab at Thane’s wrists, “M-Move them...f-fuck me with them p-please... anything...”

Thane grabbed both of his wrists in his free hand and easily pinned them above the boy’s head. Then, without warning, he started thrusting his fingers in an out of Viridian at a violent pace. Viridian screamed, hopeless, loud moans spilling from his mouth as Thane fingered him, almost angrily. A third finger forced its way inside Viridian, making slick slide out of him, rapidly wetting the bed. The squelching sound that accompanied the movement made Sasha tremble like a mad man, his legs quivering on Thane’s shoulders.

It was over in seconds as Viridian exploded all over himself, crying out once more as come pooled on his thin, pale stomach.

But Thane didn’t stop. He continued to finger the Omega at the bruising pace.

“N-No,” Viridian gasped, eyes falling shut as he writhed on Thane’s hand, his wrists still firmly in the man’s grip. The Fox’s face was unreadable, washed red in the light, “N-No more I-I can’t-“

“You’re still hard,” Thane growled, twisting his finger inside Viridian. Dark spots danced in the Omega’s vision as the Fox found a spot inside him that made him forget how to breathe.

And then everything just went dark.

Vo 2nd August 1144EE (1 day later)

Hannibal.

Cylian stared at the ‘online’ button on the console thoughtfully. According to his calculations it would be around four in the morning on Earth 6.2, only a few hours would’ve passed since Hannibal went off the grid. And yet to Cylian it had felt like long, long wrung out hours. Viridian was in his cabin now, hopefully getting some rest. The ship was fretfully quiet, everyone was asleep, and Cylian wondered if it’s too late to call.

“You should do it,” Akkie piped up. The little flowers on the cactus had closed in for the night and the plant was about to dose off. Cylian contemplated his decision as he stared at Ardath looming closer and closer. The planet was a desert, emitting poisonous gases not suitable for any of the species in the Cairn galaxy. It was interesting because its moon, Aghamora, nicknamed Qinae’s Junkyard because of all the ruined ships that had been stored on it over the years, was perfectly habitable. It was only a small grey dot in the centre of the large planet, circling it slowly.

Cylian felt small in that moment, insignificant. He needed to hear him again. He pressed the ‘online’ button before he could change his mind.

“Welcome to the link web,” the AI said and Cylian exhaled shakily, wondering what to say when he
finally hears Ayvo’s voice, “Please state your name and the name and number of ship or address you are searching for.”

“Cylian Iliev, asking to make contact with 14 Aelios Way, Göza, Aernya, Earth 6.2,” Cylian said, trying to keep his voice steady.

“Searching,” the AI replied in a monotone. Cylian fiddled with his hands... “You have been connected.”

Cylian’s heart jumped at the little beep that signified his connection with Ayvo. Without meaning to the Captain leaned forward in his seat.

“Hello?” the voice on the other end was sleepy and disoriented, but one hundred percent, undoubtedly, Ayvo. Cylian felt a smile stretch on his face and his heart started dancing in his chest.

“Hi,” he said, softly. There was a pause on the other end and the auburn-haired man awaited a response eagerly.

“C-Cylian?” the question was shaky, hesitant, full of emotion.

“Yeah, it’s me. We’re back in the galaxy.”

“Oh stars,” Ayvo let out a shaky breath, “Oh thank Stars. Thank the G-Gods, all of t-them...”

He started laughing and Cylian couldn’t help but join in, feeling like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. Then Ayvo’s laughter changed, he became breathless and sad and...

“Ayvo, are you crying?” Cylian questioned, puzzled.

“I-I’m not, i-idiot,” Ayvo sniffled. Cylian’s smile softened,

“Hey,” he said gently, wanting nothing more but to reach out and touch the other man, whoever and wherever he may be. How could a voice make someone so happy? “Don’t cry. I’m here. I’m alright.”

“I-I thought you died,” Ayvo whispered, sounding heartbroken.

“Well, I didn’t,” Cylian said, staring out at the galaxy in front of him, “We didn’t. It’s good to hear your voice again, Ayvo.”

Chapter End Notes

Thankyou for reading xx
Leave some comments and kudos if you enjoyed this chapter/story xx
Vo 4th Ailill 1144EE (4 days later)

Aghamora.

With a little shudder Hannibal touched down on the surface of Aghamora, commonly known as Qinae’s Junkyard. Viridian’s stomach did a little flip as the ship settled on solid ground once more. He looked up to see that across the dining room Eilo had unbuckled herself from the wall and was now floating near the oval window in the ceiling, her face pressed to the glass.

“Eilo, come down,” her brother said impatiently, holding her heavy shoes in his skinny arms and looking up at her with distaste. It was a peculiarly amusing expression on an eleven year old.

“Well, I am excited, so I am,” Uncle Plump said cheerfully, also unbuckling himself, “I have always wished to visit Qinae’s Junkyard, and now we are here.”

“It’s just a load of dirty wind!” Eilo exclaimed from her window.

Arch was nowhere in sight. It seemed that Sasha, Plumpton and Huambo had become the official caretakers of the royals as the Soldier now preferred to remain down in the cell with the Ishait prisoner. It’s not that Sasha held it against him, and he knew exactly what the man was doing – the Omega himself felt ashamed and embarrassed about the way he acted during his heat – but he wished that Arch would stop avoiding him. They had been good friends and now Viridian felt horribly lonely on the ship. Especially because of the way Thane was behaving.

In hindsight the Omega couldn’t have expected anything different. Thane had gotten him through his heat with the bare minimum, like the good doctor that he was, and then had laid Sasha sleep it off in his bed, which was already kinder than he usually was, while the Fox took to the floor. But that’s when the kindness ended. The ‘morning after’ Thane had stayed in the medical bay as always and when Viridian finally worked up the courage and stopped crying into his pillow from how much he despised himself, he had gone to thank the Fox and apologise.

It wasn’t a pleasant conversation, and it had been replaying in Sasha’s head for the past four days.

“Hey,” he had stayed in the doorway, too scared to go further into the brightly-lit room. He knew his eyes were red-rimmed and that his hair was messy and sweater crumpled, but he didn’t care. Thane barely spared him a glance from a box of medicine he was sorting out. He looked...gorgeous. Viridian was surprised he didn’t notice how handsome the Fox was before...or maybe he had, but his brain had pushed that to the side, deciding it would be a bad idea for Sasha to be attracted to him, “I just...I wanted to talk about last night-“

“Nothing to talk about,” Thane interrupted curtly, his eyes not looking away from the medical things he was sorting out. Sasha frowned.
“But there is. You helped me.”

Thane slammed the box down and turned around to Viridian with such an intense glare that the boy took a subconscious step back, his heart pounding, “The only reason I helped you was because it was my job,” the Vlassain growled.

“What?” Sasha asked, puzzled and not really sure he wanted to hear the answer.

“Who else was meant to sort you out?!” Thane was angry, “Arch came barging in here like a madman, saying you were in heat and in pain. As the doctor I’m supposed to make sure nobody is in pain on the ship, Viridian, and because you’re a bloody idiot you didn’t have any suppressants it all went to shit!”

“It wasn’t my fault,” Sasha protested weakly, “I couldn’t take anymore-“

“I don’t give a damn!” Thane yelled, “Do you think I wanted to do that shit with you?! Do you think I’m attracted to you or something?! It was the only way or you’d start humping walls. So no, I didn’t help you, I didn’t want to help, anyway.”

His words made tears well up in Viridian’s eyes every time the boy thought about them, and he felt sick and disgusting. Thane hadn’t wanted to touch him and Sasha was an idiot to interpret the darkness in his eyes and his kisses as desire. The more he thought about it the more he realised that the man did only what he had to, wouldn’t have proper sex with Sasha...because he didn’t want to. It made incredible self-hate rise in Viridian, so strong that he wanted to hurt himself just to let some of those feelings out. Thane was his mate and he hated Viridian. The boy was sure of it; the Fox was the only person he had ever needed this badly before...

The Omega had taken to sleeping on the floor of Rian’s and Eilo’s room, to try and not antagonise Thane further.

Aghamora could be the boy’s salvation though. In 1131EE, when there had been a massive Omega rebellion on Tussa in which they protested their treatment and the invoking of the Rules of the Charasean Regarding Omegas, commonly known as the ROCRO rules, the Omegas had raided Alpha and Beta ships and flown here – to this degenerate, abandoned moon at the edge of the galaxy where they set up their bases. It wasn’t ideal, but they had strived and survived here for over thirteen years.

Omegas, just like Viridian. Strong, independent. It gave the boy hope that he’d get over this, that maybe he’d be able to find someone who wasn’t his mate and be happy with them. Every time this hope arose the Time Maker remembered his repulsion at Arch touching him, and the positivity in his came crashing back down.

Now the boy tried to push those memories out of his mind as he went up to the window and took his first look at Aghamora. Or attempted to take a look. There was some kind of storm going on, and the window was black as every second little particles of unrecognizable cover hit it.

“There is a group of people approaching the ship,” Hothead informed everyone, “Cylian’s asking to meet in the main corridor. I suggest wearing some gravity suits unless you wanna get snatched by that nasty ass storm.”

“Thanks for that, Hottie,” Cylian’s gruff voice interjected, “Guys there are several leakages and repairs to be made on the ship because of the intergalactic jump. Vega, Champagne and Lin, a bunch of Omegas and Betas will come and help you with the repairs while the storm dies down but for now I want everyone together. No repeats of Sousnan.”
The mood was sombre as the Crew gathered in the hallway, everyone dressed in purple gravity suits, helmets tucked under their arms. Not only was there a storm raging on Aghamora but the moon also lacked gravity – Hothead had informed them that there would be old pieces of ships and other objects levitating in the air.

Thané was staying as far away from Viridian as he could and didn’t even spare him a glance, which the Omega noticed since he himself couldn’t look away from the Fox. There was something about him that was irresistible to Sasha – like the foolish belief that maybe he could change Thané, make him kind, soft and sweet...but then Thané wouldn’t really be Thané without his coldness and snarkiness.

Arch was also far from Viridian. Even in a corridor packed with people Sasha felt horribly isolated and alone. He felt like everyone knew about his heat and the things he did and said. Even remembering it made Viridian’s hands curl into fists and his stomach clench. He felt so disgusted that he could barely meet anyone’s eye.

“Plan’s simple,” Cylian started, his voice business-like, “the group will collect us and we’ll go with them to wherever we’ll be staying. Tomorrow morning I want everyone to meet after they rest and we’ll repair Hannibal, re-stock and hopefully be well on our way by nightfall.”

“Roger that,” Hickey said cheerfully. She had completely healed from Sousnan...at least physically. There was an underlining of pain her eyes that Sasha didn’t think would ever disappear.

“Captain, I need to stay here,” Arch said abruptly, “Someone has to look after Eva- the Ishait prisoner.”

Cylian frowned and Sasha looked at his feet. It was obvious to him that Arch volunteered to stay on Hannibal to get away from him and not risk having an awkward conversation. The Captain nodded, clearly seeing the sense in that. Viridian felt a tugging on his fist and he looked down to see little Eilo staring up at him. Her pink eyes were big and full of childish innocence.

“Why are you sad?” she asked loudly. The Crew turned around to look at Viridian and the Omega flushed with embarrassment. He forced a smile and pretended he didn’t notice everyone staring at him,

“I’m not,” he lied, trying to be cheerful though it was harder than he imagined.

“Alright everyone,” Cylian clearly understood how uncomfortable this was for Sasha and tried to divert the attention away from the Omega, “Helmets on and out we go.”

While the corridor was filled with the clatter of people following the command Eilo disregarded it and opened her arms wide, looking at Viridian insistently. The boy had known her for long enough to know what she wanted as he knelt on the ground and allowed her to wrap her chubby arms around him in a tight hug. Sasha put as much of his weight as he dared on the seven year old and closed his eyes, wanting for a moment to just forget the last four days. He found it morbidly hilarious how a little girl showed him more love and support than anyone else on the ship, and she didn’t even know what was wrong. Well, hopefully nobody knew...

The first door of Hannibal opened and the crew piled into the little airlock. It was a tight fit and Viridian found himself surrounded by bodies from every side. He hurriedly shoved his helmet on as Arch waved at them a little sadly from the other side. Sasha didn’t even have time to think who was around him because then the second door opened, and the storm rumbled into the airlock.

Sasha’s view through the helmet became obscured by orange and brown dirt that swirled in the air
and insistently hit the glass protecting the Omega. Hesitantly the crew stepped out onto Aghamora but there really wasn’t much to see except swirling clouds of dirt as the storm continued full force. Viridian’s breathing was obnoxiously loud in his suit and his gravity shoes were heavy on his feet, weighing him down and making his steps slower and more sluggish. A group of people in similar suits appeared in front of the crew but Viridian couldn’t tell how many there were because of the dirt in his face.

He blindly followed the person in front of him – which was Huambo – as they all shuffled after the rebels. Occasionally objects loomed out of the dust, speeding through the air. Ships, bits of scrap metals, things Sasha couldn’t identify. It was terrifying and everyone came close to being hit at least once. Viridian’s suit was being pelted with stones and bits of materials, though none broke through thankfully.

Finally a building emerged from the dusty darkness. It looked mismatched, bits and pieces sticking out of the overall bulk, dim lights breaking through the gloominess, but once again Viridian couldn’t see much clearly – it seemed that the only reason the building was rooted down was because it was partly underground. Wind was pushing at the Omega and only his gravity shoes were keeping him glued to the ground, and prevented him from being swept away by the violent wind.

Sasha was glad when they finally got inside. He was tired of squinting even though technically he knew nothing could hit him because of his suit. He found himself with the rest of the crew in a small, cluttered room with clothes strewn all over the floor.

The people that had come to get them slid their helmets off and shook their hair out – they were all paper-white like Viridian, with pointed ears, making the boy more confident about taking his own helmet off. The man at the head of the group of half a dozen Charaseans was clearly an Omega, Viridian could sense that. He was tall and lithe and quite old, his brown, short hair peppered with white. A messy, unkept beard covered his white jaw and one of his dark, tired eyes was covered with a purple eye-patch.

“Captain Cylian?” the man asked, looking at the auburn-haired Captain. Cylian nodded and reached out simultaneously with the Omega. They clasped each other’s shoulders in the typical greeting of the Charaseans.

“My name is Lieutenant Mokimedes Cuito,” the man said, “and we welcome you to the Aghamora rebel base.”

“We thank you for having us,” Cylian said curtly. Lieutenant Mokimedes’ eyes slid to Vega, who stood by Sasha. Slowly, the man bowed.

“Dutchess of Fioren,” he said, voice full of reverence, “it is an honour-“

“I am no Dutchess,” Vega said, smiling so that lines appeared on her skin, “I am simply Vega Mo’lier now, and it is good to meet you, Lieutenant.”

The man nodded, still looking at her with eyes as if he couldn’t believe she was really there. His eyes finally moved from the Beta and came to rest on Sasha. Immediately the Omega felt uncomfortable, already knowing what was coming.

“You must be Viridian Io Shatashah,” the Lieutenant said, coming forward, “the Time Maker.”

“I...yes...that’s me,” Sasha said with a nervous smile. Mokimedes grasped his shoulder in a strong grip and Viridian returned the gesture, a little awkwardly. Weirdly it calmed Sasha; he was among his own people, for the first time in years.

“Petio-lua teto,” he thanked the man in Tussah. Sasha was aware of everyone staring at them and the Lieutenant must’ve realised too because he quickly stepped back, eyes sweeping the whole crew.

“Take your suits off,” he instructed, “so there will be no cross-contamination with the inside of the base. There is a warm meal and a bed waiting for each of you after your labouring journey.”

“We thank you,” Cylian said, “however our top priority is repairing our ship-“

“There is nothing you can do in this storm,” the Lieutenant said, “from the years I spent on this moon I have learned that as unpredictable as the weather is, the storms usually end quickly. Rest, and after that we shall help your repair your ship.”

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Viridian was finally in his own room. He didn’t realise how much he had missed privacy...first it had been Thane and being constantly worried that Sasha’s every little move would piss him off, and then it was the kids. As much as Sasha loved them they were rowdy and loud and would never settle down when he asked them to.

The room Sasha got in the rebel base was small but clean and more importantly private. The boy didn’t waste time into jumping into the narrow bed, positioned in the wall in case of the ceiling coming crashing down (apparently that happened before). The little pod had air conditioning and heating and was singularly the most comfortable thing Sasha had ever laid on.

Despite that he still couldn’t fall asleep. His mind kept wandering to Thane; he was unable to wipe the Fox from his mind, the way his lips had felt against Sasha’s, the way his hands trailed down his body. It all gave Omega the shivers as he miserably laid in his temporary bed, coming to terms that he will forever be cursed with desiring Thane. All he wanted was a smile, a touch of the hand, something from the Fox, anything really, to just show him that the man didn’t completely despise him.

Viridian threw his covers to the side and swung his legs over the edge of the bed, letting them touch the cold floor. He wondered if the storm was still going on outside. What would happen if he decided to venture out now? Would he get snatched by the wind? Would it be better if he disappeared? Who would actually miss him? He used to think that Arch would, but because of recent events the boy wasn’t so sure anymore. Arch might be upset if Viridian disappeared just because he had a heart of gold.

Sasha went out into the corridor. The good thing about this rebel base was that it seemed that it was never quiet. Unlike Hannibal there were no eerie silence following Sasha down the bleached hallways as he tried to exhaust himself by walking, enough to fall asleep. There were voices echoing from all corners, laughter, different languages mixing together. At one point Viridian passed the mess hall, much bigger than the one on Hannibal. Most tables were empty due to the late hour but one was jam-packed with people, mostly Charaseans. It made Sasha warm to see so many of his species sitting together, sipping on warm drinks and eating snacks, talking loudly. Carefree and friendly and positive, despite the fact that their people were getting massacred back on Tussa – they had hope. Viridian paused and considered going up to them, getting over his shyness and introducing himself.

Do you think I’m attracted to you or something?! Thane’s voice rang in his head and Viridian looked at his feet, his head spinning with nausea. He couldn’t stand himself at that moment, and couldn’t imagine others standing him either. Viridian hurried back down the corridor, hugging himself, his ugly sweater bunching up around his hands. He didn’t know what to do with himself, he
felt so hopelessly useless and hated and pathetic.

He was so lost in his thoughts, staring at his feet, that he walked right into someone. The second his body hit the other boy’s he jumped back, feeling blood rush to his face.

“Oh Stars I’m so sorry!” Sasha blurted.

The boy in front of him laughed easily, “No worries.”

The Charasean was a Beta. He was a tiny bit taller than Sasha, and willowy. His hair was as dark as the Omega’s, his eyes a deep crimson. There was something mischievous about his smile as he looked down at Sasha.

“You’re one of the people from that Beam Ship, right?” he asked.

“Um...yeah,” Viridian was suddenly hyper-aware that he wasn’t wearing socks and that his jumper was ridiculously ugly today and that he hadn’t brushed his hair. The boy in front of him was dressed in a long leather trench coat that made him look like some space pirate. A very, very good-looking space pirate, “My name is Viridian Io Shatashah,” the Omega said shyly.

“Carmon Amboim,” the Beta said, his smile warming, and reached out to grasp Viridian’s shoulder in a firm, confident grip. Sasha did the same, smiling nervously, “So what’s brings you here?”

Carmon asked, hands in pockets, completely relaxed.

“Oh,” Viridian tucked a strand of his long hair behind his ear, “Our ship has to be repaired.”

Carmon let out a carefree laugh, “No, I mean to this hallway. You’re supposed to be resting, aren’t you? Space travel is exhausting.”

“Well...yes...I suppose I just can’t sleep,” Viridian admitted with a small shrug, looking at his feet and fidgeting a little.

“Why are you so nervous?” Carmon asked, leaning down to peer up at Sasha. He offered him a grin and the Omega couldn’t help but smile back. It was weirdly comforting, talking to this stranger, who didn’t have any inkling of his stupidly and embarrassingly Sasha had acted a few nights ago.

“I’m not nervous,” the Omega mumbled, cheeks red. Carmon laughed again, as if he and Viridian were the best of friends, and casually swung his arm around the boy’s shoulders.

“C’mon, let’s go to the mess hall, I’ll introduce you to-”

“No,” Viridian slid from under Carmon’s arm, “I...I...,” he didn’t know how to explain that he was scared of meeting new people right now. The Beta looked like he understood though.

“Who hurt you?” he asked softly. Sasha looked away, face burning, Thane’s face flashing in his mind. Carmon didn’t push his uncomfortable question, “Alright, plan change. Why don’t we go to the kitchen and I’ll make you some Kiyu, eh?” the Beta put his arm back around Viridian’s shoulders, not discouraged by the boy’s reservation.

Sasha couldn’t help but lean into the touch. He needed this – a little bit of warmth and acceptance from someone other than a seven year old girl. Carmon didn’t ask any more questions, he just treated Viridian like one of his own. Which Sasha supposed he was. As the Beta led him through the corridors, talking excitedly, Viridian wondered why he couldn’t have fallen for him rather than Thane. Carmon was attractive, a Beta, and manly enough that Sasha would’ve gladly gone for him. And yet his thoughts still strayed to the Fox, annoyingly, heart-breaking.
As if summoned by Viridian’s thoughts, Thane appeared at the head of the corridor. At once Carmon’s voice was drowned out to a hum in the background as Sasha tensed, his heart beginning to race so loudly it was the only thing he could hear. Thane was looking at his feet, hands shoved into the pockets of his jacket almost angrily. His expression was downcast, as if he was contemplating something that was making him upset. When he looked up and noticed Sasha and Carmon his whole demeanour changed. His brows furrowed, his golden eyes sparked with anger and his lip curled in a sneer as his back straightened. He became fox-like in his mannerisms as he took in Viridian and the Beta, almost with disgust in his eyes. His gaze lingered on Carmon’s arm around the Omega’s shoulders as he walked past and for a second Viridian believed he might’ve seen a flicker of emotion in the man’s eyes.

“Slut,” the Fox hissed, low under his breath, so only Viridian could hear. The boy’s heart dropped, as did his gaze and his spirit.

***

Thane didn’t sign up for this. He was a doctor for star’s sake, not a stardammed labourer. And yet he found himself helping out with the repairs on Hannibal, because as Cylian said he needed ‘all hands on deck.’ As much as the Fox hated to admit it he loved the damned ship, and that was the only reason he was now sweaty and shirtless in Ardath’s two boiling suns that reached Qinae’s Junkyard.

The storm had passed and now everything was covered in dirt, which was somehow hard as a stone and wouldn’t budge even thought it had been flying around the previous night. The sky was a malicious red, the suns two bright dots against it. There were no clouds in sight, no wind, no gravity. In order to work on Hannibal the Crew had to wear the heavy, uncomfortable gravity shoes as they shuffled around, patching up holes and dents, restocking on food and medicine. Everyone was doing something...

Actually, no. Not everyone.

Thane looked with distaste up at the sky where laughter was coming from. Attached to ropes coming from the main bunker right next to where Hannibal landed were Eilo and Rian. The two siblings, used to anti-grav, were chasing each other through the air, trying to pull each other’s shoes off. It was the first time since getting picked up from Saarashik that there was a smile on Prince Rian’s face and for that Thane was subconsciously glad.

What he didn’t like was that Viridian was up in the air with them. Of course he had been dubbed the ship’s babysitter and seeing him laughing and smiling as he flipped through the air in his ugly jumper, holding onto the long rope, wasn’t upsetting Thane. What was upsetting him was that he was doing it with that Beta boy, Carmon. Every time Thane looked up at the sky he would see the two unnecessarily touching and grinning at each other like children. He hated how it made him feel but even plugging in his music and listening to it on the loudest volume couldn’t drown out their gleeful giggles.

The past four days, Thane had had a space war in his brain and he didn’t know what to do, or how much longer he could handle it.

He had taken care of Viridian through his heat, and then told him that he had felt forced to do it. That was a filthy, filthy lie that felt heavy on Thane’s heart. When he had come into their shared room that time, he expected to feel pissed off. He had to deal with Omegas in heat before, oozing their stupid hormones and rubbing themselves against him like cats. It was all incredibly annoying. But seeing Viridian on his own bed, pressed into Thane’s covers...it did things to the Fox. When he had made the decision to help the boy out he didn’t expect to catch fucking feelings.
Just remembering how he felt about the Omega got Thane going as he sealed a piece of metal on Hannibal’s roof with a flame sparkler, trying to push the unwanted thoughts from his brain. It would’ve helped if Viridian messed up and somehow brought Thane back to reality, but he hadn’t. He had been arousing, and exhilarating, and his mouth tasted like sugar and need, and when Thane finally took his sweater off he had been as gorgeous beneath it as the Fox had imagined during the long, sleepless nights he spent on the bed, listening to the Omega’s even breathing on the floor. Thane hated how gentle he had been with Viridian, acting like he was in love or something. But then, when he finally got a hold of himself and became rougher he just hated himself even more. Viridian liked it, but when he lost consciousness Thane thought he was going to be sick with worry.

He still had that image burned into his mind; Viridian lying among his crumpled covers, dark hair falling into his closed eyes, cheeks flushed, mouth parted and swollen, pale, delicate hands limp on either side of him, body decorated with come and hickeys. The Fox couldn’t wipe that image from memory, wasn’t sure if he wanted to.

Thane had a bad habit of pushing people away, so when the next morning the boy had come to him, all timid and blushing and acting all innocent, the Fox got scared. His heart had jumped in his chest and he felt the idiotic need to smile when he saw Viridian in his doorway, even contemplated kissing him. To prevent himself from falling for the Omega, for dooming the boy to being with someone as bitter and angry as Thane, he has said some nasty stuff. The Omega’s fallen expression, confused and hurt, still haunted the Fox’s dreams.

Then, when he first saw him with Carmon the previous evening he felt actually sick. He had never felt that before, never felt pain just from seeing two people together. The slut had slid past his lips before he could even think of it but in that moment he wanted to hurt Viridian, to push some of his own pain onto the boy. Carmon looked good with Viridian, he made the Omega smile, and Thane could see that he would be so much better suited for the Omega than he was. And that’s why he was so angry now. Seeing Viridian with someone else...it hurt more than Thane thought it would, and all this because of a couple kisses and a couple orgasms. The Vlassain was suddenly glad he hadn’t fucked Viridian, like he had wanted to, because then he wouldn’t be able to even look away from the Omega.

It’s for the best.

***

Arch stood opposite Evander. Well not directly opposite him, after all there was a set of metal bars between them, however the electricity had been switched off so they were completely harmless. Arch was hesitant about letting Evan out but Cylian had been clear that he didn’t want the prisoner dying on them before they got to Arossa, and for that he insisted the Ishait needed fresh air. He had been stuck on Hannibal for a month and a day, though to both him and Arch it felt like much, much longer.

Arch had gotten used to the presence of the other man. They spent hours fighting about their political and moral differences, but also had hours of silence, peaceful. Sometimes they almost smiled at each other, when the conversation took unexpected turns and they spoke about their culture and their past and their families. It was hard not to speak to someone you had to guard for most of your days...at least that was Arch’s excuse as to why he felt some kind of affection, towards Evander. However despite these feelings he remained hesitant about taking him out onto Aghamora. Evander was like a fire, unpredictable, mesmerizing but deadly.

“If I do this,” Arch said, looking at Evan who’s gaze didn’t waver, “You better not pull anything.”

“I’d give you my word, but to you that means nothing,” Evander replied calmly. Arch rolled his
eyes. He didn’t have time to get deep and philosophical so he decided to trust Cylian and swiped his hand over the pad keeping the cell together. With a soft sound the bars retracted into the floor, enough so Evander could step over the stubs.

For a moment it was unnerving – Evander was free and standing directly in front of Arch. He had lost weight and looked vaguely sickly from his time in the cell. You could easily take him down, the soldier told himself to try and quench his unease.

“Hands,” he said. A smile played on Evander’s mouth as he turned his back to Arch. The soldier pulled a piece of kinetic wire from his pocket and tied it around the man’s lilac wrists, making sure the knot wasn’t too tight. Then he stepped away, and the kinetic wire started glowing yellow and extending, until it was almost like a leash, “Alright, let’s go for a walk shall we?” Arch asked, feeling weirdly powerful.

Evander glared at him over his shoulder, “Asshole.”

They strolled through the empty ship. It still creaked and hummed with the sound of machinery running but it felt peculiar for only Evander and Arch to be inside. They heard a din from outside, like someone banging on the roof. The soldier contemplated the burden of his responsibility – what would happen if Evander suddenly spiralled out of control and attacked him? But the Ishait walked calmly in front of Arch, not even looking around much. The soldier’s eyes slid over his back. He wondered if the man’s deep, purple hair would be soft to touch – probably not since he needed to wash it. There were muscles moving in his back, and his spine pressed against the black shirt he was wearing. Arch wondered what it would feel like to touch him.

With guilt Viridian’s smiling face flashed in his mind.

Arch had kissed him. He didn’t really know what more to do – the boy had been blushing, panting, literally begging for Arch. More than anything the soldier had panicked, and that’s why he had pressed their lips together. He had thought that it would calm Viridian down, give them a chance to talk. But then Sasha had rejected him. Now Arch didn’t know what to think, couldn’t sort out his feelings. Everything was complicated and he didn’t know what he felt towards the Omega. The past few days he couldn’t even look at the kid, and that’s why he had volunteered to take care of Evander.

But now he was questioning that too. The Ishait was clearly suffering, even though the past four days Arch had turned off the power on the bars and held the man’s hand through them when they slept, giving him some strength, Evan just became weaker and weaker. Why Arch was even bothering to help him was beyond him.

When the two emerged outside Evander’s black eyes narrowed against the bright light coming from the two suns in the angry red sky. When Arch looked up he saw Eilo, Rian as well as Viridian and an unknown Omega up in the air, attached to the bunker with long ropes. The rest of the crew was working on Hannibal, which explained all the noise Arch heard before. He quickly pulled Evander away from the ship, not wanting anyone to ask questions or give them weird looks.

Most of Aghamora was dust, hard packed, almost like clay. Tall, skinny rocks plummeted to the orange sky from this clay, and in the air there were wrecks of ships and old machinery, slowly floating around like in some kind of machine afterlife, like sentient birds. The ground was littered with ships too, half-enclosed in the clay, jutting out like ribs of some giant creature. Some of them didn’t look too damaged but others were nothing but skeletal outlines of the creations they once were. Arch’s and Evander’s heavy gravity boots meant their pace was sluggish and sleepy, but it was a nice enough day. The air was warm and fresh, despite the fact there was no greenery in sight.
Soon Hannibal disappeared from Arch’s sight. There were no animals or insects on Aghamora, so it was freakishly silent, only his and Evander’s loud footsteps and breaths breaking the serenity. They didn’t speak to each other as they walked, each lost in their own thoughts. At least Arch thought so until he happened to look up and saw that Evander had fallen back, so he was walking practically next to the soldier, and was staring at him.

“What?” Arch asked, frowning. Evan cracked a grin that meant trouble.

“You’re surprisingly good looking for a Shif,” the Ishait admitted, his Amablilis accent that Arch had gotten used to strong in his words. The soldier looked away with an eye roll, though his heart felt a little heavier.

“Are you trying to flirt your way to freedom?”

“No,” Evander said as they began descending into what Arch soon identified as a canyon, clay-rocky golden-brown walls rising on either side of them and providing some shade. Old ships stuck from the walls of the canyon like shelves, “I was simply making a statement. You’re surprising.”

“Surprising how?” the Shif didn’t understand. The Ishait shrugged his shoulders, the kinetic wire in Arch’s hands shifting.

“I always thought Shifs to be emotional fools,” the man looked away with an expression that looked less like a smirk and more like a soft smile. Arch’s heart felt heavy and for that moment he completely forgot about Sasha, “I suppose I was wrong.”

“Well, you’re not not that bad yourself,” Arch blurted, before he could stop himself. Evander’s head snapped up and his eyes widened in shock, before he looked away. He stopped walking and started at his feet, “Hey,” the Shif tugged on the wire, a little embarrassed by what he just said, “Come on, you tired already?”

Evander closed the space between him and Arch before the Soldier even realised what happened. One moment there were a few steps between them and then they were chest to chest, so close that Arch could’ve leaned forward and kissed Evander...no! Why are you thinking about kissing him?!

“The Shif’s heart started pounding as Evan looked up at him through his thick eyelashes.

“You’re kind,” he said softly, his breath brushing against Arch’s lips. The man leaned forward subconsciously. Evander’s hands found his and Arch couldn’t help but let the Ishait hold onto him even though he should’ve push him away...he couldn’t move as Evander brushed his adorable nose against the soldier’s. They were so close that Arch couldn’t move, breathe, even blink, only able to stare at Evander in shock, “And so I’m sorry for this,” the Ishait murmured.

He ripped the kinetic wire from Arch’s hands and danced backwards, away from the Shif. Holding both ends of the wire meant he was his own master and it slithered off of his wrists like some ancient snake, landing in a coiled heap on the ground.

“Evander no-,” Arch started, taking a step forward. The Ishait turned on his heel and took off with another word, away from Arch and Hannibal and justice.

By all means the Shif should’ve been furious and afraid, and yet his first thought was that Evan was running away from the rebel base, towards nothing – he would get lost or caught in a storm, unless he stumbled upon an Omega bunker before...which wouldn’t end well. Without much thought Arch started running after Evander, kicking up dust that immediately stopped in the air and floated around slowly. His shoes were so heavy but Arch didn’t risk taking them off. He was trained for this, he was a soldier. As he ran his gun smacked against his back but not once did it cross his mind to aim the
weapon at Evander, who was a little way away but still clear and an easy shot. He knew Arch had the gun but still risked the escape – did he really not care for his life? Or did he think Arch wouldn’t fire on him...

That thought angered the man. He didn’t have feelings for Evander, he wasn’t attached to him. He should go back to Hannibal and try again with Sasha or return to Arossa and forget about both of them altogether. But instead Arch sped up, his muscles straining as he ran. He wasn’t running to catch a prisoner, he was running because Evan hurt him by attempting to escape.

Arch caught up to the Ishait faster than he anticipated. He grabbed the man’s arm and jerked him backwards. His brain didn’t really work in that moment, his chest was heaving as he tried to catch his breath. He pulled Evander around.

“Fuck off!” the Ishait yelled, throwing a punch at Arch. The soldier saw it coming and caught his fist before it could collide with his body. His mind was spinning, he felt vaguely sick but adrenaline pumped through him, making his reflexes work without him even noticing. His leg came out to cut at Evander’s and the man was sent crashing to the ground, kicking up dust that hung suspended in the air as if time stopped.

Arch’s heartbeat was so loud in his head he couldn’t hear anything else as he pounced on Evander like a wildcat, pinning him to the ground. The Ishait struggled and painfully kicked Arch in the stomach. Pain erupted in the man but he pushed it to the back of his mind as his hand curled into a fist on its own accord and connected with Evander’s jaw. And then he hit again, and again. He thought his vision went dark for a moment, his brain couldn’t keep up with his movements. He felt the Ishait struggling, hitting at him, somewhere far, far away. He was so angry and upset and-

Arch felt a sudden gust of wind against his hair and his vision came blurrily back. Evander was looking up at him with big eyes. There was blood dripping from his split lip and nose – silvery, luminous Ishait blood – and bruises already forming on his jaw. The man looked...scared. Arch’s knuckles hurt.

Shakily, he lifted his head from the prisoner below him. On the horizon there was a wall of brown and gold. Arch squinted, confused, sure it wasn’t there before, and then his stomach plummeted to the ground.

“The storm,” he whispered in horror. Evander twisted in his grip to follow his gaze and the fear in his black eyes intensified. The storm was coming back, and fast, “Fuck,” Arch swore and scrambled to his feet.

Evander wiped silver blood of his chin, his eyes stormy as the cloud that was coming up behind him. Through his fury the Ishait clearly understood that they needed to hide somewhere fast, before the storm got to them. Neither of them knew how to operate Aghamora and things could get nasty fast.

“We won’t make it to the ship,” Evander growled. In this terrain, in that moment, they weren’t a prisoner and a captor. They were equal, nothing was holding either of them back. The wind picked up, throwing dirt into the two men. Evander’s eyes found Arch’s, “Run,” he said.

They started to sprint away from the danger. They would never make it to the ship in time, and both of them knew it. And yet they ran, side by side, their hands inches apart. If Arch was a braver man he would’ve intertwined his fingers with Evan’s.

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The storm hit out of nowhere and Hannibal’s crew were forced to return to the Omega base and wait it out. Cylian was agitated, hiding in his assigned bedroom and not even coming out for dinner. Hickey and Vega were worried sick because Arch hadn’t come back from walking the prisoner and although a search drone had been sent out it hadn’t returned either, probably knocked down by some of the machinery flying in the air like billets.

Thane himself was furious, wanting to get off the wretched moon and finished this cursed mission already. He hated being around so many Omegas because they were all so happy and it just reminded him how miserable he had made Viridian.

Except Sasha wasn’t miserable anymore. He spent the whole day with Carmon, laughing and smiling and it made Thane jealous. He hated it, he hated, hated, hated it. Even thinking about it now made his blood boil. He was glad to finally have dinner done and over with. He didn’t like the food and wanted to go back to his bedroom. Last night he couldn’t sleep because he had, foolishly, gotten used to the sound of Viridian’s breath and seemed unable to fall asleep without it. And then, when he went wandering round, he just had to bump into him with the Beta. Thane wasn’t an idiot – he knew he brought this on himself by pushing Sasha away. It was hard to be kind and affectionate when you were an orphan from a war-torn country.

The Fox slinked off towards his room. He thought about the peace and bliss sleep would bring him, he could just switch off for once...if he was even able to fall asleep. But of course things couldn’t just go smoothly. As Thane was walking he heard voices, which was normal since he was in a bunker full of rebels. But the voices were familiar. Thane’s hearing was amazing thanks to his Fox traits so he pressed his back against the closest wall, pretending he was waiting for someone, and listened.

It was Viridian and Carmon talking, the Fox recognised their voice. Thane tensed and felt his tail appear, flickering in the air with agitation.

“...so you’re an unmated Omega. What are you actually doing on a war ship?” It was Carmon speaking.

“I told you, it’s just a job. Hopefully we’ll finish it soon...,” Viridian sounded hesitant. Thane could almost imagine his shy, flushed face looking up at the Beta with innocent. His hands clenched into fists.

“And then what?”

“I...,” there was a pause, “I haven’t really thought about it yet. Maybe I’ll go back to Woorud.”

“I’m not going to lie to you; this is the place for you.”

“I’m not a rebel,” Viridian protested immediately, “I hate violence.”

“You don’t have to be violent to help your people. In the end what is the crew of your ship going to do for you? They don’t understand Charaseans, especially Omegas. You can’t tell me you’ve never felt like they looked down upon you.”

“I...yes. Well, sometimes...,” Viridian admitted. Thane felt guilt shot through him as he remembered all the horrible things he said about the Omega, even before he even met him.

“See! They don’t care about you, just your skills. You owe them no loyalties. Here...here you get a shot at making a difference, of falling in love...,” Thane hated the tone of Carmon’s voice, it literally made him see red, “I like you Viridian, a lot. I know it’s barely been a day but...I feel like we could have something.”
“I...I don’t know,” Viridian stuttered. There was a pause, and then a very, very distinctive sound of lips on lips. *Stars, he’s kissing him,* the Fox thought in shock. He felt liquid anger pool in his stomach and his body jerked forward. Before he could make a fool of himself and interrupt the two, Viridian spoke again, “No. No, this isn’t right.”

“Is there someone else?” Carmon asked, defensively.

“I...I don’t know,” Viridian sounded lost. It hurt Thane.

“I could take care of you. I could make sure your heats are pleasurable, we could have children-,” Carmon said.

“No. No. I’m sorry.”

A second later Viridian came around the bend of the corridor. He walked a few steps and Thane’s heart jumped at seeing him, even if he was in an ugly sweater. Then the Omega broke into a run, sprinting to his room. He didn’t see Thane standing there, looking as if someone had just punched him.
Vo 4th Aillill 1144EE (The same day)

Aghamora.

Cylian’s room was tranquil and quiet, which was weird because his brain told him that there was a storm going on outside and he should be able to hear it. But he was underground and the violent weather couldn’t reach him down here. Which was good, since it meant the Captain could concentrate on Ayvo’s voice without the storm distracting him.

Since that time that he did...things...while speaking to the Lighthouse, everything went back to normal. Cylian was ashamed to say he had jerked off to the man’s voice a few times since that, but it seemed stronger than him. Since accepting that he was a horrible human being, Cylian discovered things about Ayvo’s voice; it made him warm, comforted him when he was stressed, made him feel weirdly safe. It was addicting.

“...It’s stressful. We’re falling behind schedule,” Cylian said. He was laying on his side, looking at the grainy darkness of his room, the triangular emergency exit sign glowing softly above his door.

“You’ll be fine, it’s only one day. Nothing you can do about the weather and I’m sure Arch and the prisoner are going to be fine and back when the storm lets up,” Ayvo said. He sounded a little sleepy, but happy. Stars, he always sounded so happy. It made Cylian’s stomach do stupid flips as if he were a teenager again, “If you keep going at this rate you’ll be at Arossa in a little over a month. That’s completely fine, even ahead of schedule.”

“I know...I just...the outcome of the war could depend on this....,” Cylian reached up and rubbed his stubby jaw. He wished Ayvo was next to him, wished he could hold him in his arms, it would bring him comfort. But then he immediately started to feel guilty – would he like Ayvo no matter what he looked like? Or was he just creating an illusion of something between them, only to discard Ayvo the moment he got back to the assault on Calliban. He couldn’t imagine that, couldn’t imagine living without Ayvo’s voice.

“Lian,” Ayvo said softly.

“Yeah?” Cylian felt warm whenever the Lighthouse said his name.

“You’re a wonderful Captain. Stop doubting yourself.”

Ayvo sounded so sure, that it was hard not to believe him. Without meaning to, Cylian reached out
and pulled a pillow to his chest, hugging it to try and relieve some of the warmth he had for the
Lighthouse on something physical. When he found himself imagining the pillow was Ayvo he knew
he was falling. It must’ve been a peculiar sight; a grown man, hugging a pillow like a love-sick kid.

“It’s good to hear a human voice,” Cylian murmured into the little microphone attached to the
headphones he was wearing. He would never open up like that normally to anyone, but he trusted
Ayvo the way he didn’t think he trusted anyone...well, maybe except Hickey, “To know that there’s
somewhere to come back to, that Earth will still be there when this mission ends. There’s so much
out here, so much space, Ayvo, and you can’t see where it ends. Sometimes it just gets too much.”

Ayvo was quiet for a moment, “I wish I could see it.”

“I’ll take you when I get back,” Cylian smiled, only half joking.

“No you won’t,” something changed in Ayvo’s voice, he sounded almost...scared. Cylian sat up,
“We’re never going to meet, Lian, okay? I’m your Lighthouse I’m not...I’m...”

“Hey, calm down,” Cylian said, feeling a weight on his heart. He forced a tense laugh. The darkness
around him seemed to press onto his body, “I never...I mean, I would like to meet you-“

“No.” Ayvo said, “I think we messed up. I’m sorry...I’m sorry if I made it seem like we’re friends. I
just get bored at work, that’s why...um, that’s why I speak to you.”

Cylian knew Ayvo was lying, he was hiding something, and yet his words hurt.

“Right,” the Captain said, clearing his throat. Stars, you’ve lost your head, “Right, sorry. I had the
wrong idea,” and then he went offline.

The silence left behind was deafening. He pressed his hands over his eyes. Moments ago he had
been elated and suddenly...suddenly Ayvo wanted nothing to do with him. He’s right. He’s a voice
in space. Just a voice.

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If Evander was a better man he would’ve hurled himself into the eye of the storm without a look
back. He didn’t have anything to look back on anyway, only this deserted, peculiar, terrifying moon
and a Shif soldier who had already halfway wormed his way into Evan’s cold heart. If he was a
better man he wouldn’t have even turned to look at the horrified look on Arch’s face as he lunged
into the swirl of dirt and rocks and debris and he would’ve welcomed death and whatever Quinae
prepared for him after with open arms. If he were a better man he would’ve at least wrenched his
hand free from Arch’s as they ran, kicking up dust that never settled, running and running and
running towards the ship they would never reach in time.

Arch’s hand was warm, and that’s why Evan didn’t let go. He craved warmth these days, he was so
cold all the time, wasting away. Arch was in front of him, gripping Evander’s fingers, pulling him
along. The Ishait was weak, he had drained himself trying to escape...stupid, stupid, he had timed it
wrong, he had tried to run on a moon he didn’t know. How long would he have lasted if Arch hadn’t
captured him? Evan’s silver blood dripped from his nose and split lip as his breath echoed in his ears.
He couldn’t run for much longer.

“We won’t make it!” Arch shouted over the rapidly picking up wind. It was endearing how he
sometimes stated the obvious. Evander could feel the storm tugging at his borrowed, dirty clothes,
trying to drag him into the eye of the cyclone. He didn’t dare look back.

“Let go!” Evander yelled back, voice hoarse, tasting sand on his tongue. He knew Arch wouldn’t
abandon him because he wanted to drag him back to the ship, didn’t want to admit he lost the prisoner. Shifs and their stupid pride. But when the Soldier looked over his shoulder the look on his face caught Evander off guard – he didn’t look determined or angry, he looked scared, worried even. His hand tightened on Evander’s.

“T’m not letting you die!” he yelled, voice aggravated. It knocked the breath out of Evander because it looked like Arch cared. Nobody had cared for the Ishait in a long, long time. Half-heartedly Evan tried to tug his hand free, but to no avail. There seemed to be no air left in his lungs – his head pounded, his nose and lip and cheek throbbed where Arch had hit him, and his legs were burning. There was acid down his throat. They hadn’t even made it out of the valley yet, their gravity shoes slowing them down.

Evander was so lost in staying upright that he didn’t realise Arch stopped running until he barged into his back, causing them both to stumble. The air was full of particles, and Evan had to squint to not get any in his eyes. The wind was loud in his ears, and through his blurry vision he saw a dark hole gaping at the west wall of the valley.

“There,” he blurted, before he could consider his options. Ironically, there was no time...though lately the only thing Evan had was time. Arch followed his squinted gaze and saw the dark blob as well. His expression lit up with hope, and in that moment Evander wondered how somebody could want to live so much.

“A cave!” Arch exclaimed, and then he was running once more. Evander’s head was getting fuzzy, he didn’t know how much longer he could keep up. After months in captivity his body felt weak, unused to exercise. The only reason I’m still alive is because of Arch, Evander thought distractedly as the Shif pulled him forward, never once slowing down, desperate to survive.

Evander knew they made it inside the cave only because the wind stopped howling so much in his ears. Everything had dimmed ages ago, and his vision was blurry. The inside of the cave was so dark that the Ishait couldn’t see anything, his head throbbed with pain. He felt like he was going to be sick, or pass out, or both. The lower half of his face was wet with blood, his legs were shaking uncontrollably. He hated being conscious.

“Come on, we need to go deeper in,” Arch said, and he sounded far away, like an echo of the man and not his real voice.

“I can’t,” Evander wheezed, his head spinning.

“Stardamn, speak Faso,” Arch grumbled. Evan didn’t even realise he had switched to his home tongue. Maybe I’m dying...he thought distractedly. He became more aware of his surroundings as Arch suddenly hauled him into his arms. The world shifted to the left as Evan’s head rolled against the soldier’s muscular shoulder, completely boneless. Arch’s strong arms were underneath the crook of Evan’s knees, his other arm wrapped around his back, almost protectively. Arch plunged into the darkness and all Evan could think about was how warm the Shif was. His hand moved up on its own accord, to press to the naked skin on the side of the soldier’s neck. Touching him filled Evan with new strength, like a cup of hot coffee or a good night’s sleep or a hot bath. Things Evander hadn’t had in forever. His head cleared ever so slightly.

He pressed his face into Arch’s neck, wanting to be closer to the man. He wasn’t thinking straight – this was the enemy, not only that but a Shif enemy. Evan hated everyone who wasn’t Ishait and yet right then he wanted to stay in Arch’s arms forever.

He was vaguely aware of the Soldier laying him down. He opened his eyes, though he didn’t
remember closing them, and found that they were in a little cave inside the cave, away from the mouth where the wind would come from.

“Stars, you’re bleeding,” Arch said, a little feverishly. His face was close enough to Evander’s that he could make out some of his features in the darkness. His breath was warm on the Ishait’s cheek.

“Whose fault is that?” Evan slurred, aware that his accent was thicker than normal.

“I’m going to start a fire,” Arch said, and after a moment added, “Don’t fall asleep.”

Evander didn’t know what was wrong with him. Fuzzily he saw Arch reaching into his belt and pulling out a little plate-like device, and a tiny jar with a flame inside it. He unscrewed the top of the jar and eased the flame onto the plate, lighting it. The cave exploded with warm, flickering light and Evan had to squint at the assaulting brightness.

Arch knelt next to Evander. I’m lying down. Why am I lying down? Evan couldn’t keep his thoughts strung together, everything was confusing and muddled. He felt Arch’s warm fingers on his jaw and subconsciously he leaned into his hand. He didn’t think he ever wanted someone’s touch as much as he wanted Arch’s.

“I’m sorry,” Arch murmured, and it pulled Evan from the unconsciousness he was about to dive in, “I shouldn’t have hit you.”

“Asshole,” Evan said hoarsely, feeling like it took more energy than it should’ve to say the one word. Arch stroked his cheek...or it could’ve just been the Ishait’s imagination...

“This is where you say that you’re sorry for running.

“I’m not,” Evander slurred. Arch sighed and then there was a cloth dabbing at Evan’s cheek and lips. It was nice and warm. The man let his eyes flutter shut. He was so tired.

The sound of engines outside jolted him awake. At once he was completely aware of his surroundings as he jerked into a sitting position, heart pounding. The mouth of the ‘room’ he and Arch were in was dark, leading to the rest of the cave. The man could hear the wind banging about there, kicking in dust and particles as the storm raged outside though none ever reached him or the Soldier in their little chamber.

The sound of engines was unmistakable even over the howl of the storm. There was a ship outside.

“They’re looking for us,” Arch said. A series of violent, angry shots sounded outside and Evander flinched before he could stop himself. Arch let out a tense laugh, “Don’t worry they won’t find–”

Before he could finish a round of gunshots sounded, so close it made the hair on the back of Evander’s neck stand up and he pressed his face to his knees, his instincts kicking in. Whatever barrier he had been using to keep his fear back broke, and all of the emotions he tried to hold at bay came flooding in. Something in him snapped. He could lie to himself and pretend the reason he hadn’t thrown himself into the storm was because Arch was pulling him along, because that wasn’t it. It was the same reason why he hadn’t touched the electric bars in his cell and risked being electrocuted. Evander simply didn’t want to die. His whole body trembled – his attempted escape and getting hit by Arch brought reality crashing back in; Evan wanted to live, to be free. He hadn’t wanted to stay on Sousnan with all of its dead bodies but he didn’t want to be here either.

“Hey,” Arch sounded hesitant, uncomfortable, “Don’t worry. They won’t get in here.”

“How do you know?” Evan’s voice was muffled as he pressed his face into his knees further not
wanting to look at the other man. His eyes stung with tears but he wouldn’t give the Shif the satisfaction of seeing him cry. He wiped his face on the material of his trousers and then felt Arch’s hand on his shoulder.

If Evan wasn’t an Ishait then maybe he would’ve pushed the hand away – he didn’t want Arch’s pity. And yet the warm weight of someone else’s touch on him brought him comfort, reminded him that he wasn’t alone. Ishait’s couldn’t be alone. So Evander made the mistake of leaning into the touch.

The taste of his own blood in his mouth reminded him that Arch was an enemy. The Ishait angrily pushed the Shif’s arms away, ignoring the look of surprise on his face and the emptiness he felt when Arch wasn’t touching him. The soldier looked hurt, and Evander just wanted to shout at him. *We’re not friends! Stop pretending we are!* Arch wanted to drag him to Arossa to be tried and killed.

“You’re bleeding, let me-,” the Shif reached forward.

“No!” Evander flinched from him. Another round of shots outside made his expression crumble, and it was clear to see that he looked pathetic because the Shif’s face softened, “I hate you,” Evan said shakily, trying to hold onto something.

Arch grabbed his wrist. The wind beat at the cave, but it felt safe and intimate inside it...it was as if Arch and Evan were just two men, no species, no aliases, no agendas. Arch tugged Evander forward and the Ishait was too weak to fight the comfort and peace touching another person filled him with. *He’s a Shif, he’s a Shif,* he told himself, but his body didn’t seem to care.

“You hate me,” Arch said, softly, “and I hate you. And you hate me touching you. I’m going to touch you, and it’s alright because you’re not agreeing to it.”

Evander frowned, trying to comprehend what Arch was playing at. Everything fell into place when the soldier suddenly hauled him into his lap. Evander’s stomach flipped as the Shif leaned against the cave wall, the fire opposite them, warming Evan’s back as Arch hugged him. The Ishait’s legs were on either side of Arch’s thighs, his arms captured between his and Arch’s chest. The Shif’s muscular arms were around his waist and back, and the Ishait’s face was pressed into his shoulder.

Evander felt safe. He felt so stardamn safe.

“I hate you,” he whispered, “I hate this,” he freed his arms and slipped them under Arch’s, grasping at the shirt on the man’s back. He pressed himself impossibly close and let his eyes slide shut as the tension left him.

“I know,” Arch sounded weirdly happy when he said that.

Another round of shots sounded, but Evander didn’t care anymore. Arch stroked his back and held him close and Evander just felt himself *melting* into the man. All of the arguments against doing this flew from his head, he didn’t care anymore. He had been so deprived of touch that right now it was making his bones turn to liquid. As hard as he tried to tell himself that it wasn’t *Arch* specifically, he knew it was.

Somehow the self-righteous, prideful Shif had weaselled his way through the cracks in Evander’s walls and now made him feel like he was *safe* in the arms of the *enemy*. Everything about the man was comforting; his smell, the calluses on his hands, his soft brown hair tickling the side of Evander’s cheek, his heart, beating steadily but so strongly that the Ishait could feel it against his own chest.
“I hate you,” Evander whispered once more, scared at how broken he sounded, as he curled himself into Arch more. The man tightened his arms around the Ishait impossibly, as if he couldn’t bear to let go. Minutes ago they had been fighting, and then running...Evan just supposed they were both glad to be alive, that’s why they were clinging onto each other like this.

“I hate you too,” Arch said, his voice a deep rumble as he smoothed down the back of Evan’s hair. There were tears in the Ishait’s eyes and he was glad the man couldn’t see them.

“Tell me something,” he croaked after a few moments of shockingly comfortable silence, the warmth of the fire at his back and the comfort of Arch all around him making him drowsy, “something that I don’t know about you.”

“Why?”

“Just do something without asking questions for once,” Evan rested his cheek on Arch’s shoulder, his face pressed into the man’s neck, “I want to know something about you.”

“Alright,” Arch was still stroking the Ishait’s hair, “My real name isn’t Arch. It’s Cassius.”

Evander smiled and let out a little snort of a laugh, his eyes closing again, “Cassius,” he repeated, almost a hum from his lips, “Weird secret.”

“I hate it.”

“I don’t. It might be the first thing I don’t hate about you, Cassius,” Evander teased sleepily. Arch, no, Cassius, tugged playfully at his hair.

“Asshole. You tell me something too, then.”

Evander pressed his face into Cassius’ neck more. He was so sleepy he didn’t think words could even formulate in his mouth and yet he heard his own voice, a whisper sounding obnoxiously loud in the cave.

“I didn’t kill those people on Sousnan.”

Cassius didn’t reply, and in that moment, right before Evan fell into the long awaited, generous arms of sleep and he could forget about everything wrong in the world and in his life, he thought that for once the man might actually believe him. Because it was true – Evan never hurt anybody who didn’t try and hurt him first. He was a smuggler, not a murderer.

But Cassius didn’t believe him, because in the morning Evander woke in the darkness of the cave with the man standing above him, face shadowed, the kinetic wire wrapped back around Evander’s lilac wrists. The taste of bitter disappointment and betrayal was heavy on his tongue as they trekked through the valley of Aghamora, back to Hannibal, back to Evander’s prison, in heavy, heavy silence.

Vo 13th Aillill 1144EE (9 days later)

Hannibal. Somewhere in the Jui Nebula.

Read. Sign. Flip. Read. Sign. Flip. Read. Sign...

Thane liked to do things methodically, things that kept him busy and stopped his mind from wandering. Maybe that’s why he liked being a medic so much – of course he loved helping people, but there was also something mechanic about the job that made him feel more detached from other
living creatures.

So now here he was, sitting in a chair in the medical bay, surrounded by holograms of medical papers, making orders for medicine for when this mission was finally over and they returned to the assault on Calliban. His eyes scanned the writing in the air, and he’d sign it by pressing his fingertip to the bottom, and then go to the next page with a swipe of his wrist.

But eventually he ran out of pages.

Thane sighed and buried his face in his hands. Outside the window the Jui Nebula pulsed purple and pink, the space-dust curling together slowly. Thane wished Viridian had never stepped foot on Hannibal. One boy had managed to completely destroy Thane’s world, ever wall he carefully built up, brick by brick back when he was an orphan on Golbahar, all the doors he had barred when his planet got invaded…it all fell to pieces. Viridian somehow found a way to walk right through Thane’s defences – no, he didn’t break any walls down, he didn’t need to. The doors just opened for him.

Thane *wanted* to trust him, wanted to take care of him, wanted to be what Viridian needed him to be. The conversation the Omega had with Carmon on Aghamora played in his head, over and over, for almost two weeks as they lay in their respective beds on Hannibal, meters from each other, hearing the other breathe.

Thane slammed his hand on the table, rattling the bottles stacked up on it. *I need to stop thinking about him or it’ll drive me crazy,* he told himself.

But he had hesitated, when that Beta asked if there was anyone else, Viridian had said he didn’t know…it made Thane hopeful, and a little happy. And yet he was an absolute and utter ass towards the Omega, and he couldn’t even explain it to himself. He needed this mission to be over, needed to stop seeing Viridian all the time...his messy, long hair, his soft blue eyes, his adorable ears and ugly sweaters, his flushed face, mouth parted in a moan, eyes dark with need, naked body beneath—

Thane buried his face in his hands, “Fuck,” he whispered to himself. He couldn’t wipe the kid from his mind no matter how much he tried to.

*“Having a mental breakdown there, Thane?”* Hothead piped up. Thane rolled his eyes and leaned back in his chair.

*“You could say that,”* he said, taking a cap of a bottle of pills and flicking it across the room, *“Boredoms getting to me, there’s not much to do around here nowadays.”*

*“Is it anything to do with a certain Omega by any chance...”*

Thane glared up at the camera in the corner of the room, “I’ll reprogram you, Hothead, I swear I will.”

*“Okay, okay, I’m shutting up now. You might wanna know that there’s a ship heading for us.”*

*“What?! Again?!”* Thane groaned, *“Where’s Viridian when you need him?!”*

*“He needs to rest too you know, he’s not a machine. Let the kid sleep once in a while.”*

*“Yeah, yeah,”* Thane waved the AI off, trying to make it seem that he didn’t care, *“So what’s this ship.”*

*“Beam Ship S11 – Bermuda, according to the GTSC. They won’t make contact with Cylian*
though.”

Thane frowned, feeling a trickle of apprehension in his stomach, “Could they be dangerous?”

“The ship belongs to the Wurund.”

“That doesn’t mean anything,” Thane tried to be optimistic for once, though his shoulders were tense, “They make a load of ships. They made Hannibal. The crew could be anyone.”

“Still, Cylian wants you to get the kids, just in case.”

“Yeah, alright.”

Thane left the medical bay, feeling weirdly worried. He had a bad feeling as he made straight for his and Viridian’s room, even though the children weren’t there...he needed to wake the Omega up, have him up and ready. He was their biggest weapon...yes, that was it, that was the only reason Thane was practically running to the cabin. His tail swung at his back, and he hated it, hated showing that he was being emotional.

He made it to the cabin in under two minutes. There were no messages from Cylian or Hothead yet, but Thane wasn’t risking it. He liked to be prepared for the worst, he needed to move quickly, make a plan-

All of that flew out of his head when he swiped his hand over the door and it opened with a soft hiss. Viridian was sleeping on his makeshift bed on the floor, hugging a pillow and he looked...breathtaking. Thane felt all the tension go out of his body as he slumped against the doorway, his soft eyes sliding over the boy. He noticed stupid little things about him in that moment; the shadows his eyelashes cast on his white skin, how sleep-flushed his cheeks were, his slightly parted lips.

Snap out of it! Thane told himself angrily, and kicked Viridian in the leg, harder than he intended. The boy jolted awake, sitting up immediately, his eyes wide and confused, hair sticking up in all directions.

Stars, he’s adorable, Thane thought miserably.

“Thane?” Viridian’s eyes landed on him, surprised, and then he looked away quickly, as if he couldn’t bear to even look at the Fox, “What’s going on?”

“A ship’s heading for us, could be Wurund, get up,” Thane said, as gruffly as he could. Viridian slid from his bed, standing up, still looking tired and lost.

“Um...alright. Should...should I make time?” he asked, words a little slurred.

He hadn’t noticed that Thane was staring. For once the kid wasn’t in his ugly sweater, instead wearing a long sleeved black shirt that now slid to the side, revealing one smooth, thin shoulder. It came to the boy’s mid-thigh, and he wasn’t wearing any trousers, showing off his long, pale legs.

“You should put some clothes on,” Thane said, pointedly averting his gaze.

“Right,” Viridian squeaked, blushing vividly, scrambling for some trousers, “Wouldn’t want you thinking I’m a slut,” he added bitterly, under his breath. Thane’s golden eyes snapped to him, just as Viridian was bending over. His eyes slid over the boy’s ass before quickly looking away once more.

“What?” he asked.

“Nothing,” Viridian pulled his pants on, avoiding Thane’s eyes, “We should go to the dining room.
Eilo and Rian are there with Huambo.”

“Alright.”

The walk down the corridor towards the kitchen was painfully awkward and tense. Thane saw Viridian open and close his mouth a few times, as if searching for something to say. Thane didn’t want to talk, didn’t want to hear the boy’s sweet voice and start warming up to him. He couldn’t show how much affection he had for the Omega, if he did he’d just end up getting hurt. He was glad when they came into the kitchen, and didn’t have to acknowledge the fact that they were alone anymore.

Huambo was cooking up dinner behind the stove, keeping one of his big, milky eyes on the children, who were playing a card game on the floor of the dining room. They looked up when Thane and Viridian strode in. Eilo’s face immediately lit up and the little bumble of joy hurled herself right at Viridian.

“Sasha!” she exclaimed. A beautiful smile broke out on the Omega’s face as he lifted the girl into his arms.

“Hello there princess,” he said as she wrapped her chubby arms around his neck and placed a dramatic kiss on his cheek. Rian was more wary, carefully putting the cards away.

“Is something the matter?” he asked hesitantly.

“Nothing serious,” Thane said, wanting to reassure the boy. Someone so young shouldn’t be worrying all the time, “A ship heading our way. It’s best we’re prep-“

Before he could finish Hannibal shuddered. Thane tensed,

“What was that?” Rian asked. The blonde boy stood up and hesitated, clutching his cards to his chest. Viridian stretched his hand out and the child bounded toward him, grabbing it and clinging onto him. There was fear on his face.

“Bermuda has docked, unannounced,” Hothead informed them, “The crew is Wurund. Cylian’s going to go meet them with Greige and the girls, but you need to hide, if possible. This could turn ugly.”

“I like Wurund!” Eilo exclaimed, stretching her arms out to Huambo, who suddenly was next to them. He took the child in his arm and placed her on his shoulder. She clearly didn’t understand that Huambo was an exception to the rule.

“We could barricade ourselves in one of the cabins-,” Viridian nibbled on his lip. But Thane was already coming up with an idea. His hearing picked out the footsteps running down the corridor – Plumpton’s heavy feet, Cylian’s lighter ones in just socks, Champagne’s springy ones. There was someone trying to force the door open from the outside and Hannibal wasn’t moving anymore, sentient among the stars.

“We need to get down to the cell,” Thane said, already walking.

“What?!” Viridian exclaimed.

“Just trust me,” Thane snapped, hurrying back into the corridor and barging through the door at the end of the corridor, where the airy, spacious, dark storage room was. He could hear the others running behind him.
Vega had a mask on and was half buried in some machine she was building, only her short legs sticking out.

"Vega," Thane barked, and the woman swung out, pushing her mask into her hair and looking like a deer caught in headlights, “We’re in trouble, there’s Wurund onboard.”

“I thought I heard someone docking,” the Beta said, seemingly unimpressed. Thane knew that she had been through worse things from the stories she told him over glasses of amber at night, when everyone else slept during the Calliban assault days, “So what are the orders?”

“We don’t know if they’re peaceful,” Thane said, “but I assume they’re not. We need to get to the cell.”

A smile stretched over the woman’s wrinkly red lips, “You cheeky son of a bitch,” she laughed joyfully, “You’re planning to put Huambo into the cell aren’t you?”

“What?!” Viridian demanded.

“Relax,” Thane rolled his eyes, “That way they’ll take him as one of their own if they’re evil and at least one of us won’t be imprisoned.”

Huambo nodded his head and said nothing.

“Let’s go then,” Vega chucked her mask to the side and climbed over her project, her bones clicking as she landed on her feet.

Arch looked surprised to see so many people explode in the cell out of nowhere. His chair had been moved closer to the bars of the Ishait’s – Evander’s – cell, though Thane seemed to be the only one to notice.

“What’s happening?” Arch noticed the concerned looks on everyone’s faces, hand automatically going to the gun at his waist as he stood.

“We need you to let your little friend here out,” Vega said, gesturing at the dark shape of the Ishait behind the electric bars, glaring at them. Arch opened his mouth but the Beta interrupted, “We have no time for this, kiddo, let him out-“

“Guys there’s a bunch of Wurunds coming down to the storage room,” Hothead warned, “I don’t think-“ the AI was cut off abruptly.

“Shit,” Thane swore, feeling his pulse pick up, “Let him out, Arch!”

The Shif didn’t ask any more questions as he pulled a pad from his belt and clicked hurriedly on the screen. The thrum of electricity disappeared after a second, and after he swiped his hand over the pad next to the cell, the iron bars retracted into the floor. Arch jerked the Ishait prisoner out, hand firmly around his bicep.

“What now?”

“Now he,” Thane pointed at Evander, “pretends he’s one of us.”

“Why would I do that?” the Ishait asked, amused. Thane’s eyes narrowed and, as if reading his mind, Arch reached for his weapon. Evander raised his hands in surrender, “Got it,” he said sourly.

“Huambo,” Vega turned to the cook, “Are you sure you’re okay with this?”
In reply the Wurund carefully put a scared looking Eilo on the floor, and stepped over the bars. When the cage put itself back together Huambo looked oversized and hunched in the cell, looking at the rest of the crew with his big eyes.

“I’m so sorry about this,” Vega said, hand over her heart. Huambo grimaced a smile. Eilo started crying softly.

“Eilo, shhh,” Rian knelt on the floor in front of his little sister and pulled her into his arms.

“W-W-Why are t-they h-h-hurting Huambo?” the little girl wailed. Rian rubbed her back clumsily.

“They’re not. He’s fine,” Viridian said soothingly. He put a hand on the girl’s little head, “He’s just relaxing in the cell, aren’t you, Huambo?”

Huambo nodded slowly in confirmation.

“We need to get to the engine room,” Thane couldn’t stand all the emotions running in the cell room. He didn’t know what to say, he didn’t have the correct words to fix the situation, “And pretend Huambo is a prisoner. You,” he pointed at the Ishait, who was hovering near Arch, “better not try anything.”

“He won’t,” Arch said firmly. Thane noticed his fingers, curled around the Ishait’s wrist, but not in a threatening way. More like in comfort. But right then Thane didn’t have time to focus on that.

The crew returned to the gloomy engine room, shivering at how cold it was. Hothead was silent, there were no messages coming through. Thane could hear stranger’s footsteps echoing through the ship and it was unnerving him, low, growly voices assaulted his ears.

“Someone’s coming,” he informed the group as they all clumped together near the wall, opposite the door. They didn’t know who was coming, if they would shoot, or jump on them, or just blow the ship up. Since the attacks on Karian’s Pass by the Wurund, where they left bombs along the space highway and massacred thousands of people Thane knew they were capable of anything.

Vega was at the front, unafraid, arms crossed over her chest, mouth in a thin line. Arch’s hand had slid from Evander’s wrist and they were now holding hands, something that should’ve unnerved Thane...but it didn’t. He just didn’t care. Viridian had Eilo and Rian behind him, shielding them with his body, the children peeking out anxiously from behind his legs.

When Thane heard the footsteps right outside the door his heart jumped in his throat and he stepped forward, so Viridian was behind him. He was scared, he didn’t want to die, and yet he knew that he needed to protect the Omega. That was his priority. He had to stop himself from reaching out and taking the boy’s hand, to comfort him. *He doesn’t need my comfort. He probably hates me by now...*

The door burst open with a loud, offending bang. Vega tensed, Viridian flinched and Eilo stopped crying, her pink eyes big and full of tears and fear. Half a dozen big, bulky Wurund spilled into the room. Thane couldn’t tell the difference between them if he tried. All of their skin was grey and scaly, they all towered over the crew, their milky white eyes radiating hate. The horns sprouting from their heads gleamed in the low light in a deadly way. It was clear their intentions weren’t peaceful – they were dressed in rags, heavy, crude weapons strapped to their backs.

Immediately they started shouting at the crew in Flynkon, an aggressive, scary language that made Eilo start crying again. The Wurund advanced on the group, gesturing and shouting, waving their weapons around. Thane’s heart started pounding as he saw the axes and machetes coming closer. He thought he was going to be sick.
“We don’t understand,” Vega said calmly, though her wrinkled old hands were in fists on either side of her, not flinching even when one of the Wurund came up to her and shoved her towards the door. The old lady’s knees gave out and she crumbled to the floor.

“Stop it!” Viridian yelled, dashing from behind Thane to help Vega back to her feet.

“It’s alright darling,” Vega said, smiling at him weakly, a hand in her pocket. She seemed to do that when they were in danger, she was probably fiddling with something inside to calm herself. Only Thane noticed little things like that.

The Wurund came and jostled Viridian and Vega towards the door. With no other options Thane looked at Arch, who looked as scared and tense as the Fox felt. He was still gripping the Ishait’s hand, though his face was unreadable.

“C’mere,” Thane scooped the crying Eilo into his arms, since there was nobody else who could take the kids.

“They’re h-h-hurting them,” the girl sobbed into his shoulder, clinging onto him.

“No, no,” Thane didn’t know how to reassure her, “It’s a game. We’re just playing a game,” he offered his hand to Rian.

“It’s alright,” the eleven year old said, straightening out his jacket and looking ahead with a raised chin. The fear was obvious in his eyes.

The Wurund came full circle and started prodding at the crew from the back, forcing them towards the door with their weapons and angry words. There was nothing to do except go where the enemy wanted them to, or risk getting killed. These are the people that invaded Golbahar, the thought of his home planet made Thane’s blood boil, They are the ones who terrorize the Galaxy. If he had had a weapon he would’ve killed all of them, but instead in his arms he had a little girl that could mean the end of the war...if she lived, if they all lived.

The Wurund continued to shout among each other as they led the crew down familiar corridors, their voices low and like sandpaper rubbing on rocks. It made Thane grit his teeth. Viridian glanced over his shoulder a few times to look at Thane, looking like he was two steps from panicking. The fact that he hadn’t created time yet meant that he had no plan, and neither did Thane. This time he didn’t have Greige at his side, or any weapons. And he doubted any of them could take down six Wurund, even if they had time. None of them were strong enough to wield their weapons.

The Wurund took them into the dining room, which was the only room that fit all of them. Two more Wurund were in here, one of them shouting at Plumpton. Thane was horrified to see the rest of their people on the floor, tied together back to back. Cylian was at the front, looking furious, and behind him Champagne was trying to wriggle out of their bonds. The fourteen year olds wrists were thin, but she couldn’t seem to manage to get the thin black wire off.

Lin had a bruise on her cheekbone, for whatever reason, and her eyes were downcast. She was tied with Plumpton, who was trying to explain something feverishly to one of the Wurund in Flynkon. Greige was completely tied up by himself and dumped near the door, and clearly he had been causing trouble. Cylian’s eyes slid to the Ishait prisoner and he gave Thane a sly what the hell is going on look, clearly confused as to why Evander was pretending to be one of the crew. The Fox just shook his head – he couldn’t explain now.

In the space of minutes the Wurund tied the rest of them up. Vega joined Hickey, who so far hadn’t had a partner. Her hand was still in her pocket. Thane didn’t know if he was glad or annoyed when
one of the Wurund shoved him and Viridian together, their backs pressed against each other, and curled the black wire around them, making it a little hard to breathe. The kids were shoved into the corner, clearly not considered a threat.

“What do they want, Uncle?” Cylian asked, trying to crane his neck to see the Vlassain.

“They want to kill all of us,” Plumpton said, sounding like he was going to be sick.

“They must want something,” Hickey insisted, “ask them – do they need money? Hostages?”

“They’re rouge,” Plump said, dejected, “all they want is to take us onboard their ship and kill us in the torture chambers they have there.”

“Fucking great,” Champagne slumped against Cylian, clearly giving up on trying to wriggle her way out. The Wurund said something to each other, and erupted into growly, hoarse laughter. Plumpton winced.

“They say they’re going to sell the children, Champagne and Viridian as slaves.”

“What?!” someone demanded, and it took Thane a shocked moment to realised it was he who spoke. If he wasn’t so fucking scared and angry he would’ve blushed in embarrassment. Behind him Viridian took a shaky breath. Thane wanted to take his hand. He couldn’t imagine the boy serving the Wurund, becoming a slave...

“Ask them is there any way-,” Cylian started desperately, but before he could finish the door to the kitchen opened once more.

Nobody had been paying attention and two of the Wurund had left the room, and now they returned, Huaumbo between them. He wasn’t tied up. One of them barked something at the Wurund interrogating Plumpton and the creature’s ugly face twisted in disgust. He roared something at the Vlassain and Uncle Plump closed his eyes, as if already ready for death. It made Thane furious to see his crew – his family – threatened like this.

“He’s asking why do we have a Wurund prisoner,” he said weakly, “he said that for his imprisonment we will all be tortured and killed, even the children.”

“Fuck,” Cylian whispered hopelessly, head hanging forward limply. The Calanthe started crying in the corner, even Rian, clinging onto each other.

Thane was regretting his plan. At least Rian, Eilo, Champagne and Viridian might’ve been given a chance if he hadn’t put Huaumbo in the cell. But just as he started doubting his plan the Wurund did something incredibly, incredibly stupid. One of them clasped Huaumbo’s shoulder and handed him a gun. Thane had to bite his lip to hide his grin. Huaumbo held the gun in his arms, the weapon trained on the crew, eyes unreadable. The gun was large and bulky and looked powerful enough to rip through the eight Wurund standing in the kitchen.

One of them hissed something.

“They want us on our feet and in their ship.” Uncle Plumpton translated in a shaky whisper. Everyone still looked pale and faint, as if they didn’t think Huaumbo with a gun was a good idea. But Thane trusted the man – he knew that he wouldn’t betray his family...at least he hoped he wouldn’t.

As they were jerked to their feet by one of the enemies, Viridian’s hand found Thane’s. His fingers were clammy and cold and trembling as they gripped the Fox’s. Thane’s stomach dropped to the floor. He gripped Viridian’s hand and there was so much he wanted to say, to apologise. In that
moment, facing possible death without even being able to look at the Omega, he had realised how many mistakes he had made. He needed to apologise to Viridian, needed to make things even a little alright. How could he have been so stupid? He had Viridian right there, obviously wanting him, and instead of allowing himself to accept him he had pushed the boy away. And for what? Because he was scared?

“Viridian I-,” he started, as the Wurund started pushing them towards the door.

“Please!” Cylian suddenly said, voice laced with pain, “Tell them to spare the children – they’re children!”

Plumpton translated hurriedly but the Wurund barked something angrily, “He says no. He’s telling you to shut up.”

“They’re just children do they have no fucking empathy-“

“Captain he’s getting angry, please be quiet-“

“No, no. They can torture me all they want just not the-“

Things happened fast after that. Thane could only follow because of his heightened fox senses. The leader Wurund stepped forward, so he was in front of Cylian and, before anyone could react, pulled a blade from his belt. It was the length of a Shif’s forearm, and crudely made. It flashed once in the light of the kitchen and then with a gruesome sound it was shoved into Cylian’s stomach.

Hickey screamed. Cylian let out a little gasp and crumbled to the ground, pulling Champagne down with him. The children’s crying grew louder, at Thane’s back Viridian was shaking uncontrollably. The Wurund wiped the blade on his shirt as crimson gushed from Cylian’s stomach, pooling on the floor. The Wurund started laughing.

Thane was a doctor. He could tell if the wound wasn’t treated soon it would be fatal from how much Cylian was bleeding. He would die. He squeezed his eyes shut against the nausea he was feeling. Their Captain would die, he was sure of that. There was nobody to save them, this was it.

A sound broke over the ruckus of laughter and crying and screaming. Whistling. Everyone fell silent, surprised and caught off guard. Thane’s head turned and his eyes landed on Vega. The woman was leaning against Hickey, red lips puckered as she whistled sweetly. One of the Wurund stepped forward, but that one step was all he did, because just then Vega finally pulled her hand out of her pocket.

“Hold your breath,” she said, and opened her palm. Resting on it were three silver balls. The woman threw them, hard, and the second they touched the floor they exploded in clouds of blue smoke that filled the room. Thane stopped breathing, and could only hope the others did the same as the room became darkness and shadows. The Wurund started coughing and choking, their raspy breaths assaulting the Fox’s ears.

And then someone started shooting. The light from the lasers broke through the smoke, creating phantom images dancing through the veil of vapour. Thane saw bulky figures of the Wurund, heard the lasers cutting into bodies, saw people fall.

It was over in seconds, just as Thane’s lungs started burning from lack of oxygen. Someone pushed open the door and smoke was sucked out in seconds, escaping into the corridor and then hopefully out through the vents.

Everyone inhaled sharply, and gasped as air filled their bodies again. Someone was coughing but not
too severely. When Thane opened his eyes he saw a bloody massacre all over the kitchen floor. The Wurund off *Bermuda* were lying, dead on the floor. Their bodies had been ripped by half a dozen lasers, and black blood created puddles around them as their unseeing white eyes stared into nothingness.

Huambo stood by the door, gun in hand.

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Hickey had gone and turned Hothead back on, so everyone could communicate. The ship was in shambles. Arch and Greige were getting rid of the Wurund bodies, Champagne and Vega were cleaning up the blood all over the kitchen, belonging both to the enemy and to Cylian. Plumpton had taken the Ishait prisoner back to his cell and Lin was now taking care of the children.

Thane was in the medical bay, trying to keep Cylian alive.

There was so much blood. The knife had been buried deep in Cylian’s gut, and although it had missed anything vital like the stomach and liver, he was losing a lot of blood. At this rate he was going to bleed out. Thane had made a compress and pressed it over the wound, trying to keep the blood from flowing out and was checking his pulse. Thane had managed to get the Captain to the bay and lay him on the bed with the help of Viridian, who was still here, passing Thane all the equipment he needed as he worked on the Captain feverishly.

“Fuck,” Thane swore. Cylian’s skin was beaded with sweat, and he was murmuring things, half-unconscious, the wound was deep, “Fuck, this won’t do. I need a stardamn laser machine.”

“Where do we get one?” Viridian asked.

“We *can’t,*” Thane pressed the compress into Cylian’s skin, hard. The man looked like one of his feet was in the afterlife already, “Shifs can only be treated on Shoriah or Earth 6.2, and only the second one is medically advanced to have one, but it would take months to fucking get there and—“

“Thane,” Viridian interrupted gently, placing a hand on the man’s shoulder. Thane hadn’t realised he was almost panicking. He slumped, “Breathe.”

“I’m useless,” the Fox whispered, looking down at his Captain hopelessly, “I can’t do anything, except make a dressing and ease his pain.”

“Make a dressing, then,” Viridian said softly. Thane looked at him. The Omega wasn’t judging him for being unable to save Cylian. His eyes were gentle and soft, a warmth in them that provided immense comfort to Thane. If his hands weren’t red with Cylian’s blood he would’ve hugged the boy, “Deep breaths, Thane.”

Thane took a deep breath, “Pass the gauze, please.”

By the time the dressing was done Thane was dizzy and his hands were shaking. Cylian was completely out of it, lying on the red stained bed, unconscious. His hair was sticking to his wet, pale forehead. Thane had began a blood transfusion, but he wasn’t sure it would help.

“Come,” Viridian took his hand, not caring that it was bloody, and pulled Thane to the sink, “Wash your hands, you’ve done a great job.”

It was stupid how words like that could calm a person down. Viridian turned on the sink and drew Thane’s hands underneath the stream, carefully washing Cylian’s blood from the man’s skin. The water ran red, but only for a moment.
“Guys,” Hothead’s voice rang through the medical bay, “Akkie sent out a distress signal.”

“Why?” Thane asked dully.

“Informing the GTSC what happened. Thing is someone picked up on the signal – a Breos Ship called Mama Collateral Damage. Akkie talked to them and they’re willing to take Cylian to Earth 6.2.”

“What?” Thane’s eyes widened. Viridian’s face broke into a grin.

“They’ll be here in a moment. They have a fast ship, could be back on Earth in a few weeks.”

Thane’s shoulders slumped and his short lived hope evaporated, leaving a bitter taste in his mouth, “That’s too long. Cylian won’t-“

“It’s our best shot,” Viridian interrupted squeezing Thane’s hand under the water. How he was so kind to the Fox after everything he did was beyond Thane, “Let’s do it.”

***

Thane didn’t think he’d ever see trees in the hallway of Hannibal. Talking trees at that. And yet here they were. There were four of them – tall, gnarly, with branches bowing so they didn’t scrape the ceiling. Mama Collateral Damage was a big ship, hovering meters away from Hannibal. The trees were something else – their branches had lush green leaves and they swayed to undetectable wind. Or unhearable music, like Akkie. Their barks were rigged, little plants and mushrooms spurting from their roots, and it looked like they had faces.

“Thank you so much,” Hickey told the Breos, over and over, as their branches carefully picked the shaking, sweating, passed out Cylian from the medical bay. The girl had been appointed the Meanwhile-Captain while Cylian was away...everyone hoped it wouldn’t be for long, “Your kindness won’t be forgotten.”

“We were on our way to Earth anyway,” one of the trees replied, soothingly, its voice neither male nor female, “it’s no trouble, and if we can save a life in the meantime...”

“It means a lot. In a time of war,” another tree interjected, “there is too much death.”

The crew continued to thank them vigorously as they retreated from Hannibal back onto their own ship. Thane stood in the window and watched, mouth in a tight line. The Breos had said it would take six weeks to get Cylian back home...the man might not even live till tomorrow morning. Everyone was optimistic, hopeful and yet Thane was the only one who knew that Cylian would die on that ship, and the only thing the Breos would be delivering would be his dead body.

The door of Mama Collateral Damage shut and everyone exhaled. Viridian came to stand next to Thane, but this time his presence wasn’t comforting. Thane was haunted by too many demons.

“He’s not going to make it,” he said, softly so nobody else heard. The engines of Mama Collateral Damage fired up. When Thane looked over at Viridian, the boy was smiling.

“Yes he is,” he said, and pressed his hand against the window.

In the next moment there was fog in the corridor and there was no signs left of Mama Collateral Damage. Thane’s eyes widened when he looked at Viridian.

“What just happened?” Lin blinked in surprise as the fog was sucked out existence.
“Did you just make time for them?” Thane demanded.

“Yes,” Viridian replied weakly.

“All the way to Earth?!"

“Yes,” Viridian looked unsteady on his feet, eyes unfocused as he looked out of the window.

“Viridian you idiot-,” Thane started, but at that second Viridian’s legs gave out. Only the Fox’s reflexes made it possible for him to catch the boy before he crashed into the floor.

“Oh Stars,” Hickey covered her mouth with her hand. Thane looked at Viridian as he hoisted him into his arms. The boy was paler than normal, his breathing heartbreakingly slow. Thane didn’t even want to think about what making so much time could do to him. His heart was pounding, his head spinning.

“He’s fine,” he gritted through his teeth, as he straightened up, cradling the Omega to his chest. His heart pounded, “He’s going to be fine.”

Thane carried Viridian all the way to the medical bay and locked the door. He didn’t want anyone seeing him right now, not like this, shaking and feverish, whispering stupid things to Viridian like don’t die and wake up idiot and I still didn’t tell you...The medic did all he could; he plugged the Omega up to a vitamin drip, checked his pulse about seventeen times, put a cold compress on his forehead. But there was only so much he could do. There was only ever so much he could do.

Eventually Thane slumped in the chair next to Viridian’s bed and took the boy’s hand in both of his. The Omega looked so small and fragile on the bed. Thane couldn’t help but think it was unfair if he sacrificed his life for Cylian. The boy was always so kind, so selfless. If Cylian had just shut up, if Vega had given her signal a few seconds earlier...none of this would’ve happened.

“I’m sorry,” Thane whispered, kissing Viridian’s hand, not even caring about what it meant anymore. He was sure the boy couldn’t even hear him, but continued talking anyway, “I’m sorry for being a dick. I’m sorry for pushing you away. I promise if you wake up I’ll fix everything, okay? So just...just...”

He couldn’t find the right words so instead he cradled Viridian’s hand and closed his eyes.

“So it is to do with a certain Omega, huh?” Hothead asked, not spitefully.

Thane didn’t have the strength to answer.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much to everyone who left kudos but especially to those who commented!
You have no idea how seeing a comment on my original work makes me smile, because it's so weird to think that people are actually enjoying something I created alone.
So yeah, thankyou xx
What Happened at 14 Aelios Way

Ni 15th Aillill 1144EE (2 days later)

Earth 6.2.

It was peculiar to look out of the window and not see space. Claustrophobic.

Outside Cylian’s hospital window was his home planet; miles and miles of buildings intertwined with greenery, the dark sky alight with ships powering through the early evening. The air was fresher, the gravity stronger, and Cylian didn’t know how he felt about being back home, didn’t even know if it was home. As he sat perched on the edge of the hospital pod, listening to the steady hum of the machinery around him, he wondered how much time would pass before he came back to this planet once more.

*Mama Collateral Damage* had brought him to Göza, the capital of Earth 6.2, in under a day and after an operation which Cylian honestly didn’t remember he was as good as new. Well, save for the bandages around his stomach. From the actual assault he remembered little – an explosion of pain and then a muddle darkness, with Thane’s golden eyes staring down at him, full of worry.

Cylian hated being away from his ship – he had no way of communicating with Hannibal and although he trusted Sohalia to take care of everything he still felt weird actually having his feet on the ground.

The door to the room opened with a soft hiss, interrupting Cylian’s thoughts and a Light Ishait nurse walked in with a pad in her hand, dressed all in white, a smile on her white-tattooed face.

“Mr Iliev?” she asked softly, “You’re free to go.”

Cylian stood up, “Thank you,” he said, “the payment for the operation-“

The nurse held up her hand, “It’s been taken care of.”

Cylian knew that meant the government paid for it. It was a little terrifying to think they would also pay for his funeral if he was a casualty of the mission. He imagined his mother, her wrinkled face stained with tears as she waited to spread his ashes in the galaxy. It hurt him to think about how close to dying he had come.

*Viridian saved me*, Cylian knew that – he would have never come home in time if it wasn’t for the Charasean and his powers. And now he needed to get back on the ship and somehow thank the boy...if he was even conscious after the ridiculous amount of time he created...if he was even alive. But first things first.

Cylian had been informed that there wasn’t a ship available for him until the next afternoon since most vessels were being used to blockade Calliban. The shuttle that would take him would be
manned by himself alone, but the government had made some kind of negotiation with Arossa and was given enough supply of Time that he would be able to catch up with Hannibal in four days. Arossa usually didn’t trade but one of its provinces was known for charging insane prices for Time, which they had collected from Time Makers back when there used to be thousands of them. Cylian didn’t even know that was possible.

His mother had come to see him earlier, worried sick when she heard her boy had been hurt. Seeing her face brought Cylian more comfort than he could ever imagine. She was gone now, to sleep, and he would see her again before he left. She lived in a small flat, there was no space for him there and even though she invited him to stay, Cylian had other plans. He would either go to a hotel or...

He looked down at his hand, where he had hastily scribbled something down. An address.

14 Aelios Way, Göza, Aernya, Earth 6.2.

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The cab had long ago took back to air and zoomed off in a flash of lights, on its way to pick up another client, and yet Cylian was still standing by the gate, and hadn’t moved an inch since he got out of said cab. Behind him the river flowed slowly but steadily, the peace interrupted every few minutes with a splash as a fish dashed from the water. Cylian’s hand was on the short black gate standing in front of a cottage, his fingers tight around its cold, metal bars.

There were lights on in the cottage, which looked like something out of a fairytale, and Cylian knew Ayvo was home. That was what scared him. He had come all this way from the hospital...and now he was contemplating whether seeing the Lighthouse was a good idea. He remembered their painful last conversation before the incident with Bermuda, how Ayvo had said he and Cylian weren’t friends. Of course the man must’ve known about Cylian’s injury, the GTSC would’ve informed him. But Cylian hadn’t had the time to contact him, didn’t know how Ayvo reacted to it. What if he didn’t care?

“Get yourself together,” the auburn haired man whispered under his breath, trying to gather the courage to face the Lighthouse. If he didn’t do it now, if he didn’t satisfy his curiosity as to who exactly he had been speaking to all this time, he probably wouldn’t get to see him again, at least not for a few long, long months and who knows what the government would have Hannibal do after they finished their mission to Arossa. It would haunt Cylian for ages, the question of who exactly is Ayvo Rasmussen?

The gate creaked loudly when Cylian pushed it open with trembling hands. There was no point turning back now. He passed through the small front garden, full of blooming, scented flowers, and slipped beneath the Bangala tree, the twinkling of its flowers seemingly urging him on to the front door. No hesitation. When he got to the door, Cylian lifted his hand. He knew if he paused now he’d never knock – peculiar how someone who spent all his time in war torn space, where literally anything and anyone could kill him, was scared of one person.

The knock sounded obnoxiously loud in Cylian’s ears and he quickly snatched his hand from the wood as soon as it was done, as if the door was on fire. His heart pounded so fast he was scared it’d rip right through his chest and end up flopping around in a pool of blood on Ayvo’s pathway and that would be the only thing the Lighthouse would ever see of Cylian.

The Captain heard footsteps approaching the door and he swore that for a second he stopped breathing. He hadn’t been so nervous and excited since the time when he was eighteen, walking through a hangar on the other side of Göza and watching the ships tower over him, trying to pick which one would be his.
Then the door opened. Time came to a halting stop, and Cylian would know all about how that feels. Weeks on anticipation came violently crashing down. It was as if Viridian created a whole bubble just for this cottage, and gave Cylian and Ayvo years and years and years. Nothing felt truly real as the two men stared at each other for the first time, wide eyed and shocked.

Two things hit Cylian in the face immediately. One – Ayvo was in a wheelchair, one hovering a few inches off the ground, meaning the man had to crane his neck to look up at Cylian. And two – he was quite literally the most beautiful thing Cylian had ever seen, and that was saying a lot, since the man had witnessed the entire galaxy and all its wonders.

Cylian couldn’t tell how tall Ayvo was because of the wheelchair, but, just like his voice, he seemed younger than he actually was, his body retaining some of the lankiness of teenage years, but his physique was hidden with a slightly oversized white shirt. His sandy blonde hair fell onto his pale forehead in soft waves, his almond shape eyes were a striking dark green. His brows were raised as he regarded Cylian in complete and utter shock, his pale pink lips parted, revealing milky white, straight teeth. There was a loving sprinkle of freckles across the man’s pale cheeks and upturned nose. Cylian couldn’t stop staring, he knew he should break eye contact because it was getting creepy but he didn’t know how.

“Cylian,” Ayvo whispered, and it was a question and a statement and a sigh all in one. Emotions rushed through Cylian, and he felt his stomach turn to mush. Because finally the voice fit somewhere. Weeks of wondering what the Lighthouse would look like, who the voice would suit, culminated in this moment, in this beautiful man with an equally beautiful voice.

The Captain couldn’t stop the smile that stretched over his lips as he looked down at Ayvo, “Hello.”

“W-What...” Ayvo started shakily and then had to swallow, looking away, hand coming up to brush his hair from his face in agitation, “Why a-are you here...I...I don’t understand...”

The smile melted off Cylian’s mouth when he realised Ayvo wasn’t happy to see him, “I...I was let out of the hospital and I was in the area so...,” he shoved his hands in his pockets, knowing full well he was lying – the hospital he was in was on the opposite side of Göza and he was pretty sure he paid all his savings, life insurance and soul to the cabbie for the long journey it took to get to the cottage.

“I t-told you,” Ayvo’s bottom lip was trembling. Now his hair fell into his eyes, hiding his expression from the Captain. His hands were trembling in his lap, where he was gripping a blanket thrown over his legs, “I told you w-we’re not friends so I don’t understand-“

“It’s because you’re in a wheelchair, isn’t it?” Cylian interrupted. Ayvo looked up at him, wide-eyed, shocked at the harsh question, “Because you never mentioned it, and you were worried that I’d act weird if I knew?” Cylian didn’t know where all of these guesses were coming from. After so long of having to identify emotions from a voice, Ayvo was horribly easy to read.

The Lighthouse looked away, a blush of embarrassment colouring his cheeks, “I didn’t know how to say it to you,” he mumbled, “I...I just...,” he shook his head, as if his thoughts were getting to much.

“But we are friends?” Cylian asked, gently, “Aren’t we? Because I don’t mind that you’re in a wheelchair. I mean...um...we don’t have to be, if you don’t want to. I’m kind of realising it’s a bit weird, me coming here-“

“No!” Ayvo said abruptly, “no...I...I’m sorry. I’m usually really chatty and welcoming I’m just...it’s just...,” his expression softened when he looked at Cylian, “it’s just so peculiar to have you here. I spent so long looking at your picture and now you’re actually real,” the man pulled a face, “Ugh, I
just realised how creepy that sounded.”

Cylian laughed, feeling the tension in the air begin to seep out, “Think how I feel – up until this point you were just a voice.”

“This must be a disappointment then,” Ayvo laughed, gesturing at himself. He was making a joke but it made an ache awaken in Cylian’s heart.

“No,” he said softly, “it’s not. You’re not.”

Ayvo looked away again, which seemed to be some sort of defensive mechanism, “So, uh, do you wanna come in? We could have a drink, catch up maybe. Do you have somewhere to stay?”

“I was just going to go to a hotel I suppose,” Cylian shrugged, “my ship’s tomorrow afternoon.”

“Well, you can stay here,” Ayvo said firmly, not suggesting as much as making a statement, “Come in, don’t just stand there, idiot.”

Cylian timidly followed Ayvo into the cottage. Except Cylian was never timid – he was a Captain, he was professional, he didn’t give a fuck about most situations. But Ayvo made him feel the way he never felt before. Maybe this is what love feels like, Cylian thought distractedly as he followed Ayvo through a narrow, dark corridor, oh Stars did I actually just think that?! Am I crazy?! Love?! I don’t even know this guy...

“Just sit down,” Ayvo said when they entered the living room, “I’ll make you something to drink.” Cylian could tell that the blonde was still tense, and was deliberately being cold and distant.

Ayvo wheeled himself into an adjacent room that Cylian assumed was the kitchen, giving him some time alone with himself. The man perched on the edge of a cosy-looking floral couch and let his eyes survey the room. It was small and oval, with a fireplace in the corner, hologramic flames crackling in the air and adding to the warm, homey feel of the place. There was a small wooden table and two chairs, a white rug thrown over the floors and a massive hologramic screen on one wall, bringing in an aspect of the modern world into this vintage room. Cylian smiled to himself as he looked over the CD’s stacked in one corner, and tangles of cables and headphones in another, and he felt like he was learning little things about Ayvo just from seeing the place he lived in. He still couldn’t believe he was actually on Earth, that he had really met his Lighthouse. To remind himself that it was real Cylian pushed back the curtains in the window and looked at the river below, sparkling in the light of the stars.

Stars that were far, far away. Stars that Cylian would be among again soon. The thought filled him with homesickness and melancholy at once. He didn’t think he was made to walk the Earth, he was much more comfortable suspended among the planets.

Ayvo reappeared in the room. His green eyes were full of conflicted emotions that flicked through as if someone was switching television channels. Cylian saw hurt, confusion, fear, excitement, happiness, shame, all in the boy’s pupils.

“Here you go,” Ayvo wheeled himself close to Cylian and passed him a steaming mug. It seemed to the Captain that he was hyper-anxious to not touch hands by accident.

“Coffee?” Cylian asked in surprise, looking at the dark liquid in his cup. Ayvo resumed a position a few feet from Cylian, hands folded in his lap.

“Yeah,” he offered a nervous smile, fiddling with the blanket over his legs, “I know you’re obsessed with it,” he rolled his eyes. Cylian grinned, “How are you feeling by the way? Did the operation go
“Well?”

“Mhmm,” Cylian hummed in confirmation, taking a sip of the coffee. It filled him with warmth and courage, “and the government paid for it as well, would you believe.”

“It’s the least they could do after all you guys have been through,” Ayvo shook his head, “when Hothead contacted me and told me that…t-that…you’ve been hurt I just…,” he bit his lip, “all I could think about was what would happen if you died.”

“Well, I didn’t,” Cylian tried to reassure Ayvo, but the blonde wasn’t looking at him, picking at a loose thread in his blanket.

“And what if the last words I ever said to you was that we weren’t friends I just-,” when he glanced up there were tears shining in his eyes.

“Hey, relax, it’s alright,” Cylian felt a little panicked. He couldn’t deal with crying people. He put his cup down on the floor, “I didn’t die.”

“No,” Ayvo smiled apologetically and quickly dabbed at his eyes with his sleeves, “No, and I thank the stars for that.” Cylian smiled again, “Look, about what I said. About the friend thing. I really didn’t mean it. We are friends.”

“I knew you were lying when you said that,” Cylian smirked, a little proud, “But what was the point in it anyway?”

Ayvo shrugged, “Now it seems…foolish,” he said, as if tasting the word on his tongue, “but when you said that you’d take me up to space…well, I suppose I panicked a little. When I took the GTSC job I thought that it didn’t matter who I really was, and I thought about making up a whole different person, someone…someone who isn’t disabled. And being that, in front of you. So when you suggested we meet I just…,” he trailed off and shrugged.

“So everything you told me wasn’t true?” Cylian asked, frowning.

Ayvo smiled, almost to himself, “That’s the thing – it was. Because when I started talking to you I didn’t even contemplate lying. You were so genuine, and interesting, and when we actually got along I just…,” he shrugged again, “I don’t know. I just decided to be myself I suppose.”

“Except you never told me you were in a wheelchair.”

“Yeah,” Ayvo made a face, “Except that.”

“I’m glad you didn’t lie,” Cylian smiled, “Not that your disability would’ve made me want to be friends with you any less.”

“Except I wanted to be more than friends.”

It was a weird but natural progression in the conversation, almost like the next step, and yet the words that came out of Ayvo’s mouth shocked both of the men. Cylian stared at him, wide eyed, his brain feeling like a circuit, just an ongoing circle of he likes me, he likes me, he likes me. The Captain’s heart felt unsteady because stars he liked Ayvo too, wanted him, even before he saw how gorgeous the man was.

“Oh stars I didn’t mean to say that,” Ayvo said faintly and drifted back in his wheelchair, almost subconsciously. When he turned his back on Cylian the Captain jerked to his feet and threw his arms around him. The back of the wheelchair dug into Cylian’s chest but he didn’t care as he hugged
Ayvo from behind, arms wrapped firmly around the other man’s chest. He felt Ayvo’s hands gripping at his arms, felt his heart pounding against his arms.

“C-Cylian,” he sounded so shaky that Cylian got his brain back and quickly stepped back, scared that he freaked the blonde out.

“Shit, sorry.”

Ayvo turned his wheelchair around. His face was flushed, “Y-You...you...,” he took a shaky breath and looked up at Cylian nervously, “You’ve got something in your h-hair.”

“Oh,” the man brushed his fingers through his auburn locks, embarrassed, starting to regret the hug. He could always play it off as a friendly thing...

“You’re missing it,” Ayvo shook his head and stuck his hand out, “C’mere.”

Cylian leaned down a little to let Ayvo brush whatever was in his hair out. Instead the blonde fist ed his hand in the man’s shirt and ha led him down, crashing their lips together. Cylian was in complete shock and would’ve lost his balance if his hands didn’t somehow find the armrests of Ayvo’s chair. The Captain was in an uncomfortable position with his legs bent but couldn’t move because Ayvo was still keeping him close by gripping his shirt. Not that Cylian wanted to move anyway. The kiss was clumsy and their teeth had clanked together, but the feel of Ayvo’s lips against Cylian’s, as hesitant and unsure as they were, was exhilarating.

Ayvo broke away abruptly after a second in which Cylian didn’t respond to the kiss because he was still trying to wrap his head around what was happening.

“Shit.” Ayvo’s cheeks were flushed when he looked up at Cylian through his eyelashes. It seemed that his eyes were darker than moments ago, “Sorry.”

The kiss was sweet, and yet full of passion. Cylian rarely acted on impulse, but in that moment he did. He reached down and wrapped his arms around Ayvo’s thighs, pulling him up off the wheelchair. Ayvo squeaked as Cylian picked him up, legs hanging limply at Cylian’s hips as his blanket pooled to the ground. The Captain was used to carrying heavy machinery and in comparison Ayvo was light, even though he had no control over his legs.

“What are you doing?” Ayvo asked shakily, face inches from Cylian’s, arms wrapped tightly around the man’s neck as if he were scared Cylian would drop him.

“Where’s your bedroom?” the Captain asked. The blonde flushed a vivid, pretty pink but didn’t hesitate as in a hushed whisper he gave Cylian instructions to a spot underneath a hole in the ceiling. A second of stomach-turning anti-grav and the two men were in Ayvo’s dark bedroom, lights falling from the lamps outside and passing cars. The room was just like the blonde described to Cylian, but right now the man had other things to think about.

He made straight for Ayvo’s bed and laid him down with care he didn’t think he had. Ayvo was watching him with big eyes, as if surprised at the outcome of the situation. Cylian crawled over his body, nudging him back against the dark blankets and pillows. Against them, Ayvo’s hair looked like a silver halo.

Cylian kissed him, “I want to have sex with you,” he said in a hushed whisper, hoping he wasn’t
being too forward. He didn’t have time to be shy or coy or beat around the bush – they only had a few hours.

“I want it too,” Ayvo admitted in a small whisper, looking at Cylian through his thick eyelashes. That look should’ve definitely been illegal because of the things it did to the Captain.

Cylian pulled his shirt over his head, feeling too hot in Ayvo’s presence. The blonde’s eyes skimed over his body and landed on the bandage wrapped around Cylian’s middle. He reached out and brushed it gently with his fingers. Cylian caught his hand and kissed his palm before pressing his and Ayvo’s mouths in a heated, fiery kiss that left his stomach in knots and his member coming to life. The kiss was full of passion, but still tentative. Cylian might’ve known Ayvo’s mind and his voice, but he didn’t know his body...not yet.

When the blonde grabbed the hem of his white shirt, Cylian helped him get it over his head. Ayvo’s body was smooth and pale, but with some gentle muscle around his abdomen and biceps, probably from the fact he had to pull himself everywhere constantly.

“Like what you see?” the blonde teased. Cylian dived in for another kiss, hands sliding over Ayvo’s chest and stomach, resting on his hips. He knew if he didn’t touch the other man in some way he’d lose it.

“Can I take your trousers off?” the Captain asked, scared that he would freak Ayvo out in some way if he just went for it. The blonde bit his lip but then nodded, hesitant. Together they managed to wriggle the Lighthouse of said pants, which didn’t happen without giggles, and Cylian found himself stupidly aroused when he saw that Ayvo was wearing long black socks that reached his knees. His calves were incredibly thin and that was probably why Ayvo wore the stockings, his feet limp against the covers. When Ayvo saw Cylian surveying his legs he looked away, clearly embarrassed.

Cylian felt the horrible need to reassure the blonde that he didn’t find him disgusting or repulsive or anything like that, so he surged up for one more kiss, while he himself got his trousers off, throwing them somewhere to the side. Then the kiss took a turn as their bodies finally got used to each other. Suddenly Ayvo and Cylian fit together just right, as if they weren’t two strangers having sex with each other for the first time.

Ayvo was quivering beneath Cylian soon enough as their mouths moved together in some synchronisation that neither of them planned. Their tongues slid together, curled around one another like two dancers, desperate to be in each other’s mouths. Cylian’s hands were firmly pressed into Ayvo’s slim hips, the bones there pushing against his palms. The man used this as a way to ground himself, so he didn’t fly off the handle and completely take Ayvo apart.

“Tell me if I’m pressing to hard,” the Captain murmured, pulling back just enough so his lips brushed against Ayvo’s with each word. The blonde’s arms came to loop around Cylian’s neck and he brushed their noses together, playfully, over and over.

“I want you to press hard,” Ayvo mumbled, catching Cylian off-guard. The boy looked up at him with dark eyes, all of his shyness gone, “I want you to leave marks. So I can remember this when you’re up in space again.”

With a sound that sounded half like a growl and half like a moan Cylian kissed Ayvo again, his fingers digging into his lover’s skin until he was sure there would be bruises left on those milky hips. Cylian sucked Ayvo’s bottom lip into his mouth, biting on it, and the blonde mewled like a cat. His hands started to wander over Cylian’s muscular back, sliding into his hair, trailing down his stubbly cheeks and broad shoulders.
“Do you want to go all the way?” Cylian asked in a hushed voice, stroking the bruises he had just created on Ayvo’s hips. The blonde bit his lip to hide his grin, “What’s so funny?”

“You’re just a lot cuter than I expected,” the blonde admitted with a little giggle.

Cylian scowled, “I’m not cute,” he stated, and to back this up he pressed his mouth to Ayvo’s neck and blew a raspberry into his skin, causing the Lighthouse to giggle again. Cylian came up, grinning, and pressed his forehead against the blonde’s. He hadn’t been so happy and content in a long time. He forgot about his erection for a moment as he stared at Ayvo, stroking his cheeks caringly. He couldn’t comprehend how one person, almost a stranger at that, could make someone feel like they were flying.

“Hey,” Ayvo caught his hands, pressing his own, smaller ones over them, “You look like you’re going to get emotional. Please don’t get emotional, or I’ll get emotional too.”

“I’m not going to get emotional,” Cylian rolled his eyes, “I’m just counting your freckles.” He leaned down and kissed the man’s adorable nose, before finding his smiling mouth and kissing him again. When he pulled back Ayvo was watching him lazily, eyes half closed. They were both semi-hard and although they didn’t have all the time in the world, they were acting as if they did. Cylian didn’t want to rush this. His eyes flickered over Ayvo’s flushed face, “You’re beautiful.”

Ayvo averted his gaze, “Cylian,” he said, almost a sigh. Cylian nuzzled the boy’s neck.

“I’m serious,” he whispered, kissing the man’s heated skin, “do you know how many hours I spend thinking what you would look like?”

“I’m flattered,” Ayvo playfully rolled his eyes. Cylian nipped at his skin and felt the blonde shiver. The Captain’s hands slid from the boy’s cheeks and he found his hands, pining his wrists to the bed as he pulled back to hover above the blonde.

“I did hope you were beautiful, secretly,” the auburn-haired man admitted, “I just...I never expected you to be this gorgeous.”

“Oh my Gods, Cylian shut up,” Ayvo looked away, blushing. His breath hitched when Cylian pushed his legs open, settling deeper between his thighs. When he leaned forward to capture Ayvo’s lips once more their erections pressed together. Both the men gasped against each other’s mouths and Cylian slotted their hips together, pressing down hard. He felt Ayvo’s clothes member twitch against his.

“Fuck,” Ayvo bit his lip, turning his face away a little, eyes closed. It sent a shiver through Cylian.

“You swearing shouldn’t be as sexy as it is,” he admitted, and then gently rocked against Ayvo. A moan spilled from the boy’s swollen lips and Cylian continued to grind their erections together. It was a tease more than anything, but even that was getting the Captain riled up. He was never one for sex, but right now there was a desperation tainting his every thought, the need to be skin-to-skin with Ayvo, to get completely drunk off his body, off his smell, off his lips.

“L-Lian,” Ayvo moaned, and hearing his voice like this, the way Cylian had imagined so many times, was making him go crazy. He didn’t realise he had sped up and that he was full on grinding his cock down onto Ayvo’s until the blonde’s hips stuttered up and his hand came up to grip Cylian’s bicep, “G-Gods, don’t s-stop...”

“You’re gonna come aren’t you?” Cylian gritted through his teeth, trying to keep his sounds in his throat. His vision was fuzzy and he knew if he continued rocking against the Lighthouse like this he
wouldn’t last.

“N-No,” Ayvo stuttered, biting his lip, “n-no I w-won’t...nggh, t-this feels – ah! – ridiculously good–” his voice was getting more breathy and high-pitched and Cylian knew he’d have to stop soon or they wouldn’t get all the way. He gave a few more thrusts, reveling in the friction the two cocks rubbing together created, before he drew back.

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Ayvo threw an arm over his flushed face and tried to catch his breath. His legs laid uselessly on either side of Cylian as he pulled back to shimmy out of his underwear. Ayvo still couldn’t comprehend that the Captain was actually here. He brushed his blonde hair from his sweaty forehead and watched the man in the semi-darkness of his bedroom. Cylian threw his underwear over the side of the bed and crawled back between Ayvo’s legs. The blonde could see the long, thick member between his legs.

Ayvo wasn’t a virgin – he had had sex with a couple different people from a couple different species, but every time it was awkward because of his disability, and ended up being uncomfortable. But with Cylian it was different, though the blonde had no idea why. The auburn-haired man didn’t ignore Ayvo’s legs – just accepted that they were there, stroking them gently as he kissed the Lighthouse’s neck. His fingers hooked through the waistband of Ayvo’s shorts. He slowly eased them off, over Ayvo’s useless legs, clearly not caring that he had to do the work.

He pressed his mouth to Ayvo’s calf and started kissing his way back up.

“C-Cylian,” the blonde stuttered shakily, not knowing much else he could say, how to articulate the feelings he was being bombarded with. The man got to Ayvo’s naked cock, curving gracefully in the starlight falling in through the window. Cylian licked up the length without a warning and Ayvo cried out when he felt his mouth against the head. He jerked, the heat in his stomach threatening to spill over, “N-No!” he tugged on Cylian’s hair, pulling the surprised man away, “G-Gods don’t do that or I’ll come,” he blurted.

“Sorry, sorry,” Cylian pressed his lips to Ayvo’s neck again. He seemed to like it there, and a shot of pleasure went through the blonde when he felt Lian sucking a hickey just underneath Ayvo’s jaw. The Lighthouse hoped it’d stay there for a long time. He mewled as Cylian’s stubble rubbed him in all the right places.

Ayvo heard the bottle of the lubricant opening but honestly he was too lost in trying not to orgasm as Cylian sucked on his neck to pay attention. The Captain rearranged his legs so he had access to Ayvo’s bum. When the Lighthouse felt the man’s wet fingers against his hole he thought he was actually going to lose it.

He moaned when he felt a digit slide easily inside him. Ayvo was no stranger to this, it didn’t hurt, but it still made him shaky. He tugged on Cylian’s hair and kissed the man, his tongue sliding into the Captain’s mouth and urging his tongue to press against his. Ayvo was panting, his arms firmly wrapped around Cylian’s neck. He was quickly becoming addicted to the feeling; Cylian’s fingers were thicker than Ayvo’s own and somehow managed to reach further than the blonde ever could.

He was panting and squirming in Cylian’s grip by the time the man was three fingers deep, his breaths punctuated by moans. There was heat steadily building up in Ayvo, and the man didn’t know how much he could handle before he exploded.

“You ready?” Cylian asked, voice a little unsteady, eyes a little unfocused. Ayvo nodded. They all had their injections, they didn’t need contraception. So Cylian reached down to his own cock and
stroked it a few times, biting his lip as he did so. Looking at him, Ayvo didn’t think he had ever been so stardammed aroused.

Cylian held himself up by having one arm next to Ayvo’s head while he guided his member to the man’s ass with his free hand. The moment the blonde felt the blunt head against his wet entrance he moaned and threw his head back. He hadn’t felt this in a while – a long, thick, throbbing heat entering him. It felt so good.

“Oh stars,” Ayvo gasped, one of his hands scrambling at Cylian’s palm, splayed on the pillows next to the blonde’s head. As the Captain continued to push into the man, inch by inch, torturously slowly, Ayvo’s mouth fell open and he cried out.

“Gods,” Cylian moaned, “Shhh, shhh, just s-shut up or I’ll lose it...”

Ayvo grabbed his face and pulled him in for a passionate, messy kiss. He wished his legs worked so he could wrap them around Cylian’s waist and pull him closer. He forgot about that though, the second the Captain bottomed out inside him.

The two men moaned simultaneously into each other’s mouths, clinging onto one another desperately. Ayvo wasn’t sure he was even still breathing, he was lightheaded and dizzy, pleasure licking at his insides and setting him on fire. He was overwhelmed by the feeling and Cylian wasn’t even moving yet, his mouth now busy leaving a path of fiery kisses over Ayvo’s jaw and neck.

He started rocking against Ayvo, barely there, as they kissed over and over again, moaning and gasping against each other. Every little shift and grind made Ayvo crumble just a little. His brain was short circuiting, not working properly. Just like before, Cylian’s thrusts started out small and then slowly became faster. Then out of nowhere he was suddenly thrusting into Ayvo.

The blonde’s back arched and he cried out, eyes falling shut as he felt shaken to the core. The man started setting up a rhythm and his cock was so fucking hot inside Ayvo that all the man could do was moan and writhe on it like an Omega in heat. He didn’t know how much time passed, but with each thrust Ayvo felt like he was falling apart and getting put back together. He had never felt this way with anyone else.

“F-Fuck you feel so good,” Cylian gasped. He pulled back, hands gripping Ayvo’s hips, and thrust into him with a strength even he didn’t know he possessed. Ayvo forced himself to open his eyes as he rode the waves of pleasure that Cylian was sending through him.

Ayvo wanted to say something back, to let Cylian know how amazing he felt in that moment, but instead all that came out was, “C-Cylian, C-Cylian, f-fuck, o-oh...C-Cylian~” it’s like Ayvo’s mind couldn’t remember anything but the man’s name.

Cylian leaned forward, holding Ayvo’s legs up, and started pounding into him. At one point his hard, throbbing length found Ayvo’s prostate, and when he hit it the blonde felt his body start to tremble uncontrollably. To make matters worse (or better) Cylian’s hand wrapped around Ayvo’s hard, leaking cock and started stroking him in time with his thrusts. Ayvo had no control over anything, moans spilled from his mouth, his fingers were scratching lines into Cylian’s back as he urged the man closer.

“Faster,” he panted into Cylian’s ear heatedly, their sweaty bodies sliding together, “S-Stars faster~” Ayvo didn’t even have time to realise he was coming before he spurted come all over his stomach.

“I’m not gonna...Gods, fuck,” Cylian bit at Ayvo’s shoulder, “I’m n-not gonna last~”
“Come,” Ayvo gasped, his head fuzzy as he clung onto Cylian. All he knew was that he wanted to fully belong to this man that was pounding into him right now, losing his rhythm as his movements got wilder and wilder, “C-Come inside me, o-oh Gods y-yes please-“

So Cylian came inside him. Their foreheads were pressed together as they gasped for air, attempting to recover the breaths they lost. Ayvo was so out of it, relaxing through his afterglow, that he didn’t feel Cylian’s kisses against his face for a few seconds. When the man cracked open his eyes he saw the Captain looking down at him tiredly, stroking his cheeks, kissing his nose and forehead and brushing his hair from his sweaty forehead.

Ayvo tugged him down for a kiss because if he didn’t have something covering his mouth he would’ve blurted three stupid, stupid words. Tiredly, Cylian rolled off him and laid on his back next to the blonde, breathing loudly. Ayvo felt sweat drying on his skin and now that his ecstasy was ebbing away the sadness started creeping in. This might’ve been the only time he and Cylian would make love.

Helplessly Ayvo rolled over and looked at the clock on his bedside table. Time...a funny concept. It seemed one had so much of it, until they didn’t. Right now it was coming up to two in the morning...how many hours did Cylian and Ayvo have left together? The Lighthouse felt tears pricking his eyes – Cylian was like a fairytale prince, everything he ever wanted, and now he was going to get ripped away.

He felt a strong arm wrap around his waist and a mouth press kisses to the back of his shoulder, stubble rubbing against his skin. Cylian pulled Ayvo into his chest and poked his head over the blonde’s shoulder to kiss the corner of his mouth.

“Don’t tell me you’re having regrets,” he said, voice hoarse and low. Ayvo rolled over with some difficulty, though Cylian helped by grabbing his leg and sliding it over his waist. The blonde gripped the Captain’s handsome face in his hands and stroked his cheeks. Cylian’s brown eyes were full of warmth and tiredness.

“The only thing I’m regretting is the fact you have to leave,” he mumbled. Cylian kissed him softly but didn’t say anything – there was nothing to say that would make it better. They would be separated, and that was that, “Let’s pretend,” Ayvo whispered, pressing himself closer to Cylian and wondering how he could have such strong feelings for someone he just met, “that's we’re a couple, and that you’re staying. That tomorrow we’ll have breakfast and go to work, and kiss each other goodbye, and then we’ll come back and have dinner and have sex and fall asleep like this tomorrow night as well.”

“Alright,” Cylian smiled, eyes closing, “Let’s pretend. And the next time I see you I’ll ask you to marry me,” he joked.

“Okay,” Ayvo smiled, “So I should expect the ring tomorrow night, yeah?”

But Cylian was already asleep.
Rae 18th Aillill 1144EE (3 days later)

**Hannibal.**

Thané was starting to feel sick, and he didn’t mean the medical let-me-handle-it-with-pills sick. He meant the emotionally sick with worry that nothing could really heal. It had been three days since Viridian drained himself by sending Cylian back to Earth, and he wasn’t waking up. *Why wasn’t he waking up?!* Thané wasn’t used to caring so much about his patients – as a Doctor he was always, to some extent, detached from his feelings. After a few months working in an underground hospital in occupied Golbahar and seeing limbs ripped off and gaping wounds in people’s guts he stopped reacting to death, it was just a natural progression of life.

But he couldn’t let Viridian die, just the thought made him nauseous. He had spent the past few days frantically trying to keep the boy’s heartbeat and blood pressure normal, while feeding him through a tube and generally sitting by him, sometimes holding his hand, sometimes just staring at his face, looking for any signs of waking. He found himself falling asleep next to the Omega multiple times, his head cradled into the little dip of Viridian’s waist. Through the days the boy remained looking pale, sickly and frail.

The rest of the ship was in shambles. The only time Thané ventured out of the medical bay was to feed himself, way less frequently than he should’ve. Hickey was trying her best to keep the ship together but it was clear that her nerves were frayed from the encounter with the Wurund and the fact that Cylian was away. They had been informed that his operation was successful but nobody would relax until they saw him in person again. Champagne, Lin and Vega were trying to repair the side of the ship, where *Bermuda* had driven itself into when invading *Hannibal*, and Thané saw them in the hallways, dull eyed, pale and exhausted. Arch didn’t emerge from the prison cell at all, taking over Greige’s shifts as well. As for the Ubloit he aimlessly wandered the ship, clearly lost without Cylian. Huambo remained in the kitchen with the children for the most part, and even the young Calanthe royalty had lost some of their excitement and loudness. Uncle Plump buried himself in work, reading up on Arossian customs and traditions before they landed...if they ever even landed. So many things went wrong that Thané wondered if they’d even make it.

Overall the atmosphere on *Hannibal* was mournful and heavy and nobody wanted to acknowledge it. Then came two breaking points sometime during the third day of Cylian’s absence, at these two points broke the miserable lull in the air of the ship.

The first breaking point happened in the medical bay. It had been a tiring day for Thané, full of self
hate, writing reports and worrying about Viridian. Like most days the Fox fell asleep with his head cradled into the boy, without even meaning to. The lights in the medical bay were dimmed, only a soft glow coming from the emergency triangle above the door. Thane was surprised when he instead of naturally waking on his own he was startled back into consciousness, because someone was gently playing with his hair.

It took his groggy mind a moment to start registering what was happening. Thane was facing the door but he felt slim fingers pushing through the messy strands of his hair, a feather light touch. It was a gentle feeling, barely there. Thane yawned, unable to stop himself, and with some difficulty turned around to look up at whoever was stroking his hair.

Viridian was looking at him with half-lidded, tired eyes, his pale hand stretched out and playing with Thane’s messy ginger locks. The doctor’s heart jumped in his chest and he jerked upwards in his chair, suddenly horribly awake.

“You’re okay,” he blurted, before he could gather his thoughts and demeanour. Viridian’s hand fell to his side and he looked at Thane sleepily.

“How long have I been out?” he mumbled, voice a little slurred. Thane stood up, feeling his body start to buzz with excitement and anticipation – he knew he was going to crash as soon as relief hit him but right now he was running on pure adrenaline.

“Three days,” Thane tried to keep his tone professional but he thought it was obvious how glad and happy he was. He was almost smiling for fuck’s sake, but right now he didn’t care because Viridian was finally awake, even if he still didn’t look his best. “Stars, I actually thought you might die on me...on us,” the Fox hurried around the bed, trying to get himself in check. His hands trembled as he reached to the bag of drugs attached to the soft part of Viridian’s arm, and made sure it was inside his vein properly. Viridian winced a little, watching Thane with half-interest, eyes focusing and unfocusing. He was drugged off his head.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered, words melting together in his mouth. Thane looked at him helplessly. Even now, when the Omega had literally saved someone’s life, he was apologizing. It’s your fault, Thane told himself bitterly, you were cruel and now he thinks there’s something wrong with him.

“Don’t apologize, idiot,” Thane grumbled. He did a circle around the medical bay and returned with an armful of things. He placed a glass of electrolyte, strengthening liquid in Viridian’s hand, “Drink that,” he ordered, and Viridian drank. Thane passed him two capsules, “Swallow those.” Viridian swallowed. Thane took his temperature, pulse, blood pressure and sugar levels and all through it Viridian watched him tiredly, with an incredible softness in his eyes that Thane couldn’t understand - he didn’t know whether it was present because of the state of Viridian’s health, because of the drugs or because of Thane’s presence. Either way it made the Fox feel a way that he preferred not to address.

The medical bay was silent, but the Fox liked that better since it gave him opportunity to try and sort out his thoughts, to categorize them in his head, colour code them, shove them into folders and push those he didn’t want to think about to the back of his head. Thane turned to his desk and pulled out a pad, writing down some absolute bullshit and pretending he was busy, his back to Viridian as he tried to hide how shaken he had been, and how much the Omega’s state had really affected him.

“How’s Cylian?” Viridian asked hoarsely and Thane heard shuffling behind him as the boy sat up.

“He’s alright. On his way back now,” the Fox tried to keep his replies curt and to the point. He was scared that his voice would betray the jumble of emotions he was desperately trying to keep locked inside himself. Somehow his feelings for Viridian didn’t fit into a mental folder he could just lock
“That’s good,” Viridian sounded relieved, like something had been taken off his chest. Thane turned to him, trying to remain professional. Viridian’s facial expression threw him off – the boy was pale, his hands shaking horribly, more than he had a minutes ago. There were beads of sweat on his forehead. Thane’s anxiousness spiked immediately and he was by the bed in two steps.

“What’s wrong?” he demanded, hand shooting out to grab Viridian’s thin arm. He had grown used to touching the Omega the past few days.

“I-I...,” Viridian took a gulp of air and squeezed his eyes shut, “I think I-I’m going to throw u-up-“

Thane didn’t do vomit, that was the one thing he didn’t do. He was a war doctor for a reason – he could deal with guts spilling out, and someone bleeding out, brains splattered all over floors and amputated limbs. He couldn’t deal with vomit – he was empathetic like that, if you puke, he pukes. And yet right now he scrambled for a self-cleaning steel bucket. His hand closed on Viridian’s ankle and roughly jerked him to the side, so the boy turned, his feet dangling over the edge of the bed. Thane shoved the bucket into his lap and pulled his ebony, long hair from his face. The Omega gagged on air and leaned forward, his hands gripping the sides of the bucket as if it were a lifeline. I’m holding his hair back like some girl in a club on Sousnan, Thane thought and would’ve laughed at how stupid the situation was if Viridian hadn’t leaned forward and vomited loudly into the bucket just then.

Thane averted his eyes to the ceiling and exhaled. Subconsciously he had twisted Viridian’s locks into a knot at the nape of his neck and was holding it in one hand, his other one stroking the boy’s back in comfort, as if he were a scared animal. It was a way for Thane to distract himself from the boy being sick. Foxes weren’t really defensive over mates in nature, but right now all Thane wanted to do was protect Viridian. The boy finished vomiting and slumped against Thane’s arm since he had no strength to keep himself up, eyes closed, taking shallow breaths. The bucket cleaned itself, thankfully.

“You alright?” Thane asked.

Viridian opened his eyes slowly, like it took a lot of energy, “You’re worried,” he muttered, “About...me.” Thane flushed and removed his arm but Viridian started leaning back, as if he couldn’t hold himself up, so Thane wrapped an arm around his waist once more to keep him upright.

“I’m a doctor,” he said curtly, avoiding eye-contact, “It’s my job to worry,” he let go of Viridian’s hair, letting it slip around his small, pale, heart-shaped face. The Omega smiled weakly and Thane found himself returning the smile, a little fond, a lot relieved. Stupid, stupid...

The Fox looked away and cleared his throat, scared at how easily he was losing control over himself. He was contemplating kissing Viridian for f**k’s sake, and the boy had just vomited. The Omega leaned into Thane’s side, eyes close, and let out a breath. The doctor looked at him, biting his lip. What if I just told him now? He wondered. It was quiet, dark, private, intimate. What if I just told him how I felt about him? What if I just let myself be happy for once.

But all he had done so far was hurt Viridian. Confessing his feelings would just make it worse. He didn’t want to string the Omega with him, give him false hope that Thane could bury all his issues and just be happy with him. It physically hurt to let the boy go, and the Fox hated that.

“We should get some food inside of you,” he said, getting up.
The second breaking point came later that same night. Everyone had retreated to their cabins except Hickey and Greige who sat in the navigation cabin, making sure to avoid any ships coming their way and fretting because Hothead was offline. Thane strictly forbade Viridian from making more time for a while, and then insisted the Omega stay in the medical bay for the night. He stayed in there with him.

Everyone was tired and still shaken up and nobody paid attention, or even remembered, about the Ishait prisoner and Arch, sitting down in the cell, alone.

Evander had come to terms with the fact he was never getting out of his cell the moment that he got shoved back in after the disposal of the bodies of the Wurund. Nobody seemed to notice that he had stayed quiet and followed instructions during the whole ordeal. Idiotic, Evan had thought the crew would trust him more for not turning against them at the first opportunity. But he was back where he started, in this stardamned cell. At least the electricity was off so he could lean against the cold metal bars and contemplate his miserable life. He thought about Idra, the dessert moon, the vast emptiness, heat and pain that happened there. He didn’t want to go back and yet he knew he would.

Cassius tried to speak to him. *I have no choice, my opinion doesn’t matter here and Evander don’t be angry with me this isn’t my choice and I believe you, alright? That must mean something?* It didn’t. Evander kept his back to the soldier and didn’t speak to him. He should’ve realised the man wasn’t on his side back on Aghamora, when he had dragged him back to Hannibal. And now this – Cassius would never help Evander. To his he was just another Dark Ishait and the only reason he even paid a thought to the man was because he was a stupid Shif with a stupid conscience. That’s exactly why Evan was taught to never trust other species. He couldn’t trust his own species either, especially not the Light Ishait now in charge of the ship. He could trust no-one.

He thought he might just break – kill himself somehow, refuse food, refuse touch, refuse *everything* and finally go to Quinae like he should’ve all along. But instead it was Cassius who broke.

That night Evander had fallen asleep listening to the man talking, just blabbering on about nonsense in the hopes the Ishait would finally reply to him. The man found himself passing out without realising or meaning to more and more often – his body had no energy. He hated being in captivity.

Sleep gave him peace. In sleep he could dream about the galaxy outside, about his home planet before the war, about all the beautiful things he saw while he travelled through the Galaxies. But this particular night he was ripped from the warm embrace of sleep by a hand on his shoulder, shaking him awake violently.

Evander was up and alert in seconds, on his feet, back pressed against the wall, heart hammering. For a second he was back on a different ship, a Vlassain police officer shoving him against a window and painfully twisting his arms behind his back, repeating over and over *you are under arrest*. It was what had started the nightmare, set off the chain of events that brought Evander into this cell.

“Hey,” Cassius said, looking worried on the other side of the bars, hand mid-air, “It's just me.”

Evander didn’t realise he was holding his breath until he let it out, his panic seeping out of his muscles, replaced by frustration and annoyance. He was about to ask Cassius what he wanted but then bit his tongue and narrowed his eyes at the Shif instead. His mind told him that in front of him stood a friend, with warm, strong arms and a comforting touch. Evan’s heart hurt when he thought about how stupid he had been for putting his hope in the man.
“I...uh...,” Cassius was clearly uncomfortable, running his fingers through his soft brown hair that had grown out enough so now it fell onto his tanned forehead, “So...we’re...we’re passing by Kar.”

Kar was a planet formerly controlled by the Breos, and completely overgrown with nature to the point where it was one giant forest. Kar itself was a tiny dwarf planet. Evander had no idea why Cassius was telling him this.

“I thought...I thought I could take you for a little walk?” the Shif asked nervously, shifting from foot to foot, “down the corridor? You could take a look at Kar through the window? Would...would you like that?” he sounded so anxious and hopeful and apologetic that Evander was tempted to reply. But he kept his lips firmly shut, “Alright,” Cassius nodded, walking over to the pad next to the cell, “I'll...I'll take that as a yes. Don't try anything, Evan.”

Evan. Everyone else on this stardammed ship called him it or the Ishait or traitor or prisoner. None of them knew his name, or at least Evander didn’t think they did. Except Cassius, who called him Evan with a softness that made his knees feel unsteady. The Ishait didn’t move even as the bars retreated into the floor. He had learned that their absence didn’t mean his freedom. He had nowhere to run, not up here.

“Evan,” Cassius said on a sigh, gently, as if easing a scared animal out of its shell. Evander wasn’t a scared animal. He clenched his jaw and stepped out of his holding cell, keeping a few steps between him and the Shif. It was his last joy in life, making the soldier miserable.

They walked out into the deserted engine room, not saying a word to each other. The main corridor was brightly lit and silent, the quiet hum of the generator the only sound, paired with the creaks going through the ship. The two men stopped close to the main exit, where a helmet sat on the floor, and Evan wondered if he could throw himself out into the galaxy. How long would it take to suffocate? Or would he implode first?

The Ishait stopped by the little oval window in the wall and Cassius remained a few steps away, respectfully. He wasn’t watching Kar, he was watching Evan. The Ishait firmly kept his eyes on the small green planet rolling past at a luxuriously slow speed. It was surrounded by stars for miles as Hannibal entered a less densely packed area of the Cairn Galaxy. They couldn’t see the Morie Asteroid Belt anymore, but up ahead was the small and silver twinkle of Shoriah, fast approaching. And after that they’d have to curl around its last remaining moon, Hobemma 5, and it’d be Arossa. Finally. Evan didn’t know if he dreaded or yearned for it.

“Pretty, isn’t it?” Cassius asked, though he was still looking at Evander. The Ishait shrugged and the Shif took a tentative step towards him, “I haven’t seen so much green since Arossa. I think you’d like it if you ever got to see it – Arossa, that is.”

Evan’s head snapped to him, “If?” the words slipped from his mouth before he could think twice about them. In two steps Cassius was by him, his fingers curling around Evan’s wrist.

“There’s a shuttle in the dock by the main exit,” the Shif said, voice hushed, expression serious, eyes dark. Evander’s heart started pounding, his skin heating up where the Shif touched him, “get on it and get to Kar. It has enough fuel, I checked. There’s Dark Ishait on Kar they’ll take you-“


Cassius exhaled, “We don’t have time for this. Anyone could come by I just...,” he paused and his fingers relaxed on Evan’s wrist, “I just think you’re innocent. I believe that you didn’t murder those people on Golbahar. It’s unfair for you to get the blame. As kind and welcoming as the Calanthe are, I know their courts. They’re merciless, especially now, against Ishait since the assassination of the
King and Queen. You won’t get a fair trial.”

“Why are you helping me?” Evander’s mouth was dry and he didn’t know what to think...he didn’t want to let himself hope that maybe, just maybe...

“I just told you didn’t I?” Cassius said, frustrated. Evan wanted him to give him a different reason, an inkling that these feelings that warmed Evander’s heart, the feelings he had for a fucking Shif weren’t completely one sided. Instead Cassius let go of his hand, “Are you going or not?” he asked.

Slowly, hesitantly, Evander nodded, “Yes,” he whispered.

“Good,” Cassius seemed relieved, “the shuttle is loaded with enough supplies to last you to Kar. It’d take two days to get there if you go now. We only have one shuttle, nobody is going to chase you.”

“But the AI...,” Evander was grasping for arguments, trying to find an explanation for how they even got to this point.

“I disabled it,” Cassius seemed ashamed of that, “That’s why Hickey and Greige are now in the navigation cabin for so long. They’re trying to turn Hothead back on, I don’t know how long it will take. Here,” he pressed a gravity suit into Evander’s hand, “just in case.”

“What will happen to you?” Evander didn’t understand the sacrifice Cassius was making for him. Shifs and their stardammed pride. The man shrugged,

“I don’t care. I have to do what’s right or I’ll beat myself up over it for the rest of my life. Maybe I’ll get a fair trail,” he swiped his hand next to the pad by the door and it hissed open, “once the other door opens I’ll let the shuttle out. Get in, press the button that says on course – it’s already programmed to take you straight to Kar.”

“You’ve planned this,” Evan said in disbelief. Cassius smiled,

“Yes. I suppose I have. Now you really have to go.”

Evander nodded numbly, completely at loss for words, and walked to the door as if in a daze. He got the gravity suit on in seconds, barely aware of his actions. He picked up the helmet off the floor and cradled it in his arms. He had half his foot in the door before his brain told him that he couldn’t just leave like this. With no warning the Ishait whirled around, closed the space between him and Cassius, stood on his tiptoes, and kissed the Shif. It was a peck, a heartbreaking goodbye kiss that lasted a second. Just a second. It was painfully quick but it was all Evan’s heart could take at the moment. He was scared he would cry.

“Thank you,” he whispered to the shell-shocked Cassius, staring at him with wide eyes. And then he shoved his helmet on and stepped through the door. It closed with a hiss and the airlock chamber was sealed for a moment. Cassius came and pressed himself against the glass. He was saying something but Evan couldn’t hear him. The door at his back opened and then Evander was out in the galaxy. His heart was beating so impossibly fast. He forgot how to breathe as the sky opened around him.

Free. Finally free.

Why did it feel like he left his only bit of happiness in the corridor with Cassius?

Chapter End Notes
Thank you so much for reading! Please leave a kudo, or a comment if you're feeling extra sweet today :)
What Happened on Shoriah

Joi 20\textsuperscript{th} Aillill 1144EE (2 days later)

**Shoriah.**

Cylian’s bag was slung over his shoulder, full of some personal stuff he brought from Earth 6.2. He stood at the end of a landing pad, and around him rose the metropolitan city of Karazi, one of the many industrial areas of Shoriah, practically the last real planet in the Cairn Galaxy before Arossa. Between here and there was a moon and thousands of stars and not much else. Once this small planet with an eco-system similar to Earth had five moons that were all inhabited. However volcanic eruptions destroyed four of those moons, leaving the last one, Hobemma 5, hanging suspended in the pale blue sky up above Cylian’s head right now. The red moon was on the brink on imploding and disappearing from this galaxy like its sister-moons, and it was all fire and lava up there.

Cylian didn’t much care for Hobemma 5 and the only reason his eyes were trained on it was because a ship was descending from the sky near it. That wasn’t that peculiar – Shoriah was full of ships, mostly agents and tourists, rows of vessels flying in neat lines across the blue-tinted sky, the light of the artificial sun reflecting off the glass buildings jutting from a thick layer of clouds like ribs of some giant animal. Shoriah always had a floor of clouds near the ground, that’s why most of its buildings climbed high into the sky, generating power from the sun rays that wouldn’t otherwise break through the clouds. It was a pretty planet, bright, clean, neat. But what was prettier was *Hannibal* coming closer and closer, growing larger than Hobemma 5 until eventually Cylian could feel the warm blast of air from the engines on his face, his hair ruffled by the wind.

It felt like a homecoming.

“Your ship?” the Shif General that was in charge of getting Cylian safely back onto *Hannibal* said, standing next to the auburn haired man. To their side was a mountain of steel boxes, full of supplies that *Hannibal* would need to get to Arossa and then journey back to Calliban, and the General’s men stood about, ready to load the ship up.

“Yes,” Cylian said proudly as *Hannibal* started to land on the pod, “*my ship.*”

The vessel hadn’t yet touched the ground when Exit B burst open and Hickey jumped out, landing gracefully on her heels, like an animal. Her hair was pulled back from her face, her eyes full of worry and anticipation at once. Cylian felt happiness flood him at seeing her again, his best friend, his sister practically. He didn’t realise how much he missed her until her black-sclera eyes landed on him and she broke into a run.

Cylian let his bag slide to the ground and opened his arms just in time for Sohalia to barrel into him, wrapping her arms around him like a prehistoric octopus, like she was scared he’d disappear if she let
go. The General and his men respectively moved a little way off to give them some privacy.

“You’re okay!” Hickey wailed, sobbing loudly and clinging onto Cylian, hugging him so tightly he couldn’t breathe, “You’re alright! I-I thought y-you’d die!”

Cylian laughed easily and patted his friends back, her obvious display of affection warming his heart. Usually Ishait were only this friendly with their own kind and it felt good to know that Hickey accepted Cylian as one of hers.

“I’m home now, old girl.”

“Don’t call me old,” Hickey drew back and playfully punched Cylian in the arm before wiping her tears from her eyes and smiling brilliantly, “I missed you kid.”

He grinned at her, “I missed you too. More than I thought I would.”

Her eyes flickered over him and her smile shifted, “Something’s changed,” she said, quieter now, “Something happened,” she reached out and took Cylian’s hand, and her smile returned, “Your eyes are sparkling.”

“Don’t be soppy.”

“I’m serious,” Hickey’s smile continued growing, “You went to see him. The Lighthouse – Ayvo Rasmussen – didn’t you?”

Cylian squeezed her hand, “I’ll explain later,” he said, because he saw the rest of the crew pile out of Hannibal, who had finally landed, stretching their limbs and turning their faces to the sunshine, enjoying solid ground under their feet for the first time in weeks.

Greige came over, a gentle smile on his face. He clasped Cylian’s hand in his, “It’s good to see you well, Captain,” he said, voice low and hoarse as always. Cylian didn’t know if he was happy because he was among his people again, or because the joy from seeing Ayvo still hadn’t worn off. He missed him horribly, but he also felt like someone had slotted a missing part of his heart into place.

Cylian heard a squeal and then Lin and Champagne dashed at him at the same time, throwing themselves at him.

“Cylian!” they both yelled, looking like their faces might break from their smiles. Cylian caught them with his arms and hugged them tightly. The smell of engine oil always surrounding the two mechanics was comforting. Lin started crying, because Lin was a crier, and Champagne showered Cylian’s cheeks with kisses, and then went to try and calm her friend down with why the hell are you crying, idiot?

Even Thane had come outside, “How was the operation?” he asked, slinking over like the Fox he was. His hands were in the pockets of his medical coat and he looked vaguely uncomfortable to be out of the ship. Cylian squeezed his shoulder.

“It was good. Thank you for taking care of me.”

Thane shook his head, and there was a tension about his shoulders, “Don’t thank me. Thank him,” he pointed at Viridian with his chin. The Omega stood a few steps away, laughing with Champagne at Lin’s emotional response good-heartedly. Cylian’s heart clenched when he saw how thin and sickly the boy was, his wavy black hair tied in a knot at the nape of his neck, only exaggerating the grey shadows on his white face. Thane must’ve noticed.
“It’s alright. He’s getting better.”

“I need to...,” Cylian didn’t finish as he began walking towards the boy. Viridian looked up when he heard him approaching and smiled a little anxiously.

“Captain-,” he started, but Cylian wrapped both of his arms around the boy and hugged him tightly to his chest. He felt Sasha tense in his arms and quickly pulled back, embarrassed at his sudden impulse.

“Thank you,” he said quietly, hoping his sincerity was clear.

The kid’s face lit up, “It’s alright. That’s my job.”

“No, it’s not,” Cylian reached out and clasped his shoulder and Viridian copied the gesture, looking a little shy at all the attention, and a lot happy, “You saved my life, and I am eternally grateful.”

Sasha nodded, but that was as much as the Captain could talk to him in that instance because then Eilo finally broke away from Plumpton. The Vlassain was standing close to Hannibal, trying to keep the two children from running off. But he didn’t anticipate Eilo taking her shoes off and taking to air.

The kid was getting better at controlling her anti-gravity and she kicked her little legs through the air towards Cylian as Uncle Plumpton yelled at her in a vaguely angry Fiala.

“Cylian!” the little girl’s face was red and blotchy, as if she had been crying. Cylian stood on his tiptoes and grabbed her little ankle as she flew over his head, tugging her down, “Cylian!” the little girl’s face crumbled and she wrapped her arms around Cylian’s neck and started crying. The Captain didn’t know how many more tears he could handle that day. But he quickly understood that Eilo wasn’t crying from happiness, “They hurt Arch!” the little girl wailed.

Cylian’s eyes snapped to Greige, “What? Who?!”

The Ubloit averted his eyes, “He’s a traitor, Captain.”

“He’s not!” Rian yelled angrily, wrestling his hand out of Plumpton’s grip. Cylian held Eilo and looked around the crew, who were all suddenly sombre.

“What happened?” he demanded. Hickey sighed,

“He let the Ishait prisoner go, gave him our only shuttle.”

“What?” Cylian hissed, his happiness popping like a bubble.

“We don’t know why. He won’t talk to us. We put him in the holding cell for now.”

“Let him out!” Eilo demanded, clinging onto Cylian, “Let him o-out Lian!”

Cylian was confused and pretty pissed. He passed Eilo over to Viridian, who was the only person she wasn’t trying to fight, and ran a hand through his hair, “Let’s get the supplies on the ship,” he instructed, trying to keep a clear head. It helped to envision Ayvo, back in his bed on Earth, smiling softly at Cylian. Near dawn, when Cylian was coming to terms with the fact he’d have to leave, the Lighthouse had whispered You’re a good Captain, Lian. And that was exactly what Cylian had to be right now. They were too close to fuck up now, “I’ll take care of Arch later.”

Tuhi 25th Aillill 1144EE (5 days later)

Arch wouldn’t speak to Cylian, which wasn’t even surprising. He sat in the cell that formerly
belonged to the Dark Ishait, staring directly at the war and not speaking to anyone. Hickey had explained that he had disabled Hottie, put the prisoner into a shuttle and sent him towards Kar, but nobody understood why he would do that. The best thing they could do was hand him over to the Arossian officials and hope they could get some answers out of him.

Cylian was never close to the soldier but he didn’t like seeing him behind bars, especially when he couldn’t explain to himself exactly why he was there. So far Arch had helped them more than anything. Thank stars the Captain always had his Lighthouse to distract him from the problems in the galaxy.

Cylian was happy to be back in the navigation cabin, among all the clutter and mess. He got out of his shoes as quickly as he could, took a cup of steaming coffee from Huambo gratefully and settled in his chair. Hickey wasn’t present so he was all alone...well, save for the talking cactus and the AI.

“Hothead,” Cylian said, settling in.

“What’s up boss?”

“Can you give me a little privacy?”

“Ohhh...are you going to have online sex with your little Lighthouse?” the AI teased. Cylian rolled his eyes and mournfully thought I wish...

“Turn your speakers off or I’ll turn you off,” Cylian threatened.

“Good to have you back too, Cap,” Hothead said, only half-joking, and clicked off. Cylian didn’t have to worry about Akkie hearing anything because the Breos knew everything that was going on in his head most of the time anyway, but right now he was asleep, the cactus rising and falling slowly as if he was breathing, his little pink flowers closed into buds.

Taking a deep breath, Cylian went online.

“Good evening and welcome to your favourite radio show!” Ayvo said cheerfully over the speakers. Hearing his voice felt like getting stabbed and Cylian forgot how to breathe for a second. It felt like he was back in that little cottage, watching the blonde make him breakfast.

“Hi,” he said, voice faint and shaky, not knowing why hearing the man impacted him so suddenly. He heard Ayvo exhale.

“Hey,” the Lighthouse said, “Hi...hey. How...h-how are you?”

“I...,” Cylian swallowed, his hands clenching into fists because he wanted to reach out and touch Ayvo, except the man was miles and miles and miles away and Cylian wouldn’t be able to touch him for a long, long time. Or see him, “I don’t know. Hearing your voice...”

“I know,” Ayvo said softly, “It hurts. I didn’t think it’d hurt this much,” he laughed painfully.

“Stars I want to see you so badly,” Cylian whispered, resting his head in his hands. He would’ve cried if he thought it would help the ache in his heart.

“Hey, come on,” Ayvo let out a little laugh again and Cylian knew it meant he was close to tears, “I’m at work don’t make me all emotional.”

“Sorry,” Cylian ran a hand through his hair and leaned back in his chair, “It’s...I’m home and yet I feel like something’s missing. Well, not something. You. You’re missing.”
“When did you turn into such a sap?” Ayvo teased, and then his voice turned a little bit more serious, and a little softer, “We’re going to have to live like this – we’re apart right now and there’s nothing we can do about it. Just focus on the mission.”

“I know,” Cylian sighed, “It’s just hard when all I want to do is hold you.”

There was a pause on the other side, “I-I...,” Ayvo started shakily, “I-I...,” it was as if he couldn’t bring himself to say what he wanted to. Cylian stared out at the galaxy stretching in front of him, and Shoriah, the silver planet passing slowly under them. They were heading toward Hobemma 5, but would pass well clear of it, “I have stuff from the GTSC that I need to tell you.” Ayvo finished eventually, but Cylian knew it wasn’t what he had wanted to say.

“All right,” Cylian took a sip of his coffee, “Let’s hear it.”

“They passed an intergalactic law. At least our side of the war did, and it affects Viridian...”

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Sasha anxiously walked along the main corridor towards the navigation cabin. Cylian had asked for him and now the Omega was worried it was because the man wanted to thank or repay him somehow for what Viridian did for him. He hoped not, because he couldn’t handle other people’s gratitude.

He knocked politely on the door at the end of the corridor, past the main exit and then slipped inside. It was dark, as always, so the galaxy outside was clearer. The whole place was littered with mechanisms, winking with little multicoloured lights. Cylian swivelled around in his chair with a little awkward smile.

“Hello,” Viridian said.

“Hello,” the Captain replied, and gestured to the seat usually taken by Hickey, “Sit.”

The man was clean-shaven and looked healthier and happier than before he left, which Sasha was glad about as he perched on the edge of Hickey’s seat, looking out at Shoriah below them, surrounded by curling clouds.

“If this is about me making time,” Sasha started, pulling the sleeves of his oversized sweater over his hands the way he always did when intimidated, “then I’m ready to start again tomorrow. Thane gave me the all clear-”

“It’s not about that,” Cylian interrupted. He seemed warmer somehow, kinder, “The GTSC just informed me about the REF Law being passed.”

“REF Law?” Viridian asked, puzzled.

“It concerns the Omegas and Betas,” Cylian explained, “who were on any of the planets on our side of the war while it was passed. Or it will affect them if they go to these planets. Unfortunately the Omegas and Betas still on Tussa, or who are on Calliban, the West side of Golbahar, Idra, Vartoughi or Sousnan, Daliat or Kar can’t use this law until they get out. Technically we were on Shoriah when it was officially passed, so it affects you.”

“All right but what actually is it?” Viridian question, feeling antsy now, anxiety spiking, heart hammering.

“The intergalactic travel ban has been retracted for you,” Cylian said.
Sasha blinked, “What?” he still didn’t understand.

Cylian took a deep breath, “Due to the massacres on Tussa and the fact that the Alphas are still hunting the Omegas and killing them, they’re now allowed to intergalactically travel to Eon and Arda Galaxies. You’d be given accommodation and jobs, and accepted as war refugees.”

“Run,” Viridian said, feeling something clench around his heart, “They’re letting us run.”

“They’re giving you a chance to not be hunted by the Alphas,” Cylian said softly, “But the choice is yours. The closest planet where they’re sending Omegas off is Shoriah,” Viridian looked down at the silver planet passing below them, “However I ask you to wait with a decision until we reach Arossa and finish the mission, and then if you decide you want to go to a different galaxy we will bring you back to Shoriah, I promise.”

Viridian nodded slowly, trying to process this information. Until now his option had been returning to Woorud Station and...and what? Hiding there until the Alphas stopped killing Omegas? But now a whole new world of possibilities opened up to him. Literally. A whole new galaxy, a fresh start. Sasha had family in the Cairn Galaxy – his brothers Tamranrasset and Saurimo, alongside his sister Caála, had all gone to war when Sasha had just been a kid. He didn’t even know who they were fighting for, or if they were part of the groups tracking down Omegas to drag them back to Tussa for slaughter or worse. Annaba and Guelma, his Omega sisters, were still on Earth as far as Viridian was concerned, back when they were all sent there after the massacres on Tussa started, but he had lost contact with both of them when he left Woorud. Would they take this opportunity to start over? His parents were still on war-torn Tussa, but his father had all but disowned Viridian for being an Omega boy, and the Time Maker had no idea if his Omega mother was even still alive...

He felt like his brain was going to explode. A pair of golden eyes flashed in his mind.

“I need to think about it,” he said softly. Cylian nodded.

“You still have time until we reach Arossa, why don’t you sleep on it?”

Viridian nodded, staring out at crimson Hobemma 5 luring closer and closer, and tried to sort out his thoughts and emotions. He knew he had to leave Hannibal either way, and that hurt the most. It was just a question of where he’d go. Something tickled the back of his mind, a feeling. Something was wrong. He narrowed his eyes and suddenly noticed that there were little flickering specks around Hobemma 5 that hadn’t been there before. Specks that were heading straight for Hannibal.

“Cylian-,” Viridian inhaled sharply, pointing.

“Cylian there’s four ships heading straight for us,” Hothead informed them before Sasha could say anything else. Cylian’s eyes snapped to the silver specks.

“Fuck,” he swore, “not again.”

“They’re Alpha ships, probably stationed here to try and catch Omegas escaping the Galaxy.”

Viridian’s heart started hammering like a drum, “What do we do?!” he asked Cylian, his voice spiking with panic. The auburn haired man exhaled and straightened his back. He shoved his shoes back on and stood up,

“Hottie, inform the GTSC what’s happening,” his hand subconsciously went to his stomach, where he had been stabbed, “and get me to all the rooms over the intercom.”

“Roger that,” Hothead said, and a click sounded.
“Everyone,” Cylian addressed the crew, “There are currently four Alpha ships heading straight for us, and I doubt they have good intentions.”

“Starsdammit,” Vega swore, “We just finished patching up the damn ship.”

“Everyone be ready,” Cylian instructed, “I need everyone with weapons – Huambo and Uncle, you too. Someone get the kids down to Arch and let him out of that cell. And give him a weapon for fuck’s sake.”

Achilles woke with a little gasp, his pink flowers unfurling, “Cylian,” he whimpered, “danger.”

Viridian felt like he was going to be sick.

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The crew of Hannibal were ready when the men in space suits entered their ship, prying the door open from the outside, their heavy shoes clattering against the floor, bulky weapons in arms. The crew had their own weapons; old guns, some knives and axes, but not many of them were trained in fighting. The gun in Thane’s hands felt unnatural but he held it in a tight grip until his knuckles turned white. There were two dozen of the invaders, all in helmets, hiding their faces, forcing their way into the ship.

They didn’t seem surprised to see the crew clumped together, poised and waiting, weapons raised. The invaders filed into a semi circle around a man at the front, who reached up and took off his helmet, revealing a leathery white face, pointed ears and sandy blonde hair streaked with grey. He was old and ugly, and Thane recognised him from broadcasts.

“Crew of Hannibal,” President Vinh Navoy said, voice professional and cold and like sandpaper, inhuman, “Stand down. We are not here to hurt you.”

“We have a mission to Arossa,” Cylian said, his words ringing through the corridor, “You have no right to be here.” Thane wanted to shut him up before he got himself hurt again. President Vinh smiled dryly.

“Actually, we do,” the President gestured with his hand and the suited Charaseans lowered their weapons, “Captain Cylian, why don’t we be civilised about this? You have something you want, and the moment you give it to us, we’ll leave your ship and you can finish your mission in peace.”

“What makes you think I want to negotiate?” Cylian growled, making a point of keeping his own gun raised.

“I have four ship and many more soldiers than this. I can easily call for reinforcements, not that we would need any.” the old president gestured at the Charaseans around him who, although their weapons were down, were still tense and ready to spring into action. They were trained professionals, Thane could see that, and so could Cylian.

“Weapons down,” he said softly and hesitantly the crew followed the instructions. Thane dropped his arm, but kept a firm hold on his gun, ready to fire if someone threatened his family, “What is it you want, President?”

“As you may be aware they were some...mishaps...on Tussa the past few years with some Omegas.”

“Mishaps? Do you mean massacres? Massacres you orchestrated,” Vega suddenly spoke up, her face twisted with hatred, “don’t try and make these murders seem like anything other than retaliation against Omegas fighting for their rights.”
President’s Vinh’s eyes grew colder, if that was even possible, “Duchess of Fioren,” he said icily, “of course you’d be biased about this. For centuries Tussa was safe and peaceful, as long as the Omegas followed the ROCRO rules. The second they went against them, all those murders happened. It was their own fault for turning against their own nature.”

“Do you mean the same rules that tell Omegas that *must* have children, that if they go into heat in public any Alpha can claim them, the same rules that state that suppressants are forbidden and that rape in heat or by a mate isn’t *real* rape?” Vega demanded.

Thane felt sick. Of course he knew about the ROCRO rules, and about the controversy surrounding them, but he never really paid much mind to them. And yet now he found himself looking at Viridian. The boy’s dark hair shielded his face and expression from everyone around him, and his shoulders were slumped. Thane couldn’t imagine letting the boy live in that society. He remembered how he had been during his heat weeks ago – helpless. And to think anyone was allowed to have their way with him...

“Those rules structured our society,” the President barked, ripping Thane from his dark thoughts.

“Those rules oppressed the Omegas to the point where they rebelled, stole ships and inhabited a fucking *moon,*” Vega snapped, her eyes burning with fury.

“And now our species is dying out,” the President’s eyes slid to Cylian, as if he would understand, “the amount of Omegas that were murdered mean that there is now a much higher percent of Alphas and Betas on Tussa. If it continues like this we will become extinct.”

“And whose fault is that?” Vega snapped.

“The Omegas of course,” President Vinh said calmly, and it was the conviction in his voice that was probably the most terrifying thing of all, more terrifying than the weapons. The man *actually* believed his words, “They brought it upon themselves. Of course their deaths are inconvenient because the reproduction rate will decrease, however they will be a prime example to the youths to know about how to act; Omegas are second class citizens for a reason – they are irrational, emotionally unstable. Their deaths were a statement.”

“It wasn’t their fault,” Viridian said, shocking probably everyone. Viridian was *not* an confrontational person, he liked peace and people getting along, everyone knew that. And yet now his hands were shaking with anger and his jaw was clenched and he looked close to exploding.

President Vinh arched a grey eyebrow, “Pardon me?”

“It wasn’t their fault,” Viridian gritted out through his teeth, louder this time, “*You* murdered them!” his voice rose, cheeks flushed with anger. “You and your government!” President Vinh shook his head and tutted as if dealing with an insubordinate child.

“This is what I mean,” he sighed, “Omegas are too emotional, they don’t think rationally, they can’t be trusted to make their own decisions or fend for themselves. They are not useful for anything except carrying children.”

Viridian turned to Thane and with a sudden burst of strength he ripped his gun from him, whirling around and pointing it at the President, his face full of pain and anger. The Fox barely had time to react as the crew gaped at Viridian in shock. The Omega’s hands didn’t shake as he pointed the weapon at the President’s forehead. The only thought running through Thane’s head was *they’re going to hurt him. They’re going to hurt Viridian.* The arsenal of soldiers around the President lifted their own guns in retaliation, all of them trained on Viridian as if he were a highly dangerous...
assassin. The boy didn’t even react, his eyes only on the President.

“Viridian-,” Thane started shakily, wanting to pull the Omega behind him before someone hurt him.

“What are you going to do, little Omega?” Vinh asked, mouth curling into a cruel smirk.

“I could kill you,” Viridian said, not missing a beat, his voice steady and calm. Thane had never seen him like this, and it terrified him.

“Kill me?” the Alpha laughed, “and then what? You and your friends will just be corpses on the ground by the time my soldiers are done with you. Is that what you want? For more people to die because of idiotic Omega irrationality?” his words affected Viridian and Thane saw hesitation pass over his features. A part of him wanted the Omega to shoot, to show the President he wasn’t the weakling the man assumed he was. The other part of Thane, the rational part, told him that there were children at the end of the corridor.

Slowly, Viridian lowered his weapon.

“That’s what I thought,” President Vinh’s smile grew, and then-, “Guards, take him.”

Before anyone could react two Charaseans stepped forward and seized Viridian by the arms, pulling him roughly to the door. Fear was evident in the Omegas eyes, and they flickered right to Thane.

“Get off me!” the Omega yelled, trying to wrench himself free. The Fox’s heart twisted, and he stepped forward without meaning to.

“Stay back,” the President hissed and the weapons turned to Thane. Viridian struggled weakly in the grip of the Charaseans but it was clear that he wasn’t going to get out, “Captain Cylian. There are two things I presently require for you for this to end pleasantly and for you to be on your way as soon as possible.”

“What are the two things?” Cylian asked, voice rough and eyes full of distrust, flickering between Viridian and the President.

“Things...hmmm, maybe I should rephrase. It’s people I want, and the first is the Duchess of Fioren,” he pointed at Vega, who’s mouth tightened into a thin line.

“No,” Cylian said immediately.

“She had escaped the law for too long,” Vinh said, “it’s time for her to return to Tussa and face the courts for her betrayal.”

“No-,” Cylian started again, firmly, but Vega herself interrupted him.

“Let me take a wild guess – Viridian is the second person you want.”

“You’re both Charasean,” the President said, pleased that someone put two and two together. Thane’s hand was so tight on his gun he thought his wrist might break, “but the Omega doesn’t belong here. He shouldn’t be in space by himself, he needs an Alpha to take care of him. Or multiple Alphas.”

Thane felt the raw heat of fury in his throat, clawing, trying to get out and burn the President until he was just ash. The implication of the man’s words disgusted him – what he was implying was that Viridian would become nothing more than a prostitute that Alphas could use because there was a ‘shortage.’ It made a fire erupt under Thane’s skin.
“He is just one Omega,” Cylian interrupted, a desperation in his eyes, “allow him on his way, he makes no difference to you.”

“No difference, eh? Let’s see what’s underneath those baggy clothes, I am sure he is perfectly built to carry children, they all are,” President Vinh stated calmly as Viridian struggled, shoving the guards away as they tried to grab his sweater, “see, one unmated Omega like this could help us massively. Think of how many children he could birth, how many new Alphas and Omegas to continue to populate Tussa.”

“You’re wrong,” Thane said suddenly, stepping forward. He could’ve raised his gun, made a scene, got someone hurt. But right now he knew exactly what he was doing. Somewhere inside himself he was screaming because they were laying hands on Viridian, hurting him. Somewhere inside him Thane was ready to fight anyone and anything standing between him and the Omega. But the calm, collected, medical side of his had taken charge and Thane felt icy as he stepped towards the President, so cold that he was sure only holding Viridian back in his arms would warm him again. He would make all of it right, if he could only get another chance, “He isn’t unmated.”

“Oh really?” now Vinh seemed amused, “because I don’t see an Alpha onboard this vessel.”

“That’s because he’s my mate,” Thane said, unsure where the sudden conviction of this was coming from. All he knew was that he couldn’t handle other people touching Viridian, and the thought of giving the boy up to become nothing more than a breeding tool made Thane so furious he didn’t know how to contain himself. He wanted Sasha in his arms, safe, warm. He wanted to protect him, to kiss him, to argue with him for as long as the boy wanted if only it meant he could hold him again and tell him how he really felt. He saw Viridian’s shocked expression at his words but couldn’t quite bring himself to look at the boy’s face.

“Unfortunately,” President Vinh said coldly, “You are not a Charasean. You are not his real mate.”

“Yes I am,” Thane said calmly. Vinh’s eyes narrowed.

“You haven’t mated with him, therefore he is not yours,” he hissed, “He belongs to us now and he will be brought back to Tussa and fucked into submission-”

That was when Thane raised his gun, mirroring Viridian’s earlier position. Vega was at his sides in seconds, her own arms extended to match Thane’s as she also pointed her weapon at the President, expression unreadable. Behind him Thane held shuffling as the rest of the crew pointed their guns at the Charaseans and it filled him with warmth and pride to know that they all stood together, even if it meant this was the end.

“So this is how it will be,” the President said as his Charaseans also aimed their guns at the Crew.

The ship shook suddenly and everyone jerked to one side. People fell into the wall with a groan as outside the ship deep rumbles erupted, like a volcano coming to life among the stars. Thane saw weapons clutter to the ground and he himself was thrown against the door to the navigation cabin and banged his shoulder painfully.

“What the hell was that?” Lin demanded as people scrambled for their guns. In response the windows suddenly light up with a flash and a core shaking groan sounded from the galaxy. Everyone lowered their weapons and threw themselves to the windows. One of the Charaseans holding Viridian let go and fell against the door with a thud and everything was sudden chaos. Thane saw the opportunity to jerk forward and grab Viridian’s wrist, wrestling him out of the Charasean’s grip and hauling him back among the crew. The lights started flashing in the corridor and for a second Thane had Viridian in his arms, safe and solid. He squeezed the boy against him, relief
flooded him even though the danger hadn’t passed and there were enemies all around them. It felt insanely good to have the Omega back against him. Sasha clung onto Thane for a split second and then they were forced to break apart, standing shoulder to shoulder, weapons ready as the lights continued to flash, showing confused and disturbed Charaseans turning in circles.

“The ships!” a Charasean yelled to the President in distress, “The ships are exploding! Someone’s firing on us!"

“Nobody’s firing!” the President gritted his teeth. Thane moved closer to a window, reaching out to grab Viridian’s hand and make sure he wasn’t stolen away from him again. Outside he saw the ships of the Charaseans imploding on themselves with flashes, fires exploding for a second and then dying out, leaving blackened, hollow wrecks. But the Alpha was right – nobody was firing, “someone rigged our vessels with mines! Who the hell is destroying our ships?!”
Tuhi 25th Aillill 1144EE (The same day)

Hannibal.

Arch had to keep calm – that’s what he told himself that moment that he saw the doors close behind Evander. That was the moment he sealed his fate, abandoned the fact that he was a soldier and became a traitor. And he did remain calm as Greige and Vega shoved him angrily into the cell that was once the Ishait’s. Arch took comfort in sitting on the same floor the man before him had as he replayed their kiss over and over in his head, ignoring the Crew screaming at him for answers. He kept calm when Cylian had come back, a look of utter disappointment in his eyes.

He kept calm now, as he stood in the prison room with Eilo and Rian. He had to be calm for the children now as well as himself. He was completely in the dark. He wasn’t Thane with his sharpened senses, he had no idea what was happening in the rest of the ship. He heard bangs, shouts, muffled explosions from the outside. Eilo had been crying before, but Arch and her older brother managed to calm her down. Now the two children were in sitting in the corner, holding hands. The gun in Arch’s hands was familiar, heavy but useless. Hothead had informed him that there were multiple Charasean ships outside, and many of them inside the ship.

Arch stood opposite the door, perfectly poised, the gun loaded, his finger on the trigger. His heartbeat was steady, his breathing normal. He thought he was finally getting a hang of this soldier thing, which was ironic since he wasn’t one anymore, not since he betrayed his planet.

The lights went out suddenly, and drowned the cell in a dull green glow of the emergency lights.

“A-Arch,” Eilo wailed. The man turned to her and held out his hand. She stood up and ran for him on her short, chubby legs, pulling Rian along with her. She clung onto his and her brother’s hand. Arch met Rian’s dark purple eyes over her pale head and gave him a comforting smile. The little boy grimaced back at him, clearly trying to be brave.

Arch didn’t know how long they stood in the dark silence, three silhouettes outlined by a faint green light. He held his weapon loosely in his hand now and down the corridor they heard running, shots being fired, screaming, shouting, a shuttle taking off, something landing on the pad, then taking off again. All muffled, all seeming far, far away.

And then it was silent and the three of them just stood there, eyes trained on the door, waiting for the enemy to come flooding in. They’re all dead, Arch told himself bitterly, they’ve been killed and now those Charaseans will kill us too. Maybe they’ll spare the kids...at least Evan is safe. That final thought filled Arch with warmth. He was glad he had made the decision to help the Ishait escape.
The light calmly flickered back on, and the cell was once again bright. Arch’s hand was clammy with sweat as his body filled with fear that he couldn’t actually feel but was aware of somewhere in the back of his mind. Footsteps approached the door to the cell – many of them. Maybe they’d be taken prisoner? Arch tensed as the door clicked, sliding open. He prepared for death – he’d push Eilo and Rian behind him, in hopes that maybe-

Cylian came in first, the rest of the Crew piling in behind him. For a moment Arch couldn’t register their grinning faces, didn’t understand what was happening. He inhaled and held his breath, forgetting how to let it out.

“Sasha!” Eilo cried, and ripped her hand away from Arch’s as she threw herself at the Omega, who looked pale but relieved.

“What happened?” Arch asked weakly, trying to comprehend.

“The Charaseans are gone,” Cylian was smiling, “the President managed to get on a shuttle, that bastard, but most of his people are dead.”

Arch still didn’t understand how the Crew managed to beat back so many Charaseans, but then they broke apart to let someone through. Only then did relief hit Arch, so hard his whole body went numb and the gun went clattering from his hand. He couldn’t keep his calm any longer.

In front of him stood Evander, just like he had been a few days ago, eyes dark, hair messy. He had ditched the ‘prisoner’ garb of borrowed clothes he wore onboard Hannibal and was now dressed all in black, a leather coat over his shoulders. A gun was swung over his back and he looked dangerous. He smiled gently at Arch, as if it was an invitation.

The brunette closed the space between them and drew the Ishait into his arms. Everything clicked into place, the complicated feelings he had for the man that had been building up for the past few weeks suddenly all made sense. Arch clutched Evander close, feeling his muscle shift beneath the leather, and the slightly shorter man’s arms slid around Arch’s torso.

“Good to see you again too, Cass,” he said softly, a teasing edge to his heavily accented voice. Arch was at loss for words and all he could do was tighten his arms around the Ishait, holding him as close as physically possible.

“It all makes sense now,” Hickey said, somewhere in the back, but Arch barely heard her over the pounding of his heart and his little realisation repeating over and over in his brain.

He was in love with Evander.

Aje 26th Aillill 1144EE (1 day later)

Hannibal.

It had been a long day full of debating what to do with Arch and the Ishait prisoner. Eventually the Crew came to the conclusion that their actions proved them as allies instead of enemies, and allowed both of them to take Cylian’s old cabin until they reached Arossa, where the Crew would vouch for both of them. Rian promised to get both of them pardoned but in the end he was an eleven year old boy and it would be up to the Queen Regent. Still, everyone was hopeful. Hopeful and happy that the Charaseans hadn’t killed anyone.

Thane finished drafting medicine shopping lists for the night. He was an intelligent person, and realistic, and he knew that Arossa was looming closer and closer. It was war – the Crew wouldn’t
get time off just because they managed to successfully do something. Thane assumed they’d all be sent back to Calliban, and he had to be stocked up before they got there. As he walked through the empty corridor to his cabin he wondered where he could do a supply run – his best guess was Shoriah but after the REF law was passed he was worried there’d be traffic. He could try Rum but he’d most likely get scammed there. Worst case they’d have to have a pit stop on Saarashik. He swiped his hand over the pad outside his door and walked in, still half lost in thought.

He forgot that Viridian was in the cabin and his thoughts came to a sudden halt when he saw the Omega. The boy had clearly been getting ready for bed because he was only in his underwear and one of his big, bulky sweaters. His dark hair was tied at the back of his neck in a little bun but strands had escaped to frame his face. Thane swallowed as the Omega turned to him, almond-shaped eyes full of surprise.

“Oh. Hi,” Viridian said, almost immediately looking away and going back to rummaging through his bag. Thane could see the tension in his shoulders. He opened his mouth to say ‘hi’ back but realised he had probably waited too long and so he closed the door and walked to his bed in silence.

He and Viridian hadn’t seen each other the previous day since it was all chaos of getting out of the air space around Hobemma 5 and making frantic reports to the GTSC. The Omega made time, leaving the last moon of Shoriah far behind them, and now there was nothing surrounding Hannibal but stars. The two hadn’t talked about the fact that Thane proclaimed that Viridian was his mate to the whole ship, and the Fox didn’t know if he was more scared of speaking about it or ignoring it.

Thane smoothed down the covers on his bed, not knowing what to do with himself. He knew he had to say something, he promised himself he’d say something. So far his words had been cruel and cold, but the Fox had the opportunity to fix it now. He turned around with determination and a pounding heart.

“Viridian.”

The Omega turned around, looking surprised that Thane even spoke to him, “What is it? Did I do something...?”

“No,” it pained Thane to know that Viridian automatically assumed he was going to have a go at him, “I just...,” the Fox clenched and unclenched his fists with anxiety, “I was just wondering if we’re going to ignore what I said yesterday.”

“What do you mean?” Viridian frowned.

Oh stars does he not remember? Thane thought in panic, did he think I was lying? Did it not mean anything to him?

“I...,” his mouth felt dry, “the mate thing. I said you’re my mate.”

Viridian laughed, and it seemed strained, “Oh, don’t worry about it. We all did and said a lot of peculiar things yesterday. I held up a gun to the head of the leader of my planet for star’s sake,” he laughed again. Thane’s jaw clenched.

“I knew what I was saying,” he stated firmly, “and I meant it.”

The smile tumbled off Viridian’s face and at once he looked lost and nervous. He pulled the sleeves of his sweater over his hands and looked away, a flush rising to his cheeks.

“Thane I’m...I...,” he tucked a piece of his hair behind his pointed ear self-consciously, “I’m going to take advantage of the REF law. I’m going to go to Shoriah to rent a ship, when it’s all over.”
Thane felt as if someone had punched him, “What?” he asked quietly. Viridian shrugged and hugged himself.

“It’s the best option. Maybe I can try and settle down in a different galaxy-“

“I’m your mate,” Thane blurted, feeling like his heart was going to break. Viridian looked at him in shock, “I am...aren’t I?” he didn’t feel so secure in his words anymore.

“There’s plenty of mates that aren’t compatible,” Viridian started.

“Am I or am I not your mate?” Thane demanded, taking a step forward. In turn, Viridian stepped backwards.

“It doesn’t matter,” he sounded more confident, “We’re not...you’re...You don’t like me. You’ve made that clear Thane. It doesn’t matter what we are, because you don’t like me and I...and I...,” his voice faltered and he dropped his eyes, “and I don’t like you either.”

“I know I’ve said things-,” Thane started desperately, taking another step towards the boy. Viridian backed himself up against the wall and there was fear in his eyes, alongside a spark that the Fox couldn’t place until it was too late.

“Don’t try and fix it now,” Viridian sounded angry, his mouth in a thin line. The showdown with President Vinh seemed to have taken some of his shyness away, “Look, I told you what I’m doing. I’m going to get out of here.”

“But...,” Thane tried to think of words that would make this situation any better, “I know what I said and did and I...I was wrong, alright? I shouldn’t have been such a fucking asshole to you, you didn’t deserve it and I just...I don’t know how to fix it,” he let out a sad laugh, “You don’t know how to go back in time, do you?”

“What would you have done differently?” Viridian asked, hugging himself protectively, the sweater bunching around his arms.

“I don’t know,” Thane admitted, “I just know that the reason I was such a prick was because I had these complicated feelings for you, ones that I couldn’t come to terms with and that’s why I lashed out-“

“No.”

“What?” Thane frowned.

“No,” Viridian gritted out, “You can’t just say that now. You didn’t have feelings for me before you met me, when you told Cylian that I was a burden. Or when you were a prick to me when I was going through my heat even thought I was on fucking suppressants. You didn’t have feelings for me when you rejected me after that second heat,” now tears had sprung to the boy’s eyes, “Y-You didn’t...y-you don’t h-have f-feelings for me,” he ended brokenly, pressing his hand over his mouth as if he was going to be sick and turning away.

“That’s not true,” Thane knew he was in the wrong, but he kept trying, needed to keep trying, “I did have feelings for you that second heat - that’s why I helped you through it.”

“But you acted like an asshole during and after it!” Viridian snapped, whirling back around.

“Because you asked for Arch first!” now Thane was getting mad too. The thought of someone else touching Viridian was unbearable, “You asked for him to help you before me!”
“Because he was kind!” Viridian yelled, furious and on the verge of tears, “because he acted like he cared unlike you!” Thane was silent. He didn’t know what to say, didn’t know if there even was anything to say. Viridian was right, “What? Why you all quiet now?!” Sasha demanded, advancing on the fox and punching him weakly in the chest, “Ran out of shitty arguments?!”

“I love you,” Thane said softly. They were the only words he had the strength to say, the only words that felt real in that moment. He saw the anger in Viridian’s eyes falter as he took a step back.

“S-Shut up.”

“I love you,” Thane said again. He didn’t try to move and grab Viridian, he just stood there, helplessly looking at the Omega and trying to get him to understand, “I love you and I’m scared of the fact that I love you.”

“You’re a liar!” now Viridian was really crying, tears tumbling down his pale cheeks, “You’re lying to me. Stop lying!” he screamed.

Thane couldn’t physically bear it. He crossed the space between them and took Viridian in his arms. The Omega struggled weakly but Thane clutched him to his chest and kissed him on the mouth, silencing all the protests. Viridian tried to shove him back but Thane was stronger. The boy’s mouth tasted salty because of his tears but the Fox didn’t mind all that much. He kept their lips pressed together and stroked Viridian’s face until the boy slumped against him, giving up the fight.

When Thane pulled away Viridian looked up at him with exhausted eyes, full of tears, “You can’t just kiss me and think it’ll make everything alright.”

Thane didn’t know what to say because he knew the Omega was right, so he just kissed him again. Sasha’s lips were soft against his own, but the boy was completely limp and as Thane moved his own mouth against his, gently, invitingly, the Omega didn’t return the kiss. When it became clear that the boy wasn’t going to reciprocate, the Fox pulled back and with a sigh rested his forehead against Viridian’s shoulder, still clutching him close. He should’ve respected the boy’s words and let go, stepped back and apologised. But he couldn’t bring himself to let go of him, not now when he had finally come to terms with the fact that they were mates.

“I love you,” he said brokenly, because it was the only thing that made sense to him right now. Viridian started crying then, so quietly that the Fox didn’t even realise at first, until he felt the boy’s shoulders shake underneath him. When he pulled back he saw the tears racing down Viridian’s cheeks. It broke Thane’s heart, to know he was the cause of his mate’s pain but it wasn’t easy for him to just change, to become warm and loving and say all the correct things. He couldn’t magically become someone he wasn’t.

“Why are you crying?” he asked, desperate to make sense of the jumble of emotions in the room.

“I-I don’t k-know,” Viridian sobbed, looking at Thane hopelessly, “I-I just...I d-don’t know w-what...w-what...,” his breathing was becoming erratic and Thane didn’t have to be a doctor to realise the boy was on the verge of a panic attack.

“Hey,” he said, as gently as he could, thinking that this couldn’t get any worse. He took Viridian’s hands in his and held them tightly, “Viridian look at me. I need you to look at me.”

Shakily the boy lifted his eyes, his breath still coming out faster than normal. His eyelashes were clumped together by tears and his eyes were wet when they met Thane’s golden ones. The Fox squeezed his hands in comfort, “Alright. Breathe with me, alright?”
“I-I can’t,” Viridian gasped, shaking his head as if to chase his panic attack away. Thane took one of his hands and pressed it over his own chest. He forced his voice to remain steady and calm.

“Yes you can. Listen to my heartbeat, feel my chest rise and fall. Can you feel it going up and down? Alright so now on the up you inhale and on the down you exhale, alright?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, so breath in,” Thane and Viridian simultaneously took a slow gulp of air. Thane’s thumb was stroking the back of Viridian’s hand on his chest, “Hold it...and breath out...” he could feel the boy’s hand trembling against his chest but calming him down in turn got Thane to think straight. Viridian eventually started breathing normally again, his eyes still brimming with tears. Thane knew what he had to do – he always knew what he had to do and yet he always did the complete opposite. He wanted to fix everything but he couldn’t fix it, and he was just hurting Viridian more. For once Thane decided to not be selfish and to accept his misery if it meant Viridian would get some peace in the long run.

“I love you,” he said softly and leaned forward to kiss Viridian sweetly on the mouth before stepping back, “I’m going to go now. I’m sorry for hurting you. I’m sorry for everything.”

He went for the door, his heart feeling like it weighed as much as a planet, dragging him down, making him want to just collapse and sit there. He reached up to open the door when suddenly Viridian grabbed his hand and jerked him back around. Before Thane could even be surprised, the Omega stood on his tiptoes and kissed him fiercely, arms wrapping around his neck. His sweater rode up so when Thane hesitantly wrapped his arms around his mate’s waist he touched bare skin. Seconds ago Viridian was screaming at him and now...

“You can’t leave me,” the Omega whispered shakily, a little hysterical.

They leaned into each other and kissed and as each second passed Thane felt a little lighter. He could feel tension seeping out of Viridian as he melted into the Fox. It was hard to ignore the fact that they fit together almost weirdly well, their bodies slotted like two puzzle pieces. Thane didn’t know why Viridian was suddenly kissing him but he tugged on Viridian’s sweater to get him to lower himself down from his tiptoes and instead the Fox leaned down, angling his head to get better access to Viridian’s mouth. It wasn’t a particularly passionate kiss until Thane ran his tongue over Viridian’s bottom lip, and slipped his tongue into the Omega’s mouth. He could smell the arousal rolling off of him, mixed with the bitter scent of tears that was quickly evaporating.

Without even meaning to, the two backed up until Viridian’s back was against the wall, communicating without words. Thane’s hands slid up the Omega’s sweater to press his palms against the boy’s heated skin as their kiss turned more fiery, tongues sliding against one another in an intricate dance. The more they kissed the more the Fox lost his head becoming drunk off of Viridian’s mouth, he became more aware of the little things – the way Viridian’s hair tickled his face where it was escaping his bun, the way the boy’s fingers were shyly stroking the hair at the nape of Thane’s neck, the way he felt so tiny against the Fox.

Thane had to pull back because he thought he was going to lose his mind if he didn’t look at his mate. And then he wished he didn’t. Viridian looked at him through his lashes, eyes dark, pupils blown out, all traces of tears gone. His mouth was swollen and Thane couldn’t even remember doing that. The sweater slid to the side, revealing Viridian’s pale shoulder, and somehow that little sliver of skin seemed so enticing that Thane just had to kiss it.

Viridian let out a shaky breath and Thane felt a little spark of heat in his stomach. He knew exactly where this was leading, and he assumed so did the Omega. Neither of them were protesting as the
Fox kissed his way up Viridian’s neck with passionate, open-mouthed kisses. He didn’t know if he was allowed to leave marks, didn’t know where the boundaries lay between them.

It was different than last time; Viridian wasn’t in heat now, he knew exactly what he was doing as he dropped to his knees suddenly. Thane’s stomach plummeted to the ground and he quickly knelt in front of the boy, grabbing his hands before the Omega could touch him.

“No,” Thane said firmly, “No I don’t...I don’t deserve for you to...,” he could see the confusion in Viridian’s eyes so he kissed him, “Let me take care of you. This is my apology.”

“But I want to,” Viridian whispered, almost pouting, so innocent and arousing at once that Thane felt his stomach clench. He wrapped an arm around the boy’s waist and in one swift movement he flipped them around, so he was leaning against the wall. He easily drew Viridian into his lap. Thane pulled him close and kissed the boy’s chest through his sweater, right where his heart beat beneath his pale skin.

“Are you actually going to do it properly this time?” Viridian asked in a whisper, leaning his forehead against Thane’s. In this position the Omega was a tiny bit taller than the Fox. The lights flickered off suddenly, leaving the glow from the emergency sign. Both the boys blinked, looking at each other, and heard a click of the AI disappearing from the room. Thane relaxed.

“Hothead,” he said, a small smile playing on his lips. He leaned in but Viridian pressed his small palm over his mouth, his eyes serious suddenly, and full of questions. In the semi-darkness he looked ethereal, the light illuminating him around the edges.

“B-Before we do anything...,” the boy blushed, “I just wanted to know something. You said all those things, about h-how y-you’re not attracted t-to me and...a-and how you d-didn’t really want t-to help me during my heat...”

“I was lying,” Thane said bluntly.

“Alright,” Viridian dropped his eyes. Thane could tell he was feeling self-conscious, and that he didn’t fully believe Thane’s words. The Fox wasn’t that great with emotions, or showing them, but he knew he had to try his best to make his mate feel comfortable. He reached up and cupped the boy’s face, nudging him to look at him.

“I was being an idiot, and I was scared of all the things you were making me feel. The things you still make me feel,” his thumb stroked the boy’s cheekbone as he tried to get his heartbeat under control, “I am attracted to you. So much. You have no idea,” Viridian melted into Thane’s palm at his words, “You’re...you’re something else. I don’t even know how to describe you,” Thane tried not to think about his words, just let them pour out, “and I did want to help you during your heat. If I didn’t I wouldn’t have done it. Maybe it’ll make you feel better that that night plagued me every moment of my day, and that I couldn’t stop thinking about the way you looked when I-“

Viridian pressed his palm against Thane’s mouth again, bright red, “I-I get it!” he squeaked, clearly embarrassed. Thane smiled against his hand and pulled it back, before grabbing the hem of the Omega’s sweater. Sasha allowed him to slide the garment over his head, leaving him dressed only in his underwear. The boy blushed vividly, looking away, unable to meet Thane’s eyes. The Fox had already seen him naked, and yet he had forgotten just how beautiful Viridian really was.

The Fox bent his knees, driving Viridian forward into his chest. He wrapped his arms around the boy’s naked waist and leaned forward to pepper his chest and neck with kisses.

“T-Thanes,” Viridian started shakily. The Fox reached behind him and undid his bun, allowing his
dark hair to fall around his pale face and shoulders in soft waves. Looking at him was almost too much for Thane.

“Stars, I can’t believe you’re actually my mate,” he blurted. Viridian pressed their foreheads together again, clutching the sides of Thane’s head in his shaky hands.

“C-Can you s-say you love me a-again?” he asked in a trembling whisper.

“I love you,” Thane said sincerely, his heart filling with warmth. Viridian pressed their mouths together again, clumsily. When Thane reached down to squeeze his behind, the boy mewled and went limp in his grip, and a shot of unexpected warmth went through the Fox, going right down to his abdomen.

In hindsight Thane decided that this position probably wasn’t the best idea since now Viridian was literally sitting on his cock, which was starting to fill up dangerously fast...

“You’re hard,” Viridian whispered, pulling back just enough so his breath still brushed Thane’s lips.

“So are you,” the Fox replied, taking a complete gamble and pressing his hand against Viridian’s underwear. He found the Omega’s cock erect and the boy cried out when he touched him, pressing his face against Thane’s shoulder. The Fox forgot how sensitive his mate was but the reaction still made him smile. He shifted so his clothed cock rested against Viridian’s bum, still in his underwear, “We’re wearing too many clothes,” he grumbled.

He reached for his own shirt and pulled it over his head, throwing it somewhere to the side. Viridian’s eyes immediately slid over his tanned, muscular, scarred chest. Shyly he pressed his fingers against Thane’s collarbone, and allowed them to slide to a pale scar on the Fox’s ribs.

“Where did you get all these?” he murmured.

“Golbahar,” Thane said, “When I was a field medic. There were a lot of raids. And a lot of mines.”

Viridian leaned down, lightning fast, and pecked that scar hurriedly before pulling back up. Thane watched him carefully, then reached up and tucked a piece of Viridian’s hair behind his ear, and pulled him down for another kiss. Their bodies pressed together again but this time it was better because it was skin to skin. Slowly Thane started sliding Viridian’s underwear off. The boy performed a little shimmy to help him and in the process rubbed his ass against the Fox’s erection. Thane growled into the kiss, feeling a spark of arousal climb up his spine and he roughly pulled Viridian closer, ripping the underwear off of the boy before he reminded himself to keep cool.

Now Sasha was straddling his lap, completely naked. Thane thought that it gave him too much power (he didn’t want to intimidate his mate) but Viridian seemed to like it, clutching Thane’s face as they kissed and pressing back against his hands when they started wandering. Before either of them knew it Viridian was slowly grinding down on Thane’s cock, sensual, their breaths mingling as they kissed, open mouthed and desperate but still deliciously slow. Thane felt himself twitching and he wanted badly to be inside Viridian, to ‘seal the deal,’ claim Sasha as his own mate. The moment he had accepted that that was what they were, these emotions just came flooding in; the urge to mark the Omega as his and vice versa. They could properly talk after, when both of them had calmed down.

Viridian’s hard cock stood, arched gracefully, between him and Thane, rubbing against Thane’s abs ever so often. Thane was enjoying the slow, intimate friction of just kissing and rocking against each other but he knew he couldn’t handle it for long – he needed to be inside Viridian.

Finally the Omega pulled back and Thane realised he was allowing him to take the lead to an extent,
to establish his boundaries and what and when he wanted to do things. Thane didn’t want to push him, not like he did before. It was up to Sasha to decide what he wanted to do.

“I’m going to get slick all over your trousers,” Viridian huffed out, eyes half-lidded. Thane looked at him. He was sure Viridian was the only thing he wanted to look at for the rest of his life.

“I don’t care. They’re just trousers.”

Viridian smiled, “Can you...can you do something? Before y-you were all controlling and now you’re...,” he trailed off and bit his lip.

“I don’t want to push you.”

“You’re not pushing me,” Viridian said immediately, “I want this.”

“You were screaming at me a minute ago,” Thane said, eyebrow raised. Viridian shrugged, “And now I’m sitting naked in your lap,” he said innocently, and Thane felt the temperature of his body sky-rocketing. He attacked Viridian’s neck, his mouth moving against the soft skin. The Omega mewled, his arms wrapping around the doctor’s neck and Thane just decided to go with his gut feeling. He nipped at the boy’s neck and got a moan full of approval, prompting him to bite harder, licking over the marks he left and sucking ones next to them until Viridian’s pale neck was a map of pink and purple bruises and bites and the boy was completely out of breath.

“You’re acting like a real Alpha,” Viridian murmured when Thane pulled back.

“I am a real Alpha,” Thane said, punctuating his words by drawing Viridian closer, “I’m your Alpha,” his hands found Viridian’s naked ass and he gave the globes a squeeze, causing the boy to let out a muffled sound.

Thane’s finger slipped inside Viridian smoothly, helped by the slick wetting the boy’s thighs. The second the digit was inside the Omega’s hole the walls clenched around it, as if desperate to keep it inside.

“A-Ah,” the moan seemed almost involuntary when it slipped out of Sasha. The boy’s eyes were closed and he was panting as Thane slowly started pushing the finger in and out of him, watching the Omega’s face for any signs of discomfort. There were none – the boy’s body was built for this, “Y-You can add a-another one,” Sasha murmured shakily after a few seconds, opening his eyes, “I’m not going to break.”

Thane removed his hand and nudged the dark haired boy backwards until Viridian’s back hit the floor. He carefully gripped the boy’s legs and threw them over his shoulders, and Sasha watched him with big, lust-filled eyes. He looked like he didn’t know what to expect, which explained the shocked moan that spilled from his mouth when Thane suddenly dived between his legs and licked a strip across his hole with no warning at all.

“O-Oh stars,” Viridian’s thighs were trembling and his fingers sank in Thane’s hair, though he didn’t pull or push the Fox away. It was more like he needed it to ground himself, “W-What are you d-doing?” he gasped.

It reminded Thane that the boy below him was still a virgin and he pulled up to look at him, “Relax,” he said softly, and then watched as Viridian’s head fell back when he pressed his mouth to the most intimate part of the boy once more.

Thane didn’t think he’d ever want to do this with anyone, and yet now he found himself enjoying
this immensely. He pushed his tongue into the boy below him, the muscle wriggling its way into his already wet passage. The smell of sex and arousal was strong, especially thanks to Thane’s Fox senses, and it grew stronger still as the man proceeded to start pushing fingers inside the Omega alongside his tongue. Viridian tasted weirdly sweet, and the sounds he made were sweeter still – little moans, gasps, and everything in between. It was intoxicating, knowing that Thane was the one causing Viridian to completely lose control.

“Thane I-I need...o-oh stars y-you...nghh...A-Ah...n-no...w-wait...,” the boy was blabbering after just a few minutes, and when Thane felt a gush of slick against his tongue he thought it was probably time to stop the ministrations. He sat back and tugged off his trousers as Sasha caught his breath, and the he pulled Viridian up into a sitting position too. The boy slumped against him like a rag doll, unable to keep himself up as he shivered.

“You alright?” Thane asked, the doctor in him worrying, as he stroked his mate’s back. Viridian pulled him down for a sloppy kiss full of tongue and then gently pushed Thane back against the wall, climbing into his lap once more. He looked drunk, his mouth swollen, eyes dazed. Thane wondered if he should maybe force a break, to get Viridian to calm down a little, but before he could decide on the right course of action the boy pushed himself up on his knees, so that his chest was in Thane’s face for a second, and reached behind himself to pull Thane’s hard, leaking cock from his underwear. He gave it a small stroke and then sank down onto it with no warning, taking the whole thing up inside himself at once.

Thane gaped at him, the sudden assault of pleasure on his body making his brain stop working for a second. Viridian moaned loudly, and quickly slapped his hand over his mouth, eyes closed again as he tried to get a hold of himself. One of his hands was on Thane’s shoulders, gripping it almost painfully tightly.

“Viridian,” Thane said, quietly, almost on a breath, “Viridian-,” he didn’t know what else to say. He pulled the boy’s hand away from his mouth and dragged him close so they could gasp against each other’s mouths again. The heat that Thane’s cock was enveloped in was unbearable, especially for somebody who was usually as cold as the Fox.

Thane kissed Viridian messily, refusing to let the boy move until he grew even a little adjusted to the member inside him. There were two beds in the small cabin and yet neither of the boys could move to them, so lost in each other that a floor and a wall was all they needed. Their hands gripped at each other, clinging onto one another as after a minutes Viridian started to ride the Fox, slowly at first, his movements clumsy and unsure, and then faster as he gained more confidence.

Thane was losing his mind and he couldn’t understand that he was having sex with his mate for the first time. It was intense to the point where Thane felt dizzy, his hands sliding to press bruises the shape of his fingers into Viridian’s thighs as he lifted the boy, helping him take his cock further and deeper into himself.

“Gods...Thane...Thane,” Viridian moaned, unable to stop, and all Thane could think about was how wonderful the boy in his arms was, and that he never wanted to stop touching him. Viridian’s blush had spread to the tops of his shoulders, his cock was leaving a wet line on his flat stomach and Thane’s member made a wet squelching noise every time it sank back into Sasha’s wet entrance. He was paying attention to the little things again.

Out of nowhere Thane remembered that Arch had touched Viridian, that the Omega had called for him first, weeks ago. He felt fury spark inside him alongside his arousal – he was mad at himself for not taking care of the boy properly. As gently as he could, which really wasn’t that gentle since Thane’s control over himself was fraying, the Fox wrapped a strong arm around Viridian’s waist and
lowered the boy backwards onto the floor. In his haze of pleasure he managed to reach out and grab a blanket from the boy’s bed, laying it underneath him so his back didn’t touch the cold floor.

Viridian moaned wantonly when Thane pushed down into him, cock finding some new angle. His legs wrapped around the Fox’s waist and he pulled him closer. Thane caressed the inside of his thighs for a second, before he suddenly drew back and pushed his cock back in, harder than he intended. Sasha slid up the blanked a little so he drew him back down by his legs, and intertwined their fingers, pressing them down against the floor to keep the boy in place as he started to thrust inside him roughly. He hit the Omega’s prostate and slick gushed out of him, his back arching.

“Thane!” He cried out, and looking at him so submerged in pleasure, paired with the pleasure running through his body made the Fox realise he wasn’t going to hold out for much longer.

“You’re mine,” he gritted out, grabbed Viridian’s pretty, bruised hips, and started pounding into the boy, abusing his prostate.

“O-Oh Gods...,” the small boy sobbed, hand twisting in the blanket below him. Thane collided their mouths together, the intensity of the situation getting too much for him. He had a plan – pull out, come over Viridian’s stomach, make sure the boy orgasmed too... “I’m yours,” Viridian moaned, and that set Thane off. He came inside the boy without meaning too, just completely losing control.
What Happened on Arossa

Aje 26th Aillill 1144EE (The same day)

Hannibal

Evander laid in the narrow bed, back to back with Cassius. He knew the man wasn’t asleep, somehow felt it inside himself. He could feel the warmth radiating off the Shif’s back and as he pressed his face into a pillow, contemplating how he got from his cell to this bed in the space of a few short days.

The moment Evan landed on Kar he was accepted by the Dark Ishait there, and they informed him about the Charaseans on Hobemma5, catching ships, including Hannibal, who was heading right there. Somehow the thought of Cass getting murdered was unbearable to Evan so he stole a ship and went back up into the sky. He managed to avoid suspicion by convincing the Charaseans he was only bringing them supplies, and managed to mine their vessels, blowing them up effectively before anyone got hurt.

He murdered so many people and he felt so disgusting about it and yet when Evander saw Cassius again, all in one piece, it was suddenly worth it. Now the man wished he could turn around and wrap his arms around the soldier and cling onto him, soak up his warmth and comfort himself through the physical touch. Evan didn’t just want to touch anyone – he wanted to touch Cass. And yet he was hesitant.

Cassius was a different species, and if Evan pressed himself against him now, if he allowed the same feelings that made him kiss the man when he thought they’d never see each other run free, he’d go against everything he was taught on Calliban. He was meant to be with another Ishait, a female Ishait, and reproduce with her...and instead he was here, betraying his people, literally laying in bed with the enemy.

“Hey, are you asleep?” Cass whispered suddenly, voice deep and hoarse. Evander closed his eyes, swallowing nervously. He didn’t think he could have a conversation with the man right now and pretending to be asleep was easier – it gave him time to sort things out in his head.

The Ishait heard a rustling behind him as Arch flipped over and he almost jumped when he felt an arm slide underneath his own, wrapping around his waist. Cass’s warm, solid chest pressed against the Ishait’s back and the man’s heart started pounding furiously the moment he felt the Shif’s touch. Cass proceeded to gently brushed a strand of Evan’s dark purple hair behind his ear, and then kiss the skin he just revealed, the gesture feather-light and almost causing a shiver to run through Evan. He was rattled by Cass, and it was hard for him to keep his usual cool composure, not when the Shif was so close to him.
Cassius pressed his lips to where Evan’s neck met his shoulder. It was an innocent gesture and yet it made the man’s breath catch in his throat. He knew there was no point in him pretending to sleep anymore, he was sure his escalating heartbeat would betray him sooner or later. He twisted in the Soldier’s arms and came face to face in him in time to see the man’s eyes widen in shock. With nowhere else to go, Evander’s hands rested against Cass’ chest.

“You’re not asleep,” the man made an obvious observation, face red. He made to move his arm from the Ishait’s waist but the man grabbed it with determination, hoping that with his complexion Cass wouldn’t be able to see his blush. He rearranged the Shif’s arm around his waist.

“I thought it’d be obvious,” he said, accent stronger because of his nerves. Cass bit his lip and nodded, staring at Evan’s face as if he didn’t know what else to do. The Ishait wracked his brain for something to say because they were just looking at each other, but his mind was completely blank.

“So,” Cass whispered eventually, eyes glimmering in the dark, “you kissed me.”

Evan should’ve known it was coming and yet it still made his stomach drop, “Yes.”

“Did...,” Cass averted his gaze, “did it mean anything? Or was that just an Ishait way of saying goodbye?”

It hurt Evander that Cass thought that he just went around kissing anyone to say goodbye. It had taken a lot of his courage to do that, to show that kind of vulnerability. Especially to someone from a different species. But if Cass didn’t know whether it meant anything Evan would have to make himself clearer.

He leaned forward and pressed his and Cass’ mouths together. The bigger man inhaled sharply and Evan’s hands shot up to cradle both his cheeks, in case he decided to pull back. The Ishait expected Cass to kiss back because he had an inkling that the man had feelings for him too. He didn’t expect Cassius to completely lose control.

In the space between two seconds the Soldier was on top of Evander, pushing him down into the bed with his body as he kissed him fiercely, tongue sliding past the Ishait’s lips. His hands wasted no time as they rucked up Evan’s shirt and a fleeting thought of we’re going to have sex went through the man’s head before he lost himself completely in Cass’ touch. The touch he had yearned for, for so long.

In that moment Evander didn’t care about anything other than Cass. He hooked a leg around the man’s waist and pulled him closer, and heard Cass grunt into his mouth when his erection brushed against Evan’s thigh. Everything was happening so fast – the boy’s head was spinning as he lost himself in the whirlwind of emotions and feelings that Cass was making him experience. Neither of them knew what they were doing much, they just followed their instincts. In simple moments Evan had to bite back moans as Cass found a position in which both of them rapidly growing members pressed against one another. Evan’s skin prickled everywhere the man touched and he felt him shake when he slid his hands into his silky brown hair.

Suddenly Cass pulled back, gasping against Evan’s mouth, “W-What are we doing?” he asked shakily, in the dark his eyes looking unsure.

He was bigger and stronger than Evander, but not by much so the Ishait caught him off guard as he suddenly flipped them over, straddling the surprised Shif’s lap. The man could see the questions in his eyes but didn’t give the Shif a chance to ask them as he crashed their mouths together again. Feeling brave the Ishait shoved his hand between Cassius’ legs, gripping at his clothed cock.
“Fuck,” Cass made a strangled noise against Evan’s mouth. His big hand slid into the Ishait’s hair as he forced their mouth together in a kiss so passionate it made Evan quiver as he slipped his hand into Cass’ trousers, pulling out his swollen cock.

He stroked the meat a few times, feeling it twitch and pulse in his hand, an incredible heat in Evander’s hand that made him think about things still to come...he let out a sudden moan when Cass pulled away from his mouth to kiss his neck roughly, his hands now gripping Evan’s hips as the man stroked him. The temperature was rising in the room and Evander was sure he was going to lose his mind-

“Guys,” Hothead’s voice, tinged with apology, made the two men fall apart so violently that Evander ended up upside down, hanging off the bed.

“What the hell Hothead?!” Cass exclaimed, a furious blush blooming on his cheeks as he clumsily tucked himself back in, “Were your cameras on?!”

“Maybe,” The AI said mischievously, “I’m sorry to interrupt but Cylian has an announcement to the whole ship so listen up.”

The next second it was Cylian’s voice ringing out through the room, and probably the rest of the ship. It was cheerful and full of happiness, weirdly out of character for the Captain, “Crew, I am extremely pleased to say that we are now officially in the Arossa airspace,” he said proudly. Instead of relief, Evander’s stomach fell. He slid completely off the bed and sat on the floor, exchanging a look with Cass. Seeing him flushed and a little scared looking made Evan want to kiss him again, “and will shortly meet the Salvagan Fleet, who will escort us to the palace landing pod, and from there we will await further orders. Thankyou!” and he clicked off.

Evander got up off the floor and dusted himself off, his nerves heightened. The arousal and excitement he felt second ago was completely gone. At least until Cass got up and came to stand in front of him, pressing their foreheads together. The gesture surprised Evan.

“It’s going to be alright,” Cass murmured, as if he was trying to convince himself. Evander nodded, trying to seem confident.

“Yes.”

Aje 26th Aillill 1144EE (One day later)

Arossa.

The doors opened with a gentle hiss and light flooded into the airlock, making Arch squint at the sudden brightness. He followed the bustling crew as they stepped out, and heard a sudden wave of deafening cheers, trumpets blaring somewhere in the back. His breath caught in his throat as his eyes adjusted to the light and hr saw Arossa once more – the tall spiralling towers of the palace rising directly before him, the city surrounding it, thousands of cottages and houses stretching until the forest, where humongous trees thousands of years old towered over everything. The sun hung huge in the sky, shrouding everything in warmth and light.

People lined the walkway from the landing pod to the doors of the white palace, hundreds and hundreds of Calanthe with their pink skin and heavy shoes keeping them down, but other species as well – Shifs, Light Ishait, Vlassain. Arch was so bombarded by emotions that he couldn’t move, just stared at his home with his heart hammering, barely hearing anything going on around him. He had been a different man when he left with the Crew of The Ashinian over half a year ago. Innocent, naive. He had never expected to return home like this; shrouded in unease and nerves whether he
was welcome, whether he was a Soldier or a criminal.

“Cass,” Evander’s voice broke through the haziness in Arch’s head easily, and the Soldier felt the Ishait’s hand on his. He looked at the other man gratefully and squeezed his fingers, moving with the rest of the crew as they approached the palace.

“Arch,” Hickey hissed and grabbed his wrist, pulling him from Evander roughly, “Go with Cylian.”

Arch found himself stepping out from the Crew with the Captain to the sound of wild cheers and shouts. The crowd was a blur of faces. He found himself facing the Queen Regent, a cousin of Eilo and Rian’s, Princess Ashia. Although only eighteen years old the girl seemed to have aged much since Arch last saw her. The death of her aunt and uncle clearly weighed down on her; there were dark circles underneath her pretty eyes and her icy hair, piled on top of her head, seemed grey in the light. Behind her stood a row of advisors, as well as a young boy that seemed out of place among all the fair, light-haired Calanthe. He was maybe Rian’s age, with light brown skin and silky black hair falling into his equally dark eyes. He was smiling nervously, hands clasped in front of him. There were three slashes on his neck, like the gills of a sea creature.

“Cassius,” Ashia said, a small smile on her lips. They knew each other, “Welcome. It is good to have you back.” Simultaneously they reached out to clasp each other’s shoulders. Then Ashia pulled Arch into a sudden hug, “Thankyou,” she whispered. He held her for a second and then they stepped back. Ashia looked embarrassed at her burst of emotion, but that look melted from her face when the children were led off Hannibal by Huambo.

The Crew parted just in time for Eilo and Rian to break away from Wurund, sprinting at the Queen Regent.

“Ash!” Rian yelled, his big eyes filling with sudden tears. He hadn’t cried the whole time he was on Hannibal but now as Ashia leaned down and opened her arms and he barrelled into them, there were tears racing down his cheeks. He was just a little boy after all. His cousin hugged him into her chest and rubbed his back and opened her free arm so little Eilo could jump in. For a moment they were just three children on the ground, clinging to each other, finally accepting the tragedy that had struck their family. It was heartbreaking and subconsciously Arch turned around to look at Evander. He was at the back of the Crew, hugging himself and staring at his feet.

“Princess Eilo, Prince Rian,” a delegate stepped out of the line of advisors behind the Royals. He had a wild pink beard, twisted into pretty braids, and his hand was on the shoulder of the dark boy as he led him forward, “This is Prince Kalorian Moringathu from Fayaxiamen.”

Arch sucked in a breath. The delegation hadn’t meant to be here yet. The child – the little boy with sparkling dark eyes – was what they had risked their lives for – this marriage alliance. This moment would go down in history, Arch knew that.

“Prince Kalorian,” Ash nudged Eilo forward and the girl stood in front of the older boy anxiously, glancing back at Huambo with big, scared eyes, “This is Princess Eilo Essa Dali. Your fiancée.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Princess,” Kalorian said, in perfect Fiala, pressing his fist over his heart in some peculiar welcoming gesture.

Eilo broke into tears and sprinted back to the Crew, launching herself into Huambo’s arms, “I-I don’t wanna go!” she sobbed, clinging onto the Wurund’s thick neck, “I-I don’t wanna go!”

“Eilo, come on,” Viridian opened his arms and the girl dropped down into them, wrapping around his chest like a monkey. The Omega held her close, looking like he was close to tears himself. Arch
couldn’t have been the only person that noticed Thane’s hand on the small of his back, but he was pleased that he felt no jealousy or anger. Whatever little inkling of a feeling he and Sasha had had was long gone now, “We’re not leaving just yet.”

He walked her over to Arch and passed the Princess to him with a little smile, “It’s alright Princess,” Arch said fondly, “I’m staying, aren’t I?”

Eilo pulled back and looked at him with wet eyes, and then broke into a smile, “You are!” she realised happily and hugged him around his neck. Holding her now, Arch realised how fragile she really was. It would’ve been so easy for her to get killed during the journey. Only now was he realising that getting the children across the galaxy safely had been some kind of miracle. Arch wondered which God was looking over them.

“I apologise for my sister,” Rian told Kalorian, his tears dried though his chubby cheeks still flushed. The dark prince smiled adorably and his eyes twinkled a little bit more when he looked at the other boy.

“It’s quite alright.”

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After a few hours of frantically packing and unpacking, checking *Hannibal* for damages and assigning the Crew to rooms so they could rest for some time before getting their new orders, Arch finally managed to get Ashia on her own. He had asked her in a hushed voice about what would happen to him and Evander, to what she had replied with a laugh, informing him that she knew of their situation and pardoned them before their ship even landed on Arossa.

So now here Arch was, standing in front of the door to the room that Evander had been given, nervous when he should’ve been relieved. He didn’t know whether the feelings between him and the Ishait the last few days had been because they were both afraid of death or a life sentence. To Arch it hadn’t been like that – he had genuine feelings for Evan but now that they were pardoned he didn’t know if the other man felt the same. He was here to clear that up, with a heavy heart, expecting the worst.

He didn’t bother knocking, just opened the door. He caught Evander halfway through robbing the room, packing everything that could have any value in an open bag on the floor. Both the men froze and stared at each other with wide eyes as the Shif tried to comprehend what was happening.

“W-What the hell are you doing?!” Arch spluttered.

Evander shrugged and casually went back to trying to shove a candle holder into his bag, “I need to buy a ship.”

“What the *fuck*?!” Arch hissed, shoving the door shut. He came over and wrestled the candle holder from Evan’s hands, “*We just* got pardoned and you want to get arrested for stealing now?!”

Evander rolled his eyes and leaned against the foot of his bed, “I’m not waiting around until they send me to Earth or something. I’ve got places to be.”

“Behind bars?”

“Oh stop being such a goody-two-shoes, Cass,” Evander sighed and went to take the golden rimmed mirror off the wall.

Arch grabbed his arm and pulled him back, so Evan fell into his chest. Without really meaning to
Arch wrapped his arms around the boy, hugging his back against him. He felt Evan tense.

“Don’t be an idiot,” Arch said, softer than he intended. His heart was pounding and he hadn’t realised how much he had wanted to just hold the other man. He missed touching him even though it had only been a few hours.

“Let go, Cassius.”

Hearing Evan say his real name made Arch feel things he probably shouldn’t have.

“Are we not going to finish what we started earlier?” he asked innocently. Evander pulled himself free and turned around to give him an unimpressed look.

“You want to fuck right now?”

“Make love, more like,” Arch said, aware that he was being a hopeless romantic. He reached out and took Evan’s hand, pulling the man closer, “This is goodbye after all isn’t it?”

Hesitation flickered in Evander’s eyes, “Oh. Yes. I didn’t...I...,” he bit his lip, “I was actually hoping you’d come with me.”

“Evan, I just got home,” Arch said, feeling his heart melt at the thought that Evander wanted to remain together.

“Well I need to find a home,” the Ishait said, a little harshly, and pulled back again. Arch was tired of Evander constantly trying to move away. He pushed the man and the Ishait ended up sprawled on his back on the bed, “What the fu-“ he started, but went silent when Arch lied down next to him, forcing the man to and face him.

“Just stay here,” he whispered. Evander rolled his eyes.

“What, in bed?”

“No. In the palace. With me.”

“A Dark Ishait on Arossa. Perfect,” he said sarcastically. The annoyance melted from his face when Arch cupped his cheek in his hand. He didn’t think he could bear to let the man go. In a sense he had become like the Ishait, depended on touch. Evander’s touch, “I don’t fit in here, Cass,” Evan whispered, apologetically.

“I don’t care. You’re going to stay here,” Arch said firmly, feverishly, feeling a sudden ache in his heart, “You’re going to stay here and you’re going to let me love you and-“

Evan covered his mouth with his hand, his eyes brimming with pain, “Shut up before you say something you regret.”

Arch pried his fingers away and kissed Evander on the mouth, trying to get the Ishait to relax. He didn’t know what gesture meant what to the man, but he hoped that this comforted Evan, even a little bit. Arch withdrew a tiny bit,

“I love-“

Evander crashed their mouths together again, as if he couldn’t bear to hear the words, “Just be quiet you stardown Shif,” the Ishait grumbled, clinging onto Arch, “I’ll stay if you shut up.”

Arch grinned, “Alright.”
Now the relief came flooding in, making him melt into the pillows, and making Evander melt into him.
Ni 21th Scitli 1144EE (25 days later)

_Hannibal_

The journey back was a lot slower than the journey to Arossa, because Viridian was told not to create anymore time firmly by Thane, who insisted it weakened his immune system. The Omega couldn’t lie – it felt good to not have a burden of losing so much energy anymore.

He now spent his days mostly lounging around now, helping the girls out in the engine room or relaxing with Huambo in the kitchen. The two of them, along with Uncle Plump, felt the absence of Eilo and Rian the most. The ship seemed so quiet now. Sasha tried not to dwell on his goodbyes with the children too much because it made his eyes well up with tears to remember the Royals clinging onto him, sobbing and begging him to stay. He had had to say goodbye to Arch too, and that had also been emotional. Sasha apologised for that night, back during his second heat, and Arch told him not to worry about it with an awkward, goofy smile. Sasha didn’t feel anything for him anymore, but he still wished that they have had stayed friends, like at the beginning of the mission. In the end they embraced and wished each other the best and _Hannibal_ had left Arossa behind.

It was just one of the decisions Sasha had to make; his idea of going to Shoriah and taking a ship to a different galaxy was blurry, and the Omega was almost sure he didn’t want to leave anymore. Because of Thane.

Since finally accepting each other’s feelings, the Fox didn’t let Viridian go. The days stretched on and the two spent all the time they could together, wrapped up in each other’s arms. It wasn’t even sex all of the time, thought they did have a lot of it. Mostly the two of them laid in Thane’s bed and the Fox stroked Viridian’s hair and kissed him until the Omega fell asleep in his arms. It was good, and Viridian was happy. _Stars_ he was so fucking happy he felt like he could explode sometimes. Cylian had offered him an engineering job on _Hannibal_ alongside Vega. The burden of being unwanted was finally lifted off Sasha’s shoulders and despite the fact that he and Thane got into quite a lot of arguments Viridian knew he was the one for him. His mate. It made him shiver to think of the Fox like that, a happy little shiver that raced up his spine.

But all good things came to an end.

Viridian woke up in the dark one night, feeling sticky, hot and sick. His first thought as his throbbing brain reminded him where he was, in Thane’s bed wrapped up in his strong arms, was that he was in heat. But the days didn’t match up and neither did the feeling in his stomach.
Sasha sat up, and his world tilted to the side as a wave of nausea hit him. He whimpered and hugged himself, feeling like he was going to throw up. Cold sweat had broken out over his body and he was shivering violently despite the fact that he was feverishly hot. His heart was pounding, his brain aching. He let out another whimper.

“Sash?” Thane’s groggy words broke through Viridian’s pain-addled brain. He heard the man sit up and felt a freezing hand on his cheek, “Sasha, what’s wrong baby?” Thane’s voice was heavy with worry.

“H-Hurts,” Viridian gasped, and talking made him feel even more sick.

“What hurts?” Thane demanded, “Is it your heat?”

Viridian shook his head, and that was a mistake. He lurched to his feet, feeling like he was about to die, and ran to the door. He swiped his hand over the pad and barely had time to make it to the bathroom, which was next door (thankfully). He made it to the self-cleaning toilet and threw up violently inside. The fluorescent lights that flickered on hurt the boy’s eyes so he squeezed them shut as he rested his cheek against the cold plastic of the toilet.

He heard Thane’s footsteps approaching, and the bathroom door closing. The next thing he knew was that his mate was kneeling next to him, one of his big hands on the small of Viridian’s back, a worried look on his face. Viridian shuddered and rested his face in his hands, feeling a little better now that he had thrown up.

“I don’t know what’s wrong,” he whispered, shuddering, his stomach flipping. Thane leaned in and kissed his shoulder lovingly.

“Sit back,” he said, nudging Viridian back against the cold wall, “Look at me,” the Fox ordered and Viridian opened his eyes to look into his mate’s ones. The worry in those amber pools made Sasha’s heart warm and made him feel a little better, “Tell me how you’re feeling.”

“Nauseous,” Viridian whispered, “Hot. Not the heat kind of hot though.”

Thane nodded and checked his temperature with a cool hand to the boy’s forehead. Sasha leaned into the touch, “Just give me a moment,” the Fox said and walked out of the bathroom. Viridian closed his eyes and leaned back, and gradually the sickness disappeared. Honestly it scared him. He was worried something was wrong with him, maybe something brought on by the constant time making. He was terrified that now, when he was finally happy, everything would fall apart.

Thane came back and when Viridian cracked his eyes open he saw the Fox holding a metal rectangle in his hand, “What’s that?”

“Don’t worry, I just need to see something,” Thane said, a frown line appearing between his brows as he knelt down again and ran the rectangle over Sasha’s stomach. A hologram popped up above it, with lines of text that Sasha couldn’t read because to him it was backwards. He saw it flicker green though.

“What is it?” he asked. Thane put the rectangle on the floor, and the hologram disappeared. His hair fell into his eyes and he didn’t look at Sasha, “Thane what is it?” the boy repeated, dread seeping into his stomach.

Thane took a deep breath, but refused to look up, “You’re pregnant.”

The silence that followed that statement was deafening. Viridian remembered going to the beach with his sisters once, as a child, and pressing an intricate shell to his ear, listening to the sound of the
sea rush though his brain. Except it wasn’t the sea, but the echo of his own blood travelling to his brain. That was what he heard now.

“What?” he asked, voice merely a whisper, his mouth dry.

“You’re pregnant,” Thane repeated.

Viridian buried his face in his hands and took a shaky breath, and then exploded into tears. He felt as if someone was crumpling his heart in their fist, as if someone had punched all the good emotions out of him. He wasn’t ready – not for this, not for having a baby. He was meant to be an engineer, he was meant to go to Shoriah...he couldn’t look at Thane, couldn’t bear to see his expression. The Fox would be angry, he was always angry. He had denied being Viridian’s mate for so long that Sasha could only imagine how hard he’d push him away now. He didn’t think he could go through that again.

Without meaning to, Viridian started creating time for himself. He needed to be alone, to think, to protect himself. The fog seeped out of his hands and suddenly everything was silent – the hum of the engine disappeared, the sound of Thane’s breathing gone. Slowly, Sasha looked up. Thane’s eyes were downcast and the Omega couldn’t bear to look at him as he struggled to his feet.

He walked through the silent hallways of Hannibal, as if in a trance. He looked out of the window at the unmoving galaxy outside, but it seemed dull to him. All he could think about was all the Omegas he knew on Tussa, hollow-cheeked and dead-eyed as they raised their children, devoted their lives to being good house-wives and house-husbands. Viridian didn’t want that, but it was in his nature, the same nature he spent so long trying to deny.

Most of the ship was empty as everyone retired to their rooms. Sasha walked all the way to the Navigation cabin, where Cylian laid curled up in his chair, a blanket thrown over him, mouth parted slightly, eyes closed. In the engine room Vega was halfway through fixing something, sparks flying from the engine she was working on, frozen mid-air. Viridian left no marks of his presence, he was like a ghost, just him and the eerie mist he created.

He walked past the bathroom again, the shaft of light reminding him that Thane was still inside. Viridian couldn’t stay in his bubble forever. He went to the bedroom, sat down on the edge of Thane’s bed, buried his face in his hands. Time returned to normal and the mist was sucked out of existence. Seconds later the Omega heard Thane’s hurried steps approaching the room.

Once again he heard the doors close, “Don’t...,” Thane started, his voice sounding choked up. Viridian didn’t look at him, “Don’t run away from me like that. A-Alright?” when Viridian didn’t reply the Fox pried his hands from his face gently. He was kneeling between his legs, looking up at Sasha with eyes so full of heartbreak that it made the Omega’s breath catch in his throat. There was something in those eyes that Viridian couldn’t place.

“I-I don’t w-want this,” he whispered shakily, on the verge of hysteria. Thane squeezed his hands.

“It’s our baby, Sash,” Thane whispered, and Viridian realised that the little spark in his eyes he couldn’t name was happiness. Thane was happy, “mine and yours. It breaks my heart to heart you don’t want it.”

“A-And you d-do?” Sasha asked in shock.

“Ye-Yes,” Thane exhaled, and wrapped his arms around Viridian’s waist, leaning forward to press a kiss to the boy’s stomach through his shirt. The Omega felt his eyes well up with tears, “I want it more than anything,” the Fox looked up at him, “and I want you. I want to have a family with you I-I,...”
his voice faltered and he surged up to kiss Viridian softly, “I know it’s early, and unplanned... but... but... I love you,” he whispered, holding the boy’s cheek in the palm of his hand, “I love you so much.”

“I love you too,” Viridian sniffled, feeling a world better at Thane’s words. But it was still a burden, “I just... I don’t know...”

“You don’t need to make a decision yet,” Thane kissed his forehead and nudged him backwards so Viridian laid down on the bed. Thane climbed in next to him and rummaged underneath his bed for something.

“I don’t want to sleep,” Sasha blurted, “I don’t want to wake up being sick again.”

“We’re not going to sleep,” Thane assured him as he also laid down, so he and his mate faced each other. In his hand he held the old fashioned pad he always used to listen to music when he fell asleep. He plugged in a pair of equally old fashioned earphones into it and offered one to Viridian. Hesitantly the Omega put it into his ear, “We’re going to listen to music and if you feel sick again you tell me, alright?”

Viridian nodded. Thane kissed him and put on a song.

Shal 21st Aodh 1145 (7 months later)

Earth 6.2.

Ayvo was going through some paperwork for the GTSC, figuring out newly established trade routes between Arossa, Earth 6.2 and Fayaxiamen, their new ally from the Arda Galaxy, when there was a sudden knock on his front door. It was an early winter morning and Ayvo wasn’t expecting anyone as he floated in his chair to the door, not really thinking much of the knock.

When the door swung open Ayvo went into shock. Standing in front of him, hair dusted with snow, looking sheepish, was Cylian.

“Lian,” Ayvo breathed.

“Hey,” Cylian smiled, “surprise?”

If Ayvo’s legs worked he would’ve thrown himself into the Captain’s arms but Cylian had a similar idea because he pulled the blonde off of his chair, as if he couldn’t keep his hands to himself, and clutched the man close, swinging him around, both of them laughing. Then they kissed, messily, wildly, and Cylian sat Ayvo back down. The man’s cheeks were flushed and he couldn’t stop smiling. He hadn’t seen Lian in so long and he had forgotten how hard the man made his heart pound.

“What are you doing here?” he asked in disbelief, “How are you even here?”

“We’re having a short break before we’re going back to Calliban,” Cylian explained, “and I wanted to see you,” he was smiling too as he leaned down to kiss Ayvo again. His lips were cold.

“I can actually congratulate you on the success of your mission in person,” the blonde said.

“We couldn’t have done it without you,” Cylian said gently, reaching down to stroke Ayvo’s cheek, “Stars, I missed you.”

“Me too. I didn’t think it was possible to ever miss someone as much as I missed you,” the
Lighthouse admitted breathlessly, dragging Cylian down for a perfect, albeit a little uncomfortable, hug, “How long can you stay?” he asked, pulling back.

“Only three days,” the Captain made a face. Ayvo smiled, thinking he would never get tired of that face.

“Longer than last time.”

“Still not long enough,” Cylian said firmly, and then got on one knee in the snow. Ayvo’s eyes widened and his heart started pounding.

“W-What the hell are you d-doing?!” he stuttered.

“I didn’t have time to get a ring,” Cylian’s cheeks were flushed as he took Ayvo’s hand in his, “but I’ll do this properly after Calliban. When we last met I promised I’d ask you to marry me when we saw each other next time. That’s now. And...and,” he took a deep breath to calm his nerves, “and I know we haven’t known each other for long, but you were the person that kept me going during some of the hardest times of my life and I-”

Ayvo jerked forward, sliding to the floor, and kissed Cylian furiously, gripping his cold face, his legs folded beneath him uncomfortably, thought he didn’t care, “J-Just ask. I-I can’t take it.”

Cylian looked at him with soft eyes, “Ayvo Rasmussen, will you marry me?”

“Yes,” Ayvo whispered, “yes, stars, of course,” he started kissing Cylian, voice choked up, laughing between the kisses, and then they were both crying and clinging onto each other.

For Cylian, there were a few things he never got used to seeing, things that took his breath away every time his eyes land on them. Ayvo was one of those things.

Lev 6th Yver 1145EE (2 months later)

Calliban.

Ironically, it had been exactly a full year since the Crew of Hannibal first got their orders about the mission to Arossa, the orders that changed their lives forever. And now here they were, their ship settling back among the other ones, like it had never left. More ships had joined over the year, a large part of them bulky looking monsters from Fayaxiamen, with stronger beams.

Once more the laser beam from Hannibal had joined the others, generating at the electromagnetic shield between Gadina and Afnan, that held as strong as always. Over the last few days things were returning to their calm monotony. Akkie was swaying lightly in his pot.

“Things will change soon...,” he said airily.

“Things just got back to normal,” Hickey complained from where she was swinging in her chair and munching on some snacks. The injuries she had sustained on Sousnan had completely faded.

“At least there’s less attacks than last year,” Cylian pointed out, sipping on the delicious coffee Huambo made for him, his shoe-less feet propped up on the dashboard. He was content here, in the galaxy, but he missed Ayvo’s voice. He’d get to call the man the moment he was done with work. The stab wound on his stomach had healed completely, the scar remained.

“So...,” Hickey turned to Cylian with a smirk, “How’s the wedding preparations?”
“Yeah! I better be invited!” Hothead interjected.

“I’ll bring you on a USB,” Cylian said sarcastically, “Honestly though, Ayvo and I want a summer wedding since that’s when we first met each other.”

“How cringey.”

“Shut up, Hottie,” Hickey scoffed, “I’m so freaking excited to be the best man-”

“INCOMING!” Akkie and Hothead said suddenly, together. Hickey and Cylian automatically straightened in their seats, alert, reaching for their goggles and ready to fight any approaching ships. But the galaxy seemed peaceful, the hovering ships around them undisturbed. Instead of an attack, the two heard the door behind them slid open and when they turned around in their chairs they saw a little baby crawling across the floor, his ginger hair sticking up, mouth stretched in a happy grin as he wobbled on through all the junk on the ground. Hickey and Cylian exhaled in relief.

“’Ello, Dashe,” Hickey said warmly, “Watcha doing little fella?” she reached down and picked the kid up from the floor. He gurgled happily and tugged on her multi-coloured hair, aquamarine eyes sparkling with glee.

“Dashyan!” Viridian shouted down the corridor, and came barrelling into the navigation cabin, face red. He relaxed when he saw his son safe in Hickey’s lap, “Oh thank stars,” he exhaled and leaned against the doorway.

“You’re too paranoid,” Thane informed him, coming up behind him and flicking his mate in the ear, “We’re on the ship - there are limited amount of places where he could go.”

“I know, I know,” Sasha sighed, “I’m just protective.”

“I can look after him for a bit if you want?” Hickey offered.

“I promised Huambo I’d let him hang out with Dashe for a bit,” Viridian said apologetically. Hickey pouted and then gave little Dashyan an Eskimo kiss,

“Alright. I’ll see you later little guy,” she passed him back over to Viridian.

Something flashed outside their windows and all of their heads snapped around in shock. Cylian’s mouth fell open and Hickey’s eyes bulged out of her head.

“Oh my stars,” she gasped.

“Hothead-,” Cylian started in shock.

“On it!” the AI replied, “I’ll tell the rest.”

In seconds there were footsteps pounding down the corridor at the rest of the Crew – Vega, Lin, Champagne, Huambo, Greige and Uncle Plump – all piled themselves into the crowded navigation cabin, in time to see the electromagnetic field around Calliban shatter silently, filling the galaxy with light for a moment. The Crew all stared in complete shock as two years of nonstop fighting finally came to an end.

“We did it,” Cylian whispered faintly.

“We did it!” Hickey yelled wildly, throwing herself at the Captain and showering his face in kisses. Cheers erupted in the cabin. Thane grinned and wrapped an arm around Viridian’s waist, kissing his
forehead and then kissing the forehead of their son. Huambo’s mouth wobbled into a clumsy smile as Vega squeezed him into a hug, only reaching his ribs. Greige and Uncle Plump gave each other what could only be defined as a ‘bro-hug’ and Lin was crying in Champagne’s arms, the fourteen year old patting her back with a smile.

Celebration ensured on Hannibal, the same way it ensured on hundreds of other vessels who had fought this fight. Hundreds of ships, hundreds of crews, and Hannibal was just another one, another ship, with another crew, another mission, another set of orders.

Just another ship.

Fin.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, I'm actually really sad that this is over :(  
Thank you so much for reading this story, leaving comments and kudos. 
Massive thank you to the wonderful people that commented;  
bmattny_16  
Broken_as_shattered_glass  
chasing rainbows  
daughterofHadeswiththeblessingofAthena  
EmotionsAreOverrated  
hikaru_itsuko  
juneherondale  
lindasek  
livforjin  
Madame Duck  
Mishie  
narutoismyfrand  
SolNiveAngelo  
thefoxcycle  
...and to everyone else that will find this story later and comment too. You lot are the bomb.  
But also thank you to anyone who left kudos, or gave this fanfic a shot at all. You lot make my day and make me so incredibly happy.  
Also just to be extra I decided to write a part two to this XD (I know, I'm an idiot). It's set in the same universe but 16 years after this fic ends, so some of you might figure out who some of the characters are going to be ;)  
Link:  
Anyway, see you over on that fic, or on any of my other works, see you lovely people soon xx  

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!