Tropical Hysteria

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Summary

Aerrow and Cyclonis during a battle end up crashing down unprepared, friends and allies unable to help as they fall into the Wastelands only to find a hidden Jungle below. Now two enemies have to work together to survive, but what will they find out along the way?
(biggest work ive made yet.)

Notes

The main incident in this A.U. (the A.U. ive yet to name... ^^; )

This is definitely bigger than my other works so far. (I'll likely need to revisit this to fix an re-write some shit, because there are parts I am NOT happy with.)

Should also be noted there is some content that could be deeply upsetting for some readers, so VIEWERS DISCRETION IS ADVISED.

That said, hope you enjoy. c:

See the end of the work for more notes.
This shouldn’t be happening.

Aerrow could see his broken bike falling like he was off in the distance, his glider broken on his back.

This shouldn’t be happening.

Cyclonis’ staff wasn’t reaching her fast enough, even with her arms and legs spread out her velocity outmatched it tenfold. Ace’s ride was damaged, and despite his persistent efforts to pursue his master members of the storm hawks blocked him at every turn. The same however could be said for Cyclonis’ Talons stopping Piper and the furry rat from pursuing Aerrow. No crystals on hand to attack or recover with, and she can’t even watch him croak first.

Aerrow’s hand scraped against the top of the cloud layer and stealing a glance downward he realized it was unavoidable. They were going to fall to the wastelands.

Was it the rush of adrenaline from the fear making it seem so much faster? or was it just the momentum picking up? Aerrow couldn’t tell from the clouds where Master Cyclonis was. Was she calmly waiting for the thud? Was she unconscious? Or picked up by a confident Talon, leaving Aerrow to his demise?

Another gust, a sudden change in atmosphere. The humidity, the moisture, the air- it was warmer. This was it, they were going to fall to--

“Tropics..?!”’, Aerrow spat out to the uncaring winds.

He wasn’t hallucinating though, there was a vast jungle bellow. There seemed to be large cooling crystals in the distance, must’ve been what was preventing it from catching on fire but where was the source of sunlight?

“Whugh!”, Aerrow didn’t have time to find out as he hit the first branch in a long painful line of branches, rocks, and a tree trunk to the bottom.

“Hnnngh….agh…”, he cried out as he slowly but surely got up, undoing the glider.

*THUMP!!*

Landing not long after his arrival in an even less glorious fashion was Master Cyclonis, unconscious (no doubt from the sudden drop in pressure and change in oxygen intake) and covered in scratches, slight tears, and leaves from the fall.

“heh, if that’s all it took to take you out then we should’ve tried something like this sooner.”, Aerrow remarked.

Cyclonis’ eyes fluttered open as she got up holding her head before snapping alert and jumping to her feet only to nearly collapse again from the sudden rush of blood, causing her to take a knee.

Aerrow stepped back, almost taking a defensive stance but seeing her fumble to her knees, not already pulling out a crystal or using some sort of witch magic made him realize that maybe right now Cyclonis is just as vulnerable as he is. He only has one blade, and she has no staff or crystals.

“Just you wait, Sky Knight. Soon you’ll be wishing you hadn’t even spoken…”, Cyclonis hissed out.

“So you say, but i’m not hearing any engines or seeing any vehicles. Cyclonian or Storm Hawk.”,
Aerrow said pointedly.“Unless you and your troops finally found a way to warp anywhere you want rather than fly, i’d say we’re both out of luck.”

“...who says i’m talking about them?”, She spat out before lifting herself into a charge, positioning her better hand to line up with his solar plexus and the other above it, open but tensed. Aerrow quickly unsheathed the remaining dagger from his left side and struck at Cyclonis who caught his wrist and pulled it, causing her other hand to meet with his solar plexus and while still pulling she used the momentum to lift him, flip him, and throw him against the ground. She then dashed after his tumbling figure ready to curb stomp his head in. Reacting to being tossed Aerrow forced himself up and out of the way of Cyclonis’ boot and low kicked at her other leg as her boot crashed down, throwing her off balance. Cyclonis forced herself into a flip to get off the ground and out of the way but Aerrow bolted to where she was going to land, greeting the now standing queen with a punch towards the gut while readying his dagger arm for a hilt blow. Cyclonis took the gut blow and nearly keeled over but upon noticing the diagonal swing of his other arm she forced herself to stand enough to shield his attack with her arm. Taking the opportunity Cyclonis used her other arm to jab Aerrow’s solar plexus, hard. It knocked the wind out of Aerrow, making him fall to his knees. Cyclonis rose her elbow and swung it down towards his head but Aerrow whacked it to the side with his blade clutching fist and tackled her to the ground. He moved fast, making sure to pin her forearms as he moved his legs up enough to take the place of his hands in holding her down. Unfortunately, his dagger arm didn’t have a good enough grip and her right arm got loose allowing her to try one last attempt to call up some magic to launch Aerrow off of her.

‘come on, work…!’, Cyclonis demanded internally.

She thrust her arm towards Aerrow and Aerrow recognizing the hand gesture took the dagger into both of his hands and forced it down.

‘Have to interrupt her focus, if only a little…!’, Aerrow concluded.

The moment where there should have been light, where the should have been something, passed...but nothing came. Aerrow caught on fast luckily and he stopped his blade a little too close to Cyclonis to not be called attempted murder.

Which is exactly how Cyclonis saw it, she gave a frustrated and bitter glare as she flopped her free arm to the ground.

“.....Do it, take your victory hero.”, She spat out. Aerrow was frozen in place, taken aback by her words. Yes it did look like he just tried to-- but it was to interrupt her focus of the spell using grazing pain against her arm, granted his aim could’ve used some work, and-- was she seriously expecting him to kill her?!

He let out a long breath and sheathed his dagger. Cyclonis blinked in wide eyed confusion, confirming Aerrow’s suspicions.

“Look, it doesn’t matter how long we fight or who wins. We’re stranded.”, Aerrow said.

“Only until one of our sides up there wins.”, Cyclonis retorted.

“We were getting close to a decisive victory until you and I both fell down here. Someone should have reached us by now.”, Aerrow replied.

“Don’t count your chickens before they hatch, Sky Knight. Anything’s possible.”, Cyclonis sneered.

“...My point, is that both sides were going at it for awhile and they should be tuckerized out enough to
determine a victor by now but no one else is here.”, Aerrow said.

“...So, what, ‘there’s strength in numbers, let’s stop fighting’? Don’t play dumb with me, I know very well what my position is and how much it’d benefit your cause if I was wiped off the face of Atmos permanently. Spare me the deceit at the expense of intel gathering or whatever it is you’re playing at and just end it already!”’, Cyclonis roared at Aerrow to which Aerrow looked at her with….pity? He dared to show pity?!

“Look…”, Aerrow began with a downcast expression. His eyes gazing at his hands. “I know we’re enemies, and I know you don’t trust me, but you don’t need to trust me to work with me and survive. If anything that’ll be better for us since you’ll always be keeping an eye on me, and i'll always be keeping an eye on you.”, He looked up to her face, eyes pleading. “So please, won’t you work together with me, if only for your own sake Master Cyclonis?”

To hear him say her full title in a tone close to begging was surprising, to say the least. It didn’t feel bad though, quite the opposite really. He also did have a point. She had no crystals thanks to the fight, no magic for some odd reason, and whichever party won their skirmish wasn’t showing. They had better chances of surviving together even if in any other situation one would be killing the other. So she decided to go along with his idea...for now.

“...Very well, but you had best keep your vigilance...Because if I see your guard down, oblivious to my presence I will end you. Do I make myself clear, Sky Knight?”, Cyclonis said.

“It’s Aerrow, and yes, very clear.”, Aerrow responded.

“Good….Now, will you kindly get you and your boney knee off of me?” Cyclonis asked in a biting tone.

“Huh? OH-! O-of course!”, Aerrow blurted out awkwardly as he moved off of Cyclonis and stood, offering her a hand to help her stand up and she promptly responded by looking into his eyes with a deadpan stare while knocking it away and got up on her own.

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The skies were filled with dark clouds and conjured a lightning of an unnatural vivid purple hue. The air itself felt charged in an unsettling energy and it wasn’t just the people who were affected by it. The rides of everyone including the Condor and the Cyclonian Destroyer were having trouble staying running, let alone airborne. It was like the storm itself was against the idea of working machines.

“WHOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOHNNHHH!”,Finn shrieked as he had trouble steering his bike which miraculously hadn’t exploded or gotten chopped in half during their battle.

“GET ME OFF OF THIS CRAZY THIIIIING-!”, He wailed.

Piper, Radarr and Junko were suffering the same problems. Junko was screaming just as if not more loudly than Finn, not that Piper could tell as even the Talons were involuntarily showing off their share of pipes.

“Come on, come on, come on…! --FINN, JUNKO, GET TO THE CONDOR!!”, Piper commanded over the comm. She tried her best to make her way through the sea of panicking flyers, lightning, and vision obscuring clouds all while restarting her engines, and redirecting her malfunctioning bike. Luckily she landed in the Condor’s bike bay and quickly made her way with Radarr to the bridge where she met up with a practically hysterical Stork who had his eyes on all the
dials as his hands were tensed on both the wheel and levers, one leg on an even further lever.

“IT’S THE END TIMES, THE END TIMES!! Aerrow and Cyclonis were hit by the first strike, AND WE’RE ALL GOING TO FOLLOW SUIT! NO ONE WILL SURVIVE!!”, Stork raved.

“STORK! Look, we are going to get through this we just need to keep the bike bay open long enough for Junko and Finn to get in then we’re going to head for the nearest terra!! Okay?!”, Piper shouted to Stork as she went up to him and placed a hand on his shoulder.

“YES, AT LEAST WE’LL GET SOME SOFT GROUND TO REST UPON BEFORE WE DIE, AHAHAHAHAHAHA!!”, Stork replied most maniacally. Radarr hid under the table, shaking. Piper was worried for Stork’s mental state but at least he agreed to the idea.

Junko raced against the storm and his own bike’s declining functionality as he roughly landed on the bike bay’s floor, intentionally flinging himself off the bike as he landed. He took a breath, happy to be on solid footing only to be snapped out of his relief by the sound of Finn’s distant screaming becoming not so distant. Junko turned quickly to see Finn trying desperately to start his engine again as his bike was going down, down past the height needed to land in the bay. Junko’s eyes widened with horror, he dashed towards the edge of the platform and knelt down towards an arm flailing Finn, reaching out his arm in an attempt to save him. Finn had to jump for it, he ended up catching Junko’s hand and was pulled to safety. Finn’s bike wasn’t so fortunate.

“Thanks Junko!”, Finn chimed.

“Least I could do!”, Junko replied before a huge crack of lightning erupted from the sky, shocking both of them into bolting for the bridge as Stork closed the hatch.

“TERRA HO!!”, Stork shouted, changing course towards a spot of land he remembered flying past previously.

“Think we could find Aerrow...?”, Piper asked.

“Right now? Definitely not! You saw what that storm did to us! we’ll be lucky if we don’t end up JOINING Aerrow!”', Finn answered.

“I know not now! it’s just- it’s just his glider was damaged, his bike was trashed, and he fell past the cloud cover and....!”, Piper cut herself off, unable to formulate the words, unable to consider the thought.

Finn and Junko realizing the unspoken idea on Piper’s lips looked downward, frustrated, helpless to do anything, and worried as they worded nothing. To their surprise, it was Stork of all people who decided to say otherwise.

“He’s come back from everything this world’s thrown at him, I wouldn’t be surprised if he did it again.”, he commented.

The group looked to their ship’s pilot and all of them smiled.

“Yeah...Aerrow’ll be back, no sweat!”, Finn pitched in.

“I hope so.”, Piper said, clutching the gem of her choker.

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Rain. Of all the things that had to happen today it had to be rain. Aerrow didn’t know what was
stranger, that there was a jungle in the wastelands or that there was rain in the wastelands. It was a hard choice, that was for sure.

“Right about now I wish I had a hood like yours.”, he said to Cyclonis.

“Let’s just get some cover. Neither of us are dressed for heavy rain storms.”, She replied. She internally voiced how ironic it was that the Storm Hawks weren’t prepared for a storm.

“...what're you smiling for?”, AERROW said.

“Hmm...None of your business. Now, are you going to actually use that unsheathed dagger or am I going to have to teach a Sky Knight how to use a blade?”, Cyclonis asked mockingly.

“Okay, okay.”, AERROW muttered as he started cutting a path towards a rockwall, or what looked like one anyways.

The fauna was huge. Leaves, branches, vines, all of it so much bigger than what he was used to, it was jarring to say the least.

“I take it I don’t need to tell you to watch your step?”, AERROW asked back to his dark clothed companion.

“Just like you don’t need to tell me the sky has air in it?”, Cyclonis snidded.

“Yeah, just like that...”, AERROW responded in a defeated tone. ‘At least she has enough energy to make smart remarks...’

They made it down AERROW’s makeshift trail to the formation, but saw no cave. Knowing this AERROW started cutting down leaves, vines, and twigs as well as scavenging for rocks, all while occasionally checking on the callous queen. Partly to make sure she wasn’t trying another murder attempt, partly to make sure she was alright.

It was strange. He’s come across her many times but seeing her idle like this really shows how normal she was. When fighting Master Cyclonis came off as intimidating, powerful and the atmosphere she gave off almost made her feel towering in a sense that everything that they were, was beneath her.

Now however, he felt none of that. She was a threat, sure. Queen of the Cyclonian Empire, one of the most if not THE best crystal mage out there. But she also seemed...lonely. Just like when Cyclonis was pinned down by him, she’s aware she’s pretty much the enemy of practically every other terra aside from Cyclonia. When and if she’s in her opponents clutches she fully expects to be killed by them. Cyclonis can’t even allow herself to trust anyone outside that terra she rules with an iron fist.

‘She can’t trust me to not kill her either, even though she knows how me and my team works.’, AERROW thought as he reflected on their earlier fight. She’s the head of Cyclonian operations, surely she’s gotten reports for the number of Talons who come back from a failed mission due to the Storm Hawks?

He shook his head.

‘You can drag a horse to water but you can’t make it drink. I can’t convince Cyclonis to trust others let alone me. I can’t do the undoable. I may be the leader of the Storm Hawks, but i’m only a person.’

That’s something he’s had to tell himself more and more as of late and far before getting stranded here. There’s been so many situations where there’s been so many things that needed solving, so
many people and places that needed help, but in the end he couldn’t fix all of them.

“Of course you couldn’t fix all of them, you’re only one person, y’know.”

It was something Piper told him once when coming back from a mission. Of course he knew that, of course he was one person but with all the pressures of being the hope of Atmos that keep piling up, pushing him and his team to be better, to do better, to save all of those in need, to not make mistakes…. being “one person” doesn’t sound like good justification for messing up anymore.

‘Though I guess people would consider earning the favor of Master Cyclonis a mistake, not an accomplishment.’, Aerrow thought.

‘Now that I think about it, it’s probably thanks to her paranoia she’s a very capable and self-reliant person. Leading a group like I do is one thing but managing a terra, organizing troops, planning raids, mapping out where to gather resources, building devices, AND experimenting on crystals…..The word “incredible” doesn’t do it justice.’ He concluded.

‘To think that someone around my age could do all that work and not be worn out doing those tasks with such a slender, flexible, and…’, He caught himself and whipped his head around, facing away from Master Cyclonis. He was incredulous at where his own thoughts were wandering. What was this? Being pent up? Was that what this was?? Aerrow was completely flustered by the madness of where his thoughts were trying to go. While what went through Aerrow’s mind did not catch Master Cyclonis’ attention his staring before flipping his head away followed by his tense posture did.

The staring Cyclonis did expect. They were enemies. It’s only smart to keep your eye on them to prevent an early passing, and Aerrow did. No, what she didn’t expect was his gaze to be curious. It was plain as day on his face, it looked like how she herself would’ve looked when finding a crystal she never tinkered with or a book she hadn’t read, she was sure of it.

But then that expression changed to something…unfamiliar. It was softer but also more of an appraising look. Aerrow let out a breath, keeping his eyes on her form, opening his mouth slightly in such a way that even though the rain drowned out any sound Cyclonis swore she could have heard the sigh he let out escape his lips. The sight caused a squirming bolt of heat inside of her, an unfamiliar feeling she didn’t allow herself to express refusing to risk showing vulnerability to her enemy while attempting to discern the emotions on his face.

However, before she could get a grasp on what that expression meant it was replaced with a look of complete wide eyed shock as Aerrow turned his head rapidly to hide his face. He...hid? He felt he had something to hide. Something he needed to hide.

‘A weakness.’, Master Cyclonis thought. ‘Perhaps this unexpected situation will be more fruitful than i’d thought.’

“The shelter’s complete, Cyclonis.”, Aerrow announced after tightening the vines some more and testing its stability a bit. Yep, not going anywhere.

De-twigged branches held up the thick massive leaves that were layered upon each other, held together only by vines that were wrapped and tied at key places, acting as stabilizing support cables that were tied to spike like rocks that were hammered into the ground. The vines were also used as binding for the leaves and branches as the remaining rocks were placed around the bases of the sticks. The leftover leaves were used as matting for the ground under the covering. It was a surprisingly well crafted shelter for such a short time, Master Cyclonis would have figured it would have taken at least some more trial and error before the sky knight made a passable attempt of a shelter.
“Hm, you seem to have some experience with this.”, Master Cyclonis said to Aerrow with a bemused expression.

“Yeah, well, moving from terra to terra will do that.”, Aerrow replied as naturally as he could manage, trying to shake the earlier thoughts from his mind. Not to mention trying to stop making a face he’s certain would bring up some questions.

“Nomadic. An unsurprising lifestyle for a Storm Hawk.”, Master Cyclonis said as she sat herself on the leaves beneath the shelter’s cover.

“Wasn’t much of a choice. Choices like that are for people who have parents.”, Aerrow said also sitting down, but at a safe a distance as he could manage with such a small space. It had enough room for two fully grown adults to lay down flat and even enough space for there to be two feet between them if wanted, but that’s probably just about 3 benches of area. A safe distance from an enemy would be more than that. A Crystal Mage would be twice as much as that.

“....I wouldn’t be too sure about that.”, Cyclonis said quietly enough to nearly be a mumble. Her eyes were distant, looking at a memory Aerrow couldn’t see. Long ago when she was officially given her title, and even moment before that. Were they optional, she wondered. They were certainly willingly chosen by herself but was that because of how she was raised that influenced such desires or because she being who she was, wanted to be the ruler of Cyclonia, to be her grandmother’s successor? Her answer struck her. Right...she chose her mantle, “Master Cyclonis”. It was because of who she was, not because of manipulation. But just because she made the choice doesn’t mean others with parents had the luxury to even choose, she knew that best. Master Cyclonis has used her Talons to mess with crops on terras ruining the wellbeing of families and their finances before sending in a negotiation team to buy the land off of them, forcing them to move to less prosperous and safe lands. It was an illusion of choice, far from the real thing.

Aerrow gazed at her distant and thoughtful expression. When Master Cyclonis replied the way she did it sounded like she had had the experience to know a person’s situation was more complex than what Aerrow saw it as. He was taken aback by it, he hadn’t expected her to have a mindfulness of other people's situations like that. If she has such awareness, why would she be so cruel to others? It was perplexing to Aerrow.

Master Cyclonis however was somewhat impressed by Aerrow’s skill at constructing the shelter, his ability to detwig the sticks and cut to the right measurements without a drawn layout, to know what would be a sturdy enough vine to be used like a rope and what wouldn’t be, and then to successfully assemble it on the first try...It speaks volumes about his building expertise and experience doing such things. She then remembered his statement about “people who have parents”.

‘That means he was either a runaway foster child or an orphan.’, She concluded. It would make sense if he was an orphan, to look up to the original Storm Hawks so much that he’d try to become one must mean he was a child escapee from a raided terra way back when. Then after a few weeks, nearing the end of each day from thereon, he’d build a shelter to sleep under or risk sleeping uncovered and open to waking up soaked and sick the next day. The thought of being in such a position at such a young age...it would have been unbearable. But such suffering was not without reward, and this suffering must have rewarded him to be able to visualize designs in his mind, to be able to measure objects without ruler on hand, to determine what could be usable resources for construction just by observation alone, and to have so much persistence and grit. Just think, in a way, her predecessor created her worst enemy. She smiled bitterly.
'What a cruel gift, dearest grandmother.'

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Resting on a relatively nearby terra from the spot Aerrow and Master Cyclonis fell was a Cyclonian Destroyer, the same ship Master Cyclonis was on moments before their clash with the Storm Hawks. One would figure that since the storm had badly affected their engines the Cyclonians would rest, regroup, and wait out the storm.

"WHERE IN ATMOS ARE THOSE ENGINEERS?! DAMMIT!*WHACK!*"

This, was not the case.

"RRrrgh...hhh!!! mnn…", Ace voiced through gritted teeth as he held his aching hand.

It wasn’t wise to punch a metal wall. But Ace wasn’t trying to be, if anything he was trying to punch something that wouldn’t keel over and not work after it was hit. Like whoever wasn’t getting those engineers.

"If I don’t see an engineer Talon in 5 seconds i’ll….!!"

"D-Dark Ace, engineer squad reporting for duty,sir!", The Talon soldier said, standing tall among his cowering peers.

Ace stopped, stood up and turned to the Talons and faced their squad leader.

"Report on the status of our engines, when can we expect to fly again.", Dark Ace commanded.

"Expect...S-sir, that storm will knock out any engines that attempt to fly up there you--GHK!", The Talon spoke before his throat was lunged at by the Dark Ace’s hand and pulled into the air, holding the Talon by his neck.

"Don’t you tell me, don’t you dare even attempt to say what I can and cannot do or so help me the next words out of your mouth may well be your last.", Ace snarled at him as he tightened his grip on the Talons throat to make his point. The panicking Talon squirmed for air and freedom under his grasp while nodding intensely. The Dark Ace put him down but still gripping his neck he pulled the Talon close to his face.

"When, are, we, expected, to, fly.", Ace questioned with emphasis.

"T-Two hours! E-E-Everyone should be operational in two hours…!", The Talon whimpered out before Ace dropped him.

"They better be, or you’re going to be your team’s example of why they should be honest.", Dark Ace warned before turning away and heading for his quarters. He wouldn’t forgive himself, she needed his aid and he wasn’t able to help her. Now she was lost, the one Grand Master Cyclonis entrusted to him to keep her safe. The one who he’d almost consider as being a daughter though he was more of a much, much older big brother to her. The one who would have his back and give him the chance to fight worthy adversaries endlessly if she felt it necessary. She was missing and there was a chance even the Storm Hawks brat couldn’t even save her.

It was frustrating to be so unable to help. He hoped that by some chance she was at least safe.

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Cyclonis woke up to faint rays of sunlight dancing across her vision. She found it odd that her bed was so flat but then her memories of yesterday started returning.

‘Right, me and the Sky Knight fell down here.’, She recalled.

Sure enough, there beside her was the one who opted to switch for lookout after his rest a few hours ago. Napping on the job. Didn’t this man take out several of her forces, ones who’d be caught slacking off just like this? Did that make him more incompetent than she took his team for, or did that make her own Talons even more pathetic than she expected them to be? She didn’t want to follow that train of thought. He definitely was slacking off though, to not bother recalling her warning about what would happen if his guard was down. Perhaps the reality of his situation hadn’t sunk in yet. Master Cyclonis gazed at him, and then at the reflective glint that the puddle beside him gave off.

‘Then a reminder will do.’, She concluded.

With that decided she stood up, stretched…

“NGHKCKL--?!”

...then lightly kicked Aerrow over into the puddle he was by as she walked out from the shelter he made. He didn’t seem to like that much.

“Puh, pleh! Why did you do that?!”, Aerrow shouted.

“Still half asleep, Sky Knight? I thought you shook yourself out of that hours ago.”, Master Cyclonis responded.

Aerrow froze in place as he recalled stubbornly trying to stay awake as lookout while Master Cyclonis was taking her sleep shift but then…next he knew he woke to the world spinning into a brown wet soup thanks to a foot to the back. Now he remembered. He fell asleep during watch.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to fall asleep. That’s my fault. If it happens again though, could you maybe not kick me into a puddle?”, Aerrow asked Master Cyclonis.

“Whatever do you mean? Lacking awareness of your surroundings was your own error, I played no part in that.”, She replied dismissively.

“Agh, okay fine whatever. Let’s just try to get some breakfast.”, Aerrow said in defeat.

‘and maybe get a bit of a wash while i’m at it.’, He thought looking at the puddle he now stood away from.

“Oh, and Sky Knight, you have something a little brown on…”, Master Cyclonis said as she gestured to the tip of her nose.

Aerrow’s eyes went wide momentarily before giving a deadpan glare. The insinuation did not escape his notice. Someone was relentless today. Good, that energy will be useful. He wasn’t entirely sure they’d find a body of water nearby to fish, so they may need to do a fair bit of walking.

“Can you gather some sticks about your staff’s length? We’ll need them.”, Aerrow asked as he started inspecting the nearby area.

“I take it they’ll be made into spears to be used for hunting for our food?”, Master Cyclonis asked as she began doing so. It was easier to remember what her staff was like, she spent a lot of time building and maintaining it.
“She studies more than Crystals!”, Aerrow said facetiously.

“Hn, one needs to be prepared for any situation if they’re going to rule.”, She responded.

‘But it was only the bare minimum, I expected to at least have some crystals on me. Bad move.’, She grimaced internally. On top of how much more fit Aerrow is than she, it was clear who was more prepared for a situation like this. Something she’d have to fix once she got back.

“Ah. but yes, we are using them to hunt-- Thank you. Once i’ve cut them properly we’ll begin walking towards a good place to start.” He said taking the sticks Master Cyclonis gave him while getting a bit more chipper than he was when he got up today. He wasn’t exactly sure why. Was it because he got to make tools? No, that's not fun. Was it because he was outside? No, he is outside a lot and the enjoyment of being outside greatly varies (mostly because of why he’s outside and what happens to him while outside). Then why…? He shook his head. It didn’t matter. Why look a gift horse in the mouth?

Noticing he finished the last spear he gathered them all up and told Master Cyclonis to follow him but to try and be quiet until he gives the “ok”. She wasn’t fine with this but seeing as Aerrow has been trying his best to be friendly, he likely wasn’t using it as an excuse to silence her. His head was constantly facing the treetops and occasionally he’d turn and give a question of concern which she’d brush off. He was moving slowly enough that keeping up wasn’t an issue, she didn’t understand why he’d think otherwise. But suddenly their slow trek came to a halt as Aerrow put his hand out to halt Master Cyclonis, he pointed to the sky where she could see several small birds flying off to someplace, their movements fast. It seemed that was what Aerrow was waiting for as he and Cyclonis rushed towards where they were headed and found themselves at a large river.

“we found it!”, Aerrow said enthusiastically. More enthusiastically than Master Cyclonis was expecting.

“Yes...we did.”, Cyclonis said slowly, still trying to figure out why he was this happy.

Aerrow, realizing he was coming off a bit odd gave a nervous chuckle. He was a little wound up. Clearing his throat he once again looked to the river.

“Okay. We’ll take these spears, get in the water enough so that our ankles down are submerged and while trying to keep our legs still as possible, throw a spear at where we know the fish will be. Got it?”, He said to Cyclonis.

She gave a quiet irritated sigh. The advice was new, the general procedure was not. It was too half and half to snark at him for it. So a genuine statement it was.

“Understood, let’s get breakfast.”, She answered. Master Cyclonis took a spear from the bundle and began to take off her boots and gloves. Atmos be damned if she’s going to walk back with soggy boots and wet clammy hands.

Aerrow set down the bundle and also took one, removing his boots, gloves, and his muddy shirt which caused Cyclonis to do a double take. He cupped his hands in the water and splashed it on his face a few times while rubbing off spots of the mud before doing a final splash and noticing Cyclonis’ wide eyed stare. He hoped there wasn’t a bear behind him.

“...Something wrong Cyclonis?”, He asked.

“-! no. It’s nothing.”, She responded while turning away.

She wasn’t expecting him to take off his shirt, or more specifically she wasn’t expecting Aerrow to
take his shirt off in front of her. She expected him to wash his face, maybe his shirt too at a different
time if the situation permitted it but not this. She never actually saw any of the Storm Hawks without
their uniform, let alone any lack of covering on any level. It was new, that was for sure.

Once they got to fishing she stole a glance again. He looked more...human, than before. Maybe
also...vulnerable? No, that wasn’t the posture or the expression of someone vulnerable. It was more
likely the expression he hid yesterday fit that description rather than the one he’s wearing today.
What did it look like, she wondered. Then there was the one right before he hid...did that fit under
“vulnerable”? It was a gentle expression sure, but it had that...that look of deciding if something was
worth taking. Recalling his face brought that heat again which made her feel something she hadn’t
felt before. She felt exposed.

The feeling quickly annoyed her, there was no logical reason to feel exposed. That implied she was
wearing something she was trying to hide, which she didn’t have. Trying to reason with it quickly
became apparent to be fruitless which only agitated her further. In a last ditch attempt to be rid of the
feeling she chucked her spear at the fish she was attempting to catch, forcing her to focus on her task.
However she aimed at where it was rather than where it was swimming to and predictably she
missed it. The force wasn’t expected though and she made a bigger splash than anticipated, changing
all the fishes positions, and most notably catching Aerrow’s attention.

“I know we’re both hungry, but patience is key. Otherwise we’ll both be without a meal.”, Aerrow
said to Cyclonis, assuming she was just impatient.

“Khh…”, She seethed.

‘It’s your fault I was reckless.’, Cyclonis thought.

Eventually, they decided what they had was good enough and started setting up a fire. Then the
inevitable problem made itself known.

“You uh...wouldn’t happen to have found a cooking crystal you didn’t find on your person yesterday
would you?”, Aerrow asked Master Cyclonis.

“If I found any crystal on my person we wouldn’t be talking. Or eating together for that matter.”, She
answered bitterly.

‘Though I wouldn’t normally consider bringing a cooking crystal. Something to consider doing once
I get back.’, She thought.

“That...makes sense.”, Aerrow said before letting out a sigh. “Maybe the crystal my dagger has--”

“That’s a strike type crystal, Aerrow. It won’t make sparks or fire, just charred ashes and a flying
Storm Hawk.”, Master Cyclonis deadpanned.

“Flying…?” He questioned.

“Well, “flying” as much as a rock “flies” when one chucks it.”, Master Cyclonis responded.

Now understanding what she meant he looked at the hilt of his dagger with a gaze of
disappointment. While Aerrow was lamenting his crushed hopes Master Cyclonis was mulling over
what their options were before her mind was struck with a possibility.

“Flint could work.”, She said.

“flint?”, Aerrow asked.
“It’s a type of rock. Civilizations of old used it to make fires for making food before discovering cooking crystals.”, Master Cyclonis answered, standing up and beginning to search the nearby river’s edge.

Aerrow stood up, following her.
“What should we be looking for?”, he asked her.

“-! Right, It’s either black or dark gray colored, has a glassy luster, but you’ll need to use your dagger on it—uncharged of course, for the final test to check if its flint.”, Master Cyclonis answered. Why didn’t she think to tell him this? It’s better if two people look for it, it’ll be faster. Besides, it’s not like he could figure out how to set her on fire with it. He sounds like he wouldn’t know how.

After a bit of looking Aerrow came across a stone that looked to fit the description and immediately picked it up.

“Black, glassy luster...Okay.”, He muttered to himself and got out his dagger as Master Cyclonis noticed and walked over to see if he actually found one.

He quickly slid his dagger across the rock in a swift cut. The sparks were immediate. It surprised the young Sky Knight. Master Cyclonis gave a smirk of satisfaction.

“You found it, good. Now we can actually eat.”, She said to Aerrow.

To actually get genuine praise from his bitter, cynical, and condescending adversary was stunning. It also made him feel very happy for some reason, it was kind of concerning.

‘It’s probably just because it feels like an impossible task to accomplish, so actually doing it feels like an amazing achievement or something like that. No big deal.’, Aerrow reasoned.

They went over to the campfire area where their fish was and Aerrow sparked the fire to actually cook and eat their catch. Aerrow took some of his cooked fish and went over to the bank with his shirt and started washing it as best he could. Cyclonis, realizing what he was doing looked away. She felt no need to be guilty, though she didn’t expect there to be long term consequences for her actions (well, if you call having to see someone shirtless as their shirt air dries a “consequence”). For the most part it didn’t bug her after that little spear chucking outburst she had, but sometimes when looking at him her mind wanders back there and she has to distract herself to get out of it.

‘The idea of him making that expression at me as he is now...Khh, enough! Enough!! Think of something else, ANYTHING ELSE!’, Cyclonis chided herself internally.

That was when the beast appeared behind Aerrow, lunging out of its hiding place from across the river. The world in Cyclonis’ eyes seemed to slow in that moment before the sound of her out voice cut through the illusion.

“SKY KNIGHT GET AWAY FROM THE BANK!”, She bellowed.

Aerrow jolted from the command, his head whipping up from his shirt and then back towards the imposing figure moving his way, a second off from claiming Aerrow’s torso for its snack. He bolted into a side roll, narrowly avoiding its fangs as it crashed its mouth into the soft dirt, digging up several feet of dirt in the process before hacking it out.

The beast towered well over Aerrow and the now standing Master Cyclonis, about a fifth of the height of a Cyclonian Destroyer and a fourth of the Condor’s length. It had two sets of shark-like eyes and teeth structure similar to that of a fox’s. It’s nose however was just two slits the way a snake’s is with the skin texture to match. However its lips were not long, keeping its fangs
permanently exposed. Its gums were just as boney looking as its teeth making it almost look undead. The legs however had bird like feet at the end of each one, making this thing look like some nightmarish raptor dog with a lizard like tail!

It turned to Aerrow again, its void filled eyes fixed on its tiny prey. Aerrow made no hesitation in getting distance from the beast’s body as it bounced up its back half over towards Aerrow in an attempt to buck him with its taloned feet, sending up the water with the force alone, kicking pebbles further into the river. Master Cyclonis was stunned by the beast, its size, its appearance, its force...How long was it hidden? What would you even call this thing?!

Aerrow went for the trees in an attempt to keep it from charging and scooping him up into its terrifying jaws with the nightmarish creature not far behind. The beast’s steps quaked the ground that both Aerrow and Cyclonis were under. Cyclonis’ chances of hurting it was even worse than Aerrow’s, she concluded. He had a dagger, she had sticks turned spears for fishing and a campfire. Supposing she did manage to approach the beast with flamed stick in hand and burned its flesh, she has no idea how flammable it actually is, and with the amount of force its limbs have, one successful dodge could also mean one blown out torch.

‘I’d end up eaten by it’s massive mou...’, She thought till it was slowly silenced by a spark of an idea. She turned to the bundle of makeshift spears.

Aerrow’s plan wasn’t going well as the creature was knocking around trees while moving at a slower pace, shredding and clawing up the jungle fauna in a massive rumbling wave of trouble all to attempt to ravage the red headed Storm Hawk as he fled furiously, nearly tripping and scampering a few times as he ran. The monster was gaining on him when a voice blasted through the area, an unnatural ghostly echo heard faintly after its human ring. Aerrow’s head throbbed in pain slightly.

“HEY!!”, Master Cyclonis boomed while holding two sticks in hand, standing intensely with a vicious aura about her. Glaring angrily at the unsettling creature as it slowed and wormed its gargantuan body out of the trees to set its eyes on Cyclonis’ small figure.

Aerrow’s heart stopped as he saw it thrash the ground into an explosion of clumps of dirt in a mad dash for Master Cyclonis who….just stood.

‘She isn’t going to make it.’, Aerrow’s mind repeated relentlessly, over and over.

Aerrow climbed out of the bushes into a sprint in the open as he desperately thought up ways to draw away the creature, to steer its wrath but it was becoming more and more fruitless with each step he took. It unfolded in front of him. The beast lowered its upper body, presumably opening its mouth as Master Cyclonis’ form was obscured by its ginormous body.

“NO! CYCLONIS!!”, Aerrow shouted in a despairing tone. He never thought he’d see her go doing one good thing in her life. The punch of her demise hit him harder than he expected it to, and he held his chest with one hand while getting a death grip on his dagger hilt with the other. He charged for the flank of the beast.

“STORM HAWK! DON’T YOU DARE LOOK DOWN ON ME!!”, Was howled from the front of the beast, how…?

“I WON’T DIE TO LOWLY BEASTS SO EASILY NOW GET OVER HERE!!”, Master Cyclonis yelled, very cross about how fragile the Sky Knight saw her as. The monster was trying to get her and it wouldn’t be long before it would attempt a different strategy.

Aerrow, now more motivated than ever to move it ran quickly to the head of the beast and saw that
Cyclonis used two spears to prop the inside of its mouth open, and was trying to force its tongue down with her foot.

“DAGGER!!”, She barked while pointing at the farthest point of the roof of its mouth.

“Right!”, Aerrow called out as he raced in there, took out the dagger and plunged it deep into the beast’s flesh and it let out a blaring scream sounding like the loudest static to exist as blood spurted down and dressing Aerrow’s features along with his blade. Knowing it worked he let out a yell as the Sky knight carved the blade back deeper and deeper until he was at the edge of its tongue. There Aerrow finally pulled the dagger out while enduring the screams.

Master Cyclonis saw the cut and taking the chance she betted on it’s scream keeping it’s mouth open, tore out one of the spears and stuck it in the start of the wound and shoved it deeper, Aerrow seeing this went over and helped her shove it up further and further as the monster wailed and thrashed, challenging their balance as they did one more push and like a puppet without strings it fell limp, its mouth sagging.

“Haaah….hah….Good….good thinking, Cyclonis.”, Aerrow said to Master Cyclonis.

“Impudent Sky Knight, it is Master Cyclonis. Though I doubt you’ll bother to say it.”, Master Cyclonis spat out at him.

“Just like…. how you wont…bother to…call me Aerrow?”, He shot back through breaths.

“Quite.”, She said slowly with a slight shrug.

“Hah….hahahaha….”, Aerrow began laughing as he leaned on the length of its teeth, holding his head. Here they were, not fighting each other, not fleeing, but bantering as if they were almost friends.

“…..you will definitely need a bath, and you just washed your face too. Hahaha.”, Master Cyclonis said mockingly.

“Oh don’t worry your highness, it looks like you’re pretty much on the same boat. Unlike last time.”, Aerrow replied snidely with a smirk.

Master Cyclonis looked down to see the monster’s blood covering many places of herself as well. It was mildly infuriating that he could actually bite back this time, hopefully the next turn of humiliation would be on the Sky Knight. It was only fair, he was essentially a criminal in Cyclonia so some punishment was long due for the Storm Hawk.

‘A ruler should embody the will of their nation after all.’, Cyclonis concluded. It was miniscule in comparison to the weight of his crimes but it was still a punishment worth giving. She chuckled darkly and that unearthly undertone was present in her voice. Aerrow’s head pained as he felt some dread, tensing a bit as she turned to face him.

“Then perhaps a bath is next on the ‘to do’ list.”, She said. Brushing off the feeling her laughter gave him, Aerrow stood up straight and gave a nod.

“Yeah, it’ll be bad if this blood attracted predators.”, He responded. With that they gathered their clothes, snuffed out the fire, and followed the river off to where they would hopefully find a big enough body of water to bathe.

On the trip to there though, Master Cyclonis couldn’t help but notice something odd about the Sky Knight’s bareback. one of the higher disks on his spine was strangely shaped and was glowing blue.
ever so faintly through his skin...

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It has now been over a day since Aerrow fell, and everyone in the Condor grew restless. It didn’t help that the storm which was supposed to be gone by now was still there and if anything was getting stronger.

Stork was raving about how this was the end times before he landed on a terra while the others were attempting to calmly and coolly try to figure this problem out even after landing, but maybe….he was right?

‘Nah, that’s ridiculous.’, Piper thought.
‘It’s probably just crystal based weather because we had somehow created a reaction with a bunch of unstable crystals in a depository somewhere.’

It made sense. It was possible. But for so long? Even her theory had some holes in it. But she had to trust it. She couldn’t let fear control her like it does with Stork. Not like this.

“Junko, how are the bikes’ engines?”, Piper asked.

“Uh, still as dead as the last time you asked, Piper.”, Junko replied. “Sorry.”

“Yeah, I don’t think these are gonna fly man. Not until that freaky storm passes away.”, Finn added while looking out the window.

“Well, at least the Cyclonians can’t fly ether and with everyone stranded no terras can be attacked or harmed.”, Junko said as Finn was crumpling another written up plan on a piece of paper and aiming it at the trashcan, adding to the collection of trashed ideas Junko and Finn were trying to think up since they landed. It had gotten to the point where Stork didn’t need to stop his pacing to even chime in to tell them why X wouldn’t work anymore. All the obstacles and issues were hammered into their heads by now.

“Yes, but we all know Cyclonia is a mass of people who carry out Cyclonis’ will. Just because a body of people are stranded, doesn’t mean Cyclonia is immobilized. It still moves even now…”, Piper said gazing into her water cup.

“Well, considering how “capable” the Cyclonians’ Talons are I think we don’t have to worry for awhile. Our biggest threats are grounded.”, Stork remarked. It was odd Stork was looking on the bright side for once, but he wasn’t wrong. Snipe, Ravess, and even the Dark Ace were all grounded. The only thing to worry about was that their empress, Master Cyclonis was down below with Aerrow. Hopefully if they were alive, neither were near each other.

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“You shouldn’t stray too far Cyclonis.”, Aerrow said to her slinking figure.

She wanted him to be humiliated and see his humiliation when the situation arose, sure. Seeing each other change however…

“I’ll be just fine. I’m not some weakling you know.”, She hissed. It wasn’t a strong argument but taking the time to think up a response could be seen as nervous silence and therefore vulnerability. She would not dare give him the satisfaction.

“Look…”, Aerrow started.”…I can understand if carrying the stress of constantly being a leader and
ruler on top of now having to be with your enemy is just too much and you want some time alone--”

“What?”, She spat out incredulously as she fully turned around facing him, searching his eyes before concluding he actually was serious. She sneered.”Sky Knight, I know how to manage my stress. The weight of my role doesn’t bother me.”

Aerrow looked surprised, actually, genuinely surprised. “It doesn’t bother you?”, He asked.

Master Cyclonis raised her head tall and proud. “No.”, she answered in a way that seemed both nonchalant and gloating at the same time. Aerrow was stunned.

“.....Amazing.....”, He blurted out quietly but still enough to be heard. It caught Cyclonis off guard.

“Tsk, to say such a thing like it’s an achievement--”, She said, tone dripping with venom before it was cut off by Aerrow.

“It IS though! I’ve never been able to stop my burdens as a leader from crushing me. I can hardly even find a time to slip away!”, Aerrow said with such emotion. This was his genuine feelings.

“So to know someone who can balance it out is really amazing.”, He said looking down. Master Cyclonis felt stiff, she wasn’t used to such bare and honest praise. She had to take a moment to compose her words.

“Never been able to stop your burdens from crushing you? What a joke.”, she walked past him, intentionally punching into his shoulder as she moved toward the falls before stopping and turning toward him. “Alright then, tell me of these situations you call “burdens”. I’ll tell you whether or not you really couldn’t stop their weight from crushing you. Come.”

Aerrow was at a loss, he thought for sure Master Cyclonis was just going to belittle him and walk off after hearing that “what a joke” line. But instead, she chose to listen to his problems and….give advice? Her actions were contradictory to her words.

At least she didn’t decide to wander off. If another creature like that recently dubbed “Devourer” showed up and he wasn’t there with his dagger, Cyclonia actually could have been without a ruler that day.

Master Cyclonis really, really didn’t want to see the Storm Hawk bare. But his statements tugged at her. He actually couldn’t find a way to deal with his stress? She couldn’t decide if this intrigued her, or downright offended her. She, Master Cyclonis, ruler of Cyclonia, kept suffering defeat after defeat from a person suffering so much from stress he might as well be working as a help desk representative?! He should be mentally impaired by all that build up by now! His emotional endurance is astounding. How long has it been since he started, a year ago? How did he not die from stress alone?

“Well, Sky Knight?”, She asked while sitting by the water.

“Hmm…”, She heard Aerrow voice before noticing he was tugging down his pants. Her eyes went wide as saucers before turning around. Aerrow was confused to her sudden turn.

‘Is there another monster?’, Aerrow thought as he reached for his dagger and crouched low.

“Cyclonis, did you hear something? Like a noise that monster would make?”, He asked as quietly as he could manage and still be heard.

Master Cyclonis realized the confusion and was thankful for something to mix into her excuse.
“I thought I did, but no it was much too quiet. It’s the birds in the trees, they’re breaking twigs.”, Master Cyclonis answered as calmly as she could manage. It seemed Aerrow bought it as she heard him stand followed by the sheathing of his dagger in its holster by the water. She gave a sigh of relief.

“Mn... where to begin... Well, how bout’ the ones I know I can’t change?”, Aerrow said. “I live in a big moving target that also doubles as a big moving magnet for other admirers of the Storm Hawks of old to gather and talk to us, and sidetrack us, and insist on giving us performances or gifts...”

Honestly, Aerrow was expecting Cyclonis to laugh at him when he talked about how admirers were a problem too. People would usually say one should be grateful for all the love and attention they were getting, but unless it helped their cause or their living it was really just well intentioned actions that caused unintentional stalling. Stalling that endangered lives or ruined lands, something Aerrow couldn’t forgive himself for even though he had to.

However, there was no laughter from Master Cyclonis, no glaring, or bitterness or even mockery.

“Admirers should find a place where they can give well wishes and thanks when you’re available to accept them. Not whenever they feel like forcing upon you the “kindness of their hearts”.”, Cyclonis stated as she grumpily recalled some suck ups who flocked to her at the worst of times. “Granted, most of mine were obviously disingenuous manipulators hungry for power and wealth but still. With a firm voice and a firm hand, you can straighten them out and set up an area where they can actually give thanks. Enemies however, I will agree are an unavoidable risk.”

As she talked she could hear another article of clothing flop off of his person. Likely his undergarment. She didn’t want to see, she felt oddly tense.

“Guess that translates to “I won’t give you a break just because you’re whining”?”, He said.

“Hmhmhm. How astute of you.”, Master Cyclonis snarked.

“Though an area huh... never thought of that. Won’t people see that as narcissistic though?”, Aerrow asked.

“Such thoughts are unavoidable. You can give them the answer “its for their safety” but there will always be a group who’s convinced you’re nothing more than glory seekers. Ignore them.”, She answered with a hand wave. “Next?”

Master Cyclonis heard splashes of water as Aerrow moved in deeper and started to take handfuls of water to rinse the blood off his limbs as well as mud specs he missed. She heard a groan of annoyance at finding one of the elusive spots.

“Aerrow saw Cyclonis look at him only for her to be frozen in place briefly before ever so slightly tilting her head with a cautious yet curious gaze, interested in his figure. He could practically feel her stare, which reminded him he wasn’t wearing anything right now. Knowing that her eyes were dancing all over the view of his exposed body made his throat go dry. Was she enjoying looking at
his body like this?

He suddenly remembered for boys there’s a certain reaction their body has to being hot n’ bothered which is quite obvious if exposed in plain sight. The thought made his eyes dart away fast enough that it almost seemed as if his irises and pupils teleported off of his sclera for a moment.

‘Calm down Aerrow, she just-- she’s just looking at me to see if I had any leeches! Yeah, you know those squirming fanged water worms that stick to you and try to guzzle out all your blood to make you a dry husk of a person? Yeah! Those nasty things! I’m sure Cyclonis hates those too!’, Aerrow rambled internally, trying to prevent his flagpole from rising.

“N-No, no leeches! Just found some dirt spots that I missed earlier! Surprising where you can find dir--”, Aerrow said before an internal voice shouted ‘DON’T SAY DIRTY’ in his mind. “FILTHY! Filthy things on your person if you know where to look…”, Aerrow blurted out.

Cyclonis, who Aerrow noticed had turned away during his rambling let out a quiet, “Oh, is that so?”, From her person. She refused to let him see her embarrassed face.

“Y-yeah…”, He mumbled before turning around and threw himself into washing, making quite the noise as he splashed water everywhere in trying to clean himself.

It only took a few minutes of cooldown before he went back to the conversation of his stresses with Master Cyclonis. He spoke about trying to deal with multiple mini-factions and their leaders’ differing personalities at the planning table, how keeping the peace between them diplomatically nearly caused their defeat once which Aerrow can’t stop reminding himself of every time there was an argument in the planning room, wondering if they’ll mess up just like before but worse. How lightly he sleeps because he fears that if he doesn’t wake to the alarms on time he’d jeopardize the lives of his friends, the closest thing to a family he has and how he’d never be able to take that back. How many of his and Piper’s plans backfired for the atmosians who followed them to the letter only to end up with land gone and them in a stretcher. How one of those atmosians is in a coma right now and how troubled Piper is about it, he and she were like insomniac buddies. Aerrow also can’t help but wonder about how many Talons’ parachutes fail below cloud cover and didn’t make it back to their families. How he has to approach the families of his own allies and tell them when they’ve fallen. How even when he’s wracked with all of this mess of feelings he has to turn to his friends and say “everything is going to be alright”, he has to even quiet his sobbing in the shower to make sure his squadmates don’t hear through the thin walls of their ship.

“...In fact, I think that's why I was so chipper this morning despite you kicking me into that mud puddle.”, Aerrow said thoughtfully.

“I did no such thing.”, Master Cyclonis said dismissively.

“Har-Dee-Har Har…. …I mean it though. Waking up knowing I didn’t have to give orders to my teammates, or build up morale, go to a meeting of any kind or get ready for an immediate sky battle…..It was like the world was taken off my shoulders.”, He said.

“With all of that on your plate I could imagine it would, yes.”, She agreed before moving to her advice.”Well, for the deaths, losses, and regrets I say live for the dead who cannot, learn from the mistakes you have made, and make up for the regrets you hold to this day. For the foreboding dread of a bad situation, ignore it. It will happen when it happens.”, She leaned more inwards, resting her elbows on her knees and her chin on the back of her hands before continuing, eyes in a distant place. “Think of your focus like a tightrope walker. The longer you obsess on it the closer it gets to becoming reality, yet if you block it out entirely you’ll trip up and fall into said reality. The key is balance.”, Master Cyclonis said before declaring, “the biggest problem I see however is your lack of
“I know that but—”, Aerrow protested.

“But nothing.”, She interjected with the voice of a commander, eyes snapping to the side with an icy glare Aerrow couldn't see but definitely feel. She was no longer resting her head, one arm had whipped itself to the ground grasping the grass as the hand of the other arm balled up into a fist and landed on her knee as her back had straightened. There was a snarl to her tone. “Giving yourself some actual breathing room is key to being able to stay focused and invigorated. Not doing that is to welcome fatigue and impulsive, emotional, destructive action. You will endanger your teammates, your “family”. You don’t want that do you?”, She asked in a demanding tone.

“No, I don’t.”, Aerrow answered.

“Then fix it. You’re stranded and therefore away right now, a perfect time to fit in a way to do that no?”, Master Cyclonis asked.

“Right.”, He said in agreement. With that he got out of the water and went over to the new campfire which was surrounded by racks made from the spears and some vines that tied up and sprawled out their clothes like they were leather to be worked on. He untied and took his clothes that he himself put up there, as well as picked up his dual dagger holster with the lone dagger in it and began dressing himself while facing the fire.

“Cyclonis?”, Aerrow asked.

“What is it, Sky Knight?”, She asked.

“Why did you… why did you decide to give me that advice? You could have just as easily left me in ignorance until I worked or stressed myself to death.”, He asked her. Wouldn’t that be an advantage to her? Why would she ignore that?

“And be given a victory? Sky Knight, victory must be earned in order for it to mean something. Taking advantage of a weak leader’s condition to shut up resistance doesn’t speak highly about you or your kingdom’s power. It reeks of weakness, cowardice, something that can be broken with an iron fist, efficient weapons, and the right people. That is not what I want others to take away from hearing about their last hope’s death.” Master Cyclonis spat out harshly. Aerrow gave an annoyed scowl at the fire. His expression changed back once he heard her speak again. ”No, you need to have a resolute and sound mind, a healthy and fit body with a team just as confident, smart, and strong. That way when you are beaten the people will know its from a fearsome enemy who out-brawned, out-witted, and outmatched the best in all of Atmos! That’s why I helped you. Your weaknesses reflect badly on me and I won't settle for second best.”, Master Cyclonis stated with a passion Aerrow didn’t know she had. In an extremely warped way, it sounded like she wanted them to be their best and she was willing to help them get there. Almost like scolding a novice while motivating them to improve. It was flattering for some reason, even though in the same breath she declared she was adamant in killing them.

Aerrow didn’t know what to say. It felt like he accomplished a feat he didn’t know was possible. Master Cyclonis actually bothered to care for him, or his physical and psychological well being, at least. That isn’t really caring about him as a person now is it? It’s more like managing livestock, or pawns. But to acknowledge he’s a capable and reputable threat, one that would earn the fear of Master Cyclonis’ many enemies if struck down, is also to say Aerrow’s a respectable foe that’s worthy to be beaten.

Well, since he’s the leader of the Storm Hawks, of course. Now that he thought of it Aerrow could
also easily be replaced by Piper if Master Cyclonis chose to kill him now, she certainly had more respect for Piper. That was evident from early on. But even with that fact in mind she still decided to spend time and energy to helping the young Storm Hawk. It was… admirable, and very much appreciated.

He came to a conclusion. He decided on turning around and voicing his gratitude but once he turned to her the words died in his throat.

There she was, unclothed, exposed, bathing. Why wouldn’t she be? It was her turn to! Of course she would be naked what was he expecting?! He recalled where his thoughts wandered yesterday as he was building the shelter and the definition he gave for her fit. A Slender and flexible body with smooth and soft looking skin. Now he was certain he was pent up, he couldn’t tear his eyes off of her figure. He felt like the gulp he just took was the loudest thing in the world and his breaths seemed no quieter.

Master Cyclonis poured water over the back of her shoulder and then used that shoulder’s arm to rub away the splotches she felt just a bit lower on her shoulder blade. In trying to reach Cyclonis stretched her back even more. She took in a breath and held it, believing she could stretch her arm further by doing this, but actually only just rising her ribcage causing her chest to move with it. Something Aerrow definitely noticed.

Cyclonis let out a big sigh, giving up and attempting a different method when something caught her eye, that something being Aerrow’s red flustered face with his wide transfixed eyes on her. It should have bothered her. But that nervous, terrified, yet wanting expression was so vulnerable looking. He looked helpless and terrified under her gaze, something she’d been wanting for quite some time since their particular conflict began. The idea of actually causing this vulnerability brought a devious smile to her face as she slowly walked her way over to him.

Cyclonis’ smile sent excited shivers down his spine, he shouldn’t be feeling this way dammit! She caught him staring at her bare body. No excuse could save him now. He should be feeling awkward, guilty, and terrified not horny, guilty, and terrified! She’s Master Cyclonis, of the Cyclonian Empire! The enemy! She’s probably just happy she got a valid reason to beat him into a pulp! Not…! Not because…!

Watching her walk his eyes looked at the way the water rolled down the soft skin on her body, tracing the shapes of her lovely figure, how her torso expanded andcontracted with each breath drawing attention to her chest and its curves, the way her hips moved slightly with each step, her long slender yet shapely legs, and her controlling, confident stare. His legs were already folded up and together but watching her approach only made him squeeze them together more hoping his flagpole wasn’t visible.

She was only mere inches from him where she stood now. His eyes were focused on her face as she leaned down, staring back at those frightening yet captivating violet eyes that accentuated that wide gleeful grin.He leaned back till his back was against the ground. Now only half of his back was against it as he turned to the side, his legs on his chest and his arms wrapping around them as his nervous emerald gaze looked up to her domineering figure.

“Something you wanted to say, Sky Knight?”, Master Cyclonis said as softly and as slowly as she could manage while still being able to be heard.

Aerrow, remembering what he wanted to say and turned his head to face her.

“Tha-thank you-- FOR the advice I mean! Thank you for the advice… it means a lot... Master Cyclonis.”, He stammered out finishing his sentence with a small, nervous, bashful smile.
There he goes again actually using her full name, and in such a submissive looking pose. Such a
normally confident and cocky acting boy caught in such a powerless and humiliating state…. It made
her want to bully him more. Then, a wonderful, awful idea formed in her head.

“Oh, the pleasure was mine…..”, She said before licking some of the animal blood off of the side of
her face. “...my little pet.”

Aerrow drew in a ragged breath. Her wet, shapely, smooth naked body towering over him, her
mischievous eyes, the way she drew her wet tongue from the side of her face to over her upper lip so
slowly and deliberately with her eyes locked on him the entire time before cooing out that
nickname…! He was so aroused he was worried that anymore of this would cause him to splooge
right then and there. He scrunches his eyes shut in a desperate attempt to calm his libido.

Seeing him even more flustered and obviously bothered Master Cyclonis gave a satisfied smile
before returning to the lake to bathe. It will take him quite a while to forget that. No need to tease him
further.

“By the way…..”, She said, resuming her bath. “what’s that thing on your spine? it looks like it
replaced one of your spinal disks up there.”

The question pulled the Sky Knight out of his horny haze. That thing again? He flopped to his back
once more and opened his eyes, looking at the sky. This makes it the fourth time someone's asked.

“Oh, the crystal? Yeah, I...well, I “got” it when I was five years old.”, Aerrow answered
nonchalantly. Cyclonis however, wasn’t as calm.

“A crystal?? Why would you have a crystal placed over your spine??”, Master Cyclonis asked
incredulously.

“It wasn’t voluntary. During the escape from what was once my home terra I fell to some sharp rocks
below. The people who recovered me say I should’v died from the impact but instead the rock I hit
was one with a crystal formation at the top of it which only shattered my spinal disk. What was even
stranger was that instead of puncturing through my spinal cord, it fused to it.”, He said looking at the
cloud covers that were oddly radiating light over the jungle. He was calm now, and his expression
showed as much.

“So it isn’t over the spine but a part of it…? I’ve never heard of such a crystal related phenomena
before.”, Master Cyclonis commented.

“Neither did the doctors or crystal mages I was brought to. Piper also never ran into something like
that, but i’m sure you figured that out.”, Aerrow said with a smirk. His smirk faded. “That wasn’t the
weirdest part though. It’s been growing as much as my spine has, and i’m sure you saw how my skin
healed over it like it was my bone. It’s like the crystal and I are linked together now...its weird.”

“But you’ve experienced no odd phenomenons since then? No burns or freezes, or seizures…?”
Master Cyclonis asked.

“Nope. The crystal hasn’t wigged out, and I haven’t had seizures or whatever transplant patients
have had to risk suffering because of their replacement parts….””, He answered.

“what about the spine disk fragments?”, She asked in response.

“Disappeared, they said. The doctors and mages didn’t know if the crystal was responsible but it was
the only logical explanation. There’s been no cases of flesh absorbing its own bones, and there
wasn’t any evidence of it from the tests so….”, Aerrow said, recalling the events. It was the most
confused expressions he’s ever seen medical professionals give when they told him about his spinal disk.

Master Cyclonis’ mind was running a mile a minute at this information. What kind of crystal IS that? It’s not a Nil crystal, that would repair the spinal disk and force the crystal out of the disk’s spot. It’s powers match no record of crystal, and it’s definitely not a raw crystal ether, it had a blue glow. Raw crystals are purple, so what was it? How could the Sky Knight take it into his body so easily?! She’s heard of body modification but not on a vital bone or organ and not with live crystals! Not only that, but for it to grow?! Is he a rock?!? It was as fascinating as it was baffling.

“What type of crystal is it? the crystal mages surely got a look?”, Master Cyclonis asked. It was a valid question. What kind of crystal could that be?

“They did, but….It looked like no crystal or crystal variant on their records. So, I have no idea what type of crystal it is.”, He replied.

“What was Piper’s take on it?”, She questioned.

“Piper? She thought I was a liar at first but when she saw my back and how unusual it looked she tried activating it’s powers. I conked out once she did, supposedly.”, Aerrow said, shrugging his shoulders. “Once I got up, she explained I passed out and Piper then told me the effect of the crystal. Which is to say, nothing. Nothing happened after I lost consciousness.”

“I wouldn’t say “nothing” happened, Sky Knight. The fact that you blacked out at all due to a crystal mage activating the crystal suggests it did, in fact, do something. The question is, was making you fall asleep the only thing it is able to do?”, She shot back.

Master Cyclonis was done cleaning herself and walked over to the campfire to untie her clothing pieces and wear them. Aerrow caught something out of the corner of his eye as she began to put on her bra, as she was already done with her lower half. It was a...tattoo? It was honestly hard to tell if it wasn’t also a really bad scar underneath said tatt. It was a big circle with ancient lettering around the inside of the ring, at its center a symmetrical version of the Cyclonian sigil was seen. It’s two big, intimidating looking wings spread from its body which had a cat pupil like head with eyes open for once. Underneath the circle was a quarter of the circle line with a line sprouting out below it, looking like a handle for this oddly shaped “mirror”.

A bolt of pain went through Aerrow’s head as he looked at it. The longer he stared, the worse it got. He turned away.

“So long as we’re talking about stuff on our backs…”, Aerrow started.

Master Cyclonis turned to look at him with shirt in hand.

“…..Mind telling me the story about that mark?”, He asked.

“…….…..What’s there to tell? It’s the initiation mark all Cyclonian Emperors and Empresses get when they are chosen to rule. It’s for the Cyclonian Ruler's Initiation Ceremony.”, Master Cyclonis responded stiffly.

“Like a “Welcome the new ruler” ceremony?”, Aerrow questioned.

“No, no...It’s much more meaningful than that. It is the physical pledge to keep the promise we leaders must fulfil to protect Cyclonia and it’s people, to lead Cyclonia to a glorious and prosperous future, to ensure all the ways of the leader is all the ways of Cyclonia.”, Master Cyclonis said. She then put her hand to her chest with her other arm outstretched as if singing. “ We are the voice of
Cyclonia, we are the hands of Cyclonia, we are the head of Cyclonia, we are the heart of Cyclonia.”. She said piously with her voice raised, a faint ethereal echo to her voice. Master Cyclonis then flung out both arms wide and shouted, the ethereal tone now a strong second howl of her words as Aerrow could see her body faintly get wrapped in shadow. “We are Cyclonia!”

The pain came back strongly, now throbbing in waves of agony. He could see Cyclonis drop her arms and the shade fade from her body as his vision began to blur.

“But yes it is a promise we are expected to fulfil, here c e t h e m a r k i”, Aerrow could barely catch from Cyclonis’ lips as the colors began to spin before fading to black.

It was a void. Aerrow couldn’t feel his body. Not what he touching, not whether he was hot or warm or cold, not even the weight of his limbs. He couldn’t hear, he couldn’t smell, he couldn’t taste even the lack of taste, he was certain he couldn’t even see.

But then he saw it.

A cyan figure in the distance of the void. He moved to it, and was surprised by the speed at which he approached. Landing a foot or two away from the figure, he could see it was humanoid but with random circular holes of differing sizes through its head and body. It had no facial features, no nails or toes, no genitalia, it was like a silhouette statue of what a human was that was vandalized.

‘It’s been awhile since I saw--’, Aerrow’s thoughts managed to voice before the being raised an arm to point beyond the both of them, out in the distance of the void.

Aerrow turned to see what the being was pointing at, as he did he felt something being shoved to where he supposed his hands were and looked down to see it was a crudely crafted rope made of some faded sky blue material that contrasted strongly with the darkness, its length was extensive. He looked up from his hand to see a smaller cyan holed humanoid who gave him the rope, and several more beings like it of varying sizes rising from kneeling positions and laying positions off of the ground of the void, as if waking from the sands of an obsidian shore and each one turned and pointed at where the first one did, off to the distance.

Aerrow looked at that distance and saw the reflective shine of cyan show off of the figure of a dark, glassy creature that seemed to desperately claw out of the very material of the void.

It shook the plane as it dug out, growling and shrieking. The creature tore its limb out of the ground and slammed it onto the land, staggering Aerrow. It finally got its other clawed hand out and smashed it down on the surface, lifting itself up which made it look like the creature’s head floated up high in the air of the abyss. The monster’s eyeless head tilted down and slowly opened its mouth revealing rows upon rows of long, spire like teeth in its maw. It let out a roar that blasted the young Sky Knight and sung tunes through the holes of the voiceless beings, as if they were shouting back at the beast in defiance of its very presence here.

Aerrow looked upon it with two feelings: fear, for what it was and what it would do to them. Yet also indignant caused confidence, how dare it try to threaten the innocent lives of others, even if he had no real weapons it didn’t mean he would let it do as it pleased!

He gripped the rope and used his other hand to draw out a strand of it. Back tensed, knees apart, shoulders low he readied for a sprinting jump. He just had to time it correctly. The beast roared once more and made a B-line right for him. Aerrow jumped and looked down to aim this throw, he wasn’t sure he could pull a do over so he had to do this right. He readied the rope for a swing and--

“SKY KNIGHT-!”, Cyclonis shouted.
Aerrow jolted up with a start. He looked at his surroundings and noticed they were in a tree. Master Cyclonis was fully clothed but strands of her hair were still damp from the water of her bath. Aerrow also still had his clothes on. Master Cyclonis let go of Aerrow’s shoulders once she accepted that Aerrow had indeed woken up, giving a silent nod of “okay, good”.

He sat up to see Master Cyclonis looking around at the forest floor while trying to keep herself hidden from sight. She had punctures on her glove, and red was dressing it, possibly down to her obscured palm.

“What happened? I...I’m sure I lost consciousness but…”, Aerrow trailed off.

“You did. It looked like you were holding your head before you fell to the ground as one hand was underneath your temple area while the other was some distance from your face. It was too sudden a knockout to be from boredom, but you weren’t bitten by anything. I don’t know why you blacked out.”, Master Cyclonis answered.

“I don’t know ether. But that doesn’t explain this tree.”, Aerrow pointed out.

“That was because after you passed out and I went over to figure out why, I attempted to bring you back to the shelter you made. On the way back however, I came across a pack of beasts with jagged fangs who are apparently deaf but more than able to see. Not to mention are more than able to run. One of them caught me by surprise while getting you over here, as you can see.”, She explained, showing Aerrow the wound on her hand.

“....I’m sorry.”, Aerrow said looking ashamed after seeing the wound.

Cyclonis gave a disapproving glare before punching his thigh, hard. Aerrow keeled over.

“WH-Wha..?!”, He sputtered.

“Blaming yourself for not miraculously waking up and fighting off the creatures? How idiotic. It was out of your control.”, Master Cyclonis stated flatly.

“I just feel responsible--”, He blurted which was aptly cut off.

“Sky Knight, are you trying to say you own me?”, Master Cyclonis asked with a cold ire. She narrowed her eyes at the storm hawk.

“Huh?! No, of course not!”, Aerrow denied adamantly.

She sat up and almost looked like she was on a throne with how contemptly condescending she looked as she stared at him like an offending insect, eyes no longer narrowed.

“Responsibility, is a kind of ownership. To be responsible for something is to have power over the thing you are responsible for. If there is anything you and I both know you do not have control over Sky Knight, it's me.”, Master Cyclonis said icily.

“I know tha--”, Aerrow attempted to voice.

“Then tell me, do you hold responsibility over me?”, She asked with the same irritated tone.

“No”, Aerrow answered.

“Do you hold responsibility to every injury I get regardless of whether you are in my presence or not?”, She asked.
“...No.,” Aerrow weakly answered again.

“Are you responsible for my well-being, even when you played no part in putting me in such a state?”, She asked.

“.....No.”, He responded again.

“Then that’s all there is to it. Your feelings of responsibility have no valid basis. Do not let your emotions torment you, especially when they are unfounded. I do not hold you responsible for the consequences of my poor evasion skills.”, Master Cyclonis stated cooly, irritation now gone from her tone and features as she relaxed against the big branches of the tree.

Aerrow looked down to ponder on this, but a noise cut through his thoughts. Specifically, the sharp sound of wood shattering from impact.

He whipped his head up to see Master Cyclonis tensed as she had ducked away from the branch which now had a fair chunk of wood torn off of it. The damage took an odd shape, a cluster of shattered indentations in an almost rectangular shape with two sets of claw marks at a notable distance from the rectangular punctures, both across from it on either side. Whatever it was it moved fast enough to attack the tree and jump off before Aerrow could even lift his head.

The pause of silence did not last long.

*CRACK!* *CRACK!*

Two more attackers, both bipedal with huge taloned feet and large feathered tails. Their heads, however were the majority of their bodies which bore a full set of jagged teeth with massive eyes on...the shoulders of their legs?!?

‘What in Atmos are these things?!?’, Aerrow thought, panicked.

The two munchers launched themselves off of the tree and to the ground just as three more shot towards the branch and at Master Cyclonis. One hit just to the left of the very first attack. The other hit lower, at the very base of the branch near where Master Cyclonis was crouching. The last one however, had hit Cyclonis with such a force that it knocked her right out of the tree, jolting Aerrow up from his sitting position and causing him to race over to the edge of the tree’s cover to the opening where Master Cyclonis fell.

Master Cyclonis was thrashing her left arm into the ground over and over, damaging the mucher beast’s muzzle against the rock Master Cyclonis was on top of. The Sky Knight made no hesitation. He jumped down into a roll before unsheathing his dagger and slashing the mucher’s two toes and its muzzle, which caused its mouth to open with a wail as it flailed in pain and panic. Aerrow took the opportunity to plant his foot firmly on the beast’s tail and with his free hand, pulled up Master Cyclonis by her left arm. It was painful, but at least he was able to free her from its jaws...because the others were coming.

When Master Cyclonis said ‘pack’, she wasn’t kidding. There must have been about 30 of them, all of them were standing at the height of Aerrow’s knees and had the length of one of his full legs but were vicious, and fast. Seeing this the young Sky Knight quickly let go of Cyclonis and wrapped both hands on his dagger before plunging it’s blade in the flailing munchers throat, killing it. He lifted up its corpse with his dagger hilt and his other hand with some struggle before flinging the corpse at the now charging pack of fully fanged monsters. The tumbling body knocked down three of the beasts as the rest ran around them. Aerrow swiftly cut at the swarming crowd of munchers, making wide horizontal swings between quick turns to his opposite side, desperately trying to defend
his space as the monsters snapped their jaws while launching their bodies through the air towards
their human prey. Master Cyclonis had to tough it out harder than Aerrow as she had no weapon and
therefore no way to kill these things instantly. She had to aim her kicks just right. Trying for below
their throat line with a foot jab at what she guessed was their center of balance before swinging her
whole leg to the side of her person in an attempt to fling them into other munchers. The instant a
beast is off of her foot Master Cyclonis tucks it back to the ground before immediately sending the
other leg into the nearest available monster she sees. The pain of her bite wound was a constant
buzzing distraction in her mind she had to force her focus away from.

Aerrow was beginning to get out of breath, this was out of hand. They just didn’t stop, even though
their numbers had dwindled significantly. Suddenly a scream cut through the mess of shrill inhuman
shrieks, splotches of blood, flying bodies and fast blurs. It was Master Cyclonis, a mucher had gotten
her right shoulder and four others were mere feet away in the air before meeting her torso. The Sky
Knight wouldn’t allow that, he wouldn’t be responsible for another loss of human life, especially one
that had others waiting for her, friend or foe. He bolted behind her person and slashed with a variant
of Lightning Claw, holding the dagger in both hands and swinging strongly from right to left and
using the momentum near the end of his swing to twist his body around to Master Cyclonis and
strike down on the mucher biting her shoulder, cutting it cleanly in half.

He was panting heavily as was she, but they both knew it wasn’t over yet as both looked to where
Aerrow ran from and saw the remaining munchers bolting towards them. Aerrow had miscalculated,
he thought it would take them longer to catch up with him but they were only a yard away. This was
too close, he couldn’t counter this time. The Storm Hawk sprung his hand out ahead of Master
Cyclonis and pushed her back with it as he moved forward and in front of her, arms spread out wide
now. The last three jumped him, hitting his shoulders and torso. Aerrow let out a wail of pain.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHH!!”, Aerrow cried.

Master Cyclonis wanted to voice her surprise but she couldn’t even begin formulating what she
wanted to express. She was baffled beyond words. She was amazed, shocked, confused, horrified,
she couldn’t even will her body to move.

Aerrow could and did by stabbing the monster biting his right shoulder in its eye causing the beast to
scream and opening up the opportunity to tear its mouth off with his free hand before stabbing its
neighbor in the top of its skull hard enough to kill it instantly. He ripped the now dead mucher’s jaws
open and off of him and as he did the torso muncher squeezed its mouth tighter causing Aerrow to
double over and drop his dagger.

This was horrible, was he really going to die like this? Food for beasts in an unknown land never
knowing if his friends would’ve ever gotten to him?

He heard his dagger klink as it was picked up and saw Cyclonis standing before him with his dagger
in her hand.

“Because if I see your guard down, oblivious to my presence I will end you.”; Aerrow recalled
upon seeing her with his weapon. He was vulnerable right now, this was inevitable. Especially now
that he was dead weight.

She raised it high before him and struck down…

…into the muncher before twisting the dagger, breaking its spinal chord, killing it.

Master Cyclonis crouched before the kneeling Aerrow and stared at the bite the last living muncher
gave. Aerrow stared at her with silent surprise, she….let him live…?
“...I don’t think removing these fangs just yet is a wise idea. The other bites missed major blood arteries but...”', She trailed off.

“Y-yeah, I understand. We’ll need to get near some water to help clean these wounds. But, i'll need some of this...”weight” off of me first, if you could...?”, Aerrow responded, pointing at his dagger.

She looked at the dagger then nodded to Aerrow and began severing its head, ignoring the horrid pain her shoulder and arm were giving her. It wasn’t easy, given the pain it caused with each muscle tense and the fatigue she had but she managed a passable cut.

“That’ll have to do. Think you can walk?”, Master Cyclonis asked.

“Yeah, I might lag behind a bit. Lower stomach skin stretches when you walk, so the pain will make it harder to move.”, He said as he got up.

“Alright, i’ll be sure to keep an eye on you as we’re walking back to the spring. It shouldn’t be a long walk.”, She responded as she stood up and began walking with Aerrow.

Master Cyclonis tried figuring out how to take his actions. They definitely surprised the empress. She was his enemy. Sure, it was better to have more than one person with you to survive in a dangerous place like this but the benefit of having the leader-- the very figurehead of his enemy’s forces killed here far outweigh any danger he’d have to endure. The fact that there are no witnesses would make his little moral act look even better. The Sky Knight could say she fell to her demise as he tried to reach for her, or that she was dead before he had found her. But here he was, getting unnecessary amounts of damage for her sake. She saved him during their fight with the first monster because there was strength in numbers, as much as she loathed to admit it. He was more than capable at surviving in the wilderness, a valuable asset. For the Storm Hawk’s leader however, she was more of a liability than anything else. Every part of her screamed he was not to be trusted, that he was just lowering her guard but a part of her just couldn’t deny there would be an error in his logic that he’d have made if he was trying to trick her. It doesn’t add up, and since it doesn’t make sense logically then that means the only remaining explanation is...

’He did that to protect me because he wanted me to live.’, Master Cyclonis thought, clutching her arm harder as she walked.

She didn’t know how to react to such genuine selflessness. Sure, the Dark Ace was selfless many times but she knew he reasoned and understood it as it was one she’d follow too if she was in his shoes. To fulfill his late master’s last wish, her grandmother, and honor her. He was loyal to her predecessor and to Cyclonia through and through. It made sense since she’s the same.

This Storm Hawk’s actions however, didn’t. The idea of genuine kindness, or selflessness directed toward her was something she couldn’t comprehend. Why would someone do that? It made her feel uncomfortable. She couldn’t meet his eyes for too long. It didn’t make sense, it was infuriating. She wasn’t used to the kindness of friends, or acquaintances, or strangers...It felt more normal if there was an ulterior motive in mind as those who tried to get close to her did have at least one (with the exception of the Dark Ace and Cyclonis’ family), but Aerrow had none.

The irritation was also packaged with something else, intrigue. Yes, he did something illogical for his position but what interested her more is that he willingly risked his health, risked making himself defenseless before her without a second thought. To actually risk his life like that, even with her warning in his mind, just for her sake... What kind of person does that? It brought odd unfamiliar feelings, feelings that made her uncomfortable. She shook those feelings from her mind.

They were at the river’s side now, and Master Cyclonis was working with Aerrow to help clean,
mend, and bandage the wounds. The young Sky Knight was lying on his back to try and keep the blood loss to a minimum with Master Cyclonis sitting beside him. Outside of Aerrow’s instructions it was quiet between the two, Aerrow was expecting some sort of comment--

“Imprudent.”, Master Cyclonis stated.

There it was. Though the word was well out of his knowledge level, he could tell by the minor scowl she wore on her face that it wasn’t a positive thing. Still, what it meant exactly was lost on him so he did what he felt was the only reasonable thing to do.

“I’m sorry?”, He asked. Genuinely confused.

“What you did back there. It was a senseless, careless risk. You shouldn’t have done that.”, She said, gripping the wrapping tightly.

“Cyclonis, I was trying to make sure you’d survive.”, Aerrow replied. Surely she knows that if he didn’t she’d likely be in critical condition or worse.

Master Cyclonis put her hands on Aerrow’s bare and bandaged chest, looking down at him with a look of anger and contempt.

“I agreed to work together so we’d both survive. Not so you could die in front of me by some feral animals while acting like you’re a damned meat shield instead of being the insufferable Storm Hawk I know you are! You can plan better than that trainwreck of a scheme. Even without Piper’s help. So don’t you dare forget to add yourself to the surviving part of the equation next time, meatbag!”,

Master Cyclonis chided.

The young Sky Knight looked at the empress in amazement. What she had said sounded like she was...worried about him? The concern she felt for him, mixed with how she cared about his well-being...and did she even say he could manage a decent plan without Piper’s help? It flattered him, she actually said he was capable of passible strategy and valued his life. Aerrow couldn’t help but smile at that.

“I won't. I promise.”, He said to her in a gentle voice.

Aerrow cupped her face, and though surprised by the sudden action, she let him. He gently brushed her cheeks with his thumbs as he was taking in the sight of her. She really did feel soft.

Master Cyclonis’ eyes glanced to where her hands were and to Aerrow’s surprise she started moving them from the edges of his collarbone where she had them down to his pectorals, tracing the outline of their definition with her fingers and thumbs while lightly pressing her palms against them and avoiding the muncher’s bite marks as she slid her hands down. It felt good. He slid his fingers into her hair while still cupping her face and she gave a quiet sound of enjoyment at the sensation that made Aerrow swallow. Her eyes were once again dancing all over his exposed torso and arms, but this time with a gaze of hunger. Feeling her hands move once again snapped Aerrow’s senses to them, his body sensitive to their touch. He gripped her roots in response, causing Cyclonis to let out a breathy moan. The Sky Knight was now audibly reacting to the sensation of her touch, letting out soft cries in between breaths as she traced his muscles, careful to not press the tender wounds his torso had. Once her hands got close to his pelvic area Aerrow’s head swung back as he bit his lip sucking in a breath. His body shuddered, and his grip on her roots tightened again. She too, shuddered at his grip and his reaction with a gasp which caused Aerrow to groan with need.
“C-Cyclonis…”, Aerrow said between pants.

This name, this sound, this one little dribble of reality grounded them in the present and snapped them to their senses.

In a storm of motion, Master Cyclonis removed her hands, swung her arms away from Aerrow, and turned her body away from him as Aerrow removed his hands from Master Cyclonis’ face, tucked his arms back in towards his person, and turned to the side while curling himself up hoping she didn’t notice the large bulge in his pants.

‘What was that. WHAT WAS THAT?!?!’, Aerrow asked internally in a hysterical confusion. It wasn’t a checkup, no one was controlled, and Cyclonis was doing most of the feeling what in Atmos--

Wait. Cyclonis did most of the feeling. The way she looked at him as she did it too...does that mean she finds him attractive?! That’s definitely a question he never had to ask himself before. It’s the only explanation, otherwise she would have stopped the second she heard Aerrow let out a moan and probably would’ve attempted to kill him after she did. Though, even if the explanation made sense it didn’t stop the confusing torrent of emotions. Now that he thought of it, she was looking at all of him when he was…

“Mnnngh….”, Aerrow ever so faintly voiced his conflicted emotions. She was the enemy, she was determined to kill him and his friends, she also respected him and wanted him to be at his best, she was concerned for him and was willing to help him through his problems, she also found him attractive enough to cop a feel. One that Aerrow shamelessly expressed enjoying. Greaaaat…..

Master Cyclonis was frustrated by her lack of self control. Yes, half of him was bare. Yes, he was acting weak. Yes, he gazed at her like she was the only good thing in his life. Yes, his touch felt so comfortable that she could just melt into it. But that was no reason to just start exploring the wounded Sky Knight like that! Such interest could be exploited by his allies if not him! To think she would just recklessly show weakness like that and watch him….watch..him…

He liked it. Master Cyclonis felt like a dunce at that moment. Obviously he would, that little stunt at the lake she pulled told her as much. It was something she could hold over him, but it was a vulnerability she had as well. This meant any move he made could be used to put her at his mercy. Something Master Cyclonis could not allow. Especially now that she has a better idea of his potential in combat.

If he could make structures for shelters with nearby material and no blueprint or actual measuring tool then that means he could estimate distances with great accuracy and improvise plans on the fly. With some experience and development of his quick thinking he could become a Sky Knight of an entirely different calibur.

Someone like that is an obstacle enough already without holding a weakness of hers. However, it's the same for him now that she thought about it. She did see this as something that could be useful yesterday when she saw that expression he had. If she could make the first move next time, in just the right way, she could have some control over him. The thought made her smile.

Master Cyclonis forced the expression away to a blank face and asked aloud, “Where do we go from here, back to the shelter?”

“Oh-!Uhh....No, no. Now that we’re more familiar with the wildlife I think it’s best we make a new shelter in the trees. The forest floor is too dangerous.” , Aerrow said sitting up, putting on his shirt.

“We can make one near here, not too close to the water so we are hidden by the leaves of the nearby
trees from any predators.”, Aerrow moved to get up but winced at the pain.

“Sky Knight, stay. Just tell me what to get and i’ll bring it back, we’ll cut it, then you’ll tell me how to set it up.”, Master Cyclonis responded. She wasn’t going to allow him to mess up his injuries.

“O-okay…”, Aerrow answered before telling her how much of what items they’d need. Master Cyclonis went into the jungle and gathered the supplies that matched Aerrow’s description of them as best as possible before salvaging them and bringing them back. Once there Aerrow told her where to cut using his dagger which moved swiftly into the assembly part of the process. They ended up making a shelter with leaf flooring and railing using vines and cut branches that were carved into straight poles which had leaves tied to them acting as obscuring camouflage to prevent animals from spotting them as they slept or sat down. They made a roof using one carved branch in the center as part of the scaffold with other branches being the framework. The edges of the frame connected to the tree’s branches and were tethered together with vine. One part of the shelter however acted as a gate made of branches and vines, equally as camouflaged as the railing which opened to the pulley powered lift they made using a thick branch which was cut down to two stubs and carved to hold the vines in and had holes crudely chiseled into them so a vine could go through them and be hung up. One end of the pulley’s vines attached to a hard gigantic piece of bark where things would be placed to be lifted up. The other end of the vines were tied to a horizontal carved stick which was hooked in place by a sculpted wooden frame holding said stick while it was tied to the center scaffold via vines through a hole in the frame. The stick itself had a crank like thing at the end that a person could wind up to lift the pulley.

Working harder with more time spent on this shelter, they both kept at it till lunch where Master Cyclonis started a fire and crafted spears to hunt their lunch. Master Cyclonis wondered if they should add berries to their diet to get the necessary vitamins and energy they need but both her and Aerrow agreed that since neither could identify any of the berries, it was best not to test their luck. Once done, Master Cyclonis finished up assembling and testing the sturdiness of the shelter and it’s lift before both she and Aerrow considered it complete as noon turned to evening.

The lift fulfilled the purpose it was made for as Master Cyclonis used it to get Aerrow up in the tree. Both the Sky Knight and her thought it best to keep it incase more movement impairing injuries occurred. Thanks to the proximity to the river, Master Cyclonis was able to still fish for food before cooking it and climbing up to share. She also was taught by Aerrow how to make crude wooden bowls so they could gather water for the both of them to drink.

“Thank you for the food and water.”, Aerrow said with a smile.

“No problem. We both need to survive after all.”, Master Cyclonis said dismissively while looking at her water bowl, her eyes distant as if she was focusing on something miles away.

Their evening continued calmly, even as it darkened to night the faint light of the distant crystals that surrounded the jungle’s territory still made it just ever so faintly light enough to see what was where.

It was hard to stir up conversation after that awkward scene by the riverside, but it didn’t look like Master Cyclonis would talk much even with that being the elephant in the room. Aerrow took that as a hint to hit the sack (or in this case, leaves) and got up, went to one side of the shelter, and layed down to sleep. He could hear Master Cyclonis move to the other side and then ease herself down to rest. Guess she did too.

It was hard to actually sleep though. His mind was pointing out all the moments in his head. Yesterday with the weird train of thought, today when she stared at his naked body top to bottom, not much later when he was caught staring at her bare body and instead of being murdered he was teased, lastly he held her face, fingers strung through her hair, and she was sliding her fingers around
Aerrow curled up. He was facing away from Master Cyclonis, so he knew she wouldn’t be able to see it but it didn’t feel okay to let it just be there just sticking out the fabric of his pants. It felt embarrassing to be like that near a person, let alone a girl! He was glad he hadn’t encountered the mythical “why’ boner” yet in his life since this one was already making him a wreck. How in Atmos was he going to sleep like this?

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Three thrown off the Destroyer, two picked up by the collar before being flung to the floor...The Dark Ace was not having a good time.

The engineering team hadn’t given admirable or even passable results on their engines. Despite a well past acceptable time frame given to them if only because Ace had been absorbed by his own worrying, they still turned out zip.

He gave them each chances to explain a clearly as they possibly could.

The first one said “it just wasn’t possible!” Out. The second one said “W-We just don’t have enough time!” Nope. The third one said “We would need to invent an entirely different engine for every bike AND the Destroyer if we hope to” aaaand out the window.

He was about to look for answers from the other two “geniuses” when Ravess stepped in front of him.

“Dark Ace, would it not be wise to at least leave some of the team on board, if only because we have no one else with mechanical expertise...?”, Ravess asked with a quickly weakening, shuddering voice. Her posture shriveled like her voice, practically cowering before the Dark Ace’s furious gaze as she spoke. A shadow of what it was seconds prior.

Ace contemplated her words, especially since the snotty little snake actually questioned his authority instead of happily rolling over like she alway does. They weren’t doing a good job at getting them airborne, but the other Talons would likely make their incompetence look like the new age of technology. Still, no failure is without punishment. It would do them some good to remind them of the consequences.

Without warning the Dark Ace turned and walked around Ravess, briskly walking to the other two before rolling his head back with a sigh, relaxing his arms….Before snagging their collars and lifting them well above the ground.

“AUGH-!!” “ULG..D-DARK ACE PLEASE--!”, He heard them yelp.

“Let me make one thing clear… Just because you are the only talent we have for this kind of thing doesn’t mean I won't make your life a living hell. Because trust me, dying in the wastelands will be a luxury compared to the punishment i’ll give you...if you don’t show results. Got it?”, Dark Ace said.

The two grunts nodded their heads viciously enough to make a doctor worry about disk dislodgement which Ace took with respect. Just like how he respectfully slammed their pathetic excuses for bodies into the ground with a vibrating “WHUMP”.
He gave Ravess no room to comment on or even express her thoughts on the Dark Ace’s actions as Ace shoved past her to the exit, making his way to his quarters.

His patience was wearing dangerously thin. He didn’t sleep well at all. Ace was thankful that no one noticed or at least bothered to mention that he had even darker circles under his eyes than the usual shade his helmet casts. How could he not be restless? Master Cyclonis is still missing! it's been over a **DAY**! She would’ve sent word if she was hiding or investigating something! It was worrying! It was frustrating! His lack of sleep wasn't helping either of these things, *dammit!*

He...he had to sleep. The Dark Ace pinched the bridge of his nose. He needed to be at his best, for the grandmaster, for Cyclonia, for Cyclonis. If nothing was done by tomorrow, he’d force the Talons to make a living ladder out of themselves for him to climb down to find Master Cyclonis. They could die for all he cared. Nothing mattered more than Master Cyclonis’-- than Cyclonia’s future.

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Aerrow found himself in that black void again, but something was different. He was on the rock he was lying on by the lake when he was injured. The one that was mostly flat but also had most of its form submerged under the ground, so it was possible that flatness wasn’t actually what the whole rock was actually like. But that hidden mass was now obscured by the void. His form however, wasn’t. In fact, he remembered this exact viewpoint. It was the one he had gotten into when both he and Cyclonis rushed away from each other leading him to take the fetal position facing away from her. Revisiting this part of that moment felt...uncomfortable. It was like stepping back into an awkward filled room.

Luckily though his focus was snapped away as with one blink, there the voiceless were. Those same cyan colored humanoid figures who look hole punched in odd and often sporadic looking places. One was right in front of him, kneeling to meet his eye level and patting his shoulder. There were two far behind it on the left of the being. Of those two one was holding its sides while bending over as if laughing, the other beside it looked away from both Aerrow and the laughing voiceless, but not enough to hide its hands which were pressed together in front of its face, touching said face. The pose reminded him of when Finn made an insufferable joke and Piper covered her face sighing before removing her hands just enough so that it looked like she was pressing her nose between her hands in an odd silent plea. Though the voiceless, like other voiceless, had no nose but it did not change the meaning of its body’s expression.

Aerrow was beginning to get the impression they were pitying him for something. Given the context of the piece of that moment he’s involuntarily mimicking, it wasn’t hard to guess what and for some reason...it *really* offended him. His vision however was darkening and soon enough he woke up to a rising dawn with this odd, distant feeling...of being mocked.

He sat up and saw that Master Cyclonis was also sitting, letting out a yawn before wiping the remnants of sleep from her eyes.

“Mm, new day.”, Master Cyclonis mumbled.

“Yeah.”, Aerrow awkwardly answered back.

Suddenly all the memories flooded back. The ogling, the being ogled, being taunted, being felt up and down while panting heavily as his senses were driving him crazy and--

Aerrow quickly turned around, crouching.

“...? Something strange?”, Master Cyclonis asked.
“No, just...birds.”, Aerrow responded.

‘Yeah, like this big problematic pecker right here.’, He thought internally.

Briefly Aerrow wondered if life without genitals would be a happy one. This thought was cut short however.

*CRASH!*

“HUH?!”, Aerrow shouted.

“–?!”, Master Cyclonis voiced.

Birds went flying in a storm of unfamiliar calls and noises as a sea of flapping sounds was heard overhead, the sunlight obscured greatly by their feathered bodies of colorful avians. The young Storm Hawk could see that they were all dispersing from one area north of where they stood.

‘The crash was too heavy and dense sounding to be a monster or a tree...Maybe it was someone’s vehicle...?’, Aerrow thought.

The idea made him both happy and afraid. Happy that someone might have come down to help them, afraid that it might be one of the two’s enemy or worse....someone who failed to make it down alive. He gripped his fists as he stood, hopelessly looking in the distance for more clues. It was Master Cyclonis who broke him out of his focus.

“We should investigate what that noise was.”, She stated.

“Yeah, just what I was thinking.”, Aerrow responded.

“...You’re making it too easy for me to pick on you.”, She said turning her gaze to him with a bored expression.

“--Huh?”, Aerrow asked, turning to her with a look of severe confusion. *That* caught him off guard.

“I could just say ‘thinking? You?’ or ‘wow, what a feat.’ Guess those bites really did make you lose a lot of blood.”, Master Cyclonis responded with a smirk.

“Wh-! how can--! agh, I’m really surprised at how calm you are about this. Isn’t that crash-- I dunno, a very serious situation of interest for you?”', Aerrow asked, dumbfounded.

“Oh, trust me it is. I just don’t want to waste my energy caring about it too much, at least not until I see it.”, She answered nonchalantly as she stood up to a stretch. “We’re going to need breakfast first anyways, right?”, She asked.

“Y-yeah…”, He answered. To think usually she’s the intense one.

They caught and cooked breakfast before eating it by the campfire. Aerrow twisted the small skewer stick in his hands.

“You had any...weird dreams once you got here?”, Aerrow asked.

“...I’ve gotten my usual type of dreams, why?”, Master Cyclonis responded.

“I...I’ve been getting strange, unsettling ones lately. They feel...familiar.”, Aerrow said. He held his forehead as he stared into the flames.
“But you don’t know from where?” She asked, sitting up once she noticed how serious his expression got.

Aerrow shook his head.

“Where did I see ‘them’ before…?”, The young Storm Hawk asked aloud.

“…..”, Master Cyclonis stayed quiet as she thought. Who is “them”? Specific things he saw in his dreams? People perhaps? Well, dreams didn’t have much meaning to those who were not crystal mages and Aerrow’s knowledge of crystals was passable at best. Since he didn’t regularly strengthen his ability to tap into crystals at a distance it was doubtful he could receive visions from his unconscious mind accessing the cosmos in his sleep. Perhaps this is just where all his nervous energy went off to.

“Well, maybe it’s just a simple case of Deja vu? Since dreams are the result of taking in everything you’ve seen and thought, and then your subconscious mind attempting to compare and interpret it with past experiences it’d be no surprise a dream would do that to you.”, Master Cyclonis said.

“No, this is different...i’m sure of it.”, Aerrow defended.

“If certainty was the only evidence one would need to prove something true then Cyclonia would’ve ruled Atmos centuries ago.”, Master Cyclonis retorted snarkily. She shrugged her arms, hands out.

“You wish.”, Aerrow snapped back. Smirking.

“Wish? No. Strive morelike.”, Master Cyclonis stated as she put her skewers away then stood up.

“You ready to leave? I won’t ask twice.”

“I’m ready.”, Aerrow said as he also put his skewers away, putting out the campfire before joining Master Cyclonis in walking towards the crash site.

Master Cyclonis admittedly lied by omission. She wasn’t calm. She was in her “mission mode”, so to speak. The second he was up was the second she had to assess his emotional state of mind to see how agreeable he would be to talk. The crash was genuinely unexpected, but she would not let it throw her off. If anything it means she had to start this conversation now more than ever. She had to attempt to get him to join her. To join the Cyclonian Empire. He was a capable survivalist, a good Sky Knight that had the potential to be an even more powerful one in the future with the right training, and he was loyal. Loyal as the Dark Ace, in fact. Not only that but the way he seemed to care for her during that moment by the riverside... He was someone she could trust...if only he was on her side then he’d be someone she would trust without a doubt in her mind. Someone like that would only be a threat to her and her empire if he were to oppose her. She couldn’t let that continue. She chose to start simple, Aerrow seemed to like...

“Aerrow.”, Master Cyclonis called as she was walking behind him.

“Yes, what is it Cyclonis?”, He said back as he was focused on cutting any invading branches from their walkway.

“You feel that...everyone should be united together, right?”, She replied, choosing her words carefully. Unity he agreed with since he likes things like togetherness such as comradeship, friendship, and family. She refrained from saying “in Atmos” though, as mentioning their land might raise some flags.

“Hm? Yeah, of course I do! Why do you think I fight so hard?”, Aerrow said jovially. He’s in a good mood.
“I suppose you have a point there. Surely...you notice how hard it is to actually have them get along? You said it before yourself, playing diplomat was very difficult because of the very different ways the societies of each government had such differing values and histories that making them see eye to eye was extremely tedious. How would one unify such diverse peoples?”, Master Cyclonis asked, making a point. He knows how hard it can be, it's one of the biggest stresses he has. Saying it’s pointless would doubtlessly upset him. The best approach was to see if he actually could come up with a plan, then rip it to shreds by pointing out its flaws if he could in fact make one.

“Ah-- gosh asking me out of the blue like that...Let’s see here…”, Aerrow paused, looking up at the sky in thought as he crossed his arms. “Maybe unifying two at a time under treaties under similar needs or things one wants that the other has, stuff like that, then string those pairs of two together into groups of four with treaties that help with the needs all four groups have in common...basically rinse and repeat until all of them become at peace with each other.”

“Okay, but what if the two governments have bad blood that makes them say ‘no’ because it's them and no other reason?”, Master Cyclonis asked.

“Well, we’ll just have to convince them times have changed and so have they.”, Aerrow answered.

“What if they don’t believe it? Or they can’t be convinced?”, She asked.

“Uh…”, He let out as he slowly turned around, head facing forward but eyes up, attempting to think of a solution for the problem Master Cyclonis provided. “I’m certain we could find a way, it’s only a matter of time before the heat dies down.”, He finally responded.

“While the heat’s dying down between those two it just as equally likely two treated governments are making a series of poor decisions between each other that make them both more and more heated towards each other. How could one de-escalate that?”, Master Cyclonis questioned.

“That would be by sending in people to prevent their poor decisions.”, The Sky Knight answered.

“And if those governments don’t take kindly to “suggestions”?”, She asked.

“Then we’ll make them!”, Aerrow said. The conversation was dampening his mood, he wore a face of discomfort. Master Cyclonis guessed it was the unravelling hopelessness of achieving unity and peace with his plan was pretty demoralizing. Just what she wanted.

“So you’ll go to war with them?”, She asked.

“What?! No, that’s not what I mean!”, He blurted out in exasperation, his face was incredulous.

“Well, it's not like you can convince them while you put your people on standby. You’ll have to remove them while letting mediators come in, all the while both governments hold no obligation to freezing any missions. Even if you made them agree to it for the sake of negotiations they can still get away with it if they’re sneaky enough. Besides, what do they have to fear from it if they do not listen? Going to war?”, She said pointedly.

“...What are you getting at?”, Aerrow asked. It seems he finally noticed she was trying to go somewhere with all of this. She was hoping he wouldn’t become wise to what she was doing till a little later but this is to be expected.

“I’m saying your dream won’t be as diplomatically achieved as you thought. Conflict will be inevitable, and it will be inevitable those conflicts will cause grudges and loses. If done poorly you’ll lose more than you could hope to gain, can you say with confidence you won’t do that?”, Master Cyclonis questioned the Sky Knight.
“...So, what are you saying that I should just-- just give UP?! Is that what you’re saying to me?!”, Aerrow fumed. “Is THAT part of your advice too?!”. He shouted as he paced back and forth, holding his head while scrunching up strands of his hair with his grip.

“No, no! What i’m saying is that your plan won’t work! You need a different strategy!” She shouted back. She needed to negate this anger he was feeling and tried by starting with the fact that she was NOT saying he should give up. He had leadership skills, he’s shown as much in all of his missions against her.

“Then what strategy do I need?! I am certainly not going to war with all of Atmos that’s just immoral! Even if I was that deranged it’d just be The Condor! That’s far too small of an army!”, Aerrow yelled incredulously. Being called deranged somehow hurt more than it usually would have. It was fine, this was fine, he just isn’t used to tough decisions like these. He needs to know the hard road won’t be one he will walk only by himself.

“Sometimes the correct choices are the hardest ones to make, Sky Knight! No one said unification would be without losses but I can guarantee you won’t have a small army if you are willing to do what is good for all of Atmos! You and your friends won’t have to tough it out alone!”, Master Cyclonis shouted.

The realization of what Master Cyclonis was trying to say struck him like an axe to his skull. His expression blanked to one of quiet shock.

“You...You’re trying to get me to join your empire, aren’t you?”, He muttered in a strained voice. This was bad. She chose the wrong topic too soon. If she had helped him understand and be more at ease with the idea of waging war with Atmos as being the only true solution for unification and peace, then it would’ve been a good time to say she’d back him up. She rushed it, badly.

“....You are too good of a candidate to let go.”, She said with a scowl of self directed frustration. It looked angry and pained.

Aerrow’s feelings were a convoluted range of emotions. He felt angry at her attempt to sneakingly convert him to her empire, she knew what he stood for and that he didn’t approve of what she was doing inside her empire let alone outside said empire. He also felt hurt and betrayed that the only way she really could consider being on friendly terms with him was for him to be another addition to her empire. Her trust would never extend outside her terra’s borders which stung, yet he also felt… happy at hearing her say “you are too good of a candidate to let go”. It pulled at his emotions knowing she actually wanted to be with him, that she wanted to trust him and he wanted her to place her trust in him. But he just couldn’t, he couldn’t join the Cyclonian Empire knowing how cruelly and apathetically the empire treats the people in its territory and outside of it. It went against everything he stood for.

“Sorry, but no matter what you do I won’t be persuaded into joining your empire Cyclonis…!”, Aerrow declared sternly before performing a Lightning Claw on the path ahead, clearing the way quite a distance. It caused reckless amounts of damage to obstructing branches vines, roots and leaves.

The Sky Knight made a run for it. He didn’t know why exactly. It’s not like he couldn’t hold his ground in arguing with the Cyclonian empress but all of his body screamed at him to leave. Then he realized what it was, his emotions. He didn’t want to yell at someone crying for a connection when he wanted it too, but what Cyclonis-- Master Cyclonis was doing to her terra and to Atmos was something he couldn’t condone. Because of this, he ran, hoping that at least if there was a living person who crashed there was a chance it’d be one of his allies.
“No…!”, Master Cyclonis exclaimed quietly to herself as she saw the Storm Hawk make a mad dash for the crash site.

She didn’t want him to go. She didn’t want him to fight for anyone else, yet there he went slipping through her fingers. She would not let that happen. Master Cyclonis sprinted after him through the path, it was mostly determination and desperation that was driving her. She had no plan of action once she would be able to stop him. She had no idea how to convince him to fight for her, fight for Cyclonia but she knew one thing. She would not let him go.

Aerrow was running past the edge of where his Lightning Claw struck and was getting hit by oncoming branches and leaves, slowing his speed. Struggling to move as fast as possible he flung his arms up and around oncoming foliage to prevent collision that would slow his momentum. Unfortunately, at the speed he was moving mixed with the pain his wounds were giving him and how his eyes couldn’t register every little thing coming his way Aerrow had his arms snagged on some thorny vines. More accurately, his arms hit the thorny vines on accident but once contact was made the vines moved to wrap around his hands, wrists, and arm guards before wrapping twice around the beginning of his elbow joint.

“EUGH--?!”, Aerrow blurted out loud as his body was hoisted through the air, over a branch, and into the ground arms first.

“ACK-!”, He shouted as he hit the ground before groaning in pain.

His head was feeling fuzzy and it wasn’t because of his faceplant to the ground. He struggled to break free and found his limbs acting as if they were gradually falling asleep on him, he couldn’t control them well nor could he tense them at all. What was even more strange was he could really feel the grass underneath him. Aerrow could probably count every blade pushed up against him if someone had asked him to. Just like how he could feel every strand of hair on his head now, or that he could distinguish every piece of cloth on his patchwork clothes from touch alone, something he couldn’t do before. He heard dirt shift and saw two more vines near his legs that were nearing him and Aerrow attempted thrashing away but his legs felt like they were numb as well. His kicks were little more than bending and extending his loose floppy legs. The vines wrapped up past his ankles, his shins, his knees, then he felt it. Just from a faint touch of his inner thigh caused him to suck in a breath, swinging his head back to catch sight of the plant that was trapping him. Its colors were blindingly vivid on its leaves but what stuck out to Aerrow the most was its massive gaping maw. It could eat a whole BEAR! It was the titan of flytraps and it was trying to slowly pull him apart.

Aerrow wasn’t sure if his heavy breathing was from the vines that were rested on the edge of his inner thighs or from the increasing panic of knowing the bear-trap that was going to kill him.

A sound drawed his attention. It was footsteps. Aerrow looked up ahead of him to see it was Master Cyclonis. She stopped as she caught her breath before approaching him.

“Looks like you can’t will yourself out of this one, Sky Knight.”, Master Cyclonis said with a cold sneer. Guess running was was the most Aerrow could will his heavily injured body to do.

Aerrow could tell she was less than pleased with his flee attempt, but considering the subject matter could she blame him? Well, maybe she could. Damn, he couldn’t regulate his breath if he tried.

“C...Cyclonis...help…”, He whimpered pathetically between pants.

Aerrow’s position, his face, his breathing, his feeble little voice reminded Master Cyclonis of that moment by the riverside. Suddenly she felt that bolt of heat again, looking at him as he was strewn about by the plant. It doubtlessly injected him with some sort of toxin to immobilize him this much.
She wanted him. Not just because of the way he looked, but because of his potential to be someone worth watching unfold into a powerful individual, because of how far he would go to hold to his promises and ideals even if it meant protecting his enemies, because of how much he was willing to trust her despite doing nothing to earn that trust.

“Yes, you will need help with more than one thing today, won't you?”, She said walking over to kneel down, leaning over him.

She wouldn’t give that up to anyone, especially not this twig-brained, gluttonous, waste of space! Master Cyclonis grabbed Aerrow’s dagger out of his holster and charged it up to use a Lightning Claw on the plant, causing it to explode into a pulpy mess. Aerrow watched in shock and awe. He wasn’t aware Master Cyclonis could pull off the special moves Sky Knights had. Aerrow looked over at her. She sunk the dagger into the ground before kneeling before Aerrow, but she wasn’t kneeling by the side of his body like last time. She was kneeling in the open space between his spread out legs.

“What are you…?”, Aerrow asked in the calmest voice he could manage.

“You know, you told me something interesting today, Sky Knight. “No matter what you do I won’t be persuaded into joining your empire”......I want to put that to the challenge.”, She said with a devious grin.

Aerrow’s eyes widened as a red blush intensely colored his face. He was battling the urge to smile of all things, and attempted a worried frown which only translated to an emotionally confused expression.

'I can’t egg her on, she’s doing this to control me! This is wrong, seducing someone for power is wrong! Why is part of me begging for it?!', Aerrow asked himself internally but his hazy mind wouldn’t allow him to problem solve let alone think of anything other than the situation before him.

Master Cyclonis placed her hands on his thighs which caused Aerrow to twitch in surprise. She looked down at Aerrow, still grinning.

“Ansty today are we? I wouldn’t blame you…”, She said looking down over to her hands as she placed her thumbs on his inner thigh, the sensation making him swing his head back before she was brushing said thumbs forward towards his groin, then down, back, and up again in an oval like motion.

“Ahh!...aaa.. ah…!”, Aerrow cried out.

“.....being wound up like that.”, Master Cyclonis said, looking back up at Aerrow’s moaning face. The bulge that he managed to hide the previous times he’d gotten aroused was now in plain view, clearly telling Cyclonis how much he was enjoying it despite not being okay with it. Her thumb movements felt similar to what Aerrow imagined the motion of someone’s hip thrusting against his, and where Cyclonis was rubbing was a guy’s pleasure spots which felt good.

“Didn’t you say you couldn’t cry without risking being heard in The Condor, even with the shower running? Was it the same for getting yourself off?”, Cyclonis asked.

“-! ngh...hh..ah..”, Aerrow let out. A brief flash of shock appeared on his face. Bingo.

“Couldn’t even, blow off some steam...in the safety of your quarters…”, She spoke softly as she pressed her thumbs rougher and slower against his thighs as her thumbs neared his crotch each time
to mimic slow, hard thrusts which Aerrow definitely reacted positively to if the groans of pleasure were any indication.

“...without someone walking in...?”, She asked in a quiet tone as she pressed even harder this time around.

“Y-Yyy ess...!! Aah..! haah...”, He cried out as his back arched and his hips attempted jutting as forward as they could, given the toxin’s effects. The bulge was even taller now begging to be freed.

She leaned over Aerrow and stroked the side of his face as she wore an expression of mock concern.

“Poor boy, you must have been so pent up...”, She said to him.

Her hand was so smooth and soft. Aerrow leaned into it, thoughtlessly enjoying its feeling. Cyclonis was enjoying drinking up the sight. He was so hungry for her, lusting for her touch like that. She wanted to toy with him more since he wasn’t going to submit to her yet like this.

“How long have you suppressed the urge to imagine moving with a woman like this...?”, She asked as she pressed her chest against his and spread out her knees as she grinded her crotch against his own crotch, slowly riding his bulge. Aerrow sucked in a deep breath as he bit his lip, throwing his head back into the grass before letting out a moan of pleasure.

Each time her hips moved forward into his, feeling her soft breasts brush against his chest he let out a throaty groan, aching for more than just a grind out. Cyclonis’ core also was getting pretty agitated with need, increasing the heated bolt of pleasure she was feeling in her body as she rode him. His sounds were a delightful song to her ears.

“Nnngg..hh..a..mn...at the...hhhah...nnghh...!”, He managed between panting breaths. Cyclonis understood what he meant. He meant at the start of his time as a Storm Hawk.

“Hmm? Is that so...? All that time...”

“ghah...!”

“...hiding from your dirty thoughts....”

“Ggahh..hh!”

“...of slithering inside a girl....”

“Haaahh...!!”

“...feeling her up deep inside...”

“Aaahh...!!”

“...and finding what she tastes like...?”, Master Cyclonis finished whispering inside his ear as she slowly and strongly grinded into him, making him cry out in passionate need at the feeling of her dampened and heated crotch colliding with his hardened and smoldering bulge each time she did so. Aerrow couldn’t stand it. She was right there, moving her lusting folds into his covered up member. The only thing blocking their way to mutual satisfaction was these damned clothes! It was irritating, he wanted in.

“C-Cyclonis....hahh...hah..pl...please...hhahh...”, he whined.

“Ah-ah-ah... you have to submit first... give yourself over..... to Cyclonia...”, She quietly spoke in
his ear with that ghostly echo before thrusting into him again with those rough, slow, teasing rolling of her hips which massaged his torso with the motions of her breasts.

As if Aerrow couldn’t get any harder, hearing Cyclonis say “give yourself over” in that sensual tone of voice solidified his member beyond what he thought was capable for it. Though he felt a throb of pain through his head hearing her voice. Hard didn’t mean happy, ether.

Aerrow wanted to be in only one person’s care, someone who was respectable, someone who was wise, someone he looked up to, someone he admired, someone who he wanted to be with more than anything. He would submit to her because she wanted it, not because submitting to her would be submitting to Cyclonia. Cyclonia wasn’t the one who looked out for him or cared for him in this jungle, she was!

The Sky Knight rested his chin on Cyclonis’ shoulder. It was an odd gesture that made Cyclonis pause for a moment.

“There is…only one…person I am…willing…to give…myself over to…”, Aerrow said between breaths.

As difficult as it was with the toxin, Aerrow gyrated his hips into Cyclonis’ in a slow rhythm.

“She is…. dedicated…. resourceful…. wise…. caring…. tactical…. beautiful…. passionate…. Ambitious…. This woman is… the only one… i’d ever give… my entire being to.” , The Storm Hawk said, looking directly into Cyclonis’ eyes which were stunned at his sudden show of affection toward her.

“That woman… is the one… i’m looking at. I’d give myself… to her alone… no one else…!!”, He did his best to prevent his climax and despite how intense it was, he managed to prevent its release. Aerrow let out a sigh of relief, slowing to a stop before being surprised by Cyclonis raising herself up a bit to meet Aerrow’s eyes. She looked like she was searching his eyes for something.

“To me…and me alone…?”, She breathed.

“No one else.”, Aerrow declared calmly. He stared back confidently, showing he had nothing to hide. For a brief moment it looked like she was in pain from something, but that look quickly faded.

“How… can I be sure… you are mine…?”, She asked, looking down at nowhere in particular. A troubled look crossed her face.

“…You will... be my ‘Master.’ I’ll always... call you this when we’re alone.”, Aerrow said, managing to catch his breath. “But names don’t mean much… without a mark of approval.”

“Wait, you mean…?”, Cyclonis asked.

Aerrow nodded. “Scar me….however you wish.”

It was the best he could think of to cement their trust. A scar would be an eternal reminder of the deal they made. He’d be lying if he said he wasn’t looking forward to what kind of mark she’d make on him. Pain and injuries, while harmful and absolutely not fun to have were kind of exciting in a weird way. It’s like the pain gave a rush of adrenaline unique to any other. Though Aerrow usually kept that odd quirk buried away. It was hard to suppress right now and while weird Aerrow couldn’t bring himself to care.

Cyclonis pondered a bit before lifting his shirt which made Aerrow take a deep breath due to the sudden exposure of air giving him goosebumps. She took Aerrow’s dagger and looked at him one
last time for confirmation and Aerrow nodded back with a smile. Cyclonis looked at his torso again and traced where his sternum should be with her open hand which made Aerrow shudder. She cut a crescent moon with its crescent facing upwards with a long thin triangle sticking out of it, its tip downwards (M). While that was happening Aerrow sucked in a breath each time she cut in, holding it till she took the dagger out. He was breathing heavy.

“We’ll need to patch that up later.”, Cyclonis stated meekly.

“Yes, Master.”, Aerrow responded warmly.

Cyclonis shivered with pleasure at the name. But despite her happiness at obtaining consensual ownership over Aerrow she wasn’t satisfied, the way it looked it seemed like Aerrow gave up far more than she did in this deal. It didn’t sit with her right.

“If one gets a new name, so should the other.”, She said to Aerrow. Aerrow paused with mild surprise before relaxing and nodding.

“Alright, what will you call me Master?”, He asked. Cyclonis held her chin in thought before removing her hand, looking back down at him.

“When we’re alone...I’ll call you ‘my little pet.’ ”, She said with a mischievous grin. Aerrow’s face got as red as his hair. Much better.

“Th-That’ll be perfect.”, Aerrow stuttered. She really was trouble, saying things like that with such a condescending smile…. He was glad he was binded.

“I thought so. That just leaves the scar…”, Cyclonis said.

Marking her skin, her smooth and soft skin with something permanent so she could remember him, even in her private chambers alone at night? Aerrow thought he was going to explode just thinking that. He hoped he wouldn’t be unbinded or he might seriously lose control of himself.

“You don’t have to make the same type of mark as me or put it in the same place. As long as I can see it it’ll be fine.”, She stated.

“Th-then… Can you...take off your shirt?”, Aerrow asked. It was amusing to Cyclonis, just moments ago he was shamelessly lusting after her body but now he was nervously asking her to remove an article of clothing from her person. Though it was also interesting that he didn’t ask for the vines to be removed, guess that meant he was using his teeth. The thought was enticing.

She did what she was asked and took it off, revealing a black tube bra and her pale white skin. Aerrow swallowed.

“What part?”, Cyclonis asked.

“...left shoulder.”, Aerrow answered.

Cyclonis leaned her left shoulder close enough for him to bite any part of it he wanted to. He wanted to put it somewhere she could remember and hold it without it looking odd to her forces and chose near the neck. Aerrow opened his mouth wide, put his mouth on her shoulder, and then pressed in. Hard.

“-Nngh…!”, Cyclonis winced. She could feel his teeth digging in, his soaking wet tongue flatly resting against her skin as he applied pressure. She wondered what she tasted like to him.
He managed to get to the pressure where his teeth broke deep enough through her skin to make a lasting scar. She gasped deeply once he removed his mouth from her shoulder.

“It...wasn’t too much, was it?”, Aerrow asked, concerned.

“No, it’s perfect.”, Cyclonis answered, holding her shoulder fondly. It stung, but trust wasn’t without pain. They both paid their share.

She leaned in and kissed Aerrow, softly yet firmly pressing her lips against his. Aerrow was surprised for a moment before relaxing and leaning into it, savoring the moment. They broke away before Cyclonis kissed him again, which Aerrow more than welcomed. The third time Cyclonis swiped her tongue against his lower lip, asking him to open up which Aerrow did willingly. Cyclonis snaked her tongue into his mouth, sliding over every nook and cranny of its insides before finally wrapping and twisting around Aerrow’s tongue. She could taste the iron of her own blood in his mouth which got her going. The kissing got more and more heated as Cyclonis wrapped her arms around Aerrow’s person, holding him close as Aerrow reciprocated the kissing more fervently, his tongue licking up every part of her mouth like he was thirsting for every last bit of her.

Cyclonis rolled her hips into his again slowly to which Aerrow let out a groan of need before licking her cheek and whispering “Please….Master…."

Cyclonis grinned at this and she leaned back, removing her bra followed by her gloves, boots, pants, and underwear before getting on all fours and pulling down Aerrow’s pants, not hesitating to feel as much of the defined muscles on his legs as she could before the vines blocked her way as Aerrow moaned, enjoying Cyclonis’ interest in his body which made her more heated. Once she did that Cyclonis went and lifted Aerrow’s shirt up above his head before giving him another brief kiss, then pulling down Aerrow’s boxers as Cyclonis pressed her supple breasts against his chest.

“Well, I don’t think ive ever been this positively….dripping before.”, Cyclonis stated.

Aerrow glanced down to where Cyclonis was looking and he swore his flagpole reached a new level of hard seeing her nether regions dripping with that glassy honey liquid. She...wanted him that...badly…?

“*chuckle*...Do you want to know what it feels like, my little pet?”, She asked teasingly.

“Y-yess…! Please…!”, Aerrow blurted in desperation.

“My, greedy aren’t you? Is that how you say please…?”, She taunted him with a condescending sneer. Aerrow both loved and hated how she was making him ask for it. He didn’t even know he was into stuff like this!

“P-Please….M-Masteer….!”, He whimpered.

She smiled softly as she positioned herself over Aerrow’s pole and pressed down on it, smothering his shaft in that clear, slippery slime. When it was pressed down she started rocking herself back and forth, stroking it, coating it in her fluids.

Aerrow jutted his hips in response, it felt amazing. The smooth slimy coating made it more satisfying to move through. Cyclonis, content seeing Aerrow’s reaction, moved up and positioned herself so he would enter her when she moved back down and did so.

“Aaahh…! “, Aerrow gasped. Going inside of her sent a powerful wave of pleasure through him as her insides were gently caressing his stiff member. It was driving him nuts being massaged like that.
“M-my little pet...hh......hh...plow me...hh...deeper….”, Cyclonis begged Aerrow in a soft and breathy voice as she was leaning over him, her longing amethyst eyes meeting his eager ones. That one request sent Aerrow off the deep end as he slammed into her hips so hard both of them were seeing stars.

Lucky, Aerrow didn’t keep up that force but made up for it in speed, making Cyclonis let out moans of pleasure as Aerrow kissed her neck and breasts before silencing her with his tongue, deeply invading her mouth as she held him tight. One hand on the back of his neck, sliding up through his hair. One hand pressed against his back, keeping him close. Cyclonis only loosened her grip when she and Aerrow had to break free for air, but even then Aerrow didn’t stop his pelvic rhythm. The Sky Knight kept building up the speed, the heat, and the friction more and more until…!

“Nghaaah..ahhh..ahhh…!”, Aerrow exclaimed as he climaxed. His load was let out inside of the empress who also reached her peak.

“Haaaahhhh…! aaahn...hahh…”, She cried out, her hips spasming.

They were both a naked, sweaty mess. Cyclonis’ Head was laying on Aerrow’s chest, panting heavily as Aerrow layed there breathing just as hard. He could feel drool down the side of his face from all the intensive lip locking and tongue smashing. The pain from his fresh injury Cyclonis carved into him, while burning, it felt good. He could also feel his now limp member was completely soaked with both his and Cyclonis’ fluids.

That felt satisfying, but not as satisfying as knowing the weight on top of him was the girl who was so defensive and hostile about everything outside Cyclonia, one who he was able to actually win the trust of and could now hopefully show a different path to. It’ll be nice to see where their relationship will take them.

Aerrow tried to look down at his feet but couldn’t move his neck.

“Uh oh.”, Aerrow said.

“What…?”, Cyclonis asked.

“Master...I think I need these vines off of me pronto.”, Aerrow responded. “I can’t move my neck, or my limbs.”

Cyclonis’ eyes went wide as she got up and got the dagger.

“Why didn’t you say so earlier?!”, She shouted as she rushed to the vines on his right arm.

“Head was fuzzy.eheh.”, Aerrow said jovially.

“Khh..! This kind of error is unacceptable for a ruler…!”, Cyclonis chided herself as she cut the vines.

“Don’t be harsh on yourself, you didn’t know.”, The Sky Knight said.

“My little pet, I think you are far too out of it to be giving me advice right now.”, Cyclonis retorted. She pulled free Aerrow’s right arm from the vines before moving to his left one.

“Try moving your fingers on your right arm. Are you absolutely sure you can’t move them?”, Cyclonis asked as she was cutting off the vines on his left arm.

Aerrow tried moving his fingers, but not even the tips were moving.
“Not even a millimeter.”, Aerrow said in a defeated tone.

“I’ll have to carry you then. This’ll be a pain… There. Two more left.”, Cyclonis said aloud as she pulled free his left arm and moved to his legs.

“Too heavy?”, Aerrow asked.

“Too exhausted!”, She replied. “Honestly, aren’t you wiped out from that session we just had?”

“Yeah, but I don’t feel muscle fatigue just general fatigue. I don’t think this is normal…”, Aerrow said.

“It isn’t. It must be the poison it gave you. Hopefully it’ll wear off soon.”, She responded while cutting both sets of vines on his legs. She then pulled them out of the dead plant one by one before dressing Aerrow and putting back on her own clothes.

‘I hope this doesn’t smell of sex now… ’, Cyclonis thought as she looked down at her pants while hoisting Aerrow up in a piggyback style. He was hard to carry with her stamina drained but she managed. She started walking out back onto the path.

“Think it’s worth the risk of continuing to the crash site, or should we head back until you’ve recovered?”, She asked Aerrow.

“If its friends we can get medical treatment…”, Aerrow responded. Cyclonis noticed he was starting to act spacey. His adrenaline levels must be lowering.


“15 to 20 yards maybe…”, Aerrow said, voice slowly getting more lethargic.

“My little pet? Little pet! Stay with me here, I need an extra set of eyes!”, Cyclonis called to the delirious Sky Knight.

“I’m...trying. We should get moving…”, Aerrow said.

“.... Alright. Hang on.”, She responded before using Aerrow’s dagger for another Lightning Claw and venturing further into the jungle.

Aerrow’s estimations were right it seemed as it was well, well under a mile before Master Cyclonis came across the crash site. What didn’t make sense though was what crashed.

The scrapped together design was definitely Storm Hawk but the object itself was only half of a vehicle, more specifically the front half. The front half emitted no smoke nor reeked of any fuel. Upon getting closer and feeling the trim of its cut Cyclonis found it was cold, this wasn’t severed recently at all. What she could identify was the crossbow sticking out of the vehicle’s half, it belonged to that obnoxious chatty twit. What was his name…? Oh well, doesn’t matter. There was no one here and that was the important thing. Why it fell could be figured out later.

“This looks like half of your marksman’s Air Skimmer.”, Cyclonis said to Aerrow.

“Oh look, Finn’s better half… “, Aerrow said in a delirious haze.

“SNRK--!”, Cyclonis covered her mouth to stop her laughter. Was he aware he was insulting his own squadmate?!

“What? You’ve gotta admit it’s the only stable relationship he’s ever had.”, Aerrow defended.
“HAH--!”, Cyclonis voiced, incredulous and amused as she tried her damnedest to not burst into a laughing fit. Was he always this brutal about his opinions of his squadmates?!

Aerrow wasn’t quite clear why she was laughing so hard at his comments but he knew one thing. This was the most he’s heard her laugh the whole time they’ve been here. It was a sweet sound now that it held no malice. It made Aerrow smile just hearing the bit of it she didn’t muffle.

“Khh--We- Snrk-- We should go back...pft- We’ll get you to the shelter to sleep. Okay?”, Cyclonis asked. Mostly just to confirm he wasn’t drifting off.

“Okay…”, Aerrow answered. He brushed his head against hers and Cyclonis embraced the feeling. It felt assuring, in an odd way. With that feeling in her heart she carried Aerrow back to the tree shelter where he was lifted via the pulley lift onto the leafy ground of the shelter’s floor.

“There we are. Rest now. We’ll get lunch when you wake.”, Cyclonis said softly to Aerrow as she sat by him, leaning against the railing.

‘Hopefully, anyways….’, She thought.

“Thank you… …”, Aerrow spoke faintly before he knocked out.

There were many things Aerrow was expecting to encounter in his sleep. The voiceless, an eternal expanse with nothing in it, but not this.

Not Cyclonis. Not Cyclonis bare, leaning against an odd pillar of corrugated obsidian and panting heavily, face flushed. Not Aerrow himself as bare as she, standing before her sitting, almost laying figure. This was the last thing he expected. It wasn’t even on the metaphorical table.

The empress looked up at him, eyes bleary and half lidded as her lips parted to speak.

“Ahh…..A…..Ae….rro..w….hh…”, She whimpered, her plea barely above a whisper as she tried to control it through her breaths.

The sound heated his member to molten lava as it escaped Cyclonis’ soft lips. That noise sounded like she was drowned in need, and to call him by his name…

He wouldn’t deny her.

“Master Cyclonis…”, He said, approaching her. Aerrow knelt down into a crawl as he positioned himself over her just right to ease his crotch down and slide himself into her folds slowly. It was slick and welcoming. Aerrow took in a sharp breath as Cyclonis gasped.

Aerrow started building up a pace, enjoying the slippery feeling of her caressing walls as he was driven more and more by the cries of her rising voice alone. Cyclonis was craving this badly, and he couldn’t blame her. Doing something this wonderful with someone and knowing they’re enjoying it so much, enjoying you so much… It’s hard not to become addicted to it all.

“Ae….Aerr...ow...hahh, hahh..! Pl...ple...ase..! ...Hhaahhh...aahh..!”, Cyclonis struggled to cry out between pants and moans.

Aerrow slammed into her rougher and faster, being driven wild by Cyclonis’ plea.

“Yes...Y...Yes...Master Cyclonis...haahhh…! Yes….!”, Aerrow sputtered between breaths as he took his right arm and wrapped it around the back of Cyclonis’ head, pulling her in close. His face was buried in her neck as Cyclonis’ hands gripped Aerrow’s shoulders. The rhythm was driving them
both to their peak now and Aerrow growled in pleasure as he could feel it approaching. Cyclonis cried out once more.

“Pl..please...hahh, haa, haah, ahh…! R-run…!”, She begged.

Aerrow was snapped out of his fog and he pulled himself away from her to look at her face. Both were still breathing heavy.

“Wh….wha….?”, Aerrow asked, but it was all he could voice before he saw the scene darken noticeably while hearing a silent hiss of air along with an oddly warm draft from above. He whipped his head upwards and suddenly the scene made more sense.

That wasn’t an obsidian pillar. That was a part of a body. A body that towered over Cyclonis and Aerrow. A body belonging to the seemingly eyeless head of the monster who’s black beak lined with teeth was open wide over Aerrow’s person as he was able to see smaller mouths with rows of teeth inside it. Cyclonis wasn’t calling him over. She was trying to steer Aerrow away.

It’s massive maw plunged down on Aerrow as he heard the world (or maybe the beast) scream out deafeningly, everything fell to darkness his body was caving in--

“HAAHGH--!!”

...and he woke up in a sit. Aerrow was drenched in sweat, breathing heavy from panic. He looked around. It was the tree shelter. There wasn’t any monster.

“My little pet, I hope you realize you just scared away most of the fish?”, Master Cyclonis called out.

There was Master Cyclonis, though she was apparently catching food.

*GROWL*

Food he needed.

“Sorry, my Master…”, He shouted back as less loud as he could manage. Saying ‘master’ made him flush...he was much more sober now, and realizing what he had promised was...well, pretty embarrassing. It sounded like something that you’d hear about someone doing an editorial on in those erotic magazines Finn was sometimes caught reading or secretly showing off to him and Stork. Did those things even have editorials…?

Aerrow moved to stand but immediately winced in pain. He lifted his shirt.

“That’ll need bandaging…”, He sighed before taking off the shirt.

The wound Cyclonis gave him wasn’t too deep but it was big. An infection from that could spell trouble, and keeping on a sweaty shirt over it definitely wouldn’t help.

Master Cyclonis came to the top of the tree and gave Aerrow a set of cooked skewered fish before sitting beside him to eat.

“I see that even your dreams kept you busy.”, Master Cyclonis commented as she briefly stared down at his pants before turning away to eat.

Aerrow looked down at himself to see what Master Cyclonis meant and saw the dark spot on his pants. He and she both knew what that was, and piss it was not. Aerrow held his face and groaned in annoyance as Master Cyclonis smirked at his annoyance.
“Another thing to wash. Great.”, Aerrow sighed. “Anyways...did we manage to get to the crash site? My memory gets blurry after the part where we both get back on the path.”

“Hm, suspected as much. You were...acting interesting once we got there. We found half of your sharpshooter’s Air Skimmer. It was cut, and was oddly absent of heat or fumes. There wasn’t even bolts in his Skimmer’s crossbow.”, Master Cyclonis said.

Aerrow did remember Junko making an effort in recovering many of Finn’s vehicle wreckage after every mission he could. Junko said it was best to recover as much metals and such as they could so their team would never need to go buy metal to use, or at least they mostly wouldn’t need to. It was...easier, and more reasonable to think it was the left overs of a previous wreckage than to think Finn might’ve...

Aerrow gave a heavy sigh as he looked almost in pain. Master Cyclonis noticed this and sat stoutly as she faced him.

“Hey.”, She called him.

Aerrow snapped his attention to her.

“That band of lunatics is your squadron, right?”, She asked firmly. Her face serious.

“Y-Yes…?”, Aerrow wasn’t sure where Cyclonis was going with this.

“You trust in their abilities and experience to get any job done, right?”, Master Cyclonis asked him.

“Yes.”, He answered.

“Then don’t look down upon their competence with such negative lines of thought. Understood, my little pet?”, Master Cyclonis scolded.

He paused, looking at her.

'She just said “trust in them” didn’t she?', Aerrow thought.

Master Cyclonis was assuring him, in her own twisted little way.

’”If you think they can get the job done then they can get the job done. Your doubts are just an insult to them.”’, Aerrow internally concluded that too is what she meant.

Aerrow smiled.

It was moving how much trust meant to Master Cyclonis and what it meant when she gave that trust to others. Trust should be like that, shouldn’t it? Granted, people could make mistakes and holding them to fulfilling that trust when they aren’t at their best is unrealistic, but to trust someone is to expect that “their best” is most of the time. Finn is someone who is at their best most of the time, as is everyone on the Condor. There was nothing Aerrow should be worried about.

“Understood Master….Thanks.”, Aerrow said, grinning affectionately.

Master Cyclonis’ eyes widened slightly at the Sky Knight’s response. She didn’t expect a thanks, nor any gratitude. He was brooding over ‘what if’s’ again, she just wanted to correct his thoughts. Once again he was inviting unfamiliar feelings into her mind which she did not know how to cope with let alone take. She knew one thing, he appreciated what she just did and expressed it. Such a thing shouldn’t be punished, but rewarded.
“Y….You’re welcome.”, Cyclonis said, her body language suggesting both defensiveness and uncertainty as she curled herself inwards, hunching her back and bringing forward her shoulders as she drew back her legs. With that and her brow furrowing glare she looked like she was saying an insult but failed miserably. Aerrow found this horribly entertaining but did everything in his power not to express it as such. She’d kill him if he laughed at her right now.

Aerrow then remembered his clothes and wounds.

“I should get my clothes washed and my wounds both cleaned and treated.”, Aerrow said.

“Your wounds from yesterday mixed with what I gave you aren’t light injuries my little pet. I was surprised you were able to move as much as you did.”, Master Cyclonis responded.

“Ah-- Yeah, I think it was the adrenaline mostly that pushed me to move.”, Aerrow said.

It made sense, that crash was a sign of hope for Aerrow. Then Master Cyclonis’ offer filled him with the need to escape which got him caught by that bear catcher plant causing him to freak out.

Moving without all that energy now though? Forget about it.

“I’ll do it.”, Master Cyclonis said.

Aerrow looked at her, flustered.

“N-No no it’s okay I can--!!”, Aerrow sputtered out.

“We saw everything of each other and fucked, my pet. Frankly i’m surprised you're still even flustered anymore.”, Master Cyclonis said pointedly as she slid a finger down the side of his chest.

“-! It’s not that...It’s more like-- Gahh, I just….My clothes are….gross…”, Aerrow attempted saying.

'Well, boxers I think are more gross than my shirt or pants. Not just because of the...ejaculation from my wet dream, she probably wouldn’t be bugged by that. No, I don’t want someone to risk coming in contact with whatever else I missed that may have rubbed off on my boxers! That’d be humiliating!', Aerrow thought.

“...The purpose of washing clothes is to remove them of gross things like filth.”, Master Cyclonis said, seemingly not getting Aerrow’s point. Everything gets filthy sometimes, Sky Knights are no exception.

“Well--Yeah, but…. it’s just…..mmng…”, Aerrow tried to say what was in his mind but it was embarrassing to admit his concern and for some reason the idea of grossing her out bugged him a lot. His face was red as his eyes were looking across the ground as he gave a worried and anxious frown.

Master Cyclonis was staring at this reputable Sky Knight act like a shy little boy about to confess he thinks there’s monsters under the bed. He wasn’t a clean freak or afraid of germs. He helped her kill that devourer by entering its mouth after all, and he didn’t mind the sex she and he had so it wasn’t about getting her germs all over his stuff. Aerrow shouldn’t be shy about exposing himself, he claimed he wasn’t and Cyclonis was fine with testing that theory. Then what was left?

“......You aren’t making sense.”, Master Cyclonis said.

“Mngh...I’m trying to, I just don’t know how…”, Aerrow responded.
“Well, we can’t waste too much time. I assume nighttime on the ground only gets even more dangerous. Legs out.”, She said, moving her hands to the band of his pants.

“Whua--! Wait! I can just--!” Aerrow protested.

“You are too weak. You can’t move as efficiently if another danger arose.”, Cyclonis shot back.

“But-!”, He blurted.

Master Cyclonis took one of her hands and placed her fingers under his chin, tilting it up enough to look right at her.

“My little pet, I believe I gave you an order.”, Master Cyclonis said with a smirk.

Aerrow tensed at this. The name she used was part of the deal he made. That deal was for trust and he did it by giving himself to her. Aerrow therefore was completely subject to her will which would require him to trust her. This was a two way deal, and it wouldn’t be right to not keep his end. With this in mind he took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and extended his legs.

Master Cyclonis took a second to glance at Aerrow’s face. His brow was furrowed but his eyes shut, his mouth not betraying his anxiety. It was a face she liked, one she's never seen him wear. However, Aerrow did as Cyclonis said and she wasn’t going to take advantage of that. She unzipped and pulled his pants off his body. Aerrow’s hands clenched, he was nervous.

He hated how neurotic his mind was about these kind of things. Things like risking negative reactions. He had to think about the risks when it came to leading others but it didn’t take long before it bled into his everyday life too. His brain would berate him over the tiniest failure, the smallest mistake, the slightest show of disappointment. That led to Aerrow’s confidence dropping significantly compared to before. Piper had definitely noticed and related to it too. They both had a hard time forgiving themselves and they found a deeper camaraderie in that, but camaraderie wasn’t a substitute for a solution. If anything, it was a way to build a more comfortable sense of hopelessness.

“White knuckling your fists isn’t needed my little pet. You make it look like i’m going to gut you.”, Master Cyclonis said.

Aerrow opened his eyes at this to see Cyclonis looking at him with mild concern.

“Sorry, I just… i’m worried it’ll be….. ……”, Aerrow trailed off before closing his eyes again.

‘I'm worried it'll be disgusting to you.’, He finished internally.

He felt a hand touch his cheek and he slowly opened his eyes again at the sensation.

“It is okay, even if I see something that you might find degrading or pathetic. It will not make you less of a Sky Knight, or a person. You already found me in a pathetic state when we first came here, and….well…..”, Master Cyclonis said, her voice getting quiet as she looked down, remembering his words when he was binded by the plant.

“…..It did not make you think any less of me. It is only right that I too shall not judge.”, She finished meekly.

Aerrow was entranced by her. Her shy expression, her encouraging words, the level of respect she felt for him, how much more open she was being-- Aerrow wanted to just hold her close after experiencing this. He knew he shouldn’t though, his chest wound wasn’t in good shape and she was
in the middle of pulling off his clothes to wash. His mind reminded him of his worries and he tensed again.

'Great skies of Atmos i’m pathetic…!’, Aerrow thought.

Master Cyclonis looked up to see Aerrow shifting between heartfelt glances of both gratitude and affection to worried, scared, and self loathing side glances at the ground. He wanted to trust in her, but his fears were clouding his mind. He needed direction, focus.

'Perhaps, this can help him.’, Cyclonis thought.

Master Cyclonis straightened her posture before leaning closer to him, moving the hand on Aerrow’s cheek away to poke the tip of his nose.

“My little pet… Keep your eyes on me.”, She cooed.

“Huh?”, Aerrow voiced.

“No matter how much you want to look away or close your eyes, keep looking at me until I am finished.”, Master Cyclonis said with a playful yet gentle smile.

'His fears need to be silenced, so i’ll make him look to show him there is no reason to be afraid.’, She reasoned.

She moved her hands to the band of his boxers before moving one hand off to gesture Aerrow to use his arms to lift his rear up off of the floor to which he did. Once Cyclonis started pulling the boxers down though is when she saw Aerrow really struggle. The young Sky Knight desperately was fighting the urge to look away, every time his eyes attempted to jolt away he forced them back into place. His eyelids were quivering. His lips curled inward as his teeth clamped them down. Aerrow was scared, but he was trying to be strong. Cyclonis could see that, and was proud of him for that.

Master Cyclonis pulled the boxers off of his feet and without pause looked at the insides of them which made Aerrow flinch. His heart stilled.

“...Still doesn’t make sense. I just see the mess you made this morning. Girls have a version of this too, my little pet. Boys aren’t the only ones who make messes after wet dreams.”, Cyclonis stated.

Aerrow’s limbs relaxed. He honestly felt not only relieved, but a little ridiculous. He makes sure to be hygienic, even in this jungle he was careful to be as clean as he would’ve been on the Condor. Any possibility he could’ve been that bad was out the window, but he had freaked out anyways which was...silly, really.

He flopped onto the ground and winced, remembering he had wounds. Cyclonis chuckled a bit.

“Feeling better?”, She asked.

“Very. Thank you for erasing my worries on this, Master.”, Aerrow responded.

“You’re welcome. Now, i’ll need a refresher on what to get for the bandaging. It was rather hectic today.”, Master Cyclonis said.

“It was, haha. Alright then…”, Aerrow said as he sat back up and began explaining once again what she’d need to fetch to patch them up.

Aerrow should’ve been bugged by his bare body just being out there in the open as his clothes were
drying, but he was surprisingly calm about it. He just bandaged not quite as bare Cyclonis, who was sharing her earliest memories with Aerrow. They were very inconsequential ones, like the day she saw her first crystal, or had her first trip across the sky. Aerrow shared similar experiences. The redhead shared his first time seeing a squadron, and his first time seeing people being healed by crystals alone.

“I was surprised, for some reason I had it in my head that my mother was never going to walk again. It was silly. heheh.”, he said as he was wrapping up her arm’s bite wound.

“Oh it definitely sounds silly. Hahaha! How is she faring nowadays?”, Cyclonis asked.

“Ah, she’s….. …not here, anymore.”, Aerrow confessed.

“-! ….. ….I see. I am…. sorry to hear that.”, Cyclonis responded.

“…Not your fault, just a casualty of war. Y’know?”, Aerrow said. His mother was dear to him, but he tried not to make his anger too personal towards Cyclonia. “Many people on both sides lose their lives whether fighting or not when it comes to war. It’s easy to forget that and see the other side as ‘the bad guys’ but they have struggles and losses too. No one should forget that.”

He’s seen it when he was little and hiding from troops. He saw the stretchers and Talons grieving over fellow Talons. One of them looked no older than 15, there were many unusually dark red splotches bleeding through his uniform, and an adult woman Talon went over to stop the stretcher… before crumpling to her knees. Seeing that Talon weep over what could have possibly been her son or nephew stopped the then Aerrow’s blossoming vengeance soaked spite dead in its tracks. Talon or not, they were the same. They were people who can suffer grief just like him. It wasn’t right to dehumanize them. He’d be no better.

“Yes. That is right. If only those… ….”, Master Cyclonis managed to say before her throat refused to vocalize her words. The memory bitterly clawed at her heart as it resurfaced. She tried fighting away tears. She would not show weakness. She should not show weakness…!

“Cy-- Master…?”, Aerrow asked as he paused his bandaging to look up at her. Her face contorted with sorrow and restraint as she clenched her fists. He must’ve caused her to recall something devastating and it was eating away at her. She didn’t need to hide how she felt. She didn’t need to act strong in front of him. Aerrow already knew she was strong, and no amount of crying would change that. He would be the last person to judge her for that.

Aerrow gently held her arm with both hands and she snapped her attention to him. His gaze was equal parts compassion and concern.

“Hey… It’s okay to let yourself feel down about this. It’s because you care for and treasure that life you were with that you want to cry. Don’t hide that love you felt for them Master. I’m sure that you’d do them proud by showing you loved that they were here, and that you value those times you spent together with them.”, Aerrow said softly.

Cyclonis’ eyes widened with realization. What was she doing? Of course, of course crying meant she loved that they were there, of course it meant she loved the memories they had together! Why would she hide that? Why would she…?

One tear fell, and then another, then another. Cyclonis’ face flushed with color as tears streamed down her face and hiccuping sobs began to escape her lips. Her stature crumpled as her body curled inwards while she cried. Aerrow saw this and the young Sky Knight made no hesitation to gently pull her towards him to hold her as she sobbed. It was like watching a floodgate of emotion go down
to release long since suppressed feelings. Cries became sorrowful wails, sniffles became gasps for air between blubbery breaths. Cyclonis’ shoulders shaked with each sob while she had buried her face in Aerrow’s shoulder, the redhead keeping his arms gently wrapped around her trembling figure.

They stayed like this for awhile, it was a long time before Cyclonis stopped crying but Aerrow didn’t mind at all. She needed someone to tell her it was okay to cry, just like she needed to have someone to hold her as the torrent of emotion bubbled back up to the surface. She needed that grounding to assure her she isn’t alone. That someone was there for her, so she could let it all out.

Cyclonis finally stopped and when she did Aerrow handed her some of the unused dried leaves they had used for bandaging as tissue which the young empress made no hesitation to use while Aerrow also used some to clean up that while’s worth of sobbing on his shoulder.

“....It was my grandmother.”, Cyclonis quietly said. Aerrow paused to look at her.

“Some of the Storm Hawks allied Sky Knights that retreated during that war ten years ago came back to Cyclonia to finish the job. They had snuck onto the terra in the dead of night when the night guard should have been doing their jobs…!”, She said before stopping to prevent her throat from clamping up from grief and frustration. Once she calmed she continued. “But they weren’t, and Cyclonia paid dearly for it. Ace was out on a mission and Grandmaster Cyclonis was in the streets, wandering. She never could have seen it coming. The vicious bastards got her from behind, killing her instantly but they didn’t stop until…! Until…!”

Cyclonis started crying again and Aerrow once again held her in his arms, consoling her.

“I am so sorry she passed, especially in such a horrible way like that.”, Aerrow said sympathetically. Cyclonis shook her head.

“It wasn’t...your fault. It was… theirs.”, She managed to say before sobbing more.

Once she stopped and they both cleaned themselves up Cyclonis went to the wooden railing to look at the wildlife. The color of the light was different, less yellow, more pale. It would be raining soon. Aerrow was worried his clothes would be soaked and unusable if left out. He turned to Cyclonis.

“Master? I think we should get our clothes before they get drenched again.”, Aerrow said to Cyclonis. She didn’t respond.

Aerrow thought at first that maybe she was still somber and just wanted to be left alone. Getting a better look at her however showed she was oddly limp... despite still sitting. Her head was down and her arms dangled down so much so that her hands were touching the floor. The weight of her body had her hunched inwards but she was still sitting. This troubled Aerrow, had she come down with something? She was fine just a few moments ago! He rushed over.

“Master? Hey!!”, He called out to her as he gently shook her.

Aerrow heard unintelligible mumbling come from her. He gave her a confused look.

“What was that?”, Aerrow asked.

“....You’re a Sky Knight too, aren’t you?”, She asked, monotone and quiet. Aerrow heard ghostly whispers mixed in with her voice which hurt his head.

“Well, yeah but--!!”, Aerrow managed to get out before the young empress tackled him. He tried to sit up but her hands met his throat which kept him to the floor. Aerrow tried removing her hands in a
panic as he was feeling his oxygen intake lessen. His eyes adjusted and he could see Master Cyclonis’ eyes enraged, feral, almost inhuman like as she bared her teeth in a snarl.

”YOU’LL STAB ME IN THE BACK TOO WO N’T YOU.”, She said as her body, clothes, and hair all began to darken with that odd shadowy aura as her voice boomed with that unearthly undertone which nearly overtook her whole voice. It was barely recognizable.

“!”, Aerrow voiced through a strangled breath. She was distrustful, paranoid because of what he was. Not just because of who he was. It hurt. Not the head pain kind of hurt, he already was feeling that in full force now. No, he was hurt emotionally that she was wary of him as a Sky Knight. She was in such pain that to never fall the way her grandmother did she refused to trust a Sky Knight.

Aerrow wouldn’t allow Cyclonis to hide like that. He wouldn’t allow her to just fear many for the poor choices of the few. Life was more complex than that, they and their people were more complex than that. He let go of her hands and cupped her face, even though the contact made it feel like his head would explode, even though he could see stars in his vision from the lack of oxygen. Unable to speak, Aerrow mouthed his words to the glaring beastly ruler.

Aerrow did his best to give a trusting smile despite the pain and fading consciousness.

Master Cyclonis’ eyes were fixated on him, even more so when he placed his hands on her face. When she read what he was saying her body froze as her eyes got wide and her snarl lessened. Aerrow could feel her arms no longer pressing down on his neck but just holding it. He could somewhat breathe. Master Cyclonis then flinched before groaning in pain and curling up more, retracting her arms to hold her head as she wailed in pain. Aerrow sat up.

“What’s wrong? What’s going on?!”, Aerrow asked, panicked. He got a better look at her form. This shade was unnatural. He knew it, it wasn’t just some odd dream bleeding into his waking moments. Something is affecting her.

Master Cyclonis let out one last scream before going limp again, shade leaving her body. Aerrow caught her and propped her against one of the big branches as he crouched by the unconscious empress.

It didn’t take long for her to open her eyes again and she jolted up, looking around to see Aerrow staring at her. He visibly relaxed when he saw Cyclonis was just was confused as he was.

“Back with us, Master?”, He asked.

“Back’? I don’t remember passing out, when did I--”, Cyclonis started before seeing red marks on Aerrow’s neck. It was on the front of said neck with two thin marks spreading outwards as two big wide ones below yet attached to the thin ones were also spreading outwards like some odd red butterfly. The thin marks looked like…

Cyclonis looked down at her own hands then back at Aerrow who was rubbing the front of his neck. The Sky Knight seemed to catch onto her silent question.

“Really startled me with that. I honestly thought I was gonna die there for a bit.”, Aerrow said nonchalantly.

“I….was robbed of control….?”, She said looking back down at her hands, horrified.

“Looks like it. It happened once before but I don’t think that time you had lost control of yourself. I
figured it was just my mind playing tricks on me. Uhm, Master…?”, Aerrow said looking at Cyclonis as she held her face.

“You’re still saying that…? I just attempted to kill you a second time! Don’t you fear for your life, Sky Knight?!”, Cyclonis shouted, voice trembling.

“It wasn’t you--”, He tried to say.

“But what if it was?! I assume you saw something that told you the difference but what if that wasn’t there this time?! What if it was me?! You’re too trusting, Storm Hawk!”, She yelled.

“I don’t understand whe--”, Aerrow voiced.

“Because I could have killed you! ....and it wouldn’t have even been my choice to make. That-…….”, Cyclonis cut herself off.

'That terrifies me.', She finished internally.

Being robbed of control was already a scary enough thought on its own, but being robbed of deciding the fate of another? One who gave their entire being to her personally? Upsetting doesn’t even cover it.

“Hey, hey, look at me.”, Aerrow said as he held Cyclonis’ shoulders. Cyclonis looked up at him.

“You’re okay. You’re safe now.”, He said to her softly.

“How can you be so sure?! I’ve been presumably taken over twice! How are we sure whatever it is won’t do it again?!”, She snapped, tearing up.

“Because, I got through to you didn’t I?”, Aerrow said. “We’ll figure out what this is together.”

“...Okay.”, Cyclonis responded. She did vaguely recall Aerrow communicating something, but she had no image or sound to associate to the memory. He did reach her, and it was all she could rely on for now. She hugged him which made Aerrow wince as she accidentally touched the bandaged chest wound. She figured this out though and backed away.

“...Forgot about that.”, She managed to say.

“Ahaha, I did too. Which reminds me, we need our clothes.”, He said pointedly.

“-! Right, the rain..!”, She stood up and made a dash for the exit and for her gloves and his clothes.

When she came back up she heard Aerrow sneeze.

“Cold?”, Cyclonis asked.

“Yeah. Guess its the change in weather.”, Aerrow answered.

She undid her cloak and put it around Aerrow.

“Your clothes aren’t dry yet, neither are my gloves. So this will have to do i’m afraid.”, She said.

He looked...oddly happy about this.

“...what?”, Cyclonis questioned.
“Oh-! Euh, is-- is it weird I always wanted to try this on?”, Aerrow asked nervously.

“....Pft. I always figured the hawk would want wings.”, Cyclonis teased.

“I do have a set of wings, thank you. The Air Skimmer III Ultra?”, Aerrow playfully retorted.

“Oh yes because those wings definitely helped us avoid falling into the Wastelands, oh wait....”, Cyclonis said in mock realization.

“Bah...! I blame that weird weather. It was a disaster through and through.”, Aerrow responded, resting his head on his hand as he was sitting.

Cyclonis chuckled before stopping and delving into thought.

“.....It was a peculiar phenomenon, wasn’t it?”, She said aloud.

“Oh yeah, definitely. I don’t think I encountered anything like this. Have you?”, Aerrow asked.

“No, never. It couldn’t be a crystal, nor could it be a natural formation. I certainly never designed a crystal powered contraption that would cut the power to other crystals ether. It would certainly cut out its own power, any device like that would be dead after the first wave.”, Cyclonis reasoned.

“So...it’s... hmm... Think it could be a new natural weather formation?”, Aerrow asked.

“It’d be born that literal day then, an incident like that would definitely be reported by now. No survivor wouldn’t avoid reporting a massively annoying and dangerous storm like that.”, She answered.

“Fair point.”, He replied.

“On a different note, you said I was taken over before?”, Cyclonis asked.

“Oh, that. It was when I was asking about the markings on your back.”, Aerrow said.

“Before you passed out?”, Cyclonis said.

“Yeah, it was hurting my head before too just like it did recently. It was just one bad migraine that got worse and worse.”, Aerrow said.

“Did that happen any other times?”, She questioned.

“Odd migraines? Yes, though not as bad. They tended to happen when...well, i’d hear this... sound? It’s something your voice does on occasion.”, He explained.

“Sound?”, Cyclonis asked.

“It’s...kinda ghostly, or maybe just magic-y? It’s like there’s a weird second version of your voice that whispers what you say as your saying it. All the times i’ve heard it I had a migraine. You’ve never heard it?”, Aerrow asked.

“No, this is the first i’ve heard of it.”, Cyclonis answered.

“Strange...Master?”, Aerrow called out to her.

“Huh? What is it?”, She asked.
“You’re…trembling.”, Aerrow said.

Cyclonis looked at her hands. They were shaking. She didn’t even realize how tense she was. The young empress was...afraid. How long had this possession been going for? How long had she not been aware of it? How much control has it had over her?! How much control does it have over her?!

“Master, do you… Should we change the subj--”, He started.

“No.”, Cyclonis cut in. “It would be best to figure out what it does to determine how it works. From there we can make counter methods and hopefully find a way to be rid of it. My fear means nothing, it is just a consequence for being blind.”, She stated firmly.

‘Running away from the truth will only end badly. Face it.’, Cyclonis thought to herself.

Aerrow was amazed. Cyclonis really is strong. To endure fears, endure pain-- wait, that’s it!

“There was another time I had a migraine as well.”, Aerrow said.

“When?”, She asked.

“When I looked at your back. You hadn’t said anything, so it wasn’t your voice but when I looked at the mark on your back my head hurt.”, Aerrow answered.

Her mark? But that was for her Initiation Ceremony! Why would they give her a mark that would… Her blood ran cold. What in her family’s history could have caused such a thing to be a part of her ancestors’ rituals of succession to be ruler of Cyclonia?!

“Aerrow, I need you to use your dagger on me.”, She breathed out raggedly, shaking.

Would just a cut through do? it’s a fairly dark brand, he’d have to cut deep enough. Risking leaving anything behind however...no, he’d have to remove all of it. She bit her lip. If they had a medical facility this would be no problem but there was only this jungle here. They didn’t know when help would arrive, and she was the more mobile out of the two currently. This was bad. Horribly, horribly bad.

Aerrow placed a hand on her shoulder. She looked up at him.

“I know what you’re thinking, but I don’t think that’s going to help either of us, Master.”, Aerrow said.

“….I…am too much of a threat to the both of us, my little pet.”, Cyclonis responded.

“Then I’ll be that much of a protector for the both of us.”, Aerrow claimed.

“Hah..! We don’t even know the full scale of its abilities and you’re already making bold statements…”, She said. It was hard to tell if she found it endearing or infuriating.

“I know one thing, it looks like currently it is limited to what you can do physically. It shared the same restrained movement you have thanks to your injuries.”, Aerrow stated.

“That...Is useful information. What do we do with that information then, my little pet?”, Cyclonis asked.

“Well, maybe…mnn…”, Aerrow spoke as the thought. “...We could probably fatigue you. That way
if you’re in control we can just get you some water, food, and rest then you’ll be ready to go. If not, i’ll just hold you in place till it leaves.”

A good idea. Better than binding her body or crippling it as she’d be available to act when she was herself which doesn’t leave Aerrow to fend off enemies alone. If there was any problems, it was that Aerrow was injured badly. An issue they couldn’t avoid regardless of scenario. One person in bad condition was better than two, so Cyclonis had to suck it up and accept it.

“Very well, how do we wear me out then? Running and push ups are out of the question. Running requires an open field and its nearing night. Push ups require….unpunctured arms. Now that I think about it, I’d have to do heavily intensive exercises to get to that level of fatigue.”, Cyclonis said.

“We would have to make a regimen for you wouldn’t we? Hm, maybe we can find a good alternati-- ….. …..”, Aerrow said before cutting himself off, his face coloring.


Cyclonis looked at him, studying his face before realizing what he was thinking about. She smiled a mischievous smile.

“Sure, we can do that. I think with how long you’ve been pent up you’ll wear me out just fine. Hmmhm.”, Cyclonis said in a playful tone.

“A-Are you telling me...to go all out…?”, He asked nervously. Aerrow wasn’t sure if he was ‘skilled’ in doing his partner, but he definitely had the energy to go as far as he possibly could with her. The young Sky Knight wasn’t sure he wanted to subject Cyclonis to that unless she absolutely wanted to.

Cyclonis was already beginning to get in the mood when she realized what alternative Aerrow had thought of, but seeing him get so shy yet so eager really stirred her need. She wanted to see this redhead boy absolutely lose it. Cyclonis’ smile widened.

“Oh, my little pet…. are you not hungry for me? wanting to taste every last bit of my exposed skin....”

Cyclonis took off her shirt and bra as she stood up.

“....nibbling on any spot of my body your mouth can touch…”

She undid her pants zipper and slid down said pants with her underwear slowly enough to lead Aerrow’s eyes as he swallowed. His face coloring more watching Cyclonis’ hands trail down her thighs lower and lower over the shape of her slender legs to her very ankles.

“....to lap up my warm juices with that deliciously good tongue…”

Cyclonis slid her hands up her legs, up her shins, sliding them across her knees and up to the inside of her thighs as she once again stood up straight. She continued moving her hands up to her hips, in front and up across her collarbone, up the sides of her neck and into her hair before licking her lips.

“....and then to stuff me… with your white, creamy, filling…. I…. ah…!”,

Cyclonis shuddered with excitement as she let out a cry. Aerrow’s hairs were standing on end. She didn’t just want to. She was aching to. He couldn’t stand it anymore, he got up and went over to her.

Aerrow opened the cape Cyclonis gave him to let one arm snake around her waist, pulling her close.
He moved his face close to hers, their foreheads touching.

“I warned you…”, Aerrow said in a near growl of a whisper as the arm around Cyclonis’ waist slithered its hand down to grip a full cheek of her rear while using his other hand to hold the back of her head as he lunged his head forward, locking lips with hers as he tilted his head in the motion. Cyclonis happily reciprocated kiss, already moving to letting her tongue clash with Aerrow’s as they explored each others’ mouths. She was caught by surprise when Aerrow lifted her up off of the ground a tad to force the both of them to the floor of their shelter with the Sky Knight still tasting the insides of her mouth. Cyclonis’ legs were open with Aerrow in between them, leaning over her, kissing her.

The Sky Knight pulled his head back from hers, breaking the kiss as a thread of saliva hung and broke off from their distancing mouths. Aerrow licked his lips as he gazed at Cyclonis with a growing lust. The redhead was unshackling his desires bit by bit. How much did he want to ravage someone, to drive them as crazy as he was feeling, before taking them relentlessly until he was finished? Looking at Cyclonis, the answer was probably more than Aerrow could possibly imagine as he moved his head close to her, sliding his tongue over her neck. That wet caress over Cyclonis’ soft and tender skin soon became massaging bites down across her pale figure. Cyclonis moaned in pleasure each time Aerrow clamped his teeth down on her skin and she arched her back each time she did so. The redhead moved his hands over the empress’ bare figure, feeling the curves of her body. Her supple breasts, her shapely thighs, that smooth and lovely waist she has. He needed it.

“Aaaah…! Aaaah, haaaah…! Y-yes…”, Cyclonis cried out between gasps.

Aerrow trailed his hands down to the inside of Cyclonis’ thighs and began messaging circles into them rhythmically, making it feel like the motion of thrusting hips against her legs which made Cyclonis moan louder as Aerrow bit the side of her hip then moved to the middle of her hip line and planted wet kisses there below her stomach which made her shudder as she let out noises of sheer arousal feeling Aerrow’s teeth scrape against her skin as he kissed her.

“Oh Master…”, Aerrow breathed out against Cyclonis’ skin. “I am hungry for you…” He started trailing his kisses downward. He spoke only once he moved his head up from the kisses he made.

“I want to taste all of you…..”, He said in a sultry tone before ducking his head down between her legs.

Normally, Aerrow would’ve been nervous about this. It was his first time doing oral, and for better or worse no one had given him any advice on how to do that with anyone. However, his slow release of pent up lust clouded his normally self-conscious mind which gave him a kind of confidence he hadn’t truly had in awhile.

Aerrow exhaled close to her folds which made Cyclonis gasp, visibly flinching from the sudden sensation. He relished how eager she was, overwhelmed with anticipation. Aerrow opened his mouth and draped his tongue over one side of her major folds which caused a yelp of surprise from the empress. He slid it up and her thighs tensed as they tried to rise, to clamp down on his head instinctively but Aerrow had them pinned. Aerrow let out a ragged sigh of approval before going and licking the other side.

“Nnn…!”, He heard her voice.
'Don't hold back on me, Cyclonis. I want to hear more of you.', Aerrow said internally.

Aerrow slithered his tongue between her folds and lapped up from the start of her entrance to her clit.

"Aaah!", Cyclonis cried.

The Sky Knight kept his tongue there, twisting around and stroking as Cyclonis kept moaning in response to each movement. The empress dug her fingers into his hair, gripping the roots of them as Aerrow teased that sensitive spot. It felt like there was electricity between her legs with how he was licking it and that electric current coursed across her body making her shudder with pleasure.

"Haaah...! Aaahh...! Aaaahhh...!", Cyclonis breathed out.

The arousal built itself up in waves one after another as Aerrow tasted her which only made her voice rise higher and softer in pitch with each new level of euphoria. Aerrow craved those sounds, taking in all of her cries along with her flavor and fervently kept going while getting more and more intense in his movements until finally...

"-HHHH...!!!AAAAAAAHHHHHHNNN...!!!", Cyclonis voiced wildly as she rode her orgasm out, clenching her thighs together as much as Aerrow's hands would allow while her body was spasming with pleasure.

Aerrow, catching notice of the beginning of her climax lowered his tongue to the bottom edge of her folds at her entrance, burrowing his tongue in and taking in her fluids, savoring the taste.

Cyclonis flinched at the new sensation of a tongue down there. It was very different from the Sky Knight's shaft, it was far more spongy and slippery and had more ability to move as well as change shape. She didn't flinch because it felt bad though, it felt quite good. It just surprised her. The sensation, and Aerrow hungrily taking in her slickness like he was craving it. She knew he was going to, he said as much, it's just the intensity of it was such a surprise. In an odd way, one could see it as the Sky Knight’s desperate to eat her lust. The thought was just as amusing to Cyclonis as it was... arousing.

Aerrow was already erect when she had started teasing him earlier but drinking up that transparent fluid and raising his head up from her crotch to see that panting, dazed and relaxed reddened face with such a blissful smile, a result of his handiwork, he felt his member turn as solid as steel. The Sky Knight slowly licked off residue still remaining on his lips with a smirk while locking eyes with Cyclonis who's smile unknowingly widened seeing that little show.

"There's so much I want to do to you…", Aerrow said in a quiet voice edging with desperation. He lunged himself forward, his face above Cyclonis' as he had himself propped up by his outstretched arms supporting him up while his hands were against the shelter's floor. The redhead moved his hips into hers, entering her. Cyclonis gasped at the feeling. Aerrow started moving slow but was steadily building up pace as he dove his head to the crook of her neck, kissing it and biting it. He then moved his face away enough to speak huskily against her neck.

"I don't want to just fill you with my white waters… I want to drown you in them…", He said, voice dripping with need.

Cyclonis cupped his face and rose it to hers, kissing him passionately which got Aerrow's attention and he quickly reciprocated with his own kisses as he continued to build pace on his thrusts that Cyclonis was also returning with her own. The motion oddly enough reminded Aerrow of a piston, but the only thing he was pumping into it was this slick and caressing crevice of this wonderful raven haired girl. This girl who made no hesitations about showing how much she wanted to ride him, this
girl who is boldly and eagerly lapping up her own flavor in his mouth, getting to know how good that accomplishment tasted to him, this girl who’s body is so soft and smooth and so damned great…!

“Nnngh…!!”, Aerrow grunted after breaking off from the kiss.

“Ahh-! hhh...ahh…!”, Cyclonis cried out.

They both climaxed at the same time, bodies tensing before it stopped. Cyclonis’ limbs were limp as she was panting, her eyes closed but her mouth creased in a slight smile. He was panting too, but he had enough in him for one more.

“Think..hh....Think you can...hh...stand?”, Aerrow asked as he sat up, pulling out his rod.

“Y….Yeah.”, Cyclonis answered.

“Try...hands and knees…”, Aerrow responded.

“-! Heh…”, She voiced before steadily getting herself up and turning around, putting her hands on the ground with arms straight, standing on her knees.

The sight of Cyclonis’ brand made that pain return to his head and Aerrow bit his lower lip in an attempt to focus through it. He moved himself over Cyclonis, his torso above her back and slid his hands up her sides over to cup her breasts which caused Cyclonis to take in a sharp breath of air. Aerrow placed his hips against her rear, grinding against it but not yet entering.

“No pain…?”, Cyclonis asked.

“I guess not looking at it… helps to avoid that.”, Aerrow answered.

“I see… Mn..!”, Cyclonis responded to both his statement and his fondling.

“...It's a shame… I’d’ve loved to taste your back…”, Aerrow said in a soft sultry voice.

“Mnnh… I would have enjoyed...ahh… that…”, Cyclonis admitted.

“At least we… can still try something new… I’m entering, let me know if it… hurts too much.”, Aerrow said, slowly catching his breath.

Cyclonis nodded in response and Aerrow positioned himself just right and pushed his member in slowly.

“Ah! Nnh..!!”, Cyclonis sounded.

“T-Too much…?”, Aerrow asked.

“No just… tight.”, Cyclonis said.

It felt very different from her other entrance. It's opening much more firm than the other one. It made sense, this one wasn't designed to be used for sex but it didn't change how noticeable the difference was to the both of them. For Aerrow its “door” had a strong grip on his shaft more than the inside did, and for Cyclonis it felt like said “door” didn't have much more space left open for him if his member's girth grew an inch or two.

“Okay, i’m going to… start moving.”, Aerrow said.
Aerrow's push further made Cyclonis' back arch from the sensation. It felt oddly good having those insides rubbed by Aerrow's shaft and the suction that came with each time Aerrow moved back felt great for both Cyclonis and Aerrow.

“Am-azing…”, Cyclonis gasped.

“More…”, Aerrow rasped as he started picking up the pace again while fondling Cyclonis’ breasts, moving his fingers in circles against her skin as she moaned. He started kissing and biting her neck again as the thrusts were harder and deeper causing her to cry out more.

Aerrow wasn't aware that he was clamping Cyclonis’ body against his with his arms as he put more pressure on her breasts or that he was bending his torso into her back as he was pressing himself against her to try to be closer. This made Cyclonis’ form pressed against the shelter's floor with her rear in the air as Aerrow’s body was against hers, pinning her down and thrusting into her.

The sensation of their damp with sweat bodies rubbing against one another, feeling each other's skin, each other's shape, all of it moving to the same sensual rhythm with their sounds following suit. It picked up, faster and faster, deeper and deeper, louder and louder till--

“AAAA..!!AAAAAAAAAAHH--! Nnn...hah...hh...hah…”

“GHHK-! HNNNNGGH…!! Hahh….hahh..hah…..”

Aerrow and Cyclonis both went limp. Aerrow pulled out and rolled off of Cyclonis, breathing heavy. Cyclonis once pulled out of turned herself to lay facing the sky by the redhead, panting just as heavily.

“Y…You think I… did enough to…. to wear you out right?...hahh...hhh...can’t… tense a muscle…?”, Aerrow asked, exhausted.

“Haah… hahaha….! What… still holding back… on me...my little pet…?”, Cyclonis asked with a smirk.

“Great skies of Atmos no! hahh.. hh… I’m still… hah… new to this…!”, Aerrow defended.

“You… have skill… for someone new…”, Cyclonis noted.

“Blame Finn…. He feels he… hahh… has to share his… hh… porn mags… with me and… hh… Stork…”, Aerrow responded.

“Hhhh… I see… hhh… must've been… good ones then… I… hahh…. should read them… sometime…”, Cyclonis said.

For some reason Aerrow imagined Cyclonis reading issues of *The Cock’s Nest* in public, on her throne. It was hard not to laugh, though it did bring something to mind.

“What about… you, Master…? Are you...hh...new to this…?”, Aerrow asked.

“Yes....Actually....hh....”, She answered.

“You have skill… too…. hahh...hh…”, He responded.

“Heheh…. wonder if…. we’re…. actually good….. hahh… judges for… such things….”, Cyclonis mused.

“I’d like to.... hahh… not be...hh ...scored one to… ten… hh… by strangers, thanks…”, Aerrow
“Hahaha..! hhhh….hahahaha…!”’, Cyclonis found herself laughing.

“I’m pretty sure… i’d get stage fright… hahh… hh… doing this…. in front of…. other people…”, Aerrow added.

“Hahahaha….hh..!! Hahahahahahaha!”’, She laughed harder as she turned to bury her face in Aerrow’s chest, still laughing at the mental image.

“What….hhh… it’s true….”’, Aerrow half-heartedly whined. In truth he was just trying to hear more of that wonderful sound by playing the part.

“I-I can...hhh..!! I can imagine… you just being… beat red… and clammed up and...hh..!! ...fumbling in front...of...!! Hahahaha!!”, Cyclonis spoke against his frame before bursting into more laughter.

Was the mental image that funny, Aerrow wondered. Then again, he's never seen his own flustered expression. Guess he was missing out. But it was fine, hearing that beautiful laugh was a better prize to him.

Aerrow wrapped the cape around the both of them before putting his arms around her, holding her close.

“Goodnight, my Master.”, Aerrow spoke softly.

Cyclonis snaked her arms around his torso, returning the gesture before looking up at him.

“Goodnight, my little pet.”, Cyclonis cooed.

They both drifted off into slumber as the rain poured down in that mysterious patch of land.

---

Aerrow oddly enough did not have any dreams that night. While it was refreshing, he couldn't help but find it odd.

‘Then again it's odd to find those dreams normal. This is the third morning i've spent in this jungle, it's a little weird to be getting used to something after only two mornings and feel thrown off on the third.’, Aerrow pointed out internally.

‘But i'm also sure waking up like this is just as odd.’, Aerrow thought as he looked down through the cape he was wrapped around in at the sleeping empress.

‘Only three mornings and we’re like this, is that even rational?’, The Sky Knight wondered.

If it were regular days in a regular place between regular people sure, it would be irrational. This place however was a danger zone that they had no outside help surviving in, and they were well… they weren't normal people.

‘Bad justification huh…. I can just imagine Finn checking to see if I had a concussion somewhere. Guess life's just too crazy to be rational.’, Aerrow concluded.

“Mn…”, Cyclonis groaned quietly.

“-! Something up, Master??”, He asked.
“You're letting in a draft…”, She mumbled against his frame.

“Oh, sorry! I'll fix that.”, Aerrow said about to cover them both when Cyclonis moved one of her hands from around his waist to grab his forearm, stopping him.

“It's fine my little pet. It's daylight anyways, best we both get up.”, Cyclonis said.

“Okay.”, Aerrow responded, and with that he opened up the cape and they both untangled from each other and sat up.

Cyclonis was careful not to show her back to Aerrow as she sat, not wanting to make him pass out again. Especially knowing that she could become a threat now that she wasn’t currently fatigued. She rubbed the sleep from her eyes.

'I didn't even know it was possible to feel comfortable napping on someone. Weird how one can be ignorant of the little things such as this.', Cyclonis mused.

Aerrow checked their clothes and found his clothes and her gloves dried overnight.

“Thank goodness… Now I won't be so vulnerable.”, Aerrow commented as he held up his boxers.

“Haha, one would think you’d've gotten used to feeling vulnerable considering all the situations we’ve been in.”, Cyclonis remarked.

“Yeah, well, i'm more used to ‘injured vulnerable’ than ‘naked vulnerable’.”, Aerrow sheepishly replied.

“Oho…..”, Cyclonis voiced.

Aerrow looked over from behind to see Cyclonis sitting back with her elbow on one leg that was bent over the other laying one while her other arm was outstretched behind her, propping her up.

“So the only time i'll get to see your meek side is when you're at your bare minimum?”, Cyclonis said with a devious grin.

“....That was terrible, Master.”, Aerrow whined.

Cyclonis laughed at his annoyed expression. The play on words was terrible but that face was worth it.

To Aerrow it was somewhat frustrating how cute she could be, for her to just sit there calmly and confidently bare, her ivory skin ever so faintly glowing under the sun’s rays and accenting her silky black raven hair, laughing a sweet song with such a gleeful expression made from such beautiful features… Just by laughing genuinely she could make Aerrow forget the world around him. It was…

“--?! WHUGH-!”

“?! ...Pft! Hahahahaha!”

...just vexing.

“Seriously, how did that part of the cape even get there…”, Aerrow grumbled while on the floor, somewhat blushing as he was dumbfounded at how the tripped on the cape he was wearing.

Cyclonis finally stopped laughing and helped him up.
“Thanks. We should change these bandages. Then we can worry about our clothes and move to food from there.”, Aerrow said.

“Right. Considering last night that's definitely a good idea.”, Cyclonis said.

“Ahaha, yeah…”, Aerrow said.

“and a bath before changing since…”, Cyclonis said looking down at herself and then up to him.

“A-ah, yeah. You're right.”, Aerrow awkwardly agreed before looking away.

'Yes, since you both have sex juices splattered here and there. You know, the little things.', Aerrow facetiously chided himself mentally.

Cyclonis smiled at how shy and awkward he was being about it. He's trying to be more used to it, but spending over a year trying to suppress any thoughts or urges about sex must be a hard habit to break out of.

Both the empress and Sky Knight removed their bandages, bathed, replaced their bandages, and started to dress themselves for their morning. When they were removing bandages Cyclonis was amazed at how Aerrow's wounds recovered. It was certainly no sudden “they were healed” moment, but the healing rate was much faster than her own when she compared muncher bites.

“I’m not sure if that's double my speed but it's notably faster than the expected healing rate, my little pet.”, Cyclonis stated while putting on her bra.

“Oh, I know. Trust me, Finn and Piper said the same thing. I just don't know where I get it from.”, Aerrow responded while putting on his boxers.

“Have you always had it?”, She asked.

“I don't know, my childhood isn't the most clear so I can't remember my injuries well from back then aside from...well, y’know.”, Aerrow said as he pointed to his back.

“Right, which reminds me. I'd like to tap into that crystal, my little pet. Can you turn around?”, Cyclonis asked.

“Oh, uhm, sure. Hope I wake up for breakfast…”, Aerrow said.

“Oh, yes you told me you passed out when Piper tried it. How about we try fully on the grass then, over here.”, Cyclonis said as she pointed over to a grassy patch by the shelter.

“Okay.”, Aerrow agreed and walked over before sitting in a kneel, his back to Cyclonis.

“Let's see what you can do.”, Cyclonis said as she was standing behind Aerrow while raising her arms to the sky before tensing her hands and arms, focusing her power as she drew them in and then Cyclonis shot them out to face her hands towards the crystal lodged in Aerrow's back. The crystal reacted to her and she could feel it's energy pooling before her consciousness felt like it escaped her body. All she could see, all her senses could register was a black and silent void.

“What is this.”, Cyclonis voiced with quiet incredulousness as she looked around.

Cyclonis then felt it. A wave of something bubbling all around her. Emotions of rage. Emotions of fury. Emotions of betrayal, of vengeance, of spite! It enveloped her in one fell swoop. A myriad of voices screamed at her.
Suddenly Cyclonis felt a burning sensation all over her body. She was in danger, and Cyclonis would not have any of it. The empress used her own will to cut the connection, forcing herself out. She dropped to her knees, breathing heavy.

“What…”, Cyclonis pondered outwardly. Her pondering got cut short when she noticed Aerrow move into a stand.

“-! I thought you said... you pass out when the… crystal is activated.”, She said to him.

Aerrow didn't respond.

Cyclonis got into a crouch to begin standing when Aerrow turned around. Aerrow’s pupils, his irises, his sclera all were glowing a blinding light blue.

“Great skies--!”

Aerrow took his right arm and slammed it down into the ground where Cyclonis’ head was before she had jumped back out of the way. She was still breathing heavy. Blood pumping, pulse quickening.

He turned his head up to look at her. She bolted.

'Why, why, why...!', She panicked.

'Why, why, why...?!'

The empress hid behind a tree, catching her breath.

'Why did it do that?! Is it alive?!', Cyclonis questioned internally.

Grass rummaging, noise getting louder. Where was the dagger.

'Enough! Enough!! "Why" isn't important, surviving is! The dagger is closer to him! I need an advantage, now!!', She pointed out to herself.

Crackling energy approaching. Not good.

She rolled out of the way, tree crashed soon after. A Lightning Claw. He had the dagger.

She ran behind the trees as she heard another crackle behind her.

'He's controlled. Don't know if he is inhibited by pain, don't know if fatigue will effect him. He also has range now. Shit. Have to bash his fingers open, get the dagger, decrystal the dagger then--", Cyclonis thought.

Then what?

She froze.

There's nowhere to hide the dagger. The crystal is useless without a weapon. She doesn't know what kind of vine could effectively restrain him. Could she even get out of this without breaking one of his limbs?

Motion from the corner of her eye. Cyclonis ducked. Shaking ground from tree crash. She grit her
teeth.

Cyclonis jumped up into a run for Aerrow which he responded to by thrusting his dagger towards her. She saw this and leaned to the side before planting her feet, grabbing his arm and using his own force to flip him.

’He can be tossed. Right, he isn’t a stone wall. Aerrow's just a human.’, Cyclonis reminded herself, calming herself down.

Aerrow rolled into a kneel and ran at her suddenly, kneeing her in the gut before blindsiding her toward the ground. She twisted as she fell, her stomach facing the sky. Aerrow went over and put both hands on his dagger to stab down but Cyclonis kicked up at his wrists fumbling him back due to the force and she leapt up to a stand to pin down his arm but he got up while moving to shank her with the blade. Cyclonis ducked again and immediately punched his solar plexus. His arms went limp briefly as he heaved in response. Cyclonis moved her body up with her as she uppercut his jaw and while doing so Aerrow’s blade arm swung back inwards. Cyclonis noticed and attempted evading but it got a deep cut in her upper arm near her shoulder.

“AAAAAAGH…!!”, She wailed as she held her shoulder, falling to a kneel.

Aerrow once again wrapped both of his hands around the dagger and lunged it at her. Seeing this Cyclonis’ panic got the better of her and she curled inwards. Only to hear Aerrow shout in pain.

“What?!”, Cyclonis said as she looked up.

Whatever was controlling Aerrow was clutching his head in pain and looking away from her. Cyclonis then made the connection.

“Yes, it was hurting my head before too just like it did recently. It was just one bad migraine that got worse and worse.”

’The mark on my back…’, Cyclonis realized.

How fitting, that which can control her can mute his possession. Just like he can bring her back to her senses. Both on their backs too, really what are the odds?

Cyclonis sat up straight, still clutching her wound, her back to Aerrow. This was a gamble, but she had the advantage now. She could take her chances.

“I don't know what you want, being. But I know this! That troublesome redhead doesn't like others deciding his actions for him, and i'm not fond of it either so give him back his control, scum!”, Cyclonis roared with that ghostly undertone as she turned her head to glare at it fiercely.

It screamed painfully before Aerrow’s body fell to the ground, collapsed. Cyclonis wasted no time going over to him, lifting up his torso onto her crouching lap as she cradled his head.

“Hey, HEY! Can you hear me?!”, Cyclonis shouted as she lightly smacked his cheek a few times.

“nn….”, Aerrow stirred, but wasn't waking.

“Come on! Aerrow!”', She hollered.

“mn...huh…?”, Aerrow mumbled as he began to move to rub his face.

“Great skies of Atmos... don't do that to me!”, Cyclonis barked, both relieved and irritated.
“I… thought we...use our nicknames, Master. Heh”, Aerrow snidely remarked as he moved away his hands.

“-! Khh, i’ll file your complaint later. Are you okay?”, Cyclonis asked.

“I’m nggh...a little sore now that you mention it. Did I hit a boulder?”, He asked.

“Your crystal took control of you.”, She stated seriously.

“What?”, Aerrow asked, his expression fell to a panicked look as he sat up.

“I don't know if it was the crystal itself or whatever might be housed in it but it took control of you and attacked me with intention to kill.”, Cyclonis said.

“I can't believe it, that didn't happen with Piper…”, Aerrow said while holding his head.

“See for yourself.”, She said as she stretched a hand out to direct his view to the destroyed trees and the foot marks dented into the ground. Aerrow was at a loss.

“...it seems to hate my mark.”, Cyclonis stated.

“Huh?”, Aerrow asked.

“It acted like it was in severe pain when it saw the brand on my back. It's how I got rid of it's hold on you.”, Cyclonis replied.

“......Great skies of Atmos….”, He buried his face in his hands.

“....I always figured...It was lucky, you know?..... like, this crystal on my back was a good turn of fate or that the crystal itself was a benevolent thing that wanted only good things to happen for others. But now here it is…. taking control of me and trying to kill you…. I…. I don't think it's a nice thing Master and I can't take it out of me....”, Aerrow said, voice shaking.

“...... .........hey.”, Cyclonis finally spoke as she wrapped her arms around him.

“This world, this life, has an infinite number of possibilities my little pet. Because of this, it is possible there is a solution to live without being controlled by what is lodged in your back. Just like there is a possibility I can live without my branding. I know I'm going to try to find a way to live without this curse on my back, so, my little pet, I expect you to find a way to live without yours controlling you. Okay?”, Cyclonis said to him in an oddly soft tone.

Aerrow was moved by her words. She was right, there are many possibilities for the future. If he doesn't give up on it, he can get to that ideal place one day she fully expects him to.

“With pleasure, my Master.”, Aerrow said as he moved his hands from his face and placed said hands on hers.

“Good.”, Cyclonis leaned her head against his shoulder. They stayed like that for a bit till they both decided to head back to finish up what they were doing.

After getting fully changed (and bringing Aerrow’s dagger with them) Aerrow and Cyclonis got the wood rods out to begin fishing. That's when they both noticed it.

*RUMBLE*

The water was rippling more so than usual, the fish scattered, birds fled trees. The vibrations felt
“Those are engine rumblings”, Aerrow stated.

“Tsk, I forgot about that.”, Cyclonis bitterly admitted.

"But there was so many questions, why did his crystal react negatively to me? Why does my brand hurt him? What IS his crystal? What IS my brand? Where did that storm come from? Why did it come? What even is this jungle for it to survive so long? How was it never recorded once in the maps? How come all these coincidences lined up perfectly to involve just us?! It doesn't make sense!! We need more time!", She mentally raged as her jaw clenched and her brow furrowed.

“...You feel the same.”, Aerrow said.

Cyclonis looked over to him.

“This can't end yet.”, He said.

She understood. He was just as unhappy with the lack of answers as she was, and if they were to leave as they are now neither would be able to meet to find out the rest. They needed a way to communicate.

“Your ship. Will I be able to visit it?”, Cyclonis asked.

Aerrow stood beside her, facing the opposite direction of where she was facing. Both watching the distance around them.

“Should be a hatch door in the second story outside the center part of the Condor, leads to a vent entering my room. I'll keep the entrance from my side open.”, Aerrow answered.

“Hatch door, second story, center part. Got it.”, Cyclonis said.

She saw leaves moving oddly in the distance and gripped her hands tightly.

“How about me? You have more than one place, any definite ways to meet up with you?”, Aerrow asked

“Hmm… Airship wise my personal Destroyer is bigger than any other of my terra’s ships. There should be a vent top on the lookout part of the ship. That vent leads to my quarters. Unfortunately I can't keep it unhinged as I have many enemies, knock three times, pause and then knock two times against the entry grate to my room and ill undo it for you. If you can't find my Destroyer, make a scene at one of my controlled terras. Something notably different from how you usually do, i'll know you'll want to talk then.”, Cyclonis answered.

Aerrow saw animals running from something far off on his end. He took a breath.

“Lookout vent, knock three times, pause, knock two times. Got it. But what about your home terra?”, Aerrow asked.

“I’d be surprised if you had to go there. But if you had to… ...There's an abandoned square, oddly full of greens, very distinctive. To the right there should be a vertical line indentation, pull it. It's an old passage, it'll lead you to my washroom, just knock first.”, Cyclonis said.

Cyclonis heard rustling.

“Square, greens, line, pull, got it.”, Aerrow responded. “...Do we play?”
“Yeah…”

Cyclonis and Aarrow both turned toward each other, Aarrow had his dagger out aimed at her throat and Cyclonis’ fishing staff pointed at his in one swift motion.

“If that's what you want to call it, Sky Knight!”, Cyclonis roared as she twirled and swung the staff at Aarrow's legs knocking him over.

Aarrow used his hands like a spring to bounce him back up and used his dagger to block her swing at his torso. He knocked her pole back before striking at her torso which she used that moment to kick his dagger arm away before it could even approach and spun around for another kick which got his torso, sprawling him back. Cyclonis charged him with her spear before being stopped by an arrow hitting the ground between them and bursting.

“!!”, Aarrow covered his face from the light of the blast.

“!!”, Cyclonis got knocked back by the force, hitting the ground.

Aarrow then felt a hand pull him by the arm.

“C’mom buddy, let's go before that crazy witch starts to get up!”, Finn voiced.

Aarrow was glad to hear Finn’s voice and he took his other hand and stood up with Finn's help. He looked over to the smoke and briefly worried if she was okay before turning to follow Finn.

Cyclonis stood up on her own and saw the smoke from the explosion.

‘An evasion style arrow. Not bad.’, She noted before hearing yelling.

“UWOOOOOOAAAAAGH!!”

“?!”

Cyclonis dodged the wallop’s Knuckle Buster and flipped back to get more distance.

“I won't let you hurt my friends!”, Junko said firmly.

’Would you please get me some actual material to work with?’, Cyclonis thought.

“Too bad, I already did.”, Cyclonis shrugged.

This seemingly provoked the wallop into throwing more punches at her. Unfortunately for Junko she was much more fast and nimble than he was, so she was able to dodge more easily.

‘At least Aarrow will be able to leave safely now.’, Cyclonis noted.

“Aarrow you're okay!”, Piper exclaimed as she ran over to him and gave him a hug.

“Ugh..! Careful there, i’m not exactly ship shape!”, Aarrow winced.

“Oh! Sorry!”, Piper said apologetically as she let go of him.

“It's fine. I missed you guys too.”, Aarrow said jovially.

“It's NOT fine! What the heck even IS this place dude?!”, Finn exclaimed.

“Finn, swearing…”, Piper scolded.
“Agh, alright bad on me okay? BUT SERIOUSLY!! Tropical jungle in THE WASTELANDS?!
This place can't be real!!”, Finn shouted.

'Why did he even bother trying to be sneaky again…?', Aerrow thought.

“That is true, this shouldn't be possible by normal standards. If we were here on our own i’d love to
study it all, but our friend’s safety comes first. Condor’s up ahead, let's get moving!
”, Piper said.

“Right!”, Aerrow said as he followed the two."How did you guys even get down here anyways?
Did the storm let up?"

"Quite the opposite actually! Somehow it got intense enough that it supercharged all the crystals! If
our crystals weren't strong enough we'd have been electrified by the lightning on the way down,
Stork was screaming with how fast the Condor was moving!", Piper called back.

'Another mystery…', Aerrow thought as they all ran back to the Condor.

Cyclonis wasn’t sure whether or not to pity the wallop or to be annoyed by him. Junko couldn't keep
up with Cyclonis but refused to stop trying, swinging his fists again and again, damaging the
environment around them.

'Change up your methods or call for backup, i'm only staying here because i'm humoring your
leader! Otherwise you would have failed your mission!', Cyclonis thought bitterly.

Junko tried for her again, to which Cyclonis stepped out of the way letting Junko get his Knuckle
Buster get stuck in the dirt quite comedically. Then the flash of red happened.

“WHOAH?!”, Junko shouted.

“Agh?!”, Cyclonis exclaimed.

Junko was knocked across the ground from his spot by an energy strike and Cyclonis looked back
into the forest's trees to see who it was.

“Master Cyclonis, are you unharmed?”, Ace called out, emerging from the fauna.

She smiled.

“I’ll live. I worry for your favorite sparring partner though.”, Cyclonis replied, crossing her arms.

“looks like his team have already moved to retrieve him. This will be ended quickly.
”, The Dark Ace concluded with a sneer as he approached Junko who was now rightly scared by Ace’s intimidating
demeanor.

“Wait a moment.”, Cyclonis said.

Ace paused as he was unsheathing his sword and looked back to her.

“Killing them here will prove nothing, it will immediately be overshadowed by this newly
discovered area and tales of a rabid Dark Ace hunting and gutting the Storm Hawks’ now weak and
weary leader along with his worn out squadron will do none of us any favors nor you the
satisfaction. Am I wrong, Ace?”, She explained.

“.....”, Ace gave pause before sheathing his blade.

“No, you're perfectly correct. This garbage isn't worth my time.”, Ace scowled at Junko who yelped
at his menacing glare.

“Y-y-you…”, Junko started as he began to get up with a trembling glare.

’No, no, you idiot after I gave you an out why are you jumping back in…?’, Cyclonis groaned internally.

Junko got into a fighting stance before Ace, visibly afraid of him but far more afraid of losing those he cares for the most.

“I will beat you! HRAAAAGH-!!”, Junko launched an uppercut at the Dark Ace which he promptly blocked with his sword.

“So you do have some bite to go with that bark…”, Ace said with a crazed smile.

‘Dammit, now the war vet is getting riled up! Putting my foot down now will look to suspicious and I haven’t got my staff?’, She thought as she watched with gritted teeth as the two fought.

Junko whacked the side of the Dark Ace’s sword again, pushing Ace back some distance before backing up and pounding his chest twice to taunt the warrior.

“Hah!”, Ace barked a laugh before running towards the wallop with a downward swing. Junko brought his forearms together in front of him as a guard while his eyes were locked on Ace’s blade. Then in one quick motion, Junko jabbed firmly at Ace’s hands with incredible force knocking back the Dark Ace’s swing and the blade out of the veteran Sky Knight’s hands.

“What-?!”, the Dark Ace shouted as he regained his balance only to be punched in the solar plexus by Junko who was rightfully taking advantage of Ace’s surprise. Ace covered his gut while cringing at the pain, his face contorting with humiliation and rage.

“WhoooOOOOOH! I ACTUALLY HIT HIM! TWICE!! HAHaha! I AM AWESOME!!”, Junko cheered, unable to hold in his excitement.

Cyclonis held her face and sighed, defeated.

The Dark Ace glared at the wallop with a hatred few have seen. This hateful glare made Junko’s enthusiasm and confidence deplete faster than Aerrow’s Air Skimmer can fly. Ace grabbed his sword and quickly started wailing on Junko, left swing, right swing, upward, downward, in a flurry of slashes he pursued on Junko as all the poor wallop could do was block. The veteran Sky Knight would not stop and Junko definitely could see that and he ended up timing for when Ace would retract his sword for another swing then rammed him. Junko was about to start hitting him when he heard a screech from the trees, it was Radarr.

Junko stood confused looking at the furry creature as it was shrieking and churrling while pointing to its right off in the distance as it jumped up and down. The Dark Ace took this opportunity to hit Junko with his hilt right in the gut before slamming him to the ground with the flat side of his broadsword before charging for another energy strike.

Junko’s eyes widened with panic one he saw the red glow and scampered out of the way but Ace was quick and got Junko's right leg.

“AGH-!!”, Junko shouted as the blast burned his leg.

He flipped to his back and crawled backwards as Ace slowly approached him. The veteran Sky Knight drinking up the sight of the wallop’s fear.
Radarr jumped on the Dark Ace's head, scratching up his face while attempting to bat off his headwear. Ace was stunned by the sudden blur and pain, quickly stepping back and repeatedly attempting to grab the furry creature as it scampered laps around his noggin.

Radarr jumped off of Ace once he got irritated enough to use both of his hands, dropping the broadsword. The co-pilot then once again gestured to Junko to his right, jumping and shrieking.

“Oh! They're already-- THEY'RE ALREADY LEAVING!! WE GOTTA GO!”, Junko shouted in realization to which Radarr nodded before jumping onto Junko and the wallop dashed off with his furry friend.

“YOU THINK YOU CAN GET AWAY FROM--", Ace shouted while picking up his blade.

“STOP!”, Cyclonis commanded and the Dark Ace stilled.

“Master Cyclonis--", Ace began.

“I told you once already Ace, beating them now will prove nothing. Were you always one to let your anger get the best of you?”

“-! No, Master Cyclonis.”, The Dark Ace answered as he kneeled to a bow.

“I thought not. I expected better of you.”, Cyclonis said.

“Rgh!”, Ace grimaced as his pride was wounded.

“Ah, and Ravess would you be so kind as to come down?”, Cyclonis called out to the treetops behind her.

Sure enough a magenta haired woman descended from up high to bow to her master on the ground below.

“It is good to see you alive and well, your highness.”, Ravess said.

“Hm. Have you come across my staff on the way here?”, Cyclonis asked.

“Yes, your highness.”, Ravess said as she snapped her fingers and two Talons moved towards Cyclonis holding her staff. “Here you are, Master Cyclonis.”

Cyclonis outstretched her hand and her staff flung out the soldiers’ grasp and into hers, fully reformed with pieces drawing to it from seemingly several distant places within the jungle. She smirked satisfyingly at her staff, once again in her hands.

“Excellent… We’re returning to Cyclonia, there is much to be done.”, Master Cyclonis said standing her staff in declaration.

“'Yes, Master Cyclonis!'”, Both Ravess and the Dark Ace said as the Talons saluted.

As they started to move back to the ship, Master Cyclonis looked back to where Aerrow was moments before. Despite not seeing eye to eye on the state of Atmos, despite being her enemy, despite his mission to ruin all of her plans… She was looking forward to seeing him again. Perhaps it was because she owned him now and she wasn't keen on others taking her things, or perhaps considering their similar burdens she felt the young Sky Knight was the only person she could fully rely on, or perhaps it was merely because she wanted to see the height of his potential but she was...
hoping to cross paths once more.

‘Tsk...such a ridiculous thing…’, She chided herself with a smile.

“See you around, Sky Knight.”

End Notes

Yeh, need to work on this later.

Hope the Rape/non-con moment didn’t upset you, I didn’t want to spoil it since it was a key point in the story...

Anyways, thank you for reading! c:

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