At the Edge of the World (we will be together)

Summary

Four years have passed since Min Yoongi retired from his role as a PPDC ranger. Four years have passed, yet he’s still haunted by the mission gone wrong, memories picking away at his sanity every passing day and dreams plaguing the nights in between. It’s been four long years, yet he’s still stationed at the Busan Shatterdome Base. Now, he spends his days training new cadets to be pilots for the gargantuan Jaegers, resigned to seek distraction in a life away from the heat of the battle.

Then comes a cadet with hair the color of the sun and a smile brighter than all its rays combined, and a stubbornness that makes Yoongi want to tear his hair out in frustration.

Notes

This fic contains a lot of universe-specific lingo, so if you’ve never seen either the Pacific Rim movies, it might be a bit confusing. Everything is google-able, of course, but the basic terminology you need to understand this fic are:

Cadet - a new recruit, training to be a soldier or a pilot/ranger
Pilot/Ranger - someone who steers the Jaegers
Jaeger - the giant machines that humans use to fight Kaiju  
Kaiju - the big-ass monsters  
Drifting/drift-compatibility - to pilot a Jaeger, two people need to have drift-compatibility, aka they need to be able to synchronise their minds to one another.

(i’ve also taken a liiiittle bit of freedom with the whole pacific rim universe and terminology and stuff, but i hope it’s not too glaring or, uh, out of character~~)

BUCKLE UP FOR THE ANGST, Y’ALL, THIS IS GONNA BE PAINFUL!!

See the end of the work for more notes.

The streets of Busan are empty.

The remains of abandoned cars take up the roads, trash and debris filling most of the free space. There are tall buildings and dust and pale sunlight, but none of the life that had filled the harbor city some fifty years ago. It’s an odd sight; having arrived from Daegu—where people still dare walk outside—only that very morning, Yoongi has never seen such desolation.

“Do you think there will ever be people above the ground again?” he asks of the man walking next to him. The words are familiar even to himself, as if he has spoken them many times before.

“Yes,” his companion says with a small smile, “but not in our lifetime. When the monsters are all gone, people will rebuild this city and return to the life they had before.”

Yoongi considers that and frowns behind his mask. “I wish I could see it,” he mutters. After all, he’s here to make sure that future does happen. He should be able to see it. It only makes sense.

The man shakes his head with a chuckle and looks up towards the sky, squinting at the sun peeking through the ever-present haze of dust and dirt in the air. “So do I,” he admits. “This city feels wrong to be so empty. As if only ghosts remain to dwell in these streets.”

Yoongi scoffs and tries to speak some kind of joke about his companion’s superstitious words, but the jest stays in his mind as if chained there. Instead, he only hums and throws a nervous look around himself, his gaze catching unnatural shadows in the sunstruck pollution. He eyes the indentations and cracks and claw marks in the street, and wonders if there really are ghosts trapped within them all.
His apprehension must be obvious, for the man smiles at him, albeit tightly. “You sure you’re ready for this?” he asks and reaches over to pat Yoongi’s shoulder. The touch is oddly weightless. “I can always take you back to Daegu. There’s no shame in turning back.”

Yoongi shakes his head, without really wanting to. “I won’t go back,” he says, when all he wants to do is run as far away as he can, as fast as he can. “I’m ready, hyung.”

The unintended determination in his voice makes the man’s smile grow wider and his tension fade, oblivious to the chaos roaring in Yoongi’s chest. “Then let’s get going,” he says, much too cheerfully given where they’re going, and turns away.

As soon as he does, darkness floods Yoongi’s vision and blinds him, the pale sun’s rays blocked out by the blackness that surrounds him. With a rush of panic, he reaches out for his companion, lips parted around a mute cry of their name, but the man can’t hear him anymore. He only keeps walking, straying further and further away from Yoongi, deaf to his cries and blind to his frantic attempts at freeing himself, clawing against the darkness and reaching out for him so he can—

Yoongi wakes with a gasp, jolting upright in his bed.

He’s out of breath and cold with sweat, hair plastered to his temples. He stares at the wall opposite of his bunk, eyes flickering wildly across the plain surface in a search for something familiar to help bring him out of his state. He draws sharp lungfuls of air while his heart does his best to pound its way right out of his chest, air hissing between gritted teeth.

His eyes prickle, and he grits out a frustrated curse and rubs at them, forcing his tears away before they can begin to fall.

It takes him several long minutes before he can finally calm himself down, his heart steadily returning to its regular pace. He shudders where he sits in his bed, his blanket having slid off his body and to the floor. The air in the room feels cold and damp against his feverish skin, and while he’d want nothing more than to bury himself back in his bunk and shut out the rest of the world, he knows it’s not a luxury he can indulge in.

He throws a glance at the clock on the wall and sighs at the realisation he still has two hours left before breakfast is served in the mess hall. After a few more moments of just sitting in his bed, he rubs at his face and stands from his bed, crossing his quarters to the small, adjoining bathroom and turning on the shower.
With a slight tremble to his legs, Yoongi sits down on the floor under the cascade of the shower, holding his breath while the warm spray of water hits his face and washes away the sweat lingering from his dream. “Calm down,” he tells himself, but the words only serve an opposite effect, bringing about a wave of nausea to his stomach. “It was just a dream. ‘S not real.”

It’s only half-true; what glimpses he can remember from the dream are all part of a memory, one he really wishes he could go without. Regret, the on-site psychiatrist had declared as the cause when Yoongi had finally, after months and months of sessions, let slip what plagued him every night. Regret, and guilt.

The dreams come far more rarely now, perhaps once every month, and it’s not as if it is a particularly frightening one. It’s hardly the stuff of nightmares, but every memory of the man he’d walked with has the strength to render Yoongi a complete mess whenever he does have to relive them. That’s why there are no pictures of him on the walls or on his desk, every image stowed away deep into his bottom drawer, where he can’t risk seeing the smiling face that still haunts him, four years later.

“Fuck,” Yoongi hisses and presses the heels of his hands against his eyes, an ache settling into the base of his skull. “Fucking fuck.”

He sits like that for what’s probably twenty minutes, using far more hot water than he should. When he finally feels like he can stand upright without doubling over and vomiting, he scrubs at his skin until it’s pink and raw, washing away as much of the dream’s remnants as he can. It lingers like a physical touch and he shoves it away as best he can, drying himself with a towel with more force than necessary.

His head is pounding when he sits back down on his bunk, dressed in plain robes and slippers. There’s no point in donning his uniform now, since he still has to wait at least an hour and a half before the cooks open the mess hall for breakfast. Yoongi could go back to sleep, exhaustion wearing down his shoulders, but he persists through it and just stares dead ahead at the wall.

He won’t go back to sleep. Not when the memories are still lingering so close to the surface.

After twenty minutes of unmoving silence, he sighs and rises from his seat, steering his steps for the door of his quarters. He needs something for his headache and the sickbay never closes, so he steps out into the quiet hallways of the Busan Shatterdome base.

The base is near silent so early in the morning, with most of its occupants resting in the momentary
absence of a Kaiju attack. There had been one a couple of days ago, and the racket caused by the preparations and the battle itself had been so loud the entire base had trembled, quaking where it resided deep underground. No one had slept that night, not even when the Jaeger pilots had returned alive; celebrations had followed then, as if the small victory had ended the war between monsters and men.

Yoongi had celebrated in his own way, by downing six shots of soju and going to bed with his head pounding, much like it does now.

He passes a few cadets on patrol on his way to the sickbay, grunting an incoherent reply to the formal salute they show as soon as they spot him. They look every bit as tired as he feels, and he dimly wonders if they’re on night shift as punishment for something; Jin has a habit of inflicting consecutive night duties on the rookies who stray out of line.

“I’m not letting any wild cards near the Jaegers,” he tends to say at least twice a week. “Since I can’t put them in line with a stick like you do, Yoongi, I make them regret their dumb shit in other ways.”

Technically, he doesn’t have the authority to assign night shifts to anybody, but so far, no one has ever had the guts to refuse a command from Kim Seokjin, the head of J-Tech. Yoongi figures he’ll be next in line for the position of marshal when the current acting one retires; with no one ever questioning or doubting his decisions—for good reason—the role would suit him perfectly.

The sickbay is unusually quiet when he arrives. The pilots who had gone out to repel the most recent attack hadn’t sustained any lasting injuries—one concussion, a few sprained limbs, and a bruised rib—so the only people in the bay are the doctors and two long-residing patients. Yoongi is thankful for that; he’s hardly keen on having an audience when trying to get some pain meds without having to explain why he needs them.

“Morning, officer Min,” the main surgeon, Sejin, says when he notices him, beckoning him towards his station. “You’re up early. Trouble sleeping?”

“Something like that,” Yoongi says with an attempt at a nonchalant shrug. He avoids Sejin’s gaze, knowing full well that the surgeon is probably aware of why he’s had bad dreams; Sejin has been on the site for far longer than Yoongi, and he was the one to assign him a psychiatrist after the incident, after all. “My head’s hurting like a bitch.”

“Ah.” The surgeon eyes him for a long while before turning away with a sigh. “Well, all I can give you is standard aspirin,” he says and rummages through his drawers. “Although I recommend you
don’t take them until you’ve gotten something to eat. Pills are hard on an empty stomach.”

“‘S an hour until breakfast,” Yoongi mutters in an almost petulant manner, to which the surgeon chuckles.

“Never the one for patience, are you?” he muses and reaches down into another drawer to pull out some kind of protein bar. “Eat this first. I’ll give you your dosage when you’re done.”

Yoongi presses his lips together, having half a mind to tell Sejin he’s a grown-ass man who doesn’t need babysitting. He doesn’t, however, knowing the surgeon would probably make him eat two bars instead of one as ‘punishment’. So he takes a seat next to Sejin’s station and protein bar as quickly as he can, even though it tastes like cardboard and feels grossly thick in his throat.

“Good,” the surgeon says once he’s done, chuckling again at the grimace Yoongi offers in return. “Alright, two pills because they’re weak as all hell, but they should do the job just fine.”

Foregoing water or anything else to drink, Yoongi snaps the medicine out of their plastic containers and pops them into his mouth, tilting his head back to swallow. They taste like shit, but at least he knows they’ll work to make the pounding ache in his skull stop. “Thank you,” he says and moves to stand, even though he has no desire to go back to his quarters and spend an hour staring at the wall, plagued by the remnants of his dreams.

His reluctance must be obvious, for Sejin carefully places a hand on his shoulder. “You can stay here until breakfast,” he says with a small smile. “If you want something to distract you. There aren’t many people here at the moment, and I promise I won’t ask any questions.”

Grateful for the offer, Yoongi nods and sits back down, trying and failing to return the surgeon’s smile. “Thank you,” he says quietly, to which Sejin only nods before returning to his paperwork.

Yoongi settles comfortably into his seat and looks around in the calm sickbay. Contrary to what one might expect, he’s fairly at peace in the large room; when there aren’t many patients around, the noises and scents bear a soothing familiarity, one he links to all the times he spent resting in this very room between the countless missions he had gone on in his youth.

One would think the incident might’ve changed the emotions he related to the sickbay, but then again, the man in his dreams had never made it so far, drowning in a pool of his own blood before ever making it anywhere near medical assistance.
With a shudder, Yoongi pushes his dark thoughts away and settles for staring at whatever papers pass Sejin’s hands, only for the sake of watching the movements, finding comfort in their repetitiveness. They distract him, settles his mind into a white-noise flow of pencils scraping over paper, paper being turned over and stacked before a new arc is grabbed and the process repeats itself.

Before long, his exhaustion returns, and he doesn’t put up a fight this time, closing his eyes before he can even realise he’s falling asleep.

His rest is dreamless and peaceful, and Sejin lets him sleep far past the first call of breakfast. When Yoongi does wake up, half an hour after breakfast began, the surgeon offers him an extremely half-hearted apology and waves him away with a contented smile.

Yoongi can hardly be too upset as he leaves the sickbay. At least he doesn’t feel like a walking corpse anymore.

“You look like shit,” is the first thing Yoongi hears when he walks into the mess hall. Had he not agreed with the likely truth of the statement, he probably would’ve snapped at the one who’d voiced it or even elbowed him in the ribs in a not-so-gentle manner. But he does agree—the circles under his eyes are dark on an average day, so now, even with this hour of sleep in the sickbay, he must look like he’d pulled an all-nighter.

Thus he only shrugs, huffing out, “Good morning to you too, Joonie,” and goes to take his place in line for breakfast.

His friend is quick to follow, a crease settling into his brow. “Yoongi-hyung, are you—”

“’M fine,” he says in a tone that makes it clear just how not fine he really is. He grabs a tray and plate, and waits for the line to move. “’S fine, just… bad dreams.”

Of course, Namjoon knows what bad dreams really means, but he also has the sense to not prod too hard. Or, at least, he usually has the sense to not prod too hard. “Which one?” he asks carefully.

Kim Namjoon is the only man in the entire Shatterdome base who knows the context of each and
every one of Yoongi’s dreams, having been the one to help him through the heavy anxiety attacks he had suffered during the year following the incident. It had been far from voluntary at first, what with Yoongi insisting on pushing all his anguish and trauma into a tiny box at the far back of his mind, but upon his worst fit of panic, the words had spilled from his lips much in the same manner as the bile in his throat, and Namjoon had listened to it all.

Yoongi owes a whole lot to his best friend, a debt he’s fairly certain he’ll never be able to repay. He had said as much, once, to which Namjoon had looked like he’d wanted to slap him. “You deserve peace, hyung,” he had said sternly, “and if the world won’t give it to you, I will. You don’t owe me shit for giving you what you deserve.”

Yoongi isn’t a man to cry often, but he had cried then, and his existence had seemed just a bit more bearable afterwards.

Which is why he doesn’t tell his friend to just drop the matter now; he knows Namjoon wants to help, and Yoongi is long past pretending like he doesn’t need it. He also has a feeling if he did tell his friend to drop it, the request would go completely unheeded. “My first day here,” he mutters with some reluctance, eyeing the others standing in line to ensure they’re not listening. “The one where Giseong and I just…walk.”

“Ah.” Namjoon is quiet for a moment. “Do you wanna talk about it?”

“No.”

“You sure?”

“Yes.” Yoongi hesitates. “No,” he says, only to change his mind again. “Yes.”

Namjoon doesn’t let his reluctance deter him, although he does speak with more care than before, his tone offering Yoongi an out should he want it. “You reckon there’s anything specific that brought it on?” he asks when it’s almost their turn to get their portion of tasteless porridge. “Anything stressing you out? More than usual, I mean.”

“No,” Yoongi says and leaves it at that while one of the cooks fills up his plate, far from eager to have anyone overhear. Namjoon doesn’t question his silence, at least not until they take their seat at one of the officers’ table, the one reserved for the base trainers. “They come and go a few times every month,” Yoongi mutters. “Like they want to make sure I don’t forget. ‘S not like I can help it.”
Namjoon hums at that and digs into his breakfast, chewing thoughtfully. “I figured it’d be stress,” he says in an almost casual manner, as if he had expected this to happen. “Your dreams tend to become more frequent whenever there’s something making you nervous.”

“Nervous,” Yoongi echoes, squinting at his friend in suspicion. There’s a subtle eagerness about him, in the way he sits unusually straight, his uniform pristine and likely freshly washed. “Why would I be nervous?”

Namjoon pauses his eating and looks at him for a long moment before heaving a deep, long-suffering sigh. “You completely forgot, didn’t you?” he asks and makes a show of rubbing at the skin between his eyes. “Oh, the marshal would eat you alive if he knew…”

“Stop acting so dramatic,” Yoongi scoffs and waves his spoon at his friend. “What did I forget?”

The look Namjoon gives him is so unimpressed, it’s borderline disappointed. “The new cadets are arriving in a few hours,” he says.

It takes Yoongi a moment for the words to sink in, and the moment they do, he drops his spoon and buries his face in his hands to muffle the outdrawn groan that spills from his lips. “Shit,” he grousches and rubs at his face, considering for a moment to just drown himself in his porridge. “Shit, that’s today…”

“I should be surprised that Min Yoongi, Kwoon Fightmaster and chief trainer of the Jaeger Academy forgot something like this, but,” Namjoon emits an amused scoff, “I’m not. At all.” He grins, reveling in Yoongi’s added misery. “You’re lucky Hoseok’s sleeping in,” he says. “He’d be over the moon with smugness to get to listen to you bitch and moan about having to play tour guide for today.”

“You’re plenty smug on your own, jackass,” Yoongi retorts, his musings going from drowning himself in his porridge to drowning Namjoon in the same porridge. “Can you cover for me? I don’t have energy to deal with new trainees today. You’re a trainer as well, what’s it matter who does it?”

“I’m an instructor,” Namjoon corrects him primly, as if there’s any actual difference in their roles. “All I can do is dazzle them with lessons on what to do inside the Conn-Pod once they’re hooked up to their Jaeger. And,” he adds before Yoongi can raise his voice to protest, “before you even think of asking Hoseok, I can already tell you that no, an Assault Specialist won’t be running any introductions to newbies, since the higher-ups are very keen on not having the tour end with someone blasting off an arm.”
“Hoseok wouldn’t let that happen,” Yoongi huffs, albeit with some hesitance; the Jaeger Assault Specialist is wide-known for his Learn-By-Doing mentality, which includes putting a wide array of weapons to the test before actually learning their base functions.

Yoongi presses his lips into a thin line. “What about—”

“Seokjin?” Namjoon has the audacity to laugh. “You’ll have better luck convincing a Kaiju to run the training program for you,” he says and stuffs his mouth with another bite of porridge. “You should eat up, hyung. You’ll need all the strength you can get for today.”

“Fuck,” Yoongi hisses, cursing his sorry fate. “Fuck, I’ll have to show them the entire base.”

“Yup,” Namjoon says cheerfully. “And you’ll have to answer alllll their questions and show them alllll the facilities and explain alllll their duties and alllll the rules.” He snorts, reveling in Yoongi’s misery. “Maybe one of them will ask you how the showers work again. If they do, I hope they won’t accidentally drop their towel like the last one did.” He pauses for a moment. “Although, you know, I’m still convinced it wasn’t actually an accident.”

The groan Yoongi emits teeters on the edge of a whine, and he wonders if drowning in porridge would really be such a horrible fate compared to what he’s facing later that day. “Shoot me,” he mutters when Hoseok comes bursting into the mess hall, grinning from ear to ear as he shrieks about the newbies having began their trek to the base. “Shoot me now.”

“Yoon-Yoon,” Hoseok crows and all but flings himself into the seat next to Yoongi before throwing an arm over his shoulder. “Today is finally the day! Today, we’ll get a group of new, hopefully entertaining little baby chicks to nurture into adulthood like the proud mother hens we are!”

Yoongi has no idea what to say to that, far from willing to actually picture the image Hoseok suggested, so he just grunts and shrugs in an attempt to get the assault specialist to slip off him. “You’re heavy,” he says, but, unsurprisingly, his complaint falls on deaf ears.

“I can’t wait to have them in my class,” Hoseok says, barely managing to sit still in his excitement. “The last round of cadets are already settled in their lives here. They’re not dazzled by my weapons anymore, they think it’s all boring and same-old same-old. Even heard someone complain about how boring the old Jaegers are.” He grins and jostles Yoongi in his grip. “Jin-hyung overheard him and set him up on night duty for the following week.”
Ah, Yoongi thinks and cracks the first genuine smile of the day, although it’s more of a sly smirk at having been right about the J-Tech head’s petty vengeance.

“Nine of the rookies are coming all the way from Seoul,” Hoseok continues without pause, eager to unload as much of what he’s heard before breakfast ends. “Four from Daegu, one from the countryside outside Gimhae, and one from around here. Northern Busan, I think.”

“Really?” Namjoon hums in wonder at that, brows arching. “That’s rare,” he says and purses his lips in thought. “The people still dwelling within the city tend to stay far away from everything Kaiju-related, since they’ve grown up fearing an attack every day of their lives. Most of them aren’t very eager to,” he gestures vaguely and nearly knocks over his cup, “charge headfirst into battle with those monsters.”

“If he even gets far enough to have the chance,” Yoongi mutters and finally starts poking at his breakfast, resigning himself to his fate as Hoseok’s armrest. “Only one in a hundred cadets actually pass the training to become rangers, and fewer still find someone they’re drift-compatible with. These newbies are more likely to become foot soldiers, scientists, or pilots for the Jumphawks.”

“Ever the optimist,” Hoseok says in a voice laden with irony and pushes a finger against Yoongi’s cheek. “I hope this batch of fresh cookies will finally loosen up your stubborn ass.”

“Could you please think before you speak?” Namjoon asks loudly while Yoongi merely grimaces at the disgusting imagery the assault specialist just shoved into his head. “What the hell, there are so many things wrong with that sentence, I don’t even know where to begin.”

“And don’t call them fresh cookies;” Yoongi tacks on for good measure and finally manages to detach himself from his friend. “Makes them sound like, I dunno, infants.”

“Everyone is an infant before they’ve lived the war,” Hoseok says with feigned solemnness before standing, dragging his feet towards the food line, where the cooks are calling out for the stragglers to hurry their asses up. “You were a baby before your big brother brought you here as well, Yoon-Yoon.”

Yoongi winces as if he’d been slapped.

Hoseok is too far away to notice, but Namjoon quickly reaches over and grabs hold of his hand,
pressing his thumb into his palm. “Deep breaths, Yoongi,” he says, leaning forward to shield Yoongi from whatever curious eyes might look their way. “Hoseok doesn’t know about the dream. He didn’t mean anything bad by what he said.”

“I know,” Yoongi manages through gritted teeth, his jaw clenched so tight his bones ache. The memories from his dream come rushing back, gnawing at the corners of his mind like rodents and struggling to push images of Min Giseong out of the little box where Yoongi had locked them. “I know, fuck, but it’s—” He draws a quivering lungful of air. “It’s really fucking bad timing.”

“Yeah, it is,” Namjoon agrees and keeps rubbing at the palm of his hand, drawing soothing circles into his skin. “You want me to talk to him about it, or—”

“No,” Yoongi says immediately and closes his eyes, forcing himself to take another deep breath. “No, ‘s fine, he didn’t mean to.” The blood rushing in his ears steadily subsides, the memories retreating back into the box where they belong. “’S not his fault. It was four years ago, he… people should be able to talk about him without me losing my shit.”

“Don’t say that,” Namjoon chides gently. “It doesn’t matter how long it’s been, no one can fault you for being like this.” When Yoongi only emits a half-hearted scoff, his friend guides his hand to his cup of water. “Drink. It’ll help you calm down. You want me to get you a new spoon?”

Yoongi looks down and realises he had dropped the plastic cutlery into his bowl of porridge, its grip submerged in the thick soup. He sighs and shakes his head, and downs the entire cup of water in one go, the chill of it bringing some clarity back to his mind. “It’s gonna be a long day,” he mutters when he sets the cup down again, trying his best to ignore the way his hand trembles.

It’s going to be a really fucking long day.

The first time Yoongi sees Park Jimin, he knows they’re never going to see eye to eye.

The kid stands in line with the other newcomers, looking like he can’t wait to initiate the training that could one day turn them into full-fledged pilots. While the others appear stoic, hardened, tense in their posture, he all but exudes anticipation. He’s shorter than all the others, his shoulders and waist far more narrow, but he doesn’t seem intimidated in the least.
The other cadets look grim and solemn, or even nervous, much like newbies usually do, but this kid…

He’s smiling.

He looks like he can barely contain himself, his lower lip pulled between his teeth to keep his smile from growing too wide. In fact, there’s something almost cocky about the way he brushes his blonde hair out of his face, bouncing a bit on the balls of his feet, and he radiates all the hope and naïve determination of someone who thinks they’re going to save the world and end the war between humans and Kaijus once and for all.

Three weeks, Yoongi thinks and scoffs to himself as he observes the newcomers through the one-sided window next to the training room. He’ll be done and out within three weeks.

The clock on the wall shows four minutes past midday, which means Yoongi is already late, but it doesn’t stop him from dragging his feet, dreading the task of having to introduce the entire Shatterdome base to these rookies. He knows he should be more enthused as part of the leadership of the Jaeger Academy, but today, he just can’t bring himself to be anything but on edge.

Finally, when he can’t stall any longer, he heaves a deep sigh and walks out of the observation room.

If possible, the cadets’ tension grows further still as soon as Yoongi opens the door. They straighten their posture as best they can, looking almost like they’re trying to appear taller than they are, and as Yoongi walks up to stand in front of their lineup, none of them watch his approach, the lot of them staring dead ahead.

Except, of course, the blonde boy.

“Welcome to the Busan Shatterdome Base,” Yoongi says, making a valiant effort to not let his ire seep into his professional facade. “My name is Min Yoongi. I’m the head of the Jaeger Academy, as well as Kwoon Fightmaster. I’ll be the one to train you in close combat in this room and prepare you for the physical challenges you will face when you become rangers. If, of course,” he adds for good measure, “you ever make it so far.”

One of the cadets quirks a brow at his words, the movement small and fleeting, but clear as day to Yoongi’s sharp gaze. He can practically read the rookie’s thoughts; Yoongi is shorter than him and far less bulky, which, to the newbie, must mean he’s hardly Fightmaster material.
Yoongi briefly entertains the thought of what the marshal would say if he broke a cadet’s nose on the first day.

“In a moment, I’ll show you around the base and introduce you to the rest of your instructors,” he says and looks at them all in turn, assessing. The twinge of irritation in his chest flares when his gaze meets the blonde boy’s; unlike the others, the cadet looks back at him without hesitation, even going so far as to nod his head in greeting.

The small gesture throws Yoongi off for a second or two, because what future soldier would be so bold as to treat their superior officer in such a casual manner, as if they’re acquaintances or even friends? “First, introduce yourselves,” he says when he manages to break himself out of his momentary daze. “Most of you are going to spend the following twenty four weeks with one another, so state your names and hometown.”

He nods at the cadet standing furthest to his left. The man takes a step forward, still only staring straight ahead. “Kang Chodan,” he says, far louder than necessary. “Seoul, Gangnam District.”

When he steps back, the woman at his side follows his lead and steps out of line to introduce herself. “Lee Danbi,” she says with obvious tension to her voice. “Seodaemun District, Seoul.”

By the fourth cadet, Yoongi loses track of their names, distracted by the fact that the blonde boy just can’t seem to stand still. He leans out to look at every rookie who introduces himself, still smiling, and when he notices Yoongi’s gaze on him, he only grins and straightens up again.

“Kim Taehyung,” the cadet two spaces down from the blonde boy says when his turn comes. “Daegu, Seo District.”

Yoongi quirks a brow in surprise at the mention of his own home district. It’s not like Daegu is a very big city to begin with, but still, he hadn’t expected one of the cadets to come from his childhood home.

When the blonde boy’s turn finally comes, he takes a smooth step forward, hands clasped loosely behind his back. “Park Jimin,” he says brightly and looks right at Yoongi. “I’m from around here. Northern Busan, Geumjeong District.”

His words prompt the other cadets to break out of their tension, if only just by turning their heads or
widening their eyes. Had Yoongi not heard about the newbie’s origin beforehand, he would probably have reacted the same way; it really is a rare thing, to leave the safety of your bunker to join the war when you’ve lived in terror of them your whole life.

But Yoongi did hear about it beforehand, and so Park Jimin’s sunny attitude only serves to grate at his nerves. “Back in line,” he says, far more harshly than necessary. Or perhaps not harshly enough; while the other cadets snap back into their previous tension, the blonde boy only grins and does as told, easily falling back in line with the others.

Yoongi glares at him for a moment longer, almost missing the next cadet’s introduction of ”Son Byulhee, Seoul, Gangnam District.” Jimin doesn’t seem to care, or even notice Yoongi’s gaze, turning his full attention to his fellow rookie with that same smile that Yoongi really, really wants to wipe off his face.

He doesn’t even know why, but it’s rubbing him the wrong way in every sense.

“J-Jeon Jeongguk,” the last cadet in line finishes with a slight stutter to his voice. He looks younger than the others, with large doe eyes and unruly hair, and although he’s built better than most of them, he appears the most nervous. “From Gimhae.”

Yoongi nods and the cadet looks marginally relieved, as if he’d been worried he could somehow go about his introduction the wrong way and get in trouble. As if Park Jimin didn’t already show a worse example, he thinks with no small amount of pettiness before turning to face the rest of the newbies.

“Everything you will hear today is vital for the sake of your survival and prosperity as cadets in this base,” he says, “so pay attention to what you’re told. For example,” he gestures around the large room in which they’re standing, “this is the Kwoon Combat Room. In here, you will be trained in both fighting and endurance, to ensure that your bodies will be able to handle the strain of piloting a Jaeger.”

The cadets nod and throw cautious looks around, and Yoongi tries his best to ignore the way Jimin looks like he’s about to burst with excitement.

“Your training will be monitored periodically,” he continues and motions towards the line of computers and wires lined up along one of the walls. “We need to make sure your bodies are adapting to the strain in a positive way, so you’ll be hooked up to those for a three-hour test once a week. These tests will also show us those who underperform and are likely to be cut from the academy.”
“What kind of test?”

Goddammit.

The other cadets turn sharply to look at Jimin, the lot of them exuding a sort of panic at their fellow rookie speaking without being prompted.

“What will we do for the three hours?” he asks slowly, as if he believes Yoongi’s silence is a product of not understanding the initial question. “Will it be regular exercise just for the sake of testing endurance and stamina, or will it be like a training session to see how we hold up during our daily routines? Sir,” he adds as an afterthought, his smile turning sheepish.

Yoongi has to take a deep breath to make himself be calm, reminding himself of the fact that there’s nothing wrong with asking questions, that it’s a good thing, really. It’s a good thing. As long as you go about asking it in a respectful manner. “The latter,” he answers curtly. “We have to see how your bodies function when your training is most rigorous, since it’s what comes closest to piloting a Jaeger.”

Jimin emits a thoughtful hum and nods. “Okay,” he says brightly. “Thank you.”

He seems utterly immune to the irritated aura Yoongi is emitting. The other cadets sense it well enough, nervously glancing between the two, looking like they’re waiting for a bomb to go off at any moment.

It takes Yoongi another moment to regain his composure. “The equipment you will use during training is stored in that room,” he says and points towards the iron doors at the far end of the combat hall. “You will fetch them yourselves and clean them yourselves when you’re done using them. Failure to do so will result in penalties.”

The youngest cadet, Jeongguk, looks just shy of terrified at the thought of being punished, eyes wide in fright, and Yoongi has to put quite an amount of effort into stamping down the guilt that rises to his chest. He really is young, he thinks and turns away. Too young.

“Line up and follow me,” he says and walks towards the doors leading out of the combat room. “I’ll show you the rest of the base now.”
Jimin all but skips to the very front of the line, and Yoongi wants to bang his head against the doors.

The first stop after leaving the training hall is the Jaeger Assault Specialist’s room, residing right next to the Kwoon Combat Room. It’s the biggest of all training facilities, its walls lined completely with weapons of various kinds. There are guns and rifles, all unloaded—hopefully—and targets set up for practice at the far end. There are knives, swords, and lances as well, and clubs and maces, just about every weapon one could think of.

There’s also Hoseok, who springs up from his seat as soon as Yoongi pushes the doors open, a brilliant smile on his lips. “Hello, newbies!” he says much too cheerfully and makes his way over, throwing his hands out to the sides as if to embrace the lot of them. “I see you’ve survived the initial grilling by our resident grump.”

“You really must’ve spooked them, huh,” he says and heaves a sigh. “You guys don’t have to be so nervous. Yoongi-hyung won’t bite you outside his training room. He might look like he eats cadets for breakfast, but I swear, he’s really nice once you get past the five foot thick wall of ice he’s encased in.”

Yoongi can’t say what’s more annoying, his friend’s words or the fact that Jimin lights up with the most content smile, as if he’s thinking something along the lines of, “I knew it.”

“You can all introduce yourself when we have our first session,” Hoseok continues without paying him any heed. “The goal of the training you do with me is to teach you how to go about disposing of a Kaiju in the most efficient way possible. We’ll make use of the weapons in this room to practice
aim and skill, as well as technique.”

“How come we’re using weapons like these, though?” Unsurprisingly, the first one to ask a question is once again Jimin. “We won’t be using those guns when piloting Jaegers,” he says and points to a rack of assault rifles. “Jaegers don’t use rifles, right? Sir.” Again, he tacks on the formality as if he’d forgotten he should use it.

“It’s true, you won’t use these specific kind of weapons,” Hoseok agrees, “but you have to get used to the feeling of handling them all the same. You might still use firearms even when piloting a Jaeger. Those guns will be huge, of course, big enough for a war machine, but you’ll still have to know how to hold it.” He gestures around the room. “This goes for all other weapons as well. To be able to use them as a Jaeger, you must first be able to use them as a human.”

“Not to mention not all of you will become rangers,” Yoongi adds, frowning when Jimin turns his way. “Most of you will become foot soldiers, and for that, you’ll need to know how to use every weapon this station has to offer.”

Rather than be discouraged at the implication that he might not become a Jaeger pilot, the cadet emits a thoughtful hum and nods enthusiastically. “That makes sense,” he marvels and looks at the weapons with a new spark to his eyes.

While Yoongi rolls his eyes, Hoseok emits an obnoxiously high-pitched cooing sound. “Aren’t you just the cutest little baby chick?” he gushes, channeling his excitement by none too gently shaking Yoongi by the shoulder. “Hyung, look at him, he’s so precious!”

Yoongi shuts his lips on the statement that a future soldier probably shouldn’t be precious and merely huffs out a quiet scoff at the abashed way the cadet smiles, cheeks turning red at the praise. Instead, Yoongi internally wallows over the fact that Hoseok will probably feed Jimin’s cheeriness the same way gasoline feeds a flame.

Fantastic.

Yoongi leans against the wall by the doors while Hoseok shows the cadets around the large room, everything from the shooting range to the holographic drawing board through which he’ll be able to show them recordings and logs of Jaeger-to-Kaiju battles. The assault specialist works wonders in coaxing the rookies out of their tension, although it’s quick to return by the time they’re done and it’s time for Yoongi to continue the tour.
“Try not to choke anyone of them before the day’s over, Yoon-Yoon,” Hoseok chimes as they make their way out the doors.

“I make no promises,” Yoongi bites back and feels that flicker of irritation in his chest when Jimin giggles into his hand, a sound that’s nervously mimicked by the cadet from Yoongi’s home district in Daegu, Kim Taehyung.

The boy’s cheerfulness looks to be spreading already, much to Yoongi’s dismay.

The closest facility to their section of the base is the medical bay, so Yoongi leads them there and stresses the importance of remembering their way to it, since they’ll likely be coming here once or twice a week if they’re not careful, to be treated for overwork or muscle cramps. Sejin is not there to go into details on all the things they might want to visit the sickbay for, but Yoongi encourages them to not hesitate if they’re feeling unwell, since they’ll need to be in top shape for their training to be effective.

They stop by the J-Tech lab, where Seokjin refuses to let them enter, claiming he won’t let a pack of untrustworthy younglings into his most sacred space. He blatantly ignores Yoongi’s pointed glare and tells the cadets that once they prove their worth as promising candidates for piloting his Jaegers, then they can ask for entry again.

Yoongi shouldn’t be surprised, really; that was the deal when he first came to the Busan Shatterdome Base as well, even though Jin hadn’t been put in charge yet back then.

He decides it’s all for the best, eventually, since he suspects a certain cadet would probably faint at the sight of any Jaeger-related tech.

Instead, he leads them to the Conn-Pod Control Rooms, where the rookies who show potential will eventually begin going through simulations of Kaiju battles. It consists of two rooms; one is a replica of a real Conn-Pod, a Jaeger cockpit, where cadets will be strapped in as if actually piloting a Jaeger, and one is an observation-/control room, where the instructor, namely Namjoon, will set up and manage the simulations.

“You won’t be working with me for a while still,” he says with a warm smile, “but it’s nice to meet you all the same. My name is Kim Namjoon. When the time comes, I’ll show you the reins of piloting a Jaeger via my simulations. I’m also in charge of coaching those who find drift-compatibility with a partner in actually piloting a Jaeger; if anyone of you make it so far, which I hope you all do, we’ll be spending a whole lot of time together.”
The mere sight of the Conn-Pod replica has Jimin looking like he can barely stand still, bouncing on his feet as if he’s five seconds away from bursting into flames. He stares into the cockpit with eyes wide as saucers, a hushed yet constant string of excited noises spilling past his smiling lips.

There’s not much use in showing the cadets every part of the Conn-Pod Control Rooms, since they won’t be using it for several weeks, so he wraps up their visit quickly enough and leads them out of the room. He notices how Taehyung all but has to drag Jimin out and rolls his eyes, wondering what kind of world the boy has actually come from.

After that, they head over to the K-Science Lab, where all data and samples of Kaijus are handled. Poor Jeongguk gets the fright of his life when he accidentally bumps into a large glass tank, which contains a tiny portion of a Kaiju’s brain, swimming around in a clear blue substance.

The cadets listen intently to one of the scientist explain how they classify a Kaiju’s level of danger by bodily characteristics and behavioral patterns, as well as outwardly signs of intelligence and nature. As if a moth drawn to a flame, Yoongi notices how Jimin’s fingers twitch slightly as he listens, almost as if he wishes he had a pen and paper to write all the information down.

No matter how much the kid rubs Yoongi the wrong way—for reasons he’s still not quite sure of yet—he can’t keep from admitting Jimin is definitely invested in learning. Too invested, he thinks in a fit of petulant pettiness, as if there’s actually such a thing as being too invested in learning about the war between mankind and monsters.

The rest of the tour goes faster than the rest, since the most important sections of the base are the training facilities they’d already seen. He shows them the mess hall and leisure room, and the armory and the hangar where they park the Jumphawks and choppers and combat aircrafts. They pass the elevators that go up to the marshal’s offices and Yoongi tells them they’re not to to access it without direct orders from the marshal himself.

And wherever they go, Jimin always finds more questions to ask.

“When will we begin the Conn-Pod simulations?”

“Will we have a chance to go into the field before completing our training?”

“How soon will we be able to test drift-compatibility?”
“How many hours will we spend with what instructor every day?”

Yoongi has half a mind to turn around and put the kid in a choke-hold. “You will receive your weekly schedules every Sunday evening,” he grits out in reply to Jimin’s latest question.

Having been denied entry to the J-Tech department, the tour is much shorter than Yoongi had thought; what with the technology department hosting not only the massive lab itself, but also the restoration bay and the actual Jaeger hangar. There’s only one area left, and it serves as the perfect conclusion to their short exploration of the base.

“Through there, you’ll find the bunks,” Yoongi says and motions down the hall through a set of heavy doors. “Your personal belongings should’ve been delivered to them and placed on your assigned bed. You’ll be three per room, and there will be no switching. Showers are down the hall, men to the left, women to the right.”

He jerks a thumb towards a large board hanging on the wall right next to the iron doors. “Your training schedule will be updated every Sunday,” he says. “Take care to learn it inside out, and stick to it; the instructors, myself included, don’t tolerate tardiness.”

The underlying threat of punishment has the cadets tensing further still, and Yoongi snorts, waving a hand around. “At ease,” he says, mildly amused at the fact that no one seems to want to be at ease. “Settle in your new rooms now. Supper will be served in the mess hall in roughly an hour, so eat, and go to sleep early. Training begins tomorrow.”

Before he can as much as begin to dismiss them, Jimin pipes up with another question. “We won’t start today?” he asks with obvious disappointment in his voice.

Anyone else would probably have been amused by the cadet’s eagerness to begin the most rigorous training known to mankind, but Yoongi feels a twinge of irritation at the pout the boy pulls. A pout. An actual pout, with pursed lips and puppy eyes and everything.

“No,” Yoongi says and curses himself for the twinge of guilt brought on by denying said puppy eyes. What the hell? “Training sessions run for ten hours, cadet Park, if not longer. It would be useless to start one now, when curfew is in,” he pauses to glance down at his wristwatch, “five and a half hours.”
While the others look slightly daunted at the prospect of a ten-hour training pass, Jimin nods in understanding, although his pout doesn’t falter in the slightest. The sight of it makes Yoongi want to… well, he’s not quite sure what he wants to do, and that makes him more irritated than before. “Dismissed,” he grouches and turns on the heel, leaving the newbies to settle into their bunks.

It’s not until an hour later, at supper, that Yoongi realises he hasn’t thought of his brother even once since starting the tour. It’s a strange realisation; every other time he’d been haunted by his memories, he’d spend the entirety of the day plagued by it. But now… now he’s mostly irritated instead, his frustration born out of some kind of petulant dislike for a particular cadet.

As he watches Jimin wave enthusiastically at him from across the mess hall before taking his seat, Yoongi decides he’s not sure if this is any kind of improvement.

At 5AM the following day, the cadets begin their training.

They stumble into the Kwoon Combat Room at precisely five o’clock in the morning, having been woken by the pre-installed alarm programmed into every bunk. They’ve changed into their training garb, simple dark blue robes and shirts, and some are wearing gloves to protect their skin from whatever exercise they’re about to undergo.

Their first day will be spent under Yoongi’s tutelage, with thirteen hours spent training in the Kwoon Combat Room, plus whatever short break they’ll be taking for lunch. The rookies look well enough prepared; they’ve brought their water bottles and towels, and Yoongi hopes they’ve eaten the nutrient bars left for them in their rooms, or it’s likely they’ll collapse a few hours into the first pass.

“We will begin with thirty minutes of warm-up,” Yoongi says without bothering to wish the lot a good morning. “Today, the focus will be on building endurance. After warming up and a wide variety of exercises meant to build plyometrics—your overall power—we’ll start with kickboxing. Guards for your hands, as well as sacks, can be found in the storage room. Also,” he adds as an afterthought, “if, by chance, the Kaiju alarm goes off during training, don’t panic. Keep up your training until I say otherwise.”

The cadets nod, albeit with some uncertainty, and with a commanding flick of Yoongi’s head, they make their way over to the treadmills to start warming up. Most of them look just as hesitant as before, although more determined now that they’ve been given a direct schedule and orders to follow. They also seem more comfortable around each other already, mumbling quietly amongst themselves.
Unsurprisingly, Park Jimin is every bit as cheerful as before, showing no signs of daunt in the face of the rigorous day he’s about to face. There’s grace to his movements as he trails after the other, speaking a bright, “Good morning,” as he skips past Yoongi.

What the fuck, Yoongi thinks, glaring after him as he goes.

Warming up is easy enough, and Yoongi almost pities the cadets for their confidence when they spread out for the exercises he has in store for them, all unsuspecting of the harsh reality they’re about to face. After all, these routines have been put together by trainers who used to coach champions in various martial arts leagues and fighting sports, and perfected by veteran rangers.

Such as Yoongi himself.

“Alright,” he says and spreads chalk onto his hands. “Let’s begin.”

Two hours pass before they finish their sets, and by that time, each and every cadet is drenched in sweat and panting, looking like they’ve just been through the wringer five times over. Their limbs tremble as they go about stretching in the way Yoongi shows them, legs unsteady like that of newborn foals. When he claps his hands to signal them to hurry up and get ready for the next step, some of them look just about ready to ignore him and deal with the consequences rather than do as commanded.

The training is intentionally harsh, designed to be rigorous enough to crush the cadets until they crumble like a paper doll and have to put themselves together again. It’s meant to exhaust, to strain, to discourage, to tear down, because no matter how hard the trainers push the rookies, it will only ever be a fraction of what they’ll actually experience out in the field.

The program is twenty four weeks long, and a third of the cadets usually crack beyond repair after the first six.

“Fetch a pair of hand guards and a boxing sack from the storage,” Yoongi tells the rookies, lips curling down when Jimin is one of the first out of the cadets to rise. He looks just as exhausted as the rest, cheeks flushed and blonde hair plastered to his sweaty temple, chest rising and falling, but he looks at Yoongi with that flare of determination and does as told, grinning as he goes to fetch his equipment.
It must be a hard thing to imagine, Yoongi muses as the cadets ready themselves for the next step, that training can go on for as long as fourteen hours in one day. They’ve only done three so far, and the lot of them look done already. It makes him snort, and he thinks back to his own first day as a cadet, how utterly ready he’d been to throw in the towel and walk away after the first five hours.

The parts of the training that drags out are the countless new techniques the cadets have to learn. They’re not just building strength and endurance and power, but learning combat styles they’ve never dabbled in before. They have to learn to master each and every one at near impossible speed; while people usually take months, even years, to make their bodies remember the stances and grips and strikes, the newbies at the Shatterdome Base learn them in a matter of weeks.

As soon as Yoongi begins his actual lesson, the cadets who had been surprised yesterday to learn that he, who’s more lean than bulky, is the Kwoon Fightmaster, are quick to have their doubts proven wrong. While Yoongi doesn’t train as much as he did back in his day of ranging, he remains a master of every style of combat he was introduced to as a cadet.

For every demonstration of a move, be it a punch or a kick or whatever, the silent reverence the cadets exude grow stronger still. There is power in every move, enough to have the boxing sack rock violently with the force of it, and the fluid ease with which he shows them how to best perform a series of moves for them to learn.

He makes a valiant effort to ignore the awed gasp Jimin emits when he shows off how to pull off a proper crescent kick.

Halfway into their pass, when the clock strikes noon, Yoongi gives the cadets half an hour to go get something to eat from the mess hall and make their way back for another half hour of stretching before they are to resume their training. The lot of them groan in relief, only to complain amongst each other how the hell they’re going to make it all the way to the mess hall when they can barely stand up as it is.

Yoongi snorts and goes for his bottle of water, which he barely has time to raise to his lips before he’s pulled out of his musings by a far too familiar voice.

“Yoongi-hyung, I was wondering if—”

“I’m not your hyung,” he snaps before Jimin even has the chance to finish his question question and turns around to level the cadet with a glare. “I’m not your hyung or your friend, or any other buddy-buddy individual you’ve clearly mistaken me for. I’m your trainer. You’re a rookie at this base and I’m your superior officer, and you will address me as such. Do I make myself clear, cadet Park?”
He’s probably harsher than needs be, but he stamps down the thought, because even though he can’t for the life of him explain why, the cadet just pricks at his patience as if it’s an exposed nerve.

The room is dead silent in the wake of his outburst, every cadet holding their breath while waiting for Jimin’s reply. Jimin, however, is as far from deterred as he possibly can be; on the contrary, he meets Yoongi’s aggression with fire in his eyes, straightening his posture and looking at him as if he’s just issued a challenge for him to overcome. “Yes, sir,” he says firmly, and if anything, the resolve in his voice is clearer than ever.

Yoongi has half a mind to tell him to wipe the expression off his face, but settles for gritting his teeth and turning away. As soon as he does, however, he swears he hears the cadet murmur, “hyung,” under his breath, but he’s gone before Yoongi can react, slipping out the heavy iron doors to fetch his food.

“Rude little shit,” Yoongi hisses, gripping hard onto the water bottle in his hand. As if the others can sense his anger, they skitter out after Jimin as quickly as their tired legs can carry them, and then Yoongi is left to wallow in his irritation. “This rude little fucker, I—I swear I’m gonna—”

What exactly he’s going to do remains a mystery even to himself, his brain taunting him with images of the boy’s cheery smile. It’s only day two and Park Jimin is already seems all but an expert at crawling under Yoongi’s skin to irritate him, by doing nothing more than just… smiling.

Had Yoongi been a petty man—more petty than he already is—he would probably make some grand promise of pushing the kid to his absolute limits, until he quits or gets himself thrown out. It’s tempting, oh, it’s more tempting than anything Yoongi has ever imagined, but alas, he is a professional before all, and he won’t risk his integrity just for some naïve cadet who’s way in over his head.

But, he thinks to himself as he heads over to the mess hall to get his own lunch, *one can always dream.*

Maybe it’s a product of karma being an absolute and complete bitch, but in a way, Yoongi had almost foreseen the fact that Park Jimin is, undoubtedly, a prodigy.

It’s fitting, really; the only way the boy could’ve survived thus far in life with such a sunny attitude is
if he, by some miracle, is a faster learner than everyone around him. Lo and behold, Jimin is always
the first to master whatever new and complicated move Yoongi shows them, skilled in how to
balance and move his body in the right way to deliver as much power with his strikes as he can.

It probably shouldn’t irritate Yoongi as much as it does, but boy, does it irritate him. Probably
because it’d be so much easier to give in to whatever it is that fuels Yoongi’s dislike for the cadet and
just despise him if he was doing a poor job.

The realisation of Jimin’s talent comes to him on the sixth day of their training, when he not only
perfects the spinning hook kick he’s shown within only a few tries, but also adds it to a short
succession of complicated moves they had practiced over the last few days, with which he nearly
knocks down the boxing sack from its stand.

Every strike is delivered with power and precision, with hardly a centimeter off about the cadet’s
stance.

Jimin releases a quivering exhale when he eases out of his tension, and the smile that graces his lips
is exhilarated to say the least, the adrenaline coursing within him practically oozing from every pore
of his body.

The sight of him sparks something in the far back of Yoongi’s mind that’s definitely not irritation,
and he makes himself look away before it can grow strong enough for him to identify.

For all the natural skill the cadet possesses, it’s not to say he doesn’t work his ass off to perfect every
last move he learns. No matter how naturally the various elements of fighting comes to the boy, he
also puts in just as much effort into his training as every other cadet, if not more. He’s usually the first
one to return from a break to continue on perfecting his moves or the last one to stop when told to.

How Jimin manages to stay as dauntlessly happy is beyond the reaches of what Yoongi can
comprehend. It’s not difficult to realise he works the hardest, yet it’s as if he can’t feel the harsh
effects of what he’s doing. He gets exhausted just like the others, yes, whining as he lays flat on the
floor like a starfish, sweat dripping down his temples, and on some days, at supper, he looks like he’s
about to fall asleep with his face in his food. But no matter how tired he gets, he never fails to show
Yoongi that same determination every time he enters the Kwoon Combat Room.

The same can not be said for several of the other cadets. Kang Chodan, who had looked like one of
the more promising candidates on his first day at the base, begins to show signs of extreme fatigue by
the start of week two. The ache in his muscles doesn’t fade and it affects his overall training, wearing
him down and making him slower, more clumsy than the others.
If he doesn’t improve, Yoongi has a feeling he’ll be cut by the next round of tests.

Only a few of the other cadets are showing similar signs of exhaustion, while on the other hand, cadets such as Jeon Jeongguk have steadily been improving since the first day. The young boy is slowly but surely overcoming his apparent fright of his surroundings, coaxed out of his shell mainly by Jimin and Kim Taehyung, likely an effect of the three of them sharing a room.

The innocent-looking boy is stronger than all the others—Yoongi’s fairly certain the raw power in the kid’s punches could send anyone to the sickbay with a cracked skull—but he hesitates a lot, especially when he’s put in the ring against one of the other cadets.

Kim Taehyung, on the other hand, while hardly above average in Yoongi’s lessons, is apparently a certified genius, at least according to Hoseok. The cadet has an incredible mind for strategy and absorbs all new information like a vacuum, only to mix it all up and shape it into his own ideas of how to battle a Kaiju, which are just crazy enough to sound plausible.

In spite of the obvious standouts amongst the cadets, Yoongi doesn’t favorise any one of them. He grinds them just as hard as he does the rest, only easing up once their bones are about to crack under the pressure. As is commonplace in situations like these, he’s fairly certain half the cadets hate his guts, half-heartedly glaring at him when they think he’s not paying attention. He doesn’t blame them, really; after all, he hated his own trainers when he first started out.

However, while it’s true that Yoongi is a hard-ass, and stubborn, and unyielding, he’s as far from heartless as a trainer can be. He doesn’t baby the cadets, but he takes care of them in his own way. Like when Jeongguk spills his water during training one day, Yoongi directs him to the cupboard of towels and makes sure there’s a full bottle waiting for the cadet when he comes back.

Or when he notices how frustrated Lee Danbi, the only woman out of the cadets, gets whenever she fails to reach the same results as the others, he casually mentions to the cadets that one of the best rangers the Busan Shatterdome Base has ever seen was Choi Chaerim, a woman who came to them younger than the other cadets and far more inexperienced in combat, and rose to become the best with nothing but hard work.

Lee Danbi becomes far more confident after that, facing every challenge with determination rather than doubt.

Then there are the moments in which Yoongi, much to his own exasperation, feels compelled to help
Jimin get a particularly difficult judo move right by slowly guiding the movement of his body until it flows right. Whenever he does, his assistance places him within the range of the cadet’s personal space, and up close like this, Yoongi can see more things about Park Jimin that he finds inexplicably irritating. Like how soft and round his cheeks are or how plush his lips look, or just how intense the goddamned look in his eyes is as he follows Yoongi’s touch.

Yoongi wishes he wouldn’t care. He wishes he could just leave Jimin to do whatever the hell he wants, but he can’t. Not when the cadet is trying so hard. No matter how naïve he is or how much he irritates Yoongi, he can’t just bring himself to turn a blind eye when he catches something the boy could do better still.

He also wishes Jimin wouldn’t be so adamant about showing his appreciation, as if he feels it necessary to repay Yoongi whenever he does take the time to show him the ropes on something difficult. “Here, hyung,” he’ll say when returning from lunch, bringing him something small from the kitchen—which Yoongi isn’t sure how he got access to—like a biscuit or even a piece of fruit or juice.

Every time, Yoongi will tell him to stop calling him hyung, and every time, Jimin will say, “Yes, sir,” only to do it all over again the next day.

And every time, Yoongi will protest and refuse the cadet’s gift, yet somehow, he ends up eating it either way, thoroughly clueless as to how Jimin actually managed to convince him to accept it. It feels like he’s being strung along by the boy who’s probably a reincarnation of the sun itself or something equally ridiculous, and the thought drives him absolutely insane.

The first time a Kaiju alarm rings through the base and the noise outside the training room escalates as the soldiers and rangers prepare for combat, Jimin does exactly what Yoongi told him not to do. He stops what he’s doing and stares up into the ceiling, as if he could see through it and bear witness to the Jaeger’s deployment. If possible, his aura of resolve grows stronger still, as does Yoongi’s irritation.

It culminates halfway through the second week, when Yoongi is looking for his water bottle at the end of a training pass. He’s sure he placed it by the observation room door earlier, but while his towel still lies there, the bottle is gone. He scowls, wondering if one of the cadets took his bottle by accident, only to have that thought be promptly shoved out of his head when something icy cold is pressed against his neck.

His heart leaps to his throat and he jerks away, a startled exclaim of “What the fuck?” spilling from his lips. His reaction prompts a string of bright giggles, and he turns sharply to come face to face with the bane of his existence.
“Sorry, hyung,” Jimin says, smiling so wide his eyes disappear. “I just noticed your bottle was empty, so I went to fill it for you.”

It takes Yoongi a moment to realise that the cadet is indeed holding out his water bottle, dripping with condensation from being filled with chilled water. Still recovering from his shock, Yoongi takes it without a word, only breaking out of his daze when Jimin’s smile grows wider still, flushed cheeks bunching up to make him look even younger and more innocent than he already does.

“I’ve told you a dozen times already to not call me hyung, cadet Park,” is what Yoongi says instead of actually thanking the boy for his consideration. “How many times will I have to say it before you finally understand?”

If Jimin is at all discouraged by the harshness of his voice, he doesn’t show it. “At least one more time,” he says cheekily and takes a few steps towards the doors. “I’ll see you at supper, sir.”

Yoongi just stares after him, having half a mind to chuck the water bottle at the back of the cadet’s head. He can’t understand what goes through Jimin’s mind, he really can’t. He can’t fathom what makes the boy act the way he does or why he’s so goddamn happy all the time, as if he doesn’t actually realise what it is he’s training to become. As if he doesn’t understand that he’s being groomed for war.

And Yoongi would love to believe the cadet is simply being rude or arrogant, or purposely obnoxious. It would make it so much easier if he was, but no matter how hard he tries, Yoongi can’t convince himself that Jimin’s behavior is born out of ill intentions. His existence alone is a blearing proof of the contrary.

It doesn’t mean Yoongi is any less frustrated by it.

By the time he makes it to supper, he has managed to work himself up in his irritation, his jaw clenched and scowl set deep in his brow as he storms into the mess hall to get food. The other officers throw nervous glances his way and scurry to make room for him in line, and when he sits down at the instructors’ table, he slams his tray down with more force than necessary, huffing as he sits down.

“What’s got your panties in a twist, hyung?” Hoseok asks, arching his brows at the display.
The only reply Yoongi offers him is a glare, so Namjoon takes the liberty to reply on his behalf. “Park Jimin,” he says, sounding far too amused. “One of the new boys have gotten Yoongi-hyung all wound up.”

Yoongi’s glare turns murderous as he directs it at his friend, who doesn’t pay him any heed whatsoever. “Why the fuck would you think that?” he grouches and tears into his food, ripping pieces from his bread as if it was a mortal enemy to disfigure.

“Oh, I dunno,” Namjoon says dryly, “it’s not as if you’ve been complaining about him pretty much every day over the last few weeks.”

Yoongi parts his lips to protest, only to stop when he realises it’s probably true.

Shit.

“How come?” Hoseok asks, obviously surprised. “He’s one of our most promising cadets, isn’t he? I mean, he’s always front and center during my classes, him and Kim Taehyung. They’re always the first to answer and ask questions to make sure they don’t miss anything. And Jimin’s picked up weapons’ mastery quicker than anyone. You should see him with a bow and arrow, hyung, the kid’s a natural.”

“He’s kind, too,” Namjoon says, nodding. “Always ready to help and never causes trouble for anyone.”

Hoseok makes a sound of agreement around his spoonful of food. “He’s a real sweetheart,” he says when he’s swallowed his mouthful. “He helps the other cadets whenever they don’t understand something. Yesterday, he showed that shy kid, Jeongguk, how to properly adjust the scope on his rifle and how to clean out a magazine.” He chuckles fondly, as if he’s speaking of his favorite nephew. “Heard him say how he’s looked forward to coming here to be a pilot his whole life,” he muses. “How he wants to make a difference in the fight against the Kaijus.”

There’s a brief silence, during which Namjoon levels Yoongi with a pointed look that he promptly ignores, knowing every silent implication hidden in his glare. He pretends not to, hoping the others would just stop, but of course, fate is not that kind.

“Wait,” Hoseok says slowly, exasperation seeping into his voice. “Don’t tell me that’s the problem you have with him, hyung.”
“No,” Yoongi grits out, far too quickly for it to actually be believable, even to his own ears. It’s only half a lie, really, since even he himself isn’t quite sure why Park Jimin rubs him the wrong way, but even so, it’s still a lie, and an obvious one at that. “Can you just drop it? I don’t want to think about him more than I already have to.”

Hoseok snorts and shakes his head with a skeptical look on his face. “Fine,” he says. Another short silence settles over the table, and then the assault specialist turns away from Yoongi and faces Namjoon instead. “You really wouldn’t believe he’s actually lived in the city his whole life.”

Yoongi drops his spoon to bury his face in his hands and emit a drawn-out sound of frustration, which his friends ignore with ease.

“You really wouldn’t,” Namjoon says and nods thoughtfully. “He’s so… he’s got the personality of a sheltered boy, someone who’s never had to live through the war against the Kaiju. Someone from the mountains inland. There’s just,” he waves a hand in a vague gesture, “so much spirit in him.”

“Exactly.” Hoseok nods enthusiastically. “I hear Jeongguk was born in Busan as well,” he says, “but his family escaped to the countryside when he was young, so he’s never lived through the war in the same way Jimin has.”

“It’s pretty impressive, don’t you think?” Namjoon muses, drumming his fingers against the table. “Having managed to survive and get by in a harbor city. I wonder if he’s ever seen a Kaiju.”

“He has.”

Yoongi looks up before he can stop himself, abandoning his wallowing in favor of looking at Hoseok, whose smile has grown tight. “He has?” he asks, unaware of just how curious he sounds. “How do you know?”

“I heard him tell Taehyung about it a few days ago,” Hoseok says slowly. “When he was a kid, he and his sister apparently snuck out of his family’s bunker to get a glimpse of what the overworld is like, and they strayed too far south. The district came under attack by a grade 3 Kaiju.”

A drop of something icy cold settles into Yoongi’s chest, and he unwittingly tightens his hold on his cup.
“They were both fine,” the assault specialist adds quickly, as if he can sense Yoongi’s reaction. “The Storm’s Eye Jaeger was dispatched within a matter of minutes and it took down the Kaiju easily enough. No one even knew Jimin and his sister were there to see all of it. Jimin said…” His voice trails off for a moment and he sighs. “He said his sister was traumatised by it. She never dared go near the hatch leading out to the overworld again, so Jimin, even though he was many years younger, decided that he was going to become someone who fights against the Kaiju and stops them from scaring people.”

The tension seeps out of his smile. “He said he wants to be someone who can give people hope,” Hoseok says warmly. “He doesn’t want anyone else to be as scared as his sister was. He wants to protect people, just like someone once protected him and his.”

It takes Yoongi a moment to realise that both Hoseok and Namjoon are looking at him in an annoyingly judgemental way, as if daring him to be hard on the cadet even now. Frowning, he turns away from them both, petulantly rising to their bait. “He’s a naïve kid,” he mutters.

Namjoon snorts at that and returns to his food. “Give it a few more weeks and that naïve kid will probably be able to kick your skinny ass, hyung.”

The accusation pulls a scoff from Yoongi. “I resent that,” he says. “Just because I don’t have the ass and thighs of a dancer doesn’t mean I’m skinny.”

For the third time, there’s a brief silence, during which a highly amused grin settles over Hoseok’s lips. “The ass and thighs of a dancer, huh?” he muses, looking like the cat who caught the canary.

The implication of his tone is hardly subtle, and Yoongi none too gently smacks the back of his head, grimacing. “You can fuck right off with that, dumbass,” he says, perhaps a bit too loudly; one of the officers from the table next to theirs sends a worried look their way.

“Even Jin-hyung loves him, you know,” Namjoon says cheerfully, unbothered by their bickering. “He caught Jimin sneaking around the hangar to get a look at the Jaegers one night, and instead of punishing him, like he normally would, Seokjin actually gave him a tour, claiming he was too adorable to turn away.”

Yoongi blanches at that, a spark of offence flickering in his chest. “What the hell?” he says, almost whining. “I was already a ranger when I came to this base, yet Jin only let me into the hangar after a week, and even then, it was only thanks to—” He cuts himself off from speaking the name that sits at
the very tip of his tongue. “Because of my brother,” he mumbles instead and casts down his gaze to glare into his food.

He hasn’t thought of Giseong in a while. Which is weird, because Giseong is usually all he thinks about, or, more likely, all he struggles to not think about.

Strange.

“All in all,” Namjoon says in a far gentler voice than before, “try not to be too harsh on the kid. He might be a bit over-eager, but his heart’s in the right place, you know? He wants to do what he can in this war, just like the rest of us.”

Yoongi tries to think of some kind of protest, anything that’d excuse him from agreeing, but all that makes it past his lips are a few incoherent words, muttered under his breath. He’s drawing a complete blank, and he knows it’s because Namjoon is indeed right, but he doesn’t quite want to admit it.

Not yet.

So he just presses his lips together and stares down into the table, and gives a reluctant nod.

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Even if Yoongi does have to admit that perhaps Jimin isn’t as bad as he’d initially thought, he staves off the realisation for as long as he can, stubbornly clinging to the thought that the cadet is an arrogant brat even though he’s proving Yoongi wrong every single day of training.

The first crack is dug into Yoongi’s resolve when the fourth week’s tests come around and the cadets are hooked up to the monitors, wireless scanners taped to their temples, neck, chest and back to measure both brain- and muscle activity. The test is the most vigorous so far, with two hours to measure endurance and two hours to test how efficiently the cadets’ bodies function amidst moments of combat.

After the endurance test, the rookies are paired up two and two to go several rounds against one another in every fighting technique they’ve learned so far. It’s hardly a deviation of their everyday routine with Yoongi, and just like after every lesson, the cadets are bruised and exhausted at the end, but satisfied with their results.
Satisfied, however, is a whole understatement for Jimin.

As Yoongi had expected, the blonde boy performs every exercise with practiced expertise, moving his body in a way he knows to stave off his eventual tiredness. Unlike a few of the other cadets, Jimin doesn’t ask for a break between some of the sets, and when his time in the ring comes, he goes into it with excitement rather than apprehension.

He’s paired up with Jeongguk, and together, they go through countless rounds of boxing, taekwondo, judo, krav maga, bushido, and even sumo. The latter has Taehyung grinning as he watches from the bench, and perhaps Yoongi would scold him if Jimin himself hadn’t been so bloody cheerful, giggling through his effort of getting out of Jeongguk’s grip.

Jimin does well, Yoongi can see that before the results even come in; he’s consistent in his movements and works well on the offensive, but also puts his defences to good use whenever he’s in a position of disadvantage. He doesn’t slip up once or get sloppy, even when Jeongguk manages to land a punch right against his cheekbone. It takes him a few moments to recover from his distortion—all the while Jeongguk frets over him, voice high with worry—and when he does recover, he goes right back into it with a smile on his lips.

Dimly, Yoongi wonders how someone so small can fit so much determination into their body.

When the results do come out, Jimin is, unsurprisingly, one of the best, rivaled only by Jeongguk, and instead of the arrogant display Yoongi had expected—albeit halfheartedly—the cadet lights up with the most genuinely joyous smile, as if he’s never been so happy to hear anything in his entire life. He even goes so far as to thank those who ran the tests, bowing for each of them in turn, and then turning to wave enthusiastically at Yoongi.

The sheer reverence he emits is overwhelming, as if he believes it’s all thanks to Yoongi that he managed to do so well. Which, technically, it is, but, as Yoongi finds himself silently nodding in reply to Jimin’s excitement, he can’t help but think the cadet would’ve done well even without him, what with how hard he works every single day.

After that, it becomes harder to keep up the pretense of being annoyed by everything the cadet does. That’s not to say Yoongi likes him or anything, but he finds himself caring more and more about ensuring that Jimin’s training progresses well. Of course, he cares about all the cadets, but he’s fairly certain even the other rookies can tell that Jimin is on a whole other level. Not in terms of talent or skill, but in terms of conviction.
They’re all here to fight the Kaiju, but Jimin… Jimin is here to make a difference, an idea that becomes less and less ridiculous for every passing day.

It’s also becoming harder and harder to keep up a sour facade whenever the cadet does one of his unnecessary acts of kindness, whether it’s towards Yoongi or his fellow rookies. He keeps bringing Yoongi treats from the kitchen and Yoongi accepts them every time, even though he’s still not sure how—although his reluctance decreases for every passing time—but he also helps the other cadets in any way he can, whether it’s to show them how to get a move down just right, or by helping them in cleaning up after training when they’re too tired.

Then there are the moments when even Yoongi himself can’t tell how he feels towards the cadet’s actions. One night, he wakes up drenched in cold sweat after being plagued by another nightmare. It hadn’t been one of his regular ones; this one hadn’t shown a trace of his brother. Instead, he’d been running through a dark and endless hallway, chasing after a voice that grew more distant the closer he thought he came.

There hadn’t been anything inherently frightening about the dream, but, just like with many of the others, it’s still enough to trigger a rush of dread within him and force him out of bed.

After a shower that does little to calm him down, Yoongi decides to walk it off, strolling aimlessly through the empty halls of the Shatterdome Base, trying and failing to shove the faceless anxiety away from his thoughts. He ends up on a bench outside the science labs, his head leaned back against the wall and the heels of his hands pressing against his eyes while he breathes deeply in the way Sejin had taught him years ago.

He has no idea for how long he’s been sitting there when a sudden noise to his left startles him so bad he almost jumps up from his seat. He turns sharply and, to his immense shock, finds Jimin sitting on the other end of the bench, a thin blanket wrapped around his shoulders. The cadet doesn’t look at Yoongi, as if he’s pretending he can’t even tell he’s there, but he places a bottle of water on the bench between them.

A kind of defensive anger flares up in Yoongi’s chest, brought on by the thought that Jimin is pitying him, that he believes Yoongi can’t deal with his own shit. It rises in him like fire, choking him from the inside, his hands clenching tightly at his sides until his knuckles whiten.

Just as quickly as it comes, however, the anger within him deflates, blown out like a candle to leave nothing but stillness behind. It’s an odd sensation; suddenly, Yoongi is tired, not in the same way he had been only minutes prior. He’s not exhausted in the way where his brain feels too wrung out to function or when his body aches with the need yet inability to rest. He’s simply… tired.
He heaves a soft sigh and takes the bottle and uncorks it, drinking deep and welcoming the chill of the water that works wonders to help his body settle. He downs half the bottle’s contents before setting it back down on the bench between them with a glance Jimin’s way. The cadet still doesn’t look at him, only sits there with his knees pulled up under his chin, looking at the wall opposite of them.

Questions such as why the cadet is out of bed this late after curfew or why he has a water bottle, or how he even found Yoongi to begin with all cross Yoongi’s mind, but the longer the silence stretches, the less curious he becomes. The only thing that matters is that he’s there and that for some otherworldly reason, his presence is helping Yoongi calm down.

“Thank you,” Yoongi murmurs after several minutes of silence. When he glances at Jimin again, the cadet is smiling softly, humming a wordless reply as he nods.

He has no idea for how long they sit like that, but when his eyes begin to droop and it becomes a struggle to stay awake, Yoongi heaves another sigh and stands up. “You should go back to sleep, Jimin,” he says, the cadet’s name slipping from his lips without formalities in his tiredness.

Perhaps the call of his name is what makes the boy smile as brightly as he does, finally turning to look at Yoongi as he stands. “So should you, hyung,” he says and pulls the blanket more tightly around himself. Perhaps it’s cheeky of him to counter Yoongi’s remark, but the softness of his voice makes it hard to be upset with.

So Yoongi only snorts and shakes his head, and they go their separate ways without another word.

The next day at training, Jimin doesn’t say a word of what happened. He doesn’t act in any way out of the ordinary, nothing that would alert the others to anything special having happened in the night. For some reason, Yoongi feels like he should thank the cadet once more.

The first time Yoongi finds himself genuinely amused by the cadet is halfway through the third month of their training, when he announces that they will soon start drift sync testing to find those out of the cadets who could potentially pilot a Jaeger together. The news has Jimin so excited he can’t quite control it, literally; he none too gently smacks Taehyung’s arm and does a little dance where he stands, and rather than irritation, the first and only reaction within Yoongi is amusement.

He takes care to hide the small grin that tugs at the corners of his lips, but the task is made harder by the sunshine-bright smile Jimin sends his way.
Only seven out of the original thirteen cadets remain now, so when they do begin their testing, they’ll be paired up with cadets who have been at the base longer yet haven’t been successful in finding someone with whom they’re drift-compatible. As soon as they do find one, they’ll begin running simulations with Namjoon, and, eventually, they’ll start logging time in an actual Jaeger.

The search for drift-compatible cadets won’t begin until after the twelfth week’s tests, at which point their physical training should have passed its most important parts and the cadets will have learned enough to start the next steps of their journey to become rangers.

The closer they come to their twelfth week’s test, the more excited Jimin seems to become. If possible, he trains harder than before, he pushes himself further than any of the others, to the point it’s almost alarming. It probably would be alarming, too, if not for the fact that he never shows any signs of fatigue. Still, as Yoongi follows his burst of efficiency, he can’t help the concern gnawing at the back of his mind, one that tells him it might all be a brave front.

Which is why, one day, he pulls Taehyung aside to ask how Jimin is doing after training and in the mornings, if he’s actually holding up with his performance as well as he seems to be doing.

The cadet blinks owlishly at him, surprised by his concern. “Jimin’s perfectly fine, sir,” he says slowly, eyes flickering over Yoongi’s face as if he’s trying to figure out why he’s asking. “He eats well and sleeps well, and I don’t think I’ve ever seen him look like this,” he gestures around the room, “is too much for him. But,” he adds, and Yoongi’s face must betray some semblance of worry, for Taehyung looks mildly amused, “if you want to know if his fitness for piloting a Jaeger is still as strong as ever, couldn’t you ask his mandated psych analyst? Every cadet goes through weekly meetings with one, you know.”

It takes Yoongi a moment to realise that the cadet is indeed right; every rookie at the Jaeger Academy is assigned an analyst to help them cope with the psychological strain the training program puts them under. Obviously, the analyst wouldn’t be able to tell Yoongi exactly what is said in their meetings with Jimin, but they could surely tell him if they believe Jimin is actually taking care of himself.

“Oh,” he utters, rather dumbly, and turns away from Taehyung. “Right. Of course, uh… back to training then, cadet Kim.”

The corner of Taehyung’s lips give a twitch, as if he’s trying very hard not to laugh, but he salutes Yoongi all the same and heads back to where he’d been working on his boxing technique before the interruption.

Later, when Yoongi finds a note on his bottle that reads thank you for worrying about me, hyung!! -
PJM, he has half a mind to resign and throw himself into the sea to be fodder for the Kaiju, an idea that is heavily enforced at supper, when Jimin sends a blinding smile his way across the mess hall, which in turn has Namjoon and Hoseok looking far too amused for his liking.

Then, a few days later, something happens that Yoongi hardly even believed to be possible. He’s off duty, the cadets spending the day with Hoseok to learn… whatever it is he’s currently teaching them. Being bored out of his mind with nothing to do, Yoongi goes for a stroll through the base, intent on visiting Namjoon and keeping him company, only to have his attention pulled to the assault specialist’s room as soon as he comes within earshot.

There are voices echoing down the hall, loud and agitated and angry, and so strange it takes Yoongi a moment to even realise what’s going on. He snaps out of it at the same time as a loud crash rises from the room, and with a hissed curse, he hurries over to the door and pulls it open.

“What the hell’s going on here?” he barks as soon as he’s inside, only to have his eyes grow wide at the sight before him.

Hoseok is standing between Jimin, Jeongguk, and Taehyung, and one of the other cadets, Son Byulhee, who’s held back by the arms by Danbi and two others. There are chairs on the floor and one of the desks have been upturned, a half-assembled machine gun lying uselessly by Hoseok’s feet. Byulhee is bleeding from a cut across his nose, his left cheek already beginning to swell, and there are distinct scratches on his jaw, as if someone had clawed at his skin.

What’s perhaps most shocking is the fact that Jimin is fighting against his friends’ grip, lips curled back into a snarl as he tries to pry himself free, clearly with the intent on throwing himself at his fellow cadet. He looks like a completely different person; gone is his cheeriness and his smile, leaving nothing but rage in their wake.

“What the hell,“ Yoongi reiterates loudly and walks into the room, “is going on here?”

With a jerk, Jimin stops struggling, as if only then realising Yoongi’s presence. Wide-eyed, he turns around, and the sight of his split lip and bruised right eye fills Yoongi with anger. At whom, he isn’t quite certain.

“Hyung,” Hoseok says, sounding marginally relieved. He doesn’t move from between the two cadets, however. “Ji—Cadet Park and cadet Son got into an argument, which in turn sparked a fight between them. When cadet Son shoved cadet Park, he,” he glances at Jimin, “struck him over the nose with the machine gun he was halfway through assembling.”
Throughout his explanation, Yoongi keeps his eyes on Jimin, who casts his gaze down onto the floor, stubborn in his avoiding of Yoongi’s eyes.

“I don’t know what started the argument,” Hoseok says and looks between the two cadets. “I was helping Tae—cadet Kim at the time.”

“Well?” Yoongi asks of Byulhee, who only keeps glaring at Jimin. “Care to tell me what you were thinking?” When he doesn’t reply, Yoongi turns to the blonde boy. “What about you, cadet Park? What could possibly make you attack your fellow cadet?”

Even though it probably stings, Jimin presses his lips together and says nothing, refusing to even look up from the floor. His lack of a response fills Yoongi with frustration, and he crosses his arms over his chest and clicks his tongue. “Of all the times to be a stubborn brat,” he bites out.

That has Jimin finally looking up, and the amount of anger and hurt in his glistening eyes is startling. He glares at Yoongi, who’s so surprised by the cadet’s reaction, he can’t do more than dumbly stare back, even when Hoseok sends both Jimin and Byulhee to the sickbay to be treated for their wounds.

“What the fuck?” Yoongi mumbles under his breath as he watches the cadets leave, wondering why on earth he’s feeling guilty for reprimanding Jimin for stepping way out of line.

“I have no idea what happened.” He pries his eyes away from the empty doorway and looks at Hoseok, who’s running a hand through his hair. “Jimin just suddenly started yelling at Byulhee,” he says. “He told him to shut up and stop talking out of his ass—Jimin’s words, not mine—and Byulhee just scoffed and pushed him away when Jimin got up in his face about whatever he’d apparently said. Next thing I know…”

He gestures towards the overturned table and leaves the rest unspoken. “The kid was vicious,” he huffs with a low whistle. “Thought he was gonna claw Byulhee’s eyes out before Jeongguk and Taehyung managed to pry him off.”

Yoongi nods absently, still caught off guard by the whole situation. Fights between cadets are quite rare, since the whole basis of being a ranger and piloting a Jaeger stems from absolute teamwork and trust, but to think Jimin, the living embodiment of sunshine, would be the one to instigate a fight is not something Yoongi would ever even have considered a possibility.
At supper, Namjoon tells him both Jimin and Byulhee were assigned to three days’ night duty as punishment for their quarrel. Contrary to contentment that the cadets are being scolded properly, Yoongi’s first reaction is to worry about how Jimin will handle going sleepless on the side of how harshly he’s pushing himself in preparation for the twelfth test.

His own concern confuses him, since the last thing he should be doing is worrying about someone who clearly stepped out of line and deserves reprimand. “Stop thinking about it,” he mutters to himself hours later, when he’s trying to fall asleep. “‘S what happens to those who break the rules. ‘S his own fault.”

It takes him quite a few repetitions of those words before he finally manages to get some sleep.

Yoongi isn’t sure what he’d expected, but when the cadets filter into the Kwoon Combat Room the following morning, Jimin is smiling like nothing had happened.

Granted, he looks like hell, with a swollen lip and bruised eye and knuckles, and an obvious tiredness to him from lack of sleep, but contrary to Byulhee, who’s in the very same state, if not worse, Jimin is grinning at something Taehyung tells him as they fetch their warm-up supplies from the storage. If not for the bruises to tell the tale, yesterday might as well not have happened.

There is a slight tension to him when his eyes meet Yoongi’s across the room, and it takes him a moment longer than usual, but then he offers him a smile, a bit hesitant and perhaps careful, but it’s a smile all the same.

And it fuels Yoongi’s confusion like no tomorrow.

The contrast of the almost shy smile is so stark compared to his usual one, not to mention the glare with which he had looked at Yoongi only yesterday. It’s like the whole fight never happened, as if Yoongi just dreamed it up, which is probably why he ends up pulling Jimin aside at the end of the day and blurting out, “You smile a lot,” without thinking.

“Oh,” Jimin utters in surprise, throwing a quick glance at the rest of the cadets, all of whom are on their way out of the room, likely heading for the showers or supper. “I know,” he says when he looks back at Yoongi, and there it is again, the heistance to his smile. “Is that a problem?”
Yoongi blinks. Is it a problem? His first thought is that yes, yes it is a problem, considering the severity of what Jimin is training to do. Soldiers don’t smile as much as he does, because they’ve either lived through the hells of war or are about to do so, and once you have, cheeriness is a hard emotion to keep constant.

Yoongi’s second thought is that it’s a big problem because it reminds him of his brother.

His third thought, however, is that it’s not a problem at all, precisely because it reminds him of his brother, which is not necessarily a bad thing. It doesn’t make his chest ache or fill him with the same nausea that would always come when thinking of Giseong. Giseong who would always smile and laugh, no matter how rough things got. Giseong who was always encouraging and inspired others to try their best.

“No,” is what he ends up saying, far more softly than intended. “No, it just… reminds me of someone.” He hesitates, marveling at the momentary stillness in his emotions. “’S not a bad thing.”

His words make Jimin’s smile widen, and for a second or two, Yoongi is content. He’s content with making Jimin smile and he’s content with the fact that maybe there’s no need to be confused about why Jimin is the way he is. Giseong was like that, too. Sometimes, it was hard to see why Giseong smiled or how he managed to stay so positive, but he did. Just like Jimin.

Yes, Min Giseong was always just like that, cheerful and smiling, and strong, and the realisation of it hits Yoongi like a freight train.

Suddenly, his fleeting contentedness is pushed aside in favor of a bubbling panic, memories of his brother bursting out of the little box where he had so tightly locked them away. Giseong’s smile, wide and toothy, Giseong’s carefree laughter, Giseong’s entire existence, the way he put people at ease just with his presence alone, the way he made people feel safe and calm.

Just like Jimin does.

“Hyung?”

Yoongi gives a violent jerk, recoiling from the hand Jimin had extended towards him. Shocked by his reaction, the cadet freezes, his eyes growing wide with alarm as he looks at Yoongi. “Hyung—”
Yoongi shakes his head, lips moving soundlessly around whatever it is he wants to say. He can’t make sense of his thoughts. His chest feels as if its burning, his throat tight and dry, and all at once, he feels as if he’s been submerged in icy water. His breath passes his lips in sharp whistles, every exhale leaving his lungs with less air than he takes in, until his head starts to spin and he staggers against the wall.

He can vaguely hear someone call his name, but his ears won’t work right, as if they’ve been clogged with wet tissues. There’s a brief pain in his knees and he realises he must’ve fallen to the floor, but he can’t make sense of his surroundings. There’s a ringing inside his head, growing louder for every memory of his brother he fails to suppress.

He squeezes his eyes shut, but instead of providing him with an escape, he sees the makings of his nightmares play out like a movie inside of his eyelids. He sees Giseong walking along the abandoned streets of Busan, leading his way through the quiet paleness of the morning of his first day. He sees Giseong take a defensive stance opposite of him, hooked up to the machines that test drift-compatibility and grinning. He sees Giseong striking a ridiculous pose in his Conn-Podd suit as they prepare for their first run as pilots of the enormous Jaeger.

He sees Giseong, lying amidst the remains of their Jaeger—

“Yoongi!”

Yoongi gasps as if he’s been pulled out of water, the cloud of his mind clearing by a fraction as his lungs fill with air. He turns sharply towards the voice, blinking away the blur of his eyes to make sense of what he’s seeing, the furious beat of his heart thundering in his ears. He recognises the man kneeling in front of him, he knows him, but he can’t speak his name, the only thing making its way past his lips being sharp, harsh exhales.

“Yoongi,” Namjoon says again, his voice firm, unyielding. “Yoongi, can you hear me?”

He nods, jerkily, and tries to swallow, but his throat is too tight and throws him into a fit of coughing. “Get him some water from the kitchen,” he thinks he hears Namjoon say, and then there’s a skitter of frantic footsteps before his friend turns to him again. “Come on, hyung, follow my lead and just breathe, okay? In through your nose and out through your mouth. Just focus on breathing.”

It takes more effort than Yoongi could’ve imagined to comply, the entirety of his body quivering like a leaf in a storm. His airways feel like they’ve been blocked, the first few breaths stacking in his throat and refusing to reach all the way down to his lungs, and not until he manages to take a proper breath does the ringing in his ears begin to subside.
“There you go, in and out, just like that,” Namjoon says. He sounds so calm, and Yoongi latches onto it, just like he’s done so many times before, trusting in the stillness of his voice to reflect the stillness of their surroundings. Trusting that there’s nothing to be afraid of. “One deep breath at the time. No rush. Go at your own pace.”

Yoongi nods again, his muscles feeling less stiff, and breathes in until he physically can’t anymore. A groan passes his lips on the exhale and he slumps against the wall, squeezing his eyes shut against the pounding ache in his skull. “F-fuck,” he croaks, his voice coming out hoarse and cracked. “Fuck —”

When Yoongi blindly reaches out towards Namjoon, his friend is quick to settle next to him, pulling him against his side and rubbing circles into his back, all the while hushing him gently. The warmth of his touch is as painful as it is soothing, and Yoongi feels tears burning behind his eyes.

They sit like that for what could easily be an hour, or just a matter of minutes. Yoongi has no idea which one it is, all concept of time eluding him as he slowly but surely calms down from his fit, the pace of his heart slowing and the ringing in his ear fading into a distant buzz. Slowly, he pushes himself upright, groaning at the ache behind his eyes.

Namjoon helps him up until he’s leaning his back against the wall, making sure Yoongi is comfortable before he sinks back into a crouch in front of him, looking worried beyond belief. “What happened?” he asks, this time without the formality of actually giving Yoongi the choice to not say anything. “Hyung, this is the worst one I’ve ever seen you go through. What happened to you?”

Yoongi doesn’t know what to say. He doesn’t know what he can say. He knows what triggered his fit, but the words just won’t rise to his lips. They stack in his throat, where they form a lump that threatens to make him cry all over again.

“Does it have something to do with Jimin?”

A ripple of something dark passes Yoongi’s chest. “Why?” he asks hoarsely and shakes his head. “Why do you know it’s about Jimin? Why do you know that?” He can’t even begin to fathom how his friend would know it’s about the cadet, and half of him doesn’t want to find out.

Namjoon’s words are careful, as if he knows exactly what’s going through Yoongi’s head. “He’s the one that brought me here,” he says slowly. “He came to find me. He was hysterical, looked like he was about to cry when he told me something had happened to you and that he didn’t know what to
He speaks softly, but his words are like knives through Yoongi’s chest. The knowledge that Jimin had been there, that Jimin had seen him like that, it hurts more than he can bear. “Fuck…” he grits out, but it leaves his lips like a whimper.

“Hyung, please,” Namjoon says, sounding equally distressed. “Tell me what’s going on between the two of you.”

“Nothing,” Yoongi says as soon as he regains enough of his composure to speak. The words feel dull on his tongue. “There’s nothing between him and I.”

“There has to be.” There’s a twinge of frustration to Namjoon’s voice. “I’ve never seen you like this, hyung,” he says. “You’ve been so different ever since he got here. First, you were irritated all the time and you wouldn’t stop complaining about him, but then you became more… more at peace, more calm—”

Yoongi squeezes his eyes shut, wishing he could shut the words out along with their truth.

“—you were better than I’ve seen you in a long time, but now—”

“I said there’s nothing between us, Namjoon.” Yoongi’s voice comes out harsh, like the bite of a cornered animal. “I don’t care about him,” he grits out, but the pain of what he says makes his conviction weak, the crack in his facade audible. “I can’t.”

A brief silence follows his words, and Yoongi can see the ache written all over his friend’s face. “Hyung—”

“Fucking hell,” he sighs and runs a hand through his hair before tugging sharply at the sweaty strands. “I don’t. I don’t care. There’s no reason for me to. He-he’s just another cadet. That’s it.” His voice is monotonous even to his own ears. “There’s nothing more to it.”

“Yoongi-hyung.” When he looks up, Namjoon is frowning, creases dug deep into his brow. “You can’t keep doing this to yourself.”
“Doing what?” Yoongi snaps, even though he knows the answer is not one he wants to hear.

“Lying,” Namjoon says, a tad louder than necessary. “Convincing yourself you don’t have emotions. Refusing to listen to your own feelings.”

Yoongi forces out a snort, the sound utterly without glee. “We’re soldiers, Joonie,” he grits out in a valiant attempt at indifference. “Feelings don’t matter here.”

“That’s bullshit and you know it.”

“Namjoon—”

“No, hyung, I’m serious.” Namjoon stands upright and starts pacing, looking more agitated than Yoongi ever remembers seeing him. “You do this all the time,” he says, “and I can’t force you to talk to someone who could actually help you with it, but damn it, hyung, I can’t just watch this, either. I can’t watch you torture yourself over the fact that you might’ve found something to be happy about.”

The thought of Jimin’s shy smile crosses Yoongi’s mind, the memory so distant, as if it had happened weeks and weeks ago. It’s swiftly followed by one of his brother, and Yoongi shakes his head to get rid of both. “I don’t—”

“You do,” Namjoon interrupts before he can even begin to protest. “I still don’t know why you hated him so much when he first came, but the truth is that over the past few weeks, Jimin has made you happier than you’ve been in years.”

Yoongi braces a hand against the wall and pushes himself upright to escape the crippling sensation of being reduced to curling in on himself in his pain. “Listen,” he begins, but again, Namjoon cuts him off.

“No, you listen!” he says loudly and stops his pacing to glare at Yoongi. “Whether you want to admit it or not, that boy makes you happy, and yet you insist on rejecting your own feelings! You suppress them and pretend they’re not real! You refuse to let yourself feel, and it’s tearing you apart!”

“So what?!” Yoongi’s voice explodes out of him, echoing in the empty room. “I can’t get attached to him, Namjoon, you fucking know I can’t!” he shouts, his throat burning. “He’ll go into the field one day! Jimin can’t fucking wait to be a ranger, and what if I get attached to him and the same thing
happens to him that happened to my brother?!

It’s as if his insides have caught on fire, burning him from the inside out. “I can’t do it, I really fucking can’t!” he cries, his voice on the verge of a scream. “I’d rather deny my own feelings, because I can’t go through that again! I can’t care about someone and then watch them drown in a puddle of their own blood!”

It’s all still so vivid inside his head.

He remembers all of it. The Cleaverhead Kaiju they had faced, the way it had split their Jaeger in two, right at the command station. He remembers passing out from the impact of hitting the ground and waking up again only a few minutes later, with backup pulling him out of the destroyed machine. He remembers weakly calling out for his brother, turning his head to find him, to make sure he was okay.

He remembers seeing Giseong, lying amidst the remains of their Jaeger, his drivesuit split open at the chest where the whole of his upper body had been impaled by the Kaiju’s claw. His brother, his whole world, lying in a pool of blood, unseeing eyes staring up into the pale sky.

“I can’t,” he chokes out and squeezes his eyes shut tightly, tearing at his hair in an attempt to expel the memory. “I can’t go through it again, Namjoon, I can’t, I—” He grits his teeth around the sob that rises to his lips, not quite successful in forcing it down. “I can’t.”

The ache in his heart is crippling, as if a crack has dug its way into it and broken it open beyond repair. The thought of Jimin and his smile, of his kindness and conviction; the thought of being near him, of being close with him, holding him in his arms hurts, and the thought of having it all and losing it is unbearable.

“I can’t,” he croaks again. “I don’t want to care about him.”


Yoongi shakes his head, but he can’t find the words to deny it. “Fuck,” he whimpers and sinks back down to the floor, burying his face in his hands.

Namjoon heaves a tired sigh and walks up to him, crouching down so he can place a hand on his
“I know you’ve somehow convinced yourself the best thing for you is to spend the rest of your life plagued by what happened back then,” he says, “but hyung, it’s not true. This shit is scary, I know it is, but it could also be worth it.”

“No,” Yoongi shakes his head again. “He’ll become a ranger,” he says hoarsely. “Of course he will, fuck, he’s the best cadet this base has ever seen. And if I,” he draws a deep, quivering breath, “if I let myself care, then I’ll die a little every time I have to watch him go into the field. Every time he’s called into battle, I’ll be scared shitless it’ll be the last time I see him.” Tears trail silently down his cheeks, hidden from the world by his hands. “A-and maybe one time, it will be the last. I can’t go through that.”

The silence lasts longer this time, with Namjoon giving him time enough to settle down before speaking again. “I get it,” he says when Yoongi finally lowers his hands. “I really do. Even without what happened to Giseong, this would be terrifying for anyone. But hyung,” a small smile graces his lips, “he adores you, you know? He looks at you with so much awe and reverence, it’s overwhelming just to be in its presence sometimes. He asks about you all the time, too, always finds a way to steer the conversation to how amazing he thinks you are.”

He chuckles softly. “I heard him and some other cadets talk about all the famous rangers that have come out of this base over the past few years,” he says, “and Jimin immediately said it had to be because of you. Because you teach people how to save lives, and that, according to him, is just like teaching people how to be heroes.”

Yoongi closes his eyes, fresh tears burning behind his eyes as he thinks of the cadet’s determination to fight in this war, of his unbreakable spirit. Of the smile that’s always, always on his lips.

“You know the fight he had with Son Byulhee yesterday?” Namjoon asks. “You know what started it?”

“No,” Yoongi mumbles, unsure if he wants to know.

“Because they were talking shit about you. I don’t know the details of what they said—cadets always whine about their trainers—but whatever it was, it made Jimin so angry he actually hit the guy without hesitating. Jimin, hyung,” Namjoon stresses, as if Yoongi doesn’t already know how unfathomable the idea alone is. “Jimin, who’s never made trouble for anyone since the first day he got here. Shit, I don’t think I’ve seen him go without a smile for longer than four seconds, yet that Jimin got angry because some petty cadet bitched about you being harsh.”

Yoongi swallows thickly against the lump in his throat. He thinks back to the way he had snapped at
Jimin for it and is overcome by a wave of guilt upon the realisation of why the cadet had looked so hurt.

*I’m sorry,* he thinks, knowing he’ll probably never have the guts to say it to Jimin’s face. *I’m sorry.*

“I know he’s here because he wants to make a difference,” Namjoon says with a sigh, “but it’s like… it’s like he wants to change the world so that you could be at peace.”

Yoongi’s chest tightens, the ache in him making him want to cry or scream. He can’t quite tell which.

“Jimin is not Giseong, you know,” his friend says gently. “They’re different people, and their fates can be different, too.” He pauses for a moment, considering his words. “I think he could understand, hyung. If you spoke to him, about anything at all, I think he could understand and be good for you.”

Yoongi wants to, oh, he wants it so much it stuns him, but he shakes his head all the same, and pushes his emotions back. “I can’t. I just—I really, really can’t.”

Namjoon heaves a soft sigh and gives Yoongi’s shoulder a squeeze. “I know, hyung,” he says sadly. “I know.”

The following days are tense to say the least. Yoongi is thankful the very next morning after his fit is free for him, what with the cadets being taught by Hoseok, and he spends the majority of it holed up in his quarters. He doesn’t leave even for breakfast or lunch—Namjoon brings him food and calls him annoyingly stubborn—for risk of running into the last person in the world he thinks he could handle seeing right now.

He knows he won’t be able to avoid Jimin forever—hell, they’re scheduled for training with him tomorrow, and on the day after that, the twelfth test will take place—but for now, it’s far too fresh. After everything he and Namjoon talked about, Yoongi has no idea how he’s supposed to be able to face the cadet. He doesn’t know what on earth he’s supposed to say to him, how he’s supposed to make Jimin forget about what happened.

“He could understand,” Namjoon had said, but Yoongi isn’t sure if that’s even something he wants. He’s not sure he wants Jimin to understand what’s going on inside his head.
When he finally does leave his room, it’s to visit Sejin in the sickbay, needing a so-called professional opinion on his overall state of mind. “On a scale of one to ten,” he starts before the doctor can even voice his greeting, “how fucked up in the head am I?”

Sejin’s eyes grow wide in surprise and he only stares at Yoongi for a long moment, as if trying to read the cause of his question on his face. Yoongi doesn’t move a muscle, taking care to keep his face as impassive as he knows how until the doctor finally heaves a sigh. “On a scale of one to ten?” he repeats with a solemn chuckle. “Matters of psychological health are not that easy, Yoongi, you know that.”

“Yeah, but—”

“But,” Sejin interrupts and leans back in his chair, drumming his fingers against the armrest, “if I had to give my honest opinion, I’d say you’re quite severely damaged.” Yoongi winces, even though it’s just about what he’d expected. Upon his reaction, Sejin smiles and reaches out to pat him on the shoulder. “But you’re definitely not beyond repair,” he says. “I have every confidence that with time and effort, you can heal.”

Yoongi nods, albeit reluctantly. He says nothing more, and Sejin doesn’t push.

When he steps into the Kwoon Combat Room the following morning, Yoongi is mildly nauseous, his throat thick and his stomach feeling like a gaping hole. He’s early, a few minutes left before the cadets are to line up, and he spends those minutes struggling to draw deep, soothing breaths, every one of which feel more suffocating than anything else.

By the time he hears footsteps from down the hall, Yoongi is about as relaxed as a statue carved out of marble.

The cadets filter into the room, their carefree chatter growing quiet as soon as they step over the threshold into the training room. Yoongi pointedly avoids looking at them all, dreading the possibility that they would know what had happened, even though he knows, trusts that Jimin would never tell them.

He can feel a certain pair of eyes boring into his skull when the rookies have all lined up, and it takes quite some effort to ignore it. “Today is meant for polishing everything you’ve learned so far,” he says, jerking his head towards the storage. “Warm up first, and then spend as much time as you can honing your weakest areas. The twelfth tests will begin tomorrow, after which you’ll start the search
for a drift-compatible partner, so you’ll want to be ready for both.”

An excited hum goes through the line of cadets, the lot of them exchanging exhilarated whispers as they move over to fetch whatever they need from the storage. Yoongi turns away, deliberately avoiding that burning gaze by pretending to adjust his water bottle where it stands by the wall.

He knows he’s being cowardly, but he can’t look at Jimin. He’s not ready to see his face.

Yoongi spends the following hours walking back and forth along the Kwoon Combat Room, observing the cadets in turn and correcting mistakes wherever he catches them. A few of them ask for his advice or guidance on how to nail a certain move or how to best deliver a strike with the most power, and he shows them, his tension easing for every cadet who shows no signs whatsoever of even noticing the way Yoongi is on edge.

Of course, all that tension comes rushing back as soon as Taehyung asks him for help. Taehyung, who’s sparring with Jimin.

*Keep your shit together, Min Yoongi,* he tells himself sternly, over and over as he makes his way over to the two rookies. He doesn’t look at Jimin, forcing his full attention to be on Taehyung as he demonstrates his difficulty in parrying a jumping three-directional kick from Jimin. It works well enough, with him correcting Taehyung’s stance and defense, but then the cadet asks him to show how to do it, and…

And then he has to look at Jimin.

It takes more effort than Yoongi could’ve imagined. Even when he takes his stance in front of the blonde boy, he can’t look at him, staring into the floor and breathing slow to combat the blood rushing in his ears. *Calm down,* he chants inwardly, but the prickling in his chest means his body is doing the exact opposite. *Calm down, calm your goddamn ass down, just—*

“Hyung.”

Jimin’s voice is unbearably gentle, so much so that it almost hurts. As if on reflex, Yoongi’s head snaps up and he stares at the cadet with wide eyes, his breath labored without himself even realising it. Jimin looks at him with every bit as much intent, that familiar spark in his eyes, and then he smiles, a small, cautious curl of his lips that’s far more reassuring than it has any right to be.
“Are you ready, hyung?” he asks. There’s no pity in his voice, no disgust on his face, and the air that has stacked in Yoongi’s throat comes loose, gusting past his lips to make way for relief he doesn’t think he deserves.

“Yes,” he says and nods, falling into place. “Do your worst, cadet Park.”

There’s a moment of silence, during which Jimin only looks at him, almost as if he’s assessing, trying to find unspoken words somewhere on Yoongi’s face. Then he nods, braces himself, and charges.

The move has four kicks to block in a span of less than two seconds. The first one is aimed at his hip, the second at his gut, the third at his chest, and the last at his head. It’s a move Yoongi has demonstrated several times and deflected several times, one he knows can knock someone unconscious if you miss even one of the parries.

The first kick is met with the heel of Yoongi’s hand, the second with his forearm. His elbow parries the third easily enough, but he grits his teeth at the sheer amount of strength behind it, his feet skidding ever so slightly along the floor.

Yoongi belatedly remembers that the last kick should be deflected in a way that uses the attacker’s own momentum to throw him to the ground. The thought dawns on him like lightning out of clear skies, and it lasts only for a moment, but suddenly, he doesn’t want to humor even the idea of causing Jimin pain at his hand.

It’s a ridiculous thought, since Yoongi is Jimin’s trainer and pain is inevitable in their everyday lives, but it takes him over completely, filling him with an urgency to heed it. Thus, instead of actually seeing the block through as it should be done, Yoongi blocks Jimin’s foot and grabs hold of ankle, and forces him into a complete halt just before the kick can find its mark.

Surprised by the sudden stop of momentum, the cadet emits a yelp and lands clumsily on his left foot, struggling to maintain balance with his right caught in Yoongi’s hands. Once he’s somewhat stable, he looks at Yoongi with wide eyes and he parts his lips, probably to ask him why on earth he didn’t see the defense through properly, but the look on Yoongi’s face must cut him off before he can even begin, for he ends up closing his lips again without a word.

The palm of Yoongi’s hand burns where he’s touching the cadet, but he lets him go slowly, his thoughts oddly clouded as he guides his foot down to the floor. Now that he has looked at Jimin again, the thought of turning away seems as foreign a concept as it can be; he looks, unblinking, and the cadet holds his gaze as if he knows.
As if he understands.

“I think he could understand,” Namjoon had said, and the fierceness with which Yoongi wants breaks him out of his daze, as abruptly as if someone had screamed in his ear. He turns away sharply, suddenly loathe to meet the cadet’s eyes again lest he be subjected to the same urgency again.

He doesn’t move for a moment or two, wondering if he should say something. “Uh,” is what he manages at last, turning to Taehyung, who has followed the entire exchange with an owlish expression. “It, uh, it’s all about muscle memory. Blocking that move. That—your brain has to memorise the pattern and speed until it becomes a reflex. So just…” He gapes around silent words for a moment longer before lamely finishing with, “Just keep practicing.”

Taehyung nods slowly, gaze flickering between Yoongi and Jimin, and Yoongi can feel the blonde boy’s eyes on him, can feel his confusion and curiosity. He can feel it, and he’s half expecting Jimin to act on his impulses and speak, to call Yoongi out on his ridiculous behavior.

But Jimin doesn’t push. He doesn’t ask him about his attitude or about what happened the day before. He doesn’t sigh or express disappointment or pity. He doesn’t judge. “Try with me again, Taetae,” he says instead and turns away, and Yoongi feels like a tonne has been lifted from his shoulders.

Jimin spends the rest of the day training on his own, without asking Yoongi to be near him or talk to him. He doesn’t say anything, although Jimin does look at him with concern when he thinks Yoongi’s attention is elsewhere, his worry so genuine Yoongi can feel it like a palpable touch.

Yoongi doesn’t feel like he deserves it at all.

Throughout the day, he doesn’t approach Yoongi in the same way as before; perhaps he’s worried about triggering a similar accident again, or maybe he’s just thinking it’s probably not something Yoongi wants to talk about and that he needs space.

Yoongi really hopes it’s the latter; the thought of Jimin purposely avoiding him because he thinks he’ll cause another attack, or that he’s even the cause of it at all, makes Yoongi’s gut twist. The thought stays with him far after training is finished, has him tossing and turning, and wishing he could explain. His mind keeps replaying the silent, “Good night, hyung,” Jimin had said when he’d left, accompanied by a soft smile that Yoongi had wanted to reciprocate, but couldn’t.
“Fuck,” he groans and buries his face into the mattress. There’s a pressure on his chest, a dull ache that won’t fade no matter how hard he tries to make it stop. “Fuck…”

When he sits down for breakfast the following morning, he only needs a brief glance at Namjoon’s face to know his internal conflict is clear as day to read on his face. Thankfully, he doesn’t say anything, and shakes his head at Hoseok when he parts his lips to comment on the dark circles under Yoongi’s eyes or the air of misery surrounding him.

Half an hour later, Yoongi helps the scientists and J-Tech specialists set up in the Kwoon Combat Room, readying the hall for both the twelfth test and for the assessment of drift-compatibility. Or perhaps help is a light term; it’s mostly Seokjin bossing the lot of them around, telling them what machinery should go where and what people should man each station.

Even after cadets have arrived and warmed up, it’s Jin who directs them to their assigned monitors to begin their tests. Yoongi doesn’t protest; he’s feeling worse than he did the day before, and has no idea what would actually happen if he had to interact with Jimin.

He watches the cadets go through their tests from the sidelines, avoiding every chance of having to come in close contact with the blonde boy. With his arms crossed over his chest, he watches them complete whatever exercise the scientists tells them to, their bodies full of wireless patches and chips that monitor the movements of their muscles and bones, of their mental and physical stability.

This test is the harshest one yet, pushing the cadets until they’re just about ready to pass out. It lasts for five hours with no breaks in between, not even long enough to take a sip of water, and by the time it’s over, some of the newbies look like they’ve been to the gates of hell and barely escaped with their lives.

Of course, Jimin passes with flying colors.

The cadet’s eyes are all but shining as the scientists declare him ready to being assessment for drift-compatibility. He looks like he’s just been given the sun itself, waiting just long enough to have the patches and chips removed from his body before he emits a poorly suppressed cry of triumph and performs a little happy dance, smiling so wide his cheeks might burst.

His reaction makes Yoongi want to smile, but at the same time, it solidifies the fear of Jimin eventually going out into the field as a ranger, and so he ends up not saying a word while Seokjin and the other cadets congratulate him with cheers and equally as excited smiles.
It's a good thing, Yoongi tries to tell himself. He'll be an excellent ranger. It’s a good thing.

After the tests are complete—with only one of the men failing and being reassigned to become a footsoldier—the cadets are given one hour to go eat and prepare themselves for the drift-compatibility testings to begin. Jimin looks like he can barely contain himself, all but vibrating where he stands; even the other cadets’ excitement combined falls short in face of his exhilaration.

“Are you alright?” Seokjin asks Yoongi when he stays behind to help set up for the assessments to begin, dragging monitors and machines and displays around the fighting ring in the middle of the room. “You look… well, terrible, to be honest.”

“’M fine,” Yoongi mutters, well aware that he sounds as far from convincing as he can. He looks up and finds Jin peering at him with genuine concern, none of his usual flare or sass anywhere to be seen. “Don’t look at me like that,” he says with an attempt at a smile, his lips only managing a grimace. “You’re making me feel even worse.”

“I’m worried about you, Yoongi,” Seokjin says and places a hand on his shoulder. “I don’t know what’s going on, but I can see you’re not doing well.”

Yoongi swallows thickly and gives a jerky nod, not quite sure what he’s admitting to by doing so. “I just,” he begins and closes his eyes, emitting an unsteady exhale. “I just—I need time. I’ll be fine.”

He can’t blame Jin for how unconvinced he looks, but thankfully, the head of J-Tech doesn’t say anything else. He only squeezes Yoongi’s shoulder, and turns away to further instruct the scientists milling about the room.

The cadets return precisely one hour later, some having showered and changed into fresh robes while others look like they’ve taken a brief nap to recover from the twelfth test. It’s not only the newbies filtering into the Kwoon Combat Room, however; all the past cadets of the Busan Shatterdome Base who have been unsuccessful in finding someone they’re drift-compatible with join them as well, since anyone of them could be potential partners.

In addition, Hoseok, Namjoon, and Sejin, along with several more from the medical staff join them, some to observe, others to be ready to help if anything goes wrong. It’s not mere sparring, after all; these tests are far more aggressive, with the cadets having to engage in unrestrained combat against one another in order for the assessments to work.
Yoongi waits until all sixty two of the cadets have lined up before he pushes away from the wall to address them. “These tests will take several days,” he begins. “We will only hook up one cadet at the time and have him or her go a five-minute round against each and every other cadet present in turn. You will fight each other, one on one, until the monitors alert us to drift-compatibility of 80% or higher, or until time runs out and you’re put up against the next cadet.”

Again, he avoids Jimin’s gaze, even though he can feel it carving a hole into his skull. “Use whatever techniques you want,” he says. “Mix them up, change them in the middle. Don’t hesitate or worry you’ll hurt the one you’re sparring with; without your full dedication, these tests won’t yield anything.” He nods towards the fighting ring. “Fight each other as if defeat means death.”

A hum of tension goes through the room, the cadets turning to look at each other, some nervous, some determined. Even without actually looking at him, Yoongi can feel Jimin’s excitement as if he was radiating it, exuding it into the air itself.

“You will go by alphabetical order,” he says and looks towards Seokjin, who’s holding the list of names. “The rest of you, take a seat along the wall and get settled. We’ll be here until supper, and continue in the morning.”

Jin takes the lead and calls forth the first cadet—An Cheorim—and the others move towards the back wall, some to sit down while those with surnames closest in order stay standing, stretching and preparing to be summoned as an opponent. It’s easy to tell the old cadets from the new; while the newbies look like they can barely sit still, too eager to see how the process goes, the older ones seem almost bored, having witnessed the procedure countless of times before.

Yoongi returns to his place next to Hoseok and Namjoon, and prepares himself for a long day.

The afternoon passes without any positive results. After An Cheorim has sparred with every cadet—an ordeal that has taken up most of the evening’s time—the highest compatibility rating she has reached is 58%, which is far from enough. She doesn’t seem very dejected, and Yoongi knows it’s a product of having been through this process four times already, two years having passed since she first came to the base to be trained by him.

The following cadet only has time enough to go eight out of fifty rounds before they have to stop, interrupted by the last call for supper. They scientists strip him off the monitors and inform the lot of them to be present at 6AM sharp in the morning to resume testing. Yoongi’s shoulders are stiff and aching; they’ve been at it for seven hours already, during which he and the other trainers have only watched without moving much.
“My neck’s gonna be shot to shit by the time this is done,” Hoseok whines as they make their way to the mess hall, rolling his head as he goes to try and alleviate the tension in his muscles. “Maybe we should go a round or two against the cadets through the days, just to keep our blood circulation going.”

Namjoon snorts at that. “I don’t want to have my ass kicked, thank you very much,” he says and peers over at where the cadets are grabbing their food. “I haven’t trained like they do in years. They’d wipe the floor with me in less than twenty seconds.”

Yoongi’s lips twitch into a small smirk at his words, a flicker of pride in his chest. “They’d destroy you as well, Hobi,” he says and chuckles at the petulant pout the assault specialist pulls. “You can’t bring your weapons into the ring.”

“Well, that’s just boring,” Hoseok huffs and crosses his arms, and Yoongi vaguely wonders if he would actually do it, face a cadet in the ring armed with whatever weapons he has in his closet.

The smile falls from Yoongi’s lips when his eyes catch Jimin amidst the crowd of cadets, his blonde hair standing out like a sunflower in a field of blackened crops. The cadet is talking to Taehyung, looking excited beyond compare, and the sight of his bright smile has Yoongi’s heart twisting in his chest.

Cursing, he realises just how badly he’s dreading the moment when Jimin will begin his testing. If the cadet is this excited already, Yoongi can’t even begin to imagine how he’ll react to finding someone he’s drift-compatible with. He’s like an embodiment of the sun already, beaming; seeing him take one step closer to his dream will surely be nothing but blinding.

For the second time in his life, Yoongi wishes he could freeze time so that moment will never come. He doesn’t know what he’ll do if—when—it does.

The first sign of drift-compatibility amongst the cadets doesn’t happen until four days into testing, when Taehyung is called to the ring to go up against Jeongguk.

Their sparring is by far the most intense, the two caught in their own world as they move around one another, completely entranced and distant from the rest of the world. They see only each other, and even though their battle is high-speed and fierce, not a single strike ever finds its mark, the other
always seeming to see it coming, as if they can feel each others’ intentions like their own.

Their test is interrupted by Seokjin, who grins broadly as he declares the two share a 91% compatibility, over ten percent above the required rating. Out of breath and panting, the two stare wide-eyed at the head of J-Tech before turning to one another and all but smothering each other in a bone-crushing embrace.

“I’m not surprised,” Hoseok says from where he stands next to Yoongi. “Those two have been resonating with each other ever since they got here, like they’re two halves of a whole.”

Yoongi nods in agreement. The two have been close since the first day here, both during their training and outside; whenever Yoongi had glimpsed the two during supper or lunch, they had always been just about stuck to each other, almost as if going for too long without closeness made them uncomfortable.

“They make an excellent pair,” Namjoon says, nodding thoughtfully. “With Jeongguk’s skill in combat and Taehyung’s head for strategy, those two can become a really great asset to the nation if they continue honing their skills as they have thus far.”

Both the cadets and scientists voice their excitement, and Jimin’s cheers are loudest, the boy whistling and flashing two thumbs-up to his friends. As soon as they’ve been dismissed, both Taehyung and Jeongguk stumble over to Jimin to hug him as well, uncaring of the way the other cadets look at them in disbelief at their behavior.

“I can’t wait to see who Jimin’s partner will be,” Hoseok muses, grinning as he watches the over-excited cadets chatter and gush about the drift-compatible pair. “I don’t know anyone who’s on the same level as him, so it’ll be interesting to see who he finds.”

Yoongi says nothing to that, pressing his lips together and pretending as if he doesn’t notice the way Namjoon looks at him from the corner of his eye. If he finds someone, he thinks in a fit of childish stubbornness. He might not.

Two days later, halfway through Lee Danbi’s testing, the monitors show a rating of 83% with Oh Hwangseok, a cadet who came to the base a bit under a year ago. They’ve never met before and both of them are equally surprised when Seokjin interrupts their sparring to show them their results. Albeit nervously, the two introduce themselves to each other properly, Danbi’s short stature appearing smaller still when compared to Hwangseok, who’s a head taller than Yoongi.
“Two drift-compatible pairs before even getting through half the list,” Namjoon says with a low whistle. “We only had one pair last time, and they failed to pass the second part of their training. This is huge for our base.”

It’s true; the last compatible pair to come out of the Busan Shatterdome Base had ended up failing their training halfway through, with one of the trainees cracking under the pressure soon after they had began logging time piloting an actual Jaeger. He had been forced to retire, leaving only one active pair of pilots in the entire base, the ones who drove the Northern Star Jaeger.

Eight days into testing, Jimin’s turn finally arrives.

The cadet can barely sit still while the scientists go about placing the scanners on his temple, neck, and chest, Jimin’s leg bouncing. He won’t go up against as many cadets as the ones before him; having already sparred against half of the list in their personal testings with negative results, Jimin only has to go twenty eight rounds.

Part of Yoongi wishes no one will be compatible with him. It’s selfish and unfair, and a cruel thing to hope for when he knows how much the cadet wants this, but he can’t help it, because if Jimin doesn’t resonate with anyone, then he can’t go out into the field. Then he can’t put himself in danger.

With a vague feeling of nausea, Yoongi watches Jimin climb up into the fighting ring, bouncing on the balls of his feet as he waits for his first opponent to join him.

“I’m so excited,” Hoseok all but squeals next to him, and when Yoongi looks around, he realises the rest of the room is mirroring the assault specialist’s feeling, the air thick with anticipation for who the base’s star cadet will find drift-compatibility with.

Yoongi has half a mind to leave the room, not wanting to watch the beginning of his new nightmares take place before his eyes, but he knows he can’t. He’s Jimin’s trainer, the one person that is required to be there above the others, so he stays put, trying and failing to brace himself for when reality will finally come and punch him in the gut.

Only it doesn’t.

By the time the testings are interrupted for the day, Jimin has sparred against twenty two cadets without anything even close to resembling positive results. His performance has been top notch, with him overpowering every single one of the cadets who are called to go up against him, but none of the rounds have resulted in high numbers. On the contrary, they’ve all been low, and for every failed
test, Jimin’s excitement has faltered, a steadily growing sense of dejection settling over him.

The smile on his lips is forced and wrong when he listens to Seokjin tell him to be ready to continue in the morning, his voice stiff with his attempt to sound normal when he speaks. He sounds so off from how he usually is, it brings a tidal wave of guilt to Yoongi’s mind, cursing himself for wishing this upon the cadet.

“I really didn’t see this coming,” Namjoon says quietly, reaching up to rub at his neck. “I thought he, if anyone, would be a surefire case.”

While Hoseok voices his agreement, Yoongi remains silent, his jaw clenched as he watches the scientists give Jimin some space, moving away from him with obvious apprehension. The other cadets follow their lead, some casting fleeting glances at Jimin before they begin filtering out of the room, speaking in hushed voices as they head towards the mess hall.

“Come on,” Hoseok mumbles and nudges Yoongi in the side. “Let’s go eat.”

Yoongi nods, although it takes a lot of effort to pry his eyes away from Jimin’s slumped form. There’s an odd sensation in his chest, like his heart is trying to simulate the pain the cadet must be feeling, and it makes him linger, his steps heavy as he moves to follow after his friends.

Someone bumps into his shoulder and he turns in time to see Taehyung moving in the opposite direction as everyone else, pushing through the small crowd until he’s free to scurry over to where Jimin is standing. “Chim,” he says and puts his hands on his shoulders, leaning into his space in an attempt to comfort his friend. “Chim, don’t be sad. You still have a chance, right?”

Jimin shakes his head and says something, but it’s too quiet for Yoongi to hear. He stops, hesitating, the ache in his chest intensifying. He needs to do something, he knows he does, but he has no idea what he’s supposed to do. What he wants to do.

“Hyung?”

He jerks, turning to Namjoon, who’s waiting for him by the door. Yoongi parts his lips, then turns back again to look at Jimin, before looking at his friend again. “You guys go ahead,” he says, his tongue feeling oddly heavy. “I’m just—I’ll catch up.”

Namjoon gives him a long look before nodding and moving to follow after Hoseok and the rest of
the cadets. As soon as they’re gone, Yoongi faces the rest of the room, catching Seokjin’s eyes and jerking his head in a pleading gesture. Jin heaves a sigh and nods, snapping his fingers to command the scientists still present to follow him, and without a word, they leave the room as well.

Feeling more nervous than he has in a long time, Yoongi walks over to the two cadets, the palms of his hands clammy as he clenches them. Upon his approach, Taehyung stops murmuring words of comfort and looks up, the faintest ghost of a frown marring his brow.

“Give us a minute, cadet Kim,” Yoongi says, his throat dry. He notices the way Jimin’s shoulders tense at the sound of his voice, and it makes Yoongi feel like utter shit. “I need to speak to cadet Park.”

Taehyung hesitates for a long moment, staring at him as if he’s trying to read his intentions on his face. Yoongi doesn’t know if he’s successful or not, but eventually, the pilot-in-training sighs and nods, giving Jimin’s shoulders a firm squeeze before letting him go. “Don’t make it worse,” he mutters as he walks past Yoongi, and Yoongi knows the underlying threat is very real.

He closes the door after him on his way out, and then there’s only silence.

Now that they’re alone, Yoongi has no idea what to say. If he ever did know, that is. He doesn’t know what he should do, what he could do to make Jimin feel better, and so he ends up just standing there like an idiot, staring at the back of the cadet’s head while trying to formulate any kind of words at all.

Unsurprisingly, Jimin is the first one to speak. Still wearing the scanners and patches, he moves over to the closest stool and sits down, heaving a deep sigh. “I’m not gonna be a pilot, am I?” he asks and rubs his palms over his face. “I’ve already gone up against so many, hyung. I’ve sparred with every cadet whose name comes before mine and over half of those who come after, and the highest rating of compatibility I’ve gotten is 43%.”

Yoongi watches uselessly as the cadet slumps over in his seat, his head hanging low. “I only have seven more cadets to spar with,” he says quietly, his voice growing thick. “Then they’ll declare me incompatible. What if—” He pauses to snuffle, and Yoongi is overcome by an overwhelming urge to pull the boy into his arms. “What if I don’t find anyone?” Jimin asks. “What if I can’t advance?”

*Then you wait for the next chance,* is what Yoongi should tell him. He should tell him that there will always be new cadets, new rookies with whom he’ll have a chance. He should tell him that many cadets don’t find someone they’re compatible with on the first go, and that Jimin should be ready for that possibility even if it’ll hurt.
That’s what he should say, but the boy’s sadness is painful to watch, and so, Yoongi does something that’s probably going to end in more pain.

He gives Jimin hope.

“There’s still a chance you’ll find someone,” he says slowly. “There are still seven chances left. A few years ago, we had someone find a drift-compatible partner from the very bottom of the list, one of the last they were sparring against. You shouldn’t give up yet.”

Jimin looks up at him, and the doubt in his tear-filled eyes digs a crack deep into Yoongi’s heart, so much so that he finds himself blurring out whatever he can think of to cheer him up. “You’re too in your head about the testing,” he says, a sense of urgency to his voice. “When you’re so over-eager to get positive results, it cuts down on your chances to reach the same plane as your partner. Drifting is about your minds reaching the same level, so if all you’re thinking about is succeeding, you… the other cadets might not be able to reach that same mindset.”

The look in Jimin’s eyes changes as he listens to Yoongi’s rambling, going from dejected to surprised and then hopeful, and it hurts, it’s painful to imagine the possibility that that hope will end up being crushed. “You think so, hyung?” he asks, his voice so small it enforces the urge to hug him, make him feel safe.

“Yes,” Yoongi says without thinking twice. He looks around in the empty room and jerks his head towards the fighting ring. “Come on, I’ll spar with you to help you get in the right mindset.”

Jimin hesitates, eyes flickering between Yoongi and the ring. When he doesn’t move for a few seconds, Yoongi reaches out and takes hold of his hand, coaxing him into standing as gently as he can. The touch seems to give Jimin strength, for he nods and follows easily, his fingers twitching within Yoongi’s hold, as if he wants to return their grip.

“All right,” Yoongi says once they’re face to face in the ring. “Now, try to clear your mind as best you can. Don’t think about becoming a pilot. Don’t think about wanting to pass any tests or advancing in your training.”

“S’s easier said than done,” Jimin mumbles with a wry smile, the sight of which spurs Yoongi on further.
“I know,” he says, “but that’s what you have to do. If it helps, just… try to think only about this moment. What’s happening right now.” He slips into a defensive stance and nods at Jimin, motioning for him to do the same. “Think only about the minute that’s happening right now. Don’t focus on the next, even on the next second.”

Jimin nods, closing his eyes for a moment. He draws a deep breath, the frown on his brow smoothing out, and when he looks at Yoongi again, the familiar determination flickers in his gaze.

“Good,” Yoongi says and takes a step forward. “Now block my offense. You know every movement I do, right? You know everything I know.”

“Yes,” Jimin says. “Because you’ve taught me.”

His words echo throughout Yoongi’s being and he smiles despite himself. “Good,” he says, and then they begin.

The first few minutes are rough, with Jimin’s uncertainty dragging him down, leaving him open in his defence over and over again. Yoongi lands a blow against his waist that sends him staggering, a strike against his shoulder that makes him emit a gasp of pain, but no matter what, he doesn’t yield. He falls right back into his defensive stance, beckoning Yoongi to start again.

For every mistake, the fire in his eyes grows stronger, until they’re burning a hole right through Yoongi’s soul.

It becomes smoother. Yoongi advances without holding back, lashing out in a variety of techniques with no order or logic to it. He switches fighting styles with hardly a thought, yet for every passing second, Jimin gets better at seeing them coming, at reading his intentions until it’s like he knows what Yoongi will do. As if he can see into Yoongi’s mind as clearly as if it was his own.

Suddenly, they’re not sparring anymore.

Suddenly, it’s like they’re dancing, moving around each other as if they’ve practiced these very steps a thousand times over.

Yoongi doesn’t even realise what’s happening before it’s too late. Jimin mirrors every movement he makes with precision that is almost frightening, a concentration in his eyes the likes of which Yoongi has never seen. When Yoongi raises his hand, Jimin’s hand follows, hovering mere inches apart from
Yoongi’s, never trembling, never faltering.

Yoongi feels like he’s choking, but he can’t stop.

When Jimin strays from his movements, Yoongi follows without thinking twice, pulled into mimicking his actions as if he’ll die if he doesn’t. Jimin takes a step backwards, and Yoongi follows. He moves sideways, and Yoongi does the same, as if he has become the boy’s own reflection.

It speeds up, but neither lose track of the other. Neither loses the flow of their movements. They don’t stagger, they don’t fumble; doing so seems like an impossibility.

When Jimin leans close and grips him hard around his shoulder, his breath is heavy in Yoongi’s ears, so heavy it might as well be his own, punched out of his lungs by the hold that he returns with ease, holding him in a grip that could easily dislocate his shoulder should he twist too far. He knows exactly when to release it, letting go just as Jimin does, and follows him when he retreats, raising a hand as if to strike at the mirror of himself that Jimin has become.

For every step, they move faster still, more fluidly, until the breath they share is the same, their pulse sending blood rushing through their bodies at the very same beat. Yoongi can’t stop. He can’t look away, he can’t even blink, every cell of him thrumming with the urge to submit to what is happening between the two of them.

It’s a trance, gripping onto both of them like a vice.

It’s synchronisation.

And it’s terrifying.

“Holy shit.”

The spell is broken in an instant, so violently both Jimin and Yoongi jerk away from one another. While Jimin staggers back and loses his balance, Yoongi whirls around and finds Namjoon standing in the doorway, eyes wide and lips agape in shock. “Oh my god,” he breathes out. “Hyung…”
Yoongi turns sharply to look at the monitors, his blood draining from his face when he sees the holographic picture of Jimin’s brain practically bursting with light, the numbers displayed just shy of triple digits.

Fuck.

“Hyung,” Namjoon starts. “Hyung, you two are—”

“Don’t fucking say it,” Yoongi snaps and jumps down from the platform without so much as a glance at Jimin, even though he can feel it drilling into the back of his head. He all but flees towards the door, his steps rushed and clumsy, and elbows his way past Namjoon, ignoring him when he shouts after him.

He can still hear the beat of Jimin’s heart in his own ears.

Fuck, he thinks, his thoughts working a mile a minute as he rushes down the hallways. Fuck, this can’t be happening.

He doesn’t slow down until he’s safe inside his quarters, slamming the door shut behind him. He feels like throwing up, nausea brought on by his building panic in the face of a truth he has hoped he would never have to come to terms with again.

He had been able to feel it. He had felt Jimin’s movement on his skin, as if every step, every breath had been a palpable touch. He had felt Jimin’s entire existence as if it had been his own; his heartbeat had echoed in Yoongi’s chest and his pulse had flared to the same state as Yoongi’s own, just as elated, just as nervous. Just as curious.

“Fuck,” he hisses and leans his head back against the door, squeezing his eyes shut. “Fuck…”

There’s no doubt about it.

He and Jimin are drift-compatible.
The inevitable summons from his superiors arrives before dawn, and Yoongi is not ready to face any one of them, least of all Jimin.

He has spent the entire night dreading this moment, tearing at his hair and muffling his screams into his pillow while his thoughts have gnawed at his mind like starved rodents. He knows what the marshal will ask and he knows what Jimin will expect of him, and he’s not ready—not *capable*—of giving either one of them what they want.

How could he possibly do it? How could he ever go back into the field, or even step a foot inside a Jaeger when the mere thought of it hurts enough to trigger a fit of panic in him?

*I can’t,* he thinks as he stares at himself in the bathroom mirror, slow in his observation of his own misery. He looks ten years older than he did the night before, his eyes void of anything good, the skin underneath them dark and heavy. He feels like he’s been drained on everything that once resided within him, leaving him empty and hollow, a mere shell of who he’s supposed to be. *I really fucking can’t.*

He wants to cry, but he can’t do that either. And even if he could, he wouldn’t let himself.

His legs feel unsteady and weak when he leaves his quarters, his stomach roiling. There’s hardly a soul out and about, the summons having come at the crack of dawn, and Yoongi is thankful for it; he doesn’t want people to see just how damaged he is in this moment.

*I won’t,* he tells himself over and over in an attempt to steel himself for the confrontation to come. *I won’t do it. It doesn’t matter what he says, how he tries to convince me. I won’t go back. I can’t.*

His inner pep-talk is shot to shit when he reaches the elevator leading up to the marshal’s office and finds Jimin standing there, waiting for him.

Yoongi freezes as if petrified, his breath catching in his lungs when the cadet turns to him. The look in his eyes is unbearable as it flickers all over Yoongi’s face, searching, pleading, and so bloody sympathetic it makes Yoongi’s throat burn with the urge to scream. *Don’t look at me.* The words echo in his head, yet reach no further. *Stop looking at me.*

Neither one of them say a word. Not when Yoongi reluctantly walks up to Jimin and summons the elevator, not while they wait, nor when they step inside the elevator and choose their destination, a
muted chime of confirmation echoing from the dashboard. The tension between them could be cut by a knife, and even though Jimin isn’t looking at him, Yoongi can practically feel his want to speak.

When the cadet can’t contain it any longer, he shatters the silence, his soft, careful voice ringing deafeningly loud in the elevator. “Are we,” he begins in a murmur, only to change his mind. “We’re drift-compatible, hyung.”

Yoongi suppresses the urge to wince and keeps his lips pressed firmly together, swallowing the urge to snap at Jimin, to scream at him as if it’s all his fault he’s feeling like this. He says nothing, and the silence between them returns.

By the time they reach the marshal’s office floor, Yoongi is gritting his teeth so hard his bones creak.

“Officer Min, cadet Park,” Marshal Kim Daehan greets them from where he stands by his desk, beckoning the two of them into the room. It’s a spacious hall, with glass walls on one side to give him view of the hangar. Yoongi needs only a glance through the window to spot a dormant Jaeger, and the crippling tautness in his muscles grow tenfold. “Thank you for meeting with me.”

“Of course, sir,” Jimin says promptly and honors the marshal with a salute. It almost makes Yoongi want to roll his eyes; the cadet never honored him with any kind of respect.

“I’m sure you’re both aware of why you are here,” Daehan says, and going by how tense his voice is, he’s very much aware of just how close Yoongi is to cracking. “It has come to my attention that the two of you have achieved astonishing levels of drift-compatibility, the likes of which are unseen in this entire country. Numbers like these have never been seen before, and I believe we should—”

“No.” Yoongi doesn’t even need to hear the rest of his suggestion; he knows exactly what the marshal wants, and it’s not something he can give. “I can’t go into the field again,” he says stiffly, ignoring the way Jimin’s head turns his way, his gaze heavier than a slab of stone. “Not again.”

Marshal Daehan sighs and grimaces, having clearly hoped the discussion could’ve lasted longer before being shut down. “I understand this is difficult, officer Min,” he says, “but—”

“No,” Yoongi says again, far louder than intended. He doesn’t take care to lower his voice, however, his chest brimming with uncomfortable heat. “I can’t—fuck, I’m not even qualified anymore. You can ask anyone and they’ll tell you I’m too fucked up to be put inside a Jaeger, let alone be hooked up to someone else!”
He can’t even imagine what that would be like; in order to pilot a Jaeger, his mind would have to be synchronised with someone else’s, and that would push all his memories, all his dreams and nightmares, all his pain into someone else’s head.

“If I synced with Ji—with cadet Park,” he says, still refusing to look at Jimin, “I’d shove every last bit of my fucked up thoughts into his head and we’d die before even getting a single strike in!”

“Young-ssi—”

“You promised me I wouldn’t have to do it again,” Yoongi bites him off, his voice cold as ice. “If you stay on site to train the cadets, you won’t ever have to come close to a Kaiju again. That’s what you told me.” He pushes back against the memories of his brother, of his smile, and against the thought of what Giseong would say if he was alive now. “I asked you again and again to reassure me I wouldn’t have to go out, and you did.”

“I know what I said, but times are different now,” the marshal says with obvious agitation. “Every pair of rangers that have come out of the Jaeger Academy over the past few years has barely managed to hold their own against the Kaijus. We need more competent pilots, and this level of drift-compatibility hasn’t been seen since you and your brother—”

“Don’t.” Yoongi’s voice is venom, and even the marshal looks startled by it, eyes growing wide. “Don’t say it,” Yoongi grits out, hands clenched so hard his nails dig gouges into his palm. “Don’t fucking say it. Sir.”

Daehan looks at him for a long moment before heaving a weary sigh and raising a hand to pinch the bridge of his nose. When he looks up again, he turns to Jimin. “You failed your assessments with the other cadets, didn’t you?” he asks and Yoongi can tell he’s searching for a straw to grasp at.

“Not all of them, sir,” Jimin replies, his posture stiff in a way it never was during his training with Yoongi. “There are still seven cadets with whom I haven’t gone through testing.”

“Considering the fact that you’ve already found your most drift-compatible match,” the marshal mutters, “it’s likely none of those remaining seven will yield any results.” He heaves another sigh and shakes his head. “Top of the Jaeger Academy, our most promising cadet so far, and then…’’ He gestures vaguely between the two of them. “Then this has to happen.”
Yoongi wants to say something at that, because it’s really bloody unfair for the marshal to act as if he’s committing some act of treason by refusing to do what they had agreed he’d never have to, but Jimin speaks before he has the chance.

“Even if Yoongi-hyung refuses to pilot a Jaeger with me, I will still become a ranger,” he says, and Yoongi wants to tear at his hair at the fact that even now, in a situation like this, the cadet still refuses to be anything but casual in regards to him. “I came here to fight back against the Kaiju, sir, and I won’t be deterred by this.”

His words, for all the resolve they carry, are empty, since he can’t pilot a Jaeger without a partner to help him do it. Without Yoongi, there’s no way he can, yet he seems to believe his determination will be enough.

It makes Yoongi want to scream.

Marshal Daewon heaves another sigh and glances out into the hangar. “This is a rough situation,” he says slowly. “We only have one active Jaeger in this base at the moment, and if one of the pilots become injured, we won’t be able to defend the city or stop the Kaijus from roaming inland. I understand we have more promising pilots-in-training who showed positive results of drift-compatibility, but…”

He shakes his head, glancing at Yoongi out of the corner of his eye. “With officer Min, who has experience as a ranger,” he says, “the two of you could advance and join the ranks faster in this time of need.”

A flare of resentment rises to Yoongi’s chest, brought on by the obvious attempt to guilt him into agreeing. “No,” he says for the third time, spitting out the word like venom. “No matter what you say, my answer is no.”

The marshal looks all but pained, but nods his head either way. “Perhaps it’s too soon,” he concedes, as if he truly believes time will change Yoongi’s mind. As if four years hasn’t been enough. “Alright. You’re dismissed, but please, for the sake of our city and all its people, think this through, officer Min. The country needs you.”

“The country needs someone who can fight,” he replies stiffly, his jaw aching with the effort it takes to pry his teeth apart and speak. “And that someone is not me.”
With that, he turns on the heel and storms back towards the elevator. He doesn’t wait for Jimin to join him, pressing the buttons until the doors close and he’s left alone. With a quivering exhale, he leans back against the wall, feeling far too exhausted from the argument, however short it was. He wants to just return to his quarters and not leave again for many days, even though he knows it’s not possible, what with the testings still going on.

He makes his way back towards his room, the hallways still empty due to the early hour. His legs feel heavier than before, and he wonders if he’ll be able to sleep now, if his thoughts will grant him enough peace of mind to let him rest.

“Hyung!”

Never before has Yoongi despised a voice as much as he does then. Go away, he thinks and keeps walking, only barely managing to keep himself from breaking into a run to escape the one person he really doesn’t want to see.

“Hyung, slow down!” Jimin calls, his hurried footsteps echoing in the hallway.

“Get back to your quarters, cadet Park,” Yoongi bites out. He’s so close to his quarters. He can just shut the door and stop the cadet from ever reaching him.

He’s hardly surprised when Jimin doesn’t do as told, but it fuels his building anger all the same. “Not until you listen to me,” the cadet says, as if he has any grounds to command Yoongi’s attention.

“You think I want to hear anything you have to say?” Yoongi snaps, far louder than intended. He doesn’t turn around, his eyes trained on the door to his quarters when he rounds the final corner.

“I don’t care if you want to hear it or not,” Jimin retorts hotly. He’s out of breath, having ran to catch up, and Yoongi can practically sense the cadet’s want to reach out and pull him to a halt. “You can’t just walk away from this!”

“I can and I will,” Yoongi says curtly. The gnawing sensation is back in his thoughts, his memories struggling to break through whatever shred of control he has left. He’s so close to his room now, so close to peaceful solidarity. “I’m never getting back inside a Jaeger, not as long as I’m still fucking breathing.”
“Then you’re more selfish than I could’ve ever imagined!”

Yoongi freezes with his hand on the doorhandle, every noise in his head stilling all at once. The cadet’s words take three long seconds to process, and when they do, Yoongi whirls around, anger bursting through his chest. “Selfish?” he repeats loudly and pins Jimin under a murderous glare, one the cadet doesn’t falter under. “Fucking selfish? What the fuck would you know about me, Park Jimin? Huh?! You don’t even know the meaning of the word selfish!”

Jimin is standing barely two meters away from him, yet even as Yoongi’s voice evolves into the makings of a scream, he doesn’t back away. He doesn’t recoil, he doesn’t show any signs of fear. He only looks at Yoongi, with that unbearable glint to his eyes.

“You don’t know anything about why I’ve made the choices I have!” Yoongi shouts, his throat burning. “Selfish are the people who try to force me back inside one of those machines! You don’t even know what piloting a Jaeger means! You don’t know shit about the sacrifices you’ll have to make and the people you’ll lose if you fight those monsters head-on!”

The words are like venom on his tongue, and in the far back of his mind, there’s a voice screaming at him to stop. These are not things he wants to say, least of all to Jimin. Jimin, who’s done nothing wrong.

“You’ll never understand,” Yoongi spits through gritted teeth. “You’ve never lost anything in your life, how the fuck could you understand?”

It’s a startling thing, to watch the cadet’s own anger erupt, twisting his previously calm features into something Yoongi has never wanted to be the cause of. “So what if I haven’t lost anything?!” Jimin yells, throwing his arms out to the sides. “Did you ever stop to think that I’m here to make sure that doesn’t happen?! Yeah, my parents and siblings are still alive, but that doesn’t mean I’m not every fucking bit as devoted to this program as anyone else! I’m here because I want to make sure I won’t lose them, and you’re treating me like some naïve brat for it!”

“You—” Every word he speaks is true, but Yoongi can’t admit it, his emotions too wound up to allow even a shred of rationality. “I treat you like a naïve brat because you behave like a naïve brat!” he retorts hotly. “You act like this is some fairyland battle where you’ll play the hero and save the world from extinction!”

“And you act like the whole world ceased to matter the day you lost your brother!”
Every cell in Yoongi’s body turns cold as ice. “What did you—”

“I heard you talking to Namjoon-hyung about it after... after you—” Jimin grits his teeth, a look of torment settling over his features. “I know I shouldn’t have listened,” he says, the faintest crack to his voice, “but I couldn’t just—I had to know that you were...”

He doesn’t finish any of his sentences, but they ring loudly in Yoongi’s ears all the same. “It’s a terrible thing to have happened,” the cadet continues, “and maybe the world did stop turning for you. Maybe every other human being stopped mattering to you after it, but I give a shit, Yoongi-hyung! I care about the people I love and I want to give my life for the sake of protecting them!”

There’s anger and anguish brimming in Yoongi’s chest, clashing and attempting to consume one another. A part of him knows Jimin is right, but he can’t grasp the thought, not when his mind begins to flood with images of the cadet dying in the same manner as his brother, of his eyes losing their flame and staring blindly into the sky.

It makes Yoongi want to scream.

“Stop talking,” he presses out and reaches up to tug at his hair, needing something to distract himself. “You better stop talking right the fuck now, or—”

“No!” Jimin takes a step forward, his voice echoing through the empty hallway. “You can threaten me all you like, but you’re not gonna make me stop caring!” he shouts. “I’m not gonna be like you! I’m not gonna hide away and let my own pain consume my life! I’m not gonna turn my back on my people just because I’m too selfish to risk getting hurt again!”

A flash of rage goes through Yoongi’s body, and with a growl like a beast, he grabs hold of Jimin’s shoulder and slams him against the wall, caging him in with no room to struggle. He’s breathing hard, all the horrible things he wants to say stacking in his throat, held back only by his rapidly waning will to spare the boy from hurt.

Even now, trapped as he is, the cadet doesn’t falter in his resolve. “You’re not gonna stop me from piloting a Jaeger,” he says breathlessly, holding Yoongi’s gaze like a vice. “I’m gonna fight. I’m not gonna give up on the world, even if you have.”

“You’ll die.” The words hurt more than Yoongi can bear, and he’s angry, he’s so angry, but there’s something desperate in it, something screaming at him to hold it back. “You’re going to die if you
do,” he growls, the sound tapering off into the ghost of a whimper.

He couldn’t bear it if his words came true.

“So be it,” Jimin says, unrelenting and unafraid. “At least I’ll die trying to keep this world safe.” He jerks his head up in an almost arrogant manner, never once looking away. “What will you do, Yoongi?”

If anyone asked, Yoongi wouldn’t be able to explain why he does what he does then. He doesn’t know why, but when his anger is on the verge of bursting, he surges forward and presses his lips against Jimin’s, hard and messy. He doesn’t know why, but he needs it, he needs it more than he needs air.

Jimin doesn’t push him away. He barely even hesitates before responding in kind, fighting for dominance over the heated kiss. He grabs at Yoongi’s arms, shoulders, his chest, anywhere he can reach to pull him closer.

It’s all frustration, anger, months of uncertainty coming to a bursting point.

In the end, Jimin submits, emitting a breathless whimper as he leans back and parts his lips for Yoongi to do as he pleases. Fuelled by his pliancy, Yoongi presses him further against the wall and pushes his thigh between Jimin’s legs, a rush of heat going through him when the cadet ruts down against it, mewling against Yoongi’s mouth.

It’s an intoxicating sound, and Yoongi breaks their kiss for long enough to hiss, “Fuck,” before he latches onto Jimin’s neck, pressing his tongue against his sweaty skin before closing his lips around it and sucking, hard. The cadet’s back arches off the wall and his hands come up to bury in Yoongi’s hair, gasping out something incoherent that sounds like Yoongi’s name.

When it’s no longer enough, Yoongi moves his thigh and presses himself against Jimin’s front, his hands going down to the cadet’s ass to pull him closer, grinding his hard cock against Jimin’s own. The friction has a surge of white-hot pleasure bursting through his gut and to the rest of him, and by the way Jimin muffles a moan into his shoulder, it’s every bit as overwhelming for him.

Yoongi moves back up to kiss him, driven by a crazed urge to swallow every sound the cadet emits, every whimper and mewl. Jimin is eager to let him, parting his lips and shuddering when Yoongi sucks on his tongue before nipping at his plush lip.
The movement of their hips grow more desperate, more frantic, lacking any finesse whatsoever. It’s messy, it’s rushed, just like the building heat in the pit of Yoongi’s stomach, coiling taut much faster than it normally would.

The same seems to apply to Jimin; the cadet writhes where he’s pressed against Yoongi, arching as far as he can as a string of whines and gasps spill past his lips, muffled against Yoongi’s mouth. His hands never stay in one place for long, going from clutching at the robes at Yoongi’s chest to his back, to his ass to pull him more firmly against himself, to create more of the burning pleasure they both so desire.

It doesn’t take long before it starts to become too much, short groans slipping past Yoongi’s gritted teeth as he barrels towards his end, his fingers twitching where they hold onto Jimin’s waist in a bruising grip.

He pries his teeth apart to say something, give some kind of warning, but Jimin beats him to it, brows furrowed tightly in pleasure. “Hyung,” he gasps, “Yoongi, I’m gonna—mnh.” He presses his lips together in an attempt to stifle his moan, his breath hitching. “Yoongi, I-I’m gonna come.”

“Yeah,” Yoongi rasps, pushing more harshly against Jimin and reveling in the breathy sound he emits in return. “Fuck, yeah, do it, want you to c-come for me, Jimin—”

When Jimin does reach his peak, the sight of him pulls Yoongi down under as well; the cadet curls against Yoongi, eyes squeezed shut and cheeks flushed red, his bottom lip pulled between his teeth in an attempt to muffle the high moan that so desperately wants to escape him. His body gives a twitch and trembles, and Yoongi can feel his warmth through the robes, can feel his pleasure as if it’s his own.

It’s too much, hot arousal burning through whatever shred of resistance he has, and he scrambles to keep his grip on Jimin’s waist when he comes, body seizing as he spills into the confinements of his underwear.

They’re both equally out of breath when the shocks of pleasure begin to subside, chests heaving. Yoongi leans heavily against Jimin, who in turn tips his head back against the wall, eyes shut in bliss. His thoughts are a mess, for once unwound by the abrupt rush of arousal; he groans as he attempts to get a grip over himself, to compose himself enough even just to stand up straight.

It takes a long moment before Yoongi manages to sort out his thoughts, likely thanks to the hands
that are gently stroking his back to help soothe him. His brain is slow, made so both by his lack of sleep and the exertion of his orgasm, but he recovers slowly. He blinks through his daze and heaves a sigh; he can’t believe that he and Jimin…

That he and Jimin just—

Reality comes crashing down on him with all the force of a freight train.

Yoongi rips himself off Jimin with so much force, he almost loses his balance. It’s a miracle he manages to stay on his feet, what with the pace at which panic begins to build in him, his chest feeling far too tight for how loudly his heart is beating. He stares at Jimin and Jimin stares back, but while the cadet is confused by the sudden distance, Yoongi is rapidly descending into a pit of horror, guilt, and regret.

“Fuck,” he grits out, reaching up to tear at his hair, only to stop halfway, remembering where his hands had been only seconds prior. He can feel Jimin on the skin of his palms, and it burns. “I can’t believe—we shouldn’t have fucking done that, we—fuck, this was such a mistake, I—”

“A mistake.”

Jimin’s voice is hollow and cold and has Yoongi recoiling even further. He swallows thickly and looks at the cadet, and the hurt and the disappointment on his face is like a knife through Yoongi’s chest. “Right,” Jimin says and smiles, twisted, rueful. “Of course you’d think so.”

“Listen,” Yoongi begins, his throat dry as a desert. He’s screwed up so bad this time, he knows he has, and he has no idea what to do about it now. “This—”

“This was a mistake, yeah,” Jimin bites him off stiffly. “Fine.” It’s like he’s donned a mask, hiding the ache in his voice behind a mask of dull resignation. “Have it your way. Run away, Yoongi. You’re good at that.”

His words have Yoongi bristling, his guilt retreating in favor of his prior anger. “I’m not running from shit,” he snaps, the lie coming easy to him in his ire. “This shouldn’t have happened.”

“Yeah, I heard that,” Jimin says and takes a step forwards. He’s no longer looking at Yoongi, staring dead at the wall past his shoulder. “Loud and clear.”
Had Yoongi been in a sounder state of mind, he would probably realise that the cadet is justified in everything he says, but he’s not. Far from it. “Don’t you fucking pull that judgemental shit on me, Jimin, I—”

“I’m gonna pull whatever shit I want if you treat me like this!” Jimin barks, his facade cracking for long enough to show a flicker of hurt across his face, one strong enough to curl around Yoongi’s heart and squeeze until it’s painful. The cadet shakes his head and heaves a deep sigh, reeling himself back into his stony exterior. “I hope it’s worth it, Yoongi,” he says. “Hope your misery’s worth it.”

*Apologise,* Yoongi’s mind begs of him, but upon Jimin’s provocation, the only words that make it past his lips are, “*Fuck you,*” before he storms over to his quarters, all but tears the door open, and slams it shut behind him, the sound deafening in the early morning silence.

In his rage, his ears are deaf to the broken sob that rings through the hallway just before the door closes.

Inside, Yoongi paces around his room in an almost aggressive manner, his steps loud and harsh in the silence. Curse after curse spills past his lips, escaping through his gritted teeth. His hands clench and unclench at his sides, begging for something to grip onto to ground himself, but he can’t, not when Jimin’s presence lingers on the skin of his palms.

“*Fuck,*” he hisses and storms into his bathroom, almost tearing off the nozzle in his hurry to turn on the shower. He steps under the cold spray without bothering to take his robes off, releasing a shuddering exhale into the echoing quiet. “Why the *fuck*...”

His thoughts won’t stop racing, his head pounding with the effort it takes to sustain them all. He can’t make sense of them, each darker than the last, until he can’t bear it any longer; with a whimper, he reaches up and knocks the heel of his hands into his temples with little restraint, staggering until his back hits the wall. It’s insanity, painful and all-consuming, and he needs to make it settle before —

“Hyung, have you ever loved someone?”

The memory crashes against Yoongi’s mind so violently it has his lungs seizing. His eyes snap open yet it’s like he can’t see; all he can do is slide down onto the floor and curl up while trying his best to shut out the voices of his past.
“Not sure,” Giseong says, turning an amused smile on him. “Why? Got someone in mind?”

Yoongi scoffs and returns to his food. “No,” he says and looks around in the mess hall while he chews. “I wouldn’t want to fall in love during times of war. Especially not here. People die so easily, you know?”

His brother hums at that, nodding slowly. “Well, sure,” he says and waves his spoon around in the air, still smiling, “but that’s a pretty sad life, then, isn’t it? We’re only here for so long, Yoonie. Like you said, the life of a soldier can end easily. Shouldn’t we appreciate what we have while we have it, even if it’ll be gone the next day? Seize the day, or whatever the oldies say?”

Yoongi sends him a skeptical look, one that has him laughing, bright and cheery. “All I’m saying is that you shouldn’t dismiss the value of concepts like love or friendship just because it might be taken away from you one day,” Giseong says and reaches over the table to ruffle Yoongi’s hair. “The world will continue to turn even when we lose things that are precious to us. Loss is painful and people are fragile, but if they want to, they can always heal and try again.”

“Stop,” Yoongi pleads and squeezes his eyes shut against the burn behind them. “Stop it, leave me alone, please.”

For once, his memories do as told. They leave him be, retreating to the far back of his mind as he cracks and tears spill down his cheeks.

Yoongi knows he should’ve expected Jimin to treat him coldly after what happened. To some degree, he did expect it, but he could never have imagined the extent of the cadet’s anger.

“Yes, sir,” is all he says whenever Yoongi tells him to do something. “No, sir,” he’ll say in moments where he would’ve normally launched a myriad of questions. He doesn’t meet Yoongi’s eyes, he doesn’t smile or show any of the excitement any menial task would infuse him with. There’s a bite to his voice, sharp and allowing no argument, and Yoongi…

Yoongi is losing his mind.
Not because he would miss Jimin’s incessant bubbliness or unyielding naïvety, no, or because Jimin would be disregarding his duties. He still oozes the same determination as before and he still does every task given to him, even if his replies are short and without their usual emotion. He’s still top of the class and he still laughs whenever Taehyung tells him a joke, but whenever he’s in Yoongi’s presence, he’s utterly void of his prior cheeriness.

In other words, Jimin is finally behaving like a cadet should, and it’s driving Yoongi insane.

It’s not his behavior that’s making a hell out of Yoongi’s life, but the lack of everything that Jimin instilled in him with his presence alone. The trust, the comfort, the hope—however reluctant it was—and the belief that maybe, just maybe, the world as Yoongi knows it isn’t how it truly is. That it’s not all darkness and pain. That it’s actually worth living.

After the incident, Yoongi’s emotions are shot to shit. He feels exposed, as if all the walls he’s spent years building around himself have been torn down to leave him open and vulnerable. He’s on edge all the time and snaps at everyone and every thing, only to immediately be crippled by guilt and a need to hide away.

He spends more time in the sickbay than anywhere else. Now that the assessments for drift-compatibility have passed, the cadets spend less time in the Kwoon Combat Room, instead learning about piloting and undergoing simulations in the artificial Conn-Pod under Namjoon’s tutelage. It means Yoongi has more free time, and whenever he does, he sits with Sejin in the infirmary, mostly to hide from anyone who might look for him.

Sometimes, he doesn’t say a word. He shows up and slumps into the seat next to Sejin’s station and he just sits there, staring numbly at the grey walls while his thoughts grow incoherent and numb. Sometimes he sleeps, and sometimes, however rarely, he talks. There’s no sense to what he says, nothing that might actually serve a purpose or help him overcome his plague, but he talks and Sejin listens, and calms him down.

Yoongi catches Jimin looking at him from time to time, always during supper, when the cadet must believe he’s too preoccupied to notice his gaze. As soon as Yoongi meets his eyes, Jimin looks away, a hard frown settling over his features as he returns to his food, his movements jerky and stiff until Taehyung manages to coax a smile out of him and make him relax.

*It’s fine,* Yoongi tells himself and pretends the accompanying thoughts don’t make him hate himself. *Like this, he’ll be safe. He won’t pilot a Jaeger. He won’t be a ranger, and he won’t die. Even if he hates me, he won’t die.*
It’s a painful reality he’s determined to resign himself to. If he can just endure, he reasons, everything will be fine. Jimin will eventually come to terms with the fact that he won’t be a pilot and instead become whatever he wants to be in the Shatterdome Base. He’s skilled enough to be able to pick and choose anything he wants to become, anything that won’t put him in the direct path of a rampaging thirty-meter tall monster.

It’s fine.

Until thirteen days later, when everything stops being fine.

They majority of the base is gathered in the mess hall for supper when it happens. There’s a tremor through the floor and walls and ceiling, faint and distant, yet enough to make the lamps flicker and shake. It passes unnoticed by most, the lot of the base’s inhabitants too engrossed in cheery conversation, while those alert enough look around in confusion at the disturbance.

For a moment, it looks like everything will return to normal, the quiver in the walls merely a figment of imagination.

Then a blaring alarm cuts through the noise of the mess hall, deep and deafeningly loud. Every last soul freezes, halting whatever they’re doing in favor of staring up at the speakers installed at the ceiling corners, as if they would magically come to life to tell them all what they already know the sound to be.

The warning of an impending Kaiju attack.

Hoseok is the first to snap out of the state of dazed horror. “Cadets, stay seated!” he calls out before anyone can regain enough composure to move, let alone speak. His voice is nearly drowned out by the alarm, but he manages to catch everyone’s attention either way. “Remain calm and quiet until you’re called upon to move somewhere else!”

Everyone who’s not a trainer or a cadet remain in their seats while the soldiers, Jumphawk pilots, and rangers jump into action, abandoning their supper in favor of rushing to take their stations and brace themselves for the battle to come. Namjoon hurries off as well, needed to oversee the synchronisation of the rangers at LOCCENT Mission Control.

“Just have them sit until it’s sure they won’t be in anyone’s way,” Yoongi says and looks around, waiting for the fighters to clear the room. “They can return to their bunks if they want, but a Jaeger
will be dispatched to take care of this shit any minute now. ‘S no need for them to stop eating.’

“Yeah,” Hoseok says, keeping his hand raised above his head as a sign for the cadets to remain where they are. “It’s the first time a Kaiju has attacked when they’re not in the middle of training, so the lack of a distraction might be freaking them out a bit.”

Yoongi snorts at that, but his eyes drift towards the trainees as if on instinct, searching for a shock of blonde hair. He finds it easily enough, and is hit by an odd sense of deja-vu at the sight of Jimin; just like he did the first time he heard the Kaiju alarm, the cadet is staring up into the ceiling, almost as if he can see through the concrete into the overworld.

As soon as all the soldiers have left the mess hall, Hoseok directs the cadets to retake their seats and remain calm, his cheerful smile serving to ease the lot of them out of their tension. They do as told, albeit with some hesitance; they keep glancing up towards the ceiling, as if expecting a gargantuan monster to come crashing through at any given moment. It takes them a few minutes, but when the alarm stops blaring, the warning having already been made crystal clear, they return to their prior conversations.

Everyone except Park Jimin, who can’t seem to pry his eyes off the ceiling.

It takes Taehyung nudging him in the side to get him to finally look away, and even when he does, he seems distracted at best, as if he can’t pay proper attention to what his friends are talking about.

There’s a part of Yoongi that wants to grab the cadet by the shoulders and shake him out of whatever fascination he has with the thought of battling Kaijus, bordering on obsession. But of course, Yoongi doesn’t, because not only would that put him closer to Jimin than he himself can bear, but it would probably only add another reason for the cadet to despise him.

Thus he returns to his food, only to almost choke on his spoon when the speakers crackle to life again at the same time as another tremor goes through the entire Shatterdome base.

“Threat level six,” the marshal’s voice rings through the mess hall and once again, every last soul freezes, this time including Yoongi. “I repeat, threat level six. All personnel, report to your nearest emergency bunker right away. This is not a drill. I repeat, All personnel, report to your nearest—”

Another quake shakes the base, this time so violent it cuts off the transmission halfway through, the lights flickering once more, struggling to come back to life. A startled cry rises from all around the
mess hall, trays falling to the floor and glasses shattering. “What the fuck,” Yoongi hisses and jumps to his feet. “The fuck are they doing?”

“This isn’t good,” Hoseok says, quick to climb up onto their table to draw the attention of the cadets, who are rapidly growing more and more distressed, their voices growing every time the lights give out. “Alright, newbies, all eyes on me! I’m gonna take you lot to the nearest bunker, so stay calm and form two lines!”

The cadets are quick to comply, pushing away from the tables to form the same orderly lines that they have every day for the past fifteen weeks of training. “Lead the way,” Yoongi tells the assault specialist and jerks his head towards the doors. “I’ll make sure no one falls behind.”

They take off, sticking close to the wall to stay out of the way of the soldiers rushing back and forth along the hallways. There are orders being called out left and right, far more agitated than they would usually be, and Yoongi feels a chill run down his spine, anxiousness pricking at his nerves.

“The fuck is this,” he mutters and almost walks into one of the cadets in his disorientation, twisting his head this way and that to try and find any kind of explanation in their surroundings. “Why are they—”

“Officer Min!”

Yoongi turns sharply, his eyes widening at the sight of Marshal Daehan running down the hallway after their lineup, out of breath and frantic. “Officer Min,” he says when he catches up, bracing a hand against the wall while the other clutching at his sides. He’s sweating, and the look in his eyes is nothing short of pleading. “Officer Min, you have to come with me right away!”

“What—”

“Cadet Park, you too!”

An icy chill spreads through Yoongi’s chest, every cell in his body going taut as the cadet comes hurrying up beside him. “What the fuck’s going on?” he asks stiffly, even though he already knows.

“The Northern Star is down,” Daehan says tensely, his voice low so as to not spread panic to those around them. “It’s a category IV Kaiju, an Otachi. The last one was supposed to have been
exterminated thirty years ago, and the Northern Star Jaeger wasn’t equipped to take it on. Both pilots are down and unresponsive through the comms.”

Yoongi knows what he’s going to say. He knows the Northern Star is the only active Jaeger in the base, the Busan PPDC having faced a string of casualties within the past year, and if it’s down, it can only mean one thing. “Why are you telling us this?” he asks, pressing the words out through gritted teeth. He knows why, but he wants to hear it. He wants to hear it so he can shut it down and ease the pressure steadily building in his chest.

The marshal looks pained and frustrated all at once, his face twisting in reply. “Because we need you two!” he says loudly, reaching up to run a hand through his hair. “Before you say anything, I’m fully aware of the fact that you two are far from qualified, but—”

Another tremor goes through the base, followed by a muted yet shrill roar. “Fuck,” Daehan hisses and turns to Yoongi, his desperation clear as day. “There’s no one else! There are two Jaegers on their way from Seoul, but it’ll take twenty minutes for them to get here and there’s no one else to protect the base in the meantime!”

Yoongi knows what it means for a base to stand unprotected. With the entire structure lying underground, there’s nowhere to run to when the Kaiju begins its attempts to break in and kill everything in sight. “This isn’t—” he begins, only to stop, the words stacking in his throat. He can’t breathe right. “You can’t just—”

“I’ll fight.”

Fuck.

Jimin takes a step forward, not a shred of doubt to be found anywhere on his form. “Just tell me what I need to do, sir,” he says firmly. “I’m ready.”

He turns to Yoongi, and there’s that look, that unyielding determination, the one that makes Yoongi want to scream.

“He can’t go alone, officer, you know it’s impossi—” The marshal is interrupted by another tremor, powerful enough to send them staggering. It’s as if the Kaiju is attempting to rip the entire base out of the ground, shrieking as it tears at the facade. “We need you,” Daehan cries, shouting to be heard over the building panic all around them, “we need you right now, Yoongi!”
Yoongi parts his lips and closes them again, staring at Jimin as if the cadet is holding his gaze in a vice grip. He doesn’t speak, but everything he wants to say is clear in his eyes, burning a hole through Yoongi’s sanity.

With a snarl like a wounded beast, Yoongi turns around and rams his fist into the nearest wall.

“Fuck!” he barks, the curse falling guttural from his lips. It hurts, it hurts so much, the entirety of his being feeling like it’s about to cave in on itself and burst, and he wants nothing more than to kick and scream and maybe even cry, but instead, he turns to the marshal. “Fine,” he spits, the word like acid on his tongue. “Fine, fuck, I’ll do it. I’ll pilot the fucking Jaeger.”

Everything is a blur after that. He and Jimin are rushed into the Jaeger hangar, with people shouting incoherent orders left and right. He’s handed a uniform to change into and he does so without slowing down, his blood rushing in his ears the closer they get to the machine they’re supposed to pilot. It’s dark in color and monstrously large, far taller than any building in Busan, and Yoongi knows it, he’s seen it be piloted before, in Hoseok’s holographic scenarios.

The Black Fox.

Someone shoves a drivesuit into Yoongi’s arms to hold while the technicians get ready, and the mere sight of it has his hands shaking, wanting to drop it as if it’s burning his skin. He remembers the last time he wore a drivesuit. He remembers every crack in the glass protecting his face as he stared at the lifeless corpse of his—

“Hyung!”

Yoongi startles so hard he might’ve dropped the suit if not for the hands steadying them alongside his own. “Come on, hyung,” Jimin says loudly, his voice clear through the disturbance in Yoongi’s mind. The cadet is almost done equipping his own drivesuit, only the gloves and helmet still missing, held by the techie standing behind him. “You have to be quick, hyung, we have to go!”

There’s a scream brimming in Yoongi’s throat, but he swallows it down and nods. “Right,” he grits out and turns to his technician. “We have to go.”

It’s quicker than he remembers and far less painful, the sensorts of the Circuitry Suit pricking at the skin along his spine and neck to access his nervous system and project its image onto a screen in
Mission Control.

The technicians guide them inside the Conn-Pod where it’s suspended several meters above the Black Fox Jaeger, guiding them towards the platforms from where they will control the machine. The familiarity of his surroundings brings the panic within Yoongi to a vicious simmer, bubbling in his throat to make it difficult to breathe. He screws his eyes shut when his head begins to spin, the sounds around him muted in his ears in his struggle to maintain even a shred of his sanity.

He can’t do it. He knows he has to, but he can’t.

*Help me, Giseong,* he pleads inwardly, his throat burning. He’s feeling too much all at once, the chaos in his chest threatening to choke him, his breath passing shrilly through gritted teeth. *Help me, please, I can’t do this, not again, I can’t, I—*

“Hyung.”

The glass visor of his helmet clicks open and a gentle pressure settles against his forehead before he can do as much as open his eyes. “It’s okay, hyung,” Jimin whispers, his breath ghosting warm over the bridge of Yoongi’s nose as he leans against him, his hands cradling Yoongi’s face. “You’re won’t be alone. Trust in me, Yoongi-hyung, *please.*”

Yoongi feels like he’s losing balance where he stands, but he holds Jimin’s eyes all the same, the pressure within him stilling by a mere fraction when the cadet smiles. “We’ll make it through this, both of us,” Jimin says, so sure of himself even in the face of the battle to come. “I promise.”

He’s gone before Yoongi can even begin to reel in himself enough to speak, the visor of his helmet sliding shut once more.

“To your platforms,” the technicians call and guide them to their respective platforms. Yoongi’s legs feel like lead, heavy and slow as he moves to step into the geared locks meant to keep him in place in during the mission. His heart is beating painfully in his chest, but he makes himself do it, taking his position as one of the pilots.

The locks click into place around the boots of his drivesuit, and he feels like he could pass out.

The technicians scurry around the two of them, making sure they’re properly fastened to the motion
rig and attaching the arm controls extensions to their gauntlets. They secure the hand controls, and finally, with the attachment of the spinal clamp, the Conn-Pod lights up.

It feels like a lifetime has passed since Yoongi last stood where he stands now.

“All systems are up and running,” Namjoon’s voice calls through the intercom, his tension audible even through the speakers. “How are you guys doing, you feeling alright?”

“Everything’s okay on this end,” Jimin says while Yoongi grimaces and does his best to keep his panic at bay. The cadet is flicking all sorts of buttons on the control panel above his head, as if he’s done this a million times already. “We’re hooked up and ready to go.”

The technicians rush out and close the hatch to the Conn-Pod, and then it’s jarred out of place, taken by an elevator towards the Jaeger's body. It makes Yoongi sick to his stomach, although it’s hardly motion sickness plaguing him now.

“Cadet Park, this is your first time in an actual Jaeger,” Namjoon says. He’s speaking very quickly, as if his voice is a countdown towards the inevitable battle. “I’ll be here to guide you through any questions you may have, so even though you’ll be in the middle of a fight, if there’s something you’re confused about, ask.”

“I know more about that Jaeger,” another voice huffs, followed by what sounds like someone being shoved aside. “Jimin-ah, if there are any functions you’re unsure about, ask me.” Jin’s voice is every bit as prim and snappish as always, although there is a definite twinge of worry etched into it. “I’ll keep an eye on the battle and guide you through what buttons to hit or levers to turn to take on the Kaiju.”

“Got it, Jinnie-hyung,” the cadet says firmly, addressing the head of J-Tech as if they’ve been friends for years.

“Yoongi.” Namjoon’s voice makes Yoongi wince, and he knows his vitals are visible on a screen in the Mission Control room. He knows they can see just how badly he’s freaking out. “Are you alright?”

He almost wants to laugh, the question so utterly ridiculous. “’M fine,” he croaks instead, gripping hard onto the hand controls in an attempt to ground himself as the Conn-Pod is attached to the Jaeger, the pit jarring. “Just fine.”
There’s a brief silence before Namjoon starts up again. “The Black Fox Jaeger is equipped with a jetpack function, four powerful engines at the back,” he says. “The Kaiju is trying to break through the landing hatch, so you’ll have to blast through as soon as we open the ceiling and prevent the beast from getting inside.”

“Got it,” Jimin says again.

“We’re prepping you for synchronisation, and then it’ll be real fast from there on out.”

A rush of cold goes through Yoongi at the mention of syncing. He’s barely managing to keep his shit together, yet he’s supposed to open his mind and share it with Jimin, to let him see and feel the chaos raging through his consciousness. Calm down, he thinks to himself, frantic in his plea. Calm down, calm down, calm your fucking ass down, Min Yoongi!

“Ten seconds.”

Next to him, Jimin draws a deep breath and closes his eyes, nodding as if to show he’s ready.

“Three seconds.”

“Fuck,” Yoongi hisses, his stomach turning and his heart feeling like it’s about to burst through his ribs and choke him. “Fuck—”

“Synchronisation,” Namjoon’s voice calls through the intercom, “activated.”

A gasp slips past Yoongi’s lips at the sudden pull at the very core of his mind, feeling as if the floor is swept away from underneath him. Unknown thoughts and memories flood his senses, vivid images flashing before his closed eyes; in one moment, he’s surrounded by kids that all resemble him, giggling and hiding in the corner of a dusty vault, waiting for someone to find them and move the game along.

In the next, he’s standing in the middle of an abandoned street, his sister crying in fear while he just looks in wonder at the gargantuan monster rampaging several blocks away, its roar deafening as it’s struck down by a mace-wielding machine.
“Don’t worry, sister,” he says in a voice that doesn’t belong to him, smiling bright and wide as he eases out of a near hysteric woman’s embrace. “I’ll grow so strong, I can fight all your monsters for you. You won’t have to be afraid anymore.”

If not for the motion rig, Yoongi would probably lose his balance and fall, his chest heaving with the exertion of accepting Jimin’s mind to mix his own. It’s an unfathomable feeling, to give someone half of your consciousness and welcome half of theirs in return, and it takes him several long moments before he can even begin to recover from the shock of it.

A pained whimper sounds from his left, and Yoongi freezes where he stands.

Jimin’s struggle to cope with the synchronisation is so obvious it hurts. He has let go of the arm handles in favor of clutching at his helmet, his face screwed up in agony as he claws at the glass in an attempt to reach his own skin, undoubtedly to sink his fingers into it and scratch in the same way Yoongi has done so many times when his thoughts have been the hardest to bear.

The sight makes Yoongi hate himself, his entire being burning with a poisonous guilt for forcing Jimin to endure everything that has plagued him for the past four years, all the anguish, the despair.

“Jimin,” Yoongi croaks. He doesn’t want this, he doesn’t want the cadet to hurt like this. Not because of him. “Fuck, I knew this would happen, I—” He tries to reach out for Jimin, but the motion rigs stops him, the two standing too far away. “Shit, we can’t—Namjoon, we can’t fucking do this, we need to stop right now! Jimin—”

“No.” The cadet stands upright, his movements slow and forced as if he’s holding up the weight of the entire world on his shoulders. He’s breathing harshly and there are tears pouring from his eyes, his cheeks wet and glistening, but he grabs firmly onto the arm controls. “No, we’re doing this,” he grits out, his voice cracking. “We’re not giving up before we even start.”

“Jimin—”

“I said no,” Jimin interrupts before he can even begin. He doesn’t look at Yoongi, but Yoongi can feel his resolve inside himself, clashing hard against his dread. “If you can stand having these thoughts in your head every day of your life, I can damn well bear them for now!” His grip on the arm controls tighten, and Yoongi follows his lead without intending to, his body resonating to the will of the cadet’s. “Synchronisation complete. Get all systems online!”
With his command, the Jaeger comes to life, a deafening clang echoing through the hangar as the machine shifts where it stands, raising its arms to mimic the position Jimin guides both it and Yoongi to assume.

“The ceiling hatch is right above you guys,” Namjoon says through the intercom. “Use the button on the side of your left arm control to activate your flight motion.”

“Roger that,” Jimin says and draws a deep breath, blinking hard against the tears still swimming in his eyes. “You ready, hyung?”

No, Yoongi wants to say. He wants to break out of the motion rig and out of his drivesuit and never look at either one again, but he can’t, not with Jimin’s voice echoing inside his own head, bearing all the strength in this world. “Ready,” he rasps and reaches for the button. “I’m ready.”

He doesn’t have to ask when to activate the flight motion; he feels the intentions of Jimin’s movements reverberate through his own body, their minds as one, and so he presses down at the exact same time as the cadet.

Six rocket-like engines burst to life along the Jaeger’s back, so powerful they almost stagger with the force of it. They catch themselves just in time, moving their right foot forward to widen their stance and stay upright. Of course, they only stay like that for a split second; it takes the engines only a moment to reach full power, and then they’re off the ground and rising fast towards the ceiling hatch.

“You only need to hold out until reinforcement from Seoul arrives, in nine minutes,” Namjoon tells them when the hatch begins to open, the light of day streaming in through the rapidly increasing gap. “Play it as safe as you can, you two. Focus on defense rather than offense.”

“Yes,” Yoongi and Jimin reply at once.

The very second they’re out of the hatch, they come face to face with the Otachi.

“Fuck,” Yoongi hisses when the Kaiju immediately sets its sights on them, a shrill roar rising from its throat as it abandons the task of breaking through the Shatterdome Base roof in favor of charging at their Jaeger. “We’re still in the air! We can’t dodge, it’s gonna knock us down!”
“Watch its tail!” Hoseok’s voice joins the others’. He’s out of breath and panting, having likely run all the way to Mission Control after safely escorting the other cadets to their emergency bunker. “You have to deflect its charge instead of just blocking it, or it’ll strike you with its tail while your hands are occupied!”

“It has to leap to reach us!” Jimin says loudly and releases his hold on the flight button at the same time as Yoongi does. “We can turn it away from us midair!”

“It has more momentum than us!” Yoongi retorts, resisting the movement Jimin projects onto him through their synchronisation. “It’s gonna have the upper hand if we’re both in the air!”

“Hyung, you can’t just—”

The Kaiju barrels into them before Jimin can finish his reprimand, crashing hard against the Jaeger’s unprotected chest. The impact knocks jars the two of them inside their motion rigs, jarred out of place with so much force it makes Yoongi’s neck ache. They’re airborne for a matter of seconds, and then they crash into the streets of Busan, the entire Conn-Pod rattling with the force of it.

“Fuck!” Yoongi grits out, his head throbbing. The Jaeger is still skidding along the street, and through the HUDs that provide them with vision of their surroundings, he sees the Otachi chase after them, the earth shaking for every bounding step. “It’s charging again, fuck, there’s no time for—”

“Kick it in the face!” Jimin shouts, and before Yoongi can even process his words, his body is moving alongside the cadet’s, moving his hands to brace the Jaeger’s against the ground while drawing up its left leg.

The kick catches the Kaiju square in the jaw with a sickening crunch and sends it reeling to the side, staggering into a nearby building. “Up, up, up,” Jimin chants as they struggle to rise, the size of the Jaeger making it slow and tedious. “Come on, we have to move fast, before—”

The Otachi rips itself free from the crumbling building with a deafening cry, outraged and feral. It turns and and lunges at the Jaeger, raising its right arm to deliver a bone-rattling strike to the machine’s head just as it’s managed to stand upright. It stagers, with Yoongi and Jimin barely managing to get its hand up to brace against the nearby skyscraper to keep from falling over again.

“Left!” Jimin calls, emitting a sound akin to a growl as he pulls the Jaeger’s arm up to block the incoming swipe, all but forcing Yoongi to follow his lead. “Its neck is open, we can ram it and force
“We *can’t*, it’s gonna use its tail!” Yoongi fires back, gritting his teeth with the effort it takes to pull into a defensive stance instead of offensive, like Jimin is attempting to.

“If we strike it, it’ll become disoriented, hyung! Its tail won’t hit!”

“You can’t know—”

“Watch out!”

Namjoon’s voice comes through the intercom a split second before the Kaiju’s tail lashes out at the Jaeger’s head. A thrill of dread runs through Yoongi, the memory of the Cleaverhead Kaiju surging into his consciousness, and before he can think, he all but throws himself out of the way, pulling Jimin and the Jaeger along with the desperate attempt at getting out of the way.

The iron-clad appendage just barely misses the Conn-Pod, swiping against the side of the Jaeger’s head. The sudden shift in balance leaves them defenseless, however, and the Otachi rams its horned head against their chest, sending them stumbling backwards. Their leg catches on a short building and they lose their balance, crashing into what used to be known as Lotte Hotel.

“Shit,” Yoongi wheezes, his hands trembling where they clutch onto the arm controls.

“Get up, hyung, come on!” Jimin cries, struggling to raise the Jaeger. “It’s coming at us again, come *on*!” They barely manage to get the machine standing, staggering clumsily along the empty streets. “It’s gonna use its head again, but we can deflect it if we’re quick! Get ready to move right!”

“Stop telling me every single thing you’re about to do!” Yoongi snaps, strung out far past his self-control. “I can feel it all through the sync, you don’t have to keep fucking *shouting*!”

“Then stop resisting me and focus on the actual fight!” Jimin bites back with equal frustration. He grabs hard onto the arm controls and puts his entire body into the deflection of the Kaiju’s charge, the Jaeger moving back at the same time as it shoves the Otachi off its course to barrel head first into the remains of the hotel. “If I have to force every strike out of you, this is gonna be a lot harder than it already is, hyung!”
Yoongi bristles at that, anger both familiar and foreign brimming in his chest. “I’m trying my best here, okay?!” he barks and moves the Jaeger backwards, securing a safe distance between them and the recovering Kaiju. “It’s not a fucking walk in the park!”

“I know it’s not!” Jimin yells. “I can feel it’s not, but we’re gonna lose at this rate!”

“I fucking told you this was a bad idea!” Yoongi’s voice is set in a permanent escalation now, growing louder for every word he speaks, until his throat is aching with it. “This is exactly why I refused, fuck, we shouldn’t have—”

Much like he had in the hallway after discovering their drift-compatibility, Jimin all but explodes. “What do you think you’re gonna accomplish by holding yourself back like this?!” he screams, and Yoongi recoils with the sheer force of his ire, flaring to overpower his own. “I can feel your reluctance in every single move we make! This isn’t—you shutting yourself off from this and everything else in the world is only going to make things harder!”

By the time Yoongi recovers from the shock of the cadet’s outburst, the Otachi is charging their way again, shrieking in rage. The sight doesn’t stop Yoongi from retaliating in kind, however, his anger quick to push back against Jimin’s. “You think I don’t know that?!” he bellows. “You think I don’t fucking know it, Jimin?! You think I don’t spend every day of my goddamn life thinking about it?! But what the fuck am I supposed to do?! You’re telling me to relive all those nightmares you saw when we synced, over and over again, as if it won’t tear me apart!”

“Hiding them away is what’s tearing you apart!” Jimin retorts and raises his left arm to parry the Kaiju’s strike, Yoongi following without pause. “It’s stopping you from being human, Yoongi! You’re denying yourself from living!”

“So what?!” Yoongi knows this is the worst situation possible to have this fight, even as they manage to shove the Otachi backwards and cause it to stumble over an old billboard. “Maybe I don’t want to live like that! Living is fucking painful, fuck, just the thought of losing someone else hurts to much I could die!”

“Who said you’re gonna lose me?!” Jimin asks shrilly. “Who said I’m gonna die?! Because I won’t! I won’t die!”

There’s a white-hot flame burning in Yoongi’s chest and behind his eyes, and in the far back of his mind, he wonders if he’s the one who’s crying, or if the hurt is coming from Jimin.
“You can’t know that,” he presses out. His voice crackles and breaks, his throat raw from screaming, but he raises it either way, if only to combat the memories tearing at his sanity. “You can’t fucking know that, Jimin, you can’t know you won’t die!” The words spill from his lips without reason or restraint, set free by his anguish. “Y-you can’t ask me to let myself care about you when there’s a chance I’ll lose you just like I lost Giseong!”

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“Then help me fight this Kaiju so you don’t have to lose me!” Jimin’s voice has grown desperate now, but his strength is still there, firm as ever as he guides the Jaeger into an offensive stance, facing the Otachi’s charge head on. “If you don’t want to lose me, then come with me and keep me safe!” A growl spills from his lips as he rams the Jaeger’s fist against the beast’s skull, with Yoongi easily being pulled into the movement. “Come with me, Yoongi, and when living starts to hurt, tell me so I can understand!”

The sob bursts past Yoongi’s lips before he can stop it, his cheeks wet with tears. God, he can’t believe what a bloody mess he is, so twisted out of shape it’s like he’s forgotten what it means to exist like a human being. He’s tired, he’s so, so tired, he wishes he could just sleep for a lifetime, but he makes his body stand upright, following the call of Jimin’s mind in his own.

The Kaiju has recovered from the strike, but rather than charging, it widens its stance and jerks his head as if it’s regurgitating, about to vomit.

“Oh, fuck,” Yoongi presses out when he realises what’s going on, blinking hard to get rid of his tears. “Jimin, it’s—”

“It’s gonna release a spray of acid,” the cadet finishes for him and looks around, frantically searching all the buttons and levers around his motion rig. “Jin-hyung? Jin-hyung, does this Jaeger have a shield function?”

“In your left arm!” Seokjin says, his voice crackling a bit through the intercom. “Hold it like you’re blocking a roundhouse kick and turn your hand controls towards your body to activate it!”

“Come on, hyung,” Jimin says, far less harshly than before. “Backup will be here any minute and then you can rest, but we have to hold this off first!”

“Yeah,” Yoongi grits out, nodding. “I know.”
They move into a crouch at the same time as they position the Jaeger’s left arm like Jin instructed them to. When they twist the hand controls, a hatch in the limb snaps open to free several metallic blades from its confinements. The blades rotate and snap together to form a round shield, a pulse of orange energy crossing its surface when its form is complete, a mere fraction of a second before the Otachi releases its poison.

The spray of acid hits the shield with the force of a waterfall, splashing left and right onto the streets and buildings all around the Jaeger. “Oh my god,” Jimin squeaks, the first sign of a waver in his voice as he watches the skyscraper next to them melt where the poison hits it, burning through glass and concrete and turning it to a shapeless goo. “If that had hit us…”

Yoongi doesn’t even want to imagine what that would be like, to have their Jaeger melt down into nothingness right in front of a Kaiju. He shakes his head to get rid of the thought and moves to make them stand, but they’re too slow; distracted by the acid’s effect, they fail to notice the Otachi’s approach before it’s too late.

The Kaiju tackles them to the ground, clawing at the Jaeger’s chest and screeching, its tail attempting to break the shield off their arm, grappling at the edge of it and tearing. “This is bad,” Yoongi grits out, forcing up the Jaeger’s free arm to stop the Otachi from sinking its teeth into the machine’s head and the Conn-Pod. “Fuck, if it releases more acid now, we’re screwed!”

“The Jaegers from Seoul are one minute away!” Namjoon calls through the intercom, his voice high in his distress. “You’re almost there, just hold on a little while longer!”

“The Otachi’s underbelly is its weakest point,” Jimin says loudly, jerking his left arm in an attempt to free the Jaeger’s shield from the Kaiju’s grip. “If we can land a kick there, we can get it off us!”

“We can’t move our legs enough to kick it,” Yoongi shouts and attempts to do just that, but the Otachi’s weight keeps them grounded.

“What if we activate the flight system?” The cadet’s voice hitches in fright when the monster bellows around the bite it has on their right arm, the flash of fear prickling at the back of Yoongi’s mind. “I-if the engines can give us a blast off the ground and shift our gravity for a second, the Kaiju should lose its on us and we could try to kick it before we land!”

It sounds like something straight out of the comic books Yoongi used to read when he was young, but at this point, there’s nothing else they can do. “Let’s do it,” he says and secures his grip on the arm control.
As one, they press down the flight system’s button and the engines come to life with a roar, startling the Otachi. Before it can retreat, the Jaeger shoots off the ground, rising several meters into the air with the force of something shot out of a cannon. The momentum jars the Kaiju up, its hind talons losing their grip on the machine’s lower body, and it releases its bite to release an outraged cry.

“Now!” Jimin yells and release the button to let the engines die out. As soon as they do, the cadet and Yoongi reach out to grab hold of the Otachi and pull it down towards them, and shift their right leg to deliver a crushing kick to the beast’s underbelly when it comes close enough.

Only it doesn’t.

The Kaiju doesn’t come back down; still up in the air, it folds out a pair of leathery wings from its arms and beats them twice, resisting the gravitational pull that’d put it in the line of the Jaeger’s kick. It dodges the strike and shifts in the air until it can grab hold of the Jaeger’s head in its talons. It lifts a few meters, just enough to not grant the two pilots any stability or relief, and then it lunges down and smashes the head against the ground.

The impact goes through the Conn-Pod like an earthquake. If not for the motion rig, it’d send Yoongi’s body hurtling against the wall, and perhaps it would be less painful that way; being strapped to the rig makes it feels like a car crash, the momentum jarring his body while the rig holds him in place as best it can, shoving the air right out of his lungs.

His head jerks back and smashes against the rig’s arm, his helmet cracking open from the sheer force. Dull pain explodes against his temple, his neck aching from the sudden twist. He’s blinded by his disorientation and the struggle to catch his breath, but through the chaos, he hears Jimin emit a sharp exclaim and feels the pain as if it was his own, bursting through his left arm, twisted out of its socket.

“Fuck,” Yoongi groans, his voice coming out thick and groggy. His vision is blurry and black around the edges, and he can’t make sense of his thoughts, not a single coherent one to hold onto. There’s a voice shouting his name through the intercom, but he lacks the sense to answer it, his words stacking thick in his throat.

Jimin, he thinks, dully wondering if the cadet can hear him in his mind. Don’t die, Jimin. Please.

Above them, the Otachi prepares to repeat its strike, as if intending to crack open the Jaeger’s head like a coconut. It beats its wings and the machine begins to lift off the ground, but this time, it only makes it a couple of meters before it stops, freezing in midair.
Dazed, Yoongi squints up at it, the HUD screens crackling in and out of focus. In his disorientation, he manages to spot what looks like a trail of smoke, chasing after a tiny little rocket flying right towards the Kaiju’s shoulder.

The very instant it hits its mark, it detonates.

The Otachi emits a deafening bellow, writhing in pain as a gaping wound is torn into its shoulder by the explosion. It releases its grip on the Jaeger and it crashes back against the ground, neither Yoongi nor Jimin in a state to soften their landing. The beast lands heavily by their side, thrashing in pain, and Yoongi’s neck hurts with the effort it takes, but he turns his head to the left to see where the missile came from.

“Reinforcements from Seoul have arrived!” Namjoon cries through the intercom, his voice breaking up here and there with the damage dealt to the receiver. “Jaegers Tsunami Rage and Red Execution will engage the Otachi from now on!”

Two Jaegers are charging towards them, one with an arm like a giant blaster, the other wielding a sword of sorts. They rush the Otachi, the one with the sword swinging the weapon in a massive arch, cleaving through the beast’s injured arm. When the Kaiju attempts to retaliate, the one with the blaster fires some kind of blue shockwave against its chest, sending it crashing into the remnants of a nearby building.

“Officer Min and cadet Park in the Black Fox require emergency assistance,” Namjoon continues, and it takes Yoongi a long moment to realise their vitals are probably looking like shit. “Get the Jumphawks in the air, they need to be taken to safety right now!”

In the background of the intercom, Yoongi can hear people voice their compliance. It all sounds oddly distant to him, his ears clogged and rendering him deaf to what Namjoon says after that. He blinks, slowly, and tries to turn and look at Jimin, but his body refuses to listen, too heavy to move.

“J’m in,” he slurs, his vision growing darker for every passing second. His head hurts and he’s pretty sure there’s blood trickling down his face. Eventually, even staying awake becomes too hard a task to see through, and with the cry of the dying Otachi ringing in his ears, he passes out cold.

It’s quiet.
There’s a faint beeping sound echoing from somewhere to his side, but apart from that, it’s quiet. His eyes are closed but it’s light all around him, a soft glow of a yellowish white that’s somehow comforting. There’s a sour taste in his mouth, like he hasn’t brushed his teeth or even drank a glass of water in days, but he can’t make himself swallow, his body weighing too much to listen to his brain’s commands.

There’s a man standing not far from him, elevated in the white glow of their surroundings. They’re not looking at him, gazing out over the endless fields of nothingness. They’re important, he knows. He can feel it in all of his being, just how important this man is to him, and he wants to look at him. He wants him to look.

Jimin, he tries to say, but his lips won’t form the name right.

The man must’ve heard him either way, for he turns around, and it’s not Jimin. It’s not the cadet, but someone just as important, someone who used to be the first name on the tip of his tongue every time he woke from one of his dreams.

Giseong smiles at him, looking all but proud as he raises his hand to greet Yoongi in the same way he had the very first day of his arrival in Busan. He waves, and for once, the memory is not painful to bear. For once, it doesn’t force Yoongi to jerk out of his sleep in a cold sweat with a plea on his lips.

It’s almost peaceful.

He wakes slowly, squinting against the yellowish light of the sickbay. It’s quiet, with only a few hushed voices speaking somewhere far to his left. There’s a machine beeping right next to where he’s lying in a soft bed, likely a monitor for the beat of his heart.

Yoongi closes his eyes again and takes a deep breath, wincing slightly when a dull throb starts up behind his eye. Or perhaps it was always there, but only when he moves does it flare up enough to make him notice. His neck is itchy, and it takes some effort, but he manages to raise his hand with the intent to scratch it, only to realise there’s a thick brace around it to prevent him from turning his head too far to the side.

What the hell, he wonders, frowning despite the pain in his skull. It takes him a moment to remember the pain of twisting his neck, and with a sigh, he lets his arm drop back down, squirming at the discomfort.
“Hyung?”

The small voice has him opening his eyes and turning even within the confines of the brace. He looks to the side of his bed, where Jimin is curled up in a chair, eyes red-rimmed and puffy with sleep. There’s a bandage around his left forearm and a brace around his shoulder, but aside from that, the cadet looks unharmed.

*Thank god,* Yoongi thinks and closes his eyes for a brief moment, swallowing against the thickness in his throat. *Thank god you’re still here.*

“Hyung,” Jimin croons and moves his chair closer. “Hyung, how are you feeling?”

“Like shit,” Yoongi tries to say, but his words are slurred and probably make no sense at all. It doesn’t seem to matter; upon hearing his voice, the cadet smiles, tears springing to his eyes even though he looks like he’s only just stopped crying.

“Good,” Jimin says and nods, reaching up to rub at his eyes. “Th-that’s good, hyung, that you’re still—I was so worried.”

He gives up at trying to stop himself from crying and instead buries his face in his hands, his shoulders shaking. The sight makes Yoongi’s chest ache and he wants to comfort the cadet, but he doesn’t know how. He doesn’t know what he should say, what he *could* say.

Yoongi tries to reach out for him, to put a hand on his shoulder to show that he’s alright. He doesn’t quite make it, his strength failing halfway through, but when he groans at the pain it causes his exhausted body, Jimin looks up and grabs hold of his hand in both of his own, cheeks red and stained with tears.

“‘S okay,” Yoongi croaks, squeezing the cadet’s hand as tightly as he can in his weakened state. “‘S okay, Jimin. W-we’re okay.”

Jimin nods, more tears spilling from his eyes as he does. With a sniffle, he presses his lips against the palm of Yoongi’s hand before settling it against his cheek, as if his touch helps calm him down. “We’re okay,” he echoes hoarsely and nods one more time.
Yoongi isn’t sure for how long they sit like that; he thinks he might’ve passed out at some point, but when he comes to again, Jimin is still there, curled up in his chair with Yoongi’s hand still held gently in his own. The cadet’s thumb is stroking over his knuckles, and out of everything that’s happened, that touch is what makes Yoongi want to cry the most.

He doesn’t deserve any of it.

They sit in silence for a long time, drawing comfort from the other’s presence. After what feels like several hours, Sejin stops by to check on Yoongi and tell him what happened to him. “You cracked your skull in the fight against the Otachi,” he says with a grimace. “The impact gave you a concussion as well, and to top it all off, you sprained your neck. You’ve been unconscious for five days, but the fact that you’re awake now means you’re going to be alright.”

Jimin sniffs in his seat and Yoongi tries his best to give his hand a reassuring squeeze. “How long,” he begins, stopping to swallow around the thickness in his throat. “How long until I’m fine?”

The doctor purses his lips in thought. “You shouldn’t suffer any long-term effects,” he says, “but it’ll still take months before you’ll be fully recovered. I don’t think the marshal’s too eager on letting you get back to bossing around the cadets until I clear you for service.”

The look on his face is more than enough to tell Yoongi that Sejin has no intentions whatsoever on clearing him easily. Sighing, he closes his eyes and settles down against the pillow, answering the doctor’s following questions with only a yes or no.

After Sejin is gone, silence falls between Yoongi and Jimin once again. No one says anything for a long while, but Yoongi has a feeling he knows what the cadet is thinking about. He doesn’t know if he’s ready to face it yet, but a part of him is already resigned to it, knowing it’s not something he’ll be able to run away from forever.

True enough, Jimin eventually does speak, in a voice that’s so careful it makes Yoongi’s heart ache. “When I become a pilot, hyung, I want you to come with me,” he murmurs and squeezes his hand, almost as if he’s afraid Yoongi would try to get out of his hold. “I know you’re hurting and that I’m asking the world from you, but…” He pauses and buries his teeth into his lower lip, for once unable to meet Yoongi’s eyes. “I still want you to come with me.”

It takes Yoongi a moment to find his voice and his words, however unstable they are when he does speak. “‘S not so easy,” he rasps, closing his eyes against the dull throb of his head. “‘M… ‘m not good, Jimin. ‘M fucked up.”
“I know that too,” the cadet says with a sad smile. “But you can heal, you know? You—I know it’ll take time, maybe even years, but even so, I want it to be you. A-and it’s fine if you’re not ready yet, you know? If you’re not ready to heal, I… when you feel like you are, I’ll help you.” He nods, as if to show he means what he’s saying. As if Yoongi would doubt him. “I still have to train, you know, to learn how to be a proper pilot,” Jimin says, “and if you let me, I’ll help you get better. I’ll listen to you when you want to talk, and when you don’t, I’ll just… I’ll be there. If you want me to.”

His eyes are glistening again, but he doesn’t stop. “I’ll come with you to see Sejin-hyung,” he croons, “and if you decide to talk to a psychiatrist, or someone who can help you better than I can, I’ll come with you to every meeting and wait for you to finish. I’ll help you, Yoongi-hyung.” The smile on his lips is small yet nothing short of angelic, bearing all the warmth and comfort the world has to offer. “You won’t have to do it on your own.”

Yoongi doesn’t even try to stop his tears from falling. All he can do is look, blinking away the blur in his eyes so he can see Jimin properly, all his kindness and solace.

“And if it takes time,” the cadet continues, “that’s okay. I won’t rush you, I won’t force you to become better just for my sake or for the sake of piloting the Jaeger. It’s okay if it takes time. It’s okay if it takes years, as long as you can get better.”

He’s crying again, but he refuses to let go of Yoongi’s hand. “E-even if you won’t pilot the Jaeger with me,” he says thickly, his voice quivering, “please let me help you. Please. Please get better, hyung, so you can live again. With me. A-and with everyone else as well, but—” He presses his lips together and shakes his head as if he could get rid of his tears that way. “With me, hyung.”

If he was stronger then, Yoongi knows he wouldn’t be able to resist the urge to pull the cadet into his arms and hold him close, as close as he can. “I don’t—” His voice cracks in his distress and the beeping of the heart monitor grows faster, but he doesn’t care. “I don’t want you to pity me, Jimin,” he croaks, struggling to squeeze Jimin’s hand. “I d-don’t know what I’d do if you pitied me.”

“I won’t,” the cadet says immediately, sounding so sure of himself despite his tears, it’d be impossible to not trust him. “I could never, Yoongi-hyung, you’re the strongest person I know. I couldn’t pity you even if I wanted to. You make it impossible.”

Yoongi’s breath hitches on a sob, and he wonders what on earth he’s done in any life to deserve to have someone like Park Jimin caring so much about him when he’s been nothing but cruel in return. “I’m sorry, Jimin,” he chokes out, his tears falling freely now. “I’m so sorry. F-for everything I said, I swear I didn’t mean what I said. Any of it, I didn’t—I never wanted t-to make you sad, I—”
He cuts himself off when Jimin rises from his chair; for a moment, Yoongi worries the cadet will walk away, anxiousness quick to rise in his chest. “Please,” he croaks, struggling to hold onto Jimin’s hand. “Don’t go, please, I’m—”

“Shh, hyung, it’s okay.” Jimin sits down on the bed next to him, taking both of his hands in his own and holding them firmly. “I won’t go anywhere,” he says firmly. “I won’t leave you, I promise.”

Yoongi nods in spite of the ache in his head and neck, closing his eyes and drawing a deep, quivering breath. “Thank you,” he whispers, his throat thick and dry all at once. “I’m sorry, I really —” The words won’t come even now, even when he wants to speak them. He wants to say it, he wants to tell Jimin, but he can’t. “Shit, I can’t even—”

Even though the words go unspoken, the cadet seems to understand just what he wants to say. “I know, hyung,” he murmurs, smiling as he leans down to press his lips against Yoongi’s brow. “It’s okay. We have time.” He takes one hand off Yoongi’s to brush the tears away from his cheek, blinking hard against his own when Yoongi leans into his touch and kisses the palm of his hand. “Eventually, it’ll be okay.”

“Yeah,” Yoongi rasps, and for the first time in four years, as Jimin settles down next to him in his sickbed, he believes it.

It’ll take time, but eventually, they will be okay.

End Notes

AND THEY BECOME THE BEST JAEGGER PILOTS IN THE WORLD AND THEY END THE WAR WITH TAEHYUNG AND JEONGGUk AND EVERYONE ELSE AND THEY DON’T DIE AND THEY BUILD A LIFE FOR THEMSELVES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE AND GROW OLD TOGETHER.

BECAUSE THEY DESERVE HAPPINESS.

THEY HECKING DESERVE TO BE HAPPY >:(((

OKAY.
i am emotionally EXHAUSTED, like holy shET this took so much effort to write, all the ANGST, all the PAIN, the HURT… i had to puzzle my heart back together like 4 times throughout writing this because it kept breaking apart ;______; i’m so not used to writing this kind of angst, like this is RELATIONSHIP angst and RELATIONSHIP angst always makes me cry ;________;

HOPE YOU LIKED IT, ZOPH!!!!

if y'all wanna come yell at me for making you cry, you can do so on my twitter~~

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