Peripheral Vision

by FictionalDragonMother

Summary

A streak of bright light had shot across the sky that night, unbeknownst to all but a teenage boy who happened to be at the right place at the right time. A certain green alien develops a bad feeling about the new kid. Membrane doesn’t seem to be too fond of him either.

Meanwhile, two leaders discover that not everything is as it seems when they find that they can’t recall certain events. What happened on that horrible day? Why can’t they remember holding a funeral for Tallest Miyuki? What else is being hidden from them?
Dib peered through his telescope, looking up at the night sky. Years of light pollution had hidden most of the stars from view, but he had managed to find a place where it wasn’t totally covered by smog. A small smile pulled at the corners of his mouth. He had always been fascinated by the sparkling void of space, even before a certain invader had decided to try and take over Earth.

Ah, yes, Zim. Somehow, his thoughts always drifted back to his long-time nemesis. A few years ago, just before they started Hi Skool, Zim had discovered that his whole mission was a lie. Dib didn’t see the alien for almost a week after that event. Fearing his rival was cooking up some master plan to unleash a swarm of rabid earthworms or something of the like, Dib had infiltrated Zim’s base. He had found Zim staring blankly at a large monitor screen, looking dehydrated and starved. It had taken a while to pry the truth out of the Irken, but once he did, he had actually felt bad for Zim. To live your whole life believing wholeheartedly in something, just to figure out it was a total lie? Dib couldn’t even begin to imagine how the ex-invader was feeling.

After that day, their relationship changed. They still bickered and fought, but it was all in good fun. Zim never fully ceased with the insults, but he began to say them less and less, even going so far as to address Dib using only his name, no demeaning suffix added on. In return, Dib stopped trying to expose Zim, much to the delight of his father. Dib taught Zim about the Earth, like weather patterns and how to tell if it would rain. Together, they discovered that Zim was only affected by polluted water. Currently, they were working on fully disabling Zim’s PAK. Apparently, after taking a closer look at it, Zim had found out that certain things were blocked from him, including growth hormones. That had been the first thing Zim had gone after, determined to not spend his entire life “being smaller than a smelly HYUMAN” as he put it.

It was a good thing he had managed to unblock that much at least, as when they first started to attend Hi Skool, they learned very quickly that being short was not a good thing. It was at that infernal place of hormones and useless knowledge being shoved down your throat that Dib began regretting saving the Earth. It became blatantly obvious that, if you put together 98% of the students, you might get a whole brain cell. However, those who lacked brain, often made up for it with cruelty and brute strength. He and Zim combined didn’t have enough fingers to count the amount of times the two of them had been shoved into lockers or mocked just within their hearing range. If it wasn’t for the fact that they weren’t ready for a life on the run, Dib and Zim would have locked the doors and burnt the place to the ground.

Dib was yanked from his memories by a blinding light that momentarily blinded him in one eye. Yelping, he stumbled back from his telescope, landing on stiff grass. With his good eye, he saw a flash of white light rocket across the sky, brighter than any star or meteor. It was losing altitude fast, and before long, it crashed onto the Earth’s surface. Dib stared in surprise for a moment, before gathering his things and running to his truck. He tossed his telescope onto the passenger seat and hit the gas, tearing off in the direction of the crash.
Crash site

Chapter Summary

Dib finds out what crashed to Earth.

Dib leapt out of his truck, his boots squelching as they pressed into the moist earth. The light had crashed somewhere within the dark forest in front of him. It was one of the few true forests left, mostly because most people were too superstitious or lazy to go near it. It was far away from any civilization, and a lot of people had gone missing, mostly daredevils and stupid teens. The police could never find the bodies. Flicking on a flashlight, he stepped into the dark brush, shivering slightly as the pale moonlight ceased to light his way.

As he walked, he began to hear movement coming from up ahead, and an odd noise rang out. It was weak, desperate. It sounded almost like a wounded animal, but slightly… warped. Unnatural. Dib stopped, feeling like a drop of frigid water was sliding down his back. The hairs on the back of his neck raised and his teeth clacked together as he suddenly grit his teeth. His legs began to tremble as he continued to move forward despite his instincts screaming at him to turn and run.

As he approached a clearing, the trees became more and more destroyed, smoldering embers glowing in the encroaching darkness. Where moonlight should have been, there was only darkness, like the clearing had swallowed the light. Something that vaguely resembled a metal egg was torn to pieces, chunks of trees and metal wrapped around each other unnaturally. Small patches of flame burned softly, casting a slight glow around them.

Dib swung his flashlight around, searching for whatever had been making the noises. The thin shard of light cast by the flashlight illuminated a pair of shining eyes, two white orbs glowing softly in the pitch black. Dib leapt back, letting a curse slip out. The shadows whined, and an outline came into view. Long, dear-like ears were flattened against a fluffy head. A long black tail was tucked under the creature’s belly as it pressed itself against the wet ground. Dib righted himself and flicked a small sliding switch on the flashlight, dimming the light slightly. As the pale yellow light swept over the ball of black fluff, Dib saw a large gash that was gushing with a pink fluid that he assumed to be blood.

“Oh shit.” He muttered, kneeling on the strangely cold earth.

The creature looked at him, its huge eyes scanning him, its head tilting slightly. It opened its jaws, revealing wolf-like teeth accented by pale gums and a black tongue.

“H-help me… please…”

Dib’s eyes widened. It spoke! And in English none the less!

“Oh-oh! Yes! Duh!” He stammered, slapping a palm to his forehead. The poor thing was bleeding out! He couldn’t just let it die because he couldn’t believe another alien creature spoke English.

He paused, looking around at the wreckage. That thing, that pod… had come from the sky. This thing… was an alien. Another alien had made its way to Earth, and Dib had found it.
Did this alien want to take over Earth?

Dib pulled back, eyeing the bleeding alien before him. Its eyes followed his movement as it breathed heavily, a wheezing sound emanating from its barely open jaws as it stared pleadingly at Dib. If he left it here, it would die. After a moment of internal debate, Dib sighed and reached into one of his many pockets and fished out a small bottle of antiseptic, a square piece of cloth and a roll of gauze. He poured some antiseptic onto the cloth and moved closer to the fuzzy creature.

“Okay, this is going to sting. Please don’t move until I’m done.” He said, gently moving some silky fur away from the gash. The alien whimpered as he cleaned and dressed its wounds, careful to keep an eye on the creature, in case it tried and attack him. Finally, the wound was bandaged, and the shadowy deer-thing gave Dib a toothy, grateful smile.

“T-thank you, I don’t know what I would have done if you hadn’t showed up. My name is Mendax, what’s yours?” Its voice was clearer now, and Dib thought it sounded more masculine than feminine.

“Dib. You can call me Dib. Man, I can’t believe I met another alien!” Dib said excitedly, pulling out a small green note book with a small alien face on the back. Mendax's ears twitched forward, his eyes widening.

“A-another? You mean to say that there has been someone here before me? I thought that this planet was undiscovered?” He asked, surprise evident in his voice. Dib shook his head, jotting down notes.

“Nah, Zim came here a while ago, back when I was like, twelve. His leaders sent him here on a fake mission to try and get rid of him. But aside from Zim, I don’t think anyone else knows Earth exists, aside from the Planet Jackers.”

Mendax frowned at the mention of the Planet Jackers, his top lip curling upwards.

“Yes… it makes sense that those monsters would know of your planet's existence. Filthy creatures.” He hissed.

Dib was about to say something, when Mendax's brow furrowed.

“Wait… Zim? Who is that?” He questioned.

“Well he’s… you know what, come on, I’ll show you. It looks like you need a place to stay anyways.”

Zim glanced at his computer screen again. It was almost midnight and Dib had still not returned to his home. The Irken had spotted the teen leaving around sunset, which had been hours ago. Usually, Dib would tell someone where he was going, but when Zim had risked invoking Gaz's wrath by asking her where her sibling was, she had told him that she “Had no fucking clue” where Dib was.

Now, normally Zim could care less where Dib went, as long as it wasn’t somewhere Zim couldn’t follow in case he ended up needed help, but something had begun to bother him not too long after Dib had left. It was hard to describe, it felt like something was running its cold claws down his spine. It made his sQUEEDELYSPOODLE flip and constrict. He wanted Dib to return to the safety of either his or Zim's homes. He had tried calling Dib, but he didn’t pick up. Dib always picked up. Always.
He was about to go out and look for the teen when he spotted someone walking towards Dib’s house. They looked like they were carrying something, but Zim couldn’t see what. Opening the door to his base, he ran out, a small laser gun concealed on his hip just in case the person wasn’t friendly. Since he wasn’t wearing his disguise, he needed to be stealthy. The people of Earth were stupid, but even so, Zim wasn’t risking being possibly exposed. Silently, he extended his PAK legs and leapt up into a tree above the person. The sound of the PAK leg’s sharp metal tips piercing the wood was almost inaudible, but the figure froze, and the dark mass in their arms twitched.

Suddenly, the figure pulled out a gun and spun to face Zim. Zim quickly unholstered his own and pointed it towards the person, baring his teeth. The figure paused, before cursing in a familiar voice. Zim felt his body relax when he realized who stood below him.

“Dammit Zim, you scared me half to death!” Dib yelled softly, as to not wake the neighbors. Zim smirked, putting away his gun.

“Shame. I hoped it would be to total death.” He remarked smoothly, staring down at the human. He refused to let Dib see that he was relieved that he was okay.

Dib opened his mouth to fire something back, when the dark mass in his arms growled, near white eyes narrowed and black fur bristling. Zim’s attention snapped to the source of the noise, and that same feeling that he had felt before returned.

“What is that HIDEOUS beast in your arms?!” Zim hissed, his antenna flattening against his head. The dark creature snapped and bared its many sharp teeth. In the darkness, Zim could only make out a faint outline.

“Its, uh, m-my new dog! Yeah! C-calm down boy.” Dib said, nervously reaching out and petting the creature’s head. The snarling ceased as Dib slowly stroked the animal’s shadowy fur. Bright eyes slowly drooped as the human continued to calm his new ‘dog.’

“Sorry Zim. He uh, came from a bad home. He must have thought you were going to hurt me.” Dib said quietly, gently repositioning the furry animal in his arms. Zim huffed, frowning.

“Whatever Dib-smell, just keep that horrible creature away from my superior base.” He said, jumping down from the tree. The ‘dog’ opened one eye to stare at him, before closing it again and pressing itself closer to Dib. Great, now the human would reek of filthy animal stink.

It was only once he was back in his base did Zim realise that Dib’s new pet hadn’t smelt like a dog. It had smelt like cold air.
Dib shut the door to his house as quietly as he could, years of coming home late teaching him just how much force he needed to use. Gaz and his father were out, attending a gaming convention for “Real family bonding time”. He gently set Mendax onto the couch, pulling a blanket over the sleeping alien. His chest barely rose as he breathed, his breaths slow and quiet. He looked so different from the snarling creature he had been moments before.

He wasn’t entirely surprised. Part of him had known that there was a good chance that the Irken Empire had done something to Mendax or his species, but he had hoped that, for once, someone wouldn’t immediately hate Zim.

Sighing, Dib grabbed another blanket. His favourite one, a black fleece blanket dotted with small, reflective silver stars. His father had apparently made it for him when he was born, and he had kept it ever since. Gaz had one too, a deep purple blanket with small pink planets here and there. He rarely saw that blanket anymore, as Gaz almost never took it out of her room. Kicking off his boots and slipping out of his trench coat, Dib collapsed onto the well-loved couch, wedging his face between two pillows and using his feet to pull the blanket over his legs. Turning on his side, he could barely see Mendax’s near unmoving outline in the darkness. Strangely, he did not feel unnerved by that fact, and he fell into a dreamless sleep.

A series of buzzes emanating from his back pocket pulled Dib from the realm of deep sleep. Groaning softly, he fumbled for his phone, muscle memory taking over as he swiped his finger across the screen, silencing the incessant vibration.

“Stupid phone…” He murmured, snuggling in deeper into the soft pillows, their soft fur tickling his cheek.

Wait, the couch pillows weren’t furry…

Shoving his upper half up, Dib could see that, in his sleep, Mendax had scooted closer to him, close enough that his silky black fur could brush his face. Shaking of his surprise, Dib lowered himself back down, the rush of adrenaline leaving him as the morning sleepiness returned. He hadn’t been sleeping well lately, and he normally found himself in that certain state, where you are too tired to function, but too awake to sleep. Tired beyond being tired. He flopped back down, embracing the sleepy feeling, drifting back off to sleep.

Gaz pushed the door open, a bag slung over her shoulder, decorated in patches and pins of various symbols and videogame characters. Her dad had slipped back down into his lab as soon as they had gotten back, so she didn’t bother holding the door for him. Setting her bag down, she took off her shoes and put away her jacket. Stepping into the living room, she immediately noticed 3 things, One, the room was very cold.

Two, Dib was actually sleeping for once.

And three, there was something watching her brother sleep.

It was dog-like in form, but its legs were a little too long, its front toes looking more like fingers
than paws. Wide, white eyes were locked onto Dib, unblinking. Its black tail was draped over her brother’s back, long enough that it looked like it could wrap itself around his torso. Her neck hairs stood on end as a feeling of dread and fear clawed at her spine. Her mind screamed warnings at her, telling her to run, to get her dad, a feeling that she had not experienced since she was very young. The overpowering rush of emotions overwhelmed the usually unfeeling teen, and she found herself unable to control her body.

She took a step backwards, hand reaching for the doorknob. The creature’s ear flicked towards her, and it slowly turned its head. It looked at her for a moment, before turning its mouth upwards in a sickening grin. Razor sharp fangs glowed pearly white in contrast to the creature’s midnight black fur. Its smile reached its eyes. Literally. Sharp teeth glistened just below both of its eyes, stopping just before the two body parts merged.

That did it. Gaz threw open the door and bolted outside, skidding on the damp grass. She raced to the secret entrance to her dad’s lab, slamming her hand down on the scanner. A small wave of red flashed over her hand, before the light turned green and a robotic voice chimed “Access granted!”

A part of the wall slid up, revealing a long hallway. Gaz dashed down it, mentally counting the rooms until she finally found the right one. Her dad was holding a small beaker and was facing away from her.

“DAD!” Gaz shouted, panic squeezing her chest.

Professor Membrane jolted, not used to hearing fear in his daughter’s voice. He turned immediately, setting down the beaker he had been holding and rushing over to his shivering child.

“Gaz, what’s- “

“Something was watching Dib sleep when I went in the house! It-it looks like a dog, but its all screwed up, and its t-t-teeth…” She choked, trying to breathe. Membrane’s eyes widened behind his goggles and he grabbed Gaz, putting her inside the room. He grabbed a gun off the wall, a shotgun like weapon that fired a concentrated electromagnetic shock. If Gaz had been scared badly enough to come running to him, he wasn’t taking any chances.

“Stay here. I’m going to help your brother.” He said, making sure that she would be okay if he left her like this. She nodded, and he bolted down the hallway.

His parental instincts were in full swing as he kicked the house door open. Dib jolted awake, but Membrane’s attention wasn’t on him. It was on what was standing over him.

A vaguely dog shaped creature stood over his son, growling unnaturally. Its black fur bristled sharply, sticking up like spines. A long tail lashed, and a mouth full of white teeth gnashed. Its white eyes seemed to glow as it stared at him, never blinking, never breaking its gaze. Membrane glared and raised his gun. The creature hissed, opening its maw wider.

“Woah! Dad! Mendax! Chill out!” Dib cried, wiggling, trying to get free from the creature’s legs.

The dog-thing calmed, looking at Dib. Membrane did not lower his gun. He wasn’t sure what that thing was,

But it was not welcome in his home.
Purple smiled as he tucked the neatly wrapped gift into his PAK, careful not to let it snag on anything. Smallers rushed around on the lower decks, eagerly setting up decorations all over the Massive and retrieving snacks. Red was everywhere, as was to be expected, considering who’s Smeeting Day it was.

Speaking of his co-ruler, Purple set a mental reminder to go and wake Red soon. Since it was Red’s special day, he got to do things he normally wouldn’t, like sleeping in and not have to worry about doing work.

Walking back over to the main control deck, Purple resumed his task of finishing all their work so that they would have the day free, aside from them piloting the Massive. As he worked, he wondered briefly if he should try and finish all the work for next week as well, just in case Red forgot. After all, he certainly didn’t want to spend his Smeeting Day doing boring work. But he dismissed the thought. Red hadn’t forgotten in years prior and would not forget this time.

He was so into his work that he didn’t even register the fact that a food drone had approached him with his hourly snacks until the smaller Irken timidly tapped him. The touch was so cautiously gentle that Purple almost didn’t feel it, but one did not survive for as long as he had without developing keen senses. His antennae perked as the pleasant scent of doughnuts mixed with the tap broke him out of his concentration. The food drone trembled before him, a plate of the hoop shaped desserts balanced skillfully on his head. Purple gently took the plate and, due to his good mood because of the upcoming celebrations, gave the drone a grateful “Thank you”, allowing his usually hidden manners to show. The drone was stunned, but quickly gave a respectful bow and salute before scurrying away, not quite believing what he had heard.

Purple munched on a few of the doughnuts, making sure to leave certain ones untouched. He liked those ones, sure, but they were Red’s favourites. Finishing off his snacks, he decided that now would be a good time to go and wake up Red. Normally, if he needed Red and he wasn’t nearby, he would send a Smaller to go and retrieve his co-tallest. However, their private quarters were strictly off limits to everyone except each other, the only exception being if there was an emergency that required them or if they somehow got hurt and a medical drone needed to help them.

Purple shuddered slightly. So far that had only happened once, but when it had happened, it had been bad. It was a little while after he and Red had become the Almighty Tallests. He had been enjoying some snacks, some kind of cream filled cookies, when he suddenly had trouble breathing. He drank some soda and had even removed his chest armor to hit his fist against his chest in hopes that something had just gone down wrong. When nothing worked, he realised that, since there was nothing blocking his airways, there was only one other option.

He had been poisoned.
His Invader training kicked in, and he managed to call a medical drone. His memories were hazy after that, but he could recall that Red had been with him the whole time, refusing to leave Purple’s side. He had kept an eye on things via monitors and hourly reports while Purple recovered. An attack on one of their leaders had set the Empire on edge, and a tense buzz filled the air during the weeks Purple spent recovering.

Soon after the attack, a Meekrob spy was discovered aboard the Massive. The spy admitted to having stolen valuable information, but seemed confused when accused of poisoning Purple. He denied it every time he was questioned, even when one of his eyes was torn right out of its sockets during an interrogation session.

Eventually, Red’s patience wore thin, and he threw the spy out the airlock, but not before slicing open his underbelly. That had been one of the few times Purple had seen Red truly angry.

Shaking his head slightly, Purple realised that in his distracted state, he had unconsciously made his way to Red’s room. Straightening up and allowing a smile to slip onto his face, he entered the room. The large space was mostly dark, save for the vivid red light coming from Red’s PAK.

The Irken was fast asleep, snuggled up under his plush covers. His armor was off, replaced by a much softer outfit made for Irkens that needed to enter sleep mode to repair harm done to their body. Quietly, Purple made his way over to Red, setting the plate of doughnuts down on a side table. Careful not to touch any exposed skin, he gently shook Red awake.

Red blinked blearily, his senses dulled from sleeping for so long. A touch, soft and warm, gently shook his arm. Flicking his antennae in slight annoyance at being woken up, Red pulled the warm covers up over his head. Someone huffed, and he felt the blankets slowly being pulled off him. Who would dare…?

Opening one eye, Red was fully prepared to shout at whoever was disturbing his rest, but any hateful words died in his throat upon spotting a familiar purple colour, and antennae flicked forward as he smelled the familiar sweet scent of snacks. Propping himself up, Red gave his co-tallest a sleepy half smile.

Odd, he must be more tired than he thought, because for a moment there, he swore he saw a tinge of blue light up Purple's cheeks.


“Good morning Red! Happy Smeeting Day!” Purple chirped, grabbing the plate of doughnuts and holding it in front of his sleepy co-tallest.

Red's ruby eyes lit up in realization and a grin spread across his face. Taking the plate from Purple, he ravenously began consuming the round sweets, having been without snacks for longer than usual. He noticed that the doughnuts were his favourite flavours, and he slowed his chewing to give Purple a grateful, partially surprised smile. He knew that Purple liked most of these flavors as well, and the tall Irken wasn’t particularity known for sharing snacks he liked.

Red glanced down at the plate, before a strange feeling of compulsion fell over him, and he lifted the plate upwards, offering some of the snacks to Purple. His co-tallest's antennae perked forward and surprise flashed across his face.
“Don’t you want them? They’re your favourites.” He said, tilting his head slightly, his deep violet eyes widening.

Red felt something flutter in the lower part of his squeenlyspooch, and heat flared across his face. He turned his face away and willed it to cool.

“W-well, I know that you like these ones too. I… I just feel like sharing today. Must be my good mood or something.” He stammered.

Purple couldn’t help but notice Red’s behavior, and, not for the first time, a blue blush bloomed across his face. He cursed himself inwardly and awkwardly snatched one of the doughnuts. He shouldn’t be feeling these strange, foreign emotions. Affection of any kind was strictly forbidden by the Control Brains and thus, by extension, the entirety of the Irken Empire. Even friendship was frowned upon, which Purple never understood.

The Empire required them to stay underground for years, training in a facility with no one but emotionless robots and fellow trainees for company. And, once they were close to graduation, the Empire would pair them up and send them on practice Invader missions to hone their survival and conquering skills. How could they not bond with each other in those circumstances?

Purple had known Red his entire life almost, and now he ruled with his childhood companion, but he wasn’t allowed to call him his friend?

‘Or,’ a small part of him said, his thoughts betraying him, ‘more than a friend?’

Purple shoved the doughnut in his mouth and began backing up.

“Well, I’ll let you get ready. Don’t take too long, everyone’s eager to start the festivities!” He said quickly, backpedaling completely out of the room.

As soon as he was out of the room, he flung himself against the cold metal wall, pressing his face against the wall to cool his flushed features. He had been struggling more and more to control his urges.

He just… wanted to tell Red how much he meant to him. Red had been there whenever he could for Purple, and Purple wanted his co-leader to know this. He wanted to be able to call Red his friend out loud. He wanted to be able to openly present snacks to Red as gifts. He wanted to show some fucking affection.

He knew that he shouldn’t be feeling this way, and a wave of panic washed over him as the full extent of his treacherous thoughts finally registered. These were the thoughts of a defective, and he could not afford to be seen as anything even resembling a defective.

But...

He just wanted to be loved, and to love in return. Was that… really so wrong? And if it was, why couldn’t he stop?
A Party for Red - Part 2

Chapter Summary

Purple sees something he wasn't meant to see.

Red smiled as he looked around, nodding in gleeful approval at the party décor. Soft golden lights in the shape of stars hung from the ceiling by near invisible strings, illuminating the Massive’s interior only slightly, but it was still nice. Shiny ruby streamers lined the walls, glistening in the pale light. Balloons were tied to the ends of two long, crescent tables, a crimson tablecloth made from a thin, silky material covering them.

Atop the red moon shaped surfaces sat platters of various snacks. On some, rings of glazed doughnuts encircled small cakes topped with red rock candy and sprinkled with popping candy. Others held large cookies iced with a sugary glaze that resembled a galaxy, small white sprinkles acting as stars.

On the other table, sat a round crystal bowl filled with a shimmering red drink. Numerous cups were stacked around it, perfectly arranged. A silver ladle leaned against the rim of the bowl, small stars and moons etched into its surface. Two more versions of the cups and bowls sat at each end of the table.

There was one more table. It sat proudly in between the other two tables, its cloth a void black and covered in glittering specks. It looked as though its maker had stolen a part of space and woven it into a soft, tangible object. On the table was a three-tier cake. A substance called ‘mirror glaze’ had been coloured varying shades of black and red. The cake looked like it had been dipped in the sugary liquid, and edible glitter had been sprinkled onto it, imitating stars. Small orbs made of cake had been decorated to look like the planets Red had conquered during his time as an Invader.

The wide spectrum of treats, no doubt arranged by Purple, pleased and surprised Red. His crimson orbs scanned over the party, a bright shine caught within them. He turned to the figure standing beside him, the mastermind behind what would no doubt be an amazing party.

“Pur, you’ve really outdone yourself! This looks fantastic!” He praised. Purple smiled and didn’t say anything, but Red caught the subtle rise of Purple’s chest as he puffed it out with pride.

Red grinned. The action was more notable due to Purple’s outfit. He, much like Red, was wearing a very special armour set. A hood of silky fur-like material sat around the base of his neck, dyed a vibrant violet. The fur dipped down onto the matte dark grey chest piece, stopping just short of a black Irken Empire symbol. Draped over his PAK was a short cape of purple feathers in two different shades. For the lower half, soft frills made a dress of sorts, parting like curtains opening just above his hips to reveal a deep wine coloured, form fitting piece of cloth resembling an Invaders uniform. Finishing the outfit off was a pair of lavender and royal purple boots.

Red’s outfit was very similar, yet with some notable differences. His ruff of fur was larger, his cape was not made of feathers, instead being a thin, almost gossamer material, and it extended down past his legs and onto the floor. His pseudo dress was like two magnificent wings had been sewn onto his hips, revealing, much like Purple’s, an under cloth. His boots stopped slightly higher than Purple’s did, forming three blunted points. His colour scheme was a mix of reds and blacks.
Their final accessories were their gauntlets, a kind of black, flexible metal headband that looped around their head once before turning into a small metal Irken Empire symbol that sat on the middle of their foreheads, and traditional ceremonial body paint markings.

The markings had been Purple’s idea. He had somehow stumbled across an old, old record one night when he had been recovering and had gotten bored. Apparently, it said that Irkens used to paint vibrant stripes, spots and swirls on their bodies during times of celebration. Red had thought that stripes would look awesome, and so they had adopted the ancient tradition.

The Control Brains hadn’t seemed too enthuised about the idea, nothing new, since they were never enthusiastic about, well, anything, but had allowed it. It had taken him about an hour to apply himself, since he wasn’t about to let a smaller see that much exposed skin up close. Truthfully, it was only his arms and face, but still. He usually had his arms covered, so he felt justified in not being comfortable with having help.

Leaning forward, Red let his antennae flick subtly, tasting the air. The familiar smell of the Massive was tinged with the sweet scent of sugar. A pleasant mixture, he decided. He watched his crew scurry about, their faces a mix of happiness and determination as they finished putting the finishing touches on everything. Small as they were, the inhabitants of the Massive were some of the hardest working Irkens out there.

“Hey, Red?”

Red was pulled from his musings by the sound of Purple's voice. His antennae perked as he turned to face the Irken next to him.

“Yeah?” He asked. His eyes widened in curiosity as Purple's PAK opened, a slim metal appendage hooked under a bright red bow. Purple grabbed the package and held it out in front of him, handing it to Red.

“Here. Happy Smeeting Day. It took me forever to get this right, so you better enjoy it.” He said the words casually, but Red picked up on the slightest hint of a nervous tinge.

Gently taking the package, he marveled at the soft, velvety texture of the box, admiring its deep crimson colour. He removed the bow and opened his present.

A wave of awe washed over his face upon seeing his gift. It was a pair of battle gauntlets. Sharp metal scales that were intricately woven together shone in the light. The fingertips ended in extended claw-like blades, and Red could see tiny ridges that resembled sharp teeth ran along each claw. One of the scales on the finger closest to his thumb was coloured black and laden with tiny blue markings.

“Pur… these are incredible! Where did you learn to make stuff like this?” He asked, surprise heavy in his words.

“Don’t praise my work just yet, Red. Put one on and press that black scale.” Purple said, not answering Red’s question.

Red shrugged off the lack of a real answer and slipped one of the gauntlets on. It fit perfectly, nothing rubbing or irritating his skin. He pressed down on the black scale, only to jolt in surprise when thin blue lines of electricity began jumping between the gauntlet’s claws, accompanied by a soft crackling sound.
“Oh my Irk…” Red whispered, transfixed by the snapping electricity. A soft grin was plastered on his face as watched the tiny lightning bolts dance between his fingers.

“So... I’m going to take a guess and say that you like your present?” Purple said, a satisfied tone in his voice.

Red looked up at Purple, before flicking the electricity off and pulling Purple into a hug. Purple stiffened, before involuntary melting into the hug. The soft fabrics of Red’s outfit brushed his arms and neck as his head came to rest on Red’s shoulder, his body suddenly becoming hyper aware of how touch starved it really was. His antennae twitched, and for the first time in all his years of knowing his co-Tallest, he noticed that Red smelled faintly of cinnamon and smoky wood. Then, as quickly as the scent had appeared, it vanished as he forced himself to pull away, trying desperately to stop the vibrations forming in his throat and praying that no one had witnessed their shameful display. Red, for his part, seemed completely calm, even daring to sport a dopey grin.

“U-uhm, well, I, uh, am glad you enjoy your present! Now, if you will excuse me, I have, uh, something I need to take care of! Feel free to get started!” Purple said, backing up quickly.

Before Red could respond, he ducked into a hallway and shut the door. Purple paused for a moment, before sinking to the floor. He held his head in his hands, his claws pressing into his forehead so hard they almost broke skin. His PAK was working on overdrive trying to filter emotions he wasn’t raised to understand. Why had Red done that?! A simple gratitude filled “thank you” would have been just fine, and Red knew that.

So why had he hugged him?

Letting out a whine, Purple stood from his place on the floor and began speed walking through the Massive, lost in his muddled thoughts. He was finally snapped from his internal distress when he smacked face first into a door. That… was not normal. Every door was programmed to respond to Irken PAKs, and based on an Irken’s rank, only certain doors would open for them unless they had been given a special access key. His own quarters, for example, were locked to everyone with the exception of Red and a high-ranking medical team. However, no door on the Massive was locked for himself or Red. What was up with this one?

Rubbing his sore head, he tried again to get the door to open. Nothing. He knew it wasn’t malfunctioning, because part of his preparations had included making sure everything was working. Come to think of it, he didn’t even recall seeing a door here before on any of the maintenance maps. Purple frowned. Secrets were not supposed to be kept from him or Red, especially not on their own ship. Summoning a PAK leg, he fired a laser at the lock, which finally made the door yield to his request for entrance.

Stepping inside, Purple felt a sense of unease drip onto him like a cold drop of liquid. His antennae shot forward, vibrating nervously. The room was pitch black, save for a harsh glow emanating from a singular screen in the middle of the room. Purple tentatively walked forward, eyes darting around, searching for some hidden danger, a threat with sharp teeth and claws crouching just out of his sight, veiled by the heavy shadows that seemed to creep towards him like tangling vines or slithering tentacles.

The screen’s light hurt Purple’s sensitive eyes, and he shielded them with one hand as he peered at the screen. His eyes squinted, before blowing open wide at what he was seeing. On the screen was a monitoring system. 3 black suns sat at the top of the screen, and on the screen was the vitals and location of every Irken present on the Massive. It had detailed information, personal information. He could see files labeled ‘PAK MEMORIES’, ‘EMOTIONAL STATUS’, and ‘IRKENS
Possibly Displaying Affection’. His eyes became even wider when he saw a note saying, “Closely monitor Tallest Purple, possible that reassessment or replacement may be necessary.”

Purple stared in shock, feeling his heartbeat quicken. What, what was this?! Who could have gotten such information? The only ones who would have this kind of power would be the… no, no it, it couldn’t be… could it?

The more he thought about it, the more it made sense. No Irken would have the access to this room, and no spy could have gotten this information, and, even if they somehow had, they wouldn’t care about watching him for signs of emotions. It could only be…

The Control Brains.

Purple didn’t want to believe it, but in some twisted way, he could definitely see it being true. And if it was, then he was in more danger than he could have ever possibly imagined.

He had to do something, but what? He couldn’t tell Red about this, as much as he wanted to. As far as he knew, Red wasn’t in danger, and he knew that if he told his co-tallest about what was happening, Red would turn his burning rage onto the Control Brains, possibly getting himself or both of them killed and plunging their people into chaos. No, he couldn’t take that risk. He also couldn’t enlist the help of any Smallers, because as loyal as they were to him and Red, the threat of the Control Brain’s wrath might make even the most loyal Irken betray their Tallest. That left him with one option; dealing with this on his own.

Purple gulped and backed out of the room, eyes now flicking around to see if he could spot any cameras. Things… were going to get a lot harder now, he could just feel it.

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