I'll be your lab partner, if you be my life partner

by B_Dazzled

Summary

It started with an experiment. A question. A hypothetical situation. Could Lord Hordak, feared leader of the Etherian Horde fall in love?

Entrapta was just the right scientist for the job.

Takes place after Beast Island with the assumption that Hordak rescued her.

Finished as of 11/3
Obviously canon divergent AU.
"Fright zone log, day 148. Hordak has asked me to engage with him sexually. After some consideration, I've concluded that."

"Must you record everything?"

Hordak lay on the wide black bed in his, well, for lack of a better term, "bedroom". Really, it was just a small room with a bed in it. The great hoard leader, usually so intimidating, now looked very small and frail without his armor, yet there was a glint of amusement on his lips.

"It's for my personal study," the princess responded, setting her recorder down on the bedside table, "but if it makes you uncomfortable-"

"It isn't that," hordak responded quickly, sitting up in bed, "I just... I don't want you to be distracted. The first time is- well, I've heard that it is meant to be special."

Entrapta sat down next to the hord leader, looking down.

"So this is your first too?" She asked cautiously, "I thought-"

"Y-yes, well... I've been busy." He gestured around vaguely before clearing his throat, "I-I'm pleased that you have accepted my proposal. After some research on the subject, I believe it will be mutually beneficial for both of us. I have also been studying Etherian anatomy and techniques for sexual activity. With some time, I should be able to-"

Her lips pressed against his, silencing his clearly nervous babbling. Hordak froze, pleasure and surprise equally apparent in the way his claws shakily raked through her hair. The kiss lingered for several long moments before the princess pulled away.

They had stolen kisses before, quick messy moments behind closed doors and turned backs. But this one had been different, the intent behind the gesture was much less innocent.

There was a pause. Eyes locked, each one seemingly waiting for the other to give their consent. The tension between the two was ready to snap at a moments notice. Hordaks eyes flickered down shyly between them at his growing erection, then back up to see his princess biting her lip hungrily. Something about that gesture nearly made him lose all control. He leaned forward with a slight growl, hand to her shoulder to push her down flat on the mattress.

Her gasp made him pull back, ears hot with shame. He needed to have better control of himself.

"Apologies," he breathed, slowly reaching out a hand to her face, "ah... may i?"

The princess met his gaze with a sly smile and a nod, her hair tendrils lacing up his chest to his neck. He let out a low curse, eyes heavy with lust. He placed his hand back on her shoulder, really pushing her against the mattress this time as his mouth found the pulse point at her throat. He hovered above her, hands running through her hair as he kissed and sucked at the spot just below her ear. He had read about this and was eager to test it in person.

"Mm... effective," he heard his lab partner moan below him, confirming his hypothesis.

He pulled away suddenly, hands wandering to her hips. She watched him eagerly, shifting to make it easier as he hooked his talons under the band of her panties.
"Tell me if you want to stop, alright?" His voice shook in a way Entrapta had never heard. Was he nervous too? She'd never seen this side of him. So cautious, so afraid of messing this up. So sweet.

"I will," she promised, propping herself up on her elbows to kiss him quickly, "keep going. Please."

Hordak swallowed hard, eyes frantically searching for any hint of insincerity. He found none.

He moved back as he slid the fabric from her hips, his gaze never leaving her face until he finally pulled it from her feet. It was only then, when he was absolutely sure of her commitment to this "experiment" that he dared look down.

Entrapta watched him, feeling her cheeks go from a pale pink to a deep crimson. He wasn't saying anything, wasn't moving. He had his hands resting on her thighs, but he did nothing. All he did was stare intently at her sex, as if studying it.

After what felt like too long, Entrapta began to close her legs, looking away. That seemed to snap him out of whatever trance he was in.

"I'm sorry," he apologized quickly, "I just- you-" he was stumbling, frantic for the right words to explain. "You're... beautiful." He felt her stiffen under his hands and for a moment he was absolutely sure he'd said the wrong thing, but when he finally dared to look back up at her face, she was smiling. He let out a breath he hadn't noticed he was holding, smiling back.

"It's a little... embarassing," she murmured, looking away, "um... you can, ah, touch me, i-if you want to."

"Ah! Right!" Hordak nearly squeaked, suddenly aware of how open and exposed to him she was.

He cleared his throat, slowly running a hand up the inside of her thigh, eyes still studying her face. Any indication of discomfort and he would stop.

He felt her relax under his touch, and that was all the invitation he needed from her. He ran one taloned finger up her slit, then back down, exploring this new and exciting part of her. She sighed, one tendril of hair wrapping around his wrist, impatiently guiding him to her entrance.

Ah. So that was what she wanted. He smirked and carefully pushed one finger into her to the knuckle, then he waited. He'd read that it could hurt if he wasn't slow and careful. And the last thing he wanted to do was hurt her. But she pressed against him, forcing his finger deeper and deeper until he could go no further. Experimentally, he withdrew and pushed it back in, simulating coitus.

He went slow at first, taking her physical and vocal cues into account, before increasing his pace. Before long, he had her writhing below him, panting and squeezing his wrist with her hair. Biting back a comment, he reached up with his thumb to gently circle her clitoris.

"Hordak!"

Her voice came out in a surprised squeal causing him to withdraw, afraid he'd hurt her. Was it his claws? He'd been trying to be careful, but maybe he cut her?

"I'm sorry!" He apologized quickly, "I-I can-"

"Why did you stop? Clitoral stimulation is the most efficient way for me to achieve orgasm."
Oh. Hordak blinked. Oh! That was a... a good thing he did. Alright. He resumed his ministrations, now paying special attention to that little bundle of nerves. Every moan built his confidence, and when his name fell past her lips, he felt a surge of lust. He desired nothing more than to bring her over that peak and he put his entire self Into making that happen. He added another finger.

"Entrapta...?"

"I'm close," she moaned, not long after, "I'm right there!"

And before he knew it, he felt it. Her body clenching his fingers, her head rolling on the pillow as she rode out the waves of pleasure. And only once he felt her relax did he withdraw.

For several long moments, he watched her, fully prepared to end the experiment there. If she ask him to stop now, he would without a second thought. He was entirely hers.

But she didn't tell him to stop. Instead, he felt two tendrils of hair run along his exposed thighs. She sat up, looking him directly in the eye as she now pushed him down into the pillows.

"I believe it is polite to return the favor," she murmured, her previous shyness apparently forgotten for the moment. She was bold, her hair pulling away his under tunic.

He had the instinct to fight it, shame of his body a default emotion. But when he looked into her eyes, he felt calm. Of all the creatures in the cosmos, this one he trusted with this weakness. He moved to help her, discarding the last of his clothing over the side of the bed in a messy careless pile.

He lay below her, bare, exposed, helpless. He was at her mercy in nearly every way now. Her eyes traveled the length of his body, face expressionless until it fell to his hard phallus.

"It- it look's almost Etherian!" She squealed in excitement, "fascinating!"

The tips of hordaks ears burned as she leaned in, examining his member as if it were a new scientific discovery.

_Actually, I guess it sort of is_, he mused as she measured its length against the length of her palm. He twitched as she brushed against it, but moaned loudly when she wrapped her fingers around it to measure its width.

The princess froze, suddenly reminded of why she was really here. A grin spread across her face as she slowly, experimentally dragged her palm up and down the shaft. Her subject gasped and groaned, bucking his hips against her grip.

"Entrapta..." he growled her name, his hands going to his face, to his mouth. He bit the knuckle of a finger to keep himself grounded. It wasnt fair. She was hardly doing anything and he was about to lose it already.

"If you keep this up, I'm going to ejaculate," he warned, groaning as she massaged the dark blue tip, "Entrapta! Please-"

She pulled away, nearly too late. Panting, Hordak forced himself to calm down. He was nearly there and pulling away at the last moment was torture. But this was what he'd waited for. To be with Entrapta in the proper way. For the experiment, sure, but also for the experience. He was in love with her. He had accepted that already and he wanted to take the next logical step in their... relationship.

Wordlessly, he pulled her against him. Her head rested on his bare chest, her legs tangled with his.
He reached over to pull a blanket over the both of them while his body settled down from his near orgasm.

"Do you still want to continue, entrapta?" He asked, after a long stretch of silence.

The princess nodded, but didn't move. Not yet. Her arms wrapped around his torso, holding him close, listening to the beating in his chest that betrayed his nerves.

"Entrapta, I want you to know something before we do this," he sighed, red eyes focused on the ceiling. After all they'd been through, he never got to say it, never had the word. There was no such thing, really, in the shadow of hoard prime. It had taken time to identify the emotion and studying to identify the corresponding word. And now he had it. "I-

The princess shifted, pressing her lips to his before he could finish his confession. Tendrils of hair wrapped around his arms, cradled the back of his head, but her hands she rested against his heart. When she finally pulled away, he knew what she would say before she said it.

"I love you too."

Their lips met once more and entrapta rolled herself onto her back, pulling hordak until he was covering her with his body. He moaned against her mouth as she shifted her leg against his still hard member. She pulled away, eyes locked on his as she gave him a slow, sure nod.

He opened his mouth to ask once again if she was sure, but when she opened her legs and pulled him closer, he felt the question would be rather redundant.

He nodded in return as he carefully guided his erection to her slick opening. She eagerly shifted her hips against him, her hands pressed on his back, urging him in. Who was he to deny his princess anything?

He groaned as he pushed the tip in, pausing to gauge her reaction. But she seemed almost giddy, hands digging into his backside, legs wrapping around his hips. He met her eyes as he pressed his entire length swiftly inside her.

This time, she reacted. Nails dug into his back, her eyes squeezed shut, a cry ripped from her throat. And despite the welcoming warmth that surrounded him, despite the haze of lust washing over him, despite the fog of pleasure dulling his mind, he froze.

"Are you alright?" He asked, tenderly reaching down to brush a strand of hair out of her face, "It was not my intention to hurt you. I apologize."

"Don't. Stop. Please."

When she opened her eyes again, she was smiling, her gaze firm, steady, victorious. She reached for his hand and Hordak was helpless now.

Anything she ordered, he would do without question. This was the woman he'd conquer galaxies for. This was the woman he'd stop conquering for. He'd build her a beautiful home with a large laboratory. He'd find a way to bring back the stars and they would watch the sun set together and count them as they appeared. He'd make her his Queen, his lady, his wife.

His lab partner. His life partner.

He pulled out to the tip, before driving his shaft back into her. They both groaned together as he drove into her once again, and again and again. She moved her hips against his, desperate, both of
them clumsy. Twice he slid out and had to pause to push himself back in with a mumbled apology. But they both kept their eyes locked and their hands clasped together. Then, all too soon, Hordak felt himself once more near his end.

He tried to slow his pace, lengthen the time of their experiment, but when he did, he felt something between them. For the first time, he glanced down. A lock of entraptas hair rubbed her clitoris as he made love to her. He watched for a split second, hips stilling. But it was no use. The sight was too erotic, and she kept pressing herself up and down on his shaft.

"Princess," he moaned, "I'm close!"

"Me too. Keep going. Inside. Finish inside!"

Before he had a chance to argue with her demands, he felt her tighten around his member. His own release soon followed as he drove himself into her, hard and fast until he was spent and he spilled himself inside of her with a deep growl.

They collapsed together, his rapidly softening phallus still buried between her legs. She guided his head down to her chest, and ran her fingers sleepily through his hair. Her heartbeat, hordak noticed, was steady, surprisingly calm now. He found himself tapping the beat of it against her stomach.

"I should have asked for a sperm sample before we began," she murmured.

"Why is that?" He asked, closing his eyes, "curious to see if we're genetically compatible?"

He'd been teasing, but above him Entrapta nodded.

"The likelihood of our egg and sperm cells combining successfully are low, but I still should have checked before." She sighed and shrugged. "Ah well! No risk, no reward! Science is full of danger!"

Hordak frowned, but did not reply. Far too tired to argue that logic. What ever happened now, it was a problem for the future. For right now, right this second, all hordak could do was pull her closer and kiss the spot over her heart again and again until he felt her drift off to sleep under him.

"Good night," he whispered, closing his eyes as well, "Lab partner."
Oh my god they were room mates!

Chapter Summary

The morning after is always awkward.

Chapter Notes

WELP! guess it's a chapter thing now! Deal with it.

Entrapta woke with a start, blinking in the darkness. A bad dream. She'd had them before. Just another scar she took from beast island. She went to sit up, but the weight of something on her chest kept her down.

Huh...?

She ran her finger through hordak's hair, down his spine. Memories of the night before rushed back to her as she realized they were both still nude. On top of her, Hordak shifted, blinking up at her with bright red eyes in the darkness.

"You're awake?" He asked gently, running fingers absently through a lock of her hair.

"Yes," she breathed in response, feeling her cheeks go hot.

"Mmm..." Hordak sleepily rolled off of her and pulled the blanket up to his chest. He appeared to be feeling somewhat shy as well as he avoided her gaze. "Are you hurt?"

The question caught Entrapta off guard with how genuine his concern was.

"A little... sore, but not hurt. It was, um, very good. Thank you."

In the darkness she could see Hordak running his fingers through his hair, ears twitching.

"I should be thanking you," he mumbled, "after I failed you, you still gave me another chance. And then you let me-"

A tendril of purple hair nearly slapped him in the mouth to shush him.

"Stop. You know that wasn't your fault. And you came for me as soon as you could. I'm happy you came for me at all."

He went silent knowing that arguing this with her was pointless and instead opted to simply wrap his arm around her and pull her close to his chest.

"Do you mind if we lay like this for just a little longer?" He asked hesitantly, "I don't require much sleep ordinarily, but after sexual activity, there appears to be a bit of a recovery period..."
Entrapta smirked self satisfied with that knowledge that she had managed to wear out the fearsome Lord Hordak.

"Alright," she yawned, "for a little while longer. I promise I won't invade your bed every night."

"Mmm, no. I insist you do. My quarters are not large, but I believe it is still enough room for you as well, Princess."

"Are you asking me to move in, Hordikins?" She teased, running a tendril of hair down his hip under the blanket. She felt him tense up behind her, carefully moving his hips away so as not to press his growing erection against her. That would simply be bad manners.

"I am simply providing an option. It is closer in proximity to the sanctum, so it would be more convenient..."

Entrapta sat up suddenly and before hordak could make a sound, she nearly jumped on him, pressing her lips to his cheek.

"I'll stay," she promised sleepily, snuggling against his scarred chest. Hordak wrapped one arm around her and pulled the blanket up to cover her shoulders with the other.

"Thank you, Princess," he whispered, kissing the top of her head, "I find you affection... enjoyable."

"Love ya too. Now go back to sleep."
Oh my god they were... expecting?

"Entrapta!"

Hordak stormed into the sanctum, looking distressed. Their sanctum now, built over the ruins of the old one. Shared. Much like everything else lately.

The princess looked up from her work with a smile.

"Oh. Hi Hordak! Can you move? You're blocking my light."

The great Horde leader obliged her without thinking, still looking upset by something.

"Entrapta!" He snapped, "we have to talk-"

"In a minute. I'm nearly done-"

"Entrapta, this can not wait!"

Things had been... interesting between the two ever since that night so many weeks ago. Intimately, they'd been active enough, although during the last few months intercourse was still rare. It was fine with hordak. Much as he needed very little food or sleep, he needed sex even less.

"What can't wait?" She asked, pulling her mask up to look him in the eyes once she'd finished welding. Hordak held up a screen, pointing frantically at a data chart.

"This! Have you been paying attention to your health charts? Your hormone levels are all over the place! Your eating habits are off. You've been sleeping much longer than average! Look at your nutrition intake! There have been several instances of vomiting as well! And your menstrual cycle is irregular."

Entrapta blinked, seemingly unbothered as she shrugged past the chart he held in her face. She went to her next project, reaching for a tool with a ponytail.

"Entrapta!"

"All aspects of my charts are perfectly normal."

Hordaks eyes narrowed and he moved around to look her in the eye.

"In what species on Etheria is this normal?" He demanded, "are you Ill? You dont have to hide it from me. Let me help you!"

Yes. She may well be Ill. It would explain much. The distance she'd been keeping the last few days, her odd charts. In the fright zone, illness was treated as a personal failing. Perhaps she'd simply been trying to hide it from his notice so he would not look down on her.

As if that were even possible.

"I'm not sick," she replied with a long sigh, "I am perfectly healthy for a pregnant etherian female."

Oh.
...oh.

Hordak stood quite still for a long time, his mind working at half speed, trying to organize and analyze what she had just said. She had been taking those strange vitamins lately, now that he thought of it, and had gone a few times to the infirmary for "routine check ups". Now that he considered it, all the signs were there. He'd read all about this when he was studying etherian sexuality. He should have realized sooner.

"...mine?"

The question could have been insulting, but in hordaks mind, it was a logical one. Judging by entraptas simple nod, she thought it was logical as well. Sure, he'd been the only one she had been intimate with, but she had said herself that she doubted they could reproduce together even if they wanted to.

"An... unexpected outcome," she admitted slowly, "all the data showed the odds were low. Still... perhaps it's worth revisiting. I should check my numbers again."

Stiffly, she moved past Hordak who stood quite still, data chart now hanging loosely in his hand at his side.

"Mine..." he whispered slowly, glancing at the details of her health charts once again. His brain worked to do the math. So she was... about 6 weeks along. Not far. Hardly any of his clones made it past that point either. Much could still happen, but even so... "Mine."

Clones were not expected to live long enough for this, nor were they expected to form bonds. Still, prime had taken the time to shut down reproductive ability in most of his clones, preferring his soldiers to be beyond such distractions.

*Another defect, then,* he reminded himself, but he didn't feel that usual bitterness that came with realizing his faults. Inside was an emotion he was yet unfamiliar with. A surge of something great and powerful.

Pride?

And before he knew it he was crossing the room to the woman he'd already sworn his entire life to. At the sound of his steps, she turned towards him from the screen she'd been reading. For a moment, his face was unreadable, but then, he fell to a knee in front of her, dropping the data chart at her feet. His arms reached up to grab her around her midsection and pull her against him. His lips planted a gentle, chaste kiss right below her navel, where (he guessed) his child would be growing.

*Slow down,* he chastised himself, *you didn't even ask how she feels about it.*

Yes. She was the one after all who would be taking on most work from this. If she chose not to carry, it was hardly his place to stop her. He would support her decisions no matter the outcome, but the smile she gave him as he kissed her tummy gave him the hint that they were on the same page.

"I... guess this means you're not mad," the princess shakily laughed, using a tendril of hair to help him back up to his feet, "but it is still early. Statistically speaking, risk of miscarriage is highest during first trimester. Still... I plan to monitor every step! Can you imagine what this means for my studies? The possibility! A hybrid! Ohhh I wonder what traits it will have? I'm already forming a hypothesis now!"

He allowed her to babble about her theories. In his mind, he was already piecing this new life together. Mother, father, child. Perhaps more later, if all went well with this first one. He found that
he rather liked the idea of more children. Many. He’d had many "brothers", after all.

"So. I suppose this answers the question. We are genetically compatible." He smirked running a hand up to her cheek. "And it brings a whole new list of questions to the forefront."

"Indeed," she replied, pulling away suddenly to turn back to her computer terminal, "like how will a hybrid compare to the average etherian child? Will it have a similar rate of growth?"

Hordak cleared his throat as he stepped behind her, and placed his hands on her shoulders.

"I was thinking more along the lines of what will it eat? Where will it sleep? How does one prepare for an Etherian infant?"

Hordak, ever practical, had done some research. After all, he’d had etherian children in his employ, raising them to be soldiers from infancy. It helped to know the basic life cycle. Even so, this was different. He had planned for nearly every eventuality, but never this.

Entrapta did not respond to his questions. Truly, childcare was outside her realm of expertise. She could learn, of course. Learning something new was always fun!

As the princess worked away at her calculations, Hordak massaged her shoulders gently. She was busy inventing new life, after all. It was his job to make it as easy as possible.

"I'm going to have to learn how to cook," he mumbled to himself.

Entrapta only ate tiny food, after all, and she was going to need better nutrition than tiny sliced up ration bars. He let his mind wander as his hand traveled to massage her neck. Fantasies about leaving the fright zone after Horde Prime arrives, living somewhere green and picturesque, perhaps bordering a forest. Or they could live in dryl. A castle would not be the worst place for a child to grow up. But not here. Not in the fright zone.

Not for her child. Not for their child.

"Oh! Can I get you anything?" He asked suddenly, "are you feeling well? Do you want water? Are you hungry? Tired? Let me help you."

Entrapta sighed, seemingly annoyed by his sudden enthusiasm.

"I'm fine." She sounded uncharacteristically snippy as she continued to enter data into her log. There was a long stretch of silence before she continued. "You aren't thinking scientifically about the risks and rewards. Data, Hordak. Focus on collecting data for me. That's how you can help."

The great Hoard leader pulled away as if burnt, his face betrayed his hurt.

"Is that all this is, then? An experiment? Data?" His voice felt tiny.

"Well, what do you want this to be?" She sighed, turning around in her chair to look at him. "Are we a family now? Should I expect a marriage proposal soon?"

She laughed bitterly, avoiding his eye.

"What is a marriage pr- Never mind that!" He growled, clenching his fist, "tell me what's really wrong. What are you afraid of?"

Oh yes. He could see it in her now clear as day. Pure terror. Outwardly, she was perfectly composed, but behind her eyes, dread. He’d seen that look a thousand times, many times he had caused it.
"I never fear scientific discovery-"

"Entrapta!"

"Fine!" She shouted, "I am afraid, alright?! I've seen you preparing. I know what's coming! I know who is coming. I'm trying to be excited but... what kind of world are we making for them?"

And for once, he was speechless. He'd assumed her fear was stemmed from motherhood. Not this. And honestly, Hordak couldn't blame her. The portal wasn't meant to be finished, at least, not anymore. And he'd certainly never intended it to be opened so soon... catra had fixed that, but she was of little consequence now, rotting away in a cell.

"When Horde Prime brings his armies, he will reward us for-"

"Stop lying to yourself!" She snapped, "your 'big brother' threw you away to die because you weren't his narrow idea of perfect! What do you think he'll do when he sees you now? When he sees me?"

"I'll protect you!" He insisted, sounding desperate now, "I'll protect you both!"

Entrapta said nothing, but the expression on her face said it all.

*Just like you protected me from Catra?*

He felt his talons dig into his palm but... he wasn't angry. He *should* be angry, but he wasn't. He didn't have the capacity to feel anger towards her now. She was *right.*

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry," he turned from her, shaking hands holding her crystal tight. His ears drooped in defeat as he let out a bitter laugh. "not even a father yet and I've already failed."

"Stop. You didn't. I'm just scared. I shouldn't have yelled. Forgive me, Hordikins?"

He hated that nickname and he turned his head to tell her that, only to find her lips instead. She could move so silently sometimes with the assistance of her hair.

"There is nothing to forgive," he sighed, leaning in to rest his forehead against hers as a hand reached down over her stomach, "I just... please allow me a bit of ignorant bliss. I've only ever entertained fantasies of this day."

"Do you want to name it then?" She smiled then looked away, blushing. "T-the experiment, I mean."

"I... would like that very much. But give me time. It has to be perfect!"

"You are still far too concerned with perfection," she sighed, resting her head against his chest.

"I know, I know," he chuckled, "imperfections are beautiful."
There was so much to prepare. Not just for Primes incoming presence, but now there was a future to plan for, a family to consider. He found himself getting distracted during war meetings, sometimes even murmuring potential names out loud while he received private reports from his force captains.

"Casualties were kept to a minimum during the invasion, My Lord. We have reports that-"

"Lovena..."

"...My lord?"

He cleared his throat, looking down at Scorpia, one of his last truly trustworthy force captains. The one who told him about Catras betrayal. And a dear friend to Entrapta.

"Lovena. As a name. What do you think of it? Or Victoria? That sounds more powerful."

"They're both... nice?" She offered, suddenly looking rather suspiciously at Lord Hordak. "I suppose Hordak Jr is out?"

For a moment it did not register that his force captain had picked up his meaning so he simply waved it off.

"No. Entrapta seems fairly convinced the child will be female."

It was the gasp from the former princess that pulled him out of his daze.

"Ehh..." he cleared his throat, suddenly stern, "I trust you will of course keep this between us. For the time being, at least. Until we choose to make the announcement."

Scorpia bowed, stiff, formal, but there was a giddiness to her smile that made Hordak cringe.

"You can count on me, Sir!"

Something about her tone made him almost regret confiding in her. Almost. On a certain level, it did feel nice having someone to bounce baby names off of.

"So when was the wedding?" Scorpia asked, grinning, "I must have missed it!"

Hordak tilted his head, observing his force captain with a furrowed brow

"Wedding?"
"Yes sir! When did you get married? I didn't even know it happened, sir! I bet the ceremony was-"

"Wedding? Married? I've heard these words before. What does it mean?"

Scorpia gasped, claws held up to her face.

"You mean, you're not!? But I thought-"

"You have not answered my question, Force Captain."

"Ah! Um! It's an Etherian tradition! It's a ceremony to-to bind yourselves together? It's like... force captain orientation? But for love? I guess?"

"Facinating..." he murmured, thinking back on what Entrapta had said, asking if she could expect a marriage proposal. So this was what she'd been talking about.
"Tell me more. How does one... propose?"

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His "meeting" with scorpia had taken several hours longer than anticipated and by the time he returned to the lab, Entrapta was still working on some sort of simulation.

"Apoligies for the wait, Princess," he purred, leaning down to kiss the top of her head, "have you eaten?"

"A little," she replied distractedly, eyes still trained on the screen in front of her, "having some difficulty receiving nutrition through traditional means... currently a little dehydrated."

She gestured to her right arm where an i.v. had been carefully placed at the crook of her arm.

Hordak frowned at that.

"You're that Ill? Why haven't you told me? I could have my medical officer look at you."

"I've already seen him," she shrugged, "the pregnancy is still viable and I am healthy enough to carry to term... if all goes well."

It was good news, but he still worried. Was it always this hard having people he cared about?

"Well, I want you to take it easy. Please. Let me help you when I can."

She turned in her chair to face him. She looked worn. Tired eyes, cracked lips, her normally round face seemed thinner too, now that he actually had a chance to look at her. He wanted to lecture her
about neglecting herself, but stopped himself. Her eyes were wet, threatening tears. He'd never seen that before.

No. His job wasn't to lecture, it was to reassure. She was doing her best. He knew she was. He had to constantly remind himself to watch his temper.

"You're making progress," he complemented, as if the previous conversation had not happened. He moved to study her work. A distraction. She was always so happy to talk about her work.

"Mmm yes. Look here. I think I've figured out the formula..."

He didn't interrupt. He didn't move. He just stood there over her shoulder, smiling as she babbled on about her work. And when she finished, he leaned in to place a kiss on her cheek and a whispered request in her ear.

"Marry me?"

Chapter End Notes

I'm bad with names. Suggested science baby girl names, put in those comments. Let me steal your ideas.
"Why would you want to do that?"

Of all the answers she could have given, that was not the one Hordak had expected.

"Err... isn't it... what Ethrians do? W-when they're in, um, love?"

Entrapta froze, hands on the keyboard.

"I don't really know," she replied slowly, "I-I suppose my parents were married. It just seemed like another silly ritual to me."

Hordak stood behind her, now straight backed, hands clasped behind him. He tried to look as unbothered as possible, even if he was a bundle of nerves and uncomfortable feelings inside.

"Perhaps it is," he sighed, "i... don't have much of a grasp of your customs, I'm afraid. I just recall you mentioned it before and today Scorpia asked if we would. I thought the idea sounded..."

"Well, it wouldn't be a terrible idea, actually," she relented after a sizable stretch of silence, "a good way to make our, um, union? Public? I mean, it will get out eventually. Especially since Scorpia knows. She can't keep a secret to save her life."

So that was a... yes?

"I've heard trinkets are to be exchanged during the ceremony?" He asked. Still unsure of her answer.

"Rings are common, but sometimes other things. It honestly doesn't matter. The part that really matters are the vows. That's what people pay attention to. If we're to make a big public statement, the vows have say something."

Hordak was silent as his fingers went up to touch the crystal power source at the center of his armor. She told him what the words meant, back when he came for her on Beast island. Luv'd. In a way, he'd already pledged himself to her, promising to protect and worship her from the moment he had found her again. Now all he had to do was say that in public.

"I suppose if we are to do this, we should do it soon," he mumbled, "do you want me to start planning, or...?"

"Yeah, if you could handle the logistics, that would be very helpful. I will talk to Scorpia. Maybe I can put her in charge of planning. Of course, all the Princesses will need to be there-"
"What!!?" Hordak hadn't meant to yell. Not really. But this was a step too far, even for Entrapta. Even with his outburst, she didn't back down.

"In order for a royal union to be accepted legally, there must be a dozen royal witnesses, or at least proof that they were invited. Tradition is all a wedding is, Hordak. If you want to get married so badly, then you have to do all that comes with it."

"So be it," he snarled, "I will wed you and force my enemies to watch! We will be an unstoppable force! A union so fierce, those fools will tremble-"

"Dramatic, hordikins. You're monologueing again."

"Ah. Yes. Apologies."

He cleared his throat, grabbed a strand of her hair and kissed it gently before letting go and retreating from the lab.

"Where are you going?" Entrapta asked, watching him leave. Overhead, Imp, who had been quietly watching, swooped down to join his master on his shoulder.

"I am sending out invitations."
I always cry at weddings

Chapter Summary

Nobody can quite believe what is happening as the big day at Dryl castle approaches. As the couple prepare for their nuptials, the princess alliance contemplates the possibility of using this occasion for political gain.

Chapter Notes

Decided to skip past most of the wedding planning in order to keep things moving at a good pace. I have a lot planned and prefer to keep things moving so I don't get burnt out before I get to it. Still, I wanted this chapter to be a little silly and fun.
Enjoy!

The announcement had taken the Hoard by storm. At first, many had taken it as an elaborate prank. Perhaps it was even a test? Hordak was testing his soldiers to see who was gullible enough to believe such an obvious trick.

But once invitations had been sent out to the kingdoms of Etheria and soldiers had been given assignments to protect and prepare Dryl for a "royal wedding", they had no choice but to accept the strange reality they were living.

The Hoard leader, the great and terrifying Lord Hordak was marrying the perky science Princess. There were those who insisted they weren't surprised.

"She's in his sanctum alone with him at all hours. What did you think would happen?"

"I bet she's pregnant."

"Can she be though? Is that... possible? Does Lord Hordak...?"

The three cadets exchanged shrugs and uncomfortable looks.

"Your job isn't to gossip!" Lonnie snapped to the trio behind them, "your job is to move that aisle runner into position! Move it!"

The cadets jumped and ran to do their assigned task.

"Man... I thought my first task as a Force captain would be more exciting than this," Lonnie grumbled, arms crossed.

"Aww! Perk up! Isn't this fun? Look! Entrapta made me the wedding coordinator!"

Lonnie's eyes slid to glare at the scorpion woman holding a clipboard with her clumsy claws.

"It's my honor to serve the Hoard," Lonnie sighed, sounding anything but convincing.
"Entrapta is gunna be so happy! Look! Every Princess has RSVPed! Isn't that nice? Nothing like a wedding to make people forget a horrible life ruining war!"

"Yeah. Great. Just what we need. Invite our enemies into our territory and serve them pastries!" Lonnie threw her hands up in the air with a snort of disgust, "I dont understand why they gatta get hitched in the first place! Why would they bother?"

"Probably because Entrapta's gunna have his baby." Scorpia, smiling, blissfully ignorant of her own blabbermouth, checked another box on her list.

"...I'm sorry. I think I just had a brain bleed. I thought you just said they were havin' a baby?"

"Oh yeah!" Scorpia laughed, "she's absolutely pregnant. Hordak was telling me about baby names he was thinking about. Its cute."

Lonnie seemed to sway on her feet. Did this blundering crab lady just call Hordak, the grat terrible dictator... cute? No. Forget that! Hordak was picking out baby names!? And he was close enough with Scorpia to tell her about it!?

"I... I think I need to lay down."

--------

Imp perched on his masters thin narrow shoulders. No armor now. Just a long, floor length white tunic and a flower crown. It was one of those "traditions" that he still insisted on following. Do it properly, make a bold statement. It was a minor embarrassment for what he intended to accomplish here today.

Imp looked his master over, quickly snatching a blue flower from the top of his head. Hordak gave the little spy a little sideways glare, which may have been intimidating if he wasnt also smiling like a fool.

"Brat," he mumbled, "go. You have a job to do."

Imp hissed and flew away to spy on the conversation in the crowd just before the ceremony. That would no doubt prove interesting and maybe even useful later on.

Hordak checked his reflection one last time. Ridiculous. He felt utterly ridiculous. He frowned as he tried to stand up straight and tall. Being imposing was impossible with a flower crown. His ears drooped.

"...I hope she thinks I look handsome," he mumbled, running a hand through his hair.

"Of course I do!" Entraptas voice said right behind him.

Hordak jumped and tilted the mirror to see his soon to be wife hanging from the ceiling by her hair. She was wearing a similar white garment but on her it was flattering. Her long hair was now down from it's normal twin tails with the same flowers hordak had in his flower crown woven through the mass of purple. Hordak just stood there. She was stunning. So beautiful it almost hurt.

"Y-youre not supposed to see me before the ceremony!" He hissed once he'd recovered enough to
speak, "Scorpi says it's bad luck..."

"Huh? Interesting," the princess teased, "never took you for superstitious."

"I'm not!" He insisted, "I just want to do things... right. Besides. Should you be hanging like that in your condition? What if you fall?"

"Ah. So fun is no longer allowed now? Guess that means no more sex."

"W-well let's not get carried away!"

He felt the tips of his ears heat up at just the mention of sex. One of these days he'd stop getting embarrassed about it. Entrapta laughed and set herself on the floor with him.

"I'm glad you asked me to do this, Hordikins."

The couple exchanged smiles, held hands for a long moment before Entrapta pulled away and opened the door to leave.

"See ya in a few."

-------

"If this is a trap, its officially the stupidest trap ever," Queen Glimmer mumbled, handing over her invitation at the door.

"Honestly, I think it's genuine," Adora sighed, "last time I saw Hordak he was wearing a crystal that said "loved" and I know Entrapta gave it to him. I told you how he acted when the portal was activated? Heartbroken. I think he loves her."

"This is worse than a trap!" Bow groaned, "its cute! I support this so much and it makes me feel wrong!"

"We just need to sit through it," Glimmer grumbled, "and maybe we can convince Entrapta to help us end the war."

"A Truce? What makes you think Hordak will agree to it?" Bow asked as they moved to take their assigned seats.

"Because someone worse is coming," Adora explained, "and he has an Etherian to protect now. His tactics have become desperate lately. He's scared."

Glimmer waved to Perfuma sitting a few rows away before leaning in to whisper again.

"I hate it, but teaming up with the Hoard might be our best bet," the new Queen sighed, "it might be our only bet."

"Oh! Shh! Its starting!" Bow whispered excitedly as he pulled out a hanky from nowhere. "I always cry at weddings!"
Moments to go until it started and Hordak felt like he was going to both pass out and jump out of his skin. Even the pain felt dull now, nearly unnoticeable. Now he was a pure bundle of anxiety.

At least, he was... until he saw her face again. Once their eyes locked, once they both stood together at the altar, once they had their hands clasped, all of it melted away.
No war. No invasion. No fear. Only her.
Always her. For the rest of his life, it would be her.

"Hordak."

"Entrapta."

"I'll start," Entrapta said, producing a simple silver ring, "I know it's very expected, but you seemed bent on doing this... traditionally."

She snickered and even Hordak managed a little snort of laughter.

"This is a little different though. I made it from the remains of our Portal project. Working with you, having a real lab partner, it was the most fun I've ever had! No matter what happens from here on out, I want to remind you of the fun."

Hordak received the trinket as if he were taking a priceless piece of art. He held it so carefully, lovingly in his palm before sliding it onto the appropriate finger for a marriage band. And there, it would remain.

"Your gift is... exceptional. Thank you."

He cleared his throat. Ears burning as he became suddenly, horribly aware that he was being judged and studied by everyone. Even if he spoke quietly so only Entrapta would hear, every movement was being taken into account.

"Err... the first time you visited my sanctum, you were looking for something."

He held out a tool, a very familiar one. The same six sided hexdriver from their first meeting. Hordak had found it when they were rebuilding the destroyed sanctum and had kept it as a memento. But now, he gave it to his bride with an engraving on its handle. 'Luvd', written in the same first ones writing as his crystal.

"Hordak... it's... so practical!"

The smile she gave him could have melted steel. He found himself feeling so weak when he clutched
He turned his attention to those gathered, letting go of his lovers hand for the moment. The ceremony was a simple one. Quiet words, an exchange of gifts, and a kiss. But before they sealed their union, there was more to say. These people dared to make his beloved feel like a failure. The fact that he had elected to use words at all now was a mark of huge improvement to his temper.

"Your miserable backwards planet disgusts me. Your etherian traditions are primitive at best and you are all cowards and fools. Every last one of you... save for this one," he held a hand out, gesturing towards Entrapta. "Of all of you, Princess Entrapta is by far the most worthy creature on this pitiful ball of rock... and you, absolute fools-" he glared right at the trio seated four rows back, "left her behind in my clutches!"

He was grinning now, scanning the guests for their reactions.

"Did you not think she was capable? Did you doubt her abilities? Her survival instincts? Her intellect? These traits are precisely what makes her superior to all of you. Mark this day as your greatest failing... and my greatest triumph!"

Entrapta blinked, a smile never once wavering. She seemed flattered, blushing exactly as a bride was meant to.

"Hordak," she giggled, "you're monologuing again."

He glanced at her, clearing his throat, suddenly feeling quite childish.

"Err... Yet despite being such a miserable backwards planet, you were not without worth. Your planet gave me... Her," his voice was gentle now and he reached for her hand "meeting you was the best thing to ever happen to me. I am... honored to know you."

The stunned silence was only interrupted when Bow blew his nose loudly. Adora and Glimmer exchanged looks, pure confusion on every inch of their faces. Was he threatening them? Was he thanking them? Neither? All of the above?

And when Entrapta took a step in to close the distance, they all watched in fascination (and some in horror) as this great terror leaned in to place a sweet kiss against her lips. When they pulled away, Hordak held her hands and whispered a quiet vow.

"I will never let you be lonely again."

Chapter End Notes

Somewhat shorter chapter. I spent a long time thinking of what an Etherian wedding might look like, since there isn't much in canon. I ended up going with something very simple but I think, more meaningful to these weirdos.

Anyway. hope you enjoyed!
"Hi Glimmer! Hi Bow! Hi Adora!"

All three stood still as stone near the horderves table, piled high with tiny, tiny delicacies. Entrapta was arm in arm with her new husband towering over her in an almost comical way. Bow was the first to recover from his apparent paralysis. He managed a smile and waved.

"Congratulations!"

He stepped on Glimmers foot, jolting her back to life.

"Ow! I-I mean, hi! Yes. Congratulations you... two."

Hordak's deep red eyes traveled across the trio, narrowing into cold slits when they fell on Adora, but he said nothing, turning his gaze back on Bow.

"You are the boy who caught my flowers," Hordak observed, gesturing to the limp flower crown Bow held at his side, "you do understand what tradition suggests. Yes?"

Bow looked like he could fall over dead any moment. He quickly shook his head.

"It means you'll be next."

The way Hordak said it sounded like a threat, but then he smiled and... winked? Bow managed an awkward laugh and Adora looked like she wanted to die.

"Hordikins don't tease!" Entrapta laughed, nudging him in the side. The tall alien beside her winced then smiled, glancing at Adora once again as he laced his fingers through entraptas bare fingers. Her eyes narrowed as he lifted his new wife's hand to his lips for a brief kiss.

"We should go. Many people to greet still," Entrapta said, squeezing his hand and nearly dragging him away, "nice to see you guys!"

"Wait!" Glimmer shouted after them, "Entrapta! I want to talk to you later!"

The only response the BrightMoon Queen got in response was a wave of Entraptas hair.
"Whew! I never knew weddings could be so tiring!"

Entrapta collapsed on a giant bed in what used to be her bedroom before she came to the Frightzone.

Hordak stood awkwardly off to the side, leaning against a wall. Now that they married... he had absolutely no idea how he was meant to act. How did a husband act, exactly? Truthfully, he'd been so caught up in how to have a proper wedding that he never considered after.

"Um..." he glanced at the door, ready to leave "I'll let you go to sleep then. Good night."

"What are you talking about?" Entrapta sat up, reaching a hand out for him, "you're coming to bed with me. Don't you know what a 'wedding night' is for?"

He awkwardly grasped her hand and shook his head. In response, she pulled him down on top of her, sly smile betraying her intentions.

"Ah! I see..." he stumbled as she began eagerly tugging his wedding garments off, "s-sex. Excellent. Yes. Good idea. I was just thinking it might be nice to-"

She grabbed the back of his head and pulled him down to cut his babbling off with a kiss.

"Shut up and take me," she hissed, breaking away slightly to tug her own wedding garb up over her head to drop at the side of the bed. They had done this many times before and Hordak was hardly the blushing virgin, but despite that, every time she took her clothes off for him he had to study her again. She was beautiful, well, she was always beautiful. But today she was especially captivating.

Her hair still had some flowers in it, her cheeks glowed a faint pink, her eyes shone like glass and her stomach, which always had a slight squish, now at 12 weeks felt somewhat hard and rounded under his palm.

"May I try something, wife?" He asked, testing the way the word felt on his tongue.

"Ooo! An experiment? You know I love to experiment!"

Hordak smirked down at her before leaning in to place a forceful kiss to her neck, down her collarbone, across her breasts, over her stomach, until he hovered over her slick panties.

"May i?" He purred eyes locked on hers. She nodded, already looking flushed with excitement. Good. His clawed fingers hooked around her panties, eagerly pulling them off and discarding them on the floor with everything else. Once more, he looked her over.

Her Etherian anatomy was shockingly durable, he'd discovered, but still so very sensitive. He lifted one of her legs, planting a series of feather light kisses up her thigh. The closer he kissed to her center of pleasure, the harder she panted. After a few moments of teasing, his face hovered over her wet mound. Glancing up once more he met her eyes, desperately watching him as he went in for a taste. His tongue flicked up from her opening to her clitoris. Two fingers gently spread her for him as he licked at her little bud, taking her vocal cues.

Without warning, her hand reached down to tangle into his hair as she pulled him in, encouraging him to lap more aggressively at her. He had to hold back a smile and a chuckle. And here he'd been worried that she wouldn't like this.

"Use your fingers in me" she moaned, spreading her legs wider.

An instruction he was more than willing to follow. Two long fingers gently pushed into her,
encouraging a loud moan from his wife. There seemed to be a certain technique and speed she really enjoyed. He could tell she enjoyed this from her vocal cues, unless "yes! Please more!" meant something different on Etheria.

He felt her tense under him as she moaned out a stream of filthy words that he was not aware she even knew. Somehow, he found her dirty talk more erotic than the feeling of her climaxing against his tongue and fingers. He didn't stop until she told him to. When he pulled away, he wiped his lips against the back of his hand grinning.

"Where did you learn to speak like that? Hardly something I imagine you learned in finishing school."

The princess had one arm draped over her eyes as she gasped for breath. When she finally moved to look at him, he was licking her nectar off his fingers, grinning wickedly down at her. Oh. That was an image she wanted to take a mental snap shot of.

"Well. Where did you learn to do that?" She challenged, sitting up to grasp him firmly at the base of his erection.

He let out a faint gasp of both surprise and arousal as she began to stroke him, concentrating especially on the tip. She'd noted that he seemed especially sensitive there.

"Entrapta..." he moaned, "you don't have to-" Before he could finish, she leaned in to swiftly lick from base to tip.

The sound that ripped from his throat was one Entrapta had yet to hear. Somewhere between a purr and a sob. She paused, looking up at him with a playful grin.

"Err... that f-felt, um, good," he complemented, attempting unsuccessfully to compose himself, "you do not need to continue though..."

"Lay down," she ordered, ignoring the last thing he said, "I want to run another test."

Obediently he lay down beside her. By now, Hordak knew better than to argue with her, especially in the bedroom. Besides, he was always pleased with the test results.

"If it's too much, just yank my hair, alright?" She instructed, moving to hover over him.

He swallowed hard and nodded. With a playful smirk, she met his eyes and lowered his mouth to his erection. It was a sensation that he had never once experienced. Not quite as good as being inside her, but it somehow felt so much dirtier. He purred once more as she slid him in and out of her mouth. Near the tip she flicked her tongue, encouraging more animalistic purrs from him. He reached down to the back of her head resisting the urge to make her gag on him.

As if sensing his thoughts. A strand of her hair whipped up to wrap around his wrists and force them back over his head. His eyes widened. He looked down as she pulled her lips away with an audible pop. She smirked. Hordak blinked. Another strand of hair went to caress his ears as she climbed on top of him. He blinked again, far too stunned to speak.

Thus far, he'd always been the one on top, in control (or at least pretending to be) but there was something about her confident smile, the way she held him down, straddled him, establishing her unquestioned dominance... it had him weak. Wordlessly, he gave a nod and pressed his pelvis up against her. They both moaned as they pressed together, not quite joined, but the lust, the need was there.
"Entrapta," he groaned, "please."

Music to her ears. He was begging. Never once had she heard him beg, until now. And she found she liked the sound of it. She'd find time to do this again. Soon. Using one hand to guide him, she lowered herself down at last. When their hips met, it was electrifying. She held nothing back, bouncing her full hips into him with an enthusiasm that could only be described as almost feral.

This was... too much. He was supposed to be stronger than this. But nothing on this miserable backwards planet was supposed to make him feel this good! It wasnt fair. He bucked his hips up into her, climbing to a height he'd only experienced a small handful of times now. Too soon. Far too soon.

"I'm close."

"Already?" Entrapta breathlessly taunted, "very well. I'll allow it."

She'll... allow it?

He didn't have time to contemplate her word choice. It put him over the edge, her confidence, the way her words dripped with almost sadistic pleasure. He'd glanced bits of this during bedroom activities. Subtle demands, being a little rough, she even told him to call her Mistress once. And he found he rather liked it.

He came with a loud groan, arching his back, wrapping claws around strands of hair holding him down. And then it was done.

Her hair released him and slipped free of his quickly weakening grasp. Entrapta yawned and climbed up to rest her head against his shoulder while he simply lay there, staring at the ceiling, body spent and reeling from what they had just done.

"That," he murmured at long last as she pulled the blankets up over them. "Do that again."

Sleepily, Entrapta kissed his jaw and shook her head.

"Nuh uh."

"No?" Hordak frowned.

"Not unless you say please."

"Ah," he chuckled, rolling to face her, "please? My Queen?"

"Alright. But later. I'm tired."

"Alright. Sleep. Tomorrow is a big day."

Yes. A meeting. Queen Glimmer of Brightmoon had requested a meeting with the Princess of Dryl. Entrapta already knew what it was about.

"Mmm... goodnight, Husband."

"Goodnight, Wife."

Chapter End Notes
Next few chapters are going to be more serious, but here's some smut to tide you over. Ya perverts.
Chapter Summary

The Princess Alliance meets with Hordak and Entrapta to discuss the possibility of an alliance.

Entrapta sat at the head of a long table in a war room she did not even know the castle had. Well. It wasn't like she didn't care to know, it was just that she didn't need to know until now.

Behind her, the new prince consort of Dryl smirked at the foreign Queen seated across. His hand rested on the arm of his wife's high backed chair, fingers playing with hers.

"When I asked for a meeting, Entrapta," Glimmer sighed, "I had hoped it would just be us."

"Hordak is my husband now," she replied with a shrug, "you brought your consort with you."

She motioned to Bow who was sitting at her left. The poor boy blushed and sunk down in his chair slightly. Glimmer frowned, but appeared to be mostly unbothered.

"He is not my consort. He is my advisor."

"Ah! Well. So is Hordak," Entrapta stated, squeezing his hand.

"Is she your advisor as well?" Hordak asked, looking Adora in the eye from across the table, "or is she your consort?"

Now this seemed to get a reaction.

"Adora is a princess of Etheria," the Brightmoon Queen snapped, "therefore, she is meant to be at this meeting as well."

"And the other princesses?" Hordak asked, head tilted slightly to the side, "did they not also have a place here?"

"The others belong to the alliance and therefore defer to my judgement," Glimmer was getting impatient. Hordak could tell. It was fun, but wasted time. Instead of goading her further, he simply nodded as if all of his questions had been answered. She seemed to relax now somewhat.

"Let's get to it," Entrapta said, at last breaking the tension, "you want us to join you."

Glimmer exchanged looks with Adora and then Bow.

"Yes. As things are now, we are at a standstill. The only thing fighting does is waste resources," Glimmer responded.

"We know what happened when the portal was opened," Adora added, hands flat on the table. "We know what it summoned and what will happen when it gets here."

Now it was time for Hordak and Entrapta to exchange surprised looks.
"We... also know about the baby," Bow added gently, "sorry. Scorpia said, well... you probably shouldn't trust her with secrets."

Instead of being annoyed at their secret getting out, Entrapta laughed.

"Well, i suppose we couldn't hide it forever," Hordak sighed, "so. You know everything. And you think this somehow... gives you the upper hand in negotiating a truce?"

"We dont need the upper hand," Adora replied quickly, "this isn't about that anymore. There are bigger threats coming. You know that. Both of you."

Entrapta gave Hordak a dark look and pulled her hand away to rest over the slight bump at her lower abdomen. She couldn't meet his eye. She and him... they'd had this discussion many times. It always ended the same way. He'd insist she was over thinking it, insist the Hoard emperor would reward them, treat the planet with dignity. Entrapta would go silent, fear evident in every inch of her.

"I... I trust you three enjoyed the wedding and hope you have a safe journey back to Brightmoon," Hordak dismissed, careful to keep his tone even and diplomatic, "this meeting is over."

"No." Entrapta's voice was firm, commanding. Regal. "This is my domain, Hordak. I decide when we are done, not you."

He stared at her for a long time before pulling the chair out to her left and sitting down without a word. She was right, after all. And he was... impressed. Proud.

"I won't make a decision today," she stated, "however, your logic is solid and worth considering. You may expect our answer within the month. On the condition that no charges come against my husband should we elect to join your alliance."

Adora put a hand on Glimmer's arm, meeting her gaze sternly. The Queen sighed, nodding.

"Agreed."

"Great! Good meeting everyone!" Entrapta giggled, ringing a bell. "Tiny snacks? Fizzy drinks?"

On command, both of these things were presented on trays for her guests.

"Uh... no," Bow answered politely, "thank you. We should probably get going."

"Aww, so soon?" Entrapta groaned, "too bad. I was thinking we could catch up! I mean, you guys did leave me behind, but I still liked hanging out with you!"

"Y-yeah? That's nice to hear," Adora awkwardly replied, "We missed you Entrapta. And we're sorry for, well... underestimating you."

"Please join us again, Entrapta," Bow begged, pushing his bottom lip out, "I have so much I want to show you! I made new arrows!"

Entrapta laughed again, seeming at ease. Hordak didn't stop watching for an instant, not really. None had moved to threaten him or his wife, however, and perhaps it was even beginning to make him relax. So much so that he did not notice that when Entrapta stood with the rest of the assembly, she swayed slightly. She shook it off quickly, smiling, and chatting to her old friends as if nothing changed when she suddenly went silent.

Hordak almost didn't catch her in time as she fell.
Naive confidence

The night had been long. Entrapta had collapsed on her way out of the meeting. Seemingly out of nowhere too. Had she been unwell? Were there signs that he missed? Was he letting her over exert herself? He'd paced the halls while he waited for Dryls on site doctors to look her over, cursing his own ignorance.

"You should try to relax," Bow said from where he was sitting on a chair against the wall. He was knitting, only occasionally glancing up to the tall alien stalking the hall.

"How, exactly, can I be expected to 'relax'?" Hordak snarled, "if anything happens to them, I'll-"

"I know, I know," he sighed, "I'm worried for her too. You know, Entrapta is special to me as well. She taught me a lot. Kinda like a big sister."

That was unexpected. Hordak had never given much thought to the boy. He was young, too young to be romantically interested in Entrapta. But like a sibling? It was a relationship he found he understood. He had many 'siblings' also. Hordak sighed and took a seat next to him, arms crossed.

"...what are you knitting?" He asked politely, trying to ease some of the tension that still hung between him and what he was now calling the Brightmoon Trio.

"Hm? Oh! I'm making a baby bonnet!" He squealed, holding the yellow yarn creation for him to see. "I wanted to have it done by the time Entrapta wakes up. You two should start preparing now. It'll be here before you know it."

"She," Hordak corrected, "Entrapta says it's a She."

"Psh. As far as you know. They can tell you themselves for sure later."

Hordak considered that for a moment and shrugged.

"I do see some wisdom in that, yes. Well. She or he, or both or neither, I will simply be happy to have them born healthy."

Bow looked at the tall Hoard leader, eyes sparkling.

"Wow! You are so much nicer when you're not trying to kill us! You're going to be the best dad!"

"I am not 'nice'" Hordak snapped, but cleared his throat, looking away as he said in a small voice, "but thank you. Your...naive confidence in my abilities is refreshing."

"Shes awake!" Glimmers voice announced as she teleported right in front of them. Bow screamed and dropped his knitting needles and Hordak jumped up in his seat and wordlessly strode past them both headed for the infirmary door.

When it slid open, the sight that greeted him made his heart drop. She lay hooked up to a monitor with an i.v. in her arm again. Her face was pale, her hair, which for once, was braided out of the way, hung limp and useless over the side of the bed, the eyes that stared back at him were unfocused, glossy.

"Entrapta..."
"She will be fine," the physician assured him, "she is exhausted and dehydrated, that's all. In her condition it was a bad combination, but she should recover soon with fluids and rest. It looks worse than it is."

Hordak fixed his cold red glare on the friendly Etherian female as she checked her patient's pulse once again.

"She will recover, or else you won't," he growled, turning his focus back on his silent wife, "and the baby?"

"Healthy, as far as we can tell," the physician continued, seeming to pretend she had no heard the threat, "appears to be a good size. If all continues to go well, you can expect to meet your son in 25 weeks or so."

Hordak froze on the spot, blinking.

"Son?" He questioned, "I thought-"

"I was mistaken," Entrapta said at last in a weak voice, "I was so sure of it. Instinct, but still... um, they ran blood tests. It's possible to find out that way. About 95% accurate."

"I see. It makes no difference to me, but..."

"Prime will be less annoyed with a nephew?" She guessed bitterly.

Hordak reluctantly nodded. It was something Hordak had to discover himself on Etheria. In the Hoard, females held little purpose to Prime, save for when he took the occasional concubine. He relied mainly on his clones, after all. But on Etheria, half the population had been female. Hordak could not afford to be picky. And even if he was, he often found that the ones who's numbers most often qualified for promotion, were female. Or at least female identifying. He would have been foolish to focus on gender over ability.

"...I've decided to trust what ever you think is best, Hordak," Entrapta murmured, "if you trust Prime, I'll go with you."

Hordak pressed a gentle kiss to her brow and took a seat next to her.

"Leave us," he commanded the doctor, who left without another backwards glance, studying the chart in her hand.

"Entrapta... let's go back to the Frightzone. Once you are on your feet again, of course."

"Yes. I want to get back to the sanctum. And i miss Emily."

He nodded in agreement, reaching to take her hand.

"Get some rest, princess."

She nodded, already closing her eyes. In only a few moments, she was out again. Hordak held her hand in his for quite some time, watching over her, waiting.

The door slid open. Adora stepped in.

"How is she?" His ex force captain asked, awkwardly. Hordak glared at her, resisting the urge to shout.
"She will recover with rest," he answered, forcing his voice to be calm, "we will return to the Fright zone when she is better."

Adora stayed a distance away, seemingly conflicted.

"Is there something you need, Princess?"

He spat the last word out with such venom he was afraid for a moment the girl might attack in response. Instead. She just blinked and moved close to the bed, taking a seat at her other side.

"You're not going to join the alliance. That's a tactical error on your part."

Hordak grit his red teeth, but he didn't argue.

"Prime is unstoppable," he replied, "our best chance is to play along and hope for his mercy. I know him better than anyone on this miserable... on this planet," he corrected, trying not to insult his wife's homeworld too much.

"That is exactly why we need you!" Adora argued, "you know his tactics. You know his weaknesses."

Hordak let out a soft bark of laughter.

"The Emperor of the known universe has no weaknesses." He spoke it as fact.

"Everyone has weaknesses," Adora insisted, "Me. You. Even him. We just have to find it! Hordak! There are billions of people on this planet!"

"If I didn't care before, what makes you think I'd care now?"

But he knew the answer before he even followed her eyes to the sleeping princess between them.

"Brightmoon is open when you change your mind," she said, standing up, "tell Entrapta I wish her the best."

And then she was gone.
Entrapta awoke almost 7 hours later, still weak, but well enough to start the journey "home". She remained silent through most of it. Sometimes sleeping. But mostly she just quietly stared at the empty space in front of her.

And Hordak was useless to her. How was he to help her in this? Seeing her so quiet was, frankly, terrifying. It was nearing midnight when they received word that the Frightzone was near, and she finally spoke up for the first time through the whole trip.

"When we get back, I want us to start thinking of where we'll raise our son."

Imp was snuggling up to her, separating Hordak from his wife. She ran her fingers through his hair, petting him almost like she would a cat.

"I've considered that already," he replied, "the fright zone is no place for a child."

The violet haired princess nodded stiffly.

"Dryl, then?"

"Mmm... most likely. I can have preparations made after we make a formal announcement."

"Hordak, are you sure...?"

"Everything will be fine. Please trust me. When prime comes, I will submit a formal request to stay on Etheria and raise our son."

Her face darkened at the mention of his brother, but she nodded.

"I'm... going back to sleep. Wake me when we get there."

----------------

The greeting they received upon arrival had been more extravagant than normal. Hordak rarely left the Fright Zone, but even when he did on the rare occasion, his return was usually quiet. This time, there was a line of troops waiting to greet them as their vehicle approached. Scorpia, who had left Dryl early in order to prepare for the arrival back at the frightzone, greeted them personally.

"Lord Hordak! Entrap- I mean, My Lady! Welcome back! There are a few new developments to cover. May I update you as we walk?"

Hordak nodded sternly, guiding his bride back inside into the dim light.

"We've ceased all attack and ordered our troops to fall back to base as we prepare for the arrival of Emperor Prime."

Hordak felt his wife's grip on his arm tighten.

"On that subject, we've received a transmission. It was hard to decode, but we did eventually crack
it. His arrival time should be sometime within the month."

Hordak glanced down at the little princess on his arm, worry flooding him like a fever. She looked... so small.

"In other news, we've finished preparations here. The rebuilding effort was completed in record time!"

"All excellent news, Captain Scorpia," he replied stoically, "my wife is tired from our journey. Will you please escort her to our chambers?"

"Right away, Sir!" Scorpia gave an enthusiastic salute and offered an arm for the new lady of the Hoard, "my Lady if you'd allow me-"

Entrapta walked past her without a word or a glance back at her husband. Her face was unreadable, but her eyes were firm. Determined.

"Oh! Okay! No touching! I can dig it!" Scorpia laughed, walking with her.

Hordak... felt his heart break a little as he watched them disappear down the long hall. She was displeased. Disappointed? Angry even? Maybe. He really should have walked her himself.

Should have. Didn't.

There was so much to do in preparation for Primes arrival. That had to be his first priority now, even if he would much rather try to make peace with his wife. With a heavy sigh, he walked in the opposite direction, fiddling with his ring as he made his way through to inspect the new additions.

A royal chamber for the Emperor to stay in, outfitted with the finest comforts and luxuries Etheria could offer, as well as a throne room. a real one. Even with all the preparations and funding poured into this project. He doubted Prime would find it up to his high standards.

Such... high, high standards.

---------

"-Oh! And heres another great name I thought of! What about Hoardika? Or Hoardisha? No, that was terrible. Haha!"

As Scorpia babbled on about baby names (all including the word Hoard somewhere) Entrapta dug out her tools, unscrewed a vent and vanished into the many tubes connecting to the sanctum. By the time Scorpia turned back around, she had only enough time to witness Imps tail vanish from sight behind his mistress.

"Oh... guess she didn't like my suggestions. That's okay! You know, that is fine. I'll think of more and write them down!"

Scorpia kept walking, bouncing names around in her head.

Entrapta flew through the ventilation systems, feeling free for the first time since Hordak found out she was pregnant. If he saw her now, he would insist this was too dangerous. And Hordak was inviting danger over for a family reunion.
She climbed out of a vent in the sanctum and reached for Imp to climb into her arms. She needed to work on something. Alone. Without Hordaks well meaning suggestion that she lay down or take it easy or not experiment with highly combustible chemicals.

Her mind freely grasped for ideas, snatching an idea out of thin air and releasing it when she lost interest. Emily beeped happily from the corner to see her back. Oh, Emily. She'd missed Emily.

"Emily. Come here. Let's make a few upgrades."
"There! Ta da! Emily, I've upgraded your weapons systems and added a few other nifty features. I think it'll really come in handy."

She happily checked a data pad connected to Emily, looking her schematics over just once more. Imp napped peacefully on top of Emily.

This was the scene that Hordak saw when he walked in, rubbing his temples. He stopped, not expecting to see Entrapta still awake and here. Didnt he tell her to go to sleep?

_Idiot. Why would she listen to you?_ He silently chastised himself. _You're her husband, not her Emperor._

"Entrapta." He greeted, hoping that she had moved past her anger with him.

She looked up, swung her welding mask over her face, grasped the ceiling with her hair and swung away into the vents without a word to him.

"Entrapta! Thats-" she was gone, "...dangerous."

He sighed, his ears lowering as he collapsed into a chair at his terminal.

Of course she was still upset. He'd been ignoring her fears. Hed been too focused on pleasing the very thing she was afraid of and not enough time listening to why she was afraid. Truth was though... Hordak was afraid too.

The last time he had seen his "brother" was when he was calling him a failure and sentencing him to die. Hardly unreasonable that after knowing that, Entrapta was afraid.

His long talons clicked against the keys of his keyboard as he absently looked over data he'd been collecting on their offspring.

15 weeks now. Not far enough along for anyone to really notice, but Hordak counted the days as they turned into weeks and months. Each day that his little one continued to grow, was celebrated.

Now if only he could convince his wife to speak to him again.

Entrapta sat on the bed she shared with Hordak. For the last thirty six and a half minutes. She'd argued with herself on if she should move back to the old storage closet she used to sleep in.

She was still arguing when Imp climbed out of the vent near the floor and settled on her lap. He
looked her in the eye with a very stern expression and opened his mouth. Hordak's voice said in a very serious tone,

"I grow weary of this game of hide and seek, Princess. Our marriage is not going to end before I have the chance to try to make it up to you."

Entrapta glared down at the little spy, but before she could call him a traitor, there was a knock at the door, a pause, then it slid open.

The first thing Entrapta noticed was the tray of tiny cupcakes, piled high and messily in a pastel rainbow of colors. She almost didn't notice the tall imposing figure holding the tray.

"You will hear my apology, Entrapta. Or at least taste my apology," he stubbornly stated, "I did not walk through half a units worth of soldiers with pastel frosting on my hands for you to not at least let me speak to you!"

And... she could not argue. She stared him down, ready to hear what he had to say.

"Thank you. Now. Will you eat some of these? I'm tired of holding it."

Entrapta helped him place the large platter on the nightstand and grabbed a tiny cupcake with swirly pink frosting.

"I love you. I know I don't say it often, but I do. But I am a poor lover, unused to the intricacies of relationships. I failed in a spectacular way to recognize the validity of your anxieties and for that, I am sorry."

Entrapta grabbed another cupcake with her hair and popped it into her mouth as she waited for him to continue.

"Err... and on top of that, I not only failed to see your fears as valid, I prioritized them over you. It is too late to change what I did, but I can only promise to try to be more aware of it in the future so as to avoid causing you pain again."

Almost there. It was almost a full apology. So close. She popped another cupcake.

"And also I need to stop telling you what to do. You are a grown woman and you understand your limits better than I. I worry for you, but it is no excuse to treat you like a child. You are capable and I should treat you as an equal."

There. That was it. She managed a smile at last, grabbed a cupcake and held it out to him.

"And I'm sorry for giving you the silent treatment," she finally said as he slowly took the cupcake from her hand, "truce?"

Hordak sighed, relief flooding his body like a hot shower.

"Truce," he agreed and carefully bit into his mini cupcake with a smile.

Chapter End Notes

Things are gunna get kinda dark from here on out, so heres your last bit of cuteness for a
while.
Emperor

Chapter Summary

Horde Prime arrives at last.
Turns out hes super chill and nice and they all have a lovely tea party.

Lol jk he's a bastard.

The next month passed like a blink of an eye. It was not without its difficulties, of course. Entrapta's condition may have stabilized, the risk of miscarriage growing lower by the day, but she was not out of the woods.

She had similar fainting spells since the one at Dryl. Once even while she was in public, observing the troops with her husband. He'd caught her and in a moment of panic, lost his composure in front of everyone. She apologized to him that night when she woke for making him look bad in front of his troops, but he insisted that apparently it had only made him more popular. Something about being "relatable" and that being good for morale.

They sometimes worked together in the lab, but more often than not, it was Entrapta alone, fiddling with personal projects. Despite his vows, she found she was quite lonely quite often now.

Of course she understood. Her husband was a busy man. A busy important man preparing for an even more important man who could destroy the entire planet if he wanted. Entrapta was still afraid, of course. As her belly grew, that fear became less noticeable though. She kept it close, hidden. Guarded.

Hordak was trying to be sympathetic. It was a good step, but as the date of Primes arrival drew near, she started to need more. She needed more assurance, needed him close. She needed him with her.

But when the alarm sounded, when Primes arrival was imminent, Entrapta was alone, just as she had been all day. She looked up from her work, patting Emily gently on its dome.

"So much for home sweet home," she murmured.

She rose to her feet and crossed the sanctum, looking for the hexdriver Hordak had gifted her on their wedding day. She placed it carefully in a pocket on her new uniform. Hordak had insisted, and since her old clothes had gotten tight, she'd finally relented.

Not without making a few modifications, of course. She'd cut shapes into the sleeves of her coat, much as she had worn previously. Shoulders, elbows, joints. It made movement easier and, honestly, just looked better. The standard issue turtleneck, she had swapped out for a black tanktop, still technically correct, as far as what modifications were allowed. Her boots, however, were entirely her own. Instead of wearing them under the wide leg of her pants from before, she now wore them outside, up to her knee.

But the biggest change was her hair. For as long as she could remember, she had worn her hair up in two large twin tails at either side of her head. Today, her hair was pulled up in one large ponytail high on her head. Scorpia had suggested it this morning, actually, and Entrapta did have to admit, for
once, she did look her age.

"Entrapta!" Hordak burst into their sanctum with all the dramatic flair she had come to expect from him.

"Hi sweetie. I'm just finishing up with-"

"There is no time! You must wipe the oil off your face and come with me immediately. Prime is here. We must greet him at his ship."

"Oh. No thanks," she replied as if he had simply offered her another cupcake, "I'm fine here."

Hordak stood stunned for a solid thirty seconds while his wife went back to her work.

"Entrapta. This isn't a request. This is the Emperor of the known universe!"

"Correct," she replied, "but I also don't care."

"I-I..." as he frequently found himself around her, he was speechless.

"Um, sir?" A faceless soldier interrupted with a salute, "We really need to head down to the landing strip..."

"Fine! Fine!" Hordak snarled, pushing a stray lock of indigo hair from his face, "I will just tell him my wife is... is..."

He was struggling. Entrapta could see why. What excuse was good enough for an emperor?

"Tell him I will be in the throne room to greet him," she replied weakly, rising to her feet.

She felt, more than saw, the tension drain from her husband's shoulders.

"Thank you," he sighed, turning on his heel and stalking out to greet his brother for the first time since his death sentence.

"I not only failed to see your fears as valid, I prioritized them over you. It is too late to change what I did, but I can only promise to try to be more aware of it in the future so as to avoid causing you pain again," imp flew over her, repeating Hordak's apology from a month ago.

"I know..." Entrapta sighed, pushing her goggles up to her forehead as a tear rinsed away an oil smudge on her cheek, "he forgot his promise..."

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The ship that Hordak greeted was only a shuttle, designed for trips to and from the Emperors flagship, but it was still larger than most structures on Etheria.

For several long, agonizing minutes, Hordak waited, reminding himself of his training days before he was a general. He breathed steadily, feeling a mix of panic and dread creep up, threatening to overtake him. Without even realizing it, his fingers had reached up to trace the crystal at his neck. It made him feel better. Always. He had to be strong. For her. For them.
A long ramp slid out from the ship and a door opened. The light inside felt bright compared to the
dim twilight in the Frightzone and Hordak was having trouble making out the figure silhouetted there
until he took his first thundering step.

The face was unmistakably Hordaks, but that was where the similarities ended. The man was a giant.
Hordak was tall, but this one was easily a foot and a half taller and unlike Hordaks frail, thin frame,
Prime was muscled, strong. Even his hair, longer and a much darker shade of midnight blue, had a
shine that Hordak could never seem to achieve. He was... perfect.

From his flawless armor to the tip of his polished claws, he was perfection. And Hordak was
terrified.

"Little Brother," the Emperor greeted with a hint of amusement in his voice, "so this is where you've
been hiding."

Hordak reminded himself to bow and held it until the large figure had moved by him.

"Your Excellency. I-"

"Oh enough. I've already seen what you've been up to here. How many years? And you still have
not taken this world?"

Hordak looked at the ground, for once, grateful that Entrapta was not here to witness this
humiliation.

"It is true," he admitted, "the local inhabitants proved to be an unexpected variable."

"Indeed? And were you not trained to overcome? Were you not once one of my top generals?
Pathetic."

"The world is primitive, however, there are traces of a technology that is beyond what we had
encountered previously,"

this was it. He was going to die here. Prime was going to have him put down properly this time.

"...Really?"

The tone was unexpected, genuinely curious. Hordak felt himself breathe again. The Emperor still
foraged ahead, walking so quickly that keeping up was a struggle.

"Interesting... tell me more. With such limited resources, how did you manage to open a portal?"

Ah, yes. This was it. He closed his eyes, saying a silent apology to Entrapta.

"One of the natives," he replied, "is a brilliant scientist. Discovered the secrets to the ancient
technology here. She is how I-"

"She?"

Hordak could feel Primes deep red eyes on him. He was studying him now, his armor, the violet
crystal at his neck, the ring on his finger. With a pang of panic, he realized that when he'd spoken of
Entrapta, his voice had gone soft. Prime had no doubt picked up on that as well.

"Correct," Hordak nodded as they approached the entrance, "Princess Entrapta of Dryl, my lead
scientist."
"Ah, I am eager to meet this one," Prime laughed darkly, "tell me, Little Brother, after spending so much time on this mud ball, do you find her... aesthetically pleasing?"

Hordak stumbled, nearly tripping over his own feet.

"I am told that Entra- I mean, Princess Entrapta is attractive, by Etherian standards, y-yes."

"I did not ask if others thought she was attractive. I asked if you did."

Hordak bit his lip, eyes still studying the ground. He could not lie to his Emperor.

"Yes. I do."

"Good! Perhaps I will take her as a concubine."

"You can't!" Hordak shouted, then backpedaled the instant he realized his mistake. "W-what I mean to say is, there are plenty of etherian females, many just as attractive and she is..."

"Little Brother, I knew you were weak," Prime laughed, "but lying is new for you."

"I did not lie, Your Excellency. I simply..."

"Withheld vital information," Prime snapped, "where is she?"

"In the throne room," he relented at last, "I... believe it will all become clear when you see for yourself."

--------

Entrapta stood at the foot of the throne facing the entrance. She was not alone. Scorpia waited with her, as well as the other highest ranking officials in the Frightzone. The tension could be felt like electricity in the air.

Upon the arrival of the Emperor, Entrapta felt her breath hitch in her throat. His face was her husband's face, but the rest of him was... Perfect.

She hated him immediately.

Next to him, the usually imposing Hordak looked like a skinny teenager. He met Entraptas eyes, gave her a stiff, curt nod and led his "brother" to the throne.

Or at least that was the plan. Prime stopped right in front of Entrapta. Nearly nine feet tall to her five feet, he towered over her. Entrapta glanced around, suddenly feeling all eyes on her, not just his.

"Uh... Hi?"

"You. You will come to my bed tonight."

It was not a question or a request. Prime did not request. Hordak blinked, stunned. His voice was lost in his throat, all protests dead before it could make it's way to his vocal cords.

"No," Entrapta replied, answer firm, unwavering, leaving no room for negotiations. Prime was
unused to this.

"...No?" He raised his eyebrow, glancing behind him at Hordak.

"Um, no... thank you?"

"My Emperor," Hordak managed to say at last, "allow me to introduce Princess Entrapta of Dryl.... my wife."
Hordak knelt in front of the large throne of Prime. Alone.

Prime had insisted he come alone and dismissed everyone, even his guards. Now Hordak was certain on two things: He would not die today- prime would want his death to be public and humiliating.

And His knees were starting to hurt from kneeling that long.

"Your mate is badly disciplined."

Hordak did not move, did not speak. What could he say?

"She openly opposed my demands in public and for that, she should be punished.Harshly."

Hordak felt his fist clench.

"Do you not agree?"

"I... beg that you show her mercy, my Lord," Hordaks voice was small, fragile, fearful, "she was not aware of what she did. She is in a delicate condition and her... temper is short."

"Delicate?" Hordak could almost hear the quirk in his eyebrow.

"She is pregnant."

Prime was silent, then he suddenly let out a harsh bark of laughter.

"So. That is why. My, my, little brother. Aren't we busy? So, I understand the child is yours then?"

Hordak nodded once, still not daring to look up at the large imposing figure on the throne.

"Very well. I am intrigued. I was unaware these Etherians were compatible with us. Perhaps I can find some use with this world after all."

Hordak let out the breath he was holding, tension leaving his body.

"Thank you, My Lord."

"Oh, I wouldn't thank me just yet..." Prime stood up, one step after slow, thunderous step down the dais. "You shall take her punishment in her place."

Before Hordak could process what he just said, he felt a large, armored foot ram into his ribcage, knocking him down the last few steps. He lay curled in on himself, gasping. Entraptas armor had helped, but it did not negate the powerful attack.
"Pathetic," prime spat at him, "even now you are still weak."

Hordak felt another blow to his back.

"The only reason you are still alive is because I am waiting to see if I have a use for you."

Hordak tried not to make any sound of discomfort, any show of pain. He was failing. There was no point in fighting off the blows. He knew if he fought back at all he would die anyway and Entrapta would be next- if he didn't do something worse to her.

"You've always been so soft."

He kicked the bruised and bleeding clone onto his back, hovering over him with a look of pure disappointment. Slowly, He crouched down next to Hordak, leaning in with a smirk as he grasped him by his collar, pulling him up to eye level.

"Your little wife is safe... for now. I promise she will be unharmed so long as you behave like a good little clone."

He looked at his talons as he spoke. Polished, sharp. Perfect.

"If not..." he let the words hang in the air.

Then he slapped Hordak across the cheek with the back of those perfect talons and released him, leaving him to bleed on the shiny black floor.

-------

Entrapta was still in the sanctum, recording her vitals for the day. Normal. All was well. So far. At least physically. Emotionally, mentally, Entrapta was a mess.

The door to the sanctum slid open and Entrapta looked up to greet her husband.

"Hi Hordak, I've made progre-"

A faceless soldier supported the weight of a bleeding and bruised Hordak. Not one of the Fright zones men, she noted, as they dropped him unceremoniously near the doorway.

"Emperor Prime sends you his Congratulations," the voice behind the mask monotoned before turning sharply, leaving the couple alone.

"What did he do to you!?" She demanded, kneeling at his side to cradle him.

"It was..." he hesitated, unable to tell her the real reason outright. He hated lying. So he simply bent the truth. "It was my fault. I failed to properly prepare."

He coughed, wincing as Entrapta examined his face. Three distinct clawmarks ran diagonal down his cheek. His lip was bruised and his nasal cavity leaked dark purplish blood.

"He did this to you?" She questioned, sounding not at all surprised.

"He is the Emperor of everything, Entrapta," he groaned, trying and failing to stand up on his own,
"the fact that he took to discipline me himself is an... honor."

"Stop. This is never okay. I dont care if he is literally God, or an Emperor! I have half a mind to march down there and-"

His hand reached out to grasp hers, firm, but shaking. He met her gaze with such pure horror that she forgot all the things she wanted to say to his "brother".


She stared at her husband with shock. She had never seen him this afraid. Because he was bigger? Stronger? Faster? No. No. There was something else.

"He... did this because of me, didnt he?" She asked slowly.

Hordak avoided her gaze, refusing to answer. He didn't have to. Entrapta swallowed and using her hair gently began to walk with him.

"Come on. We have to get you cleaned up."

-----

Down below it all, Catra lay in the center of her cell, just as she had been for the last few months. It wasn't so bad. Gave her plenty of time to reflect.

The worst part was the reflecting part.

Every mistake seemed glaringly obvious from here. Every misstep. Every desperate flail for power. And the worst part of it all was, Adora was right. She was always right.

Catra had done this to herself. She had made her choices. Now she had to live with them... for as long as that was.

Honestly, she expected her execution date to come much sooner than this. Entrapta probably begged Hordak to spare her. Or they just forgot about her. Possible.

Scorpia would occasionally visit to bring her meals and talk. At first, Catra had been reluctant (ashamed?) to speak to her. But she would let Scorpia prattle on, gossip.

The fact that Hordak and Entrapta were seen kissing did not shock her. Hearing that they'd been spotted tucked away in a dark corner, deep in the throes of lust when they thought they were alone, was gross, but also not surprising.

What did surprise her was Hordak picking baby names and announcing their engagement publically and actually marrying.

Scorpia had talked her ear off about the wedding planning, who would be coming, what the decor would look like, what dinner would be served... and then no news. For weeks.

That was, until now.

Catra had not heard about the arrival of the big man, but she had suspected something big was up.
The guards talked and Catra listened. Even down here, preparations for the Emperors arrival were underway.

"Catra," a monotone voice interrupted her daydreams.

"Yeah? Who's askin'?"

"Emperor Prime wishes to see you."
Could be worse

Chapter Summary

Angst and pain. Hope you all like some sads, cuz that's what we're serving up today!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Two fractured ribs, lacerations to the face and head, substantial bruising to legs, arms and chest..."

Entrapta mumbled to herself a list of injuries, making a mental note. Every single one, she would keep close to her heart, feed it, let it grow into a rage. Nobody touched her lover like this.

"It's alright," he groaned, "it... it's not that bad."

Entrapta ignored that, bending over him in bed to carefully clean the worst of it. His armor she had to take off by hand. It took damage and would have to be repaired. But without it, she knew it would be much worse. The beating may have killed him. It was a sobering thought.

Wordlessly, she wiped the blood from his face. The wounds to the face would likely scar, but they were shallow and would heal on their own. Most of the real damage was internal. And judging by the empty look in his eyes, emotional as well.

"Hordak... is he always like that?" She asked after several long minutes of silence.

She heard him swallow, shaking still, even now. A nod was the only reply he could give.

"Why are you going out of your way for him? He's terrible! Why did you want to go back to him?"

"Because he is... was, all I had."

There was pity in her eyes, but she understood. Friends were hard to make. She'd struggled too. Adora, Glimmer, Bow. Then there was Scorpia and...

Catra...

Absently, she reached behind at her upper back where the scar from Catras betrayal still irritated her. In so many ways she was still hurt from that, but she also wondered... how badly had Catra been hurt that she thought that was her only option?

"Hordak... This can't happen again. I could lose you. You were so lucky this time, but your body is..."

She almost said fragile and thought better of it.

"Weak," he finished for her with a sigh, "it is exactly why I deserve this."

"You don't deserve this. Please don't say that about yourself."

She normally would call him dramatic when he got like this, but after the day he'd had, plus the
painkillers she'd already pumped him full of, he was being especially honest with his feelings.

"No, no. I do deserve this. But I dont deserve... you."

"Hordak please-"

"N-no. It's TRUE!" His voice shook and he covered his eyes, "it's t-true... I..."

His breath hitched, his body shook. And Entrapta... could only watch as for the first time since meeting him, Hordak wept.

He turned his body away from her as much as he could, but he was sobbing, wiping his eyes on the back of his hand. His attempts at hiding it were transparent even to a toddler. She wondered why he bothered trying to hide it.

She moved to lay down with him, pulling her white medical gloves off. He needed touch. He needed love. She gently wrapped her arms and hair around his battered body, humming a lullaby as he wept openly and honestly against her.

A part of her wanted to be excited about this development. The knowledge that Hordak's race could, in fact, shed tears was a fascinating find! But... somehow she just didn't feel the drive to record it, or run tests.

"I... owe you an a-apology," he managed to sniffle, "I should have... put you first from the-the start. You deserve so much m-more..."

"Hordak, please stop. It's alright! We'll get through this."

*Somehow.*

She could keep her head low, make herself unnoticeable, avoid the Emperor and help Hordak out however necessary so he doesn't get "reprimanded' again.

"Let me help you."

For an hour, they lay together, carefully cuddling so as not to further injure him. At one point, he fell asleep, and Entrapta finished bandaging his face and arms while he dreamed. The rest of this would just take time and patience to heal.

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When Hordak awoke, the pain medicine had worn away. And so had his dignity.

He recalled last night as he lay tucked against his wife's chest, biting back a whimper of pain as he shifted slightly to hide his face.

He had not sobbed like that since first waking up in Etheria. Such a sense of hopelessness back then. Only a broken ship and a broken body. The first year had been the hardest. Still, he would do it all over if he knew he would meet her again.

He carefully ran a hand across her cheek as she slept, smiling painfully at her snores. It was still early morning, too early for most to be awake, but Hordak was not like most.
Fighting the pain, he carefully detangled himself from her mass of hair. He had gotten very good at this, slipping away before she awoke. Usually.

The instant he stood, he nearly collapsed again. Pain shot through every nerve, every muscle, down to the bone. He did not realize that he was groaning until Entrapta sat up, blinking at him in the darkness.

"S-sorry," he mumbled, holding his ribs as he tried to force himself to dress, "go back to sleep."

Instead, Entrapta turned on a light with a flick of hair and crawled across the bed to help him. "You can't just stay in bed today?" She asked quietly.

"No," he answered softly with a shake of his head, "it would be a show of weakness. He... might actually kill me if I did."

Entrapta took a deep steady breath and grabbed clean tunic for him. His poor body was such a mess. There was always a bit of pain for him when he was outside his armor, but this had to be excruciating.

"Be careful today," she warned, helping him dress, "I didn't have time to repair parts of your armor yet. You're... vulnerable."

She saw him wince, whether from pain or fear, she wasn't sure. As she helped him into parts of his exoskeleton, her hair whipping around to slot the working parts back into place, he leaned in to press a desperate kiss to her mouth.

She paused, hands running through his hair. He was shivering, frightened. Like this kiss could be the last if he misstepped. It might just be.

They pulled away, his hand lingered over the curve of her stomach. She locked the last piece into place and ran her fingers over the crystal at his throat. Moments seemed to stretch on forever, but even forever was not long enough. Soon he pulled away,

smoothing his indigo hair back with his thin fingers as he headed out. She watched him hesitate for a moment, just a moment at the door, before he forced himself through. For her. For them.

The pain would pass. He was used to pain. It was worth it for a chance at joy. He would die for this, if necessary.

Back straight with an iron will, he walked. His feet ached with every step, but he kept his bruised face held high. A few of his soldiers passed him, followed by whispers and gasps. They had never seen him injured.

*Let them talk. I won't be humiliated so easily. I am still the Lord of the Frightzone. I am--*

His confident steps came to an abrupt halt. Standing next to the Throne of his Emperor was a feline figure he'd nearly put out of his mind.

"Catra."

Chapter End Notes
Buckle up, kiddos. We're going to some bad places.
Entrapta was awake. She had her own work to do and there was no getting back to sleep now that she'd lost her cuddle partner. Besides, she was anxious. The best thing to do for an anxious mind was distract it.

Gathering up the broken bits of Hordak's armor, she pulled herself up through the ventilation shafts again.

Generally, Entrapta preferred this method of transportation anyway, but Hordak's warning not to be caught alone with the Emperor had her scared. A lot of things had her scared. Her husband facing that brute without complete armor had her scared. The way he had looked at her had her scared. The way Hordak had wept had her scared.

She lowered herself into her lab, and immediately crossed to gather her tools. She wasn't just going to fix what was broken.

She was going to make it better.

---------

"What is she doing here?"

Hordak snarled, taking a menacing step towards the throne. Despite Entrapta's warning to be careful, he had forgotten his place and let anger speak for him. He realized too late his mistake and quickly lowered himself to a knee.

"You forget yourself," came a surprisingly calm voice of the Emperor, "Catra has been filling me in on a few things. This one is out for your job, you know."

There was a hint of amusement behind the Emperor's eyes when Hordak glanced up.

"She was my prisoner set to be executed for treason."

"And yet she lives," he chuckled darkly, leaning his cheek against his knuckles, "I couldn't have been that bad, if you let her live this long."

Catra had a look on her face that reminded Hordak of a cornered rat. What had he said to her? He expected her to smirk, look triumphant, gloat. This was... unnatural.

"My... wife asked me to spare her."

His voice sounded ridiculous, small. Out of the corner of his eye, Catra was staring at him. Another cold laugh tore through the throne room, making both Hordak and (he noted with some surprise) Catra flinch.

"How... sentimental. Another poor decision. Your soft heart will be the death of you, little brother." It sounded like a threat, and Hordak was smart enough to take it that way. "I have a job. For both of you. Perhaps you can give me a reason to keep you alive."
"Hordak, wait!"

He stopped, one hand holding him upright against the wall. Just before his dismissal, Prime had ordered one of his soldiers to give him a "reminder" of his place. He had another bruise on his ribs to show for it. And even that was acceptable compared to being ordered to work... with her.

"What do you want?" He hissed, "going to try to kill my wife again?"

"I'm sorry. I just... I just wanted to say that. Tell Entrapta. Please."

That reply surprised him. She was near begging. Why? She was the one with the power here, not him. Had her time in prison done that much? Or was it something else?

"I'll... let her know. But I don't want you near her. She is under no obligation to forgive you. She shouldn't forgive you."

"I know. But I want to make it right."

"You can't. You have to live with it. We all do. You just... have to try to be better next time."

She seemed shocked by something he said but laughed a little. Hordak noted that she seemed humbled after her time away.

"You know... Adora said almost that exact same thing."

Hordak nodded, closing his eyes for a moment. He couldn't believe what he was about to say.

"Adora... is right."
"Catra really said that?!"

Entrapta sounded shocked but excited. It made Hordak frown. She was far too quick to forgive. A dangerous habit. But endearing. Why was she so good?

"She did. But I dont want you near her. Something isnt right with her. I don't trust her."

"You dont trust anyone."

"Not true!" He looked hurt. "I trust you and I trust Scorpia-"

"except with a secret-"

"except with a secret," he agreed, "and I trust Imp. And I..." he sighed deeply, angry with himself for saying it, "trust Adora."

Entrapta blinked, pulled her glove off with her teeth and reached across the bed to touch his forehead with the back of her hand.

"Are you sick?" She asked, worry apparent in every syllable.

"Maybe," he laughed, but that quickly turned to a cough. Soon he was doubled over in pain as his injured rib cage protested. She carefully rubbed his back.

"She is irritating, but truthful. I... admire honesty," he admitted, "and she is..."

"Right. Adora is right," Entrapta completed for him. It seemed to be a theme.

He nodded, looking down at his battered fingers.
He rarely spoke to Entrapta outside of their bed chambers now. It was the only place he was fairly certain they were not being watched. The last safe place.

Just today while Entrapta was finishing his armor, she discovered a little spy bot watching her. After disposing of it, she tore the sanctum apart and quickly found three more.

Their bedroom had one, but it was not yet active. Good. She made sure to secure the room before using it every time now, changing the code on the door every day.

The implications made her hair stand up on end. Was he watching them during intimate moments? Was he watching her dress? Undress?

The breech of privacy was worse than the way he watched her during todays meeting. She could always feel his eyes on her and he had tried to make an excuse for her husband to leave her side.

This latest mission he was being sent on with Catra felt like another excuse. Another opening for him.
What did he want from her that he couldnt get from another woman?

She already knew. Hordak's humiliation. His complete defeat. She was the key to his undoing. He
seemed to take sadistic pleasure in hurting him and if Hordak had something he could not have, well, that just wouldn't do.

"Hordak... how long do you think you'll be gone?" She asked, reaching up to run her fingers through his soft indigo hair.

"A few days. I'm not going far. It's just a scouting mission."

He wanted to question why he was being sent out to do something any cadet could do. Something wasn't right. His guess was that it was an excuse to get him away from his wife.

"I've instructed Scorpia to watch over you. She can't be around all the time, but..."

"I'll be fine," Entrapta promised, falling back onto the pillows and dragging him down with her gently. "I'm stronger than I look."

It was true enough, Hordak had to admit. She was far stronger than he was. In so many ways.

He leaned against her, brushing his nails through a pile of her hair that he gathered on his lap. Everything still hurt, but this was a beautiful little bit of peace. Probably the last bit if peace he would have, if things went the way he thought it would.

"Oh! Before you leave tomorrow, I want to go through the upgrades I made in your armor."

"Upgrades?" His ears twitched with delight. He loved when she made him new tech.

"I added a communications function and connected it to Emily, that way you and I can always talk, even if you're away."

"Impressive! In such a short amount of time?"

"Not really. I've had all the plans worked out for a while and half the tech built already. I was only playing with the idea, but when your armor got damaged, I thought it was a good time to mess with it."

He nodded, smiling carefully. Too much facial expression hurt the gashes on his cheek.

"I also made it trackable, so if you're ever lost, me and Emily can come get you."

"You amaze me."

"That's not all! There's a special code phrase that gives you access to a weapon!"

Now this... actually stunned him. Entrapta was a woman of science and discovery. Weapons, war, she always seemed above them. But then... he had noticed a marked change in her since Beast Island. She was quieter now, more reserved, moody at times. He assumed it was some form of PTSD. He... understood something about that too.

But there was more to it. She also seemed angrier, less willing to just take the side most convenient. Sometimes when he looked in her eyes, the spark of something dangerous seemed to stare back at him.

"What is the code phrase?" He asked after a long pause.

She planted a kiss on his cheek and leaned in to whisper.
"Don't you worry a bit, Lord Hordak Sir!" Scorpia's ever perky voice assured him, "Lady Entrapta and I will stick together like glue! Or at least some other really sticky stuff!"

Entrapta looked from Scorpia back to Hordak. He knew she had so much she wanted to say, but behind her, Prime hovered at a distance, watching the couples goodbye with an unreadable expression.

Catra was around, but she silently stayed out of sight, preparing everything on board the transport. She and Scorpia had only shared brief moment of eye contact before Entrapta arrived to see her husband off.

"Be safe," she murmured stiffly, formally, "Come home soon."

Hordak glanced up at the Emperor watching his wife, noting the way he smirked and tapped one of his perfect talons on his cheek.

"I will. I promise."

His hand reached for hers, but it felt so stiff. Rehearsed. Like they were putting on a show for everyone.

"Change your bandages regularly," she instructed, "and try not to lift anything too heavy. And remember to eat. And..."

"I know," he couldn't help but smile now. She was trying to tell him how she felt. He knew what she meant.

"Take care of yourself and..." he placed a hand lightly on the curve of her stomach, "him."

She responded by placing a quick formal kiss on his cheek before pulling away to leave. She’d said all she really wanted to say last night anyway.

Scorpia waved one large claw before running after the Princess. Hordak didn’t stop watching her retreating form until Catra interrupted.

"What, miss her already? You two are adorable."

He glared at the feline and brushed past her to the controls.

"Let's get this over with... as silently as possible."

Chapter End Notes

The next couple chapters are going to be... a lot. Just a lot. I'll put in the appropriate warnings and all that before.

Consider this your pre-warning warning
A Genetic Trait

Chapter Summary

Characters have heart to hearts.
Entrapta works on an exit strategy.

"I mean, but do you think I should forgive her? Catra was having a bit of a mental breakdown, so maybe it's okay to forgive?"

Entrapta worked as Scorpia talked. She didn't mind the company. It helped distract her from her anxieties and gave her something else to think of besides her husband and her friends in the doomed rebellion. Besides, when it came to Catra, they were in a similar situation.

"I think it's okay to forgive," Entrapta answered, raising her voice over the sound of her welding, "but don't forget. Mental illness is tricky. You stayed her friend. That's important, but it's okay if you're still hurt."

"You know, you are so right-" Scorpia paused as Entrapta pointed to a piece with her hair for Scorpia to grab for her, "I feel like she deserves another chance."

"You gave her approximately 56 chances already," Entrapta replied as Scorpia handed over another thing to work on.

"That's true," she chuckled, "but that was before. People change. I think she learned something. Whatever Adora said to her seemed to really change something in her. I mean. Also prison, you know?"

Entrapta put her tools down, lifting her welding mask to look at the other Princess.

"Adora..." she murmured, "everyone is talking about Adora lately. Adora is... right. That's what Hordak said."

She was thinking back to things she'd heard Adora say and one memory, one very distant memory stuck out.

-Everyone has a weakness-

Shed been drifting on the edge of sleep when she heard it.

"Oh. I don't know," Scorpia laughed, "Adora has good instincts. But then again, so do you and you were wrong about the baby, right? Can't rely on instinct-"

"Shh!" A flying piece of Entraptas hair smacked Scorpias lips to shush her for the first time that day, "let me think..."

She went to Hordaks computer terminal, the one with all the old Horde data downloaded from his old ship. Some of the data was badly degraded, corrupted, but there were many parts she could access using his codes. Maybe if he looked hard enough, he could find something, anything, to help her friends. It was worth devoting time to looking.
They had stopped the craft just outside a small village under Brighrmoon control. An insignificant place, not strategically useful in the least. But so close to freedom if he wanted it. He could walk to Brighrmoon, it would take a few days in his condition, but he could do it. He could leave his brothers control.... but only for a moment.

Prime would destroy the rebellion and while Hordak was away, Entrapta would be at his mercy. And mercy was not something Prime had much of. So he stared down at what could have been freedom, sitting on top of the hood of the transport.

"Dont look so whistful," Catra groaned, cracking her neck, "you're making me feel sorry for you."

"I'm the one who should be pitying you," he shot back immediately, "at least someone still likes me- and I'm the invader that ruined the lives of nearly everyone on the planet! What is wrong with you?"

His answer seemed to catch her by surprise. He expected anger, and argument, but she simply shrugged, sitting down on the hood of the transport also.

"I honestly dont know, " she replied quietly, pulling her knees to her chest, "I was... trying to prove myself. To Shadow Weaver. To Adora. To you. "

"Me?"

"I mean, you and shadow weaver were kind of the only authority figures I had. She hated me. But you... I dont know. You recognized me when I did something noteworthy. I... kinda thought I could make you respect me. Plus you were literally the Lord of the Fright Zone and my boss, so."

She laughed bitterly, shaking her head. Hordak watched the teenage soldier, feeling guilt that he had not expected. Her story sounded all too familiar.

"I... understand. It is the same with me and Prime. I've done everything I could to make him proud of me, or even accept me, but..." He gestured vaguely at the clawmarks on his face. "I'm understanding now that there will always be people who can not be what you need them to be. Entrapta... helped me see my worth without his validation. You needed to see your worth without mine."

She was looking at him with a strange expression.

"Are you sure you're the same Hordak?"

He managed a tiny laugh, winced and held his hands to his ribs.

"You can blame a little Princess for my change of heart," he replied, turning his gaze now to the sunset, "love is a... powerful thing. Sit down with Scorpia when we return. Talk to her."

"I... will. When I see her again," Catra promised, laying back on the hood, "but I dont think Entrapta did that much for you, honestly. If perfect Adora couldnt fix me, theres no way Entrapta could change you that much. People dont just change like that because someone told them to." Hordak watched the feline shoot him a knowing grin. "So that means either you made the choice to change yourself, or you're lying to us all. And if theres one good thing to say about you, its that you never lie."
He blinked at her in the encroaching darkness.

"I do lie," he slowly replied, "only to myself though. I knew it would turn out this way again, but I convinced myself otherwise. I was... so foolish."

And he had hurt Entrapta because of it. Dragged her down with him. Because his pride wouldn't allow him to just be happy.

"Hey, join the club," she sighed, laying back with her hands behind her head, "You know...I really wanted to impress you. But now I kinda wonder why? Even when I was your second, I still wasn't happy. Seems kinda stupid now..."

"Relatable," he agreed, "being honest, I... did notice your improvements. I really was too hard on you and for that I apologize."

The feline was staring up at the empty sky now, blinking back tears.

"That was all I wanted," she whispered.

Now Hordak felt awkward. He'd intended to hate this woman until one of them died. Now he couldn't and that frustrated him.

_Ugh, I really AM soft._

He felt silly, giving advice and having this heart to heart with his enemy. But she was very much like him in so many ways. No. More so. She was the product of his abuse.

Every awful thing she had done, was by his hand. The more that sunk in, the worse he felt. This was miserable. This couldn't be part of Horde Primes plan for him out here, right? unless he was newly fond of psychological torture.

"What did Prime say to you? Why are you out here?" He asked suddenly to break the silence.

"Oh. He wanted me to kill you, make you trust me first, but then kill you. This trip was the first part of gaining your trust. He really wants you to suffer."

His eyes widened as he looked to the side. She had sat up, looking at her claws as if unsure of something.

"And... will you?"

But the fact that she so openly told him, gave the answer. She raised an eyebrow and sighed, rising to her feet.

"Please. I hardly listened to you, and you helped raise me. Why would I listen to that meathead? Besides, i... owe Entrapta."

Hordak swallowed, nodding. Still, he kept her in the corner of his eye. He still refused to trust her, even if he did understand her better.

"Then... what will you do?" "We're close to Brightmoon," she replied, "Adora is the next person I have to make it up to. You could come?"

"No. I wont leave Entrapta behind," he sighed, "but I shall have to tell Prime something when I return..."
In response, Catra unclasped her headdress and threw it to him. He caught it in one claw.

"Tell him I'm a traitor. I know you have that thing with lying, so don't go into details. It's true enough anyway. I am a traitor. Show him this and let him come to his own conclusions."

Hordak raised a brow as the feline hopped off of the vehicle and began to walk away nearing the line of trees.

"Bye, Hordak," she waved, "if you see Scorpia tell her... just tell her I'm sorry and I'll see her again."

A nod was the only response he gave before he left. Prime rarely made mistakes, but underestimating her had been a big one.

* A genetic trait, it seems. 
Chapter Summary

Trigger warning-
Abuse, sexual assault, rape, violence, all that ugly nasty stuff we hate to talk about.

If these things effect you please skip this chapter and likely the next. Be kind to yourself. A fanfiction is not worth flashbacks. Trust me.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Hordak had been gone a full day now and for the first day, Scorpia had stayed with Entrapta nearly the entire time. But the second day, Entrapta was alone. It wasnt so bad. She was used to being alone and soon she forgot being afraid and fell back into her old routine.

She sat in their lab, hunched over another project. New armor, this time designed for her. She didnt know if she would need it, but it was a good bet that in the current state of things, she should have it anyway.

Her lab door slid open without her noticing. Her welding mask sat neatly over her face, her high ponytail limp down her back. She was using her hair less to appear as average as possible, forcing herself to be less noticeable, keep an ability in reserve.

A good thing too.

"Um, Scorpia, can you move? You're blocking my light."

The large figure behind her did not move and instead leaned in, one clawed hand on her shoulder.

"Guess again," came the deep rumbling whisper of Prime right in her ear.

She let out a surprised shriek and jerked away from his grasp.

"W-what are you doing in my lab? It's dangerous. You could disrupt one of my experiments! You can't just wander in here!"

Her crimson eyes darted from exit to him, brain working at super speed to figure out her escape.

"My pretty little toy. You'll find that I can do as I please. I can take what I please as well."

He was smiling, hands pinned to either side of her. She pulled away as far as she could, her lower back bruising against the corner of the desk. She knew what was happening. What he wanted. Why he wanted it. And she knew he was going to have to fight her for it.

"Not from me," she hissed "Back off."

"Not this time, Princess. A lesson needs to be learned. My clones do not keep things from me."
"I'm not a thing," she snarled as he pressed against her, lips near her throat, "and you are not my Emperor. Back. Off."

It was the last warning she was willing to give. She saw him pull away, his eyes narrow, his hand reached for her throat. In the blink of an eye, this giant was on the floor, lip bleeding, but otherwise unharmed. Entrapta's hair swung back threatening to hit him a second time.

"Don't. Touch. Me. Again."

"How enchanting," he laughed rising to his feet again, "this planet does possess some surprises after all. Yes. You will be a useful asset to me. I'll even let your brat serve me as a soldier when he's grown. Doesn't that sound nice?"

Silently, she rose tall on her hair. In her hand, she held her six-sided hexdriver at the ready.

"Ah, you're going to put up a fight?" He laughed, wiping a bit of blood from his lip, as he casually approached once more, "good. I like it rough."

He lunged and Entrapta was too slow. A hand wrapped tightly around her ponytail, dragging her down to the floor. Her hexdriver skidded away as her other hand protectively covered the little bump on her stomach as he fought for control.

Entrapta was strong.

But he was stronger.

--------

Hordak would complete his mission, spy on this stupid little village, scope out for the best place to attack. It was a worthless endeavor. This village could be smoothed off the map just from Prime sneezing in its general direction. Still, he had to be smart, for the sake of his... family.

Horde Prime had sent him out here to die and now that he had failed to do that, he had few options. He simply needed to complete this mission, head back and pretend to be ignorant of Primes plans.

It made such little sense to him. He seemed to be taking odd steps just to eliminate him. If he really wanted him dead, he could just do it himself. Easily. What was he playing at? What was his long game? Or was he just having fun? Tormenting him?

He watched a couple walk together through the village with his binoculars, noting the male carried a baby on his back. These poor fools had no idea what was coming. He honestly wished he could warn them, but it wouldn't matter. Nothing would stand up to the Emperor.

Not unless the First Ones left some super weapon laying around.

'Behave like a good little clone.'

Primes chilling words derailed that train of thought before it left the station. Rebellion would lead nowhere. The princess alliance was doomed. Adora was right about so much, but Hordak couldn't see how she could be right about this. Couldn't she see the end barreling towards them? She had never seen the Emperor, had never witnessed his complete perfection.
What did she really know, after all?

-------------

This wasn't happening. Entrapta was certain she was having a vivid nightmare. In Primes large hand, he had gathered up her hair, both wrists and now held all of it over her head.

No amount of struggling made a difference. She screamed, knowing it was pointless, kicked knowing her feet would cause no harm. But one thing she refused to do was give in. She would fight as hard as she had to because the alternative was unthinkable.

On her back, she squirmed and struggled, making this as difficult and irritating as possible.

"Little Princess, your resistance is charming, but pointless," he growled, leaning in to sink his teeth deep into her shoulder.

The sound that came from her was a mix between a sob and a shout. He had pulled her jacket from her shoulders, leaving no resistance for his fangs to tear at her. This was no love bite. When he pulled away, she was bleeding, heavily. Her vision seemed to blur, dots forming in front of her eyes.

Something was wrong. Was she drugged? He seemed to notice her weaken, and with his other hand, he reached down to pull at the clasp in the front of her trousers.

It was enough to snap her back just long enough for one final act of rebellion. His face was near hers. So near. It was a mistake. She bashed her forehead into his face, aiming for his nasal cavity. Her welding mask managed to connect.

He reared back, snarling, but his grip never weakened. What would stop him? There had to be something.

"You'll regret that soon, princess."

Her protests were met with another bite, this time on her neck. She cried out again, feeling her body go weak. Was it... some sort of neurotoxin? Like an insect caught in a spiders web. It was so hard to fight now. And she was so, so tired.

Weakly, she strained against him as he positioned himself between her legs. When had he gotten her pants off? She wasn't sure. Everything was a fog. She needed to make a note about his teeth, whatever his bite did to her. Hordak's teeth didn't do that. Despite her desperate situation, there was a spark of interest in them.

He smirked as he held up something in one hand for her to see. Her recording device for scientific notes. He must have found it in her pocket.

"Scream for me, Princess," he ordered, clicking the record button as he forced himself inside of her.

For the first time, Entrapta obeyed.

Chapter End Notes
I really struggled with this chapter. Not the writing part. I struggled with if I wanted to post it at all.

Going to be incredibly open and real, I was a victim of sexual assault myself some years ago. From the instant I started writing Prime, I found myself unconsciously writing my assailant into his role. His mannerisms, where he bit her during this chapter, even a few phrases were nearly direct quotes.

It was hard, but I knew how this had to go. Yet I also wanted Entrapta to fight in a way that I didn't. I wanted her to have the small victories that I couldn't have, even if the result was ultimately the same.

In a way, this was somewhat therapeutic for me, a way to dissect what happened and remind myself that it's never the victims fault. It also gives me the opportunity to imagine justice that I never got.

Anyway, I hope you hated it, but keep reading. I promise this is the worst of it.
References to sexual assault. If that sort of thing upsets you, skip this chapter too.

Short chapter. Want to move on to something a little more action heavy soon.
I promise the whole thing won't be this depressing.

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Everything hurt. Her face, her hips, her wrists. Even the roots of her hair felt sore.

She stood under the boiling stream of water, carefully examining the damage. Bruises were popping up on her hips, her thighs, her back, her arms, wrist, neck. The bleeding had stopped from his bite marks at least. Whatever he had forced into her bloodstream had worked it's way out by now. Instead of weak and foggy she just felt...
Tired.

The worst thing was, she had no idea what she would say to Hordak when he came back. How could she face him? He had warned her. And she'd been careless.

Would he want to know? Would he ask how? Would he want to know how she screamed and begged? How it was ignored? How her back had been slammed against the laboratory floor with each nauseating thrust? Would he want to know how after a while, she simply closed her eyes and wept. How she waited for it to be over? How she tried to think of anything else? Tried to imagine it was him instead? How all fight had left her?
How when he was finished, he pulled out and simply left her there in the floor. How she'd laid there, shaking, in shock.

she heaved and her stomach emptied itself as she braced against the shower tile. She still felt his hands on her. Still felt him in her.

Weakly, she turned off the water and covered herself with a towel. Her long violet hair lay limp and useless, weighed down by pounds of water. She didn't bother to wrap it or try to dry it. She let it drag.

When she was in the bedroom, she stared at their bed, feeling unworthy. How could she sleep there now? How could she go back to "normal"? What was normal? How was she going to open her legs for her husband ever again, when the last person to be between them...
she felt her stomach flip again and she dry heaved into a trash bin, unable to force anything else up.

Shakily, she dressed. She had thrown out the clothes she had been wearing when it happened in a panic. Not that evidence would be useful. Who was going to go after the Emperor of everything for rape? Besides, nothing had to be proven. He seemed pretty proud of himself and seemed more than eager to tell the story.

There was a knock at the door and Entrapta tensed. Was it him, come to do more? She said nothing,
ready to flee.

"Enrapta? Uh, my Lady?" Scorpias voice came from the other side, "I brought food. You never came down for breakfast."

Enrapta let out long sigh of relief and allowed her fellow Princess inside.

"W-what happened to you!?"
Clumsily, the scorpion woman dropped the tray with a clatter.
Enrapta stared at the floor and answered in a voice that was both firm, and small.

"Him."

"Enrapta... what did he do?"
"I dont want to talk about it."
That should have been the end of the conversation. But Scorpia was not going to let up.
"I promised Hordak I'd look after you. I cant help you if I dont know what he-"
"Use your imagination," Enrapta snapped, "but dont make me say it."

There was a long strech of silence. Neither princess could look at the other.

"I'm... so sorry," Scorpia murmured, "is the baby...?"
"I think so. I dont think I've miscarried yet."
There was a bit of an emphasis on the word 'yet'.

"What are you going to tell Hordak?"

"I dont think I'll have to tell him. I think he will tell Hordak himself. Just to hurt him."

"That's sadistic!" Scorpia cried and Enrapta nodded in agreement. Was she really this slow? Or did she just want to keep believing in the best in everyone?
Honestly, Enrapta envied her.

"He... recorded it. He stole my log recorder and..."

Entrapta reached behind and pulled the blankets on the bed to her, slowly wrapping herself up like a cocoon. If she had tears left. She would cry.
Now all she wanted to do was sleep. She fell sideways on the mattress and closed her eyes. Scorpia didn't leave her side again that night, running a claw up and down her back until she fell into a fitful asleep.

-------

Without Catra, the job actually went a lot quicker. Hordak was a fast worker, taking stock of all the useful bits of information about the village, neatly organizing it all in a file for Prime. And the best part was, he hadn't been spotted.
Mission complete. A whole day early. It was time to go home and reconsider his plans.
And maybe do a little treason.
He hadn't decided yet.

Chapter End Notes
Everyone reacts to assault differently.

I only have my own personal experiences to go off of, so that's how I wrote it. A kind of numbness. A need to just strip off the evidence and go to sleep for a long time.

Trauma is not one size fits all. Its complicated and messy and I hope I manage to translate that.
Hordak arrived back the next day, nervous. He was always nervous now, especially when he had to make an appearance to Prime.

All he wanted to do was go to Entrapta and ask her to help him remove his armor. He was sore and badly in need of some care and there was nobody he trusted to assist him medically as much as her. She may not be a medical doctor, but she knew the best way to care for his condition.

As he passed through on his way to the throne room, he found Scorpia waiting for him. He opened his mouth to greet her, but as soon as he saw her face, he stopped.

"Where is Entrapta?" He asked immediately. Fearing the answer. Something was wrong.

"Lab. She said she had things she had to work on. Alone."

Something about the tone of her voice scared him.

"Is she alright?" He asked softly, leaning in so nobody would overhear.

There was a hesitation. Then she shook her head.

"The baby is okay," she assured him, "but..."

"I'll see her soon. I have to report."

Scorpia nodded but seemed hesitant to let him leave.

"Catra...?"

Hordak held up Catras headdress in response.

"Oh no! She can't be...?"

Hordak glanced around to be sure they were alone and shook her head.

"She says she will see you again."

He watched her visibly relax, and he moved past her.

--------------

Entrapta had a plan. Who knew if it was a good plan, but either way, this would be the last time she let him have his way.

Revenge was not on her mind. No. What was done was done and it was far too soon for her to really feel it the way she knew she should.
She put all her range, all her energy, all her pain into this project. If Hordak wanted to stay, if he wanted to endure the abuse, she’d drag him behind her unconscious if he had to. But she would not raise her son here. She would not be meek. For the first time since last night, her hair moved, pulled pieces together, building.

"Frightzone log: final entry; Tonight will be my final night here. One way or another, I'm gone. The build of my own exosuit is near completion. I won't ever let him touch me again.

His first mistake was letting me get near enough for a DNA sample.

His second was leaving me alive.

His third was hurting Hordak.

His final mistake will be underestimating me."

She pulled her welding mask up from her face, looking down at her completed work. She did not smile. There was no room for a smile, but her crimson eyes sparked.

"I found something in Hordak's files. I think it's the key I've been looking for."

Piece by piece, silver plates covered her bruises.

"I think it can help my friends."

She built a new body of steel, one that could not be penetrated.

"I think it can save the planet."

She built a wall of tech that could protect her from the unspeakable.

"...I think I found his weakness."

And it felt powerful.

---------

There was no surprise on Primes face when Hordak walked into the throne room. But what did seem to surprise him was when Hordak threw Catra's headdress across the floor to land at the end of the dias.

There was silence. Then, slowly, Prime nodded, apparently approving.

Hordak let out a sigh of relief sinking into a shallow bow. He would not be dying today.

"That Princess of yours is a fighter."

The sudden words made Hordak freeze mid bow.

"I don't have trouble getting what I want often, but she put up a fight. You should be pleased to know that."

A thousand thoughts ripped through Hordak's mind at once. He felt his insides lurch, reality
shattering like a pane of glass.

"...what did you do?" Hordak's voice was low, dangerous.

His red eyes sharp and focused, he studied Prime. For the first time, he noticed with some shock that he was bruised. Not badly. Not as bad as Prime had beaten him, but seeing injury at all on this perfect example of raw strength, Hordak knew why he had those injuries before the Emperor held up his wife's recording device.

"No. No! Where is she? What did you do?"

Hordak barely had time to shout at his Emperor before the other man clicked a button and the recording echoed through the sleek throne room.

At first, all he heard was whimpering. Soft, like when Entrapta had her nightmares and cried in her sleep. Then the screaming started. Words could be made out, pleading, but Hordak had no desire to listen for them. He thought for a moment that she had been tortured, but when a second sound joined in, he knew.

He was in another world now entirely. A world of pain and hopelessness. His promises, all of them, were useless to her.

"You swore she would be safe from you. You promised."

Hordak's voice felt impossibly small. He didn't know if he would rage or weep. The Emperor in his throne clicked the button once more shutting it off with a large, booming thunderous laugh.

"I lied."

The reply didn't stun Hordak quite as much as his own actions. His feet reacted before he had time to process what he was doing. But soon, he had the Emperor by the collar, his proud grin inches from Hordak's snarl. He reached a claw back to strike him, rebel, but the Emperor caught his wrist and snapped it back.

Shooting stars of pain shot up his arm and before he had a moment to even consider his injured wrist, Prime had knocked him backwards off the dais. Hordak sprawled out on the stairs, adrenaline preventing him from feeling the pain just yet. But his body didn't seem willing to move.

Prime had risen to his feet, slowly, almost lazily making his way down the stairs to his defective clone.

"I told you," he seemed to sigh, "I take what I want," prime reached Hordak, kicking him onto his back "There is nothing of yours i can not simply take from you."

"She... isn't yours," Hordak groaned, trying to pull himself up again, "she doesn't belong to anyone!"

Prime seemed to consider his words for a moment.

"Everyone is mine," Prime stated, voice calm, cold, as if he were simply stating a fact, "and I can do what I want with my... things."

Hordak managed to drag himself to his knees, but that was all. Prime examined the defective clone kneeling in front of him, face neutral. He raised his arm, talons shining like blades.

"-We are not 'things!'"
Prime hesitated, looking back at the insect-like woman hanging from a vent in the ceiling by her hair. Over her face, her welding mask sat, glowing crimson lenses making her look more insect like than ever.

It was all Hordak needed. He pushed himself to his feet at last, swiping his dull gray claws at Primes perfect face.

Perfect no longer.

He roared, clapping a hand over his left eye. With a snarl, he backhanded the clone, knocking him to the floor, unconscious, but alive. For now.

Entrapta took the opening, swinging in. Her strong metal fist collided with his jaw, sending him tumbling down the rest of the steps. Entrapta landed near the top of the dais, hair flying out to snatch the prone Emperor before he could recover.

She twisted her long violet locks around him, squeezing like a viper as she brought him close. His face was a wreck. She could not see his left eye, the blood was too thick, but there was an ooze to it that told her the eye would not be saved. Behind her welding mask, her lips twitched.

"An eye for an eye," she hissed, before slamming him with all her being into the obsidian throne.

Beneath the force of it, the stone cracked. She pulled back, then again and again, sent the Emperors armored body crashing until finally, the throne shattered behind him. Only then did she let go. He slumped, broken.

Entrapta finally raised her welding mask to look at her assailant. She stepped closer, face unreadable. It was only then that she realized that one of Primes guards, had their weapon trained perfectly on her unconscious husband.

"Don't move."

The voice she recognized. The same one that dropped Hordak off in the lab after the first beating. Entrapta froze. With rage on her mind, coursing through her veins, she had nearly allowed herself to forget.

Her eyes darted around the room. An alarm had gone off somewhere. The sound of soldiers scrambling made her quietly let out a curse.

The guard let out a grunt and fell.

It took Entrapta a moment to notice Scorpia in the shadows of a pillar, tail retracting back behind her. She smiled and Entrapta returned it.

"We have to go," Scorpia said suddenly, "now."

Entrapta launched herself down the dias with her hair. After this stage, her plan was to improvise. It was what Adora always did, after all and it seemed to work for her.

With a grunt, Scorpia scooped up Hordak and threw him over her shoulder, being careful not to impale him on her spiky paldrins.

"No time to talk about it!" Entrapta shouted, "We head to the transport bay and make it up as we go!"
"You know," Scorpia replied with a sly grin, "that's exactly what I was thinking."

Chapter End Notes

Long chapter, but probably my favorite one so far. Sometimes you lose the battle, but win the war.
Imp was a good boy. He looked after Master and he looked after Mistress. But now he sat locked in a cage. One of the smelly faceless people threw him in there. He'd stuck his tongue out at them, and they called him an abomination before leaving.

And this was where he sat alone when the one known as Kyle found him.

"Come on," the skinny blond boy whispered, unlocking the cage, "Hordak will be mad if you get left behind."

Imp flew from the cage, confused. Left behind? He wanted to ask, but he lacked the voice to do so. He simply squeaked, hoping this Etherian was bright enough to know what he meant.

"No time to explain. Hurry!"

---------

Rogelio had Emily held over his large reptilian head. He could run faster than the repurposed security bot could skitter. Luckily, Entrapta had already registered the lizard as a non-threatening entity so it simply beeped and wiggled it legs in the air.

Rogelio liked Entrapta. She was funny and shared some of her tiny snacks with him. Plus Lord Hordak was much nicer with her around.

But now Hordak had been usurped. And the new boss was a nightmare.

---------

Lonnie was not Scorpias biggest fan. She wasnt anybody's biggest fan, really. But when a six foot something Scorpian lady asks you for a favor, you dont question it.

She stood waiting in the vehicle bay, a small pile of unconscious guards in the middle of the room. She twirled the stun rod in her hand, whistling at its effectiveness.

This, she would be keeping.

---------

"This way!" Scorpia cried, darting down a narrow hall with an unconscious Hordak over her shoulder.

Entrapta easily kept pace, throwing soldiers as if they were toys, out of their way as they ran. She felt powerful, unstoppable.

No wonder Hordak liked his new armor so much. Aside from its practical uses (like keeping his body from falling apart) it made him stronger. The sensation of being able to move without restraint was exhilarating.
She could absolutely get used to this.

By the time they skidded into the vehicle bay, Lonnie had already warmed up their transport. She shouted at them to hurry as Imp flew to them, chirping nervously at his limp and unconscious master.

Kyle and Rogelio held out hands to help Scorpia on board, then assisted in moving their injured leader from her shoulders to the flat floor of the vehicle. He let out a low groan, eyes fluttering.

Entrapta had been about to board last when she felt her hair catch on something.

"I. Don't. Lose!"

The voice of The Emperor sent a chill down Entraptas spine. She turned to where he stood, bloody, battered, but alive. And now he held her hair in a firm grip, tugging her back towards him. Her fingers slipped just out of reach of Kyle's.

"Go!" Entrapta shouted, turning to once again face down her attacker, "I'll hold him off. Go!"

"You think I'll allow any of you to slip away?" He snarled, dragging her closer, "four traitorous underlings, an abomination, a broken security bot, a disgraced Princess and failed Clone?"

He reached out, taking her by the throat. Her hair still clutched in his powerful hands, holding it back, away, unusable in his unbelievably powerful grasp.

"Defective, worthless, useless, imperfect!"

He squeezed lightly, the smallest fraction of his brute strength. A show, to remind her of who he was. She felt her vision darken quickly. His empty, bloody eyesocket would be the last thing she'd see.

"Imperfections are beautiful."

It all happened fast. The blast ripped through Primes armor, a burning indent in his chest plate. He released Entraptas throat and she rolled away, coughing and sputtering.

When she looked up, her husband stood over her, battered, bloodied, weak, but standing regardless. His right arm was held out, one finger extended, smoking. The blast from the emergency weapon she designed had been powerful. More powerful than she had anticipated. She made a note of that.

Hordak swayed and Entrapta rose to catch him before he fell again. Another tug at her hair nearly yanked her off her feet. She heard the rumbling of soldiers approaching. Time was running out. She did the only thing she could.

She grabbed her husbands hand and before he could question what she was doing, she squeezed her eyes shut and swiped his sharp talons through her hair, severing it up to her lower back.

No time to mourn. She helped Hordak get on board before climbing on herself. They escaped as soldiers burst in, firing after them. But it was too late.

They were free.
There was silence for nearly an hour as the gravity of it all settled with the dust.

They had just betrayed the most powerful being in the known Universe. Not only that, but they beat him, escaped with their lives. Entrapta shook as Hordak lay across her lap, his red eyes staring unblinking at the Frightzone getting smaller and smaller in the distance until it was nothing more than a pinprick. Suddenly Lonnie broke the silence.

"Where are we going? Dryl?"

"No," Entrapta replied, "Brightmoon."

"Brightmoon!?" Everyone seemed to speak at once, shocked.

"Dryl is still under Horde control." Now Hordak spoke up at last, "No doubt my Brother will have sunk his claws into that territory by now. Brightmoon is the closest and the safest."

"Its the hub of the Princess Alliance," Scorpia sighed, "we'll probably be executed."

"Unlikely," Hordak replied, "they need information. We have it."

"What do we have?" Lonnie snapped, "we know hes hard to kill. That's all I know!"

"Actually, we have exactly what we need to take him down," Entrapta cut in, before looking at Hordak sheepishly "I um... I kind of hacked into your personal terminal sweetie, sorry."

"Why are you apologizing for being brilliant?" He smirked, but Entrapta did not return the smile. She was avoiding looking at his face.

"Emily downloaded all your old files as well as what I could get to from Primes personal archive," she continued, "I also managed to... to get a DNA sample. It will help me identify the flaw in your genetic code, Hordak. I may be able to help you recover somewhat, or at least stop the decay."

Hordak looked down at his hands, examining his fractured wrist, trying to assess the damage so as not to think about how she came across that DNA sample. He wasnt angry at her. None of the blame was hers. He knew a large part of the blame was his and for that, he felt such shame.

"I see," he nodded slowly, "you... are full of surprises."

The crew fell silent again, then Lonnie sighed from the drivers seat.

"Brightmoon it is. If this gets me killed, I'm blaming Kyle."

"Me!? What did I do!?"

Day quickly turned to night. Kyle and Rogelio fell asleep, curled together, almost cuddling. Scorpia slept sitting up, arms crossed, head tilted back snoring softly.
Hordak wanted to sleep too. He wanted nothing more than to hold his wife, rub her pregnant belly and curl up with his arms around her.

But he didn't. His wounds had not yet clotted and he now worked with Entrapta to bandage and tie them off, using strips of her jacket to do so. Entrapta's wounds had already been seen to, although she insisted they were really not terrible. The most noticeable injury was her neck. There were scabbed teeth marks there and now a large bruise in the shape of a handprint popping up.

But the thing that she grieved about the most was the loss of her hair. It was still long, by Etherian standards, but compared to the floor length she had before, it felt impossibly short, coming to end just below her hips.

"How is your wrist?" She asked, carefully grabbing his hand to examine.

"Painful," he answered, hissing in agony as he slowly moved it.

On his lap, Imp stirred, but quickly fell back into snoring.

"I don't think it's broken, but you shouldn't move it. I'll make a splint for it until I can examine it more in better light."

"Entrapta..." he reached forward with his good hand to tuck a talon under her chin. She pulled away quickly, shivering. "I... know. About what he did."

There was a pause, she finally looked up to meet his eyes. It was only for a moment. Then she swung her welding mask back down over her face.

"Yes. Of course you do. He told you. Did you hear the recording?"

Hordak could only nod. Silence again. What was there to say? His finger fiddled with his ring absently as the answer came to him.

"...take your time. When you want to talk about it, I am here."

He reached to touch her shoulder, but pulled back. No. He needed to let her breathe. She would let him know when it was alright to touch her.

"Thanks Hordak."

"You know," he continued, changing subjects, "I am very impressed with you. Proud. My brilliant wife, the warrior Queen. Beauty, brains and brawn. The 'whole package', as they say."

He smiled and he thought that maybe she was smiling back at him behind the mask.

"How was my new weapon? Did it have much kickback? It was stronger than I anticipated. What were you aiming for?"

"His head," he answered, "but I was also dizzy. The poor aim may be an issue of user error."

"Still, I should run more tests in the future, just to be sure."

And suddenly, they were back to discussions of science, optimistic, happy. There was still a darkness hanging over them, but soon, the night gave way to the dawn. And the towers of Brightmoon loomed in the distance.
This is the end of act 1, all! Act 2 will be slower, more character heavy. But I think it'll still be fun.
"Queen Glimmer! Horde vehicle approaching from the east!"

The Queen who had been nearly napping at her desk jumped up and immediately tripped over a pile of documents at her feet. Paper flew everywhere. Great. She'd have to reorganize it.

With a frustrated snort she teleported to the lookout beacon herself.

"Give me that!" She snapped, snatching a pair of golden binoculars from a tall female guard.

"Why is there just one?" She mumbled watching the vehicle approach at what she honestly considered a perfectly normal reasonable speed.

"Not sure, your Majesty. They appear to have no weapons active."

She thought for a moment, purple eyebrows knitting together. Then with a "oh!" She teleported again.

"Adora! Bow! They're here!"

The blonde and the boy had been sleeping back to back on Adora's bed. Lately, they'd all bunked together, afraid to be separate in the case of an evil alien invasion.

But Glimmer was a Queen, and she had work to do. Not as many sleepovers as she would like.

Adora jumped into a ridiculous combat stance and Bow rubbed his eyes with a yawn.

"Oh. Is it time to die already?" He asked sleepily.

"No! Not that! Entrapta! I think Entrapta is here! Ugh!! Just come on!"

She grabbed onto them with one hand each, teleporting to the front entrance.

"Let them in!" She ordered, "but be on your guard!"

As the vehicle slowly pulled into the courtyard, it became clear by the bullet holes and scorch marks that this was no invading force.

One by one, the refugees from the Frightzone left the vehicle with their hands up. Adora stood by, stunned until Hordak came out being supported by Entrapta.

"You're late," Glimmer groaned, "let me guess? Things didn't go your way?"

Hordak didn't have the energy to be irritated. He shook his head, ears low, defeated.

"Glimmer, stop. Look at them. They need help."
"Yeah? And I offered it to them more than a month ago, Bow! They said they'd give an answer before a month!"

"Glimmer is right," Adora said, "we at least need to question them."

"No need," Hordak said, voice softer than Adora had ever heard it, "we surrender. We will tell you what ever you need to know. But Entrapta needs medical attention and I need my wounds tended. Bind our hands if you feel better."

Adora and Glimmer exchanged looks, but the Brightmoon Queen nodded. One by one, their hands were bound, (Hordak hissed when this happened, citing his injury as the reason) and they were taken to the "prison".

Or at least that was what they called it. Hordak wasn't sure the people who designed this even knew what a prison was.

They questioned Lonnie first, then Rogelio, and then Kyle. Scorpia came soon after. During this time, Entrapta was being examined while Hordak had his wrist inspected and wrapped tight. The rest of his wounds were disinfected, but the poor healer trying to tend to him couldn't seem to get her head around his alien anatomy. He would need Entrapta to assist him later. If possible.

Once he was bandaged, he was brought in for questioning. Before Adora could open her mouth to ask the first question, Hordak spoke.

"Prime has 153 ships in orbit around this planet. His next move will be to attack the outlaying villages of Brightmoon kingdom to draw you out. He knows about you, Adora. he knows you're a threat.
I recommend evacuating the villages and bringing your civilians to shelters behind battle lines. It takes his power if he has nothing to bargain with. Leave him with not a single prisoner. He will use them to get to you."

Adora blinked and started writing, then she put her notebook down.

"Catra escaped?" She asked, "scorpia said she did."

Hordak nodded.
"She headed here on foot, two nights ago. Assuming she survived, I predict she should arrive tomorrow evening."
Adora seemed to tense at this. Hordak cleared his throat, feeling suddenly awkward.
"She is... sorry."

"She should be."
Hordak held his hands up with a shrug.
"I don't disagree."
"You should be sorry too."
"I won't apologize for doing as my nature commanded me to do during war time. But I will apologize for causing the war in the first place. Nature or not, it was unnecessary."
That seemed to somewhat satisfy her, but he continued.
"I will also apologize for the unfortunate conditions of your childhood. There was damage that can not be undone."

Adora threw her hands up in frustration.
"I will never get used to this! Stop being nice! What is wrong with you!?
Hordak looked actually shocked.
"I... thought this was what you wanted? I can threaten you, I suppose, but it does seem counter productive."

The blonde shook her head stiffly, looking a mix of disgusted and amused.

"Entrapta is fine, by the way," she said, changing the subject, "I know you're worried. The healer looked her over and the midwife says she's 20 weeks now. Halfway there. So. That's good."

He let out a breath he didn't know he was holding.
"I'm... glad. Thank you."

"What happened to her? She didn't look... well."
Hordak swallowed, looking away.
"She isn't."
Adora stared at her former leader for an uncomfortably long time.
"What happened?"
"It's her story to tell, not mine."

Another long silence, and Adora nodded.
"I think I understand..." she mumbled, "the placement of some of her bruises were... suspect."
Hordak kept silent, unwilling to say anything to confirm or deny.

"What else do you need, Princess?"
"Everything."
Hordak relaxed in the chair provided for him, crossing his legs.
"Well then, best get comfortable. This will take some time."

Entrapta had been placed in a bedroom somewhere in Brightmoons many towers. It was comfortable, pretty and rather large. Entrapta looked around the room, searching for any useful items to work with. Her data pad had been confiscated, but she managed to keep her hexdriver by explaining it's sentimental significance.

While she was busy disassembling bits of her armor, there came a knock at her door.
"Come in. I'm not naked yet!"

The door opened slightly, hesitated, then opened the rest of the way.

"Oh! Bow! Hi!" She greeted, struggling with a bit of tech still attached at the back of her spine. Her hair was short now. She struggled with it and it seemed almost a little out of sorts, weak. "Can you get this? I can't reach."

"Entrapta, your hair..."
"Hm? Oh yeah. I had to cut it. Better than being captured."
The younger boy did as she asked, helping her to remove the bits of her suit that had been too difficult to take off for the examination.

"You made this? Wow. I'm so glad we have you back."
Enterapta didn't respond right away. She was looking at her arms, tracing the deep purple thumb prints that had been left behind on her olive toned wrists. Bow was still examining her armor, distracted. He was so powerful, strong enough to hold her hair down at it's best. He could have killed her. It was amazing he had control enough not to.
"-and this looks like it's made o-"

She sniffled, drawing her knees up to her chest in the bed. She felt shame, relief, anger, joy, fear, security. Everything. And before she knew it, she was sobbing.

"Entrapta, it's okay! We missed you too!"
He went in to give her a hug and she immediately recoiled. He pulled away the instant he realized.
"Entrapta? What is it?"

She buried her face in her arms, shaking. This... she had been holding this in since it happened. She'd let it build, gather until it burst free.

Then it was over. She gained control in a flash, pulling it all together, putting it back, buried behind a wall of smiles and work.
Poor Bow didn't seem to know what hit him.
"I'm sorry. It's just... it's been a hard few days." She smiled again, but Bow didn't seem to buy it.

"You don't have to tell me what's going on. That's fine. You just have to know that we're here for you. We all love you."

"Thanks Bow. You're a good friend."
"Hey, that's what I'm here for, big sis."

Chapter End Notes

Wow. Where did all these new readers come from? I seriously did not expect people to, like, actually pay attention and wait for updates and be -excited- for them.
This is wild.
You guys are the best!
It was 27 hours before Entrapta was allowed to see Hordak. It made sense, after all, he had been the enemy they'd been fighting for years. Glimmer had offered him amnesty, however, that came at the cost of complete transparency, and when Hordak refused to talk about what happened to Entrapta, Glimmer had reluctantly been forced to lock him back up while they debated with the rest of the Princess council about it.

"They aren't... hurting you, are they?"

"Hm? No. Not really."

He did not see a reason to mention the intense questing he'd had to go through under some light torture. No need to put her under stress in her condition. The damage had not been permanent, even though echos of the pain still remained.

"Are you sure? You seem..."

"Ah, yes. Pastels, my one weakness," he chuckled, lounging against one fluffy violet cushion, "no, Entrapta. I'm fine. This... 'prison' feels like a palace."

And honestly, If it weren't for being separated from his wife like this, he wouldn't mind as much. Even under torture, he was happy to be away from Prime.

"What about you? Your friend Bow visited me. He said he thought you were having a hard time here."

Entrapta's eyes narrowed and she took a seat on a chair facing the magic barrier he was in. Her hands covered her bump, her borrowed Brightmoon dress highlighting the curve. Hordak thought it made her look absolutely radiant.

"I got a little emotional," she sighed, "it's nothing. I'm fine."

He didn't buy it for a second, but didn't say that. He said he would give her space and let her talk in her own time.

"I don't mean to nag," he whispered, "I just want you to be healthy and happy."

"I know."

Entrapta went quiet, face unreadable.

"Oh. I felt a kick."

Hordak jolted upright, scrambling to kneel as close as the barrier would allow. He wanted to reach out and feel for himself. Instead he could only watch, hoping to catch a slight push as an elbow or foot pressed from the inside.

"When you're out, I'll let you feel him," she promised, "he feels strong."

"Like his mother."

"No. Like his Father," she corrected.

Hordak snorted. She loved when he did that, snorting when he laughed. He was normally so dignified, but his laugh was infectious. She wondered if his habit of snorting was the reason he rarely
laughed in public.

"Let's be honest, my dear. Between the two of us, you are the stronger."

She considered that and shrugged.

"Maybe physically. I think you have more emotional strength than me."

Another snort as he lay back down on the pile of cusions.

"Please. I wept like an infant in your arms a few weeks ago."

"Yes! And that took incredible emotional strength!" She insisted, "you're amazing, Hordikins."

He'd been resting with his eyes closed, a light smile on his face. He looked so at peace, until she used that dreaded nickname. Then he cringed.

"Dont call me that. I have a reputation."

"Sorry sweetie," she giggled, "mmm... you look comfortable."

"Being honest, this is the first time I don't feel like my life is in imminent danger and it is so very relaxing."

The moment he said it, an idea occurred to him. He sat up excitedly, grinning at his wife.

"After the war, after the baby is born, we should go to the beach!"

Entrapta blinked, surprised at this giddy almost childlike side to him. She didn't get to see this often.

"The beach? Like on vacation?"

"Is that what it's called? I've only ever heard that Etherians like to spend recreational time at the beach. It sounds pleasant."

"It does," Entrapta agreed, "when we save Etheria, we can go to the beach for as long as you want. I think I would like to try swimming. I never did learn."

"I'll teach you," Hordak promised, "knowing how to swim is an important skill."

"I cant wait! Its going to be so-"

The door opened and Micha, the former King of Brightmoon stood in the doorway next to his daughter.

"Sorry, Entrapta," Glimmer apologized, "Times up."

Entrapta rose from her seat without any protest.

"Alright," she sighed, "good night, Hordak."

"Sleep well, wife."

As she left the room, she exchanged a look with Glimmer who followed her out, discussing something with her in a hushed voice.

Now it was Hordak and Micha alone in the room. Silent. Awkward.

"A truth spell then?" Hordak asked with a sigh, "is that what it's come to?"
Micha looked uncomfortable and sighed. He approached Hordak and sunk into the chair Entrapta left behind.

"Yes. Glimmer is not comfortable with you here, especially if you won't tell the whole story."

"Because it's not my story to tell," Hordak snarled, "this is personal. It has nothing to do with-"

"Just tell me," Micha interrupted, "maybe I can help."

"You can't."

"He did something to her, didn't he? That's why you're being so secretive. And you won't tell me, and you won't tell them because it was..."

Micha let his sentence trail off, but his implication was clear. Hordak did not respond, but his lack of eye contact was answer enough.

"I see... I'll speak to Glimmer. You should see your wife again tonight. Outside of this... cell."

"Thank you," Hordak sighed, once more relaxing into the pile of pastel colored cushions.
Their reunion was quiet. Hordak had been released, escorted to the suite that was now to serve as their quarters. Hordak had to admit, in almost every way, it was an upgrade from where they slept in the Fright zone.

The bedroom alone was spacious, with comfortable seating in nearly every nook. The walls were draped with luxurious fabrics, a stark contrast to the steel paneling of their old quarters. There was art, banners, portraits, murals, statues and Hordak was absolutely fascinated. When he'd been a general, he'd been intrigued by the local artworks of his defeated enemies. But this was different. This was not an enemy now and he was allowed to openly appreciate it. The furniture was ornate, stylish. Cupboards and dressers and wardrobes stuffed with clothing, some of it approximately Entraptas size. Some of it his size, if he didn't mind purples and blues. The bed was huge, bigger than any couple should ever need and Hordak wanted nothing more than to make use of it. Loudly.

But Entrapta did not even embrace him when he entered. She smiled, she greeted him politely, but she kept her hands to herself. Hordak kept his distance, respectful and understanding. It had to be hard. He had no idea how she felt, but he and Prime shared physical features. He wondered if just seeing him was painful now, if his face reminded her of what he did.

"Did you see? We have a waterfall," she pointed to the open section of wall, leading to a serene pool and a fantastic trickling waterfall. Flowers bloomed in rainbow tufts, artfully arranged to look as if they had simply bloomed wild.

"Is there a function to this display? Or is it simply an aesthetic choice?" He wondered, approaching the pool as it glistened in the light of the moon.

"I think it's a choice," his wife shrugged, "seems wasteful to me, but not my kingdom!"

She stood beside the water as well, looking down. He was reminded of the fact that she couldn't swim and had to stop himself from pulling her back. Something in the way she examined her reflection broke his heart.

"Im... ready to talk about it now, I think."

That startled him. She sat down carefully at the waters edge, one hand holding the hem of the long mint nightgown, the other resting carefully over her round tummy. She stuck her bare feet into the cool dark pool and looked up at the purple sky.

"Just promise you'll stop if it hurts too much, alright?" He sat beside her, legs tucked under him, hands resting in his lap, "and please, dont force yourself to tell more than you are comfortable with."

She nodded, took a deep breath and began.

"He found me in the lab. I wasn't paying attention, I was alone. I know you told me not to be-"
"Never blame yourself," he interrupted, "this was not your fault."
"I-I know... but still... I blame myself a lot. I shouldn't, but I do."
He understood that. He blamed himself as well. He tried so hard to forgive himself, tell himself he
couldn't have known. But the truth was, he'd suspected, feared it. And he could have done
something. He could have left with Entrapta sooner. Joined the rebellion.
But that was all hindsight now.

"It... still hurts sometimes," she continued, "physically, I mean. He was not... gentle like you."

Hordak found himself clenching his fist so hard he drew blood.

"He was strong. He held my hair like it was nothing. And he... bit me."

Hordak nodded.
"Its an ability we all have, or... should have. I seem to lack it. It's an evolutionary trait from when we
used to be predators in the wild."

She shivered and rubbed her arms.

"After that, I lost pretty quick. He took my recorder and told me to scream. I... I thought if I just did
what he wanted, it would be over faster. He seemed... excited by it. When I started crying he liked
that even more. But... I feel like it took forever. He just kept..."

"Its alright. You dont have to continue," he whispered, watching as she put her shaking hands to her
face, "I know you didnt want any of it. I just wish... well. I just wish a lot of things."

"I pretended he was you. Or I tried to. I thought it would make things easier. It... didnt."

"Is that why you never seem to want to look me in the eye anymore?"

She splashed her feet, looking up at the moon with a far away expression on her face.
"I'm... ashamed. And I'm afraid you might think less of me now."

"I could never think less of you for this, Entrapta."

She took a deep breath, the only sound between them the splashing of her feet.

"Um... you can hug me now," she whispered after what felt like ages, "if you want."

Hordak did without a moments hesitation. His thin arms wrapped around her shoulder, pulling her
lightly into his bruised chest. It hurt so much, but he felt so good.

She pressed her face against his alien heart and just breathed. For a long time they stayed like that,
holding each other, until Hordak thought she might have fallen asleep. He carefully shifted to look at
his wife silently snoozing against him.
The bed was close. Being gentle so as not to wake her, he lifted her in his arms and walked her
inside. As he laid her down in bed, she stirred, opening a single eye. Hordak didn't notice she was
awake until he began to change clothing

"You're aroused," she noted as he pulled off his tunic.
The tips of his ears burned and he turned away from her. All worked up over some cuddling.
Pathetic.
"Yes. Apologies. I will sleep elsewhere tonight."
"Its a normal reaction. I will assist you, if you want."
"...no. please," he sighed, pulling a long pale blue nightshirt over his nude form, "There is no need. Sexual activity is meant to be mutually pleasurable. If you are not ready, then neither am I."

"I'm your wife. I owe it to you."

He froze, back turned to her still.

"You do not owe anyone anything."
"Its a wife's duty."
"No. When I wed you, I did not obtain a sexual slave. I obtained a partner. An equal. Unless I misinterpreted the purpose of marriage?"
"You've done so much for me. I need to pay you back."

He sighed, cautiously approaching the bed. He sat down at the edge, hands in his lap to cover his erection.

"Our marriage is not transaction based. We do not keep a tally to trade for favors later. I help you because you are my partner. I never expect anything in return."

His wife had sat up, looking him over, but now she lay back down.

"I'm sorry. I know it's been a while. Just... a little longer please."

"Never apologize for this. I am not so weak that I can not control my urges," he smiled, reaching to place a hand on hers, hesitating until she nodded her consent, "sleep. You're tired. I will rest elsewhere."

Her eyes were shut before he finished speaking. Hordak stood from where he sat, smiling at the sleeping Princess.
Then he pulled on a long midnight blue robe and prepared to go back outside by the waterfall to calm his urges. Maybe he'd step under the cold water for a bit, if that's what it took.

The view was stunning. In one hand, he held a crystal flask of some amber liquid he knew to be alcoholic, in the other, a glass. It had been a long time since he allowed himself the luxury of a drink. Just something to help him unwind. He settled by the water once more, looking out at the treeline if the forest.

As he poured a drink he noticed something appearing out of the trees. And as he took a sip, he focused on it.
It was only when the figure was halfway to the castle that his keen eyes were able to make out who it was in the darkness.

Catra had arrived. A day later than expected.
Dawn

Hordak had not slept. Not that he ever needed much of it, but it was always a luxury he appreciated now that he was married and had a bed partner. It was just too bad his bed partner could not stand his touch anymore.

He sat in the corner of the room, one hand still clutched on the nearly empty flask, the other nursing a head ache.

He hadn't done anything last night, really. Just drank under the moon, soaking his clawed feet in the water. It had been nice, this time to relax and recover.

To think.

Some of his injuries were still serious, but his wrist had recovered at least. He was pleased to learn it was not broken. But now the dawn was creeping up over the horizon and in a few hours, he would attend a strategy meeting.

So he poured himself another glass, set the now empty crystal container down, and did what he did best. He strategized.

His old life as a general kicking in. He was not drunk enough to forget his purpose or training. Prime had not attacked yet, just as Hordak had predicted. With the extent of his injuries, Hordak knew that Prime would hold off until he was reasonably recovered. That could take weeks, even with the advanced technology of his people. It gave them time to plan, a sorely needed advantage. One Hordak refused to squander.

He glanced up at his wife as she stirred in the bed across the room. She had information that she would present today as well. She said she knew how to take him down, and when Hordak read her report, he knew she was right. How one woman could be so brilliant, he had no idea. But her plan was... risky. To him, specifically.

"All science has a element of danger," he whispered with a sigh. He'd accept the risk. It would be worth it, in the end. He had to have faith, or else he would have nothing.

He looked back at the light creeping over the treeline. A thought came to him. He glanced at his sleeping wife, then again at the morning light.

*I think I'll name him Dawn.*

Yes. It seemed appropriate. Early mornings were his favorite time of day. Not that he much saw the morning light. But it was just that feeling of being productive, listening to the world wake up around you. Plus, if they managed to survive this, they would be in the dawn of a new era, so to speak.

He had the urge to wake Entrapta to tell her, but held off. She needed as much sleep as she could get. She was drained. Seemed to be tired all the time now.

Instead, he tied the long midnight blue dressing gown around his waist and elected to go for a stroll before anyone woke. He would not have many more calm mornings like this before the worst of it came for them.

"Why, if it isn't Lord Hordak..."
The voice was so familiar, something he had listened to every day for years.

"Shadow Weaver."

There was an awkward pause between the two before Hordak began walking away. Nope. He was in too good a mood to deal with this witch. She followed.

"I was bent on killing you, did you know that?"

She let out a smokey sounding laugh. Hordak slowed his pace, swirling his drink in the glass.

"Is that why you're awake this early? Come to catch me before the others waken?" Hordak chuckled darkly, then took a sip. Stopping on front of a large window. "You can try, but I promise, I wont make it easy."

"Oh please, Hordak. I'm over it," she waved a hand as she floated over to stand next to him, "I've heard you are quite the changed man. Is it true? Did love change the mighty Hordak?"

She was trying to make fun of him. Ordinarily it would have worked, but he had nobody he needed to posture for. He had already lost his armies, his lands, his power. For once, he could just... be.

"Maybe," he replied, "or maybe I was always meant to be like this."

That answer seemed to catch the woman off guard. She crossed her arms, but her shoulders looked relaxed.

"Catra arrived late last night," her voice was soft, sad.

"Mmm, yes, I know. She was late. I expected her a day ago."

"She said she wanted to speak to you."

"Me?" Now it was Hordaks turn to look surprised, "what for?"

"Who knows. She's different too."

"So are you," he shot back.

"So am I," she agreed, nodding, "I suppose the idea of imminent death changes us all, doesn't it?"

He said nothing, just took another long slow sip before offering the rest to the woman watching out the window beside him.

"Oh. No thank you," she said with mirth in her voice, "I have a big day ahead of me."

"Suit yourself." Hordak threw his head back and drained the glass.

"You know..." she added, looking him up and down once more before heading away, "blue really isn't a bad color for you."

"Thank you..."

The tips of his ears burned and now he wasnt sure if it was from the alcohol or the complement. Either way, he could hear the castle stir to life now, and it was time to retreat out of sight once again.
Entrapta awoke to an empty room. She sat up in bed, blinking in the early morning light. Something had awoken her. It was a few minutes before she noticed Imp sitting on the edge of the bed watching her.

"Oh. It was you. Where have you been off to?" She asked, sleepily as she pulled the covers away to climb to her feet.

Imp opened his mouth and Glimmers voice came out, grumbling something about paperwork. Entrapta snorted as she looked through the provided outfits from the Queen.

"You shouldn't spy on our allies. Especially our host."

He opened his mouth and now Hordaks voice came out. She shushed him quickly, but laughed.

"Now you're spying on Hordak!? Oh. He's gunna be mad when he finds out I'm the favorite parent."

She chose another dress. They seemed to be the only things that fit her lately. Growing up, Entrapta never liked dresses. They got in the way of her work. Maybe she could find something else later. Something not so... pink. Not that she hated pink. She liked pink. but it was far too easy to get dirty in her line of work.

It was as she was pulling the nightgown over head that Hordak chose to return from his early morning stroll. And he promptly dropped his empty glass. He let out a curse in his native tongue, picked it up and sighed in relief when he realized it wasn't broken.

"Sorry! I didn't realize you were awake."

"If I wasnt awake already, I would be after that," she sighed, eyeing the glass in his hand as she pulled on a clean outfit. "Have you been drinking?"

She didn't sound annoyed or accusatory. Indeed, she sounded curious. She didn't know he did drink. Or even could drink. She wanted to grab her recording device, but that still lay somewhere in the Frightzone.

"Yes," he replied, voice almost too even, almost too perfect. Intentional, trying to cover up the effects of the drink. "I rarely consume alcohol. It usually takes a large amount for me to feel anything, but there are times when I find it... enjoyable to let my mind just go for a while."

She nodded, looking away from him once again.

"How long does it usually last?"

"Not to worry, my Love," he almost winced, realizing that he never called her that out loud, "I will be sober in time for the meeting."

She nodded, picked up Imp and crossed the room to the mirror. She set him down on the vanity and picked up a... hairbrush. Entrapta never brushed her hair. It always just detangled itself. But here she was, dead eyes staring at her reflection, mouth set in a firm line, running a brush through her hair.

Hordak felt a piece of him crumble, especially when her weakly twitching hair was piled up on top of her head in a neat bun, fastened with a decorative hair stick.
Who was this woman?

"It'll... grow back, right?" He winced the second the question left his mouth.

"Yes. With time I should get some control over it again too. I just..."

"I know. But if it helps I, um, think it looks really pretty."

She gave a very half hearted smile and stood up.

"Come here. The baby is awake."

Hordak obeyed without question, kneeling in front of her as if he were praying to a Goddess. He lifted his hand, hesitant.

This was what he wanted to do for a long time. Every moment he saw her across a room, every time he spoke to her. He wanted to rest his hands over the tiny life they created together, feel the hope growing within, the love, the change he represented.

His son. His. Their. She guided his hand to a spot near the top of the bump, closing her eyes.

"Here. Do you feel that?"

And he did. Tiny kicks, more like flutters against his waiting hand. His other hand went to touch his lips, pushing emotion back. Behind his eyes, he felt burning.

He looked up, grinning. And she... still wouldn't meet his eye. It made his heart sink. This was a moment that was meant to be unforgettable, special. And it was still ruined by the crimes of his brother.

Perhaps Prime won after all.

He pulled away after a moment, but not before leaning in to whisper against her stomach.

"It's nice to meet you, Dawn. I'm your Daddy and I love you so very much."
Chapter Summary

The Brightmoon crew have their first war meeting with the refugees from the old Horde. Hordak begins to understand that making amends with his new allies may be harder than any war hes fought to this point.

Chapter Notes

Before I begin, I want to once again thank you all for keeping up with this. I'm having a great time writing it and everyones suggestions are so appreciated. Honestly. I love them so much.
I do want to also remind everyone that what I write is not necessarily based off of the old MotU canon and will absolutely have differences, even if I make little references. I do have an end goal in mind and I would like to reach that eventually, so I likely will not have time to shove references to every 80s icon in here. Sorry.

The more I write, the more I want to focus on the idea of forgiveness as a theme. During the last few years, I myself have been struggling to leave past traumas in the past and forgive those who wronged me.
I am also dealing with how I have wronged others and learning that people are not obligated to forgive when you apologize.
With these characters, I want to explore that in, what I hope, is a realistic way. Still, i know i dont always get it right, so a suggestion is always so useful.

Anyway, thank you for sticking with this, despite the angst. I promise happier times are coming.

By the time the meeting rolled around, Hordak was indeed sober. Sober and absolutely hating himself for last night. Still, this morning had left him feeling a serenity he was not used to. He found himself humming lightly to himself as he organized his notes, sitting at the ornate table next to his wife.

It was only when a complete hush fell over the assembly that he looked up, ears drooping. Every set of eyes in the room were on him, except for Entrapta who was busy fiddling with her datapad. He cleared his throat awkwardly.

"...is there something on my face?"

With a start, every Princess straightened up again, shifting awkward glances to each other.

"You were smiling and humming," Adora whispered from his other side, "it's kind of freaky."

"Oh. Apologies. I did not realize it was impolite to be in a good mood in Brightmoon," he deadpanned, "I shall prepare my villain speech immediately, if that makes you feel better."
He saw Adora’s lips quirk into a reluctant smile. "When did you get funny?" She asked, eyebrow raised, "the Frightzone would have been way better if you were funny."

"I- I am always funny!" He hissed, just as Glimmer entered the room. The gathering rose to greet her, Hordak included, although the effect of this seemed almost vaguely threatening due to his height.

"You may be seated," the Brightmoon Queen ordered, "Adora, begin."

Hordak had to admit, he was impressed with the way this tiny pink haired teenager commanded a room. Sparkly, cute, yet she had a fierceness to her that Hordak could not help but admire. Yet another enemy he had underestimated.

"As we all know, the Horde... the real Horde-" she glanced at Hordak who nodded encouragingly, "arrived on Etheria a few weeks ago. According to our Intel, the force that arrived is about 300 times the size of what we’ve been fighting-"

There was a collective gasp and murmurs. Glimmer stood up and silence settled over the gathering once again.

"-so far," Adora finished, "however, we do have an advantage that we didn't before."

Once again, every eye fell on Hordak. He blinked back.

"Dont look at me. Entrapta is the genius here. She's the brains. I'm just the beauty."

Adora snickered, but otherwise, silence. He sighed.

"A joke. Obviously, Entrapta is both."

Entrapta gave him a quick smile before rising from her seat.

"I will attempt to state this as plainly as possible," she began, pointing to her datapad, "some of you will recall when I, uh, 'hacked the planet'. A fun experiment! I collected so much useful data! I theorize that if done right, the planet itself can be used as a weapon. More data necessary, of course, but Queen Glimmer has already given me permission to experiment with the Moonstone.

Not even just that! I did some digging in Hordak's old files, looking at schematics of their ships. It was while I was checking their communications systems that I found what I needed. Each soldier appears to have a chip inserted right about... here!" She pointed to the back of Hordak's head, making him feel suddenly selfconscious.

"The function is to inhibit free thinking," he explained with a wave of his hand, "as well as communication. Soldiers can receive orders directly. It's why his armies are so formidable, so organized."

"So... like, you have one too?" This time it was Mermista who asked, arms crossed. He tilted his head at her and shrugged.

"Technicly yes," Entrapta answered, "but it is nonfunctional. Likely damaged when he went through the portal here."

"It was disabled when I was promoted, actually," he gently corrected, "I was more useful as a free thinker."

"But if it starts working again?" Again, Mermista was asking the right questions. Hordak nodded approvingly.

"Correct. It is possible I may... have some problems. Although, it is not a mind control device. One does not lose their sense of self. Its more like a... constant suggestion."

"Can you take it out?" Scorpia asked, "so you don't have to worry about it?"
"It's... technically possible," Entrapta responded, looking down, "but there is a risk to that. Without my lab and my tools, a procedure like this would be very dangerous. It is possible I may cause irreversible damage..."

"There is risk either way," Hordak sighed, "to me, the greater risk to the cause is Prime getting to me. At this point, I have enough information to end this all in a heartbeat. You would stand no chance if I returned to Prime. It would be understandable if you had me killed, from a purely logical perspective."

"Not happening," at least three different people spoke in unison, shocking him. His ears fell, eyes wide. He was speechless for a long moment.

"But... after everything..."

"Shut up," Mermista groaned, "you're making this meeting take longer. Just accept it. You're stuck here now."

Entrapta cleared her throat again, smiling.
"Either way, knowing what I know now, there is a distinct possibility I can 'hack their brains'. Change the 'suggestion', or at least interrupt the transmission. The problem is..."

"Prime," Hordak finished, "He is... how do I put this? He like the Queen in an ant colony. Or rather, his ship is. So-"

"So in order to take control, we need to be on that ship!" Entrapta sounded excited now, both hands flat on the table, leaning in, practically bouncing. Hordak found this endlessly endearing. He was absolutely stunning when she was excited.

"So what you're saying is-" Glimmer stood up.
"-That we need a ship," Adora finished, "and I think I know where to find one."

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Hordak and Entrapta had gone their separate ways after the meeting. Hordak had taken extensive notes, organized, color coded even. Now he was off to review once more and make a more detailed plan, using what he now knew about the other territories and their resources.

Entrapta had been asked to stay behind by Glimmer so they could discuss the use of the Moonstone. Or so she said.

"Hey ya there, Boss!"
The ever perky voice of Scorpia made Hordak sigh. He honestly did not feel like having another chit chat about his personal life, but that was what it always turned into with her. Apparently she saw them as friends now and Hordak... well, he couldn't argue. She was loyal and honest and that was all that he required.

"Scorpia," he greeted, "have you some work to do elsewhere?"

"Not really! Just hanging out!" She walked beside him, "soooo... how's it going? Things, um, good now? With you and Entrapta."

Oh. Here it was. She was going to regret asking.

"Entrapta wont look at me. She wont let me touch her. Last night she allowed me to hold her for the first time in a while and I was so aroused I wanted to throw myself off the tower," he growled, then sighed, one hand to his forehead, "I am... very sexually frustrated right now."

"Umm.... wow. That was, uh, more than I needed to know..." she seemed to back off some. "Uhh...
"sorry about that, buddy."

Somewhere behind him, shadow weaver snickered and Hordak cringed. Great. So she heard everything.

"I can erase her memory," she offered, "that might get her in bed with you again."

"Go away, you old witch," he almost snarled, walking faster.

"Ooh, no need to take your frustrations out on me. I'm just trying to help," she snickered again.

"Dont you have some teenagers to traumatize or something?" He shot back, but she was already gone. "Ugh... I have a headache now. Scorpia, when my wife is out, tell her I'll be in our suite."

There. Now Scorpia had a job to do.

"You got it, boss! Good luck with your sex life!"

She was too loud. He no longer cared.

As he turned to walk away, he saw Adora. He had been about to call to her to ask if she would join him in strategizing when Catra stepped forward into view. The two stared at each other. He watched as they spoke in hushed voices, unable, even with his excellent hearing, to find out what was being said.

Suddenly, Adora reached out for Catras shirt collar and Hordak prepared himself to break up a fight. But it didnt happen. Soon, they were embracing.

It was then that he realized Scorpia was still standing behind him, watching.

Of course he knew how Scorpia felt. Only a fool could miss it. The look on her face was unreadable, but the way she slowly raised a claw to her heart said it all.

"Scorpia, it... it probably doesn't mean anything," he tried to assure her.

"Yes it does," she sighed, but then a tiny ghost of a smile found her lips. "It means she's happy."

He stared at his ex Force captain for a while. No. His friend. Then he approached and placed an awkward hand on her shoulder in a gesture that he hoped was reassuring. She took a deep breath, placed a claw over his hand and then turned to leave.

He let her, knowing that pressing the matter would only make it worse.
The Fright Zone somehow seemed darker, more militarized, more, well, frightening. The throne room had been untouched, the broken throne left in pieces, smeared blood on the smooth black tile left to dry. Everywhere, a howl seemed to echo.

ES 1075 followed the sound further into Primes lair. Their face was neutral behind their mask as they approached a grizzly scene. Metal arms rose and fell over a large shadow. Splatters of purple hit the walls, the floor, ES 1075's mask. The inhuman roar or pain was nearly deafening.

A sickening squelching sound was soon followed by a pop. The clone soldier followed a small shadow as it rolled through the poorly lit chamber, realizing as it hit their boot that it was an eye. A mangled one.

ES 1075 watched as their master, Their Emperor, underwent yet another excruciating surgery. No anesthesia. That was for the weak. From behind a glass, a surgeon worked, carefully moving spider-like robotic arms into place.

The surgeon was not a clone like ES 1075. They were female in appearance, but ES had never seen their face in full as it was always hidden behind a surgical mask.

ES 1075 stood at attention, awaiting his orders. Patient. Careful. His Excellency was always in a murderous mood after surgery.

Eventually, the screaming stopped and the robotic arms pulled away, dripping blood across the smooth gray floor.

-Surgery successful, my Emperor,- the female purred in their native tongue, -ocular implant installed.-

The giant Emperor sat up at last on the operation table, he swayed, hand over his eye. ES 1075 stepped forward at last. They were still new to this job, taking over as the last Hand of the Emperor failed to stop the traitors. They had watched his execution with excitement, knowing they were next in line to be promoted.

-Well done, Aszi- Prime hissed, lowering his hand at last, -as always, your medical talents do your gender credit.-

The surgeon bowed with an impish giggle.

-I am honored to serve, as always.-

Prime turned his gaze towards the Clone waiting. It was then that he saw the full talents of the surgeon at work. The new eye was black as night, with but a pinprick of red shining through. As they watched, the pinprick dialated to the size of an Etherian iris. Masterfully done.

-My Emperor- ES 1075 greeted, -I am full of joy to see you restored.-

-Enough.- the Emperor snapped, impatiently waving him off, -Your orders are to kill the traitor. By any means necessary. This should be a simple task. A chance to prove your worth to me.-

Aszi approached the Emperor but paused to look at ES, head slightly tilted to the side as she waited for the Clone to leave. She looked impatient, or at least they assumed she looked impatient. It was
difficult to read her large yellow eyes.

ES 1075 was young still, only leaving the tube 6 years ago, but they were intelligent, more so that the average clone soldier. He knew when he was interrupting. He slowly began to back out, keeping eye contact with Aszi.

Aszi had gotten herself into the Emperors good grace's, despite being a female, through talent and cunning. But there was something more. Aszi was rumored to be one of the Emperors children. A favorite, even, next to Prince Zed. It was in his best interest to remain respectful to her.

-Yes, my Emperor- ES 1075 bowed once again, before making their exit, -I live to serve.-

---------

Entrapta set up her work outside on the moonstone tower. The instant she had been given the ok by the Queen, she headed there, ignoring Scorpias reminder that her husband was in the suite waiting for her.

She had no doubt he would be getting right to work also, so she would do the same. And there was so much work to be done with almost no time to do it.

She calculated that Primes healing time without advanced medical tech would take 8+ weeks. But judging by what Hordak had told her about some of their advancements, Entrapta figured it was more like 4. Not even a God could jump back up after what they did. The fact that he survived was a testament to how powerful he was.

Emily whistled as Entrapta began to set up shop.

"Get comfortable, Emily. Its going to be a long week."

---------

Hordak was no longer waiting for Entrapta. From the balcony, he could see the moonstone, as well as what was going up around the moonstone.

Walls. She was building a lab with the castles runestone at its center. A good idea. He was tempted to abandon his current work and go help her, just like better times. Without the use of her hair, with only Emily and Brightmoons staff to help, he had no doubt that things were moving much slower than she would prefer.

With some effort, he pulled his gaze away and went back to his own work. This was important too. He knew the enemy the best. He knew how to counter, how to avoid combat, how to survive. He was needed here.
"Maras ship?" Glimmer asked, looking up at Adora from the reports she was reading over, "wasn't it pretty much stripped clean?"

"It was, but I was thinking there might be some way for Entrapta or Hordak to get it working again. Or at least figure out how it works. It's the only ship I know of."

"Not the only one," Hordak spoke up from where he was sitting across from Glimmer, "I arrived here with a broken ship, remember? I hid it in the Frightzone. If Maras ship is beyond repair, there is a back up, although I have doubts about its usefulness. Alternatively, we could steal one from the Emperor, although that should be a last resort. There is a reason none of my plans involve going back there."

The two considered this and Glimmer gave her nod of approval.

"Permission granted, Commander Adora. We will try Maras's ship first. Who do you propose bringing with you?"

"Lonnie, Rogelio, Bow and... Catra"

Hordak blinked at the tense silence that now settled in the Queens office. Awkward. He cleared his throat and stood up, leaving his detailed battle plan on her desk.

"Please excuse me, your Majesty," he quickly tried to think up an excuse, "I just remembered I, um..."

He always struggled with lying. Thankfully there was no need. Glimmer silently waved him off. He should be offended, but now he was just happy to be out of the room. Dramatic. Adora seemed to be a magnet for this.

"Hordak."

The alien turned his head to look at Catra, lounging against the opposite wall if the door he just came from.

"Catra. I was told you wanted to speak to me?"

She nodded, motioning for him to walk with her.

"I did, yeah."

She had her arms crossed, as they walked. Without her headdress, she looked so small, young.

"You were late," he noted, "you took longer than anticipated to arrive."

"Yeah. I did. I got cold feet. Spent some time... thinking it over. I didn't expect to see you here though."

Hordak ran a hand through his hair. There was so much to cover to get her on the same page. Did he trust her? Not in a million years. But there was information that was absolutely necessary.

"We rebelled," he explained simply, "Prime is a danger to me as well. It was a mutually beneficial alliance."
Catra nodded, understanding.

"Entrapta won't look at me..."

"Join the club," he mumbled, "she just needs time. But remember what I said, she is under no obligation to forgive you."

"But everyone forgave you."

He actually laughed at this now, shaking his head.

"Not even close. I am a useful ally, but I am hardly everyone's favorite person. Have you seen the way Princess Perfuma looks at me? She wants to kill me, I can see it."

"Perfuma?" She raised an eyebrow, "she can't hurt a fly."

"Underestimating your enemies is a grave error. Underestimating your allies is arguably worse. Honestly. It's as if you learned nothing from my mistakes, Catra."

She had a tiny smile on her face, a blush. Yes. He was talking about her too. This was what she needed to hear. That he made a mistake with her. That she was valuable as an ally.

"Would you... like a hug, Catra?" He asked stiffly.

Did she need physical comfort as well? Was this what being a father was like? Is this what he had to look forward to? She seemed to think about it, then shook her head.

"Nah. Thanks, but nah. I should get going. Adora is probably going to need me."

"Dont forget," he called to her before she could hurry away, "speak to Scorpia. She deserves that much."

"I will," she promised "before I leave. I swear."

He nodded, watching as she vanished around the corner. But Catra's promises were not worth much.

--------

A week had passed and things had gone on about how one would expect. The crew had left to find Mara's ship several days ago. Glimmer had entirely thrown herself into her duties, evacuating civilians as was recommended to her.

It was just in time too. Reports came in of a force gathering at the Frightzone. It meant time was running out. As a result, Hordak and Entrapta were still quietly stepping past each other in favor of their work.

"Alright, Emily! It's ready for the first test!"

The bot beeped happily next to Kyle, who looked entirely lost.

"Why am I here again?" He asked fiddling with his fingers.
"Because i need someone to record my experiments and make sure I don't accidentally blow myself up!"

She grinned behind her welding mask at the distressed sound the poor boy made. She was still dressed in pale pink, apparently the only color available to her at the moment, now stained and ruined, despite the leather apron she wore. Her thick leather gloves clenched around the switch.

She found that, despite her past as a bit of a loner, she now worked best with a lab partner- or at least just someone to be around for her to excitedly spew ideas to. Kyle was the only one available now. Hordak was busy and he was... well, him. She didn't want to remember. He made her do that.

Still, he had been a perfect lab partner. He allowed her to work in silence when she wanted, but when she started to ramble he listened to every syllable with interest. And when she needed advice, or wanted to discuss a theory, he was more than willing to contribute. She missed him.

So much.

Her hands trembled on the switch, hesitant. She let go. Sighed. She couldn't do it.

"Kyle, go get Hordak,"

Hordak paced, hand running through his hair. The plan was sound. His strategy could work. But if one thing went wrong, one misstep and it could easily fall apart around them. He had to have back up plans for his back up plans. He had to out think the most brilliant conqueror in all the universe. He had to somehow be better than perfection. He had to somehow win the unwinnable. Despite his flaws and failing.

And he didn't think he could do that.

He picked up his glass from where it sat on the table, leaving a ring of moisture behind on a page of his detailed file. He'd been drinking more than ever, trying to dampen the creeping, endless anxieties, fears. The pressure was crushing. If they failed to do the impossible, everything he treasured would be taken. Entrapta, her world, their son.

No. He did not think Prime would hurt his son. The Emperor, for all his hateful decisions, was no fool. He never wasted resources, and a child like his would be a resource. But the idea of his son growing up like he did, leading that life... it was unthinkable.

He stepped outside again, staring at the tower that housed the runestone, now a steel cage containing his wife as well. Where was she? She was so close, but further away than ever.

Whoever the woman was that he shared a room with, it was not the woman he married. How did he get her back? How did he heal her wounds? How were they supposed to go back?

He drained his glass just as he heard a bang on the door. He raised brow and went to answer, expecting maybe Adora or perhaps even Shadow Weaver come to bother him. But no. This time it was,

"Ehhh... Kyle, right?"
The boy seemed to almost light up at someone remembering his name, then he remembered who he was speaking to and he immediately looked rightfully nervous.

"Err... Princess Entrapta requests you in the runestone chamber, L-lord Hordak-

"Just Hordak, please."

"Err, Hordak? If you don't mind? I can escort you?"

Hordak sighed, shaking his head.

"I know where it is," he looked the boy up and down, seemed to think for a moment and then invited him in, "have a drink. You look like you're about to die from stress."

The tall alien poured a glass for the young man, ignoring the fact that he was likely not of legal age to do so. Before he had a chance to protest, Hordak shoved the glass into his hands and turned to pour himself another as well.

"To the rebellion," Hordak raised his glass, waiting for the young boy to do the same.

"Uh... yeah. To the rebellion...?"

Hordak took a long sip, watching the young man experimentally taste. The look on his face made Hordak snort in laughter.

"Apologies. I should have warned you. No matter. You will get used to it."

"Um... can I ask you something, Lor- I mean, Hordak?"

Hordak nodded, taking another sip.

"Do you think there's a way to actually... win this?"

That made Hordak choke.

"W-what?!"

The boy studied the liquid in the glass with shockingly intelligent eyes.

"I'm not stupid. I know what a long shot this is. I've seen Prime. If you're scared of him too, then I know we're really doomed. We're going to lose."

Hordak turned away, swirling his drink in the glass. He wanted to yell at the boy. He wanted to be angry. But he couldn't.

"How long have you served me?" Hordak asked, "I honestly can't say."

He could hear Kyle take a long sip behind him before answering.

"My whole life?"

"And how have I never noticed you?"

"Because I'm kind of the worst," he replied with an almost audible shrug.

"No. You are intelligent enough to know when the odds are against you. You were intelligent enough to keep your head low and just watch. That is useful. I was foolish for never noticing."
The boy was silent, sipping the drink nervously.

"Tell me, kyle, how long have you wanted to die?" He turned back to look the boy in the eye and what he saw looking back was honest. Pain.

"Years," Kyle answered softly, looking back down, "how did you know?"

Hordak crossed back over to the boy and pulled his chin back up to look him in the eye.

"Because you didn't sound afraid when you spoke of defeat. You sounded excited."

Hordak let his face go, straightened up and finished his drink. Kyle tilted his head back and emptied his glass as well.

"I am no longer your Lord or your master," Hordak said sternly, "however, I am still your superior in rank. So. If I catch any word of you putting yourself in harms way, -and believe me, I will know-, there will be consequences. For the time being, your job is the same, but when your friend Rogelio-"

"-Boyfriend-" kyle quickly corrected.

"-When your boyfriend Rogelio returns, I will have you both assigned together. You are dismissed."

Kyle set his empty glass down and walked away with the slightest wobble to his step, but not before giving Hordak the smallest of smiles.

It wasn't until the door shut behind him that Hordak sunk into a chair, face in his hands. He knew he needed to go see Entrapta, but not like this. Not with what he knew now.

That boy had wanted to die, end it, because of the life Hordak had forced him to lead. No. Maybe it wasn't all because of that. But he still had a hand in it. He was still responsible. The boy had been his responsibility. And Hordak had failed at every turn.

His hands shook, his body ached. So much. There was so much. So much to do, so much to care for, so much to answer for. He was on the verge of a complete break down.

*What if I can't... fix anything?*
Chapter Summary

Sexy times ahead.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Hordak had to force himself back to his feet. It was more than an hour after Kyle had informed him that his wife needed to see him. He should have felt thrilled. He should be sprinting to her, kissing her feet, grateful. But he was just scared now.

He had to face things he did not want to face. The fact was, he was not much better than his Brother. He had ruined lives, permanently. He'd caused damage, emotionally, physically, that could never be fixed. Maybe Entrapta was finally starting to see that. Maybe she didn't love him anymore.

He certainly couldn't imagine why she loved him to start with. He certainly didn't deserve it.

By the time Hordak finally headed to the runestone, Entrapta had grown impatient. He met her in the stairway as he headed up the tower and she headed down. Eyes met for the first time in what seemed like days. He swallowed, opened his mouth to explain.

She didn't give him the chance. Before he could utter an apology, she took the last few steps down, grabbed him by the collar and yanked him down to meet her lips. Their first real kiss since he'd left on that mission. Their first real kiss since their lives were turned upside down.

And it felt so good.

Her hands were in his hair, on his face. He felt a thrill as her tongue flicked against his lips, demanding entrance. He obliged, his own tongue meeting hers at once. She moaned, pressing herself to him as their mouths danced against each other. Her hands explored and, slowly, he allowed himself to touch her as well.

He traced his fingers up her spine, down her sides, to her hips. Her round belly pressed against him only excited him further. He had a feeling he'd just discovered a new kink. Pregnancy? He never expected to be into it. But here he was.

Suddenly, the Princess pulled away, breathless. He panted with her, burning everywhere. Her magenta eyes flickered down between them, then back to the top of the stairs. His voice was suddenly gone. He felt like he was dreaming. All he could do was nod at the silent suggestion.

No words between them as she pulled her work gloves off and reached out for his hand, leading him up the stairs back to her makeshift lab.

It was happening. Finally. It had been weeks and he was so worked up he wasn't even sure he could last a minute with her. Pathetic.

His head felt light as the door shut behind them, leaving the two alone with Entrapta's limited tools and the giant Brightmoon runestone. Their lips met again as Entrapta pushed him back until his spine.
met the corner of her work bench. He winced, but didn't complain, the pain only fueling his lust.

An animalistic side wanted to grab her by the hips and pound into her until he couldn't stand anymore. It was a side that he ignored. He had control. Enough control to keep his movements gentle, even with the heat in his veins driving him on.

She was less gentle. Once or twice, she yanked on his hair. Oh, she knew exactly what that did to him. The little minx.

With a growl, he lifted her hips and shifted to sit her up on her work desk, scattering tools and plans all over the floor. With her in a dress, it was easy for them both to slide off her panties. They finally parted when Hordak had to fumble with his clothing. He cursed in his native tongue, as they both struggled with the various clasps holding his trousers up. Idiotic Brightmoon clothing, requiring leg coverings. They were so restricting.

Finally, they managed to free his manhood and with her own hands, she quickly guided him to her entrance. He didn't have time to ask permission before she pulled him deep inside her with the back of a leg pressed around his hips.

He let out a sound like a hiss, hunched over her. So good. So tight. So wet. He wasn't imagining this. It wasn't some sex-starved daydream. This was real. She was actually letting him in again.

With a growl, he pulled out, diving back in, then again, and again. Beneath them, the workbench rocked noisily, her voice came out in little gasps. Her now bare fingers began digging into his hips, driving him on, closer to the brink. Quick, messy. And so, so good. He was already so close as it was.

His mouth traveled down her jaw, down her throat, to her neck- She let out a sob and Hordak could not hold back anymore. With a groan, he came hard, holding her tight, lips still pressed to the base of her neck. Her hands were shaking on his shoulders. She sobbed again and this time, when Hordak looked up at her, she was in tears.

The lust drained away to complete horror. He let her go quickly, pulling himself out and quickly fastening his trousers again. Her whole body shook now, her hands clasped her skirt, pulling it back down.

*What have I done?*

"I am... I am so sorry. I should never have..."

She shook her head, silencing him.

"No. I wanted... I *wanted* this. I wanted it. That... that's the difference."

"I still..." he bit his lip, "I could have..."

but she hopped down, reaching her arms around him to hold him tight.

"I love you. It was... so nice," she was weeping, her face buried in his chest, "I... I couldn't stand him being the last one to touch me like this. I wanted you. I *missed* you."

He slowly circled his arms around her also, giving a gentle kiss to the top of her head. Maybe things weren't fixed. Maybe they never would be. But they had a way forward. He would walk with her through this at her own pace. In her own time. In her own way.
Patience. Love.

"Next time, let's take it slow, alright?" He whispered, "no rush. You can tell me what you want. Every time."

"A-alright. I just... had to remind myself that you're not him," she tightened her hold on him, but she didn't sound like she was still crying, "will you... will you just be my lab partner again? Please? I can't run tests without you. It doesn't feel right."

He smiled, genuinely, for what felt like the first time in weeks.

"I never stopped," he mumbled, "I'll always be your lab partner."

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For the next several hours, Hordak worked with her, feeling more at home than he had in weeks.

The first test was promising. Entrapta was testing to see how much power she could siphon from the runestone without unbalancing the others.

"A good start," she was pacing now, "but I'm concerned about the Black Garnet. It's still in the Frightzone and I can't be sure anyone's noticed it or not. If we take too much from it, we might give the enemy ideas."

"A good point. But we can not go back to get it," Hordak sighed, "at some point, we will make its uses known, one way or another. The good news is, we have access to more than just the moonstone. We can see about using the others as well."

"Right," she agreed, settling onto his lap, "I suppose, if nothing else, the runestones we have access to outnumber the garnet. We have the advantage there."

She placed a hand over her stomach, closing her eyes. Hordak sensed a change in her mood immediately. She was always so perky when he let her bounce ideas off him. But not right now.

"Something wrong?" He asked, reaching to lace his long fingers through hers over the round tummy, "baby kicking?"

"No, well, I mean yes. But I just realized, we don't have anywhere to put him when he arrives. We don't exactly plan to make Brightmoon our new home, and we can't go back to the Frightzone, or Dryl..."

"Ah, thinking of where we'll set up the nursery?" He ran his other hand through her hair absently. "With everything that's been happening, I allowed myself to forget about that detail."

"I doubt this war will be done before the baby is born, so we'll probably need to set up here for a while. I can speak to Glimmer- oops! I mean, Queen Glimmer, and see if she's okay with that. But we need basically everything for the baby. Well, almost everything. Bow knit a bonnet for the baby. So. I guess that's one thing?"

Hordak nodded, kissing her cheek.

"We'll figure it out," he promised, "what... does an Etherian infant require? I know almost nothing
about them."

"I'll make a list. To be honest, I require some education in the subject too. It'll be a fun learning experience! Parenthood is apparently very fulfilling, or at least that's what people say! It must be true, otherwise I can't guess why so many Etherians would go through with it. Besides the obvious biological reasons, of course. Either way, we should start thinking about how we're going to make this work."

"...Have you thought about the birth process at all?" He asked after a moment's silence, "I've read that it can be dangerous. It helps to have a plan."

"In case I die?" She seemed to think about it for a long time, then just shrugged, "I'll make a will. But obviously if I die and the baby lives, I hope you continue how you're going right now. Let your friends help you. And just... make sure he has access to all of my research. That's pretty much it."

Hordak squeezed her tight, burying his face in her hair. He didn't like to think about this possibility. He preferred to pretend they would all live a happy life together.

In some day dreams, he built her a charming little cottage somewhere with golden fields and a lake nearby. Of course it would have an extensive underground lab. But he would learn to bake and make her tiny snacks and she would tinker away to build what ever comes to mind. And maybe they could work together to take care of a pretty garden. He always thought he might enjoy gardening in another life. Or maybe he could try painting.

And the children. Plural. They would have more. Ideally, he wanted at least 3, but he would take Entrapta's lead on that one. And they would laugh and learn together. And Etheria would be safe. And they would be peaceful, away from it all. No Horde. No Princess alliance. No First Ones.

Just a happy family. It was a beautiful dream, and he knew he didn't deserve it. But it was his dream regardless.

"I forbid you to die," he mumbled into her hair.

"Forbid me? You couldn't even forbid me from going into your lab," she laughed, "but I promise to do my best."

"Good." That was the best he was going to get."Now, come along. Let's go back. You need to sleep."

No. They may never go back to 'normal', but they could move along anyway. He would deal with his inadequacies another time. For now, he was just happy to be loved.

Chapter End Notes

Honestly, I just missed smut. Not even gunna lie. But also it was time for these two cuties to get close again.

Btw. Yes, I know the powers that be said Hordak would -never- wear pants. But, like, come on. How uncomfortable would the rest of the war council be if he showed up flashing his whole thigh?
Adora hated the crimson waste. When she was here, bad things always happened. She wished Huntara had been around to go with her instead, but Glimmer had already sent her out on another mission. A shame. But at least she had Catra. Catra knew the wastes and she was respected here and she was... A friend?

Adora liked to think so. Glimmer and Bow thought Adora was too forgiving. They weren't wrong. The fact that she'd healed Shadow Weaver and vouched for Hordak and Entrapta was proof enough that she was pretty quick to forgive. So far, it didn't seem like a bad thing though. Despite everything, Shadow Weaver had been a very useful ally to have. Entrapta had given them a good start of a plan.

And even Hordak... well, it was weird, but Adora rather liked Hordak. He was fine when he wasn't screaming at everyone all the time. When they were talking war strategy, they got along really well. He was a lot like her, in some ways. If Shadow Weaver was the mother figure in her life, Hordak was the fun uncle.

"Just over here," Catra shouted, pointing ahead.

Adora followed her extended claw, catching a shape in the distance.

"Wow! That was much easier than last time," Bow panted, running to catch up.

"Can we just grab this thing and go, already?" Lonnie groaned, "I know how you people like to sit and chit chat for days."

"Nobody is going to 'chit chat', okay?" Adora snapped, "but it's getting dark and we should probably at least stop for the night, right?"

Catra didn't respond, but her ears twitched, embarrassed by what was on her mind in that moment.

"Staying the night. Out here. With Adora.

She remembered camping out with Scorpia too. The tension. Back then, she knew what Scorpia wanted from her and back then, before everything, she thought she might want the same.

Now she had no idea what she wanted.

The evening overcame them before they reached Mara's ship. Just as before, they found it stripped of nearly everything useful. But it would work as a outline, if nothing else. Entrapta had shown interest in studying it once they managed to get it back to Brightmoon.

That could take a while, of course. It would have been far easier to just have Entrapta come with them, but in her condition and Hordak hovering protectively around her all the time, there was no choice.

"Alright everyone!" Adora ordered, "Rest up. Tomorrows going to be a hard day!"

Grumbling, the team split off to set up sleeping bags with Catra volunteering for first watch.

She sat, perched on top of the ship. Staring out at the dark desert, watching sand blow in the wind. During the night, it had grown chilly. She shivered, regretting her decision not to bring a blanket up
with her, but too stubborn now to go back down for one.

"You made you choice. Now live with it," she whispered, letting the cold wind whip through the light fur on her body.

"Dont be dramatic, Catra."

Her ears twiched at the sound of Adoras voice as she climbed up the ship to join her. Catra felt her face go warm and she swallowed hard.


"No. But I'm your commander now, so-" she sat down next to her, holding out the edge of her blanket, "I'm responsible for you. You'll be useless if you catch a cold."

The feline stared at the offered blanket, hesitant. Before she could protest, Adora threw it over her.

"So. Are we going to talk about Scorpia, or...?"

Adoras words caught Catra by surprise.

"What about her?" She snapped, pulling her knees to her chest.

"Um, how about how she's in love with you?"

"You're crazy," Catra rolled her eyes, trying to seem as convincingly skeptical as possible. But she knew. She always knew. The Princess wore her heart on her spikey sleeve.

"Everyone knows," Adora continued, "so? Are you two...?"

"What? Dating?" The feline raised a brow, but sighed, looking away, "no."

"I see..." Adora looked away. The silence was awkward now.

"Adora, why are you asking?"

Catra had lost her patience. Adora sighed looking back.

"I want to know where we stand. As... friends."

"Adora, you already know! Why are you dancing around this?!" She snarled, "why don't you just-!"

She felt lips on hers before she could register it. Her hands touched her face, ran through her hair, played with her ears. Oh... her ears. She knew what she was doing.

Catra pulled away quickly with a moan.

"Stop. We can't. I can't. It's not fair to Scorpia."

"I thought you said you and Scoria weren't a thing?" Adora challenged.

"We're not! But I-I need to talk to her. I need to tell her the truth. I owe her that."

Catra was not good at keeping promises. She'd promised Hordak she would speak to Scorpia. Promised twice. Failed twice.

Adora pulled away, smiling as she looked up at the empty sky.
"I'm proud of you," she said suddenly, "you really are growing up."

"Ugh. Stop. I am not!"

----------

"Enraptta, have you eaten today?"

Hordak looked up from the charts he was studying to stare at her.

"I will later," the violet haired princess responded, shoving her welding mask down as she leaned over her work.

"No. Now. You have to take care of yourself and Dawn."

Hordak sighed, crossing the small room to grab the welding tool right out of her hand.

"Come. You've been at this for hours. It is time to take a rest."

She groaned, but stood up, pushing her welding mask back up.

"Fine. A short one. We're nearly out of time."

"Not a chance. It's late and you need sleep. You've made several errors in the past 3 hours. You're hungry, tired and covered in grease. There is always time to take care of yourself."

Hordak smiled a little, but in his heart, he was panicked. She was right. They had so little time. Between assisting his wife in her lab, he was still going to frequent meetings with Glimmer and the rest of her military commanders, presenting plans and hashing out battle details, hoping that things go smoothly. Hoping that a perfect being will make a mistake.

Knowing he'll fail.

Doing it anyway.

They walked back to their room, discussing Enraptas theories all the way back. She never seemed to pause for breath and Hordak found her endlessly charming. He let her prattle on, nodding here and there, interjecting with an opinion when appropriate, but for the most part, he just liked to hear her talk to him again. He had hated when she was quiet. He missed her voice, the excitement, the energy. She was always so alive.

He drew her a bath as she continued to talk his long ears off. She only pause a moment to pull her clothing off to sink under the bubbles. The tub was big enough for two, but Hordak would bathe alone later. He had spent majority of his day in a meeting, after all, so he had not had the opportunity to get dirty in the lab. And she really needed time to be pampered.

"Hold that thought, Princess," he reluctantly interrupted as she was starting on a new tangent, "I'll be back."

He left her soaking in the tub, popped out of the room to request a tray of "the tiniest Etherian food available" from a passing servant, and went back in, chuckling at the look for pure terror the poor woman had given him.
That was when he noticed the eerie silence save for a steady drip drip of liquid hitting the tile.
Hordak knew something was wrong. Something in the air, a scent. Familiar. Foreign. The
uncomfortable silence. Except for that constant drip from the bathroom.

As he approached the door, he sniffed again. What was that smell? Subtle. Under the heavy scent of
soap and cleansing oils, he detected something that brought back memories. Long ago memories.
Old. Something so...

Alien.

He burst through the door, claws out, snarling, ready for the attack. Entrapta stood in the middle of
the room, fluffy white robe covering her nudity, hair dripping onto the tile. She appeared fine. He
almost relaxed. Almost. In the second it took for him to examine her, he realized that she was not
looking at him. She was staring, stricken by something just past him.

And it was too late.

He turned his head to look, but the flash of a weapon gave him only enough time to move himself
into a less fatal path for the attack. Instead of the weapon stabbing through his neck, it got his back.
He gasped, other hand grasping the blade and ripping it back out.

Aided by the armor Entrapta had made him, he was stronger than the young assassin. Yes. Young.
He was certain of it. He still smelled like the cloning fluid. That was the scent. It lingered. Sometimes
for years on the youngest clones after they left the tank.

The assassin swiped their other blade, hordak grabbed that too, fueled by pure adrenaline. With a
roar. He twisted his hands, tearing the weapons from the assassin. They clattered to the tile before he
could try to grab them.

The young clone swiped at him with his claws, catching Hordak across the top of his head as he
ducked. He followed up with another, too fast. Hordak was out of practice. The next caught him
down his face, barely missing his eye, but leaving a deep gash across his brow. Nearly an exact
mirror to the new scar he carried from Prime. He staggered, hissing as deep purple blood trickled into
his eye, blinding him for the moment.

In a rage, he leaped at the clone, claws swiping for any flesh he could find. They rolled together,
slashing, kicking, biting. The only instinct was to kill.

The assassin dug a claw into the wound on his back. That ended it. He was gone. This was how he
would die. He was sure of it. Hordak felt himself go limp as pain overpowered his sense. He was
dead.

Or he would have been, if not for the fierce princess in the room, taking advantage of the clone
assassins momentary distraction. There was a loud crash and the Clone sunk to the floor next to
where Hordak lay.

Entrapta stood over the body, holding the frame of a now shattered mirror that she had snatched from
the wall. Hordak stared at her with one eye open as he pressed a hand to the bloodied one.

"Let me see," Entrapta ordered, kneeling next to him, to help him sit up, "oh good. I thought he got
your eye for a moment. But you're going to need stitches."
She snatched a clean white towel and pressed it to his face, while she examined the wound on his back. He felt so dizzy. Drained. A shiver ran through his body, he swayed. He was losing blood. A lot of it.

"Your wound is bad," she reported quietly, "stay conscious. Please. Don't close your eyes."

He wanted to respond, tell her to forget about him, get away while the assassin is unconscious, but when he looked down, the pool of purple blood made him wonder if the assassin was dead. Also possible. Entrapta was strong, more than she had a right to be, even without her hair magic.

Voices. He could hear voices. Time seemed to slow, skip, speed, shift. He was blacking out, waking up in different places. He saw a series of faces, heard voices he couldn't pinpoint.

And then there was nothing.

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Entrapta was brilliant. She knew it. Everyone knew it.

And now the Horde was going to know it.

She had just defeated death. And it was, indeed, death she had been fighting. What a close battle it had been.

She looked around the makeshift operating room she had set up in the palace infirmary. The floors, the table, the walls, even flecks on the ceiling were purple. The sheer amount of blood he had lost would have killed an Etherian. It should have killed Hordak. But thankfully, they had a donor. And he was guaranteed a perfect blood match.

Entrapta stood in front of a mirror, carefully wiping blood from her face. Even wearing proper surgical garments, she looked as much a crime scene as the rest of the room.

In the corner of the room, the assassin lay conscious, strapped to a cold metal slab. The clone watched her carefully, red eyes never leaving her for an instant. In their arm, a line ran from him to an iv drip, filling their now anemic body with nutrients. Once Hordak awoke, he would be allowed to question them, as nobody else could seem to understand the language they spoke. Until then, it was Entraptas job to keep them alive.

It was not, however, her job to keep them pain free.

The clone was speaking to her now as she pulled her bloodied gloves off and began to scrub down her hands.

"Shhh... no need to fret," she murmured, turning her attentions back to the clone as she pulled fresh gloves on, "I'm not going to kill you."

She leaned over them, studying the face. Yes. This was certainly a Prime clone. The spitting image of her husband, save for the obviously healthy tissue. Just like Prime. It made her eyes narrow. She looked at their wounds. Small, in comparison. But her husband had done damage. Good.

She hovered, then unpacked a clean, fresh scalpel. She watched the clones eyes widen, they spoke
more frantically now and she reached up to place a gag over their mouth.

"Hush. I'm only going to examine you a little. You won't die," her voice then took on a hard edge to it as she pulled a surgical mask up over her mouth, "but I promise you, this will hurt."
Subject H

Entrapta had a curiosity streak a mile long. She once suggested opening her up to see how she ticked and she really was only half joking. But this... this was personal.

Her "subject" lay half conscious under her scalpel. He had stopped trying to struggle free from his bonds and now lay blinking up at her. She was doing well at keeping him alive, but she knew her time to poke and prod was running out.

It would be hard to close him back up, especially now. She had just discovered something interesting.

Hordak was defective. That's what he always said. A defective clone. Entrapta had always assured him that his imperfections made him better. But they were still painful, and they were honestly slowly killing him.

She'd listened to him explain the process, how it started in the chest, a pain, some discoloration.

She had not noticed until she was about to cut. The clone had appeared perfect at first. But as she neared, she noticed speckles, dozens of blue dots, like freckles. It wasn't until she started cutting that the nature of the dots became apparent.

"...you've got it too?" She mumbled, eyebrows raised.

The more she studied, the more familiar this looked.

"Oh, you were in for a world of pain before you even thought about hurting my husband," she mumbled to herself, "Why wouldn't Prime fix the genetic glitch when it was found in Hordak? Why would-?"

She stopped. She looked at the clone, twitching under her fingers. She blinked.

"I'm an idiot," she murmured, stunned, "Emily!! Record!"

Since losing her recorder, she had recently outfitted Emily with the ability to record audio notes for her.

"Brightmoon notes, number 27. I have begun to study subject H. Features are identical to Hordak and Prime. The cloning process is fascinating. Identical in every single way. Every way..." she began to close up her subject carefully as she spoke, "of note, subject H appears to be developing the same disease that effects Hordak. I've noted distinct physical defects to the subjects chest. Skin appears to be developing flaws. I theorize this is how Hordaks condition began. When I opened the subjects chest, I found significant degradation of the tissue just under the skin's surface.

In short... subject H is dying."

She finished stitching her subject back up, checking their vitals.

"I theorize that the 'defect' was a purposeful addition to the cloning process. My studies of Primes DNA show no evidence of this defect, which leads me to believe that two clones developing the same exact condition during the same stages in life can not be a coincidence."
She pulled her gloves and mask off, sat down in a chair at a computer terminal.

"I have several ideas about the purpose of this. From what little I know, the other average clones do not seem to have this same condition. I mean, how could they? If they did, soldiers would be falling all the time, losing battles, dying, wasting resources.
No. My best guess is that not all clones are actually created equal. Is it possible that the ones created to die are the ones Prime creates to lead? I suppose if I was an evil space dictator, I'd be afraid my creations might outlive me too, especially the ones I clone to take up a leadership role..."

She let her voice trail off and Emily stopped recording. She would run this by Hordak if... no. When he woke up. There was no if. There couldn't be an if.
4 days after Entrapta saved his life, Hordak finally awoke.

On day one, Entrapta saved his life by giving him blood from his clone would-be assassin.

On day 2 he developed a fever that threatened to overtake him. Entrapta had once again, swooped in to save him, along with, to everyone's surprise, Shadow Weaver.

On day 3, the fever broke.

Now it was day 4. And Hordak found himself staring up at the ceiling of a very white room, confused.

"You're awake."
The voice was that of Scorpia. He blinked at her, opened his mouth to ask... anything. The only sound he could manage was a weak hiss.

"No, no, no. Don't strain yourself. You're still in bad shape. Entrapta is fine. She took great care of you, but I made sure she still ate and slept and stuff. Shes sleeping right now, actually! Haha!"

Hordak tried to speak again. Another squeak, followed by a hiss of pain.

"I told you to stop that," she sighed, "look. You were stabbed pretty deep in the back. Honestly, Shadow Weaver said you should be dead from all that."

His eyes narrowed as if to say 'what does shadow weaver know?'

"Entrapta was really freaked out. I've never seen her so scared. She... saved you. She was the one who performed the surgery. She did everything. Um, as soon as you're stable enough, Queen Glimmer wants to see you, by the way."

He nodded stiffly, letting his eyes slide shut again. He was tired again. All of this new information. All new injuries to take stock of. New scars to remind him.

One day, he hoped he could point them out to his children. He hoped to cradle one on his lap as they pawed at his face, tracing the deep, jagged lines as he explained what he'd been willing to sacrifice just for the chance to meet them. He wanted to give a story to them. Inspire. He wanted them to think their father was brave. To admire him. To love him.

He drifted off again, dreams of a big family filling his head.

When he awoke once more, Entrapta was the one at his bedside. She leaned over him, carefully adjusting one of the devices attached to his body.

"En... tra..."
That was all he could manage to croak. She looked down, relieved.

"I heard you woke up a few hours ago. I've been stopping by every 30 minutes since then, hoping to catch you awake."

He tried to smile. Every pull of his face brought fresh pain to his new injury across his brow.
"We caught the assassin. Used their blood to save your life. They're fine... eh, relatively speaking. I kept them alive for interrogation and study."

He wanted to shiver. Truly, he had wed a very fearsome Queen. He would probably have been aroused by this talk from her, were it any other time.

"I... found something. While I was studying the assassin. I think you should listen to my log. When you feel better."

Another slow, careful nod was his only response.

"I should let you get some rest. Or I can bring you some soup? I'll put it in tiny bowls? It'll be cute."

Hordak seemed to think for a moment, but he slowly inclined his head. Yes. Soup. Anything. His throat felt so dry.

"Alright! I'll be right back!" She jumped up, and just as she did, she disturbed a lump on the edge of the bed, sleeping peacefully. Imp jerked awake, giving his mistress a grouchy glare as she hurried away.

Hordak jerked a finger up, towards him. Imp blinked and gingerly stepped across the thick white blanket to his master. He looked concerned, even as Hordak ran his bony fingers through Imp's soft feathery hair.

20 minutes later, his wife appeared again with a tray full of a dozen or so tiny soups, bringing back memories of simpler times. He smiled carefully, trying not to wince at the pain that brought him as she sat down with him once again.

She picked up a tiny spoon with her ungloved hands, and brought it to his mouth. Unlike the last time, Hordak responded by opening for a taste.

It was terrible. And yet, Hordak accepted a second bite, a third, a second bowl, a fifth bowl. Imp took a bowl for himself by this point, sipping it like tea. He made a face and abandoned it.

By the time the seventh bowl was empty, Hordak tried speaking once more.

"You... were right. It does make me feel better."

She set the rest aside, leaning in to give him a careful kiss to his forehead.

"I'll make you some any time you want."

"Thank you. With your soup, I will be good as new."

It took two days after that for Hordak to be able to get out of bed. He'd received visitors. Kyle sometimes came by, never for long, only long enough to wish him a speedy recovery. Scorpia was there almost every free moment she had, to the point that Hordak had gotten very good at pretending to be asleep so he could have some alone time. Even Shadow Weaver came by once. Just to sit by his side and reminisce.

And then, of course, there was his wife. She was a busy woman. So much was demanded of her, even more now that he was out of comission. But she always stopped by at the end of a hard work day with soup and a smile.

By the time Hordak was walking again, the crew had returned from the waste with Mara's ship. Adora had come to see him first, offering to heal him with her sword. He'd been tempted, but he was
unsure how it would play with his cybernetics. Catra came a short while after, but she didn't say much. Hordak knew why. And he was disappointed. Before she left, he reminded her to "Talk. To. Scorpia."

Soon, he received his official summons to the meeting and he had no choice but to carefully inch along with a walking stick to the royal council room. When he arrived at last, everyone else had already arrived. He wondered if anyone would dare chide him for being late, but they didn't.

"Thank you for making it, Hordak," Glimmer greeted, "we understand it wasn't easy for you. Your efforts are appreciated."

"My pleasure, your Majesty," he responded politely, moving to sit down with a little hiss of pain. It was not actually his pleasure. He did not want to be here.

"As you all know," Queen Glimmer began, "there has been an attack in my own palace. An Assassination attempt. Failed, yes, but it showed us exactly what our enemy is capable of."

She sighed, leaning against the table.

"Last night, I received word that Thaymor had been attacked. Thankfully, due to the suggestion of our new allies, we had enough foresight to evacuate the area beforehand. Casualties are minimal. That is... all the good news I have."

A hush fell over the gathering. Hordak clutched the arm of the chair tight as he waited for the 'bad news'.

"Prime has made his move. From Thaymore, we suspect his forces will move to the next village, then the next. It appears they are on their way here."

"He is trying to draw out She Ra," Hordak reminded the gathering, "sending out Adora would be a mistake."

"Agreed," Glimmer replied with a nod, "which is why we have decided to put your plans into action. You know the enemy the best. You know what they're capable of."

"What I'm wondering though," Perfuma spoke up, "is if the Horde is so powerful, why don't they just, like, blow us all up?"

"Because they won't waste resources," Adora said before Hordak could. He smiled. Proud. She was learning.

"Correct," Hordak nodded, "minerals, tech, plant life, and the most precious of all, manual labor. Etheria is rich with all of this. It's an ideal world for colonization. It requires little adjustment. No. He wants to cause as little damage as possible. It is... part of why it took me so long."

He glanced around apologetically, knowing that everyone in this room at one time or another, wanted him dead. Some still did. After it was all over, even if they won, he would probably have to go into hiding if he wanted to keep his head.

"You will all receive details of the plan after the meeting," Glimmer said, moving on, "Hordak, I trust by now Entrapta has filled you in on your job?"

"Interrogation? Yes. I am familiar with my task."
"Good," Glimmer nodded, "touch base with Entrapta before you go in. She said she had more information that may assist you."

Hordak was aware. She said she had a recording. Something about a theory he may be able to confirm for her. Important. Vital.

The meeting wrapped up fairly quickly and Hordak left to complete his mission, but not before stopping by Entrapta's "lab" first.

She greeted him with a careful kiss, before moving on to check his wounds once more, tutting softly as she looked at his new flaws on his face.

"You're still handsome," she decided, "imperfections are-

"Beautiful," he laughed lacing his fingers through hers, "yes. I know. Now. What did you need me to hear?"

She kissed the back of his hand and guided him to a seat.

"Emily, play recording."

The bot beeped in response once, then he heard it play Entrapta's voice.

"Brightmoon notes, number 27. I have begun to study subject H..."
Against All Odds

Chapter Summary

Ohhh yeah buddey. You get an OC now.

Hordak sat alone in the infirmary next to a being that shared his face, his blood and now his defects. He watched the clone as they slept, feeling something like pity.

Why? This one had tried to kill him. Almost succeeded. Almost ended everything. And yet... they had no choice. It wasnt until they awoke that Hordak reminded himself of why he was here.

-Traitor. You are the traitor.-

-Yes. I am.- Hordak replied in his native tongue, speaking it for the first time in what felt like forever. Even Prime had elected to speak in the Etherian language. -I am Hordak. I was once The Emperors top general.-

-Not now. You were defective.-

-Yes. Like you.-

The clone struggled now, angry. He shouted.

-we are not anything alike! I am not!-

-You failed to kill me. You were captured. You betray your Emperor simply by not falling in battle. If you return, you will be killed. Without trial. Without mercy. He can make more of you.-

-it is my joy to die by his hand then!-

Hordak sighed, face in his palm.

"Sweet Etheria..." he muttered, "was I ever this brainwashed?"

He glanced down at the clone, that same pity in his eyes again.

-My batch number was MT 1985. What is yours?- 

-...I am ES 1075. I have... not been given a name yet.-

Hordak nodded, understanding.

-This was your test then. I see.-

The clone seemed to shrink in shame.

-I... almost succeeded. I was close to victory.-

-Almost,- Hordak admitted, -the Emperor won't care how close you were. Tell me something... how are you feeling?-
ES snorted, narrowing their eyes.

- The female cut me open. I am in pain. -

- The female is my mate. - Hordak informed, - she found a defect. Your body is deteriorating. Like mine. She suspects it was an... intentional design decision. -

The look on the young clones face was one of horror. Hordak understood. The idea of being designed to be in pain and die seemed beyond comprehension. Even for him.

- She believes there is a way to help. -

The clone snorted again, disgusted.

- Etherian trash! I can get help from Aszi. -

Hordak tilted his head to the side. He wanted to yell at this clone for insulting his wife, but he managed to keep it together.

- Aszi? What is an Aszi? -

- She. The Emperors personal surgeon. -

- ... His daughter? I imagine she is. He wouldnt just let anyone operate on him. How many nieces and nephews I have now... -

The clone looked down, bewildered.

- Why am i telling you everything? I cant seem to keep my thoughts to myself? -

- Yes. That. Well, we have our... ways. -

Hordak smirked and stood up. He was about done here for now. He would pay another visit. With time, perhaps he could convince ES to work for them.

- My mate will study you, - he informed the poor shaking clone, - I will ask that she be more gentle with you this time. If she can find a way, she will heal your condition. I recommend you consider how best to repay her... kindness. Information will be helpful. -

- I will never tell you anything! -

Hordak hesitated at that, wondering if the truth spell had worn off, or if this little clone really was that stubborn.

- Then you will die, little brother, - he replied simply, - one way or another. -

Outside the room, Hordak sunk into a bench. He was in pain. So much pain. Entrapta had given him medication to assist with it, but... well. What was a little more pain? He was used to it. He'd lived with pain for years.

This was... somehow different however. This pain seemed to be deeper. In his very being. He truly missed the days before he considered the lives and feelings of others. It was simpler. He didn't have to feel so hurt all the time.

This hurt. Every time he thought about that recording, Entrapta's theory, he was hurt all over. But if he was being honest. He had suspected. Or at least, he wasn't surprised. It made sense. Part of him
did feel something like relief. It wasn't his fault after all. It was by design. He had survived, despite all odds. Didn't it make him better, in a way, to survive such odds?

But then, he also chastised himself. He was never worth anything to Prime anyway. There wasnt a thing he could have ever done. He was going to be tossed aside one way or another. It was a colassal waste of time. Did he deserve to be forgiven now, after spending so many years blind?

"So...?" The voice of his wife startled him, "sorry! Um. Did it go alright?"

Hordak nodded slowly, staring ahead at nothing.

"He is called ES 1075," Hordak reported, "can you give him something for pain?"

That response seemed to surprise her.

"I mean... I can?" She replied slowly, "but why would I? He tried to kill you."

"It was not his fault," Hordak waved a hand, "he had no choice. Please, Entrapta. He will be more responsive if we show him... empathy."

He saw her eyes go dark. He knew she didnt want to. And he knew why. The clone resembled Prime more than it did him. It had to be hard, seeing his face like that. So vulnerable. So at her mercy. She must be tempted to take her pain out on him.

"Alright," she relented, "but only because you asked."

He sighed in relief.

"Thank you, my dearest," he reached for her hand, kissing the back of it.

"You look exhausted," she noted, "did the pain medication wear off?"

"Mmm... yes," he answered honestly, "but it's nothing unmanageable. How are you though? Is the baby...?"

"He's growing well. Midwife says I'm... ahead of schedule? I found that interesting. I wonder if your species has a shorter gestation period."

Hordak raised a brow ridge at that.

"I honestly wouldn't know. Clones stay in their tubes for many years. What would that mean for you then?"

"It would just mean I give birth sooner."

"S-sooner..." he stuttered, "so we have even less time."

"It's how it appears, yes," she replied, settling down to sit next to him. She grabbed his hand, pulling it to her stomach. He closed his eyes.

"I honestly have no idea if I'm ready."

"Same. But I guess it's too late to change our minds," she gave a breathy little laugh, "are you scared?"

"Me?" He felt a kick, smiled, leaned in to give the spot a gentle kiss, "oh, I am terrified."
"Me too," the Princess ran her hands through his hair, careful to avoid the wound on the side of his head, "I'll walk you back to the room. You need to get more rest."

"Only if you lay with me."

His wife gave him a sad look, shaking her head.

"I can't. I'm sorry. There's so much to do. I need to look at the ship and still try and hack the Brightmoon crystal and then I have to see to our friend in there-" she jerked her head back to the door, "I mean... we have a war to fight, right? When we win, I can rest all I want. Besides... If I can find a way to cure him, I'm sure I can do the same for you!"

Hordak nodded slowly, unsure. All of this was on her. So much. So very much. How could she stand it?

"Entrapta..."

"I've been studying Primes DNA sample. I can use it try to-"

"Entrapta, I am now your last priority, alright? Your first needs to be you and the baby. The second, the crystals. The third, the ship- I will help you with that one myself. And only if we solve our every other problem, may you focus on me."

She... did not like that. Too bad. He watched her face as she considered this. And she knew he was right. She hated it but she could not argue.

"I'll just have to work faster then," she stubbornly replied, "because I won't let you die."

"You are the single most stubborn woman I have ever met," he snorted, "fine. I'll just have to help then."

He stood with a groan, leaning on his cane. "Don't stay up too late," he leaned in to give her a kiss on the top of her head, "come to bed in a few hours. An Etherian brain requires approximately 8 hours of sleep to be functional. Etheria's greatest mind deserves at least that much."

She smiled up at him, standing as well.

"Shall I still walk you to bed?"

"No need, princess. I can manage. The sooner you get back to work, the sooner we can spend some real time together."

There. A compromise. But the instant he was healed, he intended to help her. There was no way he would let his wife take all of it on herself. Not anymore.

"Hordak!" She called to him before he walked away, "you're amazing. You know that, don't you?"

He stopped by the stairs, smiling at her over his shoulder.

"I am... starting to, yes."

*Yes. Despite it all, against all odds, I still live.*
Family Ties

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hordak once more sat beside his clone brother, injecting them with another round of painkillers himself. He had come to the conclusion that the best way to get the clone to work with him was, well, kindness. Building trust. And Entrapta was too unfamiliar, too Alien to him. ES, as Hordak had come to call him, would never trust her. But he may come to trust a Brother.

For a whole week, Hordak visited the recovering clone Assassin every day at the same time. Over the days, he could see cracks forming. Hordak was blunt to them, but conversational, telling him about his every day life, being open about his struggles. And to his surprise, ES listened. Not that they had much choice, being a prisoner, but they added to the conversation, expressing their own feelings and opinions.

Today was a major breakthrough.

-My mate is pregnant,- Hordak said out of the blue, -set to give birth soon. I will have a son. It is... something I could never have had in the Horde.-

The clone was staring at the ceiling, but they clicked in response to assure him they were still listening. Hordak continued.

-I am happy. I was never happy before. Do you know what it is like to be happy?-

-It is my only joy to serve my Emperor.-

The response sounded rehearsed. It was. Hordak recalled saying the same thing once upon a time.

-Tell me something about yourself, ES. something interesting. Something that sets you apart. There has to be something.-

The clone hesitated. Hordak was certain he would not respond. There was no truth spell involved in today's visit. Nothing compelling the clone to answer. But he did.

-I... do not feel like I belong in my body.-

The answer surprised Hordak. He regarded the clone with a look of gentle curiosity.

-...I do not think I will live to see my Emperor again. Even if I did, you were correct to say he would have me killed. Knowing this, I just feel like someone should know my... truth.-

Hordak felt his ears twitch at the word truth. If there was one thing he valued over anything, it was honesty. The truth.

-Explain.-

It wasn't a demand.

-I think of Aszi a lot. I admire her body.-

-Aszi is your niece,- Hordak reminded him harshly.
"I have no sexual urges," the clone growled. "I have no desire to be with her. I want to... be her."

Now Hordak understood. The reason the clone insisted he use neutral pronouns for them.

He had seen this before. In some of his own soldiers here on Etheria. He had assumed it was an Etherian thing. Some had the urge to present as another gender, or both, or neither. Hordak had never objected. It never mattered, as long as they continued their work. All it took was a different check mark on their file.

"I understand," Hordak nodded, "On Etheria, this is considered normal. Acceptable."

"But not in the Horde," the clone seemed to sigh, "I've... never told anyone this before."

"Do you wish me to call you 'she'?"

The clone seemed to think this through for a while. A long while. Hordak feared he had crossed a line. Then he seemed to shrug.

"I do not know. I never thought anyone would understand."

"I will address you however you request," Hordak smiled a little. "We have never had a Sister before. You are one of a kind, ES."

The clone, for the first time that Hordak could see, returned the smile, ears pointed up.

Hordak had just created a bridge.

"Princess Entrapta? Shouldn't you wait for Hordak?"

Entrapta ran her fingers over the hull of Mara's ship as Kyle stood by. The morning sky overhead was clear, beautiful.

"Faaaaascinating!" She whistled in appreciation. "I am going to learn so much from this!"

She heard Kyle sigh.

"Did you even hear what I said, Princess?"

"Yes, I heard you. I could wait, but who knows how long he'll take. If he can make it at all. Besides, Adora is going to be along any moment to help. It'll be just fine!"

As if on cue, the blonde warrior princess jogged up.

"Sorry I'm late!" She panted, "I was on my way and then Catra-" She cuts herself off immediately. The stony glare Entrapta gave her could freeze fire. "Errr... anyway! The ship!"

Entrapta seems to forget her annoyance at once, shifting back to her normal bouncy, excited self.

"Yes! Show me inside! I can't wait!"

Adora complied at once, motioning for the scientist to follow her. For the next hour, Entrapta
explored, measuring, taking notes, testing. Today was about familiarizing herself with the subject.

"Hey, Entrapta? Can I ask you something?"

Entrapta, who had her face very close to a wall panel, looked up at the blonde.

"Sure! You're wondering what these panels are made of too, right? I have a theory! Do you wanna hear it!?"

"Maybe... um, later," Adora crosses her arms, "Look, I was just wondering why you won't forgive Catra? I mean, I was able to forgive Hordak and Shadow Weaver. Can't you do the same?"

Entrapta blinked, her excited grin sliding off her face in seconds. Without a word, she turned away, undoing a clasp at her throat and pulling her top down over her shoulders to show the bright red star shaped scar on her back.

"Catra," she explained, "I thought she was my friend. I saved her. Twice. And this is what she gave me." She pulled her top back up, clasping the front again when she turned around. "I'm allowed to be angry. I almost lost... everything. Don't tell me how to feel, Adora."

Adora swallowed hard, seemed to want to say something, but thought better of it. She nodded.

"You're right," she relented, "I'm sorry. You're absolutely right."

"Of course I am!" Entrapta's voice took on a perky tone again, "now! Hand me my measuring tape!"

Adora handed it to her, but her fingers never grasped it. It fell between them as Entrapta clutched the wall of the ship, looking pained.

"You alright?" Adora asked, "you look...?"

"I'm fine," Entrapta insisted in a tone that left Adora skeptical, "this happens all the time now. Supposedly they're 'practice contractions'. Let's keep..."

She stopped, blinking, then looked down. A wet spot appeared on the front of her dress.

"Oh. I guess it's time."

----------------

The instant Glimmer got the news, she went teleporting all over the palace. He was somewhere. She asked anyone she could find. Shadow weaver said she saw him headed for the runestone. She finally found him just before the stairs.

"Entrapta..." she gasped, startling him and making him actually scream and jump, "baby... time.... now!"

She teleported again and Hordak was left in stunned silence to try to work that one out.

"Wait... wait! B-baby!? Time!? Now!?"
So obviously a lot of things happened.

First,
I hate the idea of a token trans/queer character. So I hope this didn't come off as just me trying to check off boxes. When I began writing ES, I immediately felt they were a woman, despite being a clone. It just felt obvious to me. As someone who has struggled with my own identity, it's kind of a feeling I relate to. That's probably going to annoy some people and I'm totally down for some criticism. Unless its transphobic, then I ignore you.

I also hate the bury your gay trope. So I'm gunna try to avoid that for as long as a fan fic about war and loss will allow me. But people will die because that is simply the nature of things. Sorry, but if you're still reading by this point, you know this isn't all sunshine and rainbows here.

Second,
Forgiving someone who had wronged you is hard and choosing not to forgive at all is super valid too. Things can't always go back to how things were, no matter how much your abuser had changed. Sometimes old friendships just can't recover. Period.

Third,
On a lighter note, IT'S HAPPENING.
ES had been transferred. Taken to a room with far too many cushions. It upset them. Scared them. Comfort, freedom to move, to stretch, to curl up and sleep deeply without care.- all of these things were reserved for better lifeforms. For generals, for Lords. Not some failed clone. ES piled the cushions against the wall, as far from them as possible and settled down on the still too soft carpet.

Where was Brother? They had started to expect- no, look forward to his visits. He almost always turned up around this time. Why was he late?

ES got back up, pacing around the small room. They were going to be executed. That had to be it. Brother had gotten enough out of them and he was going to throw them away now. It was logical. Why keep a defective clone after it had outlived its usefulness?

But then the door opened and Hordak entered, running a hand shakily through his midnight colored hair.

-My mate is in labor.-

The announcement made the clone blink, then chirp.

-A fine day-

-Yes,- Hordak agreed, shakily, -I am... thrilled.-

The clone tilted their head slightly, giving a little questioning click.

-You are not with her now?- 

-No. I was ordered to go get rest. I am told it will be a long while still.-

-You are not resting,- the clone pointed out, sitting on the floor, -You are speaking to me instead. Why?- 

Hordak sighed, going to the pile of cusions at the edge of the room and settling down on them. He would look comfortable if he wasnt trembling so much.

-I... am comforted by hearing my native tongue,- he replied slowly, -etherians have flawed bodies. It is not unheard of to lose mother, child or both in the birthing process.-

-You are afraid?- 

Hordak simply nodded, honest. That took ES by surprise. For a clone to admit they felt fear was for them to admit weakness. Weak was the worst thing they could be.

There was silence, then Hordak sat up, looking the clone over.

-I will be giving my son his name today,- he smiled, -I will name him Dawn. It is the Etherian word for early daybreak. That is something about this planet i really enjoy. They give their offspring names at birth.-

The clone seemed confused. Where was Brother going with this?
-Yes. Most sentient natural born beings in the Universe are given a name at birth. What of it?-

Hordak looked down at the carpet with a smile, running a hand through his hair once again.

-I can not keep calling you by your batch number. You are on Etheria, and Etherians like names. I will give you a name as well.-

ES blinked, then they snorted.

-I do not deserve a name.-

-Everyone deserves a name,- Hordak proclaimed, -let me think. A name. Something like... yes. I think from now on, we will call you Stella. Is that acceptable?- 

-Stella? That means star, yes? There are no stars on this backwards world.-

Hordak shook his head with a knowing glint behind his red eyes.

-There is one now.-

The clone went still. Not a movement in their body, not a hair. Then they broke into a great smile, a grin, a series of excited chirps and then an enthusiastic nod.

-Stella. Yes. I am... Stella.-

----------------------

Entrapta labored comfortably in a suite somewhere in the castle she had never been to. Queen Glimmer had insisted. Entrapta was in too much pain to protest.

She walked around the suite, talking out loud through every contraction, documenting her experiences to Emily. Scorpia waited with her, watching her pace while she attempted to help.

"Can I get you water? Food? Oh! You only eat tiny food, right? I'll go get some! Can't give birth on an empty stomach!"

Entrapta held her hands to her lower back, groaning.

"The pain feels more like a really bad menstrual cramp than I anticipated," she said out loud to Emily, "lasting... about 70 seconds on and occurring every 15 minutes or so."

Scorpia had paused on her way out, unsure of if she should actually leave.

"Uh, is it time? Should I stay now, or-"

"Just go!" Entrapta snapped, "get a midwife. I need to know how long this is going to take. I have a lot of work to do. I can't do this all night!"

Scorpia left rather quickly, leaving Entrapta alone with Emily. She sighed, going to the bed to lay down again. She was so tired already. How was she meant to do this?

"I wish Glimmer had just let me do this in my lab..."
Hordak had left Stella nearly an hour later, only to find Micah waiting just outside. Hordak gave a stiff bow, before moving on, but the previous Brightmoon monarch spoke up before he was out of earshot.

"I was scared too," he said, "when Glimmer was born."

Hordak didn't really know what to say to that, so he simply nodded. This was humiliating, getting this talk. He didn't want to hear it. Not from him. Not now.

"Her birth was hard, even for an immortal woman like Angella."

"If you think this is helping," Hordak hissed, "allow me to inform you that it is not."

Micah sighed.

"Look, what I mean is... it's never easy. But Entrapta is probably the strongest woman I've met. Literally. I think she could give She Ra a run for her money."

Hordak's eyes narrowed, but he gave a little shrug. He was not wrong. In terms of just raw physical strength, his wife was a Goddess, even without her magic hair.

"She will be fine," Hordak agreed, reluctantly, "do you... think I should go see her now?"

Micah gave a smile and a nod.

"I think that would be wise."
Catra paced up in her "room", if she could even call it that. Like many of the Ex FrightZone soldiers, she did not like the large comfortable room offered, electing to stay in a supply closet instead. She knew Lonnie had taken up residence in a little cupboard under the stairway and Kyle and Rogelio stayed together by the kitchens.

This had been an adjustment and she was handling it all very poorly. Now she was avoiding Scorpia. Or Scorpia was avoiding her. She couldn’t be sure, but it had been days since she got back and she had only caught a passing glance at her once.

"She's gettin' ready to lead an attack," Lonnie had told her, "she's real busy. She was second in command after Hordak, so she's taking up a lot of his work right now."

Catra thought back to Hordak, wincing. She’d been avoiding him too. Thankfully, that was easy. The assassination attempt had injured him badly, so when he was not in war meetings or interrogating the prisoner, he was resting. She kept thinking of her promise, the quiet disappointment on his scary alien face when he realized she hadn’t kept it. She preferred when he just yelled and threatened. The disappointment was worse.

"Ugh..." She groaned out loud, "he really is a dad."

The feline stopped her pacing, biting her lip. If the rumors were true, then Entrapta will give birth tonight. That would mean Hordak and Entrapta would be out of commission. That meant Scorpia would be even more busy. And then she’d be leaving with her force. She’d be gone a long time. If she ever came back.

The gravity of what they faced was starting to settle over all of them. Time was running out fast and now with their two best scientists out for medical reasons, it really threw things into misalignment.

She left her tiny closet, running hands through her mane of messy brown fur. She had to find Scorpia. Tonight. One way or another. And she knew just where to go.

She just had to follow Entraptas screams.

--------------

Hordak had been sitting at his wife’s side for hours. So many hours. Too many. Every time the midwife came in to check her, it seemed like nothing was happening. No progress. Nothing. And every time she came in, he noted a little hint of worry on her face.

At one point, Glimmer was on the other side of the door when the midwife came back out and he heard only the tiniest hint of a whisper with his sensitive ears.

"-Child.... in danger-"

The look Glimmer gave him before the door closed made the blood run cold in his veins.

"Entrapta, what are your thoughts on a cesarean?"

His wife gave him a nod in response, glazed eyes focused on one of the many crystals dangling from the ceiling.
"If nothing happens in the next hour, do it."

He thought an hour was too long, but he knew better than to argue with this woman. She always knew more than him in almost every situation. He trusted her to know best here too.

--------

Scorpia sat outside the room, letting the parents-to-be have their privacy. But she was nervous. To kill time, she went over Hordak's battle plans once more, flipping through the detailed file, reading his shockingly neat and feminine hand writing.

Across from her, Bow sat, happily knitting what she assumed to be a tiny shoe. He seemed unbothered by the groans and screams from behind those doors.

When Glimmer arrived with the Midwife, Scorpia gave the scene her full attention. Scorpia knew nothing about childbirth, but this had gone on far too long, right? Glimmer gave her a tiny smile as the midwife went inside, only to appear moments later with a grim expression on her face.

"-Not progressing as we would like," Scorpia managed to overhear, "If we wait much longer, the child's life will be in danger. It might be time to consider other methods-"

They walked away, leaving Scorpia to fret. She turned to look at Bow, who now wore sad eyes, even as he finished one little yellow boot. He'd heard too.

"You have to have faith," he said abruptly, "I believe in Entrapta. Don't you?"

Scorpia bit her lip, closing the file.

"I do, I do," she responded with a sigh, "but still, people die. All the time."

"Not her," Bow shrugged, starting to knit the next little boot, "besides, after everything, do you really think he would let her die?"

The both glanced at the door, cracking a smile.

"He's almost as stubborn as her," Scorpia chuckled, "do you think he'd-"

The words died in her throat as he caught sight of Catra watching her.

"Hey Scorpia," she muttered, looking shy, "can we talk?"

--------

"Well, looks like we're proceeding after all!" The midwife happily proclaimed after one more examination a half hour later, "soon, I think you'll be ready to push!"

Hordak felt his ears fall, but his eyes narrowed. He leaned in to whisper to his wife's pregnant belly in a menacing tone.

"You are behaving very poorly already, little one. Scaring me like that. This is the last time I will allow you to show such disrespect."
For the first time in his life, Hordak lied. And he knew it.
The instant his child was in his arms, Hordak felt his life immediately change. Little eyes opened to
stare up at him. Tiny hands curled into fists. Small face scrunching with discomfort. And then it let
out a shriek that made its father's sensitive ears fall in an attempt to muffle the noise.
In a panic he stuck a knuckle in its tiny mouth and it sucked, going quiet again for the moment.

Next to him, Entrapta slept undisturbed. A well deserved rest. Much needed. After the miracle of
science she'd just made? She deserved so much more.
He smiled at her, proud. She was strong, powerful. If he possessed even half the strength she had just
displayed, he would have taken Etheria on his own ages ago.

"Emily, record," he ordered, rising to his feet cradling the now sleeping babe in his arms. Entrapta
had attempted to log the birth, but from what he witnessed, he had no doubt half the recording would
be a series of screams and curses. He could do at least this for her.

"Dawn log, entry one. At about 10:42 pm, Entrapta finally gave birth at 35 weeks gestation. The
infant's size suggests that the hybrid requires less gestational time than the average Etherian. 20 inches
long. 7 lbs, 8 ounces. Normal weight. Normal length.
Noted features include ears that come to a point. Eyes are similar to Etherian eyes with a color that
appears blueish. Nose is similar to Entrapta's, with small differences. Nasal slits appear higher and the
bridge seems shorter. Skin tone is paler than Entrapta for now. Facial markings light, but visible.
Will report on those with time."

Imp flew by, settling on his shoulders. Hordak smiled, tilting the infant slightly to give him a better
view. Imp sniffed cautiously.

"Hair on the head is thick and black in color. No sign of any movement, or magical characteristics,
although developing the skill will not be ruled out as a possibility. Abilities will be monitored.
Let's see, what else? Ten fingers, ten toes... slight grayish discoloration on finger tips suggesting
possible talon growth. Raised gums, likely to produce fangs... oh! Yes..."

He bent slightly to place a gentle kiss on the baby's head.

"And I love him. Very much."

------------

Glimmer was looking over reports from the front lines. No good news there. She hadn't expected to
win. Not any of these battles, but it still hurt. It was part of the plan, but she was sending people to
die needlessly.
She needed good news.

So when she heard that Entrapta and the baby had survived, it was something worth celebrating. She
had to take them, the little victories, when she could get them.
She teleported to Adora first, who was standing atop the parapet as she had been doing all night.
'Keeping watch', she claimed, but Glimmer knew better. She was trying to clear her head. She knew
exactly what Glimmer knew.
"Adora! Good news! Entrapta had the baby. They're doing fine. You should go see. He's... actually kinda cute."

Adora knew she should have been surprised by her friend popping into being right next to her. Should have been. Wasn't. It was like her brain didn't want to quite register anything right now.

"Hm? Oh. Good. Yeah. In a bit. Gatta keep watching for..."

Glimmer stared out at the darkness with her for a while.

"You want to be out there, don't you?" Glimmer asked quietly, leaning against the stone, "on the front lines. You want to fight."

"Of course I do! I'm She Ra. I'm supposed to be protecting people. And I'm just hanging around here doing nothing."

"But you know Hordak is right. He is trying to draw you out."

"I know, but too much of his plan involves waiting. Every day we wait--"

"I know. I know. I don't like it either, but we still are not in a good position to go head to head. We have to do this smart, Adora," Glimmer sighed crossing her arms. "Honestly, I can't wait to go out there too. When my mom was here, she was always the one staying back. I said I would be a different Queen, you know? I said I would take action. But... someone has to be here for Brightmoon. Someone has to look after the people. That someone just happens to be me now. We need you here too, Adora."

Adora tilted her head slightly, considering her words.

"Yeah... alright. Just..."

"Tell you what? Why don't I send you out again soon? I always need scouts. Would that make you feel better?"

Adora laughed softly at that.
"You know? Actually yeah. It would."

---------------

Dawn was not hungry. He was not dirty. He had just had a good sleep. And yet, despite all of this, he screeched with a furiosity Hordak had not known could come from a being so tiny. Were all infants this loud? He held the baby against his chest, patting him lightly on the back as he desperately shushed him.

"Shh! Shh! Your mother is still sleeping! You are the newest lifeform here. You can not just start making demands. There is a chain of command to follow!"

The infant screamed louder. Poor Bow had put down his knitting to clasp his hands over his ears.

"I, uh, don't think that is normal," he shouted over the wail. Hordak gave him a glare that could cut steel. "Err!!! I mean the volume! It's too loud!"

"All babies are loud!" Hordak shouted back, gritting his teeth against the ear splitting howl, "He is a normal newborn! But how do you make a normal newborn stop!?"
"I don't know! Did you try singing?"

Hordak scoffed at the suggestion. "I am an evil alien dictator from space! In what absurd dimension do you think I would ever sing?"

"Well you have to try something! My ear drums are going to bleed!"

In desperation, Hordak did something he never did in front of others. Something that was reserved for his own kind. Something... deeply personal.

He chirped. Slow, gentle, holding the baby close, safe, secure. He ran his talons through his feather soft hair, nuzzled his tiny cheek. A silence fell over the pair, the floppy infant opened his large storm-colored eyes to stare at his father.

Hordak did not stop until the infant had fallen asleep on his shoulder. It was only then that he noticed two things. One, Bow had vanished, leaving two tiny booties on a chair for them. And two, Entrapta had appeared at the doorway, smiling.

"You should still be in bed," he reminded her gently, "you have to rest and heal."

"I'm fine," she seemed to wave it off, but winced slightly when she moved, "I just need more ice. You say you want more kids, but after that, you are not going to want to go anywhere near this for a long time. Trust me."

Hordak snorted softly, moving towards the door and his wife. He leaned in to give her a kiss to the forehead.

"I will give you time," he promised, voice low, "but I won't stop longing for you. Tell me when you're ready, and I will come begging."

She snickered as she went back inside. He watched her slight waddle, wincing. Yes. He imagined it would hurt. Truly, females were fierce. He wondered why Prime seemed to respect them so little, if it was strength he appreciated.

He settled into the bed with her, cradling their son between them. His wife ran her hands through the child's hair, smiling dreamily. He watched her, feeling a peace he had never truly known. A love he could not quite quantify. A gratitude without measure.

"Thank you," he whispered, reaching to touch her face, "you've given me something precious."

She smiled sleepily at that, tilting her head to kiss his hand. Everything had suddenly fallen into place. For all he cared, the world could melt away outside of this room. Here he had everything he could have ever wanted. Here there was no war, no death, no illness. Here was only love and life, new, beautiful, precious life. Here was a moment to be treasured forever. Here was family.

"This..." he whispered, nuzzling his sleeping son's head, "Oh, this is perfection."
Miracle

Hordak once more sat in on another meeting in Brightmoons council chambers. Another important battle strategy to discuss. His wounds were mostly healed by now. Or at least healed enough for him to ignore. The pain in his back would likely remain until his dying day, but that was just another price to pay for...

*Perfection.*

A tiny babe slept in a sling Hordak wore around his torso. Entrapta had designed it for him, since Hordak now insisted on taking the child absolutely everywhere. This was a proud moment for him. Not only was it undeniable proof that he *had*, in fact, successfully mated, he had also somehow managed to create something that was, by Etherian standards, "cute".

Hordak shuffled his notes, unaware that every single eye in the war meeting was on him, until he glanced up. He blinked. They all blinked back.

Glimmer sighed.

"You brought the baby."

It wasn't a question. Hordak simply nodded. "Yes, of course. What else would I do?"

"Leave him with Entrapta? Or anyone else?"

Hordak placed a protective hand on his son's head.

"Entrapta has too much work to do and if you think I am leaving my son in the care of some random Etherian, you are out of your head."

Glimmer blinked and groaned. The gathering of Princesses seemed to be absolutely glowing with joy.

"Ugh! Fine. Show off the baby. I know that's the real reason you brought him."

And with the Queen's permission, Hordak found himself surrounded. All eyes were on the tiny lifeform cradled against his chest. They asked questions and Hordak answered softly with pride, flashing sharp red teeth. He took joy in his son, and he took joy in pointing out the features that resembled him.

"See his little ears?" He pointed out to Frosta, "He is going to have fantastic hearing. A real little predator!"

"Oh! Look at his tiny claws!" Perfuma pointed out, reaching. Hordak eyed her hand with a snarl, but nodded when he realized she had no means of harming him. With a meek smile, she touched his hand, grinning as he wrapped his tiny chubby hand around her finger.

"Out. Of. My. Way," Mermista snapped, pushing her way to the front, "I bet it's not even that..."

The baby yawned, opening one eye. She was done for. Her face went a strange shade of crimson and she slowly backed up.

"Oh no. He *is* cute. Ugh!"
Dawn stared at the faces clustered around, but he really focused on Glimmer. Hordak suspected it was all the sparkles catching his attention. Regardless, the baby soon began to whine and Hordak reached onto a bag at his feet for a strange bottle.

"Excuse me, Princesses," he said politely, "my son is hungry."

He pulled the baby from his sling and, while carefully cradling his head, stuck the nipple of the bottle into his mouth.

"You feed him too?" Spinerella cooed, "that is so sweet!"

"Of course I feed him," Hordak dead panned, "do Etherians just let their infants go hungry?"

"Well, no, but, like? It's you!" Perfuma added, "it's still so..."

"Sureaual," Mermista monotoned.

Hordak blinked, watching his son hungrily suck at the bottle, finding himself chirping without intending to. He cleared his throat, hoping nobody had noticed.

"Y-yes. It is," he agreed, "and yet, nothing has ever felt more correct."

------------

He was glad when the meeting wrapped up. Mercifully short and to the point. He had even allowed Queen Glimmer to hold his son while he gave his presentation. It was what he considered proof that he trusted her. A sign of friendship. After all, not everyone was allowed to touch his perfect son.

On the way to the lab, Hordak spotted Catra, leaning against a wall. She looked up, eyed the baby and looked away. Hordak found her reaction confusing. He had grown used to people fawning over his son.

"I spoke to Scorpia," she reported, "so. You're welcome."

Hordak paused on his way past, looking back at her.

"Good. Thank you."

"She is leaving soon. Headed for the front lines. Did you assign her there?"

Hordak looked stunned.

"No. I would not have sent my second to the front lines. There has been an error that needs to be rectified immediately."

"... send me instead of her, if someone has to go. Please."

Hordak crossed the hall to stand directly in front of her.

"Request denied," he replied flatly, "why do you all want to die so badly?"

"You have a bunch of teenagers fighting a war for the fate of a planet and you're surprised by
"angst?" she snapped immediately, "look. I want to do something worthwhile. It's not fair that after everything I did I get to just sit comfortably while everyone else fights for me."

Hordak honestly understood that. He felt the same. But was Catra honestly feeling guilt? Huh.

"...I will see what I have for you," he relented, just before Dawn began to stir in his sling. Hordak sighed chirping at the baby to calm him down. He was so tired. "I should take him to see his mother now. I will have orders for you soon."

Catra watched him with a sly smile as her former Lord tucked one taloned hand into the palm of a sleeping baby. The image was too funny. Here she had the intimidating figure that she had feared for years carrying a baby in a sling, feeding it, playing with it, snuggling it. She thought Imp was bad enough. Now he had an actual helpless infant that he was fawning over.

"Yes sir, Lord HorDad."

She gave him a stiff salute, before walking off snickering.

----------

Entrapta worked tirelessly. She was grateful that Hordak took the baby as often as he did, otherwise she really didn't see herself finishing any of her work, let alone all of it. As it was, she wasn't convinced she could do it all. But at least she had one thing pretty well nailed down.

Brightmoons runestone had fascinated her. It had been what she really threw herself into, the giant piece of first ones tech was a mystery that she knew she could crack with time and patience. Still, she knew how to use it, even if she didn't quite understand the ins and outs of how it had been made. That was enough of a start to make her feel better about the war effort.

As she checked her data again, a piece of her hair twitched up and to the side to wrap around a warm beverage sitting on her desk. Slowly, she was beginning to get some control over her powers again. After all this time, she still could not be certain if it had been the act of cutting her hair that had made her lose control, or if it was trauma related. Still, it was just another piece of her life that she had taken back. Mostly.

She reached out to take the cup into her gloved hands, still not entirely trusting her hair to hold steady. That was when she noticed that Hordak had arrived carrying their little bundle of joy on his chest.

"Your hair," he excitedly pointed out, "it's moving again!"

Entrapta tucked a lock behind her ear as her loose strands waved around her.

"Yeah. It took some time, but I think I can regain nearly full function within the next 6 months, considering the loss of reach, of course," she set her cup down then stood from her terminal and crossed the room to take her son from her husband. "Before I forget, I have an update on the ship. I took inventory with Adora and, using the info I gathered from your old files, I was able to come up with a repair plan. I have Bow down there right now making final preparations."

Hordak took a seat at his own work station as his wife began to nurse their son.
"Good progress. Reading your notes, it seems you've about figured out the Runestones," he complemented. As he read, his voice went quiet, full of wonder. "incredible. You amaze me."

"That's what a few good all nighters will do," she laughed softly as her son lazily suckled, "so that means we're almost ready. How are you feeling now?"

"In pain," he answered honestly, "even with the armor. The wound Stella gave me."

"Stella?"

"The clone," Hordak explained, vaguely, waving it off, "the wound isn't likely to heal any time soon. And I think... I think I'm getting worse."

Entrapta went quiet. He understood why. She knew he was dying. He knew he was dying. And for the most part, neither of them spoke about it, preferring to pretend it was not a fact. But it was. And now they had no choice but to face that fact.

"Hordak, you told me not to focus on you, but..."

"The war effort has to take priority. But you have me to help you now. We will win together. And then..." he looked up at her, forcing a hopeful smile, "and then we take that trip to the beach!"

Entrapta wanted to smile. She wanted to believe it, start picking out beachwear, decide on which beach themed experiments to conduct, pack a towel and tiny beach snacks. She wanted nothing more than to know in her heart that they would have that happy ending.

But Entrapta had too scientific a mind to allow herself to believe in miracles. And if they continued not treating him, it really would be a miracle if he lived.
"I want to take Dawn when I go see Stella today. Is that... acceptable?" Hordak cautiously asked Entrapta over a quick lunch break in the lab.

She dropped the tiny tea sandwich she had been about to eat, blinking.

"You what now?"

Hordak sighed. He had expected this reaction. Entrapta was not quick to forgive anymore. He didn't exactly blame her. There was a time when he could see her even forgiving Catra with time. But after everything she had gone through, the traumas, the horror she had to live through, the scars she carried, Hordak understood.

"Stella is like me," he explained for what felt like the 20th time, "She is the product of Prime. I know you don't want to forgive her, but it wasn't her fault. If she did not do as she was ordered, she would have been killed and replaced by someone else who could do the job."

Entrapta sighed and set her plate aside, hardly touching a single item on it.

"She tried to kill you, and you want to take your son into a sealed room with her?"

He winced. When she put it like that, it sounded insane.

"Listen, Entrapta. She has been with us for months. She is not a monster. Besides, you said her chip was non-functional, right? For the first time, she is living the way she wants. She is happy. I am confident that she is trustworthy."

Entrapta made a face and stood up, grabbing her plate.

"...I'm suddenly not very hungry," she murmured, "I'm going to go check the progress on the ship."

"Entrapta please don't leave. Just talk to me," he begged, getting up to go after her.

"If she's on our side, why hasn't she given us any information?" Entrapta demanded, rounding on him, "you visit her every day and you talk and laugh, but you never get information from her! People are fighting out there. Dying, Hordak. We came here to help save Etheria and now I'm not even sure you want to do that!"

"Entrapta!" His voice was louder than he intended and he quickly lowered his volume, reeling in his temper with some effort, "you have to understand. Stella does not know anyone here. She is still afraid. You -please don't take this the wrong way- did not leave a positive first impression."

"I did that for you," she snapped, but she was blushing, shamed.

"I know, love," he reached for her hand, "I know. But none of this is Stella's fault. She has been helpful in other ways. She has given me information about the power structure within the Horde. I've already passed that off to the Queen. See? She is slowly coming around."

Entrapta shook her head, but laced her fingers through his.

"She... has helped you too," she noted sadly, "In ways I can't."

"She has," he admitted, reluctantly, bending to rest his forehead against hers, "it is... nice to interact
with one of my own kind. I was the only one here for the longest time, Entrapta. You have to know how lonely that was for me. I was... homesick."

"I know. I know," she relented with a deep sigh, gently nuzzling her nose against his, "if... if I can be there as well, you may take Dawn. And I get to have a stun baton. Just in case."

"Entrapta!" He squeaked in surprise, pulling away slightly to gawk at her.

"Those are my conditions."

"...Accepted."

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Stella had grown used to these conditions. Occasionally, when she was in an especially adventurous mood, she would actually lay on a cushion. Oh, it felt so nice! It made her wonder what it would be like to do so every night. She even allowed herself to imagine sleeping on a real bed. All she had ever known were the hard cots in the Hordes assigned barracks.

That was not the best part though. Sure, she was a prisoner, but she was more free than she had ever been in her relatively short life. She had choices, options. She could be who she knew she was deep down without fear of punishment, without shame, without pain. And she had a big brother, a... friend. Who seemed to actually care about her, who asked her thoughts and ideas, who honestly wanted her happiness.

She looked forward to his visits. His lessons were a thrilling part of the day. She learned a new Etherian word a day and treasured them. She was even given garments from this strange country, feminine ones, from what she could tell. They fit a little short, but it was the thought that mattered.

She watched the planets strange sky from the rooms tiny window waiting for him to visit again. When he did. She was ready with a smile.

"Brother!" She greeted in Etherian common, eager to use her new words, before slipping into the familiar tongue of their people, -you were missed!-

It was at this point that she got a good look at what he carried, a bundle of blankets and a sleeping child nestled against his chest. Stella stared in absolute wonder. So enchanted she was, that she entirely missed the other figure standing aside in the room with them.

"Stella," Hordak greeted in Common, "this is Dawn." -my son.-

-Meeting you at last brings endless joy, little Nephew.- she eyed the babe with wide, excited eyes.
-never have I seen a baby. Do all start so small?-

Hordak smiled, looking down at the tiny life drooling against his chest.

"Yes," he replied with a little chuckle, before turning his attention to the woman standing in the corner with her welding mask over her face, metal armor on her torso, and a stun rod resting comfortably, almost lazily at her side. -Stella. This is my mate. Entrapta.-

As soon as Entrapta heard her name from the impossible language they spoke, she stepped into better
light, lifting her welding mask with one hand.

"Hi. Sorry for, uh, forgetting to use anesthetic."

Stella looked at Hordak expectantly, waiting for a translation. This other woman, his mate, scared her. Made her nervous. True, she had broken into their bedroom and forced her out of the tub at knife point before almost killing her mate, but she was still allowed to be scared of the scientist. That woman was truly a force of nature.

Hordak sighed and translated;

-She is greeting you and states that she regrets not using a numbing solution on you last time.-

Stella bit her lip slightly, nodded to the woman stiffly, before turning her attentions once again to the babe.

-Tell her I am also... regretful,- the clone murmured, -I do not know the word for it in her language.-

"She says she's also sorry," Hordak translated quickly, "now, can we all play nice?"

He looked from Entrapta to Stella.

-Will you be polite?-  

Both women nodded, but stayed a distance away. Stella sat on the floor and Hordak sat with her, holding his son close. Cautiously, the clone reached out, chirping with delight as the babe grasped her finger.

-Stella, are you ready for another lesson?-  

The clone nodded enthusiastically.

"I am happy to l...learn."

her Common was stilted and sounded odd still, but Entrapta couldn't help but perk up immediately.  

"Oh! You've been teaching her! That explains what you do every day!" She laughed, "she's doing great!"

Stella beamed with pride. She understood just enough of that to know it was a compliment. Hordak held the child out slightly, wincing as the babe opened one eye for only a moment before falling back to sleep.

-This is a- he spoke the word clearly and carefully, "Baby. He is a baby."

"Baby," she repeated confidently, "He is... baby."

Entrapta sat on the floor as well, elbows on her knees, chin in her hands. She had abandoned her stun rod, forgetting quickly her anger. Now she was smiling, enchanted.

"Good," Hordak replied, proud, "you are learning fast."

"Th...thank you."

For the next two hours, they sat there in that room, teaching, and when they all grew weary of that, Entrapta spoke to the clone herself with Hordak translating mostly. It was during this that Stella
finally made a real decision. She sat, touching the hand of Dawn, tracing his tiny folds, amazed. Yes. She knew what to do now. She would do it for him. Because he deserved to know his home. Because he deserved a childhood.

"Brother. I want... help you," she proclaimed, thinking a moment before continuing in her native tongue, *I will tell you want you want to know. All of it.*
"Your Majesty."

Glimmer looked up from the map she had been examining with tired eyes. The Horde was moving. Fast, but not how she had predicted. They moved slow but steady... away from Brightmoon. She supposed they had caught on to their strategy and adjusted.

It didn't matter. They would go to Brightmoon eventually.

"Hordak," she greeted, rubbing sleeplessness from her eyes, "and Dawn. You need something?"

Hordak dipped into the smallest of bows, just enough to show respect, before holding out a series of notes scribbled in Entraptas wild writing.

"She told us everything, Stella," he announced, "Prime, his plans, even where his ship is. She is on our side."

Glimmer narrowed her eyes at the notes, flipping page after page excitedly.

"And you trust her?"

"With my life," he replied confidently.

"Not good enough. You don't put much value in your life."


Glimmer glanced up from the notes, then gave a stiff nod.

"You did what I asked you to do." Glimmer set the notes down beside the map, smiling. "With this information, we may actually stand a chance after all."

"I have other good news," he added, "Entrapta has figured out the weapon. Her and Adora are preparing the final test as we speak, but she is confident that she has worked out all the details. Repairs on the ship are under way as well."

Glimmer sunk into her chair, for the first time in Hordak's presence, she looked relaxed. Eyes closed, she reached out her hands and flexed her fingers. For a moment, Hordak awkwardly wondered if she was asking for a hug. That was something he would not be doing.

"Baby. Gimmy. I need Dawn snuggles."

Hordak felt a wave of parental fear wash over him. In some ways, he was still not comfortable allowing others to touch his son, but he relented with a soft chuckle. This was Glimmer. If he trusted her enough to actually sleep under her roof, he trusted her enough not to harm a baby. He pulled the still very young hybrid from his sling and passed him off the the Queen.

"Ah... that's better," she sighed, tucking the baby against her cheek, "why do they always smell so good?"

"Not always," Hordak murmured.

"I wanted to discuss something with you," she continued as if Hordak had said nothing, "after the war, if we win."
"When we win," he corrected quickly.
"...Right. When," she continued, "where are you and Entrapta going to go? What are you going to do? Frightzone? Dryl? How do we create a successful alliance after the war? How do I assure my people you won't go back to trying to conquer Etheria?"

Hordak actually was speechless for a moment. Of all the things he had thought of, all the eventualities, he had never thought to consider after. A future. A realistic one, not a daydream.

"I... am not sure," he replied carefully, "I suppose... I suppose I could surrender the Frightzone to Brightmoon, a... peace offering? Dryl is not mine to bargain with, so Entrapta will need to decide on that."

"The Frightzone..." she murmured, "it might be enough. Are you sure?"

"Yes. Have it," he waved a hand, "I do not want it."

"Well? What do you want?" She asked, nuzzling the baby as he wrapped his chubby fingers through her hair.

"I want... to live with my family. In peace," he answered truthfully, "Is that possible? Can we do that? When all is said and done?"

Glimmer placed a gentle kiss on the baby's head, wincing only slightly as he tugged a lock of sparkling pink hair.

"I am Queen of Brightmoon," she stated with a shrug, "what I say in my realm, goes. If I say you and Entrapta are free to live your lives without punishment, that's how it'll be. If nothing else, while you stay in my kingdom, you're safe."

He was stunned. Freedom. He had freedom. Honest, true freedom to do as he wished, live how he wanted with his loved ones. In all his life, freedom was a luxury he knew he would never have. And now, after it all, after having choices made for him before he ever left the tube, he could decide.

He knelt in front of the sparkling pink Queen, eyes on the floor.

"Your Majesty, I am... in your debt."

A strange sputter made Hordak look up in surprise just in time to see Glimmer burst out laughing.

"The terrifying Lord Hordak! In my debt!" She laughed, "am I dreaming!? This is unreal."

"Y-you don't have to make fun of me!"

"Sorry. Sorry!" She wiped a tear still giggling, "what I'm trying to say is, politics are hard. There is a lot I don't get and a lot of parts to look after. You have experience and I could always use the advice. If you and Entrapta don't have anything else you'd rather do, I could use you both here. I could offer you a position, a job. You could be my advisor and Entrapta could be my lead science expert. It's not a bad gig, considering a year ago you were trying to kill us."

He rose to his feet, looking her in the eye with absolute wonder.

"It is... tempting," he admitted, his head absolutely swimming, "I shall speak to my wife. You are a fair and just ruler. Your mother would be... proud."

The look Glimmer gave him when he spoke of her mother could cut diamond. It almost made him
regret saying it. Almost. Soon enough her face softened.

"Thank you. I hope so."

She ran fingers through the baby's hair, smiling. Hordak watched. He couldn't seem to look away. Why were all of her sparkles so... bright? And the room. Was it always so slanted. He blinked, one hand going up to touched his temples. Everything felt too bright and yet muted. Fuzzy.

He swayed. Glimmer had jumped to her feet. The last thing he saw before hitting the floor was the Queen and his son resting in her arms.
"His condition is deteriorating quickly. The likelihood of his surviving the year is..."

"That's all? There's nothing you can do? What about Primes DNA?"

"I may have waited too long. He doesn't just need a cure. He will require treatment for the rest of his life. If I had access to the lab in the Frightzone or even Dryl, the prognosis may be different, but here, I can't say with certainty that I'll be able to help."

"Entrapta, you can't give up!"

Hordak was drifting in and out of consciousness. Every so often, he heard voices. Sometimes he could even identify them, even if it was often hard to figure out what they're saying.

"I'm not just giving up! I'm being realistic! I can't... I can't fix him like this! I need better technology!"

"Well then," this voice was unmistakably Glimmer, "I guess it's time to make our move. The FrightZone is absolutely off the table. But Dryl? Maybe we can make a case for that. I'll call the council."

Hordak opened his eyes at last 3 hours later. Only brief snippets of conversation could be remembered, but what little he did remember were upsetting at best.

"You're awake," Entrapta noted, watching a screen, "I've been tracking your brain wave fluctuations. You've been in and out of consciousness for 14 hours now."

"How bad is it?" He asked, always direct when it came to his condition. There was no need to pretend anything anymore. He knew he was dying.

"Bad," she replied immediately, "if you keep going without treatment, you are 60% likely to die sometime in the next 10 months or so. There is a 20% chance you won't even make it 5 months."

He let out a low curse in his native tongue, staring up at the ceiling of their tiny makeshift lab.

"Options?"

"Well, I think I have a pretty good grasp on how to treat the cause at its source. But it's complicated. I'll need to run tests and I need more time to do that. We could also attempt to clone another body. With the originals unaltered DNA, I could make an attempt at that. But that takes time that I'm not sure we have. And even if we did, I don't think I have the technology to transfer your consciousness to another body. And then there is the ethics of it to consider."

"I think cloning should be stricken from the board as an option," he sighed, "It is simply not doable."

His wife nodded gravely, moving on swiftly.

"I was thinking the same thing. But in order to properly treat you, I need better equipment. And the only place that has what I need is-"

"The Frightzone," he completed for her, sighing.
"Or Dryl," she added quietly.

"Both are too risky. What are our other options?"

Entrapta pushed off from her computer terminal, wheeled chair sliding across the floor to sit right next to where he lay. Now that he could see her face, it was transparently clear that she had just finished crying.

"Other options?" Her voice cracked, and she pulled her welding mask down, "we make you as comfortable as we can, say our goodbyes, hope its painless."

His eyes widened, he lifted a hand, looked it over. He hadn't noticed until now, but he was thinner than ever, the decay had traveled in long veins all the way up his arms now. No wonder he had been feeling weak, even with Entraptas armor. No wonder he was just surviving each battle he fought.

"Entrapta, I will not let you do what you're thinking."

"Let me!?" She snapped, "let's get one thing straight- you do not tell me what I can and can not do. Besides, Glimmer already gave us the go ahead for Dryl."

"What?!" He forced himself to sit up now, swaying as the world came into immediate sharp focus. He groaned, hand on his forehead.

"You sat up too quickly. You're going to hurt yourself," she sighed, placing a shaking hand to his shoulder to push him back down, "there is no point in fighting it. The best thing you can do it work with us. It will make things go so much smoother."

"But."

"Not another sound. Get some more rest. I'm bringing you soup. You can get up if you finish a whole serving."

He stared up at the ceiling once more, spotting Imp hanging by a pipe, watching him. There was worry on that small face.

Great. Even he knows.

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Entrapta did not immediately go get soup. Yes, that was on her list, but she had a stop to make first.

Stella had been gifted another garment from the Brightmoon Queen herself. A "thank you" gift. Stella had been thrilled. She found she rather enjoyed her new "freedom" here. She could express herself in ways she could never have imagined. Draping herself in flowy garments was just one of them.

She turned this way and that, examining the way the soft, light fabric puffed off her toned shoulders, the way the sash sparkled as it hung across her torso, the airy, slitted pants, pointed shoes. She felt, for the first time, beautiful. She had even been gifted a star shaped ear cuff.
Jewelry had been non-existent in the Horde, of course. A waste of precious resources. But Stella had seen ornaments like this worn by countless conquered peoples during his time in the field.

It wasn't just the clothes. She was just thrilled to be addressed correctly. In the Horde, every time she had been called "he", they felt a little bit of them die. But here, nobody had made the mistake. And she was so... happy.

The door opened and Stella excitedly turned to greet her Brother and show the Queens gift. But it wasn't him. His mate closed the door behind her. When she turned, Stella blinked. Her eyes were so wet. Why?

"Hello, En...trapta, you visit?" She greeted, slowly, careful of her words, "Brother is... away?"

Entrapta sighed, shaking her head.

"Hordak is dying," she announced, bluntly, "same as you."

Stella blinked, taking a long time to put the words together, to translate. Without Hordak, this would be hard.

"We... help?"

Entrapta nodded, wringing her hands.

"You can help, yes," she replied slowly, "but it might be, um, dangerous."

"Stella is warrior," the clone replied as soon as she understood, "no fear."

Entrapta bit her lip, looking the poor clone up and down. She didn't seem afraid of her anymore. A shame. Life would be better for her if she was.

"It'll hurt," Entrapta explained, "I will cut you again."

"Yes. Do. Help Brother."

The reply was so fast, Entrapta was not sure she was listening anymore. It didn't matter. Entrapta wasn't exactly asking permission.

"Alright. Tonight. I dont have time to wait."
"Alright, Emily, record."

Entrapta hovered over the now unconscious clone, scalpel in hand to reopen the incision that was now mostly healed. In the end, Stella had understood. She had enthusiastically agreed to one more operation, one more gift to her Brother.

There were some organs that, similarly to Etherians, their kind had been gifted an extra one of. Of course, taking this was temporary. All it would do was buy him an extra few months. Just enough time to get to Dryl. Just enough time to treat him properly, more permanently. Just enough time. But really, that was all they needed.

Time. That was what this was all about. Capturing time, saving it. Securing a tomorrow for their little family. Because Entrapta had worked too hard to let this end yet.

"Subject H... no. Stella. Stella has been cooperative. I gave her a good sedative. During the procedure, she should be unconscious. Recovery time will be noted in future logs. Alright. Making the first incision now..."

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Hordak watched the procedure from the other side of a window. He sat in a chair with wheels that Entrapta could push him around in. Walking half quickly become too difficult for him. In his ports, he had wires and tubes, assisting his body by carrying out tasks failed organs could no longer do.

He shivered, even under a thick robe and blanket. He never wanted to get this bad. He knew he would eventually. Of course he knew. But there had been some hope that he would either find some way to fix it or die before then. And now here he was, on the edge of death, just as he had finally obtained the happiness he had wanted for so long.

His eyes swept the scene as his wife removed a purplish hunk of matter from the other clone. Stella. He had known her for a short time, but in that time, he had begun to love her like a Sister, truly care for her. The fact that she had agreed to this so readily, despite her own failing health, told him everything he needed to know of how she regarded him. It was unnatural for clones to form bonds like true family, but then, they were both defective, after all.

"Hordak, I brought Dawn for you," Bows voice shook him from his daze.

The boy smiled at him from the edge of the room, carrying the baby in his arms. Hordak narrowed his eyes. He had dressed him in some knitted jumper with a matching yellow bonnet and booties. Well. At least he would be warm.

"Closer," Hordak ordered, reaching a thin hand to the boy, "let me see him. Properly."

Hordak could not hold him. Even if he were not covered in wires and tubes, he was too weak for that. Not being able to just wrap his arms around his baby, to nuzzle him, make him safe and warm, that hurt worse than dying. Bow leaned in with him, and Hordak ran the back of his claw down the baby's cheek, chirping softly, reassuringly.
"I am not leaving you," he told the baby sternly, "not yet. I refuse. You will grow strong and I will be there every step of the way. I must."

The baby yawned and then, to Hordak's utter delight, chirped. The face the father made at hearing his sons first vocalization that was not screaming, was one of shocked pride. He made a note to inform Entrapta after this so she could add this development to her log notes.

He has vocal cords like ours, he noted to himself, that means I can teach him our language!

The excitement sent his body into another spasm, followed by a series of coughs. Bow pulled the now scared and crying infant away, bringing him to his chest. Hordak fought the attack on his body as well as he could, bringing a handkerchief to his mouth. When it finally ceased, he pulled away a cloth stained purple with blood.

He quickly looked at Bow ears flat against his head, hoping he hadn't noticed. He did. Of course he did. Hordak turned his eyes back to the surgery happening just feet away.

"Entrapta was right," Bow said slowly, patting the crying baby over his shoulder, "You really aren't doing well..."

Hordak gestured to the window, annoyed.

"Well, obviously, otherwise I would not be receiving donated organs," he snapped, "I'm dying and the only way to fix it would put her in danger. And I am not willing to let that happen. Again."

Bow didn't respond immediately. With one hand holding the infant, he grabbed a chair with the other hand and set it beside Hordak.

"You really can't tell her what to do, you know." Bow sat down beside him, gently bouncing the baby over his shoulder. "She'll do what she wants."

"You think I do not know that?!" He snarled, "I am married to her! I've figured this out already!"

His head ached, his long fingers brushed his temples. He wanted to lay down and close his eyes now. Soon he would. Soon he would go under and when he woke, he would have a body of new donated organs to keep him going for a little while longer. He was certain Entrapta would succeed. She was brilliant.

Entrapta had not had much interest in biology before he started letting her study his. She always preferred machines over people, after all. But she was a remarkable mind and learned at speeds Hordak doubted even he could manage even with in tank programming.

Hordak, on the other hand, was fascinated with biology. He had always had a knack for it, playing with genetics, adding, subtracting. Searching for a cure, yes, but there was also an entertainment side to it. He found some small joy in tinkering, playing with his genetics. Even failed clones were entertaining to him. For a time.

Imp had been one of his pet projects, after all, an attempt at making a companion for himself at the beginning. In a way, Imp was his first child.

He had taught Entrapta what he knew, of course. With her mind, with her adventurous personality, she had taken it further than he could have ever anticipated.

"You have to just have faith in her," Bow said, wrapping a blanket around the now sleeping infant, "she's never failed you yet, has she?"
Through the window, he watched his wife stitch his clone sister back up, catching a glimpse of his gaunt reflection in the glass.

"No... she has not."

Entrapta had faced down death before, months ago. She had fought death on behalf of her lover and won. Now she was ready to square up again. But this fight would be harder. This was a fight against his own body.

After all the injuries he had accumulated, all the infections his body was trying to fight off with half functioning organs, she felt like an ant facing down a giant. She studied her husband's face, his closed eyes, lips slightly parted. She hoped he was having lovely dreams.

"Alright," she raised her scalped, glancing at the window, to their son pulling a handful of Bows hair, "let's begin."
As the clones recovered, Entrapta sat in the council room with Adora, Queen Glimmer, Lonnie and, much to her absolute dismay, Catra. The Dryl princess could feel her slitted eyes on her. It made her blood run hot with anger. What was Glimmer thinking!?

"Hordak is stable," Entrapta announced, exhausted, "for now, at least. But I don't predict he has long, even with the transplant. And with the limited technology here, I can't do much else for him."

"The sword!" Adora spoke up, "I can just heal him with my sword, right?"

Entrapta bit her lip, shaking her head.

"I thought about that, but... I can't be sure how magic will interact with his tech. It might be fine. It also might kill him. I also can't say if it will work, considering the nature of his illness. It's genetic. It's in his DNA. It's..." she looked down at her notes, everything she had collected on his condition. She shuffled her papers, eyes far away and unfocused. "Well, It's... Dawn... he has it too."

Her voice was so tiny, they almost didn't hear it. For a full 10 seconds, there was no reaction, then Glimmer posed the question.

"Does Hordak know?"

Entrapta shook her head stiffly, closed her eyes with a deep breath.

"No. If he knew, he would blame himself. He already has enough guilt to deal with."

There was an uncomfortable shifting now. Glimmer exchanged a look with Adora.

"Well... you said you could fix it though, right?" Adora questioned, "you said you cracked it. Said there was a way to... get rid if it?"

"Correct!" Entrapta seemed to perk up a little now, "I have everything figured out! I can create an injectable serum to help stop the degradation. It won't fix the damage done, but it will stop it from getting worse! It can save Stella a lot of pain and Dawn... Dawn could live a normal life. And Hordak... he could have years with us. I bought myself enough time to run tests and make sure its correct."

"Alright, but you can't make that here, right?" Glimmer helped to sum up, "but with the tech back in Dryl you could?"

"Correct. I am sure of it," she confidently exclaimed, hair standing on end, "but we have to get into Dryl!"

"I have an idea," Catra was the one to speak now, and Entrapta avoided looking in her direction at all cost, "The Horde is looking to draw out She Ra. So let's let them have her."

"What!?!" Glimmer's voice went shrill as she slammed her hands flat on the table.

"Glimmer. Listen to her," Adora insisted, "it's a good idea. I can draw their attention. They won't be expecting it. We can... we can even take Dryl back. Think of what that would mean. The tech we could have access to."

"...Fine," Glimmer hissed, "I'm listening. What exactly is the plan then?"
Stella woke first and she was quickly reminded of when she failed her assassination mission and woke in the infirmary just to be cut open and examined. But this was different. Her scars were different. This had been voluntary. This had been done out of love. It made the pain more bearable.

She stared at the plain white ceiling, wondering if she had been able to do it. If Brother would live now. She had weakened herself, shortened her own lifespan. Unheard of for her kind. But then again, so much about her was unheard of.

Her Brothers words filled her head, chasing away the pain:

"You are one of a kind."

On the other side of the room, she heard a door open. It took her a moment to adjust to the sudden light, but when she did, she recognized the outline of a large female, although this one seemed different than most Stella had seen. This female, for one thing, had a tail.

"Oh! You're awake! Great! Entrapta asked me to check on you guys while she's in the meeting."

Stella only understood a handful of words, but what she did hear, she liked. Stella smiled at the other female, trying to lift herself to sit up. No good. She lay back down with a hiss.

"I Stella," she greeted, "you name?"

Scorpia blinked, surprised to hear a friendly voice come out of this alien.

"Scorpia. It's nice to meet you," and she honestly meant it. She always did. "I, Uh, heard what you did for Hordak. That was really nice, ya know? If you ignore the whole, err, trying to kill him before thing."

"Only follow orders," she seemed to sigh, "but help brother, stella want to do that."

Scorpia laughed and Stella liked the sound of it. She found she rather liked the way Etherians showed mirth. It reminded her of the tinkering of rain on metal.

"Haha, orders. Yeah, I get that! Once I was ordered to..."

Stella lay still, listening to this Etherian talk on and on, telling her stories that she did not quite understand with words that she had yet to learn. But she found she did not really mind. This Etherian was so full of joy and laughter. Stella found the sound enchanting, contagious.

Despite the pain in her body, she laughed with her, even telling her a story as well about her time serving under Prime. Slowly, of course, with many pauses to search out the correct Etherian word, but by the time she finished her story, Scorpia was practically doubled over, her large shoulders shaking with uncontrolled bursts of laughter.

The sound could be heard in the hallway, across to the next room where Hordak now lay awake and alone.

He did not mind the being alone part as much. Truly, it was a welcome rest, away from everything, shut up an a tiny dark recovery room in the castles infirmary. It gave him time to reflect, think.
His time was limited. His new organs should hold out for a little while at least. Enough time to set things in motion, enough time to give them a fighting chance, enough time to create some memories with his family, even if his son will be too young to remember.

Perhaps he could convince Bow to take an image with one of this recording devices. A keepsake. He could record messages for him, meaningful bits of wisdom. Anything it took to make sure he understood what he had meant to him. How much he was loved.

And Entrapta. He needed to do something for her too. His poor bride. If he had known just how little time he’d had left, he never would have taken her to bed in the first place. She deserved better than a widows life.

He had so many regrets that, now at the end, it was hard to say which one was the worst.

But even so, there were just as many things he felt so very proud of, so many things that had made him smile. The laughter he heard coming from across the hall, that was one of them.

He had changed a life, give them a chance that he had not had. Stella was happy. That wasn't nothing. Entrapta was safe and alive. That wasn't nothing either. They had a son. They had friends. They were standing up and trying to do what was right.

It was worth something, in the end.

*He* was worth something.

The door opened and Entrapta stepped inside, quiet.

"I'm awake," he informed her, voice weak, cracking.

"Good. Right on time," she crossed over to take a seat, turning the light on low, just enough to see her and not irritate his sensitive eyes. "The council had decided our next step."

Hordak was dreading what she would say next. The delight in her eyes said it all.

"Hordak, we're going home!"

He groaned, both in pain and exasperation. Home could mean a few things. He hoped she meant "home" as in up to their suite in Brightmoon for him to recover more comfortably. He hoped. And he knew he would be disappointed.

"The plan is set. Once you're recovered, we're headed to Dryl."


His wife didn't back down. She held up a data pad. Because of course she did. Of *course* she would come at him with graphs and charts and evidence. Hordak draped his arm over his eyes.

"Its not suicide! I know my own castle. I have recent, updated data on their military presence. It's practically abandoned. Only a skeleton force is manning it now. I suspect my traps were effective and some of my bots are likely still active."

Hordak did not want to hear it. As much as he loved hearing this woman go on and on about her collected data, military strategy was *his* forte, not hers.
"I will look at it later," he relented quietly, with an impatient edge to his voice. He was in so much pain. "How is Stella?"

Entrapta moved on very quickly at the mention of his clone sister. On her data pad she swiped and Hordak lifted his arm from his eyes to study her vitals. So far so good.

"Excellent," he sighed with relief, "Watch her closely. And... thank her. For me. I will thank her myself when I am able, but, when you see her? Please?"

Entrapta nodded, smiling bashfully.

"Of course. I owe her too. I mean, do you know how much data I was able to collect from her?" She got excited again, her hair fluffing out like a cats tail before falling flat down her back again. "Plus she gave us more time. I couldn't ask for a better gift than that."

Despite the pain, despite the fear, despite the uncertainty, Hordak smiled. Time. Yes. They had that now. Just a little more time.

And for now, it was enough.
Hordak hated the plan. He was quite vocal about it too. Anything that put his wife in danger in any capacity was beyond unacceptable.

He needed to get over that. He'd managed to look away somewhat, at least around the lab. But what had been proposed was different. What had been proposed was suicide!

Well, maybe not that *dramatic*. According to the information Stella had given, security around Dryl was light, compared to what their scouts had seen from the Hordes' other bases and conquered lands. He wondered why. Was it a trap? The paranoid part of his brain was convinced it was.

The more logical part reasoned that it was likely not as important to Prime and too troublesome to put much effort into. The castle was a maze, deadly. And Prime was anything but wasteful. There were only so many bodies he was willing to throw at it.

He paced around their suite. In less than a day, they would leave. 19 hours and 32 minutes, actually, if he was being precise. Not enough time. There was always more to prepare for a mission like this. True, it had been weeks and they had been planning carefully while he recovered, but he still knew enough about his enemy to know how dangerous they could be. He had been one of them, after all.

He was so afraid. His body was held together by tech and borrowed organs, borrowed time. Yes, he was starting to feel more or less like his old self. The pain was ever present, of course, and he had no dreams that it would ever really disappear, but he was functioning. For how long would it last? It was anyone's guess.

And Entrapta. What if his body wasn't strong enough to protect her? What if he failed? What if she-

"Hordak, come to bed."

He stopped pacing and muttering to himself. He had almost allowed himself to forget that she was right there, waiting for him.

"Apologies," he murmured, "I was..."

He trailed off when he actually looked her over, sitting up in their too large bed. His mouth moved to speak, but found his vocal chords protesting.

His eyes swept over her body taking in every inch of her olive skin, glistening in the low light of the dying day. She was stretched across the bed, nude, except for the chest plate of her battle armor. Her knees were drawn up slightly, hiding her most intimate spot from his view.

It didn't matter. She had his attention.
Once he was able to gain some sense, he took three long strides to the bed, discarding his long nightshirt in the process and dropping it carelessly on the floor. He crawled to her, eyes half shut with lust. Her cheeks were flushed already. Her gaze shifted to his hard member. She bit her lip.

Oh, he could hardly stand it when she looked at him like that. He reached for her cheek as he leaned in, hovering over her on one arm. She pressed her lips to his, hungry. Their tongues danced and she spread her legs, pressing a calf against the back of his thigh. He pulled away from the welcoming warmth of her mouth, panting. He had to get ahold of himself. His behavior was... unbecoming.

"Does this mean you are ready then?" He asked once he could find his voice, "I said I would wait until..."

"Mm hm. You also said you'd come begging, so-" she pressed her hips up, rubbing her wet slit against his hardness, "Beg."

He groaned the same instant she whispered, arms going weak.

"Entrapta, please. Do you have any idea what you look like to me right now?"

"Mmm..." she purred, running her fingers up his spine as her hips teased his, "I can guess. You like the armor, right? Pervert."

He leaned forward, lips attacking her neck. He licked and suckled, headed south. She watched him with giddy amusement as he paused over the breastplate to place a kiss over the center.

As much as he would have preferred to have access to her breasts, he knew better. She was still nursing, and while pregnancy itself was a turn on for him, lactation was not, he discovered.

When his mouth found her soft stomach, her back arched. Her hands in his hair pulled and pressed, guiding him down. He bit back a grin. She never begged. She never had to. Serving his Princess was his job, and he delighted in the work.

He glanced up, meeting her eyes before his long tongue darted out to flick her clit. She jerked under his touch. His toes curled in the sheer delight of it and he trailed the tips of one of his talons up her thigh while the other hand gripped her leg to hold it open for him.

"Hordak," her voice was weak, breathy.

He loved the sound of it. His name spoken with such lust, it was enough to make any man absolutely swell with pride. He responded by pressing his mouth full into her womanhood, making love to her with his tongue. He watched her as he worked, being careful to shift his technique if she seemed uncomfortable.

His focus moved upwards after a minute or two, suckling at her sensitive bud as his fingers gently proded her opening. Her hips seemed to relax against him when he did this. With two fingers, he began to work into her gently as he teased her with his tongue. He hips began to press against him, eager.

There was a hitch in her breathing, a faint sheen of perspiration on her thighs. That was always a good sign. Soon enough, he felt her shudder underneath him, gasping his name in a way that made him want to positively burst. He did not stop and did not pull away until a tug at his hair told him to.

When he did pull away, he was grinning wickedly as he wiped his lips with the back of his fingers. Silently, she grabbed his hand and brought it to her lips, sucking the digits that had been deep inside her just moments ago. That was too much.
"Please, may I enter you, Princess?" He groaned, barely able to keep the desperation he felt out of his voice.

She responded by rolling over onto her stomach and sticking her round, shapely bottom up against his hips.

"Like this, you may. I've always wanted to try it from this position!"

The excitement in her tone made him forget for a moment his own damn name. He knelt behind her, hands exploring her beautiful thighs, round buttocks, the slight dips in her hips. Every flaw, every freckle, every scar and imperfection had him mesmerized. He wanted to remember them all, keep them tucked away in his memory for nights when he was alone and impatient with just his hand to keep him company.

His claws grasped her hips, as her fingers reached around to help guide him inside. And it was like fireworks. They both groaned as he pressed deep, feeling his swollen tip rub against a new angle. Such a high, was it possible to get closer to heaven?

He jerked his hips against her, and she pressed back with an eagerness rivaling his own. The bed creaked with their movements, slightly at first, but as their night climbed to its crescendo, the creaking grew and grew until the frame of the bed banged loudly against the wall.

It was nothing compared to the sounds they made. Hordak was, (generally) a fairly quiet lover. He would moan, murmur to his love, groan, but he never raised his voice, never cried out. There was always a bit of self consciousness keeping him grounded.

Until now. His voice reached a volume that, for once, matched that of the woman below him. She was watching him over her shoulder, reaching between her legs to run a finger against his scrotum. Oh, that did not help the building tension at all. He was going to absolutely lose it any moment.

He couldn't even tell her. Just admitting it would be too late. He leaned over her, one hand supporting him while the other guided her hips. His mouth found the pulse point of her throat and she let out a low growl as he sucked on it.

He couldn't hold back any longer. The tension building at his groin released and the sheer force of his orgasm sent him absolutely reeling. He shook against her throat, moaning as he came undone, spilling his seed deep inside her. Then he pulled out.

Far too late.

She dragged him down into bed with her before he had the chance to process it all. At some point, she removed her breastplate and now nestled into his shoulder, fingers dancing across the scars on his chest.

"You have... no idea what that did for me," he panted, running his fingers through her hair.

"The position, or...?" She eyed the discarded metal plates on the nightstand.

"Both. Everything. All of it," he sighed, "I don't think I've ever been that loud."

As he said it, shame overcame him. The walls here were thin. Who heard him? Who was the poor soul who shared a wall with them? He would have to make apologies.

"We're married," she reminded him, as if reading his mind, "this is what married couples do."
"On that subject," he winced, "we should have taken... precautions. I apologize for getting carried away."

"Oh. That? Don't worry. I'm not fertile right now," she yawned, "the chances are low."

"That's what you said last time," he reminded her with a small chuckle and a kiss to the top of her head.

"Like you'd complain," she giggled, lacing her fingers through his under the covers, "I know you have a thing for it."

Now that the heat of the moment had died somewhat, he was properly embarrassed by talk of his tastes. He cleared his throat, trying to maintain some sense of dignity.

"We should sleep, Princess. We have a hard journey ahead of us."

"Mmm," she agreed, nuzzling his shoulders as he wrapped a hand around under her waist, "was that a good distraction?"

"Distraction?" He looked stunned, "That's what that was?"

"Yup! You looked worried. I thought a good fuck would help you calm down a little."

"Entrapta!" He gasped, "such... language."

She snickered and placed a kiss against his neck, then his ears. He winced, moaning softly against her chapped lips. He was still so sensitive. Didn't she know that?

"Sorry, Lord NoFun. I'll be sure to only use polite language next time."

"Hm? I never said don't use it," he grinned shifting until he had her gently pinned to the bed, "simply make sure you save it for the right time and place. What we just did is called making love."

Her eyes locked on his, she bit her lip. He leaned in, lips close to her ear. As he whispered, his sharp teeth gently scraped her neck.

"What we are about to do, is called fucking."

--------------

Imp was always nearby, except when he was busy sneaking around spying on people he really had no business spying on. The poor creature suddenly had a lot of free time and that free time was often spent on less than productive means.

Like right now, as he scurried back through the open wall to the outside waterfall and flew around until he found an open window. It wasn't until he spotted a couple walking down the hallway that he opened his mouth.

"Entrapta, please. Do you have any idea what you look like to me right now?"

'Mmm... I can guess. You like the armor, right? Pervert.'"
Adora and Catra stopped immediately. For Adora, the look on her face was absolute horror. But Catra, she was on her knees, body shaking with silent laughter.

"I am going to absolutely ruin Hordak with this tomorrow!" Catra cackled, "Oh man. That's hilarious."
Hordak had not been given much choice now. The council had moved against his clearly superior judgement, despite one last desperate attempt to make them see clearly. Something about how just letting him die with dignity was not the way of the rebellion. Hordak had glared at Micah and snorted "clearly", which was apparently not the correct reply. Entrapta had lectured him about playing nice with their allies for the next hour.

Now, he was laying quietly in the back of the same Horde transport that they had escaped in, nestled in his wife's lap. She smiled down at him, running her gloved fingers through his hair. His face was neutral, save for a strange purplish blush on his face. If he was being honest, nearly dying had made him appreciate the little things, like how good his wife looked in battle armor, even with the silly pastel Brightmoon garments underneath. He was just glad she had something that wasn't a dress to wear. He could tell how uncomfortable it had made her to work in.

The royal seamstress had made clothes special for them, just for this mission. For Entrapta, she had attempted to put her in some silly flowy thing with puffy sleeves, with ridiculously small shorts. Absolutely useless for anything outside the bedroom. Entrapta had vetoed it before he even had the chance to open his mouth.

In the end, she was put in something far more practical, if a little overly decorated. The shimmery silver trim didn't exactly help. At least she was wearing something that hung close to her body now and provided decent cover.

Hordak had somewhat opposite challenges. He had a bad relationship with pants, but that was all this old woman seemed to want to put him in. It had taken him handing her the bloodstained and ruined remains of the robe he had arrived in for her to have that "ah ha!" moment. When she returned, she carried something similar to what the Brightmoon guards wore, altered to fit his unique physique. It even included slitted sides for ease of movement and cut outs for access to his back and side ports.

All in all, a marked improvement. The color wasn't even that bad either. After all, Shadow Weaver had said herself that blue was a good color for him.

"So. Let's go over the plan again," Adora said, looking over the collected team, "you listening, love birds?"

"I'm listening," Hordak snorted in annoyance, eyes still focused on his wife, "for the 5th time."

They had gone over this plan so many times, making small changes when Hordak pointed out a weak point. It was good that it was so easily adapted. Thousands of things could go wrong, and frequently did around this group. It was always a wonder to Hordak that they didn't all die already.

"So we have three teams. Me and Catra will be team 1. Bow and Lonnie are team 2. Team 3 will be the lovebirds. I'll go all She Ra and draw their attention so team 2 and 3 can have an easier time sneaking in. Team 2 will set off a series of charges above ground to divert the rest of the guard inside and buy time for team 3. Entrapta, you know your way around the castle. This should be easy for you."

"Yes. I know a short cut into my lab. Once I'm inside, I can reprogram my bots to attack certain targets. Lonnie, I recommend you hide the Horde insignia, because that's what I'm going to have them target on."
"Really!? You couldn'ta told me before we left!?!"

"Adapt and conquer, Force Captain Lonnie," Hordak growled, "or have you forgotten your training?"

He could practically see Lonnie roll her eyes from where she sat at the drivers seat. It didn't matter. She was a capable soldier, even if her attitude could use work.

"Alright, everyone got it?" Adora asked, "we're nearly there. Be ready."

"Oh! And Hordak..." Catra grinned wickedly, "try not to get too distracted by Entraptas armor. We all know what that does for you."

Hordak almost didn't react. Almost. His ear twitched, but his face remained neutral as he sat up.

"The next person to bring up my sex life," he said, deadpan, "will receive a very in depth description of the act from Entrapta. She is very good with creatively describing my anatomy."

"I am! I wrote an entire essay about it!"

The rest of the drive was nearly silent.

-----------------

Deep in the bowels of Crypto Castle, Aszi inspected the abandoned tech. She'd managed, after several days, to break past the traps and locks in this maze.

Technically, she was not assigned to be here. Technically, she was not meant to be anywhere near here. Her base was Thaymore, hardly a pebble on this miserable rock. A waste of her talents, of her loyalty.

She was angry.

Still, Father had called her Daughter when he assigned her, and that wasn't nothing. It was one step below royalty, being acknowledged as the Emperors son or daughter. He had hundreds of children, but he only accepted a small handful. Even her own twin brother, powerful as he was, was never called Son.

Still, the sting of being given such a tiny base had given her time to reflect. She may have been able to see past it if not for the fact that Father had called Prince Zed to Etheria as well. Oh, she hated him more than anything. Dryl had been assigned to him. HIM! Didn't father see what a mistake that was!?

She traced her hands over a keyboard, studying the Etherian runes with a giggle. So primitive, this world, and yet the tech in this castle was impressive. No wonder Father had wanted to take that Princess for himself.

Was that Primes first failure? She tilted her head slightly as he wondered. She was young, true, but she could not recall hearing of a defeat previously. After thousands and thousands of worlds, trillions of beings bowed before his might, had any actually defeated Prime before? Had any even come close?
Her fingers danced on the keyboard.

No. Not in literal ages. So what made this one special? Well, Aszi had a theory.

She inspected the files on the computer terminal. She was glad it worked so similarly to the Hordes own. Actually, was that a coincidence? Or was there a reason the technology worked so similarly? There was so much to consider, so many conclusions to draw. But if her theory was correct, it could explain so much.

Her long sharp fingers froze. Her yellow eyes widened. Her black lips curled into a smirk.

Oh yes. She was right. This was exactly the boost she needed. Zed wouldn't be able to stand next to her now. Female or not, she would get what she wanted, what she deserved. Because she had just discovered the key to all of this. The reason Father was so interested in this little mud ball. The reason he was so interested in this She Ra person.

"Eternia," she giggled, "so this is your little secret."
Stella had been allowed to roam free for a whole 8 hours now, yet she found herself sticking to pacing one single hallway.

The Queen herself had come to release her, giving her permission to roam. The trust was touching, but Stella was still nervous. For the first time, she was without purpose, without duty. She had her life to herself now, but what was she meant to do with it?

"Oh! Hey Stella!"

The teenage clone looked up, grinned, quickly pushed a stray lock of midnight blue hair into place and adjusted her garments.

"Scorpia," she greeted, perky, excited, "Queen let me free."

"Yeah? That's great!"

She was smiling. Stella swallowed hard, the tips of her ears going warm. Why?

"I... do not know...what can I..."

She bit her lip, struggling to find the right words. It was starting to dawn on her that she had nothing to do and nowhere to really go. It was freedom that scared her.

"Oh. You want to know what to do now, right?" Scorpia practically read her mind.

Stella nodded slowly, leaning against the wall with a hopeless look in her big red eyes.

"Well... you're a great fighter, right? You gave Hordak a hard time and that's not easy."

Her ears felt like they were on fire as they wiggled slightly at the complement.

"I... practice," she explained, avoiding the Princesses gaze, "hard work. Dedicated."

"Mm hmm," scorpia looked her up and down, claw to her chin like she was thinking about something very hard. Then it seemed like a light went on somewhere and she grinned. "I think I know what you could do! I'll talk to Glimmer about it!"

Stella was left alone feeling confused as the Princess hurried away... only for her to run back and offer her a claw.

"Oh! Oh! Come with me! I can show you around on the way there!"

Stella hesitated for a moment, shy, uncertain. The sparkle in this womans eyes and the gleam of her teeth were so bright and beautiful, it was nearly blinding. She looked down to the powerful claw, then back to that smile once before reaching out to lay her long sharp fingers on top of it with a grin.

"Y-yes. Show me."
They had not been back here since the wedding. So many months ago. A year? Hordak stopped to wonder if it was almost their anniversary. Soon. He would have to do something nice for her.

If they survived this idiotic trip, of course.

Despite their extensive planning, Hordak still grumbled about it. Maybe this was why he failed to take Etheria? He just wasn't aggressive enough with his tactics? Silly him for not wanting to waste good soldiers.

His eyes scanned the castle from behind cover with Entrapta and 'Team Two'. Team one had gone ahead and now they were just waiting for the signal.

"Entrapta-"

"Hordak-"

"If anything happens, stay behind me."

They spoke at the same time, then laughed quietly together. The look Lonnie gave them might have been annoying if Hordak cared.

"Entrapta... truly," his was softer, serious, "if this goes wrong, run. Please."

"Take your own advice," she snorted, "I'll be fine. You're the one that's in a medical crisis."

"Dawn needs you mor-"

"He needs us both," she insisted, grabbing for his hand, "that's why we're here. For him, you and Stella too."

"I don't-"

"For the Honor of Grayskull!"

The teams looked up from their hiding spot. Standing tall on the edge of the steep cliffside was their diversion, tall, blonde, and dramatic.

"That's the signal," Lonnie hissed, "let's move out."

-----------------

"Your Majesty! Good to see ya. Do something new with your hair? New Cape maybe? No?"

Scorpia was just delightful. Stella couldn't stop smiling around her. Just something about the tone of her voice seemed endlessly joyful, even if Stella wasn't 100% sure what she was saying.

"What do you want?" Glimmer snapped, looking up from a pile of papers on her desk while Dawn sat on her lap, happily chewing on a moon shaped toy, "-oh! Stella's here."

Stella felt her ears go hot. This was a Queen, superior rank. Brother had not taught her how to greet
such a person on Etheria. She dropped to a knee, just as she would have done for Prime.

"My Queen," she awkwardly greeted, choosing her words very carefully, "I live to serve."

The look on Glimmer's face was one of clear confusion.

"Uh... what?"

She blinked at Scorpia, hoping for a translation.

"She wants you to give her a job to do," Scorpia explained, "I was thinking some kind of guard? She'd look cute in the uniform!"

Glimmer narrowed her eyes.

"Not a chance! Becoming a Brightmoon palace guard takes years of training!" She shrugged, "and they have to somehow end up still not being very good at it."

The Queen stood up, supporting the drooling baby on her shoulder with one arm.

"No. I've got a different job for you." She strode past her desk, stopping in front of Stella looking down. Her face was unreadable, which might have been intimidating if the baby wasn't now trying to chew on her shoulder. "I'm assigning you to my personal guard. Anyone who can kick the hell out of Hordak is worth having close by."

Glimmer gestured with her hand for her to rise and she did, mouth open with awe. Stella glanced at Scorpia, wondering if she had somehow misunderstood. The way she beamed at her told her she was correct in her translation.

Was the Queen a fool? Trusting her so readily? Only months ago she had attempted to murder a member of her council. Then again, that very council member had been an evil alien invader who tried to take over the planet not all that long ago.

Desperate times, desperate measures, the clone reasoned.

"Let's see..." Glimmer said, as she turned towards her office again, "I know I had them around somewhere... ah!"

She pulled a pile of folders off her desk, revealing two curved silver blades, now dirty and dusty, but still sharp, deadly. One of them still had spots of Hordak's blood on it. She'd have to clean that off.

"You'll need a weapon, if you're going to be guarding me," she handed them back, careful to keep them far from wandering baby hands, "Is this alright? Or do you want something else?"

Stella looked at her hands. Her blades had always felt like an extension of herself, like she was missing a part of her body without them. They were simple, compared to the intricate spears and sword she had seen the other guards of Brightmoon carry, but they were fast, effective, elegant. She nodded, feeling heat behind her eyes. She fell to a knee again, making Glimmer sigh in irritation.

"Enough of that," she groaned, "scorpia, can you show her the ropes? I need to get Dawn down for his nap. She can start her new job properly tomorrow."

Scorpia bowed slightly as the Queen left the room, yawning, bouncing the teething baby in her arms.
"Yes, your Majesty." Then she held out a claw for Stella to take again. "Let's go. I have time before my mission. I'd like to spend it with you. Is that okay?"

Stella took the offered claw once again without hesitation.

"I like that. Yes."
Crypto Castle looked darker than ever. At least, Hordak thought so. But then, the last time he had seen it had been a beautiful autumn day when he married Entrapta. She’d insisted the sunny weather was abnormal, so perhaps it was always this gloomy. Still, the Horde presence didn’t exactly help.

The dark uniforms, the ugly tanks... had he grown so used to Brightmoon that the lack of pastels made him nervous? Perhaps. Weird what a change of scenery could do for one’s soul.

And taste, he added silently, making a face at the uniform of one of his former soldiers.

He knew this was one of his. Prime would not have wasted clones on this place.

"Come on," Lonnie hissed, "which way?"

Entrapta checked her datapad once more before handing it off to Bow.

"Through here," she whispered, pressing a stone in the wall that had been, until that point, unnoticed. A panel of wall slid up, leaving a narrow opening.

"Quickly. Move!" Lonnie once again hissed, ushering the crew through. Entrapta shut it behind them, leaving them in a poorly lit corridor in Crypto castle. Quiet. Calm. Too calm.

"Alright. This is where we split up," Bow said, reaching back to check his arrows, "remember the plan."

"We know the plan," Hordak sighed, "make sure you're prepared when the time comes."

The two teams nodded once before separating.

"Good luck!" Bow whispered before turning a corner. In his hand he held the map Entrapta had downloaded for him, guiding a very serious looking Lonnie up a set of stairs.

"When this is over, I am demanding a promotion," Lonnie growled, "with benefits."

Bow pulled out an arrow, glancing around the corner.

"Yeah, well, we can worry about that when we get back," Bow whispered, "for now, just- oh no..."

"Oh no what?" Lonnie snapped, glancing around the corner as well. Her eyes widened. "Oh no."

---------

Hordak followed his wife through the long dark halls of her castle's lower levels. They passed paintings of cute animals and he couldn’t help but crack a smile, imagining Horde soldiers accidentally activating a trap and meeting their end under a painting of a fluffy kitten.

"Walk around this panel," she instructed quietly, "floor opens up. Spikes. Basic stuff."

Hordak raised a brow ridge and walked around as instructed. If he’d been less distracted by his Portal
and more interested in actually conquering Etheria, he probably would have managed it in no time with her help. The layout of her castle was chaotic, yet genius. Truly a work of art.

"Ah! Here!"

She stopped in front of a painting of a... dog? Hordak couldn't be sure. He'd only seen a dog once. On accident. Catra had been terrified. Hordak had been delighted. But this one had squished features. A genetic defect? No time to consider it anymore.

Entrapta flicked a switch and the wall flipped, taking them both through to the other side in an instant. Hordak had been surprised, making an audible gasp, hair on end. Entrapta snickered at him and he quickly patted his hair back into place with an embarrassed snort.

"You could have warned me," he snapped.

"Sorry. Sorry! I forget that I never brought you down here!"

"Yes," he cleared his throat, "Well. We were... preoccupied last time."

Entrapta grabbed his claw with one gloved hand and led him to a door. Humming to herself, she put the code in, then pulled him through into the lab proper. His eyes studied everything they passed, focusing mostly on the materials used. She'd had access to good metal, no doubt from the mines. A good chosen location for a castle.

He stopped wondering about that very soon. A scent met his slitted nose. Not exactly familiar, but...

"Let's see... ah! Here."

She stopped in front of a large screen, and immediately got to work, unpacking supplies from the large bag she carried, "okay. I'll need some time to get everything set up. Can you check-"

"Someone is here," Hordak sniffed the air, claws at the ready, "I am certain of it."

"Not possible. They would have to get by my traps and break into the lab."

"And yet-" a voice from above purred, "here we are."

Hordak followed the sound upwards, he dipped low, ready to strike, but Entrapta had stepped in front of him first.

Clinging to the walls like an insect was a young female, early adulthood, with thick black hair piled haphazardly on her head. There was an elegance to her long, toned arms and legs, her angular face. He supposed among his own kind, she might be 'pretty'.

Her lips parted into a sharp grin, showing off her long fangs.

-Hello, Uncle.-

-------------
"What is word for what your face does now?"

Scorpia sat next to the clone at the bottom of a long stairway. They had spent nearly the entire day together, and Scorpia was teaching her the Etherian words for various emotions.

"Hm? This?" Scorpia flashed another wide grin, "it's called a smile! You have a great smile."

The tips of Stella's ears were once again warm to the touch. Absently, she ran a talon along the edge of one, looking away, shy.

"Smile... do you... really like?" She asked, feeling her cheeks pull slightly as her lips once again quirked up at the edges.

"I do! It's cute!" Scorpia insisted, using the tip of her claw to push a stray lock of dark hair out of Stella's eyes. Eyes that were now watching her with deep crimson intensity. Scorpia didn't seem to notice however. Now she was looking far away at something. She seemed... lost, suddenly.

Stella hated to see that smile vanish.

"I... think you cute also, Scorpia."

That seemed to shake her out of what ever daze she was in. Her eyes went wide, her cheeks turned pink and she looked away, tucking a strand of white hair behind her ear.

"T-thanks. Um, hey, so... I'm leaving at the end of the week," Scorpia murmured, "do you wanna hang out like this on your off time while I'm here?"

"I do!" Stella enthusiastically agreed, slapping her hands flat against the stair as she leaned excitedly towards the Princess, "I am... having, eh... joy? With you?"

"Fun," scorpia corrected, "I think you mean fun! Me too!"

They smiled at each other for a while, silent. Then Scorpia stood, holding a claw out to help the tall clone up as well.

"Let's go. Lots more to see still."
"Who are you?" Entrapta snapped, "how did you get into my lab?"

The female giggled, a strange sound. She was not yet used to simulating Etherian amusement, so it sounded musical, almost like a choir.

"Do not insult me. I can figure anything out with time," she replied, "including your primitive Etherian traps."

She jumped from her perch on the wall, landing gracefully about ten feet away. Entrapta reached to her side, fingers on a stun baton.

"Oh stop," the alien laughed, "That won't hurt me anyway."

Hordak grabbed Entrapta's hand, holding it as he moved to her side. He may be weak, but he would not allow her to get hurt trying to protect him. They would fight together.

-You are Aszi,- he guessed, -I was told about you.-

-ES 1075, I assume?- She replied conversationally, examining her claws, -So you tortured them until they talked, right?-

-...Not exactly.-

Hordak's eyes darted around, trying to make a plan. What could they use? Fully grown females could be vicious, strong.

"You look weak, Uncle," she pointed out, "are you dying? Must be what Father put in your DNA."

"You know about it?" Entrapta spoke now, hair fluffing excitedly. Hordak wondered if she had forgotten that this was an enemy.

"Of course!" His niece giggled, "why shouldn't I? I am a Child of our Emperor, after all. Mm. You don't look scared."

"You haven't attacked," Entrapta noted, "and nothing in your body language suggests aggression."

"I would prefer not to fight," she replied, "I could kill you. Yes. But that won't help me in the end."

There was an awkward silence now. Hordak glared at the female, claws still at the ready, but a realization made him laugh.

"You are playing the long game. Clever. You must have realized by now too," he pulled down the fabric at his neck, showing the inky blue veins of corruption as they creeped ever closer to consuming him, "Loyalty is only rewarded while it is convenient for him."

Aszi regarded him with cold indifference. Her head tilted slightly in a gesture that he approximated to be a shrug. She was not on their side. Of that he had no doubt, but he also doubted she would harm them. No. She needed them for something. Some larger plan.

"I won't be telling you what I'm doing," she sighed, "that would ruin the fun! But I also won't get in your way here. You're already helping me out by causing that chaos outside."
Entrapta’s eyes flickered between the female and her husband for a moment before she moved on with her work, pulling a pair of goggles over her eyes.

"Okay, well, thanks! I got a lot of work to do, so-"

"You are attempting to remedy his condition, yes?" Aszi asked, ignoring Hordak entirely now. She moved at lightning speed to look over the Etherian scientists shoulders.

Hordak was speechless now. Just moments ago, he thought he was going to have to fight her. He was certain of it. He knew he would probably get beaten pretty quickly, but he’d been prepared to do it anyway. Now he was shoved past like he was nothing but another piece of furniture. Entrapta’s body language suggested she was excited to talk about her project. She was smiling, sharing attention between her lab space and the alien.

"Sort of. I don’t have enough knowledge about the gene to cure it entirely, but I know how I can stop the condition from getting worse."

"But that is not a solution, of course. It is temporary. Have you considered this?" Aszi leaned over, with her long narrow body, fingers clicking at the keyboard. Hordak wanted to yell at her for that, but Entrapta held up a hand to preemptively silence him, eyes wide, Interested.

"Ooh!!! That gives me another idea!" She whispered, "what about-?"

"Yes, I think so."

Hordak listened to the two mumble and work. To say he was feeling jealous wouldn’t be entirely true. But he was feeling somewhat left out. And confused.

"What...what just happened!?"

Both females shushed him at the same time, then immediately went back to work.

--------------------

"This was NOT in the plan!" Lonnie cried over the absolute chaos that had ensued.

Apparently, their intelligence was somewhat out of date. Per usual. Lonnie was starting to understand Hordak’s reluctance to come here. Bow shot another arrow as a large two headed Horde soldier raced after them with a half dozen soldiers. One soldier fell. Bow was starting to run low on arrows.

"Enough complaining! More running! Entrapta, hurry up with those bots!"

As she ran, Lonnie placed a bomb on the frame of an especially large archway.

"Okay! Got it! Bow, now!"

Bow let loose an explosive arrow. There was a flash, crumbling stone and then eerie silence. Lonnie skidded to a stop, hands working on preparing the next bomb. Entrapta had said the castle itself was expendable, as long as the lab stayed in tact, but it was still better to preserve it if possible. The archer exchanged a look with the ex Horde soldier, nervous.
That was too easy. There was a rumbling as the forces tried to break through. From somewhere on the other side of the rubble, there were shouts, sounds of combat and then silence. Something shifted in the stone. Bow pulled out another arrow, Lonnie turned the stun baton on once again, holding it at the ready.

"Hang on," came a familiar voice to Bow, "ugh, let me just- Baker, can you give me a hand?"

"The kitchen crew is still here!??" Bow shrieked, putting his weapons away to assist in moving rubble.

"Hey, was that Bow?"

"Yeah! I think it was! Hi Bow!"

"You know the kitchen staff? Personally?" Lonnie asked, eyebrow raised, "is there anyone you're not friends with?"

Bow ignored her, but smiled.

"Still rebels, huh?" He laughed, moving a rock to peak through to the other side. The one with blue hair smiled back, opening the hole further.

"We never stopped! After Entrapta left, we've been working slowly to take down the Horde from the inside!"

"I poisoned the last captain stationed here!" Soda pop loudly bragged.

"Guys. Thanks for your help, but can I ask you a favor?"

"Anything bow!"

"We're ready!"

"Can you hold the Horde off here? Just for a little while longer. Entrapta is going to activate the bots again. They won't hurt you. Shes going to program them to attack anyone wearing the Horde insignia."

The Baker gasped and quickly held something out through the tiny opening in the stone.

"She needs to cover up then!"

Bow grabbed the pink apron and wordlessly handed it to Lonnie with a smile. Lonnie eyed the fabric with disgust, but put it on over the Horde insignia on her shirt.

"If I ever hear you bring this up," she hissed to Bow, "I'll cut you."

"Aww, but I think it's cute!"

"Ugh. You would."
"Hey, Stella? What's your favorite song?"

The clone tilted her head slightly to the side, confused.

"What means... song?"

Scorpia gasped, both claws up to her face. The look she gave her was one of pity and it made Stella more embarassed than usual.

"It's like, here. I'll show you."

She hummed a sweet, sad melody. Or at least, Stella thought it sounded sad. Scorpia sure looked sad when she hummed it. That was something Stella hated to see. Scorpia looking so distant, so hurt. This woman was the brightest star here. What happened to dim her light so much during these moments?

Stella found herself staring, only realizing the way she was looking at her when Scorpia stopped humming at blinked back, blushing.

"Err!!!! Um! Yes. We have... 'songs'. We have no one word for them in my, err, language. Not entirely," she explained quickly, clumsily, "we just call them," -vocal illustrations- "sound pictures."

"Sound pictures? Can you sing for me? I want to hear."

Stella stared out at the setting day moon from atop the palace where they sat. She hesitated, glancing at Scorpia who only smiled encouragingly. That was all she needed.

The sound that came from her vocal chords was like a 3 part harmony. There were no songs in the Horde, at least not for the clones. But Stella was familiar with her race, their customs, even if they did not belong to her. She knew their vocal traditions. What they were for. In many ways, it was how they courted, how they attracted. How they showed love. How they showed any incredibly strong emotion to others.

The song was... a confession.

When it ended, Stella avoided her gaze, ears burning a faint violet. There was silence and Stella worried that she had just embarassed herself.

But then Scorpia did something she had never seen anyone do. She clapped, or rather, clicked her claws together. She wondered why, but decided it didn't matter once she saw her smile and the wetness of her eyes.

"That was beautiful!" The scorpion Princess choked, "I've... I've never heard anything like that! Your voice is stunning! Wait! Does this mean Hordak is a good singer too?!"

Stella smiled back, nodding.

"For our race, I am only acceptable, but Brother has had years. He won't... eh, 'sing' in front of Etherians, but I heard him sing to Dawn. His vocal chords are strong."

"Woah. I can't imagine him singing." she laughed as the sky grew dark, "thanks. I had a good day, Stella. I loved your song. It'll be... nice to take it with me when I go."

"Scorpia keep saying go. Where?"

Scorpia looked out at the forest beyond, eyes unreadable.
"War," she explained simply. Stella understood, nodded. This was not unheard of or surprising. But something behind her eyes stung. Why? What was this emotion?

"Will you... come back soon?" She asked cautiously. If she was able. Death in battle was a reality all too familiar to her.

"I don't know," she replied, hugging her knees to her chest, "but will you wait for me? I want to, um, see you again."

"I promised self to Brightmoon Queen," she replied with a shrug, "I wait. Yes."

Scorpia leaned in and Stella felt herself panic for a moment. Was this one of those, oh, what did Hordak call it? A kiss? She closed her eyes, ready, but what happened instead was warm, nice.

"What... this called?" Stella asked quietly, leaning against the Princesses hard chest piece.

"Its called a hug."

"I see. May I, err, hug back?"

"That's how it works, Stell."

Carefully, she wrapped her arms around the other woman with a sigh. This was happiness.
Chapter Summary

Warning: sad times ahead.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hordak made himself busy with Entraptas bots while the two women worked out the serum. As he adjusted the code, he mumbled to himself in his native tongue. Words Entrapta didn't need to hear, but he was perfectly willing to allow Aszi to hear his displeasure with the situation.

"Is he always this grouchy?" He heard Aszi ask as she lifted a vial to the light to inspect it.

"Not always," he heard Entrapta reply, casual, as if this were not the daughter of an evil Emperor she was suddenly working with, "sometimes he's really sweet."

"Males," Aszi sighed, "I never understood the need for them. We can find ways to procreate without them, if we wanted to. Sperm cells are shockingly easy to replicate."

"They have their uses," Entrapta muttered, glancing at Hordak with an awkward smile, "there! That should about do it! Do you wanna do the honors, Aszi?"

The alien glanced from her uncle to his mate with a smirk, shaking her head.

"No. I should be going. I've done everything I came to do and learned what i needed to."

She pushed a stray strand of black hair back, other hand on her hip as she turned.

"Why not come back with us?" Entrapta asked, "I could use more help around the lab."

Hordak made a face as he finished his work. More help in the lab? Was he not good enough for her now? Not enough help? Was it because he was ill?

"Thank you, but I prefer to conduct my experiments alone. Besides... I am not your friend. Next time we meet, I may have to kill you," she giggled, "it just so happens that today i needed you."

Entrapta nodded as she finished her work, pressing a button to start her machine.

"Well, still, I'm glad we met. Maybe some day we can all just be on the side of science."

"Maybe," she considered, "but not likely. Your little rebellion is unlikely to survive to the end. So, little Princess, if my father offers to take you as a trophy, I recommend not fighting it this time. I've heard it's... not so bad."

Entraptas face darkened, even behind her goggles. Hordak stood up, sending off the signal to the bots of the castle.

"I suggest you leave, Aszi," he snapped, "quickly. The way out is about to become very difficult."
The female didn't hesitate. With a flap of her dark leather coveralls, she crept away into the shadows.

"Eternia," Aszi called over her shoulder, "I found the way through. Tell your little friend She Ra. It will be ours. One way or another."

And then she was gone.

---------

Adora had her back up against Catra as they fought. Wave after wave, two women against the Horde soldiers stationed here. Catra panted, one arm bleeding while she swiped wildly with the other. Adora was only slightly better off, having gained additional strength in her She Ra form.

"A...dora," panted Catra, "how many..."

"I don't know! Just hang in there! Just a little more. Soon they'll-"

There was a rumbling, dust clouds in the distance. All seemed to stop and stare, confused. Then Adora saw it. She snatched Catra's hand, leaping up on top of a large boulder, holding her tight to her chest as a tiny army of robots swept through like a storm.

"Hey Adora..."

Adora changed back, still holding her. She pulled away slightly, guiding the feline's face upwards. "Hey Catra."

Their lips met. They had won.

---------

Bow and Lonnie were resting now, pressed up against a wall. Bow was bandaging Lonnie's face where shrapnel from one of the blasts had nicked her cheek.

"It'll probably scar," Bow informed her. She shrugged, seemingly unconcerned.

"If you make it to adulthood in the Horde without any scars, you're either a coward, lazy or both. I ain't either."

Bow laughed lightly at that, shaking his head.

"No. You're not."

A beeping on his pad caught his attention. The bots were active. All that was left to do now was wait. The signal would lead them all back together. Then they could give back, after securing Dryl, of course.

"Thanks," she said, patting the bandage on her cheek, "man, I can't wait to get back. I gotta tell Kyle and Rogelio about the staff here. They'll lose it."

Bow laughed, stood up, and helped Lonnie to her feet just as a bot came around the corner. It scanned Bow, then scanned Lonnie. It began to move past.

At that moment, the ties around the back of Lonnie's neck came undone, revealing the symbol on her shirt.
There was one shot. One instant. One shout.

Lonnie dropped, a smoking hole in her chest.

Chapter End Notes

Yup. That happened.
Did I not warn you?
Death was always complicated, always messy. Always painful. At least, to someone. For Lonnie, dying was simple, clean, painless. Quick. She was gone before her body hit the floor.

Bow couldn't recall if he screamed, cried. He couldn't say if he held her body, if he touched her head, begged, pleaded.

What he did remember doing, was removing the apron, throwing it far away. She hated that apron. Didn't want to be seen with it.

By the time the others found them, Lonnie had gone cold and Bow shook uncontrollably. It had been Hordak and Entrapta who found them first. Entrapta had moved immediately to comfort Bow, let him weep against her shoulder.

Hordak... stood, silent. Seeing a dead soldier was nothing new. He had passed a dozen on the way up here. But this was different. This wasn't a faceless soldier on the battlefield. This wasn't a nameless pawn, a numbered clone.

This was different. This was... a friend?

Silently, he bent down to her and gently pushed her eyelids shut just as Adora and Catra appeared, hand in hand. They stopped and Adora was the first to break the silence.

"Is she...?"

Hordak bowed his head.
"It appears she died quick. Mercifully."

"How can you talk like that!?" Catra screamed, "Lonnie is dead and it's because of you! If we didn't go on this idiotic mission for you-!"

Adora squeezed her hand, pulled her in close.
"Shh, don't say something you'll regret."

"No, Adora," he breathed, "She is not wrong."

Silently, Hordak tucked his arms under the teenagers cold body and lifted her, wincing at the pain the effort caused. No matter. This was his responsibility as her commander and as the cause of her death.

Entrapta coaxed Bow to his feet, supporting his weight as he wept against her. Hordak met her eyes for only a moment. They were red and wet staring back at him before looking elsewhere. He desired nothing more than to be able to wipe it all away.

Without another word, they made the trek back to the transport. Entrapta quickly placed the one she called "Baker" in charge, knowing that they would hardly have to do anything. Her bots did well enough protecting. Too well, it turned out.

The only reason the rebellion needed Dryl back at all, honestly, was access to the mines and the lab. The castle was basically useless and the kingdom could be run from a distance if needed.
Entrapta would be returning, however, just for her lab, once all was wrapped up in Brightmoon.

The blue haired butler grabbed a sheet to silently cover up Lonnie's body with. Hordak had nearly asked the purpose of covering a corpse, but quickly noted the expression of relief once her form was out of sight. Wordlessly, he wrapped the sheet around the body, hiding it from all angles. Once they were back, he would see about Etherian burial rituals as well.

He set the body in the back of the transport like luggage, stone faced, then he moved to the front drivers seat. Besides Lonnie, he was the only one who knew how this vehicle operated. After all, he had been the one to design it.

Entrapta joined him in the front, staring straight ahead. She'd been crying until seconds ago. He could tell. He could always tell.

In her grip, she held her box of successfully created serum, shaking. He rolled up the privacy window, separating the bed of the truck from their side to give him and his wife some privacy. Everyone by now had begun either weeping, yelling, or both and Hordak needed to focus. He needed to just not think about the dead teenage soldier in the truck with them. He just needed to leave.

"It's my fault," Entrapta murmured, "I came up with the idea of the bots. I wanted to go back to Dryl. I-
"

"Enough," he snapped, harsher than he intended, "I will not be playing this blame game. It was my genetic weakness that made this mess. It was my inability to sufficiently look after my squad members. It was mine. And I wont let you try to take it on yourself."

Entrapta was silent for a moment, then she let out a sob. He let her. He had to. There was no comfort for her now, no arms closing around her, no kisses to her forehead, nobody to wipe her tears. Hordak had to drive, and so he could only let her weep, packing everything deep inside himself. Because he had to. Because he had no choice.

As he drove, he considered what he would tell the others in Lonnie's squad. The speech he would give. The comfort he could provide, if any. What could one even say? How did one fix this?

The answer- there was no fixing it. This was reality. And it was cruel and sudden, but it was fact none the less.

-----------

Stella had slept comfortably on the plush carpeted floor of her new... 'room'. They called it a bedroom. And entire room for a bed! Just one! The very concept seemed so wasteful to her. Especially because she still couldn't bring herself to use the bed at all.

Compared to the Queens chambers, Stella's own was tiny, placed just off to the side of her new mistresses. But it was hers, a place to herself.

As she often did, she awoke before the dawn, but this time, she awoke and releaved the night guard, standing at attention at one side of the room in her place. A shiny moon shaped badge pinned her sash to her shoulder, marking her as belonging to the Queens guard.
Glimmer awoke with the Dawn. Specifically, Dawn the baby. She had agreed to watch him and had no regrets about that, but taking care of a tiny life was hard, especially a half breed like Dawn. So much to discover.

Like teething. Dawn did not cut teeth like a normal baby. He had fangs, bright white like an Etherians, but sharp like a predator. And they hurt. Glimmer had noticed his teething the day his parents left. She had been holding him while he nibbled at her shoulder. She winced, looking down to notice blood. Hers, specifically. That was the end of that. Now she had a teether made for him. Her father's suggestion.

"Come on, cutie," the Queen mumbled sleepily as she pulled the screaming infant out of her old crib, "lots to do today. Mama and daddy are coming home soon. But you're with Auntie Glimmer for a little while more."

The infant calmed almost immediately when Glimmer pulled him close. He was a cuddler, she was discovering. Hordak always carried him around in that little pouch. He probably got used to being close to someone. That was cute, but inconvenient.

From morning, to late in the evening, Stella stood beside her Queen in her office. It was easy work, but Stella refused to get lazy. She stood tall, straight, eyes flickering over to every tiny sound in the room.

"Ugh... Stella, hold Dawn," she ordered at one point, "I need a break from baby duty."

Before the clone could question it, Stella's nephew was shoved into her arms. She blinked at the chubby half breed. Only a few times had she seen him, and not once had she held him. He yawned, curling against her chest. No doubt, it reminded him of his father.

Glimmer stood up, and Stella had a moment of panic. She looked around, wondering how she was meant to protect her Queen with a baby in her arms.

"Relax," she laughed, "I'm just stetching my legs."

Stella looked down at the infant again, chirping softly, then humming, swaying with him. The babe opened his eyes to stare back. For a full minute, they maintained eye contact, almost in a trance. It was only when the babe began snoring softly in her arms that she looked up, noticing Glimmer watching.

"A-apologies, My Queen, I-"

"No. Don't apologize. That was nice. Reminded me a little of my my mother would sing..."

She reached out to take the sleeping infant from her and sat back down, closing her eyes. She looked so sad. Stella wondered why.

"Sing again? Please?"

Stella opened her mouth to obey, but that was when the message came. They were back. Mission successful. Dryl was theirs.

Chapter End Notes
So. Gunna be hella real. Last week I lost another friend and mentor. This is one of the many I've lost this year. So after this year, I've become annoyingly familiar with the mourning process. I know I have a lot of mysteries left open, and I will get to those, but I wanted to first take some time to really get down to the nature of grief and the ways different people handle it.

Be kind to yourself. I know I am not always am, so my words don't really mean much. But life feels better when you are.

And just tell people you love them when you can. That's mostly what this year has taught me. Tomorrow isn't always a guarantee.
Break

They had arrived after the day moon had set.

Glimmer had gone out to meet them personally with Stella standing at attention at her side. Hordak's eyes swept over his Sister, noting a few things. First, her weapons were back at her side. Second, she wore the badge of the Queen's guard.

Third, and this was harder to pinpoint but still noticeable, she was practically glowing with joy.

How he envied her.

Without a word, Hordak sunk into a bow, as low as his height would allow him to go. Entrapta didn't bow. Hordak could hardly blame her for forgetting herself. She hurried to the Queen, holding her arms out for her son. With a kind smile, the Queen passed their son back to his Mother with a quick word.

That was when Glimmer noticed. The number standing before her, their sullen faces, nobody seemed willing to speak.

"Lonnie?" She asked Hordak quietly and he straightened back up.

"Her body is in the back," he replied quietly, "It was... quick. Clean."

Glimmer didn't waste time and for that Hordak was grateful. She whispered a few orders to one of her guard and dismissed the returning team.

"Get some rest. We will... discuss in the morning. Entrapta, can you come with me?"

Hordak left before everyone else, long legs carrying him further, faster than most. Not fast enough.

"Brother, wait!"

Hordak slowed his pace, but did not stop. He couldn't. Walking was the only thing that seemed to help. After hours spent locked in a vehicle with so much grief and death, he wanted nothing more than to run.

"Stella. You are under the employ of the Queen. You should be with her," he chided softly.

"Shift end," she replied, "I dismissed for night. Brother is... sad?"

He swallowed. Hard. Flexed his fingers. Stared at his claws. Stella didn't understand. There was much she did not understand. Death for a clone soldier was normal, just another part of life. Nobody acknowledged it, really. They would simply step over the bodies of their comrades and keep fighting. If one did feel grief, they saved it for more private moments. No show of weakness would be accepted.

But Hordak had spent so much time here. He had formed attachments. Bad habits. It showed in how he had run the Fright zone. He would occasionally give a squad a day or two after the death of a fallen comrade to grieve. Etherians need it, he discovered. Pathetic.

Maybe I need it too.
-I lost a soldier,- he explained, reverting back to his native tongue, -A good one. I grieve for her. Tomorrow I must inform her squad. I am unsure how I will do that.-

She tilted her head to the side, brow ridge knitted together in confusion. He sighed, certain that he could not make her understand. But then she did something he had not expected. Her long arms wrapped around him, careful, gentle, but firm. His body went ridgid, still so unused to such touch after all this time.

-Brother, you are allowed to be sad. Scorpia said that emotions are normal. If you require comfort, I am here.-

The back of his throat itched, his tired eyes burned. He leaned his weak body against her, forehead resting against her strong shoulder. She ran a claw up and down his arm, chirping comfortingly at him. And this was enough to make him break.

He shook as deep, silent sobs wracked his body. Her chirping kept him grounded, but her gentle embrace kept him comfortable. And they stayed like that for a time, hiding in the dark of the castle courtyard while Hordak wept in peace, without judgement.

Clones never mourned in front of each other.

Until now.

Now Hordak stood alone in the suite he shared with Entrapta. There was much to do. So much. But it was so late and he was so... tired. He could count the times he had wept in his entire existence on one hand. Each time had left him drained. This was no exception.

After an hour, Entrapta joined him too, a little wobbly.

"Dawn?" He asked when she stumbled in, clearly inebriated. He had seen her like this once before. After beast island. He had understood then and he understood now.

"Glimm'r insis... 'sisted on takin' him another nigh'. So I could drink. Err... I mean think. But also drink."

Hordak nodded. He would have to thank the Brightmoon Queen properly one day for everything she had done for them.

"Understandable, considering the circumstances. I had considered a similar approach to the mourning process myself."

"I think I co'sumed enough ta achieve intoxi... intoxicash... to get wasted."

Entraptas hair waved wildly, trying to clumsily remove her armor and clothing. Failing. Hordak wordlessly assisted. Layer by layer. She leaned against him as he stripped her of the memory of what they had just seen, but the scent of death still lingered. How long would he smell death in the air?

"Yes," he agreed, "I believe your mission was quite successful."

She shivered, standing nude against him, eyes heavy lidded, lips parted slightly, cheeks flushed. She started running her hands clumsily over him, trying to reach down under his tunic.

"Are ya still... sad? I can help wi' that."
"Entrapta, stop," he spoke firmly, grabbing her hands and pulling them away, "You're not thinking clearly. I am going to draw you up a bath. Then you are going to eat, have some water, then you are going to sleep."

Her face shifted from lustful back to sad. Ugh. He hated seeing her like that, but he could not blame her. He wanted nothing more than to drink until it was all gone too, but Etherian alcohol was never strong enough.

"Okay. Then in the mornin', I wanna give ya the firs dose of your new treatmen'."

"Fine. Tomorrow. But now, let me treat you."

---------

-Aszi, your presence is required in the Emperors throne room.-

Aszi looked up from her work.

-Now?- she glanced down at the open chest cavity she was operating on, then back up.

-Now.-

With a sigh, she set her tools down, motioned for her assistant to finish up. Her patient would likely die now. Shame. But that was life. Or death, rather.

She took off her gloves and apron, depositing them all in a bin on her way out. She still had a little blood on her smock. It didn't matter in the end. She almost always had a little blood somewhere.

As she made her way to the Emperors throne room, she felt the tiniest twinge of anxiety. Why had she been called? Had he heard about her trip to Dryl? Had he somehow found out that she had assisted the rebels there?

No. No, of course not. If he knew, he would punish her privately and swiftly. Public punishments were meant for more minor offenders, failures, not traitors. Traitors were not to be recognized publicly. Traitors were quickly disposed of without a word. Because public execution would possibly spark rebellion. And she knew how her Father hated Rebels.

She felt all eyes on her as she entered the large imposing throne room. She stopped just before the enormous obsidian throne, replace or repaired, Aszi didn't care. On the throne, the Emperor of everything smiled down at her. A pleased smile, she noted, feeling her anxiety bleed away as she knelt in front of him.

-Majesty,- she purred, -how may I serve you?-

The Emperor stood, motioning for her to stand as well. His large thundering foot steps approached, then moved past. She took the invitation to walk with him, staying one pace behind, but slightly to the side so as not to appear as a servant.

-Aszi, you have done well here,- he complemented, -i've been watching your work. A mind like yours does not come along often.-

They rounded a corner, leading to a personal chamber of some sort. Who's?
-I am flattered, your Majesty.-

-I have work for you, if you think your schedule will allow for it.-

-I will clear my appointments. I serve only you.-

-Good. Because I need you to...- as they approached the door, it slid open, -look after Prince Zed.-

Aszi froze, yellow eyes narrowing at the smirking Prince.

-Hello, Sister.-

She eyed him with barely contained disgust. Unlike her and her twin brother, Zed was a half breed, his mother being some Queen of a conquered system lightyears away. She could not recall the species name. It didn't matter. She hated him. Hated every sound he made, every ridiculous burgundy hair on his ugly head, hated his hideous blue eyes. But mostly, she hated that Father had chosen him. If he absolutely needed a son, she had a twin brother, after all.

-Your wish is my command.- She gave the only answer she could, hiding her repulsion the best she could.

-Good. Perhaps in time, Aszi, you may find yourself elevated once more.- the Emperor laughed darkly as he looked his two favorite children over, silently comparing the two. -I've been playing with these rebels for some time. It has been a fascinating study. But I grow impatient. I put the two of you in charge of drawing out this She Ra and bringing her to me. If the evidence is as it suggests, they may be the key to finally finding Eternia.-

Aszi's face was unblinking, still, perfectly unreadable. She had learned quickly to hide emotion, intention, thought. Beside her mind, it was her greatest strength. She knew how to hold her cards close and play them well. The secret to Eternia was her winning card. If she played it at the wrong time, it would be over.

-At long last,- Zed murmured, -Father, I shall not fail you.-

-I know, my Son,- the Emperor replied, smiling with what could have been mistaken as Fatherly affection if not for his next words, -because if you do, I will crush your throat myself.-
Glimmer stood in front of a tall window. The break of dawn illuminated the room, lighting the down turned faces of the gathered alliance. The team from the Dryl mission stared down at what ever would distract them enough not to have to think about this meeting.

"So we have Dryl now. Our mission was successful," Glimmer announced bluntly, moving right to the heart of the matter as she frequently did. It made her an effective leader.

Hordak had to admit, he was consistently impressed.

"We can't let grief paralyze us," her voice was softer, understanding, yet authoritative. "Lonnie would want us to press on. I fought her enough times to know that. We will have a burial, a day to mourn, then we all get back to it. The Horde is moving again. This time it appears to be moving against Plumeria. Our assumption is that Prime is going after the Heart Blossom. Our Intel seems to suggest that Prime has taken notice of our work with the Runestones and has begun to experiment with the Black Garnet."

Entrapta seemed to sigh, disappointed.

"It was only a matter of time," she conceded, "but I still hoped we could have more time to collect data..."

"Princess Perfuma has returned home to gather her people for an all out defensive-"

"A mistake," now Hordak spoke, quite out of turn too. He didn't care. "It is a fight that can not be won by a group of civilians."

"Correct," Glimmer continued, as if not at all annoyed by his interruption, "that is why we will be lending aid. It is important that we protect the Runestones as much as possible. They are a huge factor in our fight against the Horde."

Hordak was suddenly reminded of something. Scorpia. She had been assigned to lead that squadron. He held his tongue for the moment, but as soon as the meeting was dismissed, he approached the Queen.

"That mission will fail," he stated plainly, "you know it."

"Yes. It's why we are only sending a small force. It will buy time for the civilians to escape. We can't save the crystal. Perfuma knows it too. But we can trick the enemy into believing our forces are smaller than they are."

"Effective," he complemented. "But if it is a suicide mission, then why send Scorpia? She is far too valuable to-"

"I didn't send her. She volunteered."

The words hit Hordak with the impact of a falling star.

"What!?"

"She volunteered and I couldn't get her to change her mind."

"She can't just-"
"Sure she can. Only way to stop her is to put her in a cage, and even then I doubt she'd-."  

"But why would she...?"

He was utterly lost now. After Lonnie, how could he just allow this? He had to do something. Anything! For Stella's sake as well. After he spoke to his squad, he would pull her aside, separately.

Hordak paced in front of the tiny team from the fright zone. Teenagers. All of them. So young. Too young. Why did he do this to them? Why did he do this to Lonnie? In every way he thought about it, this was his fault.

After almost 2 whole minutes of him pacing and the teens standing at attention, Kyle finally spoke up.  

"Lord Horda- ah, I mean, Hordak? Sir? Is Lonnie coming?"

The tall alien froze, back stiff, eyes squeezed shut. He turned away from them, hands clasped behind his back.

"Lonnie will no longer be joining us," his voice took on an uncharacteristically soft edge to it.  

"During our mission to Dryl, an accident occurred. Lonnie did not make it."

He turned back to look at the stone faces of his soldiers, his family. The ones who came with him, the ones who remained loyal, despite it all. Lonnie had been one of them, and now she was gone.

"Lonnie was a fine soldier, a loyal officer, and a good... friend. There will never be another like her, and as such, her presence will be missed."

He noticed Rogelio shifting, looking down, Kyle sniffing. The two of them had known her best. But it was Scorpia that was really struggling to keep it together.

"I am... granting you all permission- no. I encourage you to take time to mourn in whatever way you feel is best. That includes coming directly to me, if you are inclined. I am told talking can help."

That seemed to break the dam holding it all back. Scorpia let out a loud sob, Kyle held tightly to Rogelio and Hordak... stood there, looking at the cloudy early morning sky, as if he could somehow see beyond. His ears flickered down and he rubbed the bridge of his nose, fighting off another headache.

"You are all... dismissed," he sighed, sounding defeated, tired.

He would have a word with them later, individually, but for now, it was best to let them grieve in the way that was best for them.

"Scorpia, stay. I would like a word. Now."

The princess blinked, but stood still as the others walked away in each other's arms.

"Sir?" Her voice still sounded wet from weeping.

He sighed, motioned for her to walk with him.

"I am informed that you volunteered for the Plumeria mission."
Her eyes went dark, finally able to register what this was all about. She looked away.

"I, uh, just want to help the war effort, sir."

"Really?" His voice sounded angry now. He didn't care. "And a suicide mission? That will help? Losing my best officer? That will assist the war effort?"

"I'm your--?"

"Yes. Obviously!" He snarled, "have you learned nothing from me!? Do you not know this mission is doomed!? Do you not see it? You will die! I forbid it!"

"...With all respect, sir? I'm a Princess. I outrank you here. And I'm going."

For the first time, Hordak looked shocked. She moved past him, face like stone, cold, empty. He watched her with his mouth open, words struggling to form.

"What will I tell Stella then?" He asked once he could find his voice, "she is... fond of you."

That got her. She stopped dead in her tracks, running a claw through her hair in thought.

"Tell her..." her voice sounded thick, tearful again, "tell her she made me happy."

------------

Today, Stella was cautious about how she approached Scorpia.

Society was so different here. It was acceptable to comfort, even encouraged. Sure, she'd done well enough comforting her Brother, but they shared a common upbringing, understood discretion. Not a soul would know about how Hordak had wept in the shadow of the castle lawn. But if she went to Scorpia now, everyone would know by the end of lunch time.

Stella sighed, making up her mind the second she spotted the Princess hunched over at the bottom of the wide stairway they'd had one of their first conversations on. When she learned the word for "smile."

The irony was not lost on the clone.

Silent as an assassin, she crept down the stairs, eyes going soft when she realized the quiet gasps coming from her was the sound of her weeping.

"S...Scorpia?" Stella placed a gentle claw on her hard shoulder, careful of the spikes, "may i...?"

Scorpia didn't look, but gave a stiff nod, sniffling. Stella sat down next to her, wrapping her long toned arms around the scorpian princess. That seemed to calm her a bit. Her sobbing slowed somewhat, she was breathing deeper, longer. Her face pressed into Stella's chest. Thay stayed like that for a long time.

Stella said nothing, letting the other woman weep against her for as long as she needed. Silent sobs came in waves, crashing against Stella's hard chest before ebbing. Then she pulled away after a while, wiping those bright eyes of hers on the back of her claws. Poorly. Stella offered a hand to assist, using the edge of her sash to mop up the worst of it.

Stella smiled at that. Friend. She liked being called that. She reached behind her, grabbing something and holding it out.

"Here. I am told give flowers brings joy? Queen helped to collect for you."

The bouquet was small, mostly wildflowers, but Glimmer had insisted it was more sincere because the wildflowers were harder to find. Stella did not have a basis for comparison, so she could only take Glimmers words for it.

Judging by Scorpias reaction, it was a good suggestion. She took the flowers in one claw, grinning through a fresh pond of tears.

"They're so colorful! I love it!"

Her arms went wide, pulling the clone on for another tight hug. Stella went stiff for a full second, survival instincts kicking in. But she relaxed quickly, leaning into the embrace.

"Thanks," Scorpia whispered, close to her ear, "for doing this for me."

Stella shivered, ears going hot.

"I would do... anything for you."

---------

Hordak lay on a cot in the makeshift lab, staring up at the tubes above him. At his head, Imp lurked, curled against his hair as if he could sense the need to comfort. In his arm, plugged into the port above his elbow, a narrow tube led to an i.v. bag, while monitors and sensors were attached to his bare chest. He was strapped down well, for his own safety, he was told.

"Alright," the voice of his wife came from his left, "your body is going to fight this. It's going to hurt like nothing you've ever felt. I promise, it won't last."

"I know," he replied, "its alright, Entrapta. Just do it."

She took a deep breath and so did he, preparing himself for the moment the drug hit his blood stream. Entrapta, dressed in a lab coat, white medical gloves and a facemask over her mouth, held a syringe high in the air, pushing slightly to remove pockets of air before injecting the solution into the I.V. She stepped towards the cot again, leaned in to give him a quick kiss, before moving away.

"Emily," she ordered darkly, "record."

It hit fast and it hit hard. Burning in his veins, burning his flesh, his bones. He roared, body twisting, convulsing. His claws grasped for anything, something to ground him, his back arched. Every inch of his body flared, every hair, every nail, even his eyes, teeth.

True to her nature, Entrapta recorded her observations, dictating her notes to the round bot. Imp had backed away by now, flying to Entrapta in fear, hiding behind her mass of hair.

For twenty minutes, an eternity, he quaked in agony. And then it was done. He closed his eyes and
finally allowed consciousness to flee. Despite the pain, this was the most at peace he had felt since they returned.

When he woke, he realized how sad and upsetting that reality was.

------------

It was 2 days later. Lonnies burial was a small affair. Her squad, Adora, Catra, Scorpia all stood in a little cluster. Bow and Queen Glimmer had made an appearance for a while, which meant Stella showed up. Scorpia and her exchanged several glances when they thought the other wasn't looking and once or twice, their eyes met.

Flirting at a funeral. Honestly, Hordak wanted to scold his sister for it. But he hardly had room to do that. He had flirted with his wife at much less appropriate times. Besides, who was he to say what the appropriate way to grieve was?

He stood, hand in hand with Entrapta who held their son close. He always imagined these affairs would be more somber, but the sky overhead was bright. Almost too bright. Hordaks sensitive eyes hurt already, despite the parasol he held over his head.

Lonnies body had been wrapped and placed in a simple wooden box. Hordak knew almost nothing about burial traditions here, but this seemed terribly undignified. Back in the Frightzone, the dead were simply cremated. Sometimes family would ask for the ashes.

But Lonnie had no family but the family she had made with them. And there was no good way to burn a body out here.

"Would anyone like to say anything?" Glimmer asked, waiting patiently for anyone to step forward. For a moment, nothing. Then Kyle raised his hand and stepped next to the coffin.

"Lonnie was the first person I met when I joined the Cadets. At first I thought she was really mean. She was always pointing out every time I messed up. But... I learned from it."

Rogelio nodded and stood next to him, holding his hand.

"She's the one who introduced me to Rogelio when i was too shy to say hi. I... really owed her a lot. She was kind of the big sister I always wanted."

"Lonnie taught me how to lace up my boots," Adora added.

"She pretended not to see when I put rat droppings in shadow we-"

Shadow Weaver made her appearance at that point and Catra coughed.

"Err, while I was playing a prank."

"Oh! One time, Lonnie gave me an extra ration bar!"

Hordak listened to the teens share stories, wishing he only had one thing to add. But there was nothing. All his stories about her were of times he had failed her entirely. Failed to notice her, failed to care. He was her leader. He was not supposed to just use people like he did.
Entrapta squeezed his hand, bringing him back to reality.

Off to his side, Shadow Weaver stood silent as well. He imagined she was likely feeling similarly. If she had feelings. He wasn't convinced.

"This will not be the last time," she murmured as Lonnie's coffin was lowered into the ground, "you know it too. We'll see a lot more of this before the end."

Before Hordak could hiss out his disgust, she floated away. He exchanged one look at his wife and a series of complicated emotions welled up inside of him.

Her eyes made his pulse quicken, his face warm. She was so alive. So full of energy. So very, very... fertile. He could practically smell it on her. She sent his senses on fire. She bit her lip and he just- he had to-

_Damn it._

_What an inappropriate time to be aroused._
Chapter Summary

It's more smut.

After the burial, Hordak grabbed up his sleeping son and approached the Queen.

"I need you to take Dawn again for a few hours."

Glimmer raised a purple eyebrow. Behind the Queen, Stella smiled and waved before turning her full attention back to Scorpia.

"You just got back and you're trying to pawn your baby off on me again?"

"Exactly," Hordak replied slowly, trying to make his meaning clear without saying it, "we just got back. From a dangerous mission. With heavy emotions."

The Queen still didn't seem to get it. Hordak sighed impatiently, his hormones getting the better of him.

"Sex! We want to go have sex!" He hissed, just a little too loud. His ears turned bright blue, and he lowered his head in embarrassment. Behind the Queen, Stella and Scorpia stared, blinking. Now it was even worse.

His sister understood sex, even if she apparently experienced zero inclination towards it. As she had told him. Several times when he asked about her friendship with Scorpia. Now he would have to endure her being nosey about his relationship!

"Ugh. A funeral!" Glimmer threw her hands up, exasperated. "You were just at a funeral and all you want to do now is... that!?"

"Yes!" He hissed, "have you any idea the complexities of grief? The various hormones at play? I dont have time to explain it, but it is vitally important that Entrapta and I experience a rush of endorphins right now! To assist in the mourning process!"

"Ew! Ew! Okay! Go," she grabbed the baby immediately, shielding its ears as if it might understand the words coming out of his father's mouth, "I'll just tell Shadow Weaver not to go back to her room for a while. I'm tired of getting noise complaints..."

"Thank you! I- wait. Shadow Weaver is next door?"

"Uh? Yeah?" She cocked her head slightly, a teasing grin on her face, "you really dont pay as much attention as you pretend to, do you?"

"Oh no..." he placed a hand over his face, walking away "I owe her so many apology notes..."

They didn't make it back to their room. Not completely. They made it to the stairway leading to their wing when Hordak had taken quite enough teasing from her and captured her lips with his. If anyone
caught them here, he would be absolutely ruined for life.

He was not a male with very strong sexual urges, and did not ever require much in the way of stimulation. But he was, in the end, a creature with needs. And in this case, the drive to mate out weighed his grief. Or maybe it fed it. The need to feel something besides pain. The need to feel life, hers, his, theirs.

Their tongues worked together in harmony, beating against each other like the wings of a butterfly. In the heat of the moment, Hordak was often less aggressive of the two. But now he ran his hands through her hair, gently tugging, guiding.

She found his neck and sunk her teeth in, electing a groan of pleasure. His free hand moved down her waist, hip, sliding until he could rub her through her clothing. That seemed to encourage her somewhat as she raised a leg to wrap around thigh, pressing him against her.

Foot steps from below caused them to hurriedly separate and adjust themselves. Entrapta ran a hand through her violet hair, panting as Hordak straightened his tunic. A Brightmoon guard gave them a suspicious look and Hordak was about 80% certain she knew exactly what they had been doing just moments ago.

The instant she passed, Hordak closed a claw over his wife's hand and guided her quickly up the stairs. What he wanted to do next could not be interrupted. Would not be interrupted. Because he refused to stop, even if all of Brightmoon itself wandered into their chambers.

Entrapta slammed the door to their suite shut behind them the instant they were both inside. He pressed his lips to hers again, long fingers clumsily assisting in removing her clothing. Her lips traveled down his cheek, back to his neck as she unbuckled her trousers and let them fall to her feet. He had to suppress a chuckle. Their height difference sometimes made letting her take the wheel somewhat difficult, as he had to hunch over uncomfortably. Still. It was always worth it for the end result.

She pulled away to tug her top over her head and he stepped back until he found the bed to sit on, smiling like a fool as she finished undressing.

"How do you feel?" She asked, stepping close to where he sat on the edge of the bed. He was still fully clothed, but he no longer wore the exosuit. Ever since her treatment, he found he no longer needed it as much. Yes, the pain was present. It would never go away entirely, but he felt stronger. More capable.

Alive.

"Better," he answered simply, wrapping his long arms around her and bringing her close to straddle his lap.

"No. I mean, really. Tell me in as much detail as possible. I need to know everything for my records."

Hordak chuckled and shook his head as he slowly fell back onto the bed, carrying her with him.

"Later, Princess. I plan to have my mouth otherwise... occupied for a while."

The look she gave him was first confused, but then it dawned on her with a wide smile.

"Oh! Alright then. I'll save my research for when you're free then."

He responded by pulling her hips up until she was bent over, straddling his face. His hands wrapped around her soft round bottom, pulling her center close until she was pressed right up against his
mouth.

The taste of her tonight was electrifying. Different somehow. More likely than not, he was imagining it, but what an imagination he had.

His tongue curled eagerly around her, desperate and needy. He growled from the back of his throat, some deep need driving him on. Animalistic almost. And above him, she smiled, running her hands distractedly through his hair.

That smile. Ugh. It did things to him.

He drove his tongue deep, eyes locked on her, studying as she squirmed above him. Her gaze grew hazy, she started to very gently, move her hips against his mouth impatiently. He carefully dug his claws into her bottom as he then ran his tongue up her slit, back down, up again with every small jerk of her hips.

She made a whimpering groan above him, tugged his hair. Every touch felt unreal, supernatural. The alien tongue under her flicked, lashed out, plunged. Her eyes fell shut as she pressed he hips along in time to the attention he was paying to her most sensitive spots. His long talons dug lightly into her backside, painful, yes, but somehow it just hurt so good. She wanted it.

"More," she whimpered, "More!"

Below, her lovers eyes widened at her demands. With another growl, he rolled them, being careful not to hurt her as he moved himself mostly off the bed, encouraging her to the edge.

She looked down at him questioningly, and he chuckled.

"Better angle," he explained quickly pulling off his tunic before going back in with his mouth again. His long fingers gripped her thighs, holding them apart as he coaxed her to the edge of heaven. He felt her stiffen, her fingers tangle in his hair. Her breath hitched. He pushed one finger in, always careful with his talons. She squirmed against him, eager, desperate.

His soft tongue slipped along her sensitive nub as he slipped in another finger. The effect was electric. Her back arched. Her hand twisted in his hair, pressing his face deep into her wetness.

"More! More!" She begged. Her voice shook. Oh, he knew that sound. Knew what it meant. And he would not let up. Not until he was sure she was well and truly satisfied.

Who knew when they would have another chance? Glimmer had promised them a few hours. He fully intended to take advantage of that.

Beneath his tongue, she shook, muttering his name. She rode out the waves of her climax, squeezing his fingers. A faint sheen of sweat made her thighs slick.

"S-stop," she begged as he continued his ministrations, despite her orgasm. She pulled desperately at his hair, trying to force his tongue free of her still pulsating center.

His fingers crooked, carefully rubbing her inside walls. She squealed, letting go of his hair to cover her face.

"Sorry, sorry," he snickered, once he pulled free, "you just feel so... inviting."

"Then get inside," she pecked at him through her fingers with a coy smile.
"Already?" He smirked, "I'm not finished with yo-"

She sat up immediately, face set with determination. He tilted his head and his lips twitched in amusement. What was she thinking now? He couldn't wait to find out.

Her pretty face was set with a determination he had grown so used to. She grabbed his face, leading him to bend in for a kiss. As her lips captured his, her legs wrapped around his waist, pulling him in while she hung off the edge of the bed.

He hardly had time to protest. With a moan, she helped guide him inside, frantically pressing her hips against his. Well. He wasn't about to ignore an order from his Princess. She did outrank him, after all.

He let out a hiss if pleasure as her warm, welcoming center pulsed around him.

Yes. This was it.

Her eyes met his, lips parted. He wanted to say something, but his body had a mind of its own. Teeth clenched, he jerked his hips against her. Hard, wild, a desperate animalistic desire to mate driving his body against hers. She gasped, throwing her arms around his neck.

Her soft, round breasts pressed against his chest as his body danced against hers. Their voices rose together. Her hands laced through his hair, forcing him to look at her. Not that he could look away anyway. She was stunning.

Soon, so agonizingly soon, he reached his limit. The look in her eyes told him that she knew it too. She gave him an encouraging nod, pressing her forehead against his as he pressed into her, once more, twice more, a third time, fourth, riding out the pleasure of his desperately needed orgasm.

He pulled out, quickly. Panting, she lay back, legs still wide as the evidence of their coupling leaked from her onto the sheets below. The vision was one he wanted to keep with him during the months she would be away from him.

"That... what has gotten into us?" He chuckled, leaning his long, lean form over her to nuzzle a shoulder.

"More.... research required," she panted, running her fingers up his spine as he pressed a kiss to her shoulder.

He pulled away slightly to look at her again, biting his lip. Well, he needed to take what he could get while he still could.

"Shall we resume the experiment then, Princess?" He moved to nibble at her neck, eliciting a giggle from his wife.

"Proceed."
Forever

Stella's treatment went better than Entrapta had expected. She had her theories. Stella's body was younger, less damaged. She did not appear to experience the same level of discomfort Hordak had. It was a fascinating experience to witness.

"Subject claims to experience minor aches in the joints and quote: 'big head pain'. It seems that there is a direct correlation between the amount of discomfort a subject experiences and the stage of their condition. My theory is, if a subject's condition is found and treated quickly enough, it may be possible to eliminate it entirely with minimal pain. More research is required, but I am hopeful for Dawn's treatment and eager to continue.

Emily, end recording."

Entrapta sat at her desk, going through some final notes, cleaning, packing. Soon she would be leaving to go back to Dryl, leaving Hordak and Dawn behind. She had work to do now that she had a proper lab to do it in, and a kingdom to look after.

And Hordak... was needed here. Queen Glimmer had insisted. It had posed a problem, as the Queen had apparently assigned her husband to be her top Military advisor. Inconvenient for her family, but good for the cause.

The ship she would be taking with her, however, as well as Bow. She needed a lab assistant, even if it wasn't Hordak, and Bow would make a good apprentice. He'd been thrilled. Glimmer... less so.

She called it a fair trade.

"How is Stella?" The voice of her husband shook her intense concentration. She hadn't heard him come in. She looked up, rubbing her eyes sleepily. It was still so early in the day. Why was she so tired?

"She has taken to the treatment well. I need to observe a little more before I leave, but it's a good start!"

He nodded, glancing around to be sure nobody else was around before he wrapped his arms around her. After all this time, being publically affectionate was a struggle. He tried to avoid it, but when they were alone, all bets were off.

"Mmm, do you know what today is?" He asked teasingly in her ear.

"The anniversary of our marriage. I didn't forget," she replied instantly, pushing lightly out of his arms to show him a pile of metal on her desk. "I made you something for the occasion. Upgrades to your armor! More advanced weapons capabilities, a personal shield and! You can record notes to it and they will download directly into Emily! I can hear your progress updates all the way in Dryl! And don't forget, your armor is linked to Emily, so we can instantly communicate any where, any time!"

His fingers ran over the thick metal plating, the tiny scratches, impossible to buff out flaws. Imperfections.

He smiled, turned back to her and bent slightly to place a kiss to the top of her head.

"Once more, I am impressed with you," he chuckled, "it is marvelous. Thank you. Now," He pulled something out from behind his back, a tiny box, gift wrapped. He had wrapped it himself, taking
such special care to make it look as pleasing as possible. "This is for you. I... realized that you will likely not wear it much, but..."

She pulled the ribbon on top and carefully pulled the box out of the wrapping paper. She glanced up at him once more before opening it.

"Oh?" She pulled out his gift by the chain, blinking at the pendant. It was shaped like the crystal in his armor, but the inscription was different.

"I... err, had Adora assist me in the translation. She is surprisingly bright, or, rather, useful? In that regard anyway. I."

"Forever," she read quietly, hushing his awkward mumblings, "it says 'Forever'.

"Y-yes," his ears lowered, nervous. It had been awkward enough asking Adora to help. "My peoples lifespan is long, Entrapta. Thanks to your medical intervention, I will likely outlive you. But I have not truly been alive until you entered my life. And for all the years I have left, I will not truly live again without you. Eternity is a long time, but for as long as I have, you will be loved."

She was smiling, running her fingers over it. She sniffled, avoiding his eyes as her hair pulled it around her neck, fastening the clasp. She was really getting the hang of her hair again. He was glad of that.

"So... you like it?"

In response, she jumped, pushing him to the ground with a thump. He blinked, now sitting on his backside with his Princess clinging to him. She nuzzled him and he chuckled.

"I love it."

--------

Scorpia waited where she always did at this time of day. Stella always had a break at exactly noon and she was rarely late. But today, almost 3 minutes later than expected, Stella finally approached the castle lawn where Scorpia was now looking very uncomfortable. She carried a large bag.

"Late. Apologies," she said, voice pleasant and perky as always, "I bring surprise!"

Scorpia's face broke out in a grin.

"What is it? Oh! Let me guess! You brought cake? Or- or! A board game! Or maybe-"

Stella looked confused by her suggestions, but then smiled. "Better! I brought sparring weapons! We train!"

Now it was Scorpia's turn to look confused.

"Train?"

Stella almost jumped with joy. She clapped her hands once, chirped. She was tall, big red eyes, sharp teeth. It wasn't fair. She had no right to be acting this cute.

Scorpia swallowed hard, eyes wide.
"You go to war tomorrow! Must be sure you are combat ready!"

Scorpia watched the clone grab a dull blade, testing the feel of it in her long elegant hands. She pushed herself up on her toes, stretching tall, then crouching low. She studied her long limbs, the way she bent, turned her body, studied her weapon of choice. Scorpia realized way too late that she was blushing.

"Come! Choose!" The clone insisted, smiling as if they were simply playing a game. To her, that's what this was, really. This was how she would often spend her recreational time, when she had it. In a Universe where it was kill or be killed, she had gotten very good at doing the former.

Scorpia bent down to pick up a long staff, but quickly snapped it in half with her powerful claws.

Now it was Stella's turn to blush. The tips of her ears went bright blue, dipping low on her head.

"Err!! Sorry! I, uh, don't normally do weapons? I usually just use, um, these?" She grinned foolishly, holding her claws up, "I'm sorry! I know. I'm making this difficult. And after you got so excited about-

"Use them," Stella insisted immediately, "use them. Fight."

"Uhhh..." she barely had enough time to drop the broken ends of the staff before the powerful alien lunged, blade shining and sparking against her hard, steel strong claws. Her face was close. So very close. The sparkle in her eyes could blind, the joy on her thin dark lips, the way her teeth glowed-

She was almost so distracted, she barely deflected the next attack, then the next. The alien was like a dancer on her feet, light, airy, but powerful. Scorpia understood why she wore such thin shoes now, how they gave her such ease of movement, light footsteps. Perfect for an assassin.

That was it. Her feet. Eyes full of apologies, she stepped one large heavy foot on the clones thin shoe. Stella winced in pain, then frustration when the large princess knocked her blade from her hands. Scorpia had a look on her face that said she thought her victory was assured.

She forgot one thing.

As she raised a claw, stella simply brought one long talon to the center of her throat with a smirk, lightly tickling the skin on her neck.

"I win," she declared quietly.

Scorpia's claw fell to her side, but her face did not display disappointment. It was pure facination.

"Ow!" She jerked back, the tip of Stella's talon leaving a small red cut to her throat.

"Apologies!" Stella blurted out, raising her hands, talons up and away from her, "I did not think you would try to move in."

"No, no," Scorpia laughed, rubbing the spot with the back of a claw, "that was my fault. That was amazing. Are all of you that fast?"

"Most," Stella answered honestly, "I hoped you could beat me. Is you distracted?"

Scorpia blushed, looking away, saying nothing.
"Is it... Catra?"

Scorpia looked back, shocked. Of all the things for the alien to pick up on... but then, she was intelligent. She had to be to pick up on the Etherian language so fast.

"Its complicated," Scorpia sighed, sinking into the grass and looking out at the treeline of the forest.

"Brother say you love the catra, but catra love the blonde Princess," Stella sunk into the grass next to her, pulling her long legs up, knees tucked against her chest. "Brother also say catra not deserve you. He calls catra, umm... there is no word for it in your language. It is rude word."

"Didn't know Hordak swore," Scorpia grinned, but then wrapped her large arms around herself, "I think I was in love with her. For a while. I just wanted her to look at me the same way she looked at Adora. I thought if I was just nice enough, if I did everything she wanted, if i..."

"That sound like slave. Not love."

Scorpia chuckled, looking up to the clouds overhead.

"Yeah. I guess it was kind of like that. The worst part is, I didn't really mind it? Even her just bossing me around was still attention from her. And now she's with Adora and..."

"Scorpia..." Stella leaned back, stretching her legs out in front of her, hands resting behind her in the grass, "do you volunteer for battle to be away?"

"...Yeah, I did," Scorpia answered, feeling foolish, "I just... when I see them..."

"I understand," Stella fell lightly back until she was laying fully down in the grass on her back, "I feel that way about someone as well."

Scorpia felt her face go redder than her armor. What was she saying? Was she teasing? Did she even know how to tease? No. When she looked down at the tall clone, her face showed nothing but sincerity in the way she smiled up at her.

"Hey, um, Stella?"

"Yes, Scorpia?"

The Princess leaned towards her and Stella felt heat travel from her ears all the way across the bridge of her nasal ridge. Something in her eyes told her what she was about to ask before she even asked it.

"May I kiss you?"

Stella slowly propped herself up on her elbows, eyes locked, feeling like gravity was pulling them in.

"...Y-yes."
This chapter was heavily influenced by Noelle's Scorpia playlist on spotify.

Go have a listen. It hurts so good.

Hordak stood in the lab, prepping last minute things to send off with Entrapta. Experiments, tools, all the little things she may need. Right now, she was occupied with spending quality time with their son. They had both been so busy, but the boy still needed his parents and they had both been woefully lacking in the parenting department as of late.

As he was picking up a delicate glass instrument, Stella burst into the lab, surprising him and making him fumble and nearly drop it. He only managed to hook one talon through the lip of the container, letting slip a series of curses.

-Stella! Why are you being so loud!?- 
-Brother! I have been given a kiss and I do not know what to do about it!-

Hordak gently packed away the instrument he nearly destroyed with his clumsiness, growling.

-Scorpia? he asked, sighing as she nodded. Great. This would end in tears. -And you needed to nearly scare me to death because...?-

Stella shuffled her feet, looking down. It would have been adorable if the teenage clone didn't look so intimidating just by her sheer size.

-Do I stop her from leaving now? Am I wrong if I do If she wants to leave? Am I wrong if I don't?-

Hordak seemed to stop to think about it.

-Do you want her to stay?-

-I do.-

-Then you should tell her.-

Hordak seemed stricken by his own words for a moment. Tell her. Oh. He needed to learn to take his own advice.

-Now?- she asked nervously, fiddling with her claws.

"Yes. Now," Hordak snapped, switching to the Etherian language, "Quickly. She leaves in the morning."

Stella bit her lip, hesitated, but quickly turned on her heel when Hordak waved her away with one hand. Once she was gone, He sunk into a chair for a moment. It was in her hands. If anyone could get Scorpia to stay now, it was her. But... he doubted it.
Sometimes pain was more powerful than love. But time would heal. He was confident of that. Stella was strong.

He rose to his feet again, glanced at everything half packed around the makeshift lab. Entrapta would be leaving tomorrow as well. He should finish this. Should. Didn't.

Entrapta played with their now 4 month old son. He had grown so quickly. Too quickly. And when she next saw him, how big would he be? This project could take months, could take years. How long would the war go?

Prime had the ability to wipe the planet. Why didn't he? What was stopping him? It couldn't just be the planets resources. It had to go deeper. She thought back to what Aszi said. Something about Eternia, and finding it. She knew that had something to do with the First Ones. She Ra used it as a password, of sorts. It was a place, she supposed. Another world. Somewhere outside of this dimension. And the Portal-

Dawn giggled, tugging at Entraptas waist length hair, bringing it to his mouth.

"No, no," she laughed, untangling the hair from his chubby fingers.

"Naughty boy," Hordak said from behind her, "I am the only one who is allowed to pull on that."

Entrapta turned just as he bent down to kiss her cheek.

"How has he been?"

"Fine," Entrapta shrugged, "I checked his weight and height again. Average weight, above average height. I theorize he will grow to be tall, but of course, more data will be needed."

"I see," Hordak chuckled, shaking his head as he sat on the floor with them, "but that isn't what I meant exactly."

"What? Oh! He's been in a good mood. A happy baby."

He watched her staring at their son, going quiet.

"I don't want you to go," he murmured, breaking the silence.

"I know," he replied, "but it doesn't mean I can't hate it."

She nodded sadly, pushing dark hair out of their son's eyes. It was starting to get long, thick. It grew fast. Like her's.

"I hate it too."

"I will... take every excuse I can to visit."

"I know."

More silence. Entrapta set their son on the floor on a little blanket she had spread out for him. They both watched in wonder as he rolled over onto his tummy.
"Ah. He is strong," Hordak whispered, smiling proudly, "Good. He will need to be."

"He's smart too," she added. Quiet again. Then- "Hordak, Dawn. He's sick too. I should have told you."

His world crumbled. Nothing had been able to prepare him for that.

"I... I gave it to him, then?" He asked, slowly, mind reeling.

"It was passed to him, yes," she answered, blunt but gentle, "but we have a way to treat it, remember? A way to stop the condition from taking hold."

"You knew? And you didn't tell me?" His voice betrayed his hurt more than he had hoped it would.

"Its true. I hid it. I thought you would blame yourself-"

"I do."

"So I was correct."

Their son rolled onto his back once again, kicking his feet. Hordak placed a talon against his palm, letting him bring it to his mouth to chew on. He could feel the sharp poke of his first fang. Another surge of pride and pain struck him.

"We... should not have more children after all," he sighed, "I know we had discussed having more, but..."

Entrapta bit her lip, hesitant. She looked like she wanted to say something else, but simply nodded instead. He was not angry, and for now, that was enough. They could discuss it later.

"I am going to miss you," she murmured, leaning her head against his shoulder.

"I will miss you as well," he looked down at the chubby baby chewing aggressively at his finger, "we both will."

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Scorpia stood in her quarters, watching the dusk roll in through a large window. She would leave at first light. She would leave and she likely would never return. But at least she wouldn't ever have to see... her again.

Was she still in love with Catra? Against her better judgement, against her own desires, against all attempts, yes. It was stupid. Every time she saw her, it felt like someone had a vice grip on her heart. Nothing helped.

Or at least that had been the case. Now a tall, elegant, deadly alien was in the way, guarding her heart, protecting it every time the sight of Catra assaulted it. She had been a friend when she needed it. She was there, constant, unwaveringly loyal. Scorpia hadn't been able to give much back, but the clone never seemed to mind.

The Princess rested her head lightly against the glass, closing her eyes. She should try to sleep, but she knew that wasn't likely to happen now.
A knock at her door broke her from her thoughts. She sighed, hoping it wasn't work related. She really just wanted to relax.

"Come in," she called, still facing the window.

The door opened and someone stepped inside.

"Scorpia?"

She turned to look at the tall clone, blinking in surprise. And blushing.

"Hi Stell. Um, I was just thinking about you."

She saw the clone's ears go blue again. She couldn't help but smile at how easy it was to get that reaction from her. Seeing the tall, intimidating alien blush was thrilling.

"You were...?" Stella's ears perked up, tall as she carefully tucked a longer lock of navy hair out of her eyes, smiling.

"Y-yeah..." Scorpia turned her attention back to the window, motioning for Stella to come closer, "so... what can I do for you?"

Stella stepped up to the window next to the Princess, fiddling with her hands in a way that made Scorpia's face go red. Why did she have to act so cute?

"I just wanted to say..." she hesitated, unsure of how to say it. She finished in her own language. -Don't go.-

Scorpia blinked. Despite being utterly unable to understand her and Hordak's alien language that they were always speaking to each other, she had a feeling she understood already.

"I mean... I wish you, um... stay."

Scorpia took a deep shuddering breath. Could she do it? Just stay? Just exist here with this girl? Just spend all of her afternoons hanging out with her? Maybe spend her evenings alone with her? Maybe they would become intimate, spending nights together in this room, in that bed. Would she like that? Would Stella?

'I would do anything for you,' Scorpia recalled her saying once, and honestly, she believed it.

"I can't," Scorpia replied sadly, "I can't. Someone has to lead. And I-"

"I know," Stella reached over to wrap a hand around her claw, "you must. I wish you stay even so."

Now Scorpia understood. She wasn't begging. The time for that had passed. Now she was simply expressing her feelings on the matter. She turned to the clone, leaning in, propping herself up on the tips of her toes to reach the tall clones mouth with hers.

They kissed for a while, longer than it felt, and yet, time could have ended for all they cared. It was gentle, chaste, and the best kiss Scorpia had ever had.

When they eventually pulled apart, Scorpia caught sight of the dark purple sky outside. When did it get late? She eyed the clone who was now pressed against her, bending slightly to rest her head against her neck. Stella was carefully nuzzling, aware of the hard spikes on her shoulder.

"Do you, um, want to stay the night?" Scorpia asked, looking away as a blush spread from her cheek.
bones to the bridge of her nose.

The clone pulled away slightly to look her over, trying to meet her eyes, identify her intentions.

"N-not to do anything," Scorpia explained quickly, "I just... dont want to spend my last night alone."

Stella considered this, then nodded. She had the night off and the next day as well. When would she have this opportunity again?

"I will stay," she promised, "since you can not."

They kissed once more, pausing only to look out the window as something streaked across the sky, bright, beautiful. And they may have thought it good luck to see a falling star anywhere else.

But on this little world, stranded in this empty demension, there were no stars to fall. All there was in the sky now were Horde battleships.

A shiver ran up Stellas spine and Scorpia reached over to carefully pull a curtain across the window before leading the clone to the bed.

"I... never sleep in bed before," Stella confessed, pausing at the edge of the bed.

Scorpia didn't laugh as Stella had feared she would. She simply offered her a claw and pulled the bed covers aside for her.

"Well," Scorpia smiled as the clone slid into the bed next to her, "this will be a good first time then."

The next morning, Scorpia awoke before the dawn, while the world was still dark.

They had stayed up late, holding each other, talking, cuddling, kissing. Scorpia knew if she had asked, Stella would have done anything she asked for in that bed. She knew this, but she also knew from previous conversations that the clone was essentially asexual.

Besides, there was no need. This was enough. She was enough. Exactly as she was.

Scorpia smiled at the now softly snoring clone as she finished getting ready. There was nothing to pack, really. She had left her old Horde uniform behind, wearing the colors and Crest of Brightmoon instead now. Which clashed horribly with her tail and claw colors. It didn't matter. Of all the things on her mind, how she looked was the very least of them.

Stella shivered in the morning chill, the blanket having slipped when Scorpia got out of bed. Scorpia crossed back over to her side of the bed, pulled it up to her shoulder, and kissed her forehead. The clone squirmed and Scorpia was worried she might wake, but she nuzzled the pillow and continued snuzzing just as deeply as before.

Scorpia watched her for a while, taking every detail, committing it all to memory. Her dark eyelids, slightly parted lips, the way her chin-length navy hair lay spread on the pillow like a halo, her taloned fingers clutching the blanket to her chest. She slept on her side, curled with her long legs to her chest.

Scorpia recalled last night, holding those hands, body curled against hers. That night was a heaven she was sure she would never know again.

At long last, she left the bedside, leaving the sleeping teen alone. As she headed towards the door, she reached to one shoulder and with one snap of her powerful pincer, snapped off one of the spikes
on her shoulder. She left it behind on a small table by the door. A last little piece of herself, a gift. A promise.

If she could have given her heart, she would have.

By the time Stella awoke, she was gone.
Hordak held his son in his arms protectively as Entrapta approached him with a needle.

"Now you promise this isn't going to... to do what it did to me, right?"

"For the last time," Entrapta sighed, "all evidence suggests that the pain is directly a result of the bodies degradation. He will feel a little pinch, sure, but that's all. Besides. I have to get him up to date on his vaccinations. This is a good time to do it."

Hordak nodded, but looked nervous, gently positioning the baby so he was sitting on his lap. Entrapta pressed the needle into his chunky thigh. The scream the baby let out broke Hordaks heart. He chirped at him as Entrapta stuck a tiny bandage over the little pinprick of blood.

-Yes, yes, I know it hurts,- he soothed in his native tongue, -but you are strong and so brave. And you make me proud. This pain will pass.-

He was still soothing the baby when a second needle was pressed into his thigh and the crying began all over again.

"That's it," Entrapta promised as she turned away, then did a double take. "Hordak, are you crying?!"

His face was close to the baby, nuzzling, chirping, soothing, but there was an unmistakable sheen to his bright red eyes.

"I just... hes so strong. I'm just so proud!"

Entrapta blinked, then smiled. She was leaving very soon. In just a few hours, right after breakfast. She was glad that she had this last little memory to take with her. It reassured her that her little family would be just fine after all.

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Stella had awoken shortly after Scorpia left. Not soon enough to catch her, but not too late to see her leave from the window. She watched for a long time, heart racing but her head was empty of all thought except one.

-Don't go-
Once they were out of sight, Stella reached up to her face, realizing with horror that it was wet. Tears. She hated this.

She quickly wiped them on the back of her hand, then rushed to the door, pausing as something red and familiar caught her eye. With two long talons, she clutched the spike, held it up to the light. A small smile finally found her black lips and she clutched it to her chest.

As she opened the door to leave, she found Catra standing on the other side, fist raised to knock. For a full thirty seconds, the two stared at each other. It was the longest 30 seconds of her life. Then Catra looked past her into the room, at the bed, crumpled sheets, then back to the clone, studying her now. Her clothes were wrinkled, obviously from the night before, her hair was a mess, and in her hand she held... Catra blinked once before backing away and leaving without a single word.

Stella had the urge to squeak out that it wasn't what it looked like but she stopped herself. A part of her, a large part, liked that she thought that. Her feelings were complex. She wanted to discuss them with someone, but Scorpia was gone now, and Brother would be seeing Entrapta off today as well. He would be in no mood to deal with her prattling on today. She may be able to try talking to Queen Glimmer. She'd always been kind to her, but that was her new boss and Stella was nothing if not professional.

No. She would just have to deal with hard emotions the way she always did. Throwing herself full into training her body.

She headed for the castle lawn as she frequently did, ignoring the pain in her heart as she neared the spot that Scorpia had gifted her with her first kiss. She began to stretch, reaching high to the clear sky, feeling joints crack before bending low again. She wondered if Scorpia was feeling the same right now. If she was stretching, readying herself for battle.

For certain death.

She shoved the thought out of her mind. No. She had to... what did that boy Bow say? Have faith? Scorpia was tough. It was part of what made her so appealing.

Part of what made her so... lovable.

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Entrapta had the last of her equipment packed away in the transport. She took little else with her, save for a gift that Bow had given them when Entrapta had let it slip that it was their anniversary days ago. A photo, framed, small enough for Entrapta to set on her desk as she worked.

It was the three of them. Hordak stood tall in the back, his face relaxed, smiling. Entrapta held their son against her chest as her hair gently wrapped around Hordaks arm. Hordak had a copy, which now sat at the bedside table in the suite.

But now he was frowning in a way that made him almost seem like an entirely different person from the one in the photo. Entrapta had done her best to make him smile today, had tried to make him happy in some small way. But now even the surprise she had was unhappy news. She wasn't sure she even wanted to tell him now.

"That's the last of it," she announced, standing straight back up after she placed the last bag. She
faced her husband and the small group gathered. Adora was the one to speak first.

"Hey. You'll be careful over there, right?" She asked, leaning in to give her a firm hug. Entrapta smiled, returning the embrace.

"I'll be fine! I have Bow to protect me. Besides, I'm tougher than I look."

Adora pulled away nodding before turning her attention to Bow.

"Have fun, you big nerd," she teased, giving him a playful punch to the arm. He winced and then pulled her into a hug.

Kyle and Rogelio approached next, wordlessly pulling her into a group hug before moving to stand behind Hordak. By this time, Glimmer had made her appearance with the remaining members of the Princess alliance. Smiles, tears and a few jokes later and Entrapta was pulled into another group hug, this one much large and more colorful.

"You're one of us," Glimmer reminded her through tears, "we'll never leave you behind again. We're always right there with you."

Now Entrapta was crying too, but when they finally pulled away, she managed to wipe her eyes before anyone really saw. As Glimmer moved on to Bow, Stella tapped her on the back, surprising her. In all the chaos, she hadn't noticed her there. Or maybe it was her days as an assassin that made her so difficult to detect.

Either way, Entrapta pulled her into a great hug, a bit comical for those watching. Entrapta was tiny compared to the clone, but she wrapped her hair around her and squeezed. The poor clone didn't know what to do except smile. After a moment, Entrapta let go, but held her hands.

"Please be a good auntie to Dawn. And please keep looking after Hordak for me. He isn't as smart as us."

Stella laughed with Entrapta, squeezing her hands back.

"You may depend on me to protect dumb brother. Promise, Sister."

Entrapta glanced at her husband now. He looked so gloomy, more so than normal. He held their son close, planting little kisses to the top of his dark hair absentely, distractedly. Entrapta dropped Stella's hands with one last nod to her, well, sister-in-law. Before heading to give another goodbye to the love of her life.

"Hordak-"

"Entrapta-"

"Be safe."

They spoke at the same time, both giving a small snort of amusement before turning their attentions towards their son.

"He will be alright," Entrapta promised, running a hand through the chubby baby's fluffy black hair, "he has daddy to protect him."

"And keep him in line," Hordak added, "who am I kidding? I am entirely at his mercy."

"I wonder how the next one will boss you around?"
Hordak almost didn't catch the implication. Almost. But when it hit, it hit like a supernova. It shattered reality. When he finally came back to himself, all he could manage was,

"You're...?"

"I think so, yes."

"Oh."

He didn't look disappointed. He didn't look afraid. After the conversation the other day, she had expected the news to break him. But something shifted. He passed their son to Stella who looked absolutely uncomfortable holding the infant. Before Entrapta could comment on it, he captured her mouth with his, one hand cradling her face, the other going to rest on her stomach. When they parted, he was grinning, leaning his forehead against hers.

"We are going to have to find a good birth control method," he whispered, with a laugh, "a toddler and an infant. As if we weren't busy enough fighting a war outside the home."

"We'll manage," she replied, "we always do."

"Hurry with your work and I will hurry with mine. I want to be back together before your second trimester."

She nodded eagerly and pressed another long kiss to her husband's mouth. When they parted, they both knew it would be their last for a long time.

Imp swooped between them, just then, clinging to Entrapta like an insect. Entrapta clutched the sweet little creature to her chest, sighing and murmuring her goodbyes. Honestly, she just wished she could bring him with her. Emily and Imp seemed inseparable, but Emily would be coming to Dryl as well. After a moment, she let him go and Imp clung to Hordak now, looking upset.

She gave baby Dawn one last kiss, touched his face one last time, then she climbed into the transport, waving to her friends, her family.

As the vehicle drove away, the crowd dispersed, princesses going back to their meetings, Kyle and Rogelio heading back to their post. But Stella stayed behind with Hordak for a while, hand on his shoulder as they watched the vehicle vanish in the distance.

After a half hour, the three of them turned to head back to the castle, discussing anything but their shared anxieties.

High above the atmosphere, an Emperor waited, watched. At both sides of his throne a son and a daughter stood. Two forces in opposition, repelling like magnets, yet pulled together by the same cosmically powerful force.

The Emperor tented his long perfect, polished fingers and regarded a holographic display in front of him.

-Aszi. Zed,- his voice was slow, precise, dripping with the importance of what he was going to say next, -do you know what the definition of failure is?-

He clicked a hologram on his display, bringing the kingdom of Plumeria up to their view.
-It is when something ceases to serve a purpose,- Zed finished quietly, having heard this particular threat a dozen times by now.

The Emperor smirked and the three watched as the Horde army decimated the Alliance forces. There was hardly a resistance.

-Bring the Princesses to me,- the Emperor ordered, watching the battle, -I will have use for them.-

Chapter End Notes

Alright guys! That's it for act 2! I will be taking a week break for the sake of my brain and then I'll be right back at it with the third and final act!

Next act will be pretty action heavy as mysteries are solved. Battles are won and lost and the gang puts their big plan into action.

Thanks for sticking with it to this point and I hope to see all you guys next week when I pick back up!
WOAH MAN!!
So a ton had happened in a week! I'm posting this up a day early just because I'm so excited! Been a good week off. My brain feels nice and refreshed and now I'm back on track to finish this thing before SEASON 4 COMES OUT!!!! And if you guys aren't totally pumped for that, I dunno what to tell ya!

Anyway I've got some fun stuff planned, so if you're still with me reading this, a huge thank you! You guys have made getting back into the writing game fun.

I've been pretty chill about canon and I thinks it's pretty obvious, but once more, this is not what I honestly think season 4 will be, especially not now. This is my own thing, I dont own these characters, blah blah disclaimer.

Anyway! I'm back! Let's jump back to it!

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

"Hordak! I was just about to call you! Did you listen to my notes from last night? We finished the ship!"

Hordak lay in the overly large and empty bed in his Bright moon suite. In one claw he held a tablet, smiling as his wife gestured to a set of blueprints behind her.

"Yes. I heard. Well done," he waved at Bow working in the background and the young man silently waved back. "Great progress. The Council will be glad to hear it."

"I've also begun work on more battle bots! These can be mass produced and deployed in large numbers."

"Impressive," he complemented, "but are you overworking yourself again? Is Bow looking after you?"

In the background Bow froze and looked back at the screen with an awkward shrug and a forced smile. Hordak nearly lost his composure and laughed. He was, of course, teasing.

"Bow has been a valuable assistant," Entrapta insisted, running a hand absently over her large swollen belly, "I wouldnt have gotten this far without him."

Hordak nodded his approval and glanced at their son sleeping peacefully in the crib Micah had provided. He said he saved it, as well as several of the items they used for Dawn, from Glimmers childhood. It meant Dawn wore a lot of pinks and purples, but so did everyone in Bright Moon.

"It's late," he noted, "you need sleep. The baby too. Take care of yourself. Bow, you are under strict orders to get her to bed. Immediately. "
Bow nodded and Entrapta squealed in protest.

"Well hold on! I'm a Princess in my own Kingdom right now! I outrank you!"

Hordak pretended not to hear her and simply continued giving orders.

"And see that she doesn't bring any work with her to bed. She will stay up working if she does. Also some water. She should stay hydrated."

Grinning wide, Bow gave a stiff salute.

"You got it, Sir!"

"What!? You can't just- Hordak!"

Her hair was frazzled. Hordak chuckled. He wished he was there so bad it hurt. 7 months was too long to be away.

"Take care, Entrapta. I will visit soon. I promise. Sleep well, Love."

Before she could show her outrage, he shut off the video feed and lay on his back staring up at the tall ceiling. His eyes traveled from crystal to crystal, as his good mood evaporated.

7 months, 13 days, 6 hours and 32 minutes. That was how long they had been apart. Long enough for him to develop a routine based around when he would hear her voice again.

He woke, got Dawn ready for the day, listened to Entrapta's notes from the night before as he dressed, went to a meeting in the morning with Dawn, had a late breakfast/lunch, handed Dawn off to Auntie Glimmer, got to work in the lab, listened to more of Entrapta's notes, worked more, found an excuse to contact her, went to a meeting, had dinner alone with Dawn, occasionally Stella would eat with them, locked them in the suite and then contacted Entrapta once more before bed. Over and over again. For months.

Hordak really wished it had been as boring as he thought it was. If it was merely boring, he could live with it. But the war had complicated things, as wars tended to do.

Perfuma had been kidnapped when Plumeria fell. There was reason to believe she was alive, especially as Spinella had been abducted as well. Glimmer seemed to believe the Horde was collecting Princesses. Hordak had reason to agree, and reason to now feel worried nearly constantly.

A knock on his door made him sit up in bed. At this hour? It could only be one person.

"Come in, Stella," he sighed, laying back down.

The door creaked open and a face near identical to his peered inside.

"Sorry. I know it's late, but-"

"Just come in. You know I never mind."

Her lips pulled back in a smile and she stepped inside closing the door behind her. He watched her cross the room, steps silent as a ghost as she hovered over the crib, looking down at the sleeping 11 month old with Imp curled protectively at his head. She gazed at him adoringly and he could tell she had to physically resist the urge to run her fingers through his fluffy black hair.

-I never get used to him,- she commented softly in their native tongue.
Despite her brilliant strides in learning the Etherian language, she was still the most comfortable speaking to him like this.

-Soon there will be another little one to admire.- Hordak responded, sitting up again to watch her.

She had grown so much, even from just a few months ago. Matured. Really discovering herself. Not just as a warrior, but as a woman.

-Any news on Scorpia?- she asked again, as she did every night when she came to visit.

-No,- he answered, -if I find out anything from the Council, you will be the first to know.-

-Catra says shes dead.-

-Many people say that. The evidence suggests she is dead. Do you not believe it?- Stella narrowed her eyes and turned back to face him.

-You know I don't. Scorpia is too strong to die like that.-

-Stella. It's been months. Why are you still?- He regarded her with a fragile hope in his eyes. Yes. He wanted to believe it too. Scorpia was Stellas lover, but she was also his friend.

"Faith. Very unscientific," he snorted, "but perhaps... this time, a little faith is needed." "See? Entrapta was right," She giggled, tucking a long piece of navy hair behind a pointed ear, "I am smarter than you."

Hordak scooped up a pillow and threw it at her face. Stella snatched it out of the air before it could hit her, not surprising.

"-and faster," she added, "but thank you for the pillow. I will sleep here tonight."

"Wha-! I never said you could-"

"Brother, hand me a blanket and turn out that light. It's been a long day. Im tired." Once upon a time, nobody would have dared to order him about. But now... He sighed, shook his head and pulled the blanket aside for her.

"Just sleep here. The beds too big for just me anyway."

Stella didn't hesitate. She nearly jumped into the bed and curled against his frail form. Hordak frowned as she clung. She'd been like this since Scorpia was reported missing. Taking every opportunity to be around someone. Lonely, he supposed. Pathetic...

but then, he was lonely too.

He growled in annoyance at the contact, but offered an open arm for her. He was not snuggly by nature, but his sister required some minor affection. He could provide a small hug at the very least.

-Now, sleep.- he ordered, pulling away after a moment to curl up away from her -Tomorrow is
She moved closer, to Hordak's great annoyance. But he would deal with it, as long as she did not make a habit of this.

...doing this once a week was not a habit, right?

*I hope for the sake of my sanity, that Scorpia is alive,* he thought as his eyes grew heavy, *I can't take many more nights of my sister snoring.*

He glared at the ceiling as a now very asleep Stella clung to his arm again. Soon, Entrapta would be with him once more. Soon he could share a bed with someone who didn't look like him. Soon. But for the moment, for just this one instance, he would be alright. It wasn't so bad.

She was family. And family stuck together.

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Adora swung at a Horde soldier while Catra fought at her side. They pressed their attack, pulled back, working in complete tandem, much as they used to as Cadets in the Frightzone.

One down, then another and another. They cut through the enemy forces like paper, the power of She-Ra and Catra's agility a perfect team.

"Enough," the gentle yet robotic voice of Light Hope cut through the simulation.

Adora abandoned her She-Ra form quickly and stood quietly beside Catra.

"You have done well together," the almost ghostly A.I. informed them, "your effectiveness has increased by 34% since you've started working with this Catra. Your timing is also greatly improved. A break is required now. I will go into sleep mode for twenty minutes. Then we shall resume."

Adora and Catra highfived and sat down together, Adora laying across Catra's lap.

"Not bad," Catra purred, twirling a lock of Adora's hair around a claw, "your almost as good as me now."

Adora smirked and rolled her eyes.

"Oh, what ever. You're just jealous."

Catra snorted and went to say something mean, but Adora had her collar in her grip and was pulling her close for a long slow kiss. When they pulled away, Catra was grinning, but Adora was silent, thinking.

"You okay in there?" Catra asked, waving a claw in front of her face.

Adora blinked.

"I'm just thinking. Glimmer said the Horde was headed towards Selineas. We already lost Perfuma and Spinerella-"
And scorpia-

And Scorpia. If we don't do something, the Horde will take Mermista too and her runestone. We can't afford to lose more of us.

Catra leaned back, looking up at the ceiling. For a long time she said nothing, then;

"Did Glimmer order you not to do anything?"

Adora nodded, frowning, looking away.

"You know... this is exactly why I don't listen to Glimmer," the feline yawned, "But still, did she specifically order you not to stop in at Selineas for a quick visit?"

Adora sat up, grinning.

"You know..." she said, finger to her chin like she was really trying to remember, "I don't think she did."

Chapter End Notes

I promise the rest of the fic will be more fun than this chapter. Just had a ton to cover here.

Thanks for coming back! <3
"We should test fly the ship immediately," Entrapta's voice could be heard from Hordak's wrist comm as he paced around the room.

"There isn't time to waste," he agreed, "Selineas is under attack as we speak. Prime is moving fast now. I can be there in a few days."

"No, no," Entrapta sighed, "if Selineas is under attack, they'll need you there."

"Who else understands space travel but me, Entrapta?"

The clearing of a throat made Hordak jump. Stella had been quietly playing with baby Dawn on the floor of the bedroom. He had nearly forgotten about her, she was so ... creepily silent.

"I do," she offered raising a hand, "did you forget? I've flown a lot more recently than you, Brother, guaranteed. You are out of practice. I am not."

Hordak narrowed his eyes, annoyed. This had been the excuse needed to go visit his wife. Still, they were both right.

"That settles it. Stella! I'll see you in a few days!"

The conversation was over. Stella met his eyes, steady, unapologetically.

"I'm sorry, Brother. But war times call for sacrifice."

"I know that," he snarled, clenching his fist. He was trying so hard to keep his temper in check around his son. -but you could have at least let me have this, couldn't you?- 

-Your sexual frustrations are not reason enough to move an essential member of the council from Brightmoon. Think with your brain, Brother. I know you have one.-

He growled and moved to the door.

-Brother? Are you angry?- 

-Not at you, Stella,- he replied carefully, -This... essential member of the council has a meeting to go to. Watch Dawn.-

The meeting was short, just an update on the Selineas situation. Glimmer was confident, or at least she said she was. Hordak knew she had to save face, especially after so many crushing defeats. Hordak stayed behind with Glimmer, going over some last minute details.

"The ship will be ready after a few test runs. Entrapta has requested Stella-

"Not you?" She raised a purple eyebrow, "are you two fighting?"

He looked down at his notes, flipping through them, reorganizing.

"No. She says I am still needed here."

"She's smart," Glimmer shrugged, "its true. We can spare Stella, but not you. Sorry."
He sighed despite his best attempts to keep his emotions neutral, one talon absently tapping his gem.

"May I ask you something, you Majesty?" He waited for her nod before continuing. "Entrapta and I made the portal. The portal took your mother from you. By all rights, you should want us dead. But here we are, having a conversation, working together."

"What is your question, Hordak?"

"Why? How can you be this... forgiving?"

The Queen stood, taller than Hordak thought she could be. Strong. She had a presence he found he was drawn to. She was a leader, one he not only could follow, but wanted to follow.

"I'm not," she admitted, "I haven't forgiven anything. You and Entrapta, you have so much to answer for. But dwelling on it does nothing. It accomplishes nothing. I could put you on trial for war crimes and have you both executed. I could, but that won't help us win. It won't fix a single thing."

He swallowed hard, fingers going still against his gem. Was she going to have them killed after? Was that the plan?

"My offer to you was genuine. After we win, there is a place for you and Entrapta both," she continued, "on the condition that the kids come with you. I kinda like being auntie Glimmer."

Hordak stared ahead at nothing for the longest time. Glimmer tilted her head, the gem at her forehead catching the light until the glint of it shook Hordak from his thoughts.

"I do not know how I can ever repay you. How do I make up for all the harm I've done? Is it possible?"

"You know," she sighed walking around the table, "I feel like every few months you have these thoughts and it becomes some big dramatic internal crisis for you. How about this? Work for me after the war. That will be how you make it up to me."

She placed a hand on his shoulder, smiled, then walked out, leaving him alone with his guilt.

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"I'm Sea Hawk! I am, I-"

"Shut up!"

Mermista was in no mood. She held one hand to her Runestone, the other was wrapped around her trident as she held a wall of water around them. This was it. Their last shot. If this didn't work, they were done.

Sea Hawk had done well defending her this far while she offered her strength to the Pearl, but even he, with his boundless annoying energy was starting to grow tired.

He brandished his sword, cutting down clone soldier after soldier with a skill Mermista honestly didn't realize he possessed. She might have been impressed. Might have even let him take her out. If they survived this.
The Alliance had sent aid. It should not have been enough, but Mermistas people were hardy, willing to fight. So far, they had been holding the line well enough, only a handful of the Horde had broken through and Memista felt so confident now, so sure that she could keep the sea-gate up long enough for the Alliance forces to claim victory.

After months of crushing defeat, they would finally have this, a victory. Mermista exchanged a smile with Sea Hawk. They had this. She held her trident up in celebration.

A celebration that would not last.

A great wind blew around them, nearly breaking her concentration. Large black ships swooped down from above. They could only watch in horror as the enemy multiplied before their very eyes.

Mermista lowered her trident, swayed, faltered. She did not want to surrender. She didn't want to lose. She wanted to fight. She wanted to win.

Sea Hawk held her up, pressing her hand to the Pearl again, trying desperately to keep the sea-gate up. But she was so tired. So very, very tired. Her eyes fluttered closed. The gate fell. The enemy swarmed and-

"For the Honor of Gray Skull!"
No Princess left Behind

Reckless, stupid, dangerous.

Adora had heard it all before. But never like this.

Adora stood in front of the remaining Council, hands clasped behind her back, face tilted up, unreadable. Her Queens voice rose with every word, shrill. Hordak carefully cleared his throat, reminding her to control.

As if he had any room to judge.

"Do you have a single clue what might have happened, Adora?" Glimmer snapped, "you directly disobeyed my orders, put the future of this rebellion at risk! If you were captured, or even killed, it could mean the end of us!"

Hordak awkwardly shuffled his papers, looking away, hoping Glimmer would not-

"Hordak! Tell her! Tell her what would happen!"

He winced, murmured a curse in his own language. Of all the times to call upon his advice, it had to be now?

"I... actually think what Adora did was very impressive."

"See!? Even Hordak is-" Glimmer cut herself off mid rant, "What!?"

Hordak raised his hands in a placating gesture, exchanging a helpless look with Adora.

"I just think it was fortunate that he was there. Salineas was saved, Mermista was spared and the Pearl did not fall into enemy hands. I can appreciate the results. Her skills are impressive."

He could practically feel Glimmers glare burning his very soul to ash as he stood there. Was he... actually intimidated by this short, sparkly Queen?

Oh, he was terrified. He'd seen what she could do. Those sparkles would never wash out. Also she had a mean left hook.

"What are you saying?" Glimmer demanded, "you think I should... reward this?"

"No. No of course not," he replied quickly, "she did go against orders, after all. I am simply suggesting that perhaps it is time to consider another strategy."

Hordak bit his lip, preparing for the storm. Instead, Glimmer sunk back into her seat, rubbing her temples.

"It was your brilliant idea to keep She Ra in reserve in the first place!" She grumbled, "are you sure your motives aren't a bit selfish?"

She met Hordaks eye and he quickly looked away. Glimmer waved a hand and the rest of the sparse council excused itself. Adora had attempted to leave as well, but Glimmers fingers closed around her arm. She then tugged her down into the seat next to her with a look that seemed to say, 'I'm not done with you yet.'
"Hordak, are you just trying to rush the war so you can get back to Entrapta before she gives birth?"

His hands clenched, his teeth close together in a snarl. He glared up at the Brightmoon Queen and just before she could repeat the question, he slammed his fist on the table.

"Yes! Alright?! Yes, I am trying to rush the war!" He growled, "Yes I want to see my wife again sooner rather than later! What is so wrong with that!? What is so wrong with not wanting to draw out a needless war!?!"

"Hordak! Etheria does not revolve around you and your personal life!" Glimmer shouted back, her temper so lost she wasn't sure how she'd get it back. "If you can't see the bigger picture-"

"I'm sorry!"

Adora's voice was calm, but loud enough to be heard over the shouting match happening around her.

"Glimmer, you're right. I was wrong to disobey your orders. But I still think I did the right thing. Mermista needed my help. Just like Perfuma did. Just like Spinerella did. No princess left behind. Wasn't it you that said that?"

Glimmer looked down, sunk back into her seat. Hordak also took a deep calming breath. Emotions were running high. They all needed a good, calming spa day. Once they defeated the Horde, they all needed pampering.

Hordak would insist on it.

"Okay, okay," Glimmer sighed, rubbing the bridge of her nose, "Maybe just this once, it was a good thing you disobeyed orders. Adora, Hordak and I will discuss the possibility of using you more often in the field. But I need you to wait for those orders, alright?"

Adora stood up and then knelt at the foot of Glimmer's chair.

"Understood, my Queen."

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When Stella finally arrived at the Crypto castle, she felt lost at once. Not only because of the castle's strange layout, but because Stella could have sworn a castle was meant to have, you know, people. Servants. Nobles. Anyone.

All Stella had seen since arriving were bots. Different shapes and sizes, scurrying this way and that to perform a variety of tasks. She raised a hand, hoping that maybe she could find a bot that could tell her where to go, but they all hurried away, entirely unconcerned with the poor lost clone.

"Are you Stella?"

The clone jumped, entirely unused to being snuck up on. Usually that was her thing. A skinny blue haired person appeared, it seemed, out of nowhere.

"Yes. I am looking for Entrapta."

The blue haired one motioned with their fingers and Stella followed, still nervous. Being anywhere
foreign made her nervous, if she were telling the truth. As she was led down to the bottom of a confusing set of stairs, the voice of Stella's Sister-in-law caught her brilliantly sensitive ears.

"Entrapta!" The clone called hurrying ahead with a smile. She rounded a corner just as the other woman turned around. Stella had been about to jump in for a hug, but stopped.

"Stella! Just in time! We were just about to... are you okay?"

Stella stared down at the large round belly. So full of life, potential, hope. It was like staring into the future itself, a reassurance that everything would be alright, that there was a future at all. She felt heat gather behind her eyes as she quietly knelt down.

"May I?" She asked, hand hovering over Entrapta's stomach.

The other woman smiled and nodded her permission. Giddy, Stella reached and laid a gentle hand over her little... niece? Nephew? It didn't matter. Family. A little fluttering kick against her hand made her smile and chirp.

-You are strong, but we will protect you still. Stay in there a little longer. Give us time.-

She stood up, running a talon under her eye to wipe away a stray tear. Entrapta pulled her into a tight embrace with her hair, now so much longer, stronger. Stella returned the gesture.

"Your tummy is so round! Last time I saw you in person, you were so small!"

Entrapta pulled away, resting a hand on her pregnant belly too, proudly.

"Your Etherian basic had improved so much! Is Hordak still teaching, or are you learning on your own now?"

"Mostly my own," Stella answered as they began to walk together, "Queen Glimmer helped me as well."

"Good! Your learning capabilities are impressive. Keep improving."

Entrapta led her out of the castle, to a large court yard where the now finished ship rested, giant, black, shining. Bow stepped out, holding a tablet. Stella greeted him with a wave before moving her attention back to the ship.

It was... familiar. How? Why? She ran her long fingers over it's dark surface, frowning. Why did she feel like she should know it? That she'd seen this model before?

"Do you wanna give it a spin?" Bows voice shook her out of her trance and she excitedly turned back, grinning.

"Yes! So much!"

---------------

High above Etheria a pair of siblings argued.

-We Have wasted enough time already!- Aszi snapped, standing tall, talons stretched at the ready.
Angry. -You would have us wait forever just so you can study this primitive mud ball!-

-This world can offer us so much. The natives here are fascinating. You are Fathers personal surgeon,- he nearly pleaded, holding out a tablet to show his collected data, -Are you not the least bit interested? The medicines they use? The healing techniques?- 

-Brother, you are soft. Soft in the head and heart! This is why you failed at Selineas! This is why She Ra has once again fallen through our fingers. We should use the weapons this pitiful world presented us! The Garnet!-

-We can't use the Garnet!- Zed insisted, -we are not sure how it will interact! The civillians!-

-The civillians!?- Aszi cackled -That is what you worry about!? I would be more worried about yourself. I've heard Father is displeased with you.- Her voice took on a high, taunting tone. -Do you think he will do it this time? Dispose of you?- 

Zed snarled, temper hot. But something clicked when he looked at Aszi. His anger turned to amusement, then he turned his back on her, a great show of disrespect, concentrating again on the data in front of him.

-I understand your frustrations, sister,- he sneered, -it must be difficult. No matter what you do, I will always be the son of a Queen, while your mother will always just be a whore Father took an interest in for a-

The blow to the back of his head cut him off before he could finish. Aszi held the shattered remains of a bottle in her claw, snarling, feral. She kicked him in the ribs.

-Daughter of a whore I may be, but I have still bested you. My. PRINCE.-

She threw the remains of the bottle, hearing it shatter against the wall. She could not kill Zed. Not now. Not without permission. Or an impossibly good alibi.

But fighting between Primes children was not uncommon or discouraged. Prime valued strength, cunning and a thirst for dominance. As long as it did not interfere with conquest, he did not much care.

Aszi headed for the exit, dusting her hands free of glass. As she crossed the threshold, she heard Zed rise, hurt, bloody, but not down. Aszi turned to face him again as he leaped at her, pushing her into the empty dining chamber.

They rolled together, biting, scratching, snarling, hissing. It was all out war between them, both prepared to kill if necessary. Aszi pulled a thick clump of Zeds hair, forcing his head back. She leaned in the rip his throat with her teeth, a finishing blow, deadly.

-Enough!-

Both teens scrambled to their feet, bloodied, although it was obvious Aszi was the victor. In the far entrance, stood the tall form of the Emperor.

-Is this what my children do? Is this productive?- Horde Prime gazed first at Aszi, before turning his attention to Zed. His face went from cool neutrality to disappointment.

-The worst of it was just how soundly beaten you were, Zed. You are my heir and you were put down by your sister.-
He sat down at the head of the long black table, picked up a glass and held it out for a waiting slave to fill.

-Zed, it appears a lesson is needed. Failure in any capacity is unacceptable.-

-Father, please!-

-Silence!- he hissed, -Your failure at Selineas was disappointing enough. Save your breath, and be glad I allow you to breathe at all. Aszi!-

The Emperors favorite daughter stepped forward, face neutral, save for a glint of wicked excitement in her brilliant yellow eyes.

-Your brother has fallen behind with his training,- the emperor continued -I hope you will... demonstrate proper technique for him?-

Aszi looked back at her Prince, a little smile, nearly unregistered tugging at her full black lips.

-Of course, Father. Anything to help my dearest brother.-

As Aszi approached, Zed glanced once more at his Father, his Emperor, holding out no hope that he would suddenly feel some small compassion and stop it. The Emperor stared back at him coolly and he raised a glass to his lips. It was the last thing he saw before Aszi kicked him onto his back.

He curled in on himself as she crouched over him, claws flying, tearing. She beat him until he was a bloody mess at the Emperors feet. When she had him pulled up by his collar, close to her face, teeth exposed, ready, one claw drawn back, only then did the Emperor set his glass down and stand up.

He motioned for Aszi to stand down and she obeyed, bowing low before backing away from the defeated Prince.

-Zed, you have one final chance. One more disappointment, one more misstep, and it wont matter who your Mother is to the Horde. I will kill you myself and send her your head-

He did not call him Prince. Worse than the threat, was that. It was a sign of how far he had fallen from favor. Bleeding, battered, beaten soundly, Zed lay unmoving as his Father stepped over him to approach his sister.

-As for you- he spoke to Aszi now, smiling, -Princess. I believe you had a plan? Walk with me. I would like to hear it.-
Heart Sick

Flying was like breathing to Stella. Never in her life did she feel more at home, than when she was between the stars. When she let her mind go blank, when she let her mind fill with beautiful memories of her early training days, she could still see it. Entire Galaxies glittering against eternity. The stars were her first friends.

Hordak was right to give her that name.

There were no stars out here now. No light, no friends. Only the enemy now. Her people. Her brothers.

When she landed, she felt more heartsick than ever. She would never see it again. That perfect, endless everything stretched out before her. It only began to really sink in now. She had entertained so many day dreams. Taking Scorpia with her to travel the stars, watching the Galaxy turn as they lay together.

But Scorpia was gone. Not dead. Stella refused to believe she was for an instant. But then, where was she?

Stella pulled herself from the controls as the holographic display went dark.

"Well? How was it?" Entrapta's voice came through the wrist comm she had given Stella.

"All systems appear to be fully functional. It's a smooth ride."

"So test number 24 is a success," Now Bow could be heard.

Stella ran a claw across the flat console once more before heading back out.

"With this latest success, I am confident that our little baby is ready for the real thing!" Entrapta was excitedly telling Bow, "I'll contact Hordak in a few and let him know. We can finally move ahead with the plan!"

Stella stood aside awkwardly, silent until Entrapta reached out for her claw with a tendril of hair.

"Come on, Stell! I've been working on something else! Come see!"

When Entrapta grabbed you, you did not get to say no. She was strong. Not that Stella had a reason to refuse. Smiling, she hurried along with her brother's wife. They stopped in front of... well, Stella didn't really have words for it.

"Do you love it?" Entrapta laughed, walking ahead, "I can mass produce bots here for combat! Bow helped me design it!"

Stella silently regarded the machine as Entrapta turned it on. Almost at once, the giant moving parts began to turn. Stella stood, stunned as bots were created right before her eyes.

"I can create an army," Entrapta explained, "with all we get from the mines here, we can build for a year if we have to. Isn't it brilliant? Prime won't expect this, will he?"

Stella shook her head. No. He wouldn't expect it. Not from a backwater world like this.

"Watch! These aren't just any bots either! I've improved their destructive capabilities by 30%!"
She snapped her fingers and a newly built bot scurried out, large as the average clone, thick shell. It reminded Stella of, oh, what did she name it? Emily?

A mannequin with a Horde insignia on its chest popped on a far wall and immediately, the bot fired. The explosion left nothing behind. Stella glanced at Bow who was keeping his head down. Entrapta did not seem to notice her assistants distress. Stella did. He had been the one to watch the one called Lonnie die. Right in this castle.

"Entrapta..." Stella finally spoke up, "we should call Brother now."

Entrapta stopped her wild cackling and perked up.

"Right! Emily! Call Daddy!"

Stella exchanged a look with Bow, mouthing 'Daddy?' Poor Bow could only shrug and mouth back 'I don't know'.

Emily beeped and then brought up the holographic image of the council sitting around the war room. Hordak smiled.

"Entrapta. Excellent timing."

"Hi Hordikins!" She squealed, and Hordak flinched, "Stella just completed test flight number 24! We can confidently say that the ship won't spontaneously explode!"

Glimmer exchanged a look with Adora and shrugged.

"That's good news...?" She offered, "so are we ready to put it to work?"

"Short answer, yes! Longer answer, yes, but with reservations. Ideally, we would have more time to run more tests, but at this stage I think 'good enough', is the best we get!"

Hordak nodded silent in agreement, eyeing the other clone. Stella knew what he was thinking. They were the only two with any flight experience. One of them would take the helm, putting lives at risk.

"Well, we've pulled off miracles with less," the Brightmoon Queen sighed, "how about your battle bots?"

"Ohh!!! You mean Emily's Extended Family! Or E2F for short!" Entrapta snickered and motioned with her hand. One of the bots skittered to the center of the hologram and settled. "My factory is up and running now. I am producing on average 150 a day! Assuming Dryls mines can keep up, we should have an entire army's worth done in no time!"

This made Glimmer smile.

"Good! Stella, your job is done. Come back home. Entrapta, Bow, keep up the good work."

Hordak watched his wife now, or the hologram of her at her usual spot at the table. She smiled at him and for only an instant, he felt like he could almost touch her. His hand went to the built in communicator and holo projector on his armor.

"Wait! One last thing before I forget again!" She cried, "Hordak! I've been meaning to tell you for weeks. It's a girl! So. There's that! Anyway! We should get back to work! Bye!"
The hologram vanished.

And then the room erupted.

"A princess!" Came a shout from Hordaks left, "Another Princess!"

Glimmer was hugging Adora. Mermista high fived Nettossa. Frosta had abandoned her seat and was jumping.

And Hordak stared ahead, face unreadable.

"Please, excuse me," he stood up, "I have work to do."

All eyes were on him as he crossed to the threshold and gently shut the door behind him. It was not until The door clicked shut that Hordak allowed his feelings to be known. And by the sounds of it, those feelings were overwhelmingly positive. Laughter, joyous, free, and then a roar of "Yes!"

He likely did not think they could hear his private celebration. He likely thought the walls were thicker than they were in a private meeting chamber. But Brightmoon castle had not been designed with war in mind.

The gathered Council exchanged looks, and then burst out laughing.

That joy would be short lived.

Aszi stood tall, arms crossed as she studied the Black Garnet. Her dark lips quirked into a smile as the Runestone was prepared.

"Uncle's precious princess took some very interesting notes during her time here, didn't she?" She purred to the struggling form on the ground beside her. "It's just as I said. These Runestones are the key to the whole planet. A weapon, yes, but so much more. No doubt this is what father has been looking for this whole time. Eternia is so close, we can almost feel it."

The alien turned her full attention back to the struggling figure on the floor.

"Aww, am I upsetting you?"

She bent low at her waist, fangs flashing in the low light.

"Poor Princess. Must be hard to be so alone."

Scorpia sat at her feet, glaring at the face inches from her own. She growled from behind her gag and tried to lunge, to bash the alien's face with her head. Missed. She lay sprawled out on her side, unable to right herself with her arms, legs and tail secured.

"Very scary," the alien laughed, giving the Princess a good kick in the stomach as she walked by, "but resisting really is pointless. Just be a good girl and use your Runestone willingly. It will be so much easier if you do. We will draw power from it regardless."

Scorpia groaned, curled in pain. Did this alien psychopath have to wear metal shoes? It really did seem like overkill. Getting kicked in the stomach hurt no matter what shoe they wore.

"Think about it. If you help us, maybe Father will make you his pet? Or-" she bent down, snatched Scorpia by her collar and held a talon to her chin, "maybe I'll make you mine?"
Scorpias face contorted as she shouted through the gag. Tutting softly, Aszi let her fall, unbalanced, onto her back.

"Just think it over, Princess. Time is running out. For all of you."
"Are you ready?"

Hordak was grinning like a fool. How long had it been? A month? Two months?

"Ready," he replied, voice husky, lustful.

The screen on the wall blipped to life, and the image of his wife on her bed in Dryl was all he had eyes for anymore. She lounged on a pile of cushions, the strap of an impossibly tiny nightgown hung off one shoulder.

The last time he saw her like this, she had been smaller. Her stomach, her breasts. Now she was like a fertility goddess from one of the first worlds he had help to conquer. She was absolutely divine. And Hordak wanted to worship her.

"You look like you're in pain," she observed playfully, tapping her fingers against her thick thighs. He would give his life to be between them again just for one moment.

"I am... having difficulties," his voice sounded small. He wanted to look away, but the way her fingers danced up the hem of her nightgown captivated him. His breathing was heavy now, his heart raced.

It was a game they played when they had these moments. It thrilled her to torment him and he, well, he found the eventual release so much more satisfying in the end.

He shifted on the edge of the bed, watching as she hooked one finger under the waistband of her pink panties.

"My Queen," he breathlessly whined, "may I touch myself?"

"No," she answered very quickly, "be a good boy and keep your hands away until I say so."

He groaned, feeling desperate as his throbbing erection pushed against the Brightmoon robes he now wore. That desperation turned into an almost panic as she shifted, sliding her panties from her hips. Red eyes followed them down every curve of her perfect legs, her tiny feet. She shifted again, on her knees now, legs slightly spread. She held her panties up to show him with one extended finger.
His wife smiled that devilish smile of hers as the breath he'd been holding came out in a whimper. If she were here with him he would ravage her... after receiving expressed permission, of course. His mind already imagined a dozen ways he wanted to take her, but a thousand ways he wanted her to take him.

With a wicked twinkle in her eye, she brought the fabric up to her mouth, held them between her teeth as she dropped both hands to her thighs. Hordak’s ears went flat against his head as his eyes widened. Her short nails danced up her thighs, slow, teasing. She bent back slightly as her fingers found her own wet core.

Maintaining perfect eye contact with her husband, she began to slowly finger herself. This was also part of the game. To see how long Hordak could resist watching, see how long he could keep his gaze on her eyes and not the display she had presented him with.

So far, his record was 3 minutes. His self restraint was horribly lacking when it came to her. Especially now with the obscene noises she was making. The wet, slick sounds her fingers made inside her were more than loud enough to be heard over her moaning.

One minute and fifteen seconds. Not even close to his record. He found his annoyance at himself died the instant he started watching her fingers dance in and on her perfect sex. He daydreamed about pressing his tongue to her inner thigh to lap up her juices as they rolled down.

Now he was panting, talons driving lightly into his own thighs to keep himself focused, grounded.

"You are so... beautiful," he breathed, "I want you to sit on my face like a throne."

Her eyes widened, eyebrow raised. She let the panties drop from her mouth, grinning.

"Get undressed," she ordered, pulling her slick fingers out to show him, "but you aren't allowed to touch yourself yet."

She began to suck on her fingers, and he watched her tongue swirl around each digit. Something like jealousy built inside of him. She paused, looking him up and down.

"I believe I gave you an order," she snapped, "Strip. Now."

Shaking, he obeyed, pulling his garments off over his head and throwing them to the side. Naked, exposed, vulnerable. And so turned on by it all that it hurt.

"Good boy," she cooed, "you are such a loyal servant, aren't you?"

"Yes, my Queen," came his immediate, desperate reply, "I live to serve."

"Loyalty is always rewarded," she purred, then sat back to tug her nightgown up over her head as well.

She was captivating. It was no secret to her that he adored her body, but like this... oh he was weak. The curve of her belly, her full breasts, wide hips. Perhaps it was a vanity thing. A reminder that he, Hordak the imperfect, had actually mated with a willing partner.
Or he just had unique preferences. A... kink, as Etherians called it.

"My Queen, I..."

"Touch yourself," she ordered, pulling out a toy that she had made specifically for their time away with a lock of hair.

"Yes, My Queen."

Who was he to disobey orders? He grasped his phallus firmly at the base, groaning at the much needed contact. He'd been aching for release all day.

The buzzing of Entrapta’s vibrator only empowered him to continue.

"Look at me," she ordered again, "eyes up here."

As his fingers caressed his hard shaft, he forced his gaze back up. There was a reason he'd been averting his eyes.

He made a sound like a pained animal. As she pressed her toy to her wet, swollen slit, he couldn't stop himself from wanting to absolutely race to the finish. His motions quickened, driving him ever closer to bliss.

"Stop."

His fingers immediately uncurled from around his manhood and he gasped, groaned, frustrated.

"Me first. Then I'll let you finish."

He was so close. That was the worst of it. He had been so near heaven. But his Queen commanded. He would do anything for her.

"Talk to me," she panted, holding the vibrator against her sensitive clit while her fingers worked into herself, "tell me what you want to do to me."

Ah. Here it was. The point in the night where she made him humble himself. Where she made him beg.

"Do you remember that night in the Sanctum? What we did on my throne?"

He watched her nod, cheeks flushing.

"I want to take you like I took you that night. I want to kneel at your feet and pleasure you while you sit at the height of power. I want to lick you until you're pushing my tongue out of you. I want to-"

"I'm so close!" He heard her gasp and he had to clench his fist to stop himself from grabbing hold of his erection again and stroking until completion.

"Please, my Queen," he begged, knowing that he would be allowed his release soon after, "please come for me. Please let me touch myself. Please let me-"

"Do it!" she cried, nearing her peak.

He did not need to be told twice. It would not take long, he knew it. His fingers found his phallus once again. Gritting his teeth, his hand worked himself quickly but carefully. He fell back on the bed,
back arched as his wife's moans chased him to an earth shattering climax. His own ejaculate coated his stomach and chest as he lay there panting.

"You have another meeting in the morning," she breathlessly reminded him.

Hordak lay staring at the ceiling, wishing for all the world he could just close his eyes right then and sleep, regardless of how obscene he appeared. Were this his own quarters in the Frightzone, he may have. But one never quite knew who would burst in here. It was why he could only do this with her very late at night, on the nights where Glimmer insisted on taking Dawn.

He reached to the side of the bed for his clothes from earlier that day to wipe himself off with as he sat up again, watching his wife hurriedly clean herself off as well.

"I miss you like the stars," he found himself saying as he watched her dress.

She began to button a clean night shirt but paused, looking him over, taking him all in. Messy hair, skin flushed purple, nude except a dirty tunic draped over his lap.

Perfect.

Entrapta had never seen the stars, but she knew how much Hordak missed them. If they were really that wonderful, then she missed them too.

"I miss you more, Hordikins. Not long now. Bow and I are going to finish one last bit on the ship, just for back up, and then we'll be together again."

"Hurry then. I cannot say how long I will be satisfied with pleasuring myself. I need you, Entrapta."

She blew him one kiss and he extended a hand to 'catch it.' The screen went dark, Hordak climbed under the bed covers and slept, pretending the pillow he held onto was her.
The Worst Timing

The Worst Timing

The return of his clone sister was all Hordak had to look forward to right now. The Horde had gone quiet after Selineas and that had the council nervous, Hordak especially. He knew the Emperor liked to withdraw his forces before pulling a large scale attack.

His sister rushed to embrace him, nuzzling his chest. Despite himself and his desire to appear stern and collected, he embraced her back, laughing with her.

-I missed you!- she chirped, -Entrapta's castle is so confusing! I needed a map!-

-I admit, I also needed guidance last I was there as well,- he chuckled, releasing her from his arms, -walk with me?-

He grabbed his son from a waiting Brightmoon guard and set him down on the ground, watching as he pulled himself to his feet and toddled ahead. Hordak watched his son walk with pride as he and Stell discussed.

"How is Entrapta?" He asked immediately switching to common Etherian once they seemed to be out of earshot of any nosey guards, "Does she seem like she is taking care of herself? Eating well, getting enough sleep, taking breaks?"

Stella grinned teasingly at her Brothers concerns.

"Relax. She is healthy. The baby too. They are both just fine. Stop worrying. "

Hordak hurried forward to grab his sons hand to stop him before he could put a stick in his mouth.

"I just... I want to be there when she gives birth," he sighed, "I haven't been there for her this entire pregnancy and I was hardly there for her the last one as well. She deserves better."

"She deserves a mate who will care enough to worry. You are doing that enough for ten pregnancies," Stella stated firmly, "It's not your fault. She understands. "

He snorted, bending nearly in half to walk with Dawn as the little boy led him on an adventure.

"My daughter will be born any day. And I have not spent a single minute just... talking to her. What if she has no idea who I am?"

"Etherian infants are born with no practical knowledge. It is silly to worry about something they will not remember anyway," Stella scoffed, "honestly, it does seem very inconvenient. At least we could be trained for life within the tank."

Hordak frowned. It wasn't just that his daughter wouldn't know him by his voice at birth. She was right. She would never remember anyway. But he would. He would remember.

"There is joy in teaching them yourself," Hordak explained, kneeling down with his son as the boy picked up another stick to examined it. "Watching their complex little minds develop. It is... fascinating. I want to devote myself to this once the war is over. Entirely."
Stella watched him with a little smile on her lips. Hordak touched the stick with one of his talons, looking Dawn in the eye while he enthusiastically told him the word for stick in both their language and common Etherian. It reminded Stella of when he taught her. Made her wonder what she would do after.

"Brother, do you-?"

A roll of thunder cut her off. The winds changed. Darkness began to set in too early. Hordak scooped up his son the instant the boy began to cry, chirping protectively to him as Stella sniffed the air, her instincts going wild.

"Something is wrong," she hissed, "the air feels thick, heavy."

Hordak grit his teeth, narrowed his eyes.

"Go to your Queen, Stella," he ordered, "she will need you."

"Brother?" She questioned, "have you seen this before?"

He held his son close, kissed his forehead.

"Yes," he answered, "they figured out how to use the runestones."

Stella hesitated, but as soon as her Brother began to hurry inside, she did as well.

The castle was in chaos. Hordak exchanged a look with his sister before they both headed to Glimmer's office. This time of day, that was where she'd be. As they ran, they found her in the hall, watching the incoming storm from the Frightzone at a large window.

"Yout Majesty!" Hordak shouted as they approached.

"I know." she took a deep breath. Calm. "I've called a council meeting already. Hordak, contact Entrapta. We need to know exactly what we're dealing with."

Brightmoon was preparing for a battle by the time the council had come together. Hordak looked from the hologram of his wife to the data presented in the middle of the table.

"As I suspected, the Horde has managed to activate the Garnet and possibly the heartstone too," The hologram of Entrapta groaned, "I'm so mad at myself. I should have erased all my data before I left!"

Hordak wanted to reach a hand out and place it over Entrapta's, but he instead settled on gently shaking his head. Were she here, he would not have hesitated.

"It isn't your fault," he assured her, "There isn't a way you could have known."

"None of that matters now," Glimmer as usual, cut right to the heart of things. "We need to discuss our next move."

"This could be a trap," Mermista suggested, "like? If they want She Ra so bad, this could bring her out, right?"
"Likely," Hordak agreed, catching a glimpse of his wife's pained expression. His eyes narrowed, suspicious before continuing on. "But even if it is, I can see few options. All of our territories are at risk like this."

"I'll go to the frightzone," Adora said standing, "I'll go there and-"

"And get captured before you can change into She Ra," Hordak snorted, "no. I will go to the Frightzone with a small team while a decoy force distracts."

"So, like the Dryl mission?" Catra asked from the corner, arms crossed. Hordak raised a brow, quite unsure why she was taking part in this discussion.

"In a sense, but on a much larger scale," he explained, watching the hologram of his wife curl in on herself silently next to him out of the corner of his eye. What ever he was about to say next was immediately replaced with, "Are you alright?"

"Uh huh..." Entrapta's answer was unconvincing, "c-continue."

Hordak did not continue.

"Okay," Glimmer reluctantly continued after an uncomfortably long silence, "so then while we send a small decoy force, what will we do about Plumeria?"

"Wha-?" He looked up, distracted, "Oh! Yes. That is where we will deploy our real force. Adora, you're going there."

Adora nodded and exchanged a look with Catra.

"Alright," she stood up, "catra and I'll go-"

"Catra is coming to the Frightzone with me," Hordak interrupted, "her agility will come in handy."

He watched the teenagers exchange a look of disappointment, but there was no time to focus on it. Entrapta's hologram produced a sharp cry, clutching her back. She gave him a hard, meaningful look, then cut the transmission before anyone could react. Hordak jumped to his feet, glanced at Glimmer. She looked back, understanding immediately.

"If everyone knows where they need to be, then get moving. Go. No time to waste."

Hordak was once more grateful for the Queen's quick thinking as the room emptied. He was in full panic mode. He knew those pains. He knew that fear in her eyes.

"I think she's in labor," his voice shook as he paced, doing the calculations in his head. Could he leave now and possibly get there on time? Was there a way?

"Hordak! Calm down!" The Queen pleaded, moving in with Stella right behind her.

- **Brother, breathe,** - Stella soothed, putting a clawed hand to his shoulder, **-calm.-**

- **How can I be calm!?** - he snarled, shaking Stella's hand off his shoulder, **-she needs me! They both**
"Hordak, it's alright. I understand if you can't do this anymore. I'll have Rogelio take the lead. He can-"

"No. No..." he took a deep breath, calm, serene. Even if he left now, there was no way to make it. Besides, he might be mistaken. This might not be what he thought it was. He pressed his wrist comm again, waited.

"Um, hi? Hordak, this isn't a good time!" Bows panicked voice came over the speaker. In the background, a string of filthy curses and more screaming.

"Is it time, Bow?" He demanded, "tell me!"

"I think so! Uh... shes nodding. So. Yes?"

"I'm on my way!" He began to turn towards the door when a shrill shriek of "Stop!" Made him pause. He looked up, ears flat against his head, distressed.

"Entrapta, but-"

"Listen to me, Hordak! If you don't stop the Garnet, I will never forgive you, do you understand?" The voice of his wife was pained, but firm. "If you don't, it wont matter if you're here or not, there wont be a planet for our children at all. Go. I'll be fine!"

He looked up at the faces of Glimmer and Stella. Their eyes said it all. They both agreed.

Snarling a curse, he cut the call and rushed off to prepare with everyone else.

Hordak held his son close now, chirping to him as he bundled the sleeping boy in a blanket, handing over a bag to a Brightmoon guard and the baby to a serving woman. Imp jumped from Hordaks shoulder, to his arms and he affectionately ran a han through his soft hair.

"Be good, Imp. Watch over your little brother, alright? Protect him."

Imp clicked in response and Hordak brought him up to give him a little kiss to the top of his head and a tiny hug before releasing him to fly after the fleeing servants headed towards Dryl.

Hordak allowed himself a small moment to watch his boy vanish into the dark before running along again to find his squad and get moving. As he headed outside, smoke in the distance made him pause, then light, orange, flickering. Fire. The Whispering woods were burning.

He glanced to his left. Glimmer stood watching as well. They exchanged one look and the Queen summoned her staff without another word.

There was no time for words now. Only action. Besides, they knew exactly what that meant. Brightmoon was under attack. It was just like before.

But worse.
Bow had many siblings, older ones, some who had kids of their own. Babies were nothing new to him. But he was young still. Too young for this. He held Entraptas hand as she screamed, wincing as he squeezed just a little too hard.

"It's going to be alright," Hordak's voice soothed as she worked through another long contraction. "Remember your breathing exercises."

Bow wasn't sure this was helping at all, but he was glad to have the support. He began deep breathing.

"He's not talking to you!" Entrapta snapped, "he's talking to me!"

"I know!" Bow squeaked in a panic, "but it helps me feel better!"

Hordak could be heard shouting orders to someone in the background before turning his attention back to soothing his wife.

"Bow! Calm down," Hordak snapped, "I need you to be focused."

The boy relaxed and so did Entrapta.

"Hordak, are you focused? On your mission? Or are you focused on me?" She asked breathlessly.

"Lord Hordak, sir, we're almost-"

"Not now, Kyle!" Hordak turned his attention back to his wife, listening to her breathing, waiting for any indication of danger. Not that he could do a thing about it. "My focus is on you, Entrapta. It always is. You know that. I made you a promise."

"That's what I thought you'd say," she sighed, "Hordak, I love you, but the mission has to be your focus now. Take care. Bow, cut the feed."

The other line immediately went silent. Hordak clicked his wrist comm with a claw. Nothing. Again. He cursed. Again. "Entrapta? Entrapta!" He howled, desperate. At that moment, he felt a slap his cheek. But it was the sound of the slap that shook him out of his panic.

"Get ahold of yourself!" Catra snapped, "you want this to be another Lonnie situation? Where we lose someone because you're too distracted to think?!"

Hordak went silent, stunned. In fact, the entire team seemed stunned. Nobody looked at anyone else. Everyone kept their heads down.

"I am... sorry," he apologized slowly, "you are right. Thank you, Catra. I needed that."

She lowered her hand, face unreadable, save for a tiny glint in her mismatched eyes.
"Any time, Boss."

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Glimmer stood proud in front of a few dozen soldiers that had stayed behind. The vast majority of their troops had already been sent to Plumeria. A miscalculation of epic proportions. Their chances were so slim, it was almost comical.

Except Glimmer did not plan to lose. There was no room for it in her life anymore. She had lost so much already. Too much. She was at her quota. Even if she had to come back from the dead, she would not let Brightmoon fall.
In the name of her Mother, she would defend her kingdom. In the name of Queen Angella, she would win.

"Stella."
The clone stepped forward to stand beside the Queen. Her Queen. The one she chose to follow.

"Your Majesty?"

"We may not survive this," Glimmer reminded her, "you just found freedom. I understand if you want to leave."

Stella looked almost insulted. She pulled her blades out, examined them. In the brilliant light of Brightmoon, they glowed like a beacon. Death came to all and Stella would help guide it along.

"I am exactly where I want to be, My Queen," she replied evenly, "I serve you. To the death."

Glimmer took a deep breath as the burning fire approached. How this other woman could seem so unconcerned with the idea of death, Glimmer would never know. She supposed that it was part of her... upbringing. So to speak. To just be one of many, another identical toy in the set.

But now she was unique. She was an individual. Brilliant. Strong. Beautiful. She didn't just wear the uniform. She was Brightmoon in spirit. And Glimmer was happy to have her at her side.

"Don't count on dying heroically just yet," Shadow Weaver appeared at Glimmers other side. "We just need to buy time. Do you remember what I taught you?"

The Queen of Brightmoon nodded sternly, hand tightening on her staff. Her Father stepped up behind her to place a gentle, encouraging hand on her shoulder.

"I'll lend power to the moonstone," Glimmer looked from Shadow Weaver to Stella. "Shadow Weaver, buy me time. Stella? Watch my back. Dad..."

She bit her lip, hesitant. So much to say. After all this time, she still felt like there was so much to tell him. Micah smiled and pulled her into a hug.

"I am so proud of you," he whispered, "I know your Mother is too."
As the enemy forces approached, Shadow Weaver prepared a spell, and Micah did the same once he pulled away from his daughter.

Stella held tight to her necklace, fingers fiddling with the spike Scorpia had left her so many months ago. She closed her eyes, whispering something in her language under her breath. The closest thing to a prayer she had.

-Scorpia, you made me happy too. Thank you.-
Garnet

If Hordak had one regret in his life, it was this place. The Frightzone had not always been like this. Once upon a time, when he first arrived, terrified and alone, the Frightzone had been a place of beauty. The canyon had been an absolute sight to behold, it's cliffsides a rainbow of reds, pinks, oranges. It's rocky center had been a bustling, lively place, with sweet little towns, a palace, trade.

And then Hordak arrived with his singular goals. Instead of taking the opportunity to start a new life, find freedom, happiness, he elected to follow his programming. And now there was not a single hint of the lands natural allure and it's princess was...

As they creeped into the Frightzone, Hordak was having flashbacks. Memories kept slipping into his thoughts. After spending so much time in Brightmoon, everything had changed. His entire outlook, his tastes, even his favorite color! Coming back to what had been his only home for so long did not feel like a reunion. It did not feel like home. It felt like a prison.

And he desperately wanted to leave.

Finding their way back to the Garnet had been easy. Too easy. Impossibly easy. Hordak knew what that meant.

"It's a trap," he stated, as they stopped for a moment, "obviously. Prime must think us pathetically predictable. He may as well have sent us an invitation to tea."

"Do we have much of a choice?" Catra snapped, impatient.

Hordak looked around, weighing his options. Were there any options? No matter what way he looked at it, this had to happen. They had to do this. The Garnet had to be stopped. He had to stop it. This was his mess. All of it. Everything.

"We don't have to go in unprepared," Kyle said, "if worse comes to worse, you can always throw me and run."

Hordak did not smile, neither did Rogelio, but Catra did. Kyle looked sad. "Lonnie would have thought it was funny."

"Yeah, she would," Catra agreed.

Hordak looked between the teenagers, that familiar guilt rising in him once more. As if he could sense it, Rogelio placed a hand silently on his shoulder, then Kyle's. In response, kyle reached for Catra and the group joined in a circle.

It was Rogelio who spoke at last, through a series of hand gestures. Kyle translated.

"Let's do it for Lonnie."

The crew nodded in unison with a murmur of "For Lonnie," before breaking away at last.
As they entered the Garnet chamber, the first thing they noticed was the strange way the Runestone glowed. The second was the strange attachments connected to it.

Only after following the cables to the far corner did they notice the third and most important piece of the scene.

"Scorpia!" Hordak cried, nearly sprinting across the room. She was alive. It was more than he had hoped for. In their desperate state, finding her alive was a miracle. He wanted nothing more than to bring her back to Brightmoon, just to see the look on Stella's face. They needed this.

As he knelt down to untie her, she was squirming, desperately trying to speak.

Hordak realized far too late, caught up in his own emotions again. He was right. Prime thought he was pathetically predictable. And he was.

"So good to see you again, Uncle."

Hordak looked up, just as Aszi jumped from above. He didn't know what hit him, exactly. There was no time to look. Everything went dark.

When Hordak came around again, he was cuffed against the wall with Kyle, Rogelio, Catra and now the very much alive Scorpia.

Blearily, he scanned the room, his head still spinning from Aszi's surprise attack. The Garnet seemed to be glowing brighter than ever, while Scorpia, who appeared to be connected to the Runestone through a series of wires. What exactly was happening with her, Hordak couldn't say. But Hordak didn't like the way she was slumping.

"You know, I really expected you to be smarter than this," Aszi sighed, seemingly bored, "it really does make this victory so unsatisfying."

He tried to focus his gaze on his niece, her silhouette against the shining stone, but the glare of the Runestone hurt his head worse than anything. He groaned, despite himself, looking instead to his team, cuffed and seated along the wall beside him.

A mistake, he realized. Catra met his gaze, nodding once. She had a plan. Good. She always had something up her sleeve. It was why he had insisted on bringing her.

But it was Kyle who moved first, despite everything.

"Father is going to be so pleased with me when I eliminate you, he might just give me a whole Galaxy to rule!" Aszi continued, distracted as Hordak watched Kyle dislocate his own wrist to break free. The sound of cracking bone was loud, but not loud enough to be heard over the bragging of Primes offspring.

"I think I'll start with you, Uncle. Maybe I'll take your scalp to Dryl? That is where your precious Princess is, right?" She snorted. "I wish I could tell you all the slow ways I would hurt her, but Father has an eye on her."

"Just one eye," Hordak snarled, "I took the other!"
"Yes," she agreed, "but I gave him a better one. You didn't weaken him, Uncle. You only made him stronger."

Hordak snorted, catching Kyle reaching behind him to the guard where he had the unlock key dangling from his hip. A poor choice for Aszi's men. And good luck for them.

"Monologuing," Hordak let out a sharp bark of taunting laughter, hoping to distract the room. "A rookie mistake. Clearly my Brother puts too much faith in you. Was it not you that assisted in my cure? You will regret that."

"It was only a bit of harmless fun," she clicked back with a snicker, "besides. It was necessary at the time to keep you alive. That's all. Now it's not."

Kyle unclipped the key as Aszi turned her attention back to the Runestone. Another mistake. Aszi was young, much as she pretended otherwise. Her mistakes were obvious and exploitable. Hordak made a mental note to teach his children better than prime taught his.

"Killing you will be enjoyable."

Hordak laughed again, a deep, snorty laugh, as if he just heard the best joke. Aszi looked... stunned at first, then she narrowed her eyes, glaring.

-What is making you laugh!?- she demanded switching to their language in a deep growl.

-Apologies!- he laughed, ignoring the pounding in his head, -it is just, I feel so nostalgic, listening to you. It reminds me of my first planetary conquest. I couldn't keep my mouth shut either! It is alright. I learned and so shall you. Save the speeches until after the enemy is dead.-

The tips of her ears were burning blue as she stepped toward him, claw raised. Hordak felt his cuffs release in time with the others. But Aszi appeared to be too angered to notice just yet.

"That will come soon enough for all of you-!"

Rogelio snatched a stun baton from the guard behind him and launched it at the charging alien like a javelin. It hit her square in the chest and, despite her insistence that a stun baton would not hurt her when Hordak met her at Dryl, she howled in pain.

Hordak took this distraction to attack. He jumped at her, claws flashing against hers. They rolled together, ripping, slashing, tearing. She was the stronger by far, but Hordak had something she did not.
A very high pain tolerance. Every new injury, every bruise, every gash, every drop of blood lost, fueled him. For her, it only slowed her down.

Still, despite that, she soon had him pinned to the floor in front of the Garnet. She smirked, claw raised.

-Any last words?- "Yes," he growled back in Etherian common, moving his hand as best he could, hoping he had a clear shot, "Imperfections are-"
It happened in a flash. Before Hordak could react, before he could yell. Rogelio charged like a machine, slamming into Aszi, taking her with him as he launched right into the Garnet.

There was a flash of light, blinding, an explosion. And then darkness, silence.

Hordak lay stunned, blind and deaf for the moment as his sensitive ears and eyes were overpowered by the brilliant burst from the Garnet. He saw blurry forms as the red emergency lights flashed around them. Heard, like sound underwater, voices.

And then in moments, reality came back into sharp focus. Scorpia was holding him on her lap, her clumsy claws cradling his head. He blinked at her and she smiled.

"Thank goodness! I thought you were dead!" She pulled him into a tight hug and he struggled as her thick carapace crushed against his armor.

"I beg your pardon," he snapped, rubbing his now sore shoulder when she released him, "I believe that was MY line."

The good mood was short lived. Kyle ran by with a sharp strangled sound. Hordak could only look on in horror as the boy bent down and cradled the broken and battered body of Rogelio.

Yes. His body. There was no coming back from his injuries. Hordak shakily rose to his feet, still unbalanced, dizzy. But needed now. As Kyle clutched his lover and wept, Hordak knelt beside him. As soon as he placed a hand on the boys shoulder, he buried his face in Hordaks chest and screamed, crying out in an anguish Hordak prayed he would never be forced to feel.

He wrapped his arms around Kyle, poor, sweet, brilliant Kyle. Underestimated by all. And now the very last of his 3 remaining squad mates. It wasn't fair. It wasn't right. Hordak grit his teeth and shook, allowing himself this one small moment to grieve.

Scorpia stood quietly gazing at the Garnet for a long time. It was done, what ever they had done to it, finished. It no longer glowed. At all. It sat looking dull as rock, a large crack ran up the side with a missing chunk at its base. Scorpia bent down to pick the missing shard of Garnet off the floor and hold it close to her chest. It was a small chunk, hardly more than the size of an Etherians finger. But it was enough.

She held it up sadly, looking from the broken Runestone to Rogelio, then back to the shard. All of this, all the effort, the pain. All the sacrifice. For what?

She sighed, but when she looked back up, there was the tiniest glow within the chunk of crystal she held in her claw. Despite it all, she allowed herself the ghost of a smile.

"When this is all over," she murmured, reaching up to touch her Runestone, "maybe we can come back and fix you. Make you the way you were always meant to be."

Scorpia suddenly looked up, reminded of where she was.

"Catra, help me, we gatta- Catra?"
Scorpia looked around. A half dozen bodies lay around the room, but none belonged to Catra or Aszi. Scorpia hurried to Hordak and Kyle.
"We have to go!" She yelled as a siren began to blare, "Now!"

Hordak hesitated for only an instant, but pulled himself and Kyle back up. Kyle resisted, grabbing for Rogelios body. But Hordak knew they would have to leave him. Sometimes it just wasn't practical to take a body of a dead soldier.

Without a word and despite his injuries, Hordak threw Kyle over his shoulder and he, Kyle and Scorpia escaped.

The mission was a success.
Brightmoon had seen battle before. The scars of the last one were still healing, imperfections yet to be fixed, structures yet to be rebuilt. They would now have to wait even longer.

Glimmer stood in front of Brightmooms Runestone, no longer encased in a metal box of Entraptas making. The makeshift lab had been disassembled recently, only a few weeks previous. There was no point to it anymore. Not even Hordak used it. And having easy access to her Runestone was better for the Queen.

"Alright, Stell," Glimmer called, "let's give them the fight of their lives."

Stella wanted to comment that it may well be the only fight if their lives for some of them, but she thought that might kill the moment. Instead, she placed herself directly in front of her Queen, crouching low.

"What ever comes across that bridge," the clone hissed, "I kill."

Micah and Shadow Weaver cast spells back to back as clone after clone threw themselves at them. Sheild, fire spell, energy wave- they summoned them together, working as a team for the first time in decades.

"You've improved greatly, Micah," the old Sorceress panted when they had a small break in the fight, "just as I trained you."

As she was distracted, a clone leaped at her, only to be thrown back by Micah at the final instant.

"Yeah," he laughed, "just like you trained me."

Shadow Weaver laughed as well, as they fought back the next wave.

"You always were my favorite student, Micah."

Micah wanted nothing more than to sit down and have a real conversation. Why hadn't they done that? They'd been staying in the same castle this whole time. Sure, they took the time to catch up, but not actually discuss anything.

As they fought on, Micah could sense his teachers strength dying. It was like watching the last bit of a candle flicker and fade, fighting against the pooling wax to stay lit.

But soon, too soon, her flame went out.

--------

"Alright. Um. Emily? Record."

Bow paced around the room holding a tiny bundle up to his chest.
"Uhh, Dryl Princess, uh... guess you dont have a name yet? W-well, she was born at 9:24 pm at 34 weeks gestation. Labor was about 13 hours, but the birth itself was quick. Entrapta is recovering well. Uh..."

He stopped and looked the baby over, feeling stupid. He wasn't sure how to note any of this!

"Um, 18 inches long, 6 lbs, 7 ounces. Smaller than average, but otherwise appears healthy."

He paced the room as the infant stared ahead at nothing with giant, wondering eyes.

"Notable features include pointed ears, blueish hair, pink eyes, uh, like Hordaks though? Dark markings around eyes. Skin tone like Entraptas, but appears to have pretty distinct facial markings. Oh, uh..."

He opened the blanket, gulped and covered the baby again.

"She, ah... has wings."

----------

Stella tore through yet another clone Brother. These ones were weak. New. Fresh from the tank. No practical experience. Easy to kill. And pitiable. It felt like killing children. On essence, it was close to it. Before they had even had a chance at life, they were thrown into battle. Sent to die. Expected to die.

Each one Stella fell, injured her heart. They had not asked to be made for this purpose. She could have been any one of them.

She panted, purple blood drenching her airy brightmoon uniform. Behind her, the Queen of Brightmoon remained focused on her Runestone, holding her staff out with one hand, while she kept the other on the glowing white surface.

Then, all at once, something shifted. Stella could feel it, the clones could feel it. Glimmer could feel it. All at once, everyone in the area seemed to freeze. And then the moonstone burst with energy.

And almost immediately, the battle was over. The enemy retreated, called back by Prime. And soon, the only indication they had even been there at all were the bodies left behind.

Brightmoon was saved. Again.

----------

Adora and Swift Wind were a perfect team. The attack on the enemy occupied Plumeria was going off flawlessly. Primes forces stood no chance. If Adora had been thinking clearly if she was not riding the high of adrenaline, she may have realized how absurd that was.

Hordak, even a defective clone, was still strong. A force to be considered. And yet, Adora was tearing through these supposed perfect clones like they were nothing.
But she was not thinking. She was feeling, living. Her sword seemed to move on its own. Her and her steed sped through the battlefield to the Runestone that was...

Not active.

Adora stopped to think at long last. She dismounted. Staring.

"What?"

As the clone soldiers seemed to fall back, as victory was assured, Adora felt a shift in the air. Something was wrong. Of course it was. It never was this easy.

She turned as the sea of retreating clones parted for something massive. What exactly it was, Adora wasn't entirely sure. It looked like it might be a clone but... no. Same species, but way too different. It was too big, for one thing. And its eyes were yellow, not red, with short black hair.

He grinned at Adora, gestured with one long talon, a challenge. He carried no weapon. Adora felt confident.

She was wrong.

In thirty seconds, her throat was in one powerful claw, her sword torn from her hands. She only managed to choke out the order for Swift Wind to fly away. As her steed hesitantly took to the sky, her vision darkened.

Just before it all went dark, she heard another voice. A younger voice, speaking that same strange language she'd heard from Hordak and Stella.

The Alliance had won back Plumeria, but lost She Ra.
Death was common. So common that Hordak should have been used to it by now. Should. Wasn't.

The council once again had gathered after giving themselves a day to recollect. Hordak and what was left of his team had only arrived back last night and mentally he was at the end of his rope. Rogelio was dead, Catra had gone missing, presumed captured by the enemy when Aszi escaped. And Kyle, poor Kyle, would not speak to anyone, nor would he eat.

All he had done since returning was lay in Hordak's own room on a long sofa and sleep. Yes. Hordak had taken him in personally. He refused to set foot in his room again and it was understandable. Too many reminders of Rogelio. Too much pain. Hordak had offered to let him have the bed, but the boy had already lay his head on the arm of the sofa and had refused to move.

Reluctant as Hordak had been to leave him, the council had been called, and he had a report to give.

"The mission was a success," he announced in a voice that sounded anything but celebratory, "with an added bonus. Scorpia has been found, alive."

The gathered council seemed to exhale simultaneously. But their expressions were worn, grave.

"I regret to report the loss of one of my squad mates," he continued slowly, "as well as Catra's capture. She was taken when the enemy escaped. The Garnet was also damaged."

He sat back down as the gathered Princesses murmured.

"The Brightmoon defense was also a success," Glimmer offered, "but it was not without loss too. During the battle, Shadow Weaver gave her life."

More murmuring.

Hordak, for all his complex feelings about her, had been upset by the news of her passing. Micah had been the one to tell him first. His heart ached for the other man. Shadow Weaver, or rather, Light Spinner, had been his teacher. And for a time, she had been Hordak's closest adviser.

It was a loss the Rebellion would feel, he knew it.

"Hordak? Any news from Dryl?" Glimmer asked and Hordak shook his head sadly.

"No word. All communication appears to have ceased, although, we know there have been no Horde forces spotted in the area, so we can assume a communications malfunction is the cause of the
silence for now."

More than anything, his soul was weighed down by this. Dryl had gone quiet. No word from Entrapta. No signal from Bow. No news what so ever.

Was she alive? Was the baby? Were they resting? Were they happy?

There were so many things he did not know. It set his temper on edge. Nothing could possibly make him feel worse.

"We finally have word on Plumeria," Queen Glimmer announced, moving forward, "enemy forces have retreated. The Runestone is secure. However..."

Hordak felt his heart turn to stone in his chest.

No.

"We have reports that Adora has been taken by the enemy."

He was wrong. So very, horribly wrong. He DID feel worse. This made him feel worse.

"Swift Wind brought us this report an hour ago," Glimmers voice rose at once over the uproar in the room, "which means there is still time."

"Prime won't hurt her," Hordak said at once, "he needs her for... something. Aszi mentioned something about her and Eternia."

"Eternia?" Glimmers eyes narrowed. "We can't go into a rescue blind. I'm going to ask Swift Wind, but I think we should speak to Light Hope. Maybe Swift Wind can get us in to talk. It's worth a shot. Any information will help."

"So, like, a rescue then?" Mermista exchanged a look with Frosta who was already turning her tiny fists into blocks of ice.

"Oh yeah! I am ready!" The tiny Princess was nearly jumping in her seat.

"If we're rescuing Princesses, I'm coming with you, whether you like it or not," Netossa snapped, "they took Spinerella. I'm gunna get her back."

"We're going to get all of them," Glimmer assured the excited group, "No princess left behind, remember?"

--------

Scorpia stared at her reflection.

Seven and a half months. That was how long she had been a prisoner and it showed. Her hair was long now. Too long. She wanted to snip it all off. Even after a good long shower, she felt filthy. Her claws went up to touch a new scar on her cheek, wincing.
Everything hurt so much. She had hoped after a little rest in a real bed, it might stop, but her muscles ached in a way she had never imagined. Months of torture would do that, she supposed.

The Princess sighed, shrugged and went to her door. It was time to move forward as best she could. If there was one thing she was good at, it was that.

Standing on the other side was exactly who she had been wanting to see from the moment she was rescued.

Scorpia had been keeping her close to her heart for months. At the worst moments, she went back to their first kiss. The memory of her laugh chased away her pain. Her smile was her constant companion during lonely nights. Her name, she had scratched into the wall of her cell, deep, perfect, permanent.

Stella.

Nobody spoke. Not a word for a long time. What could they say? They both had so much to tell, so much they wanted to make known. Emotions were high and Stella just looked so...

Beautiful.

"Hey Stell," Scorpia managed after staring for several long moments, "I'm back."

The tall aliens big red eyes welled up with tears and she bridged the distance between them. Long arms went up to pull her in and it was like a dream. How many times had she had this dream while in captivity? Scorpia had to remind herself that she was awake when her head connected to the hard muscled chest of her lover.

It was real and warm and so very good. Her heart ache was gone at once and the world was bright and alive again.

Laughing, she wrapped her large arms around the much taller woman and lifted her, held her close. She'd wanted to do that for months. And she'd also wanted to...

Stella gazed down as Scorpia held her high in her arms, her feet hovering inches above the ground. Her smile was enchanting, and even her tears sparkled with a sort of magic.

Shyly, Stella tucked a long curled stand of indigo hair behind a long ear.

"I waited," she whispered, leaning in to lay her forehead against Scorpias, "I never gave up hope."

"I know," the Princess whispered back, slowly lowering the clone back to the floor. As Stella moved, she shifted, hands on Scorpias face, guiding her chin up gently until their lips met.

For all that was wrong in the world, at the very least, this was right. This was pure. This was beautiful.
By the time Hordak arrived back to his room with a plate of food and drink for Kyle, it was already quite dark. Long meeting, a ton of planning. He'd asked Stella to check in on him periodically throughout the day, bring him food and drink, but not force in to talk.

So far, Stella said he had not moved from his spot.

When he opened the door, the first thing he noticed was that he also apparently had not touched any food or water. And then he noticed the boy was no longer at his usual spot.

And that worried him. Silently, Hordak made his way outside to the waterfall display, knowing exactly what he would find.

And there he was, as expected. Etherians could be so predictable.

Kyle had nothing. It was a thought that should have paralyzed him, but now it only served to push him forward. As he stood at the edge staring down, he didn't feel sad. Not really. Sadness at least was a feeling. An emotion. He was beyond that now. A shell.

Pain was unpleasant, but at least it had been something. He'd lived with pain his whole life. That constant, nagging, hateful prick at the back of his mind. A reminder if inadequacies, his failures. He was a joke to everyone.

Except him.

And now he was gone.

He closed his eyes, held a hand to his heart, smiled.

See you soon

He fell forward.

And stopped.

His eyes opened again, he looked behind him to where Hordak had him held to the edge by his collar. He was yelling something at him, but Kyle wasn't sure what it was. It didn't matter. As his back hit solid ground, Kyle couldn't help but look disappointed.

"Did you hear me!?" Hordak was unable to keep the panic out of his voice, "I forbid you from trying that again! Why would you just-? You can't-!"

Kyle lay stunned, unable to speak and then, the war lords arms were around him, pulling him close. The boy blinked, struck stupid.

"Never again," he was whispering as he held the boy, "Not again. Never. You're family. You are. I-
For the first time since Rogelios death, he felt something besides pain. Relief. And shame.

"I- I'm sorry!" The boy now wept, burying his face into his shoulder for the second time.

"It's not right," the warlord shakily murmured, "Rogelio didn't deserve that. Lonnie didn't deserve that. You didn't deserve it. None of you do. None of you ever did."

Kyle had the sudden urge to pat his back, comfort him. All he could manage was laying his face on his shoulder.
For a long time, that was how they stayed.

"I'm sorry," Kyle sighed when he finally finished weeping, "I..."

"I know, young one. I know," Hordak allowed him to pull away. "Rogelio would want you to live, Kyle. He would want you to keep moving forward."

"I know," the boy sniffled, looking the edge of the palace, "I know. I... can I have some water?"

Hordak nodded and silently helped him to his feet. He made a plan for Kyle, to help him. He would remain here until he was ready, have someone keep an eye on him, keep him busy but not stressed. Make sure he got the help he needed.

Because in the end, he was responsible. For all of this.

----------

Click. Click. Click.

Aszi watched those razor sharp talons click a rhythmic tempo on the arm of the throne. Silver, shining, perfect.
Deadly.

She was nervous, but her face never betrayed it, not for an instant. Her bright yellow eyes stared up at her Emperor from where she knelt on the floor. He was making her kneel for a long time. Not a good sign.

-Aszi, I am disappointed.-

She closed her eyes. He didn't sound just disappointed. He sounded almost murderous. She knew why. He was feeling the stress.

Once they came here, they became trapped. They could make a portal in, but not out. And that meant they had lost contact with their forces outside Despondos and could not order more troops. They had a few thousand clones left in tanks, but there hadn't been time to properly prepare them.

Losing the Garnet, losing Plumeria. Those were huge losses. Devastating.

With a long, exaggerated sigh, the Emperor stood. His footsteps were like thunder, slow, rolling,
rumbling. Aszi opened her eyes again to look up at him as he stood over her. Slowly, he knelt down to nearly eye level with her.

-Princess, failure must be punished,- he growled, raising a claw, -You!-

The doors to the throne room burst open and a male, large as Prime, walked in with an Etherian Female draped over his shoulder. Behind them both, Zed stood carrying the sword with one hand while inputting data on a holographic display with the other.

Prime stood back up and the large male knelt, taking Adora from his shoulders and laying her struggling, tied up form before the Emperor. There was a moment of surprise, then a smile and finally a laugh. The Emperor allowed himself a moment of pure bliss before turning his attention back to his daughter.

-So. This was your plan all along,- he nodded, approving, motioning for her to rise with flick of his finger. -Well done, Princess. Clearly I was wise to put my trust in you.-

Aszi exchanged a quick look with her twin brother as if to ask what took him so long. Nazeim was an idiot though, strong as Prime, but slow, stupid. He could hardly follow orders even. He was meant to be back much sooner. She would speak to Zed later and find out why. If it was Zeds fault, she may just kill him.

Prime stepped to the struggling Adora on the floor, smiling down at her.

"You must be She Ra. We've been waiting for you."

Chapter End Notes

Lol some of you guys legit thought I was about to kill off the title character of the show! I mean, I'm not above doing that. But not now.

Also, I am beyond flattered. You guys came back to read after my break with such an enthusiasm! I'm very excited for the response this has gotten and so excited for where the next few chapters take us!

<3
Blessed

It was around 3 am, and Hordak could not sleep. He paced the suite like a spectre as Kyle slept in his bed. He had insisted after the 'incident', as they now called it. It didn't matter. He hardly slept anyway. And almost certainly not tonight. Too much on his mind.

Grabbing a glass and a flask, he sat beside the waterfall, checking his wrist comm once again.

2 days. 5 hours. 35 minutes. That was how long it had been since he'd heard from her. So much had happened. Death. Love. Hurt. But above all of it, was worry. For her. For Adora as well.

They were coming to the end of things much sooner than he had hoped. With the kidnap of Adora, it had forced their hand. Tomorrow, they would go to the Crystal castle, then to Dryl for the ship. And then...

Well, the plan was still mostly the same.

Win. Or die.

"Hordak? Are you there?"

Hordak blinked. Entrapta's voice. His message got through this time!? He'd grown used to getting no reply that he thought this time would fail too.


"Hold on, Hordikins, I'm almost there."

"Almost... what?" He was absolutely baffled, "Entrapta, what is-?"

He shut up in a second as the large black form of Mara's ship flew overhead, stopped mid air and landed carefully in the middle of the castle lawn.

"Surprise!" She squealed from over the comm as the ships ramp descended and the doors opened. From all the way up in his suite, he could just make out the form of Bow carrying a bundle followed by the wild lavender hair of Entrapta carrying something smaller.

Hordak wasted no time. In an instant he had thrown a long blue robe over his sleep clothes and hurried out of the room, glancing back at the sleeping Kyle once more before leaving.

As he rushed down the halls, barefoot and looking decidedly less intimidating than usual, people began to emerge from their rooms as well, rubbing their eyes.

"Brother? wha-?"

Stella emerged from a room that was not hers. If Hordak cared a little more, he would have noticed Scorpia standing right behind her with a claw at her waist.

Right at this moment, he had one thing on his mind as he raced down the castle corridors. What was he going to say?
So much had happened. So much to tell. She'd been unreachable, unaware. And what would she have to tell him? That fact that she was alive at all was a victory, but his children were his everything.

As he reached the castle lawn, his footsteps slowed. Then he stopped.

There she was. So beautiful, so bright. Smiling. Her impossibly long lavender hair hung down her back, over her shoulder, wrapped around a tiny bundle.

Their eyes met and Hordak could no longer think. They were here. Alive. Safe. After everything, all the pain. His family was together. His eyes flashed to Bow who was holding his son by the hand and he gave the teen a nod before moving to greet his wife.

"Are you alright?" He asked frantically as they met, "we lost contact. Its been two days and I-"

She nodded, tired, obviously, but her face was pure bliss.

"We're all fine," she murmured, pressing herself close, "Hordak, do you want to meet your daughter?"

He couldn't speak, couldn't make the words come out at all. It was as if he forgot. It was all he could do just to nod. She pulled away at last, unwrapping a tendril of hair so that he could take the new infant into his arms properly.

In the light of Brightmoons Runestone, Hordak finally saw the face of his youngest child.

"S-she... looks like me," he realized. His heart thundered with pride. One claw went to touch a cheek and the instant contact was made bright magenta eyes blinked open. "Oh yes. Like me..."

"There's more," she whispered, pulling down the blanket and carefully shifting her until her shoulder blades were exposed. Time stilled. The sound of his heartbeat felt impossibly slow.

"Are those... wings?"

--------

This was not the first time Adora had found herself captured, alone, in enemy territory. But it was her first time in space. That complicated things. Made escape a little harder to manage.

She sat in a cell, on a narrow bench, staring at a plain white wall. She had to make a plan. She had to escape. Something always happened. The hero always escaped. The chosen one always had a second chance. She Ra did not fail. That just wasn't how the story went!

She was so mad at herself. How could she let herself get captured like this?

She stood up, pacing as she forced her brain to come up with a solution. Could she break out if this cell? Unlikely. She didn't even know how this prison functioned. Maybe she could fight her way through when the guard opened the door? Unlikely.

Her last hope was a successful rescue mission.

'We've made miracles happen with less,' She recalled Glimmer saying.
Well. Now she was hoping for a miracle.

"You flew that all the way here?" Hordak asked, amazed "right after giving birth!?!"

"Well, not right after," she explained taking a seat next to her husband in the sitting room of their suite, "I gave myself about 10 hours to sleep and recover. Then I flew here."

Hordak poured her a glass of something bubbly and likely alcoholic.

"And you know how to fly it?" He raised a brow, passing the glass over while taking one for himself. Tomorrow he would leave to learn the best way to rescue Adora. But tonight... well, tonight was for her.

"Of course I do! I designed it, didn't i?"

That was true, but if that was the case, why ask Stella to test fly it? He supposed space flight was different than just flying a kingdom over though. Hordak didn't reply. He simply reached to pull her back against him, one arm resting over her shoulder. After all this time, he imagined his reunion with her would be more physical, passionate. But forces seemed hell bent on sexually frustrating him. Kyle was still sound asleep in their bed, making the sofa the only place for them now. And besides that, she had only just given birth. Not to mention the new born sleeping in a little bassinet a few feet away.

No. It was not the passion filled night he had imagined it would be, but he would make the most of it none the less.

"So what do the wings mean?" Entrapta asked suddenly, resting her head against his chest.

Hordak thought for a long time, swirling the liquid in his glass absently.

"There is a story amongst my kind. My.. species, I mean. Clones do not have legends," he clarified, "the culture is... different. But in essence, infants who are born with their wings still intact are said to be blessed by the Gods. Most often, the wings vanish in the womb, or simply never form. Sometimes, occasionally, one of us may make it to adulthood with them. But there is a... price."

Hordak took a deep sip before continuing.

"The blessed were taken from their families and sent to live and train in a temple. Devoting themselves to serving the Gods with their bodies. And if they have their wings to adulthood, it is said a god has been reborn in their body."

"The clones in your Sanctum had wings," she pointed out, "does that mean...?"

"Yes. Prime was one of them. He was legendary on the old world. Brilliant, powerful, with large powerful wings. They say he could even fly.

But he had rivals. And as his power grew, so did fear. One day, it was decided that he had become too powerful, too threatening. His wings were torn away, and he was tossed aside, banished.

But Prime would not die and he would not go quietly into exile. He took his vengeance, in the end."
With the red wings as his symbol, he formed a rebellion. It is unknown what his name was before, but he took the name Horde Prime for himself. This was the first Horde.

He tore down the ruling class and sought to put himself at the head of it all. At least, this is what I have been told.

Entrapta was silent for a long time. He understood why. Prime was unforgivable. To Hordak. To her. Nothing could make his actions reasonable. But... at the same time...

"He's still a monster," Entrapta snarled, unmoved, "I cant wait to kill him."

Hordak drained the rest of his glass.

"Yes. Me as well, but Entrapta..." he sighed, setting the glass down with a clink, "I've done awful things too."

"You are working through them," she reminded him, "you're aware and trying to make up for it. He's aware and doesn't care. That's the difference."

He did not respond to that. Not really. Sure, he was working on it, but how could anyone possibly make up for a lifetime of terror? All the lives he ruined? It was impossible.

His eyes went to the sleeping bundle in the bassinet. No. He couldn't make it up to everyone. But he had to try to do right from now on. For her. For Dawn. For Entrapta.

"Have you thought of a name for her yet?" He asked, moving to lay down and drag her with him once she had finished her drink and set it aside.

"No," she admitted, "I've been so busy, I hardly had time."

"You'll think of something," he suppressed a yawn with the back of his hand. "Only a few hours until day break. Sleep while you can, love."

His wife curled against him on the couch and gave him a long, deep kiss. The first one in 7 months. When she pulled away at last, he found himself speechless. Blushing from the tips of his long ears, despite everything.

"Night night. Hordikins. I missed you."
The First Ones

Chapter Summary

Info dump chapter ahead.
Enjoy!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next day, they said their goodbyes quickly, then at the insistence of Swift Wind, they all headed into the still smoldering remains of the Whispering Woods.

Hordak, Entrapta, Bow, and this time, Glimmer herself, arrived at the slightly charred, but still very much intact Crystal Castle sometime around noon.

"Alright," Swift Wind said for what felt like the hundredth time, "I'm going to take you in. Usually outsiders aren't allowed bu-"

"Ugh! We know!" Glimmer snapped, "if you're with us we should be okay. How many times are you going to repeat that?"

Hordak nodded with the young Queen. Yes. The horse was irritating. He wondered how Adora handled his nonstop blabbering, but then, Adora was not very bright. She likely didn't notice.

"Okay okay," Swift Wind shook his long mane and gently kicked at a wall. A panel in the wall slid down and he stepped inside. "Just stay close. Light Hope gets a little... murderous to outsiders."

"How charming," Hordak deadpanned, following the group inside.

-----------

Adora had a plan. She was going to escape, attack a guard when the door opened, kill Prime, take her sword back, steal a ship, learn to fly in two whole seconds and get home.

Easy.

But when the door to her cell did open, she was intercepted immediately. It wasn't even a fight, more like an awkward game of catch where she was the ball.

She was subdued quickly with a bite to her arm and her now limp body was cuffed and thrown over the shoulder of a masked clone. So much for her escape attempt.

Prime waited at his throne, examining a glass of some red liquid against the low lights around the throne room. Behind him, Princess Aszi stood, one hand on his shoulder as she leaned in to whisper
something. He grinned, flashing blood red fangs as Adora was brought in and set on the floor before him. To the left of the throne, Zed shifted uncomfortably, still holding the sword. When Adora saw the sword, she squirmed, tried to stand. Failed. Fell again.

Prime laughed at the attempt.

"Princess, there is no need to panic. You are a guest here."

From her spot on the floor, Adora looked up with a face pulled into a snarl. "Yeah? Well. Your hospitality could use some work."

The Emperor laughed again, this time true amusement.

-She is funny,- he noted to Aszi, who nodded, smiling. -bring her a seat.-

-----

Light Hope was... creepy. Everyone seemed to have that same thought at once. Hordak hated looking at it, but the way it seemed to stare into his very mind forced him to look back.

"Yes? Can I help you?" He snapped eventually. The AI tilted its head.

"You are from The Horde. We have been watching you."

Something about that sentence made him cringe. If not for Entrapta being there to hold his hand, he may have left. He really did not feel comfortable here.

"Okay! That's enough intimidating the war lord," Glimmer piped up, once more just in time to save Hordak from discomfort. "Adora's been kidnapped and Swift Wind says you know why."

The AI nodded, paused as if thinking, then motioned to a mural on the wall.

"In order to explain, it is best to start at the beginning.

The 'First Ones,' as you call them, hail from the planet Eternia, land of immortality and progress."

The first panel of the mural displayed a planet in space, constellations dotting the sky behind it.

"For thousands of years, Eternia was at peace. Hundreds of sentient species lived and worked together under the wise rule of our king.

However, peace would not last."

-----

Prime had emptied the chamber now, save for Princess Aszi and Zed, who both stood behind the throne, watching.
"Do you know who I am, Princess?"

"Horde Prime," Adora spat, "Hordak says you're a real bastard."

Prime laughed and Adora noted how the one called Zed flinched at the sound.

"Hordak knows nothing about me. And neither do you, it seems. The Gatekeeper of Etheria has told you so little. Typical."

He stood up, and began to walk down the dias, one slow, thundering step at a time.

"I once called the planet of Eternia home," he explained, voice suddenly going soft, reminiscent. "Among my people, I was a God. Loved, worshipped, obeyed. But to the King of Eternia, I was merely a simple advisor, a distant cousin, nothing more."

Adora sat, mouth agape.

"You're a... First One?"

"Prime is a First One?!" Bow exclaimed, then quickly put his hands over his mouth when Glimmer shushed him.

Hordak felt his wife's hand squeeze his, gently shaking him out of his daze. Prime was a First One. A leader of his race, practically a deity. And yet, he was still only a minor member of nobility on Eternia. His mind felt numb. So much information and he did not know what to do with it.

"Prime, as you call him, was once a resident of Eternia. Was I not clear about that?" The AI asked, "or should I go over it again?"

"No, no!" Glimmer held up a hand, "his question was rhetorical."

"I... see. Yes. Etherian expressions of surprise are curious."

Entrapta was taking notes. On everything, it seemed. Good. When they were finished here, he needed to go back and review. He felt like he was going to pass out in here. Too much. All of this. His head felt light.

"So, wait," Bow asked, "If prime is a First One, why don't you look like him?"

"I may take any form needed," Light Hope explained, "however, this form is the original form of my designer. Primes race is only one of many originating on Eternia. A genetic offshoot of what you call "humans". They were some of the first to experiment with genetic alteration in order to create what they saw as a 'superior form'."

"What are we called?" Hordak recovered from his shock long enough to ask. "My race. My people. What are we called?"

Light Hope looked confused.

"I do not understand. Eternians do not have separate names for species. They are all simply
"Wait!" Entrapta interrupted again, "if they are a genetic offshoot of humans then that explains why..."

"Yes. It explains why we were able to successfully mate," Hordak finished, then caught the look Glimmer gave him and cleared his throat. "But if humans were the genetic originals, then that means..."

"Etheria was settled by Eternia," Light Hope continued, "I suppose I must explain slower and more clearly. Apologies. I am not used to needing to use such small words."

The group knew they should be insulted, and they were.

"My people were superior in every way," Prime continued, "Stronger. Faster. Smarter. We were designed to be, of course. By rights, we should have been on the throne, but for years we were used as common laborers. A waste.

Our time came when Princess Marlena was of age to marry. Of course, she had many suitors. Yet in the end, I was chosen. I was young still, admittedly, foolish. I should have been more suspicious-

"Let me guess?" Adora interrupted, "she hated you and married someone else instead?"

Prime grit his teeth and Adora was certain he was about to rip her throat out. She waited for a blow that never came. Instead he turned his back on her, sounding almost... sad.

"On the contrary, the Princess was given full power to choose her mate. This was no arranged thing."

"So what happened then?" Bow asked, "if they were supposed to get married, why isn't Prime the king of Eternia now?"

"Prime was ambitious. Before the marriage could take place, a rival discovered Prime's plot to marry the Princess and then have her killed, leaving him the unquestioned ruler of Eternia."

"- A vicious lie," Prime snarled, "yet it did not matter. Once 'proof' of my supposed plot was discovered, it was over. Princess Marlena would not look nor speak to me."

"As punishment, his wings were removed and he was banished."

"My wings were torn from me, yet the worst pain, worse than losing my home, my identity, was watching her wed another."
"So you... created the Horde?"

"I had no choice," he seemed to sigh, "were I the only one punished, perhaps I could have died in peace somewhere. However, what happened to my people was unforgivable."

"In order to ensure the people of the Night Lands would not seek to rebel, the new King ordered that the genetic strain be eliminated."

"Wait!" Glimmer cried, shrill, "they... killed them!?"

"Yes," Light Hope replied simply, as if it were obvious, "An example had to be made. Enemies of Eternia must be destroyed. Entirely."

"But! The people, they... they didn't do anything!" Adora cried, "How could the King justify genocide?!"

Prime shook his head, looking up at a black void stretched out forever.

"Being a ruler can be... complicated. The instant I found out that they had begun rounding up my kind, I formed the original Horde. A group of rebels at first, set to rescue as many as possible and flee. And we were successful, in a sense. However, before I could liberate the rest of my kind, Eternia vanished from the Universe."

"In order to maintain peace, we closed ourselves off from the rest of the universe, placing a single access point on one of our colonized worlds."

"Etheria," Entrapta finished, "oh! That explains so much about the tech at the planets core! The Runestones! They're the power source for the portal to Eternia!"

"Correct, as well as the key to deploy the Weapon."

"Yes!" Entrapta was excited now, "I discovered the planets capabilities as a super weapon years ago! What sort of weapon!? How do we use it!? Tell me everything!"

Light Hope seemed confused, processing every question and searching for the best way to answer.

"The weapon is to be used in the event of invasion as a final means of protecting Eternia. It feeds off the life force of Etheria, using it to eliminate the threat."

"...The life force?" Bow reluctantly asked, "you mean..."

"When the weapon is activated, all life on Etheria will end. For the survival of Eternia."

"My people were on the verge of extinction. The clones were a solution. Soldiers, nothing more, designed for combat, conquest. We made our way across the universe, searching for Eternia,"
"So you want to get to Eternia for... revenge?" Adora asked. "If the portal to Eternia is here, why haven't you just opened it?"

"Despondos," he answered, "this pocket dimension prevents a portal from being opened from within. It is the reason I was able to get here, but not call for more troops once I had arrived. It is the same reason Hordak could get in, and you."

"Shadow Weaver said Hordak opened the portal-"

"Incorrect. Perhaps his portal helped as a guide, but you are from Eternia. And not just any Eternian either..."

Prime knelt down in front of her now, tilting her head up to meet his eyes with a long silver talon.

"You look so much like her," he whispered, "if things had gone differently, you may have been my daughter."

Chapter End Notes

So prime is a bastard. Regardless of the tragic backstory, abuse is abuse and it's not okay.

Hope this chapter did not come across as me trying to excuse anything.
Hordak needed to breathe. He needed air. He needed... anything but this. He pressed his hand to his forehead, shaking when Entrapta asked if he was doing alright.

"It's too much," he hissed, "I can't do this."

"It's alright, it's alright," she quietly soothed, reaching up to run a hand through his hair, "I know. Look at me."

His eyes snapped to hers, growling quietly. He hadn't realized he was panting, nearly gasping for air, breath uneven, uncontrollable. He was shaking.

"I think you're having a panic attack," she told him quietly, "just look at my eyes and listen to my voice. I'm here. I'm going to help you though it."

He felt like drowning, the weight of it all pressing him down deeper until he wasn't sure he could claw his way out again.

"He appears to have elevated stress levels," Light Hope noted, "Shall I play some soothing noises to assist."

"No!" The answer came from all 5 gathered in the room at once, leaving the AI looking stunned.

Adora had no words now. Her whole life, her destiny, everything. It had all been leading to this. And now she... she almost wished she didn't know.

She sat quietly, no longer bound to her chair. Prime had ordered her release, insisted she was his guest. Nearly family, he had called her. She didn't move. Couldn't.

"...What do you want from me?" She asked at long lost, finally lifting her gaze to the Emperor who once more sat on his throne.

"I think you know what I want, Princess Adora." His voice was like a melody, enchanting.

"Etheria," she murmured, eyeing her sword, "you want me to move it again."

"I want you to put it back where it belongs. That is all."

The tranquil tones of his voice had her convinced. So close. He was right, wasn't he? Etheria did not belong here. Mara took away the stars. It wasn't her place to do that. She cut Adora off from her home, stranded her. She had parents. She didn't know them.
And it was Maras fault.

"My sword..."

Zed stepped forward holding the sword and Adora stood, reaching for the hilt.

"Yes, Adora," he encouraged, "You are doing the right thing. We can both go home."

Her hand froze on the pommel.

"What will happen when we do?" She asked quietly, "what will happen to Etheria? To my friends? To the people?"

There was a pause that lasted just a little too long. Adora's hand went limp, then she let go. It dropped to her side. The look on the Emperors face said it all.

"You are not thinking clearly, my dear," he sighed, impatient and somewhat... disappointed, "well, perhaps a little motivation is necessary after all."

-Nazeim, the girl.-

The large one stepped inside the throne room just then, carrying the kicking and screaming furry form of-

"Catra!" Adora cried, then turned her attention back to Prime. "What are you doing? Let her go! She has nothing to do with this!"

Prime studied the Princess, resting his chin on a fist.

"Move the planet. When you do, I will set her free. Not a fur harmed on her body. You have my word. I can not make a promise for her safety otherwise."

"Adora! Don't!" Catra screeched, "you can't! Don't-!

She let out a howl if pain as the large, bumbling Nazeim squeezed.

"Stop!" Adora cried, reaching again for the sword. "Catra- I'm not leaving you again. I can't."

Tears in her eyes, she held the sword above.

"For the Honor of Grayskull!"

A brilliant burst of light illuminated the dim throne room. Primes grin flashed as the tall warrior Princess appeared where Adora had been moments ago.

Face firm with grim determination, she closed her eyes, pressed her forehead to the blue stone at the center of the sword.

And reality shifted. It was almost unnoticeable. Save for the transparent ceiling. Prime looked up just as tens of thousands of stars burst into view.

----------
Madam Razz absently swept the charred remains of her cabin. Yes. This was far from ideal, but life was not always nice. She could rebuild. The woods would grow back. They always did.

She let out a deep breath and took a seat on a surviving log. The day was done. Tomorrow would bring a new day and new work. Tomorrow would-

She blinked upwards suddenly. Took her glasses off, cleaned them, put them back on.

No. It couldn’t be. It wasn’t possible. Unless...

"Oh Mara dear... I am so sorry."

-------

Hordak stumbled outside with Entrapta supporting him with her strong hair as he struggled through his first ever panic attack. Yes. That’s what this was. That was what she said it was. She was humming, holding his hand. It helped, but it was not until the cool night air hit his face that he started to feel a sense of serenity again.

"Better?" She asked, leading him over to a large boulder to sit at.

"Y-yes. Thank you." His voice still shook, but it was better out here. Out here, there was nothing to remind him of... everything.

She sat next to him, holding his hand tight, head resting on his shoulder. He nuzzled the top of her head with his cheek, content.

And then the sky glittered.

"Entrapta..." he whispered, "I believe I am having a mental break down."

"Hm? That’s unlikely. I..."

He had never seen her eyes go so big. Yes, Hordak had shown her the stars before on the screen of his personal terminal in the Frightzone. But pictures did not compare.

Entrapta reached up, eyes wet, lips pulled back in the most beautiful smile he had ever seen.

"Hordak..." she breathed, "you don't have to miss them anymore."

They knew what this meant. This was not good. This was the worst. And yet... Hordak finally felt home.

As Glimmer, Swift Wind and Bow came outside to join them, it was clear they noticed at once. And again, despite knowing what grim tidings this sight brought, it was...
"Beautiful," Bow breathed.

Hordak nodded, smiling, really honestly smiling. He lifted his wife's hand to his lips as a tear rolled down his sharp cheek.

"Welcome to the rest of the Universe," Hordak whispered.

"Hordak... I know what I want to name our daughter now."

----------

Scorpia had noticed them first. She knew what they were, of course. Stella had told her all about them. How they glittered like diamond dust on black velvet. How they flared and shone like sparks. Beautiful. Almost as beautiful as...

"Stella, keep your eyes closed!" She insisted, leading the tall clone out to the middle of the castle lawn to where she had a blanket laid out.

"Scorpia!" She giggled, "what is this about? Can I look yet?"

"Not yet. Here. Lay down. Theres a blanket- yes, there we go!"

Stella lay down with Scorpias help, eyes still closed. Scorpia settled down next to her, grinning, head nuzzling against her long neck.

"Alright," she whispered against her ear, "open."

Stella obeyed, blinking in the sudden glow of the universe. Her face went blank, unreadable, then a shaky talon went to her lips as a smile formed.

"I guess... I'm not the only Star here anymore."

Scorpia was watching her, absolutely enraptured. The stars, well, they were pretty. But she had something better. Something brighter, more dazzling. Magnificent, and magical. And all her own.

"You're still the only star to me," she murmured, leaning in to kiss her cheek. She caught lips instead. Stella turned to face her, entire body pressed together, hands on her face as Scorpia placed a claw on her hip.

"Stella..." Scorpia breathed when they pulled away at last, "when this is over, I'm going back home. I'm going to restore my Kingdom. And I want you to come with me."

Stella pulled away ever so slightly to study her face. What was...?

Blushing furiously, Scorpia sat up, pulling something out of a pouch at her side. Stella sat up as well, allowing the other woman to clumsily take her hand and present a... ring. Yes. Like the one Brother wore. The one that marked him bonded to Entrapta.

Between two large clumsy claws, Scorpia held a silver band, adorned with a brilliant red gem, at the center of it the faintest light glowed.
"It's a shard of the black Garnet," Scorpia explained, "It's... the last bit of my Kingdom left."

"Scorpia, I... you know I will go with you anywhere."

"Is... that a yes then?"

"Yes," Stella answered, then more enthusiastically, "Yes! My answer is yes."

------------

"Alright! You have your stars!" Adora snapped, "now let her go!"

Nazeim looked at the Emperor who then looked at...

"Catra," he purred, "once more I would like to thank you for your cooperation."

"Any time, Boss."

Shattered. Her world was shattered. Ended. 3 words and it was over. Immediately She Ra melted away, leaving only Adora, small, weak. Lost.

Broken.

The sword fell from her grip, clattering to the floor.

The large alien Nazeim loosened his grip and Catra jumped from his arms. She glanced behind at Nazeim and gave him a sharp kick to the knee.

"Big idiot. Don't squeeze me so hard!"

The large alien did not seem to really register the pain, but still offered a deep, "ow."

Catra buried her hands in the pocket of her jacket and faced her lover.

"Hey Adora."

"Catra- what? No! Y-you were on our side! Why-"

Prime laughed. So did Catra.

"Oh Adora, you'd think by now you'd catch on. That's why I love you. You always want to believe the best in everyone."

"Catra..."

"I've been working for him the whole time, idiot," she snorted, "why? Did they all buy it? Catra, reformed. Saved by true love."

She cackled. Actually cackled.
"Oh please. People don't change. Not really."

From the corner of the room, Zed winced, shooting a glance at Prime.

"Even if I was changed, it wouldn't matter. You've always been the important one," she continued, bitterness just audible under the sigh in her voice, "They're probably coming up with a desperate rescue for you, Adora. But I bet they've written me off as dead already. Face it. I've always been expendable."

"Not..." Adora sobbed, lowering her head, "not to me."

Catra looked stunned for a full measure, then her eyes hardened. She looked back up to Prime who simply smiled.

"A deal is a deal," he waved a hand, "she is yours. Do with her as you will."

Adora sunk to the floor, shaking her head as Catra approached. Her clawed feet paused only a moment to kick the sword far out of reach before she knelt down in front of her. A sharp finger came forward to tilt her chin up, forcing their eyes to meet.

"You're all mine now."

Chapter End Notes

Catras gunna cat

But for real. She is such a complex character, so self destructive. I love her and honestly identify with her somewhat. But she really is her own worst enemy and the author of her own misery.
Fear

The council meeting was long. Much longer than Hordak would have liked, but there was so much to cover. With their new info, the state of the planet, it had taken hours to get through it all.

And Hordak had to leave half way through. Ill, or rather, caught in the grip of yet another panic attack. Why? What kept bringing these on? It was pathetic.

He paced his room, shaking, arms crossed in front of him. His heart felt like it was going to beat right out of his chest. His breathing was hard, irregular, desperate.

"You need to calm down," Kyle said, watching him pace from where he sat on the sofa, "you're going to actually make yourself sick."

Hordak wanted to snap, yell, growl, anything. But he couldn't. Not to Kyle. And even if it were anyone else, he wasn't sure he could manage anyway.

"I... I don't know how," he gasped, "it just... this has never happened before last night!"

"Well," Kyle questioned, "what happened yesterday?"

Yesterday? Yesterday. Yesterday...

"I... learned what I am," he murmured, still pacing, "or rather, who my genetic template was. Why he... is who he is. I learned who we are really facing. The planet is a weapon. Using it will kill us all. And I learned... I learned..."

His breathing had slowed, he was calming. Talking, much as he didn't want to do it, helped.

"It's okay," Kyle soothed, "go slow."

"I learned who the enemy is. Really. I learned just how far he'll go. I learned... Kyle, I learned what we have to do. And I think I'm afraid."

He stopped, realization hitting him like a wall. Blinking stupidly, he turned to look at the boy who was holding his daughter to his chest.

"I'm... afraid. This is fear," he realized.

"You've never been afraid before?"

"Of course I've been afraid, Kyle. But this is different, I think. I've been afraid for other people. This goes further..."

"You're afraid of failure."

Hordak sunk down into the seat next to him, hands in his lap, looking lost.

"...Yes."

"It's alright, Sir. I fail at everything. It could be worse."

Hordak was silent and Kyle took that as a cue to continue.

"What I mean is, you're going to fail sometimes. That's just life. But you have to take that failure and just... work with it."
Hordak reached to the table next to him for the crystal flask and a glass. Without a response, he poured himself a drink.

"Uh. Sir? Are you sure it's a good idea to drink now? Aren't you leaving soon?"

"Yes," he replied, took a deep sip, then stared at the ceiling for a while.

"Uh, yes it's a good idea? Or yes you're leaving soon?"

Hordak drained his glass and reached for the flask, pouring again.

"Both," came his simple reply as he lifted the liquid to his lips, "there has never been a better time to drink, Kyle."

-------

"Aww, Adora, don't look so upset!"

Catra lay stretched out on a large bed, plucking at a fruit tray beside her. At her feet, Adora glared, tied to a bed post.

"Oh come on," she purred, rolling onto her stomach, "I'll untie you if you can just give me a smile. Unless..." she sat up, crawling across the bed to her, "you want me to leave you tied up?"

The look the other girl gave her could freeze flame. Catra raised a brow, but didn't back down.

Leaning in, lips close to Adoras neck, she whispered.

"I did it for you, y'know. All for you." She planted a kiss just below her ear, grinning as the other girl went ridgid. She always did like it when Catra kissed her there.

"When Prime opens the portal to Eternia, we're going with him. You get to go home and I'll be with you all the time. It'll be perfect."

"You're fooling yourself," Adora snarled, "Prime isn't going to keep his promise to you. The second you're not useful to him-

"Oh please," she snorted, "you think I'm stupid? I know not to trust Prime. That's why I have a back up plan."

Her lips went to Adoras neck once again, kissing, nipping, lower, lower until she hit collar bone.

"Prime offered me a sweet deal," she purred, pulling Adoras tanktop down over her shoulder, "but Aszi made me a better one."

"Catra..." she groaned in spite of herself, "this isn't right..."

"Mmm... just tell me to stop and I'll stop, Kitten," Catra murmured against her shoulder, "but I think you want it."

Adora went silent, biting her lip. Yes, that old habit if hers. One clawed hand went to her thigh now, tracing up, up, up... then back down, watching in lustful amusement as Adora squirmed under her, but didn't tell her to stop.

"Do you remember our safe word?" Catra asked, claws hooking around the waistband of her
leggings.

"Primrose," Adora murmured, looking away.

"Good girl," Catra snickered, tugging the fabric free of her legs, "just say that if you want me to stop. I don't think you do though."

"You're... a monster," Adora groaned as Catra pulled her legs apart.

"Maybe," she reasoned, "but you keep coming back to me."

She was right. The cycle had to end.

"P-primrose. Stop!" Adora cried.

Catra pulled away, eyes narrowed.

"Why? What's wrong?"

"Dont touch me! It's over."

"You mean-"

"Yes! We're done, Catra."

--------

-Of course being defeated was part of the plan, you idiot.-

Aszi stood in the throne room now with only Zed and Nazeim. The youngest teens blue eyes narrowed into slits and he studied the sword again.

-You are overconfident, sister,- he sneered, -you think you are so clever. You think you are untouchable. But I was Fathers favorite as well. It can change, Aszi. Before you know it.-

Footsteps behind him made Zed turn, just in time to feel the sharp slap across his face. Aszi immediately gripped him by his collar, sharp teeth barred.

-I am nothing like you. You are weak. Pathetic. When we open the portal to Eternia, I will be the one who comes out on top. And you, my dear baby brother, will be lucky if I allow you to lick my boots!-

She threw him back and he landed hard on the floor with a hiss.

-Come, Nazeim!- she ordered, -leave our baby brother to cry. We have work to do.-

-----------

"Hordak, its time."
Entrapta stood in the middle of their suite now with Dawn in her arms. Kyle stood nearby with his daughter nestled against his chest. Hordak had just finished the last glass of the weak Brightmoon wine and was feeling, well, not better, but calmer. Able to focus.

He checked his armor once more, afraid he had forgotten something. No. He was set. He went to Kyle first, giving the boy a firm pat on the shoulder and a smile before turning his attention to his daughter.

"Good bye, Celeste," he whispered, placing a kiss to her forehead. In his language he added, -My little Blessed one.-

He moved to his son now, babbling in his mother's arms. He reached to tuck a long piece of black hair behind his ears.

"Be a good boy and take care of your sister," he whispered, pausing before adding sternly, "that is an order."

It was only when he kissed his forehead and pulled back that he noticed what Entrapta was wearing. Battle armor. Why?

"No." His voice was firm.

"Yes," she replied, setting the boy down to run to Kyle and his baby sister.

"Entrapta this isn't a game. We are going to the Mothership. This-"

"I am the only one who knows how the chip functions," she snapped, her patience clearly short, "the ship was my design. The plan was my idea. I am going. And if you don't like it, take it up with your superior- oh! Wait! That's me! I outrank you!"

Hordak wanted to argue. Wanted to. Couldn't.

-Brother, there is no point in fussing. She will do what she pleases anyway.- Stella was once again the voice of reason as they stood outside Maras restored ship. -Plus, she is stronger than you.-

Hordak snarled, but he knew she was right. His disease had eaten away at him for too long. His body, while stronger than a human, was still weak compared even to the smallest among his kind. It was a miracle Aszi did not kill him outright last time they met.

"Besides," Stella added, as Scorpia approached, "I'm bringing my Princess."

Hordak watched as his Clone sister laced an arm around the Scorpian Princesses waist and nuzzled her neck. On a long taloned finger, the shard of the Black Garnet flashed.

He had meant to ask about that, but now there was no time. Besides, he was pretty sure he knew what it meant.

-Scorpia is different. Scorpia has practical combat experience and training. I hardly had time to teach Entrapta what I would have liked.-

-And yet, she saved your life.-

-i've saved hers just as much.-
"Yes! Stella agreed, -so you work together!-

"Entrapta is strong," Scorpia reminded him, "and smart. Probably, like, the smartest person I know."

How she picked up on what they were talking about had Hordak stumped, but there was no more time to question it. He watched his wife go over last minute checks with Bow. Watched Queen Glimmer speak to each crew member individually. Watched Netossa argue.

"I'm coming too!" She was shouting, "and I dare ya to try to stop me!"

Hordak raised a brow. She was... feisty. Her spirit intrigued him.

"Spinerella is up there! I know it! I'm gunna take her back if it's the last thing I..."

Hordak hovered over her shoulder, casting a tall dark shadow over the Princess. Glimmer, looking exasperated shrugged at him.

"You are Netossa," he stated. Plain. Fact. "Your power is... nets."

"Yeah? It's not all I do you know!" She scoffed, "I've been a leading member of the Alliance since before any of y'all! Everyone wants to forget that."

Hordak was silent, then he nodded.

"You will come with us. Your nets will be useful."

Off to the side, Queen Glimmer sighed.

"If the great Lord Hordak says so, who am I to argue? I'm just a Queen after all."

Hordak chuckled, bowing.

"Well? Do you mind, Your Majesty?"

"Its fine," she relented, "we've got it covered here. Go get Adora and drag her back home."

Scorpia, Stella, Netossa, and then finally Hordak and Entrapta walked up the ramp, waving. Stella settled into the pilot's seat with Hordak next to her as the co pilot.

-Alright,- Stella chirped, -Let's go say hello to our Big Brother. Then punch him in the face!-
If anyone asked Hordak how they managed to dock their ship, sneak on board and fight their way through, he wouldn't have an answer. Frankly, it was a blur.

He remembered his sister, watching her dance, blades twirling in her hands. He remembered Scorpia, muscle, strength, and a paralysing sting. He remembered Netossa, competent, clever, capable, laying traps and netting her prey like a spider.

And Entrapta. She was... stunning. With her hair again near its full strength, she moved through like a demon in a horror story, graceful, yet powerful. Red lenses of her welding mask glowed in the dim lighting. When had the lights been cut? His eye sight was good in the dark, but so was theirs.

It didn't matter. When the lights flickered back on, Entrapta stood over the bodies of three of his clone Brothers. Purple blood splattered across her welding mask and for a moment, Hordak forgot who was under it. But then she lifted the mask and smiled at him and he forgot his horror.

"Hordak!"

Her warning almost came to late. He whirled around, armored fist coming up to stop a swipe of silver claws. He had been about to tear at the only visible bit of flesh, a wrist, when a flash of Stella's blade severed the clones head. He barely had time to close his eyes before a spray of purple blood hit his face.

-Brother! Watch yourself!- Stella shouted, turning her attention back to kill another clone who came just a little too close to Scorpia.

In the wide corridor, they fought. This, of course, had not been part of the plan. But then, the plan had hardly been a plan at all. All they'd had to go on were old schematics stolen from the FrightZone before they made their escape. But they were persistent. That had to count for something.

Suddenly, it was as if the constant barrage of faceless clones stopped, vanished. Hordak looked around. Nervous. He reached for Entraptas hand, a reassurance. The rest of the group seemed to sense it too.

"Somethings wrong," Netossa murmured, holding a net in her hands.

"Let's..." he trailed off as the lights flickered again
When they came back on, the giant form of Nazeim stood in the way. Entrapta took a step, but Stella gripped her hair, pulling her back immediately.

"No!" She hissed, "Don't! You can't win."

"Wise."
The voice of Aszi rang out clear as a bell from the other side of the hall. Hordak whipped around, snarling. She stepped into view with a dozen tall clones behind her.
"Hordak..." Entrapta was looking at him now, eyes fearful.

He grit his teeth. What choice did they have? If they fought, they would die. Slowly, he began to raise his hands, a sign if surrender.

"Do it," he ordered the rest of the team, "surrender. They wont kill us outright if we do."

"How do you know that?" Scorpia asked, raising her claws.

"Because he will want to gloat first," Hordak sighed, "it's what he always does."

He was right.

After they were cuffed and subdued, they were led to the Throne room. Aszi entered first, bowing low to her Father with a smile, before stepping aside to present her gift.

"My, my, my..." Prime laughed from his place on the throne, "it's a family reunion! My Brothers, welcome home!"

"Sister," Hordak corrected immediately, looking at Stella's crestfallen expression.

-What?- he snapped, switching to their language, long talons clicking impatiently on his arm rest.

-Her name is Stella.-

The Emperor glanced from Hordak, to Stella, then to Aszi who merely shrugged in response.

"Defective," he sneered, waving a hand dismissively.

Stella stared at Hordak, stunned. He had done the impossible. Corrected an Emperor. Hordak simply looked back, giving her a smile and a nod. Reassuring. He was there for her.

"And who else do we have... ah yes. Princess Scorpia. Missed us? Had to come back already to see your old cell? It will be a much shorter stay this time I assure you."

Scorpia glanced at Stella next to her, biting her lip. The clone mouthed something, and Scorpia mouthed it back. Prime took notice, but chose not to comment. He simply filed it away for later use.

"And... who are you?" His gaze fixed firmly on Netossa.

"You're worst nightmare, ya oversized bat!" She snapped, "you got my girl, Prime. You best hope I dont find out you harmed a single fluffy hair on her head, or else you're gunna wish you were dead!"

Hordak blinked. So did Prime.
And then all at once the Emperor burst out laughing.

"How delightful! Such spirit! You remind me..."
He rose from his seat grinning as he fixed his gaze squarely on Entrapta. Taking the cue, Aszi grabbed the Princess of Dryl by her hair and pushed her forward onto her knees in front of him.

"Princess Entrapta," he purred, "have you missed me?"

The look on Entrapta's face was one of unspeakable fear, pain. Hordak could only watch, couldn't reach out to reassure. Behind her brilliant ruby eyes, flashes of memory played out. All that she had tried to bury, her trauma, his voice, the feeling of his hands, on her, in her, his teeth, his lips, his-

"I know, dearest," he continued, taunting, kneeling in front of her, "it's been too long. Have you craved my touch?"

He reached out a talon to run down her cheek.

"Tell me, did it feel good?" He lowered his voice to a husky whisper, like a lover as he leaned in, "Do you fantasize about it?"

A tear rolled down her cheek as his lips ghosted over hers-

"Get away from her!" Hordak snarled, desperate, dangerous, like a caged animal. Prime pulled away just enough to flash a bright red grin at his clone.

"I don't think I will, Little Brother."

He leaned in again, tilting her head with a talon so Hordak could see the angle as he ran his long tongue up her neck, circling the scar he had left from his bite.

"Perhaps tonight, Princess, I will have you brought to my bed?" He whispered, lips close to her jawline, just loud enough that Hordak's sensitive ears would pick it up, "if you thought last time was something, you will absolutely love what I have in store tonight. Maybe I'll make him watch-"

A sharp slap echoed through out the chamber as Entrapta's hair had lashed across his face like a whip.

Silence. Stunned, inescapable silence. And then, Prime laughed, reaching up to touch a hand lightly to his cheek as if she had simply given him a kiss.

"Ah, you have the spirit of a Queen," he chuckled, "perhaps when I've executed your husband, I'll take you as one of my wives?"

Suddenly and without warning, he slapped her, hard. She sprawled out in front of him, lip bleeding, clearly unconscious.

"But first you should learn discipline."

Hordak struggled against his bonds, howling, raging, snarling, snapping. He had been wild and desperate to free himself before, hissing and growling as he taunted his wife. But the slap had pushed him over. He made a desperate run at the Emperor, suicidal, stupid. He didn't care. The only thought on his mind was taking Prime's throat in his teeth and tearing until he felt his windpipe crush under his fangs.

But before he could take three steps, he was on the ground too, Aszi standing over him. Prime
studied his sprawled form in amusement before turning and waving a hand to dismiss them.

"I know what you are!" Hordak suddenly called to him, "I know where you come from! I know about Marlena!"

The Emperor seemed to freeze at the name. For an instant, he glanced behind at the clone, face betraying something Hordak had never imagined seeing there.

_Hurt._

And then like a ghost, it was gone before he could even be sure it had been there at all.

"This knowledge is inconsequential," The Emperor dismissively said as they were dragged away, "it won't help you now. Tomorrow I will have you executed quickly and without ceremony and then I will take Etheria and open the portal to Eternia.

But first, Little Brother, you will suffer."

Only a few hours of life left. Hordak reminded himself of that as he leaned against the wall of his cell. Only a few short hours. And in the end of it, all he could think about was seeing her, just one more time.

He hadn't seen her since he was dragged here, locked away. Where was she now? With Prime? Was he hurting her again? Touching her? Making her touch him? He knew how much she didn't like too much touch...

A groan from the cell next to him made him leap to his feet.

"Entrapta?!" He called, "is that you?"

Silence and then,

"Hordak? He put us next to each other?"

"Entrapta, oh, Entrapta..." he pressed his forehead against the cell wall, sighing. Despite their dire situation, he felt relief. "I was so worried he might have..."

Another long pause. On the other side, Entra faced the wall too, also resting her head against it.

"No. Not yet. He wants you to watch, remember?" She reminded him bitterly, running a hand gently up her bruised cheek.

"I shouldn't have let you come," he groaned, "I should have fought harder to get you to stay behind."

"It wouldn't matter, Hordikins. I outrank you."

He let out a low growl at the reminder.

"After all this... we've failed," he sighed, "do you think Etheria will ever forgive us?"
"Probably not, unless you shut up and start thinking of an escape plan!"

That voice... did not belong to Entrapta. That was-

"Adora?" His ears perked up, "so Prime is having me share a wall with you as well. A new torture technique no doubt."

"Oh, shut up, bat," he heard her snap, but there was a slight chuckle in her tone, "alright. So heres the deal. The guards come around to pass out meals every 10 hours or so. We're due for another rotation soon. When the guard comes by to distribute the food, I'll-"

What ever her plan was, Hordak would never find out because at that exact moment, the prison doors deactivated and their cuffs fell free.

Chapter End Notes

Hey so. Prime did several bads here.

We're gunna talk about intentionally misgendering.
Dont do that shit.
In victory

Freedom.
Wasn’t it? One by one, the imprisoned rescue party poked their heads out of their cells, cautious, confused. Hordak exchanged a look with Adora.

"Uhh, well, good plan?" He offered the blonde.

She threw her hands up, at a loss for words. What was the next step? Now that they were free. They had to move. But where? How?

"Where are they holding the others?" Netossa asked, bringing the rest of the group back to focus.

The answer came from a males voice just down the hall.

"Fourth level, section B."

Adora noticed him first. Immediately, she sunk down, ready to fight.

"You're with the Emperor. Zed? His..."

"His son," the teenaged boy completed, "yes. And I am also the one holding the key card that released you."

Now they were really confused.

"Prince Zed?" Stella asked, but the boy shook his head

"Not prince. Not anymore." He pulled the sword from a hidden spot behind the wall and held it out carefully, offering the handle to Adora.

Adora hesitated, glanced at the others before reaching for it.

"Why are you doing this?" She asked, "isnt he your father?"

"Yes," Zed answered, letting her have the sword without a second glance, "but he's gone too far. Father or not... I can't live like this anymore. I can't let him go through with his plans. If I help you escape, you take me with you."

Hordak wanted to argue. Bringing the Emperors son would be asking for trouble, plus they had no guarantee he could be trusted. But then, he saw few choices at the moment.

"We'll talk details later over tea!" Netossa growled, impatient, "let's go already! Spinerella needs me!"

"Wait! We have to get to the bridge!" Entrapta insisted, "the plan!"

"It's too dangerous," Hordak found himself saying, almost automatically. Too dangerous? It only ever appeared to be 'too dangerous' when she was involved.
"I'm going to do it," the Princess of Dryl said, firmly, "you can help me, or stay out of my way."

He really hated when she did this, forced his hand. And at the same time, he found it charming. There was no fighting with this woman. She would always win.

"But- fine!" Hordak snapped, "we should split up. I go with Entrapta. Scorpia, Stella, go with Netossa. Adora, you're with us. Zed."

"I will go to the bridge," he agreed, "I have key access and by now, only a skeleton night crew will be there. But we have to hurry. We will meet back at your ship in one hour. That is long enough, yes?"

Entrapta bit her lip, pulling up a tablet seemingly out of nowhere. There was only a fraction of a moment where she seemed unsure, then she nodded.

"One hour. 20 minutes to get there, 10 minutes to disable the crew, 10 minutes to work, and then 20 minutes to run to the ship. Yeah. If we're careful and lucky, it should work."

Zed looked to the others, holding out a key card.

"That will get you in," he explained quickly, wasting no time, "You can use it to unlock their cells. Remember, fourth level, section B. Prime kept The Princesses in one place. Once you get there, you should have no problems."

Netossa took the card and Stella looked over the ships schematics once more, plotting the route to their goal.

"One hour. Yes. We can make that happen," she confirmed, "let's go. No time to waste."

-----

-Reinforcements have arrived.-

Prime only nodded at this report. Of course they had arrived. He had summoned the the instant they were free of that frustrating dimension. It had been impossible to get a signal through until now. Impossible to make the move he had wanted to make.

But now? Now he had all the pieces in place. Almost all. They could take the other Runestone easy, even Brightmoon. But the Garnet had become a problem. A variable he had not forseen. When he asked Aszi if she believed it could be restored, she had responded in the affirmative. On the condition that they found the missing shard.

That was a task that would be left to her.
It was, after all, her own fault it had broken in the first place.

-Begin,- he ordered simply, watching the holographic display at the long war table as a slave refilled his glass.
The invasion would be swift, complete. He watched the miniature ships touch down at the highlighted points, watched the number displaying the battle stats as he carelessly sipped at his drink. The entire process took an hour.

- *Have Princess Entrapta brought to my bed,* he ordered, gesturing to the gigantic Imperial bed on the far wall, *-and the traitor, Hordak. Have him restrained right here.*-

The Emperor rose, black robe dragging behind him as he crossed the room to the huge window. A much better view now. He grinned, looking out at the endless Universe. His for the taking, much like everything else.

He swirled his drink, then raised the glass to his reflection, toast to his victory.

--------

The stars were infinite. Endless. Too many. Too big. Too far. And all at once too close and too small.

Catra sat at the window in her private suite. Luxury. It was absolutely everything she had ever imagined, everything she'd ever dreamed of. She'd made it. This was as good as it got.

So why did she feel worse than ever?

The answer was obvious. She didn't have everything she could have ever wanted. Not really. She'd done this, all of this, because she wanted one thing. And now it was gone.

The worst part was, she'd had it. In Brightmoon, she'd had it. No. She didn't have it. Her. Adora was never a thing to possess.

And now she realized that far too late.

Catra pulled her knees to her chest, burying her face in her arms. It was over. All of it. She'd really done it now. Adora would never forgive her.

Never.

*I'm... Alone.*

--------

It happened before the Alliance could properly gather their forces.

The enemy was efficient. For almost two years, they had simply been a nuisance. Now they swarmed. An impossible force, too big, too powerful. It seemed as if they had been only fighting children up until this point.

Entraptas robot army went to work. With them, the fight was slower, they took less ground. It gave
their people time to escape, to fall back to Dryl, the last safe place.

But it still only took an hour for the Enemy to claim the runestones.

Brightmoon was the last to fall. Glimmer defended it to the very end, but even she knew a loss when she saw it. She was worth something to the Horde if they captured her, so she made her escape with Bow and the rest of the Alliance.

In the end, the Alliance command was spared, but their forces were decimated.

And when all had gathered at Dryl, Glimmer realized with Horror that only Dawn had made it to the castle. A badly injured Kyle confirmed what they feared.

Celeste had gone missing in the chaos, taken by the Horde.

---------------

"Once we're on the bridge, we'll have to take out the crew," Zed informed them as they approached, "we have to be fast."

Hordak examined his claws. Entrapta stretched. Adora readied her sword. She would be a good distraction, but them an extra few seconds.

"Alright. On three," Entrapta said as Zed readied his key card, "one.. two-"

The doors slid open. Silence. On the bridge was a grisly scene. Bodies draped over consoles, blood on the floor.

And in the middle of it, stood Catra, panting.

She shook droplets of purple blood from her finger tips, looked up, fangs flashing.

"Hey Adora."

"Catra," Adora snarled, holding the sword up, "what-"

"No time to explain," the feline interrupted, turning his attention to Entrapta, "Hurry up. I've cleared the bridge. Do what you need to do."

Entrapta, for all her anger, hurt, took the felines advice. With only a nod to show she understood, she crossed to the console and got to work. Hordak remained by her side.

"Adora... I'm sorry," He heard Catra say as he hovered near Entrapta.

"Catra, I... you really hurt me, you know?"

"I know. I don't expect you to forgive me, but-"

"I still love you," Adora admitted, "I don't want to, but..."
"Let me help. I can't make it up to you. But let me try."

Hordak's sensitive ears picked up on these hushed, whispered words as he watched his wife work. Catra. His feelings on her were complex. On one hand, she was a useful ally in battle and she worked well with She-Ra.

On the other, she was self-destructive, and selfish. Plus she hurt Entrapta and that was simply too much.

But on the other OTHER hand... none of it mattered at this point, as long as they made it out alive. He would sort his feelings later.

"Nearly there," Entrapta murmured, focused, more focused than Hordak had ever seen her.

His ear twitched again, heating up at the tips. The noises behind him... kissing. Right here. Now. With the literal fate of Etheria on the line. Honestly, there was a time and place!

"Done!" Entrapta perked up, causing the two women to pull away, flustered.

When Hordak looked, poor Zed appeared horrified. He'd have to explain later. The look he gave the two women said it all; 'Really? In front of the kid?'

"Well done, Love," he murmured, looking her work over. But her face showed no triumph, no joy. What was that expression? It made no sense. They had done it, didn't they? So why did she look so... horrified?

"Entrapta?"

"It's... too late," she whispered, "they've won."
"What do you mean 'they won'?!" Adora demanded, dropping Catra's hand and hurrying to the screen Entrapta was staring at.

They were ALL staring now.

Hordak felt his pulse race, his mouth was dry, his breathing became rapid. On the brink of another panic attack now, he felt Entrapta reach for his hand.

The runestones. They had taken them. All of them. His mind raced. Brightmoon. He had no doubt Kyle would have taken the children to Dryl at the first sign of trouble. But the others? Was Glimmer alive? Bow? The Princesses? The Alliance?

What would they do now? If they escaped, where could they go? What was the next step. It couldn't just be over. Could it?

"The Garnet," he realized at once, "they don't have the Garnet. Without it they can't open the portal, right? It's not perfect, but it buys us time."

Entrapta was on the verge of tears. He knew just from the sound of her breathing. But his words seemed to pull her back, calm her. It calmed himself as well.

"But the Garnet is in the Frightzone," Zed noted, "it... oh. It was damaged. I remember Aszi mentioned it."

"Correct," Entrapta continued, perky once more, "and we have it's missing shard!"

-------

The map was confusing and hard to follow, still, with a bit of instinct and some luck, Stella managed to lead the team to prison level 4 section B. At least, she was pretty sure that was right. The maps they had were out of date, but Stella had a good memory. She had come here on this ship, after all.

"Spinerella!" Netossa began to call frantically, despite Scorpio's insistent shh, "Spinerella, where-?"

"Netossa?"

The princess hurried to a cell, looking happy for the first time in months.

"Spiner!" She sighed, frantically looking her caged lover over, "oh, I've missed you so much."

"Netossa? Is it really you?" The other Princess blinked, rubbed her eyes, seemingly too stunned to recognize her. She looked a mess, from her wild pink hair to her far too thin face.

"It's me! I came all this way to rescue you. I'm bringing you home." Netossa turned her attention to Stella who was now examining the prison control panel. "Can't you hurry up?"
-Impatient Princess,- Stella grumbled in her language under her breath, -why doesn't she do this if it's so simple?-

Scorpia had run ahead, looking through the cells until she made an 'Ah ha' noise.

"Hey there, Perfuma!"

"Scorpia? But how-?"

"No time to explain! Point is, we're bustin' you out!"

The floral princess looked thin, much thinner than usual. Her face was almost skeletal, sunken eyes dark, tired. Even her usually wavy blonde was flat and lifeless.

Still, despite her poor condition, she managed a smile just as Stella figured out how to unlock the cells and set them all free.

"Let's go!" Scorpia reached in a claw for Perfuma to take and helped her out. Her poor thin legs were so weak, she nearly had to carry her.

A few cells over, Netossa and Spinerella were embracing, whispering, touching. Lovers, letting time itself melt away.

And then the alarm began to blare, pulling them back to reality.

"We have to go!" Stella called over the shrill bleep, "I think they're onto us!"

Stella glanced once more at the map provided, eyes narrowed, concentrating. Once she had the route in her mind, she moved, trusting the others to follow.

At a time like this, she really wished she had been able to find her blades, but those had been taken when they were apprehended. A pity. She liked them. The weight was perfect.

As they rounded a corner, Stella felt a moment of pure serenity. They were close. The home strech. The right level, just one section away.

-You thought it would be that easy?-  

Aszi stepped into view.

Now Stella really wished she had her weapons. There was no way around it. She would not let them leave. Not all together.

Red eyes met yellow, then yellow eyes found Scorpia. Stella traced the aliens gaze to her lover. She understood immediately. Scorpia was the easiest target, weighed down by Perfuma. She could take them both down. Easily.

Stella stepped in front of her, claws out.
"You're going to fight me?" She purred, "For them? Come, Uncle-"

"It's AUNT Stella to you!"

The alien blinked, she looked ready to say something else, but stopped. Hordak had taught her a lesson last time. Save the gloating for the end. Stella lunged.

Aszi had been ready for it. She'd been ready for her, for Stella the warrior, Stella the soldier, the assassin.

But not for Stella the lover.

Aszi swiped, Stella ducked, bashed her in the face with an elbow, rolled away, rose again, ready. Scorpia was screaming for her. Why? Panting, Stella glanced at her shoulder, wincing. She'd ducked too late. It was deep. But the pain hadn't set in yet. Good. It gave her time.

"Go!" Stella growled after them, "I'll hold her off! Go!"

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Scorpia setting Perfuma down to come back to her. If she faced Aszi, she would die. Stella knew that. She couldn't have that. Scorpia would survive this, no matter what. She had to.

It happened in seconds.

Scorpia sprinted to the door, but Stella was closer, faster. She hit a button to close it and it whooshed shut in an instant, drowning out Scorpia's screaming as she reached it a fraction of a second too late. Another button click locked it, and then Stella tore the control panel from the wall as well for good measure.

Scorpia pounded a claw against the thick window. Stella gazed back, smiling.

_I love you._

The words were silent, but Scorpia knew that was what she was saying. How could she not? Tears in her eyes, she pounded on the door, desperate. Stella turned to meet Aszi once more just as the other woman recovered from her daze, blood pouring from her nasal cavity.

"We have to go!" Netossa was pulling her arm now.

"No!" She howled, watching her lover slice at the other alien, "I'm not leaving her! I can't!"

"Scorpia-!"

They all saw it. They all knew moments before it happened. The shine of enemy claws, the look of shock on Stella's face as reality hit her.

It was as if time froze. Stella's large red eyes widened, her mouth opened to scream, but no sound
came out, her claws that had been above her head ready to slice across Aszi's exposed throat went limp. Her arms fell to her side, her legs sagged under her.

Aszi tore her claws from her stomach with a sharp, wet rip. Stella coughed, bright purple blood flying from her lips as she fell to her knees. Her red eyes seemed to dull as she blinked in shock, sliding from the new, gaping hole in her stomach, to Aszi smirking over her, then, finally to Scorpia who was looking on in horror.

Her lips moved, but no sound could be heard. Scorpia wanted to reach out to her, hold her, comfort her, tell her that everything would be alright. She'd live, it was just a scratch. Hordak had survived worse, hadn't he?

Right?

Scorpia knew though, as she watched her lover fall forward, that it was over. She was gone.

Panting, Aszi knelt in front of Stella's body to slide the Garnet from her finger. She examined it, held it up to the light.

And then she smiled.

It was the last thing Scorpia saw before Netossa dragged her away.
Dryl was a perfect base to fall back on. Well protected, up in the mountains, hard to reach. And Entraptas bots kept anything wearing the Horde insignia out. So far, the Horde had yet to realize this very simple way around the problem.

Not that Glimmer thought for an instant they would bother to fix it at this point.

They'd already won. Survival was all they could do right now. Survive and hold out hope that a miracle might happen.

"Kyle?" Bow sat next to the bed where the blond bow was resting, "how are you feeling?"

"Like I got stabbed," he replied softly, bluntly.

"I know talking hurts," Glimmer said, wincing as Dawn tugged aggressively at a chunk of sparkly hair, "but we have to know what happened."

The boy finally opened his eyes to stare up at nothing. But his face was a mask of deep, pure anguish.

"They... cornered us just before we got here. I was carrying Celeste and that butler with the blue hair had Dawn. We were so close, but..."

"I know," Bow placed a cool damp towel on his forehead, "I know. Go slow."

"They caught up with me. I don't know why, but they only seemed interested in the baby. I tried to escape with her, but after they stabbed me... I blacked out and woke up here."

His eyes threatened to overflow and Glimmer leaned in to mop those up before they could fall.

"You did your best. It's not your fault-"

"Lord Hordak is going to kill me."

"He is not going to kill you!" Glimmer insisted, glancing at Bow who was making a 'are you sure?' face. The Brightmoon Queen narrowed her eyes at him and he quickly looked away.

"Hordak isn't going to be happy, but nobody is happy right now. You did your best."

"My best..." the boy repeated grimly, "my best is never enough."

The alarm. Zed was the first to respond to it. His bright blue eyes went wide with fear. His body visibly shuddered.

-He knows!- he squeaked, -Uncle, he knows! We're all dead, if we don't leave right this second!-
"We have to go," Hordak translated, hissing, "now."

"But," Adora looked confused, "he said we had an hour-"

"Change of plans!" Entrapta snapped, still typing at the control console, "Hordak. Get them out of here. I'm going to bring this ship down in the Crimson waste."

Over the glaring bleep of the alarm, Hordak wasn't quite sure he heard her right. Did she just say she was staying behind?

"No!" He roared, reaching to wrench her hand away, "I won't allow it!"

"I'm not giving you a choice," she pried his fingers from her arm with a powerful strand of hair, "hurry! We have to do this. It's how we end it! I can-"

"I'll do it," Catra interrupted, "I'll take it down."

"You?" Entrapta snorted, "this is complex. Even I'm having trouble gaining control."

In response, Catra leaned over, swiped a key card and took over.

Entrapta blinked, for the first time in her life, feeling like the stupidest person in the room.

"Oh," her voice was small, sheepish, "I guess that works too?"

"You have a key to the Emperor's flagship?" Hordak asked, stunned.

"Duh? Wow," she glanced behind at Hordak, hurt, "you really have zero confidence in me, don't you? Yeah. I took it from him-"

She pointed a claw to the dead pilot as if this were obvious. Which he supposed it was.

Now it was his turn to feel stupid.

"Why are we still talking?" Zed snapped, "we have to go! Now!"

"Just a sec! There! Autopilot is a beautiful thing. No heroic self sacrifice needed," Catra purred, reaching to snag Adora's hand as she ran, "hurry up! We got, like, 20 minutes."

Hordak snarled and grabbed his wife's hand, furious as they ran together. How could she do that? After all they'd lost? How could she try to let him lose her too?

"Never do that again." His tone was firm, dark, and yet so very sad.

As his slitted red eyes glared at her behind him, he noted she was blushing, watching him.

"You're crying," she observed as they ran together.

"Yes. I am."

Even months ago, admitting it would have seemed an impossible task. He grit his teeth, holding back a sob.
"I'm sorry," she huffed as they raced to the ship.

-------

-Your Majesty!-

The Emperor narrowed his eyes at the officer at his feet.

-Let me review,- The Emperor purred, calm, collected as he paced, -The prisoners escaped. My son, Zed, helped them do it. Then they, not only freed the other Princesses, but somehow also was able to override the command chip? Am I correct so far?"

"My Empe-!-

-Silence,- the Emperor snarled, his calm composure shattered, -To add to our humiliation, my ship is now on a collision course with a desert! And you! Blithering! Fool!- he took three steps to the cowering officer at his feet, -just let them escape!-

-B-but sir! My Emperor! The Garnet! We have the missing piece!-

The Emperor had raised a claw, silver talons ready to rip, maim, kill. At the word 'Garnet' he froze, eyes narrowed as he instead reached down to pull the alien to his feet by the collar.

-Get control of this ship,- the Emperor sighed -Now.-

The officer nodded. As if they weren't already struggling to do that.

-There is something else, Emperor,- the officer hesitated, but continued when Prime raised a brow at him, -We found something during the Brightmoon raid. I think you will want to see it for yourself, but...-

He held up a data tablet, displaying the image of a winged infant with brilliant blue hair and wide, piercing magenta eyes. Prime froze, face unreadable. Then he took the tablet.

-Prepare my shuttle. And bring the child to me the instant we land.-

With a flick of a claw, he dismissed the officer and did not speak again until he was alone.

-Little Brother...- he whispered, running a claw over the wings in the image, -How were you able to do it? The one thing I could not? How was a defect able to father... a God?-

-------

They were close. The ship could be seen just ahead, large, shining, black. Netossa waved from the ramp and for the first time since arriving, Hordak finally felt some tiny amount of peace.
That was despite the soldiers chasing them down. He held Entrapta's hand, or rather, she held his as her hair whirled with a life of its own. How he had not considered the practical applications of her hair before now, he could not say.

She was a real monster.
And he was absolutely enchanted.

Adora and Catra fought like a perfect team. In her She Ra form, Adora was raw power, and Catra was agile and quick. They worked in such perfect tandem. But there was something missing. Some key element missing that had been there.

Trust. The trust was gone.

"Come on!" Spinerella yelled, helping Entrapta on board, then Hordak, then Zed. Catra and Adora were last.

Hordak moved to the cockpit, expecting to see Stella waiting in the pilots seat. But it was empty. His eyes narrowed, his breathing hitched. Something wasn't right. His ears picked up the sound of sobbing.

And so did Entrapta. She looked away, shaking her head.

Hordak's ears lowered. He stumbled, sank into the pilots seat. Time seemed to stand still, seconds like hours.

A million thoughts went through his head. How? Why? Who did it? Perhaps he was misinterpreting the moment. Perhaps he was hearing sobbing. Maybe that was laughter. Maybe Stella was off playing some game with Scorpia. Such bad timing.

Or maybe she was just running late? Yes. That was it.

Entrapta put a gentle hand on his shoulder, wrapped her hair around his bicep in an approximation of a hug.

"I'm so sorry, Love," she murmured, "but we have to go. You have to get us out of here."

"But Stella," he replied, numb, "I can't leave her behind. We have to wait."

"Hordak. She's not coming. She's gone. We have to go. Now. Please."

"But... she..."

_Brother, you are allowed to be sad._

Her words brought him some comfort when he recalled them. She had said that just after Lonnies death. And Rogelio. He'd hardly had time to process Rogelio, even. Or Shadow Weaver.

He took the ships controls.

"Make sure everyone is... everyone who is coming, I mean, is... secure."
Entrapta hurried to double check as Hordak shoved his pain further down, deeper than ever.

The instant he was on solid ground, he would mourn.
But for now, once Entrapta confirmed everyone was secure and then strapped herself into the co pilots seat, Hordak took off.

Soon they were up and out of the Emperors ship as it continued its downward turn towards the Crimson waste.
Radiant

Chapter Summary

Trigger warning. Rape scene at the end. Don't read the last part if that's a trigger for you.

Blood. It was so difficult to get out of carpet some times. Thankfully, the slaves under Primes ownership had learned a trick. It took clone blood right up with no trace.

But it was still tedious and working under pressure was difficult. Especially when your Master could murder you too if he was angry enough.

Judging by the state left behind after this last meeting with the Emperors second in command, he was certainly angry enough. A nameless slave tried not to sigh out loud as they dabbed at the rug with a rag soaked in a chemical mix that burned their hands. They stilled as Prime himself swooped past, only daring to look at his thin slippered feet.

Another set of feet followed, careful to walk around the puddles of purple blood.

-My Emperor,- the feminine voice purred, -we are assessing the damage now, but upon initial observation, the crash caused major damage to the Velvet Glove. As of now, space travel is impossible. Repairs are under way, however it may take some time for the parts to arrive.-

The Emperor snarled in frustration, but took a deep breath.

-Casualties?- he asked, picking up a glass an pouring himself a drink.

-Minimal,- the female reported, -within acceptable numbers.-

-Good.-

The slave tried not to overhear anything important. Slaves were nearly invisible here, ignored, stepped over.

-And the child?- the Emperor asked, taking a seat.

-She has been brought to the ship and is being cared for in the Nursery.-

The Emperor simply grunted in response.

-My Emperor,- the Female lowered her voice, -May I ask what...-

-See that the child is given the very best care. Spare nothing for her. I will be along shortly to take her into my personal custody.-

The servant couldn't help but raise an eyebrow at this as they dabbed at the carpet. Still, they put it
out of their mind as they continued to sponge out the stains.

-As you wish,- the female said, bowing. She appeared ready to leave, but paused. -Father? May I speak plainly?-

The Emperor nodded, frowning.

-Zed. He must be punished.-

-Yes, Aszi,- the Emperor sighed, sounding tired, -I assume you have a punishment in mind?-

The servant dipped their cloth into the chemical bucket again, feeling the familiar burn as skin cells were destroyed.

-His Mother. He is close to her,- Aszi continued, -and with Eternia in our grasp, we have no more use for her, or our alliance with her people.-

There was a long pause as the slave moved from the now spotless rug to leave.

But not before hearing,

-Have Queen Zalah brought to me at once.-

Once outside the door, the slave did allow themselves a moment to sigh in frustration. They were going to have to clean that up all over again.

---------

Pain was nothing new to Hordak, but as he wandered the halls of Dryl, his heart was heavy with something more, something deeper.

Regret. So much regret.

He moved like a shadow in the night, gliding without purpose through the maze-like halls of his wife's castle. Everywhere he looked, he saw them. The ones they had lost. He paused at the same spot Lonnie had died, remembering her lifeless body, wide brown eyes.

He swept by.

He would visit Kyle later, once he had been able to process his grief. He couldn't see the boy just yet. Rogelio was no doubt still a fresh wound on his heart, just as it was on Hordaks. He had not had time to put him to rest, his memory.

And Shadow Weaver. No. Light Spinner? The complex women. Micah hadn't spoken of her once since he initially informed him of her passing. But even Hordak, emotionally stunted as he was, could see his pain. Hordak felt it too. It was like a thorn in his soul, words he should have said, apologies he had never made. Useless now.

He found himself on a long open walk way now, night wind whipping through his hair. In his hand, he held a flower. The locals called it Radiant, although in the Frightzone it was known by the more
common name, Moonflow. Regardless, it reminded him of her. She had worn them in her hair on occasion. He told her it was silly before. Now he wished he'd told her she was pretty instead.

He leaned against the metal railing, twirling the white flower between his claws.

-Hello Stella,- he said out loud, looking up at the glittering Universe above, -I... didn't get to say...-

Blinking. He couldn't seem to keep his eyes dry. Just admitting she was gone, saying Goodbye was... impossible. She'd been a light, a guiding star, living up to her name in a way that he had not anticipated when he'd given it to her.

-I am... Stella.-

Her voice was present everywhere, on the wind, in the sky, echoes of her were everywhere. He'd known her for such a short time, but her heart was so open, so accepting. She had loved others so easily, loved herself in a way Hordak admired, lived her truth so honestly, without apology.

-Stella...-

Their first conversation. Looking back on it, he wanted to laugh. She had been so feisty, so angry. Once her shell was gone, once she realized how free she could be... they were essentially two different people.

-Sister...-

The first time she smiled, Hordak was so thrilled. When she confessed her truth to him, when she began to live, really live. That was the moment.

-You are so loved.-

When he saw her with Scorpia, she was brilliant, blazing like a sun. He recalled what she said after Scorpia went missing. 'Have faith'. He wished he could now.

-it feels empty here without you.-

He recalled their pillow fight. So juvenile. Clones didn't do that. But she did. She was fun incarnate, young and full of energy. Smiles, laughter. And comfort. She was the one who comforted him when Entrapta was gone.

-I miss you.-

He closed his eyes, but that did not stop the flood of tears. Like a flood breaking through a dam, they rolled down his sharp alien cheeks. And he let them.

"Hordak?"

Without bothering to hide his pain, he glanced at Scorpia over his shoulder. She was in much the same state, eyes tired and red, clutching her claws to her heart.

He couldn't speak now. His breath hitched as he looked back up at the stars. As he openly sobbed, she looked up too, placing a claw on one shoulder as she tilted her head against his other side.
"S-she told me I could cry," he explained, "she said this was alright."

Scorpia sobbed in response, nodding.

"She w-was happy in the end," he continued, "you made her happy. Thank you."

"She... she made me happy too. And without you, I wouldn't have met her at all," Scorpia wept, "I am... so glad i got to meet her."

Hordak's eyes fell from the sky to the tiny flower in his large hands.

"I... I came up here to say goodbye," he sobbed, "I don't think I can do it though."

Scorpia sniffled at his side, then brought him in for a hug. He allowed it with no fight.

"Then don't say goodbye," she whispered, "nobody is ever really gone."

"Wha... But you said she D-die-"

"Yeah. She did. But if you keep her here-" he pulled away slightly to poke to where she knew his heart would be, "she'll always be around."

Sniffling, she pulled away again, looking up.

"Remember her," she continued, "I know I will. Besides..." she smiled slightly, "we've got a whole sky full of stars now to remind us."

Hordak followed her gaze up, but he didn't smile. He couldn't. Wordlessly, he brought the flower to his lips, then he released the tiny white blossom to the wind.

"Hey, remember when Stella learned the word for smile?" Scorpia perked up, draping a claw over his shoulder and forcing him to walk with her, "man, that was-

"I wasn't there for that," his ears perked up, letting her guide his steps.

"Oh! Then let me tell you. It was adorable. So, there I was..."

Yes. If he could hold the ones he'd lost in his memory, they would never really be gone.

--------

Entrapta handled the news of her daughters kidnapping as well as any mother could be expected to. Poorly.

She tore through her lab with the fury of a hurricane. So many people to blame, so little time.

First, she started with Adora. Stupid, trusting Adora. Too quick to forgive. Too quick to love. She was the one who brought back the stars. Idiot.
Then Catra. Oh, Catra. Entrapta would rip her ears off if she thought she could without invoking Adoras wrath. Catra the traitor. Catra the liar. Catra the worst friend she had ever had. Forget data. Forget charts. She knew better now. This was Catras fault.

And then, Prime. The start of all of this. His selfishness. His vanity. It destroyed so many lives. It almost destroyed hers. But no more.

He would feel her pain, her fury. He could hurt her, rape her, threaten her very world. But he made one huge error.

He messed with her family.

There would be no mercy. He would die. And he would die painfully.

Entrapta built, quietly, like a machine. No breaks, no pause. And when she was finished, she held something small. Small, but powerful. Deadly. She kept all of her designs, including the last resort weapon she had integrated into Hordaks armor.

Well. Now she had one too. And she fully intended to use it.

And when she told Hordak what happened to his baby girl, she had zero doubts he would be of the exact same mind.

--------

Catra wasn't upset. She did, after all, deserve this. The prison here was far less comfortable than Brightmoons 'prison'. Entrapta likely had a hand in this one, possibly imagining one day it might hold her. Well. Now it did.

She sat against a thick concrete wall, cold. Lifeless. Featureless. She shivered from the chill.

"Catra."

The feline looked up as the tall shadow of Hordak fell across her in the cell.

"Hey Horda-"

"Shut up," he snarled, stepping better into view.
Catra had not once seen Hordak cry. She didn't even know he could. This, seeing him so vulnerable, so raw, so... very, very angry. It scared her more than anything.

"This. All of this was your fault."

"I know," she mumbled, drawing her knees to her chest.

"What!?"

"I said I know!" She shouted, "I know! Okay!? I messed up! I lied! I got people killed. I'm unforgivable garbage!"
What ever Hordak had been about to say died in his throat. He simply sighed, hand to his face. He looked... tired.

"Entrapta wants to have you executed," he informed her, "The council is meeting about it. She was ready to be lenient, since you saved us on the bridge, but, well, once she found out you lied and helped Prime she..."

Catra looked up, studying the ceiling.

"She should do it. I would do it," she seemed to almost shrug. "Why are you here, Hordak? Want me to apologize? Well, I'm sorry. But that's not gunna fix any of it."

"I... I dont know," he admitted, "I blame you for so much. Stella died. Why did she... why did she die? It should have been you."

Catra smirked.
"You're not wrong. The universe has a sick sense of humor."

"Catra, I... I'm going to try to try to convince the council to show mercy."

That caught her off guard. Her head snapped back down to look at him. The Great Lord Hordak... showing mercy? To her?

"Why?"

"Because..." his voice was so quiet now, "because there's been enough death. Catra I'm... I'm tired. I am so tired."

And he looked it.

"If you can't do it, don't stress," she lay back on the hard metal bench, "I've been ready to die for a long time."

---------

Hordak took the news of his daughters disappearance hard, but it was only made worse when news of Kyle's condition reached him. The boy had nearly died trying to protect her. Hordak owed him so much.

He paid him a short visit, but he had remained asleep the entire time.

"He wakes up and cries," Bow told him in hushed tones, "he feels so guilty."

"He shouldn't. I feel nothing but gratitude for him," Hordak replied, surprised by his own words. He should be filled with cold fury. He should want to tear down planets to find his girl- and he did. But it was a cool, calm, calculated rage.

Oh yes. He was thinking clearer than ever.
Queen Zalah was a great beauty among her people. Large crystal blue eyes golden skin, thick hair the color of ruby. She was a walking treasure.
And Prime possessed her entirely.

In his collection of wives and concubines, she was one of his favorites. One of the few he had allowed to maintain the title of Queen after he had taken her world. He had even favored their son over all of his hundreds of other children. Named him heir.

Until now.

The Queen was quietly led to the Emperor's bed chamber. She appeared unsurprised to be here. Her Emperial husband had appetites, and sometimes those appetites required her care.

She bowed low when she entered, her thick red braids dropping nearly to the floor. Prime did not look at her immediately. He stood facing a large window, a glass of some deep purple liquid in his hand. He was wearing a long black robe and Zalah knew from experience that he never wore anything underneath it.

Before he had to say anything, she began disrobing with the assistance of a handmaiden. Only then did he look back at her. The look in his eye could freeze a supernova. Zalah knew that look. Her son had displeased him and he would make her pay for it.
With her body. She needed to make him happy. She needed to bargain for her son's life. Beg.

"Get on the bed."

His order was absolute, each word punctuated with a finality Zalah had never heard. It scared her. She obeyed at once, climbing onto the bed and obediently laying back for him.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw him remove his robe and climb up the bed towards her.

Physically, he was perfect for his species. Perfect muscle tone, flawless snow white skin, hair that shone a brilliant blue and talons like silver. Handsome.
Or he had been. Now he was damaged. He would likely move on to a new body soon.

She was able to control her voice as he took her. Uncomfortable as it was tonight, this was simply the part she had to play. And he was not always so rough. He could be a good lover, at times.

His hands closed around her wrists and he forced them up over her head, his mouth growled against her neck as he moved faster, harder. He was nearing his limit, she could tell. She would be free to leave soon, back to the others, praying as she always did that she did not leave with his child in her womb.

His teeth scraped against her neck, causing her to tense. His teeth could paralyze. She never wanted to experience that again. His large claw suddenly grasped her throat, hard. He pulled away slightly so she could see his smile.
"I am going to kill our son."

Before she could question it, his teeth were on her. She didn't have a second to fight back. There wasn't a chance.

Prime stood at the window once more. The front of his black robe could barely hide the blood that he allowed to drip freely from his chin. He studied the desert outside his window, smiling as the ravaged body of Queen Zalah was removed from his bed by a team of servants.

-Take her head,- he ordered, -find my son and have it sent to him.-

He had no doubt his order would be carried out. They always were.

Aszi approached just as the covered body of her brothers mother was dragged out. She grinned, taking in the feral scent of blood.

-Father? Everything is prepared. We await your order.-

The Emperor drained his glass and set it down with a soft click on a low table next to him.

-Open the portal. Let us end this.-
The Unknown

Prime had seen perfection before. In his clones, in his mirror. He was the image of a God. His large red wings had been worshiped, adored.

And then they were gone.

But this... the child in his arms, she was beyond perfect. She was divine.

He paced his throne room with her, smiling down like a devoted, doting father. He let her grasp his large talon in her tiny fingers, chuckled as she brought it to her mouth. He even held a bottle to her lips himself, nuzzling her inky blue hair.

Aszi watched this display with crossed arms, leaning against a pillar. She wasn't... bitter, exactly. After all, her experiment was a success. She had successfully unlocked the key to Divinity, the gene that made wings possible in offspring. She was a hero. A saint. Father should be thanking her on bended knee.

But he wasn't. She had been forgotten, set aside. He had a new daughter now, born of a clone, true, but essentially his by right.

The Emperor chirped at the babe in his arms, soothing her as she began to cry, calm, patient. He had never chirped to her before. Not like this. Not with such... affection.

Aszi bit back a sigh, holding the moisture behind her eyes in as much as possible. Zed. He'd been right. More than she wanted to admit. After all she had done, after everything she was, after being the perfect daughter...

-Aszi-

She smiled as her Father called for her, wiping her eyes and bounding to him with a fresh smile and a bow.

-How might I serve you, Father?-

-Have my orders been carried out?- 

-Yes, Your Majesty-

-Good. When the portal had opened, take Nazeim and go to it, but do not cross over. I am putting you in charge of guarding against any rebel remnants.-

-Guard duty? - She nearly shrieked, -But father, I!-

-Silence! - he hissed, red eyed widening dangerously. The infant on his lap began to cry. His face immediately softened and he held her against his chest, chirping softly.

-You have frightened Princess Serenia,- he murmured, -you are dismissed.-
Serenia. Aszi looked stunned. Too stunned to move. Princess? He was making her a Princess? And he named her after the legendary hero?

-Aszi- his voice was sharp, irritated, -i said go.-

She bowed once more and left, quickly, but not before hearing something she thought she would only ever imagine.

Emperor Prime was singing to the baby in his arms.

-------------------

Hordak, Bow, Micah and Zed all sat in a near empty conference room. The boy had been quiet for days, but not unhelpful. He always did as asked, answered questions without fuss, held nothing back. Still, Queen Glimmer had insisted on a truth spell and Zed had readily agreed to it for the sake of expediency.

"Tell us your name," Hordak began calmly, watching his teenage nephew play absently with his tea cup, rather than actually drink.

"Zed of Zenneria, son of Queen Zalah."

"How old are you?"
"In Etherian years... 16."

"Who is your father?"
"Emperor Prime."

"Why did you leave?"

Zed had answered every question easily up until now, flawless, no hesitation. Now he appeared to be fighting something.

"B-because I hate him. No. I love him. No. I..."

-The truth, Zed,- Hordak soothed switching to a more comfortable language for him, -we just need the truth.-

"I... I love him. But I hate who he is." his eyes glittered like a pond.

-I know, Zed. I know.- Hordak reached across to place a gentle claw to his shoulder, frowning when the boy twitched at his touch.

"Zed..." Micah murmured, "what did he do to you?"

The boy met Hordak's eyes, tears threatening to overflow. Hordak understood. He and his Father were identical.
-You are safe here,- Hordak assured him, -you will not be harmed. You are allowed to feel. You are allowed to cry.-

With that permission, the boy broke down. It was like a flood gate had been opened. His eyes squeezed together against the tears and he fell forward to the table, weeping into his arms.

Hordak rubbed his back, chirping gently as he exchanged a look with Micah.

_Am I doing this right?_ He mouthed, helplessly

Micah nodded encouragingly, flashing a thumbs up. Hordak returned the gesture with an awkward smile. Etherian hand gestures were odd and he was only just getting used to them after all these years. Stella had managed to catch on in days.

He felt his eyes water at the memory of her and he quickly banished the thought, focusing on the boy.
And that really is what he was. A boy. A teenager, yes, but still a child.

"Father would always tell me my only use was that I was my mother's son. I... I wanted him to be proud of me. I wanted him to love me. B-but... I wasn't strong like Aszi. And I was... soft. He said mother was too easy on me. H-he..."

He sniffled, words coming out in waves between sobs. A mess. Hordak wanted to pull him into his chest and let him sob until there were no tears left. But this was important. He had a story. It needed to be told.

"O-on my tenth birthday he took me away from my Mother for 'training',' he continued bitterly, "he... would have me beaten. Regularly. Just because he said it built... strength. And when my Mother was on the ship, the only times I was allowed to see her was when either she or I were being punished."

Hordak winced, bit his lip. He knew where this story was going. Hordak had been Primes top general. He had seen how he was with his wives and his children.

"I would... I would some times act out and get in trouble when I knew she was on the ship, just so he would take me to see her."

From the other side of the table, Bow physicality looked ill. Hordak shot Micah a look and the man touched the boy on his shoulder.

"I, uh... I need to..." Bow didn't finish his explanation before leaving. It was alright. The knew why he left and where he was going. Hearing this story made Hordak want to find his son and hold him until the world crumbled. He had no doubt Bow was going to find his dad's. Just tell them he loved them.

"Father would sometimes beat me in front of her, just to hurt her. And, It was rare, but he would make me watch when he raised a hand to her. Once he made me do it, threatening to hit her harder if I didn't. And he would make me h-hurt my siblings too. We were always expected to fight. I was expected to... to..."

The boy was clutching his head, fighting the truth.
"Micah, enough," Hordak growled, "that's enough!"

The sorcerer agreed, breaking the truth spell over the boy, leaving him free to just sob silently into the table. Hordak continued to rub his back for a moment before rising to his feet.

-I need to speak to Micah for a moment, alright? - he kept his voice as soft as possible. -I will return shortly to show you where you'll be sleeping tonight. We can get you some food too.-

The boy simply nodded and Hordak and Micah headed for the exit.

"I... m-miss my mother."

The two men exchanged looks, but came to the same idea at once.

"Glimmer," they decided in unison before stepping out and closing the door behind them.

She always was the motherly one. They'd ask her to talk to him later.

Letting out a deep sigh, Micah put his hands to his face. Hordak similarly needed a moment to relax, run his fingers through his hair. The rage he was feeling was... unhealthy.

"Father of the year," Micah finally sarcastically commented.

Hordak only nodded at that.

"What an absolute monster," Micah continued, "how could he hurt that boy like that? What kind of man does that to a kid?"

"Prime is not just a man," Hordak reminded the sorcerer, "he was raised as a God, remember? He's... convinced he is absolute, flawless. He expects his children to be so as well."

"Surely you don't agree with his behavior," Micah looked disgusted, "I've seen you with your children. You are nothing like that."

Hordak sighed and shook his head.

"No, of course I don't agree with it. But to defeat your enemy, it is fundamental that you understand them. Prime has a weakness. We just have to exploit it."

Micah looked at the door, eyebrows furrowed.

"And what weakness is that?"

Hordak looked at the door as well, then back to Micah with a knowing glint in his eyes.

Hordak took Zed under his wing, so to speak. Walked him through Dryl, weaving through the maze-like halls with the assistance of a map. No. Not even he knew his way around yet.
"He took my daughter," Hordak told the boy as he offered him food, "Prime. He has her now."

The boy nodded, spooning the soup to his lips.

"How old is she?" The boy asked after one careful bite.

"She will be 3 weeks old soon."

The boy seemed to let out the breath he was holding, tension leaving his body.

"She will be safe and well cared for," he assured Hordak, "for all his... other qualities, Father wouldn't harm a baby. He... likes babies."

There was a long pause as Hordak processed that information.

-Excuse me,- he said moving to their native language, -perhaps I misunderstood your meaning. Did you mean to say Prime... likes babies?- 

The boy shrugged, stirring his soup.

-it is true. He likes babies. He likes to hold them and feed them and sing to them.-

Hordak blinked, looking around at the empty dining hall before he laughed.

-The Emperor of a whole Universe... sings to babies. Next you're going to tell me he likes fluffy animals and has a talent for gardening.-

The boy stared at his uncle with a very straight face.

"No. You're serious?" Hordak couldn't even laugh. How little he seemed to know about the man. Perhaps if life had gone differently, he could have been...

No. He couldn't try to relate. Not anymore.

"You were his top general and he never showed you his greenhouse?" The boy raised a red eyebrow.

"I- I was a bit preoccupied trying to conquer half a Galaxy," he stuttered, trying not to look embarrassed.

The boy laughed. It was the first time Hordak had seen him do that. Hordak smiled back.

"Finish eating and then I will show you where you may sleep." The boy looked up, nervous. "Do not worry. I will be nearby tonight."

When Hordak arrived back to Entraptas quarters, he found her sitting at the edge of the bed, holding their son close. The boy, so tall, so big now. He leaned in to place a kiss on the top of his head before moving on to kiss his wife.

"Are you alright?" He asked sitting next to her.
"No," she answered truthfully, "but I will be once we kill your Brother."

He nodded gravely, reaching his arms out to take the boy. She passed him over without another word. He walked with him around the room, nuzzling his head as the boy chirped questioningly to him.

"Dada up," his son babbled, using the few words he knew, "Dada uh oh?"

-You own my heart,- he chirped to his son, -more than I can put into words. In any language.-

-Heart- the boy chirped, repeating a word he knew well. Stella had taught him. It was the closest thing they had to I Love You.

Hordak smiled bitterly, Stella on the edge of his mind. She always was now.

-I will never hurt you,- he promised quietly -I will discipline, to teach, to correct, but I swear I will never raise a claw to you. You will always be cherished and protected.-

He kissed his forehead once more

"You are loved."

-------------

In the privacy of Azis personal laboratory, she raged. A glass vial hit a far wall and shattered.

-How dare he!?- she screeched, throwing another glass instrument.

Nazeim glanced around nervously, but did not reply.

-After everything I've done!? I restored his eye! I am the reason he has all the Runestones! I brought him the Garnet!-

A specimen bottle shattered at his feet and he studied the mummified clone fetus with interest.

-And his precious Princess Serenia!- she snarled grabbing up another beaker to throw, -I made that possible! He owes everything to me!-

Her hand slipped and she crushed the beaker against the metal tabletop. Hissing, she examined her hand. By now, Nazeim had shaken himself from whatever trance he had been in and crossed the room to his twin.

-Be calm, sister,- he rumbled, watching as she carefully picked glass from her bleeding palm, -it is not over.-

-Of course it's not over.- She seemed calmer now as she began to stitch up her wound, -I have one last card in my deck.-

She glanced up, yellow eyes falling on the silhouette of a clone. As the tall clone moved into the
light, their features became clear. They wore the same face as every other clone in the army, with perhaps longer hair, but where a heart may have been, clear cybernetics had been implanted.

-Welcome back-, she purred, flashing a sharp smile, -E.S.-
Invincible

Scorpia's mind was clear. Her role was apparent. The way ahead was paved so smoothly.

As she stretched and prepared her body for the days training, Imp sat on the sidelines. Every so often, Stella's voice would come out of his mouth. More often than not, it was silly snippets of conversation, nonsense without context. But to Scorpia, it was memories, the essence of her. The spirit.

And every so often, Imp's little recorder would play back something profound. Beautiful.

It was her soundtrack as she went through the drills Stella had taught her, pointing out the weak points in her species anatomy.

Because Scorpia had a goal, a purpose. She was going to find Stella's killer.

And she was going to end her.


"Your form is excellent," he complemented, "but you are aiming too high."  

He approached, shooting Imp a look that silenced him at once. He couldn't hear Stella's voice. Not now. It helped Scorpia, but not him.

"Watch."

He approached the dummy, lowered his center of gravity. It was just like his training days. He wanted to feel nostalgic, but those days were far from pleasant. Failure was always punished harshly. A mistake like Scorpia had made would have resulted in punishment.

A clone rarely made the same mistake twice.

He twisted his body and slammed the armored heel of his foot just below the kneecap.

"This spot, right here," Scorpia recalled Stella saying, "the bone is weak below the joint. It is my greatest weakness... aside from you, of course. It's why most clones wear leg armor."

They had been in bed. Stella had grabbed her claw and set it on her long leg under the blankets. Scorpia had never blushed so red in her life, especially as she guided her claw across her smooth thigh down to her knee.

"You never wear leg armor," Scorpia had pointed out once she was recovered enough. Stella had simply laughed.

"I don't need it. I'm invincible."
Scorpia stepped up, determination on every inch of her face.

"Invincible," she murmured before landing a powerful kick to the exact spot she needed to. Hordak winced, but nodded.

"Well done. Now once more."

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Glimmer walked with Zed to visit the refugee camps. Her Father had suggested it and she was happy enough for the chance to learn more about the enemy. Yet, the more she spoke to the boy, the less like an alien he seemed. He was so young, so politically minded. Wise. When she brought it up, he smiled sheepishly.

"My Mother taught me how to rule. She would sometimes talk about me taking the throne one day. N-not the Horde. I mean on Zenneria. My Mothers home world."

Glimmer listened as they walked through a city of tents.

"Once we kill Prime, is that what you'll do? Go back to Zenneria?"

"Oh, I've never been to Zenneria," he confessed, "I was born in Fathers ship, and I lived with the Fathers other wives and children for many years before he began to have me trained."

"Wait. You've never seen the world you've been trained to rule?"

The boy nodded sadly.
"I do not think I will see it," he confessed, "it is so far away, and I have no right to call it home..."

Glimmer bit her lip, grabbed his hand and kept walking. Dad and Hordak had wanted her to be extra nice to him. Something about his mother?

"I never expected to rule either," she confided, "my mother wasnt supposed to die, so she never taught me how to do it. If I'm being honest with you, I've been faking it this whole time."

Zed grinned at her honesty, following her along. As they passed a medical tent, Glimmer paused to look inside.

Zed didn't pause. He simply went in. Glimmer made a strangled sound, reached for his collar to pull him back but missed.

As doctors rushed around, Zed swept by like a ghost, observing their technique. He was about to reach forward towards an injured child when Glimmer snatched his hand away.

"What are you doing!?!" She hissed trying to pull him away.
"Her wounds are bad," he observed, "likely she will die within the next two hours."

"So then let the doctors take care of her," Glimmer hissed.

He wrenched his hand out of her grasp, shaking his head and moving to hover over the girl.

"They won't get to her on time. I can help. I've studied your people. Etherian anatomy is similar to Prime and his clones. Similar enough to..."

He pressed a hand to the worst of her wounds, ignoring Glimmer's outrage. When he pulled away, it had stopped bleeding, the edges of the gash going pink, then, before Glimmer's very eyes, the flesh began to knit itself back together.

"How did you...?"

"My skin cells have regenerative properties. What? You think I would still look this flawless after all the beatings Father gave me?" He chuckled, holding out a hand for her to examine. His skin... had a shine to it, like gold dust.
"She should survive, assuming infection has not set in already. Still. I... I missed doing that."

"Doing wha-? Healing people?"

The boy looked sad suddenly, nodding.

"As you may imagine, it... isn't exactly a trait I advertised much in the Horde. Mother wanted me to keep it secret. Father would use Mother so often for her abilities. I think it is partly why he favored her so highly."

"So, you all can just do that?" Glimmer looked amazed.

"For a time, yes, but I'm not as powerful as most. Not like my... Mother," he sighed, pushing his straight burgundy hair back into place.

"You really miss her, don't you?" Glimmer put a hand on his shoulder.

"I am... worried about her. I should not have left without her," his voice went quiet, sad, "I do not think Father would harm her, however. Not permanently. She is valuable. Politically. Still..."

"It's alright," Glimmer assured him, "It's not your fault, you know."

Silence. This wasn't working. Why did they ask her to spend time with him? She hardly managed to make friends as it was with regular Etherians. Why did they think she could help an alien Warlords son?

She sighed, glancing once again as his shimmery palms.

"Hey! I have an idea!" A lightbulb went off in her head. "Why don't you help here? It'll give you something to take your mind off of it?"

The boy hesitated, then, slowly broke into a smile.

"I think I'd like that."
The council was fractured. In The Crypto castles war room, only a handful had been able to make it, and even then, the atmosphere inside felt more like a wake than a war meeting.

Hordak took his place next to his wife, reminded all too much of the last time he had been in this room, discussing a possible alliance. He wished he could go back in time and slap himself. Tell himself to just accept their offer, tell him all the pain they could have avoided.

"The first order of business," Queen Glimmer began, "Catra."

All eyes fell to Adora now.

"You may wish to leave the room, Adora," Hordak reminded her gently.

"No. I want you to look at me when you decide to kill her."

"Adora!" Bow assured her, "Nobody's decided on anything yet."

"I have," Entrapta said, raising one lock of hair, "she is dangerous if left alive. She's betrayed us too many times."

Glimmer nodded in agreement.

"Alright? But also?" Bow gestured awkwardly to Hordak who was doing his very best to look invisible.

"A vote?" Micah suggested, "it's only fair."

"Fine!" Glimmer snapped, "a vote then? Should Catra die for her crimes?"

She was looking to Entrapta who nodded reluctantly. Hordak knew what was on her mind. Catra was technically her prisoner. She could kill her if she wanted. But with the alliance in mind, she had to be diplomatic.

Starting with Entrapta, the vote was cast.

"Aye," Entrapta said.

"Aye," Glimmer agreed.

"Nay," Micah said, looking down.

"Nay," Bow voted.
"Nay," Perfuma shook her head.

"Aye," Huntara said, crossing her arms.


"Aye," Spinerella agreed.

"Nay," Scorpia sighed, looking tired.

Adoras vote was obvious.

"Nay! I can't believe this is even being voted on!" She slammed her palms on the table, "Catra isn't even here to defend herself!"

"Adora, enough," Hordak's voice was calm as he put a hand on her shoulder to push her back down in the seat.
Now it was his turn and his wife was looking at him expectantly.

"I um..." he hesitated, sighing deeply, "Nay. I'm sorry, Entrapta."

And with that, the voting had ended. And Hordak had been the tie breaker. The one to save Catras life. The irony was not lost on him.

Nor was the anger directed towards him from around the table. Or the gratitude from Adora.

But mostly, he noticed the look of... relief on his wife's face. That surprised him. He meant to question it when a tracker in her hands went off.

"Entrapta? Wha-?"

"Shh!!! They're opening the portal," she murmured, studying the pad, "all Runestones are active. A powerful energy reading is detected from... oh! This is interesting!"

By now, their decision had been set aside along with all the ugly feelings that came with it. All gathered waited impatiently.

"The whispering woods. More specifically, the crystal castle! Adora, you don't know why the portal is opening there, do you?"

Now all eyes were on Adora. And she hated it.

"Uh... no?" She replied awkwardly, "Maybe because something something first ones tech?"

Entrapta blinked, then her face broke out in a wide grin.

"A mystery! I can't wait to go see for myself!" She immediately pressed a tendril of hair to her husband's lips before he could protest. "I'm going."
Hordak narrowed his eyes and impatiently pushed her hair from his mouth.

"I know!" He snapped, "you think I haven't learned already? I'll be coming as well."

The Princess of Dryl smiled, but just then, the tablet in her hands did something odd. Sparked. No... sparkled.
And some strange, garbled... something.

"Hang on," Entrapta murmured, "it's... some kind of message?"

She fiddled with a dial, held it up. And all at once, the words were clear as day.

"**Shine Bright, my girl.**"

"Wait-!" Adora sputtered.

"That sounded like-" Bow looked stunned.

"It couldn't be-" Micah whispered.

"...**Mom.**" Glimmer completed, tears in her eyes, "She's... alive?"

"Wow!" Entrapta jumped up excitedly in her seat, "what a twist! She must of been trying to get a signal through this whole time! The Portal must have provided a path for the message!"

"S-so can we get her back?" Glimmer asked desperately, "but you said they would be trapped forever."

"Incorrect!" Entrapta replied, "I said POSSIBLY forever."

"So we cam save mom?"

"This is purely theoretical," Hordak replied, realistic, "there is no-"

"Yes," Entrapta answered confidently, "theres a way. There must be. I'll find it. But first, the portal."

"Yeah," Adora stood up, "Prime is after Eternia. If he gets Eternia, Light Hope will activate the weapon."

"And then Etheria will be..." Bow bit his lip.

"Correct," Entrapta finished, "Everything on Etheria will die."

"So we stop him," Glimmer stood as well, "Right now. For good."

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Aszi stood outside the portal with Nazeim. She should be angry. She should be furious about this turn of events.
Yet despite every set back lately, here they were. Eternia. She could see it clear as day through the portal, bright, brilliant, even though it was late at night where they stood on Etheria.

No wonder Father had wanted to go back so badly.

-Nazeim, we are finally going to go home- she whispered, -do you remember the stories Mother used to tell us? About Eternia?- 

He simply nodded, slack jawed.

-She said the sun set like a rainbow in the sky and the air was always warm. Winter never came and flowers were always in bloom. She said the nightlands shone with a million stars, and every evening would be full of song."

Nazeim sighed.
-Mother said we would go home.-

Aszi nodded, smiling, genuinely happy for the first time in ages.
-Mother was always right.-
They would began their journey to the whispering woods at first light. The night had been for preparing, saying goodbye, making last minute adjustments to weaponry, armor.

Hordak and Entrapta found themselves laying together in bed now, having finished all their preparations and having gotten their son down for the night.

The evening had been long and difficult. Hordak knew they should be getting sleep. He knew they should be resting their bodies for this final desperate attempt. He knew he should be saving what little strength he had.

But instead, they found themselves wrapped in each others arms, lips attacking what bit of flesh could be found. For all they knew, this could be their last night together. They had to make it count.

It had been so long. Months. The urge had been building for so long, lust so powerful he was nearly in pain everytime they touched. On the Emperors ship, when all seemed hopeless, he had desired nothing more than to press his being into hers, meld together as one and simply ride out the end of the world together.

He lay under her as she traced every dip and curve of his flawed body, nearly shivering at the lightest sensation. His breathing shallow and uneven.

Every cell in his being yearned for her touch. Every inch, every forbidden urge, he wanted to lay at her feet. He wanted to worship her, body and soul. Build her a temple with his love. Devote his life to counting her freckles and memorizing the sound of her laughter.

Her hair caressed his arms as her own hands dragged up the length of his bare thighs, slow, careful. Never aggressive. Tonight was not about that. Tonight was about love, about committing their lovers body to memory. Immortalizing the moment for all time.

He caught her eyes with his, saw her need, so raw, so pure. The shine in her eyes made him melt under her and he gave no resistance as she pulled his tunic off of him. Below her loving gaze, he lay bare, exposed and vulnerable.

And he trusted her. All his faults, all his defects, laid open for her to explore. She ran her hands carefully up his hips, resting lightly against his hip bones before traveling up. The sensation made him sigh outloud. More than anything, this felt so intimate, so personal.

Her lips pulled up into a smile as she moved closer, gently straddling his nude hips as her hands traveled up. They traced along his chest, neck, face. She leaned in close, ghosting a series of little kisses up his neck to his ears.

He wanted to tell her how wonderful this felt, how safe she made him feel, how of all the women in the Universe, he was lucky to have met her.

The only thing he could manage was a groan.

"Touch me," she whispered, taking his hands in hers to guide him.

She didn't have to ask twice. With that permission, he allowed his fingers to explore, just as he had
so many times before. And yet, it still felt so new, so surreal.

His claws trailed over her bare thighs, up her stomach, under the nightgown she wore. She pulled away slightly to pull it up over her head so that she too was bare to his touch, save a pair of thin white panties. Those he would see to later. Personally.

He traced his claw over stretch marks near her navel, admiring the pearlescent stripes running parallel along her stomach. Each one was a mark of perfect strength, beautiful power, colossal love. He was fascinated by them, her wide hips, full breasts. How her body had changed, adapted.

All so she could give him something so unique and precious. Not once, but twice.

When he looked up to her, his face betrayed his gratitude. Her gifts to him, he would never be able to repay her for.

"You are so... powerful." He whispered sitting up slightly to wrap his arms around her middle and press his kiss to her flawed stomach. -You own my heart.-

Her hair wrapped lightly around his body, embracing him like vines. Warm, alive.

"I never was alive, before I met you."

He smiled up at her, heart lighter than it had been in some time. When she returned the expression, he could only marvel at her. That such a creature of light and love would even smile his way, let alone love him was still so foreign.

"Hordak..." her tone was so full of want that it hurt, physically, "please."

He knew her request and how could he deny her anything?

"Lay down," he whispered, "allow me to worship you."

She seemed to hesitate, grinding down against him. He couldn't contain himself when she did that. She was so warm and so... wet, even though the fabric between them. He couldn't quite contain the growl in his voice.

"Entrapta, please."

The effect on her was immediate. Looking satisfied at having reduced him to begging, she shifted, hair unraveling from around him as they rolled together. They stopped when her head hit the pillow beneath them.

"The... 'sun' will be up soon," she commented, testing the unfamiliar word on her tongue.

Yes. A sun now, and several moons under the veil of an endless universe. The sky was both new and familiar, but it was home. Anywhere was home with her.

"I wont rush this," he shook his head lightly, pressing a quick kiss to her mouth before moving down. "I want to memorize everything."

He hooked a talon under the waistband of her panties.

"Your taste."

He tugged them down her hips.
"Your touch."
Down her thighs.
"Your heat."
Down her silky calves.
"Your love."
Down her ankles and then finally off the bed. He settled back between her thighs, grinning lovingly up at her.
"Everything."

He pressed a kiss to her wet sex, eliciting a sharp gasp from his lover. But when he added tongue, oh, she *writhed*. He tasted her core, long tongue sliding up, almost lazily to that beautiful little bud of pleasure.

They had so few hours left to enjoy. With the rising sun, the world crept ever closer to oblivion. Everything they'd done, everyone they'd loved, it all hung in the balance. And yet, as Hordak glanced up at the grateful eyes of his wife, the sun no longer mattered to him.

He slid one finger into her slick opening, gently rocking it in and out as he worked her with small, quick flicks of his tongue. He barely was able to contain a chuckle when her hand shot down to tug him by his hair and push his mouth deeper.

Teeth and tongue and fingers. Heart and soul and body. He loved her entirely and he loved her to completion. She shuddered under him, a quiet series of gasps drawing him forward. But it was when she whimpered his name over and over like a song that he finally felt her reach climax.

He pulled away slightly, only pulling his fingers free once he felt her relax at last. Her hair wrapped around his shoulders, drawing him up again. She could guide him anywhere this way. He was clay under her fingers, moldable, able to be what she needed at any moment.

He hovered over her again, vision locked on the Princess below him. Her flushed cheeks, her pretty mouth constantly turned up at the corners, eyes like rubies, priceless and precious. She owned him in every sense of the word.

Her hands grasped onto his, bringing one up to her lips. She kissed every talon then kissed his palm, held it tight, brought it to her cheek. There was such love in the gesture, such devotion in her eyes. She bit her lip, eyes flickering down between them as she spread her legs wider.

He could take the hint, even without her hair pressing urgently on his lower back. He pressed his mouth to hers as their bodies met as they had so many times. Her familiar heat no less welcoming and all consuming. They both groaned into their kiss, but did not pull away.

Slowly, he rolled his hips into hers. It was a careful, gentle rhythm. They danced to the beat of love, not just lust. But as their heart rates rose, so did the sun. And so did their urgency.

They rocked together, forgetting time and forgetting duty. There would be a moment for all of that later. But this cold, dark, early morning, this was for them.

"Hordak," she pulled away to whisper against his throat, "I love you."

"And...” he panted as he felt his body screaming for his release, "and I you."

The effort of holding back was almost too much. He had to let his eyes drift shut, embrace the
darkness, shut out the sight of this beauty, or else he would be undone. Her legs wrapped around him, drawing him deeper.

Oh. That just wasn't fair.

"En..." he gasped, "Entrap-"

She shushed him with a playful hiss, squeezing his hands tighter.
"It's alright," she whispered, "I'm ready now."

He opened his eyes again and her smile absolutely ended him.

His movements stuttered, his body shaking around her. A deep, feral growl tore from his throat as he pressed a hard, lustful kiss to her mouth. His tongue danced against hers as he spilled every last drop of his essence into her.

And when it was over, when he could support himself no more, he collapsed against her, panting. He glanced up at her as she held him, but she was not looking at him. Her eyes were on the window, at the light of day slowly creeping over the horizon.

He watched the sunrise with her, holding her hands even now. Together, they would face this dark new day.

And pray they lived to see the dawn of the next one.
Glimmer tossed and turned the night before. She should sleep. They all needed to sleep. But she couldn't. She'd been trying for hours.

Groaning, she kicked her blankets aside and got up, pulling a robe over herself and leaving the room to wander the halls, clear her head, maybe find a drink somewhere if she could. Anything to ease the anxiety.

"Queen Glimmer?"

It took a moment for her eyes to adjust to the darkness, but the voice was unmistakable.

"Zed? What are you doing awake?" She pulled her robe closed, feeling foolish.

"I do not require much sleep," he responded a little shakily, "and I... had a, err, what is the word for unpleasant dream here?"

"Nightmare," she answered, "I have some experience with those too. Talking helps. What kind of nightmare was it?"

He hesitated and she could see him now silhouetted against the window. His arms were crossed over his chest, shoulders hunched. He looked like a cornered animal for a moment and then he sighed, relaxing.

"My mother tried to scream for me, but Father had sewn her mouth shut. I couldn't reach her to help."

Glimmer blinked, horrified.

"I... see. Yeah. That's unpleasant."

"Something happened to her," he murmured, and Glimmer knew he was on the edge of tears, "I know it."

"Zed, you can't possibly know that," she placed a careful hand on his shoulder, "it's just a dream. I bet she's just fine. Probably missing you like crazy, but fine."

The boy hesitated, blinking back tears. With an impatient sigh, the Queen pulled him into a hug. The alien Prince froze, but after a moment, relaxed.

"...Yes," he relented, sniffing, "you are likely right. You are very wise, Queen Glimmer of Brightmoon."

"Just call me Glimmer," she pulled away, hands still on his shoulders, smiling, "all my friends do."

"Friends? Ah. Yes. I see," he smiled back, the horizon lightening from inky black to deep purple. "The sun will rise soon," he observed, "Etherians require sleep. You should attempt to get a little before it's time."

Glimmer shrugged at that, moving to watch the sun rise next to him.
"Nah. I'll be alright. A good Queen never sleeps when her people need her."

The boy smiled at that, glancing at her from the corner of his eye. He was taller than her by a head, but she felt so much more grown than him.

"By the way," she asked, "what are you doing all the way over on this side of the castle? Isn't your room right next to Hordaks?"

The boy shrugged and tilted his head thoughtfully.

"Yes. I had considered going to him after my... nightmare. However the walls are thin and it was apparent Uncle was engaged in sexual intercourse with his wife, so I thought it might be rude to interrupt."

Glimmer nodded, distractedly. And then it really hit her what he said.

"I'm sorry, what?" She snapped.

"Uncle Hordak was... how do you Etherians put it? Making love? The sound was pretty obvious, so-"

"How are you not embarrassed talking like that!?" She demanded, voice shrill.

"Talking like what?" He put his hands up defensively, confused and perhaps a little afraid he had crossed some boundary, "Etherians engage sexually with each other frequently. Is this not true?"

"W-well yeah, but we don't just... talk about it!"

The boy blinked, then pinched the bridge of his nose.

"I... see," he didn't really, but this strange planet was primitive in so many ways. "Forgive me. Within the Horde there was simply no shame about it. Father often discussed his sexual conquests in front of me. I suppose it is simply another cultural difference."

Glimmer narrowed her eyes, but nodded.

"Yeah, well, maybe we can afford to be a little less stuffy, you know, at the end of the world."

The boy raised a burgundy eyebrow to her and looked the Queen up and down.

"Was that a... proposition?" He asked awkwardly, unsure. Etherians had... unique speech patterns. So full of hidden meaning, yet so blunt. He truly did prefer his own tongue for this reason. Always to the point.

"What? Ew! No!" She almost screamed, giving him a shove to the shoulder, "gross!"

"Rude," he snorted and shook his silky burgundy hair, "I'll have you know I am considered very appealing to both males and females on most civilized worlds."

"Yeah, well, welcome to Etheria, pal," she laughed, watching the sun peek over the horizon.
Hordak had paid one final visit to Kyle before leaving. The boy seemed to be on the road to recovery, thankfully. He was even able to sit up and carry a conversation.

"You *must* stop apologizing," Hordak sighed, impatiently, "I told you, it was not your fault in the least."

"But-"

"Silence," he nearly snapped, but added to soften the order, "you may hurt yourself if you get too worked up."

"Lord Hordak, Sir-"
"Just Hordak, please."
"Err, yeah, Hordak? What'll happen after? When it's all done?"

The clone froze, blinking stupidly. After? Yes, of course. After. After they win. They had to win. That was how the story went, didn't it? The good guys always won.

"I... we go to the beach. Entrapta and I. And the children. And Imp. And Emily. And... and you, if you'd like. I've always wanted to go to the beach, haven't you?"

Kyle was smiling, playing with his hands.

"Me and Rogelio talked about it once. Can I really come too?"

Hordak simply nodded.
"Did I not say you were family?"

The boy looked up, biting his lip.

"I thought you were just saying that because..."

The tall clone sighed once more, shaking his head.
"I rarely say anything that is not genuine. In fact, I was thinking that once it's all over, if you had nowhere to go, well... Dryl has space for you here."

"Are you offering me a home?"

"I'm offering you a family," he corrected, "I owe you much. I consider this the first step to repayment. If... if you'd like."

Kyle blinked down at his lap, then offered the smallest nod.

"Yeah... I'd like that."
By the time Hordak joined the others outside the gates of the castle, the mood had shifted from the night before. There was... hope. Genuine optimism.

And determination.

He met Scorpia's eyes and she nodded stiffly. His gaze swept to the others. To Bow, examining his arrows. To Zed, examining his shimmery gold palms. To Micah preparing a magic circle with Glimmer watching closely. And then there was Entrapta, smiling, radiant as she checked her tablet.

All gathered ready for Glimmer to teleport them with the assistance of Micah. Except for-

"Where is Adora?" He asked approaching the gathering.

"She left already on Swift Wind," Glimmer answered walking around the magic circle.

"Catras cell was empty," Bow added, sounding tired.

"I... see," he pressed his fingers to his temples, "we can not focus on that. We must hurry."

"Nearly done," Micah said, "just about... there!"

Glimmer looked it over once more before nodding her approval.

"Alright!" She called, "if everyones ready, hold hands and step inside the circle."

Hordak took his wife's hand and did as instructed, smirking in amusement as her hair held her data pad in front of her, typing wildly away, even as the circle surged with magical energy. Hordak had never once been teleported before.

Glimmer reached through a floating symbol for her fathers hand, borrowing his energy for the jump. Everything glowed blue, too bright to see.

And then it faded and they were somewhere else.

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Fields of endless blue grass swayed lightly in the breeze. The sky above glowed, pink now with the setting sun. In the distance lay mountains, purple shimmering with icy snow caps. And at the bottom of a shallow valley, a huge white, crystalline palace sat.

Horde Prime sat taking it all in, feeling the feather soft grass under him. One perfect silver claw plucked a cerulean blossom and he held it to his face, smiling in a way he had not in... how long? Centuries. It must have been. And yet, looking down at the palace, it was as if he had never left.

He could still hear it, laughter as they chased each other through the castle gardens. They were so
close. Still children, still innocent. He, Randor and Marlena.

Oh, sweet, beautiful Marlena. So gentle. So lovely. So far out of his reach for so long, now so close.

All of this had been for her, after all.

The baby in his arms squirmed and The lonely Emperor cast his loving eyes down to her.

"Ah, my Princess Serenia," he chuckled, bringing the flower to tickle her little nose, "welcome to Eternia. You may be from Etheria, but your destiny lies here."

He lifted her slightly, pointing down at the Palace, as if she would somehow understand that way.

"By the end of today, I will be a King eternal. But you, my dearest, you will be something special. You will be divine. You will be..."
He paused to press a kiss to the top of her head.

-A God.-
Aszi sat cross legged on a tall rock. Waiting. Just waiting. How long was Uncle Hordak and his princess party going to keep her waiting?

Not long, it seemed. The first thing they noticed was the magic circle. It appeared like a wildfire, burning into the ground. Aszi exchanged a look with Nazeim who finally looked up from the ant colony he'd been staring at for the better part of the morning.

Then in a shower of sparkles, they appeared and Aszi was finally able to try the villain laugh she had been tirelessly rehearsing.

"Well! It's about time!" She called from where she was still comfortably perched on a large stone. "Uncle! So good to see you again! And you returned our sweet baby brother to us. How... nice."

Hordak glanced at Zed, positioned behind Glimmer, who now had her sparkles out. The boy was no fighter. If Hordak had been in charge, Zed would have stayed behind. But Glimmer had insisted. And they needed a guide. Even if he had not been here personally, Zed had been Primes heir. He knew more than anyone.

Hordak still didn't like it.

Aszi jumped down from her rocky perch, graceful as a dancer.

"Aww, why so shy, Brother? I just want to talk."

Glimmer summoned her staff still standing protectively in front of Zed. Aszi laughed again, took a step towards him.

-Aww, dont hide behind your sparkly girlfriend, little brother. I hear your Mother was looking for you.-

His blue eyes widened at that.

-Mother!-

Grinning wickedly, the alien snapped her long fingers and perfectly on cue, Nazeim pulled a clump of red ropes from a bag and held it up.

For a moment, nobody seemed able to see exactly what he held until it twisted, revealing the golden head of Queen Zalah.

The sound Zed made was heart wrenching. He sunk to his knees and Glimmer knelt beside him, pulling his face against her chest, hiding his eyes from the gory view.

Laughing now, Nazeim tossed the head away. Horrified, Hordak watched it roll away, coming to a stop between them.

"Father has a message for you, little brother," Aszi purred, flexing her claws, "he wanted me to tell you she suffered. Horribly. But don't worry. He says he'll kill you quickly."
Hordak snarled, ready to lunge, but-

"Aszi!" Scorpia stepped forward, "remember me?"

Bright yellow eyes snapped to the Princess, narrowed, then seemed to go wide. The alien flashed a bright set of fangs.

"Oh Princess. How could I forget your face? Or the expression on it when I ripped out the heart of that defective clo-"

Both Hordak and Scorpia charged. Aszi stood, smirking, unbothered. From above, a figure dropped in front of her, twin blades held at the ready. A mask hid the lower half of their face, but Hordak knew a clone when he saw it. And from their stance, their weapon, it was yet another assassin clone.

Like Stella.
He had but a small moment of hesitation as his talons scraped against the sturdy metal of their weapons. But no. It was impossible. Stella was gone. This one... was just one in a matching set.

Scorpia lunged, claw flying. Duck, weave, step, over, under. Even the two together could only dance around the clone assassin, narrowly avoiding her blades.

The rest of the crew snapped into action. The large, quiet one, Nazeim roared and attacked. It was chaos. As Hordak clashed with the clone, Glimmer and Micah held off Nazeim. Out of the corner of his eye, he watched as Glimmer threw a handful of sparkles right in the large aliens eyes. Temporary blinding him as Micah started to craft a binding spell. Bow was firing arrows, but not carelessly. His supply was limited.

Entrapta had a different goal. Her eyes were firmly on the portal as she soared past the fighting. Zed followed nearly dragged by her hair wrapped around his arm. Weaving by, following the trail Entrapta paved through the chaos.

Hordak snarled as the assassin weaved around his claws with such ease. He managed to swipe one blade away, but even without, Primes assassins were deadly. But the improved armor Entrapta had made for him eased his movements, gave him strength he might not have had otherwise. And he was still struggling.

Scorpia was more powerful than him, better equipped for this fight. But even so, even with all her strength, there was no matching the clones speed.

Hordak snarled as he was knocked onto his back. From his spot on the ground, he watched Aszi, smirking, step into the portal.

Too late. She was getting away.

As Scorpia clashed with the clone, Hordak tried to follow, snarling from the effort. His head was spinning. Somehow hes hit it without noticing.

"You are weak," the clone snarled, easily blocking a claw. "You are hopeless." Scorpia felt a fist connect with the soft tissue of her stomach. "Give up! Why won't you just give up?" The clone demanded as Scorpia doubled over. "Don't you understand!?"

A claw wrapped around Scorpia's throat, pulling her up to eye level.
"I am invincible."

The instant Scorpias eyes met, she knew. How could she not? How could she have doubted? Those red eyes. Thousands identical, but only one pair of eyes looked at her like that. She could see it clear as day, fear, regret. At the corners of those eyes, tears. The clones hand shook. So loose on her throat. Hesitant.
Fighting something inside.

"Stella?" Scorpias whispered. The clone let her go, pressing a hand to their head. Hordak saw them drop their weapon, stumble.

Scorpia struggled to her feet, breathless.

At the same time, Nazeim had gotten ahold of Zed. He held the younger boy in his large claws, squeezing his ribcage as if trying to pop him. Glimmer panted, standing over her father, unconscious, but breathing.

Entrapta was attempting to pry his hands free, but it was no use. Hordak held up a finger, ready to fire. It would be his one shot. He'd been saving it for Prime, but he couldn't let his nephew die.

That was when they all heard it.

"For the Honor of Grayskull!"

She Ra had arrived with Catra clinging to her on the back of Swift Wind.

Scorpia looked up then back at the Clone.

"Stell-!"

But it was too late. The clone vanished through the portal.

-------

"My dear, are you not hungry?"

Queen Marlena jerked from her daydream and smiled stiffly at her husband.

"Many apologies, my love," she laughed, shaking her pretty blonde head, "I was simply thinking about our guest."

King Randor nodded as he stabbed his plate.

"She says she is a Queen from Etheria," Marlena continued.

King Randor set his dining utensils down, slowly looking up to meet his Queens eyes.

"Adam? Why don't you run along? I can have dinner sent to you in your chambers?" The King
suggested sweetly.

"But Father, I haven't even-"

"Now."

The blonde boy blinked, looked to his mother who gave him a stiff nod. He left the table without another word.

The instant they were alone, Randor narrowed his eyes at his Queen.

"She is obviously lying," he told her, "the portal has been closed off. Nothing can breach it."

The Queen opened her mouth to argue, but decided against it. She sighed and pushed her plate away.

"Forgive me. I fear I have no appetite tonight."

The King grunted, but said no more. As she walked away, she glanced back, biting her lip. On the edge of her tongue, she held a secret, but she had kept that secret inside for the past 18 years. She would hold it close just a little longer.

She walked outside, through the courtyard where she used to play as a child. Where she, Randor and Hectour would chase each other around. Where she fell in love with a winged God. Where she accepted his proposal.

And where she had learned about his death.

They had brought her his wings while she stood right there, under that tree. She had sobbed while Randor told her how he had fallen during his failed assassination attempt.

Had she believed Hectour had attempted to murder her? Of course she hadn't. But in the end, it didn't matter. His wings were proof. He was gone. And she had to marry someone.

As she had done every night since his death, she stood under their tree. It had grown so impossibly tall now. They had planted it together when they were young. He carved their names in it.

He was gone.

So why was she dreaming about him now?
"That was Stella!"

Hordak helped his wife up, examining her arm. Behind him, the colossal form of Nazeim lay dead. It happened quick. It was over the moment She Ra arrived. He never stood a chance.

"Scorpia, stop," Hordak sighed, gently moving Entrapta's wrist, "that wasn't Stella. Stella's dead."

"But I saw her, Hordak! She-"

"She-they were a clone, Scorpia," his voice was a hiss now, impatient. It softened when he spoke to his wife. "Does it hurt when I do this?"

She shook her head as Scorpia paced, claws crossed in front of her.

"Hordak, she's alive. You didn't see the way she-"

"Enough!" He shouted, silencing the gathered party, "Scorpia, she is gone! Accept it!"

The Princess huffed.
"She never gave up on me. She had faith. I will too."

"Fine!" Hordak snarled, "believe the dead can walk! But don't talk about her in front of me! Not..."
he sighed, voice shaking, "not yet."

Entrapta pulled her arm free of his grasp, wincing. His eyes went soft with worry for her.

"Are you alright, Zed?" Glimmer asked, helping the boy sit up.

"I am alive," he answered, "I consider that a victory."

"But... he squeezed you really tight," she reached for the edge of his shirt, tugging it up, "let me look."

He hissed again, but allowed it.


"I mean... it is pretty bruised," she eventually agreed, "you should stay behind and rest."

"No," he groaned, touching his shimmering palms to his ribs, "I have to come. None of you know the way. Father taught me everything."

He began to stand, but faltered and Glimmer had to catch him.

"You're not going anywhere," she snapped. He opened his mouth to argue, but gave up quickly.

"At least allow me to heal your wounds," he was looking at Entrapta specifically who was still holding a tendril of hair to the wound on her arm to staunch the bleeding. The Princess of Dryl
exchanged looks with her husband before offering her wounded arm to the boy.

"Faaaaascinating," she whispered as the boy touched his palm to her bloodied arm.

The wound had been a stupid accident, caused by her own hair as he lost her grip on the aliens large fists at the last second. Sure. Entrapta had known her hair could hurt if she hit herself with it, but she'd never drawn blood like this before. She'd been wearing armor. What would have happened if she hadn't been?

Zed let go, leaving a handprint of gold dust behind on her arm. Before her eyes, the skin began to knit together. Too bad his healing dust couldn't mend a broken heart. They all needed that.

"Hey. If we survive this, can I have a sample when we get back?" Entrapta produced a sample vial from nowhere, grinning.

The boy stared at it before stupidly asking, "a sample of what, specifically?"

"Ookay! That's enough, Zed," Glimmer grumbled, "we gatta get moving. We already let them escape. Zed? Will you be alright here?"

"Yes," he answered, watching out of the corner of his eye as Scorpia dropped a bag over the severed head of his mother. He would process that with time. For now, he was content pretending he saw nothing, pretending he could still save her, pretending she was alive and well, waiting for him. "I will watch over your Father as well. You will need to head to the palace. Prime plans to become King, he will attempt to assassinate the current monarch first."

Glimmer nodded, wincing at her unconscious Father.
"Alright. So we go warn them then. Let's get moving."

"Be back soon!" Bow called, optimistically. Hordak winced. He was not exactly superstitious, but he couldn't help but notice a pattern. All optimism was met with tragedy.

"What will we do with... her?" Entrapta asked, glaring at Catra.

"For now... I suppose it's best to keep her close," Glimmer sighed, giving Adora a withering look, "if she absolutely has to be here."

"I can hear you, you know!" Catra called as they headed toward the portal.

"Yes, and you are lucky you're alive to hear it at all," Hordak deadpanned. "Votes can still be changed, Catra. Be on your best behavior."

The warning seemed to be enough to silence her for once.

--------

Home. In every sense of the word, this was home. Where he grew up, where he lived, where he died.

Where he was reborn.
He smiled down at the tiny infant in his arms, placing another sweet kiss to her forehead.

-Your destiny awaits, little one,- he whispered, before passing her off to one of his clones.

The sleeping bundle was carefully taken into the temple where she was to live until adulthood, her wings cared for daily. She would be worshipped, cherished. And Prime would be her Father, King of Eternity. Together, they would rebuild what was lost.

That was the plan.

But first, he would have to become king.

-------

ES was just a clone. One of thousands. A tool, nothing more. But they had been broken.

Princess Aszi had fixed them, or so she said. They had been made with a defect, but through the Princesses kind mercy, she had repaired them. Given them new life, a purpose.

All she had asked for was their undying obedience. And ES was more than willing to give it.

They were the perfect assassin. Cold, merciless, possessing no needs other than the whims of their mistress.

And yet...

They had hesitated. Despite their perfect programming, their conditioning, their training, they had hesitated.

The woman with the white hair. They knew her face. Knew her voice.

*Invincible.*

Why did that word hang on her tongue? Why did laughter seem to want to follow? Why did she know this language?

Why did they keep calling themselves *she* in their head!??

Why did the word *Stella* leave them feeling so...

-ES! Come! You are slowing us down.-

The clone nodded and immediately hurried along, headed towards the castle.

-My apologies, Princess.-

-ES,- she purred, stopping suddenly, -come here.-

The clone did as they were told, kneeling in front of her. They found resisting the demands of Princess Aszi near impossible.
Smiling her kind smile, she reached down to tuck a strand of long wavy midnight hair back into the ponytail on their head. Her talon gently traced a scar along their hairline from when she had peeled the scalp back to implant a new chip.

-You remember who you serve, yes?-  

-Only you, my Princess,-

-Only me,- she smiled, large yellow eyes seeming to hold the clone under some sort of spell, -very good. Do not forget now. Without me, you would be dead.-

She motioned for the clone to rise and with one talon, she gently clicked it against their chest. A faint metallic click reminded the clone exactly what they owed her.

-I will never forget,- ES promised, -I shall repay you. One day.-
"Your Majesty!"

Queen Marlena looked up from where he was sitting in the garden, daydreaming. Or night dreaming? She couldn't say. She'd been out here a long time and the sun had long set while she wandered her memories.

"Calm yourself. What has happened?" She jumped up, immediately falling back into Queen mode.

"Outsiders. A portal has opened. We've taken them into custody, but there may be others."

The Queen should have been frightened, but instead, she found herself grinning.

"Bring them to the throne room at once," she ordered, "the other prisoner as well."

The guard bowed, but froze.

"Shall I wake King Randor, or-"

"No," her voice was firm, final, "there will be no need. Go."

Her mind travelled a thousand different directions at once. Was it him? Back from the dead? Was it her? The daughter she sent away? Perhaps they were a rescue force? Perhaps this foreign 'Queen' had been telling the truth all along.

No matter how she sliced it, she had been correct in her predictions. And she honestly couldn't wait to rub it in Randors nose.

Hordak sat in a proper cell now, back against a concrete wall, cold. But unlike the last time this had happened, he had Entrapta in the cell with him. And the rest of the party, true, but at least he wasn't alone.

"Cold?" She asked quietly, wrapping a tendril of hair around his shoulders as she gently squeezed him. He'd been shivering, but if he was being honest, she was sure how much was from the cold and how much was fear.

"Ugh! Let's just bust out of here already!" Adora impatiently groaned, "Hordak, you have a way, right?"

He nodded, looking down at his finger tips.

"We do not want to escape though, Adora," he reminded her, "you said that Prime called you 'Queen Marlena's daughter,' correct? If this is true, then all we must do is be taken to her. Patience now. Think diplomatically."

"But you said it yourself!" She countered, "we don't have much time!"

"And we will waste more time if we get executed. Trust me," he sighed, tightening his arm around his wife, "we will-

"The Queen will see you now," a guard informed them, unlocking the cell.
All eyes went to Hordak who simply grinned.

"See?"

"I hate when he's right," Catra groaned.

"I know. He's always so smug about it," Adora agreed as they were led out, still cuffed, to the throne room.

Queen Marlena studied the group brought before her. For the longest time, she was silent, expression unreadable. Then she gestured for the throne room to be cleared. The instant it was, she nearly leaped from the throne to throw her arms around a very stunned Hordak.

"Hectour!" She breathed, hands on his face now, eyes pricking with tears, "I can't believe it! You've come back! After all this time..."

Hordak's large, shocked eyes found his wife who looked equal parts amused and ready to murder, especially when this mad Queen pressed her lips to his.

He blinked stupidly, but managed to gently place his hands on the shoulders of the Queen to pushed her away slightly.

"I...I'm sorry," he tried to explain, glancing desperately to his wife, then to the rest of the party, "I'm not-

"Of course I know you're not dead, silly!" The Queen was openly weeping now, nuzzling his neck. "Everyone said you were dead. They showed me your wings, but I-

"Lady, if you don't get your hands off my husband, I will pluck your fingers off your palm like flower petals."

Hordak blinked at his wife, ears going a brighter blue than they ever had. Did she just... threaten someone? If he was being honest, it was probably the sexiest thing he'd heard coming from her mouth. And at this moment, it was absolutely the worst thing to say.

"Hus...band?" The Queen blinked at Entrapta then back at Hordak. He sighed as she detached herself from him, cuffed hands going to his hair to push it back into place.

"My name is Hordak," he explained, "I am a clone. I, err, tried to tell you before."

The Queen stared for a long time, tears streaking down her cheeks. Then she wiped them away, shaking her pretty blonde head.

"Apologies," she sniffled, "I should have... well, I should have known better. You just look so much like him, I thought, maybe..."

"Actually, that's why were here," it was Glimmer who spoke up now, "because he is here too. And you're in a lot of danger."

The Queen looked from one face to another, freezing on Adora for a long time. There was a hint of recognition is her large blue eyes, but she said nothing about it directly. Then she nodded.

"Alright. I'm going to need to hear it all. The whole story. In order."
It took time. There was a lot of starting and stopping, a lot of talking over each other. But eventually, the Queen waved a hand from her throne, rubbing her temples with the other.

"This is all very hard to believe," she sighed, "or it would be, but..."

Her eyes snapped to Adora and she motioned for her to step forward with the jerk of a finger.

"You know who I am, yes?"

Adora didn't hesitate.
"You're my Mother."

"Yes. Welcome home, my girl."

"Why? I mean..." she bit her lip, looking lost, "what happened?"

Hordak was less than interested in this bit of family drama, so he turned his attention to his wife who's hair was now working at her cuffs. Queen Marlena noticed, but she said nothing, made no show of being the least bit surprised. He supposed after that insane story they just told, anything could seem possible.

The important thing was, they weren't there to kill her and she knew it.

"I sent you to Etheria," she confessed, "It was for your own protection."

"What?" Adora sounded angry now, "how was sending me away for my own protection?!"

Hordak's cuffs fell free from his wrists now. He rubbed them, smiling appreciatively at Entrapta.

"You have no idea what happened to me after! I was picked up by- by HIM!"

Hordak cleared his throat awkwardly as Adora pointed an accusatory finger at him.

"You were fed and kept alive," he countered, "I think all things considered, it could have been worse."

"Yeah, but you didn't love me. You didn't care!" She snapped, "I was a baby! I needed my mother!"

Hordak looked down at the floor now, hands clasped behind his back. What else could he say? Being a father now, he understood.

"She is correct," he admitted, "Her childhood was abysmal."

"See? Thank you!" She threw her hands in the air, now also free from her cuffs. "So what was it, Mom? What was so bad that you had to send me away?"

"I sent you away so your father wouldn't do something worse." The Queens blue eyes darkened. "There is a legend, a prophecy. It states that should an Eternian Queen produce twins, they will bring death to their King."

Hordak couldn't help but snort. Pathetic superstition. First Ones were supposed to be more intelligent than this.

"And you believed it?" Adora snarled, "you believed it and you-"

"Your Father believed it," she corrected sternly, "and he would have killed you both before risking his own life. So upon your birth, I sent you away, pretending for all the world that I had only
produced a single child. It was the only way to save you both."

"So, wait..." Adora was slow to understand. But she did understand eventually. "You're saying I have a... twin?"

"A brother. Yes."

--------

The palace had been far too easy to sneak into. Security was hopelessly lacking. Prime made a note to fix this when he was King. But first, he had to become King. And for that to happen...

- Good evening, Father.-

He turned, facing his daughter, eyes narrowed into slits.

- Aszi. Your orders were to defend the portal.-

- And I did,- she purred, -but they had She Ra. You wanted her here, yes? She will be along soon. I left the rest to Nazeim.-

The Emperor snorted in amusement at his daughters cheek.

- Your brother is not as strong as you think he is. What will you do if he dies?-

- Get a new brother,- she answered simply, -please father. I know you did not create me just to watch a portal.-

The old Emperor sighed, rubbed his temples. He looked tired. Aszi noted the way his large shoulders sagged. The fact that he showed even this small weakness told her all she needed.

She had his trust once more.

- Come, Aszi. Let us end this.-

As she followed, so too did ES, hidden in the shadows, silent. Awaiting their moment.
"Adora-

"That's Princess Adora, please,- Queen Marlena corrected.

"Princess, you must relax," Hordak continued, "pacing like this is helping nothing."

"And how can you be so calm?" Adora demanded, still angrily pacing around the nearly empty throne room.

"My daughter is missing, my murderous niece is somewhere in this realm, my genetic template wants to kill the king in this world and an AI on Etheria is just waiting for an excuse to kill a whole planet," he deadpanned. "I am far from calm."

Entrapta hugged his arm and glanced up at the Queen on her throne.

"You needn't worry about Light hope. They need royal permission before they activate the weapon," she explained.

"But why do you have a weapon like that?" Glimmer demanded, "it's sick! Its cruel!"

The other Queen blinked at her.

"Your name is Glimmer, yes?" She tilted her head slightly, "I've met your Mother. You're practically the same person, did you know?"

"Wait! Mom?" Glimmer exchanged a look with Bow, "She's here?!"

"Mm. She came through some time ago."

"Can I see her?"

"Of course!" The Queen looked almost offended by the suggestion, "I'm not a monster!"

"Right, because what kind of monster would keep a child from their mother?" Adora snarled.

"You will have to forgive me eventually," Queen Marlena sighed, "we do literally live forever here."

Adora made a face, but Hordak was already feeling uneasy by the direction this conversation had taken.

"Who says I'm staying here? Isn't my father going to kill me or something because of a stupid prophecy?"

The Queen tilted her head, lips quirked in amusement.

"Oh, your father shouldn't be a problem much longer, dearest." She laughed, a high, twinkling sound.

"You mean-"

"Prime," Hordak growled, fists clenched, "you plan to let him in. Let him murder your husband."

"Mmm. Aren't you clever?" She purred, leaning her face against her palm. "Just like my Hectour."
But you keep calling him 'Prime'. That will have to stop once he's my husband, of course."

Hordak looked at his wife, squeezing her hand. This had gone south fast. Her hair had started to frizz out, a sure sign of rage. He cleared his throat catching her eye. They had to tread very carefully here. No matter their feelings, they were quite at her mercy.

"Of course," he answered evenly, "I suppose 'your Majesty' would be the best way to address a King."

The Queen smiled at that. The rest of the party glared at Hordak. He hoped they would keep their silence for the time being.

"Randor sealed his fate the instant he lied to me. He is a traitor, regardless of our relationship."

And for all his hate and anger towards Prime, Hordak truly couldn't argue that logic. In the end, he had been the cause of it all. Not that it excused anything his genetic template had done after. He still deserved to die.

But then, Hordak hardly had an excuse either. He'd done unspeakable things as well. All in the name of... what? In all these years, he still didn't know why he did it.

For a while there, his motivation had been revenge, but now, that felt pointless.

Revenge, somewhere along the line, had taken a backseat to everything else. Now all he wanted was to go home, where ever that ended up being, with his family.

As soon as Angella was brought in, it was enough to distract. Enough to change the stakes.

"Mom!" Glimmer crossed the throne room, throwing her arms around the tall Angelic woman. For all her time away, she appeared to be in good health, clean, well taken care of.

Hordak attempted to make himself as small as possible now, hoping to sink into the background. The last thing they needed was to have to explain everything again.

"Oh my girl, I-" her voice suddenly stilled, taking on a hard, dangerous edge. "What is he doing here?"

Hordak winced, biting his lip. Entrapta squeezed his hand.

"It's okay, mom! He's with us now."

"I don't care! Have you forgotten what he did to our people?" She demanded, voice going shrill. "To your Father?!"

"Mom... Dads Alive."

That simple statement seemed to be enough. Angella's face went from stunned, to grateful, to joyful in moments.

"I... but..." her eyes met Hordak's now. "How?"

Hordak shrugged, seeming unconcerned. It was an act. She would accept things faster if he acted cold.
"Do not ask me. I had ordered him executed. It appears my underlings could not even manage that much. Is it truly a wonder your pitiful rebellion managed to stop me?"

"I can answer," Entrapta perked up. Angella looked at her now, eyes sweeping first from her hand clasped tightly in Hordak's hand, then the ring on Hordak's finger. She looked, frankly, horrified. "I found him on Beast island."

"What were you doing on- hold on. Are you two- why are you both-"

"Married," Hordak explained quickly, "2 children. Will explain later."

Angella sputtered, unable to quite comprehend a word of it. Queen Marlena began to giggle. "This reunion is charming. And to think, just this morning I had no idea about any of you."

Hordak snorted in amusement. "And to think just this morning he'd been prepared to die."

"Your Majesty," Hordak began, "I must request-"

A scream from somewhere in the Castle cut him off. Queen Marlena rose to her feet. "He's here!"

Prime stood over the body of his rival, his enemy. Once, his dearest friend. He had given him no time to speak, no chance to defend. A bite to his throat had ended him. It was messy and lacked elegance. He truly didn't care.

An elegant death was too good for him.

The Emperor smiled, for the first time, looking genuinely at peace. He had done it. The thing he had torn a Universe apart for. Revenge.

He wiped blood from his chin with the back of his hand. The taste was so bitter. He licked a talon clean.

Victory tasted sweet.

So sweet, but so short. In moments, the joy of the kill had drained from him, leaving nothing but a rotten, hollow core.

Something was still missing.

The answer was obvious.

Her.

-Father, we've done it,- Aszi purred, -now you can be King! And I can!-

-Watch over Princess Serenia in the Temple,- he completed for her, -you will serve her as her handmaiden. It is an honor that I am giving you for your service.-

Aszi looked disappointed, but not surprised. All hope in her large yellow eyes faded. All joy in victory drained.
Her father walked past her and she met the eye of the clone, waiting in the shadows just above her. The clone dropped one blade and Aszi caught it, just as the clone leaped from the shadows. Almost at once, both blade and claws dug into the back of the Emperor. He was weakened, bloodied, tired. And he dropped with a grunt. Aszi stabbed again. Purple blood flew in her face. She withdrew, stabbed again, crying, snarling, screaming like a wounded animal.

-Princess,- ES sounded nervous, -we should go.-

Aszi shakily rose to her feet. He was breathing still, hard, but Aszi knew her Father's body well. After performing countless surgeries and augmentations on him, she knew exactly how to hurt him, how to ensure death. She predicted at the rate of blood loss, he would have maybe a half hour tops if he was very still.

With a metal tipped boot she kicked him hard in the ribs, then with the heel she shoved him hard until he rolled down the stairs.

There. Maybe 20 minutes now.


-Princess, we-!

-Shut up,- she snapped, holding the blade to the clone's face, all laughter dead at once, -unless you want to join him-

Stunned, ES glanced from the tip of the blade to the face of the Princess, to the dark staircase where an Emperor lay dying. Slowly, they nodded. The clone did not fear death.

But they feared this. They feared her. The rage, the bitter fury behind her every motivation now. The unchained, uncontrolled raw hate.


And Aszi. Smiling as they lay dying.

No. They were seeing things out of order again. Why? What were these visions?

-Princess,- ES asked evenly, carefully, so very aware of the blade next to their chin, -what now?- 

-Now?- Aszi blinked, almost confused. She pulled away the knife, studying the purple blood glinting in the dim light of the stairway. She walked down now, pausing the kick her dying father just once more.

-Now we pluck the wings of a God.-
"Princess? Where did you run off to?"

Hectour had to bite his lip hard to fight off laughter as he and Princess Marlena sat high in a tree together, watching Randor stalk around the courtyard looking for them.

"Hectour, if you're out there, you have to help me look! The King-"

Tears in his eyes from the effort of not laughing, Hectour met the gaze of his Princess. And the cross eyed goofy face she was making at him. It had taken all of his self control not to just bust out laughing as it was but that was too much. He snorted with uncontrolled laughter, sending the Princess into a fit of giggles too. Together, they clutched the tree, howling with mirth.

"Real funny!" Randor grumbled, looking up at the tree, "you both scared me. I thought something happened to you!"

Once they had recovered, Hectour flapped his wings and dropped from the tree branch, turning to offer his arms to the Princess. Without hesitation she dropped into them, burying her face in his broad chest as he flew her down.

"Hmph! Show off," Randor snorted, shooting him a grin. Hectour towered over the other teen, but when Randor elbowed him, he winced and pretended to be extra hurt.

"Ouch. Are you trying to kill me?" He teased.

"Oh please," Randor laughed, "if I wanted you dead, you'd be dead. Now come on. The King wants us in the throne room."

"Father?" Princess Marlena looked confused. "Did he say why?"

Randor shook his head.

"It's alright, Marlena," Hectour soothed, placing a careful claw on her shoulder, "I'll wait for you right here. You can tell me everything after."

"Awe. That's really sweet," Randor teased, "but when I said 'Us', I meant you too, scaredy bat."

Now Hectour looked terrified, actually afraid. Being brought before the King could mean anything, including his death. Sure, he was a God among his own people, but this was King of Eternia, the Eternal one. He was the absolute law.

A thousand thoughts ran through his mind at lightspeed. Was he angry that he had been spending time with Marlena? He had never cared that they had a friends before, but perhaps it was different now that she was of age? Perhaps he didn't like that he was flying her around? Perhaps he had heard about their kiss?

Oh. Oh no.

"Come on, Hectour," she whispered, grabbing his arm, "I'll protect you."

That actually did help. He was large, menacing looking for a teen, but in truth, he was a lover, not a fighter. If it came to it, his Princess probably would have to actually save him.
Bowed before the throne, Hectour waited for permission to rise. It did not come. Not for a long time.

"Father," Princess Marlena spoke up at last, "May I ask what this is about?"

The King seemed to hesitate, but eventually he did speak up, motioning for Hectour and Ranor to rise.

"Princess Marlena. You are a woman now. As of last week, you have come of age."

"Yes Father?"

Another long stretch of silence. Despite the Princess being the only one the King had spoken to, Hectour felt like the entire court was staring at him. Why?

"It is time for you to choose a mate. Be careful with your decision, as your choice will become the next King."

Hectour stared at the Princess now, openly, unabashedly. He was sure what they had was about to end. She would choose someone with wealth, someone worth real power. Not him.

"I asked Duke Randor and Lord Hectour here because these two are my personal choices for you. However, tradition mandates that a Princess may choose her-"

"Hectour," she answered quickly, "I choose Hectour to be my husband."

The large winged man could only blink in response to her quick decision. His entire body froze when she hurried to his side to grasp his arm.

"I see," The King nodded with amusement on his lips, "And does Lord Hectour accept this betrothal?"

"I do." He spoke before he could think. But in the end, if he'd had a thousand years to consider it, his answer would have been the same.

How could he have said no? Even if he'd known all that would happen, all the pain he'd endure, all the sorrow he would cause...

He would do it all again just to see the way she smiled at him right then.

Pain. Pain was temporary. When death came, pain would vanish. It was the only comforting thought Prime could manage as he sat against a stone wall of the courtyard. He had finally managed to crawl here, using what little strength he had left. But it had been hard and the trail of blood he left behind told him his time was nearly done.

He just wanted to see it. One more time, even if he couldn't see her.

He'd spend some of the happiest moments of his life here. It was only right that his life should end here. Of all the places in the Universe, all the thousands of worlds he had set foot on, the kingdoms that had fallen under his crushing heel, none could ever compare to this small courtyard. And the tree that marked a love that had never faded. Yes. She loved him still. He could tell. The care this tree had received, their initials, still carved so deep, still so visible.
It would be a comfort in death. He closed his eyes, waiting for his heart to stop. All his life, it only would beat for her, after all. It was right that it should stop for the sake of her as well.

"Hectour!"

His eyes snapped open once more as he willed his heart to beat a little longer.

"Mar... len... "

She was kneeling next to him now, hands on his face, in his hair. Her eyes sparkled like the stars, tears like rain on his face.

Hectour stood outside as the clouds turned dark, threatening a storm. She said she would meet him here. As thunder tore from the heaven, Hectour grew nervous. Was she coming? Why was she late? Had she changed her mind? He only had so much courage, after all, and it was draining the closer the storm got.

"I'm so sorry for being late!"

Her voice made him visibly relax and he had to remind himself not to let his wings flutter in excitement at seeing her.

"Think nothing of it, Princess."

They smiled, feet apart still. Thunder rolled in the distance and now he could see lightning. His ears drooped. Everyone knew he was afraid of thunder storms, Marlena included. She closed the distance, tucking a lock of pale hair behind her ear.

"We can go inside if you want," she offered, "what ever you wanted to say, you can-"

"No!" He said it a little too quickly. Nervously. He cleared his throat, trying to emulate Randors calm, casual bravery. He still shook. "This is fine. Um..."

Marlena was blushing, a pretty sight on her. The pink so beautifully blended with her skin tone. Petal soft. He knew her skin was perfect.

"Hectour?"

"I just wanted to say..." lightning overhead made him jump and she quickly folded him in her arms.

"It's alright," she soothed, running her fingers though his hair. Her face was so close. "I think I know."

Her lips were on his, just like that rainy day. For countless years, countless worlds, countless wives, never had he felt this joy, this love. This was all he had wanted, in the end. Everything he had done, all the horror, all the pain, led him to one perfect moment.

She pulled away after a while, whispering,

"I love you."
Marlena whispered that one sunny day as they sat huddled together under their tree.

Three words was all it took. Hectour unraveled in her arms. She was so small, but as she held him, she felt strong, protective. He stared up at her as he lay on her lap.

-You own my heart,- he mumbled, smiling

She kissed his forehead, looked up at Hordak, eyes pleading.

"Help him!" She tried to order, "you must!"

Hordak glanced at Entrapta, who had by now swung her welding mask over her head. She shook her head. Hordak sighed.

"It's too late," he stated, "he can't be saved."

"That... that can't be right!"

Marlena sat down on a cold bench. Her eyes were wide, wet. Shock, pain. Anger.

It was impossible. What Randor was telling her, it couldn't be real. She would wake up soon. She had to.

"Marlena, please," Randor pleaded, kneeling in front of her, holding her hands, "I know this is hard to hear."

"It's not hard to hear," she snapped, jerking her hands away, "what you're saying is impossible! I know my Hectour! We wouldn't do that! He's incapable. Let me talk to him!"

She jumped to her feet, but Randor grabbed her by the arms, squeezing.

"Marlena! He's gone!"

"W-well! Bring him back! Let me talk to him!"

"No. Marlena. He's gone. Dead."

And just like that, she went limp. He held her up, guiding her back to the bench. So dizzy. Reality crumbled. Nothing was right.

"How?"

"They discovered his plot. When he was confronted, he fought back. He was killed in the fight."

She shook her head, looked him in the eye. Disgust. She felt nothing but disgust.

"I don't believe you."

Randor sighed. He looked so sad, so helpless.
"I didn't want you to see this, but..." he waved and a guard moved into the court yard holding a large
wooden board. Marlena was confused, until the board was turned around.

Her scream could be heard all around the castle.

Mounted to the board like a prize were a pair of large red wings. As she fainted, Randor caught her. She almost didn't see his smile.

"Marlena..." Prime coughed, sending splatters of deep purple blood across the front of her dress, "it's... alright. I am so happy. I've missed you."

"Please," she begged, "don't. You can't!"

"We can't help him. He is dead," Hordak stated, plain, to the point. He looked at Prime, a surge of negative emotions, fear, rage, regret, hate, all of it fell away in order to offer one thing he knew he would never himself receive- mercy.
"I can end your suffering. Tell me where my daughter is and I will make your passing painless."

Prime stared at his clone for a full measure, then he let out a wet sounding laugh.

"A defective clone," he coughed. "To think I have fallen this far that I need help from you."

Hordak's face was impassive. His words may have hurt years ago. Now he couldn't feel anything but pity.

"The temple," he choked, "she is safe in the temple. Just outside the forest."

Hordak nodded, glancing at his wife who slowly lifted her welding mask with a length of hair.

"You don't deserve it," she murmured, taking her husband's hand, "mercy. Kindness. You deserve to suffer and die alone and unloved. It isn't fair."

The dying Emperor nodded, slowly.

"I know. I won't ask for forgiveness-"

"Good because I won't give it."

"Yes. I... expected this." He coughed again, blood darker, thicker. "I am a.. flawed man. In the end, that is all I am."

Entrapta's fingers played with Hordak's hand, or, that's what he thought she was doing. Slowly, she extended his index finger and placed it against Prime's chest, right over his heart.

"It's okay," she whispered, "Imperfections are Beautiful."

There was the quick, sharp sound of a laser, a flash and it was over. His eyes went wide, then relaxed. He slumped forward and Hordak caught his body, meeting Marlena's eyes for a moment before focusing again on the man who had created him.

-Goodnight, Brother.-
Once upon a time, this temple had been a thriving center of culture. Visitors would come from all corners to send their prayers or leave offerings for the Blessed. Ceremonies would be held here, bright decorations hung, festivals, flowers. Beauty.

And now it stood in ruins, crumbling, decaying, ivy and vegetation overgrown.

Yet, despite the poor state, the temple truly was a sight to behold. On all sides, great winged deities stood made of stone, crumbling, but no less brilliant to behold. One of these statues, Aszi stopped in front of, guided by torchlight.

-Princess, wh-?-

-Empress now,- she corrected sternly, -or will be soon.-

Without further explanation, she ran a long talon across the unarmored knee of a sitting giant. She tapped it thoughtfully, experimentally, and before ES could question her, she had moved on.

Ad she approached the temple proper, two clones in uniform came out to meet them, weapons drawn.

-I am Princess Aszi,- she announced, holding her identification key to be scanned, -i have been sent by my glorious Father to attend The Princess Serenia.-

With the proper clearance, it was easy for Aszi and her clone guard to gain access to the Infant Deity. Nearly everything was easy when you were a recognized child of Prime. Of course, that could change when the sun rose, so they had to move fast.

They were led to the back of the temple, a low lit room where, on a comfortable, well made cradle, the winged infant slept peacefully.

Aszi did not seek permission, did not ask before anything. She reached into the cradle with claws extended, ready to-

-Wait-

Aszi froze. The voice of ES sounded odd. Strained. Aszi made a face and reached once more.

-I said, wait-

Aszi felt a blade near her throat, heard the voice harden.

-ES, you forget your place,- Aszi hissed, withdrawing her hand, -I am your princess. And I will be your Empress as well!-

-I remember,- she stated, sound equal parts hurt and amazed, -I remember everything now! You took everything from me!-

-You dare!-

-I dare, yes!- the clone snarled, -I dare to defend my family,-

-I am your family,- she snarled, eyes narrowed, -You know who I am. You do not know her! ES
The clone snatched with the other hand for Aszis throat, curling long talons around her windpipe.

-My name,- she growled, tightening her grip, -is Stella!-

It did not take long to arrive at the temple, still Hordak had wasted no time. How could he? His daughter had been apart from them for too long. He felt he hardly knew her, and yet half a planets worth of people wanted to worship her and they had not even met her. How devoted must he be, then? Being her Father?

As he and Entrapta approached, the sun had begun to rise over the treeline. The night had been difficult, yet, now it was at an end. And against all odds, they had lived to see another sunrise.

They had expected some resistance, but sitting on the edge of a broken statue's pedestal, was the clone assassin from earlier, cradling a squirming bundle.

Hordak nearly attacked, but the clone was behaving strangely. They held the baby with great care, smiling now that they had pulled their mask down. And they were singing.

Their hair had fallen free of it's tight constraints and now flopped to one side, loose and wavy, covering one eye an tickling their chin. Hordak had to resist the urge to call out her name, to weep at her memory. A ghost. That was all. He wanted so much to see her that his mind was forcing him to imagine the impossible.

Yet, as they approached, they looked up and greeted them with a wide, toothy grin. And it absolutely knocked him tumbling to the ground.

"Stella..."

He was on his knees with Entrapta absolutely glowing at his side. The pain of the past few weeks lifted from them all the instant the clone nodded, affirming what they had not even entertained wild day dreams about.

"Forgive me, Brother. I fear I have not been myself lately."

Hordak rose to his feet again with the assistance of his wife, then immediately closed the distance to embrace his sister and his daughter at once. Entrapta wrapped a tendril of hair around the group as well. And for the longest time, they all held on and laughed, and cried and thanked the stars themselves for the absolute miracle of it all.

Then they broke free.

"Where is Scorpia?" Stella asked, wiping her eyes on the back of a claw, "I have to tell her I... well, you know."

Hordak cradled his daughter, touched her cheek. For the rest of his life, he would protect her. All his children. No. Not just his. All. All children.

"She went back through the portal. Said she would be waiting for you 'at home'. She... still believed in you," he explained, "she never lost faith. Not for a fleeting instant."
If Stella was glowing before, she was positively radiant now. Even the bright Eternian sun would not outshine the spark of love.

"Where is Aszi," Entrapta asked quietly, looking at the deep purple stain on Stella's blade.

"Inside," Stella sighed, "I had to hurt her a little, but she will survive. I..."

Hordak understood. Aszi was sick. A product of hate. In so many ways, she was simply following her program, just as the Clones had.

"I will... discuss her fate with Prince Zed," Hordak decided.

"Prince?" Stella questioned, "I thought he was tossed aside?"

Hordak met Stella's gaze, the tiniest glint in his eye as he fished out Primes personal data pad, and held up a rankings list. At the very top was Zed, once more, listed as the Emperors heir.

"Oh my. It appears the Emperor accidentally changed his legal heir at the last possible second just before he died," Hordak deadpanned, "what. A. Twist."

The tiniest smirk found his lips, Entrapta smiled, stella grinned, and soon, the trio was laughing together once more as a new day rose high over the universe.
Adora had never had a family. Not really. Not entirely. She had a team. She had friends. But the Frightzone, while home, was not comfort. Was not love.

Comfort, home. Love. Growing up, these things had been secondary to survival, strength, obedience. Hordak had not valued comfort, love.

Ironic now that he was here with her, comforting her as she fought with herself.

"My... Mother offered me a place here," she explained, pacing around the castle courtyard.

"Indeed? That sounds... nice?" Hordak reluctantly offered, leaning heavily against the tree. Just over his left shoulder, the initials of two lovers hung clear as day in the crisp 'first ones' writing.

"Doesn't it?" She crossed her arms, moving to lean against the same tree next to him. She was frowning.

"...You sound unsure," he observed, "is it Catra?"

"No. She said Catra could stay-"

"Good," Hordak nodded, "if she's here, she can't bother me."

Adora laughed at that.

"But," she continued, "i mean... i don't know anything about this place. I don't know them. Like, i met Adam. Kinda? But it was at King Randors burial, so it was awkward."

"I can see how that might be uncomfortable," Hordak agreed, "'I'm your twin sister you never knew about, anyway, sorry for your loss.'"

"It goes deeper than that," she sighed, looking up at the carving. "I let him in. I moved the planet. If I hadn't done that... look, I'm just saying, maybe the prophecy was right. I did cause my fathers death after all."

Hordak thought about it for a moment, then shook his head.

"No," he decided, "he caused his own death. The only thing you are guilty of, is caring. It is not a crime to love, Adora."

Almost immediately she burst out laughing. How could she help it? That was Hordak, after all. Giving advice? Talking about love?

"Did i... say something funny?" He blinked.

"Sorry! Sorry!" Adora wiped a tear from her eye, looking at him. "I just kinda realized how tempted I was to call you 'Dad' just now."

Hordak looked stunned, crossed his arms and looked away. Adora wasnt certain, but she could have sworn she saw his ears go dark at the tips.

"I don't mind," he murmured, "if it helps."
Adora smiled and before he could protest, she wrapped her arms around his midsection and gave him a squeeze. Hordak stood, too stunned to move.

"Thanks Dad. I think I know what I'm going to do now."

Slowly, Hordak smiled and placed his hands on her back in a very slight embrace.

---------

Entrapta stood just outside the portal holding her daughter. On the other side awaited Etheria, her world, the only world she had ever known.

But now, well, it was so different now. Before Etheria had been all there was, all there would and could be. But She Ra brought back the stars, opened the door to Eternia. And now Entrapta suddenly had a billion options. The Universe was endless and it felt... well, wrong to simply stay and watch while there was so much to uncover.

She studied the portal now, debating. They had so many options, but so many plans. Every time she thought about traveling the stars, she went back to Hordak's wish to visit the beach.

"Well..." she mumbled, "there's no reason we can't do both."

Life could be very long on Eternia. Why couldn't they do it all? If she could uncover the secrets to Eternias long life... The possibilities were truly endless.

And Entrapta found it thrilling.

--------

Home. Scorpia had said to meet her at "Home". Of course Stella understood. How could she not? Home was where ever Scorpia was and Scorpia had expressed a desire to go back to the Frightzone and restore her Kingdom.

At least Stella was able to remember that much. Some of her memories were a little fuzzy, but Entrapta had been able to deactivate the chip. She'd had to sacrifice a patch of hair to do it, but it was worth it. Any chance to put the ordeal behind her and allow her to just live her life again.

It had been a few days now since Prime had perished. With her brothers blessing, she had left through the portal to return to Etheria. To Scorpia.

She found her in the Garnet chamber. Getting in to see her had been simple enough. Stella had, after all, been an assassin. She made a note to improve security when she settled. Politically, Etheria was bound to be a mess for a few years at least.

It would be fine. Stella wouldn't be leaving her Princess again.

Never again.

As Stella entered the Garnet chamber, she couldn't help but smile. Her love was so alive, so vivid and
bright. Compared to her, the now glowing Garnet looked like a hunk of dull concrete.

"I love you," Stella said, causing Scorpia to jump and whirl around, "I wasn't sure you heard me back on the ship. But I was trying to say that."

"Stella..."

The clone smiled, crossing her arms a little awkwardly.

"I am sorry," she said, "for leaving. I never wanted to-"

She didn't get to finish the speech she'd prepared. In moments, she was in the arms of her Princess, feet dangling an inch from the floor, yet she felt as if she were flying.

"Stella, Stella, my Stella!" Scorpia chanted her name like a prayer, head touching her chest, resting against the metal plate over her cybernetic heart. Slowly, she pulled away slightly, confused by the hard surface of her chest. Once feet were on the floor, Stella stepped away, ears parallel with the ground.

"I... forgot a lot of things," she explained, "my memories are a mess. And my body is... I am not beautiful, Scorpia. I fear you may find me monstrous now."

Scorpia shook her head, watching her lover unclasp the fastenings of her top and slide it down over her bone-white shoulders to reveal the extent of the damage.

The sight did not cause the revulsion Stella had expected, although it did make Scorpias eyes widen. The tips of Stella's ears burned with shame and she looked away.

But Scorpia could not. To have her loves flesh bared for her so completely, flawed though it may be, was more than The Princess would have wished for. Even as they shared a bed, no clothing had been removed. At most, Scorpia would occasionally catch a glimpse of a collar bone, but her love had no urges for sexual intimacy. Of course Scorpia could live with no sexual activity. Didn't mean her desires weren't still there however.

"Scorpia, I... I am sorry if it disgusts you. I will never ask you to touch me, if you don't want. And if it's too much, I understand..."

"Stella," she placed a claw over the hard metal plate protecting her cybernetics, "you have a beautiful heart."

The clone went still for a long moment, then she let out a shaky breath. With one hand, she touched her claw then brought it up to her lips.

"You say you don't remember some things, right?"
Stella nodded, shakily.
"Do you remember our first kiss?"
Stella shook her head, looking sad.

"Not the specifics," she sighed, "I remember it was outside though."

"Do you think your memories might come back with time?" Scorpia asked.

"Entrapta says she thinks so. Maybe some day," Stella squeezed her claw, looking her dead in the eye, "I may not remember specifics, but I remembered you. I remembered loving you. It helped to bring me back."
"Then," Scorpia said, stepping closer, "do you remember what I asked you under the stars?"

"I... think so," Stella shyly replied, "but perhaps you would remind me?"

Scorpia leaned in against her ear, quietly requesting forever. 
In reply, Stella guided her claw back to her mechanical little heart once more.
"Not even death itself could make me stop loving you. I am yours. Eternally."

----------

Aszi should have given up years ago. Why did she not? Her job as a surgeon had been fulfilling enough and she had been skilled. If she had not gotten involved, maybe Nazeim would still be...

No. No maybe about it. She had gotten him killed.

For days after learning of her Brothers death Aszi had wept. She never thought she would weep over him, but he had been her twin. Her dearest friend from the womb. Without a mother to raise and love them, they had cared for each other.

And she had gotten him killed for her own selfish ideas.

Aszi was now entirely ready to die when Zed approached her cell on Fathers now repaired flagship.

-Is it execution time already?- she purred, -I did not expect you to be the one to do it yourself.-
-Aszi. For your crimes, I, Emperor Zed... sentence you to service on Eternia.-

Aszi had been prepared for death, but Mercy? Somehow that hurt. She blinked, narrowed her eyes. Was it a trick?

No. This was Zed. He was too honest.

-Explain.-

-Our people need a guide. One of their own. One who understands the religion and can preform the duties necessary. One who can... create a God with science."

Aszi looked up, stunned. Create a God. Yes. She knew the genetic formula. She could continue the old ways. Things were changing on Eternia. A new age was upon them. Soon King Adam would rise, soon her people would have a home once more.

Soon, the vision of an Emperor would be realized If not entirely as pictured.

-What will you do?- Aszi asked.

-I will... bring my Mothers body home to her people. She deserves to be buried there with full ceremony. After that... Father left the Universe a mess. I suppose as Emperor it is my duty to clean it
up.-

-I... see. So you leave me to serve Eternity,- she realized, -while you serve the Universe.-

-We have a lot to put back, Aszi. Can I trust you?- 

-No,- she answered simply, -but I don’t trust me either. And I will serve my people. You can trust that much.- 

-it is all I can ask. Besides... Princess Stella is instructed to kill you without hesitation if you step out of line.-

-Of course, I...- Aszi blinked, -Princess?- 

-Yes. What else would you call the wife of Princess Scorpia?-
Eternian Log, Day 1

Chapter Summary

Last Chapter!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There were so many reasons to celebrate. The end of a decades long war, death of a tyrant, the new peace treaty, the coronation of a new King, the return of Angella, now retired and living peacefully with her husband in the countryside.

But for Hordak and Entrapta, they were simply celebrating life, unity, love. The wedding of Scorpia and Stella had been meant to be a private affair, small, discrete. Of course, nothing involving Scorpia was ever discrete, so naturally when the time came, not only did the entire Princess Alliance come, but so did the rest of their friends and family.

Angella, not to be forgotten as a once great monarch and party planner, organized a great ball to take place in the Frightzone. Despite the challenge of using such an industrial setting for a formal event, Angella had gone above and beyond, transforming the central command center into a formal ball room.

"With the right drapery, brass can look like gold," she had had said when asked how she did it. She did not also add that she had used her influence to have decorations from Bright moon brought in to help.

Regardless, once she had finished her work, the command center was perfect for a celebration.

Hordak stood in the middle of it all, admiring the change. Had he known what this place could become, he might have tried to decorate sooner, now that he had developed... what did Queen Glimmer call it? Taste? Style?

"Looking good, Lor- I mean, Hordak, sir."

Kyle, dressed to impress, carried baby Celeste in a sling. With Hordaks invitation to live with them at Dryl. He had taken the role of "big brother" very seriously. It... helped. It gave him something to occupy his mind, gave him something to live for. He truly did seem to love the children. And Hordak had grown to love the boy as well. He was family now and forever.

"Thank you," he seemed to hesitate then asked, "you don't think it's too much?"

Kyle looked him up and down and seemed to think on it. He wore a black evening gown with some sort of red capelet. Entrapta had called it 'dramatic.'
Hordak certainly felt dramatic.

"I like it. It's a celebration," Kyle said, "I think its supposed to be 'too much'."

Hordak accepted that answer. Besides. Entrapta had dressed in a tuxedo. He was allowed a little drama after what they'd been through.
"If Celeste is asleep, you may return her to the nanny-"

"No. Give her to me."

Both Hordak and Kyle turned to the commanding voice of Angella. Micah stood next to her, waving.

"Your Majesty-?" Hordak began to ask why and she simply held her hands out expectantly.

"Give me the baby. Have you any idea how long it has been since I've cuddled a babe?"

Kyle looked to Hordak, who was now grinning. With a nod of permission given, Kyle passed the baby over to the former Queen of Brightmoon. He watched as the woman took the child in her arms and rested her head softly against Celestes tiny chubby cheek.

"Oh. Remember when Glimmer was this small?" She asked her husband, walking away.

Hordak chuckled at the absurdity of it all, looking around at those gathered. From the corner of his eye, he spotted Bow deep in conversation with Entrapta while he held a squirming baby Dawn. His birthday was next week, and once this was done, Entrapta and Hordak would be visiting the beach, just as they had planned, and celebrating his birthday there.

Someone handed him a drink. To his surprise, it was Mermista.

"I was unaware that you were of drinking age," he mused.

"Two weeks ago," she informed him, "not that anyone cared. With, like, the world ending and all."

Hordak frowned. In truth, he had never celebrated a birthday. Not that he was ever actually "born". Hatchday? Well, regardless, he supposed it would have been sometime at the end of August. Perhaps he should pick a day, start celebrating. Another year lived. It seemed... important now.

"Happy birthday, Mermista," he said, "I shall provide a gift later."

"...Um. That's weird. But thanks." She crossed her arms, but she was smiling, "I'll have a party next year. I'll, like, actually invite you guys. Just be cool, okay?"

Hordak nodded solemnly, but snorted with a little laugh when she walked away. He took a sip of the drink Memista had handed him and walked, pausing when he heard raised voices on the balcony.

"I just-" Glimmers voice sputtered, "I just don't see why you can't stay a little longer."

"Your Majesty, I have duties to see to. Entire planets to free. My Father died, but the Horde is still operating at full capacity. I have to at least attempt to set things right." The voice of Emperor Zed sounded... pained. "I will... likely not see you again."

"So that's it? It's just goodbye? You barge in, become my friend and just..."

Hordak didn't want to hear anyone. The sound of crying was enough. But as he turned to walk away, the next words gave him pause.

"I will always be your friend, Glimmer. No matter where I go," Zed promised, "you, Uncle, Auntie Entrapta... all of you have shown me more love than I ever thought I deserved. I... want you to understand how important that is. I do truly love you."

Hordak winced as he listened to the feisty Brightmoon Queen punch his nephew.
"You can't just say that!" She snapped, "it, just-

She was cut off by something and Hordak did not stick around to find out what had silenced her so abruptly. It was none of his business.

From the corner of his eye, he caught Adora laughing with Perfuma and Frosta, along with a young blonde man that he had not seen before. King Adam, he assumed. He and Adora could not look more similar.

Adora met his eye and smiled, giving him a little wave before going back to talking. From the corner, Catra watched. Hordak waved at her as well. At this point, Catra was a constant in Adora's life, no matter what. As the resident 'father figure', it was his job to be supportive, if a little disapproving.

He drained his glass by the time Entrapta arrived with another glass for him. She stood next to him, wrapping a tendril of hair around his arm, smiling as she raised her fizzy beverage to her lips.

"Nearly time now," she commented.

"Yes. Stella and Scorpia should be down soon."

"Oh. Yes. Well, that too." She reasoned, "but I meant nearly time to go home. For good. Where ever home ends up being."

Hordak nodded at that. Yes. He had weighed the possibilities as well, but with Adora electing to remain She Ra on Etheria, but also getting the new King Adam to agree to leave the portal open for free passage to and from Eternia, they could honestly do it all if they wanted.

"Entrapta, Home is where ever you are," he answered after a pause.

She opened her mouth to say some more, but at that time, Stella and Scorpia made their appearance at last.

Dressed in a deep black gown, Scorpia was a vision. But it was her bride that stole the show for Hordak. Stella was like an angel in white. She floated down the stairs, arm in arm with her new wife.

"I want to be happy like this forever, Entrapta," he said suddenly, realizing that's what he was. Happy.

She propped herself up to give him a sweet kiss on the cheek.

"You will be," she promised, "We're all one big happy family."

And Hordak, to his endless surprise, agreed.

"Family... Yes."

-----

The sand. Hordak couldn't help but think of the stars when he thought of sand. Billions of grains, stretching out in all directions, glittering and white. Slowly, he reached down with a clawed hand, letting the dust sift through his fingers.

His gaze followed the shore line, breathlessly taking it all in. This had been all he wanted, all this
It was..
Joyful.

"Hordak!" Entrapta came bounding towards him, holding a data pad in one hand. Hordak smiled up at her under the parasol he was sitting under.

"Entrapta."

Dawn attempted to lift a handful of sand to his mouth and Hordak helpfully brushed it away from his grasp.

"I've been studying the composition of this beach!" She explained, shoving her data pad in front of his face, "you'll never guess what I found!"

Hordak bit back a sigh, smiling. They were supposed to be on vacation. Well, this was just part of her charm. Always so enthusiastic about her studies.

"The sand here is...

She went on about the composition of the sand, the chemical structures if the grains, the life she'd discovered. As always, Hordak listened with interest, hanging on her every syllable.

"So a bit different than Etheria," he noted, "did you secure a sample already to take back to the lab?"

A piece of hair held up a test tube of sand and another of water. Hordak nodded.

"Perfect. Now lay with me. Eternia isn't going anywhere."

She did as asked, laying her head against his shoulder as she wrapped her arms around him.

"I love you, Lab Partner," she murmured. Watching Kyle run by with Dawn giggling on his shoulders.

"I love you too," he murmured, "...Life Partner."

His wife kissed his cheek and he knew that for the rest of his life, be it ten years, a hundred, or an Eternity, he would always treasure the memory of today.

"Entrapta, how long do we plan to stay here?"

In answer, Entrapta held up her recorder with a smirk.

"Eternian Log, Day 1."

Chapter End Notes

Alright! That's all folks! Thanks for sticking with it! 90 chapters long. I'm absolutely blown away by the response this got!
I may add little side stories later, but for now, this little story is at its end.

If you've been with it from the start, thanks so much for going on this little adventure with me. If you're just now tuning in, thanks so much for taking the time to read!

I had a blast writing this.

Thanks again! <3

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