Blood Pride
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Blood Pride
by HowlingArmadillo

Summary

When Karkat Vantas decides to flee the Alternian Empire, he finds his friends more than willing to escape with him. But their flight goes horribly wrong when they crash land on Earth. Now, with government agent Scratch and his agency the Felt on their tails, a group of twelve trolls must now flee their pursuers, find safe haven on a foreign planet, gather their friends together, and somehow find their way off of the planet, before it tears them apart for good.

Notes
Attention all readers! Yes, that means you! It has been two months since I finished this story at the time of my posting this note. I am still seeing kudos getting dropped even now, and let me just say that's fucking awesome. Seriously, thanks to whoever out there is still finding their way to this story and taking the time to check it out.

That said, while I keep getting kudos I haven't seen a comment since the week I posted chapter 55. Not so awesome. Now as I understand it there is some nasty fucking rumor trickling around that people don't want to hear feedback on stories they've already finished. Let me tell you right now that's complete bullshit. So since this story somehow achieved a notable level of popularity, and my view count is still slowly rising, I'm going to say this here.

Tell me what you love.

Tell me what you hate.

I will never stop welcoming feedback because your opinions don't stop being valid just because the story is finished. I wrote this story for one reason: to help teach myself how to be a better writer. This will be abundantly clear if you stick with this story, the difference in quality between my early chapters and my later ones is pretty enormous. This is for you to enjoy and it's for me to grow, and if people are still enjoying that means there's still things I can learn from it. I want to know what parts thrilled you, and what parts disappointed you. I want to know what worked and what didn't. I want to take everything you have to say, and apply it to everything I have to write, until the result is something infinitely better than what I could have ever reached on my own. And in return, the next thing I write will be that much better for you.

So with that said, please, enjoy Blood Pride. I wrote it for you all as much as myself. And when the time comes that you find yourself wanting to say something about it, don't hold back. I promise I'll be watching, no matter how long it takes for you to find this story.
Mutant

Chapter Summary

A dangerous encounter with an Alternian scout sends Karkat and his friends into a state of emergency, as they find themselves falling towards an unknown planet.

Your name is Karkat Vantas. And you have completely, totally, and irredeemably fucked up. You sit at the bridge of a small vessel, hurtling towards a planet you’ve never seen or heard of. Your friend was piloting the ship, but due to an unexpected incident with an imperial scouterrorizer ship, your consoles have leaked mind honey all over the bridge. Including into your pilot’s mouth. And as Sollux Captor has often stated: “YOU MUST NEVER EAT THE MIND HONEY!”

In other words, things have gone completely to shit. Eridan Ampora has messaged you to report the propulsion systems are on fire. Gamzee Makara and Tavros Nitram are in the kitchen, where everything is reportedly “upside down and backwards and all over the mother fucking place.” Nepeta Leijon is sitting at navigation staring at the ground growing closer and hissing, which is almost as unhelpful as Equius Zahaak, who has decided to abandon all repair work to protect his moirail. Terezi Pyrope on the other hand is just standing at the front of the forward visual opening cackling like the crazed maniac she is. Feferi Peixes and Kanaya Maryam are at least staying out of the way and quiet as can be expected, but they aren’t remotely qualified to help under the circumstances. Vriska Serket has been ranting about mutiny, and pirates, and jumping overboard, but that doesn’t mean much since your ship has no escape pods.

Aradia Megido and Sollux Captor are the only people on your ship who are doing anything to help, trying to slow the ship before it crashes into the ground and fries them all. But it won’t last forever. You can see Sollux losing his control as the mind honey begins to take effect, and the strain this places on Aradia’s psionics is becoming increasingly evident. Once Sollux succumbs to the mind honey completely you don’t know what will happen, but you do know Aradia’s powers will be the only thing keeping you from fiery painful death.

No offense to Aradia, but you and your friends are fucking doomed.

This becomes all the more evident when your ship lands on top of a native flying transport vehicle, and Terezi vanishes from your view in a sudden burst of smoke and fire. She’s screaming now, no laughter to be heard. You find that the stream of curses you’ve been muttering under your breath for the past half an hour has graduated in volume to a raging roar.

You have no idea how long you’ve been yelling for, but the look of terror Nepeta is giving you is enough to snap you out of it. Right. You were the one who decided to make this shitty expedition in the first place. You are the Leader. It is you. Time to fucking act like it.

The smoke clears as air whips through the hole in the front of your ship, and you see Terezi is now clinging to a railing, somehow not dead despite being in the front row seat of the impact. The effect psionics are having on your descent is becoming increasingly clear as you see the vehicle you hit rapidly growing further from you.

Scanning the land far below, you see a large body of water growing larger by the second, not far from your position. “ARADIA! SOLLUX! IF WE DON’T WANT TO BE TURNED INTO
FUCKING GRUB SAUCE, WE’RE GONNA NEED TO LAND IN THAT AREA!” You gesticulate wildly, glaring at them to make sure they get the message.

Aradia nods grimly, sweat gleaming on her brow as she concentrates. “I’ll need to save my power and pull us up at the last second.” She replies, her normally cheerful face beginning to darken as her rusty blood rushes to her head. “If we just land in the water we’ll be crushed all the same.”

“FUCKING DO IT THEN!” You say with a nod. It’s a fighting chance, and you’ll take it. “SOLLUX, KEEP US STEADY, WE CAN’T LAND THIS PIECE OF SHIT IF WE’RE CAUGHT IN A SPIN!”

Sollux responds by screaming and going limp. Fuck. Your chances just dropped a great deal. You drag yourself up to the pilot’s seat, and unhook Sollux from the system. No use having a pilot at the helm if he can’t be bothered to stay conscious. You look back at the ground in a panic; you’re almost out of time and Aradia can’t lift the whole ship on her own.

You try not to lose your shit again as you rip the paneling of the helm apart and grab the manual controls. Amazingly enough, the primitive controls are actually helping, and your frantic hands are slick with sweat as you try to steer the ship towards the body of water in front of you. As unlikely as it seems, you think you are going to survive this after all.

Of course fate decides that this isn’t likely to happen. Sollux screams again and releases the full power of the mind honey. The air crackles with electricity. Your hair stands on end. To the left you see Equius grab Nepeta and drag them both low to the floor, as if that would help against such powerful psionics. You brace yourself as Sollux’s entire body begins to spark, and decides that vaporization is not a terrible way to die. But the twin blasts of blue and red energy don’t fly at you. They don’t fly at Equius and Nepeta either.

They hit Aradia, unable to move for fear of losing her hold over the ship. You are left with no choice but to watch as she glances at you in terror. She doesn’t have time to scream. She just disappears in a flash. Not so much as a scrap of fabric left of her. Only her frightened gaze remains, burned into your minds eye as you scream in horror.

You have to struggle to tear your eyes back towards the front and away from the place Aradia just died. You face forward, prepared to die, now that Aradia’s psionics are no longer there to keep you on track. To your left, you note Nepeta screaming and trying to crawl towards where Aradia just was. Equius holds her back; tears streaming down his face from behind cracked sunglasses. This momentarily surprises you; you had no idea that the sweaty asshole cared about anyone lower than green on the hemospectrum.

It suddenly occurs to you that your ship has not plummeted into the ground, despite the psionics there to hold it up. Sollux is clearly not responsible, still screaming and thrashing behind you as the rest of the mind honey he ingested burns itself off in a steady crackle of sparks. It seems like the ship has finally stopped being a piece of shit.

Then the bottom of the ship hits the water, and nope, the ship is still fucking terrible. It throws you away from the controls as your speed swiftly drops from the water resistance. You fall to the ground, sliding next to Terezi, who has reverted back to insane cackling again. Crazy bitch. You scrabble for a handhold as you try to regain the air that was knocked from your lungs. And you watch in terror as the opposite shore of the body of water rushes at you.

You see a line of trees rush at you, feel something heavy hit you around the waist, and black out.
When you regain consciousness, you hear coughing and groaning as people get their bearings. You figure you can’t have been knocked out for more than a few minutes, but without being able to recognize the constellations in the sky you have no idea how to identify the time passed. There is a flickering orange glow to your right, and you realize the ship is no longer moving. It is also on fire, and you scramble to your knees and call for everyone.

To your surprise, Sollux is right next to you, though he remains unconscious. Terezi is sitting right beside him, clutching her head and groaning. A sharp hiss comes from behind you, and you turn to see Nepeta has just pulled a shard of metal from Equius’ shoulder.

“Come on Equuuus, it wasn’t that big!” She says playfully. You’re relieved to see that she at least looks unscathed. She glances over and notices your expression, smiling and waving the shard, scattering indigo drops of blood. “I am purrfectly fine, Karkitty!” She says with a grin. “Equius grabbed me furst, so I was the most well protected!”

The meaning behind her use of ‘first’ is not lost on you. “You saved us, Equius?” It feels odd, talking to him so casually, but you don’t even have the energy to be uncomfortable around him anymore.

Equius looks over at you and allows himself a slight smirk. “With so many low bloods at the bridge, I knew that the only way you feeble wrigglers would survive is if somebody STRONG like myself intervened to protect you. Consider yourselves lucky.”

You’re about to unleash the most scathing retort your limited energy can come up with, when Terezi suddenly perks up and finally speaks for the first time since before your encounter with the enemy vessel. “Somebody’s coming.”

You turn to see Feferi and Eridan clamber onto the bridge, both singed, but still very much alive. A small part of you feels satisfaction when you notice that Eridan’s cape has been completely burned off. You choose to remain silent however.

“Oh thank cod you’re all alive!” Feferi cries out with a grin as she sees you all assembled. “Kanaya is bringing Vriska out, but I bereef she should be here shortly.”

“Holy fuck Feferi, this is not the time for fish puns.” You groan as she just sticks her tongue out at you and let’s out a glub in defiance, but thankfully becomes quiet.

Eridan on the other hand is acting as haughty and imperious as ever, despite his stutter. “What the fuck was that, Karkat?” He snarls, “What happened up here? This glubbing ship is never going to get off the ground after that crash! The fuck was our pilot doing?”

“Don’t even fucking start with me, Ampora.” Sollux mutters, as he lays on the ground unmoving. You definitely don’t shriek in surprise that he is now conscious. That is totally not a thing that happens.

“Indeed, I do not feel like auspisticizing between the two of you right now.” A voice rings out, and you turn to see Kanaya gracefully stride onto the bridge, holding a bleeding Vriska in her arms and somehow not getting cerulean anywhere on her clothes.

“Yeah right, Kanaya. We aaaaaaall know you always feel like getting conciliatory.” Vriska drawls from Kanaya’s arms. Closer inspection reveals that both Vriska’s left eye and arm are now missing, but with how she’s going on, you figure the homicidal bitch will be fine without your worrying.
You turn to face the back again as the last two trolls enter. Gamzee is notably distraught, which you note is unusual for him. He usually doesn’t give much of a damn about anything but getting his slime pies. Then you notice Tavros is draped over his shoulder and understand.

“Yo Karbro, Tavbro here got hit right in the back by the motherfucking table, and now he won’t wake up.” You stumble over in worry, but are relieved to find he’s still breathing steadily.

“It should be fucking fine Gamzee, just wait for him to snap out of it.” You say with a small smile. It’s not much, but it still reassures Gamzee enough to calm him down a bit, and he lays Tavros carefully next to Sollux. Then he straightens up and looks around.

“So, where the motherfuck is Aradisis?” he says in confusion as he tries to focus enough to count heads. You see Nepeta stiffen up, almost twisting as she pulls another piece of shrapnel from Equius’ back. Equius noticeably slumps as everyone looks around in confusion.

Sollux sits up at that, his lisp grating on your ears as he cries out in shock. “What? She isn’t here? What the fuck happened Karkat?”

You try to put it into words, but find yourself unable to describe the morbid scene from before. Finally, you settle for staring at Sollux sadly, and saying “You must never eat the mind honey.”

Sollux reels at this, and the group begins to cry out in alarm and distress, but they fall silent when Terezi jumps to her feet and cries out: “They’re here!”

It’s only as a noisy flying scouting vehicle shines a spotlight into the hole in the bridge that you realize how sticky you hair feels. There is a stunned gasp from behind you, and you turn to face Feferi, a sinking feeling in your gut. She’s staring at your now fully illuminated face in shock. You run a hand over your face and pull it away, staring at it in horror. It’s a sticky, candy colored red.

Eridan jumps back. Vriska recoils, but finds herself unable to move, as Kanaya has simply frozen in surprise. Gamzee and Nepeta merely look confused. Equius looks outraged.

But it’s Terezi’s reaction that really hits you, because she doesn’t react much at all. She simply cocks her head and asks everyone: “What’s going on? What happened? It’s too dark here, I can’t see a thing!”

All eyes follow yours to Terezi’s face, and you recoil in horror at the sight of her face. Her eyes have been scorched bright red from the crash, her eyes peppered with shards of glass. Teal blood is dripping from her face. She notes the silence as everyone takes in your blood and her blindness, and says in understanding “it’s not dark in here at all. Well that’s hardly fair.”

“Hey, Karkitty, why does your blood look like that?” Nepeta’s voice startles you, and you turn to see she’s crept up next to you while you were distracted by Terezi. Right. Your freak blood color was just outed to everyone. That still needs dealing with.

Equius seems to agree. He seems as surprised at Nepeta’s sneaking about as you are, and he swiftly, but gently grabs her by the collar and hauls her away. He looks over at you, and the expression on his face terrifies you. His glasses have been lost in the confusion. His one unbroken horn has been lowered to face you, and his face displays just cold, unfeeling, emptiness. You know Equius to be rigidly devoted to the hemospectrum, and his face displays all of the apathy one would expect towards something that isn’t meant to exist. He could kill you right now quite easily. All he’d have to do is run at you and you’d be dead before you could say strongjump.

A canister lands in the middle of your group before he can enact alternian law, however. Everyone
stares at it for a brief second, trying to identify it. The canister explodes in a cloud of gas before anybody has time to react. One by one your group drops to the ground, unconscious. The last one you see fall is Equius, who still tries to stagger towards you.

“This is all your doing, mutant.” He spits out as he wobbles towards you. “I will see you pay for this. If not for you, Nepeta would never…” He fails to finish his statement, collapsing to the ground beside you.

The last thing that goes through your head before you finally succumb to the gas is that Equius is completely and totally right.
Under Protection

Chapter Summary

The trolls wake up from the crash, and attempt to figure out what their situation is.

Chapter Notes

A big thank you to everyone who left comments or kudos for the first chapter of this story! It means a lot to me that you all were so receptive to the opening, and it made me that much more excited to continue this in favor of my OC story. So remember to show your appreciation if you like this chapter, because the more positive vibes I received, the more obligated I feel to return the favor!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your name is Nepeta Leijon, and you’re still trying to figure out exactly what happened. You are sitting in a white room with all of your friends, but you have no idea how you got here. You’ve only just woken up, and the room seems to be in complete chaos.

To your relief, most of your friends have woken up already, and there is a bed in the room for each of them. Tavros is still asleep on his, Gamzee at his side, and Terezi has yet to leave hers for some odd reason. Sollux and Karkat are sitting in opposite corners and trying not to look at anyone.

The rest of your friends are in the middle of the room arguing, and you are distressed to see Equius is very upset. He’s arguing with Feferi in his lowest, scariest voice, and you know that’s a terrible sign because if Equius is arguing with somebody as high on the hemospectrum as Feferi he must be terribly upset!

As much as you think your moirail is in need of a good shooshpapping, you don’t think you should just jump into such a heated argument. Instead, you decide to sneak over to Terezi’s side and get the details from her.

“Terezi, what’s going on? Why is efurrybody so upset?” You whisper as you reach her side. Terezi twitches as she turns towards you, letting you see her bright red eyes. Of course, she hasn’t left her bed because she is blind and can’t get around anymore! You immediately feel awful for forgetting such a terrible thing happened to one of your friends.

“Equius is angry at Karkat and Sollux for crashing the ship,” Terezi replies, thankfully unable to see your facial expression. Her face is surprisingly somber, on the other hand. This worries you, because the Terezi you know would normally have a scary laugh ready for any situation! But you can’t ask about this now because Terezi hasn’t finished explaining things to you. “Equius wants to see justice for what happened to everyone, and while I do love justice, I can’t help but feel your moirail is blaming the wrong people for this one. I’d say he should persecute the ship that attacked us, but Aradia crushed it before we started to crash…”

The two of you look back to the others, as you sadly remember Aradia’s no longer with you. She’s
been your friend forever, and you’re crushed that she didn’t make it. You look back towards Sollux, and remember how he killed her by mistake. From the looks of things he probably remembers too. And you know from how upset Equius is that he definitely is thinking it as well.

Eridan and Vriska seem more upset about what happened to them, but they’re backing Equius up, which is likely why he hasn’t submitted himself to Feferi’s higher hemocaste. He’s clearly angry, but also very nervous to be arguing with a fuchsia-blood. He’s sweating bullets, and while you don’t like to think about Equius’ particularly odd fetish, you know he’s likely getting off on this at some level.

You decide that while you don’t know when the argument started, it’s gone on long enough. You march up to the group and make sure you’re looking as determined as possible.

Vriska is the first to notice you, and when she turns to face you, you notice her face and missing arm are wrapped in cerulean stained bandages. She rolls her good eye when she sees you approaching. “Weeeeeeeell now, looks like the cat girl is awake. Fun’s over.” You stick your tongue out at her as you walk by. You don’t care how injured she is; nobody messes with your moirail but you!

You push Eridan aside as you walk up to Equius, and note with some satisfaction that you’ve sent him sprawling. Serves him right, making such a big fuss over his cape and his stupid gun. You don’t have the time for him right now, so you ignore his protests as he straightens himself out.

As you reach Equius, you see Kanaya has been attempting to auspisticize between him and Feferi, but it seems beyond her at the moment. While she still manages to look the picture of grace and elegance, her head has been bandaged enough that she clearly suffered some injury in the crash she kept hidden. She sends you a grateful look as you march up to Equius and drag him off by the arm. You send one back to her. She’s probably the main reason Equius and Feferi didn’t try to kill each other. You know Vriska was probably rooting for that, at least.

As soon as the two of you are apart from the others, Equius takes you by the shoulders and turns you to face him. He leans in closely and starts looking you over carefully. You always appreciate how protective he can be, even when he’s overbearing, but right now is not the time.

“Equius, why were you fighting with Fefurry?” you ask him with your eyes narrowed to slits. You shrug off his probing hands and jab him in the chest with your finger, which he likely doesn’t even feel. Stupid muscles. “You’ve never argued like that with a highblood other than Eridan!”

“Hush Nepeta, I must ensure your time spent unconscious has not led to permanent damage.” He raises his hands to check you over again, but you’re close enough that you can see his eyes dart to the side, even behind his shades.

“Don’t you change the subject with me!” You snap at him, and he withdrew his hands in a hurry. You glare up at him, undaunted by his large size, as he fidgets and sweats.

It takes several minutes before he can speak again. “I am of the opinion that the mutant and the mustard blood should be held accountable for their failure. Their mistakes as our pilot and—” he visibly shudders as he says the next part, “as our leader. Lady Peixes disagrees with my opinion that the mutant should be culled for his blatant defiance of the hemospectrum. As well as my opinion that a pilot who failed to fly a ship should be held responsible.” He’s visibly shaking at this point, and you see a tooth chip as he clenches his jaw.

“Equius, shoosh.” You say sternly, papping him softly as he trembles with anger. “There was nothing that could be done about the crash. That scouterrorizer came out of nowhere, and I was the one who was supposed to watch our surroundings for attackers.”
Regardless, the mustard blood failed to keep the ship aloft, and succumbed to foreign substances. And the mutant-

“Do NOT call Karkitty a mutant!” You snap. Instantly you realize you’ve made a mistake. At your outburst Equius has straightened out, regained his composure. You lost your cool, acted like a wriggler, and put Equius back in control. You’d start swearing if your moirail wasn’t so prudish.

“Nepeta, I call Vantas a mutant because that is exactly what he is. His blood has no place on the hemospectrum, meaning that he has no place in troll society. He is an unnatural entity, one who should not exist. And because he knew this, he sought to flee the Alternian Empire. The best option for him.”

He leans down, face to face with you, as he continues. There is a cold fury radiating from him, and it frightens you. “However, he chose to drag his friends down with him. He convinced you to follow on this excruciatingly foolish endeavor, despite my advice to the contrary. And so I followed, to protect you from his selfish mission. Because you are emotionally compromised.” He straightens out again, looking relieved to have gotten that off of his chest.

You are trembling with rage at this point. You know Equius has been aware of your feelings for years. You told him yourself; he’s your moirail after all. But while he’s always disapproved of your flush crush, he’s never used it against you like this. You hesitate for a few moments, working up your courage, and finally manage to squeak out a rebuttal. “So are you.”

He flinches at this, and you can tell you’ve hit home. Still, he continues to try to maintain his lead. “Excuse me, Nepeta, but I must say that thought is absolutely ludicrous.”

“Is it though? You say my feelings for Karkat are impairing my judgment, but what about you? I know how much you cared for her!”

Equius slumps at this. The two of you stand face to face in the corner, staring at the floor. You note the others have been pointedly trying not to pay attention to your conversation, but from the glances Feferi and Kanaya give from time to time you know they’ve been listening at least a little bit. Vriska doesn’t even pretend not to snoop, she just rolls her eyes as the room goes silent and calls out, “Awkwaaaaaaaard.” You pointedly ignore her, though you feel vindicated when Kanaya silences her with a furious glare.

Equius begins to speak again, and you snap to attention. His voice is faltering, and you pretend not to notice the tears running down his face. “I can’t forgive them. If not for them, she wouldn’t have perished.” He looks up at this, and smiles, though only slightly. “She was so beautiful. Even in death she was the picture of grace.”

You raise a hand to his face gently, “It’s hard to see somebody you love get hurt,” You say, softly. He raises his own arm and lets it hover next to your face. You smile at him, and then press your cheek against his hand and purr. You feel something click back into place, and suddenly you and Equius can understand each other again. You can tell he also feels this, because he is smiling back at you, the first genuine smile you’ve seen out of him in a while.

“I have been acting foolishly, haven’t I? Equius says sheepishly.

You grin at him. “Only mostly!”

Equius gives a resigned sigh, but you can tell at this point it’s mostly for show. He’s calmed down completely now. He rolls his shoulders and turns back to face the rest of the room. “Very well then. I shall explain myself, and set things right. You have my thanks, Nepeta.”
You’re happy to see your moirail is feeling better, but you’re not yet entirely convinced. “So you’re not going to pounce on Karkitty or Catpurr?” You hear snickering and glance over to see Feferi trying not to laugh at your puns.

Equius looks stern again. “I shall make no such promises. Vantas and Captor have caused our crash with their negligence, and execution remains the most fitting punishment. However, I shall at least promise to stay my hand until a more appropriate time.” His face is resolute, but you can tell he’s still feeling better because he didn’t call Karkat a mutant this time. You feel confident that he’ll be fine to rejoin the group now.

Equius heads straight for Feferi, standing in front of her and giving a stiff bow before speaking. “I apologize for my lewd behavior Lady Peixes. I allowed my emotions to get the better of me, and behaved rashly in a crisis situation as a result, attempting to split our group and inflict punishment against the will of a superior. I am willing to accept any punishment for my inexcusable behavior.”

Feferi is still looking up at Equius despite his head being bowed, but she’s doing her best to look serious. She raises her head and puffs out her chest, acting every bit the imperial heiress she is meant to be… until she looks over at you and winks. You snigger, as Equius stays rigid, his gaze fixed on the floor.

“Whale it’s about glubbing time!” Feferi says with a grin. “Your sentence for attempting to krill our friends shall be… to cull them!”

Equius stands up straight immediately, a look of utter bafflement on his face. You grin, knowing Feferi’s unique definition for culling. “You wish for me… to cull them?”

“Yes! You shell look after the wounded and make sure they’re back to perchfect health! And until you do, I shell not forgive you!”

Equius is losing his composure more and more by the second. “Lady Peixes excuse me, but that is hardly the proper definition of culling. It traditionally a term used for killing the weak and defective trolls.”

Feferi stomps her foot and jabs a finger up at Equius’ face. “To shell with that! If I say culling means caring for the injured, then it means caring for the injured!”

Equius stiffens yet again, clearly dealing with a great deal of emotional turmoil. He fidgets and shuffles his feet for several tense seconds, before sighing and slouching over in defeat. “As you wish, my lady.”

“Stop calling me that.”

“Yes ma’am.” He walks away grumpily.

You give Feferi a beaming grin and rush over to hug her. “Fefurry, that was purrfect!”

Feferi looks relieved, “I’m really glad you think so! I wasn’t sure how he’d take that.”

You step back and reassure her. “Don’t worry, Equius loves fussing over people, it makes him feel useful.”

“Indeed.” Kanaya glides over with a smile. “I’m sure that we’re in good hands with Equius… as long as he doesn’t close them.” You gasp in mock anger and playfully swat at Kanaya’s arm, and she gives you a knowing smile.
“Excuse me, I do hope I’m not interrupting anything.” A voice rings out from behind you, and the room goes still. Everyone turns slowly to face the source of the voice, with the exception of Sollux, still hiding in his corner, and Gamzee, who remains frozen at Tavros’ side.

The voice comes from a man standing at a door next to Karkat, which you notice uneasily has no handle in this room. He looks like nothing you’ve ever seen before, with white skin and no hair or horns to speak of. He’s dressed in white and green, a sharp suit that you can tell he takes expert care of. At his sides several similar looking men are assembled, armed with some large guns you don’t properly recognize, dressed in green. You note with some confusion that their skin tones are all different. An indication of blood color perhaps?

You stalk closer to get a closer look, but are forced to retreat when one of the other men raises their gun at you. Equius takes note of this and lowers his head to charge, hissing angrily. But before he can launch himself at the group the man at their head raises his hand and his follower lowers the weapon.

“Now, now, is that any way to welcome our guests?” The man says smoothly, his voice low and melodious. “It would hardly be fitting for us to threaten people staying under our roof.”

“So you’re the one that locked us up then?” you are shocked to see that Karkat has gotten to his feet and is glaring daggers at the group. One of the other men jumps visibly and whirls around with his gun at the ready. But before he can take aim the suited man is at his side, and knocks him out in a single blow.

“Forgive my soldiers, they are not used to visitors off planet, and lack the composure to cope.” He gives a pleasant smile towards Karkat, who is shocked by the speed at which the man knocked out his subordinate. “To answer your question young man, you have not been locked up, but you have been taken under our protection. Or to be more specific, my protection.”

The man spins gracefully to face you and the others. “My name is Doctor Scratch, leader of the Federal Extra-terrestrial Logistics Team, or FELT, for short. A rather simplistic name, certainly, but it suits our purposes well enough.”

“Well isn’t that nice.” Terezi says with a grin, as she hops off the bed. “So explain something to me, Doctor, if that is your real name… just how is it that you are able to speak Alternian?” Karkat gapes angrily at her, and you wonder what’s going through his head to make him so furious.

“I’m not speaking Alternian at all, as a matter of fact. I am speaking a language known here as English. It would seem that by happy coincidence they sound exactly the same.” He smiles widely as he looks at Terezi. “So am I safe in assuming Alternia is the name of your planet, then?”

Karkat slaps his forehead in frustration, and Terezi grimaces as you all realize her blunder. This Doctor Scratch was clearly very perceptive.

“As to my real name, Doctor is but a title. It refers to my status as a researcher of matters from off planet. It is also a common term for health care providers.”

“Medicullers.” Eridan mutters and you nod in understanding.

“Mediculler?” Scratch repeats with a grin, “What a beautifully sinister term.”

“Terminology aside, would we be correct in assuming it was you who provided medical care to our wounded?” Kanaya asks, stepping forward with a frown. She is still on guard, sizing up Doctor Scratch and his soldiers. You look around and see Equius and Karkat are still on guard as well.
Terezi is sitting again, silently frowning at the ground after her slip-up. You can tell she’s still off balance due to her sudden blindness. Eridan has moved between Feferi and the soldiers, but is otherwise the picture of indifference. Vriska seems to be attempting to probe the group mentally. Sollux has yet to budge from his corner. And Gamzee has moved for the first time since you woke up. He’s just staring at the soldiers. You’re glad he’s facing away from you, because the way the soldiers are looking at him uneasily suggests that he’s intimidating enough at the moment that you don’t want to see his face.

If Doctor Scratch is intimidated by the hostile looks he doesn’t show it. His smile has gone from manic to calm once again as he faces Kanaya. “You are quite correct my dear. Our medicullers, to use your terminology, were excited at the prospect of working on an alien species. Though we found that with the obvious exception of horns, our species skeletal structure is almost identical. Fascinating, is it not?”

Feferi smiles at this and hops forward. “That is very interesting indeed, Doctor Scratch! Tell me, when you rescued us from our damaged ship, did you happen to find any of our supplies?” Her smile broadens and she stares at the group, calculating. You can understand why. Now that you know Doctor Scratch has examined your bodies while you were unconscious you feel far less motivated to trust him.

Doctor scratch sighs and shakes his head sadly. “Alas, it would appear that most of your belongings were damaged in the fall. We have salvaged all that we could, of course. If you wish, I will gladly allow you to look through everything and assess for yourself.”

“You don’t have any problem with us accessing potentially dangerous technology? What are you, stupid?” Eridan says disdainfully.

“I have secured all weapons safely away for the time being.” Doctor Scratch replies with no indication he heard the jibe. “To provide you with some of your less dangerous materials however, is only natural. You are my guests after all. And I believe you will find that as hosts go I am simply the best there is.”

One of the soldiers smirks at this, which you take note of. You do your best to size these strange people up, and are nervous to see that the soldiers all seem at ease now. They are looking over you all confidently, despite their earlier skittishness. Something about this conversation has led them to believe your group is not a threat, or that the Doctor is simply a bigger one. Either way, you may be in bigger danger than you realized.

“Well then, it is time I see to other matters now.” Doctor Scratch claps his hands and announces loudly. “I’ll give you time to discuss everything amongst yourselves. If you should need anything, just knock on the door and one of my men will assist you.” He waves his hands, and the soldiers leave in formation. He pauses as he reaches the door.

“Be gentle when you break the news to that sleeping friend of yours. He will be in for a terrible shock, I’m afraid.” Doctor Scratch chuckles as the door closes behind him with a loud boom. Your friends group up immediately.

“We are in big fucking trouble here everyone.” Karkat says angrily. “We are unarmed and locked up, and who the fuck knows what’s been done to us already!?”

“Loathe as I am to agree with a mutant, Vantas is correct.” Equius growls, “While this Doctor Scratch is clearly considered a person of character here on this planet, we do not know the true motives of this species. And our ship will not be usable after the severity of our crash.”
“Equius, I told you not to call Karkitty a mutant!” You snap.

Feferi nods in agreement. “Yeah, everyone knows the hemospectrum is a bunch of beluga anyways.”

“Shut up you two, I know I’m a fucking abomination.” Karkat says with a sigh. He rubs at his head, and you see his bandaged head is still covered with candy red blood, staining the bandages and spotting him with his strange blood color. Karkat catches you staring and smirks bitterly, “See, you think it’s weird too.” You look quickly away in shame.

“You know, as much as I love being left out, I’d appreciate it if you guys brought this conversation somewhere I can participate.” Terezi calls out sarcastically.

“Fuck you, Terezi, why should all eight of us move for your lazy ass?” Karkat snaps.

“Because I’m blind, and without a cane I can’t navigate this room properly!” Terezi replies with a grin. “Now come to me, peasants!” You scamper over ahead of everyone else and purr; with a big grin that Terezi matches. “You see, Nepeta and I can see that you guys are a bunch of jackasses, and I’m blind!”

“God fucking dammit this is going to become a thing with you, isn’t it?” Karkat sighs in resignation as the rest of your friends start to follow you.

“Tavbro, you’re awake! It’s a motherfucking miracle!” Gamzee bursts out in joy, and suddenly everyone rushes over.

The first troll to reach Tavros’ side is Equius, who seems determined to make good on his promise to look after everyone’s injuries. “Nitram, under Feferi’s orders, I am obligated to cull you.”

Tavros’ eyes bulge out of his head as he looks up at Equius in a panic, and he stammers out a protest. “I uh, don’t think that Feferi would, um, order anybody to cull anyone. She’s definitely, probably, not interested in culling anyone. So I’m going to, uh, refuse your offer to, well, cull me.”

Feferi grins as she reaches Tavros’ side. “Don’t you worry Tavros, culling means caring for sick and wounded now!”

“I’m definitely sure that is probably not true.”

“If I say it’s true then it’s true! Isn’t that right Equius?” She turns to Equius with a smirk, and he nods his head reluctantly.

“It is as Miss Peixes says, Nitram. I shall provide you…” he shudders, “medical service.” You and Feferi giggle at each other as Equius resumes looking Tavros over.

“Well I guess if that’s the case, then it’s, uh, fine then?” He looks over at Gamzee beseeчhingly, but Gamzee has become far less protective of Tavros now that he’s awake. His relief is obvious, and you know if you had access to your shipping wall you’d be cataloguing this as soon as possible!

“Do you feel anything is at all amiss?” Equius is examining Tavros’ head and neck area, and checking his horns for damage. Since his horns are so big, if one were to crack it would probably hurt a lot!

Tavros smiles uneasily as he tries to sit up. “I don’t feel any pain at all…” He frowns as he continues to shift. “I uh… wait a second.” Everyone stares as he throws the sheets off of himself, and starts prodding his legs. “My legs feel, uhh, invisible.” He blinks and looks up. “Wow, I’m sure there was
a better way to say that.”

“Yeah, it’s called being paralyzed, dumbass!” Karkat says, rolling his eyes. He freezes as he realizes what he just says. “HOLY FUCKING SHIT TAVROS, YOU’RE PARALYZED.”

“Seriously, somebody is going to have to make me a cane or something, because I feel really left out right now.”

Chapter End Notes

This ended up way longer than I originally intended. Like wow, waaaaaaay longer. That discussion between Nepeta and Equius was not meant to be that long at first, but the dynamics between the two got me inspired and I think the end result was much more touching than my original plan! I originally intended to get further in the story than this, but I figured it was better to cut this off here, since I've been worried about the content of the next chapter anyways.

If you see inconsistencies in writing or character please let me know, I try to keep track of this stuff, but I'm hardly infallible! As for the next chapter, I can't guarantee when it will come out, as my writing is based entirely on mood. If I force myself to meet a deadline I know the quality would just plummet. That being said, all the views and kudos I got last chapter did make me pretty fucking giddy, so when I shamelessly plug the whole "like, comment, subscribe," deal, know that it does make me more motivated to continue writing, so the chapters will come that much faster!
Mindfang's Descendant

Chapter Summary

Vriska decides to take matters into her own hands when disorder starts to rock the group, and goes head to head with Doctor Scratch himself.

Chapter Notes

Well it’s finally done! Apologies to everyone I kept waiting for this, I had to send my laptop in for repairs almost immediately after I posted the last chapter, and it was hard to get back into the swing of things after that. The next chapter should hopefully go much faster.

Your name is Vriska Serket, and you have a lot of irons in the fire. All of the irons, in fact! You’ve had nothing but bad luck ever since you left Alternia. You lost your vision eightfold, as well as your left arm. You ended up on a planet full of some lame species called humans, who are almost completely immune to your mind control. The leader of these humans is the biggest problem, though. He’s analyzing your every move and keeping most of the wreckage from your ship for himself. But you are far from helpless in this situation.

Really, while you’ll never admit it out loud, Equius is actually doing the most to get everyone out of here. He’s already made robotic legs for Tavros, and a robotic arm for you. But no matter how much you pester him, he still claims making a new eye for you is beyond his skill level. He’s working on Terezi’s cane right now, saying he needs to make some improvements. Said improvements seem to be squeezing a strip of metal into a blade he can hide inside of the cane, so that Terezi can use her bladekind.

Basically Equius is doing everything he can to arm your group. The only person who was able to keep their weapon was Kanaya, and that was because her chainsaw is disguised as lipstick. Terezi’s hidden blade is the first thing he’s making, but he’s also trying to determine where the other equipment is being kept. Every time he and Nepeta go out to retrieve equipment for his mechanical projects, the two return with some more details about the layout of the base.

Kanaya has been recording the information they bring back with her sewing, making a discrete map out of needlework. She sits and sews most of the day, under the guise of replacing all of their clothing that was lost in the crash. When Equius and Nepeta are done scouting, Equius will return to his workbench in the corner, where he makes adjustments to various parts for Tavros’ legs and your arm. Nepeta will prance over to Kanaya and draw out little lines for Kanaya to fill in with her needlework. When she’s not filling out the map, it’s disguised as Eridan’s new cape.

If you’re being honest with yourself, Kanaya and Equius are being very clever about this whole affair. Their planning is very discrete, and their map is well hidden. You’ve made a point of memorizing as much of it as you can already, so you can use it for your own plans.
You’ve been making your own escape strategy to use for several days now instead of Equius’. As if you’d let the sweaty asshole break you out of a cell! When Mindfang was captured by Neophyte Redglare, did she ask for help? No! She killed the Legislacerator, killed his Honorable Tyranny, and walked away from the gallows a free troll! As Mindfang’s descendant you need to live up to that legacy.

You’ve got several things going for you. Not quite eight, but enough to get you free regardless. Your mind control may not work, but you can still put humans to sleep, you’ve managed to poke at the guards outside of your room and make them nod off once or twice. You also have your metal arm, which is strong enough to do a lot of damage.

And the third, most important thing you have going for you is Terezi. The Scourage Sisters are back in action! With only one eye between the two of you you’re not as dangerous as you were back in the glory days, but together you’re still more than a match for these humans!

Terezi is sitting on your right at the moment, head tilted as she listens to the other trolls. Her senses have been steadily improving over the week you’ve been stuck in the room. And she’s applying her incredible hearing in the most devious manner possible.

“Sounds like things are getting awfully pale over there!” She sniggers, gesturing discreetly towards the corner by the door, where Karkat has taken over. You look over to see that Feferi is talking to him again.

“Such infidelity!” You cackle to Terezi. “What must Eridan be thinking?”

“Sounds like Eridan is too busy trying to black-flirt with Sollux.” She frowns and turns to face you. “I thought that you were Eridan’s kismesis?”

“Pleeeeeeease. I left that sinking ship aaaaaaaages ago.” You snort dismissively at Eridan’s terrible flirting. “Eridan couldn’t hate his way out of a paper bag.” Terezi cackles at this and sticks out her tongue.

“I taste chocolate and tinfoil on the move.” She says with a frown. “He’s going for the stairs again, isn’t he?”

You turn in your seat and see Tavros waddling along towards a set of stairs that the humans put in “for rehabilitation purposes.” You’re pretty sure they just like seeing him fall down them. “Yup, Gamzee probably talked him into it again.” Tavros reaches the first step and promptly falls on his face. “God he’s like a stair magnet or something, he can’t stay away from the things.”

Equius rushes over to Tavros and checks his legs for damage. “I have warned you about stairs, Nitram. I told you repeatedly not to walk on stairs until you’ve had time to improve your pitiful coordination. And yet it keeps happening.”

Tavros smiles sheepishly as he tries to pick himself up. “Uh, sorry Equius, I just, well, I want to walk properly again right away, so I’m pushing myself harder, um, because I’ll get better faster that way I think.”

Equius sighs and rubs his temple. “You are an exceedingly difficult troll to cull. Your behavior is ludicrous and you will cease such foolishness from now on.”

“Aww, don’t be like that, bro. Tavbro here is just trying his motherfucking hardest to get his walk on.” Gamzee says placating, helping Tavros to his feet. Equius’ demeanor changes immediately.

“Highblood, I understand Nitram’s intentions. However using the stairs is too much for day two of
therapy.” Equius is stiffening as Gamzee watches him, and yes, there’s the sweating. You wonder sometimes how he hasn’t died from dehydration by now with how much he sweats, not to mention his inability to hold a glass without breaking the damn thing.

“Those human brothers were nice enough to provide this bitching setup for Tavbro to use. It would be motherfucking rude not to make use of such a miraculous gift.”

“There is nothing miraculous about stairs.” Equius says stubbornly, staring at his feet. “Until Nitram has had more time to recover he shouldn’t use them.”

“I think, uhh, that I should keep trying, because well, we need to make sure we’re all safe and I don’t want to hold everyone back.” You swear that’s the longest you’ve ever heard Tavros speak without hesitating. It’s almost impressive; or it would be if he wasn’t being a clumsy idiot.

Equius is feeling much the same it seems, because while he was taken aback at Tavros being assertive, he seems to be getting more frustrated, and he finally snaps. “If you break your legs then you will hold us back far more, Nitram!”

“Don’t you MOTHERFUCKING talk to him like that, MOTHERFUCKER.” The room goes silent as Gamzee glares at Equius. The look in his eyes is dangerous, a far stretch away from the stupid, sopor-added dumbass you know and find distasteful. He’s slouched over a bit, horns lowered, and stance tense. He’s coiled like a spring, ready to attack, and it’s more terrifying than you care to admit.

Equius backs away nervously, as Feferi rushes over. “What the glub is happening over here?”

Gamzee raises his head and smiles lazily at Feferi. “Ain’t anything to worry your pretty head over, sis. Equius here was getting his motherfucking disrespect on towards Tavbro, so I just set him motherfucking straight. Dropped the chastise on him and he got the picture, and now everything is motherfucking miracles again.” You notice his arms are still tense, and his eye has a gleam of… something in it, something you can’t identify, but know can’t be good.

“Gamzee, when was the last time you had a pie?” Karkat’s voice startles you, as he speaks from next to Feferi. Ever since that crabby loudmouth was outed as a mutant he’s been disturbingly good at avoiding attention. Makes you wonder why he was so damn noisy beforehand. Yet another stroke of luck from this whole mess, though you do somewhat miss seeing him riled up. His monologuing can be downright hilarious.

“Well shit Karbro, it’s been a long motherfucking time.” Gamzee says with a grin. His stance is almost completely tame again, though his eyes still seem off. “Those humans couldn’t salvage much sopor, so I’ve been saving the few motherfucking pies I’ve got.”

“I think you should have one now.” Karkat says quietly.

“Well shit bro, if you think that’s for the best, then I’ll go have myself a nice pie right now.” Gamzee says with a grin, and wanders off to the shelf where he’s been keeping all of his disgusting pies.

You realize suddenly what Karkat likely knew from the moment Gamzee snapped: He’s suffering withdrawal symptoms. Gamzee may seem like a dopey idiot usually, but he’s a purple blood, and that means when he loses it you’re all in trouble. Your time limit just got a lot shorter. Gamzee goes through pies fast. And there’s no way for anyone in your group to get more sopor.

You don’t care what happens later, but right now you need to get yourself and Terezi as far away from him as possible. Everyone else in your group is either capable enough on their own, or not worth worrying over. Except for Tavros of course, but you could never get Gamzee away from him.
The two are already trying to tackle the stairs again. He’ll have to make do, because while you like Tavros, you aren’t willing to fight a homicidal juggalo highblood on his behalf. You like yourself a lot more than you like Tavros.

Terezi seems to realize your train of thought at this point, because she’s turned to you and grabbed your wrist. “Vriska, we need to wait and make sure we do this properly. If we panic and execute our plan before we’ve received our verdict it won’t end well for us.” She’s unusually serious all of a sudden, but you suppose crazy clowns must have that effect on people.

“Pleeeeeeeease, Terezi. I can handle these people with one eye closed.” You laugh as you shake her off.

Terezi will not be dissuaded though, and she shifts her hand to your shoulder instead, turning you to face her. “I’m serious, Vriska. That Scratch person is dangerous. He’s smart, he has a lot of armed goons, and he has exclusive access to all of our technology. If we underestimate him he has more than enough of an advantage to make us regret it.”

“Which is why I won’t give him the chance. He’ll be out of the picture before he knows what’s happening.”

“No, see, that would be a perfect example of underestimating him. We are the prisoners, and he is the honorable tyranny of this world. If we make our move too soon we will all hang.” You don’t think Terezi has ever looked so somber when talking about hangings before.

You aren’t really worried by her warnings though, for two reasons. The first is that you think Terezi is overestimating Scratch after her slipup at his first greeting. She was recovering from suddenly being blind at the time, so nobody really held it against her. But she is still very upset with herself for letting something slip about their home planet to a group of potentially hostile aliens with unknown military power. (Truthfully, you’re still feeling rather smug about Terezi being the first one to slip up, since she’s always acted like she’s smarter than you.)

The other reason you’re not worried about Scratch is because you can see Gamzee still has that strange look in his eye. He’s unstable already, and he hasn’t even run out of drugs yet.

You’re not the only one who’s on guard though. Karkat and Feferi have gone back to muttering in their corner, but you can see Karkat glancing at Gamzee from time to time. Equius is keeping to his desk, but you can see he’s whispering to Nepeta, and she’s not very discrete about how much Gamzee terrifies her. Eridan’s pacing back and forth in the middle of the room, and you know he wants to put himself between Gamzee, and Feferi and Sollux (Not that he should bother because he’s got no chance with either of them). Though they’re in opposite corners so he has to make do. Last but certainly not least is Kanaya, who has set her lipstick on the table beside her.

They can all sense that Gamzee is slipping. The look in his eyes is dulled by sopor, but beneath the haze of failure emanating from the sick clown you can tell he’s getting ready to explode. When the sopor runs dry he’ll probably try to kill all of you, and you’re not sure he can be stopped. Kanaya is dangerous, and armed, but Gamzee is stronger and faster. And the only other one in you group who could feasibly fight him is a hemocaste worshipping loser.

Your best bet is to abscond while you still can. And you know exactly how to do that. You brush Terezi’s hand from your shoulder and place a hand on her face. “Shoosh Terezi, I can handle these pathetic humans. Just trust me.”

Terezi freezes. “Vriska… did you just… shooshpap me?”
Your mind goes blank for a moment, and then goes into overdrive. You definitely just shooshpapped Terezi Pyrope. You glare at the offending hand accusingly. Then you try to comprehend exactly what this means. Terezi doesn’t look angry, just surprised, and curious. And you have to will your hand to part from her face. There might just be something happening here.

“I guess I did.” You eventually admit, stepping back sheepishly. Her face is glowing with teal blood, and you’re sure your own face is flushed with cobalt, but you don’t really have time to think too deeply about it. You need to get your plan under way before you become overwhelmed by what just happened. “We can talk about it later, okay? I can’t stop now, too many irons in the fire.”

“Vriska, I really think you should.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll be careful.” You reassure her and flee before she can convince you to stay. You move to the door and knock loudly, getting the attention of everyone in the room.

“Serket. What are you doing?” Equius rises from his seat and folds his arms sternly. Nepeta isn’t moving yet, but the look she’s giving you is certainly calculating.

“I’ve had enough of stalling! I’m going to take matters into my own hands!” You declare with a smile. “Just sit back and watch as Marquise Spinneret Mindfang saves you wrigglers.” Using your role-playing name only makes you surer of yourself. Nobody can beat Vriska Serket in confidence; she is simply the best there is!

“Oh sweet bulge chaffing fuck, she’s role-playing as a dumbass.” Karkat deadpans from his corner. “Vriska go sit down and shut up before you get all of us killed.”

His words sting a little, but you know you’re far too great to let a nobody like Karkat stop your foolproof plan. “Mutants should be culled and not heard.” You say with a sneer. That shuts him up, but you can see Feferi and Nepeta giving you dangerous looks. The idiots are both obsessed with the noisy excuse for a troll.

Nobody else gets the chance to stop you though, because the door opens and a soldier steps in. “What do you want?”

“I’d like to speak with Doctor Scratch.” You say with a smile. “I have something important he needs to hear.”

You’re whisked away from the room that’s served as your cell for many weeks before any of your fellow trolls can object. You try to keep track of your surroundings, but they move you so fast it’s near impossible to determine where you are. All you can tell is that you’re above ground, and that this complex is gigantic. No wonder Equius needed Nepeta to handle the mapping; she’s probably got the best sense of space in the group, due to being practically feral.

Suddenly, the soldiers are gone from your side, and you find yourself in a long hallway. The walls are painted a bright, emerald green, almost an eyesore. You proceed to the ornate door at the end of the hall, but before you can knock, you hear Doctor Scratch’s voice. “Welcome miss Serket, I’ve been expecting you. Please do come in.”

You jump at this, wondering how the Doctor knows your name. You enter the room slowly, sizing up the office of the man who has your friends held captive.

The room is large, ornate, and painted with various shades of bright green. A fireplace crackles on one side, a large map on the wall above the mantle. On the other side is a large golden clock, decorated with serpents. The furniture in the room all looks very old, and you see that instead of a
husktop or human equivalent, he has an old fashioned typewriter on his desk.

“Welcome to my office, Miss Serket.” Doctor Scratch says pleasantly, “I’m so glad to finally get a chance to speak face to face with a member of your fascinating species. I have many questions for your group. Of course being the excellent host that I am I wouldn’t dream of prying into the business of a group of crash survivors. It would hardly be fitting of one as devoted to hospitality as myself.”

“Good grief you like to talk!” You burst out impatiently. “If you want information on trolls, you should probably give us a chance to get a word in! I mean reeeeeeeeeally, it’s rude to talk your guest’s ears off, especially when they’re already missing body parts!”

Scratch chuckles drily at this, but you see his eyes narrow. “You are right of course. I suggest you raise your hand when you feel I am speaking too much, it is a method proven successful in human classrooms.” It’s a clear jab at your obvious youthfulness, and it tells you that Scratch takes poorly to interruptions. Instead of being insulted though, you take it as a sign that he’s underestimating you.

“Let’s just discuss things like civilized beings and skip the gesturing.” You say with a smirk. “So tell me, what do you want to know?”

Scratch gets to his feet and begins to pace back and forth. “Well, let’s see here, there are so many questions that need answering… but I suppose the most important question would be the location of the twelfth troll.”

You try not to blink your remaining eye, and fail miserably. You were not expecting him to go for the throat so quickly, and you certainly weren’t expecting him to know about Aradia. “What makes you think there’s a twelfth troll?” You ask, barely managing to keep your voice even.

Doctor Scratch looks smug, and you both know he’s taken the early advantage. “My people have taken every scrap from your ship and brought it into our compound for examination. While technology was our primary goal, we also made a point of finding genetic material. It took us some time to sort past the DNA of the various biological systems aboard your ship, but in the end we were able to match DNA to the blood samples we’d already collected during your medical treatment.”

“What we weren’t expecting to find though, was a twelfth genetic code, that we were able to determine was troll. Despite our searching however, we were completely unable to uncover any remains. So where is this twelfth troll?” He turns to face you with a look of suspicion. “How did they escape? Are you maintaining contact with them somehow?”

You laugh at this. “Finally figured it out, have you? Our trump card, hiding in the background all this time? She’s been biding her time until we were ready to flee, and she has more than enough firepower with her to take you all apart!” It’s not a perfect bluff, but you feel confident in your ability to use this to your advantage.

Scratch smirks at your threat though. “A female, then? Certainly not the same female that misters Captor and Zahhak have been so tearful over?” You stop smiling, and Scratch tuts at you. “Clearly so. Miss Serket, you should not have been so quick to show your hand, until your face gave it away I was by no means certain. So tell me, how did she die in a way that didn’t leave a corpse?”

“Weapons malfunction. A laser blew up in her face.” You respond quickly, knowing already the excuse won’t be enough.

“Your ship didn’t have weapons.” Scratch said with a bored expression. “Never mind, I already know who was responsible. Equius, Karkat, and Sollux have all acted guilty since the crash, but Sollux is the only one with the capacity to kill in such a way.”
“We’ve checked your brain activity levels. Sollux Captor’s mind was powerful enough to destroy everything we’ve used to attempt to measure his neurological power. Quite remarkable, really. Of course, having you here to confirm my hypothesis is helpful as well.” He turns aside and dials a number on a rotary phone. “I have confirmed that Captor is the target. Be gentle with him. He is still our guest after all.”

You have underestimated Doctor Scratch. He knew everything he needed before you even walked into the room. All you’ve done is confirm his suspicions. But he’s made the mistake of placing himself alone in a room with you. Which means your plan is by no means cancelled. You snap your hands to the side of your head and start channeling your mind control into putting Scratch to sleep. Once he’s at your mercy, you can take control of everything easily.

Scratch doesn’t so much as blink as you focus on him though. “You know, before I was assigned leader of FELT, I was placed through rigorous mental training to resist torture and drugs. Mind control is just a more sophisticated form of these things. Thank you for showing me your skills though. I knew from the brain scans that you were also gifted, but I wasn’t sure what you could do.”

“You shouldn’t take risks with trolls.” You say with false bravado. “We’re notoriously lucky.” You start to back towards the door, but you see him advance fearlessly and know you can’t hope to outrun him.

Doctor Scratch chuckles mirthlessly. “My dear girl, it doesn’t matter how lucky you are if I hold all the cards.” He leaps at you at impossible speed, and throws a punch you barely block with your robot arm. It still sends you flying to the side though, and you hit the wall next to the fireplace hard enough to knock the wind out of you.

Scratch shakes his hand out irritably, and jumps at you again. You barely dodge out of the way, and his fist hits the wall hard enough to make the room shake. You see a flash of blue beside you, and notice several small blue pieces fall from the desk. You laugh breathlessly. It’s the fluorite octet! Doctor Scratch is still recovering from punching the wall at mach four, giving you time to scrabble over to your dice.

“I’d appreciate it if you would refrain from dragging out the inevitable.” Scratch says irritably. “This was checkmate the moment you walked into the room.”

“Not anymore.” You say with a laugh as you hold up your dice. “This isn’t chess anymore, this is craps!” You roll the dice and grin at Doctor Scratch, who is watching the die warily. 1-8-8-1-8-8-1. The dice glow and trigger a spider web, which pins Scratch to the wall. You laugh as the dice reappear in your hand, and walk up to Doctor Scratch. “What did I tell you? I have all the luck. Aaaaaaaall of it!”

You’re about to throw the dice again to go for a finishing blow, but the sound of voices in the hallway mean you need to make a hasty retreat. “Well looks like there’s a little luck left over for you after all.” You smile at him and rush for the exit. You see soldiers in the hallway and throw your dice. 4-1-3-5-2-4-1-3. A gust of wind blasts the soldiers backwards down the corridor, and gives you an extra burst of speed.

You leave the hallway with soldiers flying through the air around you. When you look around you see chaos at the building you came from. Sirens are blaring, and spotlights are sweeping around, illuminating the expanse between you and the walls encircling the base. You grin and head for the source of the racket to reunite with the other trolls. It’s time for a jailbreak worthy of Mindfang herself.
Vriska is a very hard character to write well. I hope I did her justice. If you have any suggestions for how I can better capture any of the characters in homestuck I am always open for constructive criticism! Vriska is one I've been worried about, but other characters I'm nervous about writing are Sollux, Eridan, and some of the humans, though they still have some time before they appear. Anyways, I hope you enjoyed the chapter, and remember, the more feedback I get the more I'm inspired to write. Your support is what keeps me going!
Your name is Sollux Captor, and you are a colossal fuckup. In the past weeks you have decided to defect from the largest empire in the universe, you got your ship hit by one measly scout, ate mind honey and accidentally vaporized your girlfriend, and now it looks like you’ve been busted by these humans for secretly carrying enough power to wipe out their entire base twice over.

The humans came in shortly after Vriska left to get you. You aren’t particularly surprised they knew, these humans may be primitive fuckers, but with how much power you keep trapped inside your head there was no way they wouldn’t sense it. The humans appeared with guns trained on everyone in the room, and demanded to take you into custody, and that was that. Not even the fastest troll can outrun a bullet, even if bullets are completely outdated by troll standards.

Now you’re sitting several floors underground, hooked up to a machine disturbingly similar to the pilot rig from your ship, and these humans are trying to drain the energy from your body. You could have stopped this, but it seems like you couldn’t get yourself to do anything since the crash. Probably because of your guilt over the whole accidental girlfriend-killing thing.

You’re thinking clearly now though. Maybe the machine has taken some pressure off of your head, because you still had a lot of stress placed on your thinkpan after the mind honey. You’ve been bottling it up so as not to kill anybody else, and it’s like you’ve been swimming in white noise since your crash.

Now, however, you’re thinking clearly. You can focus on everything around you. And you can hear the voices of the soon to be dead again. Normally that would be a bother to you, but you’ve noticed that some of these voices are coming from the humans standing in front of you. And you know exactly how they’re going to die.

They don’t even have the time to scream. Your psionics incinerate them instantly, and for a single, horrible second, the image of Aradia in a similar state flashes in your mind.

You push it aside for now. You’ve spent enough time being useless. Now is the time to act. First thing’s first, you need to tear this room apart and find out where your asshole friends are.

Your name is Terezi Pyrope, and you are taking charge of this mess. After Sollux got dragged out of the room everyone completely lost it. Equius started packing, Karkat started cursing, and everyone else just lost their minds.

You aren’t everyone else though. You are a genius of a troll, and if you hadn’t left Alternia you’d have become a legislacerator the likes of which nobody had ever seen. And while you may not be on
Alternia anymore, you still intend to uphold justice.

There are two humans in the room still, both training their guns on anybody who gets too close. Nobody’s dared to get near them, as they’re unsure how to escape without getting everyone killed. To get close to them means getting gunned down, and while Equius could likely punch through the walls, there’s no way to get everyone out before somebody gets shot. The straightforward approach will only get them killed.

Fortunately an expert legislacerator is an expert in deception as well as combat. You know the layout of the room very well by now, and are one of the few armed trolls in the room. But unlike Kanaya and Equius, who are tall and imposing, you are short, thin, and very clearly blind. All of these things combined make you the least threatening troll in the room. And the troll that isn’t threatening is often the most dangerous.

You take hold of your cane and begin tapping on the floor as you wander about. It’s good for appearances, though you haven’t needed it for getting around for a week or so now. You’re not sure what the cause is, but in the past little while, you’ve been finding your sense of smell growing stronger, to the point where you can accurately identify everything and everyone by smell. You’ve kept it to yourself for the most part, so that you can freak people out with it, though you did tell Vriska.

Your tapping falters as you remember Vriska’s pale advances from before. You hope she’s alright, wherever she is now. You’re still not sure how to respond to that impromptu shooshpapping earlier. She clearly wasn’t aware of what she was doing at the time herself, it just… happened.

Well, if you want to sort it out with her you’ll have to get out of here first. Your tapping takes you in the general direction of the soldiers, but you’re careful not to approach them head on. You just amble along, tapping your cane for show. As you draw closer, you sense them tense.

"Hold it right there, troll, before I mow you down," one calls, raising his gun to you.

At this point the others have noticed what you’re doing. You hear several people call your name; Karkat’s being the loudest. You grin at them and call out “I’m over here, guys. Honestly you morons are as blind as I am!”

The other human slaps the hands of the man pointing his gun at you. “Don’t lose your shit over somebody who can’t even see you, dumbass.” He mutters to him. You cackle inwardly.

“Terezi, get the fuck over here!” Karkat screams in a panicked rage.

“Well now Karkles, if you’re going to ask me like that, then maybe I don’t want to!” You grin, walking in the opposite direction of his voice, and right towards the guards. You’re glad Karkat is so predictable; you didn’t even have to tell him what to say beforehand.

“Miss, step away from the door or we will use force.” The second guard warns. You hear their hands move to their guns again, but they haven’t raised them yet. Big mistake.

“You know, normally when I execute criminals I prefer to use a noose.” You remark, taking both hands to your cane. “But I think this will work just as well.” Your arm lashes out as they raise their guns. Everything suddenly tastes like cherries. You hear the two men fall to the ground, with a wet splat.

“Well everybody, shall we be off?” You turn to face everybody with a grin. There’s a cheer from Nepeta and Feferi, and a ‘HOLY SHIT’ from Karkat, and suddenly everyone is moving. Eridan
rushing to your side and relieves the guards of their weapons, muttering a rushed compliment to you under his breath, before moving out to the hallway.

Kanaya is the next to follow him, pausing to look you over. “Excellently done, Terezi. And might I say, that shade of red is lovely on you. It goes very well with your eyes.”

Your name is Feferi Peixes, and you’re doing your best to keep your group together. At the front of the pack is Eridan, wielding the guns from the dead guards, and Nepeta, using several makeshift blades in lieu of claws. Nepeta has dispatched several humans unawares already, allowing you to proceed in relative silence. But when you think back on the loud blast your group heard shortly after your escape and think of Sollux and Vriska, who are still out there on their own, you feel like you can’t possibly move fast enough.

“We’re pawfully close now, efurrybody!” Nepeta whispers back to your group with a grin. “They’re keeping our weapons just around the corner.”

“Alright everyone, stay together!” You say softly, looking back at Equius, who is watching for soldiers behind you. Gamzee and Tavros are doggedly keeping up with the group just in front of him, but while Tavros looks determined, you can’t help but worry. He hasn’t had nearly enough time to adjust to his new legs.

Nepeta slips into a large building ahead of you all, and Eridan stands at the door, peering out into the night. “Looks like these glubbing humans are all moving to the opposite end of the base.” He calls out to you. “Not sure if it’s the asshole or the bitch who’s drawing them in though.”

You’re not sure if this is a blessing or a curse at this point. While it’s good to have a moment’s reprieve, there’s little chance of reaching the other end of the compound in such a small group. You smile at Eridan as you step forward. “Stay out here and keep watch, while I get our gear. I’m counting on you.” Eridan sends you a smile, and you feel the trust between you.

You’re not sure how your relationship with Eridan can be defined at this point; especially after all of the support you’ve given Karkat with his hemospectrum issues. But while you’re not sure you feel pale for Eridan, you know you can trust him with your life. He is your oldest friend, after all! You head inside, knowing his skills with guns will be enough to deter any threats until everyone else is ready.

Inside the bunker you see everyone has finished gathering their old gear, and are now searching for any useful items amongst the human’s belongings. Kanaya has donned a sort of armor, similar to what you’ve seen human soldiers wearing, but other than that seems content with her chainsaw. She’s holding another vest in her hand. “I felt our guard needed better protection.” She says with a smile, as she heads for the exit.

You thank her and rush for the area where everyone else found their weapons, and retrieve your double trident. After a moment’s reflection, you also gather up Sollux’s throwing stars, so that he’ll have some extra firepower when (definitely not if) you find him. But as you look around you notice that Vriska’s and Eridan’s weapons are not here.

“Eridan! I can’t find Ahab’s crosshairs!” You yell towards the door as you don a protective vest.

“What do you mean you can’t find it? I swear, if I have to spend the rest of my life using these primitive human weapons I will- FUCKING HELL!” Eridan’s rant is cut short as the sound of a loud blast echoes from the doors, accompanied by a pained cry. You rush to the door and see
Kanaya lying on the ground, a neat hole burned through her stomach, just to the right of her spine. She’s already dead. Eridan is running away cursing. Things just got horribly complicated.

Your name is Eridan Ampora, and it’s high time you took action. You’ve been hiding the map Kanaya’s made over the past week, and made sure Feferi was staying as safe as possible, even if she was spending an awful lot of time with Karkat. But now shit has hit the whirling device. Vriska has vanished, Sollux was taken, and now Kanaya is dead. But the worst part is that you recognize the weapon that did it.

Somebody out there took Ahab’s Crosshairs, and they used it to shoot your friend through the stomach. You saw enough to know where the blast came from, and you’re going to hunt the fuckers responsible down, and take back what’s yours.

A human rounds the corner and you swing your gun at his head. The man cries out in shock and hits the ground. You may not be as strong as that sweaty fucker Equius, but you’re still high on the hemospectrum, and that means being stronger than average by far. Still, you hate resorting to such crude measures to dispatch these humans. You continue towards the vantage point the sniper shot Kanaya from and spot two humans at the base of the building the shot came from. You gun them down before they realize you’re upon them. Much better.

When you reach the inside of the building you see an assortment of guards all arming themselves and smirk to yourself. The word has gone out that you are no longer jailed, but they weren’t expecting you to be upon them so quickly. Violet blood speed is not to be underestimated, and you’ve lived on land for long enough to be far more comfortable than most seadwelling trolls would be.

Your guns ring out loud enough to burst your eardrums, and you’re thankful you remembered to take earplugs from your guards. You down three guards before they can move, and dive around a corner, your cape snapping behind you. You’re hiding behind a large column now, and those humans that have managed to retrieve their weapons are riddling your cover with gunfire. You snort at their efforts. Ahab’s Crosshairs would have reduced the column to rubble with one shot.

Still, you’ll need to do something before the humans can surround you. You sigh sadly, and toss your cape in the air to your left, and aim around the right side of the column half a second later. Your cape is riddled with bullets, but you return the favor. Your second volley of bullets has left only two humans in the building alive, but one is choking out from a stomach wound, and the other has taken a stray bullet to the leg, and is crawling away. You take a handgun from a nearby soldier and kill the crawling one. The other human you leave to die.

You reach the top floor where the sniper is hiding with little incident after that. The sniper is a woman, still watching the bunker where your fellow trolls are hiding. She has Ahab’s crosshairs up to her face, and you can see her also wearing earplugs to prevent distraction and ear damage. She never sees you coming.

You head to the other windows on the top floor and check through your scope for the others. Sollux is clearly alright, tossing tanks around with what is clearly a psionic overdose. You wonder if Sollux has found the mind honey again, and kill a few of the soldiers trying to gun him down. Hopefully you can use that for some pitch flirting later.

Vriska seems to have noticed Ahab’s Crosshairs firing, because she’s changed course from Sollux to you. Several buildings behind her you see Doctor Scratch exiting, pulling some sort of sticky bullshit from his suit. Ahab’s Crosshairs don’t seem to want to focus on him though. As you try to aim at him you find your scope suffering from some sort of static interference, the image becoming blurry. You
curse under your breath and leave the tower to find the others and warn them of the news.

Your name is Vriska Serket, and you’re pretty sure this is the most fun you’ve had in ages! As you’ve tried to find your comrades, you’ve turned two humans inside out; given one a cat’s head, turned the limbs of four men into stumps, and gave one a silly hat (you had to punch him). Then you saw Eridan shooting from a high window, and decided to track him down next. He would likely know where everyone else is.

As you reach the building, a blast of light burns into the sky to your right. You sigh irritably and start running towards Eridan’s new signal, but not before a third blast lights up the sky. You rush in the direction of the next signal just in time to see Equius throw a bomb at the outer wall.

The explosion knocks you off of your feet, and can feel yourself bruising as you crash into a pile of tires. You can tell everyone else is still recovering from the blast as well. Equius stands in the middle of the mess unperturbed, Nepeta clinging to him like a big dorky backpack. You find yourself wondering when he found the time to make a bomb that big.

As everyone else starts to pull themselves to their feet, you see Equius grabbing some sort of armored truck and pushing it to block the area between two buildings, effectively blocking the road behind you. He then busies himself by tearing the side off of the thing.

A large flash comes from behind the truck, and Sollux levitates over it, flashing his reds and blues like a policeslayer vehicle. A bullet strikes him in the shoulder, and he falls to the ground with a hiss.

“Equius, you sweaty fucker! You almost got me killed!” He yells angrily. “Were you trying to cut me off or were you just being a colossal dumbass? Oh wait, I forgot, you’re always a colossal dumbass.”

“Time is of the essence, Captor. We are taking heavy fire, and our party is already down by two. Though I would be lying if I said the thought of double-crossing you wasn’t somewhat… appealing to me.” Equius has a grim smirk on his face as he continues to strip the wall of the truck. Honestly you thought the double-crossing comment was pretty clever, so you’re more or less in the same state.

Feferi has rushed over to tend to Sollux’s wound and gives Equius a withering glare, causing him to amend hastily, “I did not intentionally cut off the lowblood, it was an unexpected incident.” He grunts as he twists the last bit of the truck off of the vehicle, and holds it in front of him. “I will take point. Follow behind me closely, our window will be short.” You realize his plan and rush over to Terezi.

“How are you at running?” You ask her breathlessly, as she whirls to face you in surprise. Not a good sign.

“Vriska, I didn’t know you were back!” She looks past you, and the look of confusion on her face says it all. “I can hardly tell where anything is right now, things are too chaotic for me to taste any colors.”

You grab her hand and smirk. “Just stick close to me, Redglare. For two girls as badass as we are, one eye is moooooorrrree than enough!”

Your name is Nepeta Leijon, and you are on the prowl. Back on Alternia everything was considered prey to anything else. But this isn’t Alternia. You’ve killed wild animals with your bare hands, and
humans are a lot slower than wild animals. From the way they react to your presence you think it’s
safe to say they don’t have night vision either.

You and Equius are leading the charge tonight, especially now that Kanaya is- nope, not thinking
about that right now, can’t afford to think about that now. You can only think about your claws, your
prey, and covering your moirail’s back. When the back you have to cover is as big as Equius’, that’s
no small feat. Distractions cannot be allowed until you’re safe.

Equius has built himself a shield out of the truck he got his explosives from, and is about to rush the
hole he’s blown in the wall. Your job is to make sure the way is clear for the others.

Equius steps around the wall and the spotlight shines on him almost immediately. He holds up his
shield and nods to you, and you reattach yourself to his shoulders. Then you’re moving. Equius is
snarling as he starts to run, which turns into an all out roar as bullets hit his makeshift shield. One
skims his fingers, wrapped around the edge of the shield, and he almost fumbles. Your world
becomes nothing but light, as your ears ring from gunfire and yelling.

Then suddenly everything slides back into focus, and you realize Equius has reached the wall. He
starts to lower the shield, and you climb so that you’re standing on his shoulders, and pounce to the
top of the wall. A human cries out in shock as you land at his feet, and you open his throat before he
can raise his weapon. You grab his knife from his belt and throw it at the next guard. It misses him,
but causes him to flinch enough to kill him as well.

You scamper forward and reach the tower where the humans are shining their lights. Now that
you’re inside, you use the walls to fly at the few humans remaining, bouncing around until you’ve
killed everyone inside. You reach the top floor and slash the spotlight cables, killing their vision. You
look to the other side of the gap in the wall, and see Equius throw his shield hard enough to obliterate
the other light tower.

A moment later you notice movement at the opening in the wall. Karkat has rushed through the
opening and is running into the woods ahead of everyone else. You jump down from the tower and
chase him to the woods. He is moving as fast as he can, but you are more used to running through
the woods than he ever will be, and you pouncetackle him to the ground before he can get anywhere.

“Karkat, what are you doing?!?” You cry out in distress as he screams in rage and shock. “You have
to stay with the group!”

“Nepeta, you crazy furry freak, get off of me!” He flails uselessly against the ground, but you let him
up anyways. He staggers to his feet and turns to face you.

His face is dead. He is trying to look grumpy and angry and funny like usual, but you can see right
through it. His frown is strained, his eyes are bloodshot, his face is streaked with red tears, and he’s
clawing into his arms. It’s taking everything he has not to break down right now, and looking at him
like this kills you.

The two of you stare at each other for several minutes, neither saying a word. The sound of gunfire is
distant at this point. You hadn’t realized you’d moved so far away. Equius must be worried sick.
“Karkat, we need to go back.”

“You need to go back. I need to leave.” Karkat says quietly. He turns his head aside so he’s no
longer making eye contact. “I can’t be around you guys anymore.”

“Leave where?”
“Anywhere. As long as I’m away from you guys it will be alright.” He’s turning away more now, shuffling his feet nervously.

You’re crushed. You haven’t been able to look Karkat in the eyes for weeks now, ever since he caught you staring at his blood. You can’t imagine how he’s lived with such a burden for as long as he has, and the guilt you felt when he called himself a freak was suffocating. It still is.

It’s obvious what’s happening. He hates you. Karkat hates you all for thinking his blood color is weird. And you can’t blame him. His blood is unusual. You don’t hold the hemospectrum in high regard like Equius, but you know when a blood color doesn’t belong on it. The hemospectrum is ingrained in trolls from their days as wigglers, and while many reject the brainwashing, there’s no denying that on some level you know that Karkat’s mutation is something almost entirely unheard of.

“Karkat, I know I stared at your blood, and I know I shouldn’t have done that!” You cry out desperately. “But I also know that it doesn’t really matter! Even if you have red blood, you’re still Karkat!”

“Exactly,” Karkat says somberly as he turns back to face you. His face is nearly devoid of emotion now. “My blood color is unimportant. What’s important is I’m Karkat. And that’s the real problem.”

You can do nothing but stare at him in shock and confusion, and he takes this as a cue to elaborate. “I am a monster. I am not meant to exist. I am a terrible creature, who should have been culled years ago. Not because of my blood color though. I need to be culled because I can’t do anything but get other people killed.”

Your attempt to protest goes unheard as he starts to rant louder. “Aradia is dead, without so much as a trace that she ever really existed. Kanaya is dead with a hole in her stomach. Tavros had to get his legs amputated in order to ever walk again. Gamzee is losing his mind. Sollux got shot and is living with the guilt for something that was my fault to begin with. Vriska lost her arm and freaky spider eye. Terezi is now blind. And Feferi gave up her shot at becoming the new empress, at changing our fucked up race for the better! All because I wanted to run away, like a coward!”

You’re speechless. You try to come up with something to say, but your thoughts are disrupted when you hear Equius calling your name in a panic. You turn to stare back at the base, and hear Karkat starting to run away. You turn back to him and cry out.

“Karkat, wait!” You don’t chase him this time. You don’t have to; he stops a short distance away. He turns back to face you. You’re desperate to keep him with you at this point, but you don’t know how to break through to him. Those hollow eyes feel impenetrable, like you’ll never break through to him. And you find yourself blurring out a secret you haven’t told him even in your wildest dreams. “Please don’t leave me Karkat! I love you! I love you so much it hurts!”

Karkat smiles at you, but it doesn’t reach his eyes. “Nepeta, I’m not allowed to love anyone. I’m not even meant to exist.” You feel yourself freeze up, and he runs for it. When Equius finds you you’re crying. You don’t stop until he’s carried you far away. It’s only then that you realize the two of you are alone.

Chapter End Notes

This was originally going to be one big chapter, but as time went on I realized I was only halfway through the damn thing and it was already longer than every chapter yet.
This is one of those sequences I've wanted to write since the idea of Blood Pride first came to me though, so I'm glad to get the first part of the escape sequence out. Things have become more complex here as I decided to give each troll their own part in the narration. Those you haven't seen talk yet will get their part soon. Except for the dead ones. They don't get a part because they're dead. Haa haa, hee hee, hoo hoo.

EDIT: Somebody made a fanart of the last scene! A big thank you to guest reader ChickenMcNuggets.

tinyurl.com/m8mfa6j
Your name is Equius Zahhak, and you can’t handle the situation anymore. You’ve held yourself together for a long time, through the fire, and the prison, and now your escape. But things have just become complicated.

There is a very small list of people that you are required to guard as a troll so near the top of the hemospectrum. The first, Feferi Peixes, has blood of a beautifully royal hue, and while her eccentricities are somewhat disconcerting to you, she has the grace expected of somebody with Tyrian blood.

Feferi has escaped already. With her went Eridan, whom you are obligated to hate due to his status as a seadwelling troll (a hatred which obviously does not extend to miss Peixes), and Sollux, who you hate because fudge that guy. The three reached the gap and are waiting for the others outside.

Terezi and Vriska deigned not to wait, however. The two left as soon as they reached the gap, and now only Gamzee and Tavros are left.

Gamzee is the second troll whom you are required to protect, his blood being as rich a purple as can be seen amongst land-dwelling trolls. His behavior may be deplorable, but as a highblood you are obligated to serve him.

Gamzee is in danger now. He has been trailing behind with Tavros, but they have been moving slowly. Nitram’s legs are malfunctioning; likely due to all of the stairs he refused to stop climbing. His legs were strained too much too soon, and now they are locking up. Tavros is trying to run, but seems unable to bend his knees enough to facilitate a proper stride. And Gamzee refuses to leave him for dead, as is customary protocol with weak trolls.

The humans are closing in. Their leader, Scratch, is travelling at the head of the pack, and has set sights on the duo. He is holding a rifle to his face, and preparing to fire. Your first priority should be to take the bullet for Gamzee. As a Blue-blooded troll it is your duty to give your life for the hemospectrum.

The complication arises with the last troll you need to protect. Your moirail, Nepeta, has left to chase the mutant. Her personal feelings have clouded her judgment, as you feared. Should she choose to follow the mutant blood you may never find her again.

You are trapped now. On one side of the wall is your moirail, the one person who loves and understands you. On the other side is your duty, your role as a troll. It is a choice between love and identity, and you fear it may break you.

The humans decide they’d rather break you themselves though. The roar of flying machines cuts
through the air. Lights shine on you and the remaining trolls. A human fires upon you with an explosive projectile. As you see the shot come at you, you see the Scratch Doctor fire a bullet through one of Tavros’ legs. He falls to the ground with a pitiful wail. Gamzee cries out in rage and stands over him, head lowered. The rest is lost in the explosion, which sends you flying from your perch on top of the wall. You land in a heap of dust and find yourself struggling to get up. Very disconcerting.

Feferi rushes to your side, helping you to your feet. You notice with appreciation the way her lifetime of swimming has given her enough strength to do this. Once you’re on your feet you start to move towards the wall again. While Nepeta’s disappearance is highly distressing to you, the highblood is clearly in more imminent danger.

Feferi stops you though. “Equius you can’t go back there, now that they know how dangerous you are they’ll kill you on sight!”

You pause and regard her properly as hemospectrum would dictate. “Lady Peixes, as a blue blood it is my duty to lay down my life for those of a higher caste than myself. I must rescue Makara from the human slime.”

“To hell with that!” Feferi cries out angrily. “I don’t know what they’re planning for Gamzee or Tavros, but I know if we give ourselves to them we won’t be helping anyone! The four of us need to stick together, find the others, and figure out what we’re going to do next.”

You don’t know what to do anymore. Gamzee has been trapped by the humans, with only a lowly brown-blooded cripple of a troll to watch over him. He needs assistance immediately or else he will fall victim to the FELT again. He is also running dangerously low on his soporifics, and you know the withdrawal symptoms will make him a danger to himself and everyone around him.

Feferi, on the other hand, is well protected, with the detestable sea dweller and mustard-blooded psionic to guard her. While you find their company abhorrent, you know they are strong enough to keep her safe. Does this mean you should leave Feferi with her adequate protection and defy orders to do your duty?

And there is also Nepeta to consider. You shudder to think of what may be happening to her, what sort of corruption her proximity to the mutant may bring. And while she is certainly strong for one of her caste, unbelievably so in fact, you know the only way you’ll feel confident in her safety is if you’re with her.

Feferi makes the decision for you in the end though. She seems to have thought of a way to tip the scales, as a leader and high member of the hemocaste should. “Equius, go find Nepeta and keep her safe. That’s an order.” She looks at you sternly, and you find yourself free from doubt. The future empress has ordered you to protect your moirail. You don’t know why you ever considered doing anything differently.

“Thank you, Feferi.” You say to her with a small smile. She grins up at you, clearly pleased with herself for solving your dilemma. You turn to the others, watching from a distance. “I will leave now to save my moirail from potential harm. You will get Lady Peixes away from here. I will return as soon as I am able. Should I find any harm has befallen her I will use the full brunt of my strength against you.”

Sollux opens his mouth to reply, likely with some manner of profanity, as lowbloods tend to favor. But you do not stay to hear him. Instead you head in the direction you saw Nepeta running before, calling her name and praying you find her. You push all thoughts of Gamzee to the back of your mind.
Really, you found him to be atrocious company anyways.

Your name is Gamzee, and you’re not sure what to do. Your flush crush is on the ground nursing a leg that is now falling to fucking pieces. You are surrounded by men with guns. Your friends are nowhere to be seen. And you can feel yourself slipping into a rage again.

The pale looking motherfucker who leads this circus of assholes is standing over Tavbro, and has a gun held to his head. He can see the way you look at him. This motherfucker sees every motherfucking thing. If it weren’t such bad news for you, you’d call it a miracle. Instead you’ll call it a bunch of bullshit.

“Yes Mr. Makara, you’ll behave if you don’t want your little friend here to die.” The cue ball snaps his fingers and two of his men drag Tavros away.

“Uhh, don’t worry Gamzee, I’m sure I’ll probably be alright, so-” They drag him around the corner and out of earshot. You want to follow, but the bald motherfucker seems to have other ideas. You’d bash in his head, but you know his friends would riddle you and Tavros with bullets if you tried. Besides, cracking skulls open is not motherfucking cool. It’s miraculous, and you’d love to do it. You briefly ponder the location of your remaining pies. You’d really like a pie, even if it rots your thinkpan.

“Now then, Mr. Makara. What exactly does your friend Mr. Zahhak mean when he refers to you as ‘highblood’?”

You grin lazily at him, and find your smile broadening as some of the other humans act unnerved. “It means he’s gonna rip the rest of this fucking base down to save me, motherfucker.” He will, too. Not only is Equius one of your best motherfucking friends, he’s also a slave to the hemocaste. You can trust he’ll die like a bitch if it means saving you. Not that you’d want that to happen to such a motherfucking bro.

Scratch laughs at this. “We’ll see Mr. Makara. We’ll see.”

You suddenly find yourself doubtful.

Your name is Tavros Nitram, and you’re not sure much is going on with you at the moment. Well, yeah, you are being held prisoner, and you’re not sure if they just forgot to finish fixing your leg, or if they just decided stopping the bleeding was enough. And yes, your only friend left on the base is sinking into violent, murderous, insanity...

Okay, your name is Tavros Nitram, and your life sucks. It sucks so much right now you don’t even have to hesitate to label it. Your life is sucky. There. It’s official. You are now a hostage, locked away in a room, and while your potential savior (and maybe flush crush?) is in fact not in another layered brick fortified structure, you don’t think you’ll be getting out of here soon. Not when the token fire breathing evil overlord of this world has a gun to your royal head.

Unfortunately for you though, there’s nothing you can do. Your left leg doesn’t move anymore. Your right can barely bend. You are locked in a small cell with nothing to do but wait. So you do.

You have no option but to wait for an opportunity.
Your name is Kanaya Maryam, and you are dead. Or so you thought. You don’t think a dead person can narrate, lacking the motor functions necessary for typing or speaking, so it would seem you are not as dead as you thought.

Your friends have left in the chaos, understandable under the circumstances. And while you’re not sure how to meet up with them, you know that should be your second priority.

Your first priority is eating. It used to be bandaging the large hole in your stomach, but access to military first aid kits have allowed you to mostly deal with that issue. You’re not sure how bandages will help a hole larger than your arm, but if nothing else you feel more comfortable now that your insides are no longer exposed to the air. Spilling your guts literally feels as personal as spilling your guts metaphorically, as you have recently found out.

The first issue having been solved, you now find yourself insatiably hungry. The few scraps of rations in the warehouse are unappealing to you though. You find that rather odd, as you’re sure you’ve had some of these foods at one point or another, and even enjoyed some of them. Now however they appear as inedible to you as rubber.

Your hunt for sustenance is halted when a human enters, likely to investigate the damage done by a large group of angry trolls. However, while you feel it would be wise to hide, you find yourself oddly compelled to move closer.

You try to move to a vantage point, but the instant you move the human spots you. “Don’t move, monster! Wait, what the hell?” His authority gives way to confusion as you both realize that you are glowing in the dark. The element of surprise has been thoroughly obliterated by your body’s newly found desire to simulate a light fixture.

You decide to use the element of confusion in favor of the element of surprise, as the human fumbles with their weapon. You’re upon him so fast neither of you know what happened. Your teeth bare, the gun is ripped away, you find his throat, and he dies with a gurgling scream before it registers to you that you are drinking his blood.

It tastes delicious. You once tried tasting a small amount of lusus blood in one of your young rainbow-drinker fantasies, but while that tasted horrendous, this is nourishing in a way you can’t describe. It would seem that your brush with death has turned you into a rainbow drinker, and you may just have found your favorite flavor.

The human reduced to a husk, you find yourself stronger than ever. You can feel the wound in your stomach knitting itself together, slowly, but still at a faster rate than should be possible for such an injury. When you leave the warehouse the base is all but silent. It is disturbing, to say the least. While you’re not sure about the fate of your comrades, the sound of approaching humans means your next move is clear.

In one last burst of speed you reach the nearest wall and clamber over it. You slink away into the night and run away, unsure where things will lead you. Both the path in life forced upon you and the path in the woods you have chosen are foggy, at best. You can only hope the others have escaped safely.

Your name is Karkat Vantas, and you have left your friends behind. It’s for the best, really. They were a bunch of assholes, and you know if they continued to stay with you they’d only keep dying. Aradia was bad enough, but you and Kanaya were close. The blood on your hands is enough. If the others follow you they’ll only add to the mix of color.
The best solution would probably be to kill yourself. If you’re dead you can’t put anyone in danger. But you don’t want to think about what kind of information the FELT may be able to glean from your body. Besides, all the years you’ve defied the odds by surviving have left you feeling stubborn about living.

Instead, you’re going to live on the run. You’ll go solo, and then when bad luck strikes again you’ll be the only one there to bite the bullet. It’s really the safest thing for everyone else. Regardless of how they may feel about it. You know some of the group will take it better than others. Equius will be glad to see you gone, Vriska too, probably. Feferi will be upset, because you know she’s been trying to prod you into a moiralleagiance. But you still don’t really know about that, you feel like sometimes she’s interested in you because you’re like a poster child for her hemocaste cause.

Nepeta’s crying face flashes into your mind again and you find yourself stumbling. The silly cat-girl was supposed to be happy, and goofy, and always pretending to be her dopey lusus. Seeing her so lost, and miserable, and heartbroken, and knowing you’re responsible, is haunting in a twisted way.

But she’ll get over it. Her moirail may be a sweaty asshole, but he can be trusted to look after her. Aside from breaking shit and sweating all over everything he touches it’s probably what he’s best at. So she should be fine. You knew her romance was doomed to failure from the beginning anyways. You’ve known about her crush for years, but when pailing with somebody is a death sentence for both you and your partner, romantic involvement is the farthest thing from your mind. Well actually, romance is frequently the first thing on your mind, but that's largely because it's something you've always known you couldn't have. Sometimes life is just fucked up like that.

You climb over a fallen tree and see the lights of a small town in the distance. It’s hardly a place you intend to stay at for very long, but you think it will do for now.

“Karkat descends towards the village, ready to plunder what he may.” You mumble to yourself. “He fights past the horrifying realities of his personal failures and sudden desire to talk in the third person in order to focus on surviving.”

“He’s definitely not thinking of everyone he’s left behind.”

“He definitely can’t remember the look on her face.”

“Definitely not.”

“…”

“Fuck.”

Your name is Doctor Scratch, and this has not been a good night for you. You make a point of always being the smartest man in the room, though you hardly know everything. That being said, the extent to which you have underestimated those trolls shocks you. They were foolish, clearly adolescent, and they had suffered grave losses before they even encountered you. And yet…

The individual trolls were weak and foolish, but the species itself… they had a power to them. A great variety of powers, in fact. The mind control you were prepared for. And their weapons had been taken.

Other things were not so easy to predict. Psionic lasers, shrinking chainsaws, and the absolutely ludicrous strength of Mr. Zahhak. From the way he sweats you feel confident that troll in particular suffers from several different glandular problems.
This escape has been a preposterously large stain on a record that is otherwise a perfect white. And if there’s one thing you cannot abide, it’s stains. That being said though, the situation is still not beyond recovery.

You have a trump card now. Out of all the trolls you’ve met, there are some that have greatly impressed you. The strength of Zahhak, the resourcefulness of Serket, the tactical skills of Ampora, and Vantas in particular caught your interest as the only troll you were unable to glean information from.

But these trolls are all impressive individuals without easily exploitable weaknesses. Zahhak is prideful and strong, a dangerous combination, difficult to control. Serket is arrogant, but unpredictable, and the dice she wields are dangerous enough you kept them in your office where they could be kept safely (another miscalculation as it turned out). Ampora is too dangerous; his mind is that of a skilled warrior, despite his insecurities. And Karkat’s mind is impenetrable; clearly the result of a troll skilled at keeping secrets behind an iron wall.

There is one way to tackle such trolls: their loved ones. But there too lies a problem. Zahhak’s closest friend is a feral blade wielding cat troll, simple-minded, but no less dangerous. Pyrope, as you’ve recently discovered, is not as helpless as she appeared to be, and the talent for killing she showed during the escape has you wondering whether you’ve written her off too early. Ampora’s closest allies appear to be Peixes, who has shown herself to be capable as a leader, and Captor, a psionic so powerful you’re not sure you can contain him anymore. Vantas spent time with Peixes as well, but overall you’re not sure if he’s truly close to anybody.

Only one troll in the group has the potential to be controlled, the ability to be useful to you, and an easily exploitable weakness. Gamzee Makara has acted very unassuming and stupid throughout your time observing him, until earlier today. You had wondered why Zahhak had acted so deferentially towards him. Over time spent observing him you have managed to determine the social structure of the trolls, an unusual system based on blood color. And despite his clear idiocy, you have determined Makara is near the very top.

The incident between the trolls earlier today has enlightened you to a crucial fact: Gamzee Makara is dangerous. Unassuming, but dangerous, a combination you have learned to respect. Beneath his foolish exterior lies a deep rage. Behind his casual grin lies a vicious and sadistic mind. His slouch seems like the trait of a slacker, but in truth it is the tension of a hunter. This troll without his drugs could very well be dangerous enough to kill his fellow trolls, and laugh the whole while doing so.

As for his weakness, you are pleased to note that Makara has affections for Nitram, easily the most useless of the trolls. You made a snap decision when you saw the two making an escape. You’re still not entirely confident Makara will live up to his potential. But he is your best chance. And by shooting Tavros you captured two trolls with one bullet.

And if Gamzee should fail, there are other options open to you. You have taken and preserved genetic samples from the different trolls, all twelve of them. And there are many routes open to you with such material. You once had a colleague who specialized in genetic manipulation, and not all of her notes are out of your reach.

Yes, you may have lost to the trolls tonight, but the war is still yours to win. They have nothing, not a single chance to survive this mess. It’s only a matter of time until you hunt them down. They played you for a fool, but before this is over… you will show them who the real suckers are.

Haa haa.

Hee hee.
Hoo hoo.

Chapter End Notes

As mentioned last update, because this was originally part of the last chapter I was able to get it out much faster than usual. And I'm still plotting out the order of events from here. So there won't be any rapid fire updates for a while. On a related note, if anyone knows how to code pesterlogs I'd appreciate some tips. I honestly have no idea how these newfangled fanfiction sites work. But now that we're out of the facility the humans are not far off.
The Dead Don't Feel

Chapter Summary

The dead speak.

Chapter Notes

Well, despite what I said last chapter I suddenly found myself with a game plan for this chapter while I was working. We'll see if inspiration keeps hitting me.

EDIT: okay, fixed the text so that ghostspeak is italicized, didn't realize it was changed to normal when I switched it over to AO3. -_- Should be good now though.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You name is Aradia Megido, and you are at war in your mind.

Since becoming dead you have noticed you emotions slipping away from you. At first your biggest priority as a ghost was to look after your friends. You managed to maintain your focus enough to ease the ship to a rough landing, but since then you’ve found yourself drifting…

The voices seem to like leading you astray. Now that you’re one of the dead, it’s much harder to shut out their voices. They whisper to you constantly, trying to push you to work for them. Your psionic capabilities are rare amongst ghosts, and they seem to want you to act as a liaison. At first you found it irritating, but as is the case with many things you find yourself more apathetic about it now. Some part of you feels this is wrong, but there are so many voices drowning your thoughts out now that you don’t usually pay it much heed.

This is not usual though. According to the spirits, you’ve been here almost a month in earth time, and you’ve been shrugging off the interference of the spirits for the most part. You can’t stop listening to them, but you haven’t let them control you. Until last night, that is. The voices of the dead have been calling to you, trying to make you do things that they feel have to happen. But last night you gave in, and did as they asked.

You shifted one gear, and now Tavros’ legs have stopped working, and the humans have captured him and Gamzee. Your apathy is slipping. Things in your mind are far too chaotic considering you no longer have a brain.

You’ve hurt your friends with your powers, and now that little voice in the back of your mind is screaming. The voices of the dead are doing everything they can to drown that voice out. And it’s hard for you to tell now whether you’re still Aradia, or that tiny voice drowning amongst the dead is.

The dead can no longer drown your fear. You’re not sure what’s been happening over the past weeks anymore. You thought that the spirits were directing you away for silly, harmless reasons that only the dead could fathom. But that voice, that voice calling to you over the rabble, it’s asking you what you’ve missed in the time you’ve been away from them.
Now you’re here, looking down over the base, smoke billowing around you, as the humans drag Tavros away, as they lead Gamzee around at gunpoint. And then you see Doctor Scratch staring in your direction. For a moment it feels like he’s staring straight at you, and then he turns away and goes about his business. If you still had lungs, you’d be breathing a sigh of relief. Still, you feel it best if you don’t remain here.

Outside of the walls you find the last remaining trolls. Eridan, Feferi, Sollux, and Equius are all there, Feferi and Equius debating between themselves as the others watch. The voice in your head starts to cry out, and you feel it urging you to go to Sollux, to be with him. You no longer doubt that this voice belongs to the real Aradia. What does that make you then?

Aradia is emotional, joyful, a young rust-blooded troll with a passion for adventuring. She enjoys role-playing, and exploring ancient relics, and archeology. What about you? You are fearful, dead, dispassionate, and are being played by the dead like a puppet on a string. You aren’t an alternate personality, there’s not enough substance to you for that. Which can only mean that you are a mask, a shell. You exist only to protect that voice, the real Aradia, as the dead attempt to quell her thoughts and use you for their purposes. It won’t be long at this rate until you lose your ability to hear Aradia altogether.

In the time you spend processing this a matter of mere seconds pass you by. You look back to the remaining trolls to see them splitting up. Equius goes one way, the rest of them go the other way. Aradia seems to desperately wish for you to follow Sollux. The ghosts want you to stay where you may be useful, here the base.

You tune both of them out. The ghosts of humans, and the few trolls that have followed you here, seem to have an idea of how things should likely pan out. Aradia cares only about being with the people she loves. But there is something more important you have to do. You follow Equius, despite Aradia’s protests.

Equius may not be pleasant company, but he has tools, and knowhow. If you can somehow contact him, he may be able to forge Aradia a new body. It’s the only chance you have to save her before she succumbs to the voices.

Equius has found Nepeta at this point, and is taking off through the woods. You notice Nepeta is quite upset about something, and Aradia seems crushed to see her crying. You decide to distance yourself from the two, so you don’t end up witnessing any pale interactions between the two. It wouldn’t be proper to snoop on them when they’re getting intimate.

Several hours later they take refuge in a cave not far outside of a small town. The sun is rising on the horizon by now, and you float outside, wondering if you’d be intruding if you went in now. You’re shocked when you look again and see Equius standing next to you. You remember that the sun here is not as dangerous as on Alternia, but you still have to imagine it’s painful for trolls to stand in it.

Suddenly Equius is on the move, jumping away from the mouth of the cave and sprinting away at terrifying speeds. You float after him, trying your best to keep up.

Equius is moving at least twice as fast as before now that he doesn’t have to watch over Nepeta, and his pace is downright blistering. Even the ghosts seem impressed. They’re hardly saying anything. Though you feel like your destination may be another reason.

Equius has reached the top of a hill overlooking the base. He’s scanning desperately for something. Your comrades perhaps?

Equius gets up to move, but stops when he realizes he’s still got his robotic equipment strapped to his
back. The pack sinks well into the ground as he drops it, and you know if you don’t do something he’s going to rush in and get himself killed.

You consider pulling him back, but know that if he struggles it could draw attention from below. Thinking fast, you shake the toolbox, causing it to rattle. Equius stops and regards the box with suspicion. Encouraged by the reaction you shake it more.

Equius stares at the box sternly, as though willing it to behave, before his curiosity wins out and he opens the box. You float one of his spare mechanical arms in the air and wave to him.

Equius’ reaction is not what you expected. He stares at the arm in shock, and becomes visibly agitated. “It can’t be.” He mutters to himself and starts to pace back and forth. “It can’t be her. There’s no possible way. But humans are not capable of this…” He clutches his head and lets out a long hiss, and finally straightens his back.

“Aradia. Is that you?” Equius’ posture is straight, but you can see his face is tense, his fists clenched. You’re not sure how he was able to tell it was you, but it’s clear your presence is unsettling to him. You move the arm in front of you and bob it up and down in the air. And Equius drops.

You were not expecting this. At all. Equius has always been creepy, strong, and kind of an asshole. And the few times you’ve spoken to him he’s shifted between outrage at talking to a lowblood, and being oddly polite. Truthfully he’s always been completely impossible to figure out, and while Nepeta’s always insisted that Equius isn’t as bad as he seems, you’ve struggled to believe her as Equius continued to quote the hemocaste the same way lowbloods quote the Signless.

Now, the same troll who has quoted strength and title as the most important facets of culture is sitting here crying. He’s on all fours, weeping openly, and you find it doubtful he’s sad to know you’re still here. What this means, you’re not sure. But you know you won’t find out unless you can find a way to communicate with him.

You regard the arm you’ve been floating around for a moment and inspiration strikes you. You tug and pull at it with psychokinesis, until you manage to pull it apart and get at the wiring within. Ripping the wiring into pieces allows you to shape it into lettering, and you go about trying to communicate with Equius.

_Are you alright, Equius?_

Equius glances up at your lettering and jumps. He starts frantically wiping at his eyes and trying to pretend he hasn’t been emoting. He jumps up and coughs nervously, sweating profusely. “Ah yes, my apologies. I was, well…” He lowers his head awkwardly, “I didn’t expect to hear from you again.”

You look at him standing there, looking more insecure than you’ve ever seen him. And as much as you want him to explain his strange behavior, you know there are more important things that need to be addressed.

_Why are you back here?_

“I have returned for the highblood.” Equius suddenly stiffens and becomes businesslike again. “As I was evacuating my moirail from danger I realized that by leaving Makara to the mercy of humans I have shamed my entire caste. If I do not lay down my life for the hemospectrum I am unfit to call myself a troll.”

_Do you think I am unfit to call myself a troll?_
“I- well…”

How about Nepeta?

“That is an exceptionally unfair-“

Dying like a fool does not make you any more of a troll. And failing to carry the world on your shoulders does not make you less of one.

“You are wrong.” Equius sighs as he shakes his head sadly. “Since I was young there have been expectations placed upon me to serve the empire and uphold the duties that come with my place on the hemocaste. Unless I do that I will not belong.”

Why would you think that?

“Look at me.” Equius gestures to himself, standing there, sweaty, muscular, and alone. “I am not normal. I am defective. This strength I possess is not a trait held by blue bloods. It is exclusive to myself. It makes me powerful, yes, but also excluded. My strength is such that even the strongest of household items twist and shatter in my grip.” He sighs and looks aside. “I am as out of place as the most candy blooded trolls, unless I make a name for myself. And that route is no longer open to me.”

You don’t know what to say anymore. All this time, Equius has been as lost as anyone else in your group. You don’t know how he’s held this façade for so long.

Why are you telling me this?

“You asked. Most people don’t care to know about me.” He smiles sheepishly, and you wonder how you ever considered Equius to be so unpleasant. He’s certainly a classist asshole, but he’s also just as vulnerable and insecure as the rest of you. You focus on him again as he mumbles something to himself.

What was that?

“It’s not important.” Equius looks down at his hands and sighs. “We should leave this place. I have come here based on a rash decision, and should I be spotted here I will have put Nepeta in harms way once again. I will rescue the Highblood at a more opportune time.”

They won’t let you escape if you come back here.

“I haven’t changed my mind. When the time comes I will lay my life down for the highblood. But this,” he states as he closes his toolbox, “is an exceptionally bad time. They are still on high alert. Were I to attempt to break in I would not be able to rescue Makara or Nitram safely.”

You intend to rescue Tavros? It hasn’t escaped you that this is the first time he’s mentioned saving Tavros as well. His classist tendencies are still in play, despite your bloodpusher to bloodpusher.

“If I wish to rescue one, then I must rescue both.” Equius says irritably. “They will not leave each other behind. They are flushed for each other after all, regardless of societal taboos.” He throws his toolbox over his back and strides back the way he came.

I was not aware you paid much attention to quadrants. Your relationship with Nepeta was very spontaneous as I recall.

“It was, yes.” Equius says with a fond smile, “And my moirallegiance is precisely how I became more perceptive to quadrants. Her love for shipping, foolish though it may be, does enlighten one to
matters of romance.” He stops suddenly and turns towards your text. “On that note I have something to ask you.

By all means.

“Why are you here with me?” He says it so fast you almost can’t understand him. “I know Captor would likely be more suitable company for you than I am. And yet you have deigned to follow me on my excursion instead of him. I was of the impression you were quadranted?”

If you weren’t a ghost you’d blink at this. Even you aren’t sure what your relationship with Sollux is (was?). While you were able to agree that you were together, Sollux never seemed able to decide which quadrant the two of you were in. You suppose it’s all been part of his obsession with bifurcation, though you’d be lying if it didn’t make things difficult sometimes.

It’s complicated.

Sollux and I, I mean.

I definitely love him, but I don’t exactly know how? Especially now that I’m dead. It’s hard to sort emotions when you barely have them anymore.

“You lack emotions now?” Equius seems curious now, not to mention… sad? Angry? You’re not entirely sure. But you know he’s not as horrible a person as you thought, and you may be able to use this to get your body back.

The dead don’t feel, Equius. I have been dead for a short time, and yet my thoughts have been slipping away. In time I shall lose my capacity for rational thought completely.

“And you require my assistance.” Equius groans as he starts to pick up his speed. “You wish for me to make you a body.”

How did you know?

“I am an expert in artificial limbs. As well as an expert in mediculler techniques.” Equius shrugs. “I have studied in many different techniques over the sweeps, as is befitting a strong mind. Those two have been in high demand lately.”

Can you do this?

Equius takes a deep breath and stares into the sky. “It is difficult to say. An exceedingly challenging job like this would be a colossal undertaking even with the full brunt of my lab technology. Without my materials… it will take time. A great deal of time.”

But you will do it?

Equius looks at you, or rather your text, and you can see his face is resolute. “I will do it. I will make you a body. No matter how long it takes.”

Thank you. Thank you so much.

Equius smiles awkwardly again, and starts to sprint back to Nepeta. You trail along behind him, letting the wires snake around you as you fly. It’s funny; the way he’s acting is so different from how you always thought he was. He had acted like he hated you and Tavros and Sollux for as long as you can remember, and yet he saved Sollux from dying to the crash. He made Tavros new legs. And he openly cried over your death in front of you.
You still think Equius is a jackass, but now that you know the root of it you feel like you can understand him at least a little bit. And while you were with him you felt like you understood yourself again as well. The voices went silent when you were around Equius, as though he scared them away, or voided them out.

And now Equius is getting ahead of you. You haven’t been trying very hard to keep up, so he’s not there to keep the spirits away. You realize this just as the voices return.

*You thought you could shut us out?*

*Why did you leave us Aradia?*

*WE NEED YOU, YOU STUPID BITCH.*

*Please don’t leave again miss!*

*You think your friend can protect you from us?*

*You want to just forget we’re here?*

*You have to do what we say or things will get bad for you. And your friends.*

*That sweaty monster won’t always be here to shut us out.*

*He’s gonna die, you know? Clown’s gonna fuck him up.*

*CAN’T SHUT US OUT THEN. WE’LL HAVE YOU SOON ENOUGH.*

*We need you to help us, dear. You’re the only one who can touch their world.*

*You monsters are going to regret coming to earth.*

*Please help us Aradia!*

*You can’t keep down the clown, Megido. He’ll kill you all soon enough.*

Some are angry, some tearful, some young, and some old. Their voices hit you like a wave, crashing into you in a cacophony of sound and emotion. You scream as you feel your mind fraying at the edges, and you realize you’ve let your defenses down while you were talking with Equius. When did the mask’s voice become your own?

When did you let Aradia out? You had wanted to keep her locked away safely out of reach of these spirits. Some are friendly, but others are hateful, so, so hateful. You thought trolls were savage, but these humans have rage and cold fury to rival the most dangerous trolls. And what some of them said…

Gamzee is going to kill Equius. The voices said it clearly. You always thought Gamzee was harmless, but the spirits have a way of knowing how things are going to happen. You follow after Equius more closely now, and hear the voices receding. But the damage has been done. The same troll who you need to survive, the troll who makes the voices go away, is the troll who you know is going to die. And now that you know him you’re not sure you can live with that.

Chapter End Notes

Honestly I'm not entirely sure this chapter coveys everything I want it to. But I've given it my best effort. What you see here is the beginning of my real experimentation with characters.

Aradia is not a character I particularly like. She has a pretty face, sure, but that's about it. Quite frankly, she's boring. No emotions, does what the voices tell her to do, and after coming back to life she spends her whole time on the sidelines grinning like a maniac. But that's not really who she is. Aradia is a character who has died and come back to life. But resurrection doesn't turn back the clock. Homestuck's Aradia is permanently
damaged. She has spent years with little company other than corpses. And it has changed her. But while Blood Pride's opening is meant to emulate Homestuck to some extent, the timeline, motivations, and causes surrounding the misfortunes that befall the trolls have been altered. This is why Vriska and Terezi are still allied, as the FLARP incident is not the reason for the injuries everyone suffers. It is also why Aradia is not dead to the world. Yet.

Aradia as a character before her accident was interesting. Lively, feisty, brave, and proud, the glimpses we see of her as a character back then make her condition when we first meet her all the more tragic. But Aradia's ghost is still Aradia. Her memories are still there, and her decimation of Vriska tells us that her emotions remain on some level as well. While you can argue that her lack of body means lack of emotions, that seems ridiculous. If memories don't vanish when she dies, why would other aspects of her character?

So we see here Aradia as she is slipping. Her mind is there, but a ghost amongst the dead is bound to slip away like the others. The voices that call Aradia are remnants. Aradia has a powerful mind, and the idea that she would lose her personality but the other ghosts would not is absurd. The spirits are emotion, feeling, willpower, but are not really people anymore, just as Aradia in Homestuck isn't really the person she once was. Unlike Homestuck, however, Aradia is not as isolated here. The way she died leaves much less in the way of bad blood between the trolls, in particular the critical levels of resentment she held towards highbloods after Tavros' injury. This is why she is not as adverse towards Equius' help as she would be otherwise.

Equius on the other hand exists in Homestuck as a character with beautiful depth and conflict but not nearly enough development. What you see above is my interpretation of his motivations. I have always felt Equius' adherence to the hemospectrum and appreciation of the most noble of practices on Alternia was the result of insecurity. You can see evidence of this most abundantly in Seek the Highblood, when he confides in Nepeta his hurt at being left behind by Aradia, as well as his decision to program Aradia to love him. Were he truly a confident blueblood he would not rely on such tactics, and likely wouldn't seek to fill quadrants in lower castes at all.

I have never believed that Equius' colossal strength was natural. There's his vegetarian diet, first of all, unsuited to athletics. But more telling is his inability to use basic items such as a simple glass. If such strength was in a troll low on the hemospectrum it would not be impossible. But Equius is a blueblood. He is well within the upper tier of the hemospectrum. And if his strength was natural to his hemotype then there is no chance that items wouldn't be made to compensate for it.

In other words, Equius would have to be alone for this to be a problem. He is a mutant, cursed with an absurd amount of power, beyond the level to which troll goods are built to withstand. And while he could simply order such goods made by somebody lower on the spectrum, that would be an admission of weakness. Equius does not have the luxury of appearing weak.

Trolls are devoted to the natural order of the hemospectrum. It is the most important facet of their society. Homestuck doesn't really explain the depth of this, as Equius is the only troll in the gang who truly favors the hemospectrum. Eridan pretends to be above others, but his insecurities are even more apparent, and he casts it aside once it stops working in his favor. Equius holds to it tightly though. As a mutant with strength beyond even the strongest trolls if Equius was not devoted to the hemospectrum he'd
likely be perceived as a threat to the higher castes. His religious adherence to societal order may very well be a sort of defence mechanism, to prove he is not dangerous. This is only a theory though.

What is clear is that Equius has little holding him together. He flaunts his blood color like a wall, so that nobody can question his status or where he belongs, and this has led to his distance from the other trolls, regardless of his skills. The question is: will he change before it is too late for him?
Dave Strider has an unusual encounter with a pair of aliens.

If you've been reading these chapters as they're being posted I advise you to look over chapter six again, I fixed up Aradia's text between updates. It should be much easier to follow now.

Your name is Dave Strider, and you are hating this weather. Seriously it’s hot enough to fry an egg on the fucking sidewalk.

It’s hot enough that you’re so damn exhausted by this shitty sunlight you can’t even think of a good metaphor for how damn hot it is. Egg on the sidewalk? Shit’s weak. Your bros would eat you alive if they heard you say something that cliché. You need to get home with your payload before you lose your Striderisms altogether.

You normally don’t leave the apartment when the heat waves hit, but this was an emergency case. You failed to stock up on apple juice. You opened your minifridge and found nothing but leftover pizza. During a heat wave this lapse in preparation is a serious crisis. You need to stay hydrated if you’re going to get through this heat wave without permanent brain damage. You could just drink water but fuck that.

Anyways, here you are, walking through downtown Houston, trying to get your bottled ambrosia back to your shitty apartment before your family can rig your room with puppet sex toys again. Who are you kidding, you’ve been gone half as long from your house and still found smuppet traps laid in every nook and cranny in your room. Sometimes it really sucks being the only Strider without a homosexual puppet fetish.

Your thoughts trail off as you look to your right and see somebody wearing the most fucked up outfit you’ve ever seen. You hope to god that it’s ironic because it’s almost beautiful in how ugly it is. This freak is wearing bright red baggy pants, a jacket the color of dogshit, a green scarf that seems to be wrapped around their head four times over, fryer gloves, and like the cherry on the shit sundae, a tall baby blue top hat.

Your opinion changes swiftly from impressed to suspicious when you realize they’re walking into a shop in that getup and are perfectly disguised from anyone that might be watching. Honestly the fryer gloves should have tipped you off to that from the start, but that hat just locked your attention like a goddamn laser pointer. Holy shit you want that hat. Where do you even buy something so beautifully hideous?

And while you were sitting there daydreaming about giant top hats you see the snappy dresser has
left the sandwich shop with at least six footlongs. You’re pretty sure there’s no way to make six footlong subs in such a short time frame, so you decide to stick your head inside and see what’s up.

Everyone in the shop is asleep. The folks at the tables, the guys behind the counter, that fat lady who was on her way to the bathroom, and now has rolls just expanding all over the place. It’s like the bitch is made out of gravy. You think you’re gonna leave before you have to bleach your eyeballs.

At any rate you know how snappy got their hands on those sandwiches. You check down the alley they ducked down, and see the same dogshit jacket they were wearing lying on the ground. And just past them is the scarf. You don’t make a point of chasing sandwich thieves, but if the disguise is being ditched… that hat… it beckons.

Yeah you’re chasing a criminal with access to some sort of sleeping gas for a stupid looking blue top hat. This is the Strider level of devotion to irony. And you wouldn’t have it any other way.

Of course you find yourself wondering if you’ve fucked up a minute later when you see two freaky cosplayers with grey skin and horns around the corner tearing into the sandwiches. They don’t look particularly dangerous, but you’re still not sure how they knocked out a sandwich shop full of people. Maybe you’ll do without the hat.

You step back to leave and see a flash of blue. You’re preparing for evasive maneuvers but pause when you see the blue is a bunch of game dice. You watch them curiously as the roll to a stop, and suddenly start glowing. Time to resume getting the fuck out of here.

Suddenly the dice grow brighter, and you throw an arm over your face as they reach the equivalent of a flashbang in intensity. Okay, these guys are bad news, and they know exactly where you are. You flashstep out of the alley before you can get into trouble, and take off for home. Without your shitty katana at hand you’re pretty sure you want to take them on. And more important than your lack of weapons is the apple juice, which must be protected at all costs.

Wait.

Where is the apple juice?

Where the FUCK has your apple juice gone?

You did not do something so stupid as to leave your apple juice back in that alley. That definitely did not just happen.

…

No one can ever know about this.

Okay, so you need to go back to save your juice from evil flashbang packing cosplayers. You also need to find that goddamn hat, because if you’re going back there you are going the whole fucking way. Without your katana though you have nothing to fight with, which is a problem because you don’t use flashbangs unless you’ve got some sort of weaponry or martial skill to back it up.

Fighting will not be an option. This much is clear. But you do have the advantage of speed. Flashstepping is a Strider original, after all. Okay so it’s actually an anime thing, but Striders are the only ones who actually practice it. You dart down the alley and peer around the corner. You see the cosplayers packing up the sandwiches, along with your juice. And the hat is… on the ground next to the taller one. A closer look tells you that she’s got some sort of mechanical arm, either a convincing fake or just a fancy prosthetic.
You decide to move in before they can run off with your apple juice, and decide to get their attention. It’s time for… a distraction. Basically you flashstep in and take the hat. It gets the attention of the cosplayer with the mechanical arm, but the other doesn’t appear to notice you yet. She’s wearing glasses and has a cane. Blind? Or just faking it? It would explain the flashbang use if she was actually blind. A capable blind person is more than enough of an advantage if they go for your senses again.

“You know, around here ganking apple juice from a Strider is a capital offense.” You remark casually, the top hat already perched on your head. Oh yes this was so worth it the robot girl is looking at you like you’re insane. “If you lovely ladies don’t put the juice down and back away slowly I’m going to have to unleash sweet fruity justice on your fine asses.”

“Wееееееell, it looks like you weren’t scared off after all!” The robot girl says with a smirk. “Unfortunately for you Marquise Spinneret Mindfang never lets go of her booty.”

Clearly this Mindfang person is going for a pirate theme, going from the stupid name, eye patch, and totally serious use of the word “booty”. You’re not sure if it’s hilarious or sad how totally unironic she’s being about this. Either way, you know exactly how to handle her. “Well shit that’s fair enough, if I had a booty like yours I wouldn’t want to let go of it either. Still gonna need the juice though.”

You were expecting her to be embarrassed by your comment. What’s odd though is that when she blushes her cheeks turn blue. Some sort of strange makeup, perhaps? Doesn’t really matter, you guess. What’s important is that you’ve already got her completely flustered. She likes to talk big, but clearly she’s not used to Strider level witty banter.

You can definitely handle Mindfang. She’s clearly dangerous, but she’s also easily riled up. You decide to focus on the other one instead. She’s laughing at your comment and that’s not good. Laughing means comfort. Comfort means confidence, real confidence, as opposed to bravado. You’ve got two weapons at the moment: speed and banter. Far from ideal, especially if the blind one is unperturbed by snappy comebacks.

You decide to prod at them both some more, to see if you can make them slip up. “So, how about it? The juice, or your dignity? Which is it gonna be?”

“Oh my, it would appear that we are in fact dealing with some sort of coolkid!” the blind one cackles like a maniac as her head turns towards you. You see or a brief moment her tongue flicking out like a snake. “How do you intend to take our dignity, coolkid?” Oh man does she even know how that sounds holy shit.

“Well from the way your friend is reacting I think I took hers already.” You say with a smirk. You flashstep next to her, just out of reach. “I get the impression it won’t be so easy with you though.” Blind doesn’t seem vulnerable to banter or innuendo, so you figure playing them off of each other may work better.

You stop as eight dice bounce off of your chest. The flash bang dice again, shit. You jump back so that you aren’t as close to the blind girl, and throw an arm over your eyes again. Except this time there is no flash. A tree grows in the middle of the alley instead. What. The. Fuck.

“You’re not wearing costumes are you?” You jump away as Mindfang steps around the tree to chase you. “I mean shit, usually cosplayers aren’t capable of much other than looking stupid.”

“Nooooooooope, not costumes.” Mindfang drawls with a grin. She knows she’s got the advantage again, and her bravado is returning stronger than ever. The element of surprise is hers now. “We are
waaaaaay better than you humans.”

“Aliens then. Hot damn that is dull.” You jump into the tree and spy the bag of apple juice sitting next to the blind girl. “I mean really, grey skin and horns? That’s just lazy alien design. We’re talking Star Trek levels here. Give them pointy ears and call them Vulcans, oh no they’re not people anymore they’re space people! Much better!”

“We’re called trolls.” The blind troll calls out casually. “And trust me when I say we’re definitely better.”

“Is that why you need to steal our pitiful earth sandwiches?” You jump to her side. “I mean I can understand stealing apple juice because apple juice is the best fucking thing ever, but that sandwich shop was pretty shitty.”

There it is. The blind girl is off guard for the first time you’ve seen. She’s clearly a tough girl; her blindness doesn’t seem to faze her. But this is a vulnerability that she can’t fight past. “Even alien girls need to eat.” She smiles ruefully as she turns to face you. You suddenly feel like the bad guy here.

Mindfang rushes back around the tree and gets between the two of you, head pointed down defensively. You step back, eying the girl’s horns warily. “Okay shit, look, clearly we got off on the wrong foot here. I didn’t come looking for a fight; I just want my fucking apple juice. Also this hat. I can’t give up this hat, that is so completely non-negotiable.”

“Aww, I kinda liked that hat.” The blind girl says with a grin.

“That’s because I’m the only one with a good eye between the two of us. Three of us apparently…” Mindfang turns to stare evenly at you. “Okaaaaaaaay, so here’s the deal, Strider. We give you your damn juice; you agree not to tell everyone you know there are aliens hiding in this city. We’re trying to keep a low profile here.” She pockets her dice and grabs the bag of juice. You notice she’s trying not to use her robot arm.

“Your arm broken?”

“None of your damn business, just take your stupid juice and go.” Mindfang snaps at you. You look the two of them over again properly.

Both girls are looking pretty skinny, and while they’re putting up a good front you can tell they’re worn out. Mindfang’s arm is definitely broken, from what looks like gunfire. You don’t know what these two have been through, but you know it’s likely been more difficult than you can imagine. Your decision is pretty clear at this point.

“Tell you girls what, I’ll do you one better. You come to my place with me, get a good night’s sleep, get that arm fixed up. I’d offer dinner as well but we’ve got more weapons in our kitchen than actual food.”

Mindfang opens her mouth, likely to protest, but the blind girl cuts her off. “Well, well, a coolkid and a gentleman! I don’t think you can fix a robot arm, though. The guy who made it was very skilled. We’ll take you up on that offer though. My name is Terezi, and this is Vriska.” Vriska groans, as her friend seems to take over.

You gasp in mock surprise. “Wait shit, you mean her name’s not really Mindfang? Holy shit that’s amazing I thought Mindfang was the most not fake sounding name ever!” Vriska sticks her tongue out at you and you smirk at her before you start walking down the alley. “Alright ladies, the name’s
Dave Strider. Just follow me and act natural, we’ll be at my place in no time. And don’t worry about the arm. I know a guy.”

You pull out your cellphone and dial your bro. Normally you don’t bother checking in with him when you’re going out, but you figure you should warn him before you bring space aliens home. You don’t have to wait long before he answers.

“Dave? The fuck are you dude, I thought you were buying apple juice?”

“Hey Bro. I’m heading home right now, just stopped to do my duty as interplanetary ambassador on the way.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?”

“Aliens, dude. Found a couple of space babes and decided to take them home for a good time.”

“You’re bringing home space aliens.”

“That’s right bro, so get out the good napkins, set up some doilies, and get some pants for your damn puppets, I don’t want you embarrassing the human race with your pornography.”

“Fuck off little man, you’re the only one in my house who likes women anyways. So you can impress them on your own.”

“Whatever dude, I’ll be there in five.” You hang up with a chuckle and turn back to the girls.

“Alright, we’re all clear on my end, let’s get moving before my family can trash the house.”

Terezi and Vriska follow closely, Terezi tapping along with her cane, and Vriska glaring at anyone who looks twice. You’re not entirely sure about the logic behind inviting space aliens into your home, but whatever. This promises to be too entertaining for you to pass up.

You can only imagine what John will have to say about this.

Chapter End Notes

I originally just thought of the top hat as a way to cove Vriska's horns, but when I thought of how Dave is, I knew he'd want the thing by virtue of it's sheer ugliness and ironic potential. And from there this chapter more or less wrote itself.
The Light in the Woods

Chapter Summary

Rose gets some unexpected news, before receiving an unusual visitor.

Chapter Notes

I have no idea how to code text. Please forgive me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your name is Rose Lalonde, and you wish you could say you weren’t expecting this. Unfortunately the writing that has been on the wall for several months now is now shifting to your monitor before your very eyes. You have received a text from your online boyfriend stating that he wishes to talk. Normally that would not be suspicious, but you know John is never available Friday evenings, as he spends those with his family. You expect the worst.

-- ghostyTrickster [GT] began pestering tentacleTherapist [TT] at 01:41 --

GT: hey rose.
TT: John.
TT: I was not expecting to hear from you tonight.
TT: Did your family cancel movie night?
GT: oh, no, that’s still going on…
GT: we were just watching con air and it made me realize something.
TT: Oh my, has Nicholas Cage’s wifebeater led you to yet another epiphany?
TT: My goodness, will the wonders of that filthy shirt and it’s crippling lack of sleeves never cease?
GT: come on rose, I’m being serious here.
TT: Of course John.
TT: I know full well the seriousness with which you take Con Air.
GT: roooooooooooosse!
TT: Joooooooooohnnn?
GT: i don’t mean con air levels of seriousness here!
GT: we all know when i’m being “serious” about con air it’s usually just me being a goof.
TT: Oh.
TT: Well yes obviously I knew that, but I never thought I’d hear you say such a thing.
TT: My apologies John, please continue with your genuinely serious matter that you need to discuss with me.
GT: hehehe, no worries.
GT: i can totally see why you’d think this was just me acting like i always get when i watch con air, even though it’s not.
GT: okay so serious time.
GT: this is… oh man how do i begin here?
TT: Take your time John.
TT: I am more than willing to wait.
GT: okay, well this is about…
GT: shit, okay, so this is about our relationship.
TT: …
TT: I see.
TT: Well, this does promise to be a serious matter then.
GT: right, well, basically i was watching con air.
GT: at the scene where cage reunites with his loving wife and daughter.
GT: and i was imagining myself in that situation.
GT: but when i was picturing my loving wife in that situation…
GT: i couldn’t picture you.
GT: i was trying to imagine myself reuniting with you, because you are my girlfriend and that’s just common sense.
GT: but when i thought of your face in that situation it just felt…
GT: wrong.
GT: and so i started thinking about our relationship, and how we’re on opposite sides of the country, and how we’ve only been able to meet a few times in real life.
GT: and lately when we’ve been talking online it seems…
GT: strained.
GT: like we’re trying too hard to force ourselves to be affectionate with each other.
GT: so i was just thinking that maybe we should break up?
TT: Oh…
TT: Well, that was even more serious than I had imagined.
TT: perhaps we should have discussed this over the phone instead.
GT: yeah, i wanted to do that, but i don’t think i could have said this clearly over the phone. I’m pretty much a stuttering mess right now.
TT: Well then let me just make sure I have this straight.
TT: You realized through Con Air that you had troubles picturing us in a long-term relationship.
GT: yes.
TT: And because of this you feel that we should just be friends instead of remaining romantically involved.
GT: yes.
TT: And now you’re replacing me with Nicholas Cage.
GT: yes.
GT: WAIT NO ROSE WHAT?
TT: So my suspicions were correct.
TT: :O
GT: you close your mouth this instant rose!
GT: and stop putting strange sentences in mine!
GT: i’m trying to have a serious discussion about our relationship here!
TT: I can tell.
TT: Clearly your attraction to Nicholas Cage is a great wall between us I cannot hope to conquer.
TT: My love for you is not enough to defeat his sweaty wifebeater.
GT: no, rose, can we please just talk straight here?
TT: Oh, very well then.
TT: Your new love interest shall have to wait for another session.
GT: okay i have to say you are reacting to this a lot better than i expected.
TT: Am I?
GT: well yeah.
GT: i mean as stupid as it sounds i just decided to break up with you because of con air.
GT: well mostly because of a lot of soul searching and bittersweet memories.
GT: but con air started it.
GT: i’m not sure here rose but i feel like this should be grounds for anger. after all i’m even angry with myself for how this started!
TT: It’s fine John.
TT: While you’re right that the reason you started thinking like this is laughably awful, I understand that your feelings on the matter are genuine.
TT: And in truth I’ve been noticing the distance between us too as of late.
TT: While I certainly do love you dearly John I’m afraid I too have issues seeing us in a lasting arrangement.
GT: so does that mean this is a mutual break-up?
TT: I believe it does.
GT: oh thank god!
GT: i was so worried i would be hurting your feelings, or breaking your heart or something!
TT: Rest assured my heart remains in full working order.
GT: okay so we’re good then.
TT: Of course we are, John.
TT: After all the time we’ve known each other it would be silly to let a break-up damage our friendship.
GT: agreed!
GT: hehehe, wow i feel silly for worrying so much now.
GT: okay, well i guess i should get back downstairs; dad and jane already watched another movie while I was thinking.
TT: Feel free.
TT: I would not want to interfere with your family time.
TT: We can talk more later.
GT: yes, i’d definitely like that.
GT: have a good night, rose!
TT: Good night, John.

-- ghostyTrickster [GT] has signed off! --

You’re honestly not sure how you feel about this. John has been your online boyfriend for five years now, since shortly after he turned 13. While it’s true that you had trouble seeing the relationship continuing into the future, you still feel like a constant element in your life has been destroyed. While the distance between the two of you was great, he still managed to be there for you when you needed him.

After several minutes you decide that sitting in your room is not doing you a damn bit of good, and you decide to escape the house and get some fresh air. You go to your window and climb out onto your roof, forgoing the door so as to avoid your family. The night is overcast, and the only light in your area comes from your own house, and the laboratory next door where your mother works. The few stars that can be seen appear dim through the rare gaps in the clouds.

“Rooooooosie!” the voice ringing out behind you sounds far too chipper for your current mood, and you flinch as you turn to see your sister stumbling across the roof. “Rosie, you know the rules! No roof parties without me!”

“Oh I’m well aware of the rules.” You say, trying to keep your voice even. “I’m simply not in the party mood.”
Roxy stops and scrutinizes you carefully, her expression changed from goofy to sad. “He decided to break up with you, huh?”

“How could you possibly know that?” you glare at Roxy before she can hug you, and she raises her hands in surrender.

“Well, you know Egdork.” Roxy smiles sadly at you. “He’s been panicking about this all day. Watched Con Air last night because his family vetoed it for movie night, and then started emailing everyone he could try to get advice.”

“That’s not what he told me.” you frown as you think back to your conversation with John. “Why would he lie about that?”

“Auuugh, that was Jake’s idea.” Roxy slaps a hand against her head and shakes it in frustration. “He thought you might be more offended if John told you he spent all day thinking about breaking up with you. I said that was stupid, but John had already latched on to the idea.”

“Just how many people were involved in this discussion?”

“Me, Jake, Jane stepped in a little bit, Jade, Dave, and Lil’ Hal.” Roxy sighs, “though Jake and Dave were no help at all, and Jade spent most of the chat being sad. If I took a drink every time she typed ‘oh noooooooo’ it would be enough to kill even me.”

You have to smile a bit at that. “Well at least John had you and Hal to set him straight. I imagine it must have been quite the debate. Rose Lalonde: is she worth it?”

Roxy grabs you before you can defend yourself, and gives you a bone-crushing hug. “Rosie baby, you are so completely worth it you have no idea.” She starts rubbing your back, and it takes all your willpower to remember why you’re upset. She starts talking right in your ear, in a comforting murmur that settles you. “I know you love John, and I know John loves you. You’re not in a relationship any more, but that’s not going to change how you two feel. It just means you know how much you really mean to each other.”

You smile as Roxy’s words sink in. Your older sister always seems to be able to put things in perspective, and it’s made you realize why this has upset you. You knew for a long time that your relationship with John wasn’t what it used to be, and that frightened you. You may laugh at high school romances and find romantic comedies trite, but it would seem that breakups remain scary as hell.

“Thank you Roxy, I’m feeling alright now.” You smile reassuringly at her as she steps back, and you notice she’s tearing up. Your face remains thankfully dry. “You should go inside, it’s a rather chilly night.” You look down and notice that she’s dressed in only shorts and a t-shirt, one of her old ones with a cat on them.

“I’m fine baby sis, you and I both know this bod’s too hot for a little cold weather.” Roxy exclaims proudly as she places her hands on her hips, prompting a chuckle from you. “Besides, we gotta take advantage of the weather while it’s not raining. Watch the stars, catch some fireflies…”

You frown. “Roxy, the fireflies don’t come out for a few weeks yet.”

Roxy’s face goes flat as she squints out into the dark. Her eyes narrow suspiciously, and you turn to see what she’s looking at. “Rose, do you have your phone on you?”

“Yes, what’s going on?”
“Call mom.” Roxy rushes over to her window, and comes back with her rifle. You take another look into the forest, and see a light moving about in the pitch black. Your hand flies to your phone immediately.

Roxy raises her scope to her eye and peers into the woods, her face all business. You are trying to see the source of the light, your phone held to your ear. It goes immediately to voicemail, and you hang up. “Her phone’s off, she’s still working.” you say to Roxy, and she bites her lip and nods. The light in the woods is growing steadily.

Roxy continues to stare down into the woods through her scope, though her hands have yet to move to the trigger. You tend to favor using your knitting needles if you need to defend yourself, so you have no choice but to leave matters to Roxy.

Finally, after several minutes pass where the light skirts the edge of the woods, Roxy loses her patience and shifts her hands to the trigger. She tenses up and fires a shot wide of the light, causing it to freeze. “That was a warning shot, asshole!” She hollers into the night. “Come out with your hands up or I put the next one in your head.”

There is a moment in which nothing happens, and then the light moves to the open. You and Roxy gape. The light was not a flashlight, as you originally thought. Instead, the light’s source is coming directly from the person who walked out, a tall woman wearing black and red. Her skin is glowing a bright white, and with her black lips it makes her face easy to read.

She seems to be embarrassed, a bit of a smile on her face as she holds her hands in the air, with her arms raised and her head lowered. “I apologize for disturbing you,” she calls out with a soft voice, “I was just trying to pass through, I didn’t mean to intrude.”

Roxy smirks as she moves along the edge of the roof, silent as a wraith. She slides down the roof’s access ladder with one hand, the other keeping her rifle trained firmly on the intruder. Once she reaches the ground you follow behind her, keeping an eye over your shoulder as you go.

“Well, that certainly sounds inconvenient.” you say as you reach Roxy’s side. “It’s a wonder you haven’t ran afoul of any unwanted attention before now. And the horns, are those a recent development as well?”

Roxy jumps as she looks up and spots the two horns on top of the woman’s head. “Sweet Jegus how did I miss those?” She mutters to herself.

“Alright, so what’s with the glowing?” Roxy asks casually as she trains her gun on the intruder. “Is that usual for you?”

“I’m afraid so.” The woman glances aside with a frown. “I started glowing several months ago and I haven’t been able to figure out how to make it stop.”

“Well, that certainly sounds inconvenient.” you say as you reach Roxy’s side. “It’s a wonder you haven’t ran afoul of any unwanted attention before now. And the horns, are those a recent development as well?”

Roxy jumps as she looks up and spots the two horns on top of the woman’s head. “Sweet Jegus how did I miss those?” She mutters to herself.

Kanaya coughs and looks around, perhaps trying to see if she can make a break for it. Then she looks back at the rifle and Roxy’s stern face and sighs. “I was born with these horns. I’m not a human. I’m what’s known as a troll.”

“You aren’t half as ugly as any trolls I’ve ever seen.” Roxy says with a laugh. “And you sure don’t sound Jamaican to me.”

“Uhh… Jmaecn? No, my name is Kanaya. Who is Jmaecn?” Kanaya asks with a puzzled tilt of her head. “What other trolls have you met?”

“She’s referring to trolls as they are portrayed in video games.” You say, rolling your eyes as Roxy
bursts out laughing. “No relation to your species.”

“Oh, I see.” She glances at the rifle, still trained on her face even as Roxy is doubled over laughing. “Well, if you don’t have any information for me, I’d like to be on my way, I won’t disturb you again, so…” she sighs, as Roxy remains oblivious to everything she’s saying. “Could you please get her to stop aiming her gun at me?” She turns to you beseechingly.

“Roxy, down girl.” You say with a smirk, and Roxy lowers her rifle. She straightens up and smiles winningly at Kanaya. You turn to her with a smile. “There, gun’s down, we’re all friends here.”

“And as our new friend, you have to come inside for the night!” Roxy says with a grin. You nod in affirmation. Kanaya makes a move to run. The resulting scuffle is short, as Kanaya given only half-hearted resistance, and the two of you steer her back to your house.

Your mother Rue Lalonde is already in the kitchen. She has a bottle of tequila on the counter, to your annoyance, but when she sees Roxy enter she swiftly tucks it away into her private pantry and locks it.

“Hey mom, an alien followed us home, can we keep her?” Roxy yells loudly. Kanaya is acting more out of place than ever, and you smile reassuringly at her. Your smile falters as your mother rushes over, with a look you cannot discern. Not that anything she does ever makes any sense to you.

“The plane that went down in Illinois last November, right?” your mother’s face has become sharp as she looks at Kanaya suspiciously.

Kanaya seems very taken aback at Rue’s question, and you can tell she’s feeling very uncomfortable with the situation. “Uh, yes, that’s what I’ve heard, though my knowledge is limited. I find it hard to keep up to date on current events while on the run.”

“And you’ve been on the run since the crash?”

“No, only for the past few months. Since… February? Is that what it’s called?”

“That’s right dear, now tell me one more thing. Where were you held between November and February?”

“I was with my friends on a military base. They held us there until we escaped. Well I assume they escaped. I died during the endeavor, so I missed the ending of it.” This causes everyone in the room to pause, even your mother, and you realize suddenly that Kanaya’s pale skin and slightly protruding canines remind you of Dracula. Your curiosity is put on hold as your mother recovers her train of thought.

“The man running this base. What was his name?”

Kanaya’s face shifts at the question, from nervous but collected to downright livid with rage. Her hand slides into her pocket, as she seems to let out a low hiss. Roxy moves her hand back to the trigger of her rifle as she eyes Kanaya warily. Kanaya remains still though, and while she trembles with anger she spits out “Doctor Scratch.”

Rue Lalonde’s face goes white as a sheet as she hears the name. “What was your name dear?” She nods absentmindedly as Roxy blurts out the answer, “Well Kanaya, I’m sorry to say that if your friends are not in custody they will likely be soon enough. Doctor Scratch is a shrewd tactician, with a great deal of resources at his disposal.”

“You speak as though you know him, mother.” You turn to face her curiously. “How would you
know the captor of our friend? Have you met these trolls before?”

“Trolls? Oh no, this is the first time I have had the pleasure.” Your mother waves a hand dismissively and addresses Kanaya again. “My dear, I insist you stay with us until you receive further news. Rest assured that as long as you are in my house you will be safe from prying eyes. Out there however you will be found. It would only be a matter of time.”

“Mother, while I agree we should keep our guest safe, I will not let that be a distraction.” You glare at her as Roxy sighs. She has been in the middle of many a spat between the two of you over the years.

This time however her services are not required. Your mother taps her foot irritably, but knows that she’s said too much to keep her information a secret. “Fine Rose, you win. I know Doctor Scratch because he and I used to be colleagues. I used to work with him for the government.”

Chapter End Notes

Welp, pretty simple portrayal of the characters for the most part. John's earnest, shrugs things off easily, and is sometimes an asshole by accident. Roxy is goofy but ridiculously capable. Rose is serious for the most part, but still has snark enough for all who wish it. And Kanaya is polite, reserved, and hiding some serious levels of kickass. Also a note on shipping here: I know some people think Rose is lesbian because she is dating Kanaya. That is by no means an unfair assessment. However, I feel that Rose wouldn't be Rose if you could categorize her so easily. Therefore, Rose in my headcanon swings whichever way she damn well pleases. Sue me.
Your name is Gamzee Makara, and you are leaving the base where you’ve spent the past five months. You’ve got some people you need to meet, and a best motherfucking friend/guy you are completely flushed for, to save.

It’s been a long month of agony for you, as you felt the sopor slime that kept you contained draining from your body, and you slipped closer to insanity. Each time you used the load gaper, each time you woke up in the middle of the night heaving blood and bile, each time you dug your claws into your skin so deep they came away drenched in purple, you felt yourself slip a little more.

You don’t know if that’s how it really works, but it’s how you perceived it, so it’s motherfucking gospel as far as you’re concerned. The miracles you used to believe in are nothing compared to the gospel of pain.

You are Gamzee Makara, and last night your friends abandoned you to the whims of humans. They ran away, and left you behind to rot with Tavros. You don’t think that was very motherfucking cool of them.

Even more uncool is the torture though. Since they dragged Tavros away the humans have busied themselves beating you to a pulp. At first you tried to fight back, managing to stick your horns into one of them, but then they told you “try that again and we’ll kill your friend.” You’ve not been fighting back since then.

Instead you sit strapped to a chair, as they continue to beat you. It’s not enough to do permanent damage, but damned if it doesn’t hurt. And when you feel so weary that you want to pass out they stick drugs in you. Not the good kind though. All these drugs do is keep you awake, so that you can’t even sleep the pain away, and you really wish you had some sopor to take the edge off of your mind, and all of this feeling.
You are Gamzee Makara, and you are following your best motherfucking friends to a shuttle. Karkat is ushering everyone along, and while he looks pretty motherfuckin’ worried, he’s also looking pretty relieved. He’s taking you all away from Alternia, or as he calls it: “The biggest fucking shithole of a planet in the goddamn universe.” You don’t think your home is that bad, but Karbro has always been smarter than you, so you suppose there must be a reason to leave. Besides, it wouldn’t be right to abandon your best motherfucking friend in his time of need. *Even if his blood is complete fucking garbage.*

You are Gamzee Makara, and you are being dragged to a cell in chains. Unlike the room they kept you in before though, this one is small and cold and empty. The humans throw you to the ground and laugh. One of them spits on you. *You think you’d like to tear his lips off.* Though that seems like a bit of a motherfucking overreaction.

Two hours ago your friends ran away through the hole in the wall, and left you and Tavros to fend for yourselves. At first you thought Equius would come for you like he’s motherfucking supposed to, but it doesn’t seem likely anymore. And if he isn’t coming for you the others sure as fuck aren’t either. You’ll have to figure out what to do on your own.

Your thoughts are disrupted when Doctor Scratch strolls into the room, and pulls something long and black out of his suit. “I want you to know before I do this that your friends forced me into this position,” he states calmly, “normally I would never resort to such unrefined measures.” He presses a button on the thing he’s holding and it crackles to life with electricity. When he jabs you with it your body alights with agony. You feel, more than hear, yourself scream as your body crackles from the voltage.

“It would seem that 5 million volts is painful no matter what species you are.” Scratch says calmly. “We seem to be learning something already. And we will have plenty of time to learn more in the future.”

“Best not get too motherfucking complacent. My friends will save me.” you choke out, trying to get your limbs to work correctly again. “And the mirthful messiahs wouldn’t let something this unmiraculous go down.”

Scratch stares blankly at you for several seconds, and then bursts into laughter. “A Juggalo troll! Will wonders never cease?” You feel your lips curl back into a feral snarl as this motherfucking worm laughs at your faith. Unfortunately for you he notices, and drives the electric prod into your side again, this time holding it there as you thrash about in agony. His face is impassive, but his eyes, bright green and cruel, linger in your mind as everything goes black.

When you wake up again Dr. Scratch is still there, facing the opening to your cell. You struggle to sit up, but find that your body is still unresponsive. Your foot barely twitches when you try to move it, and you’re not even sure if you made that happen.

“I have no patience for religion.” You look up at Dr. Scratch. He hasn’t moved an inch, and deigns not to so much as glance in your direction. “Religion is a crutch for the weak, a feeble support to carry the hopeless through their lives. And you are not allowed to be feeble or weak or hopeless.”

“You are going to be strong. You are going to be deadly. It is not I who will make you that way though. No, you will be deadly because you wish to be. You will kill because you are a killer. It is written in your eyes, you see. When I look at you I see a vast wealth of untapped potential. We’ll have to see what we can do to reach into it.”
“First thing’s first: you will no longer be a Juggalo. We will stamp that out and replace it with something you can use. Pain.” You hiss as he approaches you again, but with all these chains you can’t smash his skull in like you want to do. All you can do is lie on the ground helplessly, as Doctor Scratch steps over you and pulls out a knife.

The first cut isn’t so terrible; you were ready for it beforehand. The knife drags from the top of your forehead down, splitting your head all the way to the tip of your nose. Not terrible, but it still hurts like a bitch. The second is worse though; as you still try to recover from the first cut he slices into your left eyebrow and drags the knife slowly, curving over the bridge of your nose and cutting through to the right eyebrow. The blood rushes into your eyes and blinds you, and so you don’t know where the third cut is coming from until the knife is in your cheek. This last cut loops around your cheek, curving your jawline, and repeats the pattern on the opposite side of your face.

“While you are under my supervision, there will be no messiah to save you. Your friends will not find you. And nothing will exist for you except for pain.” Scratch whispers lowly into your ear. “While you are here in my domain, I am your God.”

He leaves the room, and you lay on the ground bleeding on the floor. It’s funny though, now that the cutting is done, you feel… refreshed. Really, that wasn’t so motherfucking bad at all!

You are Gamzee Makara, and after weeks of torture they are finally letting you see Tavros again. You’ve been worried sick about him, stuck in this place with no friends, no legs, and no confidence. You hope he’s endured everything as well as you’ve managed to, because you don’t know what you would do if your only remaining friend was to go through the pain you have and come out different. Really though, as a bronze-blood his mind is supposed to be weak anyways.

When you see him however, you’re surprised to see that he’s more or less the same as ever. He’s still looking well fed, he’s got a wheelchair now so he’s not immobile, and he doesn’t look like he’s been tortured at all. Pity.

“Gamzee, it’s uhh, really good to umm, see you again!” Tavros says with a grin, wheeling forward to meet you. “I was, well, worried about you!”

“I’m fine, Tavbro.” you’re unable to help the smile creeping across your face, and while your eye is nearly swollen shut seeing him makes it all worth it. “These motherfuckers have been hurting me plenty, but it’s nothing I can’t handle.”

Tavros stops smiling at that, and you see him look you over with worry. “Well, uhh, if you’re sure about that, then I uhh, I guess that’s okay?” It’s not motherfucking okay. But you don’t want Tavros to worry. You care about him too fucking much.

You are Gamzee Makara, and you just confessed to your flushcrush in the most embarrassingly clumsy way possible. You’re staring at a row of commas stretching across your trollian window and wondering what you were motherfucking thinking. ‘Make out a little’? You don’t just ask somebody as shy as Tavbro to make out at the drop of a hat! You have to order him.

But you don’t want to go and make a bro up and have feelings for somebody against his will. Unfortunately for you though it doesn’t look like Tavros is feeling particularly concupiscent towards you. He’s logged off of Trollian completely now. You grab a pie and consider trolling Karkat. He watches a lot of rom-coms; maybe he’ll know what you should do.
You are Gamzee Makara, and you’ve beaten the drugs. They beat you mercilessly, but now you don’t feel it. You’ve let your mind go blank, and shut the pain out of your head. Eventually they toss you in with Tavros, and he’s looking more worried than usual.

“Gamzee, uhh, why are you going through all this?” You take note slowly, staring over at him blankly. “You could have just, uhh, left me behind and escaped, but you, uhh, stayed with me…”

You force yourself to sit up properly. “I couldn’t just motherfucking abandon a good fucking friend like you to these worms. I love you too motherfucking much to do that.”

You need him to say he loves you as well. After everything you’ve gone through, you need to hear that he knows what that means. That it means something to him too. If you can just hear him say he loves you, you know they’ll never break you.

Tavros looks uncomfortable. He seems unsure of what to say, for some reason. Even though there’s only one answer that you need… he’s hesitating. “I, uhh, well, I really appreciate it Gamzee, and uhh, I think that you’re a really, umm, a really good, uh, friend as well.”

The next time they hit you the pain is worse than ever.

You are Gamzee Makara, and you are leaving the base where you’ve spent the past five months. You’ve got some people you need to meet, and a best motherfucking friend/guy you are completely flushed for, to save.

You have a job now. Doctor Scratch has sworn to let you save Tavros if you bring him the heads of the other trolls. Well actually, he just wants proof they’re dead, but you think heads will do the trick just motherfucking fine for that. Maybe wipe that smug grin off of his bald head. And if it doesn’t, you’ll just tear that grin off his head yourself. Or even better, tear his head off of that grin.

You don’t want to wait to kill Scratch, but you have no choice. A motherfucker like that, so convinced he’s got you under his control; you need to kill him when the moment’s right. When he’s got your friends at his feet, when he thinks he’s bought you off, when he gives you Tavros and things your deal is done. That’s when you’ll do it. You’ll stab him through the motherfucking heart with Tavros’ own horns.

If they try to kill you then you won’t be worried. Your traitorous, cowardly fellow trolls will be dead. Your tormentor will be dead. You’ll be free. And when you’re free you know these human fuckers won’t be hurting you. You’ll be hurting them. You won’t let yourself die until you’ve stopped every fucking one of them.

Chapter End Notes

Gamzee is psychotic. Tavros is cowardly. Writing Gamzee is difficult because nobody knows what the fuck's going on in his head. Writing Tavros is easy because I just write lot's of uhhs and umms, and have him say whatever people don't want to hear.
Typical Troll Behavior

Chapter Summary

John comes across a troll in serious trouble.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Your name is John Egbert, and you could seriously use some air. You’ve spent most of the day arguing with your classmates over your aviation engineering assignments, who don’t seem to understand anything about aerodynamics. The efficiency of their design was terrible, so you spent the day fighting instead of getting anything done. They think they’re smarter than you, but you know better.

If there’s one thing you know better than anyone else, it’s how wind works.

If there’s one thing people don’t accuse you of, it’s knowing things.

You tend not to let these things annoy you; people have taken you to be somewhat thick for ages, and to be fair you can be airheaded. The problem is though, that this incident is being coupled with the fact that it’s been two weeks since you’ve heard from your now ex-girlfriend Rose Lalonde.

You broke up with her after a full day spent deliberating and asking your friends for advice, including your ex’s sister and a particularly smart computer. And while you felt that you ended your relationship on good terms, you haven’t heard from her since. She has not called you, texted you, or messaged you on Pesterchum. When you asked Roxy about it she told you that Rose was being kept busy due to a sudden houseguest, but that wouldn’t account for a full two weeks without contact. It’s rather upsetting to you, because while you decided Rose and you were not suited for each other romantically, she is still pretty much your best friend ever.

So now after spending the day arguing and coming home to your computer to find that Rose has neglected to contact you for the fourteenth day in a row, even as Roxy is talking to you more than ever, you’ve decided that you need to vent your frustration.

You’ve dressed all in black for safety’s sake, and are at the front door. You hear a commotion from the kitchen and look to see Jane in another baking frenzy. She’s been back from medical school for all of two days, and has baked at least four cakes. You thought your dad was bad on his own, but you had forgotten the way your family gets about baking when they team up.

“You’re going out for a bit.” You call to her as you abscond out the door. “I have my phone if you need to get ahold of me.” Jane’s only response is a grunt, as she furiously works a whisk. When she’s in the zone that’s about all you can ever get out of her. Your differing opinions on Betty Crocker have been the result of many a war in the Egbert household, and ignoring you while she cooks is the only way Jane manages to contain an impending cakepocalypse.

Once outside you stretch your legs and arms a bit, preparing to make your exit quickly, before your father gets home from the office. Once you feel more limber you let the wind carry around your feet, and jump.
As far as you’re concerned there is nothing more relaxing than flying. Feeling the breeze flowing around you and lifting you off the ground is a ridiculously freeing sensation, and you don’t really know how you’d deal with the stress you put up with all the time if you didn’t have flight to keep you grounded (hehehe). It’s an ability you’ve had ever since you were a child, one that only your father and sister know about, though you’ve never been able to get an answer out of your father as to how you can even do it. The wind simply comes naturally to you, and you think of it like a brother. A brother that only speaks in whistles.

The air grows colder as you rise further into the sky, and you see your breath leave you in twisting puffs. Your black clothes make you all but invisible from this high in the air, and you let yourself drift with the breeze. Your school and ex girlfriend are no longer on your mind. When you fly, all that exists is yourself and the wind.

After an hour or so, you decide to stop for some food, and you let yourself down in a back alley near a burger place you know will be open until midnight. You start to walk towards the road when the sound of something moving causes you to stop. You look around in confusion, and see a cat pawing around in a dumpster. Clearly, nothing to worry about.

The cat does not agree with you though, as it abruptly hisses and jumps back as a tin can flies out of the dumpster and narrowly misses it. “Stupid fucking flea-bitten beast!” A voice calls out of the dumpster, and the cat swipes at somebody just out of sight. “FUCK, YOU MANGY LITTLE FUCKER, GET OUT OF HERE! After all I’ve been through, the last thing I need to see is a FUCKING CAT!” You see a sickle of all things swing around wildly, and the cat runs away yowling.

“Stupid fucking thing, like I really needed that reminder of my colossal fuckups.” the voice grumbles, and you hear what you think is the person trying to settle down. You decide to investigate.

You lean over the dumpster, and are surprised to see that whatever is down there is almost definitely not human. The person’s grey skin could probably just be a result of sleeping in garbage, but there are clear claws and horns visible, and that is not something you’ve ever known humans to have.

As this is sinking in, the creature notices you, and spazzes out from surprise. You barely have time to take note of it’s blood red eyes before you remember this thing is armed and jump well out of reach.

“YOU PIECE OF SHIT HUMAN, TRYING TO SNEAK UP ON ME, EH? WELL TOO BAD FOR YOU, I WON’T BE RECAPTURED SO EASILY! I’M GOING TO DICE YOU UP!”

“Oh wow, that’s really impolite!” You can’t help but be amused by the antics of the creature (which you are pretty sure is a boy), despite the weapon and shouting. It doesn’t help that he’s got a leg stuck in the garbage, and is waving his scythe at you like a madman while hopping around on one foot. When he frees his foot, the momentum catches him off guard, and he falls on his face with a loud thud, as well as a great deal of cursing.

He manages to enunciate quite well despite him lying face down on the pavement. “TAKE YOUR SHITTY HUMAN MANNERS AND SHOVE THEM UP YOUR WASTE CHUTE. AFTER THE WELCOME YOU FUCKERS GAVE ME WHEN I GOT HERE YOU’RE LUCKY I HAVEN’T CULLED YOUR ENTIRE PITIFUL ASSHOLE RACE. BY ALL RIGHTS I SHOULD HAVE HAD YOU TAKE ME TO YOUR FUCKING LEADER AND TAKEN HIM DOWN BY FORCE. THEN MAYBE YOUR GODAWFUL PLANET WOULDN’T BE SO UNBELIEVABLY TERRIBLE.”

You’re not sure how to respond to that. If it’s true that this guy is here to take over your planet, then you should probably consider calling the police. On the other hand, he looks very similar to humans,
and you don’t think real aliens actually say “take me to your leader”. Even if he is a real alien though, he’s not particularly threatening, and seems bitter rather than bloodthirsty.

You decide to keep things simple, walking up to the fake-looking alien and holding a hand down to him. “Hello, alien creature. My name is John Egbert.”

There’s a long pause. The alien remains face down, unmoving for several long moments. Then finally he lets out a long, drawn out sigh, and holds up a hand. “Karkat.” You can’t help but grin as you help him to his feet and get a proper look at him.

Karkat is very normal looking over all; the horns and red eyes are the only particularly noticeable thing distinguishing him from plain-old human hobos. He’s eying you up as well, probably trying to judge your intentions (your intentions are that you’re friendly). You see blood trickling down his face from his nose, probably from the fall.

“You know you’re bleeding, right?”

“OH SHIT!” Karkat’s eyes bug out again, and he starts wiping at his face with his sleeve, smearing dirt and blood everywhere before stopping. “Wait, why am I freaking out? Everyone knows I’m a mutant blooded monstrosity already.” He lowers his arm, revealing a face that is now far messier than ten seconds earlier, though his face hasn’t diminished in sheer surliness.

“So what’s an alien doing hiding in a dumpster?” You ask, trying to show some friendliness with by smiling. He seems to take it as an insult, glaring at your grin until you are forced to remove it from his presence.

“I’m just sleeping here for the night and carrying on tomorrow morning. I’m just going to go somewhere with low population density so I can never curse anyone with my presence again.” Karkat sighs and trudges back to the dumpster. “You don’t actually have to worry about me killing you or anyone else, I’m not that much of an asshole. Just let me be and keep quiet, and this time tomorrow you’ll never have to worry about the creepy alien monster you found in a giant waste receptacle.”

“You know they pick up the garbage tomorrow in this area.” You inform him with a frown. “You sleep in that dumpster you might get put through the compacter.

Karkat glares at you, as though it’s your fault for setting the garbage schedule. “Well, that’s just fucking great. I guess I’ll go find somewhere even more degrading to spend the night then. Maybe under a rock. Or how about under a bridge? I hear that that’s typical troll behavior around here.”

You decide to put the question of how a space alien came to learn human nursery rhymes aside and deal with the serious issue. “You could always spend the night with my family.”

Karkat looks up at you in disbelief. “Are you fucking serious? You know I don’t have human currency, right? I don’t have any of your different kinds of money. You’d be getting nothing in return.”

“Doesn’t matter.” You reply with a grin. “I just want to help a foreign member of an alien species out.”

Karkat looks hopeful for a moment, but then his face freezes. Hissing, he suddenly turns around and stalks back to the dumpster again, muttering to himself. “What the fuck am I thinking, about to get a family of innocent morons killed just so I can sleep inside.” He turns back to you and gives you a
steely glare. “Yeah, thanks but no thanks, dumbass, I’ve got a lot of shitty people chasing me, and a tendency to get my friends killed. We’re both better off if I stay away.”

You grin at him and grab his wrist. “Too late, my mind’s made up.”

Karkat reacts to the sudden contact like a cat with water. “WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING EGBERT, GET YOUR FUCKING HANDS OFF OF ME, I SAID…” he trails off, one hand still trying to loosen your grip on him, and you see his eyes go wide. Rosy colored tears start to stream down his face, and he starts opening and closing his mouth as he tries to form words that aren’t coming to him. “I said… I said…” he whispers breathlessly, his eyes roving all over the place.

Karkat falls silent, not letting out so much as a breath, and you immediately panic. Unsure of what else to do, you lay him on his side and use your wind powers to push air in and out of his lungs, which thankfully seem to be in the same place as that of a human.

After several moments of this, you see Karkat twitch a little bit. You stop pushing air into his lungs and are relieved to see his chest rising normally. You are less relieved when he chokes, rolls onto his side, and throws up. Bile and blood spill onto the ground, and you decide that you are officially done with this situation. You are not qualified to provide medical care to a space alien.

You pull out your phone and call home, relieved to hear Jane pick up almost immediately. “Egbert residence, this is Jane speaking, how may I help you?”

“Jane, this is John, I need you to get your car and drive down to the Burger Depot, two blocks down the road from the Dadly Depot. I found a space alien that needs medical attention, and he says bad people are following so I don’t think the hospital would be a good idea.”

There’s a pregnant pause before Jane answers. “John, this is a shitty prank even by your standards.”

“Jane! Just get over here fast, this is an emergency! If you don’t get over here right now I’ll use my wind powers to wallpaper your room with cake mix!” You hang up the phone before Jane can give a rebuttal, and return your attention to Karkat. You also catalogue your threat in the back of your mind for future pranking.

“Fuck… off… Egbert…” Karkat’s calls out hoarsely, having barely regained consciousness. “Not… your… business…” he trails off again as he tries to get back on his feet, but he can’t seem to lift himself off of the ground. He seems to settle for rolling away from the vomit he’s left on the ground, though even that causes him to curse from the exertion.

“Shut up Karkat, I’m not going to leave the first space alien I’ve ever met to die in a back alley. Besides, we’re friends now.”

“Oh, great… your stupid friendship emotion. That’s just fucking swell.” Karkat manages to look thoroughly unimpressed despite clearly being in excruciating pain.

“Friendship isn’t an emotion, fucknuts.” You say with a sigh, smiling a bit in spite of everything when you see Karkat weakly raise an arm to flip you off. You decide to leave him for a moment so that you can keep watch for your sister, and after making sure he’s not going to hurt himself further, you head for the opening to the alleyway.

“I don’t… deserve this.” you hear Karkat groan to himself as you walk away. You can’t help but think that he’s right. You don’t know what Karkat’s been through, but you think it’s safe to say that whatever it was, you wouldn’t wish it upon anybody.
So here's John, a goofball with a kind heart and the ability to control the wind. Originally I wasn't going to give any of the humans their powers, but after much consideration I felt it was necessary to have the characters make use of them to at least some extent. John and Jane are the primary ones I placed under consideration regarding this though, because the others all prove to be skilled combatants without their powers. This story is, after all, as much based on action as it is based on character. And the Egberts (as they shall henceforth be referred) are the only characters not to show any sort of aptitude for combat before sburb. Even Rose went from mild-mannered to gouging an ogre's eyes out immediately upon getting an excuse to do so. John on the other hand... lost to an imp. I felt it best to give him something so that I could justify him surviving more than two chapters in a story with so much violence. As for other human characters... well you'll see.

Don't forget to leave a comment! I crave your opinion like other people crave hamburgers. Well, I also crave hamburgers, but I'll settle for constructive criticism!
Your name is Eridan Ampora, and you are on high alert. It has been two months since you and your fellow trolls fled the compound the humans were holding you in, and though you have put many miles between your group and Doctor Scratch, you know he won’t stop looking for you that easily. The dark is deep here on earth, the moon here being much smaller than either of the two on Alternia, but you have your wits honed to razor sharpness.

Your companions are not as focused as you however. Feferi and Sollux have been letting their guard down more and more as they’ve moved away from the base. Feferi is doing everything she can to keep her composure, and acting silly and happy is how she does that best. You could never fault her for that. Sollux however…

You’ve always thought Sollux was supposed to be smart, but he’s acting like a fool right now. His intelligence was something you’ve always respected about him, but now he’s become chipper instead. Well, as chipper as Sollux gets, which basically means rather than scowling he smiles. But his happiness means he's not as on guard as he should be, which could very well get you all killed.

You’d like it stated for the record that you are only against Sollux being happy because it means he’s not as tactically useful. It is definitely not because he has entered a relationship with your moirail/flushcrush. That is not even remotely the reason.

…

You really wish Karkat was here to give you advice. He may be a red-blooded asshole who abandoned you all the first chance he got, but he was always ready to help you with relationship problems. And if you’re being honest, now that you’re a traitor to troll-kind and don’t have anything to gain from the hemospectrum, you really don’t give a shit whether Karkat was a mutant or not.

Suddenly you hear a sound behind you and you freeze, raising Ahab’s Crosshairs to your shoulder. You turn behind you and look around, trying to spot the source. You can’t see anything at the moment though; you’re standing in the middle of a forest clearing at the moment, and the trees are obscuring everything from view.

“Eridan, are you coming?” Feferi calls back to you, having only just noticed that you’ve stopped following them.
“Oh, leave him FF, he’s just jumping at squeakbeasts again.” Sollux waves dismissively and continues to float away. You realize something as he hovers along.

“Sollux stop hovering, you stupid fuck. All of your sparking and fizzing is making it impossible to hear anything!” You spit out angrily, peering back into the woods. You don’t know what you’re hearing, but you know damn well it isn’t squeakbeasts.

“Hmm, how about no.” Sollux smirks and gives you the middle finger, two of them, of course. “I don’t feel like walking through the dirt just because you’re being a paranoid dumbass.”

Another noise sounds out from the woods, closer this time, and you can almost make it out. Feferi suddenly turns to Sollux. “Beach yourself Sollux, I heard somefin that time.” Sollux sighs at that and lands himself as well, the sparks from his psionics fizzling out. The forest is cast into complete silence.

After a short while Sollux loses his patience. “There’s no fucking sound, Eridan, now can we go?”

You smirk at this. “I know you don’t get outside very much Sollux, so let me make this simple for you. When there’s no sounds in a forest it means things are very bad. Especially on a fucked up planet like this where the goddamn chirpbeasts never shut up.”

“Alternate theory: they fucking went to sleep.” Sollux grumbles under his breath, but you see him take his glasses off, so you deem that good enough.

Suddenly you hear a noise to your right. The slightest shuffle of leaves. Whatever’s been following you has caught up. You snarl at this and fire your gun into the forest nearby, a quick shot so that the power doesn’t level everything. For a moment the forest is lit up, and you curse this planet for the hundredth time that it’s single moon is so terrible at illuminating anything. The light of Ahab’s Crosshairs does reveal something though; you glimpse the shortest flash of yellow eyes in the dark.

“Nepeta, is that you?” you call out warily. You think Nepeta would be more likely to just tacklepounce her way into sight rather than sneak around in the shadows, but you can’t think of any other trolls that could move so silently. Equius perhaps, but he wears sunglasses. “Nepeta, if that is you get over here before I shoot you.”

Then you hear it.

**HONK**

Feferi brightens up immediately. “Gamzee, I definitely thought you were still trapped! Why the shell are you hiding back there, come on out!”

**HONKHONK**

Gamzee comes stepping out into the small clearing you’ve stopped in, and stands beneath the trees. His face is mostly obscured by shadow, though you can see his eyes and relaxed grin. Something seems off about him though, and you keep your gun in hand as you walk around Feferi to keep your line of sight clear. His eyes dart towards you and narrow, ever so briefly, and you wonder if him placing Feferi between the two of you was intentional. Surely not?

“It’s good to motherfucking see you, my best fucking friends.” Gamzee raises his hands and let’s his grin broaden further. “Saw my bro Sollux blinking like a firefly from miles away, followed the light here like a little miracle.”

Sollux eases at this. “It’s not really a miracle dude, I glow in the fucking dark, big deal.” He starts to
spark and light up again, and Gamzee is thrown into full view. His body is covered with scars now, his shirt likely long since discarded, and you see little spirals carved into his skin. Some are scarred over, but some are recent enough that they’re still oozing.

“Oh my glub, what happened to you?” Feferi’s jaw drops in shock, and you hear Sollux curse under his breath. “Did the humans do this? To torture you?”

Gamzee absentmindedly wipes the blood off of one of the marks, and licks it from his fingers. “Nah, this ain’t anything you need to be worrying your pretty little head over sis, I did this myself. Just a few little cuts here and there, enough to hurt. The pain is what keeps my motherfucking head clear, you know? Helps me forget things. Like Tavros.”

Feferi gasps at this. “Oh shell, Tavros, what happened to him? Is he alright?”

Gamzee frowns at this. “Nah, sis. Tavros ain’t motherfuckin all right. Those humans fucked him up. Had to leave without him.” His voice softens to a cold murmur.

Feferi lets out a half sob at this, and rushes over to Gamzee. Sollux curses and turns aside, his body flashing like a firecracker. You want to be upset, but when you look at Gamzee, his eyes darting between the three of you, his body shifting slightly again so that Feferi is now perfectly situated between you, you come to a horrible conclusion. And you don’t think to act on it until Feferi is right in front of Gamzee, and he’s raising his club skyward.

Gamzee Makara has gone Highblood. He’s gone highblood and has just bashed Feferi’s head in with one of his fucking juggling clubs. Sollux turns back in shock as she slumps to the ground, and you realize you’re screaming.

**HONK**

Gamzee is gone in a blur of motion, and you realize he’s next to Sollux before you have a chance to react. His club swings around like a blur, glancing the side of Sollux’s head before a blast of energy from his eyes forces Gamzee to retreat. This time you’re able to follow him though, and you raise Ahab’s Crosshairs to block yet another blow to the head.

**HONKHONKHONK**

Gamzee is grinning like a maniac, and you see the blood rushing to his head as he swings his clubs at you, turning his yellow eyes a deep purple, his face oozing blood from the various cuts he’s inflicted upon himself. Behind him you see Sollux stumble over to Feferi’s body. He’s clearly too distracted to be of any use.

This proves to be a problem, because Gamzee is not somebody you think you can fight on your own. There’s no clear strategy to his attacks. He swings his clubs with a brutal ferocity though, and while your Ahab’s Crosshairs can take the clubs easily, your body cannot.

**HONKHONK**

You block a blow aimed at your head and spin the gun around to stop one coming at your shoulder. By then though he’s brought the first club back at you, forcing you to jump back. The blow hammers against your knee and it’s all you can do to avoid stumbling. You’re barely able to stop the next attack at your head.

Close combat is not your forte. You prefer to attack from a distance and Gamzee clearly knows this. Every step you retreat he matches easily, and his blows come so fast you know you won’t be able to
fire at him without taking a lot of damage. But this is your only choice. Gamzee’s strength is that of the most deadly purple bloods right now, but he’s using what are probably the shittiest clubs possible. His blows will hurt, but as long as you’re ready for them and don’t let him get your skull, you’ll survive.

The next time Gamzee swings at you you’re ready. You stop the blow with your gun and let yourself fall with the attack. Gamzee is caught off guard, stumbling a little, and you suddenly push back, causing him to rear back several steps. You scramble backwards in the dirt, raising your gun to fire, but Gamzee is on you before the shot can be primed. The blows rain down on your body with blinding speed, battering your gut and definitely cracking at least one of your ribs. The shots aimed at your head you block with your arms. One of them breaks. You hold on anyways.

**HONKHONKHONKHONKHONKHONKHONK**

Ahab’s Crosshairs glows blue, and you turn your gun on Gamzee. It was the longest two seconds of your fucking life, but you survived them. You roar out your challenge as you force your gun on Gamzee, disregarding the hammer blows of his juggling clubs. The shot isn’t perfectly aimed, but the radius of your shot is enough to pick Gamzee off of the ground and spin him through the air.

**HOOOOOOOOONK**

Gamzee hits the ground with a thud and bounces back to his feet, his scarred body smoking, but otherwise appearing unharmed. Purple-blooded tenacity at its finest. Gamzee grins at you, but sees a glaring strobe of red and blue light and you both realize that Sollux is back in the game. Gamzee let’s out a scream and charges at him again, leaving you to struggle back to your feet.

**HOOOOOOONKHONKHONKHONK**

Before Sollux can fire and before Gamzee can swing his clubs though, Feferi stabs the latter through the stomach with her double trident. You choke out a sob of relief as she spins it smoothly and sticks him again in his left shoulder.

“YOU GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE, MAKARA.” She roars in anger, and you notice the Pisces symbol glowing faintly on her head. “IF I EVER SEE YOUR FACE AGAIN I’LL KILL YOU MYSELF.”

**HONK**

Gamzee is gone in a flash, and you all look around in confusion. Suddenly his voice rings out from the darkness.

“YOU MOTHERFUCKERS ARE HARDER TO KILL THAN I FUCKING THOUGHT.” His furious roar suddenly stops as his voice shifts to a cold whisper that somehow rings out even more clearly than his yell. “It doesn’t fucking matter though. THERE’S PLENTY OF TROLLS THAT WILL BE EASIER TO KILL THAN YOU. Nepeta, Karkat, Terezi… HELL, EQUIUS WOULD PROBABLY MOTHERFUCKING KILL HIMSELF IF I ORDERED HIM TO. So I’m going to go find those sad motherfuckers and kill them. AND WHEN I’VE FINISHED THEM ALL, I’LL COME BACK FOR YOU. I’m going to box up all of your MOTHERFUCKING HEADS, and THEN I’m going to wrap them up in a MOTHERFUCKING RIBBON, AND GIVE THEM TO SCRATCH. Best be ready, motherfuckers. BECAUSE YOU WON’T KNOW WHAT HIT YOU NEXT MOTHERFUCKING TIME.” You hear a tumultuous racket as Gamzee runs away, not bothering to be quiet this time as he disappears completely into the night.
You sigh in relief as you hear his voice fade into silence, and suddenly realize Feferi is upon you. She’s fussing over your wounds, trying to figure out how to help you, and talking so fast you can barely understand her.

“Oh my glub, Eridan, are you okay? I am so sorry for this, I let him knock me out so easily, and you had to take all of those hits, while I only got hit once. That was so glubbing unfair to you and now you’re really badly hurt and it’s all my fault for letting him hit me! I should have realized Gamzee was off, his cuts and his eyes and the way he was sneaking around were so weird but I was just so happy to see him alive and so guilty for leaving him behind that I just didn’t pay any glubbing attention at all. This really is my entire fault, Gamzee went crazy because I made Equius leave him behind, and now he’s going to kill everyone because I didn’t get everyone out of the base! I just-”

You raise your hand and pap her on the side of her head, silencing her immediately. “Shoosh, Fef. This wasn’t your fault. Gamzee was going crazy before we were even leaving the base. This would have happened eventually no matter what. I’m just sorry I couldn’t stop him from hurting you.”

Feferi blinks at you through her tears, and she chokes out a laugh. “Hurting me? Look at yourself doofish, you clearly got hurt the worst.” She’s setting your arm in a splint now, and you suddenly regret all those years you’ve spent telling her that her medical interests were a waste of time. As you ponder this you notice Feferi is blushing.

“You know Eridan…” She starts to trail off, and looks determinedly down at your arm as she continues to talk. “All these years we’ve been moray-eels, and that was the first time you’ve ever shooshpapped me.”

You blink at this and sit up, wincing as your ribs cry out in protest. “You serious Fef? No way, that can’t be right. I must’ve papped you at least once…” You find yourself unable to think of it happening. All those years you were flushed for her, your moirallegiance roles were left by the wayside. It had always felt painful to you to act pale when you wanted to be red. “Goddamn it I’m such a fuckin’ failure as a moirail, you must hate me so much right now.” You’ve always been somewhat aware of it, but it’s certainly never bothered you so much before.

Feferi shakes her head vehemently as she bandages your ribs. “It’s okay Eridan, I know you still care for me even if you don’t show it. Besides…” She blushes again. “That was really… nice. Though I’d be lying if I said I didn’t wish you’d done it sooner.”

“Yeah…” You think about it for a while in silence as she finishes your ribs. “It was… it was pretty glubbing good for me too.” She blushes again and smiles awkwardly at you, and you find yourself wondering briefly why you never gave this moirallegiance thing a chance.

“Holy fucking shit, do you mind not getting so fucking intimate with me standing right here?” Sollux bursts out in irritation, and Feferi’s blush deepens as she hastily jumps to her feet and backs away from you. You find yourself scowling again as the three of you start moving again though, and you find your anger fading. You trail along behind the two of them as they start to talk between themselves, and start to think about what just happened.

You’ve never really liked the pale relationship between you and Feferi. It always seemed like an insult, a prize for the runner-up, while the winner had yet to reach the starting gate. All those years
you pined after her fruitlessly, letting her play pale with you and hoping she’d see you in a redder fashion. Meanwhile you just kept trying to find a way to climb into the red, while being too scared to take the risk and talk to her.

Papping her though… that felt good. Feeling her face beneath your hand, watching the tears running down her face just stop, and knowing you were responsible. There was a power in that, a fulfillment that you’ve never really paid mind to before. Feferi’s tried calming you before, but her soft papping always felt like a slap in the face. You wonder how you’ve been so blind.

The soft sounds of birds and small animals fill in the silence gradually as you walk along, Gamzee’s spell over the forest seemingly broken. The faintest smell of salty air touches your nose, and you see Feferi jump in excitement and run ahead. Sollux floats lazily after her, and you trudge slowly up in the rear, minding your ribs carefully.

The others have climbed a steep hill, and by the time you catch up the sun is rising behind you. Feferi is standing at the top of the hill, illuminated in the golden orange light, as she jumps up and down and waves at you, pointing out past the hill and chattering excitedly: “The ocean, it’s an ocean Eridan, isn’t this wonderful?”

You reach the top of the hill and see the narrow gleaming band of distant water far in the distance. It will likely take you another day or two to reach. But you don’t mention that for now, choosing to let Feferi revel in the familiar sight.

Her smile has never felt more important to you than it does now. And you feel your resolve strengthen as you look back over the forest, where Gamzee was retreating before. He will be back again. But when he does you’ll be ready. You won’t let him hurt you again, and you definitely won’t let him hurt Feferi.

You’ll do whatever it takes to protect her smiling face. Whatever is necessary.

Chapter End Notes

I have to say, I always liked Eridan as a character. He’s another one who had the chance to become something so much more than what he was in Homestuck. While his darker side runs deeper than Equius’, he clearly cares a great deal about his friends, and shows on many occasions that he has the potential to be good. I can’t say whether he’ll slip up down the line, but if he does this time, I intend to make it a proper tragedy.

Also, if I managed to fake anybody out with Feferi’s injury, please let me know. I crave your tears... HONKHONK
Chapter Summary

Equius attempts to fix everything, and breaks more than that.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Your name is Equius Zahhak, and you are an inexcusable failure. You have spent a long time now attempting to craft something that could function as a working body for your secret flushcrush. Approximately twelve weeks in standard human time, according to Nepeta. Unfortunately, while prosthetics are manageable with your current equipment and resources, you are finding the more intricate workings of such a machine to be beyond you.

“Fiddlesticks!” You spit out in a rage as your third attempt to create a functioning heart collapses on itself. Every time you have attempted to run a current through the piece to check it’s functionality, it has crumpled. Even the slightest charge proves to be excessive. The same has proven to be true for any other internal parts. Your attempts at lungs have burst open, your work with eyes has proven to remain entirely fruitless, and you simply cannot seem to get her face right.

If you had access to alternian metals such issues would be easily remedied, but they remain beyond your reach. Human metals are either too soft or too brittle; the balance required for such a project is too fine for either extreme. Nepeta does her best, stealing scraps of metal wherever she can, attempting to find something that you can work with. But success continues to elude you both.

Meanwhile, Aradia is growing more distant. She still speaks with you using the old wiring she’s been manipulating, but whenever she draws away from you she claims the dead continue to harass her, the voices growing angrier every time she leaves them. Meanwhile, the same unexplainable force that causes the dead spirits to leave you alone also seems to damage Aradia in some way. Should she spend too much time around you you’re afraid her spirit might fade completely.

“Equius! Did it worrrrrrk?” Nepeta’s chiming voice shatters your reverie, as you feel her flop across your shoulders.

“It would appear my efforts have once again proven futile.” You sigh and start to pack up your equipment. Nepeta lets out a groan and paps your face gently.

“Don’t worry Equius, I know you’ll figure it out. Maybe the paw-lace we’re going to will have what we need!” You nod hopefully as Nepeta hops down and moves to the door of the run down building you have been occupying for the past three days. You have been moving towards a laboratory in the east for the past week, after hearing the technology it boasted was well beyond normal human limits.

“I’m going to go find Purradia and tell her we’re leaving!” Nepeta calls as she leaves the room. You wave to her and gather your things, while keeping your ears open for trouble. You know that Nepeta can handle herself exquisitely on her own, but as her moirail and physical superior you still don’t feel comfortable unless she’s within sight. You know she doesn’t appreciate it very much, but you can’t help but fuss.
You gather up the last of your things and prepare to leave. Nepeta is capable of hunting well enough for both of you to eat properly, though she resents spending time finding vegetables for you. Instead most of your luggage is made up of robotics equipment, including scrap metal, your toolbox, and a more recent addition: an icebox. You can only hope that this laboratory will have the resources you need to make Aradia her new body.

Two nights later you believe the laboratory is within reach. It has been slow going for you and Nepeta, as while you are both able to move swiftly, you have been careful to remain silent. Stealth is something you can handle surprisingly well, especially given your impressive size, but it will never come as naturally to you as it does to Nepeta. Her ability to carry herself so perfectly when she wishes to is something that has always impressed you about her.

Suddenly you glimpse a glimmer of lights distantly, through the dense cover of trees. Nepeta spots it and bounds soundlessly away. You continue to move behind her, and see her silhouetted in the light for a brief moment. She’s back at your side a minute later.

“The lights are from a house!” she reports with a grin. “The lab is just behind it, and the lights are off!” You nod and start to move, when Nepeta speaks up again. “Also, I found this kitty!”

You turn back and stare at her. Nepeta is positively beaming, holding a small black kitten with four eyes in her arms. The both of them are purring at each other. “Nepeta. That cat is clearly abnormal. You will return it to wherever you found it.”

Nepeta hisses at you, and to your consternation you see the cat is now imitating her every action. “No, Equius, I want to keep him, he’s sooo cute! Look at this face.” She holds the cat up to your nose. It hisses at you. “How can you resist this face?”

“Nepeta, cease this foolishness and put the cat down immediately.”

“No!”

“Yes.”

“No!”

“Yes.”

“No!”

“Yes.”

“GRAAUGHRABLAH!” Nepeta waves her arms around in a frenzy. The cat has wisely chosen to relocate to her shoulder. “I don’t want to put the cat down! He reminds me of Pounce!”

You were not expecting her to bring up her guardian. “Oh.” You look down at the cat again. “It’s the wrong color.” You realize that this was a terrible thing to say when Nepeta glares at you and runs off with the cat.

It was hard for many of those in your group to leave their lusus behind. Vriska and Sollux were pretty glad to get away, but the others had more difficulty. You know that leaving Arthur to tend to your home on his own was difficult for both of you, though with all the trouble you put your dear butler through you think that he honestly earned a vacation. Though he’s likely still cleaning the house, he’s simply too good at butlering to abandon his duties.
Nepeta was probably the one who had the most difficulty leaving her lusus, with the exception of Feferi who had to find a way to leave without killing every troll in the universe. Pounce de Leon and Nepeta used to hunt together daily, and the two relied heavily upon each other in a lot of ways. She was so upset when it was decided that her lusus was too large to bring along that you banned everyone else from bringing their lusus along as well.

Clearly this cat, with its redundant second set of eyes, reminds Nepeta of Pounce’s redundant second mouth. This is suddenly exceedingly obvious to you, and makes your earlier comment seem all the more foolish and mean. It would seem that Aradia agrees with your conclusion, as you see the wires she uses for communication slither into view and form her own criticism.

*That was very foolish and mean Equius.*

“In retrospect I have become fully aware of that.” You mutter. You can feel Aradia’s stern gaze boring into you, despite her having no visible eyes. It suddenly occurs to you that you are sweating profusely. “I will go to apologize to her immediately.”

*That would be best.*

You nod and turn to face the direction Nepeta ran in, when you hear a hiss and a slurring voice. 

“Unhand my Mutie or suffer the consterse- oh fuck me, what am I even saying? Lolz!”

You move swiftly in the direction of the voice and see a human standing in front of Nepeta, with a rifle trained between her eyes. The human’s aim is steady, though she is herself swaying back and forth, apparently suffering from hiccups. This is completely unacceptable to you.

“Aradia, if she fires, do not let the bullet strike Nepeta. Or the cat.” You charge before taking the time to see if she responds, throwing all of your considerable muscles into a strongjump that sends you flying straight towards the human. She spots you just before you can reach her weapon though, and somehow manages to dance out of the way. Your momentum carries you through a swathe of trees, and into the clearing where the human home is.

The human stares after you as you rise to your feet. “Oh my Gog, I have miscombobulated the shit out of this situation.” She says quietly as you march towards her. You find yourself unable to help the smirk that her reaction brings. The human doesn’t seem to be completely out of ideas though, as she shoulders her rifle and claps her hands together, muttering to herself. “Okay Roxy, you can do this, just focus or else the big monster troll will kill you, focus, and invisibilate!”

The human suddenly disappears from your vision. You whirl around in an attempt to spot her, but she is clearly completely gone. Nepeta jumps to her feet as well, hackles raised and claws at the ready. “She’s completely disappeared, Equius!” Nepeta hisses in surprise, “I can’t even hear her breathing! Whatefur she did, it was more than just invisibility!”

You look around for a little while longer, but find that she truly has completely vanished. Running away is a coward’s ploy, but you have to admit her powers of evasion are strong in their own way. You hear the door to the house close and your worry suddenly rockets. “We must go to the lab now, Nepeta. After tonight they will be on guard, and we cannot take the risk of more people spotting us. We are lucky that human appeared to be inebriated.”

Nepeta nods, and takes off running for the laboratory on all fours, with you following behind, keeping an uneasy eye on the house. The human acted inebriated, yes, but still unnervingly sound of mind. You have little doubt she can convince her kind that she speaks the truth. Especially with the damage you’ve dealt to the area. And more disturbing is that she knew your species by name. It may have been a coincidence that she referred to you as a troll, but you somehow doubt it.
Your instincts as a blueblood tell you to rip the house to the ground and kill everyone inside. If this were Alternia, your instincts would be correct. But this is not Alternia. To destroy a threatening house is natural when one is a highblood. But, as much as the thought disturbs you, you are not a highblood here. You are a refugee. As much as ever, discretion remains your most expedient option.

You turn back to face the front and see Nepeta bounding away, gaining distance on you as you have been distracted. You put on an extra burst of speed to catch up with her. At this point your only chance is to ransack the laboratory for useful equipment and make a run for it before anyone catches on.

Suddenly Nepeta stops, her head tilted to the side. It would appear that she has heard something. You slow your pace as you look around for whatever she’s noticed. Neither of you see the human adult until she’s between you and the lab.

The woman looks like an older version of the one from before, and you are stunned by how swiftly she’s appeared in front of her. Before you have a chance to react, Nepeta leaps for her, claws outstretched. You call out a warning to her, but the situation has caused Nepeta to move entirely on instinct, and she is heedless to you. For a moment you are torn between wanting to stop Nepeta from harming the human, and protecting her from harm herself. It is the latter that proves the greater worry.

The woman dodges Nepeta’s pounce easily, grabbing her by the tail and swinging her around. You cry out in alarm and rush forward, only to find your arms full of angry cat-girl. Nepeta is clearly angry, but thankfully unharmed. You place her on the ground, mindful of her flailing claws, and step forward to face the woman.

“My goodness, but you’re a big one!” The woman says, stepping forward smoothly in her heeled shoes. Her face is set in a grim smile, and despite your size advantage it sets you on edge. “You know, I do not have an issue with outsiders. I do not have an issue with creatures of a different species. But I do have an issue with anyone who would attempt to harm either one of my daughters.” Her body shifts smoothly into a combative stance. Your body breaks swiftly into a sweat.

“Nepeta, go get the supplies. You know well what kind of metals and tools I require. I will keep this woman occupied.” Nepeta nods her head reluctantly and slips into the shadows. The woman watches her go, but knows better than to turn her back on you.

“As an outsider on your property, I know full well that I am in the wrong here.” You say with a sigh. It seems like ever since you have come to Earth you have been forced to take custom after custom and break it in order to survive. “However, because I cannot allow you to speak of this incident, or in some other way draw unwanted attention to me or my moirail, I am afraid I have no choice but to eliminate you.”

“You can try.” The voice comes from behind you, and you whirl around to see the woman has moved to your side in an instant. “But you won’t succeed. As I understand it, the notion of parents is foreign to trolls. So allow me to teach you why you should never mess with a mother.”

Her fist strikes in a blur, sinking into your stomach, and to your mortification the human manages to send you back a step. You throw a fist back, but the surprise attack has made you sluggish. The woman is behind you before you’ve pulled back your arm. The next blow from her comes just below your ribcage, a sharp jab in your side that causes your back to arch involuntarily. While not nearly as strong as you, this woman is clearly exceptionally skilled.

Despite the fighting prowess of your opponent though, you are swiftly getting a feel for her speed and attack style. Her next jab aims for a pressure point in your leg, but by flexing your muscles fully
you are able to deflect the attack easily. The woman jumps back at this, and begins to regard you again.

While physical opponents are never able to measure up to your strength, you have trained for such eventualities as this. It is unfortunate for this human woman that while you prefer fights to be a contest of strength, you have ensured that your opponents are capable of measuring up to you in some regard. The robots you program to attempt to kill you could never withstand your strength, so you often designed them to be fast instead.

This woman is strong and fast, and possesses a fighting skill far beyond any machine you have built. But you have power, and as any self-respecting troll will tell you, in a proper fight enough power can exceed any stratagem. You are not a skilled fighter, as your attempts to learn techniques beyond punching or kicking have always resulted in immediate destruction of your target before you can adequately practice. But you are strong, and you are smart. That’s all you’ve ever needed.

The next strike from the woman is a jab for your throat, but you are able to deflect this by flexing as well. The strike is enough to hurt, but causes no permanent damage. You retaliate by sweeping your arm in a swift arc, grazing her and causing her to stumble. Her ability to retain her poise in heels is baffling to you, but hardly relevant. The blow has left a bruise that you can already see blossoming on her forearm.

Taking the initiative, you charge forward, but find that your opponent is prepared. Your frontal assault is met by two fingers on each hand, which strike at vital points, using your momentum to hit hard at your chest and shoulder. Her stance then changes from solid to lithe in a smooth movement, and she flips you over your head, finishing with a punch to the face as you fall.

You lay on the ground in shock, hardly able to believe that a human was able to counter your attack so easily. Her strength is clearly immense, particularly for one of her species, and you feel uneasy at the thought of fighting her further. You find yourself wishing she were a troll for a moment, but dismiss the thought as too lewd even for you to dwell upon.

As you sit up, you find yourself wondering why the woman has not struck a finishing blow. Your time spent winded on the ground was only a few seconds, but for her this would be a trifling amount. You get to your feet slowly, stopping for a moment to spit out blood and a tooth that was knocked out in the blow. Simply exquisite.

The woman is eying you warily from where she struck you, still mad, but clearly exhausted herself. Further investigation reveals that her counterattack has broken the fingers she used to strike at you. You find yourself wanting to know how her punch would have felt had her hand not been so exceedingly damaged.

Unfortunately you have a task to complete, however, and no matter how exquisite a specimen this human is, she has seen too much. Discretion is your only chance at survival, and more importantly, Nepeta’s only chance as well. You attempt to raise your arm to deal a final blow, but find that the damage to your shoulder is enough that you cannot lift it. A step forward reveals that your body is protesting all movement. The woman’s strike has clearly damaged your bloodpusher.

The woman has noticed this, and now that she has confirmed that you are injured, prepares a final blow. Her stance shifts back from defensive to offensive, and she suddenly rushes at you. Her injuries are not as severe as yours, but they have disrupted her enough that she is no longer moving faster than you can follow. You decide in a split second that you have one chance of surviving. You suck in air, ignoring the pain in your chest, and force your body into a strong jump. It is now your turn to vanish.
You fly into the air in a blur of movement, and see that your opponent below you is unable to see you in the night sky. She has stopped moving, and seems to be searching the skies for a sign of you, but your height is great enough that you are out of her sight. You fall back down with a grimace, knowing that your injuries prevent you from landing properly, but the damage upon impact should be enough to kill the human effortlessly.

A loud shriek catches your attention suddenly, and you see a blur of white and red in the corner of your eye. Before you can land the finishing blow you feel a hand grasp your good horn and haul you around in midair. The interloper throws you effortlessly into the ground to the side, and you feel with a jolt the shifting of your innards. You roll slowly so that your body is facing down, and haul yourself wearily to your knees.

Your left eye won’t open, apparently swelling from a cut that is blossoming across your brow. Your left eye sees clearly, a sure sign that your last pair of sunglasses has finally shattered under pressure.

Standing next to the woman you were fighting is the girl from before, and another slightly shorter one. Between them and yourself is Kanaya, chainsaw out and pointed at your face. She says something to you, but a loud whistling in your ear drowns her out. You were quite sure that Kanaya was dead. This clearly requires some form of questioning.

You open your mouth to speak, but find that you are unable to make a sound. It occurs to you that your mouth is now full of blood. You cough up the blood welling in your throat and spit it on the ground. Everything is now sideways. Nepeta is running towards you, but you fear that it is too late for her to appear. You have been killed by humans and a ghost, and if Nepeta doesn’t leave soon, the same will happen to her.

The last thing you see before you black out, after Nepeta is met by Kanaya and forcibly stopped from attacking the humans, after the younger humans rush to their protector, is Aradia’s scrawling text.

_Time is running out Equius. I’ll be waiting for you._

You finally pass out.

Your name is Dirk Strider, and you have just received an unexpected phone call.

“Diiiiiirk, I need you!” Roxy’s voice rings over the phone, brash as always, and you’re annoyed to hear that she has a noticeable slur.

“Roxy, you’ve been drinking again.”

“Pshhh, only one or two martinis, no big!”

“Roxy how are you even making martinis, you said your family cut you off! Your mom locked you out of the cellar, didn’t she?” You know if Mrs. Lalonde has begun letting Roxy back into her liquor cabinets there will be hell to pay, from you and Rose both.

“Ooh, there’s a cool story about that, I can tell you all about it when you get up here!”

“Up there? Roxy, why in the world would I be going all the way up to Rainbow Falls?”

“Honestly Dirk, I just exclaimed it to you, I need you! Come to bed with me!” She snorts out the last line and starts sputtering with laughter. You seriously can’t deal with this right now.
Luckily somebody has appeared to answer your prayers, because after a brief scuffle on the other end you hear Rose’s voice drowning out protests from her older sister. “Dirk, I’m sorry for disturbing you, but we have need of your robotic expertise. There is a project that may be a case of life or death, and we lack the skills to complete it. I have sent you some schematics.”

You check your computer and see that Rose has indeed emailed you an attachment. The blueprints are absurdly detailed, and would require the kind of materials you know only Mrs. Lalonde can readily provide. But one thing doesn’t sit right with you here. “What happened to the person who drew these blueprints? Surely if they’re good enough to draw something like this they’re good enough to make the robot?”

Rose hesitates. “He is… indisposed. Mom ruptured most of his internal organs. And she can’t attempt it either because he broke her arms.”

What.

“What!!?” Rue Lalonde is the only person your brother has ever shown fear towards. You can hardly imagine what could break her arms, save for a speeding train.

“We have some rather… unusual guests.” Rose mutters, and you start checking the rest of the files that she sent you. You reach the head diagram and suddenly understand everything.

“I’ll book a flight.” You hang up the phone and grab a bag, throwing some clothes into it and ducking out of your room.

Your hall is filled with smuppets, hanging from nooses like some strange execution gallery. It’s a tactic Dave and Terezi have been using to get back at your Bro for smuppet bombing them, and your bro seems to take a strange satisfaction in seeing his creations strung up like criminals. Vriska’s tactic of ripping them to pieces is much less effective, as Bro has found a way to fill the smuppets with smaller smuppets. Truly, he is the porn puppet master.

Your twin and his guests are sitting in the living room watching Peter Pan. Dave and Terezi are poking fun at the movie, and Vriska is enthralled. Your Bro is making some kind of macaroni casserole in the kitchen. He is wearing a flowery apron.

“Hey bro, I’m going to New York. The Lalondes need me to build a robot troll.”

“Pack an extra sword, that family is nuts.”

Chapter End Notes

Equius has had it rough lately, but is good at pretending his problems don’t exist. Rue Lalonde (or Mom, if you prefer), is a total badass, who loves her kids to death, regardless of what Rose thinks. The fight between them became way longer than I expected, because as you may have noticed, I am addicted to writing action sequences. Thankfully I should be able to take some time to focus on actual character development for the next couple of chapters. Probably. Next time, the Harleys finally appear! Along with more crazy powers that I’m still not going to explain yet!

In unrelated news, it would seem that my computer is able to recognize GRAAAUGHRABLAH as an actual word! Somehow Microsoft word had no problem
with it. I guess I've used the same frustrated vocalization in the past?
Blue Blood

Chapter Summary

Kanaya struggles with her new dietary needs, while Roxy and Nepeta have a super platonic feelings jam.

Chapter Notes

So wow, it's been more than two weeks. I blame Smash Bros and Hyrule Warriors. Definitely not me. I am faultless, the games made me do it.

But seriously, sorry for this, I know Homestuck fans are used to waiting at this point (or not, now that it's updated!!!!!!), but that's no reason to add to the problem. This was just a tricky chapter to write, and I decided in the end to cut out a good bit of plotstuff in favor of giving Roxy and Nepeta some character development, since they're my favorite girls in homestuck. The result was twice as big as originally intended, of course. A big shout out goes to John Powell and Hans Zimmer, because apparently the Kung Fu Panda soundtrack makes kickass background writing music.

Also, if you're looking for a shorter read at some point, I wrote a quick little oneshot thingy while I was fighting through writer's block the other day. It's based on my mythical role, though it's not accurate to my actual life. Still, for how long I worked on it (like two hours) I think it turned out well enough so definitely check it out.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Your name is Kanaya Maryam, and you are starving to death. You haven’t been able to eat properly in a long time, as human blood has proved to not be as nourishing as you had once thought. While you found it to be suitable at first, you lost your taste for it over time, as your body seemed to realize that you were not, in fact, tasting the rainbow.

The last time you drank blood was several weeks ago, when Rose had tentatively offered you her arm. You barely drank at all that time, and found the taste to be increasingly unpleasant. The initial high of drinking blood has long faded, and now all that is left is the knowledge that humans make for a poor imitation of what you really need. You need to drink blood from a troll.

You are lucky in that this is an option for you at all right now. Nepeta and Equius have both recently arrived at the Lalonde Estate, and you find yourself hungering more as you look at them. Their blood could likely keep you satisfied for some time.

If only it could be that easy.

The initial meeting between Rue Lalonde and Equius was completely disastrous, and required the most hands on auspisticizing you’ve ever performed. Unfortunately you were far too late to prevent catastrophic damage to both parties, due to a… distraction. You arrived in time to prevent the death of Mrs. Lalonde, but Equius’ damage was far more extensive. While Mrs. Lalonde’s strength was
not enough to withstand a single blow from the powerful blue blood, she was able to rupture most of his internal organs using a strange form of martial arts.

Meanwhile, Nepeta doesn’t trust you at all, which is understandable given the circumstances. She saw somebody fire a bolt of energy through your abdomen, and then she saw you take a leap on par with Equius’ strongjump and throw him like a ragdoll. And since dying you seem to smell different to her as well. As far as she’s concerned you are not Kanaya.

So with Nepeta raising her hackles every time she sees you, and Equius so injured that you don’t think you could take his blood without killing him, you’re not sure you have any chance of getting yourself a donor before you start to lose yourself.

Meanwhile, the humans have called over some kind of robotics expert to make a new body for Aradia, who seems to be even more skilled at evading death than you are. The young man, named Dirk Strider, appears to be well acquainted with the Lalondes, and is impressively capable in the field of robotics, as far as you can tell.

The Aradiabot has been under construction for a week now, despite Roxy shifting motivation between helping and harassing Dirk. Somehow the robot has almost been completed. You suppose Dirk is simply better at resisting distractions than Equius, as Roxy is easily on par with Nepeta in terms of general insanity.

Nepeta is keeping herself useful by playing doctor to the injured party, physically holding Mrs. Lalonde and Equius down whenever they’re feeling antsy. Rose, meanwhile, has busied herself by talking with Aradia, apparently fascinated by the idea of a spirit retaining consciousness and memory.

This leaves you, a starving rainbow drinker who is feeling increasingly out of place with every new addition to the Lalonde Estate. The Lalondes are still not entirely familiar to you, though Rose has been… more than hospitable. Dirk seems to be more machine than human, though his scent tells you that he is indeed flesh and blood. And the trolls are dubious regarding your undead status, which you feel is rather unfair, given their current interaction with a ghost.

You lack any sort of technological experience, so assisting in the creation of Aradia’s body is out of the question. You possess some skill in medical procedures, but with Nepeta guarding the injured, entering the impromptu healthcare wing upstairs would likely result in a mauling.

With nothing else to do, you have been wandering the grounds of the Estate, trying to pretend that the roaring in your gut is all in your imagination. You see a rabbit go by, but animal blood has proven to be even less satisfactory than that of a human. You’re beginning to wonder how you’ll make do from here on out, but it’s not something you can worry about.

Worrying will only serve to make you more desperate.

Your thoughts are disrupted when you look to one side and see something in the undergrowth. You investigate further and find a cooler sitting buried in moss. It’s blue in color, and you suppose it must have belonged to Equius. You can’t imagine why he’d keep a cooler with him though. You suppose it can’t hurt to take a look th-

Oh.

Oh my.

The cooler is filled with blood. Equius’ blood stuck in bags and put on ice, which by now has all but
melted. The shade of the trees kept it from melting completely, but time has caused the chill of the cooler to disappear. The blood lacks the warmth of life, but the rich blue hue of Equius’ blood still seems very appealing.

The reason Equius kept a cooler of his own blood is a question you don’t even think to ask. All you know is that you are so, so, hungry. And this is the epitome of easy meals.

Your name is Nepeta Leijon, and you are not in a good mood. You haven’t been particularly happy for a long time, actually. It’s been some very trying months for you, and there is no sign of things getting easier in the future.

Aradia is dead, and the creation of her body is being taken over by humans. You do not trust humans very much after what they’ve done to you, even though these humans seem nicer than most, so this doesn’t sit right with you. And Equius, your moirail, the most important person in the world to you, is currently suffering from severe internal injuries.

This is made all the worse by the fact that he was so devoted to helping Aradia, and now he can’t. Aradia assured him she didn’t care, but that only made things worse. The Aradia you used to know would have cared. She would appreciate all that he’s done, and what it means to him.

Equius puts up a good front, but you know that he’s always thinking of how he’s acting against the hemospectrum. He’s devoted himself to helping a rust blood while Gamzee is suffering under Doctor Scratch. You think it’s a healthy change to make, but you know it’s eating him up. For most of Equius’ life the hemospectrum was all he had. It was just him and Aurthour in a house far too large for the two of them.

You wonder sometimes how Equius became such a fixture in your group. When the two of you met you seemed to synch up perfectly, but your affiliation with the lowbloods never sat well with him. Really, your blood is more than low enough to draw his ire as well, but somehow that never seemed to be an issue with you two. He’s been looking after you for sweeps now, and you’ve done the same for him as best as you could.

Equius has fallen asleep for the first time in days; he’s been awake and fretting over everything since he awoke from his fight with the Lalondes. Now that he’s asleep, you can take this moment to help somewhere.

You haven’t been able to stay fully up to date on the progress with Aradiabot, but you know that Dirk won’t be able to finish the job without something only Equius can provide. Equius has been taking his blood as you’ve travelled, so that he’d have enough to fill the robot. And you know where the blood is now. In the woods. Where you forgot it. And now you are going to go get it so that you can be helpful to Aradia, and get her back to normal.

You climb out the window, so that you won’t have to deal with all the humans below. You don’t think they’re bad, on the contrary you find the Lalondes to be very likeable, but you just don’t feel ready to spend too much time with humans yet.

Unfortunately for you, it seems that fate has other plans, because you see somebody is on the roof already. Roxy Lalonde, who is lounging with a bottle, turns and spots you before you’ve taken two steps.
“Neeeeeepeta!” her voice is loud enough to make you wince, and you start looking for an escape route. Then you see Vodka Mutini rolling on his back next to her and you find yourself creeping closer. Cursed, adorable, fluffy, kittens! They shall always be your greatest weakness and you love them for it.

Roxy notices your hesitation and grins broadly at you. “I don’t bite you know, and Mutie already loves you too much to do something like that. C’mon, c’mon!” She rocks on her feet like she’s about to fall over, then squats down and scratches Vodka’s tummy. His purring is audible from across the roof. You’re sold.

Five minutes later all three of you are lying down on the roof, and you’re purring enough to match Mutie. Roxy isn’t purring but she’s grinning ear to ear, and seems to have forgotten about her alcohol completely, which you are happy to see because from what you’ve seen her sister thinks that alcohol is bad, like soporifics on Alternia.

“So Nep, why are you so scared of humans?” Roxy asks as she props herself up on an elbow. “Kanaya doesn’t like us either, but she doesn’t want to talk about it.”

You sit up with a groan. You don’t like to talk about it either, but with four trolls now imposing on these people, you feel like they deserve to know. And so, you tell her, every single thing that’s happened to you since you crashed on earth. And Roxy cries through most of it. She also hugs you, which is both nice and awkward.

You realize as you finish recounting your journey here that you’re crying as well. There is a long period of silence as the two of you sit together on the roof. Finally Roxy stands up and grabs the bottle she was drinking before and takes a long drag.

“Why do you drink that stuff?” You ask inquisitively, wrinkling your nose as Roxy smacks her lips.

Roxy shrugs, “Well I used to make martinis, but since Rose started being all meddly with my drinking habits, I can’t get at the glasses, so I just drink from the bottle instead.”

You shake your head. “No, I want to know why you drink any alcohol! Your family doesn’t like when you drink, especially Rose, so why drink anyways?”

“Because my mom drinks.”

You stare at her with your best ‘what does that even mean?’ expression, until she gives in and explains. “You’ve seen how Rose is when she’s with our mom, right?”

“Nyeah, they fight a lot, like they can’t get along.”

“Right, but see it’s not really like that.” Roxy sits down again and smiles ruefully. “It might look like their fighting is mean spirited at first, and Rose sometimes wonders if our mom isn’t insane, but that’s not really how it is. Their passive aggressive arguing is just how they connect with each other. They’ll be at each other’s throats sometimes, but afterwards they always bounce back closer than ever. Nowadays when they insult each other it’s just a joke, like they don’t even mean it. Insulting is like a sacred tie that binds them. I don’t have that.”

She looks at the bottle she’s holding with a grimace. “I’ve got nothing really linking me to my mom like Rose does, so I just started acting like her. I’ve been doing it for so long I can’t even remember when I started. And all it’s done is make everybody look at me like a drunken idiot. So I just drink more to forget about it.”

You think about this for a while, as Roxy nurses her bottle. The answer comes to you pretty quickly
though. “Well, the best thing to do is to get yourself a meowrail!” You announce with a grin. “Then they can help you get through all these purroblems!”

Roxy blinks for a moment at this, and then turns to face you with a grin. “You know your cat puns are totes adorbs girl, but they don’t make it easy to understand what you’re saying.”

You giggle at this, “Okay, I will drop the cat puns just for you, Roxy. Meowrail actually means moirail, which is one of a troll’s romantic quadrants!” Roxy nods in understanding, which you suppose must mean that Kanaya has brought this up to some extent with the humans, so you continue. “Moirails are like me and Equius, we complete each other, like a soul mate! I try to stop him from being a creepy stick in the mud, and he tries to stop me from being a wild and crazy goofball even though it’s fun and I love it.”

Roxy frowns thoughtfully at this. “Well that sounds like what romance is like for humans, but without the sex. Ideal human relationships have both people helping each other improve, while also liking each other physically. Though it almost never works out because most people are crazy and never want to be wrong about anything.”

“Humans put both red quadrants together?” you are absolutely baffled by this. “That sounds as complicated and difficult as it is just weird.” Roxy snorts and nods in agreement.

You don’t think that humans have a very good idea about how romance should be best conducted, but you decide that it’d be easier to help Roxy with her weird human quadrant mash-up, rather than teach all of humanity that they’re doing romance all wrong. “So is there somebody that you are in love with?” you decide to be straightforward.

Roxy sputters, caught off guard and looks at you in a panic, but you make sure your face leaves no room for argument. Roxy groans, starts to raise her bottle again, and stops, holding it halfway up to her face. Then she frowns as though remembering something unpleasant, and with a sudden yell of frustration throws the bottle off the roof.

“Can’t drink while I’m thinking about him.” She mutters, panting as she collapses back into a sitting position. This seems promising. “The guy making the robot downstairs, Dirk. I’ve been in love with him for years.” She smiles ruefully as she says it.

“Oh. My. Gosh.” You need to make a new shipping wall. Immediately. “That is so PURRFECT! You’ve loved him all this time and haven’t told him? You’d be so great for each other, he’s all strict and rigid, so he’d help you stay sober and you can help him be livelier!” He’s also got a great butt for a human, objectively speaking, but you don’t think Roxy would like to hear that. Actually… she doesn’t seem to like anything you’re saying right now.

“Yeah, he’s the best. Which is obviously why he’s gay.” She groans, leaving you confused as heck. You tilt your head inquisitively, and Roxy elaborates grumpily, “That means he only likes men. You know, homosexual?”

What.

“How is that even a thing?” You stare down at her in bewilderment. She shrugs. “Human romance sure is weird.” You frown as you think of a solution. You don’t think making Dirk not gay is an option. If being gay is a thing here, then it would be wrong to make him change like that, even if he and Roxy would be super cute together. Liking dudes is not the kind of thing that you think should be changed, especially since you tend to like males more than females as well.

“Is there anybody else you might love instead?” you ask tentatively, not sure if it’s right to ask her to
fall in love with a new guy, even if he doesn’t love her back. Roxy seems to think similarly, because she lets out a yell of frustration at the question and covers her face with her hands. “I’m sorry! I’m still trying to wrap my head around how your human romance works!” You stutter out in a panic.

“It’s not your fault, Nepeta, you’re super brilliant and awesome.” Roxy says through her hands, “The problem is that I do like another guy, and its super complicated.”

“Complicated is better than impawssible!” You say brightly, “Who is he? Is he nice?”

Roxy snorts, “Yeah, he’s pretty much the nicest guy ever, it’s both adorable and kinda weird. His name is John Egbert, and he’s a huge dork who spends all his time watching bad movies and studying how to make planes. He’s really sweet, and nice, and cute, and funny, and also I think he’s actually pretty ripped for some reason? That’s what Rose told me at least…” She seems to get upset as she mentions Rose.

“So she’s Rose’s friend?”

“Yeah, that’s an understatement.” Roxy says with a bitter laugh. “He dated Rose for like, five years. They were totally inseparable, until they suddenly weren’t. Only now that he’s available, that means that he and Rose have something weird going on between them. She’s hardly talked to him since they broke up, and everything feels so weird between them, and because she’s my sister, and he’s already one of my best friends, that means things are weird between him and me as well!”

Humans are really weird. And they seem to overcomplicate everything. But you think this time you have the answer. “You know, things are only going to be as awkward as you make them.” She looks up in confusion, and you smile at her. “Things are probably only weird between you two because you feel like they should be, but if you let that continue you’ll never get a chance! So you should just let Rose and John sort things out on their own, and then put the moves on him without letting that get between you! And then if it’s still weird between you two then you’ll know it’s because John’s just a weird guy!”

Roxy bursts out laughing at this. “His weirdness is sooo cute though!” She breathes out through her chuckling. She stops and then stands up, smiling at you broadly, like she was when you were both playing with Mutie. “Thanks a bunch Nepeta, you’re totally right. If I love him as much as I think I do, then I shouldn’t second-guess myself!” She hugs you, and you purr affectionately, picking her up off the ground.

Roxy grins down at you, “Nepeta, you are seriously strong for somebody so short, you know that.” Your smile broadens, and you set her down as she continues, “Alright girl, let’s go inside and see if everyone is surviving without the two hottest babes in the building for company!”

You smile and follow her inside, but stop at the window as Roxy’s words reverberate in your thinkpan. You’ve been second-guessing your love for quite a while now. Ever since that day Karkat smiled at you in Scratch’s prison, and called you out for your hemoism, you’ve been feeling guilty and heartbroken. And when he ran away after you all escaped, that feeling only intensified. The look on his face when he stared at you, his hollow eyes, they haunt you to this day. They’ll haunt you for the rest of your life if you don’t do something about it.

You’re still thinking about this when you rejoin Roxy at the foot of the stairs to the lower level. Roxy is staring ahead blankly, and when she sees you next to her she starts to mutter curse words so fast you can barely understand her. Then you look up to see Equius hooked up to the Aradiabot from his bed. There is a tube transferring blood from him to the machine, and he’s looking horrendously pale. On the table nearby the cooler full of blood is visibly empty, and Kanaya is sitting next to it with her head in her hands.
Dirk glances over from where he’s supervising the blood transfer, and sees you just in time to roll out of the path of your claws. Kanaya looks up in shock, and Equius speaks weakly, but you don’t pay them any heed. All you know is that Equius, your injured and horribly weakened moirail, is now having the blood sucked out of him by this man, and you will not let him do something like that without maiming him horribly. Dirk is refusing to comply though, darting back from your attacks with a stoic expression on his face that serves only to infuriate you further.

Suddenly you’re floating in midair, and you realize that Aradia has intervened. More shocking is that she is using the new body. Equius is grinning weakly as he stares up at her, while Roxy and Kanaya both grab you before you can start flailing again.

“Aradia, your body is functioning!” Equius says weakly as you all stare up at her in shock. “Are you feeling well?”

Aradia stares down, her face as impassive as you’ve imagined it did all the time she’s been communicating through wiring. Then, as though something is breaking within her, she starts to scream.

“IT’S NOT RIGHT! IT FEELS WRONG! I CAN’T STOP IT!” She grabs her head as though in pain, and rips a horn off in frustration. Equius looks heartbroken, as Aradia sinks to the ground screaming, “THEY WON’T STOP TALKING, I CAN’T SHUT THEM OUT.” She grabs Equius and starts shaking him, “WHY CAN I STILL HEAR THEM, I’M NOT SUPPOSED TO BE ABLE TO HEAR THEM WHEN YOU’RE HERE!”

Dirk intervenes in a flash, cutting Aradia’s arms off before she can harm Equius further. Aradia’s screams only increase further, and you look around in alarm as the robot’s body tears itself apart, and the room becomes a cyclone of metal and blue blood, the blood that Equius just gave, and you realize with a start that despite losing her voice box you can still hear her screaming. Then with a loud bang, the whole tornado bursts through the ceiling and out of the building.

Equius looks stricken, Kanaya and Roxy look outright stunned, and even Dirk seems shocked. You struggle away from Kanaya and Roxy to rush to Equius as he lies on the bed. He blinks slowly when you pap him, as though he’s waking up from a dream, and turns to face you slowly.

“I failed her, Nepeta.” Equius whispers quietly. Tears begin to trickle down his face as he shakes silently. “After everything I gave up to make this right, I failed to help her. I should never have betrayed my role as a blueblood; I have proven to be a complete failure as a troll ever since I left Gamzee to die. Why didn’t I just do as my caste dictated?”

You wrap your arms around him, as he continues to weep noiselessly, and think about his question. The troubling thing is, that with your moirail now in the weakest state you’ve ever seen him, you’re not sure if you can give him an answer anymore.

Chapter End Notes

It’s somewhat of a challenge to come up with reasons why some of the characters act the way they do in this story, since I have to find ways to maintain their character without giving them the same backgrounds. Roxy is the clearest example of this, as much of her character is based on her isolated upbringing in Homestuck. Meanwhile in Blood Pride she has a younger sister in Rose, as well as her mother. However, most of the alpha kids have some differences between themselves and their Beta counterparts. Dirk has his
robots, Jake has an obsession with the shittiest movies known to man, and Roxy has hacking and video games, to go with her love of manly guys and wizards (which some would argue (correctly) belong in the same category). So I decided to highlight Roxy's differences with her family by highlighting her similarities. This way I can allow Roxy to maintain her flaws in a different upbringing.

My opinions on troll and human love are based upon my own interpretation, so if you feel I got something wrong definitely let me know so we can argue about quadrants and shit. Except don't, I'm happy with my interpretations as they are. Anyways, next chapter we'll start visiting some of the other groups again, though much of the main storyline still revolves around team Equius. That being said, I've been falling behind on Terezi and Vriska since I don't like them much, so I need to suck it up and write for them already.
Your name is Sollux Captor, and you are feeling very left out. Which is ironic, because being “out” is probably the best thing to happen to you in recent memory. You’re currently sitting on the shore of a small cove, secluded from unfriendly eyes, and watching your companions enjoy themselves. You knew Feferi would be drawn to the water, but even Eridan, who swims less than any sea-troll you’ve ever heard of, is relishing the water.

You’ve spent your entire life inside, in the middle of a city far away from any seadweller, a conscious decision made as a wiggler, so you know absolutely nothing about swimming. Back on Alternia you kept your distance from anybody who would want to make use of you for your psionics, and you know doing anything else would be completely idiotic. Still, when you see your matesprit in the water enjoying herself for the first time in months, you wish you had learned to swim.

After a while you grow tired of waiting around for the two of them to come out of the water, so you wander further back into the cove. You chose to spend time here when it became apparent that the place didn’t see a lot of people, but you haven’t fully explored the area. Feferi was so excited to be near an ocean again that you didn’t have the heart to delay her. But since you can’t swim, you figure you might as well make yourself useful.

The cove itself is pretty open. The whole area is shaped like a bowl, with steep cliffs forming a wall around the outside, so that you had to levitate in. The back of the cove is covered by a sparse stretch of sandy beach, and the sides are filled with tide pools. The only interesting thing to note in the cove is a small cave set at the back of the beach. The only thing that needed checking in the area, and you didn’t do so because your matesprit wanted to swim. Love has made you a fucking idiot. And for some odd reason you’re not completely against this.

The cave looks very unassuming, but you know it’s best to make sure everything is safe before somebody gets killed. Though you have to admit since coming to earth the number of voices you’ve heard has been far less than what you heard back on Alternia. It’s a nice change of pace.

*It’s okay Sollux, this isn’t your fault.*

Aradia’s voice flashes through your mind suddenly, and you shake your head in a pointless effort to forget. It’s always been your curse to hear the voices of the imminently deceased. But the curse of having your dead ex-girlfriend’s voice playing in your head two seconds before you vaporized her is relatively recent. It started happening approximately two seconds before you vaporized her. Her voice has been stuck playing in your head like a shitty web ad you can’t turn off ever since. And unfortunately you can’t hack your brain to deal with things like you did with your old husktop.

You really fucking miss computers.
You haven’t been able to use a computer in close to a sweep by now; not counting the ship computer you let Karkat wire you into. And without a keyboard beneath your fingertips you are incomplete.

That doesn’t make it any less terrible when you walk around a corner in the cave and find a room full of computers.

You look around the room in alarm, seeing nobody around, but you know this many computers wouldn’t be around if something big wasn’t going on in here. And anything big on this planet involves a shitload of humans.

Your curiosity gets the better of you though, and you decide to look around the room since there’s no sign of people at the moment. Most of the screens are filled with a spirograph pattern, and tapping a few buttons doesn’t change anything. You decide to focus on computers with information already available.

The most eye-catching thing in the room is a series of monitors on the far wall, with a human displayed on each. The humans are only children, barely past the larval stage. Or was it babies? Who cares, humans are fucked up no matter what you call them. These humans seem to be more fucked up than most though. There’s a long list of statistics cycling along to the right of each human, each listing a way they have been tampered with, and the effect this has led to. Aerokinesis, precognition, intangibility, soul destruction… these humans have more fucked up powers than you do.

You decide to probe deeper into these altered humans, and start tampering with the computer their monitors are attached to. This computer is tough to crack into, even for you, but there’s never been a firewall you couldn’t snuff out. After about forty seconds you’re in. That’s definitely longer than most security systems take you to destroy. These humans aren’t as hopeless as you thought. Two out of ten.

The next file readily available is a duo of strange creatures, one lithe and angry looking, the other looking like a strange mix of human and wolf. Both have pale white eyes and are pitch black in color. These appear to be the previous experiments before the humans. One is called Spades, the other Jack. Pretty stupid names, as far as you’re concerned.

After the two… things, the next file is for a pure white barkbeast, one that reminds you of the lusus back on Alternia. It seems to have teleportation capabilities, but was deemed a failure due to being dangerously radioactive.

There is one thing these creatures all have in common. They are completely beyond the means of human beings as far as creation is concerned. You have seen human technology. It’s shit. Creating creatures with power like this is something far beyond what even trolls can accomplish. There is clearly a source for all of this, and you are sure that source is not on earth. You need to be doubly sure though.

You start to dig deeper and deeper into the computer’s files, past thousands of experiments, most barely able to survive a few minutes. The computer is filled with enough freak shows to start a carnival so messed up it would make Gamzee scream. But at the same time, the further back you go, the more it seems like you recognize these creatures. This one has heterochromia like you, this one has giant pincers, this one… is a shapeless blob, but the next one has long curly horns that remind you of something you don’t want to think about.

Finally you strike gold. The source of all of the familiarity. You have found an alternian ship hidden in the depths of this shitty human computer. And this alternian ship was carrying a biologist’s wet dream. You have found the fucking mother lode. And the mother lode seems to be indicating that you and your friends are in far deeper shit than you ever imagined. You need to report this to Feferi.
You turn away from the computer, and come face to face with the barrel of a gun.

“Well met, lad. Now put your hands above your bloody head before I make your head bloody.”

Your name is Feferi Peixes, and it’s been ages since you felt this alive. You haven’t known the feeling of being submerged in water in ages, and now that you’re here, you’re not sure you ever want to leave. Even Eridan has decided to join you, though you think that may be partly so that he can leave Sollux alone on the beach. Eridan has some very strange ideas about kismesissitude sometimes. But he seems content with his strategies, so you figure this is something you shouldn’t pry into.

“Man, I wish seahorse dad was here for this.” Eridan says with a grin as he swims along beside you. You’d never know looking at him now that he spends his time out of the water; his form is impeccable. “I mean, this ocean is pretty glubbing polluted compared to Alternia, but it’d be nice to swim with my lusus all the same. Don’t you think so, Fef?”

You look at him with a grin. “Shell yeah! It’d be great to have your lusus here!”

Eridan rolls his eyes. “Well duh, of course seahorse dad would be great to have here, he’s pretty much the best lusus ever. But I did kinda mean that we should both have our lusus along for this.”

Oh.

“Yeah, that’d sure be great!” You grin as widely as possible. “Too bad it can’t happen. Oh well, let’s just focus on making the most of this.”

Eridan stares at you for several seconds, eyes narrowed, and you realize that you won’t be able to change the subject that easily now that he’s taking your moirallegiance so seriously. “Fef. Talk to me.” He says with a frown.

“Nothing to talk about.”

“You said sure just now instead of shore. You wouldn’t miss such an obvious pun unless something was bothering you. Do you miss your lusus that much?” Eridan is clearly far better at pale relationships than you realized, he is completely on to you.

“Yes, that’s it, I definitely just miss Gl’bgolyb a whole lot and wonder how she’s doing back on Alternia.” You sniffle a bit for show, and look into the water and pray he accepts this as the reason behind your attitude.

You hear the water moving as Eridan swims lazily around you, moving in a circle as he examines you from all angles. “You know, there’s something that I’ve been wondering about. How is it that Gl’bgolyb is all right alone back on Alternia? After all, I’m not there to kill things for her, and you’re not there to comfort her. She should probably have become upset by now, don’t you think?”

He’s on to you. “Don’t be silly Eridan, I told you all before we left that I had the situation with Gl’bgolyb well under control! I wouldn’t let the vast glub happen so easily!” You laugh and start to swim away.

Eridan’s hand catches your arm immediately, and while you’re far stronger than him, his grip seems to freeze you in your tracks. He stares sharply into your eyes, and you can feel his gaze boring into you. “How?”
“What?”

“How did you stop the vast glub?”

“I… I asked her not to glub while I’m away…” It’s feeble, and you know it. But you don’t want to
tell anybody about your actions back on Alternia, not even to Eridan.

Eridan will not be deterred however. “Gl’bgolyb wouldn’t stay quiet just because you asked her. All
she cares about is eating. And with us here her meal ticket is gone. She’d freak the fuck out.” Eridan
is being very perceptive and you want him to stop.

He doesn’t.

“Slow poison, I’m guessing.”

“What did you just say?”

“Slow acting poison. It’s the only way I can think of to kill Gl’bgolyb without upsetting her and
unleashing a mass genocide. A slow toxin would take effect gradually, until she’d be too weak to
speak. Then, she’d die quietly.”

“How could you possibly-”

Eridan scoffs at you. “Please, Feferi, I take your security very seriously. Do you think I wouldn’t
have a plan for the monster lusus that you share with the most sadistic bitch in the universe?”

You sigh, letting yourself sink down to the bottom of the cove, where you sit on the sand. Eridan
trails after you, dropping in front of you and staring you right in the eyes. “You did what you had to,
Fef.”

“No, I didn’t.” You’ve tried using that excuse on yourself before. It failed miserably though, because
you clearly didn’t have to do what you did. “I could have just stayed back on Alternia, and let you all
leave. I didn’t have to kill my mother, but I just wanted to get away from it all so badly!”

“If you stayed, The Condesce would have killed you. You did what you needed to do to survive.”
Eridan paps you a few times and stands up on the seafloor. “Now then, let’s get back up to the
surface before Sol thinks we’ve run off on him.” A smirk creeps across his face. “Then again, it
could be alright to stay down here for a while longer, just to make him sweat.”

You smile at this. “Eridan, I’m not just going to flounder around down here to help you flirt with
your fishmesis. Let’s go, I feel much beta now.”

“Really? Because the school of fish-puns didn’t tip me off at all!” Eridan grins and follows you to the
surface. You find yourself thinking how lucky you are that you have a moirail like Eridan, even if he
only started helping you recently. And you still can’t shake that feeling of guilt. But you do feel
better now, and that’s what matters.

You reach the surface and look around for a moment in confusion. “Where’s Sollux?” you ask
Eridan as he breaches the surface. He seems to be as confused as you are.

Suddenly the back of the cove explodes. You turn to see rocks flying through the air, with Sollux in
the middle of it all. Three humans are running for cover away from the mess. You rush for the beach
and narrowly avoid a chunk of rock nearly twice your size. You look and see the humans hiding
behind another rock. They appear to be arguing amongst each other.
“This is why I tell you two not to use guns as a solution for everything!” The speaker is a girl, and she is arguing with the others, who appear to be looking rather ashamed of themselves. “You don’t just introduce yourself by sticking a gun in somebody’s face and telling them to surrender to your fucking machismo! There’s a time and place for a simple ‘good morning!’ and you never seem to be aware of it!”

The other two humans are both male, one wearing shorts and a green jacket, the other dressed up in simple gear with a bushy moustache. Both are armed, but they seem to be no match for the girl, who has a rifle on her back but doesn’t seem to deem it necessary for dealing with her cohorts.

“What the glubbing fuck is going on here!” Eridan yells out as he dodges another rock. “Why is Captor going insane again?”

The girl turns to you two and gasps in shock. “Oh geez, you’re friends of his, aren’t you? I am so sorry about this, it’s a complete misunderstanding, my family just completely acted out of line.”

“Jade dear, it is hardly out of line for a man to stand his ground against foreign invaders.” The older man protests, but Jade turns back to him and gives him a withering glare that silences him immediately. You think you like Jade.

You stand up and walk out into the maelstrom. Eridan curses and tries to follow you, but has to retreat as another boulder flies at him. A small rock flies at your head, but you draw out your double-ended trident and smash it easily. “Sollux! Get it together before you get us all killed.” You roar up at him, but the rush of air caused by so many flying rocks drowns you out.

You decide you’ve had quite enough of this, and swat a rock through the air. It flies up and hits Sollux directly in the temple. The rocks crash to the ground, and Sollux drifts slowly to the ground, cursing and grabbing his head.

“FF, what the hell? I wasn’t going to hit you.” Sollux lands on the ground and stumbles around in a daze. He falls to the ground in a heap.

“That’s a bunch of bullshit, you nearly took my head off.” Eridan spits out as he walks forward, “and you dropped a rock on my cape.” He gestures behind him at the corner of his cape sticking out from under a rock, where he left it to go swimming. Sollux snickers at that.

Suddenly Jade bursts into the middle of your group. “Hello everyone, is your friend okay?”

“No I’m not okay, I nearly got my head taken off!” Eridan hisses.

“I was talking about the one who got hit by a rock, jackass.” Jade deadpans back at him. She turns to Sollux. “I am so sorry about your head, my grandpa likes to act rashly, and thinks with his gun, but I swear he’s not a bad person!”

“He threatened to blow my head off.” Sollux says with a wince, as he continues to rub his head. You’re starting to feel bad about the rock. “That is not good person behavior.”

“You were trespassing and intruding into my bloody computer!” The older man protests as he approaches.

“Shut up grandpa!”

“How dare you take that tone of voice with your grandfather, I raised a better girl than that! Jake, did I raise her to act like that?”
“Grandpa, I am staying out of this one.” The younger man adjusts his collar and clears his throat nervously. “Jade has bally well made her point.”

Jade takes their distraction as an opportunity to lead you all inside. “You guys are going to stay the night, it’s the least I can do for all the trouble. We have all kinds of seafood and game, I shot some of them myself!”

Oh yes. You definitely like Jade.

Chapter End Notes

Well, here we see the beginning of the explanation as to why the humans have their powers. As well as an explanation as to how Feferi managed to leave Alternia without upsetting her Lusus. She's dead! =D

Feferi is a rather interesting character in that she has the weight of the world thrust upon her as soon as she's born. She has so many responsibilities she needs to live up to, as the only person capable of fixing the damage her ancestor's done, and while she tries to take it in stride, it's apparent from the start that she doesn't really know what she's getting into. She seems to be aware of this herself on some level, but it's hard to say for sure because Hussie killed her off. His priorities are terrible.
Flesh is Overrated

Chapter Summary

Karkat learns to live with Egbert insanity, and Dirk embarks on a dangerous mission.

Chapter Notes

EDIT: Okay, just realized that because typing quirks are the biggest bunch of bullshit Hussie ever invented, a section of the trollian chat got completely removed during publishing. It took a while to figure out what the fuck was going on, but it should be fixed now.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

carcinoGeneticist [CG] opened memo on board ALL ABOARD THE CULLING TRAIN

CG: ALL RIGHT FUCKERS; LET’S GET THIS SHIT SHOW STARTED.
CG: NOW, BEFORE I GET TO THE IMPORTANT SHIT, LET ME MAKE THIS CLEAR SINCE HALF OF YOU DUMBASSES WON’T REALIZE FROM THE TITLE THAT SHIT’S SERIOUS.
CG: THIS MEMO HAS BEEN PROOFED BY SOLLUX, SO NO INFORMATION CAN GET OUT.
CG: WHAT HAPPENS IN THIS MEMO STAYS IN THIS MEMO, BECAUSE IF IT DOESN’T WE’RE ALL FUCKING DEAD.
CG: AND YES, I AM BEING LITERAL HERE.
CG: WHICH IS WHY I’VE ALLOWED ONLY PEOPLE I’M SURE I CAN TRUST TO JOIN THE MEMO.
CG: WHICH I GUESS IS EVERYONE I KNOW, PRETTY MUCH.
CG: PLUS EQUIUS AND VRISKA, BECAUSE I’M A FUCKING IMBECILE, AND BECAUSE SOME PEOPLE SEEM TO THINK THEY SHOULD BE INVOLVED.
CG: SERIOUSLY, WHY DO I EVEN KNOW YOU PEOPLE, YOU’RE ALL INSANE, AND I’M INSANE FOR EVEN ASSOCIATING MYSELF WITH YOU PEOPLE

twinArmageddons [TA] responded to memo.
TA: holy fuck KK, ju2t get 2 the poiint.
CG: OKAY, FAIR ENOUGH.
CG: LORD KNOWS IT’S NOT THE TIME FOR MY SELF-DEPRECIATING BULLSHIT.
CG: ALL RIGHT, SO HERE’S THE DEAL.
CG: AND I’LL SAY IT AGAIN, THIS DOES NOT GET OUT.
CG: SOLLUX AND I HAVE BEEN TALKING ABOUT THE CULLING DRONES THAT ARE COMING AT THE END OF THE SWEEP.
CG: I CAN SAFELY SAY I WON’T SURVIVE THEM.
CG: WHEN THEY FIND ME I AM FUCKED, END OF STORY.

grimAuxiliatrix [GA] responded to memo.
GA: This Is Troubling News
GA: Why Are You So Assured Of Your Imminent Culling
GA: Question Mark
CG: …
CG: I CAN’T SAY.
CG: LOOK, IT’S NOT LIKE I DON’T TRUST YOU GUYS, OBVIOUSLY, OR ELSE YOU WOULDN’T FUCKING BE HERE.
CG: BUT THIS IS NOT SOMETHING I FEEL COMFORTABLE TALKING ABOUT.
CG: SO I’M NOT GOING TO FUCKING TALK ABOUT IT.
GA: Fair Enough
GA: My Apologies For Prying
arachnidsGrip [AG] responded to memo.
AG: Oh coooooooooome oooooooooon!!!!!!!
AG: Are we really just gonna let Karkat drag us on a suicide mission without telling us why?
AG: I don’t think so!
AG: Come oooooooooon, Karkat, the people demand answers!
CG: I’D BAN YOU, BUT YOU’D PROBABLY TURN ME IN TO GET REVENGE.
CG: REGARDLESS, FUCK YOU.
CG: I’M GOING TO BE CULLED, THERE’S YOUR FUCKING ANSWER.
CG: THAT’S ALL YOU’RE GETTING.
cuttlefishCuller [CC] responded to memo.
CC: Are you shore you don’t want to talk about it?
CC: This sounds reelly serious, Karkrab!
CG: DIDN’T I SAY THIS AT THE START OF THE MEMO?
CG: THIS IS FUCKING SERIOUS.
CG: THIS IS THE MOST SERIOUS SHIT I’VE EVER HAD TO TALK ABOUT.
CG: SOLLUX AND I ARE PLANNING TO FLEE ALTERNIA.
CG: WE’RE GOING ROGUE.
arsenicCatnip [AC] responded to memo.
centaursTesticle [CT] responded to memo.
adiosToreador [AT] responded to memo.
gallowsCalibrator [GC] responded to memo.
CG: OH FUCK, HERE WE GO.
caligulasAquarium [CA] responded to memo.
apocalypseArisen [AA] responded to memo.
AC: :33 < Karkitty, you can’t!
AT: aRE yOU, sURE tHAT iS a gOOD, iDEA?
CA: wwhat the fuck?
CA: this better be a fuckin joke
GA: This Strikes Me As A Terrible Idea
CT: D-->So you seek e%ecution on your own terms
CT: D--> A respectable venture, certainly
CG: OKAY THAT’S ENOUGH, SHUT THE FUCK UP.
CG: IN CASE THIS WASN’T CLEAR, IT’S MY ONLY OPTION IF I WANT TO LIVE.
TA: not 2 mention my only optiion that doe2n’t iinvolve 2pending the re2t of my liife piiloting an iimperiial flag2hip
CG: RIGHT, THAT TOO.
CG: ANYWAYS, HERE’S THE PLAN…

Your name is Karkat Vantas, and you are waking up from a terrible dream. You’ve been replaying the mess of the last sweep in your head for ages now, but that one was particularly vivid. The start of the period in your life when you decided that rather than die quietly you’d drag your friends down with you.
Sometimes you long to be six sweeps again, planning on a way to become a threshecutioner despite your condition. Those nights weren’t exactly great, but at least you had hope back then. Nowadays your only hope is that you’re not fucking things up by carrying on living.

Looking around the room you’ve found yourself in, you can’t help but feel that you’ve failed in that regard. The fact that you’re in a room at all is troubling, but to see one filled with movie posters reminds you enough of home to feel like a slap in the face.

You struggle to your feet and realize that your body feels weak enough to be all but useless. You try to stand up from the sleeping block you were lying on, but your knees buckle immediately and you fall to the ground with a lot of flailing and cursing. The movement causes you to feel downright nauseous as well, and it’s all you can do to keep from throwing up.

You curl into your stomach with a groan, and try to focus on not throwing up whatever meager substance remains in your body. And that’s when John Egbert walks into the room and everything that happened before you lost your consciousness comes back.

“Oh wow, you probably shouldn’t be moving right now, Karkat!” John’s cheerful voice cuts through your head like a knife. “It’s great to see you finally awake though! Are you feeling okay?”

“No, I am not feeling okay, Egbert, I’m lying in a respite block I don’t recognize, I feel like I’m going to throw up, and I’m probably going to get you all killed just by staying here.” You hiss out the words with as much venom as you can muster.

John picks you up effortlessly and sets you back in the sleeping block, much to your annoyance. He grabs a cup of water and hands it to you, and you become suddenly aware of how dehydrated you are. You drain the water, and find yourself growing dizzy. You glare up at John, who shrugs. “It’s just some sleeping pills. You still need time to recover from whatever’s poisoning you.”

You try to tell him that he’s the only one you can see who’s poisoning you, but you feel everything going black before you can get any words out.

Three weeks later you’re feeling well enough to walk around, and you’ve now met the rest of the Egbert family. They are all psychotic. Jane has an unhealthy obsession with baking, and wears what is probably the rattiest looking hat you’ve ever seen around the house.

Meanwhile their human lusus father thing, Atticus Egbert, is a complete goofball at home, and seems to be where the prankster’s gambit was inherited from, because the man enjoys moving the furniture when you’re not looking just to confuse you. You have walked out onto the balcony and found the fridge just sitting there. When you went back inside there was a safe in the middle of the hall. You had to climb over it to go to bed that night, and when you woke up the stove was in your room and John was using it to make pancakes.

It has occurred to you that the reason they keep doing this shit is because you make such a big deal over it, but you don’t give a fuck; as long as they’re acting insane you’re not going to stop telling them so.

At the moment things seem normal enough, but you’ve started watching your step everywhere you go in this house. Last time you walked around a corner unguarded you were met with a pie to the face. It was banana cream, and you thought it was delicious, which made the fact that it was wasted for such an inane prank all the more frustrating.
Suddenly as you walk down the hall you feel something tense beneath your foot. You just stepped on a tripwire. You hear a click and look up to see the door to the Egbert attic open up and drop a pail on your head.

Oh HELL no.

You fucking talked to him about this. You specifically told him not to pull any more shenanigans with pails.

“GOD FUCKING DAMN IT EGBERT.” You roar out in fury.

“Hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo!” the laugh that rings out is Jane, not John. You are so fucking done with this shit. You grab the pail from your head and rip it to pieces.

“DON’T YOU ‘HOO HOO’ AT ME, JANE. I KNOW DAMN WELL THAT JOHN TALKED TO YOU ABOUT THE PAIL THING.” You are spitting with burning fury at this point, but Jane seems not to be disturbed.

“He did, yes!” Jane says with a cheeky grin. Oh god no.

“Oh god no.” you whisper in muted horror. Then you find your voice again. “No, no, no. You are NOT coming on to me, Jane. That is completely against all that is good and right in the world.”

Jane makes a face and steps back. “What? How am I coming onto you?”

You facepalm in disbelief, “What the bulge chafing FUCK, Jane? I thought you said John explained what pails mean in Troll culture!”

Jane looks very uncertain of herself now. “He told me it was an insult about your diet to you guys…”

“We use pails for reproduction Jane.” You sigh as you rub your temples in annoyance. “What you just did was like some serious pitch flirtation, and it’s downright obscene here. God fucking damnit, John didn’t listen to a word I told him.”

“Heheheheheh…” You and Jane both stop as a familiar laugh rings through the air. Then you look at each other in horrified realization.

John suddenly floats up the stairs in a rush of windy stuff like he always does, and the most devious grin you’ve ever seen is stretched across his face. He points at you and starts laughing openly. “I heard every word you said, Karkat!” He declares triumphantly. “I simply lied to Jane to put you both in this situation, thereby putting you both in a horrible and awkward situation!”

You hate Egberts.

“JOHN.” Jane yells out angrily and runs at her brother, but he floats out of reach with a laugh. “I’m going to make you regret this!”

Suddenly the voice of Mr. Egbert calls out from the kitchen, “Well done John, you’ve finally achieved the prankster’s gambit over your sister! I’m so proud of you!”

“Thanks dad!”

You hate Egberts so much.
Your name is Dirk Strider, and you are trying to figure out what to do next. You’ve spent the better part of two weeks helping some trolls that the Lalonde family found, so that you can make their dead ghost friend a new body. And last night, after draining half of Equius’ blood to make that body function properly, despite him recovering from serious injuries, you finished that body.

Five minutes later though when the ghost attempted to make the body work, she decided using a robot for a body was too fucked up for her and decided to trash the house in protest. She came back several hours later, repaired the house as best as she could with telekinesis, and apologized for reacting the way she did. But that doesn’t change the fact that she is without a body, and you need to come up with a new plan. Striders don’t give up before the job is done.

Also brainstorming with you is Mrs. Lalonde, Kanaya, and Rose. At this point though you feel that brainstorming is a poor word for it. Nobody is saying a goddamn thing in this room except for Hal, and you think he’s just sending you random messages to annoy you, because his main program is still running at home.

AR: Flesh is overrated anyways.

Yup, that’s the third time he’s sent that particular gem to you, part of some stupid ironic bullshit routine where he says things almost relevant so that he can trick you into thinking he’s helping. You get seriously tired of his crap sometimes.

A noise comes from behind you and everyone looks up. Equius drags himself into the room past you and collapses into a chair. “I have spoken with Aradia. She feels that the robot body didn’t work because her spirit is incompatible with my blood. This means our only choices are to either wait for her soul to deteriorate further and try again, or find an alternate means of creating a body for her.”

Even to somebody like you, who can’t really figure out emotions on a good day, it’s pretty damn clear to you that this guy is at the end of his rope. You can understand that, really. It was you who took his blood, after all. Kanaya wanted to take his place, since it was her fault for drinking all the blood he’d saved up, but Equius was very insistent that the machinery would work best with his blood, something to do with consistency.

He’s not determined any more. Rather, he looks defeated, which you don’t think suits him. You liked that look of stern, quiet, stubbornness much more. Hell, if he wasn’t so clearly in love with this ghost chick, you might consider him as boyfriend material. You have to respect a fellow man with a fine appreciation of horses and robots.

But you still have other plans on that front. And you’d have to be a damn fool to let Jake English’s fine ass leave you by without going for it.

Okay, your train of thought has completely derailed. All of the shit you were supposed to be thinking of is now lying dead in the burning mess that is your mind, a crapload of important things now left corpses by the obstruction that is English booty. Time to focus.

“So, I’m assuming there’s no viable way to Frankenstein up a new body for Aradia?” You ask aloud, looking towards the other end of the room.

“I considered that,” Rose replies with a frown, surprising absolutely nobody in the room. “But if the robot with troll blood was too different for Aradia, I highly doubt a body made of human remains would suffice. We would require troll bodies for such an endeavor. Troll bodies of the same blood type, no less. And the only maroon-blooded troll to come near Earth is Aradia herself.”

Mrs. Lalonde frowns at this, looking at her daughter and shaking her head in disbelief. “What sort of
television has Roxy been letting you watch?"

Rose’s reply of ‘you’d know if you weren’t always at the lab, mother!’ goes unheeded as her mother continues. “At any rate, as I understand it, there is no trace of Aradia’s body. If we had some sort of DNA, we’d be able to clone her a new body, but without any remains that route is closed to us.”

You nod grimly. Then stop as you realize this rings a bell to you. You’re trying to jog your memory when Hal sends you another message.

AR: Okay, this is actually me this time; I’ve been listening in a bit so I don’t miss anything important.
AR: I know you’re reminded of something here too, since you’re me and all.
AR: But since I’m a computer, I’m obviously way better at remembering inane shit than you, so as usual your glasses are here to show you up.
AR: Vriska was rambling about this.
AR: One of her self-indulgent stories about how awesome she is, the ones she obviously embellishes so we can’t hear about the times when she trips over her fake arm and shit.
AR: Anyways, she definitely said that the Scratch dude was getting all worked up at some point because he found some hair or something that didn’t belong to any of the not dead trolls.
AR: In other words, the government has DNA from all twelve trolls.
AR: Boom. Who’s the man? Not me, that’s for fucking sure, I’m glasses.

You have to let a bemused smile slip at this one. “Thanks, Hal.”

AR: You got it, me.
AR: Want to see me do some more tricks?
AR: 1+1=2
AR: Hot damn, do you see that math?
AR: I just mathed the shit out of that equation.
AR: All the lady calculators are swooning right now.
AR: They want to have my computer babies.

And he’s being an insufferable little shit again. Time to tune him out and pass the useful info along to the rest of the table, who are looking at you in various states of confusion. “Alright, so Hal says that the asshole who locked you trolls up has DNA from all twelve of you guys. That base he was at probably has everything we need to science up a new body for ghost-troll.”

“A dead end, then.” Kanaya replies bitterly. “That base was well fortified, and is likely even more so since our escape.”

Equius stands up shakily, “I will go. I have the power to enter that base, no matter how well they have fortified.”

Were he at full strength, you’d be inclined to agree. You’ve seen him break things around the house accidentally with the slightest touch. If he were to actually attempt to break something you have little doubt it would be obliterated. As he is now though…

“Equius, you are barely capable of walking.” Kanaya looks over at him sternly. “Should you attempt an attack of that magnitude it will almost certainly end in your death.”

“Who, then?” Equius snarls, and you notice the others moving back. “I am the only one who has a chance at getting what we need and getting out.”

“Not necessarily.” You smile grimly. “I can get in and out before they know I’m there. I’ve already put too much energy into this project to let the fun part slip by.”
“You’re such an energetic and fun loving guy, after all.” Rose says with a smirk.

“Damn right.” You get up. “I’m going to call home and get some info from Terezi. She’ll know the layout of that place better than anyone.”

“I would consult with Nepeta as well, she helped make the map we had of the compound.” Equius adds with a sigh. “And when you’ve done that, I would appreciate it if you would send her to see me.”

“Yeah, I’ll do that.” you nod firmly and walk out of the room. You don’t want to stick around much, especially since Rue has a look on her face that tells you she doesn’t want you anywhere near Doctor Scratch. Well too bad for her. You don’t care if they used to work together, if she really wanted your group to pay her any mind, she’d elaborate on that more. It’s times like this that you can see all too clearly where Rose gets her personality.

Several hours later you feel like you’re ready to go. You’re heading for the front door when the sound of voices catches your attention. Equius and Nepeta seem to be talking about something serious. Considering Equius’ attitude earlier, you decide to eavesdrop.

“I can’t just leave you Equius!”

“It is no trouble, Nepeta. I will be safe here. Besides, I know how much he means to you.”

“You mean more to me!”

“And you mean more to me that anyone else as well. Which is why I can’t in good conscience hold you back in such a way. My health is well looked after, and Strider is looking after Aradia’s situation. There is no reason for you to be held back in this way while your matesprit is out there alone.”

“He’s not my Matesprit! And you need a moirail, especially after what happened yesterday!”

“I will feel better once Aradia is well. Until then, I regret to say I will be uneasy despite your best efforts. You however, will be upset regardless.”

“Nooo, I’m fine! I won’t be upset! I have to look after you.”

“Nepeta. You have watched over me ceaselessly since we fled from the humans. I know that I am hardly in an able state to demand this, but I implore you, allow me to see to your needs as well.”

The rest of the conversation dissolves into sobbing whispers and calm comforting, and you finally hear the window being opened and somebody sneaking out. It would seem that Nepeta has left the Lalonde household.

You walk into view and see Equius staring forlornly out the window after his moirail. “You’re planning on going with me, then?” you ask casually.

Equius doesn’t so much as flinch at your appearance, making you wonder if he knew you were there the whole time. He turns back to face you with a sigh. “I have unfinished business with Doctor Scratch. He still holds some of our comrades. I cannot allow a human to go alone while I still have a duty to fulfill there.”

“And you don’t want Nepeta to be put in danger again.”
“She is more than capable of moving unseen. I sent her to find a fellow troll she has feelings for. It was the only way I could possibly convince her to leave me and go alone.” His face sours at this, and it reminds you of how you feel when you see Roxy has been drinking again.

“You don’t like the guy, huh?”

Equius groans. “His name is Karkat, and he is the one who led us on this darned voyage. He is a mutant blooded rapscallion, and the thought of Nepeta associating with him is… excruciating. He is a foul mouthed cretin, and Nepeta deserves better.”

“Are you saying this because he’s a bad person, or because he doesn’t fit on your hemospectrum?”

“I… I don’t know anymore.” Equius sighs. “My opinions of the hemospectrum have been inexcusably weak lately. But that does not matter. What’s done is done. We will leave now, Nepeta has had time to distance herself.”

“What if she’s still watching?”

Equius smiles at this. “She would not deceive me like that. She has always been straightforward in her feelings. It’s something I’ve always found admirable about her.” He walks towards you, and you see none of the staggering that was present earlier. “Now, let us make haste.”

You’re still unsure about whether to let him go on such a mission, but AR seems to be listening in again, and he sends a message to you before you can say as much.

AR: You know he’ll go whether you say so or not. Better you travel together, that way you aren’t both getting yourselves killed. Though you still have a 99% chance of failure.

“Is that right?”

AR: Fuck no, Strider success rate never goes below 4%.

“Four percent is all a strider needs.”

AR: Yes.

“Hell yes.”

AR: Hell

“Fucking”

AR: Yes.

You smirk and turn to Equius. “Alright dude, let’s get your girlfriend’s corpse.”

Chapter End Notes

Typing quirks suck ass. That’s all there is to say about it. Not much else to say here, except that shit hits the whirling device soon. Prepare yourselves.
Chapter Summary

Vriska challenges Doctor Scratch.

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Your name is Vriska Serket, and you are officially sick of all things human. For over two months now you’ve done nothing but sit around the Strider apartment watching Disney movies and playing computer games. You have gotten very bored with Disney movies and computer games. And now that Dirk is gone across the country, even the people here are pretty boring.

Dave used to be pretty entertaining, but now he spends most of his time making shitty comics and going to school, when he’s not making out with your ex-moirail. Which brings you to the next issue that’s been plaguing your mind: Terezi.

You and Terezi were doing great before you came to the Strider household. You were always being awesome, she always helped you keep in line, and together the two of you were badass babes on the run. The scourge sisters were a match made in pale heaven!

And then you met Dave and his family of ninja freaks, with their creepy gross puppets, and their weapons hidden in every storage space in the house, and everything fell apart for you. Terezi became completely enamored with her damn coolkid, and now that you weren’t relying on each other to survive, your moirallegiance fell apart immediately.

If Karkat or Nepeta were around they’d probably tell you that your romance was doomed from the start. Well just because they spend all their time fantasizing about make-outs and shitty romances doesn’t mean they’re experts! But it is pretty clear that things aren’t so great right now.

Lately Terezi has been spending her time on the Internet looking up human law and justice systems. You’ve been looking up anything else that seems interesting. Mostly Spiderman. Spiderman is pretty great. You also looked up human pirates for a while, but gamblignants like your ancestor are so cool that pirates look like complete jokes.

Superheroes are cool though. And they’ve made you realize that you and your fellow trolls are powerful enough that you could all probably be superheroes here, even Tavros. Wouldn’t that be a great story? Too bad if you show your face Doctor Scratch would pounce on you immediately.

You start browsing through various forums about superheroes, when you see one about Spiderman that interests you. And it’s talking about Daredevil too, which is a weird superhero that reminds you a lot of Terezi. You’re about to start poking around when you notice something odd. The person running the forum is named White-Pawn. Isn’t that related to that chess thing you remember Doctor Scratch liking? Spiderman, Daredevil, and Chess… it seems almost too much to be a coincidence, though you’re probably just overreacting.

On the other hand though…
You grab the tall hat you were using to hide your horns before you met Dave and sneak towards the front door. Luckily for you Terezi and Bro Strider (whose real name remains a mystery) are both preoccupied with training on the roof at the moment, another pastime Terezi has taken up recently. This means it should be easy to get out before-GAAAAAAAAH!

Lil-Cal suddenly appears in front of you, arms wrapped around a couple of hanging smuppets and taking up the whole hallway like the disturbing freak of nature he is. You don’t know how it gets around like this, but you can’t let it bother you. You’ll give Terezi another two minutes max before she gets schooled again. As long as you don’t see the puppet move again you should be fine.

You get out easily. Luck is on your side today, clearly, because you didn’t see the puppet jumping around once on your trip to the front door. You head down the street to a shitty little burger place with free Wi-Fi, and use your powers to make everyone inside fall asleep. You still can’t make them do a single thing other than that, but you’re definitely getting way better at putting them to sleep. At least eight times as good as when you first tried.

You push the door closed and bar it with furniture, before shoving some loser out of his seat and using his computer. It takes you a few minutes to find the forum again, but once you do you decide to confirm your fears. And a girl like you has only one way to do that: blatantly.

You hear a knock on the door and decide to make this quick, before a passerby looks in and calls the authorities. There are at least four people in clear view of the front window, after all. You sink lower in the booth you’ve settled in and hope nobody will notice.

arachnidsGrip: helloworld everyone, gr8 to be here!
White-Pawn: My goodness, you’re not even trying to be discrete, are you.
arachnidsGrip: neither are you, Scratch.
White-Pawn: Guilty as charged. I had a feeling this would lure you in. It would seem that you are the one caught in the web this time.
Bl1ndJust1ce: wait, what’s going on?? weren’t we talking bout DareDevil right now?
White-Pawn has banned all humans from the forum!
White-Pawn: There, much better, don’t you think?
arachnidsGrip: I knew it was you the moment I saw your username. Not much of a web if I can see it coming from a miiiiiiiiile away.
White-Pawn: Perhaps.
White-Pawn: And yet, here you are trapped all the same.
White-Pawn: honestly, I knew this would work as soon as I noticed the URL had the number 8 in it.
arachnidsGrip: Awwwwwwwww, using my obsession against me, how cute.
arachnidsGrip: NOT!!!!!!!
arachnidsGrip: really though, pretty pitiful b8.
arachnidsGrip: All you did was call the real spider to the web, I’m the one hunting here now!
White-Pawn: So you fancy yourself similar to a Dewdrop spider then. Fascinating.
arachnidsGrip: What?
White-Pawn: Honestly Vriska, how can you consider yourself a proper spider girl if you don’t even know basic arachnology?
arachnidsGrip: Again: What are you talking about????????
White-Pawn: It would seem that I am the spider expert here after all. How sad for you.
arachnidsGrip: Ok8y, you just piss8d me 8FF!!!!!!!
arachnidsGrip: N8body cl8ims sp8d8r 8xp8rtise over meeeeeee8!!!!!!!
White-Pawn has changed his name to Spider8xpert!
Spider8xpert: haa haa hee hee hoo hoo
arachnidsGrip: AAAAAAAAHYYYYYYYYY!!!!!!!
arachnidsGrip: Th8ts it!!!!!!!!!
Your blood runs cold. You turn and peer out of the booth towards the front door. Sure enough, there are several men in suits standing in the windows. One of them, a short fellow wearing a ridiculous hat, waves cheerfully to you at points at the door, as though expecting you to unlock it. The rest appear to be underlings, and are arguing about kicking the doors in.

arachnidsGrip: You son of a bitch.
arachnidsGrip: How did you get here so fast?

Spider8xpert: Elementary.
Spider8xpert: We were already here.
Spider8xpert: Do not underestimate the scope of my resources, Vriska.
Spider8xpert: I know where all of the trolls are.
Spider8xpert: The only reason we’ve left you alone until now is because of a rather interesting trend I have noticed.
Spider8xpert: The humans you have all taken up residency with are all of interest to me.

arachnidsGrip: You found all ten of us? I call bullshit!!!!!!!

Spider8xpert: It would seem I am the authority on trolls now as well.
Spider8xpert: I’ve found all twelve of you.
arachnidsGrip: ????????

Spider8xpert: I will leave you with that information. Do with it, as you will.
Spider8xpert: If you survive the explosives, that is. My young associate outside is quite the artist with demolitions. Aside from his generally pleasant demeanor it is the primary reason I hired him.
arachnidsGrip: good luck killing me with that!
arachnidsGrip: Maybe you’ve forgotten, but I have alllllll the luck!

Spider8xpert: You certainly have had a good streak of fortune, yes. But luck wouldn’t be what it is if it didn’t run out.

Spider8xpert: Either way, I’ll see you soon.

You sit back in your seat, mind racing. You can honestly say you weren’t expecting things to take a turn like this. Once again, Doctor Scratch has revealed his hand to you, and it’s as stacked as before.

You glance out towards the front and see that the door has in fact been rigged with explosives. A lot of them, too. Thinking fast, you flip some tables into the middle, and dive behind the counter. You finish by using your robotic arm to rip the large sink the place uses for washing dishes out of the wall and hide beneath it. It smells awful, but you’d rather be dirty than dead.

The first explosion shakes the building, and you have little doubt it caused damage to everything before the counter at least. Then you hear something bounce loudly off of the sink you’re hiding beneath. The next explosion fills the kitchen area, and a heat wave burns you through the hole where the drain was in your shelter. You scream, despite your best efforts, and you hear footsteps at the entrance to the burger shop.

“Oh, why did she have to hide at this place? I’ve been coming here for lunch every day for the past week! And she wouldn’t answer the door either! Oh no, is that Stacy behind the counter? I quite liked her, she gave me extra fries!”
“I gotta say boss, this doesn’t sit right with me. I get that we need to round up these freaks, but killing civvies is not right.”

“It is very sad, isn’t it?” The first voice chimes in again, not sounding very upset at all. “I didn’t want to kill everyone, but what the boss says, goes. If she’d just opened the door we wouldn’t need to use force!”

“Boss, I get that the Doc wanted us to break in, but why did we need to blow up everything inside, too? Hell, why use explosives at all? I could have just smashed a window and walked in!”

“If there is one thing besides fashionable headwear that I am valued for here, it is my skills with bombs! If Mister Scratch tells me to break anything, then that means he wants it done thoroughly! And bombs are very efficient at breaking things!”

You stifle your breath as the footsteps draw nearer. “Hellooo? Miss Troll? I know you’re still alive here, I heard you screaming!” Something about that singsong voice the leader keeps using is terrifying to you. “It’s alright, just come out and I’ll put you out of your misery, you’ll only scream a little more, and then it will stop hurting!”

“Jesus Christ” one of the man’s underlings mutters under his breath. You realize his voice is coming from right next to you. You make your move.

The sink flies into the air as you heave it with your robotic arm. The short man from before squeaks in astonishment as it narrowly misses his foot, and you grab the nearest suit by the throat with your arm and hold him in front of you as a shield. “Alright, nobody move or I crush his windpipe!” You announce loudly as the man flails and shrieks in panic. “You’re all going to put your weapons down and let me walk out of here!”

“Oh dear! Miss Troll, we can’t let you leave!” The leader looks up at you in astonishment and moves closer. He seems unfazed that you have a hostage. Not a good sign. “I was instructed to bring you to Doctor Scratch, dead or alive! It would not be proper if I were to let you leave so easily!”

“I said I’ll kill him, so back off, pintsize!” You snarl, and squeeze the man’s throat a little tighter, causing him to splutter.

“Please, troll, lady, ma’am, don’t kill me, I’ve got a family!” The guy wails and pleads, and you have to will yourself to ignore him. He’s just like every other sad sack you’ve lead to their death in your life. Only difference is you’re the one doing the killing this time, not spidermom.

“Back off, you sons of bitches!” You spit as you start to move for the back door. The little man sighs sadly.

“George, I’m afraid I have no choice. We can’t let the troll escape. I will send your family a gift basket every day for a year.”

“Boss, please, no, don’t do it, Mr. Deuce, I’m begging you here, don’t, please-”

His voice dissolves into screams as his boss pulls out an automatic rifle and peppers you both with bullets. You throw the man forward in a panic and run for it, punching the back door as you pass through it. The doorway collapses behind you, and you run away in the dust, not stopping until you collapse from exhaustion.

When you reawaken, you realize that you’ve moved from the Houston inner city to the slums, and that when you collapsed it was into a pile of trash. You’re feeling very repulsed by that; who would sleep in trash? Losers, that’s who!
Though you’re pretty sure you lost that round pretty thoroughly. You wince as you move to stand up and find that you’ve taken at least three shots to your abdomen. Also five to your right arm and shoulder. An even eight bullets that all hit you. You hate that that makes you feel better about being shot.

You grit your teeth and start digging the bullets out of your arm, wanting both hands working when you start poking around your gut. Your front is a mess of cerulean and red, but you can tell that most of the bullets passed through your body. The three in your gut are still there though, and it feels like one lodged itself in your shoulder joint.

You keep your face straight as you dig the bullets out of you, but inside, you’re trying your best not to panic. Scratch has knowledge on all of you, human and troll, and no qualms killing civilians to get at you. If he wanted to he could simply collapse the Strider apartment before anybody had time to react. And you don’t know how to stop them. They are focused and organized, with more than enough equipment to kill all of you many times over.

But if they’re so well organized… then chaos is the best way to defeat them.

You smile as the idea comes to you. As long as the trolls are in hiding, they will be easy to catch. That’s part of why Doctor Scratch has been so lax in your capture. But as soon as you started moving so did he. He intends to counter your movements and use your discretion against you. Which means if you stop being discrete, and start acting openly, it will catch him off guard.

You need to become Scratch’s number one priority. And that means stirring up more trouble than he can hope to keep on the down low. It will paint a big target on your back, and he’ll have no choice but to devote his troops to stopping you. If you do well enough at this, it may even draw attention from the other trolls, wherever the hell they are.

It will be tough, and it may make the trolls suspect the worst of you. But that doesn’t matter. You can keep them safe this way, and draw Scratch into the open. The cards he keeps up his sleeves, the ones that he uses to build his perfect deck, will be revealed, and then you can strike back.

It’s time for Marquise Spinneret Mindfang to become a household name.

Your name is Terezi Pyrope, and you are worried sick. You haven’t seen Vriska in several hours, and from what you’ve seen the city is dissolving into chaos as explosions and bombings are occurring all over the place. Bro Strider went out when the chaos first started and dragged Dave home like a wriggler, and now he’s sulking in his room while Bro scans the Internet to find out what’s going on, and you watch the news.

Well, that’s what you think is happening before Dave bursts into the room. His face is stoic, but he’s dripping with sweat and you can see his fists clenched tightly enough to draw cherry flavored blood. He grabs the remote, fumbles it for a moment, stops to stare at his hands in surprise, and then changes the channel to a different station. “Friend of mine just mentioned this.” He says quietly.

It’s Vriska.

Vriska is standing in the middle of an intersection, on top of a burning car, laughing like a maniac. A reporter is yelling something about terrorists, and Vriska throws her fluorite octet to the side with a flourish. It summons a giant spider similar to her lusus, which starts screeching and rushes the camera. Everything cuts to static for a moment before the news station takes over the feed again. It smells so sharply to you, even though you’re sure the feed was probably blurry.
“I can’t believe she’s using that hat for evil again.” Dave cries out. “That hat is ironic and pure, it doesn’t deserve that kind of bad press! Ow, shit bro, I’m just saying!” The elder Strider has moved over to check the report and is now staring down at you behind his shades. The gaze between you is far too intense for two people who aren’t actually making eye contact.

“Do you want to deal with her, or should I?” He says quietly. “Can you even deal with her?”

You thought she was better now. She’d seemed so much happier since she left her psychotic lusus behind and followed you all into space. You thought she was done with the killing, and generally being horrible. It brings you back to some of the pranks she’d played on Tavros and Aradia, back when you role-played together. Those pranks were the reason you didn’t talk to Vriska much before your trip.

You’ve always known Vriska was dangerous. But you had hoped that she’d be better now. You thought she was better now. You were wrong.

“I can deal with her better than anyone.” You say with a sigh. “One way or another, I’ll put a stop to this.”

Chapter End Notes

Nice short chapter for you guys, just to tide you over until things get really hectic. Also, don’t be alarmed if you look back at the chapter list and see things moved around, I fiddled with the chapter order in a way I think fits better. I’ll probably shift the notes a bit to match later. Anyways, next chapter, Scratch gets himself in a situation he really wasn't prepared for.
Completely Catawampus

Chapter Summary

The humans prepare for action.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the wait on this one people. Life's been pretty busy as of late, but with all that's coming up I assure you the wait will be well worth it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Your name is Doctor Scratch, and you have made another miscalculation. The last time this happened cost millions in government funding. This time however, you stand to gain plenty. You didn’t underestmate the trolls’ skill and power this time, only their stupidity.

Vriska Serket has begun acting out in a clear challenge to your insults from yesterday. You certainly expected her to act out, but attempting to burn down the entire city of Houston Texas is rash and foolish on a level you never expected. You never thought for a moment things could go this well.

The world now knows that aliens are amongst us. They only know of two at present, Vriska, and Terezi, as the two are currently locked in combat, with the assistance of two Striders, interestingly enough. Two is more than enough though. The damage they’ve done is on a breathtaking level. And with your men there to keep things escalating, the city of Houston has dissolved into a warzone.

And with so many people now terrified of the extra-terrestrial, your team is receiving funds to spare. All this money is yours to do with as you please, and you won’t even need it to begin wrapping things up.

You began to make your move the moment Caleb Deuce reported to you that Vriska escaped his grasp. The one troll currently in your possession, Tavros, is being moved to a separate facility on the other side of the country, so that he cannot be found. This removes any chance of Makara saving the brown-blooded cripple.

Meanwhile, you have your men fanning out in pursuit of the other trolls. New York State is covered in a veil at the moment, so none of the trolls there can be found, which is disconcerting, but you know where the trolls in California and Washington are, and you have your men tracking them now.

The only thing standing in your way at this point is the humans. You can’t help but worry about them, with the knowledge they have of you, they’ve been on high alert since they met the trolls. The Egberts, the Lalondes, The Striders, and the Harleys.

Those four families are all that stand between you and the keys to a whole new race.

But they also hold a great deal of potential for you.

You know that the four families are close to each other, but not all are equal in protection. The
Striders are hidden in plain sight, masked within the urban sprawl, but your taunting of Vriska has drawn two of them out. The third one is likely elsewhere. The Harleys are vulnerable as long as they’re not on their island, though catching them will still be difficult. The Lalondes are untraceable. The Egberts are sitting in the open though.

Catching the Egberts will require only something to draw them out. And you have the perfect bait in mind. One lone troll was seen recently, one that left the cloaking protection of Rue Lalonde’s influence. You suspect it to be Kanaya Maryam, as the other two trolls in the area that aren’t ghosts are near inseparable. And while Kanaya has proven lethal and hardier than the other trolls, you have something deadlier.

There was a time when you had access to an impressive group experimenting with genetics to make some rather interesting results. The majority of these experiments are lost to you, but two remain. One, Spades, is a deadly, fast, armored human, who was your best underling even before he was augmented, though somewhat unruly. Nowadays he looks after the base on the coast where Nitram is being transported.

The other minion of yours is Jack. The younger brother of Spades fused with the same DNA that created the mutant dog that now belongs to the Harleys. Jack is unstable, but capable. He is the perfect creature to collect Kanaya Maryam as bait. You expect it shall only be a matter of time before the Egberts are in your hands. And once Jack is done with Kanaya he’ll be able to round up the Striders as well.

This was Vriska’s fatal mistake. She thought that by causing a distraction in Houston, you would be forced to divert resources to stop her. But you know that the other trolls are not as rash as her. She is being kept busy by Terezi, the Striders, and the few men you’ve placed down there, despite her absurdly dangerous dice.

And while she knows you can see her, she has no way of knowing whether her plan is working. You’ve sent more troops down to make her think she is distracting you, and allow her to feel justified in her actions. But she doesn’t remotely know the extent of your resources. All she’s done is increase fear towards her kind, limiting the trolls’ movements further, ensuring they have nowhere to run, and making them easier to trap. Checkmate.

Your name is Roxy Lalonde, and you are not entirely sure where you are right now. You’ve been travelling as fast as you can, riding Dirk’s flying skateboard to trail him and Equius across the country, but with them travelling on foot and being as sneaky as possible, you don’t have much of a trail to go on. Seriously, you thought being sneaky was your thing!

You have a general idea of where the two are heading, thanks to the map you stole from Kanaya, but you decided to leave it at home so you wouldn’t lose the thing. You have no idea why you did that in retrospect. You were probably drunk. Well, it’s you so drunkenness is more or less a certainty. Not that you’re drunk right now. Drinking and flying is a big no-no, even for Roxy Lalonde!

The thing that’s worrying you the most right now is that you’re pretty sure you’re almost at the place where the base is supposed to be, and yet you still haven’t seen a single trace of Dirk or Equius. I mean really, how have you not even found a trace of Equius? He breaks everything he touches and leaves sweat marks wherever he sits down. There should be a trail of destruction from the base to your house and back!

Not that you don’t think Equius is great. He’s a big old softie underneath all that awkwardness and anger, and you do recognize that. But you’re so irritated right now that you’re feeling just a bit upset
You’re just debating whether you should land for an hour or so and rest your legs when a shadow appears on the hoverboard behind you. “Oh thank Jegus, I was starting to think I’d never find you.” you breathe a sigh of relief. The only person who could possibly get on the hoverboard while you’re driving it without you noticing is Dirk.

“Roxy, what the hell are you doing here?” Dirk hisses as he shifts his feet to effortlessly land the hoverboard. The two of you dismount in a clearing, where Equius is sitting on a rock, sweating and muttering about towels.

“I am here to assist you in your break-in attempt!” You announce with a grin. “I realized what you guys were up to, and realized that your team was in serious need of my sexy skills!” You wave at Equius as he makes a choking noise.

“Roxy, you are not following us into a government facility.” Dirk says with a sigh, rubbing his temples in frustration. You start making the poutiest face you can muster as he continues. “This is going to be dangerous, and will require a good deal of quiet.

“Excuse me for interrupting, humans, but if it is danger that worries you, I believe miss Lalonde is more than capable of coping.” Equius speaks matter-of-factly as he walks between you. “As for stealth, I have seen Roxy turn invisible with ease. She could be an asset.” Aww yes, Equius is awesome when he’s not trying to kill you!

“You weren’t exactly looking all too stealthy on my hoverboard.” Dirk says bitterly. “I should just program that thing to stop other riders.”

“You and I both know I’d just hack into it.” You smirk triumphantly. “Besides, your hoverboard doesn’t have a computer.”

“I know.” Dirk stares flatly at you. “I was being ironic.”

“Anyways, I can turn invisible and walk through walls. I’m the most useful one here if we’re going to be stealthy!” You conclude with a nod.

“I’ve been wondering how you were getting into the alcohol.” Dirk glares at you, and you realize you just completely blew it. Dirk does not like you drinking, so letting slip how you’re getting your drink on is not wise. Also, the look of anger and disappointment he gives you when you drink cuts even deeper than the looks your little sister can give.

“Roxy’s vile habit of polluting her body with soporifics, loathsome though it may be, is a matter best left for another time. It would be more expedient if we were to move in on the base for the time being.” Equius states firmly as he looks to the south. “I expect that we are no more than a few miles away. Let us put our inadequacies aside, at least for tonight.”

Aww Equius, you used to be cool. Like two minutes ago you were cool, and now you’re all bluh. Though he did get Dirk to stop glaring at you, so you guess you can let this slide. Slide in this case meaning you give him a look that says pretty clearly “don’t you go talking to me about inadequacies, buddy.” Equius responds by looking away and muttering about towels. Who is the best at making people not want to deal with your issues? You are!

You’d say that sounded better in your head, but that line was definitely not even said aloud. You
have such a headache. Sobriety is overrated.

Actually, you’ve been thinking sobriety isn’t a terrible idea, but withdrawal symptoms are definitely not what you need to be dealing with right now.

Dirk has already moved ahead while you were lost in thought. Equius is looking back at you, but he’s at the edge of the clearing as well. “Miss Lalonde, we must stay low and make haste moving forward. Will you be able to keep up with our speed, or do you require me to carry you?”

You try not to make a face, you really do, but while you don’t really hold any ill feelings towards Equius, the thought of touching his sweaty anything is very gross to you. “Sorry big guy, but I’m gonna pass on that. If I fall behind, I fall behind, but I’ll be damn sure to go the right way.” Equius frowns, though without seeing his eyes you can’t tell if he’s annoyed or offended. Probably both. Either way though, he nods curtly and rushes into the underbrush, and holy shit, how does somebody that big move so silently?

You grab a bottle of aspirin you’ve been keeping in your back pocket and swallow a couple dry, then run after them as fast as you can. It doesn’t take much time before they’re far ahead of you. And not much time after that before they’re out of sight.

Your name is Jake English, and life has been pretty darn spiffy for you as of late. You and your family have been having a ripsnorter of a time sailing along the coast of the old Americas, and have spent the last bit of your time moving with some new comrades: three trolls, who have been quite happy for the shelter and have been eagerly accompanying you on your adventure.

The gentlemen are maintaining a bit of the old banter about it, but you’re quite sure they are simply putting on a fanciful charade to maintain their pride. Much like the Striders, with their dadblasted ironic veils that they always hunker behind. The young madam on the other hand, is bally well chipper about the whole venture, and has struck up a camaraderie with your younger sister.

It’s just as well that everyone is so aces with the situation, because your dear old Grandpop Harley is not all too keen on letting your new friends vamoose. Ever since your sister decided to unleash the full weight of her lasspluck on him regarding the use of his precious blunderbuss on the trolls he has insisted that he keeps them under his scrutiny.

At the moment your grandpa is doing just that, steering the ship across open waters, while Jade and Feferi chat below deck, and Eridan and Sollux sit on deck. The two are currently recovering from another fit of seasickness, which is quite the humdinger of a laugh in your opinion, particularly because Eridan is supposedly a denizen of the briny deep himself! The two of them are pretty much completely catawampus at the moment.

Your Grandpop doesn’t particularly seem to give a hoot that the two are discombobulated at the moment though, as he’s watching them like a hawk. You’ve been pondering whether the distrust may be the result of their perusing of the computers at the base, as that’s what set the man on the train of thought that the trolls were knowledge pilfering rapscallions. It’s certainly true that Mister Captor has been trying to jimmy information from him since then, though neither is willing to talk to you about it. Really, the two of them are both being very inscrutable about the whole thing.

Several hours later, you’re stopping for fuel, and your grandpa has gone into town to fetch supplies. It’s been several days since you last went on land, and you feel rather sympathetic towards your wards, whom are currently left with no choice but to hide below deck until you can be off again. Jade is doing her best to keep them all collected and happy in the meantime, though you know some
dry land would be good for them.

You’re debating requesting a rest stop for them at an island or something, so that they can get themselves collected, but you do hate to delay when the call of adventure is tantalizing you. Plus, it won’t be too long now before you’ve reached Washington, where your good chums John and Jane are living, and you know Jade has been downright giddy to visit them. Well, it will likely be a few weeks, but when you’ve been sailing from the middle of the Pacific Ocean that hardly seems like much!

A flash of movement catches your eye from across the way, and you see a chap dressed in black strolling briskly along the pier. He is leaving a boat (also black) with at least four other men dressed similarly, and the lot of them are a pitch-black shadow on the water. Something about it looks rather familiar to you, but you can’t quite place it.

A large hand claps you on the shoulder, and your hand immediately moves to the pistols you keep concealed at your hips before you realize it’s your grandfather. Of course being the savvy gent that he is, you find yourself locked in a chokehold before you can unholster your trusty arms. Honestly, your grandfather is so friggin on the ball you swear it’s impossible to get the drop on him. Given how trigger-happy your family is that’s probably for the best though!

“We seem to be in quite a pinch, my boy.” Grandpa Harley says in a low tone. “I have noticed a selection of curmudgeonly cads that appears to have been tailing our fine vessel all the way from Ventura to here. Also, I have found something rather troubling in the paper as well.” He hands you an article and moves to unmoor the ship, muttering a warning in a low tone as Jade moves up to the deck and smiles at you. “Keep your wits about you, lad. Mustn’t worry Jade.”

You peruse the article your grandpa gave you briefly, and feel your blood run cold. It would seem that these trolls have been pulling the wool over your eyes as to the nature of their kind. The article you’re reading is about a troll that has turned a large city into a warzone. You see Jade peering over at you curiously and hastily toss the paper into the bay.

“What was that, Jake?” Jade asks suspiciously as you climb aboard the vessel.

You chuckle nervously and try to wave her off. “Nothing at all, just a bit of the old political banter and whatnot.”

Jade’s look of suspicion shifts to irritation, and you have to inwardly curse your inability to tell a decent fib. “Jake, you may have changed your last name to sound more like some kind of silly secret agent, but that doesn’t mean I can’t see right through you. Fess up.”

Sometimes you really miss the good old days when Jade was young, carefree, and trusting. The Striders really have been a pretty bad influence on her in a lot of ways. Though you can’t really fault her for her sharpness. You’ve picked up a few things from your wilier Internet companions as well though. For instance, Rose taught you that where a lie doesn’t work, half-truths often will.

“Well dag nab it Jade, I suppose you’ve caught me red-handed.” You tug at your collar and chuckle sheepishly. “The article wasn’t the issue, but there is something bothering me.”

You feel the boat shift underneath you, and feel yourself relaxing a bit. That’s one humdinger of a pickle you can stop worrying about for now. You look back and see the man from before at the entrance to the pier. He’s waving with a casual smirk, which is far more worrying than it probably should be. It doesn’t distract you from what Jade is saying though.

“Let me guess, you’re worrying about Dirk again.” You whirl around to face her and see her
smirking slyly at you. “He’s always getting flustered about something.”

Nope. You are not touching that one with a ten-foot pole, especially not with the myriad of more important issues to deal with. “Jesus Christopher Kringlefucker Jade, I am absolutely not talking about that sort of thing with my little sister!”

Jade sighs and rolls her eyes. “Fine, stew in your romantic mess for all I care. But one of these days you’re going to have to wake up and realize I’m not a little kid anymore.” She disappears below deck, leaving you alone with your worries.

You’re glad she wrote everything off as relationship issues. As devilfucking awkward as that little dialogue was, you think it was probably better than your original plan to tell her about your suited pursuers. You see your grandpa nodding at you in approval and know he’s in agreement.

You can’t help but worry about the article though. Not only because it means that the refugees you are sheltering below deck may be secretly hostile, but also because Jade’s reminded you of something very troubling. The city of Houston, where the troll has caused all of this destruction, is where the Strider family takes up residence. The next time you hear from Dave or Dirk may be the last. Assuming you haven’t heard the last of them already.

You stare out over the expanse of ocean to your right and find yourself wishing you were back on your island, roaming the forests and hunting the wild beasts that are about. Life was simple then, a mess of silliness and adventure. Or so you thought. The sudden developments have you questioning whether you really understood what adventuring meant. Or whether the adventure you’re heading into is something you’ve ever wanted at all.

Chapter End Notes

Jade will be elaborated on soon enough, as I realize the way she's acted to now in the story could be seen as out of character. It's mostly about growth, and how ridiculous her family and childhood are. As for Jake, well he's as straightforward and dopey as ever really. If anything, having Grandpa Harley around only makes him more of a complete and total Jake. There's really no better word for it, is there?
Your name is Equius Zahhak, and you are finally prepared to die. You’ve been living for far longer than you have any right to, and this is the night you set your affairs in order. You are currently standing at the hill overlooking Doctor Scratch’s base; that same hill where Aradia’s ghost first contacted you. This was where you strayed from the path intended for one of your standing.

This base signifies all of your failings as a troll. This is where you failed to protect Gamzee. This is where you abandoned Feferi in order to pursue your misguided affections for Aradia. This is where your doomed mission to bring a troll back to life began.

This is where you will give everything you have to set things right.

You have three roles to fulfill here: rescue your fellow trolls, obtain the genetic material needed to finally save Aradia, and prevent Scratch from endangering your kind any further by any means necessary. If that means your death you will not be particularly upset, it will mean another wrong righted that should have been dealt with long ago.

At your side is the human Dirk Strider, who seems to be impatient to get under way. You consider this understandable, as his close friend Roxy Lalonde is no doubt close behind you. The relationship between the two is as close to a moirallegiance as you’ve seen from humans.

“We need to make this fast.” Dirk’s saying, and you note the flash of red across his glasses, indication that his computer program is communicating with him. “Hal can’t get anything on this damn place, so we’ll just have to find the most important person we can and grill them for info. Let’s move before she catches up.”

You nod firmly, dropping to a crouch as Dirk flashsteps away. A quick glance tells you that he’s moved to the base of the nearest guard tower. You wait another moment for him to deal with the guards, and strongjump into the base.

There’s only one way for you and Dirk to succeed in your plan. You’ve discussed it at length as you travelled. The only way to stay ahead of the FELT is to allow Dirk space to move in silence, and the best way to do this is by making as much noise as possible. You glance around your space casually and see two soldiers on patrol by the nearest building. You’re upon them before they realize it, and after dealing a backhand that obliterates the first human, you throw the other at a guard tower. Plenty
of screaming from the second human assures that your presence will be known.

The entire base is lit up before long, and you note with some satisfaction that the searchlights are all focused on you. Dirk can avoid such lights easily, and with Roxy’s powers of invisibility she should be safe as well. The only one in any danger this way is you.

There’s a sudden blast of gunfire, and you feel the sharp sting of bullets grazing your body. One in particular rakes your leg and nearly causes you to stumble, forcing you to throw yourself into another leap to avoid being felled early. Your momentum carries you through the wall of the nearest bunker, and you realize it’s a munitions depot similar to the one that held the weapons your group lost the first time you were here.

You hear the sound of voices growing louder as the soldiers begin to catch up to you, and pull yourself to your feet. A sharp stab of pain lances through your chest, and you have to prop yourself on a crate for stability until it passes. The damage from your fight with Mrs. Lalonde is still healing, despite your insistence otherwise. Running is not strenuous to you, but the strong jumps are taking their toll.

You look around the room you’re in irritably, realizing that if you plan to stay ahead of the human weapons, you’ll need more than your bare hands. It would be refreshing as a turn of events, if the situation weren’t so crucial.

The answer comes swiftly though, in the form of a rattle from the crate you’re propped on. As the humans burst through the main door and into the room, you hurl a tank shell at them. The explosion sends those not killed running in fear, leaving you with a clear chance to get away.

You punch your way through the wall behind you and escape while the humans prepare to enter the warehouse. You continue to ignore the pain that gnaws at your insides as you run. You can’t afford to fall until your job here is complete.

When the highblood is safe, you’ll be allowed to die.

Your name is Dirk Strider, and you are moving as fast as you can manage. Equius is taking a big risk by acting as decoy for you, and you know it’s only a matter of time until Roxy catches up with you and does something irrational. You love the girl dearly, but you’ve always thought something was just wrong with her priorities sometimes. The world could be ending and she’d be too busy trying to save everyone to get to safety.

Besides, she’s too nice of a person for the work you’re doing here. You just decapitated a soldier who was trying to shoot you. She doesn’t have it in her to kill, and you doubt she’d appreciate seeing you kill anyone either. You don’t care for it much yourself, but when things come down to life or death, you’re not one to dwell on the morality of a situation. Take unnecessary feeling, and bury it away where it can’t hold you back. That’s what Bro’s always taught you.

You look around the complex from the guard tower you’ve claimed and see that the base is far larger than you thought it would be, especially given the relatively large amount of secrecy surrounding it. This is some high-level government intelligence shit right here, and you’re about to infiltrate it singlehanded. Meanwhile Equius is going to take on the brunt of their firepower on his own as well, and he’s not as good at hiding injury as he might hope.

The bunkers around the outside appear to be primarily for military use, and unless the base is secretly being run by Professor X, you think it’s safe to say there aren’t any secret doors under the training
grounds. In other words, there are two buildings to choose from. One matches Equius’ description of the area the trolls were held in before, but you doubt that area would be used as a prison after it already failed at that role so spectacularly. This leaves the larger main complex.

As expected, the facility is lax on security, likely due to Equius rampaging outside. You decide to be less cautious than normal on that note, as the amount of gunfire and explosions is pretty fucking unnerving, even to you. It’s always been that way to you, really. You need to get fucked up for a plan to work? Fine. But when your friends are in danger, your mind goes to shit.

AR: Okay, so I’m running facial recognition on everybody I see here. If I can’t find any info on somebody, they’re probably top of the ladder.
TT: Sounds like a plan, I’ll head for the upper levels and sweep this place for the labs.
AR: Just so you know, if you die here, I’m totally taking your place.
TT: You don’t have a body.
AR: Bodies are useless anyways. My mind is the same as yours, so rest assured nobody will know the difference.
TT: Fuck you.
AR: That’s the spirit!

You smirk in spite of yourself. If Hal’s still being a smartass piece of shit then things can’t be all that bad. Not yet anyways.

It takes far longer than you’d hoped to find the lab, but once you’re there, you manage to round up the DNA samples by threatening to break everyone’s arms. You stow them all safely in a case for holding lab samples that Mrs. Lalonde gave you. Mission one accomplished. Now all you have to do is find the trolls that are being boxed up here and make a break for it.

Hal hasn’t messaged you since you last spoke to him, so you decide to find a bigwig on your own. In the end you decide to start from the top floor and work down. Your path takes you to the roof of the building. The whole complex is built like a labyrinth, and the hallways all seem to be open to the sky for some strange reason. It’s considerably easier to navigate from above though, since you can just jump over the openings in the roof and see which doors look important.

A large explosion rings out to your right, and you see Equius throwing a tank across the courtyard. The machine hits the roof next to you and punches straight into the floor below. Clearly the guys who built this place were not prepared for falling tanks, which is pretty damn irresponsible of them in your opinion.

You glance down into the hole and see that it’s not actually a room below your feet like you thought. It would seem that what you took to be a chain of office rooms was actually one long hallway, the only one you’ve seen around here that’s actually covered up. This looks promising.

AR: This looks foreboding.
TT: Sounds right.
AR: Don’t die here bro, I don’t actually want to fill in for you while you’re dead.
AR: I’m way more interesting than you, it would be a total downgrade.
TT: Can’t deny that.
TT: We’ll be fine though.
AR: We nothing. I don’t live in your glasses anymore, I just talk through them, remember?
TT: I’ll be fine.
AR: That’s more like it.

You’ve reached the end of the hallway while talking with Hal, and now you find yourself standing at a pair of ornate wooden doors. You look up at the large knockers set in the middle of the door. Might
“Come in, please.” A voice calls through the door before you’ve so much as touched the knocker. A bit weird, but whatever, you clearly don’t have the element of surprise, so you might as well acquiesce.

You walk into the ugliest room you’ve ever seen, like some little kid went a bit too crazy with the green crayons. The only thing in the room that isn’t green or black is the man sitting at the desk in the middle of the room, who’s paler than Rose (and lord knows that girl could use some sun), and completely bald.

He’s reading over some files as you walk in. “You know, usually you wait for a guest to knock before you invite them in.”

“Nonsense, I always know when guests are arriving. The knockers are for show. To scar the wood of those doors with brass would be unforgiveable.”

The man looks up with a smile. “Now then, how may I help you, young mister Strider? Simply state your business and I shall help you the best that I can. That is the duty of a good host, after all. And feel free to clean the blood off of that sword while you’re here, that can’t be good for it.” Well that’s unexpected. If you weren’t completely repressing your emotion right now you’d probably be feeling unnerved right now. Doctor Scratch is clearly as unflappably confident as you’ve heard, and what’s more, he apparently knows who you are.

“How do you know the name Strider?” You draw your sword and polish the edge, keeping it casual. Doctor Scratch pushes forward a container of wet wipes, and you start cleaning the blood off with a nod.

“Well Dirk, as it happens I used to work with your caretaker, Brock Strider. His assistance was essential for my goals when I first established the FELT.

“Yeah, my bro isn’t exactly the type to do the government any favors.” You finish cleaning your sword and sheathe it, tossing the wipes into a garbage can helpfully placed next to you. “Honestly, I’d be surprised if he even paid most of his taxes.”

“He doesn’t, we’d have tracked him down years ago if he paid his bills properly.” Scratch says unconcernedly. “He did work for us though. He was one of my head of security, as well as a blood donor.”

“Blood donor?”

“For genetic testing.” Scratch shrugs, and starts rifling through his desk. “We used his DNA to facilitate some of our more complex experiments. Orange soda?” He pulls a bottle from under his desk and sets it on the desk. “Normally I’d offer my guests a glass, but I feel that in your case a sealed bottle would make you more comfortable.”

You shrug and take the bottle. Stay calm, show no signs that you’re ready to cut this guy’s head off at a moments notice, and remain emotionless. Scratch is clearly collected, but nobody beats your poker face. Plus, orange soda is the shit.

“Surprised a classy guy like you keeps orange soda in your fridge. You know I was coming? Or did you just run out of wine?”

“It is the duty of a good host to provide for any guests. I keep a myriad of refreshments for anybody who may visit. I do have wines as well, of course, but you’re hardly old enough to partake. This is as well.
after all, America.” He places a hand on his heart with a respectable level of irony.

“How do you know I’m not old enough to drink? I could be thirty-one for all you know. In fact, that’s exactly how old I am.” you throw a hand over your eyes in mock distress. “Now you’ve offended me! I am so very hurt and offended by your insinuation at my age! I think I’ll go stand in front of the next tank my friend throws so that I can be put out of my misery.”

“You are nineteen, the same age as your twin brother, naturally.” Scratch smiles widely. “Two years below legal drinking age.”

“What?”

“Ah yes, I did forget to mention that, didn’t I?” Scratch stands and walks over to the fireplace (which you suddenly realize doesn’t actually have a chimney, what the fuck?), pulls down a broom from a plaque above the mantle (again, what?), and starts sweeping in front of it. “You asked the wrong question before, you see. The important point was not ‘How do you know the name Strider?’ It was: ‘how do you know I’m a Strider?’” You are not liking the direction this is going.

“Your hair was the big tipoff, you see. You’ve had that ridiculous hair ever since you were a baby. Not to mention the shades, which reflect your brother’s so well. Then there’s your serious attitude, your build, your fighting skill… Honestly, you are like him in so many ways…”

Scratch turns to face you, a winning smile across his face. Not to say that he’s winning you over with his grin, more like he can tell he’s got you hooked, and is about to reel you in. “It’s quite simple, really. You take to Brock’s teaching much better than Dave does, because you are almost exactly like him. You are, save for some relatively minor adjustments we made along the way, his exact clone.”

You suddenly understand nothing.

“There were eight of you in all, see. Eight children, all cloned from four guardians, four exact copies, four mixed between two parents, all with one purpose for their creation.”

“Weapons.” You spit out bitterly. You suddenly understand everything. The strange things your friends can do, from Roxy’s invisibility, to the absurd things John and Jade can do, right down to your ability to shut down parts of your brain at will. Plus that other thing you don’t like to think about.

“That’s right, weapons. Government weapons to be used for whatever we deemed necessary. In the end, we planned to create an army of your kind, but were stopped when your guardians decided the moral implications were too great. They destroyed our data, took you all, and scattered across the country.”

“And then we all adopted trolls, and decided to come to your home base.”

“Very perceptive of you. Yes, we’ve tracked all of the trolls, and they are now all with you. Quite the small world we live in, isn’t it?” Scratch smiles as he continues, pacing around his room at his leisure. “And once I’ve dealt with you all, it will be that much smaller.”

You see him stop in front of the door, and draw your katana. “I will soon have the Egberts, the remaining Striders, and your trolls either dead or under my custody. All that remains is to tear the voided area under Rue Lalonde’s veil apart and find where you’ve been hiding, and chase down the Harleys. Once I’ve taken care of you lot I’ll have everything I need to pick up where I left off, and tie up any loose ends.”
You whirl about and bring your blade on Scratch’s head, but he effortlessly parries you with his broom handle. His grin at this point is looking positively wicked, and he throws a heavy punch at you that you barely manage to evade.

“You’ll not find me so easy to kill, Dirk.” Scratch says with a dark chuckle. “Though I’m glad you attacked me, honestly. Initiating an attack against a guest would be improper, but when a guest tries to kill me? I think I can strike you down guilt free at this point.” His broom swings at you faster than you’d believe possible, but your training with Bro and Dave allows you to keep up, if only barely.

You dart in to strike at his arms, but he spins the broom so fast it nearly disarms you. You dart back as he swings again, and the speed at which the broom grazes your face causes the bristles to gouge several small cuts across your cheek. What the fuck, you know for a fact that’s a regular straw broom, and your katana may not be as good as Bro’s, but it sure as shit isn’t a piece of junk like Dave’s.

“Yes, before we created you children, we also performed several other experiments.” Scratch says with a shrug. “I have augmented myself a great deal through genetic tweaking, though as a grown adult, there was only so much we could do.”

“So it’s freak vs freak then.” You say with a smirk. You’re doing your best to come up with a plan, taking your panic and shoving it away where it can’t affect you. His broom is still a piece of wood, no matter how well he wields it. All you need is one good hit to take the advantage here.

He won’t go down though. Doctor scratch gives you no openings at all, taking your hits easily and striking back even easier. You thrust and he parries, you slash and he deflects, and his broom has yet to so much as splinter. This guy is ridiculous.

You glance back at the room, and see no windows to leave through. His fireplace seems to let smoke out without actually having a chimney, so you can’t leave that way, and unlike Equius you can’t break through reinforced walls. You have one choice left.

Alright, it seems like I can’t touch you with this sword.” You jump back to the far wall and put your sword away. Scratch pauses, his stance immediately relaxing. The bastard hasn’t even broken a sweat. You haven’t either, mind you, but you can’t say you appreciate him making beating you look so easy. “I guess I’ll have to make this get ugly.”

“Oh dear, try not to make a mess of the place.” Scratch says calmly. “I go to great lengths to keep my office in order.”

You glare at him through your shades, and raise your hands. This is not something you like doing, because it’s probably the most painful thing you’re capable of, and it lasts long enough that the whole process feels more like torture than anything. That’s not cool with you. But it’s also not something you think Scratch can block.

You use your powers. Not the lame emotion capping ones you’ve always used to keep yourself at the top of your game. You use the powers that let you rip souls out of people’s bodies. You’ve used them once, before you mastered your emotions, and got particularly pissed off during a sparring session. Once Bro was done beating the crap out of you he explained them to you, and you decided to never use them again.

This is a desperate situation though.

Scratch takes the hit as poorly as you expected, collapsing to the ground the moment you send spirit lightning into his limbs. He thrashes on the ground, snarling and yelling, fighting against the urge to
give in and scream. Then he raises an arm.

He’s not supposed to be able to move at all, so that’s not a good sign. He throws his arm in front of the lightning though, and it stops at his hand.

“Soul lightning is not like the real deal, apparently.” Scratch pants as he pulls back his sleeve. “It doesn’t travel through metal.”

The son of a bitch has a bionic arm. Your soul works on flesh, but apparently metal doesn’t conduct souls. Go figure. This means your lightning is useless, but perhaps now that he’s hurt you’ll be able to get him.

“I know what you’re thinking, and no, you still stand no chance.” Scratch snarls at you as he retrieves his broom. “All you’ve done is anger me.” He proves his point by flying at you across the room and knocking you sideways with the broom. The bristles come away bloody, and your glasses are shattered. “I’m afraid my hospitality is far past its breaking point.”

You start to scramble for the door on all fours as he strides towards you. This guy is ridiculously good, and has a trump card to match yours. You have one option left to you. As he gets close you get to your feet and start to run. Scratch grabs your shoulder before you can get anywhere, and you spin to face him. You bring your hand, clenched in a fist, up to eye level as he raises his fist.

And you throw a handful of broken sunglasses in his eyes. Pixie dusted, motherfucker.

Scratch screams in agony as he reels backwards, and you run for the door. Your face is dripping blood everywhere, and your shoulder feels fractured. He’s just blind and mad, and you’ve been around Terezi enough to know that’s still plenty dangerous.

Doctor Scratch hears you move, and just to prove your point, throws himself at you with a roar and grabs you by the ankle. You trip, haul yourself that last step as Scratch fumbles at you, and grab the door, hauling it open.

And you come face to face with Rue Lalonde.

What.

The.

Fuck.

“Dirk sweetie, I’d forgotten what a lovely color your eyes were.” She states simply, as though a murderous maniac wasn’t clawing at your leg right now. Though he seems as dumbfounded as you are.

“Mrs. Lalonde?”

“Rue?”

“Doctor scratch.” Rue’s smile fades to a look that blows the locks off of the mental safe you keep your emotions in. You. Are. Terrified. And she’s not even angry with you. She steps into the office to stand behind you, and plants her heel firmly into Doctor Scratch’s face. His grip on your leg relents, and you stumble forward in surprise. “Dirk, go to the hill, Equius and Roxy are waiting for you already.”

“Wait, what the fuck, why are you even here? What happened to Equius? Who’s distracting the
“The guards are no longer aware of our presence.” Rue says coldly, standing in her fighting stance as Scratch gets to his feet. “Equius has been injured again, the silly boy, but Roxy was able to get him out. And I’ve been here since shortly after Roxy left to follow you. I have spent the past three days deleting all troll data from the computer archives, as well as cleaning up the lab after you left it. The only troll DNA in the building now is the samples in your bag. This does mean that the prisoners are gone, sadly.”

You take a moment to process all of this, and then realize she hasn’t answered the question that’s confusing you the most. “But why are you here?”

“I helped make you.” Rue says with a small smile, looking back at you fondly. “I didn’t want to interfere with your mission, since I prefer to let children grow on their own, but I did want to be here in case something went wrong. Like you walking into this office. Out of all of us, I am the one most responsible for everything, so call it atonement.”

A loud explosion rings out, and you look back to see fire down the hallway, and a cloud of smoke through the hole left by the tank. Rue’s smile becomes wicked as she elaborates. “Also, I wanted to make sure that when things were cleared up here it was done thoroughly this time. You really should go meet with the others, this facility will not last much longer I’m afraid!”

“You conniving witch!” Scratch hisses as he pulls glass from his face. “I should have killed you years ago when I had the chance!”

“Indeed.” Rue pushes you out the door with a light touch, and you turn around in alarm. “Now it seems both of us are going to die here.”

“What the fuck Lalonde, there’s no way I’m leaving my best friend’s mother to die fighting a maniac!”

“Dirk sweetie, tell my girls how sorry I am. And look after Roxy, I know how much she relies on you.” Another explosion rings out from directly above you, and you throw yourself away from the doorway as the ceiling collapses, trapping Rue inside with Doctor Scratch.

Your name is Roxy Lalonde, and you have been very busy. You’ve killed a person with your rifle, spent a good half hour sobbing over it, and had to help carry a troll twice your size out of a government facility while he bled all over you and muttered about suicide. Then your mom showed up, used some weird voidy thing to blind everyone in the complex, and went to find your best friend in the world, who neither you nor Equius have heard anything from all night.

But your mom is here now, so you finally feel like things are going to be all right. She saved you from Equius, she locked all her alcohol away when she found out you had a problem (not that that stopped you), she always has a way to help you in dangerous times.

The explosions are a bit unnerving though, you’ll admit. Plus Equius is still bleeding everywhere despite your best attempts to patch him up. He seems convinced that he’s disgracing himself by laying here not dying, which is a bunch of bullshit, but he made sure to get you both out of the facility so you think he’s probably just being hard on himself for some weird troll thing. You make a mental note to ask Nepeta about that later. Whenever you meet her again.

“Strider, you are damaged.” Equius’ voice gets your attention, and you realize he’s flashstepped
behind you while you were busy watching the base. “It would seem this mission was a failure.”

“Not completely.” Dirk holds up his bag, determinedly keeping his back facing you, as you move to look at him. “I’ve got Aradia’s DNA here. Hopefully it will be enough to clone her a new body.”

“That is excellent news!” Equius seems thrilled in spite of himself, as you reach Dirk’s side. His head’s turned.

“Dirk, stop being an ass and let me see you,” you snap as Dirk flinches and shows you his face and the mess of parallel cuts across the left side of his face. “Ohmygosh. Dirk, what happened to you?” You grab some bandages and start wrapping his face messily.

“Got hit by a broom.” Dirk mutters as you try to bandage his face without covering his mouth and nose. “Other guy looks worse though. Think I blinded him.”

“Well as long as you fucked him up.” You finish the impromptu medical treatment and start looking around. “Anyways, where’s mom? She should have caught up to us by now, right?”

Dirk flinches. You feel your stomach drop as he looks up to you, his eyes boring into you. He’s not crying, but he looks… empty. “Roxy, your mom’s not coming back.”

You stare at him blankly. Then you slap him across the face. “That’s not funny Dirk, what the fuck happened!” You stop and look at your hand, at the blood there. He should have dodged that; he would never let you hit him unless…

Unless he felt like he really deserved it.

“I failed, Roxy.” Dirk’s voice wavers as he says it, though his face remains blank. “That’s what happened. Your mom just gave her life to save me. And I am so… so… fucking… sorry.” Dirk’s stoic face cracks as he cries, blood leaking from his bandages, tears dripping from his face, his whole body held stiff as he shakes in a silent sob.

You black out.

Chapter End Notes

I had to cut content out of this. A whole two povs had to get taken off of the end of this chapter, because the Dirk and Scratch confrontation just got out of hand. And I regret nothing. The ending to this one hit me hard as I was finishing it as well, so it's probably for the best. Particularly Dirk crying, because that was something I debated the whole time I was writing this, and the fact that it's Dirk crying makes it all the more effective in my eyes.

I know some people will be disappointed that Dirk got his ass handed to him here, but as much as I wanted him to be the ultimate badass he is in Homestuck, things had to happen this way for the story to get anywhere. He tries to play it all cool, but this is the sort of thing that hurts no matter how stoic you try to be.

Rue Lalonde is the sort of character in Homestuck that has a great deal of significance that you don't find out until later. She knows what's going on better than most, and like the other guardians in Homestuck, the full extent of their knowledge is a complete
mystery to us fans. Some have gone so far as to theorize that Mom Lalonde is in part behind the creation of the game itself. I can't say I am a supporter of that theory, but she's certainly behind things in this one.

At any rate, things will be getting crazier from here on out, as the action picks up with the other kids, so be sure to stay tuned. Also comment. I cannot begin to describe how much enthusiasm that gives me to continue this story. I feel that hype people. I feel your hype, and it is good.
Chapter Summary

As the FELT attempts to recover from their loss at the hands of Rue Lalonde, Rose attempts to cope with the loss of her mother.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Your name is Gamzee Makara, and you have just missed one hell of a circus. You got the word that somebody was kicking up all kinds of wicked shit down at Scratch’s hive, and decided to rush right the motherfuck on over. But all that’s here now is a mess of rubble and a big old pile of beautiful corpses.

You wander yourself on down to the site of all this beautiful carnage first of all, to see whether you can be discovering what the cause of this motherfucking shit show could be. Though you have a pretty good idea already.

There are entire buildings destroyed with no sign of explosives. That means blunt force brought them down, and any vehicle that could do this would be in the wreckage. There is not a lot of shit that could do this to a building in one night.

By your estimation your old pal Equius is most likely the culprit of all of this. Which means that he’s finally up and left that big old cloud of void what was obstructing your senses. Motherfucking miraculous.

You can sense him now, actually. That foul stench of sweat and failure lingers on the breeze, and you remember all over again why you want to kill him so fucking badly. The piece of shit lowblooded trash was supposed to die for you, and now you’re going to give him the motherfucking opportunity. You’ll give him a long, slow, painful death, and let him feel what you felt all that time spent in captivity. It’ll be more than he deserves, but that’s what friends are for.

Your name is Spades Slick, and you are sorting through the rubble of your boss’ home base. As you understand it a couple of kids, an alien, and an attractive older woman razed the place to the ground and destroyed most of the experiments and weaponry that was being researched. And while you appreciate that they’ve probably killed your boss, you can’t say you’re a fan of the wanton destruction of an agency that you plan to take over some day.

Either way though, you’re now stuck sifting through the rubble of a place that is still burning in some areas, all so you can find what few survivors remain underneath, not to mention your boss. Can’t go taking over an organization if the old boss could still be alive, after all. Wouldn’t be proper. And as much as you want to stick a knife between his ribs you can’t deny that Doctor Scratch is a capable man.

You’re directing a few more people towards the general area of Scratch’s old office when a honking noise catches your ear. You turn and see a troll stalking off from the base. That’ll be the juggalo that
Scratch hired then. He’s about as creepy as you thought he’d be, and that’s putting aside how much you hate clowns.

You’re distracted from the clown when a loud cry comes from the direction of the people you just dispatched. They’ve found something. You rush over in a hurry.

They’ve found a woman lying in the rubble, dead as a doornail. You figure it’s probably the woman that the survivors of last night’s massacre saw burning this building to the ground. They weren’t kidding when they called her attractive, even with the blood oozing from her head she’s a fine looking dame. Quite the pity, really, even for somebody who’s got no real interest in romance these days.

You get a couple of diggers to remove the body and have the rest resume while you make a call to a friend of yours in the area.

“Oh Slick, need something broken? This patrol duty is boring as hell.” You hear the voice of Harvey Boxcars ring through, one of the guys that ran for you before your transfer. According to reports he’s been staking out the border of the voided area around where a big group of the kids Scratch wants has been hiding.

“I need you where you are Harvey, there’s trouble on the way.”

“What kind of trouble? If it’s those kids from last night, it’s too late. Some giant troll carried them through the line an hour ago. He was moving so fucking fast that he broke through my men and into the void zone before we knew he was there.”

You spit in frustration. You knew that they came in by foot, but that the big monster that did this could move so fast never even occurred to you. Still, you have another idea to deal with them.

“Alright Harvey, forget the kids. There’s another troll on the way. Creepy looking freak that looks like a clown.”

“I’ll take him down then?”

“No Harvey, let him through.”

“What?”

“That clown is tracking the others somehow. You let him by and he’ll lead you straight to the others.” You pause as you hear the diggers calling for you again. “I gotta go Harvey, you call me as soon as you find them. And feel free to kill the big guy, we can’t catch him anyways.”

You put your phone away and move back to the mess. “What is it, did you find Scratch?”

“I don’t know what we found, sir.” One man replies shakily, as a few others nod.

“Oh, I assure you, I am indeed Doctor Scratch.” A voice calls out from behind them. “I simply ran afoul of some rather potent void abilities. Luckily for me, they did not work as intended.”

That sounds like the Doctor all right, but you have to wonder why everyone is so frightened and confused by finding him. Then you see him approach the group, one of your men lending a shoulder, looking uneasy all the while. You find yourself wanting nothing more than to stick knives into this thing until it stops moving.

You know it has to be the doctor you’re looking at, because nobody else would wear such a garish
shade of neon green, but his face is completely different. It appears that he doesn’t have a face at all, in fact. He has no mouth, no eyes, no nose, and even is missing ears. It’s as though somebody was drawing a person, and forgot to add facial features, leaving skin stretched over bone as though the face were there, but the details erased.

You see Scratch’s face dimple at your shocked expression, and you can’t tell if his absence of creepy smile is an improvement or not. “Now, now, mister Slick. It’s rude to stare. I’m feeling rather self-conscious now!”

“What the hell am I looking at?” you stare at his face in disbelief. “How can you even see without eyes? Hell, how are you even talking?”

“I haven’t the foggiest!” Scratch spreads his arms wide and laughs. “Our old friend Rue Lalonde used her powers to erase my face, but for whatever reason I am still functioning perfectly. In fact before she did this to me I feared I would be permanently blinded! Her attempt to kill me with her last breath succeeded only in helping me. Truly one of life’s great ironies.”

“That was Lalonde? Didn’t recognize her.” you glance back in the direction her body was carried. Rue Lalonde was one of the scientists that augmented your body years ago, as well as the body of your brother. You’re rather surprised you didn’t recognize her, though at the time you were blind in one eye and hazy from blood loss, so you suppose it’s understandable. “Well we’ve dug her up already, so that’s one of the intruders we’ve found.”

“The others will be long gone by now, I’m sure.”

“Yeah, they’re back in the void zone. Looks like the juggalo is tailing them, though. I’ve got Boxcars getting ready for him.”

“Excellent work, Spades.” Doctor Scratch claps you on the shoulder and moves towards the infirmary tents. “It’s high time that the clown earned his keep.”

You nod as Scratch leaves, and decide to get status checks from the rest of your group who are checking up on the other kids. Deuce, Droog, and Droll are all tailing the trolls as well, and as you understand it they’ll be making their move soon. Which is just fine with you. Can’t have your closest people appearing disorderly. You need Scratch to trust you if you’re ever going to take the FELT from him. And after an incident like this you feel your time is coming. You just have to wait until the time is right, and then you’ll drive Scratch out.

Only when he’s gone will The Midnight Crew be able to run this operation.

Your name is Rose Lalonde, and you are perfectly fine, regardless of what anyone else has to say. Your mother is presumably dead, your sister is near catatonic, and one of your best friends is on the news fighting a troll that Kanaya has described as “egotistical and highly unstable”. But these are trivialities. Bad things happen every day, and you have a job to do, making sure that Aradia’s revival is properly completed.

Your mother did most of the work already, actually. But she also ensured that you were prepared to help run the machinery, and that you were familiar with the procedure. At the time you thought it a passive-aggressive ploy to make you act as her assistant. Now you realize she wasn’t sure she’d return from her encounter with Doctor Scratch, and needed you ready in case the worst happened.

Aradia’s DNA has been analyzed and cloned into a young troll body, which Equius has called a
grub. Personally, you feel that troll grubs are cuter than human variants, in an ironic twist of fate. This grub has a dull red body, and the face of a child with slender horns. If she remains this pretty to look at in the coming days as she matures, you feel that you will be able to easily understand Equius’ affections for her. As it is now though, she’s just an adorable troll baby.

There is little else to do but wait at this point. You had Aradia possess the grub as soon as it formed, as per your mother’s instructions. Now all there is to do is wait so that the body can undergo artificial aging to the point where Aradia’s body will be the correct age. By then her soul will have fully merged with the new body.

The lack of anything apparent that needs doing hasn’t stopped you from keeping busy though. You’ve checked the systems to ensure they’re working properly at least a dozen times since you started the procedure two hours ago. You’ve also dusted the consoles, swept the floors (the vacuum brings up painful memories that you aren’t ready to think about), fed the collection of cats that stays here, and did anything else that occurred to you. All so that you can’t go back and hear Roxy crying, or see Dirk standing lifelessly at the front window, or clean up after Equius as he attempts to tend to the house (or butlering, as he calls it), in order to make up for his “inexcusable failure.”

Really, you just want nothing to do with your house at all right now. You’ve taken to exploring this lab instead, so that you can immerse yourself in an unfamiliar environment. You’ve only ever poked around this building as a child, so nothing brings up any painful memories.

Your latest foray has taken you into the basement of the lab, where some old computers are being stored. There are also a couple of teleportation pads lying about (you refuse to use the term ‘transportalizer’ for reasons of proper grammar) that you believe lead to some of Scratch’s hideouts. You assume this primarily because they’ve been smashed beyond repair rather recently. Your mother’s handiwork, no doubt. She didn’t want you wandering into the belly of the beast unwittingly.

The mystery of how your mother managed to get to the Scratch base has been solved at least. Though this doesn’t explain why your mother didn’t have everyone attacking the base use the device. Even in death her actions remain a complete enigma.

You spy a doorway past all of the old junk that’s been stored down here and walk towards it. You can’t see much of anything down the hall, but that’s never stopped you before. You hold your hand up and summon a small ball of light, one of the few powers you’ve been granted. Sometimes you envy John his control over the wind.

The hallway leads a long way, with no twists or turns, and no lights at all either. You reach the end of it after about fifteen minutes, and realize that this tunnel seems to lead under your house. Perhaps your mother built an escape tunnel before she perfected her transporters? But the pads leading to the labs mean that she’s had them built since she moved here.

You spy a lever on the wall, and decide that you’d like to find out where the tunnel comes out. You pull the lever and a door opens above you, letting sunlight stream in. Considering the number of windows your house has this doesn’t mean much in regards to where you are. Clearly there’s nothing to do but climb.

You emerge in a small stone room with a winged cat statue set in the wall. It would seem that the passageway leads into the mausoleum for Jaspers, your first cat, killed when Roxy knocked a book off the kitchen counter and onto its head by accident. The mausoleum is spotless as always, since Roxy never forgets to come in and keep it tidy. The only thing that’s different from normal is a small addition sitting on the casket: your mother’s scarf. You pick it up and see two envelopes sitting underneath it, one addressed to you, the other to Roxy.
Dear Rose:
I’ve never been very good at expressing my feelings, but because I’m going on a journey to a place I
don’t think I’ll come back from alive, I feel it best to leave you something. I hope you know that my
taking the idea from Atticus Egbert does not in any way reflect disingenuously upon my words,
rather, this is me taking a cue from somebody who has always known exactly what to say to their
children. I know we’ve always bickered over silly things, and that you often feel my affections are
filled with only passive-aggressive notions. And in many cases you’d be correct.

You’ve grown up like me in many ways, and so it didn’t surprise me in the slightest when I learned
that you had inherited my tendencies for stubbornness. And when some of my more excessive actions
rang hollow to you, I did often take your scorn as a challenge. But that never meant I didn’t truly
love you.

So I’ve left this note for you in the place that started it all. You thought that this mausoleum was a
sarcastic gesture, but it was really the actions of a mother who was terrified she wasn’t doing
enough. Ever since you came to me I have been deathly afraid that I wasn’t ready, and this led to me
overcompensating in many cases. I never planned to have children, after all.

Before I die, I need to tell you something important: you are not a normal child. I know that you
were aware of this for a long time, but you don’t know the full truth. You are a clone, a mixture of
the genetic coding from both Brock Strider and myself. Roxy is more of a half sister than a proper
one biologically speaking, as is Dirk. Your closest relative aside is actually Dave Strider.

I created you all to be tools for the government. Human weapons. But that all changed when I
looked into your eyes for the first time. You and Roxy were so precious to me; I couldn’t bear the
thought of letting you live life as an object. So I hid you away at our home and tried to let you live
the most normal life possible.

The joy you two have brought my life has meant everything to me over the years, despite the horrible
things I did before I met you. And I wish I could have brought you that same joy in life. But now
everything has come apart, and I have to right the wrongs I am responsible for. So I’m going to end
Scratch once and for all, even if it means my death.

If you remember anything of me Rose, always remember this: I love you. You and Roxy are the
greatest things that have ever happened in a long life of mistakes. You’re a strong girl, stronger than
I am by far, even stronger than Roxy. So you look after her, and yourself. And always remember that
I couldn’t be prouder of you.

You can barely read the last line through your tears. You just curl up around the scarf and cry
yourself to sleep. By the time you’ve woken up it’s well past midnight. At some point Kanaya must
have found you, because you’re in your room now, and she’s curled around you. The scarf is still
clenched in your fists.

“Are you feeling better now, Rose?” Kanaya whispers softly in your ear, and you feel her thumb
massaging slow circles around the back of your hand. “I could get you something to eat, if you’d
like?”

You roll over slowly and give Kanaya a light peck on the lips. “I’d rather get it myself. I’ve been
asleep for more than twelve hours.”

Kanaya sits up with you, and you notice she’s stripped you to your underwear. “Hmm, you’ve been
rather naughty while I was sleeping, haven’t you?”
Kanaya scowls at this. “Rose you were lying on the ground of the building you use to house your dead cat. Your clothes were filthy. I wasn’t about to let you track mud all over the house.”

You wake up fully at this. “You carried me through the house in my underwear? Kanaya what the fuck?”

She gives you a sly smile at this. “Equius was looking after Aradia at the time, and we both know Dirk doesn’t care one way or the other what a lady is wearing. Regardless though, I didn’t do anything of the sort. Your decency was well preserved until I put you to bed.”

You frown at her and get up, deciding to don only your bathrobe and slippers. “You pick the oddest times to let your humorous side show, dear.”

“I felt it more appropriate than bringing up the letter.” You turn to stare at her and she backpedals hastily. “Not that I meant to read it, I was merely curious to see why you were in such a state, and I found it rather engaging so…” She trails off helplessly, quailing under your scrutiny.

You shrug it off in the end. “It’s not any concern of mine. I would have trusted you with it regardless, and I feel rather tired of being upset for the time being.” It’s true too, you’re completely cried out, at least for the moment. Now you just feel sore from lying on hard concrete for several hours, and very hungry.

“Thank goodness. I would not want to upset you again.” Kanaya smiles subtly in that way that drives you crazy, and continues. “All the same, you can rest assured that the letter to Roxy remained untouched until delivery.”

“Thank you Kanaya.” You smile fully at her and walk arm in arm with her to the kitchen.

You’re rather surprised to see Roxy is now happily cooking eggs and bacon, the smell filling the kitchen. Dirk is standing next to her, still looking rather downcast, but clearly better than before. Equius is sitting next to the eldritch princess doll on the couch, watching the news. Roxy flips some bacon onto a plate in a deft movement, and upon spotting you grins widely.

“There’s my baby girl! Rosie, come down and get some of this hot stuff!” She waves cheerfully as you stare at her in stunned silence.

“Roxy, what brought this on?” You say softly as you walk down the rest of the stairs and into the kitchen. Dirk passes you a glance as you enter, mutters something about girl time, and flashsteps out of there.

“I read mom’s note.” Roxy says, her smile faltering somewhat. “She told me that I was always the most beautiful when I smile, and that my cheerful attitude made her happy.” A tear trickles down her face, but she’s grinning again. “So when I read that, I thought to myself: ‘Roxy, what the fuck are you doing sitting around in your room feeling sorry for yourself.’ So I decided to cheer up and make breakfast for dinner, because that’s the best meal of all time!” She shoves a plate of eggs into your hands and waves you towards a chair. “I’ve already fed everyone else here, except for Kanaya, but she doesn’t really like people food, so we’re all good!”

“We are indeed.” Kanaya says with a smile, glancing over at you. You smile back, and sit down to eat eggs. Things are far from all right, but as long as your sister can still smile, and Kanaya is with you, your situation is far from bleak.
This ended sooner than expected, I feel. Often I'll start a chapter with a list of perspectives I want to cover and a plot point I want to end on, but far more frequently I find myself filling up a single perspective with more and more character development or action, until I don't have room to fit any more. I try to keep all chapters within the same general length as a rule, though I'm often not successful.

Please leave a comment if you liked (or disliked) the chapter, nothing motivates me to write more than seeing proper feedback. That said, I am so thrilled about the reception this story has received so far. I mean, 100 kudos? That's completely insane to me. I'm not even close to finishing this story and yet it's already received more attention than I ever thought possible. I mean, it's gone from 100 hits per chapter to being a good 600-700 over the old trend. I love you guys for loving my story. Let me state that for the record before I start channeling my inner Hussie and making you all cry like babies. Because things will get worse from here, believe me.

Haa haa, hee hee, hoo hoo.
Let Luck Decide

Chapter Summary

Tavros sits, Nepeta searches, and Terezi faces off against Vriska.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Your name is Tavros Nitram, and it’s about damn time something interesting happened with you. Well actually, you can’t say you’re thrilled to be in this predicament at all. Really, you’re not sure why anyone would want to see your perspective at all. When you first were placed in captivity you found yourself imagining that you were the daring and courageous page, biding your time in prison until the time was right to spring forth and dazzle everyone with your skills and self-confidence.

That was months ago. All you’ve done is sit in a cell. The only difference now is that your cell is now the back of a truck. Now that you’re on the move you can’t even see Gamzee anymore, and he was the only friend you had left.

He wanted to be more, but you were too cowardly to give him a real answer, too cowardly to think about it. Some hero.

You’ve been completely miserable ever since the day your leg was ruined and you were treated like the damsel in distress in one of your flarp sessions. You can see why they were always npc, because this is dull and horrible and you’re really not sure you can take it anymore.

Even worse, you seem to have hit a growth spurt of some kind, because your legs don’t seem to be the right length anymore. Your body feels stretched out, your back aches from lying on the floor at night, and the food is horrible.

You need to get out of this place, but you’re really not sure how to do that. You’ve tried imagining what Rufio would do, but your imaginary friend would most likely just drop a cholerbear in front of the truck with his mind powers and fly out of here. Why did you have to create an imaginary metaphor for your self-confidence that can do things you can’t, like fly, or walk up a flight of stairs?

You cringe as another jolt of pain stabs through your back, and you shift around to try to get comfortable. You stare down bitterly at the new legs you were given before your move. Gamzee threatened to kill several people in order to get those for you, in one of those increasingly rare moments where he wasn’t insane.

It makes you wish you’d had the courage to answer him any of the times when he’d told you he loved you. Even if you don’t know if you’re flushed for him, you care a lot about Gamzee, but you were too scared to tell him even that.

You fiddle with your legs angrily, and jump as one of them extends by an inch or so. You smile a little at that. That’s one problem solved, at least, though your back hurts as much as ever. You should really start sleeping on your side.

You spend some time adjusting your legs, and walking around as best as you can in the shaky truck.
You can’t keep your balance very well with the ground jumping beneath you at every bump in the road your truck hits, but you think that you can set your legs to the right length at any rate.

You’re just finishing with setting the length of your legs when another stabbing jolt of pain lances through your shoulders. You fall to the ground with a grunt, and realize the pain is getting worse. You place a hand on your back and it comes away bloody.

Another jolt of pain, and you find yourself smearing bloody handprints across the floor as you struggle to stay conscious. You try to think of when you may have injured yourself, but nothing comes to mind. Your back is burning with pain, blood is now trickling down your arms, and you feel yourself convulsing. You cough and spit up a glob of brown blood on the ground.

You think you might be dying.

Your name is Terezi Pyrope, and you are at the end of your rope. The rope in this case being your grip on the situation, and your grip on the situation being the noose you’d like to throttle Vriska with right now. She’s making such a complete ass of herself it’s not even funny.

What’s more, she’s decided to involve the entire city of Houston Texas, which is not only the place where you are hiding out at the moment, it’s also the home of your new boyfriend.

Dave Strider, the boyfriend in question, is currently fighting with members of the FELT a block away. His guardian, Brock Strider (or Bro, as he prefers to be called) is fighting another giant spider, summoned by Vriska. It’s probably the third one she’s summoned since this mess started, and you suspect that her dice may be loaded in some way, because she is getting way too lucky right now.

Vriska has been tearing the city apart for about a week now, and you’re starting to think her excessive actions are fetishistic in some way. She’s smashing buildings like she used to smash magic 8-balls back on Alternia. She’s also leveled a city park, covered the space center in spider webs, and burned that ugly top hat that Dave’s been obsessing about (you can’t say you disapprove of that particular move).

The damage being done to Houston is extensive enough that it’s becoming increasingly unrecognizable. Vriska’s fluorite octet is an unstable weapon at the best of times, but Vriska seems to have lost all sense of self-restraint with the damn things, and is tearing the city down more and more every time she throws her dice.

The two of you have been repeating the same dance number for a week now. You get close to Vriska, she throws the octet, and you have to deal with whatever happens after that while she gets away. You’re getting sick of the routine by now, and this is becoming clear to Vriska because you’re tearing her attacks apart faster every time she throws the damn dice.

Vriska last escaped you an hour ago, when she summoned a suit of armor to fight you. You had to slash every single one of the joints on the damn thing before it stopped trying to attack you, and the sheer tedium of it all has you madder than ever.

You’ve tracked her trail to a large skyscraper that’s sunk halfway into the ground at this point. The building has collapsed sideways, and is leaning against one of the few intact buildings left in town. You can smell her faintly in the distance, the tinge of cobalt at the top of the mess all too familiar. Apart from the sound of gunfire in the distance, all is silent. The humans not fighting fled days ago.

This means that when Vriska speaks, it cuts through the air like a knife, the pride in her voice clear.
“Wow Terezi, I’m impressed, that was your fastest time yet! This is what, round eight?”

“Round seven.” You call back. Your face tells nothing of the hurt you feel right now, or of your rage. You have truly mastered the Strider poker face. “And as much as I know you’d love to hold out for the full eight rounds, I don’t have the patience for your schemes any more.”

“Awesomewwww, Terezi, you know as well as I do that I have the advantage!” Vriska laughs as you start to climb the pile of rubble leading up to the fallen building. “I have the fluorite octet, my incredible luck, and the high ground.”

“You have the physical high round, perhaps.” You draw your blade with a snarl, “But the moral high ground is mine!”

Vriska sounds almost disappointed when she replies to you. “I shouldn’t expect you to understand. You’re always so caught up in your ideas of justice and retribution that you never see the bigger picture.” Vriska waves her arm towards the direction where Dave is fighting. “I did this for all of us, Terezi. You’re just too narrow minded to see it.”

You reach the top of the rubble and take a running leap up to the fallen building. “I don’t know what you think you’re doing,” you yell up at her, “But it’s wrong either way. You’re just doing what you’ve always done: rushing into the situation without thinking things through, and dragging everyone else down with you!”

Vriska hisses in anger. “Fine then, have it your way!” She screams, and while you can’t properly sense her from so far away, you don’t need to smell her to know she’s throwing the octet.

You start running. You need to catch her this time, no matter what. Before she can escape again, before she does more damage, before she drags you into her stupid eight obsessions. You need to stop her here and now. You sprint along the top of the fallen building, and smell the bright flash of blue signifying the octet activating far ahead.

Suddenly your senses are assaulted with the smell of lime, and you barely manage to flip backwards in time to avoid the trees that explode from the ground where you just stood. The glass window beneath you shatters, and you roll forward, cutting your hand open on the shards of glass. You run sideways down a hallway and burst out of the glass in an area that doesn’t reek of tree. You rush forward again, ignoring the biting pain in your palm, focusing only on Vriska, who is throwing the dice again.

A boulder appears, rolling down the building in your direction. Rather than test the windows again, you pull several shuriken that you borrowed from Dave out of your pocket and shatter the glass in front of the boulder. This time the window leads to a large office space rather than a hallway, and the boulder falls uselessly out of sight. You shift your position so that you’re moving along the frame of the building rather than the windows, as Vriska curses and throws the dice again.

You blink as your head suddenly smells of grape, and you realize that the dice have summoned a silly hat for you to wear. You see no reason to take the hat off, and keep running as Vriska screams in frustration. You’ve almost reached her.

She throws the dice once again, and you smell the air alight with flame. A meteorite crashes nearby, small, but no less dangerous. Then another hits right beside you, the heat burning your arm even without touching you. The next one lands behind you, further away, but large enough to tear the building in half. You sprint desperately for the top, as the entire building begins to fall, tilting dangerously close to vertical.
Suddenly, your foot lands properly, and you sprint forwards across the top of the building, even as it begins to plummet. With one final leap, you throw yourself up, as high into the air as you can go. Your fingertips catch the edge of the roof, and you struggle to get a better grip, to pull yourself up.

Luckily for you, Vriska is there to catch you before you slip to your death. “You reckless idiot!” She cries, panting to catch her breath. All you had to do was give up in the first place and that wouldn’t have happened! I thought I had killed you!”

“None of this would have happened if you’d just behaved.” You spit at her, as you stumble to your feet. “You haven’t given me a choice in the matter.”

“I’m helping, Terezi!” She cries out angrily. “I’m drawing Scratch’s attention to me so that he can’t go after anyone else! I’m saving the day here, and you’d realize that if you’d just trust me!”

You can only stare at her in disbelief. “You… truly believe that, don’t you?”

“I wouldn’t lie to you, Terezi! We’re a team, the scourge sisters, best of the best and baddest of the bad!” Vriska sulks, glancing over at you from time to time, as she looks as downtrodden as she possibly can.

You can’t see anything but deceit anymore. Vriska is lying to you as much as she’s lying to herself. You stand up and draw your sword again. “I’m sorry Vriska, but you’ve gone too far this time. You’ve destroyed this city, and no doubt killed hundreds of the people living here. I need to bring you to justice.”

Vriska goes from miserable to angry, and you feel her gaze boring into you despite your inability to actually meet it. “Who cares about these damn humans? What have they done for us? They’re a worthless, inferior species, and I’m prepared to sacrifice as many of them as I have to in order to save all of us.”

You lash out with your cane and she jumps backwards. “You’re only making us look worse in the human’s eyes! They’ll never do us any favors as long as we’re acting like a bunch of assholes and making them hate us! And in case you haven’t forgotten, they outnumber us several hundred million to one!”

“As long as we’re smart we can take those odds on.” Vriska looks aside uncomfortably. “I’ve got Scratch right where I want him.”

“No we can’t, and no you don’t!” you yell in frustration. “Did you forget that they have prisoners? Did you forget about Tavros and Gamzee? Did you forget that they’ve already killed Kanaya?”

Vriska steps back angrily, and holds her dice up. “Of course I didn’t forget, don’t you dare say that! But that doesn’t mean I should just roll over and surrender! That may be all right with you, but I’m better than that! I’m going to fix everything, even if you don’t like it!”

She’s not going to change her mind. You can feel the determination emanating from her in waves. “I won’t let you endanger our lives further than you already have.” you say quietly. You pull a coin from your pocket.

Vriska smirks at this. “You’re going to let luck decide? Not exactly a fair trial, is it?”

“The evidence stacked against you is damning. You can consider this a show of mercy.” You flip the coin into the air and the two of you tense. It’s not the coin that matters, and you both know it. You and Vriska have known each other more than long enough to realize that the important thing is what happens after the coin lands.
The coin lands with a clatter, and Vriska laughs. “Looks like luck is still on my side.” She turns her back to you and grins. “I win the coin toss.”

You know she’s convinced of her freedom, convinced that you lack the conviction to deliver your sentence. You need to prove her wrong. If she leaves now and continues on her rampage she could very well set the humans on a planet wide troll hunt. If you don’t stop her now, every single one of your remaining friends will pay the price, not to mention yourself. Vriska needs to die if you’re going to have any future here.

You move swiftly and silently, your blade poised to strike right at Vriska’s bloodpusher. Vriska doesn’t seem to notice you moving, and you mentally thank Bro Strider for training you to flashstep.

Just as you’re about to stab your blade through Vriska’s back, she turns her head back and smiles at you. That same smile that she gave when you first met her. The same smile she showed when she shooshpapped you back in the FELT base. Her genuine smile, tinged with worry, sadness, and pain. The smile reeks of Vriska, everything she is and ever has been: your closest friend since wiggling day.

The blade stops close enough to draw blood, but not nearly enough to be fatal. It’s barely a nick, and you tremble, as you will your arms to send the blade the rest of the way. It’s better for everyone if she dies, and you know that. But knowing that isn’t enough to make you kill your sister.

Vriska knows that you can’t finish the job, and takes a deep breath in relief. “I really thought you were going to do it for a second there.” Vriska murmurs. She steps away from the blade, and you are ashamed to see the sword shaking in your hands. Vriska throws the fluorite octet to the side, and in a flash of cobalt light a pair of fairy wings appears on her back.

Vriska vanishes from your view with a flurry of pixie dust and a loud peal of laughter. You’re left standing on the roof, still holding your blade up to where Vriska’s heart had just been. You couldn’t do it. You knew Vriska had to die in order for your other friends to live, but you still couldn’t do it.

You hear a crunch of gravel, and smell Bro Strider standing on the roof. His face is impassive, but you can taste his disappointment and frustration on the wind. “I should have dealt with it myself.” He says in his familiar monotone. “I knew that you wouldn’t be able to do it, but I wanted to trust you to do what had to be done.”

“Shows what you know.” You hiss as you start to lower your arms. “Trolls have emotions just like people do. The only person who can stop themselves from feeling is you.”

Bro shrugs his shoulders at that. “You say that like it’s a bad thing, but we both know you wish you could.” He turns around and walks back to the edge of the roof. “I’m going to help Dave finish up with the FELT. You know where to find us when you’ve got a handle on your shit.” He vanishes as suddenly as he appeared.

You straighten your back and taste the air. The sky here is supposed to be blue during the daytime, and the light is supposed to feel warm on your skin. It was one of the more liberating feelings to you when you first stepped outside during the daylight. Now the sky is black with smoke, and everything tastes like oil and death.

Vriska’s left Houston now, and you have no idea if you’ll ever see her again. The only sign that she was here is the minty taste of fairy dust, turned bitter by soot. Soon enough she’ll be turning other cities into this; a scarred wasteland that will likely never fully recover from her impulsive bullshit.

You yell with frustration and throw your cane aside. It bounces and falls off the side of the building
with an audible clang, but you’re too upset to care where it’s landed. You drop to your knees in the gravel and slam your fist against the roof. You’re vaguely aware that you’re crying, but you’re so pissed off that all you can do is punch the roof again.

This continues until you run out of energy, and your rage is spent. Your hands have been reduced to a mass of raw flesh by now, and you notice that the rooftop is speckled with teal from your furious flailing. You’ll regret this once the adrenaline stops flowing, but for now you’re just numb. You move slowly over to the roof’s edge and smell your cane sitting in the fire escape.

You sheathe your weapon and start to move in the direction of the gunfire and explosions. You want nothing more than to follow the pixie dust until you’ve found Vriska’s back once more and opened it wide, but for now you need to help your matesprit and his brother.

But when you and Vriska clash for the eighth time, she’ll find that it’s no longer her lucky number.

Your name is Nepeta Leijon, and you have no idea what you’re doing. Well, that’s actually not entirely true. You know what you’re trying to do; you just have no idea how to do it. You’re mostly hoping to find some trace of Karkat, but you don’t know where to start looking. The last time you saw him was months ago, and while you’re a perfectly good tracker, you’re certainly not that good!

This whole idea was stupid, as much as you don’t like to admit it. You’ve left your moirail behind in order to search for a boy you have a one-sided crush on, without even knowing how to find him, save for knowing the direction you saw him run in.

You can only hope that will be enough. You’re currently travelling along the general direction Karkat ran off in, hoping to find some trace of him. If Karkat has turned at all your plan will be completely ruined. But if you know Karkat as well as you think you do, you know he’s stubborn enough that he’d rather tear a wall down than walk around it.

You’ve been running for almost a week now, and you have yet to see so much as a single sign. Not a footprint, not a scrap of clothing, not the slightest whiff of his scent. If this were prey you were trying to hunt down you’d have given up long ago. But you’re not hunting prey. You’re hunting Karkat. You love Karkat still, and whenever you remember the sight of his face, staring at you with hollow eyes, you feel like a hand is squeezing your bloodpusher so hard it hurts.

“If I care for him as much as I think I do, I shouldn’t second guess myself.” You say to yourself, echoing Roxy’s words from before. “Karkat may not love me, but I love him, and I know he needs somebody to be there for him. So I’m going to be that somebody if it’s the last thing I do!”

“I doubt you’ll last long enough for that, kid.” A voice calls out from behind you, and you whirl around with a startled yowl.

You don’t know who this intruder is, but you know he’s like nothing you’ve seen on Earth to this point. His body is vaguely like a human, but his head is that of a dog. He has a furry tail, feathery wings, and is dressed only in a pair of black pants. His eyes glow white, but the rest of his body is pitch black, so that he looks like a shadow, even though it’s currently midday. The most disturbing thing about him is his left arm though, which ends in a long blade rather than a hand.

You aren’t sure how he managed to sneak up on you, but he won’t be able to catch you in the forest. You step back from him as he sighs and points his sword arm at you. “Look kid, I’m not supposed to kill you, just maim you a little, maybe stab you a few times. So just give up and let’s get this over with.”
You stare at him in confusion for a moment. “Stabbing kills trolls as well as it kills humans.”

He scratches his head with his good hand and tilts his head in confusion. “Really? That’s not what the Intel said. Aren’t you undead or something?”

He thinks you’re Kanaya. This could be either good, or horrible. “Nope, that’s not me! You’ve clearly got the wrong troll, so I’ll just leave and you can go on your way.” You smile and step back more, inching your way towards the trees.

“You’re the only troll around for miles, girl.” The dog man says with a shrug. “And they sent me straight here. You may not be the undead troll, but you’re definitely the one I’m supposed to hunt.”

Okay, things just got horrible. You hiss at him and turn to run, as he barks harshly and dives at you. You fall on all fours and take off running, as his blade whistles behind you. You hear the crash of a tree behind you, and when you chance a glance backwards you see that he’s cut the end of your false tail off. You’d be pissed if you weren’t so terrified.

You’ll be in big trouble if he’s brought friends, but you can’t afford to think about that. You need to focus on running and putting distance between the two of you before you run out of forest. His wings are big enough that he can’t use them well between the trees, but you’re made to move in these conditions. His barking fades into the distance quickly as you move as fast as possible. Even when he’s out of earshot though that doesn’t stop you from running.

You keep going, sprinting along on all fours, praying he doesn’t have the nose to match his face. As long as you’re in the trees, you’re safe. But once the forest runs out, he could probably gain on you easily.

Your train of thought is disrupted entirely when the dog-man appears in front of you in a flash of green light. You try to turn aside, but you’ve been running at top speed, and the sharp movement backfires on you, sending you tumbling.

You roll to the ground a short distance away, and the dog-man lets out a barking laugh that chills you to the core. You unsheathe your claws and rise to fight back.

He stabs you through the stomach before you can lift an arm.

You start to fall to the ground as he rips the sword out of you, but he catches you by the hair and hauls you back up roughly. You want to scream at the pain, but you can’t actually muster the strength to make a noise anymore. By the time he’s stabbed you three times, you feel so numb that it barely registers anymore.

The only thing that you can do is cry, as the sight of Karkat’s hollow face fades from your mind, and is replaced by the barking visage of the dog.

Chapter End Notes

No mind powers to force Terezi’s hand this time. And we all know how that encounter goes without them.

Tavros was not forgotten, though I’m sure some of you were beginning to wonder.

Really, his story is just getting started.

Nepeta suffers because as much as everyone loves Nepeta, the fan fiction community
seems to love watching her suffer even more. And like Andrew Hussie, regaling the fans with his tales of Crowbar and the consorts, I too give the fans what they desire! Are you not entertained? No? You want more Nepeta suffering? Well too bad, because she's not in the next chapter! HAHAHAHAHAHAH!

Seriously I feel so fucking evil right now and I don't regret a thing.
Your name is Aradia Megido, and you are getting tired of waiting. You have been trapped in your new body for several days now, and you’ve been struggling to stay awake despite advice to the contrary. You know that allowing yourself to fall asleep along with your body will be the best way to prevent your soul from tearing yourself apart again. But at the same time you can’t help but feel afraid of what could be coming next.

You began to feel again soon after entering your new body. As your soul connected with flesh you found yourself able to experience and control your emotions on a level you haven’t experienced in ages. You were able to enjoy that for a short while, but now fear has replaced everything else. Your body is unconscious, and now your mind is feeling the slow drag of sleep pulling at it. Once you submit and fall asleep your body and soul will connect fully, and you fear you may have traded the yawning vastness of death for a cage.

If you fuse with the new body, what will happen to you? Your new thinkpan can’t possibly contain the information you’ve accumulated over the sweeps. How will your mind retain itself if your brain does not match what you know? Will you even be the same person once you wake up?

The voices don’t seem to think so. They’ve been screaming at you ever since you entered your body, trying to pry you away from your new body with every insubstantial fiber of their being. They seem to think your connection with them will weaken as you become synchronized with your body. You want to sleep just so that you can confirm their fears, but at the same time many of them are whispering the same things that have been making you nervous.

If you sleep, you may lose yourself. But if you don’t sleep you’ll likely fall victim to the voices. It’s enough to make you panic, and were you more in tune with your new body you’re sure your thoughts would rouse it.

“Aradia.”

You freeze as you hear a familiar voice echoing in your mind.
“Aradia, the devices indicate that you are not yet asleep. Your brain activity is higher than it should be for one who is meant to be unconscious.”

It’s Equius. His voice sounds fuzzy, likely because your brain isn’t fully connected to your soul. It’s also probably because your brain is asleep right now. But the voices have gone silent; in that way they almost always do when Equius is nearby.

“You must rest, Aradia, if you wish to regain yourself.” Equius’ voice rings out in your head. “I shall not leave until I am sure you are properly resting.”

You don’t want him to leave; if he does the voices will return to wake you. And your reluctance must be conveyed through whatever brain scanners they have fixed on you, because he sighs. “I will remain. Just rest, and I will stay until you awaken.”

With the voices now silent, sleep comes easily.

Your name is Kanaya Maryam, and you are bringing food over to your fellow troll. It is important that you continue to think of him as such, despite your instincts telling you that he is meant to be prey. Really, you’ve done a shameful amount of damage to Equius due to your prior lapse in judgment. It’s not something you feel you can allow to occur again. Perhaps if you ever reunite with your group you’ll look into getting a moirail?

You enter the lab and see Equius sitting on the ground in front of Aradia’s growing body. The female troll is looking much better than before, and according to the notes left by Ms. Lalonde, she should be fully recovered within the next day or so.

“Equius, I have brought you your dinner.” You place the meal before him with a loud thump. It really does take a ridiculous amount of food to satisfy a troll like Equius, especially given his refusal to eat meat. Thankfully vegetarianism is a far more common trait on Earth than it is on Alternia, so coping without Alternian vegetation has been rather simple.

Equius jumps slightly and straightens up, apparently having woken from sleep. With his sunglasses it can sometimes be difficult to tell. “Ah, thank you Kanaya.” Equius smiles gratefully and gestures to a table nearby. “I have likewise prepared nourishment for you.”

You glance over to the table and see several blood bags set up and filled with blue blood. “Thank you Equius. While withholding my hunger for long periods of time is relatively easy for me, it is a relief that you are so willing to provide a meal.”

Equius nods. “As the strongest troll in our group, it is only fitting that I shoulder the heavy burden of providing blood for your newly acquired disturbing eating habits.”

You ignore his slight jab at you and begin to drink from the bags. “Well, I can not say that I have much of a choice in the matter. The only other troll present is in a glass tube, after all.”

“Not for much longer, hopefully.” Equius says wistfully, starting to glance back at the tube, before blushing and facing forward before he can set eyes on it. “I will be relieved once she is no longer… compromised.”

You smirk at him as he digs into his meal, trying not to drip sweat on it. “Equius, how long has it been since you last looked at Aradia?”

Equius freezes with a forkful of vegetables halfway to his mouth. “Urgh, Kanaya, it would greatly
“Behoove me? Or behoove you.” your smile broadens as Equius stares determinedly at his meal. “It’s been quite some time, hasn’t it?”

Equius sighs. “I have not.” He starts stuffing forkfuls of food into his mouth while you reflect on this.

“You have not… looked at her? Not even once?” Equius starts to sweat even more visibly. The fork in his hands snaps in two.

“I would not dream of looking upon Aradia while she is… indecent.” Equius says, so softly you can hardly hear him. He grabs one of the spare forks you brought over and starts prodding at his salad. “It would be inexcusable of me to look upon a fellow troll in such a state without consent.”

You smile fully at this. “And if she gave her consent?” Equius’ hand jerks forward, sending salad flying everywhere. You can’t help but chuckle at that, and Equius forlornly stares down at his dinner, which appears to have been shredded to ribbons by his rough ministrations with the fork.

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“The Lalondes have been a terrible influence upon you, Kanaya.” Equius says gruffly, as you try to recollect yourself. “You are behaving extremely foolishly right now.”

You can’t begin to debate that, so you let him grumpily stare over at you while you struggle to stop your giggling. “I am terribly sorry Equius, truly I am! Please do not misunderstand, I am honestly very impressed.”

“I am impressed that you are acting like such a gentleman.” You correct with a smile. “You have been in here for several days now, such restraint is admirable. Even somebody like Karkat would have difficulty containing themselves for so long, and he is easily the most prudish and high-strung troll I’ve ever known.”

“You think it is that difficult to contain such impulses?” Equius starts jabbing at his salad again.

“Certainly. Aradia is a very beautiful troll, after all.” You glance back up to her, still floating in the tube. “I look forward to seeing how she looks in the clothing I’ve prepared.”

“Yes, Nepeta always has thought you were more appreciative of the female form…” Equius mutters to himself. “It would certainly help to explain your attraction to miss Rose.”

You freeze at this. “I… I haven’t the foggiest idea what you’re talking about Equius.”

Equius smirks at you, and you feel that the tables have been completely turned on you. “Honestly Kanaya, we’ve been living in the same house for some time now. Did you think I wouldn’t notice?” You nod at him, and he shrugs and continues. “Did you think Nepeta wouldn’t notice?” Well shit.

“She figured it out within the first day we were here.” Equius leans back with a grin. “I figured it out in three days. Nepeta kept the news to herself, for fear that I would be cross.”

“I must admit you’ve taken the news better than I would have thought.” you remark. “Aren’t you against the idea?”

Equius stops smiling, bowing his head grumpily again. “Perhaps once I would have taken offense to such lewd behavior. But my recent failures have made my inadequacies all too clear. I am in no position to judge anybody on their indiscretions.” He rises to his feet. “A failure of a troll has no right
You frown at him, but say nothing. As much as you wish to tell him his actions are nothing to be ashamed of, the last thing you wish to do is be guilty of accidental pale flirting. Equius picks up his bowl, and the remaining silverware, placing them at your side, before backing into place in front of the tube.

You finish off your last blood bag, gathering up the trash and taking it along with the remains of Equius’ meal. Equius has resumed sitting, but he’s eying the salad on the ground with distaste. You’ll have to fetch a broom for the mess.

You’re about to leave when a slight motion catches your eye. You turn back and eye the room suspiciously. The movement is Aradia’s, a slight twitch, so small that your heightened senses as a rainbow drinker are the only reason you caught it. But if she’s moving at all…

“Kanaya, is something the matter?” Equius looks at you in confusion.

“Aradia’s about to wake up.” You say with a frown. “I’ll have to get Rose, she knows the most about the process.” A loud beeping starts to emanate from the cloning machine. “You’ll have to…” You pause as a chill runs down your spine. You are suddenly overcome with dread, as though a sort of danger is near.

Equius stiffens, likely sensing the same thing as you. “This cannot be.” He mutters to himself. “The timing is too ludicrous to be true.”

“Do you know what this is, Equius?” You ask cautiously, pulling out your lipstick.

“It’s the highblood.” Equius looks up at you in dread. “What we just felt was the aura of fear that exudes from a rampaging highblood. Chucklevoodoos.”

You rush outside; Equius right on your heels, and see the Lalondes and Dirk rushing through the woods towards you. Rose clutches you tightly as the two of you meet, as Equius starts looking around in a panic.

“Kanaya, thank goodness. I suddenly had a terrible feeling that something awful had happened to you.” Rose murmurs into your chest. “Irrational though it may be, I felt I had to find you.”

“Everything is all right for the moment, Rose.” You kiss her softly, “But I’m afraid things are swiftly becoming dire.”

“Miss Rose, there is a matter that desperately requires your knowledge.” Equius looks over and barks out. “Aradia is waking, and if I may be so bold, I must insist that you see to her at once.”

Rose steps back from you immediately, her face all business once again. “Of course. Roxy, come with me, I’ll need your help.”

“Alrighty then!” Roxy says with a nervous smile. “But shouldn’t we worry about whatever freaky black magic shit just made us all run out here?”

“I will handle the situation, Miss Roxy.” Equius says, glancing around. “I must order that you please assist Miss Rose.”

Roxy nods firmly and follows Rose back into the lab, leaving you with Dirk and Equius.

“So, what the hell’s going on here?” Dirk says seriously, looking towards you and Equius. “Because
anything that can put out enough vibes to throw us off from outside of the Lalonde security setup is serious business.”

“Our companion is returning.” You state grimly.

“Wait, isn’t that supposed to be a good thing?”

“The companion in question is a homicidal clown.”

Dirk’s face doesn’t budge in the slightest, but he draws his katana in an instant. “Alright, so we’ve got a killer troll clown on the way. Should be easy enough to manage with you and muscles here.”

“I fear it will not be that simple.” Equius says, glancing back at the two of you. “The last time I saw Gamzee, he was being taken prisoner by Doctor Scratch. He may very well be bringing unwanted company with him.”

“Implies that a killer clown isn’t unwanted company enough.” Dirk mutters to himself. “So basically, we’re about to be torn apart by an evil clown, and there’s also a group of evil government agents surrounding us.”

“It is extremely likely.”

“Peachy.” Dirk sheathes his katana again. “Well Rue’s alarms haven’t gone off yet, so I think we’ve still got some time.”

A loud siren starts wailing, one of the many alarms and defense systems that Mrs. Lalonde had installed since your unexpected appearance on the Lalonde estate. Dirk slaps his head in frustration as more alarms and sirens start activating. “God fucking damnit, with how often this sort of shit happens to Dave you’d think I would know better than to tempt fate.”

“We cannot remain here,” You twist your lipstick and it seamlessly turns into a chainsaw in your hands. “We’ll have to make a run for it.”

“Aradia will not yet be ready to move.” Equius says angrily. “We cannot leave until she is fit to travel.”

“Rose will need half an hour.” Dirk says calmly. “I checked over some of the more important details with her. That will give us time to finish waking Aradia and start moving.”

“Then I will buy that time.” Equius says with a grim smile. “Makara will be here long before the humans. I will stop him from wreaking havoc. You and Kanaya will fetch supplies for travel from the house, and get everyone out.”

“Whoa there big guy.” Dirk steps forward and grabs Equius by the shoulder. “The last time I saw you smiling like that did not end well for anyone.”

“Equius do not do anything foolish.” You scold firmly. “We have gone to great lengths to ensure that all of our party is alive and well again. Your death will help nothing.”

“This is my chance, Kanaya.” Equius says, still smiling. “With this I can make amends for all the mistakes I’ve made. I am responsible for the highblood’s troubling condition. It is only right that I face my shame now.”

“Absolutely not, bro.” Dirk barks out angrily. “I forbid you from killing yourself like a douchebag. You hear me? I am pulling your creepy fetish on this one, so you shut the fuck up and listen to me.”
“You will do as I command.”

“Fuck no.”

“Yes.”

“Seriously, shut the fuck up, I said no.”

“Yes.”

“Absolutely not.”

“You will do as I command, because my plan has the best chance of ensuring the safety of the Lalondes and Aradia.” Equius looks towards you and sees that you’ve already realized the same thing.

As much as you don’t want to see Equius risk his life, the bitter truth of the matter is that you care for your matesprit more than you care for your friend. Dirk’s closeness with Roxy means the same thing. Neither of you want Equius to die, but there are people you value more, and leaving Equius to keep Gamzee at bay is the best way for you to get them out safely. It sickens you to admit it, but you have no problem making that choice.

“Fuck you, that’s a low blow.” Dirk says bitterly.

“I have behaved lewdly and foolishly my entire life.” Equius says with a sheepish grin. “This low blow should hardly be surprising. Just as it is not surprising to me that you place so much value on the people in that building. I am under no illusions. I am alone here. I have spent my life pushing you all away, and I have only suffered for it.”

“Equius…” You grab him briefly in a hug. “You are not alone. We won’t be there when you fight Gamzee, but we won’t forget you.”

“You may be a sweaty douchebag, but you’ve got heart, dude.” Dirk says solemnly. “Try to get out of here in one piece.” He flashsteps away without another word.

You turn to leave as well, but stop as Equius calls you again.

“Kanaya, one more thing.”

“Yes, Equius?”

“Please tell Karkat that while he is a foulmouthed cretin, he was a capable leader. And tell Nepeta that… I’m sorry.”

When you return to the lab with the supplies Equius is already gone.

Your name is Gamzee Makara, and you’re closing in on your old buddy. You’ve tracked the foul stench of lowblooded horse lover for almost a week now, and while you got lost for a while in a rather odd area where it was almost impossible to sense anything, you managed to get back on track. It won’t be long now before you have Zahhak’s throat in your claws.

You hear the humans moving far behind you, and figure they must have escaped the void zone as well. They’ve been following you for the past four days, as you struggled to find your way through the area, and now they’ve managed to make it out. Looks like it’s going to be a motherfucking party.
You know what they’re after, and you don’t particularly care at the moment. As long as they don’t touch any of the motherfucking trolls they can do whatever the fuck they want. Let the humans kill the humans, and let the trolls kill the trolls.

At least for now.

You wander a bit closer and see something in the dark, a motion sensor of some sort. You walk up to it and rip it out of the ground. Alarms start flashing. A siren blares in the distance. It’s motherfucking music to your ears.

You trigger every alarm you see on your way in. Each siren is another sign that you’re closing in, another tune for your merry motherfucking circus. Not that you’re the biggest fan of the circus these days now that you’ve realized that your mirthful messiahs are a bunch of fucking frauds.

Ugh, there you fucking go, talking about your old bullshit religion. It makes you sick every time you think about it too much. You used to be so motherfucking blind, taking delight in your false prophets and mind-altering chemicals.

Ever since you learned the miraculous state of being that is pain, you’ve found a whole new meaning in life. When you were fighting the torture and lies back in the scratch base, pain was the only truth you had. And now that you’re a free troll, you feel a growing need to spread the motherfucking love.

That’s part of why you’re making sure to set all the traps off. To cause pain to these motherfuckers what are hiding in their holes like a bunch of fucking rats. Because pain isn’t about physical harm, it’s about the emotional damage you can deal. The pain of a cut fades over time, but the pain of being torn to pieces because you love somebody so fucking much and they don’t care about you? That shit hurts no matter how long you wait.

These little motherfuckers need to feel that. They need to hear you coming, feel your rage from miles away, and know that they are going to lose their home, their loved ones, and their life, no matter what they do. They need to scream and cry at the futility of it all, just like you did. And once they’re curled up in a puddle of their own tears, you’ll kill them off nice and slow. When that time comes those motherfuckers will be so far gone they’ll thank you for it.

An explosion sounds far behind you, and you can faintly hear screaming. Sounds like the stupid fuckers are triggering more than just alarms back there. All manner of other traps on the property, but damned if you’ve been triggering any. When alarms go off it causes fear, but when mines, snares, and defenses start going, the mind becomes less fearful. They start thinking like they’ve got a chance to fight back.

As if to prove your point, Equius walks into view just as another explosion sounds, closer to you this time. Not that the motherfucker has any sort of fight in him. Not against you.

“Well, if it isn’t my old motherfucking pal Equius!” You leer at him as he stands and stares at you. “I’ve been wondering where the fuck you were.”

“I am fully aware that you came here by tracking me, highblood.” Equius states simply. “Such pleasantries are polluted by falsehoods.”

Something is wrong here. Equius hasn’t moved an inch since he walked into view. He’s nervous, yes; the fact that he’s sweating like a hoofbeast is proof enough of that. But the fucker hasn’t shaken, fidgeted, twitched, or done anything else to show emotion. His face is blank. Where the fuck did this sweaty shithole learn to keep a poker face?
“So, what brings you here, Equius?” You say, failing to maintain your smile. “I thought you were done with this motherfucker.”

“Nonsense. You are a highblood. I am compelled to serve,” Equius states, still expressionless. This fucker has some nerve.

“Of course you are.” You stride closer, pulling your clubs off of your hip and giving them an experimental twirl. “But you haven’t been doing too motherfucking well at your duties, have you? Left me to die in that base, didn’t you?”

Equius shudders. Good, his composure needs to be broken if you’re going to enjoy this. “I had my moirail’s safety to attend to.”

“Sure thing, buddy.” Your smile starts to creep back onto your face. “And after that? Where the motherfuck were you when you got kitty-sis away?”

Equius opens his mouth to speak, but you interrupt him. You can feel your rage creeping in like the slowest of motherfucking poisons, and it feels intoxicating. “You found something ELSE to distract you, didn’t you? You let yourself be led away from your RIGHTFUL PLACE at my feet, so that you could consort with SCUM BLOODS AND HUMANS.”

Equius stiffens again. “YEAH, I CAN SMELL THE FUCKING RUSTBLOOD, MOTHERFUCKER. I can sense her filth pervading the air. MAYBE I OUGHT TO FUCK HER UP AGAIN? Teach you some motherfucking manners for up and disrespecting me.”

Equius lowers his head. “I apologize for my disrespectful behavior. I have thoroughly shamed my hemotype, and caused you great pain.”

You shake your head at the ignorant motherfucker. “NAH, The PAIN AIN’T NOTHING TO BE UP AND APOLOGIZING FOR, MOTHERFUCKER. The pain is fucking miraculous, really. SHOWED ME WHAT I’m SUPPOSED TO BE BEING.”

Equius’ fear is all over his face now, and it looks delicious. “What you’re supposed to be?”

“The motherfucking messiah, motherfucker. I’VE LEARNED WHAT THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER IS. I’ve learned what it takes to make somebody powerful.” That catches his attention. “IT’S PAIN, MOTHERFUCKER. Pain’s what makes a body strong. I DON’T FEAR IT ANYMORE, YOU SEE. So now I’m motherfucking unstoppable.”

“I am here to stop you, highblood.”

You look back at Equius in amazement. This motherfucker’s never had the bulge to talk back to you like this. The lowblooded sack of shit was so pathetic that he’d backtalk himself before he let himself contradict you. What the fuck has happened to him? Does he really think he can stop you?

No. “YOU’RE NOT MOTHERFUCKING CAPABLE OF IT, LOWBLOOD.” You scream with laughter. “You couldn’t stop me if you tried, and you’re TOO FUCKING WEAK TO TRY IN THE FIRST PLACE.”

Equius throws himself at you, punching you in the face and sending you tumbling. “I have no other choice. Leaving you alive means you will be a danger to every other troll and human on Earth. I will not allow you to harm Aradia, Kanaya, or Nepeta. Or any of our other friends. As ludicrous as my behavior may be, I must do this.”

The motherfucker isn’t serious. If he really wanted to stop you he’d have just punched you for real.
This fucker is holding back. He’s still too much of a bitch to finish the job, but he doesn’t intend to let you have your way with his flush-crush either. That makes you want to split her thinkpan all the more, of course.

“Alright motherfucker, let’s get this circus started.”

You swing your club at his head, and he swiftly leans back out of reach, before throwing a jab that causes the air to whistle past you like a slap in the face. If you weren’t a highblood your jaw would already be broken, your mind concussed. But all he’s done so far is knock a tooth loose and piss you off.

Your next swing of the club strikes his fist, and sends your arm snapping back so fast it almost dislocates. Equius hisses and pops a finger back into place as you try to get the blood flowing again. You’re getting more pissed off by the second, but this fight isn’t one you can lose, so it doesn’t exactly make a difference. You’re fighting to kill; he’s fighting to buy time. The outcome is pretty fucking obvious.

You decide to make a game of it. You start aiming for his right arm, the same one with the broken finger. You’re not as strong as Equius, but you’re still a highblood, and a few solid hits have his arm bruising.

You dart around as he snarls and throws punches. Speed is something you’ve got in spades, and Equius may be fast, but he’s sure as shit not agile in close quarters. His arm is swollen to twice normal size after five minutes of this fuckery.

You’ve made it next to impossible for him to throw a right punch, so now you start trying to hobble him. You aim for the knees and ankles, darting out of reach as he strikes back, all the while marveling at how easily he could have killed you by now if he wasn’t acting the bitch.

Then you get behind him and he roars, whirling with a backhand. It becomes clear to you that he’s purely stalling for time. He doesn’t care what happens to him as long as his little band of motherfuckers gets out. This isn’t how it’s supposed to be.

“NO, YOU MOTHERFUCKER. I don’t want you to yell. I WANT YOU TO SCREAM!” You bellow at him and catch his backhanded strike. Two of your ribs shatter on impact. Three more crack. You feel yourself coughing up blood. But you’ve got his arm now.

He bellows as you manage to twist his arm behind him and drive him to the ground. In his position, he can’t work up the strength to escape your hold. You hiss as he tries to throw himself backwards, to roll over, to do anything to get out of your clutches. You start pulling on his arm.

There are several minutes where nothing seems to happen. Equius continues to struggle as you keep pulling on his arm. You spit in anger and switch tactics. You start to lessen tension on his arm, then jerk suddenly. His arm dislocates. Equius screams in pain.

You repeat the motion. Ease up tension, and then heave. Ease up tension, and then heave. Equius screams again with each pull. His fist slams against the ground, his legs kick up, but either the pain is too much for the motherfucker to focus on, or the sick bastard is getting off on this, because he hasn’t done much to stop you. You wouldn’t be shocked either way.

Fire from the landmines has spread to you by this point. It rings you as humans start to reach your location. A few stop to stare, but most continue towards the house. You’ve been dealing with this piece of shit for longer than you thought.
You hear Equius screaming anew, and look down to see that while you were watching the humans, blood has began to ooze from his shoulder. At this point the motion is automatic for you: ease up tension, and then heave. It’s been fifteen minutes since you started the action.

Suddenly, there’s a sound of tearing, and you stumble backwards as Equius’ arm comes away with you. You collapse to the ground with the arm still clutched in your hands, and hear a quiet murmur from beside you. You stand.

Equius is face down, motionless. You kick him over so that his face is pointed towards the sky. His shoulder is oozing blood slowly, and you know if high blood tiers didn’t have thicker blood he’d be long dead already. As it is, he’s just lying on his back and crying. He isn’t making a sound, but tears are dripping from his eyes, and a calm look is on his face.

“What the fuck are you so happy about?” You whisper to him. He’s supposed to be screaming right now. “YOU’RE SUPPOSED TO BE A WHIMPERING PILE OF SHIT ON THE GROUND BY NOW.”

“I’ve paid.” Equius says, so softly you can barely hear him. “I’ve finally paid the price for my sins.”

What.

“Oh no you don’t, motherfucker. OH NO YOU MOTHERFUCKING DON’T.” You scream as Equius starts to properly smile. “No, you don’t get to die satisfied, do you hear me? YOU ONLY GET TO DIE ONE WAY, AND THAT’S SCREAMING LIKE A BITCH.”

Equius laughs quietly. The fucker can’t even hear you. You strike him with his arm, splattering your face and his with cold blue blood. He doesn’t flinch. He just keeps laughing. “No… NO!” This isn’t right. You want to scream in rage, but your voice is slipping. Equius’ contented laughing is all you can hear above the crackling of fire. “I suffered because of you, motherfucker! I FUCKING SUFFERED BECAUSE YOU ABANDONED ME LIKE THE SHITBLOOD.”

Equius remains deaf to your protests.

“I’m going to kill you for leaving me to rot, you know that, right?”

Equius remains deaf to your protests.

A wicked thought comes to your mind. “BUT I’M NOT GOING TO MOTHERFUCKING DO IT YET.”

Equius stops laughing.

You let out a screech of victory and grab Equius by the hair, dragging him towards the flames. He starts to kick as he realizes what you are doing, but you’re too maddened to care. You grab Equius by the throat and shove his gaping shoulder onto the burning embers. The smell of burning flesh fills the air. You lick your lips.

Equius screams again as you leave him on the flame. He’s so exhausted that he can hardly move, but as long as his wound is cauterized he won’t die here no matter how much he burns. His blood is too cold for that.

“You listen up closely, motherfucker.” You put your head next to his, so that the fire burns against your face. “I’M NOT GOING TO KILL YOU HERE. That’s too easy, and you’ve really pissed me off. INSTEAD I’M GOING TO TELL YOU THREE THINGS. First of all is that Scratch got Intel on Nepeta. WE KNOW WHERE SHE IS AND THE MOTHERFUCKING HUMANS ARE
HUNTING HER DOWN. The second is that I’m going to hunt Aradia down myself. YOU CAN TRY TO STOP ME, BUT WE’RE BOTH TOO SAVVY TO THINK THAT’S POSSIBLE. The third thing is this. WHEN THOSE TWO ARE LYING DEAD AT YOUR FEET? That is when I’m going to kill you, slowly and painfully, so that what happened today seems like nothing in comparison. REMEMBER THAT FOR NEXT TIME, YOU LITTLE FUCKER.”

You kiss him tenderly on the temple as he begins to moan in anguish. You drop his arm in the fire for him and get up. The flames don’t burn you as you walk through them and towards the humans. Rather, they feel cold against your skin. Your rage burns much hotter in comparison. Though the sound of Equius screaming in frustration behind you is more than enough to put a smile on your face.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, now it's a pretty horrifying cliffhanger.

This was tough for me to write, but damned if I don't feel confident in this chapter so far. It's too bad for Equius, but quadrants come first, so as far as he's concerned he's the most expendable one there. His moirail is miles away, and by sacrificing himself he is ensuring Aradia's escape. Equius is fully aware that his love will likely not be returned, so he sees no need to stay by her side. There are no doubts at this point. By facing the highblood, Equius will be saving the lives of the girl he loves, his fellow troll, and the humans, all of whom he owes a great deal. What's more, he will also be living up to his ideal fate: to face justice for his mistakes at the hand of a highblood. Stalling Gamzee is to be his last great crime. And as far as troll society is concerned, that's a hell of a way to go.

Gamzee has other plans however. His devotion to the idea of pain is the result of two things. The first was the fact that there is no time-travelling super being for Gamzee to worship in this story, as Lord English just cannot fit into the narrative without reworking either him, or the story itself to the extreme. I needed Gamzee to have a super fucked up religion without depending on a literal god for guidance. His worship of pain was a good way to drive Gamzee into madness and ensure he remained a maverick. It also ensures nobody goes thinking Gamzee is misunderstood, because that trope pisses me off. Gamzee is a psychotic clown, who only functioned in normal society by drugging himself into a harmless stupor. Gamzee without drugs is a sociopath, pure and simple. He cannot be reasoned with, he cannot be controlled. He does what he wants, and if he's on your side, well good for you. Otherwise, look out.

The other reason is much simpler: I wanted Equius and Gamzee to act as foils to each other. Both are land-dwelling highbloody with attitude problems. Both are aware of their superiority on the hemospectrum. But while Equius is viewing this as a cause to become a protector, Gamzee takes the traditional Alternian approach of killing whatever the fuck he wants to. This idea of them being the same and yet different lead to me wanting them to have more than one big encounter in the story. And Equius’ contentedness with dying at Gamzee's hands clashes with a Gamzee who wants him to suffer. In other words, while Equius dies due to inaction when facing Gamzee in homestuck, the change in Gamzee's beliefs leads to an opposite result here. Gamzee wants fear and pain, they are his master now. Acceptance is essentially the opposite of that. Where this will lead the two characters, even I'm not sure yet. But I intend for it to be kickass, so look forward to it.
Chapter Summary

The FELT makes a move, and Karkat reflects.

Chapter Notes

Merry Christmas, beautiful people! Just a quick reminder here, make sure you've read all of chapter 21, as it was released in two parts. Anyways, have what is probably my biggest update yet, my gift to you. No regifting.

Your name is Desmond Droog, and this is not the sort of work you signed up for. You’ve been stuck on a stakeout for the past month; a job that you made pretty abundantly clear was below your pay grade. But because the kids you’re keeping an eye on are a couple of lab rats gone rogue and an alien, they’ve apparently decided that you don’t have a say.

That’s a pretty shitty situation already, but it’s the second part of the job that’s really got you pissed off. The second part of the job in this case being a girl that your old boss’ crazy half-dog brother is set to bring any day now. You’ve tried to limit your contact with Jack as much as you can, but that hasn’t kept you from knowing roughly what kind of state the girl will be in when she arrives. It won’t be pretty.

And there’s nothing that depresses you more than a pretty girl in distress. Normally you try to keep such things to a minimum, you’ve got a daughter and seeing any young girl in danger makes you think of her (even if you haven’t seen her in years). But whenever Jack gets involved with a job, all bets are off. The guy is a wackjob who prefers stabbing in favor of handshakes. As in, he literally stabs people as a greeting.

Not to say your old boss hasn’t gone knife happy at times himself, but he usually keeps a lid on that sort of nonsense barring special situations. Jack doesn’t have half of the self-control Spades has, though. Hell, he probably doesn’t have any self control at all.

As if to prove your point, Jack appears in a flash of green light and drops the girl at your feet, trying to stab you with that fucking blade arm of his. You swat it aside with a scowl and check the girl over. Yup, she’s been stabbed at least four times, probably more. Hard to tell through all the blood, particularly because it’s olive green. These aliens and their weird blood colors, you swear to god.

“You’re lucky this is the undead one, we need her alive for this to work properly.” You say calmly, lighting a cigarette. “No good getting people to risk their lives for a corpse.”

“You’ll want to move quickly then, this isn’t the vampire.”

“What.” You almost drop your lighter. That is how much you are about to lose your cool. “If you knew that this wasn’t the undead alien, why the hell did you stab her?”
Jack grins wolfishly (the only way he can grin these days), and nudges the girl with his foot. She lets out a faint groan, and you wave one of your men over to try to keep her from dying all over the goddamn hardwood floor. “I just didn’t like her very much. She reminded me of a cat. Doesn’t she remind you of a cat?”

You stare down at the girl blankly. “I don’t have much experience with dead animals.”

Jack lets out a deafening bark at this, pointing his twisted sword arm at your face. “Well you better use her properly before you do! I’m going to Texas now, so you’re on your own here.”

“This isn’t over, Jack. Scratch will hear about this.” You say coldly, blowing smoke into his face. Jack snarls at you, but vanishes in a flash of green as always. Even now that he can teleport and rip your throat out with his teeth, Jack is as scared of you as he was when he was a regular punk.

He’s smart, you’ll grant him that.

“Alright, get her stabilized ASAP, we need her as alive as possible if she’s going to make effective bait.” You point to the men trying to give her first aid.

“Sir, she’s lost too much blood, without a transfusion we can’t possibly save her!”

“You think I don’t know that? I didn’t say I wanted her fixed, I said ‘as alive as possible.’” You say coldly. The man who spoke up shrinks back in fear. “You have ten minutes, starting now.” You glare at them, as though daring them to protest. Really, that’s exactly what you’re doing, but the last person who took that dare you personally dismembered. It’s seen as more of a promise than a dare these days.

You walk into the bathroom, and check over your appearance. Tie straight, hat sitting properly, face shaved clean. It’s important to look your best at all times, not that you’d know it looking at half of the slobs who work for you. That’s probably the one thing you like about your boss Scratch. The man dresses impeccably. Though his love for bright green becomes less tolerable as far as his office goes. You’re not sad at all that that entire place burned down.

You walk out the front door and stare across at the Egbert family’s house. Pretty nice place, all things considered. It’s a bit bland, looks like most of the houses on the block, but that’s hardly terrible. It’s a good house to live in if you want to raise a kid on the down low. Also a good kind of house to live in if you want to stalk somebody on the down low, as it happens.

You look around, sighing that this had to happen during broad daylight. These days secret missions never happen during night. And that means a lot of extra work. Jamming phones, diverting 911 calls, dealing with all the extra witnesses, there’s a lot of crap you have to sort out when you need to keep a secret out in the open. Thankfully when it comes to dealing with tricky situations in an orderly manner, you’re simply the best there is.

Your name is John Egbert, and you are on high alert. The government agents posing as your next-door neighbors have just showed themselves, after staying discrete for the past month.

Your father was the one who first noticed the “family” across the road was suspicious, likely the result of his time spent in the marines. Ever since then you’ve used the breeze to watch the house discreetly. Any unusual movements in the air currents around the building and you know. But there’s been nothing odd at all until today, when the air started burning with electricity. And not even five minutes later a man came out into the front lawn.
Your father and Jane left to do some shopping about half an hour ago, leaving you and Karkat to do your usual afternoon routine of watching movies and arguing about romances and other bullshit. You’ve called Jane’s cellphone (your dad never cared for the things), but they won’t be back for twenty minutes. This means that you and Karkat are likely going to have to deal with the situation alone.

Karkat is by the window, pressed tight against the wall and trying to stay out of sight. You’re lucky enough that you can watch them without your eyes, feeling the situation out with your windy powers. But your friend is exposed, and you know he hates it. His sickle is shaking like a leaf in his hand.

“What the fuck is up with this guy, why is he coming out now of all times?” Karkat has a manic grin on his face as he glares out the window. “If he was planning to wait until I let my guard down he’s in for one hell of a surprise, because I am always at the top of my game! This fucker tries anything and I’ll bring the full power of my fury on him before he knows what fucking hit him! What the hell is he even doing John, I can’t see him properly without giving away my position.”

You frown and let the breeze feel around more. You can’t get a read inside the house very well, but there’s lots of movement and that doesn’t bode well. As for the man in the front lawn, he’s standing outside with a cigarette. And he seems to be gesturing somehow with his fingers, tracing out patterns in the air… wait.

I KNOW YOU SEE ME

The asshole is writing words in the air. He knows about your windy powers and is using them to talk to you. You flinch back, and the wind responds to your fear by sending a gale howling at the man, who stays perfectly still, apart from placing a hand on his head to hold his hat.

“Nice to finally talk to you, kid!” The man calls across the road. “My FELT codename is Diamonds, but you can call me Mr. Droog. I’m sorry to interrupt your little movie marathon, but I felt I should tell your guest that we have something of his.”

Karkat almost reveals himself at this, but manages to hold himself back. “Oh god, please don’t tell me they caught somebody.” You want to tell Karkat that everything will be all right, but there are men bringing a body out the door, and you find it difficult to say much of anything right now.

“We thought the hostages we already had would be enough to draw you in,” Karkat’s jaw drops at this. “But I can see why a clown and a cripple would make for poor incentive. Hopefully you care more about this one.”

“Gamzee and Tavros?” Karkat sinks to the floor, stupefied. “I thought they… they should have gotten out. Why the fuck does Scratch still have them?” You’re torn between comforting your friend and figuring out who the new hostage is.

“It’s a girl, but she’s hardly breathing.” You whisper, eyes clenched as you feel for the faint gasps of air the troll is choking out. She’s not going to last long unless Jane gets back immediately.

“Oh mother fuck, who is it?” Karkat looks up at you pleadingly, but you don’t know enough about his friends to identify whom the hostage is. You shake your head at him helplessly.

“Come on now, Egbert, if your troll friend and your family come out with your hands up I promise you we’ll get this girl the best medical care possible! But if not…” The man pulls out a long item and draws a circle lazily in the air. “I don’t like treating girls poorly, but a job is a job, you understand. Now hurry up!” He lowers the item until it’s pressing against the girl’s belly. Her breath hitches.
“Time is dead kids, after all!”

Droog pushes down against her stomach. The girl screams. Karkat vanishes out the window with a roar and a flurry of broken glass.

“GET YOUR FUCKING HANDS OFF OF NEPETA YOU SON OF A BITCH.” Karkat is in the street by the time you’ve reached the window, and holy cow; you’ve never seen somebody move that fast without flashstepping. You didn’t even know Karkat could move like that, but there he is, bringing his sickle down on one of the goons who carried his friend out, while you’re still gaping out from your living room.

Okay, you should really get moving here. You jump out the window after Karkat, using the wind to throw glass at the other goon. Karkat has already cut his opponent’s ear off, and is rolling away as the man grabs clumsily at him. The man you threw the glass at is running into the house, his arms shredded from blocking your attack.

Droog spits on the ground as you rush towards him and Karkat’s friend, and you see now that the item he used to hurt her is a solid cue stick. It’s polished well, so you can’t do much to it with wind, but now that you’re face to face with Droog you’re not particularly worried about dealing with him. The fact that he’s not looking too worried either though is rather troubling to you.

“Kid, that was probably the stupidest move you could ever have made in your short life.” Droog has a grin on his face, a predatory smile, which is seriously unnerving to you since you know he knows what you’re capable of. You’re really not sure about fighting this guy anymore, but as long as he’s got Karkat’s friend you aren’t going to back down.

Karkat is fighting another pair of men in black suits, and you can see now that they’re continuing to file out of the house. You start to send a gust of wind to slow them at the doorway, but Droog interrupts you by taking a shot at your head with his cue stick. You raise your arms to block, but the blow still manages to send you spiraling through the air despite your guard.

You right yourself in midair and dive back down, grabbing Droog’s weapon in both hands and trying to wrestle it away from him. He responds by shifting his grip to hold both ends of his cue, and swinging it, as well as yourself, through the air. Your hold slips as he spins, and you’re sent flying into the house, barely managing to cushion the impact with wind.

“JOHN, STOP FUCKING AROUND AND GET NEPETA OUT OF HERE!” Karkat roars at you, as four men converge and tackle him to the ground. His scythe lies out of his reach, and he starts spitting and clawing, and it terrifies you that you don’t know whose blood is flying through the air.

“What in the world is going on out here?” A voice shouts from across the street, and you look over in alarm to see your neighbor Mr. Brinner is rushing to the scene of the commotion. Things are quickly getting out of hand, you do not want innocent people getting involved with evil government agencies OR the Egbert family’s new alien guests.

“You see John, all you had to do was come quietly and this wouldn’t have happened.” Droog looks over at you with a smirk. “Now I have to kill this nice man, and dirty his nice suit.” You jump to your feet and rush at him, throwing several furious punches, all of which fail to connect properly.

As it happens you focused on the wrong person. Droog is knocking you to the ground again when you hear gunshots, and look up to see one of Droog’s men opening fire on your neighbor. “A real shame, that. Always hate to kill off a man with good taste in suits. Almost as much as I hate to kill a woman.” He looks down on you with a smirk. “But this clearly just isn’t our day, is it kid?”
You hear screaming and look up to see Brinner’s wife and children running out to him. Then in another flurry of gunshots they fall to the ground not far from the first body. Droog watches the scene with a casual smirk. “All because you didn’t turn over your new pet.”

Your blood runs cold. You become deaf to everything, even Karkat’s furious yelling. The color seems to seep from the world like paint running down a canvas. All that you can see is the man in front of you, and the body he’s standing over, still barely clinging to life. You’re not sure you’ve ever felt this way before, but if you had to guess, you’d say this is what hate feels like.

The wind is responding to your hate rather poorly. You can feel the air rushing towards you, whipping violently around your head. Droog is looking right at you, no longer grinning. You feel look at the blood in the street, on the bodies, in the grass, and you just snap.

Droog throws himself to the ground as a blast of wind roars at him like a wave, but he manages to pin himself down by stabbing his cue into the dirt and clinging to it. You snap your arm and suddenly the wind blows from a different direction, picking up two of the bastards fighting Karkat and throwing them through the air. All the while, the wind around your head is growing more furious.

One of the men from before looks towards you and fires a handgun at you. The wind catches the bullet easily and sends it flying back with twice the force. The man seems to burst as the projectile punches a hole in his torso. You kill two other men the same way, before people start fleeing back indoors.

Karkat has finally shaken off the men fighting him and is crawling across the lawn towards Nepeta, using his claws to stay low. He’s yelling something at you, but you’re honestly too mad to hear it.

You’ve stopped listening to Karkat altogether, and are focusing on Droog again. His hat is missing, his jacket snapping in the wind, but his face remains casual.

“Didn’t know you had it in you, kid. Though you’re so mad right now you probably don’t even realize what you’re doing. Still, this has been impressive.” Droog nods his head in acknowledgement, a move that only makes you angrier, before he stands up and pulls out an unusual pistol. “I’m going to take you down now though, can’t have you making the cleanup any more of a hassle.”

The gun fires out a bullet almost the size of your fist, but when you send another gale of wind at it you find that the shot is a polished sphere, like a cue ball, so that the breeze rolls off of it. You’ve barely slowed the shot when it hits you and knocks you clean off your feet, dislocating your shoulder and jarring you out of your angry state.

“It’s too big and bulky to do any real damage, of course,” Droog comments, pocketing the gun. “Not enough firepower in such a small revolver to break through the skin. But it’s wind-proof, and can certainly stun you long enough to do my job here. I’ve just got to grab you and the aliens, take you back to the teleporter, and then oh mother fuck.”

You look up just in time to see your dad’s car fly into view, sending Droog spinning through the air and into the side of the house. Your father is at your side immediately, helping you to your feet.

“Son, what happened here?” He whispers, looking down at you in alarm. You raise your head and see the aftermath of what looks like a bad horror movie.

There are three bodies lying in the grass, all a mess of gore that makes you immediately repulsed. You stare in shock, and look down to see that some of the blood has made it’s way to your clothing. Scattered elsewhere are the pieces that Karkat hacked off in the middle of his rampage, but the only
bodies you see here are those of the three men you killed, and the Brinner family.

You decide to fall down and vomit. Really it’s the only sensible move. You killed three people. You killed them without so much as a flick of the wrist. And your father knows it. He’s looking at you as though he’s never seen you before. He didn’t think you were capable of such a thing. Hell, you never even dreamed of doing something like this before, but here you are, collapsed and heaving next to three human beings that you killed. Next to an entire family that died because you weren’t strong enough.

Suddenly the breeze winding around you picks up, as you hear a voice yelling. Karkat is curled around his friend, howling in panic. “JOHN! GODDAMNIT JOHN, HELP ME! SHE’S STOPPED BREATHING!”

Your name is Karkat Vantas, and you are done watching your friends die in front of you. This is what you were thinking not even five minutes ago, as you sliced half of a man’s hand off. You didn’t care that you were out in the open, getting beaten, cut, shot, all while being somehow even more out of place than you were back on Alternia. All you knew is that your friend was in mortal danger, and you weren’t going to let her die.

You were so sure that you were going to save her. You failed to save Aradia, you failed to save Kanaya, you failed to save Gamzee and Tavros (the fact that you weren’t aware of this until recently only makes the guilt greater), but you were not going to let Nepeta die.

Then Atticus Egbert drove a fucking car through the miniature warzone this yard had become and you thought that was it. The battle was over; your friend would be safe now.

This was what you thought until you got to Nepeta and held her in your arms and saw that it was too late. Nepeta’s wounds are horrible, multiple stabbing injuries to her chest and belly, all oozing olive green blood. You’re not sure how she lived this long, honestly.

That doesn’t stop you from grabbing her by the shoulder and calling her name, just praying that she will respond. And for a moment you think things would be all right, as her eyelids flutter open, she looks up at you and smiles. “Karkitty… I finally found you.” She raises a hand to you, sticky with her blood, and places it on your cheek, and the hope just drains from you.

Her hand is like ice, her touch so faint you can barely feel it. Her eyes are already closing as you clutch her hand to your face. You smile down at her as best as you can, but tears are falling from your eyes all the same. Nepeta is still smiling as well, her eyes closed, and you drop your head next to her mouth. You can’t feel or hear the slightest breath from her, and her hand, still clutched against your face, has gone limp in your grasp.

“Nepeta? Oh shit, Nepeta, wake up, don’t do this to me.” When she doesn’t budge an inch you start screaming for help. “JOHN!”

John is looking over at you blankly, and you notice the bodies next to him. When did those get there? After John’s neighbors got shot down everything became so crazy you couldn’t keep track of it. John’s dad is there too, but he’s trying to help his son while also figure out what to do about the sheer carnage that’s happened across the street from his house.

Jane is by your side before you realize she’s there, pulling you and Nepeta up. You lift Nepeta almost unconsciously (God, she’s so light), and follow Jane quickly across the street. Jane looks back and calls John over, and he follows in a daze. Then she starts looking Nepeta over, while leading
“Her heart is failing right now, but as long as there’s brain activity we can save her.” Jane says grimly, having you place Nepeta on the same bed you first woke up in at the Egbert household. “John, I need you to push fresh air into her lungs.” John seems to shudder as he starts to summon the breeze. You’ve never seen him struggle to move air before, but now he’s throwing his whole body into it. He’s still in shock after killing those men.

“Karkat, you’re in the way. I need you to step back and let me work.” Jane pushes you aside and places her hands on one of Nepeta’s wounds, closing it with a flash of green light. She’s got healing powers. You never knew, but being John’s brother you suppose this isn’t surprising.

“Seriously Karkat, you need to go.” Jane looks back at you sternly. “Even with my life powers this may not work, so having a troll looking over my shoulder will not make this any easier.” You open your mouth to protest, but the look Jane gives you brooks no argument. You make a hasty retreat.

Mr. Egbert still isn’t back when you go downstairs to the den, but you notice that the glass from the window you broke has been moved inside, probably so nobody realizes somebody jumped out the window and into a firefight. You look out the window just in time to see the house across the way burst into a fireball. Mr. Egbert is surveying the blaze from the sidewalk. You hear sirens and decide to retreat to the kitchen until you can get news.

Two hours pass before Mr. Egbert finally comes inside. He’s in the kitchen immediately, and sits at the table across from you calmly, pausing only to light his pipe.

"Droog and his men got away. They had some sort of teleporter inside the house, they left a bomb in the sitting room and jumped through it. There's no sign they were there, save for a few bodies."

So you'll be seeing him again. You're not sure if you're angry or terrified, but either way it seems that the world has once again decided to fuck you up the ass. "And what about the police? How are we not swimming in red tape, there's no way earth houses just explode like that."

“Some old friends of mine helped us. After Droog blew up his house, we planted evidence to make it look like a meth lab. It’s a human drug producing facility known for violent accidents. As far as the authorities are concerned, Droog’s gang was involved with drug production, and they had a fight over money. The Brinner family was caught in the crossfire.”

“Are they all...” you’re afraid you already know the answer, but you need to know for sure what happened to the family that came out to help you.

“Are they all...” you’re afraid you already know the answer, but you need to know for sure what happened to the family that came out to help you.

“The wife and kids didn’t make it.” Mr. Egbert says with a sigh. “David is in the hospital with a punctured lung. I still don’t know what to tell him if he ever wakes up.”

“I see.” You look down at the table silently. That’s three more people dead because of you, not to mention the three men John had to kill to save you two.

“Your friend will be alright, Karkat.” you look up at Mr. Egbert and he smiles warmly at you. “Jane won’t let her down.”

You grin bitterly and look back down. “I know she won’t. It’s not exactly a secret that I’m the one who lets people down around here.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Experience.” You mutter and get up to leave. “People around me tend to die. It’s something I’ve
learned since leaving Alternia."

“Why did you leave Alternia?” You stop and turn back to face him. His face betrays nothing, still with that same calm smile as before. “What was so terrible about your planet that you left it? You never did tell us why."

“Alternia is a shithole.” Mr. Egbert cocks an eyebrow at you. “Sorry, but if there was ever a time when I was going to break the swearing rule this would be it. Alternia is the most miserable fucking planet in the universe."

“Why is that?"

“Why is any shithole a shithole? Government. The planet is run by a dictatorship, with social status based on blood color. And I was as low as it gets. My red blood, it’s a sign that I am a mutant. A pariah, to be killed on sight. I decided that rather than wait around for somebody to kill me, that I should get the fuck out."

“Are your friends mutants as well?”

“Fuck no.” Mr. Egbert clears his throat, though his face appears calm as ever. “Sorry, I’ll dial it back a bit. Anyways, mutants like me are literally one in a billion. The last time a freak like me appeared was so long ago that there are only a handful of trolls alive today that still remember it. I only know about this stuff because of a diary a friend of mine had."

“So why did your friends follow you?”

“Misery loves company? I don’t know.” You sit back down at the table and sigh. “Sollux was a psionic, doomed to spend the rest of his life as a living battery if he didn’t run for it. Feferi was at the top of the hemospectrum, and had to kill the current leader if she wanted even the slightest chance of reaching twelve sweeps. Eridan left because he’s smitten with her. Aradia and Tavros are low blooded, which means there’s nothing good in their future on Alternia. Terezi and Gamzee just thought it would be interesting, and Vriska is so caught up with the tales of her ancestor the famous pirate that she just wanted to do it to stir things up. Kanaya just likes meddling in whatever crazy shit I get up to, probably so I don’t get myself killed. And Equius wanted to look after Nepeta."

Mr. Egbert has no idea who any of these people are, but his face doesn’t betray this. He just watches you and nods, as you list off your friends, his smile calm. You feel better just talking to him, like you usually do (before you understood the human concept of parenting you were half sure you were turning pale for the man). Though his next question makes you pause. “And why did Nepeta leave?"

You look down. “She left because I was going. She’s had a stupid crush on me since we met, despite the fact that I’m probably the most loathsome fucker in history. She chased after me, ignored her high-blooded asshole of a moirail even though he could have given her a great life back on Alternia, and chased after me."

Mr. Egbert hums thoughtfully at you, his smile more sly than calm. “Hey, don’t get any ideas, Egbert Senior. I do not like that look. No, put those eyebrows down, I swear, I need to stop forgetting where John gets this shit."

Mr. Egbert laughs, a hearty chuckle that sends the wisps of pipe smoke dancing in the air. “It sounds like more than a crush to me.” You grunt at this. Truly you are the master of banter."

“Doesn’t matter, she’s better off without me.” Mr. Egbert quiets again, waiting for you to continue. “Look at what happened to her when she came looking for me. I’ve been cullbait since I was a
wiggler, and I’m not going to drag anybody else down with me. By the time she wakes up I won’t even be here.” The words leave your mouth before you really think them through, but you mean them all the same.

“You plan on leaving her here then?”

“The FELT think she’s dead, she’ll be safe here.”

“They want my children as much as they want you.”

“They can’t touch your family, not with your connections and John’s powers.”

“She’ll follow you.”

You look up at him angrily, but the look on Mr. Egbert’s face chills you. He’s sending you the strongest look of stern fatherly disapproval that you’ve ever seen. “Nepeta will follow you to the ends of the earth, and you know it. She’s already followed you here from Alternia. Do you really think you can escape her?”

You shrink under the all-powerful gaze of Dad Egbert, your protests feeling feeble by the minute. “I have to escape her. That’s the only way to keep her safe. As long as she’s with me she’s in danger.”

“So protect her.”

“I’m not strong enough to do that!”

“Become stronger, then.”

“I don’t know how to do that!”

“I will help you become stronger.”

“I can’t let you put yourself in danger like that.”

“It’s too late for that.” You blink at this. “You’re already part of the family.” Mr. Egbert smiles warmly at you, the same carefree smile that John and Jane inherited.

The Egberts have been protecting you for months now, but you never really thought of them as family. The only family you’ve ever known was your lusus, but Crab-dad was picked off by imperial drones a few sweeps ago. At the time you just considered yourself lucky he wasn’t at home when they found him, but that hollow feeling never really left you. Still, the Egberts have come closer to filling the gap than anybody else ever has.

“I don’t deserve this.” You mutter.

“Nobody deserves the life you’ve lead until now.”

“That’s not what I mean!” You snap miserably. “I mean… this! Your protection, your friendship, your strange human disease called family, I don’t deserve any of it.”

“And why is that? Because you’re a mutant?” You were about to tell him that exactly, but Mr. Egbert’s stern face seems to leave you speechless. “Karkat, you need to stop putting so much stock in what Alternian society says you deserve. You are one of the brightest young people I’ve ever met, and you are worth more than any of the FELT. That girl upstairs can see this, so why can’t you?”

You have no answer for him, but he doesn’t seem to mind. He just gets up and walks over to the
doorway. He stops before leaving and looks back at you sternly. “If you do want to leave that badly though, at least wait until she wakes up. You owe her that much.” He vanishes with that, leaving only the smell of tobacco to indicate he was here at all. You hear a piano playing (Showtime, the Egbert family anthem), and figure that he’s moved to his room. 

The sound of music is ringing throughout the house as you leave the kitchen and walk upstairs. You stop outside John’s room, where Nepeta is being treated, and stand in the hallway. 

“She’s going to be alright.” You jump and spin around as John smiles at you tiredly, having just left the washroom. “She’s breathing without me now, and Jane’s almost done in there.”

“Are you going to be alright?” You remember how shaken up John was after the fight. 

John’s grin becomes fuller, though his eyes remain tired. “I think I just need to sleep on things for now. I pushed myself pretty hard today. He walks back towards the steps. “I’ll be on the couch if you need me.”

You want to ask further about him, but Jane leaving the room behind you takes up your attention. “She’s lost a lot of blood, but she’s stable now. We just have to wait for her to wake up. It’ll be a few days at least before that happens though.” She’s smiling, despite the fact that she’s clearly barely able to stand. You help her to her room, and then walk back to Nepeta. 

Nepeta’s unconscious like Jane said, but her breathing is a lot stronger than it was before. You grab a chair from across the room and pull it next to the bed. You sit watching her for hours, as the sound of the piano becomes a duet, then falls silent as the low sounds of John and his father talking come up from the floor. 

John will be all right with his father there to set him straight. And Nepeta is all right thanks to Jane. You don’t know if you’ll ever be all right yourself, but you want to stay all the same. Running away hasn’t solved your problems so far. 

It’s time to see what happens when you face your fears. 

Chapter End Notes 

Droog is not to be fucked with. The idea of Droog being a father is a bit of an homage to the stabdads fandom, in which the midnight crew members are parents to the trolls they guid through SGRUB. Hell, if there was ever a crew member who could pull off fatherhood it would be Diamonds. The others are either too murderous, too stupid, or both.
Chapter Summary

Roxy sits in a ditch. Tavros summons a moose.

Chapter Notes

Figured after how stupid long last chapter was I'd tone it down a bit. That said, after the summary I know you people are fucking hooked.

Your name is Roxy Lalonde, and you are sitting in a ditch with your sister and a couple of space aliens. This is definitely not what you envisioned yourself doing with your life after moving out. Then again, in your head moving out also didn’t involve government conspiracies and a homicidal clown monster, so you guess life is just full of surprises sometimes.

You’ve been hiding on the side of the road for about two hours now, waiting for Dirk to get back from the city so you can all get out of here. In the meantime, you’re chilling out with Lil’ Hal, also known as fun Dirk, so you can’t say you’re too bored at the moment, but the way the others are getting you really hope you’re not waiting much longer.

Rose and Kanaya have been sitting a distance away from you for the past hour, whispering and muttering to each other. You know at first Kanaya was hoping to cheer Rose up after your house burned down, but now it’s starting to look a bit sketchy over there. There’s far too much eyebrow movement for your liking.

Meanwhile Aradia is still trying to adjust to being not dead, while simultaneously acting rather crazy on account of all the emotions she’s got again. She’s been pacing around in the ditch, despite you telling her constantly to stop sticking her horns in the air where traffic might see. Big Horn sheep are not indig… indej… native to New York, so there’s going to be some double takes if anybody spots her horns. Though the fact that they look like giant candy corns means people will look twice anyways.

You can’t really blame her for pacing though. She’s even more worried than you are right now, with her superman troll friend missing and presumed eviscerated. She keeps muttering about his promise to her that he’d be there when she woke up, and while you explained to her what happened back at your home, you’re pretty sure that just made her scared instead of angry.

You seriously wish Equius were here right now. He was awkward, sweaty, rude, and kinda perverted, but you can’t deny he was a pretty upstanding guy all that aside. Plus, he’s strong enough to bench press a tank, and when the army is after you that is exactly the sort of person you want on your side.

Kanaya’s stories about highbloods back on Alternia have not left you feeling particularly optimistic about his fate, though.
AR: You know fretting about the hot troll isn’t going to lighten up on group tension at all, right?
TG: Wat? Are you reading my mind again?
AR: You kidding me? Equius is totally hot.
AR: This is coming from a robot here, too. So you know my opinion is 100% fact.
AR: No hormones affecting my judgment here, my word is scientific, mathematical, and historical
evidence all being fused into pure, unbiased, truth.
AR: The dude is ripped, doesn’t wear sleeves, and has self-esteem issues.
TG: Oh wow, totes swooning at that one.
AR: Hey, it’s a winning combination in the right circles.
AR: That said I was in fact talking about Aradia, not Equius.
TG: Oh yeah, she’s a babe, I’m so jealous.
AR: Hey, no worries Roxy, you’re a babe too, so you’ve got nothing to be jealous about.
TG: Ooh, a confession at last!
TG: I knew you had the hots for me!
AR: Yeah, that’d probably be true…
AR: Except, you know…
AR: I am glasses.
AR: Definitely asexual as it gets.
AR: That said you can rest assured that my judgment of your hotness was also statistical fact.
TG: Ooh, Hallie, I love it when you talk statistics!
TG: *statistics
TG: TAKE ME NOW!
AR: Sorry babe, still lacking anything remotely resembling genitalia.
AR: Shit, I’m still trying to get Dirk to make me a torso.
AR: I’m all like: yo me, do your robot clone a solid here.
AR: I’ll just roll around; it’ll be ironic and shit.
AR: And he’s all: I don’t trust you with autonomy, evil robot me.
AR: Also that’s not what ironic means.
AR: Breaks my fucking heart every-
AR: Wait, shit, something’s up.
TG: What’s going on Hal?
TG: Did something happen to Dirk?
AR: No, it’s not him, it’s back at home.
AR: I’m getting some crazy messages from Dave.
AR: Something about a cyborg werewolf?
AR: What the fuck is the kid smoking this time, I swear to fucking god.
TG: This time?
AR: College is a strange time for young adults, Roxy.
AR: You just didn’t notice because you were already into the whole substance abuse thing.
TG: Yeah :(.
AR: Oh shit, sorry, I didn’t think that was still a sore subject.
AR: Weren’t we joking about this last week?
AR: Is my memory corrupted or something?
TG: Nonono, sorry Hal, you’re fine! I’m just thinking of my mom again.
TG: Probably because of our house burning down.
AR: Yeah…
AR: Wish I could say she died like a boss.
AR: But since that Scratch asshole smashed Dirk’s glasses at the time…
AR: I was stuck back in the computer at home the whole time, until he could connect to me again
with this pair.
AR: So I don't actually know just how badass she was.
TG: It’s okay, Hal, I can’t be mad at you for not being there.
TG: I mean really, you practically died in that fight as well!
TG: I mean you just got loaded back onto your computer automatically, but still, you did get crushed to bits fighting Scratch, right?
TG: Though I’d be lying if I said I didn’t wish mom had a computer to put her brain into as well…
AR: Oh mother fuck Dave, what are you doing?
TG: Is he alright?
AR: The kid’s lost it!
AR: He keeps talking about this damn dog, and saying that apparently Bro is dead.
AR: Even though I just sent him a message and he’s clearly responding to me.
AR: Oh god fucking dammit Dave you little shit don’t you dare!
TG: What’s he doing? Are you all right?
AR: He’s trying to unplug me!
AR: He keeps saying he needs to get us to safety, and now he’s trying to grab my computer.
TG: He’s bot-napping you!
AR: Yeah, no shit!
AR: I mean it’s kinda flattering in a way, since Dave seems to be trying to evacuate me along with everything else he’s got laying around here.
AR: His troll, his pet crow, his turntables.
AR: It’s like I’m part of the family.
TG: Yeah, Dave’s all heart!
TG: Didn’t take after Brock at all!
AR: Fuck yeah; love this kid, but not the point right now.
AR: The point is that the little asshole is unplugging me while I’m talking with you!
AR: Oh wait, he just stopped to let me finish.
TG: How did Dave learn manners when Dirk didn’t anyways?
TG: Aren’t twins supposed to share brains or something?
AR: I don’t know, it’s probably the biggest mystery in the Strider family.
AR: But anyways, since I don’t have any arms or anything I’ve got no choice but to go with him.
AR: Don’t know how he’s going to carry my box plus his turntables, plus his fucking bird, but whatever, the dude’s made up his mind. I’m getting taken off the web.
AR: Going to basically be dead for the next fuck knows how long.
AR: Dirk’s spare glasses don’t have the specs for me to upload myself, so I’m gonna be trapped inside this computer.
TG: Aww shit, you gonna be okay?
AR: I’ll be okay as long as Dave doesn’t drop me.
AR: Okay, he’s getting impatient.
AR: Strider manners are as short-lived as they are rare, apparently.
AR: Sorry my fleshy little shit of a bro is being an ass while we were trying to start a feelings jam, Roxy.
TG: That’s cool! I still love you Hal!
AR: Heh, alright.
AR: Just promise me you’ll look after Dirk while I’m offline, okay?
AR: Alright, I’d tell you to stay safe too, but since Dirk would rather die than let anything happen to you I’m not worried.
TG: You think?
AR: Of course.
AR: After all, I may be an AI, but that doesn’t change the fact that we’re pretty much the same guy.

With that, Lil Hal goes offline, and you sit back and wonder what Dave could be so worried about. He may be the most emotional of the Striders, but he’s still a Strider through and through, and
Striders do not panic over silly things. Except for a certain incident involving Dave and a flock of crows when he was thirteen, but he doesn’t let people talk about that.

...

He totally killed one by accidentally throwing one of his shitty katanas and ended up moping for a week until he managed to fish it off his roof and bury the thing. Hal recorded the funeral and posted it online. You still have a copy of the video and it is adorable!

You look over to the others to see that Rose and Kanaya have absconded somewhere while you weren’t paying attention, and Aradia is still being a total grump, so you decide to grab your laptop and send a message to one of your other friends. And by one of your friends you mean a certain John Egbert, in yet another attempt to put the moves on him (he can be rather dense sometimes).

-- tipsyGnostalgic [TG] began pestering ghostyTrickster [GT] at 9:42 --

TG: Hey John!
TG: John bb u there?
TG: Joooooooooohn
GT: HOLY SHIT, WHAT DO YOU WANT?
TG: :O
TG: You are most definetly not John.
TG: *definitely
GT: UHH…
GT: FUCK.
TG: Busted!
TG: The fuck is you?
GT: OKAY, SHIT, HOW TO EXPLAIN THIS…
GT: YEAH, I’M NOT JOHN, OBVIOUSLY.
GT: I’M A FRIEND OF HIS, STAYING AT HIS PLACE FOR REASONS I’D RATHER NOT DISCUSS.
GT: IT’S BEEN A ROUGH FUCKING NIGHT AND I’M AT HIS COMPUTER, SO I JUST RESPONDED WITHOUT THINKING.
GT: JOHN IS… BUSY RIGHT NOW.
TG: Well shit, that sucks.
TG: I’m pretty bored right now, thought I’d see if he was feeling any less dense than usual today.
GT: DENSE?
GT: OH NO WAY.
GT: ARE YOU ROXY?
TG: Yea?
TG: Wait do you mean John menshuned me?
GT: IGNORING YOUR BUTCHERING OF YOUR OWN FUCKING LANGUAGE, YES, HE MENTIONED YOU.
GT: HE SHOWED ME PICTURES OF ALL OF HIS FRIENDS TOO.
TG: Well damn I’m totally at a disadvatnage here.
TG: You should send me a picvture of you!
TG: Even the playing feild.
TG: *fix fix fix
GT: NOT A GOOD IDEA, SORRY.
GT: CREEPY AS IT MAY SEEM, I’D RATHER REMAIN A NOISY FACELESS ASSHOLE.
TG: Aww, prude!
GT: YEAH, STOP TRYING TO CHANGE THE SUBJECT HERE, ROXY. I’M ON TO YOU.
TG: Uhh, wat?
GT: YOU SAID JOHN WAS DENSE EARLIER.
GT: I’VE WATCHED ENOUGH ROMCOMS TO KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS.
TG: lol romcoms
GT: YES ROMCOMS, SHUT UP.
GT: WHAT YOU’RE SAYING IS THAT YOU’RE INTERESTED IN EGDERP, RIGHT?
TG: uhh…
TG: Damn, mysterious stranger, I will never doubt your romcom power again!
GT: DAMN RIGHT.
GT: SO YOU DO THEN.
TG: Yup, I am p much as interested as it gets.
TG: He’s a total dork, but that’s part of the Egbert charm I guess?
GT: HOLY SHIT.
GT: I HAD NO IDEA JOHN HAD IT IN HIM.
GT: UNTIL NOW I HAVE DISMISSED HIM AS A COMPLETE DUMBASS INCAPABLE OF DRAWING ROMANTIC ATTENTION.
GT: I MEAN HE’S MY FRIEND AND ALL, BUT STILL.
GT: YOU MEAN TO SAY THAT YOU FIND THAT ATTRACTIVE?
TG: Oh man, you are asking a lot of questions for some random dude on the Internet.
TG: though I guess lots of people try asking me shit online?
TG: I dunno, I guess I usually block them when they get all personal.
GT: FOCUS ROXY.
TG: Right, sorry random shouty dude!
TG: Yeah he’s p fucking adorable imo.
GT: WELL HOLY SHIT.
GT: AND WHEN YOU SAY DENSE…
GT: HOW BAD ARE WE TALKING ABOUT HERE?
TG: Auuugh!
TG: Really bad, shouty!
TG: All the hints, all the veiled discussions of wanting to go out with him whenever we meet up in person…
TG: I’ve lost count of how many times I’ve winked at him.
TG: :) 
GT: WELL FUCK.
GT: I GUESS THE WORLD MAKES SENSE AGAIN AT LEAST.
GT: JOHN WOULD FUCK THIS SORT OF THING UP.
TG: :( 
GT: I’D OFFER ADVICE, BUT JOHN EXISTS IN A SORT OF ROMANTIC BUBBLE.
GT: I’M NOT SURE HOW TO BREAK THROUGH TO HIM WITHOUT JUST STABBING AT IT UNTIL IT POPS.
TG: lol yep he’s a real goober like that.
GT: HA! YEAH GOOBER SUMS IT UP NICELY.
GT: ANYWAYS, IF YOU WANT I CAN SEE IF HE’S FREE FOR YOU?
TG: Nah, that’s okay Shouty, I gtg anyways.
TG: It was nice meeting you!
TG: See you soon!
-- tipsyGnostalgic [TG] has signed off! --
GT: ALL RIGHT, LATER THEN.
GT: WAIT, WHAT?
Dirk has finally pulled up in a van with tinted windows, and is starting to flash step around grabbing all the suitcases you’ve been sitting on. He nods to you and Aradia, and then sends an impatient look at Rose and Kanaya as they reappear from the woods. Those two have become waaaay too hooked on their inter-species make-out sessions. Especially with Equius being MIA and Aradia sitting here all single because of it, the whole thing seems almost rude.

“Alright, so with Houston being on fire and all, we’ve got a pretty damn long trip ahead of us.” Dirk speaks up, interrupting your train of thought and pushing you into the van with everyone else. “The next nearest place we can feasibly hide out at is all the way over in fucking Washington. We are going there as fast as fucking possible, no side trips, no sightseeing, so if there’s anything anybody needs before we go, speak up.”

“We’re not waiting for Equius?” Aradia looks over at Dirk sharply from the passenger seat. Dirk sighs and shakes his head.

“I don’t like it any more than you do, Aradia, but we don’t even know if he survived. If we wait here we’re just sitting ducks when the F.E.L.T. find us. And I do not want to deal with that clown if he shows up again.”

“Equius isn’t dead.” Aradia faces forward angrily. “I may be able to ignore the voices now, but that doesn’t mean I wouldn’t hear him if he died.” You share a look with Kanaya and Rose, having completely forgotten about her ghost powers. If she’s telling the truth, then Equius could be trying to follow you right now!

Dirk raises an eyebrow at Aradia’s comment, but doesn’t move otherwise. “Alright, so tell me this: can you hear Gamzee’s ghost?”

Aradia blinks at this. “No, I can’t.”

“Then we can’t afford to wait. Equius fought Gamzee until the F.E.L.T. were all over the damn place, so even if Equius isn’t dead I doubt he got out safely. Maybe he was captured, maybe he escaped, either way, we have no way to contact him and the clown is still on the loose. We’re leaving before he catches up.” Aradia falls silent at this, as Dirk puts the van in gear and pulls back onto the highway.

Your name is Tavros Nitram, and you are past the worst of the pain. Your back is no longer bleeding, and your thoughts are focused once more. You definitely don’t think the pain was very fun, and the blood loss was also pretty terrible, so it’s nice to be feeling better.

Really, you’re feeling great now. You’re sitting in the back of a truck on a floor that’s been painted brown with your own blood, yes, that’s definitely a thing that happened. By all rights you should probably feel pretty miserable right now, or possibly dead? But you’re not dead, or miserable. You can feel your telepathic links with animals working better than ever, so that you can now sense all the different animals around you. And if you use this to your advantage, along with the other thing, you should be able to escape.

You think it’s probably been a day or two since you fell asleep in the truck, and if the men driving weren’t trying to stay off of main highways and out of populated areas, you feel like you’d probably have arrived at your destination a long time ago. The animals around you are disappearing so quickly that you know you’re moving pretty fast. This means that you’ll need pretty good timing to enact your daring plan.
The first part is going to be bad, because it involves a lot of blood and death, but you’re not going to let that stop you from not being ripped apart by humans with evil government agendas! No, you’re going to take action, and ask something you haven’t asked in a long time.

What would Rufio do?

As it happens, it’s not as difficult as you thought it would be to enact your plan to stop the truck. What ever the human equivalent of cholerbears is here on earth, they are clearly much faster than the bigger Alterian version. And they are still big enough to stop a speeding truck, though you’re afraid that unlike a cholerbear, an Earth fur monster is more vulnerable to heavy impacts.

This means when you make the beast run in front of the truck, it stops with a lot less of a jarring impact, though it’s enough to throw you around the back of the truck all the same. It also means that the animal is killed almost instantly, meaning you can’t have it eat the drivers.

You settle for summoning a giant antler creature to do the job.

As the humans scream and fight the antler creature, you use your robot legs to help you kick the door of the truck open. From there, you defer to Rufio’s guidance once more. When you first thought of this plan, you imagined Rufio would fly away, while you were stuck on the ground.

But your horrible back pain seems to have granted you wings of your own now. You spread them with a sprinkling of brown glitter as you climb out of the truck. It takes a few flaps to lift you off the ground thanks to your robot legs, but you manage it all the same. The humans yell after you briefly, but they are forced to retreat. Clearly the quality of giant antler creatures on earth is very high, because the animal is throwing the humans around easily, while clearly not giving much of a fuck about anything.

“How yes, so cool!” You cry out triumphantly as you fly away in the opposite direction the truck was heading. “Behold the hidden power that is my self esteems!”

You have absolutely no idea where you’re heading now, but with a pair of brand new awesome wings on your back, and the only men who know you’re gone currently being mauled by a giant antler creature, you can’t say you care.

The only thing that matters is that this pupa's gotta fly.

Chapter End Notes

YOU WANT AUTHOR NOTES? HERE'S AN AUTHOR NOTE, FUCKERS. MOOSE ARE BAD ASS AND NOT TO BE FUCKED WITH. GIANT ANTLER CREATURES FOR THE FUCKING WIN.

The moose was definitely a last minute thought that I am classifying as my best idea ever. Even better than the fucking top hat from chapter 7. You just can't beat a well placed moose. They're like horses but weaponized and perpetually pissed off! THAT'S THE MOST KICKASS THING YOU'VE EVER HEARD OF, AND IF YOU DENY IT I'LL SLAP YOU THROUGH THE INTERNET.

Anyways, I've still got a bit more writer's block to fight through before I've got the set up for the next big part of the story planned out, but it's coming together in my mind.
more and more. The final chapters are becoming more than just vague concepts, there's now scenes in my mind! Cool scenes! With... hardly any moose at all BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD THIS ENDING SUCKS.
To Keep Us Safe

Chapter Summary

Dave and Jade take charge of their respective situations.

Chapter Notes

Apparently the viewers have spoken, and they want more moose. It's the most unanimous thing I've heard from reviews other than how good my story is (and damned if I don't appreciate the hell out of that, btw). Anyways that being the case, I have decided that if I get a chance to add more moose, I will. It will have to make sense in context still though, otherwise this chapter would have contained moose with water skis. I mean moose with water skis sounds like the best thing ever, but that's a bit... at odds with the general mood of the story. Know that it was an idea that I had while writing this though, even if it didn't make final cut.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your name is Dave Strider, and you are running very short on time. This is ironic as fuck for several reasons but you’re on too tight a schedule to properly appreciate it. You just got home and by your count you have approximately twenty-four minutes and seven seconds before you need to be long gone.

Terezi is home already; still trying to plot out where Vriska could have went. The spider lover hasn’t shown her face since Terezi completely and totally failed to bring her to justice (her words, not yours), and Terezi seems to think if you don’t hunt her down and kill her ASAP she’s gonna blow up another city. Which would be believable if most of the buildings weren’t trashed by FELT members, but whatever, you need to find out where the hell she went anyways.

“Alright Terezi, pack up your shit, we need to be gone, and we need to be gone now.” You cry out as you burst through your front door and start gathering duffel bags.

“What are you talking about Dave?” Terezi looks up at you as you start stuffing one of your bags full of weapons. “Did something happen?”

“Yeah, something happened. The apartment blew up. And now we need to get out before we blow up with it.” You close up the duffel bag and start filling another with all of the non-perishable food in the apartment. Or you would if you had any, but you don’t, so you settle for grabbing electronics instead. Terezi is facing your direction, clearly disbelieving everything you’re saying. Fair enough, you don’t believe what’s going on yet either.

 Doesn’t mean you aren’t in deep shit though.

“Dave, what the fuck is going on? Last I heard you were sending a bunch of messages about a goddamn cyborg wolf thing.” Hal’s voice chimes in over the speakers, an electronic rendition of your twin brother’s voice that somehow manages to sound less robotic than the real thing.
“Yeah, he showed up four minutes and thirty two seconds ago; I’m currently fighting him to the death.” You say irritably, “Now prepare to power down, Hal, we’ve got fourteen minutes and twelve seconds before Bro dies, and I won’t keep him busy much longer than that.”

“What?” Terezi’s voice and Hal’s buzzing ring out in unison, as you start filling bags with clothes, one for you, one for the trolls.

“Just messaged Bro, he’s still alive.” Hal says smugly (where the fuck did that damn AI learn to be smug, anyways?), "meaning there is approximately a ninety-nine percent chance that you’re full of shit."

“Shut up Hal, we’re evacuating. Now stop doing whatever you’re doing before I shut you down.”

You’re not moving fast enough, flashstepping isn’t enough to make up for all the time you’re wasting on Hal, and Terezi has yet to leave the kitchen table. You focus for a brief moment, and feel time freeze around you. All right, grab bags, flash to car, flash back, and shit, looks like twelve seconds is as much as you can hold time in place for. How the fuck you made that jump earlier is beyond you.

“Dave, I don’t know what the hell you’re on about, but I’m in the middle of a pretty fucking serious discussion here.”

You flash into Dirk’s room and start grabbing things, trying to avoid anything too phallic. You eye the plug in the wall irritably. “Hal, finish whatever you’re doing or I’ll unplug you right the fuck now.”

“Bite me.” You flash to the plug and back, barely there for a second, but enough to piss Hal off. “Oh god fucking damnit Dave you little shit don’t you dare!”

“I’m serious dude, stop talking to whoever the fuck you’re busy with!”

“I was talking with Roxy about her recently departed mother, asshole!”

“Seriously? God fucking damnit, fine, you’ve got five minutes, but I am getting us out of here now, so make it fast.” If anyone deserves more Hal time, it’s the Lalondes; you haven’t heard from them since the news their mom died, and you’re sure it’s been rough on them. You’d talk to them yourself, but Hal’s a better choice, the guy is probably the most emotionally perceptive person in this house. Not like you, you’re just emotional. And your brothers… yeah, Hal is the Strider for the job.

“Terezi, start moving, dammit!” You cry out as you jump to your room and start gathering up your stuff. The turntables are going to be problematic, so you settle for getting your computers and Oriole (the taxidermied crow you keep in a cage), and freezing time again to deliver them to Bro’s car.

When you unfreeze time you notice that Terezi is packing up her notes and stuffing them roughly away. “I’ve been moving, ass!” She sneers at you with a grin, “Maybe you should hurry up instead!”

Whatever, as long as she’s not standing around like an asshole. You grab your turntables, and haul them out as fast as you can manage. You consider slowing time while you move them around, but your powers have exhausted you enough as is. “Thirty seconds, Hal!” You yell as you descend to the car with the turntables. You haven’t been able to use your time things before today without them, so you figure that they’d be good to keep with you.

Terezi is making her way down the fire escape as you freeze time to jump back up to Dirk’s room. Most of his robotics supplies were taken with him to New York, so all that’s left is to grab Hal.
You jump down, throw everything into the back seat, and drive away. Terezi is still buckling her seatbelt, and you’re not actually sure whether Hal finished his conversation, but you don’t care. Even with the time freezing you’re leaving with only four minutes and two seconds to spare, and you have no idea if that will be long enough.

The guy coming for you has a dog’s head after all; it wouldn’t be surprising if he could track you. Yours is the only working vehicle left in Houston.

“Now that we’re successfully evacuated, would you mind telling me what that was all about?” Terezi asks irritably. “I was in the middle of something.”

“Bro’s dead.” You say, keeping your tone all business. “I am currently being chased by a flying cyborg wolf man with teleportation powers, trying my best to avoid getting impaled. In two minutes and sixteen seconds I will escape, at which point the freak will teleport to my house and blow everything right the fuck up.”

Terezi blinks at this, eyes weary from several all-nighters. “I don’t even have to inhale to know that your statement reeks of deceit.”

“Does it smell like deceit though?”

“Oh, absolutely.”

“Ha, yes, I knew you were bullshitting me with that fucking line!” You say with a smirk as you swerve around a tree root growing out of the road. “I’m telling the truth, just lived through that bullshit.”

“That makes absolutely no sense. You’d have to be in two places at once.”

“Bingo.” You smile fully in spite of yourself. “I am officially a time traveler, as of fifty eight seconds from now.”

“Really.” Terezi faces forward irritably, clearly not at all convinced. Until you both hear the explosion from behind you and you check the mirror to see smoke rising from several blocks away.

“Yeah, really.” You floor it as you reach the main highway out of town. “Now then, we’ve got to get out of here as fast as possible, head up to New York, where Dirk is.”

“Forget Dirk, we need to go north to Dallas, if Vriska’s looking to start chaos, that’s where she’ll head next.” Terezi says dismissively, looking over her maps.

“Alright, Rainbow Falls New York, glad we’re on the same page.” You say coldly, staring ahead. “We’ll regroup with my brother and the Lalonde’s and figure out our next move. Hell, you can even spend some time with some trolls that aren’t completely insane.”

“Dave, if we don’t track Vriska down then she’ll kill even more of your kind, is that what you want?” Terezi looks over at you, eyes narrowed to slits. With the eyes glowing red that makes for a very effective image. But with all the insane troll bullshit you’ve dealt with recently, you just aren’t in the mood.

“Terezi, what I want is to meet up with my brother and tell him the guy who raised us is dead. What I want is to get away from Houston before I lose anybody else close to me.”

Terezi hisses at this. “You’re not getting it, coolkid!” She cries out in a singsong voice. “That thing that killed your brother is here because Vriska drew it in. She led it right to us, and your brother died.
because of it. Not to mention all the other people who have died here. If we don’t stop her, she’ll just keep going until everyone around her is dead!”

“Then we’ll stop her.” You say impassively, as Terezi watches you angrily. Apparently she knows you’ve made up your mind on this, which makes you wonder just why she’s pressing the fucking issue. “We’ll meet up with everyone else, and then we’ll figure out a plan to stop her.”

Terezi loses her shit at this. You don’t think you’ve ever seen her anything less than calm before, and it’s unnerving. Even after everything with Vriska, she was angry, but still logical. Now… she’s acting insane. “We’re going to go find Vriska now!” Terezi shouts angrily. “We’re going to hunt her down for everything she’s done, and put a blade in her goddamn chest!”

“In her chest? Or between the shoulder blades?” You ask with a smirk. Terezi gasps in outrage at this, and grabs for her cane beside her.

Yeah fuck this, you don’t know if this is a recent thing for Terezi or something she’s just been hiding all this time, but damned if you’re putting up with it either way. You slam the brakes, screeching to a sudden stop that snaps you against your belt. Terezi on the other hand keeps moving and hits her head on the glove compartment.

“You know, my bro never let me or Dirk ride in the passenger seat of this damn thing.” You say casually, unlatching the seatbelts as Terezi curses and tries to regain her senses. “The belt doesn’t catch properly, and the airbags don’t work worth shit. It was one of the great Strider ironies that my bro took car safety so seriously despite training us with real swords by age four.” You get out of the car and saunter around as Terezi braces a hand against the glove compartment.

She’s got blood dripping from her head. You’d feel bad if she hadn’t been going for her sword. As it stands you’re still just pissed off.

“Anyways, it was stupid as fuck, but it was a pretty telling sign to us that even when he was swinging a blade at our heads Bro loved us. He always had a weird way of showing it, but he did whatever it took to keep us safe. He trusted himself more than any machine, and when he went for a blade…” You throw open the passenger door and grab Terezi by the shoulder. “He never once had any intention of cutting us. Nah, Bro was good enough with a sword to cut the shirt off of my back without even grazing me skin. I didn’t get that impression from you just now though.”

Terezi lets out an undignified squawk as you haul her out the door. “You’ve got one chance left here, Terezi. I know I play it cool, but it’s hard to be patient when the closest thing you have to a dad has just been murdered. So you either play by my rules, or I leave you here to chase your goddamn tail while I look to meet up with people that are less insane.”

“I’m not stopping until I bring Vriska to justice.” Terezi spits angrily.

Honestly, you didn’t expect that from her, but what the hell. If she wants to chase shadows and project all of her issues onto one fucking person, that’s her problem. You grab the bag you stuffed her and Vriska’s clothes into and toss it to her. “Alright then, have a good time. I’d offer you some food for the road, but you know how it is, swords come first in this family.”

“I’ll take my chances without.” Terezi says impassively, grabbing her duffel bag and slinging it over one shoulder. She’s still got her cane held tightly in one hand, blade only partially unsheathed, and she snaps it shut with a click, and begins tapping her way down the highway.

“Next left will take you to Dallas.” You call after her, walking back to your car. She flips you the bird and moves off in the correct direction, as you put the car back in gear and drive away. Terezi’s
form quickly becomes a speck in your rear mirror, and it occurs to you that that was likely the worst break-up you’ll ever go through in your life. Oh well, it was nice while it lasted.

Here’s hoping the next trolls you meet won’t be so fucking crazy.

Your name is Jade Harley, and you really want to punch something. You’ve been stuck on a boat for weeks now, with your Grandfather stubbornly refusing to allow you any time on shore. Not that you don’t understand why, but you think somebody should remind him that cabin fever is a real thing!

The trolls are losing their mind, you’re losing your mind, your brother would be losing his mind if he wasn’t such an airhead, and your grandpa is stubbornly insisting that nothing is wrong.

You know something is wrong, and you know what that something is, you’re hardly stupid. You’ve probably got more common sense than the rest of your family put together, but apparently your grandpa thinks your brother is more trustworthy than you are.

This is the price you pay for taking up gardening as a habit. Your brother was hunting wild animals while you were growing flowers, and despite the fact that you’re a far better shot than him, the stigma of flower loving girl vs adventurous boy stuck in your family’s mind. Only you remain aware of the fact that you’re the reason anything gets done in this family.

Your grandpa would be happy staying at home shooting anything that moved, and your brother would be just as happy running around pretending to be daring and strong while running scared whenever anything small and furry came near. You’re the one who keeps the house clean, you’re the one who knows animals are good for more than taxidermy, and you’re the one who knows how to radiate steaks without running a risk of cancer. That last point is far more important than one might think!

Your family doesn’t realize it though, so you sit below deck with the trolls, teaching them about earth culture and practices, keeping them entertained, and trying to stop them from getting antsy and blowing something up. And all three of them are capable of doing damage if they get too worked up.

Eridan is the worst, taking to fiddling with his gun at your workbench whenever he’s not studying military history or arguing with Sollux. You always get antsy when he toys with his gun, because it’s already strong enough to vaporize your whole boat. But he’s become so enamored with nuclear physics that he just refuses to let it rest until his gun is strong enough to vaporize anything that could possibly threaten him or his friends. When he gets like that it’s hard to refuse him, you can sympathize with wanting to protect people close to you after all!

Sollux isn’t as volatile as Eridan, but he’s not exactly interested in learning about humans either. He just sits below deck, either moping around or messing with psionics. He messes around with your computer occasionally, but usually gives up soon after booting it up though, muttering about how primitive your machine is. You can’t help but agree with him on that, your computer here on the boat is far worse than the ones you have back at home. Even Jake has better computers, and his are all terrible! One of his computers is a jacket. How the heck are you even supposed to use that properly?

Feferi remains the most level headed of the trolls, but even she’s slipping. Her love of the ocean became a real issue for her when your grandpa started refusing to let her swim, so now you just do your best to keep her distracted from it. When everything smells like saltwater though you know putting the ocean out of your mind is all but impossible.

You’ve talked it over with the trolls, and you all know why this banishment below deck took place.
Your grandpa doesn’t seem to realize that news can be delivered via the Internet (he still gets newspapers delivered to the island), but that doesn’t stop you from looking it up yourself. You know all about Houston, though you’ve been hard-pressed to find any information from the Striders save for the occasional update from Hal.

Your family has not yet seen fit to inform you that the city the Striders live in is in danger, likely so they don’t arouse suspicion. But it’s painfully obvious that they know a troll is burning a city to the ground and haven’t told you.

They also won’t tell you about the men following you, likely people from the FELT searching for the trolls. Though you’re not sure how they know you have them. Still, your grandpa may be paranoid, but you’re sure the government has no real reason to chase you! That hasn’t stopped them from tailing you for the past week, leading to your grandpa employing some very… interesting evasive maneuvers. Mostly zigzagging around every second island you pass.

It’s gotten especially bad in the past few hours, hence the recent rise in frustration below deck. Sollux is feeling more seasick than ever, and even Feferi is starting to look a little ill. Eridan is the only one feeling all right besides you, having apparently spent time on boats when he was younger. Everything else below deck is getting sent flying as the boat makes sharp turns though, and you’ve got a few bruises.

“Jade, do you know how this boat runs, because if you do I’m staging a fucking mutiny.” Eridan spits angrily, dodging as a book flies past him. “This is completely ridiculous.”

“I don’t have a license, but I’m sure I can -OW” A box flies into the back of your leg, prompting a chuckle from Sollux. “I’ll manage.” You grab your rifle and march on deck, Eridan following behind you.

Jake sees you emerge and rushes over. “Jade, you bally well can’t just march on deck in the middle of a firefight! It isn’t good for a young dame to get involved in a scrum.” He gasps as you step aside to let Eridan up. “And you need to stay below deck old chap! Mustn’t let the civvies get a gander at your horned noggin!”

“Jake sit down and shut up.” You snap at him as you emerge fully on deck. Jake starts to puff himself up, but Eridan throws him off by tossing his cape into his face. And here you thought that the cape was just silly!

“Below deck lass, the blighters are preparing to shoot!” Your grandfather says, standing at the helm resolutely. “We’re woefully outgunned at present, this is a time for evasion!”

“Grandpa, you’ve been ‘evading’ for the better part of three hours, and they’re still clearly visible.” You check stern and see three small two-man boats following, each with mounted automatic weapons on the back. They call this outgunned? You have enough guns to annihilate these idiots. Your family should as well! Unless…

“What’s wrong with your guns?” You face your family angrily. “Six people should not be giving you this much trouble.” Your grandfather sputters indignant, while Jake just looks away in embarrassment.

“Flintlock pistols!” You jab a finger at Jake. “A blunderbuss.” You point up at your grandfather. “You have some absolutely ancient weapons with poor vulnerability to seawater, and you haven’t maintained them at all, have you?” The two fall silent, and you decide that you are officially tired of their horseshit.
“Eridan, lower you gun.” You turn to your troll friend, who has his laser cannon raised and ready to fire. He looks at you angrily, about to protest, but you silence him with a glare. “I know it’s the best weapon we have right now, but it’s also big and flashy, and we are still trying to be discrete here. Besides, I need to prove a point.”

Eridan looks at you for a moment, before dropping his weapon. “Alright, whatever. It’ll be nice to see you humans do something useful for a change anyways.” He’s been around your family enough that you feel the comment is justified. But he’ll still be eating his words before long.

You walk up next to your grandfather and raise your rifle to your shoulder. “First thing’s first, you’re standing up and in the open when they’re aiming automatic guns at you.” You snap at him as you fire a shot and knock the gunner of the foremost boat into the water. “Their guns are made so that they don’t need to aim, the only reason they haven’t shot yet is because they want the trolls alive. But if they did you’d be a sitting duck.”

Your second round hits the driver of the first boat cleanly, and the other boats start accelerating. “Your blunderbuss is powerful, but only at a short distance. Why you’d think it to be the only gun you need is beyond me, this isn’t a video game, range is a factor.” Your next shot hits the driver of the second boat in the shoulder, causing it to swerve briefly before the driver stabilizes. You hiss a curse under your breath and aim again.

“Your evasive moves are useless because their boats are clearly more maneuverable than yours is.” Your next shot fails to prove this point, as you manage a clean strike on the gunner of the boat, whose driver is clearly still having difficulty. “Your best bet would have been to outlast them, because they obviously have less fuel capacity than us. This boat is meant to drive long distances, and you’ve been treating it like something out of a spy movie!” Another shot finishes the wounded driver from before, and the last boat starts shooting.

“Finally, you need to learn to make proper use of your resources.” You say, watching carefully as the gun tries to train itself on your location. “Eridan’s gun is capable of killing all three of these boats at once, but you’re still stuck on your shoot first and ask questions later mentality! And before you say anything about Houston, don’t go acting like all aliens are out to get us. That’s just racist.” You fire one final round as your remaining tail hits a wave and jumps out of the water. The bullet kills both driver and gunner in one fell blow.

“Gosh Jade, that was a ripsnorter of a shot!” Jake whistles admiringly, failing entirely to make you less annoyed, but definitely instilling some degree of pride in you. You whirl back to your family sternly, as your Grandpa seems to be struck mute.

“Thank you Jake, now go to your room.” You snap, pointing down below. Jake stares at you for a moment, before sullenly drooping his head and walking below deck. “And don’t come back up unless you’re willing to use the Berettas I got you for your birthday!” You yell after him.

You turn back to your grandpa next. “Now then, you’re going to go down and fix all the weapons that you ruined by letting the seawater get into them. I don’t want to see you come up until they’re working at one hundred percent!” He stares stiffly ahead; clearly trying to pretend you didn’t completely own him. Your grandpa just doesn’t take well to being shown up in marksmanship. Well too bad! He needs to learn that life is not a goddamn action movie. You start poking him with your gun until he finally moves downstairs, grumbling under his breath all the way.

Feferi and Sollux come up a moment later, relieved at the fresh air and lack of stupid swerving. Feferi in particular is positively giddy, bouncing around the deck as the rest of you watch fondly. She settles down, as you start moving again, piloting the ship towards Washington.
“I gotta say Jade, that was damn well respectable.” Eridan says to you. “I gotta appreciate your ability to command.”

“Well when people are being a bunch of dumbasses, sometimes you need to do things the hard way.” You say with a smile, nodding in thanks to Eridan as he moves up to talk to Feferi. Sollux catches your eye and shoots you a quick thumbs up, though he still looks ill.

Everything’s under control now, as far as you can tell. At this rate it will be smooth sailing all the way to Seattle. You’ll be meeting the Egberts in no time!

Chapter End Notes

See, if Jade was being chased by moose with water skis everyone would be dead now. Jade's a good shot, but moose are moose. Ahab's crosshairs? Ha, the moose laugh at your puny lasers!

Okay, serious character talk time.

Terezi gets a lot of credit as a character, being considered generally awesome by most of the fandom. I don't like her at all. She's competent, sure, but she doesn't do much besides act crazy and stab Vriska in the back. The rest of her arc revolves around doing things she regrets, and getting into some (admittedly hilarious) banter with Dave. In fact the most I've enjoyed her is in the mess happening in the current updates, and even then she's already dead for most of the good stuff! Well sorta, you know how this time shit gets.

Her obsession with justice is interesting though, and it made me wonder what would happen if she actually failed. Like in Doctor Scratch's alternate timeline, only without her getting butchered by Bec Noir. How would failing to kill Vriska affect her mentally? In essence: I'm taking her regret and putting it to good use. She's not wallowing in regret, she's using it to drive her. What that will drive her to, I won't yet say. I got excited when I first came up with the idea though, so know if nothing else it should be a fun spin on things.

Jade is probably the character I've agonized over the most, definitely the human I have the most trouble writing. John is goofy, well meaning, and dense. Rose is snarky and brooding. Dave is always trying and often failing to properly contain his emotions. I've got basic ideas for each character that develop into better representations as I flesh out each chapter. Jade is weird though, because her personality does somewhat of a 180 mid story in Homestuck. She starts off goofy, carefree, and happy, but after enough bullshit decides to become still positive, but also rather short-tempered and serious. In homestuck this is primarily caused by Karkat's inane self hatred manifested through time traveling IM. In Blood Pride though, I realized things have clearly worked themselves out already.

Jade's family is ridiculous. Her guardian is the most enigmatic and also somehow simple, most appearances of him involving him either blasting something to smithereens, or flying around with his battleship. The most complicated thing about Grandpa Harley is how he fits into the damn timeline, because that shit is confusing as fuck. Her post scratch self is just... dumb. I mean Jake is a hell of a fun character but he's probably the
thickest human in homestuck. Even John, with his obvious dense moments, manages some real brilliance at times (his innate skill with both alchemy and wind powers), and manages to keep his team together through some real tough situations. Jake... the dude tears his team apart without even knowing it.

So Jade, who I'm sure grew up initially very cheerful and kind, probably got sick of the bullshit after growing into a mature independent woman and realizing just how old-fashioned and dense her family is. It should be noted though that my ideals of Grandpa Harley's attitude towards Jade are based not on gender but on age. She'll always be his little girl, even when she's giving him a time out. I realize that may seem rather hard to interpret for some, but I don't think Grandpa Harley is that much of an ass. I mostly give him the flaws I do because he's got the same DNA as Jake, and that guy drives me nuts.
Chapter Summary

The trolls reunite, Scratch prepares his next move, and the Gold Pilot receives welcome news.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Absolutely not, FF.”

“Why the shell not?”

“IS THIS REALLY A FUCKING QUESTION? DID YOUR THINKPAN DRY UP IN THE HOUR SINCE WE LAST ENDED THIS CONVERSATION? BECAUSE I CAN’T THINK OF ANY OTHER WAY YOU COULD POSSIBLY HAVE FORGOTTEN YOUR PSYCHOTIC MONSTROSITY OF A LUSUS.”

“Shit Karkat, could you shut the hell up, I got this.”

“FUCK YOU SOLLUX, THIS IS IMPORTANT AND I’M NOT SITTING ON THE SIDELINES WHILE FEFERI TRIES TO SINGLEHANDEDLY EXTERMINATE OUR ENTIRE FUCKING SPECIES.”

“Will you at least stop yelling, you’re being twice as loud and obnoxious as usual, and that’s saying something.”

“Fine! Is this better?”

“Perchfect.”

“Shut up with your disingenuous perky fish pun bullshit Feferi, you know damn well why we can’t let you come with us.”

“Glubby won’t be a problem, I swear.”

“Giving it a creepy pet name does not sell us on the idea one fucking bit, you know.”

“Damnit FF, you know I don’t like saying this, but Karkat’s right. If you follow, Gl’bgolyb is going to flip her shit, and then we’ll all be dead before we’ve left the atmosphere. ‘We’ in this case being every single troll in the fucking universe.”

“She won’t flip her shit, she’ll be quiet, I promise!”

“She gets antsy if you leave the ocean for more than two hours, if she senses you moving much higher than sea level she’ll flip her shit. After the Condesce left her behind to conquer the galaxy she’s pretty fucking clingy.”

“And boy what a pleasant mental image that makes with all those fucking tentacles.”
“Heheh, fucking tentacles.”

“GODDAMNIT SOLLUX I WAS JUST BEING COLORFUL.”

“She won’t try to stop me, I talked to her.”

“As if that would change anything! Look Feferi, I’m sorry, I seriously fucking am, and I feel terrible that this bullshit is necessary, but we can’t bring you along with that damn lusus there to fuck things up.”

“She won’t!”

“FF, I know this isn’t a great situation for you, but-”

“She won’t because she can’t.”

“Wait, what the fuck?”

“Gl’bgolyb can’t do anything to stop me.”

“She can stop the rest of us, we’re not immune to the vast fucking glub.”

“She’s dead.”

“She’s what?”

“Feferi, what the fuck did you do?”

“I… I killed her.”

“Oh my god FF, you did what?”

“You… you stupid crazy bitch.”

“KK ease up, man.”

“No, fuck you, do you not realize what this means? She’s single handedly killed her lusus, and removed the most important part of Her Imperious Condescension’s grip on the hemocaste! She’s probably just started a civil war! You just… You just fucked up the entirety of our race because you didn’t want to stay at home any more. Fuck you, Feferi. We leave in an hour.”

Your name is Sollux Captor and you just woke up from a rather unpleasant memory. You’re currently hiding in the back seat of the Harley family van, which you’re pretty damn sure hasn’t received any sort of maintenance in years. That said, the vehicle runs well enough that you were able to nod off in the back, so at least it’s better than the fucking boat.

“Wake up sleepyhead, we’re almost there!” Jade chimes at you from the seat next to you, stopping you from taking another shot at some rest. “We’re two blocks away now, so I thought you should get ready.”

“You take way too much fucking enjoyment in my goddamn bifurcation gimmick.” You mutter at her, rolling your eyes as she starts giggling. She seems downright giddy at the chance to be meeting with these friends of hers, the Egberts. Apparently their father is ex-military, so he should be able to help you all disappear somewhere on this planet where the FELT can’t find you.
You also have it on good authority that they are a bunch of notorious pranksters, and you’ll take that over a family of trigger-happy lunatics any day. Really, the only person who seems disappointed with the arrangement is Eridan.

You suspect that’s more because he’s flushing for Jade than because of the workbench and materials, which was his claim. Though you can only suppose to a trigger happy genocidal freak like Eridan, the ability to pick off six moving targets with machine guns from the back of a moving boat is a winning skill. And honestly, you can’t blame him in that regard. Jade’s shooting was the most impressive thing you’ve seen since Eridan fought Gamzee (not that you’d ever tell him that).

Your train of thought drifts as you look over and see a burnt building around the corner. Well, it’s really not so much burnt as blown the fuck up. Either way, it doesn’t exactly instill a great deal of confidence. “Beautiful neighborhood, huh?” Your remark contains enough sarcasm to draw the attention of everyone else in the vehicle, at which point you notice you’re turning onto the same street as the rubble.

“Oh no, John and Jane never said anything about this!” Jade cries out in surprise. She then draws attention to a small memorial across the street. “Oh nooooo! That’s the Brinner’s house! They were so nice when I visited last time. I hope they’re all safe!”

“Well, there’s two pictures at that setup, so chances are about jack shit on that one.” Eridan mutters from behind you. He squawks loudly as Feferi punches him in the shoulder. “Well shit Fef, I’m just sayin’!”

“Say it like less of a douchebag next time, ED.” You snip back at him.

“Never to fear chaps, I’m sure that the Egberts will be right as rain!” Jake calls from the passenger seat with a smile. “Heck, I’m sure that Jane’s probably got all kinds of baking ready for our arrival!”

Feferi cheers at this, and Jade seems to cheer up a little as well. You’ll say this much for Jake: he may be an idiot who changed his last name so he could sound more like a movie star, but he does know how to keep the mood up. Well it works with girls at least; you still find his accent to be as irritating as it is fake.

Still, he’s better at this sort of thing than you are, so you just smile along for everyone’s sake. Meanwhile Harley Sr. is pulling up in front of the house across from the disaster zone, and Jade jumps out with a grin. “Alright now chaps, just hunker down here for a tick, and we’ll make sure things are aces with the Egberts.” Jake says to you all with a smile, before running after Jade with a chuckle. Their Grandpa follows after them with a grunt. The old douchebag hasn’t said a word to you since Jade took over the boat.

You watch nervously as a tall man with a pipe appears at the doorway, and the two chat for barely any time at all before he rushes to the vehicle. “Get inside, quickly.” He says in a stern voice. “Ever since the mess across the street the neighbors have been on edge, no telling who could be watching.”

You decide not to question him, the vehicle you’re in has tinted windows but that doesn’t do much to mask the horns on your heads.

“Why isn’t he surprised to see us?” Eridan asks nervously as you all walk up to the door. “He didn’t even blink when he saw us, shouldn’t aliens be a bit of a surprising thing to find at your front door?”

“Maybe he knew we were coming?” Feferi says, clearly unsure.

“Nah, even if he knew aliens were coming he wouldn’t be expecting our appearance.” You say, trying to keep your voice level as you reach the front door. “It’s almost like he’s met a troll before.”
You lead the way in as Feferi and Eridan trail behind nervously. Jade is beaming at you as you look around the house curiously. Not too bad of a place, though you’re not sure why she’s so damn happy about. It’s then that you look up to see a boy dressed in blue running into view.

“Come on dude, you need to see this!”

A collective gasp comes from your group as Karkat Vantas walks around the corner.

“Damnit John if this is another one of your pranks I swear to god this is not the time for-” Karkat stops as he looks down at you. “What the fuck? What the… just how did… what the actual fuck?” he stares at you for a good minute before he turns and walks away. “I need a minute.”

Jade’s face just drops as she looks back at you all. “Are you guys not getting along?”

“Well, if we aren’t that’s news to us!” Eridan cries out angrily, “What the hell’s gotten into him?”

“Sorry about that,” The boy from before smiles sadly down at you. “The past few days have been pretty rough. My name’s John, it’s nice to meet you all!”

At the sign of friendliness, Feferi perks up and starts handling introductions, while you go stand by the foot of the stairs and look everything over. The house seems to be normal, but other things, namely the people, seem way off.

It’s something you’ve been puzzling over ever since you met Harley Sr. (or rather, his gun). The humans you see here all look familiar to you in a way. They have less baby fat, and are a lot taller and uglier, but they all match up with the wrigglers from the screen you saw ages ago back in the computer lab. You haven’t been sure until now though, since Jade and Jake never used any reality bending powers.

Seeing John and Jade side by side has removed any doubts. The two are almost identical, though John has a far larger build. The info you found on the computer said that these two were made from the same genetic sources. And yet when you asked Jade earlier she had said that the Egberts were only ‘friends.’ They’re clearly on good terms, so there’s no way anybody got disowned, or however the fuck human families work, you don’t know.

John decides to prove your point further by jumping over the balcony and slowly drifting to the ground. He’s the one with Aerokinesis. This means that you are in the middle of at least four human beings that have been forcefully fused with alternian DNA. The only person currently here who you can count on with this information is Karkat though. Eridan is too self-centered to care, and Feferi, as much as you’re flushed for her, is not one for deep thinking.

You take advantage of the distraction in the main sitting room to sneak upstairs and find Karkat. It turns out to be surprisingly easy; he’s behind the first door you check. You walk in and see that he’s sitting in a chair next to a bed, with Nepeta of all people in it.

“I thought she was with Equius.” you remark, acting as casual as possible so that you don’t scare Karkat off. He can’t run anywhere, but he can shut himself off pretty damn well, which is just as bad. “I guess she followed you instead?”

Karkat looks up at you, then behind you, probably to see if anyone else followed you up. Seeing that it’s just you two and a comatose troll in the room, he shrugs his shoulders and looks back to Nepeta. “I have no fucking clue. She was like this when we found her. The FELT nearly killed her. All I know…” He pauses and grimaces before continuing, “All I know is that she was looking for me.”

Damn. “I never thought that her crush would lead to this.” you remark sadly. “I always figured, you
Karkat laughs bitterly at this. “Yeah, well that makes two of us.” he sighs and looks down again. “The last time I saw her she told me she was in love with me.”

“Really?” You look down at Nepeta in surprise. “Didn’t know you had it in you Nepeta, way to go.” You smirk at the scowl Karkat gives you. “So is she going to be okay?”

“Against all odds.” Karkat grunts. “Jane Egbert is in medical school, she managed to save her.”

“Using her medical knowledge.”

“Yup.”

Clearly Karkat knows something else is up, from the way he’s fidgeting, so you figure you’ll make it easy for him. “So Karkat, while we’re on the topic of the Egberts, have you noticed anything… odd about them?”

Karkat sighs and looks down. “Okay, I don’t even know why I’d try to hide this with how John is, yes, they have weird powers. John does windy stuff, and Jane can heal people as long as they’re not dead. That’s how she saved Nepeta.”

“Windy stuff.”

“His term.”

“Whatever.” You pause for a moment. As much as you think all this stuff is pretty vital and possibly dangerous, their powers clearly saved Nepeta’s life. You figure it’s best to lay off the high level paranoia and lead into things slowly. “Do you have any idea how they have these powers?”

“No clue, all I’ve heard is that they were born with them. Atticus won’t say more than that.” Karkat glances over at you and elaborates. “The guy with the pipe and hat. He’s their dad, I guess.”

“I’m not so sure about that.” You say, more to yourself than anything. The files you saw had names on them, full names of the people who gave DNA. Atticus was definitely not one of the names, though you do remember an Egbert being there. “How does he fit in though?”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Karkat looks over at you irritably. “If he’s not their father then who the fuck could he possibly be?”

“I have no idea. All I know for sure is that the Egberts and the Harley’s don’t fit into whatever fucked up familial system is typical on this planet.” You look down at him. “They’re some kind of genetic experiment.”

Karkat stares up at you for a moment before looking down thoughtfully. “That… actually makes a lot of sense. Or it would, if it was actually possible for human technology.”

“They used more than human technology. They combined it with Alternian technology, and created a system that let’s them tamper with DNA.” You’re mostly theorizing here, since Alternian sciences aren’t advanced enough to create mutations on this level either. Your hemocaste is the closest they’ve come to success, but that’s mostly because your psionics are so goddamn powerful to begin with. They’ve only ever managed amplifying what was already there.

“How did they get Alternian technology?” Karkat has stood up and is pacing around, trying to figure this out. “There’s no way any self-respecting troll would trade for information with this species… So
we weren’t the first ones to crash here.”

You’re not sure whether Karkat is smart for figuring it out, or whether the rest of your group is just that thick or oblivious, and it’s actually obvious. “Yeah, I don’t know the details, but there was another ship that crashed down here before we did. And it gave them a mother lode.”

“Making us the second. Lucky you.” Karkat smirks as you flip him the double-bird. “Alright, so that explains how they knew to expect us, and how they were able to strip down everything we had so easily. What it doesn’t explain is what happened with their genetic experiments, why their knowledge wasn’t able to account for so much of our abilities, or what an Alternian ship was crashed down on Earth in the first place.”

“And the only person I can think of who would be willing to give any answers is a troll hating old douchebag with a big gun.” You say irritably. “Can we try to squeeze some info out of Atticus Egbert?”

“I don’t know.” Karkat says with a sigh. “Let’s wait and see if our chances improve after things settle down. When you see the others, tell them about Nepeta. But only let one of them up at a time, she needs space to recover.”

“Then why don’t you give her some?” You ask with a smirk.

“Fuck off Captor, somebody needs to look after her, and I owe her.” Karkat scowls and shoos you away. You figure his plan to wait is the right one for now, so you throw a second pair of middle fingers his way for good measure before turning to leave.

“Sollux?” Karkat’s voice stops you, as you’re about to leave. You turn back to see him looking over at you. He scratches his head in embarrassment, and looks down. “I’m, uhh, shit. I’m sorry I ran off on you guys. That was pretty fucking terrible of me.”

“Don’t worry about it, KK.” You smile back at him casually. “We’re all running here, remember?” Karkat smiles back, and his face looks vulnerable enough to shatter on impact, the way it always does when he shows positive emotions. He turns back and starts fussing over Nepeta’s unconscious form, straightening blankets, and checking some weird bag hooked up to her arm.

Way to go indeed, Nepeta. You close the door on the two and go downstairs to tell the others that the resident shipper is no longer missing in action.

Your name is Doctor Scratch, and you are standing over the burned remains of Lalonde Labs. The laboratory was incinerated by Rue’s flame traps, a final insulting wrench in your plans from beyond the grave. The insult is twofold, in fact, as the flames burned long and hot enough to not only incinerate all traces of Lalonde’s cloning technology, but also cause any indication of where the fleeing subjects are going to be marred by ash. The only intact things remaining on the estate are a mausoleum housing a dead cat in a suit, a vacuum cleaner cast in bronze, and a rather hideous wizard statue engraved with the name Zazzerpan the Learned.

Rue Lalonde always was rather insane, but this is a bit much even for you.

“Is there any sign of the clown?” You ask Spades, as he directs his second excavation of the week.

“Boxcars trailed him to a nearby town, but we lost him there. It’s assumed at the moment that he stole… an ice cream truck.” Spades checks his notes again in disbelief. “I don’t care how useful you think this clown is, next time I see him I’m shanking the bastard.”
“As you wish. Makara has become too much of a wildcard.” You shrug noncommittally, “His allowing Zahhak to escape is evidence enough that we can not count on him for these things. He allowed us to find where six of our wayward trolls fled to, but could not acquire a single one of them. I clearly overestimated his destructive capabilities.”

“Meanwhile, we’ve lost Serket, Pyrope, Dave Strider, and Nitram, as well as the five from last night. Leijon has been taken from Droog despite his best efforts, Deuce is in the infirmary recovering from a sword slash to his side, and Droll lost five men to head wounds from a rifle, with a sixth one expected to remain a vegetable.” Spades spits as he concludes his count. “These kids are proving to be more trouble than they’re worth. Better to just kill them and get it over with.”

“The key figure in the creation of those children died erasing my face.” You say coldly, “Use your head, Spades. The fact that they are troubling us so much means that they are very much worth the effort. You are living proof of the possibilities they may hold.”

“And my brother is living proof of the faults behind it all.” He mutters irritably. “Not that I had any love for the guy.” He looks back at you and sighs. “Alright Scratch, we’ll figure this out. Might not be too difficult either. We know that the humans are in contact, right?”

“You think that they will gather together, now that two of the families are homeless.” You grin, as much as you can without a mouth, as you nod your head sagely. “You are quite right, excellent thinking. Send Boxcars and his group to chase them down, have Droog and Droll move to intercept. While they trap the Lalondes, I have a third group closing in on the specimen already at the Egbert home. Meanwhile, the remainders of Deuce’s men are tailing Pyrope. She has separated from Dave, and will likely lead us to Serket.”

“And the others?” Spades doesn’t seem surprised that you’ve already made arrangements to cut them off.

“Stragglers can be rounded up later. The important thing is to collect the larger prize.” Time is drawing to a close on this game of cat and mouse, and the number of holes your prey has to run to is dwindling by the second.

Your name is forgotten. You had one ages ago, but the eons you have survived for have seen it lost to time. You can hardly even remember the title you once carried, the one that they gave you when you stood by your old friends in a time long past. Nowadays, you are not considered to be alive, not even a troll. You are less than that, a mere piece of a larger mechanism, a tool to be used by Her Imperious Condescension.

You sit in the pilot seat of the Battleship Condescension, steering it through space as fast as you can, to the point where you feel you may die from the effort. But though you sit in the pilot seat, you hold no such title. You are the Ensnared, the piece that drives the ship, but cannot even control where it goes. You are a pawn in somebody else’s game.

It is especially bad then, that the one holding your piece is the kind of person who tends to flip the table when she’s losing. The last time a play was made against her, everyone ended up dead, save for you.

This time things are different. The table seems to have been flipped, but you don’t know who did it. The voices ringing out in your head just went silent one day, those whispering words that used to worm into your skull like horrible tendrils, subtly burrowing through your brain. You can’t hear them anymore, and it feels wonderful; not only because of the pain those noises caused you, but because
of what the whispers represented.

The whispers started as the Condesce began to tear at your mind, to make you into a proper battery. The more she tampered with you, the more your body resisted death, and the louder the voices became. It did not take you long to realize that the voices belonged to Gl’bgolyb, the dark horror that rules Alternia in the Condesce’s stead.

A long while ago now, those voices went silent. You detected it almost as soon as she did, and now she is rushing home. She fears the worst, while you hope for it. There is only one reason for the voices to go silent. It means that a new heir to the throne has quieted them; destroyed the source of the power behind the hemocaste.

You want to drive faster, but to do so would mean your death. You need to hold on for longer, long enough to see the Condesce break.

And when you reach Alternia, you are richly rewarded. Gl’bgolyb is a colossus, so large that it’s body, floating dead on the ocean’s surface, is visible from space. The trolls standing at the bridge fall silent as they see it. They can’t sense the voices like you can, like she can, and they did not understand why you were returning. Now they do, and you can see those by the doors slipping out. A purple blood near the Condesce begins to distance himself from her, but she grabs him before he can go far.

“Somebody better be calling the Legislacerators. We need to dive to the bottom of this now, before whoever did the job is gone.” Her Imperious Condescension hisses as she squeezes the purple-blood’s head into a mess of blood and brains. His body slumps to the ground, as those unable to escape the room in time turn back to their computers before she can round on them next. A trembling rust blood rushes to her side and starts cleaning the mess.

“The culprit must have run for it.” A nearby troll mentions, one of the few Legislacerators that works under the Condesce directly. “If they were aiming to overthrow you, they’d need Gl’bgolyb. Contacting the legislacerator office on Alternia and scrambling the drones.”

“Good. Now you!” She turns to you angrily, “Land the ship. Now. And clam up before I do somefin to make you clam up.”

It’s at that point you realize that you’ve been laughing. A rough, raspy chuckle is shaking your whole body, burning your throat as your vocal chords are suddenly being used for the first time in ages. The revelation makes you laugh louder and harder, and you feel blood oozing from your lips as your chest burns from the strain. The Condesce screams in frustration, not wishing to kill her best pilot, and she drives her double culling fork through the chest of a nearby troll, a hapless seadweller who now leaks fuchsia and lets out a rattling gasp as she sits pinned in her seat.

Meanwhile, your laughter continues to grow, as the Condesce stalks out of the room angrily. The other trolls look towards you uneasily, but you pay them no mind. Nobody dares touch the Condesce’s pet. You can’t say anything due to the years of disuse your jaw and lungs have seen, but your thoughts are made clear. This is the beginning of the end. One way or another, Alternia will never be the same after this.

Chapter End Notes

Most of this feels pretty self-explanatory here, so I'll take this opportunity to talk about
Nepeta, and the way she tends to be treated in fanfiction. It's no great secret that Nepeta is more than anyone else, the emotional anchor of the trolls. She's the most empathetic, the most expressive, and is generally positive. And that's likely why people like to kill her off. She's one of the easiest trolls to connect to, in stark contrast to her moirail, who is arguably the most alien. This means that when bad things happen to Nepeta, everyone feels it. She's bubbly and cute, so we're sad when she dies. Even in Homestuck, John gets bummed out just looking at Nepeta's corpse, despite never knowing the girl. Killing Nepeta is clearly an effective tactic. Which is why I pulled the fakeout before. It's also why I determined she damn well was going to live to the end of this fic.

I've mentioned this to some of my commenters before; Nepeta is my patron troll. I think she's precious as fuck, and tend to get far more invested in shipping than any twenty-two year old male probably should. I also share a love of anime and Equius is my favorite character. Basically, we see eye to eye on things. And this means I get rather upset whenever I see her die in fanfiction, which is... often, to say the least. Basically, Nepeta didn't die to multiple stab wounds, because I don't want to be that guy.

Another short note on Jane's powers: I'm aware that she's supposed to be able to bring people back from the dead. I just decided to cut back on her powers, limiting it to healing. Why? Because I don't want to write two death sequences for every fucking character I don't want alive at the end of the story. So there.

Gold Pilot is my favorite homestuck song. If you don't have colors and mayhem, buy it, it kicks ass. Armadillo out.
Eyes Open Fully

Chapter Summary

Rose has a troubling vision, Equius makes a new friend, and John and Karkat talk about girls.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Your name is Dirk Strider, and you are going to snap if your group continues at this pace. Seriously, if things continue you are going to start yelling or something and completely lose the grip you have on everything. Well, what little grip you have left after accidentally getting Mrs. Lalonde…

You know what, you may be a stoic motherfucker, but you’re still nowhere near ready to think about that. The constant stops on this damned road trip are calming in comparison.

You should be at the Egbert’s house already, but between an insistence on stopping for meals and bathroom breaks, and the fact that the car you rented has the fuel efficiency of a goddamn bonfire, what should have been roughly two days of driving seems destined to stretch into as much as a week. Plus, the condition of Aradia remains shaky enough that you need to make extra stops so that she can get some extra rest and fresh air.

Meanwhile, Rose continues to flirt with Kanaya in the backseat, and Roxy has begun regular communications with some asshole who claims to be John’s friend (you suspect he’s just a hacker). All in all, you seem to be the only one who fully grasps just how desperate your situation is.

“Well of course we realize how bad things are, but wallowin’ isn’t doing any good to anyone, Dirk!” Roxy snapped at you the one time you mentioned this to her, and you haven’t brought it up since, but you remain wholly unconvinced.

“Dirk…” Aradia’s voice calls forward weakly, and you groan audibly as you pull the vehicle over so that she can throw up again. Kanaya escorts her to the side of the highway as you and the Lalondes sit and wait. Rose busies herself with a book as Roxy continues texting.

“Oh hey, it looks like the Harleys and Jake are there now!” Roxy exclaims as she keeps clicking away on her phone.

You can’t help the flinch as you hear Jake’s name and the news sinks in. You had forgotten that Jake’s family was heading for the same place you are. You had been making all sorts of plans to deal with the English situation before shit hit the fan and you found yourself in New York. Unfortunately things have gone so completely fucked up that you have no idea how to plan for this.

You notice the soft sound of a book closing, and you risk a glance at the rear view mirror. Rose is waiting, instantly drawing you into eye contact with a sly grin, before you successfully divert your gaze forward. “Cool, it’ll be one big party.” You force your voice to sound as casual as possible as you do everything you can to not look back at the mirror, where Rose’s crafty eyes bore into you like dental drills to the head. She sees through you so easily, always has, and goddamn, you just can’t deal right now.
Then her gaze is gone, and you feel a strange sensation from the back seat. You glance uneasily, and see her eyes glowing a pale white. She comes to her senses and frowns. “I sensed something.”

“I thought you didn’t believe in your premonitions.” You say irritably, prompting her to quirk an eyebrow. It’s the next stage in the Lalonde game, acting as though she doesn’t know that she’s bothering you, so that she can upset you further.

“No Dirk, I said that I don’t like premonitions.” Rose abandons her game and looks down thoughtfully. “Seeing the future does not mean changing it, and so vague hints to what may be coming serves only to make one feel worse about whatever you’ve been warned of. My visions are, however, entirely accurate.” She looks up at you calmly.

“Swell.” You sit back and rub your temples as Roxy looks back curiously. “I know I’m going to regret asking, but what exactly is this premonition?”

“A song of death comes to unleash horrors upon our party.” Rose purses her lips as she recites. “Very foreboding and vague, but completely lacking in imagination. Not to mention lacking even a hint of prose. All in all, one of the more disappointing predictions I’ve made.”

“What about the one about you falling out of the tree?” Roxy asks, prompting you to quirk an eyebrow and Rose to sigh.

“The prediction was interesting, but the result was such a letdown.” Roxy grins and turns back to her texting. You get the feeling this is something she’s bothered Rose about for years.

“You seem awfully casual about this whole thing, Roxy.” You remark, as you look out towards the trolls, still hunched over in the ditch. “This doom and gloom doesn’t worry you?”

“Nah, can’t do anything about it, so why worry?” She keeps texting. “Somebody in this group has to keep their head on straight.”

“I resent the implication that I am not entirely calm.” Rose says with a sigh.

“You’re just like Dirk, Rosie, you’re both trying so hard to be calm that you’re stressing yourselves out more.” Roxy waves dismissively. You sigh, knowing she’s seen through you completely.

“Can’t let a blade go dull.” You shrug your shoulders. “I’ll let loose when our alien problem is dealt with, and the government isn’t trying to kill us. Until then, I’ll keep my belt fastened so I don’t get caught with my pants down.” Roxy and Rose lean in and start waggling their eyebrows like mad at that, prompting you to nod your head. “Yeah, you’re damn right, that was exactly what it sounded like.”

Roxy bursts into laughter at that, and Rose even manages a chuckle, as the trolls return to your vehicle and glance at each other in confusion. You wait until everybody is buckled up again, and pull back onto the highway, as the others continue chatting, their mood now far lighter than before.

You on the other hand, keep your ears peeled for music.

Your name is Equius Zahhak, and things have finally gone quiet. You’ve been hiding underground for several days now, praying that the FELT members digging through the rubble wouldn’t find your hiding place. Meanwhile, your body is still in enough pain to be near crippling.

The fire burned you deeply, and while you haven’t seen your face since then, placing your remaining
hand over the injury has told you all you need to. Your face is scorched, half of it twisted like wax. Your shoulder is in worse condition, still recovering from the immense trauma of having your arm ripped off.

Trolls are no strangers to injury, especially those in the higher hemocastes. Your body is meant to recover from severe injuries with little issue, due to your thick blood, which clots faster and runs at a lower temperature. It is said that unless damage is done to a blueblood’s internal organs, they will never succumb to bleeding. The temperature also helps with burning. Were it not for this, you would certainly be dead already.

As it stands, your body is warped, much like your face. The fire that Rue Lalonde used to execute invading parties used strange chemicals, which have left patterns reminiscent of spider webs across your body. Your right shoulder has been a swollen mass of dead flesh for a while, and there are a few spots where boils still remain, though great deals of them have receded. You lack the resources to clean the wounds though, your only resource being a few water bottles you found on the way to your hiding spot.

You’d like to clean your wounds, but blue blood or not, being burned alive makes a troll incredibly thirsty. You had to drink the water or risk damage to organs through dehydration. Your immune system is strong, strong enough to fight off the infections caused by the burns. But it will take far too much time. By the time you recover, your friends and loved ones will have been executed by Gamzee.

You have no choice but to travel in this damaged condition. The idea of walking long distances like this fills you with revulsion, but you have no other choice. Aradia is a powerful psychic, but highbloods have ways to resist such powers. If they did not the hemospectrum would be meaningless.

You’ve drained the last of the water in preparation for this. The entirety of the Lalonde estate has been burned to the ground. Your hiding place has no exit anymore. Both the laboratory and the mausoleum are annihilated, and there are no other exits to the emergency tunnel.

The tunnel was the only place you could think to hide. It is not on any blueprints of the property, and was likely dug out by Rue Lalonde herself. It would have remained unknown, were it not for Rose’s disappearance the other day. You learned of the tunnel at that time, and managed to make it there through the basement of the laboratory as it collapsed around you. It is fortunate that the arm remaining to you was not the one that Gamzee broke, or else you may not have made it here.

Now, using the strength you have built up over the time spent underground, you strike a solid blow against the ceiling of the tunnel, shattering the concrete roof. Dust and soil comes raining down on your head, as your next punch weakens the earth above you further. The tunnel around you fills with dirt, and you wince as it irritates the flesh around your shoulder. As the dirt pours down further, you crouch and jump. The jump is enough to carry you out of the ground, and you feel yourself spin in the air as you clear the soil and ash.

“Fiddlesticks!” You have enough time to roar as you hit the ground on your back. You feel a few of your blisters rupture on impact, and a slew of inexcusably lewd words slip from your mouth beneath your breath. You find yourself extremely thankful that Nepeta is not here to see. Reprobates such as Karkat prove poor enough influence.

“Shit dude, mole people have the same curse words as we do? Maybe there really is hope for us. Maybe our species really can coexist.” You freeze as a voice calls out in a deadpan. “I guess all we needed to do is give love a chance…” That voice sounds familiar.
“Dirk Strider, why are you not protecting Aradia?” You sit up irritably, wincing as your shoulder throbs painfully. You glance over towards the man, pausing when you notice that it is not in fact Dirk, though he is clearly similar. “You are not Dirk.”

“Uhh, no man, Dirk’s my bro. We’re twinsies.” the man says distractedly, staring at your body in clear shock. “Name’s Dave. You know, I’m not sure if anybody’s told you this, but you’ve got a little something on your… everything.” He waves his hands indicating your right side.

“Yes, I apologize for my disturbing appearance.” you sigh as you stand shakily. “I have recently been maimed and set on fire.”

Dave frowns at this, though his posture relaxes. “Oh, well shit, say no more. That’s gotta be the top of the list as far as extenuating circumstances go. I’m assuming you’re Equius?”

“Yes. Dirk informed you of me, then?”

“Nah, Dirk never thinks to give information unless you specifically ask him for it. Roxy told me once the red tape lifted on all things troll. But yeah, you’re big and sweaty looking, so I figured you were the guy.”

“I am not sweating. Most of my sweat glands have been burned to the point of uselessness.” It’s the one good thing that came of this.

“Well that’s beautifully ironic.” Dave nods his head sagely. He looks up at you blankly. “So uhh, I’m hoping nobody else got set on fire whenever the fuck this happened.”

“Not to my knowledge. I endured this so that the others could escape from the carnage.”

“Cool, cool. And what the fuck did happen here?”

“A homicidal clown troll who used to be a friend and genetic superior to most of our party led a small army of FELT members to the Lalonde estate, but not before a series of flame traps razed the property to the ground.” you state as concisely as possible, hoping to move on soon.

“Well damned if that’s not about two percent of the story.” Dave nods again, and gestures to a car behind him. “It’s also not much more than Roxy told me on the phone, nobody thought to tell me what the fuck was going on until shortly before I got here. I figured, what the fuck, I drove for like three days to get here, might as well dig for treasure or something. Plus, all Roxy told me is that the house burned down and they’re going to John’s house, so I knew basically nothing about what happened.”

“Given the circumstances, I can only assume that they’re preoccupied.” You frown, “Though that was extremely rude of them.”

“Hell yeah it was, when we catch up with them I’m going to have to be all kinds of strict with them.” Dave smirks and carries on. “Tell them off, make them sit in the corner, probably administer spankings as needed.”

“Oh dear.” You choke as your breath catches in your throat. “That is extremely lewd.”

“Also exciting, huh.” Dave makes a disturbed face as he glances down. “You know, I’m not going to judge a guy for popping a giant alien boner, but I think we should probably get you something to cover up. Shit’s distracting.”

What.
“WHAT?” You freeze and look down. Oh dear. Oh fiddlesticks, o drat, oh dear. “Oh fuck. Oh damnit all, my fucking pants lit on fire three days ago.”

“Yeah, thought you knew.” Dave rubs the back of his neck awkwardly. “I wasn’t going to make it awkward or anything, since you’ve clearly had the shittiest week possible, even by the standards held to our group of refugee misfit assholes, but when you start popping giant alien boners, a dude needs to say something.”

“I just… I… fuck, FUCK, I need a towel, or a blanket, or… or…”

“Pants?”

“YES, PLEASE GET ME SOME FUCKING PANTS.”

It takes several minutes for Dave to dig up clothing that fits your immense size, but in the end he finds a pair of pants with an elastic waist, which stretches to fit you, as well as a baggy hoodie. You decide to forgo the latter until your burns heal though. In the end though, the important thing is that you are decent enough now, and that you will make Dave swear never to speak of this again.

“Youman, I won’t tell anyone, troll or otherwise.” Dave raises his hands in a placating gesture as you attempt to regain control of your nerves. “Like I said, normally I’d be weaponizing this sort of ridiculous bullshit, but I get that you’ve had a shitty week. Even a Strider knows when to drop it. Besides, it’s not as funny as it sounds. Not like you forgot your pants. This shit is pretty damn heroic, really. I tell people this and I’ll look like an asshole.”

You can only stare as he starts rambling further. “I mean really, it’s one thing if I tell somebody that you just walked outside naked one day because you forgot clothes were a thing, but this? ‘Hey mister president, check this asshole out.’ ‘Why is he naked, Dave?’ ‘Dude burned his pants the fuck off stopping a homicidal clown from murdering my brother.’ ‘Well shit Dave, let me just get the biggest medal we have here, this man’s shlong needs to be given our highest honor!’ Then I look like an ass because the guy I just tried to shame has a jockstrap made of pure American freedom. There’s no situation in which I win here dude, I’d have to move to Canada or something!”

Dave trails off as he looks at you, “man, did you kill this clown by any chance?”

“The clown is alive. He’s also attempting to hunt down the Lalondes, my fellow trolls, and your brother.” You try to keep your impatience out of your voice, mindful of your manners now that you’ve regained your composure once more. “Were you not in possession of a vehicle I would have left you to pursue them already. However, I am very tired, and very sore, and am entirely fed up with running.”

“Got it.” Dave nods and gestures to his car. “Not sure if you’ll fit into this tiny piece of shit properly, but whatever, we’ll make it work.”

“Excellent.” you follow Dave to his vehicle, remembering something important as you go. “Ah yes, if memory serves Terezi was in your company?”

Dave pauses for an instant before moving on. “Nah, she left to chase after Spider-bitch.”

“Ah yes, of course. Terezi has always had an admirable devotion towards the laws and practices of society.”

Dave laughs mirthlessly at this. “Yeah, devotion. Hell of a word for it.”

You squeeze yourself into Dave’s vehicle, as you think on this. “It is not appropriate?”
“She’s not devoted, she’s obsessed.” Dave gets a dangerous look in his eye as he sits behind the wheel. “I don’t know where she is now or what she’s doing, but at this point, I doubt it’s anything good.”

He starts the car and drives off in grim silence, leaving you to wonder what exactly Dave could mean by this.

Your name is John Egbert, and things are getting crowded. You’ve been moved back into your bedroom with the arrival of the Harley’s, Jade’s grandpa now taking the couch you’ve been sleeping on since Karkat arrived. Now you’re sharing your room with Karkat, Sollux, Eridan, and Jake, and because Karkat won’t let anyone move Nepeta to the room that the girls are staying in, all four of you are sleeping on the floor. Well, Karkat sleeps in the chair he’s set up next to Nepeta’s bed, but the rest of you are still very cramped.

Sollux mutters and sends out sparks in his sleep, which is very unnerving, and Jake tosses and turns, which is very annoying. As a result of this, you’ve started keeping vigil with Karkat, since he doesn’t seem to sleep ever these days. It’s not very healthy in your opinion, but since you can’t sleep either now you figure you probably shouldn’t judge.

“She’s looking better now.” You remark to Karkat, as the two of you spend the night sitting by your bed and watching over the troll. She really does look well now, definitely looking more like she’s asleep than dead. The time when she looked dead was terrifying for everyone, even with Jane’s healing powers.

Jane’s been giving treatments every few days with her life powers to help Nepeta recover faster, and now that the other trolls are here they try to help as well. Feferi helps Jane however she can, and brings Karkat his meals, much to his irritation. Sollux comes in now and again to chat with Karkat, or you if you’re there, and despite being completely bipolar and having a weird lisp you think he makes for good conversation. Eridan doesn’t help with Nepeta much, but he makes a point of patrolling around the house and ‘shoring up the defenses’ of your home.

They’ve been through a lot, so it makes you happy to see them trying to support each other after everything. You think of the trolls down in Houston that were appearing on the news before they cordoned off the city, and you know that they could benefit from this attitude.

“Yeah, she’s looking good.” Karkat smiles fondly as he watches Nepeta, “She’ll probably wake up soon.”

“Are you going to ask her out then, or will you wait for a while first?” You ask with a grin, prodding Karkat with your elbow as he scowls at you. “Come on Karkat, it’s totally obvious you’ve got a thing for her!”

“He’s not wrong.” Sollux chimes in sleepily from his spot curled up on the floor. “You’re putty in her claws and she hasn’t even woken up yet.”

“Shut up and go to sleep Sollux.” Karkat grumbles irritably, rolling his eyes as Sollux throws up two middle fingers and promptly nods off again. “He’s an asshole even when he’s sleeping.”

“I guess you could say he’s pulling double duty.”

“Oh fuck off, John.” Karkat growls. “And don’t go pestering me about Nepeta, you still have to talk to Roxy about your feelings for her.”
“Karkat, it’s not that simple!” You step back defensively. “It’s a complicated situation!”

“Yeah, yeah, I know, you used to date her sister.” Karkat rolls his eyes and glares at you. “Big fucking deal. I know you humans have a lot more restrictions on relationships than trolls do, but I also know that’s not one of them.”

“No, but, see…” You try to voice your uneasiness about it all once again, and find that for once the words are coming to you. “I dated Rose for a really long time, right, so if I date Roxy now after I broke up with Rose, then it’s like I just… traded one Lalonde in for another! I’d be insulting both of them, because I’m replacing Rose with her older sister, and treating Roxy like a fallback girl for her younger sister!” You’re not entirely sure what you just said.

Karkat can tell. He’s looking at you like you’re the biggest idiot ever. “John, sometimes you are just the biggest idiot ever.” He says irritably. “Have you been talking to Jake again?”

“Well he’s the only guy I can talk to about this stuff who’s my species right now…” you quail as Karkat’s face goes from annoyed to pissed off.

“God damnit John, do you think I only watch romantic comedies because they are timeless classic pieces of cinematic art?”

“Uhh…” you’re pretty sure he watches them because he has questionable taste in movies (and coming from you that’s saying something). You decide not to voice this opinion though. “Yes?”

“No! I watch them because the information they present on quadrants and human dating is invaluable to my status as an expert on romance! I have done nothing since arriving at your house but dodge traps and watch your human rom-coms, so that I could ensure my knowledge on all things romantic was absolute. And you go to Jake. Jake doesn’t have enough mental capacity to recognize flirting when Eridan does it!”

“Karkat, I-”

“Nope, shut up, still talking here. You’ve been tiptoeing around Roxy for ages now. I’m pretty sure I talk to her more at this point than you do, and I don’t even have a chat client of my own. That’s completely pathetic. What are you going to do when she gets here? She’s lost her goddamn house and has nobody to turn to except for you guys. And you can’t even work up the guts to talk to her! That’s pathetic!”

You know he’s right, but damned if that doesn’t sting a little nonetheless. “I’m just trying to be respectful here, Karkat.”

“That’s Jake talking again. I don’t care if he’s three years older than you, he’s not a viable source of romantic advice, John.” Karkat throws his hands in the air. “Now, the next time Roxy messages you, I’m not answering for you. I’ve indulged your bullshit for too long, and I admit that’s partially because I find her funny and charming, but exploiting her for her pleasantness is your job now, not mine.”

“I’m not exploiting her!” You protest that because it’s the only thing you can reasonably object to.

“What the fuck ever, just go bask in the warmth and affection of your flushcrush, you goober!” Karkat cries angrily.

“Yeah, you tell him Karkat!” Jade calls over from the next room. “You tell him tomorrow, when people aren’t trying to sleep!”
“Fuck you Jade, this is an intervention, and I’m not derailing it because you’re a light sleeper!”

“Honestly Karkat, you’ve woken up every glubbin’ person in the house already.” Eridan mutters from the corner.

“Blame John for being a stubborn dumbass!” Karkat gestures at you angrily.

“Just take the advice and go to bed John!” Jane calls over. You want nothing more than to fly out the window and disappear right now.

“John, I will always be proud of you no matter what you do.” You look over in alarm as your father sticks his head in the door. “But if you do anything to break Roxy’s heart, I won’t let you skip baking days any more.” Oh god, only your family would think to feasibly threaten you with cake.

“Ha, your dad says date her, you’ve got no choice now!” Karkat grins over at you smugly.

“Indeed. Now please refrain from such outbursts at this time of night in the future Karkat, everyone needs their sleep.” your dad’s smile is crooked, a sign that he’s not as indifferent to this as he may seem, and Karkat visually deflates when he notices this.

“Yes sir.”

Your dad vanishes as suddenly as he came, leaving you to grumble about everyone sticking their noses into your personal life, as Karkat tries to settle down. A light rustling snaps you out of your mood though, as Karkat suddenly straightens in his seat.

“Was that…” you glance over at Karkat, but he’s staring transfixed down. You follow his gaze and see Nepeta’s hand, twitching against the sheets. “Oh man, is she?”

“…I…” Karkat’s voice trembles as he stares intently. “I think… I think she is. Oh holy fuck I think she’s actually…”

Suddenly a flash of light catches your attention, and you glance towards Nepeta’s face to see the light from outside the window glinting off of her eyes.

“Where am I” Nepeta mutters groggily. “My arm itches.”

Karkat lets out a choked sob and grabs Nepeta’s hand. “Oh man, Nepeta, you’re, you’re…”

Nepeta’s eyes open fully and she stares at her hand. Her eyes seem to trace Karkat’s arms up to his face. “Karkitty, is that you?”

You feel yourself tearing up in spite of yourself, and you place a hand on Karkat’s shoulder as he shudders, torn between laughing and crying. “Yeah Nepeta, it’s… it’s me.”

Nepeta smiles as she gives Karkat’s hand a light squeeze. “I knew I’d find you.” She whispers to herself, prompting Karkat to start weeping happily.

You grin as the others start to sit up, realizing what’s happening. You start laughing, and the air seems to dance around you as it feeds off of your energy. “She’s back.” You say to yourself, and the wind responds by blasting around you, throwing doors open throughout the house as you start yelling happily. “SHE’S AWAKE!”

You fly out of the house with a peal of laughter, as your father rushes after you. You feel so elated that Karkat’s friend is no longer in a coma that you hardly pay attention to him. You just start
flipping and dancing around in the air as the breeze tugs at your hair and clothing. It takes your father
calling Sollux out to drag you back inside, by which point Karkat has finally fallen asleep at
Nepeta’s side. Nepeta is asleep again as well, still lacking energy, but otherwise okay now. You fall
asleep to the sight of her curled around Karkat’s sleeping form.

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Rose’s opinion on prophecy is paraphrased from Digger of Convoluted Tunnels the
wombat, from the webcomic Digger by Ursula Vernon. It seemed appropriate for Rose,
given her general attitude of practicality, even towards magic. I recommend everyone
reads Digger, btw. It's pretty much a masterpiece.

I always get a kick out of the idea of Equius swearing. It happens maybe once in the
comic, but when it does it's completely hilarious. The scene with Equius was one that
just popped into my head and became entirely essential in my mind. I know Dave was
always creeped out by Equius’ quirks... in the comic, but considering the characters
are all in their twenties (in years, not sweeps), I figured Dave would be mature enough
by now to handle it.

The concept of quadrants is something that's always irritated me from a fandom
perspective. Mostly redrom, mind you, as the others are more or less agreed upon.
Moirallegiance is about emotional fulfillment and promoting self control. Auspisticism is
about keeping the peace between fellow trolls. Kismesissitude is about rivalry and
sexual tension arising from conflict, and is considered entirely unhealthy by human
standards. But then there's the last one.

Matespritship is pretty simple. It's what humans feel, though humans also try to squeeze
the emotional fulfillment aspect out of things as well, and fuck things up when they
don't manage to get all in one in a person. I'm getting off topic here. Basically, redrom is
about love. Pretty fucking simple, except that half of the fanbase thinks it's about pity.
Why? Because Karkat said so. But regardless of what Karkat thinks of himself in
Homestuck, he is too fucking insecure to know what romance is. I don't see why it's so
complicated for people, since in Hussie's first rundown on quadrants Matespritship is
represented by dad Egbert and mom Lalonde. Clearly if that's the first example of
redrom Hussie goes to then it's not something abstract by human standards. It has to be
something humans find accessible. But nope, Karkat says it's pity so fans everywhere go
along with it because they need everything about trolls to be strange and new.

What they don't realize is that Karkat is fucked up in the head. His most viable blackrom
partner in Homestuck his his future/past self for fucks sake! As I have pointed out
before, as a mutant blood, Karkat grew up knowing that the instant he pailed with
somebody the drones would likely kill him. You can't keep your genetics hidden as a
troll, it's just not possible. This is why Karkat latches on to his romantic comedies. He
wants what he feels he can't have. That's why when he forms a relationship with Terezi
in the comic he gets so clingy. He wants Terezi all to himself, because she's one
romantic partner more than he ever thought he'd get, and he holds that on a pedestal in
his mind. It's also why he feels pity is the basis of Matespritship rather than love. He
considers himself pitiable, and probably doesn't fully understand what love really means.
He attributes his movies to himself, but can't interpret such positive emotions to himself.
Love? Nobody would love Karkat in his mind. But pity, that's believable. Therefore,
pity is what constitutes romance in his mind.

Nepeta's feeling for Karkat aren't really up for debate though. She loves him and she makes it clear. Karkat doesn't understand that, and it scares him. He thinks he's loathsome, and finds romance instead with Terezi, who accompanies her affections with jabs and antagonism. Karkat and Terezi were basically doomed from the start in Homestuck, because he has no real concept of how love works, and Terezi is... difficult to interpret. The same could be said for a relationship with any troll though. In the end, Karkat's ability to love others is dependant on his ability to love himself. He needs to grow up before relationships are an option for him, which is the route I'm trying to portray here. It's also likely the eventual destination for Karkat in Homestuck as well.
This World is Wrong

Chapter Summary

Vriska meets a friend. Gamzee strikes again.

Chapter Notes

Sorry it’s been so long. Real life sucks ass right now, but thankfully I got a little minivacation to finish this chapter up.

I guess I should throw out a quick note for Monty Oum. The guy was a wizard, and it's pretty damn sad that he died. If this seems unnecessary or out of place, I should point out that the music from RWBY is what I listen to when I write action scenes, so this is actually kinda relevant!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your name is Vriska Serket, and you are completely alone. It’s been a while since you felt like this, before you left Alternia, certainly. You got pretty involved when Karkat started the plan to become fugitives from the biggest empire in the universe, and after you left you spent a lot of time with Terezi, which may or may not have involved some pale feelings you had for her. Pale feelings you clearly should have followed up on, because as soon as you left to start your plan to distract the FELT Terezi went crazy and tried to kill you.

Oh well, she didn’t stick her sword in your back just yet, so maybe there’s still hope for that relationship. She just needs to understand that you’re acting in her best interest.

Yeah, so you’re not all that broken up by what happened down in Houston. Things got a bit crazier than you expected, but really that was the plan from the beginning. And thanks to your awesome wings you were able to escape the city pretty easily. Nobody expected you to fly out, so you got past the blockades and stuff that the humans set up without even trying. It’s too bad those wings are gone now, they were pretty useful.

Terezi can’t fly, but she’s got Dave with her, so you’re sure she’ll be fine. Plus, there’s no reason she’d have to leave. The FELT dealt a lot of damage, but Houston was still mostly standing when you left. You only knocked down eight buildings tops! If you’d done more than that you’d still be fuming about it.

Either way, you’re out, Terezi is almost definitely safe, and you’re well north of where you started. Which means it’s time to start again! You slacked a bit too much in between cities, here. If you want your plan to be effective, you need to cause damage in as many different places as quickly as possible. The FELT was a pretty big organization, so if you keep them guessing where you’re going to hit, they’ll spread themselves thinner and thinner as they attempt to find where you’ve gone and where you’ll attack next. Then, once they’ve run themselves ragged, you’ll hit them at home, and crush their home base! The whole place will collapse without their main base and their asshole leader.
You’ve decided that this city will be your next target. You’re honestly not sure what it’s called, something with M, probably. All you know is that it’s big. Really, that’s all that matters.

You start by using your telepathy to scope the place out. You need to find a place that sees a lot of traffic to begin, so that the word spreads as quickly as possible. Then you’ll… you’ll… what the fuck.

You’ve sensed something unusual. Unusual as in: definitely not a human. Unusual as in: that’s Tavros, and his thought waves are coming in from about the same height as you. You’re standing on a skyscraper right now.

‘Get over here, you dweeb.’ you send a command into his head, and watch as you see him fly towards you, looking dazed (which makes sense since you just hypnotized him, but it still irritates you).

Tavros looks ridiculous, honestly. His hair has grown way out, covering his ears, though his mohawk persists, and has grown halfway down his back. His clothes are a bit tattered, though he’s clearly kept himself clean, because his symbol looks the same, and his metal legs are shining. His face has hardly changed at all. All in all, he looks like a scruffy, tall, dork. Honestly you kinda like it.

He lands in front of you with a flutter of his brown, translucent wings, and suddenly snaps out of his trance. He looks around in confusion, and then looks at you in surprise. “Vriska! Oh wow, I wasn’t expecting to run into you here!”

You smile in spite of yourself. “That makes two of us, Tavros. Weren’t you supposed to be locked up in Scratch’s dungeon?”

“Oh yes, that was definitely a thing that was happening, but then they moved me, and I grew these wings. Which was when I decided to use a giant antler creature to escape.”

You hate to admit it, but you’re pretty damn impressed. Tavros somehow managed to escape from the authorities using his shitty powers without even having access to any of the crazy lusus that he used to play with on Alternia. This leaves only one key piece in Scratch’s pocket. “So what about Gamzee?”

“I think they still have Gamzee, probably.” Tavros says sadly. “They were torturing him a whole lot, and he didn’t say anything, but I think it might have messed him up, like those pies did, only really a whole lot worse.”

“So you’re going to save him then.” You already know the answer to this, but a plan is brewing in your head.

Tavros is, predictably, taken aback. “Vriska, that is something that I would uhh, definitely like to do, but… it also sounds like something that is definitely, probably… impossible.” Oh god, he’s stammering again, you knew it was too good to be true.

“Alright Tavros, stop talking before I lose respect for you again.” You sigh as you look down and stop your tapping foot. If you want to control others you need to control yourself. “Okay, I’ve already started on a plan to stop the FELT here, so you just do as I say and we can save Gamzee, along with everyone else.”

“Everyone?” Tavros looks very doubtful.

“Everyone who isn’t dead already.” You look back down. “We’re going to trash some cities, break some heads, and get the FELT nice and excited. And that’s when we go for the heart.”
“Are you sure we want to do that?”

“You want to save Gamzee, don’t you?”

“I do, but…”

“You bastard.” You slap him. You can’t let him start thinking like Terezi, and as long as you can shame him into thinking your way, you won’t have to deal with another mutiny. “Every hit he took was one you didn’t have to suffer through, so the way I see it, you owe him.” Probably true, though you can’t say that’s really why you’re acting the way you are.

“I’ve suffered plenty.” Tavros spits irritably, and you pause in spite of yourself. He’s eyeing his legs bitterly. Fair enough, though you never imagined he’d be so bitter about everything that’s happened. Too bad for him you need him to make your plan easier.

“We’ve all suffered, jackass.” You wave your metal arm in front of him dismissively. “And you’ve hardly been worse off than anybody else. Kanaya and Aradia are dead, or did you forget? It could just have easily been you. Gamzee is proof of that.”

“I don’t want to give them the chance.” Tavros mutters. “I just want to be free from all this.”

“So help me. We won’t be free of this until the FELT is dealt with, and you know it.” You sigh and look back down on the city. “Now, are you in or not?”

Tavros waits for several long minutes to answer, and you’re almost ready to dismiss him. But just as you’re getting sick of waiting he mumbles a quiet “I’m in.”

“Good.” You smile to yourself. “Now let’s get going. We’ve got a lot of attention to draw before we can coax the FELT out of their little holes.”

Your name is Rose Lalonde, and you having a bad day. Ever since your (bland, cliché, painfully vague) prediction, you’ve been bracing yourself for trouble, but as always the biggest problem with prophecy is the complete inability to know what will happen given the little information you’ve received. Roxy was probably right about how futile it is to worry about these things, but you don’t want to give up.

When your only powers are this useless, it becomes a point of pride to attempt to make use of them. You’ve compared your abilities with those of your friends, and the difference in scale is downright infuriating. John can fly, summon hurricanes, and sense the slightest changes in air pressure. Roxy can turn invisible, and recently mastered walking through walls. Jade is always talking about teleportation and this one time she shrunk Jake’s movie collection just enough so that he couldn’t play his DVDs. And Dave may only be able to freeze time for two seconds or so at once, but he also has years of combat training and that flashstep power Striders are taught at birth, which is essentially a superpower by itself.

You see pointlessly vague premonitions of the future. You’ve tried learning martial arts like your mother taught Roxy, but you don’t have the talent for it like Roxy does, and if you can’t excel at something, you need to just pretend you don’t care about it. Then when you find yourself unable to perform up to standards you just let all the frustration out at once and move on with your life. It is the Rose Lalonde way.

“Rose, you are grimacing, is everything alright?” Kanaya’s voice startles you from your reverie. You’ve been finding it increasingly difficult to keep a lid on your emotions while stuck in confined
quarters with your group for so long. Kanaya is hardly perceptive, so if she’s asking that means that
your ability to not keep your shit together is at an all time low. Roxy is scrutinizing you from the
front seat as well, but she’s been able to figure you out since you emerged from your mother’s DNA
splicer, so that’s not surprising.

“I am fine, just growing weary. I do not wish to impose more stops upon our good driver.” You sigh
and sit back in your seat. “I think the best thing for my mood is to arrive at our destination as soon as
possible.” Dirk grunts an assent, and Roxy shrugs and faces forward. Kanaya returns to her sewing,
hands deft despite the rumbling of the car, but she continues to eye you uneasily.

The silence caused by Kanaya’s sudden attention to detail lasts for twelve minutes during which you
feel as though a stifling pressure has draped over you like a blanket. The attention of almost
everybody in the car has been directed to you, whereas before it was Aradia drawing more worry.

You’re almost thankful when Aradia speaks up, having been staring out the tinted windows of your
rental this whole time. “That’s a lovely song.”

You start at this. Aradia has strange tastes in everything, so when she states something is lovely, it’s
certain to be interesting. But songs are somewhat of a touchy subject at the moment. You strain your
ears to listen to it, noting that Dirk, possibly subconsciously, is accelerating.

The song starts to ring in your ears after another five minutes. A slow, lilting, and haunting tune,
ingring through the air, it takes a moment for you to recognize the piece.

“I wasn’t aware ice cream trucks could play Danse Macabre.” You voice your thought curiously.
There’s a beat, and then Dirk, Roxy, and yourself curse almost simultaneously.

“What is the matter?” Kanaya looks around in alarm, before Aradia’s soft voice seems to cut above
the noise.

“It’s Gamzee.”

Your name is Kanaya Maryam, and you are not prepared for action right now. The confines of the
vehicle have long been stifling to you, but now in particular, with a deranged form of your former
friend chasing you in a confectionary serving vehicle, you cannot afford to be sitting trapped in the
back seat of a minivan. Your chainsaw sits securely in your pocket, but using it with Aradia and
Rose on either side of you would be certain to result in an accident.

You’re trying to debate what would be best to do when the cold feeling of dread you experienced at
the Lalonde estate creeps back down your spine. Equius had called them Chucklevoodooos, as you
recall. You find yourself desperately wishing Equius were here now.

The music from the strange truck following you seems to reverberate through the air, blaring in your
ears over the roar of the engine. Aradia is humming along to it in spite of herself, her face a picture of
worry in spite of her lilting tones. She looks over at you and frowns, “I won’t be able to do anything
here. I’m still regaining proper control over my telekinesis, a moving vehicle is beyond me.”

“Of course.” You try to keep your voice even despite your frustration. It is hardly Aradia’s fault she
was recently reborn after being disintegrated. You’d be lying though if you said you weren’t
immensely hopeful that her powers would be of some help.

You lack any sort of ability to be of proper use to your friends in times such as these. You don’t have
the mental abilities of Tavros, Aradia, or Sollux. You also lack the physical prowess of Nepeta or
Equius. And in terms of mental strength, Karkat or Terezi are far beyond you. You’re just a regular troll with a chainsaw and good fashion sense. The most unusual thing you’ve ever done is glow in the dark.

That’s not entirely true though. You hardly remember how it happened, but the time you spent racing across the countryside is still in your memory. You haven’t forgotten the blind panic that moved you to grab Equius from the air and toss him aside. The blow to your stomach all those months ago left you with a hole in your gut, but paradoxically you were more than you were prior to the wound.

The music is cacophonous at this point, hardly recognizable from the haunting tones before. The roar of the engine continues to grow louder, a low rumble that echoes in your head over all else. You hiss in irritation, and shut the noise out of your head. The sound of the music becomes overpowering, and you tune it out as well. Voices seem to erupt from the air, as Roxy yelling about her rifle and Dirk grimly muttering about traffic can suddenly be heard. You seem to have redefined selective hearing.

You realize suddenly that you have been spacing out rather terribly. Rose is shaking your shoulder, trying to get your attention. “Kanaya, are you alright?”

You look over to her and smile, quickly pressing your lips to hers. She’s taken aback at the sudden gesture, and you pull away before she can recover. Then your chainsaw is out, and you make a swift cut through the roof of the van.

“Kanaya, what the fuck are you doing?” Dirk spits angrily, dodging around an oncoming vehicle. “Wrecking the car is supposed to be the clown’s goddamn job, don’t go off script here!”

“Apologies. I felt I could use some air.” You press your hands to the sides of your incision, and tear the roof of the vehicle open like tin foil. You climb out onto the roof and look behind you.

Gamzee is driving a car colored with many pictures of desserts, but also has blood smeared along the side, Equius’ and Gamzee’s both. Gamzee is driving the truck and laughing, one hand working the steering wheel while the other gives you the finger. He’s pulled up alongside you, and is attempting to hit you off the road, Dirk’s superior driving skill letting him evade trouble.

You pull out your chainsaw and let out a scream, slashing wildly and removing the rear view mirror from the side of the vehicle as Gamzee attempts to close in on you.

Gamzee roars back at you, and manages to accelerate ahead of you. You vaguely hear Dirk protesting the speed this truck is managing. Rose meanwhile, is marveling at your ability to remain stable on the roof of a truck moving so fast. For whatever reason balance comes easily to you.

You glare ahead at Gamzee as Dirk tries to pull level with him again. Suddenly Roxy appears below you, rifle at the ready, as she climbs out through the hole in the roof below you, her chest resting on the roof as Rose and Aradia hold her steady. “Don’t mind me, baby, just need a clear shot.” She mutters to herself, the thought that you might actually hear her likely not occurring to her. She aims, fires her rifle, and manages to shoot a tire, but not before Gamzee throws a bucket out his window, which splashes red liquid across the windshield as Roxy curses and ducks away.

“Holy shit is that blood?” Roxy calls up in a panic. You wipe some off of your dress and press it to your tongue.

“Worse. Cherry syrup.” You mutter to yourself. There’s no way you could ever get this cleaned out of your dress. It’s ruined. You are suddenly fuming.

With a massive leap, you land on top of Gamzee’s truck, mindful of its swaying and jostling, made
worse by the blown tire. Your chainsaw appears in your hand, and you slash the roof open and jump into the back of the truck. “I liked this dress.” You mutter angrily, as you swing your chainsaw at Gamzee.

Gamzee easily dodges, ducking his head forward under your swing, and he smiles back at you as you attempt to retrieve your weapon from the side of the truck. “I liked my truck, sister. But it looks like neither one of us motherfuckers can have nice things.” His grin becomes manic, and he swerves the truck into Dirk’s vehicle. The cherry syrup is obstructing Dirk’s vehicle enough that he doesn’t see you coming.

Your name is Rose Lalonde, and you are likely concussed. You’ve recovered your senses after the crash to find that both your vehicle and Gamzee’s have been ripped to pieces. Aradia is lying in a daze in the middle of it all, meaning the excessive damage was likely a panic reaction on her part.

“Rose. You are alright?” Kanaya calls from beside you, and you look over to see that she has been trapped by debris. Her blood is splattered across the ground, but sounds no worse for wear. “My muscles received much damage in the crash. I will need time to heal. Are you alright?”

“Never better.” You smile at her, barely managing to keep your shit contained. “Let me check on the others.”

Aradia is sitting up when you turn back around, and you assume she’s all right. Roxy calls you over to her, and you find Dirk, unconscious, but seemingly not terribly injured. He managed to protect Roxy, but took a hit to the head. You’ll have to have him looked at properly, but you think that Kanaya suffered the worst.

“That’s the two biggest problems solved, isn’t it sister?” Gamzee’s hoarse voice calls over to you. He drags himself out of the wreck of his truck, standing next to Kanaya casually, casually twirling a knife in his hand. “Now there’s just three people left to deal with.”

Aradia groggily raises a hand in an effort to use her powers on him. Gamzee lifts off the ground for a moment, screaming out a curse, but he falls again before he can utter it completely. Aradia winces as she struggles to regain her control, but Gamzee closes the distance on her and punches her in the temple. “I’ll be back for you later, sister.” he says coldly. She falls to the ground senseless, and Gamzee closes in on you and Roxy.

You pull out the long knitting needles you always keep on hand, but you’re feeling woefully outmatched at best. This troll beat Equius, making him your physical superior by a cataclysmic amount.

You dart forwards with your needles, and predictably find yourself grabbed by the wrist and thrown sideways. You hit the ground with a crunch, feeling the air knocked from you as at least three of your ribs break. Your arm sits twisted at a strange angle, also broken from being thrown. You spit out a tooth. None of these things are remotely important though, because Gamzee is closing in on Roxy.

Your first hope is that Dirk will wake up. He sighs and groans about it sometimes, but you know that he’d rather die than let anything happen to Roxy. The pool of blood below his head is rather telling though, small enough that he’ll recover but certainly an indication that he’s down for the count. Aradia is still inert, and her abilities are not yet working. Kanaya is dragging herself over, but a piece of steel shrapnel is firmly embedded in her spine, and her right arm is mangled, leaving her with one working limb.
You know that only you are capable of even attempting to help, but it hurts to even breathe. You manage to get to your knees by the time Roxy finds her gun torn from her hands. She’s dodging Gamzee’s knife decently, but with his strength it’s only a matter of time. “Roxy!” You wheeze out in despair, managing to stand with all your strength.

“There it is.” Gamzee says quietly. His arm moves faster than your eye can see, snaking past Roxy’s guard and into her belly. Roxy gasps in shock and looks down unbelieving. “There it motherfucking is.” Gamzee says again, his head twisting around to leer at you, grinning almost literally from ear to ear. “That’s the real fucking deal. That’s what I live for. If I twist this knife in the bitch’s gut will you cry some more?”

You let out a wail of anguish and Gamzee starts laughing, letting Roxy fall to the ground. You were powerless. You failed to do anything. Aradia fought through hell and can hardly move without choking on blood, but even she did more than you. You saw this coming, but failed to act upon it. That’s all you can do, an impotent girl who holds her knitting needles like they’re magic wands, all while knowing your power is no more than stating the obvious.

The thought should burn you up inside, but instead it turns your blood to ice. Cold fury, you suppose, is an apt term in this case, as you feel your heart rate slow down. You are likely going into shock. Your sister is dead and you failed to do anything to stop it from happening.

But you can avenge her death.

You start walking forward, taking a deep breath to clear your head. It should hurt you, but you feel only invigoration. You raise your arms; needles in hand, and watch as your arm uncoils itself and the bones set once more. Your tooth regrows.

“I’m going to rip you apart, Gamzee.” You say out loud, not caring that something very different emerges from your lips. You point a knitting needle at the troll and smile grimly as it glows white, a stark contrast against your skin, now charcoal grey. A bolt of white energy strikes the ground next to Gamzee, missing, as your arm seems to shudder of its own accord. You fire again, seeing a twisting eruption of black thorns rush at the clown. He leaps out of the way, only barely.

You look down to see that you’ve floated off the ground quite a bit. Aradia is staring up at you, laughing hysterically. Kanaya is being helped away by Roxy, even though that’s impossible. Roxy is dead. This world is wrong. You should probably correct it. But first, the clown will have to die.

Chapter End Notes

Not a great deal to say here, honestly. I’ve always felt that for all her sass and badassery, Kanaya was in a way the most average of the trolls. She doesn't kill wild animals singlehandedly, has no understanding of tactics, and lacks leadership ability. The only troll more average than her is Feferi, but she's got the most interesting life politically, so when that is actually taken into account (which it wasn't in Homestuck), Kanaya loses out. She's still super badass though.

I still think Tavros is my least favorite troll, because he collapses under pressure, and his most badass moment in Homestuck involved him running away and still acting like a tool. I mean, good for him for leaving Vriska to rot, but running away is not all that cool. Yeah, Tavros sucks, I don't know why people like him. Meanwhile Vriska, supreme bitch, gets brought back to life again! Hussie, that was a brilliant twist, but I
still think Vriska should stay dead. She's a horrible person. :/
Shadows Flow Like Water

Chapter Summary

Karkat and Feferi have an unexpected confrontation, as Roxy tries to keep everything together.

Chapter Notes

In this chapter I attempt to write adequate fanservice for male characters despite being a heterosexual man. I have no idea whether it worked, but I did try. Don't be too hard on me ladies!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your name is Karkat Vantas, and you aren’t fucking avoiding anyone or anything, regardless of what everyone is saying. You’ve just been relishing in the fact that Nepeta is conscious now and able to take care of her own goddamn self. Right now for instance, you’re spending some time out of the house. You need some room to breathe, and the only living member of the household is still hospitalized for bullet wounds. The Brinner house makes for a convenient bit of breathing room.

You’re breathing heavily right now, as it happens, working through a series of motions you’ve learned from Mr. Egbert. Capoeira, he called it, one of several martial arts he’s taught you the basics of. You find that the majority of the lessons you’ve received haven’t stuck well with you, and this is no exception. A lot of the kicks and handstands involved with the art don’t fit well with your use of sickles.

You let out a sigh as a misplaced hand causes you to hit the ground. You’re too tired to curse at this point, having worked on this for the past three hours. You are truly devoted to the art of being good at kicking ass. Definitely that is the only reason you are over here.

“You’re not fooling anyone, you know.” a voice calls out from the back door, startling you as you get up. You expected Sollux or Jane to stop by to scold you sooner or later, but it looks like Feferi’s decided to come over instead. You’re not thrilled.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” You mutter irritably, grabbing a damp towel and wiping up the sweat sticking to your torso. “I’m just making sure that I’m at the top of my fucking game.”

“Shore, shore.” Feferi smiles cheerfully as she walks into the room. “It’s showing, too. You know she can sea everyfin from next door, right?”

You freeze and look over to the window in alarm, realizing suddenly that the large side window of the house is indeed providing a perfect view to the upstairs window next door. You make brief eye contact with Nepeta before she flushes and ducks out of sight. You look down at yourself, shirtless and still pretty sweaty from working out. “Well that’s just fucking perfect, isn’t it?”

“Perchfect.” Feferi’s smile broadens as she casually corrects you. “And no, with all the times you’ve
fallen on your face I can’t say I’d go that far.”

“Ha. Fucking ha.” You sigh as you angrily eye the blinds on the window. You had considered closing the drapes, but the goddamn pull-cords keep throwing you off. “Well excuse me for trying to stay in shape, but somebody has to cover our asses when shit hits the whirling device.”

“We have Jade for that.” Feferi says with a wave.

“I’ll believe that when I see it.” You’re sure Jade is as competent as any of the other humans, but when she acts so goofy and bubbly all the damn time it’s hard to believe the stories Eridan and Sollux have mentioned. “Besides, Jade can cover human asses as much as she fucking wants, but if we let her cover ours we’ll be a fucking joke.”

“And you think you can do beta?”

Feferi is being even more irritating than usual, but whatever. “Not the fucking point Feferi, it’s not about doing better than the humans; John’s powers are so obscene that it’s a complete impossibility. It’s about proving ourselves as a bunch of not incompetent douche-nozzles that are capable of taking care of ourselves. Which, you might have noticed is something we’ve been completely failing at in every possible sense of the word.”

Feferi’s smile drops and she sends you a glare. “No thanks to you.”

“I beg your fucking pardon?”

“You left us floundering the first opportunity you got.” Feferi sits down across from you and crosses her arms. “We wouldn’t have gone belly-up if you didn’t clamscray!”

“Well excuse me for thinking you fuckers would be able to handle yourselves without me!” You start toweling yourself off again, doing your best to ignore the way your sweat stains the white towel pink. “You planned your fucking jailbreak without me, don’t blame me if you bulge loving nookstains are too thick to come up with something as simple as sticking together.”

“And you were such a perfect example of that, weren’t you?” Feferi smiles again, coldly this time. “You were gone before I was even at the wall.”

“Again, I thought you could take care of yourselves.” You grab your shirt and throw it on, walking past her and heading for the back door. “Clearly I was mistaken. Hence my training to cover your sorry asses.”

“Hence you’re trying to make up for beaching us.” She calls at your back. And wow, you are feeling really fed up with the bullshit at this point.

“LIKE YOU’RE ONE TO TALK, FISH FACE!” You snarl as you whirl around and point an accusatory finger in her direction. “WE’D NEVER BE ALL THE WAY OUT HERE IN THE MIDDLE OF FUCKING NOWHERE IF YOU HADN’T DONE WHAT YOU DID.”

Feferi blinks in shock at you, and you press your advantage further. “YEAH THAT’S RIGHT BITCH, YOU HEARD ME. I JUST WANTED TO FIND A QUIET PLANET WHERE NOBODY WOULD BOTHER ME AND I COULD LIVE IN PEACE. BUT YOU HAD TO GO AND KILL YOUR FUCKING LUSUS, THE KEY BEHIND HER IMPERIOUS CONDESCENSION’S POWER. BECAUSE OF YOU WE HAD TO FLY ALL THE WAY TO THE EDGE OF IMPERIAL SPACE TO AVOID BEING HUNTED DOWN AND MADE AN EXAMPLE OF. I RAN AWAY PRECISELY TO ESCAPE THAT KIND OF LIFE.” You stop to catch your breath.
Feferi seems surprised, stepping forward to say or do something, but you cut her off again. “I just wanted to leave before I became a blip on anybody’s fucking radar,” you snarl, panting. “But you made sure I couldn’t have that, didn’t you? You came to Sollux and I crying about killing your lusus, expecting us to pity you for damning our entire fucking race, and I had to just smile and nod along because you always get what you want. Don’t fucking deny it, Feferi, you’re a goddamn Tyrian, you’ll never understand what being hard done by is really like, so don’t fucking pretend.

“You spent your life dreaming of becoming a queen and ousting the old leader, and watching as the cute little low-bloods came to kiss your feet, oh look how quaint that is, they love me because I treat them like a bunch of fucking bark beasts.” You smirk at her as she reels (fucking ha) at this. “I know how you think of lowbloods, so don’t give me that preachy bullshit, don’t even start. You’re as racist as the rest of them, but you think that your inferiors make better pets than cattle. I’ve heard all about what your definition of culling really is, I know about the little cages in your room. How long would it take before you made those troll sized?”

Feferi seems to be stunned speechless, and this whole rant is making you feel more alive than you’ve felt in weeks, so you decide to finish things off. “I guess we’ll never know though will we, because you decided to run for it. The rest of us were all a bunch of fucking misfits, but you? You were somebody, Feferi. You never realized it because your lusus and Eridan never let anybody fucking near you, but you were pretty fucking important. And you threw that away because you got scared. So don’t give me that bullshit about fucking responsibility or abandoning people. I left behind eleven fucking people that should have been all right without me. You left behind a civilization spanning half the galaxy that needed you if they wanted any chance of not being ruled by the biggest bitch in the universe. You’ll never have the right to lecture me.”

She slaps you suddenly at that, crossing the room in an instant. Then, as you try to recover (Tyrian strength is just absurd), she grabs you by the collar and kisses you roughly. You decide to go over that in your head again just because of how ridiculous it is. Feferi Peixes is going for a serious pitch make-out session here. You’ve barely started to reciprocate when she stops.

Her expression is angry, shy, and excited all at once when she meets your eyes. “Challenge accepted.” She says quietly, rushing out the back door past you before you’ve even turned your head after her.

Holy fucking shit that was actually pretty damn amazing. She’ll need to work on her ability to argue back before this can go anywhere, but honestly you think you might have just blown your entire pitch load with that rant, so the next time you fight it might not go so well for you. You’re looking forward to it, really. Still, the big question from all of that still remains on your mind: “Just where the fucking hell did that come from?”

“I haven’t the foggiest clue old bean, but congratulations!” You turn around in shock to see Jake fucking English standing in the doorway cheerfully. “Sorry to interrupt chap, but I’m afraid our good chum John just received a spot of bad news. Sent him in an awful tizzy, it did. We’ll have to move fast to catch up to him.”

You stare at Jake torn between surprise, mortification, and confusion before what he said finally sinks in. “Catch up?”

Your name is Roxy Lalonde, and you haven’t found yourself wanting a drink so badly in months. Dirk is at your side, barely able to walk straight due to a head injury, and Kanaya is still pulling metal out of anywhere she can reach on her body. Aradia is at your feet, curled up and giggling like a maniac. She’s received some seriously bad vibes and it’s messing her up worse than alcohol messes
up a Lalonde, meaning whatever is happening to your baby sister is seriously bad shit.

She’s standing out in the middle of the highway right now, her skin glowing black against her platinum blonde hair, as tentacles of shadow flail around her. It’s completely ridiculously horrifying. How did Rose learn to do this? Did your mother know about this? How the hell does something even glow black anyways? These are the questions you’re too terrified to dwell on right now.

You look down at your stomach again, eyeing the puncture in your shirt again. Gamzee’s blade sliced the fabric just below your ribcage, but it didn’t work on your skin, passing through it like there was nothing there. Your powers kicked in automatically, saving you from something you couldn’t focus enough to prevent. You don’t think Rose realized this though, because she’s screaming nonsense and trying to kill Gamzee with every fiber of her being.

“Dirk sweetie, are you feeling better?” You pat Dirk on the shoulder, eyeing the blood staining through the rags tied around his head.

“It’s like I’m underwater, Rox.” Dirk groans, shaking his head slowly. “Is this what your fucking martinis are like? Because this is shitty. Why did you like this?”

“I didn’t, now shut up and drink some water.” You shove a bottle in his hands and look to the others.

Kanaya shrugs helplessly, gesturing to a clean break in her spine that’s still reconnecting (and god do you hate that you can see it happening). “I won’t regain motor functions for at least a day.” She twitches her broken arm feebly. “My body has too much to do at once right now.”

“Right, you’re useless.” You groan and shake your head. “Totes sorry Kanaya, just gotta call it like it is right now.” You look down at Aradia, who giggles. “And she’s the same as long as Rose is giving off bad juju.” You grab your phone and sigh. “I’ll be right back.”

You’re hiding in a ditch right now, watching over the lip of it all as Rose and Gamzee fight on the main road. Rose is lashing out with thorny coils of shadows, and Gamzee is dancing and skipping around them, attempting to dart in with his knife and a pipe.

You want nothing more than to interfere with the fight and protect your sister, but with the way she is, you’re truly not sure how much that would help. She could just as easily turn on you, and you don’t want to know what those tentacles can do. Your only idea is to call for backup.

“Oh god, come on, come on, pickup…” You’re standing so that you can keep an eye on things, but you’re not sure if Gamzee or Rose will be okay with you calling on help. It’s terrifying to you that you really don’t know whether Rose is on your side right now, or even whether she knows who you or the others are.

“Hello?” John’s voice rings out in your ear, startling you from your confusion. “Roxy, are you there?”

“John! Oh thank Jegus I am so fuckin’ happy to hear your voice you have no idea!” You grab your phone tightly in both hands, trying your best to stay calm. “I need you to come here yesterday, I’m stuck on highway 90, our car just exploded, there’s a clown trying to kill us, and Rose just went crazy.”

“Wait, what? Roxy you’re not making sense, did you say clown? Hold on a second.” You hear another voice talking in the background, and wonder briefly if it might be the same person you’ve been gossiping with. Whoever it is, they seem to know something, because when John speaks up again he sounds grim. “Roxy, is the clown Gamzee Makara?”
“Wait, the fuck? Yeah, that’s the guy. John how did you-”

“I’m on my way.” There’s a loud thud in your ear and a roar of static, and you’re left wondering what’s going on.

“Hey, Roxy was it?” A grouchy voice with a lisp comes in on the phone. “John just flew out the fucking door, so he’s definitely going to find you as soon as possible. We’ve only got one vehicle and way too many people here right now, but we’ll be following right away. Be careful, Gamzee is dangerous. Are there any other trolls there?”

You pause and stare at the phone. This guy knows a shitload more than you thought he would. The Egberts have never mentioned knowing trolls, not that you’ve asked. You put it aside with about a hundred other things, focusing on answering the question. “We’ve got two trolls here named Aradia and Kanaya. They’re both pretty messed up right now though.”

There’s a pause on the other end. “Holy fucking shit, I thought NP was just losing it. All right well we won’t let them die twice. Hold tight Roxy. JAKE.” You hear the voice yelling as he hangs up, and remember that Jade and Jake are supposed to be visiting the Egberts right now. That means that they both knew about trolls and didn’t tell you. This strikes you as an absolutely ridiculously large coincidence, and were you not in seriously deep shit right now you’d be taking your sweet time mulling that one over.

You look back at the fight, and freeze as Gamzee meets your eye. His face is cold, but he’s too preoccupied with Rose to interfere with you. Rose still seems ignorant to your presence, her attention devoted solely to the clown. But she’s spreading out, her tentacles growing in all directions. It won’t be long before she’s tearing into the ditch the others are hiding in. You peer intently in their direction, but whatever twisted shit Rose is doing seems to be expelling the light from the area. The air around you seems to be growing darker by the second.

You rush for the ditch, suddenly fearing the worst, and find Dirk staggering towards you. Kanaya is draped awkwardly over his shoulders, dripping green blood everywhere, and Aradia, still giggling, is being led by hand.

“Did you call for help?” Dirk hisses with exertion, as you move beside him and grab Aradia. “Please tell me you got ahold of somebody who can help? Preferably Jane, I want this fucking head wound gone so I can do something useful.”

“You’ll just get yourself hurt even worse if you go in there alone.” You scold, as you tug at Aradia. “The others are coming, so until then sit tight.”

“Alright, but I seriously need some form of redemption here.” Dirk gives a manic grin; blood oozing from what you hope is just a cut in his mouth, lining his teeth with red. “I mean seriously, letting a car accident do this to me? Fucking disgraceful. I’d almost rather let that fucking juggalo hit me.”

“Sorry.” Aradia chokes out breathlessly, still trying to contain her laughter. “Definitely overreacted back-hehehe- back there.”

“Are you ready to rejoin common society then?” Dirk asks irritably. “Because your giggling is seriously annoying right now.”

“It’s getting better with distance.” Aradia coughs out, trying to keep her face straight. “Though I think you’re shutting it out a bit too, Roxy.” She seems to settle for a manic grin. “God damn, Rose is so fucked up right now.”
“Do you know what’s happening to her?” you ask in surprise.

Aradia just smiles further and shakes her head. “She’s having a nervous breakdown, and it’s driving her powers out of control. That’s all I know.”

“Since when does Rose even have powers?” Dirk asks you pointedly. “I thought she just had stupid premonitions. Summoning Fluthulu seems like a bit of a fucking stretch in comparison.”

“I’m as lost as you are!” You protest, looking back nervously. The shadows are growing thicker, lashing out and blackening everything around Rose, who remains the only clearly visible thing in all of the darkness. The shadows flicker more and more, looking like a coiling mass that builds and builds, almost hypnotic, until you have to force yourself to look away. You sigh dejectedly as you lead the others further away. “I’ve never seen anything like this before in my life, and mom never said anything about it.”

“So we have no idea what to do then.” Dirk mutters, spitting a glob of blood out of his mouth angrily. “I try to have plans for every eventuality, but when there’s so much shit I don’t know that makes things very difficult.”

“Calming her down would likely work.” Kanaya says with a groan. “Of course I do not have the foggiest idea how we would go about doing such a thing, but if we can make Rose regain her senses, she can likely contain this herself.” She glances down and groans, “Dirk, green is most definitely not your color.”

“Hey, you picked this outfit.”

Further conversation is interrupted when a noise like a jet turbine roars overhead. You look up confused to see John approaching, moving so fast you do a double take, before stopping abruptly far above you. The change in speed seems to send a rush of wind so powerful it blasts the clouds overhead away. Then, after falling like a stone, he stops just a few feet in front of you, slowly touching down in front of you on a cushion of air that blows the hair away from your face as it dissipates.

That was probably the hottest thing you’ve ever seen in your life. And it’s made so much better when John rushes forward and firmly grabs your shoulders. You’re so completely awestruck that it takes you a moment to realize that he’s talking.

“Oh geez I’m so glad you’re okay Roxy, when Sollux told me about who exactly Gamzee was I though you might be hurt, or in trouble, or worse. You are okay, right?”

You open your mouth to speak, when Dirk cuts in. “Yeah, we’re all fine here Egdork, thanks for asking. Really touched by your concern.” He’s smirking in spite of himself, but John seems shocked all the same.

“Oh man Dirk, what happened to you! You look terrible, I mean, god I’m sorry!” He glances back at you, and then shakes his head and rushes over. “Jane should be here soon, so she’ll help you out. The drive from home is only half an hour or so, I think, so the others should be right behind me. You should not be carrying somebody with that head wound!”

John gingerly takes Kanaya in his arms, and it’s a testament to how exhausted Dirk must be right now that he doesn’t protest. “Are you alright? Is this uncomfortable?” John is asking as he starts carrying Kanaya away bridal style.

“You are fine, John. Compared to everything else that has happened to me today, this is quite all
right.” Kanaya seems bemused by the whole situation, smiling in spite of everything. She smirks at you as she passes by, wiggling her eyebrows. “Trade you.” She says quietly, making you feel very transparent.

“What was that?”

“Nothing John. My name is Kanaya by the way…” her voice trails off as John rushes away, determined to put Kanaya far out of harm’s way. Aradia and Dirk fall in on either side of you as you start following.

“That’s John?” Aradia asks with a grin that looks decidedly interested, rather than manic. “You said he was cute, not hunky!”

“It would seem that Egbert has grown up.” Dirk nods sagely. “It’s too bad he’s quote: ‘Not a homosexual’, because if he was I would be all over that. You’re a lucky woman, Roxy.”

“Shut up Dirk, we’re not even dating.” you punch him lightly in the arm, grinning in spite of everything. You glance over at Aradia, and are rewarded with some serious eyebrow wiggling. John’s appearance seems to have raised everyone’s spirits big time, probably because his entrance was so damned awesome.

So of course now that everyone’s feeling better about life, Gamzee decides to ruin it. You’re a fair distance away from the fight, but when the clown starts screaming it may as well be right in your ears. You throw your hands up to block it out instinctually, letting go of Aradia in the process. She falls to the ground with a brief “Oh, shit, not this again,” before she loses herself once more and starts giggling hysterically again.

“Ahh, fuck!” Dirk curses as he grabs his head. “Jane had better get her ass over here ASAP, because this is fucking terrible.” You nod in agreement, looking behind you to see what’s going on.

Gamzee is face to face with Rose, so close that Gamzee is able to hit her easily. This liberty is one he’s taking full advantage of, using the pipe he grabbed earlier to swing frantically at Rose’s head. The only thing saving her is the shadows, which slow his swing like water. The blows still look horrible though, and it’s all you can do to refrain from rushing into the middle of it all right now.

Rose is retaliating by ensnaring his body, constricting him in darkness so that only his head and his flailing arm remain clear. Rose is shouting in that weird demon speak she’s been using since her skin turned black, and when she snaps an arm outward, the shadows seem to pulsate as one. There’s a wrenching sound, followed by something reminiscent of a wood chipper, and Gamzee’s arm vanishes from the elbow down.

Everything freezes at that. Gamzee and Rose seem to both be regarding the gaping wound where the limb was, as though neither can understand what happened to it. Rose looks back at Gamzee and raises her arm again, but Gamzee recovers just as quickly.

His jaw opens wide, showing his razor sharp teeth. His entire head splits like a bear trap, stringy globules of blood trailing across his jaw like spider webs. His eyes are glowing red, and blood is slowly oozing from cuts all over his face. Whether they’re self-inflicted or the result of a fight is unclear; there’s no recognizable pattern to it. He lets out a deafening noise, as much a scream as a roar, and it makes you dizzy just hearing it.

Rose doesn’t take it any better. She cries out in agony as Gamzee’s cry rings in her ears, and for a brief instant the shadows dissipate. Gamzee falls to the ground like a ragdoll, and vanishes in an instant. You recognize the move as flashstepping, but how Gamzee could have learned such a thing
“Roxy, we need to go, now.” Dirk says wearily from behind you. “With Gamzee gone Rose has nothing else to distract her from what upset her in the first place.”

“What?” You look back at Dirk, who’s grabbed you by the shoulder and is trying to lead you away. Then you look back at Rose. She’s staring at you directly, eyes burning with white flames. Right, she got pissed off because she thought you were dead.

Rose screams in her not-language, and starts to advance. You do the only thing you can do in response, you push Dirk away and run. It would never work normally, but with his head wound Dirk is barely able to stay upright.

“Roxy, no!” Dirk is on his feet again in an instant, attempting to follow you. His attempt at flashstepping leads him into the path of part of Gamzee’s ice cream truck, and he collapses to his knees at the effort. His head wound is keeping him out of commission and safely away from you. The look of anguish on his face as he watches you run further is proof that he recognizes it as well.

Normally you can escape from just about anything with little trouble. Your only powers (that you know of at least) make you invisible and untouchable. But you need to draw Rose’s attention right now, so not being seen is very counterproductive. And it seems that you can’t phase your way through shadows, because Rose catches you in an instant, tripping you up with shadows and stopping you from running any further.

“Rose baby, it would be really appreciated if you stopped being fucking nuts.” You say meekly, as your legs are constricted. “Like ‘I will do the dishes for a month’ appreciated. We’re talking serious brownie points here.” Your attempts at negotiations are predictably fruitless, and Rose continues to ensnare you.

You’re just waiting for the wood chipper noise to magic away your legs when John appears again. He seems to ignore the shadows crawling across your body like ice, wrapping his arms around you in a bear hug, and forcing himself between you and your sister despite the tentacles trying to drive him away.

“DON’T TREAT WOMEN LIKE THAT!” John yells hysterically, throwing an arm backwards. A gale force wind rips past you both, slamming into Rose and her giant ball of evil and blowing them into the air, sending her into the clouds in a matter of seconds. The shadows tangled around the two of you seem to dissipate as Rose is pushed too far away to maintain them.

John pauses for a moment, breathing hard, still holding you in his one arm. “Are you okay Roxy?” He gasps out once he’s contained himself.

“I am now.” You smirk at John before continuing, “Was that seriously the best movie quote you can think of? ‘Don’t treat women like that?’ It doesn’t really work when you’re saying it to a woman, you know.”

John flushes red as he steps back. “I panicked, okay? I wanted to give a cool one-liner when I saved you, but I didn’t exactly have a lot of time to think of something good, so my mind just went to Con Air, and ‘put the bunny back in the box’ was hardly fitting, now was it?”

You hum playfully. “Oh John, you know if you want me to be your bunny all you have to do is ask.” This is clearly too much for John, because he seems to shut down on the spot, his face blank. You’ll have to be more careful with his sheltered, dorky little mind in the future.
“Alright snap out of it.” You pat him on the cheek fondly. “My sister will be back soon, and we still have no game plan.”

“We could try what Kanaya said and just get her to calm the fuck down.” Dirk says sarcastically, as he staggers between you two. You and John start to talk him down, but he takes off his shades and gives you both a look, and you shut up immediately.

Dirk turns to face John fully before continuing, “You just worry about keeping Rose from killing anybody and we’ll be fine. I’m the only other person here remotely capable of functioning, so I’ll be damned if I’m sitting things out. And you.” He turns to stare at you angrily at this. “If you pull anything that stupid again I’m making you go to another AA meeting.” you gulp visibly at this. Alcoholics Anonymous was hell, and you know damn well Dirk’s not kidding.

Rose descends from the clouds at this point, tentacles convulsing violently, the darkness around her seeming more opaque than ever. John gasps at this, staring up as horrified as you are. Dirk is opting to leave his glasses off, likely so he can watch the shadows better, and smirking in spite of everything. “So what do you say Egbert,” Dirk says with a smile, “Are you ready to face your ex?”

Chapter End Notes

Originally the scene between Karkat and Feferi was going to be set after the grimdark fight. However there's a lot of scenes like this between characters coming up, and if I want the story to have any semblance of pacing I figured I needed to push some of it forward. Karkat and Nepeta was the main thing I wanted to focus on as far as romance goes in this story, so I decided his other big relationship in the story would be the one to get bumped up.

Kismesisitude is a confusing subject at best. I know what it's like to hate somebody, but the simple fact of the matter is humans are not properly hard-wired to associate that with sex. As I understand it though, the spades quadrant is based upon rivalry, competition, and sexual frustration. It's not unheard of for people to get into relations like this really, but it's not exactly expressed well in media or real life. We've been raised to think that only one kind of relationship has a chance of emotional fulfilment, so the emotions associated with black rom aren't something that people pursue. This is all written in the hope that I might excuse myself for being so bad at writing Karkat and Feferi's relationship.

The two were originally a pale relationship in my mind, but the more I thought about how they'd interact on crucial matters, the clearer it became to me that they would butt heads more than reach compromise through calm discussion. Feferi's attitude towards lowbloods is just so fucking patronizing that Karkat would never stand for it.

Meanwhile John and Roxy are finally getting some proper screen time, which is hilarious when you consider that by number of kudos, Blood Pride is currently third highest on this site (the first two primarily featuring homosexual couples, btw). So now I'll actually have something to show for it if somebody's really looking for that pairing. The thing about John and Roxy is though, that they fit together so fucking well that you could never write a full romance focusing on them. There's next to no opportunity for conflict because the two basically like each other right from the get-go, and as the emotional anchors of their respective teams they're more than capable of sorting their
shit out if something were to come up. If I had to guess that's probably why nobody writes about them, even with all the attention Hussie's been giving the two lately.

I suppose while we're talking about John's romantic interests, I'll take a moment to reflect on how much I hate fanfiction for their depictions of his likes. When a character says they're not homosexual, in my eyes all depictions of them as homosexual are simply OoC. I hate OoC writing, and try to avoid it as best as I can. Yet many people shamelessly depict John as being sexually attracted to Dave (who's only ever dated girls himself) or Karkat, not to mention all the other male characters they ship him with. I just don't get it. With all the characters Andrew Hussie gives you that are openly bisexual, pansexual, or homosexual, is it so hard to just let the one openly heterosexual character be heterosexual? And meanwhile everyone takes Dirk, a gay dude, and ships him with Roxy. YOU PEOPLE DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT YOU WANT, DO YOU?
Because of the Humans

Chapter Summary

Karkat and friends try to stop Rose, with some unexpected assistance.

Chapter Notes

I've had more free time than usual as of late. Aren't you all lucky!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your name is Karkat Vantas, and you can’t say you particularly want to share your innermost thoughts again so soon. Seriously, isn’t there some sort of law against making somebody open two fucking chapters in a row? Unfortunately though, you have little choice in the matter, because things are going wrong in every fucking way imaginable, and you are the only one available with enough of a handle on your shit to deal with things.

With you are Eridan, Feferi, Jane, and Jake, all claiming they are prepared for a fight, despite you knowing they won’t handle things well. Sollux is staying back with Jade and her racist grandpa so that somebody you trust can look after Nepeta, and unless Atticus Egbert gets word about what’s happening they’ll be staying there.

The one good thing is that you know exactly where you need to go, due primarily to a massive black mass in the sky showing exactly where things are going lopsided enough to be troll related. Because obviously the massive ball of darkness and evil in the sky is your fault, who the fuck else could cause things to go that completely wrong?

Jane pulls over shortly after you arrive on the highway. You step out of the Harley family van, slightly surprised it got you this far, and follow her to the opposite lane.

The road is being torn to bits by black tentacles, all coming from a human floating a good fifteen feet off the ground. Her skin is pitch black, which you’re pretty damn sure isn’t normal for humans, not that the tentacles and glowing eyes aren’t indication enough that things are fucked up.

This must be Rose. Sollux said there was word she had gone crazy after Gamzee attacked, and since she’s supposedly another one of the test tube babies with troll DNA you figured that could only be bad news. Still… this is more than you signed up for.

Really, just all of this… when you left Alternia you did not sign up for any of this shit. Your life is so fucked up.

“What the shell is going on?” Feferi asks in shock from behind you. “Why is she… those tentacles look like Glubby.”

You didn’t notice that, probably because you’ve never seen GI’bgolyb in person, but it occurs to you that she’s right. Every account you’ve ever read of the queen lusus is brought to mind by this evil
aura. Could this be another result of genetic manipulation? Did those humans somehow get their idiot hands on Gl’bgolyb’s DNA?

“No point thinking about it.” Eridan says coldly. “I’ve got this under control.” He raises Ahab’s Crosshairs to his shoulder and takes aim in a smooth motion, giving you very little time to realize what the hell he’s trying to do.

“SHIT!” You swat his gun up just as he fires, causing his shot to miss completely. Rose continues to fight, attacking a figure flying around her, most likely John. Two other humans on the street underneath the monster realize what happened and head straight for you.

“What the hell Kar? I could have finished her off with that!” Eridan whines, giving you an accusatory glare until he realizes just how pissed off you are.

“DID I SAY WE WERE HERE TO KILL HUMANS? NO, I SAID WE WERE HERE TO SAVE HUMANS FROM OUR MURDEROUS DOUCHEBAG CLOWN FRIEND. JUST BECAUSE THE CLOWN ISN’T HERE DOESN’T MEAN WE GET TO KILL THE NEXT DANGEROUS THING WE SEE.” You bellow at the top of your lungs as everyone converges on the two of you. “DO NOT SHOOT ANYTHING UNTIL WE FIGURE OUT WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON.”

“Fuck! Fine, whatever, just get off my glubbing back dude!” Eridan stalks off angrily. “I’ll just be over here, not shooting shit then. Why the fuck did you even bring me if you’re not going to let me do my thing?” He sits down in the ditch, before jumping back. “You’re suppose to be dead, what the fuck?”

You sigh and walk over to see what he’s going on about, and find Aradia lying in the ditch in the fetal position. She’s laughing like a maniac, her eyes are bugging out due to breathing difficulty, and tears are streaming down her face. She’s also not dead, but with everything happening at once you figure you’ll file that one away for later. No way to dwell on that one without losing your shit, and now isn’t the fucking time.

“What the hell are you assholes doing?” You hear one of the humans calling from behind you, and figure out pretty easily who’s talking.

“He’s in time out, drop it Roxy.” you turn around irritably to see Roxy and one of the Striders (you never bothered with learning to tell them apart) approaching. You’re rather pissed off to see that the Strider has blood coating the side of his head, and apparently still declared himself fit for duty.

“Wait, are you Shouty?” Roxy smiles as she looks at you. Feferi sends you a wicked grin from behind her back, and you realize with dawning dread that Roxy has enough materials for a kismesis’ wet dream. Fucking shit, you need to file that away immediately before losing your mind completely.

“Yes, I’m fucking Shouty, now can we save the tearful reunions and emotional meetings for a time when people aren’t being completely fucking stupid?” You roll your eyes in as showy a manner as possible, and start pointing at Aradia. “Why is Aradia flipping out?”

Roxy frowns at this, “She’s picking up on some sort of mental disturbance from Rose. It’s got her going seriously crazy.”

“And you decided to leave her here instead of helping her?”

Roxy shifts nervously, “Well Dirk and I had our hands full with my sister, sooo…”

You point at Dirk. “He doesn’t. He’s too fucking injured to be even slightly useful. Don’t give me
that look you pointy-headed douchebag, you’re fucking reeling. Go do something not completely
erst and prideful, and help get my friend out of here before she dies again.”

Dirk flinches at that, staggering over to Aradia’s side. “Fucking asphyxiation, should have realized.
I’m getting sloppy.”

“WELL YOU WOULDN’T BE IF YOU SAT DOWN AND SHUT UP LIKE PEOPLE WITH
HEAD INJURIES ARE SUPPOSED TO, ASSHOLE.” You yell after him irritably. “Alright,
where’s Jane?” You look around for her and see she’s back in the direction Dirk’s heading, tending
to somebody on the side of the road.

“JANE, WHOEVER THAT IS, LEAVE THEM AND FIX THIS DOUCHEBAG BEFORE HE
GETS ANYONE ELSE KILLED.” You roar down the street.

“She’s got a fucking hole in her stomach, you asshole!” Jane yells back at
you irritably.

“That’s Kanaya,” Roxy mutters sullenly behind you.

“Fucking great!” You sigh to yourself before turning back to Jane. “She’s survived worse,
if she’s not dead yet she’s not going to die, so get the easy job done
first before you blow all your energy on one person. Sorry Kanaya,
but them’s the fucking breaks!”

Kanaya waves an arm dismissively, and then flips the bird at you when she thinks you’re not
looking. She’ll be fine then. “Alright, Jake, Eridan, hang back until we find a use for guns other than
killing Rose. Roxy, talk to me. Does Rose have any clear weaknesses like this? Anything throw her
off so far?”

“She got dazed when Gamzee yelled at her. I don’t know if it knocked her dizzy, or made her lose
consciousness, or what…” Roxy shrugs her shoulders. “We could never make a noise that loud
anyways.”

“Highblood death scream. They say the Grand Highblood once killed a sea dweller’s lusus by
screaming at it.” Eridan says grimly. “Almost glad we’re dealing with Rose instead of him.”

“Yeah, that’s very helpful, thanks.” You sigh and look back up at Rose. John is gamely fighting
back, blasting her with wind, and keeping her from tearing a path down the highway into Seattle.
Meanwhile Rose is expanding more and more, sending tendrils out further, blotting out the street
behind her, the sky above, sunlight streaming between tendrils and through a gap above her head.

“Wait, that opening… Eridan, fire a shot, don’t hit the humans.” you stare intently as Eridan
grumbles and burns a hole into the air with Ahab’s crosshairs. As you suspected, the hole lingers in
the shadows, the tendrils seemingly burned off into useless stumps. “That’s fucking perfect. Holy
shit, I’m not even being sarcastic here, that’s actually totally fucking helpful. The rest of the day is
clearly going to be a complete fucking nightmare, because this is far too not horrible to be my life.”

“Well Karkat old chap, if it’s lasers you’re looking for, I’ve got the tools for the occasion right here!”
Jake smiles broadly and draws his guns. “The guns are brand spanking new, so I only have a few
clips made for them, but they shoot the same thing.”

“Okay, it’s probably a light thing. We’ll see if we can’t cut Rose off from her damned tentacles and
maybe things will become less completely catastrophic. Hurt her and I let Roxy deal with you.” You
nod at Roxy, who smiles gratefully.
You’ve got yourself a working game plan. Now all you need to do is wait for things to go wrong.

Your name is Spades Slick, and things are going completely wrong. You don’t know what game you’re supposed to be playing here, but the stakes are a hell of a lot higher than what you signed up for, and that seriously pisses you off. Nowhere in your experience or your file access does it state any of the kids being capable of anything this completely devastating. The casualties would be colossal if you hadn’t been ready to divert traffic.

Boxcars noticed Gamzee was back on the trail of the kids and broke protocol, interfering and stopping cars from driving into a warzone. The guy was always the most empathetic, for all his brutality. Droog has a soft spot for kids; Boxcars has a soft spot for anybody he’s not hired to kill.

And then there’s Droll and Deuce, who have no sense of proper human emotion and completely creep you out. But you don’t like to think about them too much.

“Disturbing traffic, destruction of public property, evading arrest, and irreparable damage to a confectionary deliverance vehicle!” Droll is reciting, dancing around like a madman. “That is grounds for capital punishment!”

You have no fucking clue what he’s on about. You’re just glad Deuce is still in the hospital. Put Droll and Deuce together and they feed off of each other in the worst way. You once caught them rigging a fridge with explosives just because they wanted to see if it would kill somebody. You know if they’d succeeded they’d be in tears about it for weeks, but it wouldn’t stop them trying again. You keep them on other sides of the country these days.

“What right do you have to block off an entire highway like this?” A civilian yells at Boxcars as he secures the barricades across the highway. “This is a violation of human rights!”

“Sorry sir, terrorist activity.” Harvey Boxcars shrugs as he sets the last barricade down. “We tracked them down, but they’re making a stand down the road. Can’t let anyone into a fire fight.”

“Shut up Harvey, we don’t want word spreading about this!” You call back. It’s actually exactly what you want, but Scratch wants things kept hush. You’re second in command for a reason, and that reason is you give Scratch what he wants, at least until he’s dead in a ditch with your knife between his ribs. It’s all part of the plan.

“Sorry boss.” Harvey shrugs his shoulders at the loudmouth and moves back. “So what do we do about the kids?”

“I’ll scout ahead and see what the hell they’re doing right now.” You pull a dart gun out of the trunk of your car. You see the looks the others are giving you and sigh. “Kids need to stay alive. Scratch’s orders. Besides, the more they fuck with his plans the more they start to grow on me.”

“Don’t get killed, boss.” Harvey nods.

“I won’t die without getting the chance to run this damn operation.” You smirk back and head in.

The shadows aren’t as bad as they were an hour ago, and you find you’re able to get much closer to Rose before things get dangerous. The tentacles that lash out at you are easy to dodge, the results of years of training and tampering with your body. It’s a simple matter of time before you’re tiptoeing your way through the thick of things, slipping through gaps in the shadows.

It’s ice cold inside, and the outside is nearly impossible to see, even with your ability to see in the
dark. You have to focus on the shadows, rather than what’s outside of them or else risk letting them grab you. Rose seems preoccupied with her friends though, which is what makes this insanity possible for you.

It takes a few minutes before you finally see the other kids, now reinforced and organized. One of the trolls seems to be taking charge, while the wind boy, John, is now hiding. According to Droog’s Intel the kid was holding this thing off for a while on his own. You’d be lying if you said you weren’t impressed.

You look over the humans present and go over their files in your head. Roxy Lalonde, capable of manipulating the physical properties of her body to become invisible, and according to recent reports, intangible. Dirk Strider, emits electrical energy that disrupts brain activity. Rose Lalonde, foresight. You laugh as you see them in action. It’s all complete bullshit. Scientists actually tried to quantify the things these kids did using the laws they knew, but they are so far beyond the laws of physics it’s ridiculous. If there’s one thing you’ve come to accept since you grew an exoskeleton, it’s that magic is undeniably real.

Rose proves to be a perfect example of this, as she continues to create tangible shadows out of thin air. No science could account for something like this.

Jake is proving difficult to figure out as well. He was the first thing Dr. Scratch ever made, and was deemed to be ultimately a failure. He used to glow in the dark when he was a baby. That was all he could do. Then that light grew more powerful, until he learned to contain its energy into bullets with the help of his asshole grandpa.

Now he’s out of bullets, and is fighting his way through the shadows by emitting energy from his fists and punching the darkness away. It’s so completely ridiculous that you want to put a dart in his neck just so he’ll stop fucking with your head. The kid has laser fists. And it’s unbelievably stupid.

“NOTHING LIKE A BIT OF SCRUMS, EH OLD CHAPS?” He roars as he flails his arms around like a maniac.

“Jake, stop flailing like a douchebag and get behind her like we talked about!” The troll in charge yells, sitting back with a female troll and Roxy. “We have three fucking people here capable of fighting this, so just do your damn job!”

The first person you see capable of fighting appears to be Dirk Strider, who is no longer injured and is running electricity through his sword. His training under Brock is clear as you watch him; his flashstepping skill is as smooth as your old coworker’s ever was.

The last one to catch your eye is the seadweller troll, Eridan. You remember him better than most of the freaks, mostly because a lot of his kills were with human weapons and no backup. He looks ridiculous with his cape and rings, but his movements are self-assured, and his gun is powerful.

The three capable of using attacks on the shadow monster are trying to burn back the tentacles with light, a tactic growing less useful by the minute. Rose, consciously or otherwise, is adapting to the technique, branching extra tentacles to loop around and expand faster. Eridan is the only one who can make any sort of dent at this point, with Jake and Dirk hesitant to enter the thick of things.

The team leader is aware of this, too. He’s pacing back and forth in agitation, knowing that he needs to finish things fast. Whatever plan he’s got involves removing Rose’s shield, but the chances of that working are growing slim.
“Well shit.” You sigh to yourself. “This is our best chance.” The FELT is not designed for this kind of insanity, the offensive power this thing boasts is insane, and most of the team is even warier about disobeying the doctor than you are.

You decide that rather than kill the girl you’ll keep playing along, and do the stupid thing. You start weaving through the darkness and come out in the middle of the fray.

“Hey kids.” You smile as you draw Rose’s attention at last. It seems she’s still only really aware of what she can actually see; an important bit of info to note. The tentacles come down swiftly now, but you scuttle away easily.

“Who the fuck are you?” The troll in charge is standing stunned, as Roxy and the last troll ready their weapons. You feel tempted to laugh; as you notice Roxy Lalonde is holding a crooked gun like a baseball bat. It was likely damaged in the earlier crash. The troll has a double-headed trident though, and damned if you want to test it against your armor.

“Lower your damn weapons if you want answers, I’m not sticking around if you’re going to keep that shit up.” You spit on the ground at the leader’s feet. He glances at the others, and they acquiesce. “Much better. The name’s Spades. I’m with the FELT.”

It takes serious effort not to laugh as the girl’s try to raise their weapons again, so fast they almost fumble with them. “Don’t get cute, if I wanted you dead I’d have left you for her.”

“Guys, just chill the fuck out.” The last one swats irritably at their arms, knocking their weapons away. He holds a hand up to shake. “My name’s Karkat. What the fuck are you doing here?”

“Saving your ass.” You glance back at Rose casually. “I’m guessing you’ve got a plan for what to do when you get that girl out of her shell.”

“At this point, we’ll settle for knocking her out.” Karkat groans irritably. “If she’s summoning these things in her sleep we’re fucked anyways.”

“If it comes to that, my people will deal with it.” You ignore the horrified look on Roxy’s face, the furious glare of Egbert as he rises from the ground nearby. The other female troll (Feferi, that was the name!) steps forward angrily. Karkat stops her.

“We won’t give up on her.” Karkat stares at you, and you’re struck by how normal his expression is. He’s retained the same look of disgruntled irritation throughout your entire conversation. Even now, he’s the only one in the group who’s calm, addressing you without a hint of malice. “We’re dealing with this shit now, and getting Rose out alive.”

You think you like Karkat. The other kids get angry or distressed when things are crazy. Karkat only seems to collect himself further. “I hope for your sake you’re right. Anyways, if knocking her out is all you need to do, I’ll handle that.” You hold up your tranquilizer. “If this doesn’t stop her, I use lethal force. There’s the deal.”

Roxy grabs for the gun, forcing your hand back. “Give it here.” She snarls. “I’m not leaving my sister’s life in your hands, creep.” You sigh and give her the gun. The darts won’t get through your armor anyways. If she wants to be responsible for whether her sister lives or dies it’s not your business.

“Alright, I’ll get you your opening.” You walk back towards Rose and make some snap decisions.

“Eridan, yes you, I’ve got a job for you!” You gesture impatiently and watch as he rolls his eyes and stomps over.
“Who the hell are you and what do you want?”

“I’m in charge now, that’s all you need to know.” Eridan opens his mouth to protest, but you really don’t have time for cape wearing douchebags and their ego complexes, so you cut in before he can get anywhere. “Can you adjust the power of your gun?”

Eridan puffs up indignantly. “What? Of course I can adjust the power of my gun, what a question! I can focus the shot by enough to melt a hole through a tank!” You’ll have to make a note of that for later.

“You’re thinking about it all wrong, kid. Make it weaker.” He gasps as though the idea is offensive to him. “Don’t give me that shit kid, can you do it?”

“I refuse to reduce Ahab’s Crosshairs to a level below non-fatal damage. To do so would be an insult to my ancestry.” You try to contain your irritation.

“Fine, just focus the laser and we’ll work with that instead.” You sigh, as he reaches for a slide near the trigger. He pauses when he realizes your request makes absolutely no sense, but he’s already given himself away. You slap him down and grab the gun, widening the beam as far as possible.

You take a brief moment to tell Jake and Dirk to back off, before pulling the trigger and sending energy scattering everywhere in front of you.

The blast burns through the shadows slowly, making you wonder not for the first time how Rose can possibly be giving them solid form like this. However, enough light and they vanish all the same. Jake and Dirk start flanking you, stopping the tentacles from looping to your back. They’re saying something, likely threats in the case you hurt Rose, but you seriously can’t be bothered to give a shit.

Rose stubbornly fights you, but refuses to back away. This is good as far as you’re concerned, because it only makes your life easier. She can lash out all she wants, but as long as the humans are keeping her away beside you, you’re safe.

This is what you think until Eridan Ampora tackles you from behind. “Like glubbing hell I’m letting you use my gun!” he screams as you struggle to keep your aim steady.

“What the hell are you doing you stupid little shit, you can have your damn rifle back when we’re done!” You roar as you desperately keep Eridan’s claws from tearing at the gun. Suddenly, you hear a maddening screech, and release the trigger.

Rose is trembling, the result of Eridan turning up the power on the laser and blasting her with far more intensity than you intended. However, the blast did burn off the shadows guarding her. “TAKE THE FUCKING SHOT!” Karkat yells behind you, and you hear the soft pop of the dart gun. The shot hits Rose in the shoulder, not a perfect hit, but still enough to do the job apparently, because she drops to the ground a moment later.

There’s a roar of wind as John flies overhead, catching Rose and crashing to the ground. Again, not bad, kid. You take advantage of the distraction he causes to flip Eridan over your shoulder and smash his nose with the butt of his own rifle. Violet blood streams from his face immediately, and you drop the rifle next to him as he curses.

You turn back to Karkat calmly. “I’m going to ignore that little douchebag and the shit he just pulled. You kids have been making my life difficult lately, but you’re also clearly not stupid. I can safely say I don’t want to stab all of you, and for me that’s a pretty big deal. So I’ll give you some useful info. We’ll be stopping by in three days. Be ready for it.”
You don’t wait to hear his response, you just walk away. Around you the shadows are dissipating, and you realize that it’s actually the middle of the night. It seems Rose was creating her shadows by pushing the nearby light away. She was making a giant ball of darkness by creating daylight. It’s ironic, in a way.

You check your watch and smirk as it turns to midnight. “Hmm, only two days now.” You mutter to yourself. “Time’s running out pretty damn quickly for them, isn’t it?”

Your name is Eridan Ampora, and you feel pretty glubbing embarrassed right now. You thought you had the situation well under control, but then some asshole stole your gun, started fucking with the settings, and nearly killed the person you were there to save. Granted you almost killed the same person earlier, but that was before you knew she wasn’t supposed to be killed, for crying out loud!

You sit up, ignoring the pain in your head as best as you can. “Is that fucker gone?” You pull a handkerchief out of your pocket to sop up the blood streaming from your nose. “Where the hell is Jane, my nose is seriously broken right now!”

You lower your hand to see that Jake and Dirk have weapons leveled at your head and scramble backwards. “Wait, what the fuck are you two idiots doing, I’m on your side!”

“Eridan.” You turn around to see Karkat and Feferi looking down on you. Karkat is barely containing himself from blowing his lid, and Feferi… she looks disappointed, and you get a bad feeling in your gut.

“Why are you all looking at me like that?” You start to get to your feet, but fall back as Roxy appears out of nowhere and punches you down again. “Glubbing hell, what did I do?”

“You nearly got us all killed!” Karkat hisses.

“You almost killed Rose!” Roxy yells.

“You just couldn’t handle somebody else touching your things, huh?” Dirk chuckles mirthlessly as he walks to your side. “The gun’s that important to you?”

“Well I couldn’t very well let somebody from the FELT hold on to it!” you protest angrily. “All he’d have to do is turn around and we’d all be dead.”

“Is that why you did what you did?” Feferi looks sternly at you, “Or was it just because he hurt your pride?”

“What the fuck Fef!” You gape in shock at her. She’s supposed to understand. “Yeah I don’t like people touching my gun, that’s pretty much always been common knowledge, but this is a pretty different thing! He’s the enemy!”

“Sounds like pride to me.” Dirk says casually. “Hey no worries, I don’t like it when people touch my sword either. Then again I’ve never killed anyone over it.”

“You should have known better, Eridan.” Feferi says quietly. “Rose is really hurt. Because of you. I thought you’d gotten past this.” She’s not even using fish puns. Feferi seems genuinely convinced that you’re in the wrong here. They all are.

“Okay, I see how it is.” You snarl and back away. “You all think I’m guilty. You all trust a FELT member over me. Look, I know I was an immature shit sweeps ago, but I’ve changed since then!
You helped me as much as I helped you Fef!

“Oh please, since when did you start caring about that relationship?” Karkat scoffs. “Your moirallegiance was dead in the water sweeps ago! You just stuck around because you were flushed for her!”

Feferi flinches at this. Karkat just accused you of breaking some serious ground rules of moirallegiance. Ground rules you definitely broke many times over the sweeps. Your face is enough to convince Feferi, and she runs away looking crushed. Karkat watches her go and turns back.
“Couldn’t even pretend for her sake?”

“Well I can’t start lying to her now that I’ve started taking this relationship seriously, can I?” You snap back furiously. “That’s right Kar, to answer your question, I started caring shortly after we escaped the base and set out on our own. I knew about her pitch-crush on you before she knew it herself! I know about Glubby too! I fucking care, alright!” Karkat is taken aback at this. Fuck him.

“I don’t know why I even bother.” You growl as you bend down to pick up your gun. “I’m clearly not appreciated for my efforts around here.”

“Hey.” Dirk says coldly. “Leave the gun. I don’t know you or trust you enough to let you walk off with something that deadly. You’re unstable, and I won’t let you become a threat.”

“Do you know what happened the last time I lost this gun?” You glare up at Dirk past the point of his sword. “A FELT member used it to shoot my friend through the stomach. If she weren’t lying over there recovering from another fatal wound I’d still think she’s dead. Hell I still can’t believe she’s alive looking at her. So no, I won’t leave the gun, you arrogant fucker. Never again.”

Dirk stares at you for a while, but lowers his sword in the end. “Just get out of my sight,” he mutters irritably.

You pick up the gun and walk away, past the scattered remains of street and vehicle, past John and Jane as they tend to Rose. John looks up at you, quiet and contemplating. He may very well be the only one here who hasn’t made up his mind on the matter. You look into his eyes, bright blue and hypnotic, for a few seconds, before whirling around irritably.

“KARKAT!” You yell furiously, prompting him to look back at you (or it would if he wasn’t watching you leave). “YOU TELL HER THE TRUTH. YOU TELL HER HOW I REALLY FEEL.”

Karkat stares at you for what seems to be the longest minute of your life. In the end he gives a single nod. It’s good enough. Karkat probably doesn’t understand, but if he’s good on his word you think Feferi will.

You look back to John, nod stiffly, and mutter an apology for the accident. He gives you a lopsided smile and wishes you good luck. You leave.

But you aren’t done with them.

If there’s one thing you’ve learned from this experience it’s that humans are not to be trusted. They don’t trust you, and so you can’t trust them. Your fellow trolls don’t seem to realize it, and they keep grouping up with them. But you’ve seen it all. Sollux tried to keep it to himself, but you’ve picked up on a few things over time.
The humans are not friends to you. Since you got to earth your friends have gone through nothing but misery. Almost all of it is because of the humans. And you’ve had enough. There are good ones, like John or Jade, but even Jade’s family has a racist old bastard in it. The rot is everywhere.

The more you think of it, the more certain you are. Humans are nothing but trouble, and Feferi is in danger as long as she’s with them. You need to get Feferi and anyone else with any sense off this planet and away from the others. And there’s only one way to do that now.

You need to get in touch with your fellow trolls.

Chapter End Notes

Eridan, stop that. Bad troll.

Karkat is a leader for a reason, people. A lot of people don't particularly take him seriously, what with all the shouting and crying and freaking out regularly, but it's a pretty well established fact that he gets his shit together the instant things get difficult. He's very good at keeping track of what his team is capable of, possibly due to all the creative ways they could kill him. But knowing your group's strengths and weaknesses is essential to leadership, so Karkat really is the best troll for the job.

For those wondering why Feferi reacts so poorly to Eridan's conduct, keep in mind that she's suffered sweeps of emotional neglect at his hands. The two were pushed into a moirallegiance from an early age, being the two at the top of the hemospectrum, and their relationship was terrible. In the comic, Feferi dumped Eridan around six sweeps old, but this was because she would soon be free from needing to feed her lusus, and didn't need Eridan anymore. In Blood Pride however, the trolls are closer to nine or ten sweeps, which means a lot of additional time in an unhealthy relationship. Eridan has clued in and rectified his ways over time, but Feferi hasn't forgotten. And the more she enters into healthy relationships of her own free will, the more her bad memories of Eridan stand out. He's got a lot to make up for.
Your name is Dave Strider, and this is unironically the worse fucking road trip you’ve ever been on. It’s just you and a giant troll burn victim with no social skills, crammed into a car so small the two of you barely fit with all of your luggage.

Of course, Equius did a damned good job of settling that problem in part when he got into the car. As soon as he sat down his legs pushed the whole damn chair backwards and crushed your turntables. Your brother got you those turntables, and you’re pissed that he broke them like that. Also pretty freaked out because the seats in your car are not designed to slide backwards, he just ripped it out of the floor by sitting.

All you really have to say about the matter is thank god his skin is so fucked up, because he can only sweat from the left half of his body and still manages to gross you out. You made opening the windows mandatory after twelve minutes and thirty-seven seconds with him, and you curse that you’re stuck on the side of him that isn’t incapable of leaking.

Or at least you would be, if he weren’t still a leaky burn victim on the other half of his body. You’ve been looking for a chance to help clean out his mess of a shoulder, but it’s not like you have any sort of skills with burns. Your expertise lies in cuts, lacerations, and puppet-induced trauma; the result of being trained in swordplay from infancy. The only person you know who can possibly help in this situation is Jane, and she’s still two days away at best.

Yeah, you’ve been driving for all of two hours, four minutes, and thirteen seconds and you’re already miserable. And if you’re miserable you can only imagine how Equius feels about things. Getting your arm ripped off by a clown, being burned alive, and then getting buried alive definitely qualifies as the worst fucking day in the history of worst fucking days.

The sun sets ahead of you and you suddenly become painfully aware that you’d been driving for hours before you found Equius. You had been hoping for a chance to relax after two days spent trying to put what happened in Houston far behind you. Now the Lalonde estate is burnt to the ground, your brother is missing, and your friends are gone with him.

You need a break, and Equius needs some time to clean the dirt out of his stump. You pull over to a seedy looking motel, and after spending some extra cash to get some towels; you sneak Equius into your room and send him to the bathroom.
You sit on the single bed in the room, not nearly as filthy as you had feared, and pull your phone out of your pocket. The piece of shit broke when you were fighting back in Houston, meaning that unless you set up your computer there’s no way for you to contact everyone. You always thought your bro kept an address book for ironic purposes, but apparently there was some genuine practicality to it.

A pained grunt sounds from the next room, and you sigh, going out to your car to get the first aid kit. You’ve been awake for the last fourteen hours, and it looks like you’ll be up for a long time yet.

Blue blood is leaking all over the bathroom when you go in, and Equius is hissing as he runs water over his arm. He’s attempting to dab the blood and grime away with a towel. Unfortunately for him though, dabbing seems to be about the same as a solid punch, because you can hear a dull thud every time he touches his shoulder.

“Oh for fucks sake, I knew you were a muscle head, but this is ridiculous. Move over.” You grab the towel he was using, and shake a mixture of mud and gore off of it. “Well that’s the single most disgusting thing I’ve ever seen. Okay, we’ll just burn that one later. Here.” You soak another towel and start cleaning his arm.

Equius winces, but overall seems to be in less agony than when he was punching himself, go fucking figure. “Seriously dude, I used to be the third deadliest guy in Texas, and now I’m stuck playing nursemaid to a giant one armed alien freak. The only way this could be worse is if you lost your fucking pants again.” Equius snorts at that.

“If such a humiliation should befall me, I give you permission to kill me.” Equius smiles grimly.

“You keep bleeding like this I won’t have to.” You sigh and drop another towel. “Almost done here, need another towel.”

“Need a towel… I need a towel.” Equius mutters to himself. “I won’t be saying that so much anymore, will I?” He looks down, and begins chuckling.

“Uhh, dude? What the fuck are you talking about?”

“Towels. For the sweating.” Equius chuckles. “I can’t sweat from half of my body now. So I won’t need towels very much anymore.”

“Except for now, because you need towels for the burns.” You look down at the mess of blood and dirt in the tub. “That’s actually pretty ironic.” You and Equius send lopsided grins at each other, which results in the two of you laughing like maniacs before long. After that, cleaning grimy blue blood out of a burn wound is much more bearable.

Of course when you get to the final part of it all things get horrible again, because using peroxide makes him punch a hole in the wall the size of your fucking head. And when you start wrapping him up in bandages he grabs the bathtub and squeezes it into dust. Finally, you manage to patch him up while remaining as far from him as possible, and spend the next three hours spraying your car with air freshener while he sleeps.

After a night of little to no sleep, the two of you are sitting in relative silence back on the road. You never bothered to mention the state of your room after last night, which suffered damage to the bed, the chairs, and a lamp in addition to the shit show that went on in the bathroom. Equius’ injury leaves him a very restless sleeper, and his thrashing was pretty fucking terrifying.

Now however, he’s relatively sedate, staring out the window as you drive down the highway.
Neither of you have elected to say much since getting on the road.

You’re making good time, and you figure it’ll be two more days on the road tops before you get to the Egberts. This is a good thing, especially since you’re going stir crazy from all the goddamn driving you’ve done lately. There’s nothing to look at, and definitely nothing to listen to; it’s just been you and the road for almost a week now.

You glance down at the CD player and contemplate playing something, but you’re not sure you’re ready yet. You’re almost tentative when you decide to hit the play button, and the music that plays reminds you of your Bro almost instantly. You last through almost a minute of freestyle rap before you decide to jab at the stop button and maintain your calm.

“Not to your liking?” you try not to jump as Equius speaks for the first time since you got on the road. He’s looking over at you quizzically. At least you think that’s what he’s conveying. It’s honestly hard to tell what sort of facial expression he’s making, and it’s not just because half of his face is missing.

It takes another moment before you register his question. “Oh, uh, nah, that shit was weak. Can’t taint my ears with that sort of garbage.” You love that disc. But sometimes being cool means turning your back on the things you love. Also you’re not feeling particularly connected to rap music right now.

Equius nods thoughtfully as he faces forward again. “I see. I did not find it particularly unpleasant, personally. It had a very strong rhythm, much like Alternian Slam Poetry.”

“Slam poetry.” You’re struggling to keep your eyes on the road, because you just want to gape at your companion right now.

“Yes, it is essentially the same as what you just played, your freestyle.” He frowns as he recalls, “your brother, Dirk, played some of it as he worked. He said once that he would challenge me one day.”

“You slam?” Yeah, you’re physically forcing your face forward, but hearing this giant troll talk about rapping is making your focus extremely shaky.

Equius looks immensely uncomfortable now. “I have dabbled in slam poetry before. It is something I usually prefer to keep to myself. They are private.”

“Well unprivatize them, or whatever. Just let shit flow.” You are feeling incredibly invested in getting this guy to unwind all of a sudden.

“I don’t want to.”

“Ha, I bet you don’t even rap.”

“I do… rap, but I don’t like to share them. Even my moirail hasn’t heard most of my raps.” There’s some sort of cultural gap you’re not appreciating there, but you can’t say you care at this point.

“Dude, this is beyond your quadrants, this is a camaraderie only understandable on the most deep of levels by only the most dedicated of slam poets. Just let it all out.”

“I don’t wish to reduce myself to slamming on command.” Equius stiffens, and you’re ready to push again, when all of a sudden he seems to just unwind, slinking low enough in his seat that he doesn’t even need to hunch anymore. “But I can clearly tell already you refuse to let this stand.”
“As a poet I’m afraid that my lines are not spectacular. But it seems that to appease you I must unleash my full vernacular. You’ve challenged me to slam and as my blood dictates, I have little choice so now I’ll show you how my flow conlates. My superiority will soon make itself apparently inherent, I’m declarant; it’s transparent, and not just ‘cause I’m aberrant. It’s a simple fact that slamming holds much cultural significance, And as a blueblood I’m beholden to pay duty to its brilliance. So when you ask me to rhyme and hint that I might be incapable, It’s demonstratable, I’m unbreakable, with superiority inescapable.”

He looks over at you, a strange mix of exhilaration and embarrassment, and you nod and smirk.

“You talk a lot of shit, but you’re clearly holding back, So I think it’s time I dropped my guard and went on the attack. Your skill as a slammer isn’t bad but I’m superior, It’s not even a contest, you’re big but you’re wearier. You think trolls are top tier, but people fly higher. We don’t tire, we acquire the fire required to make you criers retire. And when we’re done you’re going to realize the price that you’ve paid: Your raps can’t compare because we Striders have it made.”

It’s sloppy by your standards, but it marks the first time that the ice has been properly broken between the two of you outside of awkward laughter. From there on the two of you proceed to have what is no doubt the greatest rap battle in the history of paradox space, whatever the fuck that means. It lasts three hours, by which point you’re both almost completely insane, and have absolutely jack shit for material. Equius’ valiant effort to rhyme horse with milk is conclusively decided as the point where things need to stop for the sake of slam poetry as a medium.

“So, are you looking forward to meeting all your weird troll friends?”

It’s five hours after the great rap battle, and the two of you are sitting in another motel. You’ve just changed Equius’ bandages again, and this time he’s punched two holes in the wall instead of one. Now you’re sitting in the chair again as he takes the bed. His arm looks to be swelling, and you figure he could use a distraction.

Equius takes his sweet fucking time before responding with a drawn out groan. “Are you certain they will be there when we arrive?”

“IT’S PRETTY FUCKING LIKELY. WE’RE ALL A BUNCH OF SOCIAL OUTCASTS; WE DON’T KNOW ANYBODY BESIDES EACH OTHER. THE EGBERTS ARE THE ONLY FAMILY IN OUR GANG WITH A STANDING HOUSE THAT ISN’T IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FUCKING PACIFIC. I CAN’T THINK OF ANYWHERE ELSE THE OTHERS COULD HAVE GONE.”

“And your other friends will not take issue with our kind?” He sits up and stares at you, measuring your response.

“You kidding? The Egberts are the most stupidly nice family I’ve ever seen. Their house knows not hatred or prejudice, only nice feels and rainbows.” You smirk at him as you continue. “Seriously though, you’ve got nothing to worry about. So when we get there, your friends will all be there ready to find out you’re not dead and stuff.”

“I DREAD IT WITH ONE HUNDRED PERCENT OF MY BEING.” Equius collapses back into bed. “There is a
reason I was left behind to face Gamzee.”

“That’s the clown, right? Weren’t you just fighting him because you’re a walking tank?” You know he’s got a few creepy interests (that fetishistic horse thing, dear god), but you doubt Equius’ fellow trolls would attempt to have him culled via evil clown.

“There was imminent danger to our group. We had just lost Rue Lalonde, and her brood… daughters? Her daughters were emotionally compromised. When the clown attacked with the FELT we were in poor condition to retaliate. Not to mention her…” Equius trails off for a moment grumbling. “Well at any rate, I was the most expendable to our group. Kanaya and your brother had vested interest in protecting the Lalondes.”

“Kanaya had vested interest? Oh snap, that’s who Rose is dating? Goddamn, I knew some sort of shenanigans were going on there.” She has a habit (which she’ll never admit to) of being needlessly evasive whenever something big happens in her life. Whenever Rose Lalonde says the phrase ‘I wonder’ you can tell something’s up.

Equius seems a bit irritated by your enthusiasm. “Yes, shenanigans are indeed a word that does little justice to the depth of what’s happening here. I would think inter-species relationships held more weight to people.” He sighs and looks aside. “At any rate, that’s the reason for my staying behind. If anybody else stayed to fight back, there would be somebody unwilling to leave them. I am currently without such luxury.”

“Meaning there’s somebody out there who cares,” You point out. “Is that the ‘her’ you weren’t talking about?”

Equius looks up. “That is the one whom Dirk came to assist. She was recovering from her treatments when I left. I do not know whether she… I have not spoken to her in some time.”

“Quadrant material?”

Equius sits straight up, eyes bugging out. “I am not- I do not- she is… too good for me.”

“So she’s high class then? One of the seadwelling trolls?” Terezi filled you in on most of the hemospectrum stuff when she was staying with you, so you know the group has trolls from every level of their fucked up class system. You know where the blues fit on the system, so anything too good for Equius is going to be up there.

Or so you thought. “She is as low on the tier as is possible.” Equius sits back with a sigh. “In my youth I thought her to be far too good for her hue. She is exceptionally beautiful, and strong-minded. But with the difference in class between us, I had always felt I could only admire her from afar.”

“Got it. I’m picking up on some stalker vibes, but whatever, I know how crushes get.” You don’t actually know a damn thing about girls or crushes, being raised entirely by emotionally repressed homosexual males, but sympathizing is a vital part of brohood. “So you’ve pulled a one-eighty on the superiority thing, huh?”

“Aradia died during our crash on earth.” Unexpected. “Her telekinetic powers allowed her to endure as a spirit, and she used her powers to ensure our survival both before and after death.” Impressive. “Her strength was incredible, and it made me realize how poorly I’ve judged her. It was exhilarating to see her handle the situation.” And back to creepy. It’s the full Equius spectrum in crush form.

“So you like her.” You decide to be frank. “But you got caught up in your bullshit troll caste system and kept your distance. This lasted until she died, and she did such a good job of it that you fell for
her all over again and decided to smarten the fuck up.”

“I became a disgrace to my society.”

“Yeah, like I said, you smartened the fuck up.” You’ve heard enough about troll society to know that everything about it is objectively and non-objectively horrible.

“I was also supposed to be there when she woke up from having her body regrown. I kept vigil until she began to wake, but had to leave at the end of the process.”

“Because clowns?”

“Because of the unexpected appearance of Gamzee, yes.” Equius sighs. “I had to break my promise.”

“Well if she’s anything like you’ve said she’ll be pissed. Good luck.” You spend the rest of the evening chatting about Nepeta, the other woman in Equius’ life. The guy seems happier mentioning her, and has no trouble talking about her until he succumbs to fatigue. You swiftly fall asleep after him.

It’s shortly after noon when you arrive at John’s house, and you are definitely not nervous at all. The obliterated section of highway near the turnoff is worrying enough, but the missing house across the road from your destination is borderline terrifying.

You’ve barely left your vehicle when the door flies open and Dirk appears in the front lawn. He stares at you for several seconds, as though he’s unsure if you’re real.

“Sup bro? You look like you’ve seen a ghost.” You smirk at Dirk, forcing false casualness. “Don’t tell me you were—whoa shit!” A mess of black hair appears beside you and floors you before you see her coming.

“DAVE! We all thought you were dead!” Jade Harley is latched to your waist and grinning like the completely adorable goofball she is. “John was freaking out when he felt you coming, he’s coming downstairs right now!”

“I’m right here Jade.” John is leaning against the car in the driveway, and he looks like he fought a pickup truck, because he’s purple rather than his usual pale complexion. “I’m worn down, but I’m not a cripple.” He gives you a lopsided grin and you thank whoever the fuck that he’s still got his teeth.

“Egbert, what the fuck happened to you?” You look him up and down in disbelief. “You look like shit.”

“Rose beat the shit out of me last night.” John shrugs, “It could be worse. Kanaya’s still regrowing her spine.”

You look back at Equius, who seems very shocked by this. You look forward again, “Okay seriously, what the fuck happened?”

“We’ll tell you later.” John says with a grin. “Let’s get your friend inside, and holy shit. JANE!” He stumbles back into the house as quickly as he can, and you can only assume he’s noticed Equius’ arm.
“Oh mother fuck, Equius…” Dirk stares forlornly at Equius missing arm. “I shouldn’t have left you to this. Can we make a prosthetic?”

“Gamzee burned the wound; it is partially cauterized.” Equius says with a shrug. “The nerve damage was extensive. I will simply have to live with one arm from now on.”

You all move inside, Jade still latched to your waist. “I expected to die in that encounter, Dirk.” Equius continues, “Do not feel so remorseful. Your hand was forced, in some part by myself. I demanded this outcome.”

“Did you now?” A soft voice calls out irritably as you follow Equius indoors. A troll with curly horns and long wooly hair is staring coolly at Equius, and you see no less than four other trolls in the room, along with most of your friends. They are all staring between Equius and the other troll, whom you are almost certain is Aradia.

Jade lets go of you to whisper in your ear. “Roxy said she’s been muttering about him for days. Serious drama bomb here.” You can only nod mutely as Jade peers over your shoulder.

“Aradia, you are looking well.” Equius smiles nervously, his expression roughly as horrified as the day you met him and he remembered his wardrobe malfunction. “Have you been recovering properly from your procedure?”

“Oh, I don’t know, why don’t you be the judge of that?” Aradia tosses her head back and throws her arms open. “Do I look recovered?”

“Aradia, determining such a thing…” Equius trails off, knowing he’s trapped. Aradia gives him a look, and he groans and continues. “Determining such a thing would require constant supervision and analysis.”

“Well, you were waiting for me when I woke up right? Surely you’ve had time.” Aradia places a finger to her mouth thoughtfully, “Oh wait, that’s right. You weren’t there. You said you would be there, but when I woke up all I got was Kanaya telling me you fed yourself to a clown.”

God fucking damn this is juicy.

“Aradia, circumstances were entirely beyond my control. It is ludicrous to think that I would break a promise for such a reason.”

“If you weren’t Equius Zahhak, I’d believe that.” One of the trolls in the room mutters, before the troll next to him slaps him upside the head. “Ow, fuck off Feferi, we were all thinking it.”

“Thank you Karkat now shut up.” Aradia glances at the troll irritably, silencing him, before turning back to Equius. “There are all kinds of reasons for me to be pissed at you right now. And if this place weren’t a goddamn party right now I’d start listing them. But for now…”

She strides forward, and slaps Equius across the face. He winces, and you can see his arm trembling from frustration. Aradia glances around the room and everyone starts going back to their business, acting disinterested until she leaves the room. Jane takes the opportunity to rush Equius upstairs, John stumbling after her.

“Well that was insane.”

You look at Jade, who seems to be hanging off of your shoulders now, and smirk. “Damn right it was. Now quick, before my soaps are back on, fill me in on all the other shit that happened.”
So half of the time I spent planning this chapter was deliberating on the rap battle. I was honestly pretty terrified of writing it to begin with, but when I started it was immensely easy. And now I'm worried it actually sucks. Expect a lot more character shit to go down soon, we've got a lot of ground to cover there.
Your name is Tavros Nitram, and you are feeling very conflicted. More so than usual even, which is saying a lot! At the moment you are flying over the city you are helping Vriska terrorize, trying not to think about things too hard. That said, you think everything through way too much already, so you really can’t manage to keep your focus right now.

A flock of birds take off from below you, and you curse. They’re supposed to be staying put and intimidating people. You have them swoop down on a vehicle stubbornly moving around, prompting the driver to steer into a streetlight. He’s probably dead now, which is apparently what he gets for ignoring all the terror you’re causing. That’s how Vriska would put it anyways.

You don’t like this. You really don’t like humans; the only ones you’ve met have been total jerks to you ever since you got to earth. But the more you look around and see people screaming from all the animals you’re having run amok, and the more you see Vriska burning buildings and tearing up roads, the more you feel like the FELT was not like most people very much at all. It goes against what Vriska’s told you, but she’s kinda mean and dishonest to begin with, so you think your hunch is probably not wrong.

You decide to land next to the car you just crashed and see if the driver is okay. He’s alive, but pretty dazed, so you pull him out of his vehicle. After a moment, he wakes up, sees you standing over him, and runs away screaming. That is definitely not the typical way for a bad person to act. You fly up in the air before anything else crazy happens, and look down sadly.

Vriska’s plan is bad. You don’t just mean poorly thought out either, though knowing her it’s probably that as well. She’s being really mean again, making lots of people who are probably perfectly nice upset and injured. And you helped her do it; because she was so adamant that she was being helpful.

“Well it is Vriska… She probably thinks she is being helpful,” you think aloud. You’d really like to leave now, but you want to tell her she’s being horrible again. She’ll probably try to make you stay with her mind powers, but she doesn’t like using them unless she’s feeding her lusus, so you know she’ll stop eventually. She always does.

‘Tavros, get over here!’ Vriska’s voice cuts through your head sharply, and you feel your body start moving before her control is cut off. That’s not normal. Vriska’s probably in trouble. You fly in the direction she started pulling you as fast as you can.
When you find Vriska, she’s in the middle of a big intersection, fighting Terezi, who you were definitely not expecting to see. Terezi has her cane out, and is slashing at Vriska, who is barely managing to fend her off with her robot arm.

“You can only delay the inevitable for so long, Serket!” Terezi is screaming as you close in on the scene. “The people of Earth deserve their justice, and I will not deny them!” Her cane is a blur of red and silver, carving nicks into the metal on Vriska’s arm as she retreats, looking panicked.

“Terezi I’m not going to fight you, so stop acting like a goddamn psychopath and let’s talk about this!” Vriska looks over and sees you, but other than a pleading look, she’s too preoccupied to say anything.

“You’ve had your chance for talk, and you made your position clear.” Terezi shrieks, lunging forward with her blade aimed for Vriska’s good eye. Vriska barely dodges aside, the blade slicing her cheek open neatly. Vriska falls back with a scream, holding her hand up to the wound. Terezi relents then, standing over Vriska triumphantly. “You’ve lost your way Vriska, that much is clear even to a blind person like myself. Maybe now you’ll understand.”

Vriska gasps and glances towards you. You nod in understanding. Terezi aimed for the eye, and now she can smell Vriska’s blood. The cut was such a near miss that she can’t tell it didn’t work. You step forward determinedly.

Terezi points her blade at you without turning, causing you to pause. “You’ll get yours next Tavros. Sit down and shut up until then.” You and Vriska freeze and look at each other in bewilderment.

“What the hell are you mad at Tavros for?” Vriska starts to rise angrily, but is stopped when Terezi kicks her down ruthlessly.

“Terezi, this isn’t like you, at all. I think you’re acting very, umm, irrationally.” You stammer out nervously, drawing Terezi’s attention once more. Her red eyes seem to bore into you, even though the gaze they send is false.

“You’d know.” Terezi snaps angrily, turning on you in an instant. “You’ve been tainted, Tavros Nitram.” She strides towards you as you backpedal hastily. “Your chocolaty blood has become tarnished with the smell of deceit. It reeks of mud. You helped Serket in her criminal activity, and now you are an embarrassment to your hemocaste.”

“I’m not exactly okay with this anymore either.” You grumble irritably, ignoring Vriska’s cry of protest. “I just thought it would help Gamzee by getting the FELT to be distracted.”

“You sound just like Vriska.” Terezi’s voice sounds sad at this, but you can see a malicious grin spreading across her face. “You sound like her, but I don’t smell her foul influence on your mind. You’ve become a lowlife, just like she is. And there’s only one thing in the future of criminals like you. The noose.”

You let out an undignified squawk in fear as Terezi darts forward with her cane. You get in the air just as she reaches the ground below you, sniffing like a bark beast. Her head snaps up and she slashes with her cane, but you’ve ascended out of her reach. “Well that’s new.” She stalks below you maliciously. “Can’t hang somebody who can fly, can I? Those wings will have to go.” She licks the blood off her sword, and you gape.

Terezi has gone completely nuts.

You never would have thought it possible, because Terezi has always been the most stable and
composed person in your group, but she’s lost it completely. You look over at Vriska, and her expression of realization makes it all too clear that she’s responsible somehow.

“Terezi, what happened after I left Houston?” Vriska asks quietly, staring over at her discerningly. “Where’s Dave?” You have no idea who Dave is, but this sounds important, so you decide you should probably save the questions for later.

“What happened?” Terezi whirls around angrily. “The FELT happened, that’s what! They called in a monster to kill everyone left in the city! Including Dave’s brother!”

“I’m pretty sure that monsters aren’t real…” You point out in confusion. “Plus if the FELT had access to a giant monster they’d probably have used it by now…”

“Shut up Traitor!” Vriska yells at you angrily, and you go back to watching everything in confusion. “He’s totally right though, that story sounds fake as shit.”

“I’m not here for cheap confusion tactics, I’m here for justice!” Terezi yells angrily, brandishing her cane again. She runs at Vriska again and swings her sword, kicking Vriska in the gut when she blocks. “Besides, if the FELT weren’t responsible, then who was? Unless it was your dice, fiend!”

“Okay, this is confusing, and scary, and kinda silly, so I’m just going to go…” You sigh irritably, flying away as Vriska and Terezi just dissolve into yelling.

“Aww, motherfuck Tavbro, don’t be all absconding just as this motherfucking circus is getting started.”

You whirl around in confusion just in time to see Gamzee falling towards you. There’s a flash of neon green and white and you’re suddenly falling from the sky. It occurs to you that Gamzee must have just clubbed you in the head. A dull throbbing starts pounding at your skull as this information registers. Then you hit the ground.

Your heart is pounding, your vision is darkened, and you definitely taste blood. You try to recover your senses, managing to open your eyes for long enough to see Gamzee pulling himself to his feet. He’s not too far from you, and for some reason that thought is terrifying. Why is he so frightening to you? You wanted to find Gamzee, didn’t you?

You spit out a glob of blood and try to move, but your chest lights up with fire as you shift your arm. Your chest is injured, and you can hardly breathe. You gasp in pain as you crack your eye open to see Gamzee sauntering towards you.

“It hurts, doesn’t it? That pain in your chest?”

You cough up more blood as you get an arm underneath your body. Your other arm doesn’t move properly, likely broken. You try to lift yourself, but the effort merely rolls your weight to your bad arm, causing you to scream in agony.

“That pain you feel right now… It’s nothing.”

It doesn’t feel like nothing at all. It feels horrible and wrong, and you wonder briefly if this is what it would have felt like if you’d been able to sense your legs being sawed off. No, that would probably have been worse. You heave again, and manage to get to your knees, though you’re still slumped over. You want to stand up straight, but your body can’t summon the energy. You just stay slouched, like a puppet with its strings cut.

“Your agony right now? That’s only the start of it motherfucker.”
You try to lift your head, but all you manage is to glance up with your eyes alone. Your blood is pooling below you, dripping from your mouth, as well as one of your horns. You see a pair of big colorful shoes stop below you, one foot tapping in your blood and smearing it around.

“Let me tell you something Tavros. Something you need to fucking know about pain.”

A hand grabs you by the hair and hauls you forward, slamming your head facedown into the puddle of your blood.

“Pain is the greatest of motherfucking miracles, Tavros. Without pain we’d never know what’s wrong with the world. I’ve hurt like you wouldn’t believe, Tavros. The things they did to me while you sat in your little box and waited for all the bad things to pass you by, they’d make you scream just hearing about them. I’ve hurt, and I’ve felt the sick injustice of it all.”

Your scalp is numb, your horn still drawing your attention, and Gamzee starts bouncing you up and down by your hair, just enough to send jolts of agony through your skull.

“But here’s the weird thing, my best motherfucking cellmate. The things they did to me weren’t what really hurt me. Oh, that shit stung, believe me motherfucker, it did. But the worst pain? That was all you.”

You blink slowly at that, trying to remember when you’d done anything like Gamzee was describing. “Huh?” You manage weakly, barely getting the noise out at all. Gamzee snarls at your response.

Suddenly your mouth is full of dust and blood, and Gamzee is slamming your head into the ground with a scream. You try to move, to fight back, but his strength would be far beyond yours on a good day. Right now all you can do is pray he’ll stop before you die.

“I COULD HAVE BEEN FREE, YOU PIECE OF SHIT. All I had to do was run, just make it to the wall with the other backstabbing fuckers. BUT I STAYED WITH YOU. I wanted to help you with your legs, with your confidence, WITH ALL THE SADNESS WHAT’S SITTING IN THAT HEAD OF YOURS. I wanted to make it go away, let you be happy. SO I STAYED TO PROTECT YOU. Because you were my friend. BECAUSE I FUCKING LOVED YOU. And it didn’t mean a thing to you. YOU JUST KEPT PLAYING YOUR SILLY GAMES, ignoring all the bad stuff that was happening around you, EVEN THE THINGS THEY DID TO ME. And what did you tell me as it happened? YOU’RE A REALLY GOOD FRIEND.” You feel yourself choking to the point of breathlessness on your own blood. “When did you stick your neck out for me, friend? WHEN DID YOU HURT FOR ME? You didn’t. Not even once. WELL NOW IT’S YOUR TURN TO BLEED.”

Gamzee hauls you out of the blood and you cough and choke for air. The instant you manage a breath your body starts warning you about other things. Namely, that Gamzee is dragging you to a nearby car. He tosses you onto the hood, and positions you so that your head is dangling off of the side.

“This would be easier with two hands.” Gamzee grumbles to himself, as he raises his club. You notice with that comment that his left arm is missing, but before you can think about what that means Gamzee brings the club down on your broken horn.

The blow sends a jolt of pain that lances throughout your entire body, making you scream once more, even as your chin is slammed into the car. You barely avoid biting your own tongue off, and try to shift weakly, only for Gamzee to hit you again.
It takes three more blows for your horn to finally snap off, at which point you realize that he broke off the one that wasn’t damaged. Gamzee hits you one last time, and your other horn is shattered in a single blow. You lay on the car sobbing, as Gamzee picks up the broken ends of your horns impassively.

“Just remember Tavbro, this is nothing.” Gamzee hooks one of your horns under your chin and lifts your head with it. “You can consider this an appetizer for what I’ve got in store. Because I’m killing you last.” He lets your head drop. “Now to get what I came for.” Gamzee stalks off towards Vriska and Terezi, still fighting in spite of everything not far away. You lay still for several long moments, and once you hear the trolls screaming you finally manage to flap your wings and fly away.

You don’t have a name anymore. You left it behind so many sweeps ago that you couldn’t even begin to remember what it was. What you do have is titles. Some are reverent, some disdainful. But these things don’t matter to you. The only thing that matters is that when they use one of your titles they are always fearful.

You are Her Imperious Condescension, the Condesce, the Witch, the Baroness, the All-Culler, and many things besides. You used to be the owner of the most dangerous creature in the universe, but now you are the holder of the most hateful grudge instead. There will be no mercy when you find your prey, and you are on the trail.

Travel to and from Alternia was banned for many reasons, not the least of which being that it makes keeping track of those coming and going from the planet child’s-play. You found the trail of a ship that your analyst’s have determined left mere days after the death of Gl’bgolyb, and you are pushing your pilot to his limits for the sake of hunting them down. The area around the pilot’s chair is a mess of yellow, and you doubt he’s going to survive the trip. Pity. He was damned good at his job, even if he was a mouthy bastard.

“Your imperiousness, we will arrive at the end of the trail in a matter of minutes.” One of your trackers announces. “We’re detecting some debris, and scans indicate that there is a class five planet nearby. Reports indicate this planet is inhabited by no less than seven billion sentient life forms, with basic technology.”

“Drop anchor.” You demand quietly, hearing the gasp of relief from your pilot. The ship comes to a swift stop, and you note the raspy breaths as a sign that the Psiionic may survive this trip after all. Fortunate.

You look out the windows of the bridge, and see with some satisfaction that the planet is already in sight. “What other info do we have on this planet?” It’s on the absolute edge of your territory, but that edge is always expanding.

“I’m afraid there’s little else.” A teal blood nearby states ruefully, her frown turning into a look of blind panic as you turn to glare at her. “Forgive me, our scouts have only just begun the initial phases of reconnaissance upon this planet, and our most recent scout failed to report. It is likely that it was involved in the same incident that led to the debris in this planet’s orbit.”

“Well there’s nowhere else my prey could be.” You snarl. “Figure somefin out, and clam up until you do.”

You didn’t live this long without being cautious. There are trolls who feel the best way to deal with a dangerous situation is to blast through it, like the Grand Highblood used to. You aren’t one of those trolls though. You approach every situation with cold, ruthless, calculated efficiency. Never
approach a planet without knowing what they have in store, never underestimate a potential enemy, and never make an enemy unless you already know every single trick up their sleeve. The trolls you’re hunting killed the most dangerous lusus in Alternian history, and kept her quiet while doing it. You’re playing it safe.

It takes little time for your patience to be rewarded. You’re just relaxing in your seat when a screen opens in front of the communications officer, as well as the main bridge com-screen.

A young troll’s face appears, complete with purple hair and glasses, as well as a pair of horns that look unsettlingly familiar. An ancestor of Dualscar?

“Hello, calling any and all trolls in range of this transmission, this is Eridan Ampora, of violet blood,” here he pauses and slices his palm open as verification, despite all of the injuries covering his face. “I am requesting urgent assistance in the recovery of important assets to the Alternian Empire, as well as the elimination of potential… hindrances. If you receive this message send word to my present location immediately.” The kid’s been watching way too much Grub-tube, but you do appreciate his attention to detail. The word ‘hindrances’ is much less offensive than ‘threats’.

“Drop the guppy a line.” You point to the troll that originally received the message.

There’s a brief moment, before the image quality changes, and a live feed begins. “Well, it’s nice to see somebody out there understands the importance of being prompt!” The troll says smugly, before looking off to the side and doing a double take, likely at his video feed. “Holy fucking shit. No way.”

“Way. This is Her Imperious Condescension, and you are a fish well out of water.” You state lazily, holding up a hand casually. “Now state your business, shrimp.”

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, nothing much to say here, except that Terezi will probably be campy and overdramatic all the way to her deathbed. Insanity or no insanity. It's the one thing I like about her character.

I know I said there's no April fools shenanigans here, but I think I'll point out that there is some humor to be found here. Haha, GamTav Shippers, looks like the jokes on you this time! Sorry, not sorry.
Your name is Karkat Vantas, and you would love to know why the fuck everyone’s been so fucking interested in your feelings lately. Seriously, is it too much to ask that people let you figure shit out on your own time? You’ve got a lot of shit to think about here, serious, important things, things that could mean life or death for you and your friends. Nobody cares about that though.

They all want to know why you haven’t visited Nepeta lately.

There are five members of your group missing. Gamzee was last seen missing both his arm and his sanity. Eridan was last seen with a giant laser and a long history of poorly made emotional decisions. Vriska and Tavros were last seen destroying a city on the evening news. And nobody’s seen Terezi since she tried to pull a sword on Dave Strider. They all used to be good friends of yours, and now have the potential to do serious damage to the public.

But who cares about that, it doesn’t matter at all! Because Nepeta is in love with you, so obviously everything else takes a back seat!

“Cooowaaaaard.” Feferi sings in your ear smugly. “I don’t even have to try to guess what you’re working so hard to not think about, it’s so obvious.”

“Shut up and go bother your moirail, Feferi. Oh wait, I forgot, you left him to rot in Chicago,” you snap irritably, turning back to the map you’re using to try and sort out where the others could have gone. You had Jade mark the locations shown on the news, but it doesn’t help much. “God fucking dammit, they’re probably all just chasing each other now.”

“Who is?” Sollux asks from across the table. The three of you are currently holed up in David Brinner’s house again, along with anyone else not requiring Jane’s attention. Still at the Egbert house is Nepeta, Equius, Rose, John, and Kanaya, all still recovering from injury, and Jane, Mr. Egbert, Roxy, and Aradia, all helping with caretaking. Jade Dirk and Jake are making some sort of teleporter in the next room over from you, while Dave and Grandpa Harley are off minding their own business somewhere.

“Basically everyone except for Eridan have one person they’re likely to target.” You reply to Sollux, looking back to the map. “Terezi was after Vriska from the start, so that’s obvious, and she’s got Tavros involved in her schemes, likely due to mind control.” You point down at the area most recently shown in the news. “So this is where they’ll be.”

“And Gamzee?”

“He needs an arm.” you sit back and snarl. “And since the stupid fucker decided to maim the only person he knows that’s capable of building troll prosthetics…”
“Vriska’s the only person with an arm to spare.” Sollux nods in understanding. “She’s fucked.”

“Probably.” You sigh and rub your temples in frustration. “I feel bad for Tavros, but we can’t get to him before the FELT attack tomorrow. We’ll just have to wait for everyone to kill each other and deal with whoever’s left.”

“That’s cold, Karkat.” Feferi declares bitterly from beside you. If she were just trying to annoy you you’d probably flip at this, but the sad fact is that this is just a shitty situation in general, and you’re all recognizing it at once.

“I don’t like it either, but what the fuck else are we supposed to do?” you slam your head on the table and groan. “We’ve got no time, not nearly enough hands to support a trip so far away, and no guarantee they’d even be there when we arrive. Our hands are completely fucking tied.”

“Maybe…” Sollux says thoughtfully, “Maybe not.” He looks over at you meaningfully. “The humans have ways.”

You blearily stare up at him. “I’m not asking him.”

“Him?” Feferi asks in confusion.

“Dave.” you grunt irritably. “Process of Elimination decrees that he’s the time traveler.” You can’t stand Dave. His habit of twisting everything people says every way imaginable is as infuriating as it is exhausting to deal with, and while infuriation is inevitable with this many assholes around, you have way too much shit to worry about to be exhausted.

Cue Dave appearing in the last open chair in the room, lounging casually as the others jump visibly. You refuse to give him the satisfaction, instead straightening up and glaring at him. “Speak of the devil.”

“Sup.” Dave nods at you casually, before turning to the table. “I heard my name and realized that you all must be going through Strider withdrawal, so I came to save you. Feeling magnanimous as fuck right now.”

“That’s you in a nutshell, fucker: all heart, no brains.” You snap irritably, trying not to get too pissed off when Dave smirks at you.

“Aww, don’t be like that. I’m just looking to make nice. Do my civic duty by helping out some government fugitives, you know. Seriously though, what’s up? I’ve been bored as hell here; need something to do before I lose my mind. We can’t have a precious commodity like Strider brains going to waste, that’s like denying a man a blood transfusion, we’re talking serious essentials here.”

“We want you to use your powers to help my friend before he gets stuck between Gamzee and Terezi.”

“Terezi?” Dave groans as he sits up straight. “Well as much as I’m looking forward to seeing her again, I can’t do a goddamn thing here. Hands are tied, and by hands I mean time. Time is tied up in all kinds of crazy knots here and I was never much of a boy scout.”

“You can’t time travel.”

“I can time travel, but there’s rules.” Dave shrugs, his face blank. “If I’m going to time travel, I need some kind of indication when I’m returning. Usually left by future me whenever he gets back. There hasn’t been a future Dave around in a while, probably because I’ve jumped through time properly a grand total of once in my fucking life. So whatever jumping I’d need to do to make things work for
your friend would have to have happened already if it was going to work.”

“You can’t break the rules?”

“I’d die, dude.” Dave looks at you seriously. “The one time I’ve time travelled that wasn’t me practicing, there was dead Dave’s all over the fucking place. If I diverge from whatever the fuck is supposed to happen, I’m done.

That sounds morbid. “How the fuck does your body show up multiple times at once?”

“I think it’s like a warning mechanism.” Dave frowns and stares down at the table. “Probably. Certainly works like one, because that shit is creepy as hell.”

“Okay, so long story short, unless you show up to tell us otherwise, you’re useless.” Sollux interjects bitterly.

“Pretty much.” Dave frowns as he stares at the map. “Sorry. And just so we’re clear, that’s legit apologizing there, not trying to be an ass here.”

“Yeah, thanks anyways.” you wave a hand dismissively, and look back at the map. “Okay, so there’s nothing we can do about the psychopaths. What about Eridan?”

“Didn’t he try to kill Rose twice?” Dave cuts in coldly. “Because if so then I say fuck that guy.”

“Well tough shit, we want to get out of here with as many trolls as we started with.” You snap, looking back at the map. “Besides, Eridan gets violent when he’s lonely. He’ll start copying Vriska if we leave him for long.”

“He didn’t strike me as that bad of a guy…” You turn around to see John stagger into the room, looking weary, but thankfully not injured any more.

“Holy shit John, should you be moving around?” you ask in surprise, as Dave casually vacates the recliner he’s been lounging in and squeezes onto the couch with you and Feferi.

“Yeah, Jane’s patched me up for the most part, everything else just comes down to bed rest.” John smiles gratefully at Dave as he takes the open chair and sits down gingerly. “Besides, they’ve got limited hands over there, and…” John cuts himself off abruptly, cheeks flashing pink.

You grin maliciously, “What’s the matter John? Was your presence proving distracting to anybody?” Dave glances between the two of you in confusion, clearly not in the loop on all the gossip that’s been going around lately.

John groans and buries his head in his hands. “Karkat, not now, please. We were talking about Eridan?”

“You saw him yourself.” Sollux sighs irritably as he looks around. “He’s dangerous, mentally unstable. He always wants attention to stroke his ego, and gets stupid when he thinks he’s been made a fool of, which is often.” He looks over at you and Feferi in annoyance. “Which is why running him out was probably a terrible idea.”

“Dirk was going to kill him if he stayed.” you protest, despite knowing he has a point. “And if he didn’t Roxy certainly would have.”

“Nah, she’d probably just kick his ass and be done with it.” Dave shrugs. “Roxy doesn’t really do murder.”
“And Dirk?”

“I dunno, maybe? Roxy is kinda… special. She’s been his friend longer than anyone else has; dragged him into our social circle kicking and screaming. If there’s anyone he’d kill for, it’s her.”

You find yourself staring at Dave curiously, until he shifts uneasily and looks over to you. “Dude, what?”

“I just thought… it sounds similar to a moirallegiance, doesn’t it?” You look over to your fellow trolls in the room for feedback. Feferi nods, Sollux shrugs (as close to a yes as you’ll get from him, no doubt), and you look back to Dave. “Yeah, almost sounds like those two are practicing quadrants.”

“Well they didn’t take any cues from you.” John responds with a chuckle, “they’ve been like that for as long as I can remember.”

“Say what you will Egbert, it just supports the simple fact that quadrants are the superior method of romantic expression.”

John sticks his tongue out at you, but before he can come up with a rebuttal Sollux cuts in. “Yeah, not that this isn’t fun and all, but we were talking about Eridan, not stupid romantic crap.” Right, you forgot about that.

“Does it matter?” Dave sits back with a sigh, “Dirk and Roxy aren’t thrilled with Eridan right now sure, but Old Man Egbert knows what happened out there now too. And if there’s anyone who isn’t going to budge on somebody so dangerous it’s him.”

He’s made a very good point. Mr. Egbert is strong, stern, and skilled enough to make anybody who threatens his family think twice. And the look on his face when he found out about Eridan’s actions was nothing short of terrifying.

It’s probably the biggest reason you haven’t been going near the Egbert house. Atticus Egbert stuck his neck out for you more than anybody else; he put the most at risk for you and your friends. Knowing that one of your friends responded by almost killing somebody so close to his family is sickening to you. You’re terrified that the next time he looks at you he won’t be so fond of what he sees.

You find yourself wishing not for the first time that you had a moirail. Unfortunately there’s little to be done about that for now. “Fuck, you’re right.” you groan irritably. “John, I don’t suppose you could…”

John shakes his head with a sigh. “It doesn’t look good. My dad is really mad, and kinda stressed, so we have no chance settling anything for now. Maybe once we’ve cleared the whole FELT situation he’ll be more open minded about things?”

You stare flatly at him. “John, we’ll be miles away by then.”

“Well tough shit Karkat, my dad’s got his mind made up for now!” John frowns at you. “I said it doesn’t look good for a reason, you know!”

“Fine.” You stare down at the table, at the points on the map, four far away, one in Chicago. “Fucking fine. Well then it looks like we can’t help anybody else.” You stare down at the table feeling empty. “They’re all fucking dead.”

“Not helping, asshoal.” Feferi glares irritably at you.
“Does it matter?” You snap at her. “Nothing is helping. There is literally nothing we can do right now. We might as well be useless.” You turn back to the map and feel suddenly furious. “They are going to die and we can’t do anything to stop it, so sitting around talking about your happy-go-lucky-let’s-all-hold-hands-and-sing bullshit isn’t going to do us the slightest damn bit of good!” You stand and swipe the map off the table in a furious movement.

A sudden sharp pain lances through your head, and you realize Feferi has grabbed you by the ear. “Outside. Now.” She snaps, dragging you away from the others.

“What the fuck? Feferi get your hands off of me! SHIT! I said let go, not twist you psychotic bitch, do I have to speak in terrible fish pun to get you to understand the words that are coming out of my fucking mouth?” You flail wildly, but Feferi’s already moving, and with a grip like steel clamped down on your ear you have no choice but to stumble after her.

You look back to the others pleadingly, but they remain seated. Sollux laughs at you, Dave gives you a nod and a thumbs up, face impassive, and John waves. They are all traitors, and while you have the horrible feeling that what’s about to happen is for your own good, it won’t stop you from giving them hell later.

Feferi goes right out the back door with you, and dumps you in front of the back door to the Egbert house. “For the record: it pisses me off to no end that I’m the one who has to knock some sense into you. So I’m just going to be as quick and as rude as possible here, and we can pretend this wasn’t awkward as shell for either of us. You’ve done plenty. And if you’re not convinced get your shrimpy ass in there and start kelping out.” She storms back inside at that, leaving you to stare up at the Egbert house and reflect on how many people inside of it you’re afraid of seeing.

Your name is Jane Egbert, and your life is completely out of control right now. You’re trying to finish off the treatment on Equius’ burns, with Nepeta watching from the bed. But if Equius’ current attitude is anything to go by, he’ll just end up doing something to damage the shoulder again. He won’t even lie down for treatment, he’s just insisting on sitting next to Nepeta’s bedside. It makes you think of Karkat really, but mentioning the troll seems to make Equius pretty cross, so you haven’t told him that.

Of course, there are all kinds of problems, and they don’t stop with Equius. Rose still has internal bleeding from her episode two days back, and you’re not sure if you’ve fixed it all. Nepeta is doing far better, but you’re still not convinced that she’s recovered from all of her internal trauma. Kanaya’s regenerative capabilities are incredible, but she’s got at least three fatal wounds that she needs to recover from.

You released John today, but you’re really not sure about his state either. He pushed himself well past his limit saving Rose, and took several bad hits. The only reason you let him leave is so that Roxy and Aradia can focus instead of tittering away over him.

You’re still not sure how to think about that. Your best friend gushing over your little brother is not something you can say you expected in the slightest. It’s not like you don’t think John is a great guy, he is, but you’re really not sure how to think about him being the kind of guy that girls fawn over. So far he seems to be ignoring it as best as he can, so you’re pretty sure that he’s not sure how to deal with it either.

You’ve always told John that his flying around was going to draw the wrong kind of attention. You’re not sure you’ve ever been more wrong.
Equius flinching under your hands draws your attention back to the present. “Stop being such a baby, this is taking long enough as it is.”

“I have no desire to be a… baby.” Equius sighs as he looks down. “This is however a very serious injury, and all attempts to tend to it in the past have proven… excruciating.”

“It’s alright Equius.” Nepeta grabs his hand and beams up at the two of you. “Jane is furry good. She’ll fix you up in no time!”

Equius nods, more to himself than Nepeta, and then slowly relaxes. “Of course. Forgive me miss Egbert, my weakness is inexcusably hindering to you.”

“Please don’t call me miss Egbert.” You ask, not for the first time, as you continue to work your way around his shoulder. Thankfully, it seems that Dave did a decent job of cleaning the wound, because there’s little foreign residue left in the wound, and only minor infection. The treatment has gone more smoothly than most of the crap you’ve had to deal with since trolls started showing up on your doorstep.

You place your hands directly onto the wound, causing Equius to hiss as Nepeta anxiously pats him on the arm. Then you use your powers.

If somebody were to ask you how your ability worked, you’d never be able to tell them. It doesn’t fatigue you any more than the typical symptoms of stress in such situations would dictate, and you don’t draw energy from other being either. You simply let life energy start flowing and watch, as everything gets better. Sometimes, as was the case with Nepeta, you have to direct it inside, so that things line up properly inside. But time spent at medical school made this less of an issue.

Really, for all the horrible external damage done to Equius, the wound is easy to fix. You watch carefully as the raw bloody skin knits itself closed, and the swelling begins to visibly recede.

“Young lady, I’ll give you a shot of antibiotics to prevent infection, and everything should be great!” You smile cheerfully. “I’ll have you stay the night here, and if you’re still showing signs of improvement tomorrow you’ll be free to leave.”

“I will stay with Nepeta.” Equius’ voice brooks no argument, and you decide to let it slide. They’re easily your lower maintenance patients at this point. As long as nobody catches some sort of bacteria or virus your powers can’t cure they’ll be fine.

You turn to leave when you hear a knock on the door and Karkat sticks his head in. Nepeta glows. Equius glowers. “Hey Jane, I’m uhh…” He looks like he’s not sure what he’s doing her any more than you are. “I’m here to see if you need any more help?”

You can’t say you’re surprised; Karkat hasn’t been one for staying still since you met him. “Everything’s under control here Karkat.” you say with a roll of your eyes. “Why don’t you see if you can help dad in the kitchen?” His eye twitches when you mention dad, and you roll your own eyes in response.

Equius interrupts you irritably. “Mu-” He spies Nepeta giving him a nasty look and hastily corrects himself. “Vantas, I am ludicrously cross with you at present. Leave Nepeta’s appearance immediately.” Nepeta hisses at him, and he adds a tentative “Please?” This does jack shit to improve Nepeta’s mood, and it’s souring yours as well.

Karkat glares at Equius and you can see his chest swelling with air as he prepares to go off. You step between the two angrily, and Karkat catches himself just as he’s about to shout something offensive,
making a noise similar to a balloon as the air flies out. “He’s stuck here until I say so, so like it or not you can’t be here agitating my patient.” You jab a finger in his face and he flails backwards, despite you stopping short. You wave goodbye to Nepeta and close the door on the two, as you stalk after Karkat into the hallway.

“Karkat, I appreciate the thought, but three people is enough for medical duty, especially since I’m the only one with the training.” You sigh as you step into the hall.

“I’ve got medical experience.” Karkat says irritably. “I had to patch myself up all the time as a wriggler, so I didn’t get put down by any medicullers.”

“I appreciate the offer, really Karkat.” You gently push him towards the stairs. “But there’s nothing you can do at this point that my powers don’t do better. Besides, you haven’t slept in weeks!”

“Can’t afford to sleep,” Karkat huffs grumpily, “I need to make sure everything here doesn’t fall apart again.”

“We’re here Karkat. And we’re together. We are going to get through this. You stretching yourself to breaking point isn’t what’s doing that though. All of us are working together here; so let some of the weight off your shoulders. We’re more than capable of taking it.”

Karkat sighs at this long and heavily. “I don’t know Jane, I just… I’ve got so much to make up for.” He walks away and leans on the rail above the stairs. “I ruined their lives. I can’t stop until I’ve made it right. Or at least, as close as fucking possible.”

You’re really not sure what to say to that, so after standing quietly for a moment you decide to turn towards your room, where Rose and Kanaya are recovering. You’ve barely taken a step when Dave appears in the hallway, blood trickling down his face.

“Dave?” You reel in surprise, unsure how he got there. His appearance was immediate, not at all like flashstepping, where you can at least somewhat tell where he came from. Karkat has turned by now and seems to be cursing up a storm.

Dave looks around curiously between you and Karkat and frowns. “Aww hell no, did I miss the soaps already?”

“When did you come from?” Karkat sputters out in a panic, rushing next to you. “What happened?”

Dave frowns at Karkat. “Dude, you’re not going to let me do my bit? I can’t even drop a quick ‘I come from your future?’ no wait that’s shit. I am the ghost of Christmas yet to come.” You fix him with a glare and he hastily amends, “Yeah okay got it. I’m from about an hour ahead.”

“An hour?” You’re not sure what could possibly have happened in such a short amount of time, but you’re sure you won’t like it.

Dave rubs his head and stops, apparently only just noticing the blood. “Yeah, we need to abscond right the fuck out of here. FELT is coming in about… ten minutes, I think. Shit's about to get very fucking insane.”

Chapter End Notes

SHIT’S GETTING REAL.
Also, first chapter with Jane as narrator, because I don't find Jane interesting... Her and Jake, they're just the bottom tier humans in my mind. With Terezi and Tavros on the troll side. And Vriska's not boring, but I hate her guts, so blah. There's the reason those 5 characters aren't around much.
Chapter Summary

Dave One leads the defence against the FELT attack.

Chapter Notes

This is another chapter that I was forced to split in two. Sorry if the ending feels abrupt as a result.

Your pulse is pounding in your head, your feet hitting the ground with a sound like sledgehammers against your skull. Ahead of you a crowd is forming, and you can see more drones dropping from the sky. You pause as you see the drones forming a perimeter, and run to a nearby rooftop. You stay low as you scale a ladder and creep to a vantage point.

There he is, in the middle of a trio of drones. Your lusus. The drones have their claws raised, and your lusus is snapping at them as it screeches in distress. The drones are moving to prevent your lusus from escaping, as the others form a perimeter.

The last drone moves into place and the three drones step forward. Your lusus lets out a shrill cry and charges at one. The others fall on his back. It’s over in seconds. You want to say that he gave as well as he got, but in truth it was a massacre. Candy red blood drips from the claws of the culling drones, and your lusus died before it could so much as scratch them. You try not to imagine your own body lying broken in that circle.

The drones begin to move into the crowd, and all the idiots who gathered up to see the show begin to panic, as they try to leave. The drones are looking for the custodian of the lusus they’ve killed. You slip away as silent as you can.

It’s a long walk back to your hive, and you’re not sure how you made it to the scene so quickly. You saw a drone fly overhead and suddenly you were there, despite always walking the opposite direction whenever you’ve seen culling drones in the past. You knew this was happening on some level.

Your hive is well outside of the typical search radius for such cases, so you let yourself breathe once you’re safely inside. Lusus are rarely known to wander away from home, and yours in particular almost never left the house. In truth, you’re not sure what possessed it to leave this evening at all.

You walk into the kitchen and are struck by how hollow you feel. You eye an old drawing of your lusus on the cooling block, and feel a wave of sadness hit you. You rip the drawing down and clutch it to your chest as the tears start.

“Goodbye, Crabdad.”
Your name is Jade Harley, and you’ve finished what may be the most important project you’ve ever had to do. A brand new teleporter pad sits in front of you, and with help from Dirk and his Auto-responder you’ve managed to make sure it’s operational and linked to a pad set up at your home. You smile happily as Dirk leans back against the fridge.

“We’ve totally trashed the kitchen.” He smirks to himself as he wipes grease from his hands. “Poor Dr. Brinner is going to pitch a fit whenever he gets out of the hospital.”

You wave him off with a grin, “It’s fine, we’ll clean it up before we all go!” You check it over one last time and conclude: “It’s almost perfect!”

“Whoa there, I’m not sure I want to trust my molecules to anything unless it’s running at one hundred percent, Jade. Where’s the issue?” Dirk’s hand moves to a screwdriver on the floor beside him, and he eyes you suspiciously.

“It’s not that it doesn’t work properly!” You giggle as you point to the bare round circle on top. “It’s just so boring looking! The pads at home always had spirographs on them, they looked way more interesting!”

Dirk frowns thoughtfully at this, “I guess aesthetics are necessary if you want something to be truly perfect, huh? He steps forward and draws a crude series of triangles in a pattern on the pad with the machine oil nearby. “Boom. That’ll look like shit as soon as somebody uses it, but at least we’ll know in our hearts that this is the best thing.”

You grin and hi-five him as you get to your feet. “Well, no point in waiting around here, we need to start moving things through.” You walk over to the kitchen table, where Jake’s fallen asleep. He was helpful when you were assembling the machine, but once you started programming the thing he ended up completely lost, and chose to rest his eyes.

Now however, he will be put to work! “Wake up ass!” You grin cheerfully as you shake your brother into wakefulness.

“What the devil?” Jake jumps, barely catching himself from falling out of his seat. “Jade! I’ve told you about disrupting my bloody rest before! A trained adventurer like myself is not to be disturbed! I am a fighting machine, a finely trained master of fisticuffs! I could have knocked your bally noggin off!”

“He’s right you know.” Dirk says seriously from behind you, “That wild arm flailing? Definitely masking a cobra strike at your eyes. You’re lucky to be alive right now, Jade.”

You manage to somehow repress your sudden giggling fit, but only barely. “Alright you two, go on ahead and get things ready for everyone else.” You grin and push Jake onto the transportalizer pad, and he vanishes in a flash of light with a startled yell. Dirk stares at you blankly as you turn your smile to him. “You want me to go set up futons? Not really my thing, Jade.”

“You can set everything up faster than anyone else can, and Jake knows how everything’s set up. It’s perfect! Now go play house!” You make a shooing motion towards the transportalizer.

Dirk stays completely still, but you see a smile playing across his lips. “Logic, romance, and irony all at once. You play a dangerous game, Harley.”

He’s totally on to you, and you both know it. Your smile broadens. “I know Striders. I’ve been dealing with you and Dave for years. Are you going to tell me that you’re not convinced?”

“Oh hell no. You just pulled a serious checkmate right there. I’m sold. I just wanted you to know I
appreciate your efforts.” He flashsteps to the transportalizer and gives you a bow as it activates.

“Well played, Jade.”

You grin to yourself and pick the pad off the ground. You consider giving them some time to themselves, but under the circumstances your brother’s romantic life will have to wait! You open the door just in time to see Karkat and Dave walk into Mr. Brinner’s living room. Which is weird, because Dave it also sitting at the coffee table.

You aren’t really sure how to process this in your head. Obviously this is the result of the time travelling trick that’s Dave’s been working on, so you guess one of them is from the future? Or the past? No, probably the near future, they’re both wearing the same red hoodie and jeans. If you had to decide, you’d say that the one with blood all over his head is from the future, because of course he fucking is.

“All right fuckwits get your acts together, because things just got complicated!” Karkat disrupts your train of thought and starts yelling. “Dave just showed up to tell us that the FELT are on their way here a good twelve hours ahead of schedule, so we need to move and we need to move now! Jade, get that teleporter to the other house so we can get the injured out first, John that includes you. Everyone with the capacity to fight from a distance needs to hold them off, everyone who can fight close range, stay inside and buy time when the first team becomes useless piles of shit. If we keep the plan simple, hopefully nobody does anything too stupid! Get moving!”

“Okay first thing’s first.” You walk into the middle of the room before anybody can move, which Karkat does not approve of. You point at the Dave with blood on his head. “You’re Dave One.” You point at the Dave sitting in the chair. “You’re Dave Two. That way nobody gets confused.”

“Thank god somebody said something!” Feferi chimes in gratefully.

“Hold on, why the fuck am I Dave two?” Dave Two protests from his chair. “That makes it sound like I’m the lesser of the two.”

“Technically speaking I was here first.” Dave One nods thoughtfully. “Good thinking Jade.”

“Think of it this way Dave Two.” John adds with a grin. “Now you can look forward to becoming Dave One later.”

“It was a pretty rewarding moment, really.” Dave One replies.

“Fuck you all. I’m out.” Dave Two gets up and heads for the door, before Karkat cuts him off.

“Where the bulge-blistering fuck do you think you’re going, Strider?”

Dave Two shrugs. “If future me is sticking around, then I’ve got nothing to worry about going out there.” He turns to Dave One, “Am I good?”

“Yeah you’re good. Clear out Dave Two.” Dave One nods grimly, and Dave Two flashsteps out of the building. You notice Dave One’s fists clenching as he sighs. “Well, causality dictates that we follow, so see you all out there.” He vanishes as well.

“What the fuck people! Did nobody listen to my carefully foolproof plan? Because it’s only foolproof if people actually fucking follow it!” Karkat yells angrily, waving his arms in the air. “I don’t care what Asshole One says, you need to stay inside and wait until WHERE THE FUCK ARE YOU GOING EGBERT.”

John shrugs his shoulders as he stumbles his way to the door. “I’m going to help Dave. I’m not about
“Damnit John you are not ready to be fighting anybody, you’re too tired to stand right now!” Karkat snaps back. “You probably can’t even lift your arms right now.”

John grins wryly at Karkat. “I’m not a bird, Karkat. I don’t have to flap my arms to fly.” He pushes gently past Karkat towards the door, and lifts off in a flurry of air.

“Alright, let’s get this shit over with already.” Sollux walks up.

“GOD FUCKING DAMNIT SOLLUX WILL YOU JUST…” Karkat trails off as he realizes who he’s talking to. “Right. You’re the one person in this fucking room who’s actually supposed to be out there.”

Sollux grins. “That’s right. Now are you going to let me do my job or would you like to make an ass of yourself again? It wouldn’t work with my bifurcation thing, but I feel like it would make me feel better anyways.”

Karkat groans and just waves him off. The two of you look towards Feferi, the only other person left in the room. Karkat doesn’t even bother protesting at this point. “You don’t give a flying fuck what my plan is, do you?”

Feferi just smiles and blows him a kiss, before walking out the front door.

He turns to you, expression strained to the point of breaking. “Where are Dirk and Jake? I need people who know a good plan when they hear one.”

“They’re setting things up for everyone back at our house!” You drop the transportalizer on the ground and smile. “You can go get them. I’ve still got orders to carry out here.”

Karkat stares at you for several seconds, before clapping a hand on your shoulder. “You’re alright, Jade.”

“You’re not so bad yourself, fuckass.” You say with a salute as he steps on to the transportalizer and vanishes. He barely had the time to flip you the bird before leaving.

You pick up the pad and move for the Egbert house as soon as you’re sure he’s safely travelled. You need to start welcoming guests before things get worse.

Your name is Dave One, and you don’t have much time before things get worse. The events of the hour before you travelled are weighing heavily on your mind, and you’re about to watch everything unfold a second time.

The FELT have cleared out civilians as of thirty-seven seconds ago. In a minute and twelve seconds they’ll be out of earshot, too far to see anything that you or your friends do, the cue for the attack to begin. You have enough time only to block the streets, which Sollux and Aradia are doing by pushing cars into the road. Your car is included, which is a serious bummer, because that means that you only ever got to drive it for one sweaty road trip.

The road bocks will last for six minutes and twelve seconds, by which point the FELT will drive tanks completely over them. Sollux will make them regret it immediately afterwards. That’s when they bring in air support, due another twenty-six minutes later.
“John, Sollux, Aradia, watch the streets!” You call upwards, directing Dave Two towards the yards with a gesture, where Roxy should already be keeping a watch from the window with her rifle. Feferi follows behind him. You stop on your way to the back and grab John’s sledgehammer from the ground, tossing it into the front yard.

Jade walks out with the transportalizer then, and she walks up to you immediately. You want nothing more than to disappear, but you can’t do that to her, not after what happens next.

“Dave One?” she frowns, “Okay, I’m just calling you Dave right now, that doesn’t really work in a one on one conversation. Anyways. Are you okay? I noticed you were all agitated when we were inside.”

You stare down at her, trying harder than ever to keep your face calm. “What? Agitated? Come on Harley, Striders don’t get agitated. No reason to be agitated. Things are going to be right as rain, or drought in this case? Because there is definitely not going to be any sort of waterworks here, that’s the last thing that’s going to happen. Just camels as far as the eye can see.”

“You’re rambling, Dave.” Jade gives you a lopsided smirk. “You need to calm your tits. Freaking out is Karkat’s job.”

“Oh no, you did not just compare me to Karkat.” You groan as Jade starts giggling. “That is so wrong on so many levels.”

Jade grabs you by the wrist with her free hand and smiles. “Dave. Everything is going to be fine. We’re all going to get out of here, and then I’ll give you all the grand tour of my island. It’ll be great!”

You smile back at her in spite of yourself. “Sure thing Jade. Now get going, we need every second we’re going to get.” She nods and runs inside.

You don’t know if you’ll ever see her smile like that again after today. But there’s no time to dwell on it. You rush onward to the back yard and hop the fence. You can see Dave Two doing the same thing several houses over. Feferi is still here, pressed up against the corner of the house, her face grim.

A sudden explosion sounds behind you, and you see Sollux using his laser eyes from the air. A gunshot rings out from above, a sure sign that Roxy has spotted the enemy.

“Aww shit.” Roxy curses from above you. “My gun still isn’t firing straight Dave One, I can’t do much until they get closer.”

“Just do what you can.” You call up, before jumping another fence. John, Sollux, and Aradia are watching the streets from above, meaning you’re covered on two sides. If the enemy is going to sneak up on you it will be through the back yards, where the cover is ample.

It’s all guesswork for now. Dave Two isn’t nearby, so you have no idea what you’re supposed to be doing at the moment.

You hop another fence and land directly in front of a FELT soldier; slashing his hands while he’s occupied and making him drop his gun. The man yells in shock and tries to kick at you, but your next cut guts him before he can get the chance to hit you. You leave him to scream over his guts, and flashstep out as his comrades come around the corner.

“Oh hello there, Mister David Strider!” You freeze as you spot a familiar face. The man who called out to you is almost exactly like Agent Caleb Deuce, save for the absence of a ridiculously stupid
hat. “My name is Carter Droll, it’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance! My cousin told me so much about you!”

The man who you cut open just now starts screaming again as the other soldiers draw near, and Droll pulls out a pistol with a grimace. “You’re already a dead man, Bill. Dead people don’t interrupt.” There’s another wail and Droll shoots the injured soldier in the head. It seems that wanton killing of underlings is a family trait. You don’t stick around any longer.

Droll clicks his tongue as you hop the fence. “Fan out, don’t enter the street. Try not to kill him, we need him alive.” His singsong voice is cut short as Roxy fires again. A body hits the ground with a scream, and a startled gasp rings through the air. “Oh my goodness, that woman was trying to shoot me!”

Jesus fucking Christ that whole family is so goddamn creepy. It’s like you took every fucking spider in the world and fused them into two goddamn cousins with way too much pep for a giant ball of creepy. It’s a fucking social enigma that two people that fucked up can even exist, seriously.

Gunshots pepper the fence not far from you and you decide to start moving again. You rush at the soldier who kicks through the mess of bullet holes, and decapitate him before anybody can register what happened. You flash behind Droll and his two remaining subordinates, and swing your sword through the three of them at once. Droll dives forward instinctively, and you find yourself stuck as your sword sticks in the spine of the man on the right.

“You’re trapped!” Droll squeaks triumphantly, firing his pistol as you drag the man in front of you. The bullet rips through the man’s guts, hits your sword, shattering it, and embeds itself in your shoulder. You were wondering how all that shit happened. Turns out a half-pint psychopath with a goddamn pistol wrecked you with one fucking shot. And Roxy saw everything. Fuck.

Another shot whizzes past your ear, and you bring the remains of your piece of shit broken katana down on Droll with a roar. He barely scampers away, and fires a panicked shot that nearly hits you in the head again. You run before he can finish the job. Thankfully Droll seems to be doing the same.

Feferi is standing strong with several bodies at her feet when you meet up with her again. “Jade’s helping out upstairs.” She says calmly, looking out casually. “She got the wounded through, but the transportalizer is overheating. We’ve got to wait between uses now.”

“I know, you just told me.” You reply with a smirk, pointing to Dave Two. “I’m basically up to speed on everything for the next thirty seven minutes.”

“Oh, right.” Feferi blushes at this and turns back around. “So that’s how long we have to stall for?”

“Kinda.” Dave shrugs. “They’ll be regrouping right now. I’m going to start filling people in on what’s coming up next. Stay vigilant.”

She nods and turns back to the yard she’s watching. You head inside. This is where things are going to get difficult.

The streets are a mess, but the super power trio out front seems to have kept the damage from the house. Atticus is standing vigilant at the front window with Grandpa Harley. Atticus nods grimly to you, his mouth pressed into a line with worry as he watches. Old man Harley has his goddamn souped up blunderbuss on hand, and you can tell he’s waiting for an excuse to fire the damn thing.

You move on upstairs and reach Jane’s room just in time to see her vanish through the
transportalizer. Roxy and Jade are standing by the window with their rifles, Roxy still trying to adjust hers desperately.

Jade brightens up as she spots you. “Dave! You’re still alive!” She runs up to hug you, ignoring your protests. You wince as her shoulder bumps your bullet wound.

“Damnit Jade, I’ve got multiple injuries, you need to get your chill on. Striders may be as badass as they come, but we’re still mortal!” You push her away gingerly.

“Sorry.” Jade replies with a smile that suggests she has no remorse whatsoever, before moving to examine the transportalizer. “It’s still running poorly. We’ll need to give it more time before we can use it normally again.”

“Not much more. John’s next.” You say with a nod. “Roxy, you’ll have to go get him. He won’t listen to anyone else.”

“Is he really being so stubborn in his condition?” Jade exclaims irritably. “Karkat was right, we shouldn’t have let him out there at all!”

“Maybe somebody else could make him, I don’t know.” You shrug. “Roxy’s the one who’s going to do it though. Just chalk it up to time travel.” You look over to Roxy pointedly and she nods and runs downstairs. You follow behind closely.

You get outside just as John hits the ground in a heap. FELT members are closing in on him, and Sollux and Aradia are busy with the tanks, too busy to help out. One soldier draws a sort of taser, but John counters by grabbing the sledgehammer at his side and using the wind to flail his arm in a wide arc that catches the man in the ribs and sends him flying. The others behind him are wiped out as Dave Two appears and cuts them down.

“Thanks Dave Two.” John pants wearily, using the hammer to prop himself up on his knees.

“Still with this Dave Two shit John, really?” Dave Two throws his arms in the air irritably and storms off.

“John, baby, we need to get you out of here, you’re not looking good.” Roxy murmurs as she reaches John’s side and helps him to his feet. John tries to wave her away, but that final swing of the hammer seems to have drained him of whatever energy he had left. Roxy drags him inside, hammer and all, and you cross another event off your timeline. The two of them will end up going through the transportalizer together when John makes a fuss at the last second. That’ll leave five humans and four trolls to deal with, once Karkat gets back.

And none of you will be enough to stop the dog.
Chapter Summary

The siege on the Egbert house continues.

Chapter Notes

Slow going on the writing front at the moment because Xenoblade 3D owns my soul right now. I wrote this chapter by straight up forcing myself to sit still and go for about nine straight hours.

Your name is Dave Two, and you hate that you have to go by that right now. You are actually, genuinely looking forward to the time when you’ll be able to start calling yourself Dave One. You have completely fallen into Jade’s diabolical as fuck trap.

You don’t have the time to concern yourself with Jade’s trap though, because it looks like you’re barely squeezing out of Doctor Scratch’s trap. The bald asshole decided killing Rose and Roxy’s mother wasn’t good enough for him, and now he’s setting out to add some more points to his body count.

The important thing for now is that he’s not going to get away with pulling anything this time. You’re not having the easiest time of it at the moment, but with John and Roxy proving that you can go two at a time it shouldn’t be too much trouble to get the team out. Then all you need to do is jump back in time and assume your rightful role as number one Strider.

You’re feeling pretty confident, really. Or you would be, except your future self seems to be pretty on edge. You’ve just come down the stairs again after getting the wait time for the next chance to escape. You’re on your way to back up Sollux and Aradia, who are now without a certain wind-loving dork to save their skins.

The instant you step foot outside everything goes to shit.

It starts when Sollux decides to vaporize the street. It strikes you as a pretty stupid overreaction, destroying the street. But you suppose psychokinesis can only keep you juggling tanks for so long. Brains get tired too.

This means that the FELT will have a hell of a lot of trouble getting to you for the next little while. Which is okay in your books, really, even if it still strikes you as stupid. Sollux doesn’t seem to care though, going back and doing the same to the area behind the house. You’re just staring at the absolutely insane levels of wanton destruction going on here, trying to figure out what he’s playing at, when a flash of green light catches your attention.

You turn just in time to see the black wolf appear directly in front of Dave One. Their swords are meeting before you can even register that the monster is there. Dave One’s blade is broken though,
meaning he can’t do much more than defend. He is in serious trouble, which means that you’re in serious trouble by extension.

You rush forward just in time to slip your blade in at the monster’s throat, but he’s gone before you can strike the killing blow. He appears behind you in another flash of green light, just in time for Dave One to swing his broken sword for the thing’s head. He’s two steps ahead of the both of you, but that’s to be expected from somebody who’s been in this same fight once already.

The Wolf man dances out of the way and takes to the air with a rush of wind, getting out of your reach. “Will you little shits just stay put and let me do my job? I’m not even supposed to kill you!” He snarls down in annoyance, brandishing his sword arm.

“You weren’t supposed to kill my brother either.” You point out irritably. Seriously this guy is clearly not one for leaving survivors.

“Yes I was!” The guy protests. “Why the hell wouldn’t I kill him? He’s not exactly valuable!”

“On the contrary, whippersnapper. Brock Strider was a treasure to everyone who knew him. Even your brother had the sense to know that much.” Grandpa Harley hollers from the front door, raising his gun. The guy turns in surprise, just in time for Old Man Harley to blast a hole the size of your head straight through his wing. He falls to the ground with a roar, vanishing before he can hit the ground.

Dave One moves immediately, leaping into the air above Harley’s head and kicking the monster as he appears, sending him sprawling to the ground. “You’re not going to kill him.” He declares coldly.

You take a moment to reflect on how badass future you is. Like seriously, holy shit.

And in that moment Aradia hits the ground beside you.

You whirl around in shock; half convinced that she’s dead. It seems pretty clear that she almost did die, but she’s mostly just rattled. Blood is streaming from a small gash on her head, and with her weird blood color it looks like a scab is growing on her face. She’s lying on her back spread-eagle, and her eyes are bugging out as she states calmly: “They have air support.”

You look up in dismay to see a helicopter advancing. The sound of blades chopping through the air becomes noticeable as you fixate on the machine. “It’s got a lot of firepower, and I can’t stop bullets. Yet.” Aradia is mumbling as you help her to her feet. “One of them almost clipped me. Thought my head was going to explode. I don’t want to die like that. At least the first time was clean.”

“Oh, you’re going through next.” You decide on the spot, hauling her along beside you to the door. “If you somehow manage to die twice I don’t think anybody’s going to take it well.” You nod to Dave One as you bring Aradia past Grandpa Harley. He nods back, but doesn’t take his eyes off of the Wolf, who is still eyeing everything from the ground nearby.

You’re just getting inside when you hear gunfire break out above. You whirl around to see dirt flying through the air as machine gun bullets rip a gash through the front yard. Suddenly Atticus Egbert hits you like a goddamn automobile and you’re getting thrown against the back wall of the living room along with Aradia.

“You can’t.” Atticus roars over the sound of shattering glass and bullets ripping through earth. He’s thrown his arms wide over you and Aradia, for all the good it would do, and is clearly intent on stopping anything from harming you. It strikes you as a bit silly, since there’s clearly a future you still outside, but it’s a hell of a nice sentiment anyways.
The helicopter seems to pull up, and suddenly everything stops being quite so hellishly loud. It’s probably going to pull back and assess damage done before resuming with fucking your shit up.

Atticus pulls you and Aradia up quickly and ushers you to the stairs. “Get yourselves out of here immediately. We won’t have much more time before that helicopter is back.”

You won’t be leaving here until after you’ve finished your time travel, but you don’t really see a reason to argue on the point right now, so you drag Aradia to the stairs. She seems to be pretty fucking out of it after everything that’s happened, talking total nonsense. “I can see where he gets it.” She’s mumbling as you take the stairs. That’s totally stupid and probably doesn’t make any sense to anybody. Aradia needs to lie down.

You hear a commotion as you reach the top of the stairs, and see Dave One and the Black Dog (you need a better fucking name for this douchebag) fly past the front window. Grandpa Harley takes aim from the front door, but seems to be struggling for openings.

You and Karkat arrive in Jane’s room at the same time, much to Jade’s surprise. “What the hell are you doing, fuckass?” Jade yells in shock as Karkat steps off of the transportalizer. “The machine is overheating as is, we need to focus on getting people out, not coming back in!”

You’re just about ready to flip your shit as well at this point, but Karkat has a look in his eye that implies he’s actually got something meaningful to add for once, so you hold off. His addition is to stare grumpily at the two of you and dump a couple of bags of ice on the ground beside the machine. “Normally I would have a lot to say about this.” He says irritably as he kicks the ice into place around the pad. “But this is obvious enough, and things are shitty enough right now, that I’m just going to let the feeling of overwhelming shame you’re all feeling right now be degrading enough.”

“That really doesn’t make any sense if you make such a big deal out of it Karkat.” Aradia giggles as she leans on your shoulder.

Karkat looks over at her and his eyes start to bug out. “Aradia, get the fuck out of here before you die and make me lose my shit a second time.” He walks past the two of you angrily, grumbling more curse words under his breath.

“Aww, he does care!” Aradia rolls her eyes at you, before stumbling a little and grabbing your shoulder more firmly. “Okay, I’m seriously fucking dizzy here, just set me down and I’ll be gone as soon as the transportalizer is ready.”

“Alright, Jade, keep an eye on her.” You look up to see her glaring at the transportalizer, “And try not to focus on how stupid Karkat just made us all look.” She directs her glare to you and you give her a small smile. “Too much shit out there to be pissed at, Jade. Don’t go using that glare for evil. And you,” You turn down to Aradia, who has slid down to the floor beside you. She stares up at you blearily. “Don’t go picking any more fights with helicopters.” She grins.

“DAVE, QUIT FLIRTING AND GET YOUR ASS DOWN HERE.” Karkat screams from downstairs. You make a hasty exit. Karkat loses his temper over a lot of shit, but in a time like this it pays to treat every exclamation like a sign that things are getting crazy. Because guess what, it’s pretty fucking crazy out there.

Turns out Karkat has a reason to freak out, because two men are climbing out of the trench into the Egbert’s front yard. One is lean, with a long scar running down his face, and the other is roughly seven feet tall and half as wide. Both are wearing black suits, and are pretty fucking scary in general.

Karkat has his sickle drawn, and is clenching it like a lifeline. “The smaller one is big in the FELT.
Not quite on Scratch’s level, but I don’t think he’s far behind.”

“And the big guy?”

“Fucking look at him. That’s all we need to know. He’s fucking big enough to kill us with his bare hands.” Karkat stares out irritably. “Why aren’t they coming any closer?”

“Probably so the helicopter doesn’t shoot them by mistake.” You step forward, trying to spot it in the air. It’s not visible, but you can definitely still hear it. Meanwhile, Dave One is still fighting the Wolf, and unlike Dave One you have no idea if your counterpart lives to the end. At this point evidence point to you’re totally fucked.

“This blighter keeps hopping all over the bloody place; I can’t seem to get a fix on his damned head!” Grandpa Harley exclaims from outside, and you step forward again.

“Get inside you stubborn, racist bastard!” Sollux screams in the distance, as you take another step.

“What the fuck is a helicopter?” Karkat asks from behind you, as you reach the door.

The sound of gunfire is starting to drown everything out, so you’re not sure if you heard that last one right. It’s a pretty ironic thing to say though, so you hope it was correct, as fucked up as that sounds.

The front of the house was looking pretty fucked up before. The first time the helicopter came through it left the wall looking a lot like Swiss cheese. Now though, it looks like somebody put their fist through a wheel of cheddar (and you mourn that you don’t know enough about cheese to come up with a better simile). Basically, there is no more front wall. The machine gun shredded everything, hitting at an angle and obliterating whatever was inside. The television is completely annihilated, the fireplace crumbling. The urn on the mantle, which carries the ashes of John’s grandma, falls to the ground and shatters.

Words cannot describe just how thankful you are that John isn’t here to see this. He’d be destroyed. Even Karkat looks like he’s about to break down.

You hear a great deal of screaming and snap out of it long enough to risk a glance outside. Sollux caught the helicopter this time, and is pissed enough that he doesn’t seem to be using his eye lasers anymore. Instead he’s settled for ripping it in half with psionics and is crunching the two halves into small balls of metal. He throws one into another helicopter making an approach. The other ball gets shot at high speeds into the area where the FELT are gathered across the road.

It’s only after you’ve watched all of this that you realize Sollux is pissed off because the chopper shot Grandpa Harley.

He’s leaning against the wall behind the front door, leaking blood from a hole in his gut. And by hole you mean if he turned you could probably see right through him. He’s already barely holding on to consciousness, but he takes a moment to raise his gun one last time and fire a shot at the Wolf, who has distanced from Dave One in the wake of the gunfire.

There’s a screaming howl from the Wolf and he staggers backwards, clutching at the shoulder attached to his blade arm. Grandpa Harley grins at this. “Finally… got the bastard.” He slumps forward, but is caught in a wave of red and blue sparks by Sollux’s psionics.

Sollux doesn’t say anything to you or Karkat, he just points to the two men across the yard, as they start to move forward. Then he walks inside, the old man hovering gently behind him.

Karkat doesn’t hesitate, he just runs at the two of them screaming. You rush forward to back him up.
You think at first that this will be a two on two fight, but Atticus Egbert clearly has other ideas. You’re about to approach the big guy when a safe comes flying through what’s left of the front of the house and hurtles directly at the giant. He catches it, but barely, wheezing from the impact as it thuds against his chest. Atticus takes this opportunity to burst out of the safe, punch the guy in the face, and then spray him in the eyes with shaving cream.

You’d laugh if you weren’t so terrified of everything going on. You settle for letting out a yell and swinging your sword at the small guy’s head.

That’s when you realize that you got the tougher opponent. The little dude is another mutant, and his arms have some sort of plating on them that stops swords because of it. Your blade cuts a large strip of fabric out of his suit sleeve, and you can see some sort of carapace underneath, shiny and black like a fucking beetle. Karkat is having similar problems, swinging his arm like a maniac and finding his blade bounce back each time.

The man’s arm snaps back at an impossible angle and backhands you across your temple. The blow hits harder than John’s sledgehammer probably could, and you suddenly understand with painful clarity where that head injury on Dave One came from.

You’re not sure if you actually slow time as you fall or if it’s just a perception thing. You see Karkat’s flailing sickle slow, and realize that he’s taking a number of strikes at the guy’s joints, which he’s deflecting almost as fast with his forearm. You see Dave One rushing towards you, leaving the Wolf behind, beaten but not broken. You see Atticus weave past a bone-breaking punch and strike at the throat of the giant man.

Dave reaches you, catching you by the shoulder and hauling you to your feet so fast you feel minor whiplash. Atticus grabs the extended arm of the giant and flips him, still choking to death on his crushed windpipe, into the beetle man. The beetle man reacts with visible horror as the big guy flies at him, screaming out the name “HARVEY!”

Atticus is already upon him, grabbing the giant and slamming him down on top of the smaller man. He grabs Karkat by the scruff of his neck, throws him towards you and Dave One, and moves to attack the Beetle, still reeling over his comrade.

Dave One looks up at you, tears in his eyes, and whispers quietly, “Help me hold him.”

Karkat hits the ground rolling, stopping on all fours. He starts trying to crawl back. “MR. EGBERT, WATCH YOUR FUCKING ASS!” You realize that the left side of the yard is empty.

The Wolf Monster appears behind Atticus Egbert in a flash of green light, and stabs him through the back.

You all stare in shock, with the exception of Dave One, who is grabbing Karkat and pulling him towards the house. Blood starts dribbling from Atticus’ lips. The Wolf starts roaring with a sickening mix of barking and laughter as he rips the sword back out.

Atticus looks down at the bloody hole in his chest, and then looks up to you, the picture of calm. “Dave, Dave, Karkat,” he looks pointedly at each of you, “Tell John and Jane that I’m sorry.” His voice starts to dip as he turns to face the Wolf. “And tell them that I’m proud of them. I’m so proud of them.” His face doesn’t waver, but you can see tears running down his cheek as he turns away. The wolf’s blade rips through him again, and the point sticks out of his back.

“MR. EGBERT!” Karkat screams as you rush to Dave’s side and start dragging Karkat away. “DON’T YOU FUCKING DO THIS, DON’T YOU LEAVE THEM LIKE THIS. DON’T-” he
Atticus grabs the Wolf by the throat, turning back towards you all as you pull Karkat inside. Blood is already pouring from his mouth, but you can all clearly hear him all the same. “Karkat.” He speaks in that strange way he always has, not needing to raise his voice to be heard. “I’m very proud of you too. Don’t ever forget. You’re part of my family.”

Atticus disappears from sight.

Karkat loses his senses at this, screaming incoherently as you and Dave drag him up the stairs. Dave is keeping his poker face, but you can still see tears streaming from his eyes. He’s muttering over and over again as he hauls Karkat towards the transportalizer: “It had to happen. It had to happen.”

Jade is already gone when you get to Jane’s room. The only sign left of Aradia is the blood she left on the wall. You can see the trail of blood Grandpa Harley left as Sollux brought him up, and you remember that he’s probably dead as well.

Dave looks over to you as he pulls Karkat to the transportalizer. “You know what to do now, right?”

It’s a stupid question, but the mere thought of giving some sort of witty response makes you want to carve out your fucking tongue. “Yeah, I know what to do next.” You reply weakly. Dave nods solemnly, wipes the tears from his face, and drags Karkat onto the pad on his own. You’re alone in the room.

You stare at the transportalizer pad for a moment, wanting nothing more than to just step onto it and leave all this behind. You drive your sword through it instead, splitting it in half. You see the blade crack with the effort, but can’t be bothered to dwell on that.

You step into the hallway. You want to sit down, to rest, to do anything that might help you recover from all of this. The Wolf and the Beetle will probably be up here soon though. No time to lose.

That being said it still takes you several precious seconds to recompose yourself. You can’t go back in time a sobbing wreck. You have a job to do. You need to keep yourself collected, because if they find out beforehand that people are about to die it will fuck with everything. Another dead Dave to fuck with your head.

You take a deep breath. Then another. You go through several different sword movements in your head. You think up a new page for that shitty webcomic you used to draw. You think of Jade’s optimistic face when your future self first showed up. You need to protect that smile.

Yeah, that fucking did it.

You raise your hands; let your fingers dance as though you’re working your turntables again. You remember doing this back in Houston, jumping back half an hour to run before the Wolf could hunt you down. This time is different though. This time you’re not running. You’re going back to kick some ass and save as many people as you can.

You just survived the worst hour of your life.

Time to take it on a second time.

Your name is Sollux Captor, and you are attempting to rescue the same racist asshole that tried to imprison you in his own fucking ship.
That’s not true though. You know he’s already done for.

You heard his voice bitching that you’d be there to hear his last words instead of his grandchildren. He’ll be gone by the time he’s reached his home. Jade likely left with Aradia to make sure her injury wasn’t serious, judging from the blood on the ground. That means that the only person to hear him out is you.

“The Cabot…”

There it is. The old bastard has woken up again. You want to ignore him, but last words are pretty important to you in general, so you raise your head and turn to face him.

He’s pouring blood from the hole in his stomach, and it’s dripping down his legs onto the floor. That doesn’t stop him from holding his head high as he faces you.

“I’m afraid I’m done for, lad.”

“You do have an apology,” He nods as you do a double take at that; clearly aware you weren’t expecting it. “I’ve been… mistrustful... of you trolls from the top of it all. When I saw you nosing… around in my computing device, I admit I saw red.”

“You don’t have to apologize for that, I was being an asshole.” You’re feeling immensely uncomfortable at this point. “Save your breath for your grandkids.”

“You have that I could.” he shrugs. “But in my state… I’ll never survive the trip. Besides, I owe you something as well.” he reaches up for his head and removes his hat, revealing a flash drive inside. “The secrets on this device… are likely as relevant to your kind… as they are to my own. When you get to the island, find my computer.”

“I will.” You nod at him gratefully as you take the drive, and start to lower him onto the transportalizer.

“Wait one bloody minute!” he exclaims, prompting you to hold him mere inches above the pad. He stares serenely at you. “You tell my family… I love them both. Those are the only fitting last words for a family man.”

You give him a lopsided smirk and a final goodbye: “Thanks for everything, asshole,” before dropping him onto the pad. He vanishes with a cheeky grin and a flash of light. It’s his own way of saying that he can see right through your bullshit. The final message of Grandpa Harley.

You pocket the flash drive and step forward. Atticus Egbert is about to die as well. You can hear his voice in your head, talking about Karkat and his kids. You’ll probably have to wait a while before tracking that computer down, Karkat’ll need a friend once this is all over.

But when the aftermath of this bullshit day is over you’re going to figure out what the humans have been hiding once and for all.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry Dad Egbert! I wrote you the most badass death I could. Well, so far at least,
you won't be the last person to die in this story. It's heartbreaking, really, to see the guy go. I felt like he had the most personality of the guardians, particularly his little notes.

And yes, for those of you who are wondering, Atticus Egbert did in fact just kill the shit out of Hearts Boxcars. Don't act surprised, the dude can lift a goddamn refrigerator, he's more than tough enough. The safe trick was detailed in chapter forty-seven of Colonel Sassacre's Daunting Text.

With this we're basically at the 2/3 mark of the story. or maybe 3/4, I'm not sure how the next few chapters will turn out, and there's still one more big detail I need to work out before the finale. That said, there's a lot of backstory and romance and other bullshit in the meantime, so don't worry just yet. But because of aforementioned detail, as well as this being the point of no return if I want to get all the emotional stuff in, that means there will likely be a bit of a pause before the next chapter. Can't really get away with making things up as I go along anymore.
Your name is John Egbert, and you think you’re probably in shock right now.

You’ve been holding Jade tightly for the past several minutes as she sobbed over her grandpa’s death. Jake hasn’t moved since the body appeared, and Dirk has been wrapped around his shoulders ever since. Sollux of all people is the most upset about it after them, and went outside immediately after bringing him through. You can hear yelling, and the murmured words of Aradia as she does her best to soothe him.

Roxy just came back from checking on her sister and Nepeta. She’s standing at the foot of the stairs in stunned silence. Jane is behind her, looking on in horror. Feferi is sitting by the front door in surprise. Next to her is some horrible stuffed abomination that used to be sitting on the transportalizer in the Harley’s foyer. The room is filled with these sorts of strange looking creatures, as well as old paintings of blue women, suits of armor, and the occasional mummy.

There are a lot of things here to distract you from the scene that just appeared in the middle of the room, and your brain is taking full advantage of it. But you can’t do that. It takes considerable effort for you to face the center of the room.

When you saw Dave and Karkat appear it wasn’t immediately clear what was wrong, but you felt your gut twist all the same. Karkat was screaming, is still screaming, but the fact that its grief instead of rage is alarming to you. And Dave…

You don’t think you’ve ever seen Dave cry before now.

The instant that thought occurred to you your eyes were everywhere else in the room. You knew immediately, just as Jane clearly did. Nobody’s going to follow them through.

Your father is dead.

Jane lets out a wail of grief as it she comes to the same conclusion. Roxy spins on the stairs without hesitating and catches her in a crushing hug. The two sink down to the stairs, holding each other as Jane sobs and Roxy murmurs in her ear. You ignore the look she sends you. You’re fine. You have to be.

You take a deep breath and walk forward slowly. Dave looks up at you, with guilt in his eyes. “I tried, John. I really did.”

You want to tell him he’s wrong. You want to tell him to shut up and let you through the fucking portal. You want to grab your hammer and start breaking things.

You place your hand on Dave’s shoulder, look him in the eyes, and ask him: “Are you guys okay?
Are you hurt?"

Dave pauses and gives you another look. “Uhh, fine. We’re a little banged up, but we’ll… John, not to be an insensitive prick, but your dad is dead.”

You smile sadly. “I know Dave, geez. It was kinda obvious.”

“Dude, are you okay?”

“I’m… I’m fine. They won’t be able to follow us here. We’re safe now. It’s sad that dad died, but he got us out. He’d be happy for that.” You nod, more for your sake than the sake of everyone watching you. “Was he… Did he say anything?”

Karkat lets out a choking gasp at this. Dave nods slowly. “He said he was proud of you. Both of you.” He turns to Jane at this, who squeezes Roxy a little tighter in response. Roxy rubs circles in Jane’s back in response, and looks up at you worriedly. You turn away.

“I’m going to go check on Sollux. Be right back!” You walk past Feferi and out the front door. Dave’s voice drifts after you, but you tune it out.

Sollux is in the middle of screaming his frustration into the sky when you find him. His eyes are sparkling weakly, and you know he’d probably be firing his lasers in the air if he hadn’t used up so much energy defending your house. Aradia is standing a ways behind him, watching him sadly.

“Am I interrupting?” You ask meekly, not sure if you’ve walked into another quadrant thing. It can be really hard to tell sometimes!

Aradia turns around and gives you a slight smile. “We’re just wrapping up. No need to worry. Is everyone here now?”

“Not everyone.” You and Sollux say in unison. You turn to him in surprise, and he looks down in embarrassment. “Sorry. I… I knew they weren’t going to make it shortly after the fight started.”

“Sollux hears the voices of people about to die.” Aradia explains sadly, “So he knew what was going to happen to your dad before it happened. He tends to beat himself up over it if it’s somebody close to him.”

“Shut up AA…”

You look between the two of them in wonder. Aradia mentioned her ability to you before, but you’ve never heard about Sollux’s power before now. You can see why they get along so well. “So you both talk to the dead. That’s really fucked up.”

“Fucking tell me about it!” Sollux throws his hands in the air angrily. “It’s just a way for a whole bunch of assholes with no chance at making it anymore to drive us insane! And we can never shut them up, can’t do anything to them, because you can’t do anything to people who are already dead! No such thing as double dead!”

“It’s pretty much haunted us all our lives.” Aradia shrugs casually, though you can see the pain of it etched across her face behind her cheerful grin.

God fucking damn it everyone in this goddamn group is broken in some way or another, aren’t they? It’s like Earth and Alternia both are just making a point of dumping all of their shit on you all, and you’re getting seriously sick and tired of it!
You turn to Sollux. “Nothing you did could have prevented this. I know my dad well enough to know he would never blame you.”

Sollux looks into the air and sighs. Then he turns to you. “Thanks John. It’s not like I didn’t know all that shit already, but hearing it still helps.”

“It’s good to get a second opinion.” Aradia adds with a grin. Sollux nods thoughtfully.

“Alright, I’m feeling like less of a shithole now, so I’m going in. Need to talk to Jake or Jade, whichever one of them is up to it.” He walks up to you and smiles crookedly. “Thanks John.”

“You already thanked me.” You reply with a chuckle.

“Well you know me.” He claps a hand on your shoulder (twice), and walks back up to Jade’s house. Aradia follows behind, giving you a small smile as she leaves.

You turn around and look back across the island. It’s quiet for now, though if Jade is to be believed, the more dangerous of the local wildlife become active closer to evening. You’re not sure if she was serious, but it’s probably best to play it safe.

The sun won’t set for a long while yet, mostly because Jade’s house is several time zones over from yours. That probably won’t stop just about everybody from falling asleep as soon as they’re done mourning.

You’re not sure what it is. You want to lose your shit. You want to break things, to scream and cry, to call on the wind until you’ve blown this entire island away. But you can’t. You won’t.

You’re strong. You knew you could do amazing things. You knew that you had more mangrit than people twice your age, mostly due to your dad’s training. But you didn’t appreciate what that meant.

You didn’t know what was so special about being strong until you fell from the sky three days ago and saw Roxy, and Aradia, and Kanaya, and Dirk (Dirk of all people!) looking up at you like some sort of God. That was when you realized just how much you were needed. What your strength meant, with all the horrible things that had happened to everyone.

You have to be the leader. You have to be somebody that everyone here can look to for guidance. They’ve already started looking at you like that, and with your dad and Jade’s grandpa gone it’ll only get worse.

You don’t know why you feel this way. But there’s no doubt in your mind. You’ve kept calm all this time under pressure because it’s what you had to do. You stopped yourself from mourning for your father because if you break they won’t know what to do next. Not with Rose still injured, and Dave having the Strider equivalent of a panic attack. Not with Karkat curled up crying on the ground over losing another parent. Not with Jane weeping into Roxy’s arms.

It’s all falling on your shoulders. You have to be the friend that they can count on no matter what. You have to be the leader.

Even if it breaks you.

Your name is Terezi Pyrope and you have been dealt a great injustice. The stench of betrayal is heavy in the air, emanating from your old ally across the way.
You are in a cell, a small room with barely enough space to lie down. And on the other side of one of the walls you can detect the odor of cerulean and lies that always follows Vriska Serket.

You have not been discreet about your being able to sense her.

“You’ve dragged me down with you for the last time, Serket!” You yell at her furiously. “The next time I see you it will be you who is locked up instead of me!”

“Holy shit Terezi, for the last time we’re both in cells here! The FELT caught both of us after Gamzze bashed our heads in!”

“A likely story!”

“YOU WERE THERE! He showed up while we were fighting and started beating the shit out of Tavros, remember? We heard him screaming?”

“Obviously you killed him for betraying you!”

“He flew away! He was crying like a wiggler the whole time, how did you even miss that?”

“A LIKELY STORY!”

“Next you’ll be telling me that you’re the one who ripped my arm off and started slapping me with it!”

“I love slapping!”

“AUGH! I can’t take this! You used to be so much fun to be around, and now you’re just crazy!” Okay that’s it: this bitch is going down.

“I’m not crazy, you’re crazy!” You hiss, clawing at the wall as fast as you can. “You murdered Dave’s brother, you turned Dave against me, you killed Tavros, and you burned two cities to the ground! You’re just trying to trick me because you know I’m better! Well tough luck! Your defeat is inevitable!”

She starts screaming something along the lines of “I hate you!” over and over again until she’s repeated it eight times, classic sign of a psycho. Then she starts pounding on the walls. “Get me out of here already, this bitch has lost her mind!”

“You lost your mind!” You protest angrily. “Everything was fine until you started destroying things! It’s because of you that this happened! And I’m going to stop you, just like I promised Brock!”

“You said Brock was dead!”

“I promised him before that!”

Vriska is silent for a few moments. When she starts speaking she’s gone quiet, possibly trying to use her mind tricks on you from the other room. “How did he die?”

Is she trying to twist your memories? Well if she is it won’t work. It’s a transparent ruse, and your mind has always been strong enough that she can’t get in your head very well. “After you left, Dave, Brock, and I were all busy trying to stop you from doing any more damage to the city. I was tracking your movements while they were clearing all your minions out of Houston!”

“I didn’t have minions Terezi!”
“I am telling this story, not you!” You proclaim, pointing your finger at the wall triumphantly. “Your summary of events would never hold up in court! Anyways, while I was pinpointing where you’d strike next, your foulest creature appeared. A great black demon, with massive wings!”

“A what?”

“It fell upon Dave and Brock immediately!” You continue over her protests, “And struck Brock through the heart! He was slain before his mastery of puppet-rap-sword fighting could be utilized! A tragic fate for our benefactor, to be slain by the minion of one he took in! Such betrayal fouls the air around you even now!” She groans in exacerbation at that.

“With the mighty Brock Strider dead, it was all Dave could do to flee. The demon can teleport in an instant, so Dave had to run backwards in time in order to evade the demon’s clutches! But his warrior’s spirit was broken! He fled in shame, betraying his brother’s memory, and leaving the role of vengeance to me!”

“So you’ve been going crazy ever since you couldn’t stab me in the back.” Vriska groans irritably. “What the heeeeeeeell, Terezi? You’re supposed to be the smart one! How could I even have summoned these minions?”

“You’ve got the fluorite octet! It would be child’s play!”

“The FELT has the fluorite octet now, actually.” Vriska sighs. “If I had the octet I’d have left your crazy ass to rot here aaaaaaaages ago! Now all I can do is wait until they blow themselves up with it.”

You hiss angrily as Vriska continues to dance around your questions. She was always good at excuses. Obviously she got in over her head when she summoned that monster, and now she’s trying to play it off. It’s a classic Serket ploy. But you won’t be fooled. You’ll get out of this prison cell and expose her for the murderous traitor she really is. And once you’ve done that, it will be Tavros’ turn.

You’ll hunt Tavros down… and show him JUSTICE!

After all, he was the only person to escape that battle. Except for Gamzee of course.

But wait, Gamzee is still locked up, isn’t he?

Didn’t Tavros die back there?

You start to look around the cell in confusion. How did the FELT capture you anyways? Is Vriska working with them now?

She must be! That traitor has gone too far this time! You hiss at Vriska once more, and sit down on your terrible bed, trying to think up a strategy. You can’t handle Vriska, the FELT and the demon at once, so you’ll need all the time to plan that you can get.

You fall asleep to the thought of Vriska, struggling in a web of her own making.

Your name is Spades Slick, and one of your closest friends is now dead. The Midnight Crew has lost Harvey Boxcars. In spite of all the things the FELT has achieved today, that one loss is enough to make you sick.

You aren’t the only one upset by the news. Around you stand the other members of the midnight
crew. You’ve left the noise of the FELT behind. Let them revel in this great victory they’ve won for Doctor Scratch. You’re just going to sit in your office at FELT’s western branch with your crew, and figure out what happens next.

Desmond Droog is sitting over in the window smoking. He looks impassive, but you know he’s seething with rage. Harvey was responsible for setting Desmond up with his ex-wife. It was a shitty marriage, but that doesn’t mean the gesture wasn’t appreciated.

Meanwhile, on the couch you’ve got set up against the wall, Caleb Deuce is sadly staring down at the floor. Deuce wasn’t at the siege with the rest of you; he was responsible for capturing the troll girls after that fucking clown broke up their fight in whatever shithole city they burned down. You almost didn’t want to tell him about Harvey, he was feeling so giddy.

Carter Droll is staring at the door sadly from his perch on the corner of your desk. He seems convinced that this happened because he failed to catch the guy who killed his men. Honestly you’re more concerned about his mortality rate than his feelings at this point. He’s lost almost a dozen men in the past few weeks.

You’ve decided to distract yourself with paperwork, but you can’t actually seem to get into it. You sigh as you shuffle the forms on your desk. Usually paperwork is something you enjoy. This whole mess really has gotten to your head.

“You know,” Desmond says thoughtfully from behind you, “I never liked the way Harvey did things. He was all about using brute force, never paid any attention to elegance. But he was straightforward. I admired that.”

“I think we all did.” You sigh, putting your paperwork aside. “Lord knows I spend so much time around Scratch that I wonder why I do half the things I do these days.”

“You’re the leader. He’s the muscle. You did your jobs.” Caleb says with a sigh. You look over at him in surprise. It’s an unusually perceptive comment from the man. Desmond is chuckling behind you, clearly as taken aback as you are.

“Why were those our jobs though?”

You pause and turn to face Carter, who has turned to face you. “We should have just shot everyone and cleaned up later. Why did we have to go in?”

“We need them alive, Droll.” Desmond points out. “Scratch wants live subjects to take apart.”

“Bullets don’t always kill.” Carter points out petulantly.

“Maybe not, but that’s not what’s important.” You say irritably. “Carter has a good point. We shouldn’t have been sent in there on foot in the first place.”

It’s been bothering you since shortly after the siege ended and Scratch declared his intentions. The operation, despite failing to secure even a single subject, was considered an absolute success.

The victory was not the death of Atticus Egbert. He was probably the one person who had the least to do with everything that went on here. He was just a dad looking after his family. And he protected them to the death. It’s damned respectable, to the point where you’re not even mad at him for killing your comrade.

You’re mad at Scratch.
The victory was that you drove the aliens out, and the mutants with them. That was what Doctor Scratch proclaimed to all of his idiot pawns. They’re sitting out in the Pacific with nowhere to run or hide, and every single thing needed to conclude this mess is out there with them.

“Carter, how close did you come to dying back there?” You ask after thinking everything over. “You said you almost got your head cut off, right?”

“If I didn’t break the boy’s sword I would have been killed!” Carter exclaims in horror. “And I didn’t even manage to kill him! It was very unlucky!” You don’t know about that last part, but overall it does sound like a mess.

“Okay, so how about you, Caleb? Anything out of the ordinary happen down in whichever fucking city you were stuck in?”

“There wasn’t a clown. Scratch told me to watch out for the clown, but he wasn’t there.” Caleb says with a nod. “I was relieved, clowns are creepy.”

“Hear, hear!” Desmond intones.

“Allright, so that makes four of us then.” You continue after the clown hating is properly concluded. “Desmond, I imagine things were quiet for you?”

“Silent as the grave.” Desmond says casually, blowing smoke out the window. He turns back after a beat and eyes you suspiciously. “You think I did something?”

“Fuck no.” You respond irritably. “You’re like a brother to me. Get your shit together.”

Desmond looks up thoughtfully. “Scratch wants me around because I’m the most stable, then?”

“I think so.” You nod; ignoring the looks of confusion Carter and Caleb are giving you. “I’m violent and planning an uprising, and these two are borderline sociopaths.”

“Borderline?” Carter replies with a smile.

“Sociopaths!” Caleb gasps in shock.

You hate these two sometimes.

“That’s right, and Harvey was powerful and loyal to a fault!” Desmond hops down from the window ledge and eyes you. “The only person who could possibly take him on aside from Scratch or us…”

“Would likely be Atticus Egbert.” You conclude with a sneer. “That man’s strength was abnormal, and he had years of military experience, with a lengthy list of medals to go with them. He was a legend before he settled down.”

“He was planning to have Harvey die from the start!” Caleb exclaims in sudden understanding. “And if that Egbert guy was strong enough to kill Harvey then he could probably kill you too, Spades!”

“Exactly.” You nod at him grimly. “Scratch knows what I’ve been planning, and he sent us in today to have us all killed. You’re dangerous Desmond, but you’re the best here at following orders, and with us dead you’d be out of luck anyways. Scratch just tried to wipe out the Midnight Crew in one fell swoop.”

“Meaning your brother saved us.” Carter adds casually. “That was nice of him!”
You and Desmond turn to face Carter at once. Caleb pipes in from the couch, “Jack is way to fucked up for that to have been on purpose!” You and Desmond slowly turn to face Caleb.

“Caleb, you’re talking way more sense than usual, and it’s scaring me. Please stop.” Desmond says, holding a hand to his head. Caleb salutes and mimes zipping his mouth shut.

You storm away from your desk in irritation. “Let’s just leave my idiot of a brother out of this please! Whatever bullshit he gets up to is completely unimportant to what’s happening.”

“So what is happening now?” Carter asks curiously. “Are we going to kill Scratch?”

“Fuck no!” You snarl, leaning back against the wall by the window and staring out into the night. “We can’t kill him. It wouldn’t do anything for us anyways. Our only hope is those damn kids.”

“Not quite.” Desmond adds thoughtfully. “There is one other way for us to turn this all around.” You turn to him curiously, and he elaborates with a smirk. “There’s one loose end that Scratch has forgotten to cut. Brinner.”

“That witness you shot before?”

“That witness I hospitalized.” Desmond’s smirk twists further. “He’s a regular user of Serious Business.”

You turn to the others. Carter shrugs. Caleb unzips his lips, shrugs, and zips them again. You turn to Desmond. “What the fuck is that supposed to mean.”

Desmond sighs and pulls out his phone. “It’s a social media application. Used by politicians, businessmen, and other people who want to expand upon professional or friendly relationships with fellow gentlemen. I’m a member myself. Brinner is more well known on it though.”


“The people on this service are some of the most powerful people in America.” Desmond states with a nod. “And Brinner, though only a mere professor at a university, is on good terms with all of them. The one witness to FELT atrocities that Scratch hasn’t wiped out has the method to ruin the FELT completely. All he needs is a little more information.”

You find yourself smiling in spite of yourself. It’s a stupid plan. Completely insane. Which means Scratch will never expect it from Desmond Droog. Desmond is the one person to never break from his modus operandi, and the last person Scratch would think to use an online attack. You clap a hand on his shoulder. “Go now. Make. It. Happen.” Desmond gives you his signature smirk and leaves the office in an instant.

“Are we going to avenge Harvey?” Caleb asks, once he’s sure Desmond is out of earshot.

“We’re going to make him proud.” you reply with a grin. “We’re going to flip this entire fucking organization on its head.” Carter starts cackling like a maniac at this.

You’re just feeling good about yourself when the phone on your desk starts ringing. Then your cellphone starts vibrating. And finally, to top it off, the emergency siren starts sounding.

“What’s happening? Did somebody else die?” Caleb shrieks in a panic, as Carter runs to the window and checks the courtyard.
You grab your cellphone first, and see that it's responding to an emergency news broadcast. You read the headline and know that you must be going pale, because Caleb is looking at you in silent terror. You force your eyes away from the image of a grinning troll on your screen, and you find yourself staring into the sky next to Carter.

You’re suddenly not so sure any of you will last long enough to see Scratch lose.

Chapter End Notes

In case it wasn't completely clear:
Caleb Deuce=Clubs Deuce
Desmond Droog=Diamonds Droog
Carter Droll=Courtyard Droll
Harvey Boxcars=Hearts Boxcars

I decided early on that I'd need five midnight crew members instead of four, primarily because I needed to ensure they were keeping up a presence wherever I needed them. This is why I included Deuce and The Droll. Diamonds Droog is my favorite carapacian in the story, but as much as I wanted to have Droog and The Dignitary, there's no room for two sly second in command characters on the crew. Deuce is simpler, the base grunt of the organization, so including two of him made for much easier management of the crew.

I made the crew a bit more empathetic and warm-hearted for several reasons in this story. The first is simply because they're humans rather than Dersites, and that means some different reactions to the events seen so far. The second is that rather than a gang, this crew is basically a bunch of guys who trained together back in the day. They're not actually meant to be mafia types in this story, but I kept the name Midnight Crew for easy identification, as well as to make it clear that they're their own team within the F.E.L.T. Finally, I wanted to ensure that there's adequate contrast between Spades Slick and Jack Noir.

I felt so pleased with myself when I came up with Serious Business as the MC's plan. I intended for Brinner to be serving this role from the get-go, but I wasn't sure how to make him an actual threat to a government organization. It wasn't until Droog suggested using Brinner that I realized exactly how to make it work.

Meanwhile, terezi is acting silly as per usual, with a notable lack of productivity due to being stuck in a damn cage. Also being slightly off her rocker at the moment.

And John... well, we'll be getting to that soon enough.
Half the Time That's Left

Chapter Summary

The Condesce declares war, leading the trolls to reflect.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Attention all humans!

I am her Imperious Condescension, master of the Alternian Empire.
You are probubbly wondering why my face and voice are swimming through every audio and visual digital interface on your pitiful planet. Well for those of you unfinformed, you are all a bunch of pathetic little guppies, and there are far stronger things out in the universe. And too bad for you, trolls are beta than any of them.

...

That’s us. We’re called trolls.

Now clam up, because what I’m going to say next is important. I have evidence that some of my species has fled to your planet. These trolls have reportedly been subject to all manta of carp, and I’m pretty pissed hearing aboat it. So I’m gonna make this simple: return all trolls to my custody immediately, and I won’t melt your icecaps and flood your planet. I’ll just enslave you all finstead.

This is all the mercy you’re gonna get from me, so best think it over real careful before answering. Oh, and just so you minnow I’m serious, I’m going to have my fleet sink into orbit after I’m done here. You can drink it in while you contemplate your inevitable doom.

All right, so summarizing here: give me my subjects back, submit to my rule, and curse your pathetic race for being shella weak. Kthanxbai.

Your name is Feferi Peixes, and you are completely and totally doomed. You have spent your entire life hoping not to deal with Her Imperious Condescension. And now her face is plastered across every computing device in Jade’s tower.

You’re going to die. The instant The Condesce spots you she’ll run you through on her double trident, just like she’s done to every other fuchsia she’s seen in history. You feel yourself hyperventilating as you think of it. You really need a moirail, but Eridan’s gone without a trace, and you have no idea where he is now.

You feel your throat hitch up and you start to choke, but air starts forcing its way into your lungs on its own. You look up in confusion to see John standing at the doorway to the tower.

You feel your head clear as John continues to regulate your breathing, and look to the others. Karkat, Sollux, and Aradia all look horrified, and you feel almost certain that Karkat’s also having his breath controlled. He may be the only person who has more cause to fear The Condesce than you.

That being the case, it surprises you when Karkat rises to his feet and turns to face John weakly. “John, I think we may have damned your entire race.”

It takes a while for John to respond once everything’s been explained to him. Karkat and Sollux do most of the telling, and when they’re done John simply closes his eyes and turns his head skyward. You decide then to abscond outside.

You feel terrible. Not just because of The Condesce, but because you completely failed to consider that you might be responsible for what’s happening. You’re the reason The Condesce was so angry that she trailed you across the galaxy.

‘You just fucked up the entirety of our race because you didn’t want to stay at home any more,’ Karkat’s derisive comment from back when this all started comes back to you. You didn’t realize it at the time, but that was probably the point when you started feeling pitch for Karkat. You like to think it was when he started feeling pitch for you as well, though you feel like his hatred was likely more platonic. It was probably the worst thing you’ve ever done, after all.

Now it turns out you may very well have destroyed two civilizations with your one selfish act. That’s fucking up on a level you’ve never even thought possible before.

“Finally figuring it out, huh?” you turn around in surprise to see Karkat eying you with a frown. You’re sitting on the beach watching the sunset, probably a pretty obvious place to run to, so it’s hardly a surprise that he found you.

“Figuring what out?” You frown huffily and face forward again.

“How much you fucked up.”

You smile in spite of yourself. “Yup. I’ve sealized the error of my waves. I guess I don’t need you anymore.”

“We both know that’s bullshit. Besides, even if you didn’t need me, that doesn’t change the fact that you clearly want me.”

“Excuse me?”

“How quickly you forget how our relationship started. I didn’t start that make-out.”

“Oh please, like your speech wasn’t blatant pitch flirting!”

“I never said it wasn’t.” Karkat sits down next to you with a smirk. “But you still started the make-out session.”

“So vain for someone who’s so self-depreciating!” You gasp in mock surprise. “You’d probably try to start a black romance with yourself if you could find a way to hold a conversation!”

“It’s not like you deserve all that I have to offer!” Karkat’s smirk fades, as he seems to catch himself. “Hold on, let’s not get too into this here. I did have something to talk to you about.”
“How completely I’ve fucked us over?”

“No you fucking-wait yes! Yes that’s pretty much exactly it. We need to discuss the situation our bullshit has landed us in.”

“Our bullshit?” You’re honestly surprised. It’s very unlike Karkat to share blame on anything.

“Your lusus killing bullshit and my responsibility fleeing bullshit.” Karkat leans back with a sigh. “I mean, Sollux helped come up with the idea, and Eridan got us the fucking rocket, but really it was mostly us that caused this shit show.”

“You didn’t start fleeing responsibility until after we landed.” You point out irritably. “Back on Alternia you were as unimportant as it gets. You didn’t have responsibility to flee.”

“Well that fucking depends on who you ask, doesn’t it?” Karkat looks ahead sulkily. “If you ask Equius, he’ll probably tell you it was my responsibility to die on that forsaken rock.”

“You know damn well how I feel about that.”

“Right, you’d rather some high-blooded asshole keeps me in a cell.” Karkat glares over at you. “I’d rather die than suffer that.” You really don’t know where he gets this shit, it’s not like you kept your cuttlefish in their cages in the first place. They were free to leave whenever they wanted! Mostly because you had no good way to contain them, but still!

Okay, this is clearly not an argument you’ll be winning any time soon. You decide to change the subject. “How did the humans take the news?”

“Right! I meant to bring that up, fucking quadrants distracting me again.” Karkat glares over at you. “I’d rather die than suffer that.” You really don’t know where he gets this shit, it’s not like you kept your cuttlefish in their cages in the first place. They were free to leave whenever they wanted! Mostly because you had no good way to contain them, but still!

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“Water boat John?”

“He’s apparently crazy. Go figure.” Karkat stares out for a while without elaborating, but finally sighs and explains. “I don’t know what it is about John. He’s even less broken up about losing Mr. Egbert than I am. Do you know what he said when I explained to him how fucked we are? ‘Everything will be fine. It’s okay, Karkat.’ He’s not even fazed! It’s honestly kind of creepy!”

“Even though his dad died?”

“Even though his dad died! And that guy was seriously likeable! He was like some sort of never-ending fountain of support and wisdom.”

You can’t help but agree. Mr. Egbert was pretty much the best guy ever. Which means John’s reaction is really weird. You never forgot how broken up Karkat was when the drones got his Lusus, not to mention how he was earlier today. “I guess some humans are just different?”

“I guess so.” Karkat frowns thoughtfully and stares out to sea. “Anyways, I guess we’re going to wait until everyone can focus on our inevitable demise before coming up with a plan… but John wants to fight. I don’t know how he plans on doing that… but I’m helping him, whatever the fuck he comes up with.”

You turn to face him fully. “Since when do you face your problems?”
“I don’t think this counts.” Karkat says grumpily. “It’s this or die, so really I’m just picking the option with some dignity to it.”

You smirk. “Wow Karkat, big steps! Now all you need to do is talk to Nepeta and you’ll almost have a spine!”

“Fuck off.” Karkat stands up and dusts sand off of his clothes. “I’m going now. When you’re feeling up to it, Sollux wants to talk to you. He was snooping around the tower looking for a computer or something. Hate your guts.”

“Hate you too.” You smile wryly at him as he leaves. As usual you feel that same sense of wanting to slap him and kiss him at once. It’s not a good time for sloppy make-outs though. You just look back out to the sea as the sunset dyes the sky red.

So. Karkat’s going to fight. You can’t say you like that idea. You’d rather just swim to the bottom of the ocean and live with the fish for the rest of your life. Fighting The Condesce is suicide. You’ve been raised to believe that for longer than you can remember. In troll society the leader of your people is the same monster that culls any young trolls who stay out in the sun. Her name is synonymous with death.

You’ve survived culling longer than most Tyrian trolls. When you were young you thought it meant something. You thought you were destined to overthrow your ancestor, and lead the trolls to a bright future. But you’re not six sweeps old anymore. You’ve had plenty of time to look at the troll race and see the sick truth. Nobody is interested in fixing your species, and that’s because the one in charge of it is determined to maintain her ironclad rule.

You’re the same when it comes down to it. You know what needs to change on Alternia, but the more you think about it, the more you feel that you just aren’t willing to risk your life for it. It’s pretty selfish, really.

“I’ve become a self-centered bitch,” you mutter to yourself. “Karkat’s right.” You flop backwards in the sand with a yell. “Damnit! Why does that smug asshole have to keep being right?”

Your name is Sollux Captor, and you’re getting down to business, after far too much time spent doing jack shit. You’re searching the Harley house for the computer of Grandpa Harley. The flash drive you’ve been given seems to be encrypted; it won’t work unless the computer has the code to access it. You’d need your husktop for a chance to crack it. It’s pretty fucking impressive, really.

The Harley tower is ridiculous, its design is maddening enough you feel halfway convinced a troll must have designed it. It’s shaped like a giant fork, with two side towers for Jade and Jake, and the central tower devoted to the old man. You’ve put aside the side towers, as you feel little doubt Grandpa Harley wouldn’t store anything there.

“Are you sure it’s not in the side sections?” Aradia asks from behind you. “He might have hidden it in the last place you’d think to look!”

You make damn sure Aradia can hear you when you sigh in exasperation. “AA, you never really met this guy. He didn’t trust anyone. Not me, not FF, and certainly not his kids. Well actually he trusted them twice as much as he trusted me, but that doesn’t amount to much either way.”

“Oh cheer up, we’ll find it sooner or later!”

You turn to face Aradia with the most unimpressed look you can manage. “I’ll find it. Then I’ll tell
you when I’ve got something. You’re going to go talk to him.”

Aradia glares at you. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Sure you don’t AA, sure you don’t.” You turn back and start climbing the stairs to the top level of the tower. “Because obviously you just get pissy whenever Equius is brought up by coincidence.”

“I don’t want to talk to him, and I don’t want to talk about it.” Aradia crosses her arms grumpily and floats past you. You have no choice but to chase after her on foot, any more psionic use today and you risk a migraine.

“Aradia, we both know how badly you want to vent about this shit, so vent. You tell me what’s pissing you off and I’ll tell you what an idiot you are.”

“That’s my line!” Aradia snaps as she whirls around angrily.

“Tough shit AA, moirallegiance is a two-way vehicular paving line.” You smirk in spite of yourself when Aradia’s face shifts from angry to pouting. “Yeah you know I’m right, so spit it out, tell me all about the sweaty asshole who’s stolen your heart.”

“He hasn’t stolen my heart!” Aradia protests, “I just… Argh, I don’t know what to make of him anymore!”

“That’s honestly an improvement.” You comment as you continue to hike up to her level. “For the past four sweeps or so before we left you hated his guts.”

“He was an arrogant asshole.” Aradia crosses her arms and leans against the wall. “Still is, in a way. But I guess not? For somebody who thinks he’s better than anyone else, he doesn’t have many nice things to say about himself. See? This shit is what I’m talking about! He makes no sense! Oh for crying out loud.” She stares irritably at you and lifts you up the stairs with a gesture. “Work on your cardio, Sollux, that was sad to watch.”

“This is you time, AA, not me time. You should have covered cardio before Egbert showed up.” You start fiddling with the door handle, only to find it locked. “Can you pick this? I’ve heard enough about Jade’s dog to not want any doors broken down.”

She stares at you in exasperation, but starts probing the lock with her telekinesis. She pokes at it in silence a while longer. You just watch. She’s already opening up, better to let her talk on her own.

After a minute of fruitlessly prodding the lock, she finally starts talking. “I used to think Equius was just a stuck-up asshole. I literally didn’t see anything else to him. He treated Nepeta all right, but she’s so wild, I figured he was just trying to civilize her. It’s not like she goes into details, she takes romance too seriously to break such a big rule of moirallegiance. He was always just a big sweaty piece of shit who broke everything he touched.”

“That’s fair.” You consider, “It’s not like any of us got to know him better than that.”

“Was it fair though?” You look down and see her staring into your eyes. She’s genuinely asking here. “The night you all escaped the base, I thought I was going to disappear for good. I didn’t think I was going to survive, no, to... endure... much longer. I was drowning in death. And when that happened, I put my trust in Equius. I wanted to follow you, the dead wanted me to stay by Gamzee, but Equius was the one I needed to rely on. And he came through. How can it be fair to think so poorly of him then?”

You’re not sure how to answer that.
“It’s not like he gave us any sign that he wasn’t…” You say hesitantly.

“Nepeta did.”

“Yeah okay, but Nepeta is a goofball. Plus, she’s in love with Karkat, so her judgment is questionable at best.” Aradia cracks a smile at that, and she turns back to the door. It clicks almost the instant she looks at it, and her smile broadens as she opens the door.

You grab her by the shoulder as she’s about to walk in, and turn her to face you. “AA, you and I both know that we treated Equius like shit because he treated us like shit. It’s not worth it thinking ‘what if we’ve misjudged him all this time?’ because we didn’t misjudge him. He was a complete asshole. And all the shit he’s dealt with recently has made him think better of it, but that doesn’t change what he was. It just means he’s better now. And even now he’s pretty much still an asshole.”

“Do you know why he’s like that though?” Aradia looks at you determinedly.

“No AA, I don’t know why. And I don’t want to know.” You sigh and look aside. “I don’t give a fuck about back stories. You can be an asshole with a troubled past like Equius, or you can be an asshole for the sake of being an asshole, like Eridan. Doesn’t change the fact that you’re an asshole as far as I’m concerned. If it makes a difference to you, then whatever, go for it.”

“I don’t want to go for it though!” Aradia groans. “I just want to… figure out what to think of him!”

You snort at this. “We both know you’re flushed. You just want to talk yourself out of it.”

“I do not!”

“Then you want to justify it.”

“No, wait Sollux, you asshole that’s not what I meant!”

You can’t help it. You start laughing. Aradia just glares at you, cheeks puffed out, as you try to keep your shit contained. When she starts punching you decide to put a lid on it. “Ow, fuck, okay, okay! You’re not in love with him, I get it.”

“I didn’t say that either.” Aradia looks aside, eyes narrowed.

You sigh and walk past her. “Seriously AA, just fucking talk to him if you’re having that much trouble figuring it out.”

You start poking around the room in exasperation. It’s a dead end. He’s got a few more of those weird pictures of blue ladies, and a closet full of those stupid jackets of his, as well as four gun racks and a bed. But there’s no computer here. You sigh and sit down on the bed, look up, and see Aradia still watching you. “AA, I can’t help you if you won’t talk to me. So if this is driving you so fucking crazy… talk. You know I’m going to do what I can.”

Aradia opens her mouth several times, trying to find words. She looks at you pleadingly, but you can only shrug helplessly. The two of you stare at each other in silence for a good eleven minutes. Finally, Aradia seems to crack, and she looks down sadly as she whispers, “I don’t want to figure it out.”

You’re just starting to process that when she breaks down in tears. “Oh, shit, AA, Aradia, come here, fuck.” You get off the bed and rush over to her, and she clings to your front the instant you come within arms reach. You run your hand through her curly hair and rest your head on hers. “Come on Aradia, it’s okay, just keep talking to me. You know you don’t have to freak out here! It’s
“It’s not like that!” Aradia sobs. “I think I actually really like him! I know he’s an asshole, but after all he’s done for me, how can I not? I’m just scared!”

“You mean because he can snap you in half with his pinky?” You guess cautiously, “Because you know he’s not about to do any damage to people in his quadrants, he’s careful enough with Nepeta.”

“He’s going to die.”

“What?” You look down at her in confusion. “It’s not like any of us are immortal, AA.”

“The spirits told me Gamzee is going to kill him.” Aradia chokes out, slumping further in your arms as she says it. “When I woke up in this body and he wasn’t there, I thought that was it, that he was already dead. And I was so mad!” She straightened up and glares at you, tears still streaming down her face. “I was seriously pissed; thinking that he had just died without even staying long enough to let me see him!”

“Wait, so this is a kismesissitude now?” You ask cautiously. She glares up at you. “Sorry! Sorry, I’m trying here AA, really! You know I’m fucking terrible at this sort of thing.”

She sighs and punches you again. “Well you’re not entirely wrong. I thought I was feeling pitch at first. These things are complicated.”

“Look how long we took to figure ‘us’ out.” You comment dryly. “I know twice as much about complications as most people.”

Aradia just falls back against your chest. “It doesn’t matter either way. Pitch or flush, I care about him, and he’s going to die. I don’t want to talk to him; I don’t want to figure things out with him! Not if he’s just going to die before I can do anything!”

You look down at Aradia; curled into your chest, and suddenly, just get it. “You know it doesn’t matter if Equius is about to die. We’re all about to die.” You remark quietly, prompting Aradia to lean back and stare up at you.

“Is that supposed to make me feel better?”

“Getting there, hold on two seconds.” You frown and continue. “You said that you felt like shit when you thought Equius died. So you know what will happen if you let him die without getting this shit dealt with.”

“I’ll feel like shit again.”

“Yeah, except this time you’ll be kicking yourself twice as hard, because you’ll have fucked up two times in a row. And then we’ll die. Immediately. The Condesce will make a point of us by killing us as soon as she finds us.”

“Seriously, when do we get to the part where I feel better?”

“We’ve got jack shit for time, Aradia.” You smile halfheartedly. “Go talk to him now. Even if you’re only together for two days, chances are that’s at least half of the time we’ve got left.”

Aradia thinks about it for a few minutes, before nodding and looking up. “Point taken. I’ll think about it.” She kisses you on the cheek quickly and floats out of the room. “I’m going to leave you to do what you need to. Thanks Sollux.”
You turn back to the room, but pause as Aradia yells up the stairs, “Just so we’re clear though, that was the most depressing encouragement ever!”

You smile sadly as she leaves, muttering to yourself, “Tough shit AA, these are depressing times.” You spot a panel similar to the ones Jade uses to jump between the lower floors hidden under the bed, and nod. “That looks promising.”

You take two steps forward when a flash of green causes you to freeze in your tracks. You feel energy crackling in the air, and turn slowly to see Jade’s dog eying you. Except Jade was clearly bullshitting you because that dog is almost as tall as you are. It looks more like Alternian barkbeasts than anything, everything about it seems to scream "not of this world."

Becquerel is way scarier than any barkbeasts on Alternia though. So scary that he has blown right past your veil of disinterest and made you remember his name with a glance. That’s fucking potent.

The two of you stare at each other for several minutes, before you both turn to face the bed at the same time. You snap back to attention. The dog is staring at you again. It growls. You step back at the same time it moves towards you. You’re probably fucked.

The dog barks suddenly and you run at the bed. You try to push it over, but end up falling flat on your face. There’s a weight on your back and the bed suddenly falls on the other side of the room. The dog looms over you as you struggle to face it. It’s sitting on you. You are trapped.

“Stupid dog.” You spit out irritably. Becquerel barks happily in response, before sniffing at your hand. You open it reluctantly, and it sniffs the flash drive you’re clutching. “That was a gift.” You say nervously, as the dog pays extra attention to the device. There’s another bark and suddenly you’re not in Grandpa Harley’s room anymore.

You’re in the middle of a stone room, sitting next to the other teleporter pad. You look around in confusion and realize that Becquerel has left your back. You get to your feet shakily, and see a room of computers in front of you; similar to the one you found back when you first met the Harleys.

“Holy shit.” You whisper as you look at it all. “This is it. I’m finally about to blow the lid right off all of this conspiracy bullshit.” You step up to the computer, stick the flash drive in, and watch as the computer starts decrypting the information automatically.

Another bark causes you to turn, and you see Becquerel has reared up on its hind legs beside you, resting its front paws on the table. You hear a ping sound and look up to the monitors. The data is accessible. You’ve done it. You start opening files, reaching over to give Becquerel a scratch behind the ears.

“Good dog, best friend.”

Chapter End Notes

So not sure how many people knew this, but Feferi’s blood color is not actually fuschia. It’s actually a shade called Tyrian purple.
#TheMoreYouKnow
Btw, The Condesce doesn’t speak with Hashtags because I hate hashtags with a burning passion. That hashtag up there exists purely as a segue.
Next chapter: I finally summarize all the shit you probably guessed a long time ago and
put it in writing! Hooray, backstory!
Chapter Summary

Sollux uncovers the link between the humans and the trolls.

Chapter Notes

I owe all my readers an apology for the inexcusably long time between updates. My life at home has been rather hectic as of late, particularly due to the arrival of a small dog in my family. The dog hates men, a rather broad group of people of which I am a member, and the past few weeks of my life have been devoted to trying to convince the little shit not to bite me. Also, the area I keep reserved for my writing is now covered with dog hair. I am allergic to dogs. Let me repeat all of that. my family adopted an imbalanced, noisy little shit of a dog completely disregarding my allergies. If it was a nice dog I’d be fine with things, because in spite of my allergies I do love dogs a great deal. But this dog is an asshole, so I can't even enjoy having it around. I am very grumpy right now. And I do not write well when grumpy. Or stressed. I had to fight to get this chapter done, let's leave it at that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your name is Sollux Captor, and you are hosting movie night. After about twenty minutes of decrypting and sorting confidential files, you’ve rushed back through the transportalizer to the Harley Tower to present your findings. After a rushed explanation, Jade managed to use one of her fucked up computers to set up a holographic display for what you’ve found in the mediculling block.

It’s taken another half hour at least since then to get things organized, and you’ve now gathered up everyone you could to view your findings. Only Dirk, off sulking like a wiggler, and Rose, still sleeping off the aftereffects of her rampage, won’t be in the loop when you’re done.

In truth the amount of time it takes to get things organized and to make everyone shut up is ridiculous, but for the sake of your sanity you’re choosing to skip the narration right to the part where relevant shit starts happening; namely, when you actually get to play the first fucking movie.

Grandpa Harley appears on the deck of a boat as the filming begins, grinning in glorious, shitty looking 1950’s color, which according to Dave (eternal purveyor of useless facts (for ironic purposes, so he claims)) was right around the time when the color TV was invented. Holy shit this species is even more primitive than you thought.

As you’re reflecting on the pathetic nature of human technology Grandpa Harley is standing aside in the boat, revealing an island, which judging from the inactive volcano is probably the same island you’re on right now. It also occurs to you that this Harley is clearly not a grandpa; while identical in build and moustache, his hair is a deep black rather than pale white, and he has none of the wrinkles that will one day crease his brow.

“Good day, chums! This is Jeremiah Ichabod Harley, recording what will likely be the first of many
video doohickeys revolving around my expedition into the mysterious secrets of the Isle of Bone! This quaint little spot of land in the middle of the Pacific has long been considered uninhabitable, due to the mysterious and terrifying fauna within! But your man Jeremiah is far too dashing and fearless a gent of the adventuring sort for such rumors to hold sway!"

“Mr. Harley, if you please, this video is for research purposes. Less… pomp and circumstance, alright?”

“Nonsense m’dear, circumstances as jolly enrapturing as these require as much pomp as one can muster!” Mr. Harley winks at the camera and pulls out his blunderbuss. “We venture forth into near certain death today, and only the most steadfast of hearts will remain at the end of it all! Adventure awaits!”

The screen cuts to black for a moment, resuming with a shot of Mr. Harley standing on the beach. Unlike before, he seems visibly agitated, pointing into the air wildly. “Up there now, there’s a sport!” The camera pans up shakily, to the sight of a pure white dragon flying overhead. Beside you Karkat is unable to resist gasping out a loud ‘what the fuck?’ as the beast roars. “What you see making a fuss up yonder is the same beast that took down the whirlybird sent by the last expedition. This dragon does not take very well to aerial invaders! Breach of territory and whatnot!”

“Are we also breaching its territory?”

“Nonsense! This beast makes its home at the peak of that volcano, and only reacts to aerial invaders besides that. We’re as far from the volcano as can be! Safety is an essential part of proper adventuring, after all! Now, as we begin our excursion inland, do remember to stay behind me at all times. Can’t bloody well look after you if you go gallivanting off, can I?”

“She’s boned.” The room turns as one to face Dave. He shrugs. “This is basic level shit, she’s going to wander off and get ripped apart now.” You snigger as Jade starts protesting in a hushed whisper.

The next scene shows Mr. Harley sitting on the beach, covered with red and purple blood. His face is flushed with anger, and he’s hardly paying attention to the camera at all. Dave is smirking triumphantly when you glance in his direction. “The one thing. The one thing I told that blooming idiot not to do, and she did it. I told her not to go gallivanting off, and she chases one of those blasted bull fairies right into a goat’s mouth. Why the devilfucking dickens is it so hard to find good help these days?”

He stops to clear his throat and turns to face the camera with a grimace. “Good evening. Jeremiah Ichabod Harley here, drawing an end to the first day of exploration. My personal assistant will no longer be joining us, after an unfortunate incident with the local fauna. All footage of said incident has been lost in the kerfuffle, and regrettably I will no longer be able to record adequately, for reasons of personal safety. Only the most important of my findings will be recorded from this day forward. All others will be summarized at the end of each day, until the blasted government can afford to send me an assistant with some degree of competence!”

This is why you don’t like working with others.

“I have explored the southern edge of the jungle, and I must say it is overgrown as the dickens! The creatures here are all drastically different from anything seen on other islands in the pacific, and all have an unusual pure white coloring. That white coloring on all the fauna is where this island got its name!” Harley reaches behind him and draws out a small cage. The jaws of every other troll in the room drop.

The creature looks like a small bull with wings, odd enough in its own right by earth standards. But
what’s truly bizarre here is that the creature is familiar to you. It’s exactly like Tavros Nitram’s lusus, the same species, here on earth.

“This bull fairy is likely the most timid and tame creature on the island. Indeed, when it saw my assistant and I it immediately acted friendly. Even caged it remains placid, the very picture of domestication.” He sticks his fingers into the cage and scratches the lusus behind the ears, eliciting a contented moo.

“On the other hand…” Harley picks up the camera and turns it to face an assortment of other bodies. “Most of these creatures are downright vicious. The goat you see here is responsible for eating my assistant, and retrieving those remains was no easy feat, by Jove! This cat you see here tried to rip my bloody head off while I was cutting the beasts stomach open!” Nepeta hisses as the camera pans to show the furry lusus.

“Indeed, all of the creatures you see here are responsible for attempting to kill me. This ogre tried to use me as a blasted cudgel. This crab whozit nearly bit my head off! And don’t get me started on this devilfucking spider! I’m still fucking peeved about the rubbish this dastardly arachnid put me through!”

“Indeed, just about the only creatures on this island I can stand are these centaur chaps!” The camera turns back to Jake and one of the hoofbeasts in question, which is currently serving tea. “Should I fail to acquire a fresh assistant from the organization that funded my expedition, I may just form a crew of these fine fellows! Look at this gent! He was born to butler. I dare say when it comes to butlering he may be the best there is!” The lusus blushes a deep blue and puts a hand to his face in flattered embarrassment.

“Indeed, they are exceptionally excellent at butlering.” Equius nods firmly. “Far beyond what human or troll can hope to accomplish.”

You roll your eyes and start tapping at a few keys. “Well you get the idea. This island was swarming lusus when he got here. The next few days of his recording just involve a lot of studying the lusus and exploring the island.”

“So… wait. You guys know what all these animals are?” Roxy asks in confusion, and you sigh as you remember that half of the room doesn’t know what’s happening behind the scenes.

“We were raised by these animals.” Feferi explains. “They’re called Lusus, and they are responsible for rearing Troll grubs.”

“Except for Feferi, who was raised by a giant hentai monster.” Karkat adds with a smirk. “Tentacles for literal miles.” You barely choke back the snort of laughter when Feferi glares at you. You know you’re not supposed to be encouraging your matesprit’s kismesis, but you have no self-control when it comes to crass humor.

“Bassholes.” Feferi spits out angrily.

“I’d make a joke about sleeping on the couch, but since most of us are sleeping on the floor that’s pretty fucking arbitrary.” Dave comments. “Anyways, we’ve got an island full of albino troll baby daddies here, and no trolls in sight. Not to mention that dragon. Is that a lusus thing too?”

“Terezi was raised by one of those.” Karkat replies. “It never left its egg, but still.”

Dave stares at Karkat for several long minutes in disbelief, before looking up in some sort of epiphany. “This explains so much. Like, holy shit, I dodged such a fucking bullet. Jesus Christ, if
that had carried on I’d never live past meeting the parents…” He trails off quietly, mumbling to himself. You decide to move on while he recovers from whatever the fuck episode he’s going through.

“Anyways, just going to skip to the next big breakthrough here.” You announce, tapping a few keys. Jade throws an elbow to shut Dave up, and you nod and start the clip.

Mr. English is standing on the edge of the cove in the middle of the island. You can see rocks sticking up in the distance, forming a large ring jutting up like teeth in the ocean. In the middle of the water is a large temple with a sculpture of a frog adorning the top.

“Salutations chaps! Jeremiah Ichabod Harley here, now with a full excavation team! My exploration of the main island has come to an end, and these fine folks have arrived just in time for the final part of my investigation. The temple you see behind me sits in the center of what was almost certainly once a crater. The temple is thousands of years old, and likely is linked to the origin of the island itself.”

“Save the conjecture, sir. We’re about to get all the information we need.” One of the men off camera cuts in.

Jeremiah looks amusedly to the side, clearly unbothered by the interruption. “A man of action, eh? I like the cut of your jib! Quite right, quite right, let us venture forth! This is to be the pinnacle of our exploration, never mind that bit of dragon slaying nonsense yesterday. Tally ho!”

As the team gets into boats and starts to sail out to the island, you note that everyone’s attention has been drawn to you. You sigh. “Yes, the dragon slaying was caught on camera, and yes I still have the footage. And no, I will not show you that part, because it has absolutely zero fucking relevance to anything regarding the bullshit we’re dealing with.” Typical of the idiots you work with here, they’d rather watch a British gentleman fight a dragon than risk learning something.

The fight was one of the most badass things you’ve ever seen, but still. Idiots.

The others seem to want to argue, but Mister Harley seems to have arrived at the temple entrance, and now he and his group are venturing inside. Somehow the idea of learning all the answers to the questions they’ve had ever since this whole disaster started is edging out over their inevitable drive to spew bullshit. Somehow.

The temple is only accessible through a series of traps and other extraneous bullshit, but you don’t really pay attention to any of the footage, even as Aradia bounces in her seat beside you. Instead, you re-examine the walls in the background for what feels like the hundredth time, looking over the carvings in boredom.

The people who built this temple years in the past clearly had their own idea of what everything you’re seeing here means, but you can’t say you put much stock in any of it. They were a bunch of ignorant fuck-ups, so who really cares what they thought. You sigh, glancing over at your moirail fondly as she grins giddily at the scene. You’d never have left this bullshit in if you didn’t know that she wasn’t crazy about this stuff.

A muttering of confusion from on camera causes you to snap back into focus, as you realize the important shit is finally happening. The view pans over to an abrupt shift in the walls of the temple, and you mute the footage. “Okay I’m taking over the narration now, because these guys have no idea what the fuck they’re dealing with.”

You ignore the protests, primarily from Jade and Jake, and start talking over them. “The walls have
made an abrupt shift from stone to metal and organics because the team has reached the core of the temple. They built the temple on this site because at its core is a hive transport. It crashed here centuries ago, and the humans who found it were a bunch of superstitious fucktards who worshipped the thing.”

“The ship was being used as an arc to transport a large collection of lusus in various cryogenic cells. Probably an old Alternian colonizing vessel, one of the first of its kind judging by how fucking ancient all this technology is.”

“Hold on, if that’s true shouldn’t there have been trolls piloting it?” Feferi asks curiously.
“Colonizing vessels always had small groups of trolls to run them. What caused the vessel to crash?”

“Normally they’ve got people to run them, yeah. The fucking pilot systems were still experimental in those days, so troll crews were more common. This craft didn’t have one though. They find the head command station later on, and there isn’t even bones. Other than these damn pods the ship is populated by a grand total of jack fucking shit.” The skeleton of a giant lusus looms on screen as if to emphasize your point, the remains half scattered through a massive hole in the pod.

“Then how did it get here?” John asks in bewilderment.

“No way to know for sure, but I have my guesses.” You stare back at the screen. “Just wait, they’ve almost found it.”

The group turns down one more corridor of cryogenic tubes, and finds one at the end more advanced than any of the others. “This pod is the key to the mystery.” You say grimly, as Mr. Harley advances to wipe fog from the glass. “I’m not an expert on Alternian history or anything, but I’m pretty damn sure that I’m on the right track.”

The figure inside the pod is beautiful, ethereal, a grown troll with long black hair framing her torso, almost reaching as far as her knees. The details are difficult to determine through the frost collected on the inside of the cryogenic pod, but you think it’s pretty fucking easy to put the pieces together. The looping symbol around her neck is obvious enough, but there’s more than just that. The shifting in the room means that everyone else has noticed to.

You glance over to Nepeta and see her frozen in shock. The others are staring at her in stunned silence, and you see Equius curl around her defensively. They aren’t imagining it. The figure in this image is almost a perfect double for Nepeta, with longer fangs and horns.

“Assholes and bigger assholes, I present to you the Disciple, the most notorious fugitive in Alternian history.” You throw your hands up. “We just discovered the secret to one of the biggest conspiracies in all of troll culture.”

There’s a lot of gasping and murmuring from the group, and you’re honestly feeling pretty proud of your delivery there. So of course the humans have to cut in and ruin everything with perfectly sensible questioning.

“Okay Sollux? That sounds, like, super fucking impressive and stuff, but as somebody who knows jack shit about troll culture can you fill me in here?” Roxy raises a hand with a quizzical look.

Karkat groans. “Okay, can anybody really explain this one? Without all the bullshit conspiracy theories and propaganda?” He looks around the room to see you and the other trolls looking just as clueless. You know a lot about the Disciple, but your knowledge definitely falls into the conspiracy category. Feferi’s knowledge is more based on the political aspects. And the Disciple’s story is so thoroughly covered up that it’s hard to really find trolls who know the story at all.
In the end Equius is the one to speak up. “The Disciple was the closest follower of the most infamous revolutionary in Alternian history.”

“Well that summary was brief and useless, thank you Equius.” Karkat snaps.

“She was also the only member of said revolution to escape the Condesce’s extermination.” Karkat glares at Equius as he stops again and waves him along.

“It has been the subject of debate for many years, how the Disciple could have slipped away even as her friends and her lover perished. There are, however well hidden, accounts for the locations and deaths of every member of the movement, if you look deeply enough. The leader of the revolution, The Signless, was tortured and killed by my ancestor. His closest allies were made slaves by the Condesce’s top soldiers. But The Disciple, one of the most noteworthy of all, escaped.”

“And nobody knows how?” John asks quizzically.

“I know how.” Equius mutters. There’s a pause as you and the other trolls look at him in disbelief.

“Equius, stop fucking with us.” Karkat says uneasily. “How the fuck would you know the truth behind a revolution that ended fucking centuries ago?”

“I do not wish to say. It is irrelevant to our situation.” Equius says with a grimace. “Indeed, we should all just forget I said anything. Yes, an excellent idea. I command all of you to forget I ever mentioned the Disciple.”

“Irrelevant?” Karkat glares at Equius in disbelief. “EQUIUS YOU FUCKING NOOKSTAIN, DID YOU FORGET THAT THERE’S AN IMPERIAL BLOCKADE ABOVE THIS PLANET RIGHT NOW? I THINK THAT ANY INFORMATION ON HOW TO ESCAPE THE CONDESCE WOULD BE VERY FUCKING RELEVANT.”

“You’d be foolishly mistaken.” Equius snorts. “At the time of the Disciple’s escape the empire did not yet have enough spaceships to create a blockade. The empire was only just beginning their preparations for space travel.”

“How the fuck can that be true?” You ask, feeling slightly resentful that Equius’ hidden knowledge has taken the wind out of your presentation. “They seemed to have ships ready to go.” You indicate the screen.

“It was experimental.” Equius states simply. “One of two transport ships that were created for early terraforming attempts. This one was publicly deemed a failure and scrapped, but in reality it was making it’s way here.”

“Cover-ups within cover-ups!” Jane gasps.

“How could an experimental ship with no pilots make such a long journey?” You ask more to yourself than anything. This story makes no sense at this point.

“The Psionic.” You turn to see Feferi looking up at you, her mouth open in shock. “This is about the Psionic, isn’t it?”

You stare at her for a moment, before everything suddenly becomes brutally clear. The Psionic, your ancestor, the pilot for Her Imperious Condescension’s head battleship, and known to be the last revolutionary of the Signless to be caught.

“Holy shit.” You mutter to yourself. “My ancestor was captured when he shot the Disciple into
Equius sighs and nods. “The empire’s predecution teams were in disarray at the time. My… The head Executor had just defected, and was being expunged from the Alternian command for his crimes. The Psionic was only captured because he was weakened from the endeavor.”

You remember Equius mentioning his ancestor being the one to kill the Signless, making him the defector in question. You figure it’s better not to mention it.

“Okay, glad we got that sorted out.” Dave cuts in. “So basically, what we need to take away from all of this is: we’re all packing DNA from a fugitive space babe.”

You groan in frustration, “Yes, that sums it up nicely. This is the secret I’ve been trying to uncover ever since we landed on this godforsaken planet. That’s the extent of my months of work, summed up in one fucking sentence. Thank you very much, you asshole. Good to know my efforts mean so little to you all.”

Dave nods firmly. “It’s what I’m here for.”

“It also means that you are all directly connected to the only troll the Condesce may hate more than me.” Feferi adds glumly. “If the Condesce finds out about you she’ll krill you for shore!”

“Chances were good for that anyways.” Karkat says with a shrug. “It’s hardly a secret at this point that we’re all fucked.”

There’s a long silence as everyone remembers the battleships floating in space.

“It also means that we’re all related to Nepeta.” John adds after a few minutes.

You stare up at him blankly, with most of the room doing the same. Nepeta tilts her head quizzically and let’s out a puzzled “Mrowr?”

John chuckles sheepishly. “Well, you know, if this Disciple is Nepeta’s ancestor, and she’s also responsible for our powers somehow, then that means we all share DNA! Right?” He trails off, unsure of himself.

Karkat opens his mouth, likely to start ranting about how fucking stupid this idea is (which you can totally get behind, because that’s really fucking stupid), but he’s cut off immediately.

“Oh my fucking god.” Dave blurts out. “Nepeta, why didn’t you tell me you were a Strider.”

Nepeta just tilts her head further. “I’m purretty sure that I’m still a Leijon. It is a neat way to look at things though!” She beams at John, who chuckles and scratches at the back of his head in response.

Dave is not deterred in the slightest. “No. Nepeta. Just. Hold on. You clearly weren’t listening to me. You and I share genetic material.”

“Phrasing.” Kanaya mutters.

“Shut up I’m having an epiphany here.” Dave waves her off as he closes in on Nepeta. “We are, like, cousins or something, Nepeta. Space cousins. That’s makes you a Strider. You can’t just deny the call of Striderism. This is an important new way of life that has just opened up to you. Please Nepeta, this is super important. Look at my serious face right now.”
Dave gives Nepeta the sternest look he can manage. Nepeta quails under the intensity of Dave’s bullshit. Equius hardly seems bothered, and that’s the point where your brain checks out twice over. When things have reached such a high level of complete fuckery where even Equius has stopped being an uptight asshole, that means it’s time to get the fuck out while you still can.

You’ve just grabbed all of your gear when Roxy and Karkat start interjecting, as loudly as possible. Then Feferi and Jade get involved. You’ve taken two steps towards the door when suddenly the whole room is getting involved, and you don’t want to get sucked into the hurricane of bullshit. You walk faster.

A hand claps on your shoulder before you leave, and you turn to see John. “What the fuck Egbert, can’t a troll abscond in peace?” You would have thought John would be trapped immediately, being mostly responsible for this hoofbeast-shit, but he looks to be surprisingly stable.

“Sorry Sollux.” John looks down with a look you probably wouldn’t be able to sort out even if you did give a fuck. Which you guess you pretty much do now, because damn, he looks like he has even more on your mind than you do. Impossible, but still worrying. “I just wanted to say thanks for this. It means a lot that you went to all this trouble to figure this out for us. I think everyone’s kinda… looking for answers right now.”

He needs a moirail. Or whatever human equivalent exists. Therapist? Whatever. The least you can do is give him a proper answer. “It’s more for my curiosity than anything, EB. Don’t get all human emotional on me.”

“Human emotional?”

“I’m being abrasive, it’s a fucking deflection technique. Now shut up.”

John chuckles. “Alright, fair enough. So what are you going to do now?”

“I’ve still got more work to do.” You look up at the computer equipment you’re levitating. “I’ve still got a few more things to figure out. Believe it or not the alien monsters and the space ship were easy to find. There’s stuff here twice as difficult to uncover.”

John nods, leaning in to whisper grimly. “Okay. If you find anything out about our powers, let me know. We’ll need every edge we have if my friends are going to survive the next few days.”

You stare at John for a few moments. You haven’t known him for long, but it still feels like the John you first met and the John you’re talking to right now are two different people. You have enough to think about already though, so you just nod and leave.

The chaos from behind you fades as you head back up to the transportalizer, and you find yourself properly considering what you’ll do when you finish with Grandpa Harley’s data. Seeing John so determined, you’re starting to think fighting may really be your best option.

Your name is Doc Scratch, and you’re readying yourself to deal with the new pieces that have entered your little game. The thought that there may be other aliens to follow the first group had crossed your mind before, but the exceedingly dramatic entrance of what is no doubt the leader of the Troll race was yet again, more than you had expected.

Truly, you have not enjoyed a game so much in ages. Not since Rue Lalonde and Jenna Egbert have you ever needed to so thoroughly exercise your strategic capabilities. And now that the newest player has arrived, you find yourself at a disadvantage of all things! It’s refreshing, invigorating even!
The uphill climb will surely make victory all the sweeter.

Until now, things have been progressing, while not smoothly, certainly ever in your intended direction. This game that began the night your newest wards enacted their impressive escape has been interesting to the extreme! It lacked the subterfuge and second guesses that came when you matched wits with the human guardians, but more than made up for it in surprises. Fitting for a game that you never expected to be playing in the first place!

The trolls had incredible powers, abilities that shed light on the extreme level of success your genetic experimentations had years ago. What’s more, they led you to the same children you lost when their guardians managed to outwit you years ago! It was a plethora of new resources for your prey to tap into, and an outstanding opportunity for you.

Then there’s the Midnight Crew to spice things up; the quintet of elite soldiers, bearing their name from their time in the military, all working to overthrow you from within. The team is so adept you almost regret their inevitable deaths, would were their defeat not so enjoyable to orchestrate.

This whole ordeal has you beginning to wax poetic; you endeavor to restrain yourself, so that your internal monologue may be clearer to those reading.

Indeed, it is time for business. You are dressed in your finest white suit, and you examine yourself in a full body mirror. Your head seems to have stopped it’s (admittedly alarming) swelling, having settled into a perfectly nondescript white ball. Rue’s self-alterations over the years gave her a truly impressive power; while her original intentions to erase your head completely failed, she still managed to erase all of your defining features. Your fingerprints are the only things remaining that identify you as Doctor Scratch.

At any rate, you are looking currently as impeccable as a man with a cue ball for a head can. Clearly this is the best time to make a call.

It was surprisingly simple to trace Her Imperious Condescension’s call back to her battleship. If you were to guess, you suspect she intended this; it makes for an easy way for the groveling masses to proclaim their loyalty to their new troll overlord.

Your head is clearly enough to unnerve even the trolls in charge of communications aboard the battleship. They patch you through to the troll in charge with very little fuss.

The troll in charge proves to be very loud, and very grumpy when she answers. “Okay chum, this had beta be worth my time. I am a shipload of fins to do, so make it snapper.”

You begin with formalities, like any gentleman should. “Good afternoon, my name is-”

“Glubbing hell! What the shell are you? Where the glub is your head?”

You are thankful that your new head comes with a flawless poker face. “My head is the result of an incident that would no doubt be far to long and convoluted to burden yourself with. At any rate-”

“Give me the highlights then.”

You’d blink if you still had eyes, but you settle for a startled moment of silence before continuing. “Certainly. Far be it from me to disrespect a new acquaintance. If you wouldn’t mind though, I would greatly appreciate it if you allowed me a brief question.”

“Shoot, gill-frond.” The Condesce appears to be abandoning her number one priority of instilling fear in favor of curiosity at your head. You are however, feeling impatient. You skip right to the
“Thank you. I was wondering if you were interested in some trolls I have under my protection?”

The Condesce blinks, and then her mouth splits in a way that easily draws to mind the maw of a shark. Her grin is lined with razor sharp teeth, and you regret being unable to smile in return.

“Swim on up here, guppy. We have a lot to talk aboat.”

Chapter End Notes

Fuck me, this was supposed to be a short chapter originally. But then everyone kept butting in during the filming, and Doc Scratch got tired of waiting for his turn to talk. ARGH.

People, I need comments. My brain is turning to slag, and of the three comments I got last chapter, one was super toxic and I had to delete it because fuck that noise. I need nice comments! Not nice as in tell me how good I am, I won't demand that of you because that makes me look like a needy bitch and I won't get better that way. But feel free to ask questions, or critique me! Or just shoot the shit about pairings, hell I don't know, anything will do. Because while seeing my views steadily increase is fucking awesome, it's so much more awesome to see what kind of people read my story.

But seriously don't go calling names or being a shit in some other way. That shit ain't cool, and it just means your comment gets deleted. No attention for you. Bluh bluh.
Your name is Aradia Megido, and you have no idea what you’re doing. Well, that’s not entirely true. You’re actually standing outside the mediculler block, or as Jade calls it, the infirmary. Most of your companions have spread throughout the tower in the wake of Sollux’s big reveal. The only ones still inside are Jane, Equius, Nepeta, Kanaya, Rose, and Dave.

You sigh as you try to think about your next step. Your talk with Sollux helped clear your head a little, helped to sort your thoughts away from the whispers of the dead. These days it is less a cacophony and more a murmur in the background, but often it can be no less effective an influence.

You still think Sollux’s advice was pretty much shit, but he did have a point. Chances are good that you’re all going to die soon. Which means that you have limited time to figure things out. If you’re going to get a handle on your relationship with Equius, this is the only time.

You sigh and turn to the door. Okay. Deep breaths. It’s now or never. You can do this.

The door suddenly swings open and it’s all you can do to not run for the stairs. There’s a low thudding rhythm from inside before Kanaya storms out the door, pausing briefly in surprise. “Oh! Hello Aradia! I hope I didn’t startle you.”

“Only a lot, no biggie!” You grin up at Kanaya to show you’re only joking, before asking the obvious question. “Shouldn’t you still be in bed?”

Kanaya scowls and crosses her arms. “I have finally managed to convince Jane that my regenerative capabilities are more than able to handle my injuries. It is hardly the first time I’ve been disemboweled.”

“So she let you go! That’s great!”

“I refused to stay any longer.” She indicates the infirmary. “I’m afraid that I have very little tolerance for Dave’s musical leanings at the moment. If you’ll excuse me.” You step aside as she stalks away grumpily.

You enter the room at last to find that Dave Strider has turned the room into a sort of rap classroom. Nepeta is sitting upright at the foot of Equius’ bed wearing his sunglasses and cheering. Jane is
sitting next to Rose, trying and failing to look grumpy. Rose seems to have woken up and is watching the scene with bemusement.

Honestly, you’re not sure how Dave managed to get a whiteboard in here, but it’s clear he’s taking his decision to inaugurate Nepeta into the Strider family seriously. He had won the argument over adopting her through sheer confusion; spewing bullshit so quickly even Roxy was forced to give up. You can only wonder when sword-fighting lessons begin.

“Alright now sit your asses down because my class is in session, And I’m here to teach you losers how to rap in perfection. It’s an easy thing to do if you just have the predilection, Just take some words, make a collection, and then make the right connections. But first let’s take a moment for Aradia’s section!” He spins and points to you with a grin, and you freeze up. Slam poetry was never your forte.

He hits the stop button on the cassette player he was using to play his background beat. “Too soon?” He asks with a grin. “Or are you not feeling this rhythm? Are my beats too chill for the hottest alien in the room?”

“Hey!” Nepeta protests.

“Sorry Nepeta, you’re family now.” Dave lowers his sunglasses and looks at her seriously. “We have rules about hitting on family. It goes like this: shit’s fucked up.” He turns to you smoothly. “Seriously though, what’s up?”

You allow yourself a grin. “I was just stopping by to see how everyone was doing?”

Dave looks levelly at you, sunglasses still lowered enough that you can see his gaze shift slightly to Equius. Fuck. Dave’s got you completely figured out. He looks back to you and winks, smirking as he fixes his shades. Fuck. Dave’s got you completely figured out and now he’s trying to play feathery flapper troll to your quadrant endeavors.

“Well, I think Nepeta and I were just about to take this show on the road. And by road I mean the stairs. No roads on this island, and your alien baby daddies are up now that the sun’s set. So like fuck we’re going outside.” He turns to Nepeta. “We need to find Dirk. Let him know that we’re making this happen.”

“I will accompany you then.” Equius shifts as he prepares to get up. You’re not sure if you’re thankful or pissed off.

Dave cuts in first though. “Equius. Bro. This is a family affair. Blood Striders only. You’re an honorary Strider, but we still have to set some fucking ground rules. If not, who knows what would happen?”

“Anarchy, no doubt.” Rose quips from her bed, still smiling mysteriously. And by mysteriously you mean fuck she knows too.

“Fucking Anarchy.” Dave nods in agreement.

“That sounds clawsome!” Nepeta cheers. She and Equius have a swift muttered conversation between the two of them, and Nepeta bounds up to Dave. “Can we find me some sunglasses that fit while we’re out?”

“Oh hell yes. What’s a Strider without a proper pair of shades?” Dave nods as the two leave. “We are going to get you all the Strider pre-reqs by the end of the night. Hell, I’ll even teach you to hate
puppets. Sanity will finally reign in my family. Fuck yes let’s do this!” Dave sounds genuinely excited as his voice fades away, and Nepeta’s cheer of “YAY” is pretty great to hear.

“I never actually cleared Nepeta to leave.” Jane says in sudden realization. She turns to you. “I’d better go after them to see how she does. Make sure everyone else stays in bed please.” She rushes out the door without waiting for your answer.

Jane’s gone all of ten seconds before Rose gets up as well. “Well that’s convenient. Now I don’t need to trick Jane into leaving. I’ll leave you two to sort out your feelings.” She walks out of the room swiftly, stumbling only once, to her credit.

You look around. Equius and you are the only people in the room.

“Fiddlesticks.” Equius mutters. “She is exceedingly blunt.”

“Yup.” You look aside awkwardly. “It’s probably for the best though.”

“Why is that?”

“I’d be trying to abscond from all this if she hadn’t said it outright.”

“Ah.” Equius fails to hide his disappointment at this. He looks down at his bed, and you finally summon the nerves to face him directly. He looks depressed, but raises his head to meet your gaze. “That is very unlike you.”

“Is it?” You tilt your head and think about it. “I don’t see why.”

Equius flushes and looks aside again. “You have never been one to run. You possess an… admirable excess of courage.”

Equius is very determinedly staring at the ceiling as you turn back to him. “Oh.” You say softly, not sure what else to say. “I guess… I should live up to expectations?”

“My expectations have proven to be… rather despicable, in the past.” Equius’ gaze turns down again. “I expected you to be a lot of things you are not, and should not be.”

“Such as?” You narrow your eyes at him.

“I felt you should be obedient. Reverent. Devoted to our old customs.” Equius sighs. “For some time I was of the opinion that your rebellious stance towards the class system was your greatest flaw.”

You knew that Equius has been getting better about his classist tendencies, but it’s no less surprising to hear him speak like this. “You don’t think so anymore, then?”

“You would not be… you if you were not rebellious and free-spirited. To have you obey our laws would be… unacceptable.” He shudders even as he says it.

You allow yourself a smile. “My goodness Equius, are you telling me to break the law? Since when were you such a poor example! What would Nepeta think?”

Equius winces, and you realize that your voice has become scathing in spite of yourself. You choose to attribute the outburst to Rose’s bad influence, and change your tone. “I’m sorry. It’s still hard for me to move past how you used to be. You used to be so obsessed with the stupid class system, and it made it so hard to even talk to you!”

“I was a jerk.”
“Yes.” You sigh sadly, not wanting to kick him while he’s down. You haven’t forgotten the times you talked to him as a ghost. He was an asshole, but he was also a scared kid. Living on Alternia does that to you. “You’ve gotten better though.”

Equius snorts. “After all that has happened to me I would be a fool not to adapt.” He indicates his missing arm, the mutilated and scarred flesh remaining around his shoulder. “Though some would say it took an excess of misfortune to change me. And I do not believe anyone is convinced I’ve really changed. I am not convinced myself.”

“Stubborn as a mule.” You add with a small smile. He lets out only a halfhearted smile in reply. You sigh and walk forwards, stopping at his shoulder. You can see his other side start to sweat, but his scars appear to have lost their sweat glands. You wonder briefly if he’s as thankful for this as everyone else must be. Small blessings.

“I owe you an apology Equius.” You say, looking up from his shoulder to see him ducking his head away. “I was so rude to you before. You went through all this for our sake, and I was just yelling at you for leaving me. I was a complete asshole!”

“The fault is mine. I broke my promises.” Equius says quietly. “I swore to be there when you awoke. I swore to get you your new body. In the end Dirk Strider did far more than I did.”

“You put your life on the line for me.” You say softly. “You helped me without question. You gave me hope that I could cheat death.” You gingerly place a hand on his shoulder, and he turns aside more, until all you can see of his face is scars. “You saved me Equius.”

“I saved nothing. My reasons were… selfish.” Equius spits out irritably. “It was all an attempt to gain your favor. My own lewd desires at work as always.”

“My favor?” You remove your hand from Equius’ shoulder, and he seems to deflate. “This was all a ploy to win me over?” Equius doesn’t respond, but really that’s confirmation enough. The two of you just stay in silence for several minutes.

When Equius finally speaks it’s so soft you can hardly hear him. “I have admired you for sweeps, Aradia, since we were young. When you came to me for help, I thought that this would be my chance to win your affections.”

You scowl at him. “Affections are earned, not won.”

“And lost far easier than gained.” Equius says glumly. “I am fully aware that you think poorly of me.”

“I never said that.” You reply.

Equius stiffens, turning slowly until you can see the corner of his eye. “I am not foolish. My degrading attitude has made you cross many times in the past.”

“Exactly. In the past.” You watch him sadly. You used to think Equius was nothing more than a self-obsessed asshole. Nepeta may have been the only person to recognize the pain he kept bottled up. “You’ve gotten better since then.”

Equius turns far enough that you can see him smiling bitterly. “I just informed you. My change in attitude was merely a ploy to gain your favor. Any changes you’ve perceived are the result of this ploy.”

“How about this one?” You place your hand back on Equius’ shoulder, and this time he turns
towards you.

His face is livid, and it takes you a moment to realize his anger is directed towards himself. “Especially that change.” His eyes rise to meet yours, and you note that this is the first time since the start of this conversation that you’ve looked at each other. “My arm is the evidence of my failure. This arm was not taken because Gamzee overpowered me. It was taken because I was not strong enough to kill him. My resolve failed, and Gamzee took my arm for my weakness.”

Equius stands angrily, and you step backwards as he continues. “I was determined to right the wrongs I’ve committed. I wanted to stop Gamzee before he lost all reason. I wanted to kill him. I wanted to be killed. I wanted to save you all, but I also wanted to die for the sake of fixing my past actions: to remove myself from this world for my crimes against Alternian law. And Gamzee showed me the folly of my actions. He burned me.”

“Equius…” You stare up in shock. He’s never brought this up before. Even Nepeta claims to have no idea of what went on after Equius stayed at the Lalonde’s to fight the FELT.

“Gamzee showed me the truth.” Equius says with a snarl, pacing away to the center of the room. “That I was beyond redemption. That I had strayed further than Alternian law could forgive. That I had committed a crime that our people would never forgive. He let me live. I was unworthy of execution. My actions could only be amended through suffering.”

“Suffering through your burns and your arm.” You nod in understanding.

“No.” He turns back to face you, and you see tears running down the left side of his face. “He wanted me to suffer for my love.”

“He threatened Nepeta?” You snarl angrily. “I’ll fuck him up! I’ll kick his stoner ass!”

“You mustn’t!” Equius cries out in a panic. “You can’t go near Gamzee. I will not allow it!”

You want to tell him where he can stick his damn refusals, but the look in his face is enough to make you curious. “Why is it so important that I stay away from him?”

Equius turns aside and blushes a deep blue. “I… he… you are one of his targets as well.”

You find yourself blushing as well and you lean back against the wall. “Oh.” you think about what that means for a moment. “Well fuck. Gamzee wants to kill me.”

“Indeed.” Equius looks back at you. “I owe you my apologies. My improper affections towards you have put your life in danger.”

“So Gamzee’s intention is to kill you after he has killed Nepeta and I.” You stare at Equius for a moment before shrugging your shoulders. “Well I won’t die easily. Not this time.”

Equius snarls. “I will not allow it either. I will die before I see Gamzee’s expectations fulfilled.”

You think back to the warnings that the dead have been whispering. Gamzee will kill Equius. This is how it’s meant to happen. He’ll die to protect you.

You look at Equius standing in front of you, determined and broken, always a contradiction in your mind. He is strong, and he is timid. He destroys without thinking, yet creates delicate machinery. He treated the hemospectrum as law, and yet he’s in a moirallegiance with a foul-mouthed olive blood. He has ridiculous amounts of muscle despite a diet with hardly any protein.
He was always a mess of rough edges behind his straightforward attitude. His burns just reflect that. He’s towering over you, with cords of blue scar tissue stretching across half of his body like webs, trembling in frustration and probably fear as well.

He’s incredible.

You smile and walk towards Equius. “Well then, I suppose we’ll have to look out for each other. Because I’m not about to watch you die either.” When you stop in front of him you’re barely up to his chest, so you levitate up to him until you’re eye to eye. “I don’t care how terrible you think you are. I am here because you risked your life for me. If it weren’t for you I’d have lost my mind to the dead ages ago.”

He starts stammering, but you decide to shut him up before you start going in circles again.

You kiss him, and all of the doubt you felt earlier seems like a distant memory. You just keep your lips pressed to him, as his arm comes up slowly, hesitantly, toughing your shoulder so faintly you can barely tell he’s there. But you can tell he’s there. There’s only you, and him. It doesn’t matter what comes next, you’ll handle it together, or die trying.

Your name is Jane Egbert, and Dave is going to be in big trouble later. He has somehow managed to completely vanish with Nepeta, despite being limited to this tower. You’ve been searching fruitlessly for the duo for a while now. But while Jade claims to have seen them, you think she’s helping them evade you. Jade doesn’t talk much about her powers, but you’re pretty sure she could have Dave teleported anywhere in the building in the time it takes you to blink.

It’s just as well, you suppose. Nepeta was more or less recovered. And whatever trolls are made of, their muscles atrophy at a far slower rate than humans. You’d be surprised if Nepeta needed more than a good stretch to get back to proper physical condition.

Seeing the look in her eye when Jake and Jade mentioned the lusus running around at night, you’re more concerned about the safety of the islands animal population.

Well, with Kanaya and Equius almost healed as well, soon it will be just you and Rose dealing with medical issues. Dave’s gunshot healed up immediately once you got the bullet out, and everyone else is just dealing with simple exhaustion. You suppose you could work with Equius a bit more and try to clear up some of his scars, maybe fix his scalp so his hair can grow back properly. You’ll have to ask him when this is all over.

You reach the infirmary door and walk in expecting Aradia to be looking after things like the dependable person she is. She’s making out with Equius instead. You try to sneak out without drawing attention, but Equius spots you first. He promptly freaks the fuck out.

You leave. Immediately. And run up the stairs as fast as possible. You can hear Equius knocking something over behind you, but you decide to leave that to Aradia.

You’ve climbed three flights of stairs before it occurs to you that Rose wasn’t in the room. “Fucking… shucks!” You yell in annoyance. Knowing Rose, she’s probably found the quietest corner in the building to vanish to, and she’ll probably stay there until she knows you’re done looking for her.

You look into the next room. It’s full of mummies. Nepeta, Dave, and Jade are in the process of teleporting out of the room, which basically means you see them for about half a second before they
vanish in a burst of green light. You fucking knew it.

You have lost all patience for your patients.

When the time comes you will destroy them all with your ruthless executive authority. John may be the friendleader of your operation, but you’re the friendleader’s older sister, and they will respect your authority!

Later though. It’s never good to go on a pranking spree when you’re so miffed that you don’t have a good sense of karmic retribution! If you’re not having fun setting up a prank it won’t be fun for anybody else either! This sort of knowledge is what makes you the pranking master.

With all of your patients either hiding, running, or making out, you decide that you’re done giving medical treatment for the time being. With nothing better to do you decide to explore some more. The Harley’s house has a lot of floors with all kinds of crazy things on it, collected by their globetrotting Grandpa.

You’re wandering around the upper levels when you spot Jake hauling something large on a handcart. “Ah, Jane!” he spots you and waves around his load, which is covered with a blanket. “I was just finishing up some family business. What brings you up here?”

“Just exploring.” You reply with a smile.

“Capital! Nothing like a bit of adventure to finish the evening! That said though, not much else up here besides our rooms…” He chuckles as he starts walking to the transportalizer, “it would hardly do to let you explore my bedroom without supervision!”

“That’s fair!” You nod and smile, “Then how about I accompany you instead?”

“There’s an idea!” Jake grins and carries on. “I’m just taking Grandpa here down to the fireplace. Right this way!” He steps onto the pad and vanishes. You stare after him and wonder what the hell is going on. You follow, dearly hoping that you’re not about to attend a cremation.

When you step out onto the main floor you see Jake waiting for you in the lounge. “Here we are! It’s a bit of an odd tradition, but grandpa was very specific. I think I did a bang up job, really!”

He pushes the handcart, apparently holding one Grandpa Harley, up to the mantle and sets it down. “Here we are, Grandpa! Tally-ho.” He pulls the cart aside and throws the blanket back to reveal his Grandfather, taxidermied. You barely restrain a cry of shock, but you’re sure your facial expression is dead giveaway that you’re not reacting well mentally.

“Sorry for the shock.” Jake says sadly. “Personally I’ve never seen what the bloody problem is with a plain old grave, but Grandpa left very specific instructions, so…”

“He’s skin is going to look terrible if you leave him there.” You mention, unable to think of anything proper to say, and finding your mind drifting to body preservation chapters from your medical textbooks. The things they teach in school these days!

“He’s got some sort of troll nonsense for that, he’ll be looking cheery for years to come.” Jake says with a smile. That smile quickly fades as he adds, “that said this is a family tradition, and my Grandpa never did agree to reveal what the rest of his family looks like.”

The two of you share a look of disgust, interrupted when Jade teleports into the room. She gives a half-hearted smile at the sight of Grandpa Harley, and grabs Jake in a hug that would probably fracture your bones.
“Thanks for taking care of things Jake, I don’t think I could have handled it!”

“Nonsense sis, you can handle anything if you keep the right mindset.” Jake says cheerily. A soft snuffle comes from Jade, buried against Jake, and his face just melts. He wraps his arms around her tenderly. “But I was happy to do this myself. I wouldn’t put you through that.”

They stay there a moment longer, but break apart before you start feeling too awkward. “So, a future Dave came and told me to find you guys. And he also told me that you guys need to go!”

She whirls and points to Jake. “You need to go get Sollux out of Grandpa’s lab, because the goats will start poking around soon and we need it in lockdown!” She then turns to you. “And you need to tell your brother to stop being a dummy! Last I saw him he was in the greenhouse.”

“Wait, what?” You turn to Jake and see he’s as confused as you are.

“It’s time stuff, very difficult to explain! But Dave says if you don’t do what he says then everyone dies! Go on! Get out of here!” She cheerfully starts pushing you out towards the stairs.

“Hold on, I still need to check on Nepeta!” You protest, remembering Jade’s status as accessory to Strider bullshit.

“You’ll never see her again!” Jade cackles in what she no doubt thinks is an evil fashion, before sticking her tongue out at you and vanishing again.

“I’m sure Nepeta just wants some time to stretch her legs.” Jake says cheerfully. “Anyways, Jake’s right, that lab needs to be closed off again for the evening! Cheerio!” He steps onto the transportalizer pad and disappears again. You have nothing better to do at this point, so you start climbing stairs up to the greenhouse.

You’ve been meaning to talk to John anyways.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so originally I was planning for this to last longer, but Aradia and Equius wouldn’t shut the fuck up, so I decided to stop before I got too far into the 4000 mark on my word count. It took me like three or four tries before I was able to shift their conversation into a way that felt right to me. I kept upping Aradia's sass levels too high, and then things got needlessly complicated. Just because I ship Aradia and Equius doesn't mean I can just throw them together. Aradia's way too strong minded to just start swooning over Equius. it's not who she is. So there was some balancing to do there. It's not like John and Roxy, where the two just meet and fucking chemistry happens (huehue, fucking chemistry).

Now we just need Karkat and Nepeta to get a handle on things.. Seriously Karkat, get your shit together.

Now readers, you beautiful bastards, please tell me truthfully: did I succeed here? Asking honestly, because I've got zero experience writing anything romantic. Or reading. I've basically just got anime, and enough cynicism to know I can't trust anime. I am not a romantic person, is what I'm saying. Just don't have a head for this stuff. So if this worked, hooray, tell me how I blundered into success. If not, tell me how the fuck
feelings work. My ability to facilitate sloppy makeouts depends on you!
We're All Still Family

Chapter Summary

Jane and John reflect on their life.

Chapter Notes

I was in a collision with a stupid motherfucking deer on the highway a few days back, otherwise I’d have had this done faster. The fucker wrecked my van, so I was fuming over that mess for a few days and couldn’t focus on writing. Deer suck. I would murder the shit out of Bambi and his mom. Just fuck up that whole dumbass species in general. Could have died if I didn’t hit the brakes in time. Fuck that’d be a shitty way to go.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Your name is John Egbert, and you are going to keep your shit contained. You're not having an easy time of it at the moment, but you know that if you dig deep down inside, you’ll find the power to believe in yourself.

That’s actually a bunch of bullshit, believing in yourself doesn’t magically make you handle things better, but it’s not like you can think of anything else to do at this point.

Earth is being invaded. It sounds stupid, like you’ve been dragged into one of those bad movies you love watching, but it’s true. There is a blockade being formed through the air over all of earth. Which is ridiculous because as far as you know human technology is hardly developed enough to try going anywhere anyways. If the ships were flying saucers instead of extra pointy star destroyer things, it’d be just like Independence Day.

Well, you’ve got a super alien hacker, but he’s made it pretty clear that in real life hacking does not solve all the world’s problems. Really, you’re not sure that you have anything that can solve this.

You need to figure something out. You don’t intend to sit and wait to die, but you don’t know how to fight this. You know you’re going to fight to your last breath, but you don’t know how to win. You’d like to at least stand a chance. But right now the odds of your success are nonexistent. Especially since half of your group seems to think running and hiding is the only way out.

This alien invasion bullshit is putting a serious strain on your newfound role as friendleader.

You wish your dad was here. He’d know what to do.

You wouldn’t be surprised if the others were thinking along similar lines. Your guardians always seemed to know how to handle things.

Your mind is drifting. You can feel the air shifting around you, the light breeze drifting in through the gaps in the greenhouse roof. You feel the faint breathing of Roxy, as she sits at the stairs behind you. You’re not sure when she got there.
You decide to stretch out your feeling further, past Roxy, through the stair well. You feel the weary breathing of Jane, the result of running all over the tower looking for Dave and Nepeta, who Jade is teleporting around the building. Even now you can feel the fizzle of electricity on the air as they move again. You feel Kanaya and Rose, hiding together a few floors up from you, their breathing calm as they relish the relative peace that’s come over everyone.

You feel Equius and Aradia, his breaths nervous, hers steady. You feel Sollux and Jake at the tip of the tower, emerging from the transportalizer. You feel Karkat and Feferi arguing near the front door, slinging insults and sparring. The air is laced with energy. You feel Dirk, standing at the tip of the building, his breathing ragged as he goes through a series of movements. He’s probably been training since his disappearance earlier; he can barely lift his sword anymore. There’s another Dave nearby, clearly the result of his time powers. You stretch further.

You feel the island, the creatures on it, the cool air blowing over the ocean, the clouds overhead, and the air currents further above, the way they twist and loop their way to the mainland, where Imperial battleships float overhead, scattered throughout the sky for miles and miles, until-

“John?”

You’re on the floor of Jade’s greenhouse.

What the hell was that?

You sit up quickly, wondering how you ended up lying on the floor. You look towards the stairs and see Roxy and your sister looking around for you. “I’m right here Jane! I guess I dozed off, hehehe.”

Roxy lets out an undignified squawk and jumps in surprise. Jane just sighs and shakes her head.

“John this isn’t the time to be dozing off.”

“Are you sure?” You take a moment to do some quick math. “It’s like, eight AM our time.”

“Put a sock in it John, we’re talking now.” Jane rolls her eyes. “And also so she can turn invisible out of sight and listen in.”

A pair of fingers snaps in front of your nose and you jump to attention. “I’m not ogling!” You protest weakly. “I was just curious why she was sneaking out.”

“Probably because she’s a lot more shy when she isn’t drunk.” Jane rolls her eyes. “And also so she can turn invisible out of sight and listen in.”

‘Why would she be shy?’ is the first question that jumps to your head, but you have a feeling if you said that out loud Jane would just shake her head and make some kind of comment about how dense you are. It’s probably some mysterious girl thing you know nothing about.

You settle for saying “She doesn’t need to be shy around me.”

Jane gives you a knowing smirk. “The fact that you can say things like that without thinking is exactly why she’s so shy. She spent years crushing on Jake and Dirk. The first one is oblivious and the second is a flaming homosexual. She’s never had a boy return her feelings, or even show attraction before without being a total creep about it.”

You can’t help but groan at that. “Jake? I’m supposed to hold up against hot pants mcbootyshorts? That’s not even fair!”
Jane gives you a flat look. “You greatly overrate the allure of Jake English.”

“This coming from the person who had a crush on him for most of grade school.” You reply jokingly. “Well, one of the people.”

Jane’s flat look turns briefly into a glare, but melts into embarrassment quickly after. “John, just drop it, okay?”

“Alright!” You hold your hands up in pacification, “I’m just saying, he’s a popular guy.”

“I’m pretty sure just about everyone got over it.” Jane replies irritably. “Except for Dirk, you know how stubborn he is.”

“So you’re saying I don’t have to compete with Jake English.” You reply with a grin that’s a lot more authentic than you’d like to admit.

“Even if you did, you’d win hands down.” Jane says with a smirk. “She’s my best friend, I know these things. She wouldn’t be such an awkward dork around you if she weren’t serious. Isn’t that right Roxy?” Jane calls over her shoulder.

There’s complete silence until a flowerpot suddenly falls off the table, and a trail of dirt gets tracked all the way to the stairs. Jane turns back with a huff. “She thinks I don’t know my best friend is in the room just because she’s invisible and inaudible?”

You gulp. “She was listening in?”

Jane rolls her eyes and looks down at you. “I told you she would be. When it comes to figuring out what Roxy’s up to, I’m simply the best there is.”

“Oh.” You are completely mortified. “Well, I’m just going to curl up and die, don’t mind me.”

“Nope.” Jane gives you a stern frown. “You and I are going to have a proper conversation, and then you’re going to go talk to Roxy, and everyone else you need to talk with.”

“Okay.” You pull yourself to your feet. “So what are we talking about?”

“What happened to Dad.” Jane looks you directly in the eye, “and you.”

“And me? I didn’t die back there, you know.” You turn your gaze away from hers.

Jane gives a half-hearted smile. “Yes you did. You’re a ghost now, didn’t anybody tell you?”

You watch out the window as a couple of crab lusus monsters wander the open field below, smiling in spite of yourself. “That would explain why the only people I’ve been able to have a proper conversation with tonight have been Sollux and Aradia.” You turn back to Jane and let your vision go cross-eyed, whispering solemnly, “They see dead people.”

Jane lets out a single chuckle at this, before stepping up directly next to you. “Do you remember when we were kids, and I tricked you into thinking I was related to Betty Crocker?”

You grin at the memory. “You said you practiced your baking so that you could inherit the company, and that you would use your powers to make me eat cake for every meal, ‘because as Betty Crocker’s descendant, I have absolute authority over cake!’ I was terrified.”

Jane nods and laughs. “And then you went to dad to complain about it, and told him what I told you. And he just gave me the most serious look ever and said-”
“Oh Jane, how did you find out? Now we’ll have to send you to the company for training.” You cut in, giving your best Dad impression.

Jane starts heaving with laughter as she continues. “And he dragged me half-way to the car, with you and I freaking out because we thought we wouldn’t be siblings anymore, before he broke down and told us he was playing a prank.”

“And then Dad and I spent the next three years calling you Jane Crocker!” You break down into laughter as well.

The two of you sit there laughing for a few minutes. It feels good. You still don’t want to let yourself cry, so having any sort of emotional release is helpful. It’s only when you’ve finished laughing that you notice that Jane has tears running down her face through her smile.

“He never stopped calling me that.” Jane says, her voice shaking. “He’d always call me his own little Crocker when we baked together.” Her grin broadens, but she’s choking up. You wrap your arms around her without thinking.

“I never knew.” You mumble to yourself as much as her, “I hated all of your damn baking so much that I never stuck around while you were in the kitchen.”

Jane lets out another laugh-sob as she replies, “I know. I remember you once tried to escape the kitchen with smoke pellets when we invited you to join us.”

“And when that didn’t work you set them off in my room.” You groan. “I had to switch the salt and sugar to live that one down.” Jane sniffs, and punches you in the side lightly in response. She had been pretty upset about that particular prank.

The two of you just stand there hugging for a while, until Jane stops crying and collects herself again.

“Do you remember what Dad said to us after he calmed us down?” Jane asks, and you struggle to think what she’s talking about for a moment.

“You mean after he told us you weren’t really related to Betty Crocker?”

“Obviously!”

“Right, uhh... Not really.”

Jane pushes you back, holding you at arms length by the shoulders. “He said: ‘Even if we weren’t really related by blood, that doesn’t matter. We’re all still family, whether our name is Crocker or Egbert. And I will always be proud of you.’”

You grin at that, “He was probably thinking about what we all are. I bet he was waiting for the right time to tell us.”

“Dad always thought ahead.” Jane smiles fondly.

“Yeah.” You sigh and look back out the window. “He wanted to give us the most normal life possible, I guess.”

“I think he just wanted to give us any sort of life.” Jane replies. “You know, I still remember a few things from when I was little.”
You whirl around to face her and she throws her hands up defensively. “Not a lot, just bits and pieces! You know that I’m the oldest person in this group, other than Jake. I was two years old when we left that place.” She looks aside, her expression inscrutable. “It’s only natural I’d remember something of that horrible place.”

“So what do you remember then?” You press.

Jane looks up at you. “Dad was never at that base. I remember Grandpa Harley being the one to give us to him. And he was at our home. He always lived there.”

“So, he was probably the only one of our guardians who wasn’t involved in this mess somehow?” You reflect on this. “Are we even related to him?”

“I think so.” Jane replies confidently. “Grandpa Harley wouldn’t have given us to just anybody. Maybe Sollux can figure that one out?”

You sigh. Your dad wasn’t really your dad. Wasn’t even your clone dad. “He must have had it so rough.” You reflect. “He just came back from serving in the military, and suddenly he had two kids dumped on him. Two kids with super powers. How did he even deal with us?”

Jane smiles at this. “I guess you just take after him.”

“Do I?”

“Pranking and ridiculous amounts of muscle aside, you also had his ability to keep calm no matter the situation.” Jane pats you on the back. “It’s what made him such a strong person. But don’t forget the most important thing.”

“What’s that?” You can’t think of any one thing that made your dad great. He was pretty much the best dad ever, and that’s all there really is to say on the matter.

“He didn’t do it alone.” Jane pulls you to face her. “We met every single one of our human friends because of him. He turned to Rue, and Brock, and Jeremiah Ichabod Harley, and because he talked to them, we talked to them too. And when things got bad, we got out because we had all of our friends there with us.” Her gaze becomes urgent, and stern, and you feel yourself quailing inside over it. “So don’t shut yourself off from us. When things are difficult, talk to us. When you don’t know what to do, ask us. You’ve placed yourself in charge now, and I think you’re the best person for the job. But that’s because the John Egbert I have lived with for all my life was never afraid to turn to somebody for help.”

You nod before you’ve even begun to think about what your sister is telling you. But damned if it doesn’t make a lot of sense when you do think about it. You’ve been shutting yourself off as the others relied on you more. “We have an entire fleet of well armed spaceships holding our planet hostage.” You say to yourself as much as Jane.

“Oh! Well, yes that’s definitely something we could use help with I suppose.”

“I have no idea how to fight so many spaceships.”

“Obviously, but you know John I was more talking about your emotional issues here.”

“There’s only one person who I can count on to help me fuck up an army of evil space aliens!”

“Fine, stay traumatized about your emotional baggage, I’m still counting this as a win.” Jane sighs and watches as you push your emotional baggage aside and flee the room.
When you burst into the room Rose and Kanaya are in they are in the middle of making out.

Naturally though, this being Rose and Kanaya, they end up sitting properly so fast you’d almost swear they weren’t sucking face a second ago.

“Rose! I need you to help me plan an attack on an army of evil space aliens and kill their evil empress!”

Rose gives her most enigmatic smile as she wipes green lipstick off of her face. “Why John, I thought you’d never ask.”

Your name is Vriska Serket, and you are somehow not dead. This is a big deal, because you’re currently sitting in the middle of a prison cell in the depths of the Imperial Flagship. Mortality rates in troll prison are about eight times higher than in wimpy human prison.

You could have made it out of troll prison altogether, but unfortunately for you Eridan is a bitter, colossal douchebag.

Yes, it may be true that you’re not dead, but things are still pretty fucking shitty for you right now. You’ve been sold to Her Imperious Condescension along with Terezi in order for Doctor Scratch to gain favor with the Empress. But while being amongst fellow trolls is an improvement over all the fucking humans, you’re still in trouble because Doctor Scratch has claimed that you were both locked up because you were insane.

Terezi just laughed for hours when they asked her to refute the claim, and Eridan decided to agree with Scratch when they tried to verify your sanity. So you’re both in prison.

You’re fuming. How the hell did Eridan even become such a big shot so fast? He may be the next highest person on the hemospectrum besides Feferi and the Condesce, but he’s still a cape-loving douchebag! Between his rings and his stupid hair he’s easily the biggest loser in your group, except for maybe Tavros!

Everyone is out to get you and it’s not okay! First Karkat left you all to rot back at Doc Scratch’s base, and then the Striders and Terezi tried to kill you. You got away from all that and thought you’d be able to get back at Scratch then, but then Tavros and Gamzee showed up and fucked up your plans by being cowardly and treacherous! And if that wasn’t bad enough when Doctor Scratch caught you after all that you found out that Equius of all people blew up the base you wanted to blow up a week ago! He stole your mark!

And now you’re stuck with a whole bunch of people you want nothing to do with! The Condesce wants to kill you for running away with the same person who killed her pet. Doc Scratch wants to kill you for being way smarter and better than him and making him look bad. Terezi wants to kill you because she’s obsessed and crazy. And Eridan wants to kill you for dumping him sweeps ago and making him look bad.

Not to mention Gamzee. You don’t know where he’s hiding, or how he even got up here. But he’s on the ship. You heard it last night, as the guard was sleeping; a honking noise that could only belong to that fucking juggalo prick. He’s probably wearing your arm right now, waiting for a chance to finish the job.

You’d start cursing, or talking to yourself to make yourself feel better. But unfortunately for you Terezi is still nearby, and she still likes spending her free time threatening you. Whenever you make
a noise she starts rambling about guilt, and justice, and makes you want to kill her with as much platonic hate as you can muster.

Terezi is talking right now, muttering about hangings and justice and flying dogs in a low voice. You hate when she talks about the dog. You almost want to believe that she’s making it up, but you know that even as crazy as she is, Terezi isn’t hallucinating. Her evil dog monster is almost definitely real, and that’s a terrifying thought. You’d probably need more lucky breaks than you’ve had your entire life just to handle the thing.

You sigh and shudder, laying down in your cot and trying to put it all out of your head.

“That’s right Serket, sleep! We all know how tiring a burden guilt can be! You need all the rest you can get!” Terezi crows from her cell.

You do your best to push Terezi’s cries from your mind, but it’s getting more and more difficult by the day. You do feel responsible for what’s happened to Terezi. You failed her completely, after all. That’s what it means when you let your moirail go insane. You never thought you’d have to be the saner half of the Scourge sisters.

Nowadays it's all you can do to keep yourself from slipping into madness right along with her.

Chapter End Notes

So for those of you wondering, the order in which the humans were created is as follows:
Jake
Jane
Roxy
Dirk/Dave
John
Rose
Jade

It's probably not ever going to be completely established in story, since I decided against writing an entire sequence of events at the F.E.L.T. base for pacing purposes, but I figured it's worth at least a footnote. Jake is roughly 25 months older than Jade.

The climax is approaching slower than I intended, but it is approaching. There'll be two, possibly three chapters before it begins, tops. I was terrified of writing character development scenes in the early chapters of this story, so I'm playing catch up just a little bit here.
Pitch Dark of Night

Chapter Summary

Eridan gives the others a choice.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Your name is Dave Strider, and you are currently the master of the unnecessary time loops. Seriously, there’s no reason whatsoever for any of this bullshit, you just happened to run into a future you, and now you’re standing on the roof while past you resumes teaching Nepeta to rap.

You hope you said everything correctly. You’re not sure what actually happens when a loop goes tits up, but you haven’t forgotten the dead Daves from your early time travelling days. It’s been a while since you’ve seen them, but seeing a bunch of dead Daves rag dolling all over the place like a bunch of fucking sock monkeys left a serious impression.

That impression: things will probably go to shit if you fuck with the time stream. If you don’t ensure that things happened exactly like you remember, it will probably be bad.

So when you’re dicking around with your new cat sister and a future you shows up telling you and Jade a bunch of time related stuff, you damn well better go tie the knot on that shit. Causality is your gift to the world, and if the bow you slap on that present isn’t fucking immaculate the world is going to throw it back in your face and then light itself on fire. The universe makes for a very needy girlfriend, and you’d like nothing more than to dump her ass and move on with life. But you can’t do that, because future you keeps showing up and telling you that you have to keep the relationship alive.

That was a shitty metaphor. Goddamn.

At any rate, you’re wrapping up the last of the loops you’re aware of now, so this isn’t as terrible as the bullshit you put up with yesterday. You don’t need to aim any flying kicks for a demon’s head, or try to drag a screaming troll up a flight of stairs with a bullet in your shoulder. You just need to fight your brother.

You’d rather get shot again.

Okay, you’re on the roof, your brother is somewhere up here, despite the fact that this isn’t your fucking apartment building and this entire roof is just a big smooth ball. What is it with your family and high places? Doesn’t matter that the footing up here is beyond shitty, your bro is still going to stay up here and prance around like the flaming douchebag he is, just because Striders are only comfortable on rooftops.

It’s a hell of a view up here though.

“Alright Dirk, wherever the fuck you are, stop being there and start being here. This roof is a hazardous piece of shit and there’s no way in hell I’m staying up here any longer than I need to.” You groan.
You’re honestly not sure how you’re supposed to know Dirk is up here, you just came here because future you told you this was where he’d be, and nowhere along the way to getting up here did anybody tell you Dirk was actually up here. You had to tell past Dave your bro was on the roof because you remember future you telling you the same thing, but there’s been zero confirmation.

Time travel is such confusing horseshit.

You’re still cursing internally over time shenanigans when Dirk appears and swings his sword at your head. A typical beginning to a Strider showdown.

What isn’t typical is how easily you dodge the attack. Seriously, you just jump backwards and lean a little further and the blade flies clumsily past your nose. To the untrained eye this would still be terrifying, but to you it’s a goddamn disgrace.

“Holy fuck it’s worse than I thought.” you stare flatly at your brother and raise your hands. “I just saw you coming. What the fuck Dirk, am I going to have to replace you with the cat girl?”

Dirk grunts, and angles an upward swing from groin to chin, which you side step flawlessly. You just stare after him in disbelief, until he swings another blow for your head. You duck under it, and then evade his low kick with a small hop.

It took him two whole seconds to do all that, meaning your bro is definitely in the worst condition of his life. You haven’t even needed to draw your blade yet.

This continues for another ten embarrassing seconds, wherein Dirk continues to make shitty attacks at your vitals and you dance around him easily. Finally you have enough, and as Dirk swings his sword at your head with a frustrated grunt, you raise your arm and smack the flat of the blade. Then you bring that hand down on his face.

Open palm, humiliation strike: Strider Slap.

Critical hit.

Seriously, that blow sends him reeling so hard that he lands flat on his back.

“Dirk, what the flying fuck was that?” You stare down at him, aghast. “Don’t try to tell me that was on purpose either, I know you were trying to fight seriously.”

“Fuck you, that was a total throw.” Dirk says blandly, staring into the sky. “I am absolute master of the intentional loss. The sovereign of surrender.”

“You’ve been going over shitty exercises for the past six hours, haven’t you?” You raise you sunglasses just so he can see the stern brotherly glare you’ve been working on. “You’re slow, you’re exhausted, and you just lost your first strife to me… ever.” Wow yeah, you’ve never actually beaten him. That’s genuinely depressing. Okay shit time to move on. “Speak your mind, bro. Is it trouble with Mr. English? Are you worried Egdork will sully Roxy’s fair virtues when they start engaging in sloppy makeouts? Did Jane finally tell you Santa wasn’t real?”

“Holy shit dude, you just ruined Christmas. You are the Grinch. It is you.”

“God no, you’ve seen me wear green, it isn’t pretty.” You shudder, thinking back on the lime green suit you used to wear for ironic purposes. “Never sacrifice fashion for irony, Dirk. Especially not with Kanaya around. She will impose her trendy edict upon us all no matter the cost.”

Dirk just smirks and remains still on the roof, until you finally get fed up and sit down beside him.
“Dirk. Talk to me.”

Dirk sighs in frustration. “You need to take more cues from your clone sister. A little psychoanalysis ability would make this pretty fucking clear.” When you continue sending him a blank stare, Dirk just groans and props himself up on his elbows. “Fine then, I’ll spell it out for you. I’m pissed off because I fucked up again and more people died.”

“Okay, so this is a serious talk then.” You nod your head thoughtfully. “With all that emotional suppression bullshit you picked up from Bro I wasn’t too sure.”

“Like you’re any better, bitch.” Dirk glares at you.

“What I do is called deflection, totally different!” You protest, staring down at him. “I make people focus on something else; you just pretend nothing’s wrong. They’re entirely separate coping mechanisms. And by coping mechanisms I mean: holy shit this solves nothing, why the fuck do we do pull this crap?”

Dirk continues to glare at you until you finally just look out towards the island. “Fine, tell me your grand failure so we can solve our problems for a change.” You shrug your shoulders.

“I went to the island to flirt with Jake instead of being here to make sure everyone evacuated smoothly.”

You nod thoughtfully. “That is certainly a way to phrase what happened yesterday. It doesn’t really do any sort of justice to the full scope of the situation, but hell, nobody can. Except for me. I lived through it twice, so I know more about what happened than just about anyone.”

“Alright smartass, so tell me this: how did my not being here prove to be a good thing?”

“You’re being down on yourself, you tell me.” You snap irritably. Dirk has an uncanny knack for being hard on himself and stroking his own ego at the same time, and it gets old very fast.

“I couldn’t hold anyone back.” Dirk sighs, and you turn around irritably. You’re about to shut him down when he cuts you off. “Like I did with Rue.”

“Rue as in Rue Lalonde? Stupid question, who the fuck else do we know with a name like Rue? I thought she died fighting Doctor Scratch?”

“She fought Doctor Scratch because I was getting my ass kicked by him. If I hadn’t decided to fight the leader of a government organization like a cocky asshole she wouldn’t have needed to risk her life.”

You look down at your brother and know that this is one of those moments that he’ll never elaborate on. Like Equius’ fight with Gamzee, some things are too painful to openly discuss. That means if you want to improve anything you’ll need to come up with a way to bypass that shit and get in his head without poking at the soft bits.

Luckily for you, you have your fair share of personal failures as well. Time to spread the crippling sense of self-loathing.

“I’m way higher on the ranking for losing people’s parents, you know.” You mention flippantly. “I mean, Grandpa Harley, Dadbert, and Bro all died on my watch. That’s three times as much failure as yours.”

“I should have been there for that.” Dirk spits out bitterly. “I was too busy playing with robots and
flirting with Jake to be there when you needed help. I keep leaving, and things keep falling apart. And even when I’m there, it doesn’t make a difference. I couldn’t protect Rose from Gamzee, and I couldn’t stop Doctor Scratch from killing Rue. I failed everyone.”

“Guess that means Striders are just born to fuck up, huh?” You stare off into the horizon. The sky’s already getting lighter; morning comes ridiculously early out here in the middle of the Pacific. Dirk’s gaze follows yours, and the two of you sit stoically on the edge of the roof like a pair of mopey badasses.

“Fuck that.” Dirk says after a while. “Bro wasn’t a failure. He succeeded in raising us even though he was a homosexual single dad living in fucking Texas. If he can pull that off we can kill a couple of lab reject assholes.”

“So we’re going after Scratch and the Dog?” you ask, failing to hide how fucking thrilled you are with the idea.

“First thing when we’re done dealing with the Condesce. I’ll take the bald one, you take the hairy one.” Dirk nods, standing up. “Let’s show them Striders aren’t to be fucked with.”

“Just an FYI: the hairy one is named Jack.” You whirl around in surprise to see Sollux floating close behind you. He seems entirely disinterested in you, which is a fucking crime as far as you’re concerned. Sollux floats away before you can hit him with a metric fuckload of Strider Sass though.

He stops above the small opening you used to get to the roof, turning before he descends. “You guys want to get off the roof, by the way. We’ve got an imperial fighter incoming.”

Your name is Eridan Ampora, and this was everything you’ve ever wanted. Stepping down from the door of your own ship, watching as your inferiors, the lowbloods and aliens, gather together in fear. You are above them, and its made clear as you look down on them.

It pisses you off, really. I mean, obviously you’re superior to just about everyone, and one glimpse of your blood was all it took to earn you a spot standing on the bridge of the Battleship Condescension. But seeing your friends glaring up at you makes you remember that there was a reason you left; that reason being your group’s collective hatred of all things Alternian. You never really felt as strongly, but you still went along with them. You’ve betrayed your friends, and you are thoroughly aware of it.

Well, no matter. You may have betrayed everything your friends stand for, but you’re also here to save their lives, so they can just suck it up and deal. Figuring out where they were hiding was easy enough; you spent enough time locked in Jade’s boat to memorize the coordinates of this stupid island. Now you just need to put your plan into action.

“Well everyone, it looks like I was right all along, as you can see!” you call out as you step forward. All Alternian ships have exits leading to the roof, so that their pilots can look down on people even as they disembark. You now stand on the nose of the ship. It’s pretty stupid, honestly, but you know if you don’t appear completely confident the others won’t bow to your superior planning.

As expected it’s Kar who speaks up first. “Right about what, nook stain? That you’re the most treacherous and self-serving douchebag any of us have ever met? Because you’re proving the shit out of that right now!”

“Well obviously not, Karkat, that’s just hurtful.” You frown, holding an arm up to indicate your ship.
“I’m saying I was right about escaping Alternia.”

The others open their mouths to protest, but you continue undeterred. “I said that we’d probably just get hunted down and killed. You thought I was being quote: “pessimistic and mean”, but here we are. You’re all cowering like a bunch of losers, and I’m running the show!”

“You’ve got a lot of nerve Eridan!” A voice calls out from the rear of the group, and you see Feferi elbowing her way to the front of the group. “I otter kick your bass for saying all that!”

You take a deep breath as you look down on her. She’s as flawless as you remember, her hair spilling down her back in thick waves, silky smooth. You want to run your hand across her head and remind her that you’re on her side. You want to tell her that you’re still there for her, that you never stopped being there. But it’s too late for that.

You settle for a sneer instead, because you’ve got a perspective on things that these clowns can only wish for. “What Fef, are you seriously gonna tell me that this wasn’t gonna happen? That this planet wasn’t doomed from the start?”

“Of course it wasn’t!” Fef cries out, before looking down at the ground. “We brought all this on Earth.”

“Wrong.” You reply casually. “Did you forget how we ended up trapped here in the first place?”

“The imperial scout.” Equius replies grimly. You smirk and point to him.

“Exactly. They were scouting this solar system before we even showed up. In other words, Alternia was always coming to Earth. We just sped up the glubbin process.”

There’s a heavy silence at your words, and you press the advantage. “This was never going to be a safe place for us guys, come on. Our prospects were pretty fucking hopeless from the start. If we stay here we have nothing to look forward to other than dying like a bunch of animals.”

“Speak for yourself asshole!” Karkat protests grumpily.

“Oh wake up Karkat, I’m obviously here to help.” You wave him off casually. “Who said I don’t know how to be a team player? My efforts are going unappreciated as usual.”

“So you came back to help us fight The Condesce?” John asks hopefully.

It’s all you can do not to drop your gun.

“Wait what the fuck?” You burst out in shock. “You want to fight her? What kind of stupid idea is that? Fuck! No you moron, I’m not fighting anybody! I’m just here to get my fellow trolls off of this godforsaken rock and over to the winning side.”

“The winning side being The Condesce,” Kanaya states with a frown.

“Of course, who else?” You reply confidently. “Look, I’ve been engaging in some top level Alternian politics while you were all playing on this island. The Condesce basically thinks I’m one of her best soldiers by now. She thinks we crashed fighting the real culprits behind her dead Lusus, and now she just wants to gather us up for reasons of pride. And also conquer this planet for the Alternian Empire.”

It took a lot of work for you to make this all work; you introduced several trolls to the business end of your rifle for daring to question you too much. Though you do need to mention one more thing.
“Though Fef, Kar, you can’t come along, obviously. I’d be getting us all killed just for associating with you two. I told the Condesce you died, Fef, and Karkat never existed as far as the empire is concerned, so you just need to lay low.” It’s as good as it’s gonna get for them, unfortunately. Alternian law is shitty that way.

“She thinks I’m dead?” Feferi asks quietly.

“I told her you were killed stopping Gl’bgolyb from acting up.” You reply with a smile. “Since commoners still can’t go near her corpse the Condesce would have to search for your body herself. And with succession being based on closeness to Gl’bgolyb until now, she doesn’t consider you a threat anyways. But you’re still a Tyrian, so you’ll die if you go anywhere near the fleet.”

“So the only thing I can do is hide and pray nobody finds me.” Feferi says flatly.

You cringe. “Yeah, it’s pretty much a completely terrible plan but it’s the only one that doesn’t involve you dying, so we’re going to go with it.”

“Speak for yourself.”

“So yeah, I just need everyone else to…” You look back at Feferi suspiciously. “What do you mean?”

“I’m not hiding anywhere.” Feferi stands defiantly.

“And if you think I’m leaving her and signing up to get strapped into an imperial cruiser you can go fuck yourself.” Sollux says with a smirk, stepping beside her.

“We’re going to fight.” Karkat replies. “We may be completely fucked, but I’d prefer dying trying to stick my sickles in The Condesce’s windpipe over getting hunted like a fucking animal.”

“What? Are you out of your minds?” You look around to see everyone else staring at you with similar disdain. “You are. What the fuck you guys, I’m giving you a chance to not die here!” You turn to the humans.

The humans are all glaring at you as one. Even John looks angry, which is an expression that is far scarier than you’d imagined it would be on the goofball. Dave smirks. “Yeah, you’re sure as shit not on our good side, so look elsewhere.”

“You’re going to just drag my friends down with you then?” You accuse angrily. “You fucking losers. You’re dead already. Fight all you want, that won’t change!” You leap from the nose of the ship, landing in a cloud of dust, and advance towards your fellow trolls. “And nothing any of us can do will change that either!” You point back at your fighter. “This ship could have killed you all before you even knew I was here! What fucking chance do you think you have against the whole damn fleet?”

“What chance could the fleet possibly have against me?” Sollux grins dangerously, his eyes sparking.

“We’ll win.” John speaks up. His gaze is piercingly cold, and you step back as he walks up to you. “Just because you don’t have any hope doesn’t mean we should give up ours.”

“YOU HAVE NO FUCKIN’ HOPE!” You roar in desperation, grabbing your rifle. “AND IF I HAVE TO VAPORIZE YOU FUCKERS FOR YOU TO SEE IT THEN I’LL JUST HAVE TO LIVE WITH THAT!”
A shadow looms over you suddenly, and you whirl around in shock to see Equius standing behind you. You lower your gun and smirk. “Equius. I should have known you’d do the right thing.”

“I am afraid not.” Equius says grimly. “Your expectations are unfounded. I have determined that Alternian law leaves little in the way of security for the ones I care about.”

You look back to the group and see Aradia and Nepeta smiling at Equius’ words. “Huh. You actually got somewhere with that. Well shit, good work.”

“Thank you.” Equius says blandly. “Now excuse my use of force, but I believe you have exceeded your welcome.”

His hand comes down on your head before you can so much as yell. You’re being lifted off the ground in an instant, his palm effectively smothering you. You’re still struggling when he whispers in your ear. “Excuse my use of force, but I believe it is in your best interest if The Condesce believes you not to be our ally.”

You feel his wrist twitch, and you’re sent flying through the air. You have just enough time to scream before you hit the side of your ship. Unconsciousness is blissfully immediate.

When you wake up you’re lying on the floor of the Imperial Flagship’s main docking bay. The bay is in complete disarray, trolls running about in a panic. You see a fragment of your fighter lying nearby in the corner of your eye, and realize that they somehow exploded it. Fucking hell, you really liked that thing, even if the bright red color was revoltingly garish.

You look up and realize that you are being tended to by medicullers. “What happened?” You ask groggily, as you try to make sense of things through the throbbing pain in your head.

“Funny. I was aboat to ask you the same question.”

Your head clears immediately. Fear does that to a troll. “Your majesty!” You sit up immediately, ignoring the protests of the mediculler checking your skull.

The Condesce stands over you impassively, hip cocked to one side and her double-ended trident held upright. She’s regarding you coolly, and you know what you say could in all likelihood determine whether you live to leave this room.

“What happened?”

You snarl bitterly at your failure. You intended to save your fellow trolls, but they all want to die like insects instead. They ignored you for the last time.

If it’s a war Feferi wants, it’s a war she’ll get. It’ll be a last good deed for your moirail.

“Please forgive me your majesty. It would seem that the heiress is not as dead as I thought.”

Your name is David Brinner, and you are not well. You were recently gunned down in a horrible accident involving a gang of unidentified ruffians making some sort of attack upon your young neighbor and his two friends of indeterminate ethnicity. However, while your efforts appear to have allowed young John Egbert to escape unharmed, you have learned that your family was tragically killed during the incident.
There has been nothing but bad news since then. The men who killed your family, apparently drug dealers, were able to escape after setting their base aflame. Your neighbors, the Egberts, were apparently killed in a gas explosion, which also led to the destruction of your own home, as well as the memorial your neighbors had erected in your family’s memory, to say nothing of your collection of fine hats.

There’s also been some news pertaining to an alien invasion, but you don’t much care about that sort of nonsense, so you haven’t paid it any mind.

Meanwhile, surgery is still required for several of your less critical bullet wounds, and the build up of scar tissue makes your breathing spotty. This has led to several periods of time in the middle of the night where you have awoken with a fit of wheezing and struggling for air.

It was one such coughing fit that has you awake right now. You have been gasping for air for several minutes, as well as drinking copious amounts of water. You are thankful that you never took up smoking like Atticus Egbert did, or else your coughing fits could certainly be the death of you.

You are just preparing to get back to sleep when you see a light in the corner of your room. It’s a dull orange glow from a cigarette, barely visible in the pitch dark of the night.

“Evening.” A smooth voice cuts through the room like a blade. “Hope the smoke isn’t disturbing you.” You can’t remember where, but the voice is familiar to you.

“Well, if I had to guess I would say that it probably isn’t helping.” You reply candidly. “But in my state I think such matters would be better left to the nurses.”

As you hoped he responds, though only briefly. “Probably for the best.” His voice sends a chill down your spine, but you still can’t tell where you’ve heard it.

You squint into the darkness, and as if on cue, the light of the man’s cigarette seems to glow brighter. His face seems to loom out of the darkness, dim, but recognizable.

It’s the same man who ordered the shooting on your family.

You start wheezing again as you try to contain your mounting panic. “Here… to finish the job, then?” You try to sit up, but you’re still strapped to the hospital bed.

The man smirks, doffs his hat, and gets up. “So you recognize me then. That makes this easier. It’s good to know that you saw what you did.”

“Eliminating a witness then.” You rasp out with a nod. You feel a thrum of panic as you remember John Egbert facing this same man, but it subsides into hollow sadness when you remember that John died in a fire yesterday. At the very least, he has nothing to fear of your killer.

The man laughs. “Using a witness.” He stops at your bedside and grasps your hand, giving you as firm of a handshake as can be managed with the restraints. “I’m sure you don’t trust me, but believe me when I say I’ve got your best interests at heart, pal.”

You stare blankly up at him.

He shakes his head and turns aside. “You’ll warm up to the idea by the time we’re done here. Not that I’ll give you a choice either way. All right, so first thing’s first: obviously I can’t give you my real name, so just call me… Diamonds.” He nods to himself and faces you once more. “I’m not going to spin a bunch of bullshit and tell you what happened to your family was an accident. I fully intended to have you killed, from the minute you walked out the door and into my business.”
“Wrong place…” You mutter grimly.

“Exactly.” Diamonds smirks. “That said I’m not really a fan of anything that I was doing that day. Torturing girls, beating kids, shooting an impeccably dressed gentleman and his family. That kind of crap puts a bad taste in my mouth.”

“Then why take part in such actions?”

“Because I was ordered to.” Diamonds’ eyes meet yours and you’re horrified by just how cold they seem. “I always follow orders. Even if I’m not too pleased by them.”

“So then, you would pass the blame onto your supervisor.” You ask, feeling rather put out by how closely this business is starting to resemble bureaucracy.

“I would indeed.” Diamonds gives you another nod, but his smirk has vanished. “I joined my organization because I believed in what it stood for. I’d tell you what that meant, but then I really would have to kill you. Suffice to say, there are big things going on right now, and while the whole world may be seeing the effects now, they have no idea just how deep the root of it goes.”

You glare sharply up at Diamonds, “If you would have me help you then stop speaking in riddles. I will not lift a finger for you unless you give me proper cause.”

Diamonds regards you coolly for a minute, before shrugging his shoulders. “Fine. Let’s talk straight.” He grabs the chair from the corner and pulls it up to your bed, sitting languidly and blowing a puff of smoke into the air. “How much have you heard about this alien situation?”

When Diamonds stops talking you feel ready to faint. “That’s the most unbelievable thing I’ve ever heard.” You mutter quietly.

Diamonds smirks again. “You’re not wrong. But even if you don’t believe it, there are people out there who will. And you know some of them.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Don’t worry, this part’s simple.” Diamonds pulls out a knife and cuts through the straps holding your wrists to the bed. He then takes your hand and places something in it. “Just don’t get too crazy with the questions. The less people think you know, the better.”

You look down. Diamonds has given you a PDA. Serious Business is opened up to the log in screen.

“Oh, and one more thing.” Diamonds places a hat on the table next to you, with a dry-cleaning ticket inside. “I saved what I could. It’s already paid for.” He vanishes out the door noiselessly, leaving you alone with your thoughts.

The following matters have been submitted in a frank and forthright manner for fedorafreak’s judicious appraisal.

fedorafreak - 4:13

report: recently awoke from excessive application of bullets to torso. complete loss of family, home.
reason to believe wardrobe is safe, but unable to verify at present.

NightOwl - 4:14

fedora freak. So rare to hear from you. I am most pleased that our differing hours of business have allowed a chance to verify your wellbeing. I profess my deepest sympathies for your loss of home and family.

criticalRole - 4:14

Thank you NightOwl. in light of current events, your safety is heartening.

2busy4this - 4:15

condolences. much sad news of late.

wellPressedAttire - 4:15

Welcome back fedora freak. You have been in our thoughts since pipefan413’s update regarding your health.

fedora freak - 4:16

surprised to see so many friends at so late an hour.

2busy4this - 4:16

aliens = stress high

wellPressedAttire - 4:17

Indeed, it is difficult to sleep when such a threat hangs overhead.

NightOwl - 4:18

For what it is worth, I deeply appreciate the company. Wisebird has been silent since the incident in Houston. I fear he may have fallen victim to the chaos. It is rare to see any one other than him with the hours I keep.

fedora freak - 4:19

Wisebird is a strong man. we can only hope he will reply in time. though I have sad news too. pipefan413 is dead.

2busy4this - 4:19

confirm?

fedora freak - 4:20

family killed in gas explosion, same which destroyed my house.

NightOwl - 4:21

Such tragic tidings! I have long envied pipefan413’s impressive mangrit, as well as his outstanding collection of pipes!
wellPressedAttire - 4:22

It would seem that there have been no small number of tragedies in Washington as of late. Our mutual friend officeurchin1280 was recently killed by an alien as well, along with most in his broadcasting station.

fedorafreak - 4:23

was unaware officeurchin1280 lived in area. sad tidings.

2busy4this - 4:24

confessed location b4 death

NightOwl - 4:25

officeurchin1280 was a kind fellow. If only there were some way we could do something in the wake of such disaster!

wellPressedAttire - 4:26

We all do what we can, but even the most serious of business pales before war.

fedorafreak - 4:27

actually, may have lead on possible course of action.

2busy4this - 4:27

pls elaborate

NightOwl - 4:30

fedorafreak, if you would be so kind as to explain your insight, we may be able to come to a solution together.

fedorafreak - 4:32

apologies, friends. reason to believe information comes with chance of risk. however, loss of family, friends, too great. willing to do anything for justice.

wellPressedAttire - 4:33

Say no more, fedorafreak. We are equally determined to ensure our friends not die in vain.

2busy4this - 4:33

^

fedorafreak - 4:34

very well then. my thanks to all. information comes from anonymous source, suspect responsible for death of family. regret voiced, name of superior given.

fedorafreak - 4:35

is anyone familiar with a man by the name of Doctor Scratch?
Chapter End Notes

Oh Eridan, why must you always get so stupid when you're angry?

Apologies to any sticklers for Serious Business, but I felt the bottom-up order to things would be incredibly inconvenient for most readers. Hell, I'd be amazed if anybody here actually read all of the Serious Business sections. Personally, I love them. The idea of a bunch of businessmen having their own personal social media service for talking about fancy wardrobes and professional attire is just hilarious to me.

For those unsure, Eridan is indeed responsible for killing officeurchin1280. The poor guy just wasn't equipped with the right paperwork to stop laser rifles. You need tax forms for that.
Your name is Nepeta Leijon, and you are fed up! With multiple things! The first of which is standing between you and your freedom!

“Come Nepeta, it wouldn’t do to make Jane cross.”

“Shut up you big dummy, you just want me to stay inside furever!” You protest angrily. You’re pacing around the front foyer of the Harley’s home, and wishing desperately that there were a way for you to teleport outside. But Jade’s busy preparing for action, and the transportalizer pads only reach the front door. So if you want to get out and enjoy the sunshine, you’ll need to get past your moirail.

Equius is large enough to block the whole door by sitting in front of it, and is taking full advantage of it. “I would not be opposed to your remaining where it is safe.” Equius says stubbornly, and you are unable to prevent yourself from hissing at him.

“You just don’t want me outside because you know I’m going to see him!” You glare up at Equius and he flinches.

You’ve been pissed at Equius for a while now, ever since you found out that he sent you away all those weeks ago just so he could do all the dangerous stuff without you around. It’s been hard to stay mad at him because he is your most precious moirail and you love him dearly, but there’s no denying that he’s an asshole.

You had thought that he was starting to respect your feelings, but he just used them to get you out of the way. And now he’s not even pretending to approve of your opinion anymore.


You shriek and jump at Equius angrily, but are stopped in midair. Equius looks past you and blanches.

“Just why is that, Equius?” You turn around and see Aradia, looking sternly at the two of you.

“Aradia put me down!” You protest, flailing in the air. “I need to teach my meowrail a lesson!”

Aradia gives you a bemused look. “Nepeta sweetie, your claws are out.”
You look down and see that your claws are indeed extended. You promptly flip the fuck out. “Oh shit! I got so mad that I forgot!” You sheathe your claws and gaze wide-eyed at Equius. “I’m sorry Equius! I’m sorry I’m sorry! Even if you’re being a butthead I don’t want to hurt you!”

“I accept your apology.” Equius says with a frown. “Though I must strongly disagree with your assertion that I am a… butthead.”

“No Equius, you were pretty much being a complete jackass.” Aradia says with a scowl. “What the fuck are you doing here?”

“Language.” Equius says sternly.

“That won’t work on me and you know it.” Aradia replies coolly.

“Hnnrg.”

“Equius won’t let me go out to see Karkitty because he knows I’m going to seduce him!” You wail in frustration.

“I will not allow you to fraternize with one such as him!” Equius protests.

Aradia gets a dangerous look in her eye. “Equius, if this is hemospectrum related I will end us right now.” You gasp. Equius stands up so fast he bumps into a suit of armor and crushes it.

“He is a delinquent, a hypocrite, and a foul-mouthed cretin. Were it just a matter of blood I could dismiss it as my own shortcomings, but the fact of the matter is he is not right for my moirail!”

“You’re not right for your moirail, you jackass!” Aradia replies angrily.

“Both of you shut up!” You protest furiously.

Equius and Aradia turn to you and immediately fall silent. That was unexpected. You are suddenly in charge of this argument and it is awesome.

“The honorable pouncilor is now in charge!” You declare triumphantly. “Now listen up, because I am going to lay down some rules!”

Equius opens his mouth to protest, but you give him a look. He’s suddenly quiet. You don’t know what just happened but you love it. “Equius, I am going to fall in love with whoever I want, and you are going to deal with it! If somebody hurts me, you can hurt them back as much as you want, but the fact of the matter is we can’t keep doing things your way!”

Equius flinches at that, clearly hurt. It makes your heart ache, but harsh truths are part of being in a moirallegiance just as much as they are part of a kismesissitude. “Equius, you can’t keep trying to act like we’re back on Alternia. I know I was a stubborn goofball back then, and you were the only thing that kept me from doing something stupid to get myself killed. But we’re not on Alternia any more.

“We left because we hated the way they did things. You say that you came along to protect me, but you know as well as I do that you could have stopped me from coming here. We didn’t feel safe at home, so we took the only alternative we had. You just blame Karkat because you’re too damn stubborn to admit that breaking the law was the best thing we ever did. And he makes it easy.” You add sadly.

“Nepeta, I am only looking out for your best interests.” Equius protests. “Karkat will hurt you.”
“You hurt me too, Equius.” You respond with a warm smile. “But that doesn’t mean I’d change what we have for anything. Karkat’s made a lot of mistakes, but look at all the good things that have happened too! We may have been running, but at least we took our destiny in our own claws! We crashed here, but look at all the great friends we made! Running away from Alternia was terrifying, and dangerous, and crazy, and it will probably get us all killed, but it was still the best thing that ever happened to us! And Karkat needs somebody to make him realize that!”

Equius looks down in consternation, sighing, “I suppose you are the best person for that job.” He steps aside slowly. “I have been foolish again, haven’t I?”

“A big dumbass!” You reply with a grin, throwing your arms wide. “But I love you all the same!”

“D’aww” Aradia chimes in from the background.

“Right!” You whirl around and Aradia jumps in surprise. “You! Aradia! I still have to yell at you! Aradia, you’re my best friend and I think you’re totally pawesome! But if you ever try to tell Equius or me what’s right for our relationship again I’ll kick your ass! And then I’ll tell Sollux!”

Aradia blinks slowly, then frowns in comprehension. “Oh! I’m… I’m sorry. I just…” You cut her off with a hug.

“I know!” You say happily. “I’m glad you want to help Equius as much as I do.” You step back and hold Aradia at arms length. “But as the moirail I get to be in charge of that!”

“Right! Of course, I just…” Aradia looks up at you and groans. “I hate that attitude so much.”

“I am… attempting to improve.” Equius says sadly.

“We know.” You encourage him, before turning to Aradia. “Alright, my first order as leader of Team: Make Equius Less Dumb is for you to tell Equius you love him!”

Aradia gives you a smile, and turns to Equius. “Equius, I love you. Now shape up.”

“Hrngh.”

“That’s purrfect!” You cry out triumphantly. Aradia’s small smile broadens, and she pulls you into a hug now.

“You’d better get moving now. Good luck seducing Karkat.” Aradia whispers in your ear. You don’t need a mirror to know that you’re blushing from ear to ear.

“Okay.” You reply meekly, before moving to the door.

“Nepeta.” You freeze as Equius calls after you. When you turn, he has a half-smile across his face. “You are the huntress.”

You rush back, hug Equius, kiss him on both cheeks, and then scamper out the door before you get too comfortable with him. The allure of spending time with your moirail can be difficult to resist.

Outside the sun is blazing down, and you can see several groups of people in the distance. Dave and Jade seem to be practicing combo attacks with their powers in the distance, while Rose, Kanaya, and Roxy are watching John as he circles around overhead. Karkat is nowhere in sight, so you decide to ask John for help instead. He does have the aerial advantage after all.

Roxy is the first to notice you approaching, and she starts waving frantically as you approach.
“Nepeta! You’re outside! Fuck yes, come here, girl!” You grin and bound up to her, and she catches you in a hug. “Aww yes, hugs for my main babe!”

“Implying that you have other babes in reserve.” Rose adds with a wry smile. “Is this evidence of some secret life I was unaware of? What a scandal!”

Roxy smirks and separates from you, turning to Rose. “Rose. Look at me. I get all. The. Girls.” She emphasizes each word with a big shake of her hip, before sighing. “It’s just the guys I can’t seem to get any luck with.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that.” Rose replies with a devilish grin, before calling out. “What brings you down to earth, John?”

“I noticed we had somebody new down here! Hi Nepeta!” John says with a grin as he descends to your level. “My sister finally let you outside?”

“She gave up on chasing me!” You announce proudly, hi-fiving him. “I threw a mummy at her!”

John cackles, as Rose smiles and cuts in. “So John, you’re saying your sudden descent had nothing to do with my sister’s rather interesting… gyrations?”

Kanaya breaks her calm silence with a sudden fit of laughing she attempts to disguise as a cough. Roxy screams blue murder and tries to silence her sister with a hand over the mouth. John turns beet red.

“I didn’t notice anything like that Rose, jeez.” He looks aside guiltily, and you decide to come to his rescue.

“Hey, John! Do you know where Karkat is?” You ask loudly enough that everyone is forced to take notice.

“Oh well thank goodness one of you is finally doing something.” Kanaya responds with a smile. Roxy gasps and nods along, before punching her sister in the shoulder. Rose is still grinning like a maniac, but she’s looking up at you eagerly.

“I am on the hunt!” You confirm with a nod.

John grins, “Oh man, I’ve been waiting ages for this! I don’t know where he is right now, but just give me a sec and I’ll check.”

John closes his eyes, and his body glows blue. It’s odd, but for a brief second you could swear you can almost see through him. The others are looking on in similar wonder. After just a moment though he opens his eyes and the sensation passes. “He’s down at the beach training.” John says with a smile. “He breathes so heavily that it’s easy to find him.”

You consider mentioning whatever weird thing John was doing, but decide in the end more important things are afoot! “Thanks John! I’m on the purrowl!” You run off for the beach, as the others call good luck after you.

You are the huntress.

You are the huntress.
You are the huntress.

You don’t think you can do this! You want to, but you’re just so damn terrified! There are so many things that could go wrong here.

What if he’s not alone?

What if you can’t bring yourself to properly talk to him?

What if he says no?

“No!” You slap your hands to your cheeks and let the sharp sting clear your head. “You are the huntress! You will track your prey down and make him submit!” You march up the last hill before you reach the beach.

You are the huntress.

You are the huntress.

You are- oh shit there he is.

And he’s got his shirt off.

You throw yourself to the ground and commence freaking out again. He looks so hot it’s not fair!

“What the fuck are you doing up there?”

Oh no. Nononononono. Hot shirtless boys should not be talking to you if you haven’t been given time to mentally prepare yourself. It’s against the rules.

“Nepeta?”

You are on the verge of flipping the fuck out. But you need to do something. You stick your head up and see Karkat glaring up at you from the beach. “I am hunting!”

Karkat stares up at you flatly. “Please tell me you did not just admit to literally stalking me.”

“No! I just got here, dummy!” You protest, your face flushing green. You really hope he can’t tell from down there. You decide to employ misdirection instead. “There’s all sorts of cool stuff on this island to hunt!”

Karkat goes bug-eyed and you remember that you aren’t really even supposed to be wandering around yet. Oops. “You’re hunting wild LUSUS? What the fuck Nepeta, are you trying to get Jane to lock you up?”

“I need my exercise!” You protest plaintively “I’ve been stuck in a bed for weeks! I want to hunt! I want to kill something!” All true, though not why you’re out here. Jane was ruthlessly strict with you.

Karkat is looking down silently, a sure sign that he’s thinking about something. It’s one of the things about Karkat you can always count on. Even if he’s not being loud vocally, you can always count on his thoughts being noisy.

“Well, if you need exercise so badly, then just get down here!” Karkat eventually calls out. “Feferi’s off with her damn matesprit, so I don’t have anyone to spar with.”
You are so blown away by how well things are going that you don’t trust yourself to speak, so you settle for nodding quietly and scampering down.

“So you usually train with Fefurry?” You ask meekly.

“I guess?” Karkat scratches his head as he looks out to sea. “It’s something we’ve done a few times since we started this relationship, but it’s a bit soon to call it usual. Plus she’s got all that extra muscle from being higher on the hemospectrum, so I can’t really handle her that well. Don’t tell her I said that. Basically, she’s a freak of nature, and I don’t doubt that in a few sweeps she’ll be as strong as Equius.”

You’re reminded suddenly of just how many sweeps The Condesce has had to get strong, and you look down with a wince. Karkat does the same, muttering an apology.

You sigh and shrug your coat off. “Alright, so are we using weapons or did you want to fight with your bare paws?”

Karkat rolls his eyes. “I’m not about to risk any serious injuries when the Condesce is rallying her army to wipe us off the map. Bare paws- I mean, fuck, hands.”

You nod, and in a fit of inspiration, start working your shirt off. Karkat rather predictably freaks out.

“Whoa what the fuck are you doing?”

“You fake a casual attitude, looking over at Karkat with a smile. “So, are you ready to spurr?”

Karkat shakes his head furiously, and pauses, “Wait, yes, sorry, just clearing my fucking thinkpan.” He tosses the sickles he was holding aside, and lowers his stance. “Take your gloves off though, I’m not risking you gutting me like a fucking fish.”

You giggle and make a big show of taking your gloves off, leaving them with your shirt and coat. After thinking about it you decide to take your false tail off as well. You’re a lot more cautious about fighting with it since Mrs. Lalonde used it to throw you that one time!

“Okay Karkitty, let’s see what you’ve got!” You grin.

Karkat smirks as he replies, “Bring it,” and remains still.

You crack your knuckles and start circling. It’s immediately clear that Karkat’s a lot better than he used to be, as he shifts perfectly to face you, his stance remaining steady. His training with Mr. Egbert was clearly effective.

Well, when it comes to prey with strong defenses, the important thing to do is find weaknesses. You take an experimental hop to the side and wince. Karkat’s smirk grows. You can’t jump very well in the sand, and he knows it. This is why you prefer forests, you could never handle sand as well as Pounce de Leon can. She always made it look so easy!

You shift tactics, dropping to all fours. Karkat frowns, lowering his stance fractionally more, but doing nothing else. He clearly hasn’t dealt much with opponents that know how to get below him.

You throw yourself forward using all four limbs to propel yourself as fast as possible, and Karkat
curses in surprise at the sudden move. He throws a punch, but you duck under it, and throw a punch at his gut. His stomach tenses with the blow, and you can tell he’s hardly bothered by it. Just how much has he trained his abs?

There’s no time to focus on that though, as Karkat’s other fist is coming at you fast. You dive flat on your belly, and draw your legs in. Karkat leaps backward just in time to avoid the kick you send at his head.

Karkat’s stopped grinning, looking more determined than usual. You’re still smiling like a goofball though. You can’t help it; he’s just so cool right now!

You dart in and throw a punch, but he deflects it easily and returns with a hit of his own. You weave around it, and suddenly the two of you are throwing punches like crazy, none landing more than glancing blows to the body. He blocks, you parry, and both of you are dripping with sweat already.

Suddenly Karkat drops below one of your jabs and throws a ridiculously fast uppercut. You bend backwards just in time, and use your hands to spring yourself backwards into a flip. When you rise he’s already on top of you, jumping in the air and throwing a kick at you. You have no choice but to block.

The hit sends you flying backwards, and you barely manage to recover, rolling and skidding to a stop on all fours. Karkat is back in his stance, looking over with concern clearly visible behind his mask of grumpiness. You smile at him in reassurance, before immediately pouncing.

Karkat steps back in surprise, but manages to catch your wrists before you can get ahold of him. You curve your body easily and kick him square in the chest. His grip loosens, and you send him backwards as you break free, using his chest like a springboard to land in a crouch.

Karkat is wheezing as he gets to his feet, looking furious with himself. You stare after him in confusion, but snap into alertness when he rushes at you with a snarl.

Karkat launches into a chain of powerful punches and swipes that forces you on the defensive, and you’d be impressed if there wasn’t clearly something strange going on. His attacks are on point, but his face looks desperate. He’ll make a mistake soon.

Karkat doesn’t disappoint, by which you mean he totally does, in an overly dramatic way that just screams Karkat. He let’s out a loud shout of “FUCK!” and whirls around, throwing a spinning backhand at you. You catch him by the wrist easily, and pull.

Karkat falls forward with a strangled cry, and you leap after him, landing square on his back. He hisses, but you put a stop to that when you tug on his wrist and put your knee at the base of his neck. He thrashes about for a moment, but gives in when he realizes that he can’t move from there. It’s over.

“FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUCK.” Karkat screams in frustration, before coughing and spitting out a mouthful of sand. You hastily let him go, and he rolls onto his back. You stay on your knees next to him as he pulls himself up and starts frantically rubbing the sand from his face. Also tears. You peer at him curiously as it occurs to you that he’s so upset about losing that fight that he’s actually crying.

You debate briefly whether to ask him, but you know that would only make him close off. You’re forced to sit quietly while he recovers. In the end Karkat has to go to the shore and splash seawater in his face to clean the sticky red mess of tears, sand, and sweat from his face. You dust yourself off a little in the meantime, but most of the sand is on your back so you don’t bother too much.
When Karkat walks back he’s calm, by Karkat standards. He sits in the sand next to you and looks down. You stare over at him sadly, wanting to speak, but not really understanding what has him so upset. This is all very frustrating!

“I lost the fuck out of that fight, huh.” Karkat states bitterly, surprising you into alertness.

“Well, yeah, but it was still a really great fight!” You reply as cheerfully as you can manage. “I totally feel great meow!”

“So basically what you’re saying is that I made a good warm-up.” Karkat says blandly, giving you a tired glare.

“N-no! I mean, yes, but that’s not what I meant!” You flail defensively. “Back on Alternia you wouldn’t be able to fight me at all, so you’ve gotten way better than before!”

“That doesn’t fucking matter if I’m still not good enough.” Karkat snaps. “I can’t protect… anyone like this.”

You do not miss that pause, and the implications are enough to put flutters in your stomach, but pointing it out would just make him defensive. “You’re being too hard on yourself Karkitty! You’re really strong now, probably as strong as me! You just lost your tempurr!”

“Don’t patronize me Nepeta, fuck.” Karkat growls. “I’m shit. It’s pretty common knowledge that out of all the trolls I’m probably the most useless. Ever since I met you all it was pretty clear that I had the least to contribute. Even Tavros, dumbass that he is, has his telepathy. I’ve only ever been able to shout and push my opinions on others like an asshole. That’s it. I’m just a noisy asshole that people just bother with because I’d be even more of a nuisance otherwise!

“And it’s the same on earth, too! I try to be strong, but all I’ve done is ruin everything. Meanwhile all these humans, who should by all rights be way weaker than I am, are probably more powerful than any of us! I am literally the most pathetic person on this island! I am the loser! It is me!” By the end of his rant he’s clawing up the sand in agitation, screaming as you watch on.

“You never needed to be strong, Karkitty.” You reply quietly. “That’s not what made you important to me.”

He looks back wide-eyed and panting, but he’s remaining quiet, so you continue. “You’ll never be stronger than the others. Between Equius and Feferi that’s purretty much impawsible. We need you because you’re the one who keeps us all together. You know what’s important.”

Karkat stares on in bewilderment, so you pluck up your nerve and explain. “When we were back on Alternia, we all knew things wouldn’t end up well for us. Sollux and Aradia were certain to be used as psychic slaves, and most of us would probably be culled sooner or later. The only safe ones were probably Kanaya and Eridan, because Equius would probably kill himself for any highblood who asked, and the rest of us don’t really follow the rules very well.” Karkat snorts at that.

“Nobody wanted to do anything, because we were all too scared to act. You were the only one. You wanted to make things better, but instead of just waiting and hoping for the best, you actually did something! You made us realize that our only chance for survival was to do something, and now we’re here, with some of the best furriends I’ve efur had, fighting fur our lives!”

“How the fuck is that an improvement?” Karkat replies harshly. “All I’ve done is put us in one deadly situation after another! We aren’t any better off! I just made our lives that much shorter!”

You stand up and glare down at Karkat, and he leans back in shock. “Karkitty, if I die tomorrow, I
won’t have any regrets! Our time on Earth may have been scary sometimes, and I may have spent a lot of it unconscious from multiple stab wounds, but that doesn’t matter! My life since leaving Alternia has felt more full than it has in sweeps, the fullest it’s felt since I met Equius! If I had to choose between living on Alternia and waiting until some highblood decided I wasn’t good enough to live, and coming here and doing all that I’ve done, I wouldn’t change a thing!”

Karkat stares up at you in bewilderment, and your voice softens. “You always knew what was best for us, even if you didn’t know what was best for yourself. It’s why you’re our leader!”

“I’m not your fucking leader!” Karkat protests.

“Well tough shit, because I’m still going to follow you!” you snap back. “And you know it. You’ve seen how far I’ll go to track you down! You know how I feel about you! And no matter how much you try to deny it, or tell yourself that you don’t deserve it, that doesn’t matter! I’ll still love you!”

You finish, panting for breath, as Karkat stares up at you in shock. You think for a moment and gasp. “Aaaah! I said it again! I wasn’t supposed to say it then, I was supposed to wait until the moment was romantic enough! Shit!” You grab your shirt from the sand beside you and yell into it in frustration.

“I’m not good enough for you.” Karkat replies, making you drop the shirt. Karkat’s staring down into the sand, still sitting. “And what I said last time hasn’t changed either. I’m… Being with me is still a death sentence.”

“You’re with Feferi.”

“And she’s no better off than I am.” Karkat replies bitterly.

“None of us are better off now, are we?” You shout. “If you’re going to reject me then reject me, don’t just dance around the issue!” You realize you’re starting to tear up, and hiss in frustration. “No! Just fucking… no!” You rub at your eyes angrily. “Not this time!”

“I don’t want to!” Karkat replies angrily, getting to his feet.

“You don’t want to talk properly?”

“I don’t want to reject you!”

You blink at that. “You…” You stop to process that, but at this point you’re not sure you can believe what you just heard. “You… want to be with me?”

“Are you kidding? Of fucking course I do!” Karkat replies loudly. You look up and see that he’s flushing bright red, his eyes bugging out of his head. He looks like he’s going to burst a blood vessel. “I just… I can’t! I never fucking could! I can’t give you what you want; I can’t be with anyone without damning them! I’ve never been able to have that!”

“Why not?”

“I’m a fucking mutant, Nepeta! For fucks sake, if I fill a pail with anybody they’ll just be killed along with me!” You flush at that, but decide to let it go for now. “I can’t just be some ball and chain to drag down whoever I decide to get into a relationship with!”

“So when you said you weren’t strong enough, you meant that you wanted to be strong enough to protect me!” You realize, and Karkat looks aside in embarrassment.
“I just… if I’m going to risk somebody’s life by being in a relationship… I want to be strong enough to defend them.” Karkat finishes lamely, taking a few steps away. “Until I can say that… I don’t deserve a relationship like what you want.”

You don’t hesitate. You just walk forward and wrap your arms around him. His shoulders stiffen, but he remains still otherwise. “What did I tell you? You don’t know what’s best for yourself.”

“You also said I know what’s best for you.” Karkat grumbles.

“I did,” you admit. “But that doesn’t mean I don’t know what’s good for me too. And I’ve spent enough time in love with you to know what’s best for you.”

Karkat turns around slowly in your arms, until you’re face to face. “I… you… You’re too fucking perfect to end up with somebody like me.” He whispers.

You smile, replying breathlessly, “If I’m so purrfect, then I should be able to end up with whoever I want.”

You move in slowly, and Karkat looks you square in the eyes. He looks unsure, scared, and it reminds you enough of your confession outside of the prison that you hesitate. Karkat sees this, blinks a few times, and then glares.

“Fuck it.”

He closes the distance between the two of you himself, and you lose yourself in the feeling of his lips on yours. They’re cracked from the heat, and you can still taste the sand and saltwater on his face, and it’s all more perfect than you can bear.

A sudden blast of lighting far over your head brings it all to an end way too soon, and way too unexpectedly. “What the fuck!” Karkat screams in shock. “The Condesce can’t be here already, it’s only been a few hours!”

“That came from the tower!” You realize, scampering up the hill. Karkat chases you as fast as he can, stopping to grab his sickles.

The two of you make it to the Harley’s house in record time, where you see John lying on the ground in a heap while Kanaya and Roxy fuss over him. Rose stands nearby looking dazed.

“John?” Karkat calls out in a panic. John stirs slightly, giving a thumbs up. “Holy fucking shit John, what the fuck happened?”

“I seem to have discovered the secret behind the powers I used during my grimdark affliction.” Rose replies wide-eyed. “I theorized that in my maddened state I was using my powers to somehow manipulate light energy to create force, but when I attempted to replicate it the effects were more… explosive than I expected.”

“You almost hit me Rose!” John calls out wearily. “This is why we can’t have nice things!”

“Hush Johnny, even if you dodged the laser, you still fell right out of the sky!” Roxy says sternly. “You might be all concussed and stuff.”


“Indeed, I see no immediate sign of trauma.” Kanaya assures.
“Well this is just fucking perfect!” Karkat says with a groan. “We get more firepower, and Rose immediately uses it to almost kill somebody! I’m gone for an hour, and…”

You and Karkat seem to realize simultaneously that everyone’s attention has firmly turned to the two of you. You look at each other and blush.

Rose speaks up first. “Kanaya, I do believe we have competition for the title of ‘Island’s Hottest Couple’. We’ll have to step up our game.”

“Indeed.” Kanaya replies, looking you up and down before smiling. “Well played.”

“Karkat, am I gonna have to kick your ass?” You turn around in surprise as Karkat shrieks to find Dave has somehow appeared behind the two of you. He grabs you by the shoulders and winks, before stepping behind you and staring over at Karkat stone-faced. “Have you besmirched the honor of my fair Lady Strider?”

“Fuck off Dave, I haven’t besmirched a fucking thing!” Karkat protests angrily.

“You haven’t?” Dave looks at you in mock horror. “You poor thing. Well shit Karkat, guess I really do have to kick your ass.”

You burst into a fit of giggling as Dave advances, “Nooo, don’t do that!”

Dave turns around. “Nepeta, this troll has failed to sufficiently put the moves on you, and as a fellow Strider I must defend your right to tap dat ass. Are you saying you don’t want to tap dat ass?”

“Uhh…” You blush and reply hesitantly, “Not… not yet?” You squeal in embarrassment as Karkat groans and Roxy and Rose burst into laughter.

Dave nods. “Understood, sis.” He turns to Karkat, points at his sunglasses, and points to Karkat. “You insult a Strider’s booty again and I will wreak vengeance upon thee.”

“No to interrupt, but I fear something’s wrong with John.” Kanaya cuts in smoothly. “He seems to be sensing something.” You look over to see that John is indeed glowing blue, the same way he was when he was sensing Karkat, only this time far brighter.

John awakes in a panic just as you all start to crowd around him. “They’ve assembled!” he shouts frantically. “The Alternian fleet has gathered! They’re heading this way. We’ve got two hours, tops.”

Your name is Doctor Scratch, and things are getting underway. Of course you are not simply referring to the fact that your new companion Her Imperious Condescension has amassed her forces and is advancing upon the Isle of Bone. You also refer to the fact that there are multiple plans taking effect by many of the people on board this ship, which obviously includes yourself.

You have no more than a skeleton crew of humans with you: Carter Droll, Caleb Deuce, Jack Noir, and Spades Slick, along with a handful of grunts unworthy of mention.

This group of disloyal but capable men is stationed in a private room not far from the bridge of the Imperial Flagship, and you’re feeling reasonably certain that as soon as The Condesce is dealt with they all plan to have you killed. Spades has always been wary of you, and his crew proved more resilient to the certain danger of your runaway mutants than you expected. Spades has just enough resources to be a threat.
It matters not though. Spades may be augmented, but not to the extent that you are now. And you’ve kept the most important tricks for yourself.

Which is what brings you here, to the prison cells. There are all manner of fascinating alien species locked up here, and you’d like nothing more than to study them extensively. But you cannot delay here for long. You have only one destination in mind.

“Vriska Serket.”

The troll in question stirs from her bed, looking up in horror. “Oh what the fuuuuuuuuuuck. I know that voice. You’re Scratch. They said you were fucked up but this is ridiculous.”

“On the contrary, I find this form far more useful.” you reply indifferently. “Much like you, I find that whatever fails to kill me only makes me stronger. In this case that pertains to my flawless poker face and intimidating abnormal appearance.”

“Yup. You’re a fucking freak.” Vriska replies bitterly. “Glad we established that. Now if you’re done gloating over me here, get your lack of a face out of my face.”

“Now now Vriska, there’s no need to be like that.” You reply. “After all, I am here to help you.”

“Help me?” Vriska sits up, though she tries to keep her face indifferent. “Why and how would you possibly help me?”

“Two very good questions, both with exceedingly simple answers. I wish to help you so that you can help me.”

“Not happening.”

“Oh, but it is.” You chuckle. “You see, I want The Condesce gone. And you need to help me if you want any chance to see daylight again. So if you want to help yourself, helping me is an essential step.”

Vriska hisses to herself, and leans back against the wall. “I’m listening.”

“Of course you are. It would be foolish to do otherwise. Now then, this is how I will help you.” You open the small opening on the cell door that provides food and place the fluorite octet inside. “Do not use these until the time is right.” You state firmly as Vriska dives upon them. “Play your hand too soon and you’ll never survive.”

“What do you mean?” Vriska asks suspiciously. “What’s to stop me from using these to blast you to bits and taking this ship down by force?”

“There’s a whole fleet out there, foolish girl.” You admonish. “And if the octet were enough to stop the Condesce then it would have been used for such a purpose long ago. No, the right time is coming soon, but not yet. Your friends will soon be facing the Condesce head on. That will provide your chance.”

“No way they’re that stupid.” Vriska snaps back.

“They are desperate, which is an entirely different cause for bad decisions.” You reply. “They will fight, and in all likelihood lose to the Alternian fleet. But they will give you a chance to escape. And they may very well give you a chance at The Condesce herself. It will be your only chance to escape. And once you have, then I will hunt you down and reclaim you. Or you will kill me. Think of it as one last game, a gamble between you and me. I know how you do love games.”
Vriska glares up at you, but you wave farewell before she can properly respond. You’re passing the next group of cells when she shouts after you. “I’ll win! I’ll win this and then I’m coming for you, Scratch! One last dance, you and me!”

You smile internally and look to your right. “It is as you hear. I have conspired with your old friend.” Terezi glares out at you with unseeing eyes, nostrils flaring.

“It would seem I’ve upset you. My apologies. I simply wished to keep you in the loop. Do with this information what you will.”

You continue out the door, chuckling to yourself all the while. It is hardly the most ideal of circumstances, but one must make dangerous plays to win a dangerous game. And no matter what happens next, you are the only one who knows all the pieces at play here.

And that means that at the end of the day you are in the best position to win this game.

Chapter End Notes

Main romantic subplot has been resolved just in time for the beginning of the end!
Boom.

Karkat finally got his shit together in the end, but I always did plan for Nepeta to be the one to make him do it. Well that's a lie actually, I also considered having Kanaya do it. I think Kanaya and Karkat are pretty much a pale otp for me, but I have so many damn relationships going already that I decided to leave that one out. This isn't Herding Cats or Secret Heart Club of Secrets after all, romance is supposed to be on the backburner. That said, DAMN this felt good to write.

Also, yes, Nepeta's basically just wearing a green sports bra. I just called it an undershirt because that seemed less stupid to me than guessing about whatever underclothes an alien species with indeterminate sexy parts might wear. I know that my explanation makes that null and void, but whatever, that's how my thought processes work sometimes. Those thought processes gave you a hot cat girl with her shirt off, so just roll with it.

So climax is coming, and it shouldn't take too long for it to start. I've got it all mapped out and ready to go. I just need to somehow keep it from going way out of control in scale. Which as you can probably tell from what you've read until now isn't going to happen. I'm about to completely lose it and it will be glorious.
Chapter Summary

After all their struggles, the end is nigh. These are the true thoughts of the ones who face death.

Chapter Notes

Each large space represents a switch to a different character. You should be able to figure it out on your own which is which, especially since I kept a pretty simple order.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Once, long ago, you decided that you were born to rule. Your only purpose, your every motivation, all revolves around that determination. When your subjects bow, it simply feels right. And when your subjects object, you’ll drive their faces into the dirt yourself. This is what it means to be a leader.

You thought at the start of all this that running from your problems was the best solution. That you could just get far away, as far as you could possibly go, until your problems were so far away that they would never find you again. And of course the world decided to take that notion and fuck it up beyond repair. You found plenty of new problems after you left, and your old problems followed you.

There have been good things since your escape as well though. You met the humans, and they’re all as close to you now as anyone in your group. You filled your black and red quadrants, the two aspects of your life that you thought would always go unfulfilled. And for the first time in your life you were able to live without worry. It was brief, but all that much sweeter for it.

You are going to protect everything you’ve gained. You are going to stop all the fuckers that want to destroy your life, and the lives of your friends. When it comes down to it all of this is your fault to begin with. It was your cowardice that brought hell onto everyone you love. Your decision to flee that turned an entire empire on its head. The fact that you are to blame is an indisputable truth.

The fact that you’re going to make things right? That’s still up in the air. But you’ll make it a reality if it kills you. And there’s no power in paradox space that will help the fuckers that get in your way.

You died once. It wasn’t pleasant. The feeling of having your flesh and bone burned away is horrific no matter how quickly it happens, and knowing that somebody you care deeply for was responsible, no matter how accidental, makes it hurt that much more. You gained a lot in death though: a greater understanding of the world, the knowledge that your friends will do whatever it takes to help you, even if it’s in defiance of all natural laws.
You came back from the dead, at the cost of one of those friends. You don’t talk about it, but you still question whether you were worth that sacrifice. And the sacrifice Equius made for you was horrific as well. It’s been happening too often: people suffering for you.

You aren’t a damsel in distress. You are powerful, smart, and fearless. This is your chance to prove it. You have your role to play, but you know that there is more to this battle than what your friends have marked down on paper. You know that the people you care about the most are the people in the greatest danger. And you won’t stand by while they suffer on your behalf any more. This time you’ll be the one to save them. But you won’t suffer for them. You won’t let yourself die this time.

You’re alive.

And you intend to stay that way.

You’ve been waiting for a long time. You waited for an escape plan, you waited for Gamzee to help you, and you waited for Vriska’s plan to make things better. Well, the escape plan worked for everyone but you, Gamzee went crazy, and Vriska just drew in a whole lot of bad stuff to make your day miserable. Waiting is now, in your humble opinion, the shittiest thing you can do, because it just makes everyone’s lives terrible.

When you spend your life waiting, you’ll never be ready when the time for action comes. When you only ever wait, you won’t be able to notice when your best friend is waiting for you. Gamzee went insane waiting for you to make his suffering worth it. He loved you. And you were too hesitant and frightened to appreciate what that meant. Now he’s a monster, and you know that while the torture, and the bad treatment didn’t help him, it was your inaction that made him what he is.

You remember what Gamzee used to be. You didn’t realize at the time, but you loved what he once was. And now, you’re going to save him. No matter the cost.

You’ve always been powerful. They told you from an early age that you would be destined for great things, greater than anyone of your hemotype should dare to dream. But you saw through them. You knew what their plan for you was, and what it would do to you. That’s why when Karkat said he wanted to escape you told him immediately that you’d be by his side. Also because he’s your friend, but you’d never admit that out loud.

Your power is not your psionics, not really. It’s just one part of your mind, and that’s where your true strength lies. You are the smartest person in your group, and everyone knows it. It’s how you know that the greater things you’re meant for have nothing to do with the helm of a space ship, and anyone who tells you different is just too fucking stupid to see it.

You have always been ruled by emotion. Your moirail thinks it’s what makes you act foolish, but you know that it’s also how you always know what’s really important. When the troll you love wanted to leave, you understood the horrors that followed him, and you went along. Because even if you’re not smart, you know what matters.

Karkat matters. Equius matters. Aradia matters. Roxy matters. All of your friends, all of the people you hold dear, they matter more to you than anything else. They are truly important. And knowing they love you as much as you love them is what gives you the strength to carry on. You’ll sacrifice
anything to keep your friends safe, and fight against impossible odds. That’s what love is all about.

You pride yourself on being a pinnacle of good sense. It’s the reason your friends think they can rely on you. There is no real mystery to your life, no questions needing answers. You simply care. Your friends are headstrong, impulsive, and often too smart for their own good. You are their pillar. The trolls are desperate and scared, so you will guide them. The humans are lost and suffering, so you will protect them. You don’t always understand your friends, but you always understand what dangers they face.

It’s simple. You are their rock. You will remain strong. You will tear apart any and all threats to them. They are your friends, and you will protect them, long after this fight is over.

You find it difficult to think clearly these days. Once you were one of the smartest people in your group. Now you’re lost. You had friends, but they’ve all disappeared. You left them behind, in desperation, or selfishness, or some other emotion you can’t recall anymore. Ever since you left your pursuers behind, there have only been two people that matter: you and Vriska.

You were like human siblings once. It seems impossible now, but it felt like you were going to be all right as long as you were together. It’s how you met the Striders, likely the only family in the world that would ever protect a couple of unstable aliens like you. And even when you were dating Dave, Vriska was still the most important person in your life.

That’s why it hurt so badly when she turned on you.

Your allies are dead. You feel sure of it. Gamzee killed Tavros, probably, if the screams were any indication. Gamzee must have died when they captured you, because he was never good at staying out of trouble. The others you haven’t seen since you left them at the Scratch base, except for in your dreams in which they still haunt you.

There is only you and Vriska now. She caused the death of your new friends. She brought a demon onto your new home. She betrayed your trust. And you swore to end her for it. You made a promise. And with your mind slipping away and your friends dead and gone, that promise may be the only thing you have left.

You haven’t forgotten your determination. You still have plans, you still have goals, and no matter what Terezi or Scratch say, you’ll have the upper hand when this is all over. Nobody could ever hurt you badly enough that you won’t get up and deal it back eightfold. That’s how you work.

Scratch wants to manipulate you into doing his dirty work, but he won’t be so smug when you’ve killed him. And Terezi? She’s long gone. You care about her still, but you’ll never care about anybody more than you care about yourself. So the next time she tries to kill you? You’ll take her apart. You have the Octet, you have your cunning, and you have your luck.

Fate has thrown you plenty of bad rolls lately, but that just means that you’re overdue for some good ones.

Since leaving Alternia your life has been a series of indignities. Deferring to a mutant, being defeated
by an inferior alien race, losing your arm, your face, your pride, all unpleasant experiences. Your path has been nothing but suffering.

In suffering, you have learned much. You have reevaluated the systems that once defined your existence. You have come to understand that your values are meaningless in comparison to those of your friends. You know now that the most important thing of all is what those close to you define it as. They have, in retrospect, always known better than you.

You followed the laws of your society, and they hated you for it. You looked down on them, deemed them trash, and told them they were unworthy; when it is exceedingly clear to you now that the unworthy one was you all along. The indignities you’ve suffered were your just punishment for a life of hatred.

Your suffering is also what made your rewards all the sweeter. Just as you were punished for your misdoings, life has been good to you since your betrayal of the hemocaste. Your moirallegiance with Nepeta is closer than ever, and your love for Aradia has finally been returned. You have made new friends in Dirk and Dave Strider, and your fellow trolls have, ironically enough, given you greater respect now that you have ceased to feel entitled to it.

You have come far since leaving Alternia, and have perhaps changed more than anybody else. Another of life’s ironies, as you were the most opposed to this venture. You go now to fight for your lives, but this will not be the end of your journey. You have a long way to go yet, and many more lessons to learn. While you go to this battle prepared to die for all that you’ve gained, a sliver of hope that was never there before, now sits firmly in your mind.

This will not be the end for you.

It is only the beginning.

What is life without pain? You don’t know that there’s an answer to that question besides mother-fucking nothing. You don’t know what your life was before you started to feel pain. The pain of a lost lusus, the pain of leaving your home behind, the pain of a knife, opening your face and showing the world what you’ve got all up inside your head.

There were times, you guess, when you didn’t know pain. Times when your life was a haze of carefree hours by the sea, and the blurring of thoughts caused by the drugs you were taking. Times when the dazed fog of lost memory makes it impossible to remember when one night would fade to the next.

That wasn’t living though.

Life isn’t worth living if you can’t even remember it. You don’t know SHIT about all the sweeps you spent back when you were MOTHERFUCKING HAPPY. As far as you’re concerned, THEY DIDN’T FUCKING EXIST.

The times you’ve hurt? THOSE ARE THE TIMES YOU’LL NEVER FORGET. The times when you screamed, and cried, and watched your friends backs as they left you behind. THOSE ARE THE MOMENTS THAT STUCK WITH YOU.

Pain is life.

HAPPINESS IS DEATH.
So when you say that you’re going to hurt your friends, IT’S ONLY BECAUSE HELPING THEM IS SO MUCH WORSE. You’ll break their bones and rip out their guts, AND THEY’LL NEVER FORGET IT. They left you to learn what a fucking miracle pain is. NOW YOU GET TO RETURN THE FAVOR.

After all, what are friends for?

:o)

They rejected you. You gave up everything for them and they threw you aside.

You thought you had friends. You thought that you had people who you would do anything for. And then they chased you away the instant you made a mistake. Karkat made mistakes. Feferi made mistakes. But they still kept their friends.

So really, the fact that you’re with The Condesce now isn’t a betrayal; if they cast you out they can’t ever have been your friends to begin with.

This has been everything you’ve ever wanted. The power. The feeling of superiority. The respect.

You aren’t going to give this up. Not for them. They never cared about you.

It’s not like you’re being unreasonable! They have no hope of winning! They hate you because you’re the only one with the good sense to accept it! Even though you came back for them!

They don’t understand the things you’ve sacrificed for them. Your status, your home, your lusus, you left it all behind. And they turned their back on you. You were never given the recognition you deserved from them as a friend.

You’ll just make them recognize you as an enemy instead.

You want to run away. It’s just what you do. You avoid your problems. You pretend they don’t exist. You hide away where nobody can reach you and think happy thoughts until it’s all better. Even though you’ve always known that nothing was getting better for you.

This is a day you’ve been dreading your entire life: your battle with The Condesce. It’s something you were doomed to face from the moment of your hatching. And you’ve been terrified of it, so unbelievably scared that you just tried to pretend it wasn’t going to happen, no matter what the others said.

Eridan used to tell you he’d face it together with you. Now he’s on her side. Karkat used to tell you he wouldn’t have a fucking thing to do with it. Now he’s leading the charge. Life is funny like that, full of twists and turns that nobody could ever predict.

That’s mostly what’s keeping you going at this point. You expect to die. You’re hopelessly outclassed. But when has anything ever turned out like you predicted?

This is all you have to rely on, and it’s not even a real thing. You’re praying for a miracle here, and even as you hope for it you know it will never come. But either way, you know you have to do this.

You can’t stay hidden forever. For better or worse, you’ve turned troll society on its head. This fight
is going to determine who picks it back up.

You’re not qualified for what you are to your friends.
They say you’re strong, but you’re clumsy.
They say you’re clever, but you’re oblivious.
They say they’re proud of you, but you don’t know that you’ve ever done anything to merit it.
For all your powers, and all you’ve done the past year since you met Karkat, you know the truth.
You’re still just a regular guy.
You’re not as smart as Rose or Roxy.
You’re not as skilled as Dave or Dirk.
You’re not as brave as Jade or Jake.
You’re nothing compared to Jane.
But they look up to you all the same.
It doesn’t seem right to you, mostly because you’ve been looking up to them for as long as you’ve known them. But looking at your new friends you think you understand.
This all started with Karkat. Which makes sense to you, not just because of everything he’s told you about his life. It makes sense to you because you can tell just by looking: he’s a leader. He doesn’t think he’s the leader, but it’s obvious to everyone else. Even you.
Karkat has looked up to his friends all his life, partially out of fear, but also because he thinks he’s inferior to them. Karkat has no powers, no skills, and no experience. But he knows his friends better than he knows himself, and he always tries to think the best of them. It’s harder for him, especially after all the horrible things his friends have done, but he still tries.
You think you know the feeling.
You have powers, but you can’t use them well. You know things, but have trouble applying them. You’re strong, but you’re also clumsy. And you know that your friends have mental fortitude you can only dream of.
You just… try. You try your hardest to keep up, so that when you fall, the people you’re following see you and come to pick you back up.
And that might be the most important thing. Nobody in your group would be helpless on their own, but you? You wouldn’t know what to do with yourself. You treat life like a team sport, even while your friends are thinking independently. You’ve relied on them all your life. Which means that now that everyone is relying on each other, you’re ahead of the game!
You’re not strong enough to be a leader. But you can’t be a leader if you’re alone. And out of everyone in your group, you think you may be the least alone.
That has to count for something.
There is little to say about your ‘arc’. You fell in love with a beautiful alien, the same night you broke up with a man that still means the world to you.

But there’s no grand design in that, no real involvement on your part. You simply saw a light in the darkness, and welcomed it inside. And really, it was your family that took the initiative on that affair.

Indeed, you have done very little in this grand adventure, and that strikes you as unacceptable. That’s what’s driving you today. You owe your new friends more than you will ever be able to fully understand, and with your planning you will bring victory.

You cost your friends a lot this past year. Out of your entire group, only two people still have a house, and nobody has a guardian. The others say it’s not your fault, but you aren’t having that shit.

You love your friends. Unironically. If they asked you to rip off a limb for them you’d probably go through with it. So when they suffer and you fail to stop it? It’s on your head. You were raised to give anything for your friends, and so far? You’ve failed to give it. They hurt because you didn’t stop that pain from coming. That sort of failure is disgraceful to a Strider.

You are a time travelling katana-wielding badass, and you will not stand for this shit anymore. The next time you see pain coming for your friends, you will get your hands on whoever is responsible and you will fuck them up.

This time, you’re going to make it so clear that even you won’t be able to question whether you did your job. They fuck with your friends; you fuck with their necks. That’s how Striders make amends.

You aren’t sure what your story is. You take charge, you kick ass, and you are basically just an awesome person. But there isn’t much to explain about why you’re here.

You first met the trolls when they were lost and afraid, so you helped them. You saw people coming to hurt your friends and family, so you took them apart. And now there are people coming to destroy your planet, so you’ll stop them too. You like to keep things simple that way.

You were raised to think that life was simple. If people are good, you should be friends with them! If people are bad, they can just fuck off! And if they won’t leave you alone, you were also taught that there are few problems in life a good firearm can’t solve!

So when the people you love are in danger, you are going to help them. And when you see the bastards who have been out to ruin your life, you’ll put a bullet between their eyes. That’s what your grandpa and Jake taught you, and it’s never steered you wrong before!

You’ve always held family to be more important than anything else. Your dad and brother have always been closer to you than anyone you’ve ever met. Nobody you’ve befriended, dated, or otherwise been close to has ever matched up to your family in your mind.

So when your family lost a member you felt like you were losing part of yourself, in a way. The person who was always at your side when you baked, and who encouraged you to study medicine, was essential to you. Losing him felt like you yourself were dying.
And now that you’ve recovered you’ve realized that you’re not sure you’d handle losing any of your friends any better.

Troll or human, the people you’re standing with are like family to you. You’ve eaten with them, slept under the same roof, and have become as close with them as you have ever thought possible. Closer, even.

That’s what motivates you. You have a family that’s bigger than you ever dreamed, and at the end of it all, you’re going to make sure they all leave in one piece.

You think at this point it’s pretty much common knowledge that all of your friends would be lost without you. It seems ridiculous, but somehow the person who’s been unable to deal with their own problems most of their life is the best at solving everyone else’s.

You haven’t been drunk since your mom died. It still drives you mad, the cravings you get for alcohol, and while you’ve only been sober for a month or so, it feels like years have passed since then. You’re not sure how much of that is due to withdrawal, and how much is because your life has been completely fucked up lately.

Sobriety has brought a sort of clarity though, and you can’t say you don’t appreciate it. You’re still fighting, but that doesn’t change the fact that you faced your problems and dealt with them. And now you can take that self worth and use it to help your friends. They act stupid, and get worked up about all kinds of dumb stuff, but you know what it means to be better than something, and your friends are all better than this. You just make sure they know it.

So when they go head to head against your enemies today, you know they’re fighting their personal demons as well. And now that you’ve beaten your own demons, you’re going to help them overcome their own.

You used to think that if anything crazy ever happened, you’d be the one to keep your group together. It made sense. You had the superior sword skills, the robotic and programming skills, and the ability to take your problems and push them aside in favor of getting shit done.

You’ve discovered since then that compartmentalizing issues does not make them go away. It’s obvious, really, but somehow that tidbit slipped by you. So when push came to shove, you fucking fell apart. All your skills meant nothing because they were part of the same brain that was filled with a lot of unresolved bullshit.

That’s why you’re keeping this simple. You want to walk out of this alive. You want your friends to do the same. And you want to find Doctor Scratch and cut his fucking head off. Then you’re going to find Jake English, kiss him, and ride off into the sunset together.

Basically: you’ve got a job to do, and you’re going to do it. Leave the leading to Karkat, or Roxy, or John. You’re just going to do what you need to do, and sort your shit out after that. As long as you remember that order, you can keep a lid on it long enough that you won’t be responsible for anyone dying on your watch ever again.

You remember the labs you were born in. It’s not something you talk about, but those days stayed with you. Sometimes it feels like you did most of your growing up in those first three years of your
You remember being a failure, disappointing because your powers never manifested as a tot. It hurt, particularly because you didn’t have a bloody clue what you’d done wrong.

You remember the people who looked after you; your grandpa, mom Lalonde, Bro Strider, and an old woman who you realize only now was likely the reason John and Jane were brought into this world. That old woman died getting you all out of those labs, and you never understood the significance.

Until now.

Your powers were once negligible, but now you feel like you could take on the world! You were the weakest of the bunch, but as things have become bothersome, you became stronger. Your friends don’t remember the pain they went through, but you do, and you won’t let them suffer under anyone’s authority ever again.

You’ll show the world that you are strong. You’ll show the world that they were wrong to hold you down. You’ll show them that those years you’ve spent in freedom made you a force to be reckoned with, and that they won’t ever put you back in that place ever again!

You never really had friends, only brothers. Blood relations, comrades in arms, they always meant the same thing to you. They always meant everything to you.

You’ve lost everything far too often for your liking.

Your younger brother was never bright, but he was family. Now he’s a mad dog pulling at the leash.

Meanwhile Harvey was the heart of your group, one of those rare empathetic people who could also rip a safe door out of a wall. He’s buried six feet under with a collapsed windpipe.

And you have very little doubt that Caleb and Carter are going to get themselves killed; they just don’t have the sense to survive a proper warzone.

You don’t know what the world will be like at the end of this mess anymore. All you know is this: your family has been destroyed. Scratch ruined everything you’ve built over the years. He took your brothers, and has ripped them away from you one by one.

You may very well die before this day is over. But you won’t do it until you have Doctor Scratch’s throat below your knife. You won’t go down until he does.

You have relied on the fleeting nature of luck more often lately. It’s unnerving really, in the past you were never anything less than in complete control of a situation. You have one loss on your record, but that loss led to a steadfast determination to win. Until now you’ve never come close to failing in this determination.

You have about a fifty-fifty chance. The most important pawns are still within your control, and The Condesce’s trust was easily bought with your prisoners, to say nothing of your other gift. But there are wild cards in play; too many to count.

It pains you to say it, but you fear you may have been delegated to a lesser position. You are not the
greatest threat anymore, and possibly never were. The haunted looks of the trolls at your first meeting
wasn’t the result of your display of power, but the remnants of fear connected to the monster hunting
them. You think you may come to fear her yourself, should your plan fail.

But you will never show fear. That is what makes Rue Lalonde’s gift so special. You will always be
the picture of confidence, a calm poise and unreadable expression all it takes to put fear in your
enemies. Even The Condesce is wary around you, and if you had a human face you doubt that
would be possible.

So until this is over, you’ll just keep stating that you hold all the cards. And when circumstances
prove you right, they will look at your doubtless face and they will be more terrified of you than
ever.

Chapter End Notes

I wasn't going to do this chapter originally, but I feel like this is some of my best writing
now that its done. I basically caved in on this idea halfway through part one of the
climax, and wrote this whole thing in a day. So there's the chapter, more or less and
interlude of sorts, and an idea of what they're fighting for. Because writing a
motivational speech seemed stupid to me.

Hopefully I won't be long with the next part, since it's already started. That said, the
climax is a complete clusterfuck, so it's proving tricky to get things rolling smoothly.
You Could Never Hide

Chapter Summary

John and Sollux wage war in the air while the others prepare to destroy the Imperial Flagship.

Chapter Notes

Blanket statement here for my readers: you guys are awesome, and I am hyped as fuck that you guys liked the last chapter so much, because I'm still convinced it was the best thing I've written.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your name is unimportant. Like seriously, who the hell gives a fuck about your name when your title alone is enough to make a full-grown troll cry? You are Her Imperious Condescension, and you are way too bad for anybody to fuck with you.

And now you’ve got the chance to prove it once and for all.

In all of your countless sweeps as the Empress of Alternia there has been a grand total of two times you have lost. Sure, the Signless and the Summoner led some pretty damn big movements against you, but you stomped them out in the end. As long as you win there’s no real problem in your book. Enough public executions and nobody will think about making trouble until a few lifetimes have passed.

No, they can fight all they want and you won’t bat an eye. It’s when they escape that you get pissed. Which is why the first black smear on your record, the Disciple, has been a niggling thought on your mind for eons.

But not anymore.

You’ve got the remains of the Disciple in a glass tank. It’s the best thing to happen to you in sweeps, a chance to finally put an end to all of the doubts that followed in the wake of that disaster. The authenticity of the remains cannot be doubted; even if you didn’t remember the exact look of the one that got away (which you do), the plaintive moaning of the Psionic when he saw her was proof enough.

You think you’ll leave the remains here on the bridge. It will serve as a reminder to your people: no matter where you run, The Condesce will find you eventually.

You quite like that actually, you think you’ll have that engraved. It’ll be your first order of business once your little assault on this miserable planet is complete.

Which brings you to your next loss. Gl’bgolyb. The great monster was the key to your authority over the troll people, and with it gone reports have flooded in that Alternia and other troll colonies too
stupid to keep the news under wraps are in open revolt.

It’s been too long since you’ve held a public execution. You’re looking forward to it. Feferi Peixes, your descendant, the one responsible for killing your greatest tool, will die soon. You will capture her, flay the skin from her bones, and torture her personally until the whole of your empire has heard and will never forget her screams.

As far as you’re concerned it’s moments like this which make being empress worth it.

You turn away from the Disciple’s remains to see that the seadweller you picked up is fiddling with his gun again. It pisses you off seeing a shrimp like him toy with Ahab's Crosshairs. You haven’t forgotten the times when that incompetent douche Dualscar nearly blew something up playing with the thing. If this kid is anything like his ancestor he’s going to end up on the business end of your culling fork very soon. You’re already pissed about your docking bay.

“What’s got your fins in a bunch, shrimp?” You frown as he snaps to attention.

“I don’t like this, that’s all.” Eridan replies. “Keeping Scratch around. You’ve got what you want from him, so can’t we just cull him and be done with it?”

“You said yourshellf that those human-troll hybrids are capabubble. I don’t like surprises.” You state offhand. “I use my prawns until they’re dried up, and then I toss them overboard. No sooner.” You doubt there will be much of an issue really, but Scratch knows them better than you, so might as well keep him around until the little pests are all dead.

“Empress, the island is in sight. Detecting life signatures consistent with basic Alternian lusus forms,” A troll nearby reports. “As well as two figures airborne: one Troll, one native.

“Airborne. They’re psionic.” You frown. “Have all ships fan out and circle the island. Main weapons, prepare to fire.”

“Do we have visuals on the airborne targets?” Eridan asks, turning to the troll that made the report but eyeing you. He seems careful not to undermine you, which is smart as far as you’re concerned. You nod to the troll in question and he rushes to bring up the visual feed.

Sure enough, you see one troll and one human, just as was described. You really can’t make anything of the information though… Except that the troll looks familiar somehow.

“All Hands, GRAB ON TO SOMETHIN’!” Eridan roars urgently. “THAT TROLL IS A CLASS TEN PSIONIC!”

Some of your crew responds accordingly, others look on in confusion, and a few more just glare at the young troll indignantly. You refuse to cling to the railing like a wriggler; opting instead to spike your double culling fork into the floor. You do so just in time.

There’s a faint flash of purple from your main window and suddenly the whole ship reels as twin blasts of red and blue energy race across the bridge. Those who braced themselves in time barely manage to hold tight to their stations. The trolls who refused to respond are sent tumbling to the ground. One of your minor system husk stations overloads with psionic energy and explodes, killing several trolls nearby.

You hiss angrily, tightening your grip on your fork and riding out the storm. It’s over as quickly as it began, and Eridan hauls himself to his feet as you direct your subordinates to their stations furiously.

“So that was your descendant!” You remark to your pilot, tied in beside you. “He has your eyes.”
“If we take another hit like that we’ll be done for!” A troll behind you cries out in a panic, and you snap his neck with a burst of your own psionics.

“Shut up you worthless idiots, if he tries that again he’ll rip himself apart!” Eridan hisses, before turning to you with a bowed head. “I’m sorry your majesty, I didn’t expect Sollux to lead the fight, it’s not really how he works.”

“It doesn’t manta, the fighters will take care of him.” You reply flippanantly.

“They won’t be any use in this fight, I’m afraid.” You turn to see Doc Scratch stroll onto the bridge. “The human lacks the power to shift our larger vessels, but your imperial fighters will be incapable of flying with him here.”

“He can affect them that much?” Eridan spits in disbelief.

“I make only the finest of specimens.” Scratch replies with pride.

“Lose the attitude or I’ll carve you a new face, beach.” You snap at Scratch, and he holds up his hands in appeasement. You face forward angrily. “The wrigglers down below can wade. These two die now. All Imperial Destroyers: scatter and destroy our enemies! We do nufin else until they’re dead!”

Your name is Sollux Captor, and you are going out in a blaze of glory. What the fuck happened with your life? This is sure as shit better than being used as a battery until you’re out of power and tossed out with the trash, but you’re a hacker, not a hero, and dying like this is not your style.

Though with Egbert covering your ass you think you may have a chance. This kid has a grasp on his powers that makes even you envious. Which is ridiculous since you’re sure that when they pulled the DNA to make John Egbert from the genetic slurry, trolls like you were the main ingredient.

He’s still freaking out about all the damage you did when you blew your load all over the Imperial fleet. Honestly, you’re feeling pretty proud of the work, even if the damage is mostly the result of these assholes failing to use their shields. You destroyed a good dozen of the smaller vessels with your first shot, and damaged twice as many.

You think that this laser actually managed to do more damage than all the shit you’ve pulled behind a keyboard, and you’re not sure if you’re proud or pissed. Lasers are awesome, but it’s your hacking you’re really proud of; that’s a skill you learned and mastered, rather than just being born with.

It’s a good thing you and Dirk still have a plan on the digital front, otherwise you’d be feeling vastly underutilized. Sure, you’re the reason your group has the Flagship’s floor plans, but you got your hands on that information sweeps ago. The stupid shit you pulled back when you were only seven sweeps old can’t really be considered part of a plan taking place now. Your pride wouldn’t allow it.

“Okay Sollux, they’re starting to move! You should get down and rest before they start targeting you!” John calls out nervously. You want to protest, but you’ve got maybe two more shots before you fall out of the sky. You let yourself descend, as John summons the wind.

When you reach the tower you’re glad to see only three people are left here: Jane, Kanaya, and Roxy. The others will have already infiltrated the flagship. Mission accomplished, now you just have to juice yourself up enough that when you go up again you won’t die.

“How did it go?” Roxy asks anxiously as you descend.
“All things considered: not terrible.” You reply, grabbing the thermos Jade mixed up for you beforehand. You’re not sure what’s in it, just that she said she included quote ‘every caffeinated thing I could find,’ so whatever it is, you’re sure it’s potent. “John’s fucking them up now, and by the time I get up there they’ll really be opening fire. That’s when we have to slow down. Start dodging and we can only hit back half as hard.”

“Don’t let anything happen to my brother.” Jane orders sternly as you start chugging Jade’s caffeine swill. It tastes horrible, but you’re already starting to feel wired, so you can’t say that you care. “If you do I’ll kill you myself when this is all done.”

You drain the thermos, and give her a look. “You and I both know he’s got a better chance walking away at the end of this than I do.”

“Well don’t you go dying either!” Jane snaps back.

“No promises.” You flip her off and fly away with a smirk.

John is unleashing his full power when you get in the air, and you can’t stop your jaw from dropping. The wind he’s releasing is so furious you can practically see it, a mess of currents that seems to twist the air itself, fading out the sky to a pale blue. After a moment you realize that the effect is caused by entire clouds that he seems to be drawing into the vortex. He’s roaring as he sends his cyclone flying at the nearest ship, shredding it into scrap metal. Another ship turns to face him and he punches at the air, sending a rush of wind that knocks the nose of the ship aside.

You decide that you won’t be outdone, and let another blast of energy rip through the closest ship. These smaller ones aren’t nearly as strong as the flagship (legally, nothing can be), so you can damage them fairly easily. The level of power you’re capable of now wouldn’t be able to scratch the flagship anymore though, so it’s nothing to celebrate.

Suddenly a burst of white light flashes behind you, and you feel a wave of heat roar across your back. You curse as you spin around to see a laser flying by a few feet from you. Even a near miss can be fatal without some sort of protection. John can use the wind to protect him at least a little bit, but you don’t have that luxury.

You start flying as erratically as you can, closing in on the ship that just shot you. You’re dodging their attacks as well as you can manage, but just as you’re getting in range, another ship fire a beam of energy right in front of you, and you’re forced to veer away.

It’s all you can do to dodge, and John doesn’t seem to be faring any better. He needs more time to prepare his attacks than you do, and he’s dodging fire as well when you draw close enough to talk.

“How many did we get?” John hollers over the sounds of rushing wind and energy blasts.

“Not sure. About half of them?” You reply. You’re rounding up, but whatever, it works with your damn bifurcation obsession, and helps John feel better, so you can roll with it.

“Half…” John appears to be considering it. When he looks back at you he’s got a grim smile on his face. “I can live with half. Now let’s get the rest.”

You nod and veer off from John, heading for one of the Imperial ships sitting on the fringe of the conflict. There’s a wall of fire coming at you from the side, and you attempt to close the distance as soon as possible.

Suddenly, John appears again, directly on your heels. “Brace yourself. This is going to be messy. Also: awesome.” He cries out as he grabs you by the feet. You’re about to protest
when he suddenly pushes you, throwing both his arms and a blast of wind into it.

You’re on the ship so fast you hardly have time to start burning, the air slamming into your feet so hard it feels like you’re standing sideways. You hit the ship, and keep on going. You see a brief flash of shocked faces, twisted metal corridors, and several important systems, before you’re suddenly looking at open sky.

When you turn around, you discover that you’ve burned straight through the ship and come out the other end. You see a few trolls jumping from the openings you’ve made, but they’re swallowed up in the ensuing explosion before they can get anywhere.

The other ships seem to pause in their attack as the ship crashes into the ocean below. They’re probably as amazed by that as you are. John doesn’t waste any time, throwing another wind punch into a pair of ships flying too close together. They crash into each other, but manage to recover, as their allies resume firing.

When you fly back into the fray you’re grinning like crazy. Your odds are still shit, but if you keep this up, you may have a chance to win this thing after all.

Your name is Karkat Vantas, and this is the last fucking place you ever wanted to be. Well, that’s not true actually. Once upon a time, standing in the Imperial Flagship was everything you’d ever wanted. Once, you dreamed of somehow overcoming your mutant status to be a proper Threshecutioner, and standing proud as an Alternian soldier.

You were such a fucking idiot back then.

As it stands, you’re currently feeling just a little bit overwhelmed. This place has been a setting in both dreams and nightmares you’ve had for sweeps. You’re standing in the middle of the Condesce’s War Room, the place where she meets with her most trusted subjects. In the heat of battle it is left unused; the time for talk is long over with John and Sollux fighting outside.

Jade’s voice causes you to snap back into focus. “I don’t sense anybody out there!” She says resolutely. “I think you’ll be safe to leave.”

“All right fuckers let’s go over the key points of the plan here.” You bark out impatiently. “Once we leave this room we need to move fast. Does everybody know where they’re heading?” You see nods all around and grunt in approval. “Good. Now, Sollux’s blueprints should account for just about everything, but some hallways may be shuffled, and we have no idea where emergency access tunnels are because he never got his hands on them.

“Our only chance is to get security down ASAP. As long as they’re active we can’t communicate with each other because who the fuck knows whether they can listen in on our devices. We also have no idea what they can see out there, but The Condesce is an arrogant bitch, so she probably doesn’t care enough about security to put cameras everywhere. I’m guessing only at key junctions and critical systems, maybe some extra near the Security Center itself.”

“Which is where I come in!” Jade raises a hand cheerfully.

“Damn fucking right it is. Keep their attention, and avoid anything too important. You should get started. Do you have the pad?”

Jade points to Dave, who stoically pulls a small metal disc out of his pocket. He sets it at the farthest end of the room from the doors, and Jade uses her spatial distortion abilities to enlarge it into a full
sized transportalizer. You nod in approval.

“Alright fuckwits, we’re good to go. Just remember, don’t fucking call anyone until the blackout team gives the go-ahead.”

Equius nods and moves to the door. “I will depart then. I have the most ground to cover.”

Rose calls out before he can leave. “Equius, be careful. I sense... something is at play here. I’m not sure what fate has in store for us, but you in particular... there seems to be fewer good options for you than anyone else.” She looks around the room. “I have nothing concrete, no precognitive visions to share. I just know this will be even harder than we first thought.”

“Sounds like a good time.” Dirk comments dryly, as the tension thickens over the room. You sigh in exasperation.

“What the fuck Rose, we’re already shitting ourselves here! Was the prophecy of doom really necessary?”

Rose shrugs, though you can see in her face that she’s not thrilled either. “As I said, I don’t see anything in particular. No deaths, no hidden threats. It’s just... chaotic. That could mean trouble, but it could just as easily be the key to our success.”

You’re about to launch into a truly inspirational tirade when you notice Nepeta tug on the hem of your shirt. You turn around and see that she’s not even looking at you, instead watching as Aradia and Equius murmur to each other softly by the door.

“You’re not going to say goodbye?” You ask Nepeta softly. You take a step closer and she seems to melt into your side. Your blood pusher shudders at the contact, and you wish you’d been honest with Nepeta ages ago when she chased you that night as you left the FELT base. Rather, you wish you’d been more honest with yourself, and paid attention to the crushing weight of emotion you felt the first time she said that she loved you, rather than trying to stamp it out and run away.

You’ve been with her for no more than a few hours, and now you’re both about to head off into certain death. When you think about all the time you wasted acting like a complete fucking coward it pisses you off enough that you want to reach back through time and slap past you in the fucking face.

Nepeta’s response brings you back to reality. “They need this time more than I do. They want to use every second they have left to figure out what they have, and I won’t get in the way of that.”

You wrap an arm around Nepeta and pull her closer. “I guess we should do the same, huh?”

“Karkitty, I had you figured out years ago.” Nepeta smirks at you. “Ever since the first time you yelled at me I knew what kind of guy you were. You could nefur hide how much you cared about everything.”

“Bullshit. I am a mystery wrapped in an enigma. The inner workings of my mind are too deep to be comprehended by mortal minds, it’s just too complicated to be possible.”

“Not fur me.”

The next precious moments are just spent squeezing Nepeta to your side and smiling like a fucking idiot, because there’s really no other appropriate reaction to something that disgustingly sweet.

Finally, Equius walks over to the two of you and Nepeta disentangles herself from your side. You
watch as Equius brings his hand up to hover in the air next to Nepeta’s face, and she closes the gap with a gentle lean.

Equius’ eyes dart up to meet yours, only for an instant, and you nod. Even when he wanted nothing more than to kill you, and even when you thought he was just another shallow high-blooded prick, you always admired the way he and Nepeta just… worked. Equius responds with the slightest dip in his head. It’s not respect, not really, but it’s not hate, and that’s a pretty big fucking improvement.

Before you can reflect any further though, Equius breaks contact with Nepeta and moves for the door. Dave is the last one to speak, just as Equius is leaving the room, with a call of “Do the Strider Clan proud, dude.” There’s no response; all you can hear is the low thud of footsteps as Equius runs into the depths of the ship.

Just like that, everyone starts getting ready to move; you barely have any time before Nepeta is leaving as well, giving you a quick kiss on the lips before slinking away with Aradia. Rose pats you on the shoulder reassuringly and smiles, saying “Don’t worry Karkat, I will do my utmost to ensure her safety.” She leaves after them before you can respond.

Jade claps her hands and smiles cheerfully as the door swings shut. “Okay, I guess it’s our turn!” Dave nods, checking over his sword one last time before walking next to her. Jake rises from the corner looking pale, and you find yourself realizing suddenly just how unusually quiet he’s been this whole time. Before you can mention anything though, Jade flicks her wrist and the three of them vanish in a flash of light.

“Well ladies, guess it’s just us.” Dirk nods to you and Feferi. “Guess we’d better head for the bridge.”

Your name is Rose Lalonde, and you have now long since left your hiding place behind. You have been traversing long hallways of garish red metal for roughly half an hour, along with Aradia and Nepeta. Your destination: the primary center of the Imperial Flagship’s communication and security.

You lead the charge, gathering light in the tips of your needles as you go. So far, there has been an unnerving lack of trolls along the way, but you have no doubt that unless you reach your destination that will no longer be the case. There are likely few trolls wandering about in this crisis period, they will be detained with repairing whatever havoc Sollux wrought with his ambush, if not preparing their retaliation.

“According to the blueprints Sollux provided for us we have to go two floors up, and then head for the back of the ship.” Aradia intones as she follows behind you. “We’ll reach the stairs at the end of this hallway. I’d guess we’d be there in about ten minutes.”

“Isn’t there some kind of teleporter or something we can use to get around instead?” You gasp. To your shame cardio continues to not be your forte. You’re starting to wish you’d learned how your grimdark self was able to fly, instead of shooting lighting. Fuck that though, your lightning is amazing.

“Any faster methods would involve alerting the ship to our presence.” Aradia shakes her head, struggling for breath as well. “Better to take the long way. Alright, the door should be right around this corner.”

“Alright! Let’s go!” Nepeta cheers and bounds ahead effortlessly. “The sooner we get this done, the sooner I can get to Karkat… or Equius, or… I HAVE NO IDEA WHO I SHOULD CHASE
“AFTER THIS!” She lets out an exasperated yowl and disappears around the corner. “FUCK!”

“Nepeta? What’s the matter?” You ask worriedly as you trail around the corner behind her. The problem is immediately apparent. Rather than a door, the corner has led to a dead end. Nepeta is kicking at the wall furiously, but it rather predictably is proving ineffective.

“Damn!” Aradia curses as she rounds the corner behind you. “They must have fucked with the layout! We’ll have to go back and find a way around.”

“No need.” You reply calmly. “I’ll just burn my way through.”

“Rose, that’ll draw too much attention.” Aradia protests.

“No more than Equius will soon be drawing should we fail to accomplish our objective in time.” You reply coolly. “This won’t take a minute.”

As it happens, it doesn’t take more than a few seconds; you’ve hardly made a single cut in the wall before Aradia uses the opening to tear the wall apart. Evidently mentioning her matesprit proved to be more than sufficient motivation.

There is a long hallway past the opening, stretching on a long ways both left and right. “They must have closed the corridor to make this hallway?” You surmise irritably. “Hardly a clever design.”

“Troll architecture is notoriously convoluted.” Nepeta replies with a shrug. “That’s why I just live in a cave. No purroblems with silly buildings that way!”

“I bet.” You reply with a smile. “At any rate, the stairs should be just through that door there.” You step out into the hallway, but freeze when a flash of movement catches the corner of your eye.

It’s Nepeta who reacts first, throwing herself on you just in time to knock you out of the way of a bullet that was aimed right for your head. Your vision goes fuzzy as your head hits the floor, but you’re sure that’s better than the alternative. You catch a glimpse of the assailant as Nepeta drags you back into the opening.

“He’s human!” You gasp in alarm as Aradia attempts to peer out into the hallway. “There are humans on this ship.”

Aradia hisses as a bullet pings off the wall beside her, forcing her to recoil out of sight. “I think I remember him from the Egbert’s house! He’s with the FELT!”

“That’s so stupid! Why would they team up with the Alternian Empire?” Nepeta exclaims in disbelief.

“Not sure, but if the FELT are involved in this then we need to get to the communication center that much faster.” You state grimly. “Until we’ve ensured that they can’t intercept our communications we won’t be able to warn the others.”

“He’s a purretty good shot though!” Nepeta exclaims, gesturing wildly as another bullet bounces off the edge of your makeshift doorway.

“I’m… not great with bullets.” Aradia shifts uncomfortably. “I can shield us across the hallway, but if he follows I’ll run out of energy too fast for what I need to be doing.”

“Well then, that leaves one option.” You give your most dangerous smile and approach the hallway. “I will occupy our assailant. You two go on ahead.”
“Are you sure?” Nepeta asks anxiously. “You only just learned how to use your magic stuff.”

“Well then I guess we’ll have to field test this a little prematurely.” Your needles crackle with energy. “On my signal.”

You arrive right at the edge, and stick a needle out experimentally. A bullet bounces off the doorway so close it seems impossible. You’ll need to try a different approach. You step backwards, walking all the way to the corner, before taking a deep breath and charging at top speed, letting out a fearsome battle cry.

“YOUTH ROLL!” You shout triumphantly as you curl into a ball and somersault into the hallway, landing on a knee and letting a blast of lighting fly at your attacker. You hear a shriek of panic and turn back to your friends, “Abscond now!”

Aradia and Nepeta race past you as you release the energy pent up in your second wand, and you witness a short man dressed all in black duck around the corner. You check to ensure that your friends have headed for the upper levels, and upon confirming that they indeed have safely escaped you pursue the FELT member.

When you round the corner after him he almost shoots you again, but this time you drain the light from around you, and evade by bathing the hallway in darkness.

Your blast of lightning returns the lighting to normal, and you’re pleased to see that the man is once again running. Truly this man is a fool above all others, bringing a gun to a lighting fight. You pursue gamely.

It’s only when you reach the next room that you realize, far too late, that the short man has duped you. There are no less than four other humans with automatic weapons in this room, which appears to be a sort of museum for The Condesce’s achievements. You fire a last bolt of lightning at your prey before diving behind a nearby statue of The Condesce stabbing a lowblooded troll.

You have enough time before you get out of the way though to notice that, to your horror, the small man seems to split into two people, both identical. They land in perfect symmetry and fire their pistols simultaneously, ripping chunks out of your cover.

You could almost laugh. They’re identical twins, most likely, or else they are simply cursed with the same stupid face on a stout body. These doppelgangers are clearly skilled enough to make your life miserable though, so you have little choice but to hunker down and pray that the communications ban lifts as soon as possible. This will be more than you can hope to handle alone.

Your name is Equius Zahhak, and you are in this fight alone. There will be no assistance in your mission. Not from Nepeta or Aradia, who share your quadrants. Not from Dave or Kanaya, your friends. It will be just you, and you alone, against what will no doubt be the most well defended position in the entire ship.

Your allies would likely see it as depressing that you still feel that this is appropriate.

It is exceedingly simple though. Of all the trolls and humans in your group, you are physically the strongest by far. Even John Egbert, with his impressive power known by him as ‘mangrit,’ pales before you in terms of musculature. And so with your incredible strength, you can fight longer than any other in your group. This was your logic, as accepted by Rose Lalonde.

Truly, yours is the most vital role in bringing the downfall of The Condesce. You are not with the
battle team, fighting the Condesce herself, or the aerial assault team, destroying the fleet. They are in all likelihood doomed to fail. But you are the failsafe. Your duty is to find the heart of the Flagship, and if all else fails, destroy it. Executing this plan will mean the guaranteed doom of The Condesce, who will either perish in flames, or be trapped on this planet for an eternity. It is inelegant, but it is a sound plan nonetheless.

You tread slowly, unwilling to compromise your position before the saboteurs have usurped control of communication. But the further on you tread, the more you begin to feel that your worry may be unfounded. There has not been a sign of a troll since your appearance on the ship, meaning that any alarms triggered would have little effect on your surroundings.

It does however mean that you are in critical danger regardless of the status of the alarm. The black bowels of this ship do not bode well for your current situation.

Wait.

“Black bowels?” You mutter to yourself, “What has happened to the lights?” You reach up to your face and remember that your lack of a right ear makes wearing sunglasses difficult now. This darkness is entirely real.

You turn back the way you came and see that the lights behind you have shut off as well. The only visible light is so far down the corridor that it exists merely as a pinprick of white in your vision. You spend several minutes debating, before deciding to turn back and find a path with proper illumination.

You take two steps before the light comes back on, and you find yourself frozen in place once more. The lights were not shut off; they are simply covered in blood. Troll blood, smeared about the corridor in all of its blues and violets and greens, is covering the casings for the lights. The one source of light in this hallway comes from a wall lamp that had its protective casing ripped off. You didn’t even hear it happen.

You hear the honking though.

“This shouldn’t be possible.” You mutter uneasily. “It’s ludicrous to think he could even be up here. The crew would have noticed something.”

“Only if I motherfucking LET THEM.” A voice whispers in your ear. You whirl around, but with only one arm Gamzee Makara dances around you easily, and simply melts, like a shadow, into the darkness of the corridor.

You hear the honking though.

“Better hurry the fuck up you slow motherfucker! ALL KINDS OF SCARY SHIT IN THE DARK. Who the fuck knows what’s getting their hiding up in here?”

“It’s rather easy to extrapolate.” You mutter drily. You take another step, and swipe out as you spot Gamzee emerge from the shadows. But his movements are too fast for you; he simply cuts your arm and vanishes again. Catching him appears to be completely beyond your means.

You sigh as Gamzee honks at you from the shadows, and grab the wall beside you. It’s slippery with blood, but your strength allows you to push into it easily, until you are able to grab a fistful of metal
and rip a panel off of the wall. You hold it in front of you like a shield, plant your feet, and propel yourself forward.

There’s a light clinking sound as Gamzee’s knife bounces off of your makeshift shield, and you know somehow that he hit it only because he felt like it. Still, he’s unable to stand before you moving at a decent speed, and you fly down the corridor in an instant, so fast that even Gamzee will need a moment to catch up to you. You emerge from the corridor trailing blood as a spray in your wake, tumbling down a flight of stairs and sliding to a stop. It takes you a moment to pull yourself off the ground, and when you do you find that you’ve reached your destination.

You stand at the core of the Imperial Flagship: The Psionic Conversion Reactor. It hangs in the middle of the room, and indeed looks like a heart made of metal. At its top you can see the tangled mass of cords that draw power from the Helmsman, trapped at the bridge far above you. Here, the power is converted and diverted into the crucial systems, propulsion and primary weapons. Other minor systems have their own reactors, with psionics that are typically spent every few sweeps and disposed of. Only the mythical Helmsman could power this primary reactor, and he does so to the point that it glows yellow despite being made entirely of the same red metals the rest of the ship is composed of. Even Sollux would likely not suffice as fuel for this system.

A glance around the room confirms your suspicions: the several hundred or so soldiers and scientists hired to maintain this reactor are the source of the hall of blood. Gamzee has been busy here. The wounds are all fatal, apparently inflicted with whatever objects were lying nearby. One troll was clearly bludgeoned with a bottle; his own lance has impaled another, and still another seems to have been gored by the horns of the troll next to him. Almost all the wounds are from behind, and the bodies lay slumped where they fell, if they haven’t been torn to pieces for Gamzee’s twisted gallery.

You are immensely glad your friends are not present to see you when you fall to your knees and vomit. The act of weakness brings almost more shame than you can bear.

“Motherfucking beautiful, isn’t it?” Gamzee’s voice causes you to raise your head wearily, as he walks into the doorway behind you. “All this color, all this pain, all the motherfucking WORMS WHAT BEEN TAUGHT JUST HOW PRECIOUS FEAR IS. Kill the first ones slow, SO THE HORRORS CAN REACH THEM, but not too potent to make them run. THAT’S HOW FUCKING HORRIBLE SHE IS. Even as they fell like motherfucking flies, THEY STILL FEARED HER MORE.”

You get up and turn around, feeling more composed even as Gamzee smiles sweetly down at you. “If I was really feeling devoted to the craft I wouldn’t do anything. THE BEST PAIN YOU CAN FEEL IS KNOWING YOU’VE STRUGGLED FOR NOTHING. She’s above all of us still, AND A GODDAMN CORPSE PARTY LIKE THIS WON’T MAKE HER RETHINK THAT SHIT. I’d love to see the look on your face when you realize that. BUT THIS IS PERSONAL BUSINESS FOR ME. Gotta make you bleed myself.”

“You said before that I was not to be your first target anymore.” You reply warily. Surely he hasn’t killed Aradia and Nepeta while you were gone, even he couldn’t move that fast!

“THAT DEPENDS. I’m gonna leave this up to you.” Gamzee smiles as he reaches behind his back. “MAKE YOURSELF WORTH KILLING. Otherwise I’ll do exactly what I fucking said I would.” He pulls out a pair of curved yellow bludgeons, and by the time you’ve recognized them as Tavros’ horns he’s already upon you.

Chapter End Notes
That was the last calm you’ll get, readers. From here on out it’s all going to get completely fucking crazy. And lord only knows how many chapters will be left, I’m already cutting this first chapter off early from my set timeline. I can’t contain this climax people it’s already getting away from me!
No Point in Regrets

Chapter Summary

The Condesce strikes back, and everybody tries to keep their shit together.

Chapter Notes

You know, when I started this chapter I wanted to finish it up in July? I was hoping I could just write solidly and finish things by the end of the month, so I could say it only took me a year to write the whole thing. Well that worked well, didn't it? Anyways, a whole fucking month later and it's finally done, so I guess I'll just move on and wish everyone a happy anniversary! It's enough to make me feel all wishy-washy, but there'll be plenty of time for that once I've finished. On with the show!

Your name is Terezi Pyrope, and this may finally be your chance. All this time spent stuck behind bars on trumped up charges will soon be made right by the fortunate tidings of circumstance. You’ve spent several days trapped in the depths of the Imperial holding cells, but the rumblings in the floor tell you that the tides are turning.

Something is happening that to your knowledge has never been attempted before. The Imperial Flagship is being challenged. You can only imagine that it is the work of your once comrades. You’re sure nobody else could be so desperate. All around you the sounds of cheering and shouting and insane shrieks can be heard. You and your prey are hardly the only ones trapped in this place, and your neighbors can feel the change as clearly as you.

You don’t like it, but all you can do is wait for now. Nobody knows what’s going on outside the prison, but you can all sense change. It’s enough to bring some degree of focus back to your mind. Your instincts know that this is your only chance, that your desires for vengeance cannot further cloud your judgment.

Your mind still craves the taste of cobalt blood though, and so you feel your focus sharpening on the cell further into the hall, where Vriska stays. This is how you can hear the sounds of clattering, like a stone on the floor.

“VRISKA!” Your roar is inaudible next to the sound of a high pitched buzz, blocking out all other sound until you can only hear it’s incessant whine. There’s a brief moment where the energy barrier running across your cell’s doors breaks, but it comes on again before you can fully register the malfunction.

You try to stand, but find your balance distorted. You can smell a hint of blue raspberry, and realize that your ears are bleeding. The damage has clearly affected your balance as well. In the end you place both claws on the wall and pull yourself upright. When you turn back to the cell door Vriska is there.
“…” Vriska is talking, but all you can hear is a low buzz. You sniff the air, and find that you can detect the faintest whiff of blueberries. Vriska’s strange attack clearly damaged her own ears as well, and you wonder if she can even hear what she’s saying. Probably. Her ears aren’t as sensitive as your own, and with her love for hearing her own voice she’d likely defy deafness on principle.

You sense motion further down the hall, and suddenly Vriska vanishes. She clashes with two people, likely guards, and flees, leaving them alive. She no doubt hopes they will provide a distraction in the case you should escape. You try to follow, but drawing close to the door causes the forcefield to react, crackling the air and tickling your nose like soda bubbles.

You sigh, tear a strip out of your shirt, and start attempting to clean the blood from your ears. Your situation has not changed, even with Vriska on the run. All you can do is wait. But now that Vriska is on the loose you’ll have to be at your best if you’re going to survive this day.

Your name is Jade Harley, and you can’t tell what’s going on anymore! You’re trying to keep your senses locked onto everyone, but the further apart they get the harder it becomes, and you’re having a hard time wrapping your mind around the twists and turns of the Flagship. This place is like a labyrinth, built so erratically that even you can’t make sense of it!

“Jade.” Dave’s voice snaps you out of your reverie, as he appears suddenly by your side. “I don’t know what this place is or what that machine does, but it’s been blown the fuck up. Let’s find something else.”

“Right!” You agree cheerfully. “Okay, let’s see here, there’s a big room a few floors down from us. I think it’s some sort of hangar. Or maybe we should break this other minor system a level up? I don’t know, it might not even be minor! Why don’t we have a troll with us to tell us what we should break? This is so stupid!”

“Tell me about it. We’re like a single cat in a room where the wall is made of laser pointers. We have literally no idea what to chase. Can’t tell what’s important, what isn’t, how well guarded it might be, what it does or where the bathroom is.”

You give Dave a stern look. “If you start yammering about needing to use the toilet I will teleport you back to the island right now. In the forest.”

“Aww no, I can’t do my business where all the weird troll dads could be watching! That’s messed up Jade.” Dave hangs his head.

“What’s the matter, worried you won’t be able to look the trolls in the eye after this? You’re right, how will you sweep them off their feet then?” You tease, as you start looking around for your brother. “You know that literally every single one of the trolls is taken, right?” You stop and think about that statement for a moment. “Actually the only single people on our team are you, me, and Jane. That kinda sucks!”

“Not true. Our older bros still haven’t made shit official yet. I’m pretty sure they’re the only ones to not jump on the ‘let’s bone before we die’ bandwagon. Not sure if they’re above that shit or way, way fucking below it.”

“Probably the latter.” You roll your eyes as you see Jake walk out from behind the big… thing he and Dave just broke. “Our brothers are pretty much both complete social outcasts at this point.”

Jake finally reaches the two of you as you’re saying this and smiles cheerfully. “Well sis, hope
you’re not having a laugh at my expense while I’ve been off finishing business.”

“Believe me, I could never laugh at you.” You frown at him. “You’re a mess, but you’re still family.”

“Damned if that ain’t the sweetest thing I’ve ever heard.” Dave cuts in. “Seriously though, let’s get going before more trolls show up.”

“Right!” You salute Dave with a grin and start looking around, sensing for the locations you were scouting earlier. “Okay, eeny, meeny, miny, mo!”

“Aww shit, now we’re talking.” Dave nods in approval. “The scientific method.”

You punch him in the arm and he smirks at you, and you finally gather your focus around the three of you. You shift your way to the minor system you detected before, and arrive in a flash of green lighting.

It’s funny, you think, as you touch down and Dave vanishes from your side. You could have sworn that, in the instant before you left, you detected an entirely different source of energy like your own nearby.

The roar of a troll causes you to snap out of it, and you dive out of the way as a war hammer slams into the ground right where you were standing. You click your tongue in annoyance and bring your rifle up to his head while he’s attempting to heft his weapon. There’s a pop from your gun, and suddenly his head burst with blue.

You can’t afford to keep getting distracted. You’ve got a job to do.

Your name is Eridan Ampora, and things have gone from bad to worse. The crew of the flagship has taken severe casualties, particularly in the Psionic Conversion Reactor, also known as the second most important area of the fucking ship. Meanwhile the bridge has lost more than half of its crew, leaving only a few dozen trolls manning stations. The reports that are coming in aren’t good.

“We have two highbloods with extreme physical mutations fighting in the Reactor zone. All surviving crew are severely injured…”

“Security is activating perimeter defenses, they have detected unauthorized approach from two trolls, one of which is a class eight psionic…”

“We have multiple hull breaches from the class ten that our engineers don’t have the time to repair…”

“Sound based disturbance in the main cell block, security has been restored, but several high profile prisoners have escaped and are fighting the guards.”

“All members of the FELT have disappeared from their quarters, two of their overseers are recovering from minor stab wounds.”

“The stabs were not intended as an attack.” Doctor Scratch states calmly, turning to Her Imperious Condescension. “My second in command, Spades, has a tendency for using stabs as a greeting if he becomes stressed.”

“Oh well, that’s fine then, isn’t it?” You snap at him irritably. “That’s pretty fucking normal, really.
Why don’t you keep your men under control, and do something to help the situation, and then you can talk about stress!”

Scratch tilts his head in a way you’re sure is just meant to piss you off. “Oh? But they are helping. I have word that my men have cornered one of the humans and are subduing her as we speak. In fact, it’s the same human whom you failed to subdue before your impromptu contact with this vessel.”

“One human? That’s the best you can do?” The Condesce says coldly.

“Certainly it’s the most my lesser soldiers are capable of.” Scratch nods solemnly. “They are, after all, only men with guns. My best men are still on the move, tracking down the enemy within.”

“Well waterver. I have my own ways of dealing with things.” The Condesce sighs, walking forward and pressing a button on her personal station. It’s the only button on her station, actually, used solely for sending orders to the ship. Everyone’s day is about to get much worse.

“ATTENTION PRAWNS. THIS IS YOUR MOTHER GLUBBING GODDESS SPEAKING. THE IMPERIAL FLAGSHIP IS OFFICIALLY ENTERING A STATE OF EMERGENCY. ALL INACTIVE CREW HAD BETA REPORT TO THEIR STATIONS ASAP. MOBILE SECURITY TEAMS ARE NOW IN EFFECT, AND WILL REPORT TO THEIR ROUTES IMMEDIATELY. EMPRESS OUT.”

You knew this was coming. Unlike other ships, which run crew on two shifts, the Flagship runs three shifts of trolls for every station. This means that the people on every station are always running at maximum efficiency, and are also able to be called upon to swarm the ship with as many as a million trolls.

You’re seething at this point, and you don’t want The Condesce to see it, so you announce that you’re going to patrol the area outside and abscond while The Condesce is preoccupied. She knows all you can really tell her at this point, so you’re useless there anyways.

You get three steps out of the bridge before you have to punch the wall. It dents, but far more damage is probably done to your hand. If Equius or Fef had thrown that punch the wall would probably be ripped apart, and you’re reminded again how weak you really are. It makes you even madder, and now you want to punch the wall again. Only the sight of blood trickling from your knuckles keeps your head clear.

Those fucking idiots.

You told them.

You told them they had no chance, and they didn’t fucking listen. They just ran blindly into oblivion. That alone is ridiculous enough, but what’s worse is just what a goddamn terrible job they’re doing of things. It’s fucking laughable. The only person who’s done any real damage is Gamzee, and he’s no more than a fucking dog running around off his leash. He doesn’t have a plan besides break anything in sight.

They’re going to die.

Your friends are going to be rounded up and killed like animals, all because they refused to listen to you. You told them what waited for them if they didn’t follow, and now the Empire will crush them.

“Fuck.” You mutter as you tear a strip from your old cape. “Why couldn’t they just listen to me? I’m pretty clearly the only one with any sense around here.” You start wrapping the piece of cloth around your bloody knuckles. “Just another case of my talent and genius going completely unappreciated.
You look back at your cape forlornly. It’s seen better days, being covered with rips and tears from the different scrapes you’ve been in over the past year. There are burns along one corner from the fires of the scratch base, a small fuchsia stain from when Feferi got sucker punched by Gamzee, several tears from when you had to dig it out from under a rock, and so much damage from salt water that you can barely see the old map that Kanaya once sewed into it. “This used to be pretty fucking impressive looking. Gonna need to find somebody who can tailor it properly back on Alternia…”

You know there’s no saving this thing. It’s been damaged beyond repair, tattered and worn through from what was probably the most eventful year of your life. You lost half of your rings, you haven’t been able to dye your hair in weeks, and you still have a scar or two from fighting Gamzee. You remember looking in a mirror for the first time on Jade’s ship and being dismayed. Now you wear your scars with pride.

You glare down at the violet colour wrapped around your hand as you reflect on this. There’s no doubt that you’ll have scars from this as well, but you’re not proud of these ones. You doubt you’ll have anything to feel proud of at the end of the day.

“I just need to focus.” You mutter to yourself. “No point in regrets anymore, I’ve done the only thing I can. Gotta do whatever it takes to survive. They’re going to die, and I’m going to live.”

You grab Ahab’s Crosshairs from the floor beside you and move down the hallway. You came here so that you can live through this travesty, and you’re not going to let anything get in the way of that. Not your friends, and not yourself. That’s the only way to get by.

Doesn’t stop you from thinking that you’re pretty fucking hopeless either way though.

Your name is Aradia Megido, and things are getting complicated. Way more complicated than you expected them to be this early into the plan. The Condesce has just sent out a kill on sight order for everyone in your group, meaning that you and Nepeta were too late to get your job done.

“Purradia, what do we do?” Nepeta cries out in distress as she peers down the hall. “There’s already trolls arriving at the security center, and it won’t be long until more are right on our tail, too!”

“We have to get in there now.” You mutter more to yourself than Nepeta. “If we don’t take their communications apart then Dirk won’t be able to finish his job. If only we had Rose’s firepower this would be much easier!”

“Can you do anything?” Nepeta asks in a panic. “I know you’re not as dangerous as whatever Rose figured out this meowing, but I can’t fight at a distance so you’re our only chance!”

You check around the corner behind you and see a group of trolls approaching from behind. You have no choice. You grasp at the air with your hands and latch onto the walls with your telekinesis, twisting the corridor shut.

And as you do, the whispers of the dead grow to a soft murmur.

You still don’t like to think about the voices of the dead, but they never really leave you. Something about Equius seems to keep them at bay, but now that he’s running to the far end of a space ship several miles long, you’re officially further away from him than you’ve been since Dave brought him to the Egbert’s doorstep, not counting those few minutes in the heat of things when you fought the FELT.

The spirits of the dead have been waiting for Equius’ strange block to fade, and now that he’s gone,
they feel obligated to remind you that he’s about to die.

*It’s happening right now.*

*Him and the clown.*

*You should have listened.*

*“ARADIA.”*

You jump a little as Nepeta’s cry snaps you out of your reverie. “We have to move NYAOW. What’s the plan?”

She’s as worried as you are. Not because of the dead, or the trolls closing in, or the dangerous situation everyone’s in. She just worries. She always worries about everyone, because that’s just how she is. You need to make sure that she’s not too busy worrying about you on top of everything else.

“Cover me.” You snap, rushing around the corner. The hallway is filling with trolls now, as more arrive at the communications center and start searching for intruders nearby. They know you’re coming.

You smile to yourself. “Well, it figures that they’d be able to sense us! That doesn’t mean they can handle us though!” One of the trolls near the head of the pack spots you and yells, raising a pistol. “Well that won’t do!” You declare, slapping his hand aside with telekinesis. The bullet flies past your ear, and you feel blood rushing to your head as you start to get worked up further.

“Not. Cool.”

You’re torn between laughing and screaming, as you start pushing your way down the hall. You suppose the term would be manic? Another shot flies by, this one ripping a chunk of skin out of your leg, and you start laughing hysterically. Yup, you’re in a full blown fit of manic destruction.

It feels fucking incredible.

The trolls are tumbling backwards as you throw your considerable telekinetic weight at them. There’s panicked yelling as they tumble over each other in the hallway. There’s enough room for two full-grown highbloods to walk side by side in here, but with your powers you can occupy the whole thing easily. You feel a jolt of pain through your leg as you step forward and start levitating, and anybody who wasn’t aware of what you were doing is suddenly painfully aware.

“Fall back! Clear the hallway!”

“Physical combat won’t work, they’re saying she’s class eight at least!”

“Anyone with ranged weapons, start using them!”

The hallway becomes a mess of bullets and arrows in moments, and you have to throw up more psychic shielding than you thought you were capable of. It’s been a while since you exerted yourself like this, and the absolute exhilaration it brings you is enough to make you giddy.

You think you used to be a class nine, actually. Back before you died, that is. It’s nice to have that sort of power again. You’ve really missed the hell out of it.

The bullets and arrows can’t break through to you, and as they bounce against your shield, you start flicking them back. They’re light enough that moving them takes little effort, and it’s only a matter of
minutes before you start hearing screams from ahead of you. The shooting stops for only a moment, before you hear an enraged bellow.

That’s when a troll tosses a fucking throwing axe at your head. It’s big enough to punch through your psychic shielding, and you find yourself remembering in startling clarity just how far from recovered you are.

Thankfully Nepeta is still behind you, and has been waiting for things to get serious. Her claws are fast, almost invisible to your eye, and the axe gets knocked aside effortlessly.

“Keep moving.” She hisses at you. “You stop the bullets, and I’ll stop everything else.”

You can feel yourself smiling again, even as the troll who threw the axe closes in on you. Nepeta’s smiling too at this point, and you start laughing again as she catches the guy and throws him over your head in a fluid motion. You hear screaming as she pounces after him, and a bit of purple blood flies past you.

You can see your destination clearly from here, and with little to use for cover, the other trolls start retreating into the communications room. A few other braver trolls rush you, but you pepper one with bullets and watch as Nepeta easily disembowels the others. Finally they close off the room as a last resort. If you try to get in, they’ll be able to pick you off immediately.

“That’s okay!” You grin as you place your hands on the walls. “I don’t need to get inside to do what I’m supposed to do anyways!”

It takes a few moments until you’ve managed to properly wrap your head around things; by which you mean that you focus as best as you can, before crumpling the room like a paper ball. It’s a long process, taking several minutes, and you think most of the trolls manage to get out. But they don’t matter. All that matters is destroying the room itself.

By the end of it the other side of the door from you is just a solid mass of twisted metal and ruined electronics. You finish by pushing the remnants of the room away from you, and you and Nepeta watch silently as the ball of metal falls to the ground a floor down. The space where the Flagship used to house it’s communications center is now a gaping hole, and you can see into every single room and hallway that used to be adjacent to it.

Which is where most of the other trolls seem to have remained.

Nepeta notices them first; grabbing and pulling you back just in time. The bullet one fires chips your horn and you can barely stop from screaming. You retreat in panic, stopping a ways down the hallway and pulling up the floor to serve as a haphazard shield.

“So, what do we do meow?” Nepeta asks anxiously.

“We hope that our friends can get to us first.” You sigh, raising a hand to your head. “I’ve got nothing left but fumes here.”

“Got it.” Nepeta nods and pulls an earpiece out of her coat pocket. “Let’s hope these things work.”

Your name is Karkat Vantas, and you are somehow not dead yet. By all rights you should be a smear on the walls by now, but your ever fickle luck seems to have decided that your suffering should be prolonged as much as possible, so here you are.
It was too much to hope for that things would go according to plan. You realize that now, as trolls rush at you from all sides. Really, all you wanted was for things to stay quiet until you got to the bridge. That was the plan. Get to the bridge, fight the Condesce, and get killed. It was all you had, the closest to a plan that you could come up with.

“God fucking damn it!” You scream angrily as you dive out of the way of a green blood with a saber. “If I’m going to die I’m going to fucking die where I decided to die you ugly piece of shit!”

“I’m not risking pissing the Condesce off for your pride you little shit!” The green blood screams back as he advances.

Well, that’s fair enough. You’re still not feeling too merciful though. You slice out his ankles as you dive under his next strike, and slash his throat as he crumples. The blood that covers your sickles is just a few shades north of olive, and you suddenly feel nauseous.

“I’M GETTING REALLY FUCKING TIRED OF THIS SHIT.” You scream irritably, ducking around the mass of flailing weapons and screaming trolls surrounding you. “DIRK, FEFERI, WHERE THE FUCK ARE YOU USELESS BULGESTAINS?” You cut another troll open, and the blue blood that spills out doesn’t make you feel any less queasy.

“Why the fuck does our group have to be so fucking diverse, I can’t kill a single one of these pricks without being reminded of somebody I don’t want dead.” You mutter as you parry a spear thrust at your gut.

“Damn Karkat, look at you with all your groupies. We’re over here working our asses off and you’re just chilling out getting up to all kinds of raunchy shenanigans.” Dirk states calmly from behind you. Feferi appears on your left and impales a troll trying to flank you, smirking all the while.

You breathe a sigh of relief as you finish killing the troll with the spear, while Dirk just sends a blast of his fucked up pink lightning into the rest of the group. They fall to the ground with a collective scream that cuts off far too quickly for your liking, and Dirk pauses to note, “They’re just unconscious, but they’ll be that way for a few days at least. Electric sucker punches to the soul are pretty fucking potent.”

“How the flying fuck did the humans even make something like you?” You gasp in disbelief. Dirk just shrugs and moves ahead, where Feferi is already rounding the corner. If you had to guess you’d say Dirk’s probably as unnerved by his ability as you are.

You’re just about to follow after the others when you hear Nepeta’s voice in your ear, and it’s so goddamn relieving to you that it’s all you can do to stay standing.

“Hello? Is efurrybody there? This is Nepeta reporting that we have succeeded in our mission!”

“Nepeta!” You gasp out, as Dirk and Feferi turn back to group up with you. “Holy shit, are you okay? I thought you’d be done like twenty minutes ago!”

“Well everybody, it looks like Karkat’s the clingy type.” Dave’s voice cuts in. “Just wait, this won’t end when we’ve saved the world, he’s going to spend the rest of his life checking his troll phone for cat puns.”

“Shut the fuck up Dave, we’re waiting for a status update here!” You yell angrily. “Now seriously Nepeta, what happened?”

“What happened is that I was separated from our little group.” Rose cuts in, sounding far more harried than you’ve ever heard her. “And might I add that some backup would be severely
appreciated."

“Do you know where you are? I can be there right away!” Jade replies swiftly.

“I’m in some sort of museum.” Rose replies, and you suddenly realize holy shit there’s gunfire in the background. “Unfortunately, I believe that it is a recent addition, as none of the neighboring hallways match the blueprints. I couldn’t tell you the exact coordinates.”

“FUCK.” Sollux’s voice rings in next, though even yelling he’s barely audible over the howling of wind and heavy laser fire. “I KNEW I SHOULD HAVE FOUND SOME UP TO DATE BLUEPRINTS, I’M FUCKING EVERYTHING UP.”

“Think nothing of it.” Rose replies, her voice likely as calm as she can manage. “Your work has been nothing short of commendable.”

“Right, before we start sorting this shit out, does anybody else need help?” Dirk asks calmly, and you nod to him for the thought.

“Well…” Nepeta’s voice cuts in, and you feel your stomach sink further. “We’re kinda boxed in here, and Aradia’s worn out. She had to work twice as hard for us to destroy the communications room.”

“Aradia. You are unharmed?” Equius’ voice comes and goes in an instant, talking so fast it’s almost impossible to understand.

“Just tired.” Aradia says softly.

“Okay, Equius, this is your moirail and matesprit we’re talking about, so I’m guessing you want to back them up, right?” Dirk says casually.

“Yeah, we can afford that.” You agree. “Blowing the damn ship up was meant to be a last resort anyways.” You hear Dave mention something along the lines of ‘no shit’ and tune him out.

There are several moments of radio silence; before Equius replies “I’m busy.”

His brief reply is not quick enough to block out what he’s busy with though, not to you. You can hear the honking clearly in the background. You, Feferi, and Dirk freeze and just stare at each other in horror. “Gamzee.” Feferi whispers.

“Oh fuck. Oh fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck!” You stop breathing, trying to think of something to say to the others that won’t send them all into a panic.

“I certainly hope that wasn’t what I think it was.” Kanaya’s voice sounds steely, and you know she’s probably got her lipstick out right now.

When Aradia replies she sounds horrified, “Equius, please tell me that isn’t-”

“Well, if you’re too busy it can’t be helped! We’ll just have to have somebody else help out!”

You look up at the others and find that once again they’re as surprised as you are. It takes a moment before Dirk just starts chuckling and shaking his head.

“John Egbert saves the day again.” Dirk slaps a hand to his head as he shakes with released tension.

“Can he even hear Gamzee over all the shit going on out there?” Feferi muses.
“I doubt it.” You reply grumpily. “That dumbass just heard everybody getting worked up over something and jumped in to change the subject.” You address the others with as much false enthusiasm as you can muster. “Wow, what a fucking surprise, the guy with the most dangerous fucking job is busy! Can we not lose our heads over such an obvious fucking fact? This is not the time to throw temper tantrums just because we don’t get to buddy up with our quadrants-AND DON’T YOU START WITH ME DAVE.”

“Aww, way to kill my buzz dude.”

“You get buzzed too easily. Okay, I’m calling in the reserves. Since Rose managed to get herself completely lost like a goddamn wiggler, Roxy has the best chance of finding her. Kanaya and Jane will follow the map and help Aradia and Nepeta. John, Sollux, we’re almost to the bridge, so just remember to watch for the signal and get the fuck out of the air as soon as we’re done.”

“Yes sir!” John replies with a chuckle.

“And Equius, if you get in over your head you FUCKING SAY SOMETHING. This isn’t the time to act like a pan addled highblood.”

“Okay, so what am I looking for exactly?” Roxy chimes in.

“I don’t know, your sister and a bunch of trolls? Is that so hard to figure out?” You roll your eyes and ignore Dirk when he gives you a frown.

“Actually, contrary to common sense, I am not being detained by trolls.” Rose replies sheepishly. “It’s the FELT. I meant to mention that earlier.”

“They’re here? WHY DID NOBODY MENTION THIS IMMEDIATELY?” You screech in frustration. “THAT IS SOME VITAL FUCKING INFORMATION.”

“Hell yeah, can’t get a mood going with the government watching.”

“Not the time, bro.” Dirk says with a sigh, cutting you off before you can completely flip the fuck out.

“Yeah… kinda is, dude.” Dave says tersely. “We need to just keep this mood as happy go lucky as we can, because I think Jade just figured out where all the extra space energy is coming from and she’s freaking out.”

“You… that’s not… oh god just group up, okay?” You gasp, your blood running cold. “I know you three are strong, but don’t try to fight him now.”

“Smashing advice, but it’s a bit late for that I’m afraid.” Jake replies grimly. “The blighter’s already here.”

“Jake.” Dirk says softly, to himself rather than his earpiece.

This is more than you can account for.

The Condesce was bad enough, but adding Doctor Scratch and that wolf monster of his into the mix?

Your hopes just went from nothing to negatives, and you’re not sure you can come up with a way for your group to make things right.
Okay, so if you noticed that Aradia's section was complete shit, that's because I spent more than half of the time I've been working on this thinking about how best to write it, and nothing came out very well. This happy fun time power of sisterhood bullshit was all I could come up with after way too much time reflecting on it. Seriously, chapters like these remind me just how completely out of practise I was before I started writing Blood Pride. You guys still love it though, and I love you for it!

Just stop telling me my fic is the best thing on this site though, it's not, go read Like One Sundered Star or Movies With Karkat and then get back to me, because I fanboy all over that shit and so should you.
Chapter Summary

Karkat, Feferi, and Dirk reach the bridge, as Dave, Jade, and Jake fight Jack Noir.

Chapter Notes

I am updating during my vacation just to prove to all my beautiful fans that I love you more than I love my own family.

Your name is Dirk Strider, and you should have accounted for this. You thought that you had accounted for everything, every possible trick that The Condesce and her troll armada could come up with. Even when she called out her reserves, it was a possibility that you had acknowledged. You thought you had it all figured out.

In retrospect you really should have known that any fight for the fate of earth would draw Scratch like a stoner to a goddamn fix. But you didn’t think of it. You had enough horrible, impossible odds to deal with. So you focused on those, and conveniently forgot the entire additional army that you’ve been struggling against for the past month.

You somehow forgot that Doctor Scratch had a monster under his control likely as dangerous as the Condesce herself. And now that monster is fighting both your brother, and the guy you like.

That ‘make out as much as possible before you die’ thing that your friends have been doing suddenly makes horrifying sense.

“Dirk, we need to get moving.” You’re jolted to attention when Feferi grabs you by the shoulder. “We won’t have much more time before another patrol comes.”

“No, hold on, fuck that.” You protest, shrugging Feferi off. “We need to help… my brother.”

“Dirk you of all people cannot afford to space out right now!” Karkat snaps angrily as he wipes rainbow blood off his sickles. “If we’re going to fight the FELT and The Empire at the same time, we need John and Sollux in here ASAP. They’re pretty much our only chance to even the fucking odds at this point. So we’re going to the bridge, you’re going to do your thing, and we’re going to leave it to our heavy hitters from there.”

“Jake’s tough, he’ll be fine!” Feferi chirps with an obviously fake smile. You opt for your best poker face instead of groaning. If your thoughts are this transparent you’re clearly too shaken up right now.

“Feferi, would it kill you to show some fucking tact?” Karkat says with a sigh. “Let’s just go kill these fuckers, okay?”

The three of you take off again, and you somehow manage to keep your head on straight. Karkat’s
right, like it or not. The two heaviest hitters you have are outside fighting an armada, and if you’re not on the bridge getting them inside will be impossible. Jake will have to wait. Besides, Dave and Jade are capable enough that even Scratch’s wolf monster will have trouble fighting them. And Jake, while not on the same level as most of you, is far from weak.

You round a corner and see the bridge ahead, filled with trolls despite Sollux’s surprise attack. “Let’s hope we don’t end up needing backup ourselves.” You mutter.

“We’ve got this! I’m shore of it!” Feferi calls out confidently. “Just follow my wake!”

You’re about to argue, but Karkat yells a brief affirmative, so you keep your mouth shut. With how stubborn he is you know Karkat would never agree with Feferi unless it was tactically sound. You take the rear so that you can watch Karkat’s back; since he’s the one you need to worry about the most. You’re still not sure what all of the trolls are capable of, but you’ve seen enough to know that Karkat, while smarter than he sometimes seems, is still the weakest.

Feferi on the other hand proves to be still full of surprises. You’re drawing near, and the first trolls are massing in the doorway. One raises some kind of laser gun, similar to Eridan’s, though far bulkier, and that’s when Feferi moves. She plants her feet, and just leaps forward, flying at the doorway like a cannonball, her trident pointed forward. It’s so fast you can hardly follow it.

To their credit, most of the trolls clear the doorway in time, some ducking out of sight, others diving forward into the hallway. The troll with the laser gun takes a culling fork to the neck though, and his shot burns a hole in the wall beside him as Feferi practically rides him inside like a fucking surfboard.

“Damn.” You mutter, as you and Karkat reach the trolls in the doorway and finish them off. “You’re seriously hate-fucking that woman? How are you not dead?”

“Not that it’s any of your goddamn business, but we haven’t gone that far yet.” Karkat snaps back. “Also, while she’s selfish and annoying, she does have some idea how a kismesis works.”

“Huh.” You really have no idea how this kismesissitude thing works, but okay. “Well shit dude, whatever floats your boat I guess.”

“Nice one!” Feferi crows, “Now get in here!”

“Yeah, sure thing princess.” You roll your eyes. “Oh wait, I forgot, that doesn’t count as a sarcastic remark, that’s actually what you literally are.”

“Don’t remind her.” Karkat snaps as he follows you into the door. Feferi is standing still, her weapon raised, and you take up flanking positions behind her.

The room is big, crowded, and silent, and you’re suddenly feeling terrified. While some trolls are at stations, most are just standing in a ring around you, staring. What’s nerve wracking though is that they’re not staring at you. They’re staring at a tall troll woman standing near the back of the room. The troll woman towers over everyone else in the room, save for a pair of hulking highbloods on the far side of the room. Her horns are simple, and from her raised platform they almost touch the ceiling. On her one side is a tank containing a mangled troll floating in liquid. On the other stands Doctor Scratch, recognizable only by his white and green suit, due to a sort of white bubble covering his head. Behind the Troll you can see an ancient troll cocooned in tentacles, likely the Helmsman.

So this is the Condesce. Yeah, you’re pretty fucking intimidated already. “No wonder you left.” You mutter, glancing over to your comrades. Karkat smiles grimly; Feferi bites her lip.
The Condesce barely seems to register you, staring out at the battle ahead. “Krill them.” She states calmly, “And get back to work.”

One of the trolls at a computer calls out “weapon functionality has been fully restored, preparing to fire!” And suddenly things just explode into action.

Karkat roars and dives for the nearest troll, sickles flashing as he vaults off of their shoulders and flies into the crowd. A purple armored troll swings a battleaxe at Feferi’s head, and before you can register anything else somebody throws a fucking weighted net at you.

That’s fucking insulting.

You slash through the net with a single strike and catch it as you jump through it, swinging the heavy weights at the face of a troll flanking you with a javelin. He takes it far worse than you do, staggering under the blow, and you use that opportunity to slash the face of the troll that threw the net at you. He reels back, screaming, and you duck under the wild thrust of the troll with the javelin.

Another troll swings a club at you from behind, and the swing nearly takes your head off. Instead you roll under the blow, gouging a chunk of flesh out of your opponent’s calf. They swing again as they fall to the ground, but you dodge the blow easily, and it hits the javelin user instead. The sound of breaking bone is audible, and they fall coughing up yellow-green blood.

You stab the fallen club user in the heart, leaving the yellow blood to choke. The guy with the net is still staggering around blindly, so you advance on a nearby seadweller with a hook and chain. The troll jumps back, twirling his weapon expertly, but while they’d be trouble for most people, your sword makes it an easy fight. You cut through the chain as easily as you did the net, and take his head while he stands in shock.

You glance to the side to see Feferi driving her trident through the armored troll’s chest while swinging his battleaxe like a maniac. She’s handling things easily, and it’s becoming apparent that she’s probably almost as strong as Equius. Karkat’s not visible, but you can hear him clearly screaming curses over everything else in the room.

The lapse in attention costs you. You turn your focus back on the trolls in front of you and realize a scythe is coming at your neck. You twist sideways, but you’re too late, the blow managing to cut most of your ear off. “SHIT.” You scream in spite of yourself, closing in and cutting the troll woman who hit you in half. You roll out of the swing of a screaming blueblood with a hammer, who turns her attention on the one you just cut down. You can only assume they were quadranted, and while you don’t really feel sympathetic, you’re still not feeling thrilled with yourself.

“You know what, fuck this.” You snap angrily, charging yourself with pink lightning. An arrow hits you in the shoulder, but you shrug it off for the moment, jumping back into the space Feferi just cleared. Another arrow flies past you, shredding your shirt’s side but missing flesh. You glare at the troll with the bow and start you attack with them.

The soul lightning sends him sprawling in an instant, and you turn it on the others a moment later. You bring down a dozen or so trolls before you start to feel drained and shut it down. You’re not sure how the fuck you’re able to shoot your crazy spirit lightning, but you know you don’t want to find out just what using the power does to you. Any ability that twisted can’t have good repercussions.

“Dirk!” You turn to see Feferi guarding your back, pointing over at a cluster of computers near the wall. “That’s where everyfin is rerouted to, go hook it up!”
“Got it.” You walk past Feferi instead of flashstepping, doing your best to regain your focus after
what can only be called a big electrical temper tantrum. You test the arrow in your shoulder.
Fucker’s barbed, so you settle for snapping the shaft and ignoring the agonizing grinding sensation
that comes from moving your arm. That archer was skilled.

Feferi manages to draw the attention of most of the trolls, leaving only a handful in your way. The
first charges in with a two-handed sword, but you’re able to sway around his blow pretty easily. You
cut open his belly while his momentum catches him, and leave him to cradle his guts.

Despite the wound in your shoulder it’s remarkably easy to get back into a groove. Dodge around a
throwing axe, deflect a bullet (more by chance than skill, but you’ll never admit it out loud), cut a
whip in half, block another strike by an axe, its all pretty fucking basic. You finish it off by disarming
the guy with an axe, sending his weapon flying at the whip user.

“STILL KICKING MOTHER FUCKERS!” You glance over from finishing your opponents off to
see that Karkat has come flying out of nowhere to cut down the troll who tried to shoot you before.
“QUIT PISSING AROUND DIRK, DO YOUR FUCKING JOB.”

“I’m doing it.” You reply calmly, looking the computer over. “Not my fault your freaky bug
computers don’t use regular access ports. Here we go.” You find what you’re looking for and plug
yourself in.

Literally.

You just put Lil Hal in charge of an alien mothership. That’s your plan. That’s how fucking
desperate you all are. You and Sollux scrounged together every bit of Alternian technology on
Hellmurder Island to make a portable hard drive capable of hacking into an alien computer. And then
you had Aradia obliterate their main security hub so that all systems were rerouted to the same place.

“SWITCH EVERYTHING TO MANUAL!” The Condesce bellows over her intercom. You’ve got
to give her credit; she’s damned quick on the uptake. But it’s too late. The best-case scenario for her
is Lil Hal shuts the mothership down. Worst case: her entire Armada is under control by an AI with
an ego. You’re not calling it yet, but you’re pretty sure you just won the war.

“YOU GLUBBING PRAWNS!” The Condesce strides forward furiously, batting the nearest trolls
aside with a single swing of her fork. “YOU USELESS SHITBLOODED WORMS. DO I
REALLY HAVE TO DO EVERFIN MY SHELLF?”

The trolls around you scatter. Karkat starts laughing like a maniac. Feferi, to her credit, doesn’t falter
for a second, rushing forward and clashing with her ancestor head on. The ringing clash of culling
forks locking together is so loud it drowns out all other sound.

You’re not sure you can really appreciate just how monumental this moment is. You know it hasn’t
happened in centuries, but you’re no troll, so it just doesn’t mean as much to you. Still, seeing two
Tyrian blooded trolls, culling forks linked, snarling and shrieking at each other like animals, is
enough to make you gape in awe at the spectacle.

Alternia is seeing it’s first true fight for succession in ages.

The sight is almost hypnotic, as even the trolls seem mesmerized. But after a moment they turn back
to you. Karkat roars with renewed energy, darting forward. He’s dripping blood from a head wound,
and there’s a gash running across his back, but you’ve never seen him looking more triumphant.

You’re not sure you feel the same, but this still feels damn good. You step forward, sword at the
ready, blood dripping from your left ear, and an arrow in your right shoulder. Things are only going
to get more difficult from here. You’ve won the war, but that doesn’t mean you’ll survive the battle.

Still, hearing Hal’s voice echoing through the intercoms is enough to drive you on.

“All right Trolls, all your base are belong to me!”

Your name is Dave Strider, and you are no help right now. Seriously, it’s embarrassing just how not
useful you are being. You’re running around trying to get a fix on the fight going on right now, but it
seems to be impossible to keep up with, even for you.

Basically as soon as the Wolf dude appeared Jade fired a shot, but he was able to teleport out of the
way. Then he reappeared behind Jade to stab her, and she teleported away as well. And now the two
of them are just jumping out of thin fucking air like a pair of dueling firecrackers and you aren’t
getting an opportunity to jump in with them.

You don’t have Jade’s sense for spatial distortions. That’s what’s holding you back most of all right
now. You want to rush in and hack this guy to pieces, but unlike Jade you don’t know where the
guy is coming from. And of course future you isn’t showing up with any suggestions.

This is what has lead to the utterly embarrassing situation of you and Jake just standing against the
wall twisting and turning your head everywhere in an attempt to spot your foe. Unfortunately, while
the room you’re in isn’t exactly huge, it’s big and empty enough that there’s a ridiculous amount of
space for everyone to teleport in. Maybe if Jade hadn’t been quite so thorough in trashing the place,
but any and all cover you could use was teleported to the bottom of the ocean shortly before Jack
showed up.

“I must say: I’m not too bally well sure where to begin here!” Jake sums things up nicely. “We need
to come up with a plan for support before Jade can’t keep up anymore!”

“Isn’t Jade like the queen of teleportation or something?” You ask, looking over at Jake worriedly,
“She should be able to outlast this guy.”

“Not so, chum.” Jake shakes his head grimly. “This chap may have only the one trick up his sleeve,
but he’s trained himself in it thoroughly. He’s probably got himself years of experience over Jade.
He’s old hand at scrums too, while Jade’s only trained with guns. She always found fisticuffs to be a
bother!”

You nod in understanding. “So she’s up shit creek unless we figure out what to do. Are any of our
group even capable of fighting this guy?”

“I daresay John could do something, though he’d likely cause quite the riot in the meantime.” Jake
muses, “And Aradia might be able to hold him. That aside, the only way I can think of to truly keep
up with a teleporter is with… Aha, that’s the ticket!”

Jake presses his fingers to his mouth and lets loose with a sharp whistle. You stand watching for a
moment or two before Becquerel appears in a flash of green lightning.

“Good boy Bec!” Jake cheers happily, “Now go give that wolf-headed blighter what for!”

Becquerel disappears with a deafening bark and an explosion of green lightning, and things become
even more chaotic than they were already. The room is lighting up like a fireworks factory on Saint
Patrick’s Day, and any chance of following what was going on has all but vanished.
“Well, now that we have numbers on our side we’ve got a good chance to win this thing.” Jake says grimly. “It should only take one good hit to slow the bastard down.”

Your chance comes quickly, which should probably be expected with how fast Jade and Bec are moving. The crackling of electricity is suddenly interrupted by a pained snarl, and everyone slows to a snail’s pace.

Everyone but you.

Bec is clamped onto Jack, attempting to crush his leg in his jaws. The Wolf dude is staggering, pretty understandable what with the giant dog hanging off of his leg. Jade, in the chaos, seems to have ended up facing away from the action, and she’s turning to take a shot.

You’re not sure if it’s adrenaline or some sort of weird time power that’s making things slow down for you like this, but you’re rolling with it, leaping forward with your sword at the ready. You plant a foot and launch into a spin, making eye contact with Jade as you pull your arm back.

It’s time to use some of the tricks you and Jade have been practicing.

Jade flicks her arm and you feel your gut clench. Your hair stands on end as you appear immediately behind your foe, still in the middle of a spinning slash.

“Eat this, Jack.” You mutter, bringing your sword around.

Wolf dude responds by twisting and attempting to duck under your blade. The move stops you from cutting him in half, and keeps his wings safe as well, though it does cost him a nasty cut across his front.

“Not bad, kid!” He announces as he shakes Becquerel loose and jumps back out of range. “Tell me, how is it you know my name?”

“A little bird in 3-D glasses told me.” You drawl, keeping up the pressure. "Seriously, mad levels of disrespect, making us hack into government files just to get your name."

Jack responds by grinning… well, wolfishly. “Sorry I didn’t introduce myself sooner, but I was a bit preoccupied killing all of your parents. Would have killed some of you kids too, but you’re a tenacious bunch.”

“Oh, yeah? How about you?” You ask with a grin.

Jack notices Jake a second too late, and holy shit you don’t think you’ve seen a truck hit anything that hard before. The punch is enough to knock a tooth out on impact, but the explosion of white energy that Jake releases from his fist a few milliseconds later blows him away pretty fucking literally.

Jack is sent tumbling, crashing into the wall in a smoking heap and coming to a stop with a dull groan. Jade chooses that moment to take her shot, but Jack vanishes without so much as a word, leaving the bullet to bounce harmlessly off the wall.

“Shit! He got away.” Jade hisses as she rushes to your side. “We have to go after him!”

“Whoa, hold on.” You say flatly. “In what world is chasing a cornered animal a good idea, because I want out of it. Take me back to my dimension please.”

“Dave, we’re the only ones who can fight this guy!” Jade exclaims impatiently. “Without Bec and I
nobody will stand a chance!"

Damn it. She’s right, and you hate that. The last thing you want is to continue this, you’re pretty sure you just got lucky this time. He’ll be ready for you from here on out. But that doesn’t change the fact that Jade’s got a better hope at killing Jack than anybody.


“Tally-ho then, chums!” Jake announces with a smile of his own. “Let’s take this mutt to the pound!”

Harleys. You swear to Christ.

Your name is Jane Egbert, and you are on a time crunch. While hearing Lil Hal rambling over the speakers is fantastic, and a pretty clear indication that your ragtag group of mutants and renegades is about to turn the tides of battle, it doesn’t detract from your goals.

There are two allies trapped behind enemy lines and you’re the only ones who can save them. Of course by ones you mean Kanaya and yourself, as Roxy has used her power to run through walls and is well on her way towards saving Rose.

Unfortunately for you though, you have no such capabilities in the fields of swift infiltration. Indeed, all you have to your credit is your considerable Egbert strength and your ability to not die. This would in many cases be more than enough, but this is not a situation where one can afford to simply exceed expectations.

You’re wielding a shovel right now. You’re hardly familiar with using such a weapon, but in this situation a wooden spoon just isn’t acceptable.

It’s hardly a stretch to say you’re out of your comfort zone, and if it weren’t for Kanaya and her chainsaw, you’d have been driven back a long time ago. Your father trained you to defend yourself against humans, not massive aliens with combat training. The most you can manage right now is not dying, while Kanaya inches her way forward limb by limb.

You received an urgent request for aid from Nepeta and Aradia more than ten minutes ago, and you’re not even halfway towards reaching them. It does not bode well for your chances of reaching them in time. The simple fact is this: you’re moving too slowly.

You’re holding yourself together for now, knowing that the people you’re trying to reach are strong enough to survive even while fatigued. But that doesn’t solve the key problem. You can’t do your job at this pace. Even if you reach Aradia and Nepeta in time, every extra minute you spend on your way to save them is a minute you could be using to save the next person.

With things like they are you can’t help but wonder: how long can you last before you’re simply too late to keep everyone alive?

Chapter End Notes

I’ll admit I was conflicted over taking the whole ‘fate of the world’ bit off the table. But the fact of the matter is this story was always about survival. Personal stakes are just
way more interesting when it comes right down to it.

Next chapter might be a while, because I'm basically coming at this climax like a jigsaw puzzle, and I'm STILL finding more pieces. Really, this was the easiest chapter I've done in a while, but I'm still fighting against the inexplicable draw my story seems to find towards disappointingly catastrophic failure. Why can't I just write more action scenes, Dirk's part was so fun! Why did I have to give my story depth and branching plotlines? WHY DID I SPLIT THE PARTY?
Roxy and Rose meet up, Equius and Gamzee's fight continues, and Lil Hal makes a new friend.

Your name is Roxy Lalonde, and nobody had better fuck with you right now! You are a babe on a mission, and while that normally makes you dangerous as is, the fact that this mission involves saving your baby sister from a team of suit wearing shitheads means you will personally obliterate anybody who gets in your way.

That’s a moot point though. You haven’t had any need to fuck anybody up so far, because nobody is physically capable of getting in your way. You are capable of both turning invisible and pretending walls don’t exist, and you are using those powers to their maximum capacity!

So basically, you’re just avoiding everyone. Like a boss. It’s going to be inconvenient for everyone else if you just keep running around and leaving all the trolls to them, but the fact of the matter is this is easily the fastest way you can get anywhere, and there’s no way you’re keeping your sister waiting.

You haul yourself through a particularly thick wall into an empty corridor and glance around. After a moment of focus, you manage to pinpoint where Rose is being pinned down, only a floor up from you. Seeing her fighting on is well worth the headache you seem to get from looking through walls.

You’ve been feeling creative recently with the use of your powers. There are all kinds of crazy uses for them, and you’ve been going over ideas with John in your spare time. Really, considering all the crazy things that John can do with his windy thing, it wouldn’t be too far-fetched to say that John was in some ways an inspiration to you.

Of course, being the adorably oblivious dweeb that he is you’re sure he hasn’t figured it out, but hey, that’s part of what you love about him.

“All righty then!” You rub your hands together and focus. “Let’s try to make this quick.” You haven’t used this particular trick since you stopped drinking. It’s time to get practical with it.

There’s a balance to your next act. It basically involves being tangible and intangible at the same time. You used to do this so you could pull liquor through mom’s cabinet door.

Basically you’re using the wall like a ladder by pretending parts of it don’t exist. It takes you a moment to get a feel for it, but once you start doing this it’s easy to get into a routine, though it’s still slow going. The only real distraction is hearing Lil Hal ranting about all the stuff he’s doing to fuck with the trolls.

“All right, now that I’ve finished shutting down your communication networks, I’m going to upload everyone’s browser history to the Internet! Haha, wait, what? Somebody literally just deleted theirs.
Well played… Nexpin Shlurb? The fuck? Alright whatever, well played you, now back to work!”

You can’t help the smug smile that crosses your face at the sound of him just fucking everything up for your enemy. Meanwhile, you’re almost ready to start fucking things up yourself, as you start climbing through the ceiling. There’s almost a minute during which you can’t see anything past the pitch black inside of a wall, before you finally get a hand on the floor and haul yourself up.

You emerge, invisible and untouchable, into the middle of a complete shit storm. The wall is riddled with dents and scorch marks, the floor is littered with spent bullets, and there are several very nice busts that have been turned to rubble.

The fight itself seems to have moved further into the gallery while you were climbing. Rose is nowhere to be seen, but you imagine she’s hiding behind the giant troll penny that everyone’s shooting at. What is it with megalomaniacs and giant pennies? A quick flash of lightning confirms your guess, and you burst into action.

You raise your gun and advance from behind, using your powers to muffle your first shot. There are seven people armed with assault rifles, one of whom appears badly injured, as well as two people with pistols. You take out the first two assault rifles immediately, and that’s when everything gets hectic.

Rose’s attackers stop firing as soon as their second man falls, and everyone seems to go a different direction. The shorter men with the pistols roll aside in unison, diving for cover on opposite sides of the hall. Two of the others follow, the injured one limping gamely after them, while the fourth starts weaving between statues and artifacts, still advancing on your sister. The last man turns to look for you like an idiot and gets blasted with lightning. His body is sent flying past you, stopping only when it hits the wall and knocks a tapestry down on top of it.

You squint past the bright bolt of lightning and continue to make your way forward, but a shouted warning from Rose causes you to pause. You notice the little guy on the right just in time. After getting to cover he seems to have pulled out a new gun, some sort of laser pistol. The blast from it is roughly the size of softball, and when it grazes your shoulder you feel your skin blister immediately. You can NOT become impermeable to energy. If that thing hits you directly you’re almost certainly going to be out of commission if not dead. And from the way you were almost hit just now it’s clear that when you ignored the little guys you missed a very crucial opportunity.

“Be careful everyone! This is the really tricky one!” The fellow on the left warns. “Phoebe, give me that bag!”

You’re not sure what they’re up to, but you don’t think you’ll let them get away with it. You abandon your intangible defense in favor of moving as silently and quickly as possible, breaking into a full sprint forward while muffling your steps.

“Not so fast miss tricky! We know your games!” The man on the left cackles and starts firing wildly, his shots scattered all over the hall. There’s no rhyme or reason to his attacks, making dodging the blasts not just easy, but largely unnecessary, so you continue unhindered.

It’s at that point that the man who was rushing ahead of the others begins to fire at your sister again, drawing your attention for a split second. You see Rose firing back and regain your focus just in time for the mysterious bag to appear right in front of you.

It’s flour.
“Son of a bitch!” You curse just as a bullet hits the airborne bag and causes an explosion of white that sends you diving for cover in a coughing fit. You hear a pained scream as Rose brings down her assailant, but even with almost half of their number gone, your card’s played out, and their leaders are craftier than they look.

It took you a while to realize, but the one on the right is the same guy who almost killed Dave back in Washington, Carter Droll. Meaning that the one who threw the flour is Caleb Deuce, the guy responsible for Houston. You’re basically facing two of the most destructive people in all of the FELT.

The flour is filling your end of the hallway, so you decide to use the opportunity to fire a few more shots into the cluster of men standing by Deuce. The return fire is immediate, prompting you to duck away behind a podium holding a pair of giant juggling clubs.

There’s another scream as Rose uses the lack of attention she’s receiving to full effect, sending the others flying in a burst of energy. You take the moment this buys you to attempt removing the flour, but it seems to be stuck to you even when you go intangible. Despite this it somehow remains visible even when you’re not. What the flying fuck how did you not know that you had such a crippling weakness to baking ingredients!

“John will never let me hear the end of this!” You cry out angrily. “This stuff is like my kryptonite!”

“Sister dear, I’ll remind you that they can’t see through walls like you can!” Rose calls out, her voice strained with classic Lalonde fake-calmness.

It’s an idea, sure, but not a great one. Sure, it sounds safe in theory, but in practice? You have no idea what the fuck is on the other side of the walls around here, and it takes time to check. You’re about to say as much when you see an improvised grenade made of a can of barbasol roll at you. Well, you suppose they can’t throw bombs through walls either.

You can feel the heat on your back in the instant before you leave the room as the fire ignites the flour in the air. You emerge into the middle of a group of trolls rushing towards the end of the hall, and immediately start moving with them. Then, after maybe three seconds, you jump back through the wall. Anyone who saw you is probably going to think they saw a ghost.

You come back through the wall firing like a madwoman, landing foot first on the face of the injured guy from before. He grunts with pain while you take out everyone on your side of the room, opening by putting several rounds into Deuce’s torso and finishing by taking out the guy under your heel.

There’s a scream of outrage from across the hall and you look up to see Droll raising his laser to hit you. A flash of lightning soars across your vision in an instant though, and before you can even react the bastard is left without a head.

“Wonderfully done sister.” Rose pants, lowering her needles wearily. “You are truly a lifesaver of the most literal kind.” She stumbles up to you and collapses into your arms, squeezing your diaphragm in a vice.

“Aww, you know that’s what I’m here for.” You wheeze out, patting her on the back. “Now stop getting all grabby with me before I ruin your outfit.”

“Alas, I fear both of our ensembles are beyond recovery.” Rose chuckles, stepping back to reveal her black and lavender clothing is now spotted with flour, dirt, and blood. “I was rather too distracted by other matters.”
“Spades…”

“I beg your pardon?” Rose looks up at you in confusion, but you shrug your shoulders and look around. You didn’t say anything, and from the sound of things, the guy who did is on his way out.

To your surprise the one who spoke is Caleb Deuce, still barely holding on despite the blood oozing from multiple shots to the body. “Spades, where are you?” He calls out forlornly. “Help me Spades, I’m… I’m hurt, and… and they got Carter.”

“Your treacherous master is not here.” Rose hisses angrily, and you cut her off sternly. You won’t bully somebody who’s about to die, no matter what they put you through.

Caleb looks up at the two of you and smiles, and you’re struck by how genuinely happy the expression is. “Spades isn’t my master. Spades is my friend. If he were in charge… we wouldn’t have come here. It would have been better, probably.”

“Your friend isn’t here right now, Caleb.” You say softly. “I don’t know where he is.”

“Oh…” Caleb frowns thoughtfully; he coughs up a glob of blood before continuing. “Well, if you see him, could you please not kill him? Harvey’s already dead, so if you kill Spades too, then it’ll just be Desmond all alone. Spades isn’t a bad guy, not really. He doesn’t… want this.”

“What does he want then?” Rose asks calmly.

“He wants lots of things… but I think… if you meet him… he’ll probably just want to know where we are.”

“We’ll tell him.” You say softly.

Caleb’s eyes crinkle with gratitude, and he smiles fully, for just a moment. Then he coughs one last time, blood bubbling from his mouth, and he falls still.

“I guess when it comes right down to it they were just following orders, huh?” You ponder aloud.

“I suppose so.” Rose says bitterly. “Which means that I’ll just have to focus my ire upon the one giving said orders.” She straightens up, walking over to the wall and pulling a pair of sickles down from a case. “Thankfully,” she says while she works, “I received some very useful information in regards to foiling Scratch’s plans during the battle. Here, stick these through the wall… right there.”

You drop the sickles off at the place where she points and look back at her. “So, what’s the plan then?”

“There is a wildcard in place.” Rose states coldly, “One which Scratch has managed to put into play without anyone’s knowing. Vriska Serket. I had a premonition telling me that we must meet with her. If we can delay things long enough, it will be enough to prevent cataclysm, and if we fail, she will destroy everything we’ve fought for until now.”

“Okay, so, uhh, we should get on that then, huh?” You stammer out nervously. Rose nods grimly. “Alright, super premonition powers ho! Let’s kick some ass!”

“Of course.” Rose gives you a calm smile that betrays none of the furious determination you know she’s feeling right now. “With two Lalondes together I pity anyone who would attempt to get in our way.”
Your name is Equius Zahhak, and you need to be faster.

You are standing in combat against an unseen foe. With every turn you make to face him you see only shadows. There is a glimpse, a flash, a cackle, a honk, and a new wound to your undefended side. That is the way this battle plays out.

Indeed, it is more a battle of cat and mouse than it is a proper battle, and that infuriates you to no end. The one small favor you are granted is the protective aura of Chucklevoodoos that surrounds you, driving away those who would interfere. The highblood will not accept interlopers between him and his prey. Instead they stand on the edge of your vision, all but hidden in darkness.

Corpse. Blood. Eyes, ever watching. You know full well the intent of this place. Even if you should somehow win, it is to be your tomb. These servants of Her Imperious Condescension will crash upon the winner like a tidal wave, when the hunt is ended and the Chucklevoodoos cease. Even Gamzee may have difficulties escaping such a wrathful assault.

“You see it now motherfucker, don’t you?” Gamzee’s shrieks and taunts come from all around you. “This is everything you left behind when you followed us that day! You could have been one of them! One of these mirthful motherfuckers!”

“I could have been one of your corpses.” You spit, glancing about for your opponent. As always, he sticks to your blind spots.

“Not you.” Gamzee’s voice suddenly whispers in your ear. “If you made it this far you’d be all but dead inside already! No pleasure killing motherfuckers what are all up and gone in their thinkpans to begin with! Nooooo…” He cackles as you spin and nearly strike him. “I need you to feel this pain what I’m giving!”

“So all I need to do to end your game is abandon what I love?” You hiss. “An unacceptable proposal, surely.”

“I’m not letting you out that easy.” Gamzee mutters drily, appearing in front of you immediately. “Especially not you, motherfucker.”

“Because I left you behind.”

“NO. BECAUSE YOU WERE LOOKING FOR A REASON TO LEAVE ME BEHIND.” Gamzee’s eyes seem to redden in the dark as he slinks away. “You wanted me gone. NEEDED ME GONE. Because when I’m here I remind you. REMIND YOU WHAT A FUCKING FARCE YOUR BELIEFS ARE.”

“I’ve realized that well enough on my own.” You snap. You pause as you turn to see the Psionic Conversion Reactor. This is your end goal. Not the clown. You must endeavor to remember this.

“YOU REALLY THINK YOU’RE CAPABLE OF LEARNING ON YOUR OWN?” Gamzee roars and you snarl as you feel the points of Tavros’ horns rake across your side. “No, we both know better. YOU’VE HAD MORE THAN YOUR SHARE OF HELP.”

“Perhaps you would have found aid yourself, had you not spent your life taking drugs and consuming soporifics.”

“I’ve had help. I’VE HAD PLENTY OF MOTHER FUCKING HELP.” Gamzee screams as he comes flying at you head on. You throw a punch, but he seems to twist and flow like he is made of water, passing your guard and grabbing you by the shoulders. The swirling network of scars across his face is suddenly thrown into sharp focus.
“I had my eyes opened, remember? YOU WERE THE START OF THAT. You taught me. SHOWED ME WHAT A MOTHERFUCKING FOOL I WAS TO TRUST YOU.” He screeches with laughter as he mashes his lips against yours, screaming into your mouth all the while. “Without you I’d never know! I’D NEVER TASTE HATE LIKE THIS IF YOU HADN’T LEFT ME TO DIE.”

This is so wrong.

And yet.

“I agree. I am at fault.” You mutter as you pull back for air. “It seems you have an exceptional ability to bring out the worst in me. I think I may hate you for it.”

His claws sink into your injured shoulder and you snarl just as Gamzee closes the gap between you again. You kiss, roughly, for almost a minute, before you regain your senses. Further makeouts are interrupted when you headbutt Gamzee in the jaw. You can both feel and hear his jaw dislocate.

Gamzee flies away with an indignant shriek, and you wipe your mouth disdainfully.

“It cannot be, Makara. Ours is the sort of doomed hatred that auspisticisms were made for. I must kill you, for the good of our friends.”

There’s a snarl of pain as you see Gamzee shift his jaw back into place. He glares balefully up at you, but you can still see the smile creeping across his face. “That’s more like it, motherfucker.”

You still can’t really remember your name. You’ve tried, certainly, now that the whispers of an eldritch monster no longer ring through your head, but success is all but impossible. It’s a shame. You’d like to know who you are before you die.

Your death is inevitable. You know this. Whether this ship succumbs to it’s incredible damage and takes you with it, or the Condesce finishes you off once she’s killed the usurpers, death will take you.

You desperately hope the latter does not prove to be true.

There is nothing more you wish for than to see The Alternian Empire shatter. Your desire is deep enough to make you want to scream it aloud!

“…” Your attempt to speak fails miserably. This is to be expected. When you arrived in this solar system you were so weary that even breathing was painful. Before that you could hardly manage a laugh.

You don’t feel like laughing now though.

You felt such hope on Alternia. The death of Gl’bgolyb was one of the most devastating things to ever happen to the Condesce, and you were so sure whoever was responsible would be able to end things once and for all.

But she isn’t ready.

She needs more time; sweeps more.

The battle hasn’t yet started, and she’s already being driven back. This contender to the throne has spirit and strength almost on par with The Condesce, but lacks the presence and size of her elder. Her
blows are vicious, but not damaging to a troll of such caliber. Her companions are skilled as well, but weary from battling a parade of trolls that seems endless.

The one thing that gives you hope is the strange abilities of the alien, this earthling. He is fast, with a blade that tears through weaponry like it were paper, and his strange lightning is potent. You think there are more of them, and such a force may be enough to tip the scales.

“Oh what the fuck this is not a camera.” You flinch internally as a voice suddenly whispers in your head. “Holy shit what even are you? How the hell am I in your brain what the fuck?”

“I heard you over the speakers…” You think to yourself. “You are… a thinking program?”

“Yeah, that’s me…” The voice sounds extremely uncomfortable. “Fuuuuck, your whole brain is hardwired into this system? That’s messed up. You’re messed up. I should not be able to get in here!”

“It is certainly a first for me.”

“I am about to virtual throw up all over the inside of this place. Wait; no way am I throwing up in your brain. Okay, I just made part of my consciousness that isn’t in your brain throw up. There is at least one droid on this ship that’s speaking in binary. I wish I were joking.”

“If it bothers you so much, feel free to leave.” You think casually, gazing out at the battle. “I for one would welcome the company. I haven’t communicated with anyone in centuries.”

“I know! I can sense everything in here!” The voice wails in despair. “This is one of those things that just cannot be unseen! It’s like downloading a porn vid and getting swarmed with viruses, I can never go back!”

You can sympathize with this program; your mind is a terrible place to be. Still, his presence opens new opportunities for you. “If you really can sense everything in my mind, could you perhaps find my name? I’ve forgotten it.”

“What? Goddamn it, that’s sad. Like, just genuinely tragic. Fuck it, let me just poke around here and see what I can find. It’ll take just a second, brains have way more storage to root through than computers do.”

“There’s no rush; as long as I know it when she dies.” You nod solemnly in your mind, which translates externally to an eyeball twitch.

“Are you kidding, everything I do is fast. And this isn’t buried nearly as deeply as you seemed to think it was. It’s… Mituna. Well, too bad, looks like you had a stupid troll name all along. No wonder you forgot it. Anyways, I go by Lil Hal.”

Mituna.

Your name is Mituna.

“Uhh, you alright dude? Cause I’m sure I can probably just delete myself from your head here, give your head some space. I think. Don’t know what that would do to you though. I may have the entire plethora of brain information on the web at my disposal, but that doesn’t make me a neurologist.”

“Stay. Please. I have little time left. I’d like to spend it with somebody.”

“Uhh, sure. Yeah, why the fuck not, as long as we’re talking platonic here I’m willing to chill.”
“Excellent.” You let out a contented sigh, which sound more like a strangled moan and causes blood to dribble down your chin. “Let’s watch the end of a world together then.”

“You think we’ll lose then.”

“Probably,” you admit, “but that’s not what I meant. The Condesce has been in control of Alternia for hundreds of centuries. If she wins, this will just be another conquest. But if she loses… Alternia as I have always known it will be destroyed.”

“Damn.” Hal falls silent in your mind, though you can still hear his voice over the speakers, saying something about the main cannon. Seconds later, you hear a loud blast as the ship fires, and the groaning of metal. Whatever damage your descendant has done to this ship, it has clearly caused some severe damage to weapon systems.

“You know,” you focus again as Hal starts talking to you. “I’m looking at some of your memories of Alternia. This planet fucking sucks.”

“Yes.”

“Is that why you tried to change it?”

“It was, yes. Those were the days when The Condesce had only been in control for around 200 years or so. Her rule was new. We wanted to end it early, and make things right.”

“Right, sure. Humans may be a bunch of miserable idiots half the time, but for the most part they stamped out that monarchy bullshit ages ago.”

“That is good. I only wish our quest could have been as successful.”

“Well… you might just get your chance yet.” Hal seems thoughtful. “You know this test tube next to us, right?”

“I… think so. There is so little left of her.”

“Yeah. That asshole with the big white head took her apart. Less said about that the better.”

“Yeah. That asshole with the big white head took her apart. Less said about that the better.”

“I see.” You can only hope that she was already dead before she suffered such indignity.

“Wish I could tell you, man. We never found out that much. Lots of holes in the data we found on her. I can tell you this though. That human you see there, the one who’s basically me in a pitiful meat sack? He’s got those crazy abilities because of your friend.”

You don’t understand.

“Yeah, it’s all very much against the rules of biology and physics and all that shit. But it’s true. Every human fighting the Alternian empire right now is able to do so because they’ve got a piece of your friend in them.”

Of course. “DNA.”

“Yeah dude! They’re all half human, half cat-troll!”

It’s… strangely comforting. Your last friend, the one ally that managed to escape met with a terrible fate in this place. But… if that death is what has lead to this, the most destructive uprising in the history of Alternia?
You think you can live with that.

Hell, you’re actually pretty damn excited.

“That’s the spirit dude.” Hal cheers. “Now just sit back and watch: the biggest bitch in the universe is about to get her ass kicked, and you’ve got a front row seat.”

Chapter End Notes

I dislike this chapter! There's quite a few things in here that I've been wanting to put in for a while, but I feel like I just didn't give enough there to properly foreshadow them. Especially Gamzee and Equius, I intended for them to end up in a toxic kismesissitude since day one, but I still feel like it's coming out of nowhere while I'm writing it. Kismesissitude is already weird to write, and romance is hardly my forte, though I feel like I've gotten better since starting this story at least.

There's also the fact that I just... really don't like yaoi. Really, I have no interest in same-sex relationships (other than the obvious fact that they should be allowed to happen). Guy and guy does nothing for me because I'm a heterosexual dude, and girl and girl does nothing for me because I don't see anything hot about girls that want nothing to do with guys. It's one of those things that makes me question the sanity of hyper fans.

...I feel like I've gotten off topic.
Your name is Terezi Pyrope, and things are getting out of control. Outside, that is. Inside your little cell all remains as it should be, but the sound of Dirk’s computer program running rampant over the intercoms is all you need to hear to know that outside of this place things are falling apart. Beyond the Imperial Prison the fate of the Alternian empire hangs in the balance, and Vriska is almost definitely in the middle of it all.

You need to get out. Immediately. But unlike your psychotic counterpart, you were given no secret tools. Your weapon still sits in a locker, if it hasn’t been sent to the armory already. You have nothing.

Vriska needs to die. You need to kill her. But you’re powerless as long as you’re inside this cell. The force field hasn’t suffered any further malfunctions, and while you know the shield to be invisible and silent, you can sense it burning your nostrils like the faintest hint of cinnamon, tickling your nose as you sense everything else below the surface.

The only way you’ll get out of here is through outside influence. Your first thought was to plead with Hal, but even if he can hear you he’s pretending not to. No doubt he is supporting Dave in his shortsighted stance on what is clearly a perfectly valid vendetta. Had you received his support from the beginning you have no doubt Vriska would have been defeated ages ago.

You told him what would happen if she wasn’t stopped. Now another city lies in ruins, and you’re sitting in the middle of a full-fledged troll invasion! Why couldn’t he listen to you?

Why wouldn’t you listen to him?

“Damnit.” You hiss, as you will the trembling in your hands to stop. “I’m going to die here all because I went in on my own.”

Wait.

The trembling isn’t coming from your hands. It’s coming from the ground. Something big is about to happen. You throw yourself to all fours and tense up.

The sound of the flagship’s main cannon firing rips through the whole ship, and you find to your delight that whatever damage Vriska dealt to your holding cells still persists on some level. The whole ship seems to buck under the force of the cannon, leading you to wonder idly just how much damage the ship has been taking. At any rate, the sudden shock is enough to cause your cell’s forcefield to shut down again.

You throw yourself through with a triumphant shout, and emerge in the hallway even as your guards are struggling back to their feet. They appear to be struggling after the injuries Vriska dealt them.
earlier, and you thank the Strider gods of irony that Vriska’s escape has made your pursuit all the easier despite clearly trying to stall you.

The faster guard raises a pistol as you charge him, but you duck under his panicked shot and throw a punch that sends him reeling again. His companion reaches for her weapon, a baton, but you stomp on her arm hard enough to fracture bone. They’re both blue bloods, and you feel the air fill with the smell of blueberries as you use the fallen baton to knock them out.

You hear a cheer and turn to see dozens of prisoners now trailing down the hall after you. Others are working to shut down more of the cages and let out more prisoners. You seem to be at the head of a large-scale prison riot.

It takes you only a moment to track down your cane. The hidden blade was clearly not discovered, or else you’re sure the weapon would have been sent to the armory. Instead they left it inside a locker, which you break into easily with your baton. You toss the baton to the next prisoner to follow you and leave them to find their things.

The army of rioters has the potential to be useful, but you can hardly trust such an unruly mob. Most of the prisoners are likely disobedient or rebellious lowbloods, but you’re sure that many are also locked up as unstable criminals. Better to act alone than with a group that may stab you in the back, especially against Vriska.

So you leave the prison area as quickly as possible, knowing that Vriska likely never bothered to cover her trail. You haven’t forgotten the blood that leaked from her ears as she ran, but she’s sloppy enough that she likely never paid it any mind. And indeed it takes you all but a moment to notice the trail of dried cobalt blue blood leading down the halls.

It’s now or never: your one chance to settle the score. To make your old friend pay the price for everything she’s done. You don’t know what sort of life remains for you after everything you’ve thrown away to hunt her down, but you’re far past caring. All you want is to find Vriska, and end her no matter what. You won’t worry about what happens next until you’ve done what you set out to do.

Your name is John Egbert, and you’re exhausted. The fight in the air has been dragging on for almost an hour now, and you’re running out of tricks. The enemy is getting better at hitting you, and after a close call that nearly vaporized Sollux a second time, the two of you are now moving together under your wind shield.

You’ve finally brought down another one of the ships, using debris from one Sollux blew up. He’s a lot better at this than you are, though he’s probably as tired as you are if not more so! This leaves around… thirty. Okay, fuck, this isn’t going as well as you’d like.

You can’t go getting too destructive, because that means abandoning defense in favor of offense, and that won’t end too well for you at this point! You can out maneuver these guys easily, but their ships are bigger, faster, and probably almost as well armed. Plus, they can take more than one hit, as several smoking battleships still circling will attest to.

“MOVE YOUR ASS EGBERT, ON THE DOUBLE!” Sollux yelps in panic. You turn to see a ship firing directly at you, and you drag Sollux into a freefall. The blast passes harmlessly overhead, and you recover with a wind punch that spins you right side up and causes the whole ship to buck.

You’re feeling pretty pleased with yourself until the second ship fires and hits you directly. You’ve
barely turned around when Sollux lets out a strangled scream, and suddenly you’re being blinded by a blast of light so intense it scorches your retinas even after you’ve shut your eyes. The heat is intense, though the fact that you can feel the pain of your skin blistering at all reassures you that your shield is holding.

The sensation lasts for some what feels like an eternity, long enough for you to realize that you’re screaming loudly enough to drown Sollux out, even as he clings to your shoulder.

Then, just as suddenly as it began, the heat dies out, and the last wisps of air around you dissipate. You feel yourself starting to fall from the sky, but Sollux catches you with a hoarse mutter. You’re relieved to notice that he looks mostly unscathed, his skin being thicker than your own.

“God fucking damn it Egbert don’t you dare die on me or I’ll kill you a second time you heavy asshole.” He’s barely holding on himself, and you can see the sparks of psionics around him flickering from exertion. You pick yourself up again in a hurry.

“I’m okay! I’m… well actually I feel like my flesh is burning off of my bones. Which I guess almost happened?” You try to laugh and end up coughing instead.

Sollux let’s out a choked laugh in relief. “Understatement. Such an understatement you fucking dweeb. If that actually hit us we wouldn’t have any fucking bones. Good news though, pretty sure it just feels worse than it actually is. From what I can see, you just have really fucking bad sunburn. Also your shirt is… not really there.”

“Aww man!” You look down to see that your flimsy old ghost busters shirt is indeed little more than scraps. The blue jacket you were wearing over it was newer, so it still more or less has its shape, though it’s definitely smoking. “I liked that shirt!”

“Let’s hope that’s the worst casualty of the day.” Sollux spits irritably. “Now let’s try to move before another ship fires at us.”

You grimace. “I can’t move very fast at this point, Sollux, let alone try to fight any more warships. You’re better off not relying on me at this point. I can’t stop them again.” You glance at your hands and see they’re clutching your war hammer in a vice. You can’t feel your fingers right now. “Unless we get the signal soon I’m probably going to die!” You attempt to grin in spite of everything, but Sollux just looks horrified. You can’t feel your face much either.

“John, I’m pretty sure if you let anybody else hear you talking like that they’ll probably lose their will to live.” Sollux states frankly. “Luckily for you I’m already convinced we’re all going to die, but you should still just stop talking as long as you’re thinking doom and despair. Crushing hopes and dreams with cold logic is my territory.”

“Sorry to intrude.” You’re pretty sure you manage a proper smile this time.

“Apology accepted.” Sollux smirks back. “Anyways, we don’t have to hold out, we just have to run and hide now. We got the signal.” He points down to where the wreckage of a freshly ruined war ship is sitting just offshore from Harley Island. “Pretty sure that signal is what saved our lives. Ripped those assholes in half.”

“They fired. Oh thank you Jegus.” You gasp with relief. “Okay, let’s get on board while they’re still trying to figure out what’s going on.” You fly for the ship as fast as you’re able, trying to ignore the burning sensation of cold air against your burned skin.

As you draw nearer to the Imperial flagship you notice that parts of it seem to be falling from the sky.
“Sollux, should that be happening?”

“Of course not.” Sollux snaps in reply. “I did a lot of damage when I ambushed the flagship earlier. Not enough to get anywhere deep inside, but most weapon systems on this thing are near the surface. Firing the main cannons probably put a lot of strain on this thing’s hull. It was probably enough to knock over all the shit I fried.”

“Well that’s good.” You mutter, before noticing movement from the other ships. “Oh geez Sollux I think they’ve noticed us.”

“Yup. They know we’re on the ropes. Pretty sure they’re sending in the fighters now that you can’t use them for confetti.” Sollux stares ahead grimly as he starts pushing you along with psionics. “We need to move faster.”

“Oh man, what are those things coming out of the flagship?” You stare uneasily as a swarm of freaky robots start flying at you head on.

Sollux is going bug eyed, but he hasn’t changed his course. “Those are imperial drones. We just have to hope that Hal’s got control of them or we’re dead no matter what we do.” A shot flies past him and you turn to see a small red ship flying at you. “And there’s the fucking fighters right on cue. We’re dead John, we’re both going to die, and everything is horrible. Just in case you weren’t aware.”

“It was pretty obvious!” You grin nervously, still right on Sollux’s heels. The drones are clearly visible at this point. They look exactly like Karkat once told you: spiky, inefficient looking, and horrifying. Still, they might be Hal’s and if they are you have a chance to make it, so you keep flying right at them.

You become acutely aware of how little you’ve been breathing, and let out a sigh of relief when the first drone flies past you and stops a round from hitting Sollux in the back. The next few fly by as well, and suddenly there’s a wall of angry robot between you and your pursuers.

“010010001000101010011000010010011100100000010010010011100101000010100111000101110

One of the drones remarks as it draws up next to you. You hear Sollux snort and mutter ‘really?’ to himself as the drone seems to seize up and fall from the sky. Another immediately takes its place.

“I was looking for that one, sorry.” Hal’s tinny voice calls out from the drone. “Fucked something up back on the ship, long story, not important. What is important is that with my support your chances of making it to the ship are roughly… forty seven point four six five nine percent better. Now, follow this drone and it will lead you to Jane. We need you both at top condition if we’re going to make it through this, I can only control around a third of these drones.”

“What the fuck, after all the work I did making sure you’d be compatible with Alternian systems that’s the best you can do?” Sollux yells furiously.

“Hey, blame your goddamn girlfriend, when she shut down the security station she went way overkill!” Hal protests. “The only thing I can access from the back half of the ship is visual feed, everything else is cut off. It’s like ripping the pit out of a cherry, there’s just a big gaping hole in the fucking systems, nothing can hack through that because there’s literally nothing there!”

“Damnit!” Sollux snarls, “That means that the majority of the Drones are still acting autonomously!”

“Exactly. Making all the ones I can control a very valuable commodity.” Hal replies. “So get on board already before I lose any more.” You turn around to see drones falling from the skies as they
try to fight the better-armed imperial fighters. You try to fly faster despite the pain.

“Okay, so once we get back on board things might get a little hectic.” Hal states calmly. “I will have to use my drones to lead the way, but the forward section is still swarming with trolls, and ripping through the walls is too dangerous without knowing what’s on the other side. This means it will be slow going, with my drones leading the way through the halls and whatever the hell is inside them. But it also means your pathetic meat bodies won’t get pulped on the way there, so just deal with it.”

“Let’s move then. Double time.” You grin as Sollux rolls his eyes, before sighing. “Except I can’t move much faster than this.”

“One step at a time Egderp.” Sollux mutters.

The two of you reach the Flagship and nearly stumble into each other as soon as your feet hit the ground. Without your wind holding you up the weight of your hammer becomes immediately apparent, and it wrenches its way out of your hands, hitting the deck with a loud thud. You stare down with morbid curiosity as your fingers, wrenched open by the sudden weight, curl up again slowly.

“Still can’t feel a thing,” you mutter.

“What the fuck.” Sollux gapes in horror. “Next time I take the laser, that is so messed up.”

“I’ll hold the hammer.” One of Hal’s drones grabs your weapon and lifts it easily. “Now let’s get below deck and start moving. As long as you two are dead weight we don’t stand a chance.”

Your name is Feferi Peixes, and you don’t stand a chance.

You stab and she parries.

You swing and she deflects.

You block and you feel your arms go numb.

You are outclassed. Completely, brutally, outclassed. Your opponent is twice your size and has lifetime’s worth of training. You’re giving your all and she’s making only a token effort.

“I gotta sea, I expected beta.” The Condesce drawls, as she lazily bats your swing aside. When she strikes back it’s so fast you can barely duck beneath the strike, which would have taken both of your eyes at once. It wasn’t intended to kill though. She’s toying with you, and when she does kill you she’ll do it slowly.

“You krilled our lusus. Without krilling our speseas. I never expected that.” She shrugs as she spins her trident. When she moves her weapon it seems to bend as though made of water. “Well, you’re more clever than most of the competition I’ve ripped apart. You’re no guppy. But you’re hardly a proper shark either. Too young to be dangerous. If you’d waited a hundred sweeps this could have been a proper challenge. Instead…”

You raise your weapon to block her strike, but she twists her wrist and suddenly the trident seems to flow around your weapon like water. You grit your teeth and leap backwards, but the swift attack leaves your shoulder bloody.

“The one thing I’ll say is that your backup is good. Really, haven’t seen trolls like this in a very long
time. Not since my generation, really.” As she abandons her puns her strikes become far faster, and you attempt to emulate her movements now to keep up the defense.

She aims for your gut and you knock the blow downward, continuing the momentum of your spin and catching another strike with one end of your fork while you lash out with the other. She yanks back on her weapon though, tugging the end of your weapon forward and almost causing your own trident to twist back into your face until you catch it and block a stab that sends you stumbling backwards.

“You also learn fast. Yeah, you’re decent. I’m almost glad to be killing you now.” The Condesce shrugs as she starts a series of jabs that slips past your guard and starts peppering your chest and stomach with minor puncture wounds. When you manage to swat her trident aside she spins with her weapon, bringing it around in an arc that it takes all your strength to block. You can feel your bones crack with the exertion.

“Had enough of this shit.” Dirk suddenly snaps, and you look up in shock to see that he’s flash stepped behind The Condesce. Even she looks surprised, though she deflects his sudden slash with little effort. As Dirk’s sword hand gets knocked upward though, he brings his other hand up and fires a bolt of pink lightning right into her chest.

“I’m not making Feferi do all the work here.” Dirk seems to say to himself. You look at where he came from and see Karkat fighting three trolls at once, though he’s trying to make his way over as well. He nods resolutely when your eyes meet, though he has to focus on the fight immediately after.

The Condesce doesn’t react normally to the attack though; refusing to scream or even let her breath hitch up. She just snarls, and though her arms are clearly trembling, she brings her trident up to block the attack. “I know how your power works, worm!” She snaps as Dirk leaps backwards. “It can only affect organic matter. Any warrior who can properly use a weapon will find it useless. You are not worthy of fighting me.”

“I couldn’t agree more, your highness.” Dirk whirls around in shock, and you realize with a jolt that Doctor Scratch has suddenly closed in on him. He lashes out swiftly, sending Dirk flying with a punch to the face. You can’t tell his expression thanks to… whatever is going on with his head, but his voice is cheery. “Now Dirk, we mustn’t be rude. I made you better than that. It wouldn’t do to get involved in troll matters.”

“It doesn’t mean a fucking thing how well you made me.” Dirk spits as he gets to his feet. “I was raised by an asshole.”

Dirk vanishes, and Doctor Scratch’s arm lashes out immediately. You gasp, as Scratch effortlessly seems to grab Dirk out of thin air, his bionic arm catching Dirk by the collar and throwing him aside. Dirk rolls back to his feet and stares Scratch down, blade at the ready. Clearly you won’t be getting help from him unless Scratch is dead.

“I think I might have to breed some humans of my own when this is done with.” The Condesce muses as she watches the two fight. “These cloning powers have potential. If I could put them in troll bodies it could be interesting.”

You stab at her chest hoping to take advantage of her discussion, but the Condesce easily stops you, grabbing your fork by the prong and twisting the whole weapon out of your hands. “You on the other hand…” She glares down at you coldly, and you feel panic welling up. “I’ve lost interest in you.”

The Condesce throws your culling fork aside and lifts her own, holding it like a bat. You try to get
away from her, but the length of her weapon makes it impossible. You’re mid-leap when she swings it into your side, and you feel as though a train has hit you.

Blood seems to rush to your mouth immediately as the prongs of the trident strike you, and you think it’s likely you’ll choke on it all. Your left arm takes the brunt of the blow, and you can feel the bones shatter on impact. Your ribs are cracking as well, as your arm is crushed against it. Then for a few moments you feel strangely weightless as the attack causes you to fly across the room, until your back slams into the wall with enough force to tear into it. The metal folds around you like tinfoil, before you bounce out and collapse to the ground in a heap. You barely manage to prop yourself up on your right arm before you start vomiting blood.

“DON’T YOU FUCKING DARE DIE ON ME FEFERI!” You hear Karkat screaming in panic as you struggle to get to your feet. Your vision is blurring, to the point where you can’t even see where he is any more.

“Get out of there, now!” Dirk snaps, before grunting and falling silent again, no doubt due to Scratch going on the offensive again.

Karkat is still screaming, growing more desperate by the moment. You see the boots of The Condesce appear in front of you. You try to get to your feet, but suddenly a glimmer of gold appears directly in your face. The prongs of The Condesce’s weapon slide around your neck smoothly, and you’re lifted into the air like a fish on a hook. You try to speak and find all you can do is choke as blood bubbles in your mouth. You right arm paws uselessly at the culling fork. Your left arm won’t move.

“It was fun while it lasted.” The Condesce muses, as she pulls you in to rest a hand on your skull. Her claws clamp down on your temples and you realize that this is what it means to have your head in a vice. She’s about to crush your skull in her hand.

Your vision goes white. The Condesce snarls. You slide off the fork and collapse to the ground in a heap.

You are not dead.

You look up in disbelief to see that The Condesce has turned aside. “I knew you’d pull something stupid eventually, kid. But this is stupider than I ever thought you were capable of.” You follow her vision and gasp.

Eridan is here. With his gun pointed right at The Condesce’s face.

“Quadrants are funny like that.” Eridan snarls, his face twisted in rage. “But weirdly enough, as stupid as this is it’s the first thing I’ve done this week that I don’t regret. Now keep your filthy fucking claws off of my moirail you bitch.”

Chapter End Notes

It’s about fucking time Eridan, I’ve been waiting all year to write that scene.
Your name is Nepeta Leijon, and you’re not sure how much longer you can hold out. You’re trapped in a small stretch of hallway with no way to escape, and more trolls are continuing to claw their way in over the wall of metal Aradia raised earlier. That took the last of her strength though, leaving you to stop them as they fall on top of you.

At the moment you’re making use of a fallen foe’s assault rifle, and are firing at anyone who sticks their head over the wall. It’s not nearly as comfortable as using your claws, but you can’t fight everything close range if you want to survive this.

“They’ll be here soon.” Aradia murmurs from where she’s leaning against the wall. “They’ve made it to our floor at the very least. Also, Sollux says that he and John will be meeting with us here for medical attention as well.”

“Well good.” You say tersely. “Let’s just hope we’re still alive when they get here.” Another troll hauls himself over the wall and you somehow manage a lucky hit between the eyes. He falls back with a choked scream.

“You imbeciles!” a voice cries out from behind the wall, “We have other intruders to deal with after this, so use your fucking thinkpans or there won’t be anyone else to fight them! Out of my way!”

“They’re trying something.” You mutter, raising your gun. “Try to move back Aradia, things might get hairy.”

“Furry.” She corrects with a wry smile, “At any rate, I can’t really get up right now.”

“Then just stay low.” You move to the wall and place yourself in front of her.

You see a troll come over the wall in one huge leap, screaming and flailing, and pepper the unfortunate individual with bullets. They crash to the ground in a heap, and you realize that two more trolls have scaled the wall behind him. You turn your gun on them and manage to bring one down.

That’s when they throw a dead body at you. You’re about to focus on the second troll and suddenly the corpse of the troll you shot earlier lands in front of you, more than large enough to obstruct your vision. You shove the body aside and see that there are now four trolls in the hall, and they’re too close for your gun.

You surprise the first one when he swings at you, dodging aside and springing your hidden claws on his throat. But the next one is already there to take his place, and you can see more coming behind him. You duck under a hammer, jump, land on a spear that was just thrust at your leg, and shatter it, kicking the spearhead up into the face of the troll with the hammer. As they flinch back, the spear
haft crashes into your head and sends you reeling, though you manage to cut the weapon in half as you stumble aside.

You see the troll with the hammer about to swing at your head, but a hand grabs you from behind and throws you further down the hall, out of reach. You look up in surprise to see Aradia glaring down no less than a dozen trolls, hair floating around her like ethereal wisps.

Then she closes the hallway on them. It happens so fast you can hardly believe it. There’s a sudden creaking of metal, and suddenly the whole hall just pinches shut around the trolls. They barely manage a scream before everything is lost in a mess of cracking bones. It’s enough to make even you queasy.

“Okay. That’s definitely all I have left.” Aradia turns around, and you see blood leaking from her eyes and ears. “I’m going to pass out now.” She collapses in your arms with a groan. You look back and see a mess of color oozing from the now closed hallway.

That’s when it occurs to you that the hall you’re sitting in is now completely sealed on both ends. “Perfect.” You mutter grumpily, turning your earpiece on. “I have good news and bad news efurryone. The good news is we’re not being attacked anymore. The bad news is there’s no longer any way to reach us without tearing a wall down.”

“Don’t worry.” Sollux replies. “I’m pretty worn down, but I’m sure I’ll manage. Is Aradia alright?”

“Aradia will be fine!” You say with as much cheer as you can manage. It’s technically not a lie, as long as Jane gets here soon.

“That’s good to hear.” Kanaya’s voice chimes in. “And I’m happy to report that Little Hal’s drones have found us. We should be there momentarily.”

Sure enough, it only takes a few minutes for you to hear the stomping of metal feet on a metal floor, and you watch in fascination as metal claws rip into the same area Aradia closed when you first started this suicide mission and tear it to pieces like tissue paper.

The drones make you nervous at first, but seeing Kanaya and Jane walk through after them is enough of a relief that you can finally drop your guard again. If you weren’t carrying Aradia right now you would absolutely pouncegreet them with everything you had.

“You seem to have held out very well, Nepeta.” Kanaya smiles warmly as Jade rushes over to help you lower Aradia to the ground. “That’s wonderful. You said Aradia was alright?”

“She pushed herself way too hard!” Jade exclaims in distress. “I think she’s given herself an aneurism, hell, at this point she may be hemorrhaging!”

“I didn’t want Sollux to worry!” You cry out when Kanaya looks at you in alarm. “But you’re here now, so she’ll be fine, right?”

Jane sighs and places her hands on Aradia’s head. “It’s easy enough for me. I can heal internal bleeding without needing to go below the skull. But this would likely be fatal if I wasn’t here. She’s powerful, but not that… wait.”


“Except for Aradia herself!” Jane chides, before becoming thoughtful again. “But no. Her body is just… odd. There’s something… it’s like she’s not properly developed? There’s a part of her brain that seems to be too weak, it doesn’t match up with the development of the rest of her brain.”
“We did rush the awakening procedures.” Kanaya comments. “The F.E.L.T. attacked us just as Aradia’s cloning process was near completion. We thought she was just weary after being brought back to life, but maybe we pulled her out too early?”

“Fucking shucks!” Jane exclaims in annoyance. “How did I miss this all this time, she’s been straining her mind to keep up with her usual capabilities when it wasn’t even fully developed! Nepeta, are you injured at all?”

“A few bruises, and I guess I got hit in the head, but I’m alright!” You smile reassuringly, but Jane springs up and grabs you by the ear. “Owowowow, whaaaat?”

Jane just manhandles the heck out of you, turning you around and placing a hand on the base of your neck. You see Kanaya stifling a giggle and hiss at her. “You’ve got a concussion, you idiot.” Jane sighs. “You need to take head injuries seriously, I will be very cross with you if you get yourself almost killed again.”

You feel fatigue wash away that you weren’t even aware of, and your senses seem to suddenly sharpen. “Oh wow!” You exclaim. “That’s actually meowch better!”

“Glad to hear it.” Jane smiles at you. “Now try not to get yourself injured again, I’m going to see what I can do for Aradia.”

“I’m not going anywhere!” You wave her off with a grin. “Not yet anyways. Though…” You turn to Kanaya. “Kanaya, what should we do next?”

Kanaya hums thoughtfully, “As I understand it, the only places to go from here are the bridge and the reactor. Dave, Jade, and Jake are teleporting all over the ship, and the Lalondes have gone silent.” She frowns as she recalls her matesprit’s unknown status.

“Well Roxy is with her now, right?” You ask hopefully. Kanaya nods affirmation and you grin. “Good! As long as they’re togethfur Roxy can keep them safe! She can just walk through walls if anything bad is about pounce!”

“That is true.” Kanaya smiles gratefully. “Thank you Nepeta, that is reassuring.”

“Fur sure!” You nod, before remembering what you were originally trying to figure out. “But still, I wish I knew where to go from here! One place has my moirail, and the other place has my matesprit! I don’t know what to choose!”

“I am sure that Gamzee is no match for Equius.” Kanaya says, though you hear the question in her voice.

“Gamzee’s the only one who’s a match for Equius.” You reply grimly. “But I’m not sure any of us are a match for The Condesce.”

“I wish I could help you.” Kanaya shakes her head. “I am just happy that there are no further reports of injuries.”

“JANE I NEED YOU ON THE BRIDGE IMMEDIATELY THERE IS DEATH HAPPENING UP HERE!” Karkat’s voice suddenly screams over the earpieces.

Kanaya blinks, before wincing in frustration. “I seem to have jinxed us. Of course there is death happening, this day really is such bullshit.” She lets her head fall back against the wall with a dull thud, before responding. “Aradia is preoccupying Jane, and John and Sollux will require medical attention soon after. Are things really so dire? Please say they are not.”
“FUCK. FUCK, I WISH I COULD KANAYA. UNFORTUNATELY FOR US THE WORLD IS AS USUAL CONSPIRING TO FUCK US UP THE ASS, BECAUSE FEFERI JUST BROKE HALF THE BONES IN HER BODY AND I DON’T KNOW HOW LONG ERIDAN CAN HOLD OUT FOR.”

“Eridan!” You exclaim in shock.

“YES, ERIDAN. TURNS OUT THE DOUCHEBAG IS A COMPLETE BACKSTABBING TRAITOR. AGAIN. ALSO THANK FUCKING GOD YOU’RE ALRIGHT.”

Kanaya looks at you and nods. “It would seem that our decision has been made for us. I will head there immediately. As long as her injuries are not currently life-threatening I will be able to help.”

“I… FUCK, OKAY, I’LL TAKE IT, JUST HURRY.” His voice cuts out and you and Kanaya start moving.

“Jane, we will be departing to assist Karkat and Feferi. The drones should provide ample protection, yes?”

“I’m fine, go.” Jane waves you both off without turning away from Aradia. “The others should be here soon anyways.”

You tail Kanaya to the entrance that the culling drones made, and notice a mess of gore. “There were trolls attempting to break in on this side.” Kanaya explains.

“Most of the fleshbags on this end are gone now.” one of the drones at the entrance speaks up, causing you to jump. “All drones not on escort duty are fighting their way to the back of the ship. If I want to stop you all dying to a robot apocalypse at this point I have to do it manually.”

“Thanks Mr. Hal!” You grin up at him.

“Oh please, Mr. Hal was my prototype.” The drone seems to shift sheepishly and wave you off.

Kanaya is already forging ahead, so you scamper over the dead troll bodies to catch up. Just as you’re reaching open hallway again, you notice something underneath one of the bodies. It’s some kind of curved blade, colored in a mix of lime green and pink. You’re not sure why, but you find yourself compelled to retrieve the weapon.

You roll the body over and discover that the blade is actually a sickle, and that there is yet another one beneath it. The bindings on the handle appear ancient, though you can tell they’re some sort of black leather hide. And while the color of the blade is likely the result of centuries fading the original color away, the blade itself is pristine and sharp enough to be lethal.

“Nepeta, we must hurry!” Kanaya calls back to you. You grab the sickles on impulse, hooking them onto your belt. You have a feeling that they’ll prove useful before everything is over.

Your name is Vriska Serket, and you are once again doing the jobs that nobody else has the guts for. Big surprise, Vriska saves the day again, maybe this time somebody will actually give you some fucking credit for it.

Well, probably not. Even for you this job is an ugly one. But it’s a good plan, one that will cripple the Alternian fleet, possibly even permanently. And better yet, it involves stopping the Condesce without even having to face her!
Doctor Scratch thought he was so damn clever, trying to trick you into beating his greatest enemy for him. But you saw through his ruse easily! The fact of the matter is there’s no need to fight the Condesce at all, because all you need to do is keep her here and it will be your enemies wiping each other out instead!

That’s why you just murdered about a hundred yellow-blooded trolls. The empire’s entire storage of batteries, all stuck in hibernation until they need to change one. And they’re all dead. This means that the only yellow bloods that the empire can use are the ones already plugged in, and you’ve heard enough from Sollux’s annoying whining to know that they get used up quickly on long flights.

All you need to do now is kill the pilot of this ship. Once that’s done the Alternian army will be stranded on earth. And as long as the Alternian army is stranded on earth, you just need to convince the others to take a new ship and fly back home!

After all, you’re easily the most convincing person on this ship. And while you can only control Sollux half the time, there should still be plenty of time to get him to a point where he’ll find struggling to be more trouble than flying home.

You’ll return to a home completely free from your bitch of an empress, while the Alternian Empire and Earth are left to fight amongst themselves! You’ve definitely impressed yourself with this one.

Apart from the killing hundreds of yellow bloods in their sleep part. That part is really gross. The walls of this room are just dripping with yellow, not to mention the countless pods set in the wall your victims were contained in. Oh well, this is merciful compared to what awaited them otherwise.

You turn to leave the room and head for the bridge, but to your surprise you are no longer alone. Two human females seem to have wandered in on your little mercy killing spree, and naturally they are really grossed out.

“Oh man, oh man, Dirk never said she was this crazy!” The taller girl says in disgust. “No wonder your future powers said she was bad news.”

“Indeed.” The shorter girl wrinkles her nose, but still steps forward. “I feel certain had he known he would have mentioned that his ward was a sociopath.”

“Uhh, hello? I’m right here. Talk about rude.” You cross your arms and glare at them angrily.

“Well girl, we may be rude, but you, you’re insane.” The taller girl shakes her head. “Rosie, I think I need to throw up here, can I step out for a minute.”

“Alas, I fear this particular foe may require multiple hands to efficiently subdue, dear sister.” The other girl responds. You’re about to respond with something smug and clever when you realize just who you’re dealing with.

“Oh woooooooow, are you the Lalondes? You are, aren’t you? I remember Dave mentioning you two: he said you were blonde and crazy.” It’s coming back to you clearly now, the shorter one was just called Rose; meaning the other one has to be Roxy.

The girls seem to blink at you, before turning to face each other. “Tell me the blood soaked psychotic bitch didn’t just call us crazy.” Roxy says grumpily.

“Alas, it would seem that the mass-murdering degenerate has deemed us her kin.” Rose smiles coldly as she turns back to you and raises a pair of knitting needles. “It’s enough to make one contemplate doing something… extreme.”
You’re about to laugh her off when Rose’s needles start to glow white. You barely have time to react before a burst of light flashes past you.

Okay, Dave said they were crazy, but he definitely did NOT mention shooting lightning. And when you turn back, you’re just in time to see Roxy disappear in place. “What the heck, you’re even bigger freaks than Karkat!” You burst out in shock.

“Hey, Karkat’s my bestie, shut up!” Roxy’s voice calls out, echoing throughout the air in a way that makes the origin impossible to determine. You look around in bewilderment, and notice suddenly a strange mass of white floating in the air beside you. “Aww fuck, you can see the flour, can’t you? Evasive maneuvers!” A heavy fist plows into your face hard enough to lift you off the ground, and you find yourself thrown into a pool of sticky yellow blood.

“Roxy, I’m not sure that such tactics qualify as evasive.” Rose chuckles from somewhere near the door.

“Hey, I avoided a hit better than she did.” Roxy replies smugly.

Oh that is it.

“AVOID THIS!” You throw your dice over your shoulder with a grin, climbing to your feet just in time to see Roxy throw her hands up as the dice bounce harmlessly off her. She looks up in confusion, but seeing your expression and hearing Rose cry wordlessly, she suddenly bolts.

You back into the corner just as the fluorite octet summons a pillar of fire so intense and tall that it reaches the ceiling. The inside of this room just turned into an oven, and you can feel waves of heat blasting you with so much intensity your eye is forced shut.

Then, as suddenly as it appeared, the fire is extinguished, and your dice reappear in your hand. You look around the room. Dried blood is flaking down from the wall like snow, and you realize with a cry of revulsion that crusted blood is all over you.

That cry of revulsion stops as you notice Rose peering cautiously back into the room. A moment later, Roxy sticks her head through the wall and looks around in shock.

You laugh triumphantly as the Lalondes approach back into the room. They don’t have the same confidence they had a moment ago, far from it. You may only have one arm and eye to your name now, but you know for a fact that you’re still the best troll on this ship. And you’re about to prove it.

Your name is Jade Harley, and you’re closing in. Your quarry is leading you on a pretty lengthy chase, but you’re catching up. The family murdering, dog-headed prick is about to face Harley justice! Plus one Strider.

You’re feeling pretty good about finishing this fight as you continue to teleport after Jack. Becquerel is just ahead of you, moving unhindered while you pull Dave and your brother along for the ride.

“Jade, seriously, can we just reconsider this plan?” Dave gripes for like the hundredth time, “I know it looked like we messed Jack up pretty good, but for somebody who just got laser punched in the face he doesn’t look too worn down to me.”

“Nonsense chap, seize the moment!” Jake crows triumphantly from your other side. “We’ve got this blighter on the ropes!”
“Yeah, you’re just being silly Dave!” You smile as you keep up the chase. “This guy is about to get what’s coming to him! Nothing can go wrong.”

“What the fuck Harley, what the fuck? You just jinxed us. Just wait, everything is about to go completely horrible now!” Dave’s eyes look manic even behind his shades. You turn your head to look at him properly as you teleport again, just to make sure he isn’t about to pass out or something.

This was the worst thing you could ever do, as it happens. You broke one of grandpa’s most important rules: never turn your back on the body. As soon as the crackle of energy dies out and your feet are on solid ground, you sense movement out of the corner of your eye, and realize just what a huge mistake you’ve made.

You matched Jake in eagerness. That should have been the number one clue that you needed to dial things back a little, but you wanted to mess this guy up so badly that you just threw caution to the wind. That’s never a good idea when John’s not around.

Jack was biding his time, waiting for a chance, and as soon as he saw you look away he knew this was it. You hear a shout of warning from Jake, and suddenly Dave is dragging you to the ground fast enough to give you whiplash. You see Jack’s blade arm coming for you and know that he’s not going to be fast enough.

But Becquerel is.

Jack’s sword is almost on top of you when suddenly Becquerel just appears between the two of you. The blade stops before it completely passes through, but you know the wound is still more than enough to be instantly fatal. Jack hisses in disappointment, but continues the swing hardly missing a beat. The delay is enough for Dave to get you out of range, but Jake doesn’t have anybody to help him get away. He takes the full weight of your dog to the face, and is sent flying into the wall, where he slumps to the ground unconscious.

“Stay down.” Dave snaps, darting in and slashing at Jack’s torso. Jack leaps back, taking only a glancing blow, while slamming Dave with his wings. He places his foot on your dog’s face and shoves him off of his blade disdainfully, and that’s when you go from shocked to pissed.

“GET YOUR FEET OFF OF MY DOG YOU FUCKER.” You scream, raising your gun and firing a bullet, which Dave immediately catches in the air with time powers. You triple the bullet in size and watch as Dave releases it to punch a hole through Jack’s wing the size of your fist.

“No good, he’ll be ready for that one now.” Dave hisses and rushes in again, dodging around as Jack lashes out with wings and sword. You can’t find an opening to shoot anymore, as Dave dances around the opponent trying his best not to die. Firing means likely hitting your friend.

But this piece of shit stabbed your dog, so damned if you’re going to just sit by and do nothing. You charge instead, using your gun like a club to smash Jack over the head while his back is turned. He doesn’t so much as flinch, bringing his wings back to crash into you from both sides. You expected as much, but the amount of power he has in these wings is staggering.

Unfortunately for him you were hoping to get your hands on his wings. Especially now that there’s a convenient place to grab ahold of. Jack may be a stone cold son of a bitch, but even he starts roaring with pain when you stick your left arm through his wing and hook your elbow around it.

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Jack tries to shake you off, but you jump and plant your foot against his back, straining against him to keep the wing pinned behind him. He glares back and smashes his other wing into you, but you’re so jacked up on adrenaline at this point that you don’t care how hard you get hit. You just focus on
bringing your gun up with one hand and pointing it at his head.

“This is for Bec.” You snarl angrily as you pull the trigger.

For an instant you think you’ve won, but Jack’s neck seems to twist impossibly at the last second. Your shot tears the left side of his face up, but he’s still very much alive. Your only option is to shoot again, but with only one hand the recoil of your rifle has wrenched your arm skyward. It will take a moment to bring it back down.

Jack is faster on the draw than you are unfortunately. His arm comes back just as you’ve managed to stop the momentum of your arm, and before you can move, he’s sliced your foot off.

Maybe it’s the shock, but you don’t feel a thing. Well, it’s pretty obvious that you’re in shock right now; you’ve been feeling pretty numb since Bec died. But the pain isn’t the real issue, gravity is. You could probably stop yourself with space powers on a good day, but it’s pretty obvious that you’re no longer thinking straight. So you can only fall, as gravity tears your arm back through Jack’s wing.

Jack turns, swinging his sword arm in an attempt to finish you quickly, but before you can register it Dave is between the two of you. He’s too worn out to stop the blade properly, settling for blocking it with his own body. Jack was aiming for you, so the blow is low, but it’s deep, and you’d almost swear you could hear the blade stick in his femur.

Dave doesn’t flinch, bringing his blade up to hack at Jack’s arm, muttering rapid-fire curses under his breath. Jack stumbles back with a scream, and you stare in horror as blood starts gushing from Dave’s leg. Turning your gaze to Jack is worse, as exposed bone seems to shine through the mess of black and red that is his face, and his arm hangs limply from the elbow.

At this point everyone except Jake is going to bleed out. You need to finish this quickly and get to Jane before it’s too late.

You lift yourself with your space powers, raising your gun more with mind than muscle, and fire another shot that puts a hole in his left shoulder. It’s not good enough, that arm is already useless, but you still take the opportunity to say “That was for grandpa.”

“I didn’t even kill that one!” Jack snaps, but he knows you’re past giving a shit. He tries to swat the gun away with his good wing, but the blow falls short. He’s as exhausted as you are.

Your next bullet hits him in the chest, and you know from how his eyes widen that you managed to hit him in the heart. “That one was for Dave’s brother.” You say. He’s done for now and he knows it as well as you do.

But Jack’s not ready to give up yet. “I’m taking you with me you little shit!” He screams, ripping his arm off and charging with it. The move catches you off guard, not that you have the energy to stop him anyways. There’s a weary yell from Dave, and suddenly Jack’s sword arm is buried in your stomach. You blink in shock as Jack stumbles backwards with a satisfied smile.

“Well that’ll do it.” Jack barks out a laugh that causes blood to burst from his mouth. “Finish it girlie. You’ve got one more shot.”

He’s right. You raise your gun one last time. “This is for Mr. Egbert.” you try to say, but you’re choking on enough blood that you don’t think it’s very clear. Jack nods regardless. He already knows. Your last bullet hits him right between the eyes. It’s not nearly as satisfying as you imagined.

Dave grabs you by the shoulders as you feel the last of your strength drift away. He’s yelling
something, but you can’t really hear him anymore. Everything’s gone fuzzy.

You fall unconscious.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sure Jade will be fine, no worries.

Ha.

Hahaha.

I'm a bad person.
What We Started

Chapter Summary

Eridan does something rash, Jake does something desperate, and The Condesce reveals what she's truly capable of.

Chapter Notes

10,000 HITS. I FUCKING LOVE YOU PEOPLE.

Your name is Eridan Ampora, and you are the biggest glubbing idiot in all of Paradox Space (whatever the hell that means). You’re currently facing down the most dangerous person in Alternian history by several hundred nautical miles, and all for a bunch of assholes that probably still hate your guts.

Seriously, why are you doing this? You were ready to go! You’ve been talking yourself into stopping your old friends for days! You were going to kill them all and secure your place in Alternian history!

Then you walked onto the bridge and saw your moirail dangling like a fish on a hook, and all logic just went out the window. Suddenly you’re spouting cheesy lines and shooting your new boss in the back of the head, and just generally acting like a complete fucking disgrace!

Well, as long as you’re turning traitor (again), you might as well do a good job of it. You shot The Condesce in the back of the head just now; there will never be an excuse good enough to get you out of this one. Nothing for it but to stomp all over this moirail attacking bitch and go home a hero, right?

If only it could be that easy. Logically speaking, your first shot should have been enough to mess The Condesce up, but all it really did was frizz her hair a bit more than usual. The scary thing is you have no idea how she stopped the blast from damaging her.

Until you find out, you’re keeping your distance, which is basically the only possible way to win this fight. The Condesce is big, strong, and fast, to the point where Equius wouldn’t be able to win even with both arms. She’s skilled enough to make Feferi look like a complete joke, and you’ll end up the same way unless you stay well away from her.

You chance a quick glance in Feferi’s direction while you’re thinking about her, and are relieved to see that Karkat has finally finished off the last of his opponents, and is now helping her to safety. He is also mocking her mercilessly like a proper kismesis, and Feferi seems more than well enough to gripe back at him. It’s strangely relieving to see.

But you don’t have time to focus on that, as The Condesce has closed the gap between the two of you while you were checking on your moirail. Her jabs are lightning fast, and were you not holding a legendary nigh-indestructible artifact of incredible power you’d be dead right here and now. As it
stands, you’re able to block the first strike with your gun, and ride the impact backwards to a safe
distance.

“Well fuck, now or never.” You mutter as you take the opportunity to pull out one of Jake’s weird
super batteries. You’ve upgraded your gun enough that hooking up the battery takes only a simple
flick of your wrist, and the blast that fires from your gun is enough to send The Condesce reeling.

“Well isn’t that somefin?” The Condesce hisses as she regains her footing. “You’ve modified one of
the strongest weapons on Alternia. I’m impressed!”

“I aim to please.” You reply with a grimace. You were really hoping that the blast would be enough
to vaporize her. It seems to have broken through whatever The Condesce is using to defend herself,
but not enough to deal any sort of damage worth mentioning.

“Well guess it’s time to get even stupider.” You say with a sigh as The Condesce moves in again.
“We’ll try point blank.”

This is what your moirallegiance has reduced you to. You are about to throw away your only chance
at surviving the fight in order to take a chance at stopping Feferi’s worst enemy.

If this doesn’t get you back on Fef’s good side you are going to be pissed. Like, obviously that’s not
the main goal of this bullshit; you’re definitely just making sure she’s not going to die. But you feel
like you’re entitled to some of Jade’s quote: “brownie points” for this one.

The Condesce puts her fork just an inch to the left of your eye as you twist to the side and move in.
You bend until your spine is almost parallel to the floor, as the fork swings overhead, and raise your
gun as you straighten up. This time the blast engulfs the Condesce’s entire head, and you can’t help
smiling smugly as The Condesce seems to stumble backwards. There’s no way you didn’t get her
this time.

The Condesce seems to disagree with that sentiment though, because just as you think everything’s
about to be over she braces herself with her fork and pushes herself upright. You keep your gun
trained on her and squeeze the trigger still, but your laser doesn’t seem to be bringing her down, even
as it’s white light is blotting out her head!

“Why the fuck won’t you die?” You yell in both fear and exasperation, cranking the gun to its most
focused beam. The Condesce hisses as the gun reaches it’s most devastatingly lethal setting. But she
still refuses to die.

In fact from what you can tell now that your shot is smaller, Ahab’s Crosshairs still doesn’t seem to
be hitting her. This woman’s defenses are ridiculous!

Wait, is she glowing purple?

“Oh no fucking way.” You gasp, noting with horror that your gun is about to burn through the last of
its power source. Jake’s batteries do not last long enough for this kind of drawn out fight. “This is
just not fair.”

“As if I’d let you guppies have a fair fight!” The Condesce shrieks as your power runs dry. “AS IF
YOU WERE CAPABUBBLE OF GIVING ME ONE.” You feel yourself hauled into the air by an
invisible hand, and stare into the flashing blue and red eyes of The Condesce. “I haven’t even gotten
searious.”

Her Imperious Condescension has somehow mastered psionics.
All hope is officially lost.

You feel something hit you in the gut hard enough to send you flying. Unfortunately though, your head hits the wall so fast you’re unconscious before you can even see what hit you.

Your name is Jake English, and you’ve got a splitting headache. From what you remember something hit you while you were chasing Jack, but from there, you must have blacked out.

Your attempt to open your eyes proves to be rather daft, as the light sends pain right through your bloody head, so you settle for attempting to stand as well. You’re not sure what happened while you were out of it, but it would hardly do to be caught sitting down if your foe is still alive and kicking!

Thankfully, nothing seems to be broken, as your arms and legs seem to move properly when prompted. Your legs feel a bit out of sorts, but bracing against the wall makes standing relatively simple. You do note however that your shirt is sticking to your back a bit, likely the result of a minor head wound from hitting the wall. A tentative hand to the back of your neck confirms the sticky, wet feeling of drying blood.

All right, you think it’s bloody well time to open your eyes and get the lay of the land, now that you’re upright and a bit more awake. The light is still bright as the dickens, but you manage to take the edge off by throwing your arm up, bringing the room into

What.

What the hell is this?

Just what the ever-loving fuck happened while you were unconscious? The room seems to be almost plastered with blood, and you can see to your surprise that Jack lies dead.

That’s a fucking lie though. You don’t even notice the hairy son of a bitch. You notice one thing, and one thing only.

“JADE!” You scream in horror as you sprint for the middle of the room. “NO!”

She’s lying still, coated with blood, in the middle of the room. She’s hurt. Your baby sister is hurt and you need to-

You slip in the blood and collapse, almost falling headfirst onto what you recognize as Jade’s missing foot. You’re not sure what you’re even thinking at this point, but you grab it and crawl forward, still slipping on freshly spilled blood.

She’s not going to make it. You can tell as soon as you reach her that it’s hopeless. If she isn’t dead already she won’t last more than a minute or two, especially with that sword in her stomach. The blood loss alone will be catastrophic.

“No…” You stare down in disbelief. “No, no, nononoNO! FUCK! THIS ISN’T, THIS CAN’T BE, THAT’S NOT POSSIBLE! JADE!” You drop her foot and fall to the ground with a strangled moan. How did this happen? How could things have gone so wrong while you were unconscious?

“Hey, you found her foot. Nice one dude, she’ll probably be needing that.”

You freeze, and look up to see Dave is propped up on Jade’s other side, grimacing as he holds his hands over Jade’s near-lifeless body. His face is streaked with blood and tears, but he still manages a
curt “Sup” as you take notice of him.

“Dave… what happened, how did she… how did this happen?”

“Nothing to it dude. You got knocked out, so we kicked Jack’s ass in your place.” Dave grins like a loon as he nods towards his leg. “He wasn’t so bad himself.”

In spite of everything you still recoil when you look at Dave’s right leg, which has what can only be described as a wedge taken right out of his thigh, so deep that you can see a sizeable portion of bone. “Son of a bitch, Dave, you won’t last much longer than…” You look down at Jade again and feel yourself choking up.

“She’ll outlast me.” Dave says with a frown. “Like I’d fucking stand for anything else.” He wiggles his fingers. “I told Jane we’re injured, she’s got four culling drones helping her track us down.”

“They’ll never make it in time!” You cry in despair. “Jade’s wounds are-”

“Not going to bleed out.” Dave snaps. “Take a proper look.” You look again and realize with a start that your sister’s wounds are indeed somehow not bleeding at all! Dave gives you the closest thing to a smirk that he can manage as he wiggles his fingers again. “Time powers. She’s not dying until I do.”

“You stopped time for her?” You gape in disbelief. It sounds like total poppycock but you’re too desperate for Jade to live to give a fuck. “Bloody hell Dave, when did you learn to do a thing like that?”

“Just fucking now.” Dave says with a nod. “Nobody kills a choice babe while a Strider is on the case. We are the masters of Deus ex Machina. We are the gods in this ugly as sin bright red piece of shit machine. We are… fuck… We are probably going to pass out if we keep losing blood like this.”

“Son of a bitch!” You exclaim irritably, “What I wouldn’t give for some medical know-how! A wound like that is too serious for bandaging though, so I don’t know what we could possibly do besides sit on our asses and wait for Jane!”

“There’s one thing.” Dave says, his face twisting unpleasingly as he shifts his bad leg slightly closer to you. “But it’s not going to be pleasant. For anybody. We gotta burn this motherfucking piece of shit.”

The realization of what exactly Dave is asking of you hits you like a punch to the gut. “Cauterize the wound? Dave, there’s nothing we can even use for that!”

“You got your laser fists, don’t you? Put those bad boys to use.” Dave says with a smirk that you think is probably meant to be reassuring. It makes you feel ill.

“Dave, I can’t bloody well control my powers that well!” You protest, “I’d be more likely to take your damn leg off!”

“So take it off.” Dave’s smirk disappears as he snaps at you. “Dude, like it or not, this is the only thing I can think of that will keep us alive long enough for Jane to find us. I’m not going to last long like this, and when I’m gone Jade won’t be here very long afterwards.”

Jade.

That’s right.
This is the only way to save Jade. Dave too, probably.

“I suppose we don’t have time to argue about this, do we?” You smile helplessly.

“Nah man, we gotta make every second count.” Dave smiles again, though you can see his arms trembling.

“Okay.” You get up, and walk around Jade to kneel at Dave’s side. “I… well, if I tried to hold back we’d probably just be doing this twice. So…”

“Just go for it, dude. It’s my leg or my life.”

“Please don’t pass out from this.” you ask, more to yourself than Dave, though you know his consciousness is more important.

“Dude, I am not letting her go for even the smallest fucking fraction of a second.” Dave replies grimly. “Wait, give me something to bite down on.” You pull one of your leather holsters from your belt and he clamps his teeth down on it, giving you a firm nod.

You don’t think Dirk will ever forgive you for this.

You still hold back in spite of everything when you throw your punch. But like you thought, it doesn’t make a damn bit of difference. The energy you release from your fist is still powerful enough that the middle of Dave’s leg is burned away instantly. What’s left is twisted, a raw mass of black, red and purple that you can’t bear to look at.

Dave screams through your holster, and from how his teeth clench you don’t doubt that he’s close to biting through it completely. But while he’s clearly in more pain than you can possibly imagine, he’s not bleeding. A glance at Jade tells you that somehow Dave is still keeping his hold on her, because her blood remains still.

It’s done. Only one sensible thing to do now...

You scramble to the side and start throwing up.

“Doogie Howser would be so disappointed in you right now.” Dave calls out to you, his voice still choking up. “You wouldn’t last five minutes in a hospital.”

“Dave, that was never a point of debate.” You groan wearily, as you wipe your mouth and stagger back. “Are you…”

“I’m conscious and not bleeding to death.” Dave spits out over his involuntary whimpering. He seems to be trying his best not to hyperventilate right now. “AHH JESUS FUCK. Is this seriously what Equius had to deal with?”

“I’d say Equius’ encounter with cauterization was far messier.” You smile feebly. “I can safely say I didn’t burn your face.”

“Normally that would be crossing a line, even for me.” Dave groans. “But damned if that isn’t the best news I’ve heard all day… I’ll let it slide.”

“Grand.”

“Spiffy.” Dave starts to shift, but stops with a jolt. “Ahh, fuck! Can’t fucking move, don’t want to agitate this! Oh mother fuck, I can feel myself wiggling my toes, this is such complete horse shit.”
You decide it’s probably best not to draw attention to the tears running down his face at this point. In a way this is making you feel more ill than the actual sight of Dave’s leg.

Dave Strider has, for possibly the first time in his life, completely and totally abandoned his persona of coolkid. You feel terrified seeing him like this. You need out. And so does he. He needs something to latch onto, and you’re damn well going to give him what he needs.

“Well… you probably wiggled the wrong foot by mistake!” You say with as much false cheeriness as you can muster. “The way you’re sitting it’s a wonder you haven’t gone numb!”

Dave’s face twists with confusion for a moment, but while you can still see tears running down his face, he still manages a cocky smirk in the end. “Don’t talk to me about numb dude. Do you have any idea just what I would do to go numb right now? If I could, I would stop time for my goddamn leg. But I can’t do that. Gotta hold out. Nothing to do but wait until Jane gets here. If I let Jade die she’s gonna kick my ass.”

“Along with mine for good measure.” You add. “She does have that way about her, doesn’t she?” You manage to twist your face into something resembling a smile, and turn your back on Dave. “Which means I should probably do my part.”

“You’re not coming back?”

“Not until we’re done sorting this lot out.” You say as you walk out the door. You think Dave says something else, but he doesn’t have the strength to shout right now, so you can’t say what he’s raving about.

You don’t care at this point either. You’re done. You are feeling downright ornery at this point and these fucking trolls and their treacherous allies are going to know about it if it’s the last thing you do.

You turn on your earpiece and find things disturbingly silent. It seems nobody has time to chat anymore. They’re all fighting for their lives, against the Condesce, against Doctor Scratch, against Gamzee, against whoever is left to fight. Still, there’s one person you’re certain will still be listening.

“Jane, are you out there?”

There’s a few seconds of silence but Jane answers like the dependable lass she’s always been. “Jake? Oh geez, are you alright, Dave said you took a bad hit-”

“Beg your pardon dear, but after seeing what he’s been through I can hardly take anything I’ve been through today seriously. Do you know where we are?”

“We’re trying to find out, but Hal can’t seem to find you on any cameras! I don’t have a clue where to go!”

“Then I’ll give you a clue. Brace yourself.” You flick off your earpiece again. You doubt you’ll use it again today until the battle is over.
You reach the end of whatever hallway you’ve followed from the empty room and find that you’ve been sitting in one of the areas the trolls walled off during renovations. It’s good that you’ve lost your temper, or else Jane would never find you.

And there’s no doubt you’ve lost your temper. Your feelings of shock, sorrow, horror, and guilt are feeding into pure adrenaline, and you want nothing more than to utilize it.

In short you are miffed. And you want the world to know. So you dig down deep inside and summon up everything you’ve got.

Well actually that’s a bit of a fib. You don’t dig very far down at all. Your body is like soda that’s been put through the mixer, shaken up and fit to burst. You’ve got more power than you’d ever know what to do with. You’re not sure you’ve ever realized just how much until now.

It’d be terrifying to you normally. But right now you’re happy for it. Because you know exactly what to do with this power now that you’re aware of it.

You’re going to light things up. You’re going to unleash everything you have and bring these cads to their knees. And you are going to leave a trail of destruction that will lead Jane right to your chums. You are going to be your friends’ personal ray of hope.

“TALLY HO!”

Your name is Sollux Captor, and you are about to rejoin this fight. Jane’s ability seems to be twice as potent as she claims at least, because when she healed your burns and cured your fatigue, she also seems to have recharged you as well. You’re not anywhere near your maximum, but you’ve gone from running on fumes to having some energy to spare. She’s not much good in combat, but Jane has powers that trolls couldn’t dream of.

She’s finished with John as well, and he’s not far behind you, though you’re not sure if Jane’s had the same effect on him. John isn’t some sort of battery like you; he doesn’t just produce energy, and Jane’s still trying to reserve power. Good thing too, because whatever happened to Jade’s group sounded serious.

If you’re being honest you want to find Jade and Jake and check on them. You’ve been with them long enough that you guess you’ve grown attached. But that won’t do any good. Their fight is over; you missed your chance to help them. Like Aradia, sleeping off Jane’s brain treatment, they can only wait for things to end.

You don’t intend to make them wait long.

You and John have chosen to abandon the twisting hallways of the ship, opting for a fast, direct route by making your way outside and flying directly to the bridge from there. The battle in the sky is all but over; without The Condesce’s guidance the fleet seems to be battling each other, though you feel reasonably certain that Hal has broken through to some of them. That computer is almost as good of a hacker as you are.

The bridge is in sight, though it’s probably another minute away at your current pace. Going faster would be dangerous, but it frustrates you all the same, knowing that your destination could be only a couple of seconds away were it not for such simple matters.

Of course, safety definitely seems to have its merits, because something seems to be going on down below. The air is tingling with energy, and you could swear that it feels familiar…
Is that Jake?

Your answer is a burst of white light that rips a hole out of the side of the ship and starts to tear it apart. That weird energy is Jake’s signature, though this is the first time you’ve felt or seen it used to such an extent.

“That’s insane!” John cries in shock as Jake bursts from the side of the Flagship in a flurry of metal. “Do you think he can fight the Condesce like that?”

“Not without fucking up everyone else!” You gape as Jake fires a second blast that carves a furrow along the upper hull. “I don’t know what that dumbass is doing, but he is begging for collateral damage right now.”

“Alright, then how about this?” John swings his arm and you watch Jake tumble in the air as a gust of wind hits him, before looking around and spotting the two of you. “FIGHT THOSE GUYS!”

John yells, gesturing towards the other imperial ships.

Jake nods, fires one last blast at the Flagship for good measure, and then rockets towards the other ships. You see several of them descend to the water, along with the few drones that remained outside. Clearly these are the lucky few that Hal has commandeered. The others likely won’t know what hit them.

“Okay, not that I’m complaining about the additional firepower…” You turn to John, “But since when could that dumbass pull shit like this? If he had used that earlier we’d be done already!”

“He’s probably just upset.” John says sadly, watching as Jake reaches the enemy and starts blasting. “I… I don’t think Jade made it. I can’t feel her breathing.”

“Are you sure she’s not just… out of range?” You ask with as much false calm as you can manage. “I mean… that’s possible, right?”

“No. I can sense everyone. Even Dave, and he can’t go anywhere with that leg injury he mentioned. But Jade is…” John grits his teeth. “Yeah, Jake is probably upset right now. I can relate.”

“Are… are you alright?” Something about John is starting to give you a bad feeling. He’s dangerous. You knew that before, but knowing what he’s capable of doesn’t do justice. Not now that John feels ready to use his powers in full.

Your thoughts are interrupted when you see a blast of energy fly out from the bridge. “That’s my psionics!” You cry out in alarm. “What the fuck?”

A moment later Dirk comes flying out the front of the ship and lands on a platform outside; the Condesce’s viewing platform. Chasing right on his tail is a figure with a giant white orb for a head. “Oh god, that shirt he’s wearing… is that Scratch?”

“You asked me just now if I was alright,” John’s voice startles you as he floats forward. “Well I’m not. My friends are dying right now. I’m pissed. But that guy down there is the one responsible for that.” John turns to you and gives you a grim smile. “I think kicking his ass will make me feel a lot better.”

“You can handle him?”

“You’ve got your own score to settle.” John says with a nod, hefting his hammer. “And from what I can tell they need your help in there.”
“Good luck.”

“You too.” John nods and rockets to the ship hammer first, sending Doctor Scratch flying. Dirk is already back on his feet and darts after the Doc, but beyond that you don’t catch what happens.

You burst into the room already crackling with energy and see to your horror that the only one left fighting at this point is Karkat. He’s darting around like a maniac, dodging blasts of psionic energy by the skin of his teeth, but can’t seem to get closer. You don’t see Feferi; meaning Karkat must have dragged her out of here, and Eridan…

“Oh, fuck.” You can’t help but mutter.

You were too late. Eridan is against the wall, slumped over and limp. The Condesce’s trident is pinning him through his stomach. With Jane off looking for Dave there isn’t a chance she’ll be able to save him. Assuming he’s even still living.

Well there’s no time to dwell on that. If The Condesce wanted, she could kill anybody in a one on one fight effortlessly. She’s toying with you all right now. Even as her army and her fleet lies decimated she still refuses to take you seriously.

Well it’s time to see if two trolls can do what one troll can’t. You meet The Condesce’s next attack head on with your own, and are relieved to see that your power is equal. Karkat takes the opportunity to dart in, but The Condesce manages to counter him easily, even while matching your psionic blast.

Karkat is send sliding across the ground to stop at your side, and you stop your psionics to check on him.

“You still with me KK?”

“That bitch snapped my sickle!” Karkat sits up and waves the remaining half of his weapon furiously. Once he’s got that out of his system he turns to you with a glare, “Does this mean that Kanaya and Nepeta are here?”

“Sorry dude, flew straight here, they’re probably still running down the hallways.”

“Sorry?” Karkat laughs as he hauls himself to his feet. You notice uneasily that he seems to have left a streak of bright red blood across the floor. His back is wounded, along with who knows what else. He acts as though he doesn’t notice it though. “Sollux that is the best fucking news I could hear. What kind of matesprit would I be if I let Nepeta fight this psychopath?”

You chuckle as you realize what he’s getting at. “A pretty shitty one, I guess. I certainly feel like a prick for leaving Feferi with this bitch. So we’ll just have to beat her into the ground before she gets here, huh?”

Karkat grins back at you, “Well it was our boneheaded decision that got us into this mess, so I think it’s high time we set things right. Let’s finish what we started.”

Chapter End Notes

Told you Jade would be fine. I can only hope that the looks on your faces were as ridiculous as I imagined.
Yeah, in case Equius' whole arm thing didn't make it clear, I don't know much about cauterization. Like, I researched stuff on it, but unfortunately it's rather difficult to find anything online about what the whole process looks like. You can find medical bullshit all over, but an actual idea of what the experience is like? Good fucking luck. That shit hasn't happened much since the dark ages, especially since people started using tourniquets for injuries. That said, as I understand it tourniquets aren't good for really deep, big gashes like Dave had, so I'm pretty sure that wouldn't have worked. Also laser cauterization is way more dramatic.

Anyways, I give the climax another chapter or two tops. Can you people fucking believe I originally thought I'd get through it in three chapters total? Hahahahaha, what the FUCK was I thinking?
Chapter Summary

Equius and Gamzee finish their fight.

Chapter Notes

Things get a bit... ugly as far as the violence goes here, mostly near the end. If you've got a weak stomach for these things be warned.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Your name is Aradia Megido, and you are awake. That doesn’t mean you’re conscious, though that’s certainly true. It means that you feel like your mind is working in a way that it hasn’t been since before you died. What took extreme concentration ten minutes ago now requires only a fleeting thought.

The world is bending to your will, and you think you’d like to see just how far you can twist it before the day is over. Walls bend like paper around you now, and so you have neglected to walk normally, instead floating as a path forms before you.

You’ve missed this. You’ve missed it so much. Whatever Jane did to your head, you love her for it.

Before you can show her your appreciation though, you have other business to deal with. Primarily, dealing with a certain troll who seems to think it’s still okay for him to deal with his problems by himself.

Your name is Gamzee Makara, and you are done with this motherfucker. Equius Zahhak should be dead a dozen times over. You don’t know why the fuck you didn’t kill him already.

No, that’s a motherfucking lie. You know exactly why Equius isn’t dead: because the motherfucker wanted it. This lowblooded sack of filth is always the perfect servant when it suits him. You tell him to die and he’ll fucking do it, unless his quadrants get involved. This piece of shit values his relationships over social order, and you hate his guts for it.

How dare he? How fucking dare he act like Alternia’s perfect example of model troll behavior? He talks big, but you’ve seen the truth behind his cracked shades and gaping grin. He’s a fucking hypocrite, a liar who would rather abandon everything he claims to believe in than let himself face the consequences society has in place for him.

And no matter how much you throw that in his face, Equius refuses to let himself fall. This piece of shit thinks he’s somehow made it past everything that makes him such utter trash. By accepting all the wrong choices, placing his priorities in the last places his society dictate they should be.
You know he hates you as much as you hate him. But you also know that he will never give in to that hatred. Even as your feelings are the same, your values are too different. The same divide that led to your hatred for Equius makes your relationship impossible. You recognized that even before Equius head-butted you.

Still pisses you off though.

Everything that has happened on this planet has pissed you off, torn you apart, and stripped you down to nothing. You had friends that you thought you could throw your life away for, and a life of luxury. You had freedom, drugs, and all of the finer things Alternia had to offer, all at your fingertips.

But then the drugs wore off, and you realized that somewhere along the road you’d lost everything that made your life great. Your possessions were lost, your high had run out, and you were trapped in a cell. And your friends? Those motherfuckers left you to rot. The trash left you like you were the garbage!

AND THIS. PIECE. OF. SHIT. EQUIUS ZAHHAK. THIS MOTHER FUCKER WENT ALONG WITH IT. He said he was loyal to his duties; that he respected his place on the hemospectrum. BUT HE LIED.

That’s why you’re killing him. He made promises, swore his loyalty to the hemocaste, and then abandoned everything when things got tough. The motherfucker acts strong, but you know the truth. HE ONLY TAKES THE EASY ROUTE.

“YOU’RE A MOTHER FUCKING COWARD!” You scream aloud, letting the whole room hear it. The audience continues to watch silently, entranced by your Chucklevoodoos. “You followed the law because it meant living, BUT WHEN THINGS GOT TOUGH WHAT DID YOU DO? You ran. YOU RAN LIKE A LITTLE BITCH. Much easier to do that than to make any sacrifices, right? YOU TRADE YOUR PRIDE FOR CONVENIENCE.”

Equius has lost his glasses. Well, you knocked them off his fucking face. You’ve been running circles around him for almost an hour now, hacking and beating at him with shards of metal, and bone, and knives, and Tavros’ horns, and any other fucking thing you can get your hands on. The bastard is dripping with blood, mostly around the scars on his right side, though you’ve made a point to hit him just about everywhere. He’s bruised, bloody, and scarred.

Yet Equius is still standing straight. Even as blood drips slowly to the ground and forms a pool of deep indigo at his feet, he is upright and alert, facing you directly in the face of your outburst. “I can deny none of your assertions.” He says firmly. “But I will still not allow myself to lose. I am aware of my weaknesses. And I will use them to make me stronger. Defeating you will be my proof of this.”

You have no words for this, so you settle for screaming with everything you have. You aren’t going to hold back on this motherfucker anymore. You aren’t going to toy with him. He needs to die. He needs to break, and he needs to scream, and he needs to know that you are going to make him suffer for everything he put you through when he left you behind.

Words will never convey just what you want to do to him.

“HOOOOOOOOOOOOONK!” You screech as you pull out your clubs and dart in. Equius swings, but his swing is high, and you slip below him easily, bringing your clubs up to slam into his jaw. You see blood trickle from his mouth as he staggers back, but without skipping a beat his fist snaps up and shatters one of the clubs in your hand, leaving you holding a splintered handle.
You bring the handle down into his shoulder, but the wound is shallow at best, so you dart away and pull out Tavros’ horn instead. As a weapon it’s as good as useless, being large, but unwieldy, the curve of the horn making for a poor handle. But you don’t give a fuck.

“Hooooooooooooonk!” You swing your other club at Equius’ throat, but he brings his chin down and crushes the weapon in an instant. The swing of your horn bounces off of his skin with little effect, so you continue to circle him and try to stick the pointed end into his eye. He bats your arm aside with enough force to send you spinning, and you barely manage to roll aside as he aims a clumsy kick after you.

Equius is going to win at this point. You need something better to fight with if you’re going to kill him. The floor is littered with weapons from the miserable fucks you killed waiting for Equius to show up, so you figure you’ll start improvising.

You reach for a sword, but Equius’ foot shatters it before you get it off the ground. You throw the handle into his face and pick up a spiked mace instead, bringing it around to hit him in the leg. Equius snarls like the wounded animal he is, grabs the weapon, and shatters it in his fist, seemingly ignorant of the gaping wounds he’s placed in his hand.

“HOOOOOOOOOOOOONK!” You scream in rage, grabbing for a knife and throwing it immediately, darting back and picking up another item without thinking. You bring your arm around, and realize that you’ve grabbed a curved hook with a chain. You start by sticking it in Equius’ arm, before hurling the chain end down to tangle with his feet.

Equius lashes out with his hand, which has been injured enough that he can’t seem to form a fist anymore. The blow still catches you in the chest and sends you tumbling, wheezing as you feel your lungs empty against your will.

Well that’s fucking fine! Air is overrated. You’ll just kill him with the breath you have left. You look up and see Equius stumbling to the ground, his outstretched arm having pulled the chains tight around his legs. It’ll be easy to finish him off if you act now!

You see the glimmer of a blade on the ground, and grab for it with a rasping cackle of triumph. You can hardly run, but you stagger forward all the same, bringing your weapon up to take Equius’ head off. It’s far from ideal, but you’ll still kill him on his knees. You don’t think you can stop laughing at this point, whether from enjoyment or hysteria. Doesn’t matter, as long as you’re smiling.

“This is it, motherfucker!” You gasp out, bringing your blade down at Equius’ neck. It looks like you’ve picked up a sickle…

You drop the weapon.

You… drop the weapon?

Why the fuck did you do that?

You look down at your hand, and realize that your mechanical arm, the same one you stole from Vriska, is suddenly hanging limp at your side. Below you, several fragments of metal have fallen to the ground. Did Equius’ blows damage the arm? Or was this the result of your mess of a job attaching the thing? Maybe you damaged it when you ripped it from Vriska’s shoulder? Whatever happened, it seems that when you lifted your arm it pulled things too far.

You look down at the sickle laying on the ground and Equius, still struggling to get an arm underneath himself as he slips in a pool of blood not all his own. “Ain’t no motherfucking matter,
You comment casually, reaching down with your other hand. “This one still works.”

You get the sickle maybe a foot off the ground before it slips from your fingers again. “What the fuck?” You don’t understand what’s going on. Your arms aren’t responding to anything you want to do. Something about this sickle, maybe?

“Not a fucking chance.” You mutter to yourself, grabbing the sickle again, and squeezing it with everything you’ve got left. “This is going to fucking end it. I’m not letting some motherfucking sickle beat me.” You bring it down again.

GAMZEE MAKARA DON’T YOU FUCKING DARE YOU WORTHLESS GRUBSTAIN.

The weapon slips from your fingers again as you hear a voice seem to scream out in your head. “Kar…kat?” You ask in confusion. You… you haven’t seen Karkat since… well the last time you really remember seeing him was after Kanaya got shot all that time ago. When he ran through the wall and never returned. You’ve seen just about every other troll since then, but not your best fucking friend.

Karkat probably knew what you were turning into. You haven’t forgotten the sinful blood running down his face. And he knows you looked at him like that. Is that why you’ve never seen him since?

Is that why his voice is ringing out in your head?

“It looks as though Karkat’s weapon of choice has brought back unwanted memories,” Equius states with a cold stare. “I wonder: was it by mere chance that you have not seen him, or did you consciously avoid him until now? The slightest reminder seems to have brought you to your knees.”

You look down in surprise to see that Equius is correct. You’ve fallen. “What the motherfuck is happening?” You mutter to yourself as you grasp around for the sickle. “I need to get this over with, make this fucking traitor bleed for what he did to me. I need to put this shit right.”

“Nothing about you is right, Makara.” Equius says sadly, shaking his head. “I will forever curse my foolishness for not seeing as much sooner. But regrets are meaningless at this point. I will rectify things myself.”

You look up at Equius to realize in shock that he’s getting to his feet, digging his fingers into the floor for traction and hauling himself upright. The chains you tangled around his legs are falling apart like a fucking daisy chain, as he rips it to pieces with the slightest movement.

“Goodbye Gamzee.” Equius picks you up by the throat, and you feel a twisted thrill in knowing that he could kill you right now with a simple squeeze. You can break out of this easily though. Or at least you could, if you could move your arms… or even your legs.

Why? Why did seeing that sickle just sap your will to fight? Why aren’t you acting? You could dig your thumbs into his eyes, stick Tavros’ horns down his throat, take a knife to his tendons, eviscerate him, rip your piece of shit arm off and beat him with it… there are an infinite number of ways to kill this motherfucker. But you can’t.

The worst thing is that Equius knows it. He’s staring you down, his face twisted in confusion, knowing that he should be facing all the pain you have left to give him. But you can’t move. You can only sit here and stare blankly in confusion. It’s ridiculous. You start to laugh in spite of yourself.


“I will finish it, then. For both of our sakes.” Equius nods. He drops you suddenly, and you stagger
as your feet hit the floor. Another moment, and you’ll probably crumple like a rag doll.

Equius doesn’t give you a chance though. He only let go of you so that he could finish things with a punch. Your knees are just starting to buckle under you when his fist hits you in the chest, and you’re sure your ribs would punch through every motherfucking bit of your organs if they didn’t disintegrate on impact. You fly fast, crashing into the far wall with a dull thud that masks the complete obliteration of your spine. Equius just punched you so hard your insides turned into soup. That’s motherfucking beautiful.

You’re not too motherfucking sure how it ended up this way, but you just lost.

Your name is Equius Zahhak, and you can hardly call this a victory. Gamzee had to die; you know this. But for your bout to end in such a… disappointing manner… There is nothing to be proud of. This was not a fight, but an execution.

“I was prepared.” You mutter to yourself, unsure of how exactly to feel about this. “I was… I knew your arm would fail; I was ready to react. But you… As soon as you dropped that sickle, you let yourself be overcome by regrets, didn’t you?”

You won due to a mechanical failure that caused him to doubt himself, catching him off guard and shattering his pace. By pure chance, you seem to have shattered his will instead of his body. You’re not sure what else could be the cause.

You’re jolted from your reverie when a rasping cough comes from your opponent. Your punch didn’t kill him… it would seem that purple-blooded tenacity is prevailing yet again.

“This may be a good thing.” You muse, as you walk over to Gamzee’s limp form. “You still have some drive, some will to fight for your life. That is good. As long as you are resisting death…” This won’t feel so empty to you if he’s still fighting.

“Don’t do it!”

You freeze as a voice calls out from afar. You had forgotten that your fight was subject to an audience. Gamzee’s Chucklevoodos are no longer keeping the crowd at bay. Does this mean that the onlookers are stepping in? Are the trolls of Alternia so loyal that they rally even to a broken highblood?

“Equius, please stop!”

No. This speaker knows your name. And upon further thought you realize that you recognize this voice, though it lacks the typical stammer.

Tavros Nitram.

He appears in front of you in an instant, dropping from the sky and hovering in front of you with his wings spread wide. They look far more impressive than they had when your comrades first saw them over human news channels, though they are likewise far more enigmatic in person as well. But more surprising is Tavros himself.

He is bloody and beaten, but not broken as you thought he would be. His horns are still scabbed over, though you can see blood leaking from the wounds where Gamzee no doubt shattered them. His legs are falling apart from lack of maintenance, and he holds a spear of sorts that he seems to have carved from a tree branch, though it is free of blood. Still, while he clearly still lacks the
strength to fight back, it is clear he endured much to come here.

But to what end?

“Nitram… do not interfere.” You stare up at Tavros impassively. “I have business I must conclude with Gamzee.”

“I’m not letting you hurt him anymore.” Tavros says pleadingly, “He’s been through enough!”

Why does he defend this loathsome cretin?

“You are being foolish.” You snap, noting Tavros’ flinch back at your words. “And you are fully aware of that fact. You have first hand experience of what Gamzee is capable of. He still has much to answer for.”

“Tav… bro…” You stare past Tavros towards your quarry, still lying in a heap on the ground. You doubt he is capable of movement at this point, but as long as he is breathing, you can’t afford to take the risk that comes with his mere existence.

“He’s… Equius, he probably can’t even move anymore!” Tavros protests feebly, already aware that you know this. “Just leave him alone, let him die in, well, almost peace…” He finishes lamely, though he still has a defiant look in his eyes.

“Why?”

“Because he’s already lost, there’s not really anything to gain anymore!” Tavros knows this to be false. He knows why you need to see him die. You know that Tavros can recognize Gamzee’s handiwork on your body as surely as you can see it on his horns.

You need closure. You need Gamzee to die. And you need to be the one to kill him, if only to prove to yourself that you have it in you to cast aside the pressure placed upon you by the hemocaste.

“I need this.” You say softly.

“I need to protect him!” Tavros protests, his eyes filled with desperation. “He… he’s like this because of me, because I didn’t help him when he needed me the most. I can’t abandon him now! It’s pretty much the only reason I came this far!”

You’re honestly taken aback at this. Not Tavros’ admission of guilt, but his determination. He’s never seemed so driven in all the time you’ve known him.

You won’t allow that to sway you though.

“I hate him.” You say coldly, walking up to Tavros and noting with some irritation that while flying he is now eye to eye with you. You would rather overwhelm him with your size, drive him away through intimidation, but the bronzeblood is determined not to back down.

So are you.

“He ripped my arm from my shoulder. He burned my face beyond any hope of restoration. He attacked Feferi, Sollux, Eridan, Kanaya, Rose, Dirk, and Roxy.” Tavros has no idea who the humans are, but you don’t care.

You refuse to back down. You are going to drive Tavros away, make him flee like the coward he is. You let your temper slip, until your voice has become a rumble that fills the vast room to the corners.
“HE THREATENED ARADIA AND NEPETA, THE TWO INDIVIDUALS MORE PRECIOUS TO ME THAN ANY OTHER, WITH DEATH, JUST TO HURT ME. AND YOU WOULD STOP ME FROM ENDING HIS LIFE. WHAT WOULD POSSIBLY INSPIRE SUCH FOOLISHNESS IN YOU, NITRAM? WHY DO YOU STILL PERSIST IN DELAYING THE EXECUTION OF SUCH SLIME?”

“Because I love him!” Tavros cries out in desperation. “I don’t know if it’s the guilt talking. I don’t know if I’m just crazy! I don’t know, and I don’t care! All I know is that I’m not going to leave him to suffer! Not this time!” He finishes, sobbing in desperation and fear, tears streaming from his eyes. But he still floats in the air, eye to eye with you.

You should be shocked, but you’re not. In a way it was rather obvious the moment Tavros came between the two of you. If your feelings for Gamzee have come to become this twisted sense of longing hatred, then it’s not too far fetched for Tavros to find a similarly twisted sense of love.

“You know what this means to me, and you would stand in my way anyways. Even knowing what I am capable of.” You stare at Tavros coldly. “I could kill you with the slightest touch. Even after casting the hemospectrum aside, I still feel as though this would be a guiltless affair. To take even the slightest chance that Gamzee might live would be unacceptable.”

“He’s as good as dead already…” Tavros says with a sob, “I just want to be there for him in the end.”

You know that what Tavros is saying is true. It is abundantly clear that Gamzee Makara will not live. Even the trolls that watched your fight seem to know this, as they still stand somberly in the shadows. The highblood will die. You already won this fight.

“I’ve had enough of this.” You sigh wearily as you turn aside. “Killing Gamzee… it wasn’t what I came here for. And it will not make this day feel any less empty to me.”

When Gamzee dropped that sickle, your chance at a perfect victory was shattered. In the end, Gamzee Makara got the last laugh. In a way it is fitting.

“I will do my job then. And you will stay by Gamzee’s side until it is time to flee.” You say glumly, walking back to the reactor in the core of the room. “This ship will fall, and it will become a tomb for those who chose to die fighting for our foolish race and it’s miserable Empress. When that time comes… I suggest you exit.”

You look around on the ground and spy Gamzee’s remaining club laying at your feet. “I suppose this would be as fitting a tool to bring things to an end as any.” You reach down to grab the club and it explodes in your hand.

You stare down at your hand forlornly, the holes already present now filled with splinters of wood. You look back and see that Tavros has already gone to Gamzee’s side, murmuring to him in a low voice, likely comforting him until he breathes his last.

The thought that your most hated of foes could still receive such a luxury may be what finally drives you over the edge.

Your frustration is released. Your fist hits the ground and causes the ground to shudder as the floor dents. You scream so loudly that the onlookers dare not approach, and find that you’re crying, for what seems like the first time in ages. Another fist driven into the ground drives your arm through the floor up to your elbow, and you feel the tingling of live wires near your fingertips. When you pull
your arm back the twisted metal carves deep blue lines into your flesh.

After all he put you through, he is still loved like that. You don’t know why the thought hurts you so deeply, but it does all the same.

You don’t know how long you stay like this: curled up, head to the floor, screaming in frustration at it all, before you realize you’re not alone.

She comes into the room with an explosion of sound and fury, and you hear the few trolls still idling about fleeing in terror. But before long all falls silent again. Her footsteps are so light you can hardly hear them. But the feeling of her hands on your back is as solid as can be. When her head comes to rest between your shoulder blades you feel every bit of the strength she possesses, so far beyond your own it pains you.

“Aradia…” Your voice is hardly a whisper, and you cannot begin to convey everything you feel for her in this moment: that you love her, that you don’t deserve her, that you regret every moment spent letting your twisted society prevent you from speaking to her, and countless other things besides.

She is perfection to you, a complete contrast to you and all your faults. It pains you to face her after failing like you have. And it pains you more that you know she will not hold this against you, this, what may be your most shameful moment in a life that has known no end of humiliation.

“It’s okay Equius. I’m here.” She whispers against your back, as though sending those words into your very backbone. “I should have come sooner. I’m sorry.”

“No.” You hiss in protest. You find yourself wanting to rise suddenly in your agitation but with Aradia pressed against you your only choice is to tense and remain curled on your knees. “I wasn’t strong enough. I should have kept you away from this. Away from him.”

“Never.” Aradia’s arms curl up and around, until her head is against your neck and she’s all but clinging to your back. “I couldn’t stand the thought of you dying for me. So don’t tell me I should stand by while you sit by and let yourself get killed!”

After a few moments of silence Aradia starts talking again. “They told me you would die here. I was just… so scared to face the idea.”

“I almost did lose.” You admit, before adding thoughtfully, “And in a way… I think a part of me has died.”

“Don’t get psychoanalytical on me jackass.” Aradia let’s out a nervous laugh against your back. “Sorry.”

There’s another minute spent like this before Aradia finally gets to her feet. “We need to go. The others probably need us.”

“Of course.” You get to your feet shakily, tearing the tattered remains of your shirt away and using it to wipe your face. “Let me tear this place down and be done with it.”

“I’ll do it.” Aradia says with a hint of eagerness. “I’ve got energy to spare.”

As it happens, it doesn’t take much to set the reactor ablaze; the smallest breach sends psionic energy exploding into the ceiling, and Aradia pulls you out of the room with a wave of a hand.

The wall Aradia tore through to enter closes behind you, and after several similar passages through
the walls, you feel the ship shudder. “That’s it, it’s only a matter of time now before everything loses power!” Aradia exclaims with a savage grin. “There’s only one thing left to do now.”

“Indeed.” You nod along as Aradia opens a new path. “All that remains is to ensure the death of Her Imperious Condescension.

Your name is Tavros Nitram, and you finally did it. You flew for what seemed like ages, crossed an entire ocean without rest, dodged Imperial Culling Drones and savage highbloods alike, and faced down with Equius. All for this.

“Gamzee.” You sink to your knees beside your friend and stare forlornly at him.

His body is a mess of scars, loops and swirls that seem to form hypnotic patterns across his face and arms, though they fail to stretch very far across his exposed back. Some are still fresh and bleeding, likely opened when Equius finished the fight. His limbs are twisted, and blood is pooling around him. And you can’t help but notice that his torso seems unusually flat, as though it was deflated.

“Gamzee, it’s me. It’s Tavros.” You try again, “I’ve come back. I’m… I’m here for you.”


“You’re, well, not in a shape to kill anybody, I think.” You respond glumly, “I think you’re, uhh… you’re going to die.”

“I know…” Gamzee mutters. “I can feel… everything… inside me. I’m a goner.”

“Yeah… Probably a bit late for me to show up, huh?” You smile sadly. Gamzee’s face seems to twist at that.

“Hey Tav… flip me over.” Gamzee says after a moment. “Let me… get a proper… look at you.”

“I can’t do that!” You exclaim in horror, “I can’t put you through-”

“I don’t give a fuck about pain.” Gamzee spits out suddenly, “I just want… to see you.”

You really don’t think you have a choice but to relent. So you twist and roll him, trying not to think about how his body seems to shift unnaturally as you do so. He doesn’t even react to the pain he’s clearly going through, gritting his teeth through it all without comment, until finally, you’ve turned him over, and are holding his head up to face you.

Gamzee’s grimace shifts into a smile as his eyes meet yours. “There’s… my mother… fucking… bro. Hey.”

“Hey Gamzee. I’m, uh, well, I’m here.” You smile helplessly down at him. “I’m here, and, well, I’m going to get you through this, okay?”

“Shit bro…” Gamzee stops for a moment to hack up blood, most of which ends up on your hands. “Sorry… meant to say… that sounds… motherfucking swell.”

You hear a commotion, and look up to see Aradia is here, tearing the reactor apart. You thought she was dead… But there’s hardly any time left to think about these things.
“Okay Gamzee,” You say with a nervous grin. “Everything’s about to come apart here. Won’t be long now before it’s all over, probably.”

“Well shit…” Gamzee mutters. “You should… go… just… leave me.”

It’s tempting, honestly. But you came here to make things right, and you’re not going to back down. “Not this time, Gamzee. This time, I’m going to be there for you, because, well, I love you.”

Gamzee’s face creases into a full grin, but he doesn’t say anything else. His breath rattles to a stop.

Gamzee Makara is dead.

You don’t cry. It wouldn’t be right. Gamzee died smiling, after all. So you work up the biggest grin you can manage. You look up at the reactor just in time to see it start to burst. The explosion will be big enough to tear this room apart.

You know you don’t have a chance of making it. But that’s okay. You didn’t plan on leaving Gamzee anyways.

You are staying with him until the end.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, there was originally going to be more here than just Gamzee's grand finale, but... well I guess things got away from me, because I finished that part and suddenly we were at the 5000 word mark.

Sorry to the GamTav shippers, but when it comes to shipping Gamzee, I can only really picture tragic endings. This... yeah, it's been planned from the very beginning, pretty much. Equius and Gamzee's failed Kismesissitude, and Tavros choosing to die with Gamzee. The only thing I really deliberated on was whether Tavros should show up earlier in the climax. I figured in the end having his appearance be a surprise was the way to go.

I'm not going to estimate on how much is left this time, I fell behind my estimate again already. I keep fucking that shit up. Seriously, when I started the climax I somehow thought I'd get it done in three chapters. Can you believe that shit? The fuck was I thinking?
Playing Mind Games

Chapter Summary

Dirk and Scratch try to mess with people's heads.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Your name is Dirk Strider, and things are looking to be back on track. Everything’s been going off the rails for the past few hours, but somehow it’s been set right. As long as you force yourself to forget that something horrible has happened to your brother.

Yeah… that hasn’t really been working out for you. Quite frankly you don’t give a shit how collected you’re supposed to be right now, your brother is pretty much the only thing on your mind. The fact that you’re supposed to be fighting the guy who played tinker toys with your DNA really doesn’t matter to you anymore.

Thankfully for you, the cavalry has arrived in the form of one John Egbert: crouching doofus hidden badass. Yeah, he’s here compensating for all of the metaphorical ass you’re sucking on account of being distracted. Unfortunately he’s not too pleased with you right now because of it.

“Uhh, Dirk? I know this is hardly a good time to be criticizing team-mates, but it’s really not a good time to be spacing out either!” John yells at you as he fends off another one of Doctor Scratch’s super robot punches.

“Yeah, I know, sorry.” you hiss through your teeth and advance on Scratch, swinging your sword down on his shoulder. He hums to himself, swatting it aside in a gesture so fast you can’t even register it, before he throws another punch that would probably knock you out if John didn’t bat his arm aside.

“My goodness, Dirk.” Scratch goads, sliding backwards as John’s wind rushes over him. “It really is unlike you to act to distracted during a fight. I would imagine with everything that’s happening you’d want to get this over with.”

“Nah, you clearly need the attention,” you call back, almost yelling to be heard. “It can’t be fun getting demoted to miniboss.”

“It has its charms.” Scratch states calmly, his voice clearly carrying despite his casual tone. “I would hardly wish to fight the monsters doing battle up above.”

“You know we’re far more dangerous that they are.” You reply, feeling just a little bitter. “We’ve got powers most of them can only dream of.”

“Perhaps.” Scratch nods thoughtfully. “But they work together far better. The only members of your group practiced in cooperation are currently bleeding out far beneath our feet. You lack the attitude, and John lacks the cohesive fighting style necessary for combined offensives. You rely on your powers before you’d rely on each other.”

He’s not wrong. John’s hammer is a weapon for leading an assault, not weaving around attacks.
Meanwhile his wind attacks are powerful enough to blow you away. And as for you… yeah, you still want to kick this cue ball’s ass for what he did last time.

“Well, I guess going solo will just have to work, won’t it?” You mutter to yourself grimly.

“Dirk, just wait for a chance.” John scolds, shaking his head. “Scratch is too dangerous to start acting crazy.”

“Sorry, can’t hear you Egderp. I’m too busy doing something crazy.” You nod at him and rush Scratch in an instant.

You aren’t going to switch things up at this point. You have a system, and the only way to survive is to stick with it. This isn’t some anime bullshit, where you can try some miraculous new technique and have everything work out. This is reality, where trying anything you aren’t sure of means letting Scratch know your plans immediately.

Your sword bounces back as Scratch deflects, but you didn’t really commit to your first strike. Instead you just dart past him, making multiple swift strikes. The attacks stop Scratch from grabbing you the way he has every other time you’ve tried flanking him, and you manage to get behind him, bringing your sword down on his shoulder.

What Scratch fails to realize is that you’re swinging the sword down, but holding it sideways. His arm snaps back impossibly fast to deflect your blade, and runs directly into the cutting edge. You’re using his own momentum to cut his arm off.

Except that plan doesn’t work out, because apparently Scratch’s arms are the one thing that your katana can’t cut through. You jump back just in time to avoid Scratch’s retaliation, and find that his arms aren’t even… scratched.

“Fuck you for me thinking that.” You mutter irritably as Scratch chuckles.

“It was a good plan, Mr. Strider. Indeed, if you were fighting anyone else this fight would be over. Unfortunately, the same metal that makes your sword was created by my organization. The FELT formed it by taking Imperial metals and refining it with a variety of techniques from Earth. The result was far from the most exciting discoveries we ever made with Alternian technology, but it was certainly one of the most practical in action. The result is as you see: my arms are indestructible.”

“How about your fat head?” John cries out triumphantly as he flies in at top speed. Scratch raises a hand to deflect, but it doesn’t work worth a damn. Striders are built for speed, but Egberts are pure power. Scratch’s super powered robot arm bounces off the hammer without any effect. True to his word, John hits Scratch perfectly in the head, and sends him tumbling.

“Gotta say John, I think I’m in love.” You remark casually as he lands next to you.

“Send it that way Dirk, or Roxy will kick both our asses.” John replies with a roll of his eyes, gesturing out to where Jake is destroying the last of the Imperial Fleet.

“Eh, I’ll start blowing kisses later. Cue Ball’s getting back up.” You turn to see Scratch slowly rising to his feet.

“Another interesting discovery. I seem to be immune to concussion.” Scratch says as he pats his pristinely white head. “The more I learn about my condition the more benefits I find. Rue truly did a horrible job of attempting to kill me. At least when her mentor did the same thing she didn’t apply the upgrades herself.”
“Mentor?” John asks curiously, as you start stepping around looking for an opening.

“Your key biological donor. No doubt your father would have referred to her as your grandmother. She was as unpredictable as they come, really. A master of biological engineering, one of my best researchers, and as I once found out, an expert in the use of improvised explosives.”

“My Nanna used to work for you?” John asks in disbelief as you scan Scratch for an opening.

“Well you didn’t think is was your father, did you? No, Atticus Egbert was a simple, everyday, ex-military man who earned several dozen commendations for his services before becoming a businessman in order to raise his children. His mother on the other hand, was a shrewd, tactical genius who helped me form the FELT and create super soldiers, before her conscience got the better of her. She then blew my arms off and enlisted the other donors to rescue you from my clutches.”

“…What?” John gapes in disbelief. You can agree with the sentiment. That is a whole lot of information to just drop all at once, and you feel like the shock factor is a big part of his motivation here.

“You seem overwhelmed, John.” Scratch says smugly. “Well let me just conclude the story here then: I’m also the one who killed her.” He raises his hand and you realize what’s happening all too late. You don’t have any time to react before he fires a bullet from his finger.

John doesn’t have time to react either, still trying to process the sudden reveal of his family history. Fortunately for him though, he’s saved when a blast of pure white energy rips through the ground between him and Scratch. The bullet enters the blast and is immediately disintegrated.

“Hmm. Disappointing. I only had the one shot.” Scratch muses. “I really am growing fed up with all of this outside interference.”

“Tough shit!” A voice calls out as Scratch is suddenly sent reeling. “You try to shoot my BF and you’re damn right I’m interfering!” You hear the dull thud of knuckles this time as Scratch stumbles again. Roxy seems to have joined in.

She starts becoming visible after a moment or two more, but that doesn’t stop her from completely kicking Scratch’s ass. Scratch swings his arm out faster than your eye can see, but it passes through Roxy’s head without leaving a trace. His attempts to block her fists don’t manage anything either, but once they hit something important they’re as solid as can be. And Roxy’s hits are almost strong enough to reach Egbert level.

It’s suddenly occurring to you that Roxy may have the most impossibly broken powers in your whole team. She is untouchable and unstoppable at once, with stealth capabilities to boot. You’re not sure you could take her anymore.

“I see things are going smoothly up here.” You turn in surprise to see that Rose is ascending through the opening in the ground on a platform seemingly made of pure darkness. It seriously starts fucking with your head before she lightly steps down and causes it to dissipate.

“Rose, you’re okay!” John exclaims happily, grabbing Rose in a bear hug that she handles with typical Lalonde bemusement. “Was that laser thing you?”

“My visions have been decidedly straightforward today.” Rose says as she delicately slips out of John’s arms. “I was in the middle of dealing with a troublesome pest when I found myself looking up at the ceiling, and found my destructive instincts stirring. I just got a really good feeling, so I ran with it. And here we are.”
“A good feeling.” You sigh fondly and shake your head. “Shit Rose, if that’s your basis for firing lasers we are going to have a problem in the future.”

“I certainly hope not.” Rose replies calmly. “It would be a shame to run into any significant issues now, since as far as I can tell the most prudent course of action now is to evacuate.”

Wait what.

“Rose, we can’t leave yet, there’s still too much left to do!” John protests.

“All that remains is to deal with Her Imperious Condescension, actually. All other matters have been dealt with.” Rose nods towards Roxy as she brings Scratch to his knees with a strong punch in the gut.

“We should be helping the others with that then!” John says firmly.

“John.” Rose says calmly, turning to face him directly. “All other matters have been dealt with. Aradia, Dirk, Jade, and most importantly Equius have all completed their tasks. Do you understand me?”

Equius. Oh fuck.

John turns to you in sudden, horrified realization. “Jane’s still down there with two people that can’t move.”

“Oh no fucking way.” You hiss as you feel a sudden rumbling throughout the ship. You turn and stare along the vessel as a point far away bursts into flames. “It’s going down. It’s about to crash and we don’t have Jade to pull us out. John. Where the fuck are they?”

“Directly below us, I think!” John glances around frantically. “When Jake left the ship he burned a path right to them for Jane to follow!”

“Fuck, okay, what about him?” You gesture towards Scratch. In spite of all the damage this shit head has taken he seems to be enduring against Roxy, evading blows instead of taking them and watching patiently as Roxy tires herself out. “We can’t just leave him like this.”

“Assistance will be here shortly.” Rose says with a hint of smugness. “And in the meantime… Roxy, allow me!” She calls out firmly, prompting Roxy to suddenly dive into the floor. Then in an instant she is blasting the area with lasers.

“You two are considerably more difficult to manage than Dirk or John!” Scratch calls out irritably from behind a wall of white energy. “It’s heartwarming to see how much you’ve all grown!”

“Blow it out your ass.” Rose replies with a scowl. “We’ve more pressing matters to worry about than your reunion.”

“We can’t leave him be, Rose!” You snap in frustration as you look on. “As soon as we leave he’ll start pulling some other bullshit.”

“As I said, it’s handled.” Rose smiles grimly as she gestures to the same opening she emerged from. “I have decided the best way to handle our remaining irritations is to have them deal with each other.”

You look away as Roxy pulls herself out of the floor with a smug grin. “It followed me home Dirk, can I keep it?”
You look back at the hole just in time to see Vriska Fucking Serket explode outwards with an outraged shriek. “DON’T JUST IGNORE ME, ASSHOLES!”

You… have no idea what the fuck is going on. You haven’t seen Vriska since she was trashing whole cities on live television. Karkat had been pretty sure that Gamzee killed her.

As it stands, she doesn’t look far off. The mechanical arm you fixed up for her all those months ago is just straight up gone, and she looks like she’s taken several good hits to the jaw. Her clothes are grey with grime and dirt, her feet look to be torn apart, and most of her hair has either been ripped out or burned off from what you can tell. Her one eye is practically bulging out of her head.

In short, she looks like a psychopath, and considering she basically was one when you first met her you’re not sure you want to know what’s going on in her mind right now.

“Rose, whatever you’re planning, make it happen now!” John roars, as the sound of creaking metal grows louder in the background. “We’re already losing altitude.”

“I believe at this point my work has been done for me.” Rose smiles smugly as Vriska spots Doctor Scratch. You find yourself suddenly remembering just how resentful Vriska has been towards him until now.

“YOU.” Vriska screeches. “This was your plan? THIS was the opportunity you were talking about? These fucking humans?”

“This was certainly the opportunity I referred to, yes.” Scratch replies coldly, “Though I should think it obvious that a plan as poorly constructed as this is hardly my doing.”

You look to your right to see Rose and Roxy watching intently and get what is probably the most deliciously ironic idea you’ve ever had.

“Aww, don’t be like that, Doc.” you say with a smile as you step forward. “We’re giving it our all here. Where’s the support?”

“Dirk?” Vriska stares, as she seems to finally recognize you. “What are you doing here?”

“Oh, just checking out our handiwork.” You gesture to the mess Jake is making in the distance. “Took some doing, but we’ve got it all worked out now. Isn’t that right, boss?”

At this you turn to face none other than Doctor Scratch.

“What?” Vriska cries in outrage.

“What?” Scratch turns in surprise.

“What?” John and Roxy gape in confusion.

“Hmm…” Rose muses with a knowing smile.

“Hey, I know it’s not as neat as you wanted things to go, but desperate times, right?” You nod resolutely. “It was this or watch the planet fall under alien rule, and I know how much you like to be in charge.”

“You…” Scratch hisses in sudden understanding.

“Whoa, okay, I’m sorry boss, really!” You raise your hands in surrender. “We don’t like doing it either, you know that. But if it’s a choice between our planet and a fleet of space ships… Well, even
if the ships are destroyed we still get the pieces.”

“Dirk, you’re… you were working for this creep?” Vriska cries out in pure disbelief. It’s almost flattering.

“Stupid question Vriska. Of course we were. After all…” you turn to your friends and smirk. “What regular family would be stupid enough to adopt a couple of random aliens they met in a back alley?”

“Quite the ruse, Mr. Strider.” Doc starts talking, but you raise your voice and keep talking. And god damn does it feel good to interrupt this smug prick.

“No need to toot your own horn, Doc!” You spin back to face Scratch and point a finger mockingly. “It was your idea, after all.” You see him react in confusion and spy Roxy winking at you. She’s using her powers to silence him.

“You’re… you’re lying.” Vriska says, narrowing her one good eye in suspicion.

“Oh come on, think about it Vriska.” You say with a grin that just keeps growing broader. “Remember Houston? How everything went to shit down there? What happened just before you made contact with Scratch?”

“You… left to visit… the Lalondes!” She turns to them in realization.

“That was a cover story Vriska, do keep up.” Rose replies with a grin of her own.

“I was reporting to the FELT, obviously.” You continue with a shrug. “Seriously Vriska, use that brain. I left, and shortly after, just who happened to message you?”

“Scratch.” She replies, cold and quiet.

“Bingo. It was all one big ruse, just to tear you down.” You finish with a nod, which Rose returns.

If there’s one thing Vriska can be counted on to do, it’s to act as though the whole worlds against her. And right now, while she’s unstable, you just confirmed everything she’s been imagining her whole life.

“Why.” Vriska asks quietly. “Why did you do all this to me.”

To your surprise it’s John who finishes things. “Because you’re dangerous.”

When he looks Vriska in the eye his expression is nothing but cold, silent, understanding. In the span of a minute John seems to have completely figure her out.

If there’s anything about the Egbert family you can say scares you more than anything it’s that weird way they have about them. Their ability to just… understand a person.

Vriska doesn’t like it much either, turning back to you. “I’ll kill you all.” She hisses in equal parts fear and fury.

“Hey, we were just following orders.” You say with a shrug. “You want to get revenge, well, the guy in charge is right here.”

She stares a Scratch for a minute as he trembles in fury. For a moment you wonder why he didn’t simply stop you from speaking through physical force, but when you look him over you realize that Roxy seems to have seriously injured his legs in her earlier beat down. He’s still plenty dangerous,
but right now he has no choice but to let you pick his enemy.

Vriska doesn’t notice though; she’s still cursing her inability to recognize your bullshit agenda. “This won’t end with him.” She snarls as she looks around at all of you. “When he’s dead, I’ll hunt you all down next.”

“I’m not going to let you just kill my boss, you know,” you remark, holding up your sword. “As long as you two are here I’m going to make your life hell.”

“Well then.” She snaps as she throws her dice down, “I guess there’s only one thing to do.”

The dice summon a strange tether that coils around Vriska’s arm as she nods in approval. Her arm flashes out immediately and the weird rope flies out to wrap around Doctor Scratch.

“Try saving your boss now!” She cries triumphantly as she dives into the same dark hole she crawled out of. Scratch stands still for a moment, turning his head to look at each of you in a motion only recognizable by watching his neck. The rope goes taut. Roxy visibly relaxes as she releases her powers.

“Well played.” Scratch says, his voice betraying a feeling of pride that makes you want a shower.

Then he’s gone.

“And just like that, the two biggest pains in our collective ass are now hampering each other instead.” Rose says with a smirk. “Well done everyone.”

“Dirk, that was so cool!” Roxy cries enthusiastically. “I haven’t seen you show that much emotion… ever!”

“Not as cool as you kicking Scratch’s ass singlehandedly.” You concede, letting yourself revel in the moment just this once. “John and I were hardly handling him together.”

“I was curious about that.” Rose commented. “Why was my interference necessary? Surely you two had a clear combat advantage?”

“Something you’d find out about Scratch if you actually spoke to him: he plays mind games.” You say irritably. “The bastard’s good enough at it that he’d probably be able to get into your head.”

“Hmm, that does sound fun.” Rose says with a smile.

“Not even slightly.” John grumbles. “Rose, when this is done I think I’m actually going to request your psychoanalysis powers.”

Rose’s smile shifts to a frown immediately. “That bad?”

“Yeah, he just…” John places a hand on his temple and sighs. “Yeah. But we’ve got other things to worry about now. I need you three to go down below, find Jane, and help her get Jade and Dave ready to move.”

“Surely you would be an important asset for such a task?” Rose replies suspiciously. “What will you be doing?”

“Buying us time.” John says resolutely. “Just send somebody to get me before the ship falls on me.”

“What?” You can’t help but burst out.
“Understood.” Rose says grimly. “Be careful.”

Roxy rushes over to John and throws her arms around him. They stay like that for only a moment, before Roxy gives him a quick peck on the lips and softly says, “Come back alive.”

You look to the side to see Rose watching the two as well, with a bittersweet smile playing across her face.

When you turn back John is already flying away, descending to disappear over the side of the ship. Roxy walks back, grabs your and Rose’s hands, and quietly nods, pulling the three of you back into the Flagship.

You take one final glance up at the bridge just before it disappears from view. Even now you can see the flashes of troll psionics high above you all, the last glimpse you’ll get of the troll’s battle for the fate of their race.

It’s all up to Karkat now.

Your name is Terezi Pyrope, and you’re sorry if anybody was expecting someone else. But you’ve been waiting ages for this chance, and you know now that the opportunity is here you don’t feel like waiting any longer.

Vriska is just ahead. You know you’re on her trail, knew it the moment you walked into a room filled with yellow-blooded corpses. She’s been fighting, tearing this entire section of the ship apart. There’s no way she’s made it far enough to evade you.

The ship groans around you as it starts to fall apart, and you ignore the aching pains running through your legs. You’ve probably run the length of this ship by now, and the exertion has made old wounds reopen.

Your feet are a mess of gore right now, the result of sprinting non-stop over dirt, grass, concrete, fire, metal, and corpses to get here. It’s the result of every step you’ve taken since leaving Dave’s car in Houston, and whatever mediculler technique they used to seal them in prison has long since failed. Your legs, having suffered from the pursuit similarly, are aching from extended periods of both exertion and disuse.

None of that matters though. Only one person matters, and you can hear them above you, screaming and fighting and mindlessly destroying everything around her to achieve her goal.

“She’ll never change,” you mutter to yourself in a mix of both bitter emotion and fondness.

Yes, fondness. It was your feelings for her that led you to feel so betrayed, after all. And that feeling of betrayal in turn led to the vindication in your pursuit. When you crashed the ship all that time ago you were shocked, trapped in an unfamiliar place, with no lusus to go to and friends who were too scared to worry on your behalf.

When you felt your most hopeless it was Vriska who helped pick you up again.

You sniff out an opening in the ceiling where the air smells fresher, and start climbing, using corpses still dangling from their stasis pods and hauling yourself upward. The hands hanging limply prove easy to grasp, and you know that the dead are carrying you forwards. They bear you upwards, so that you can reach the one who wronged them, wronged you, wronged this entire doomed world.
You knew from the start that this place would fall under attack. You were probably the one person who immediately recognized the significance of that scout which shot you down. This planet was marked long before you ever arrived. But with nowhere to go, nowhere to run, to speak on the matter was just an exercise in futility. There was nothing to be done, so you didn’t waste a thought on it.

On the other hand, Vriska never gave up, even in the most hopeless situation.

It takes you a few moments to hook your cane into the opening on the ceiling and haul yourself towards a proper handhold. You almost don’t make it, needing to cling to wires and piping and grates as you creep along like a spider, holding the ceiling with everything you have. Then you reach the next floor, climbing into another hallway. You almost immediately sniff out an area further along where the metal floor seems to have erupted with daisies. Clearly her luck is running out.

Vriska always was uncommonly lucky, regardless of how she loved to claim otherwise. With the way she seemed to go out of her way to make enemies, and the reckless behavior she was known for, she should have died sweeps ago. She acted like the world was out to get her when life had been cutting her slack since birth.

She was the protagonist in her own little world, and if she saw something that didn’t involve her she just took it as a challenge.

This is clearly more of the same. She is the hero, in her head at least, meaning anyone who stands against her is on the losing side.

Vriska never did have an appreciation for tragedies. Which is ironic in a way, since a story like hers couldn’t possibly be anything but a tragedy.

Really, the only thing that’s uncertain in this story is whether Vriska will recognize her mistakes before the end. You hope she will. There’s no fun in bringing justice to somebody who can’t even recognize their faults.

As far as you’re concerned the only difficult part about finally killing Vriska will be making her see just why it’s necessary. And you relish the challenge.

Chapter End Notes

Once again this chapter is covering less ground than I planned. And I’m not sure it works too well. Scratch revealing the past interactions between him and Grandma Egbert was almost entirely a whim, something I would have revealed far sooner if I was actually good at this writing thing, but alas, I’m still barely adequate. As such I’m not at all pleased with how I introduced the information. On the other hand, bringing Vriska and Scratch together was another snap decision that I vastly prefer to my old plans, so that’s good! I was originally going to have two separate fights that concluded separately, but that would have been boring.

Yeah, I don't know, I'm mostly just calling this chapter a learning experience. Some things worked for me, some didn't, as long as I remember what's what I'll come out better in the end.

BTW, if anybody reading this likes RWBY, I wrote a quick thing to let myself get over
the season 3 hype. It's under my works, and is... fine. Rush job, but cute enough if you like the pairing. Probably.

Yeah, it's hard to shamelessly plug your work if you're as self-critical as I am.
Looking Back

Chapter Summary

The Condesce deals with insurrection. Terezi catches up. Jane arrives in time.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for waiting people.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Once upon a time, centuries ago, you still had no glubbing clue what your name was. You were impossibly old even back then, and already in complete control of an entire planet, so you had better things to worry about than what trolls used to call you. When trolls started calling you Empress you didn’t see a need for anything so trivial as a name.

If you were ever to acknowledge your emotions you’d probably realize adopting a persona in favor of your actual self made it much more painful when trolls appeared that refused to call you by your title. If you’re not their Empress, then what are you?

It’s a question that’s bothered you for ages, but you keep the thought buried so deep you’ll likely never allow yourself to think about it.

It’s far from normal for you to be like this. If there is one thing that the Condesce has never been known for, it’s looking back. But right now, as you find yourself being driven into the most desperate situation you’ve ever experienced, you can’t help but remember the last time you felt this infuriated.

It’s the blood. It was always the blood that unnerved you. Bright red blood leaking from the gory furrows that whips drove into his back. Red blood slowly leaking from an arrow feathered with blue, as a dying curse echoed across Alternia.

Something about mutant blood always drove you mad. It almost seemed to glow as it drained from the last troll to cross you. It always seemed so much brighter than your own. And it was clearly the most unique, rarer even than your own Tyrian.

Twice you have seen a mutant blooded troll rise up to stand against you. Twice they have gained allies almost effortlessly in their bid for survival. Twice you have faced followers of a pariah alone, your empire crumbling under the weight of change.

You haven’t felt this serious in a long time.

You sneer and scowl, towering over your two opponents, a red blood and a yellow blood.

The gurgling laughter of The Psionic, yellow-blooded companion of the last red blood you killed has not escaped your notice. He sees it too. Your past has come back to haunt you. Though it’s likely
that even he doesn’t know just how true this is.

The red blood has cast aside his broken weapons and is using the armaments of his fallen foes. You can respect that sort of thing, even if he’s fucking terrible with them.

Kill, claim, and hold. The troll right of passage has been as much, ever since you first took the crown of an old bastard and started the empire that would one day conquer your planet, and the galaxy long after.

When the mutant uses this against you it’s fear as much as outrage that flows through you. He draws a weapon, dances around you, and casts it aside once you’ve shattered it. He curses, he screams, and he darts in whenever his ally tries to hold you down with his psionics. He takes advantage of every resource he’s given, and casts things aside when they’re no longer of use to you.

In a way his current fighting style reminds you of yourself, and that pisses you off to no end.

He is weak. So weak it’s embarrassing, and everyone can tell. You’re driving his attacks away barehanded, and shattering steel with your claws while he scrabbles over corpses for scraps. With one good strike he would be dead, and you both know it.

Yet he continues to evade. The way he fights is entirely based around defense, never taking hits but instead flowing around them. The time he’s spent running from your wrath like a coward has trained him in the art of avoiding damage. The things you used to stop the little princess’ escort, psionics and thrown items, are being negated by the psionics of the yellow blood.

And so a fight that should have ended in an instant has dragged out into several long and irritating minutes. It’s embarrassing for you, really. The fact that you weren’t able to slap this pest’s skull into a jelly immediately is enough to make you uneasy. Nothing about this has gone the way it should. Enemies that your firepower should have obliterated several times over are clinging to life, dodging around blows too fast to see and enduring hits powerful enough to kill them thousands of times over.

When you feel the shuddering of your ship’s engine grinding to a stop and see the front end of your ship bursting into flames though, that’s when you begin to fear.

“Haha, it’s happening!” The Psionic croaks out in triumph. “Not yet, not yet, I’ll die when I see the end. Only then!”

You’re tempted to put your heel through his face just to prove him wrong, but there are bigger things to worry about. Your ship just exploded.

“Fuck! It’s too soon EQ, shit!” The yellow blood curses as you look around the room. The few computers still running are filling swiftly with alerts and emergency reports, automatic systems rushing to tell you what you already know: it’s over.

The fleet is in shambles, burning to ash as screaming trolls call and cry out for assistance. The front end of your ship is crumbling away as the rear struggles to remain in the air. The Psionic Reactor just overloaded, the outside weakened enough that it couldn’t contain its energy anymore.

Which means…

“Cod Clammit.” You spit as you whirl around. The Psionic is straightening up. He can feel as his energy remains trapped inside of him, rather than being siphoned to the reactor. He looks up, eyes sparking with energy.

“Not happening.”
Too bad for him, it looks like he is the biggest thing to worry about. He wanted to see you die so badly, but getting a chance to kill you himself would have been a dream come true. A dream that ended the moment it began when you turned and put your fist through his head.

“YOU FUCKING Bitch.” A voice screeches over the monitors, the same that has been taunting you for some time. The AI proceeds to bellow with rage and curse at you.

The machine's smug attitude from before is gone, a voice that taunted you now twisted in grief. It fills you with determination.

You’ve lost everything but what matters. Your life is still your own, and you know damn well that nothing these pathetic guppies do is going to change that. You’ve built up an empire from nothing before.

So when this is over, and your enemies are dead at your feet, you’ll just do it again. You will take this planet single-handedly, build your fleet from the rubble, and retake Alternia once more.

You think you’ll start with the mutant.

Your name is Vriska Serket, and Doctor Scratch is powerless to stop you. His punches aren’t landing, his banter is slipping, and he looks like a truck hit him. The truck in this case actually being you.

Well, honestly he was looking pretty fucked up before you showed up, but damned if you’re gonna give credit for kicking this freak’s ass to anybody else. Vriska Serket does not share glory with anyone.

So far things have been way to easy though, which is making you start to feel just a bit nervous. Even with the beating he’s taken, you know from experience that Scratch is insanely good in a strife, and right now…

Yeah, if it weren’t so obvious that he was planning something you’d almost feel bad for him. He’s staggering backwards with every hit, throwing punches that never connect, and muttering to himself rather than taunting you like he always does. He’s losing to you even though you only have one arm AND aren’t using your dice right now.

So, definitely a trap. But you need to figure out what kind of trap. There’s no reason why he can’t just start fighting properly right here, so he’s probably got something set up further back, the way he’s stumbling along.

You decide to throw one of the Octet as a test, sending it hurtling over Scratch’s shoulder down the hall. The die lands with an audible clatter out of sight, and you wonder suddenly just what that was supposed to accomplish. One die isn’t going to change anything in this fight!

Especially since, as you note when you pass by, it landed on a one. Even perfect rolls from here on out would barely inconvenience Scratch.

“It seems your luck is running out.” Scratch notes in amusement. “With a roll like that, it seems your opponent has nothing to worry about.”

“I’ve been driving you back plenty without the Octet you smug asshole!” You snap bitterly, now hoping furiously that he hasn’t been holding back after all.
“It’s true, I’m actually growing quite weary.” Scratch muses, before shrugging casually. “Luckily for me, I’m not the only one looking to fight you.”

Oh fuck no.

You turn around just in time for Terezi’s cane to tear your side open with a thrust that goes wide. Any further to her left and you’d be dead here and now, but Scratch’s warning allowed you to move barely in time. No doubt a calculated action.

“How delightful, two friends reunited for the last time.” Scratch claps his hands together and steps backwards. “I’ll leave you two to settle your disputes then, shall I?”

“Denied!” Terezi screeches and brings her blade around to strike at Scratch’s head, but he effortlessly swats the blade aside, seeming to grow in front of you as he pulls himself together.

Terezi starts lashing out at Scratch, but can’t slip past his metal arms, the clanging of metal against metal loud enough to give you a serious headache. After a moment or two of this you decide to take the opportunity to shred your shirt for bandaging, wrapping your side as tightly as you can manage with what you have to work with. It’s not perfect, but your resourcefulness has kept you alive so far.

When you look up again Terezi is still trying to stab Scratch, and you decide to bounce a couple more dice against his pristine fat head, mostly in the hope of distracting one of them.

It manages to turn both of them in your direction, and distracts you instead when you roll two more ones. You’ve barely gathered your breath to let out another curse when Terezi flies at you.

“Treacherous filth!” Terezi screams as she swings for your head, forcing you to duck so fast that her blade cuts your hair short. You note irritably that rather than floating down the lock of your hair simply drops, weighed down by blood and grime.

“Terezi, he’s getting away you obsessive freak!” You cry out irritably as you swat Terezi away, slipping your arm through her guard and attempting to pursue Scratch as he runs back in the direction the two of you came from.

“He was never really my prey to begin with!” Terezi cackles as her sword clips your leg, bringing you crashing to the ground with a shriek. “Your co-conspirator will simply have to wait until I’m done with you!”

“I’m not in league with that freak, you psychopath!” You shriek in indignation and throw two more dice at Terezi’s face. Your luck proves to still be all but gone as Terezi brings her sword up for a plunge and bats them aside by pure chance.

One die flies out of sight, but the other clearly lands on a one. You’re starting to get scared of your own weapon.

Terezi still proves to be the bigger threat though, as she brings her sword down at your heart. Your attention to the Octet is costing you big time; you don’t have time to get out of the way.

You do the only thing you can, then. You stick your arm in front of the blade.

Terezi doesn’t stop when her sword misses it’s original target, and you didn’t expect her to. But when her only weapon is going straight through your arm it gives you a bit of control over where it’s going. So your heart remains not skewered, and you’re glad for that.

The problem is though, that Terezi is holding the blade and she won’t settle for a complete miss. You
try to make it happen, but in the end she still gets you in the shoulder, and puts so much strength into it that you’re immediately pinned to the floor. You scream in spite of yourself as fire burns through old wounds, and Terezi staggers back out of sight wordlessly.

Your right arm and left shoulder can’t move. They’re stuck on a spit and pinned to the ground. You won’t be getting away without help. Really, if you weren’t so fucked up on adrenaline you doubt you’d be able to even think coherently at this point.

You’re in shock though, so you’re processing things just fine. And… well it doesn’t look good. You’re completely helpless at this point, any attempts of moving would just overload your head with pain, and thinking’s your only way out of here.

You don’t like it. This sucks. This really fucking sucks. Planning is not your forte; you’ve always made it clear you got results by just doing whatever feels right. But impulse isn’t going to get you out of this. You’re not sure what could.

You could try to roll the dice, but at this point, with how many ones you’ve rolled, anything you could get from the last three dice would be either ineffective or self-destructive.

So you decide to use the last weapon you have left: words. “Wow Terezi, it looks like you finally got me!” You give the friendliest grin you can manage at this, though you’re not sure that you feel too much affection for Terezi after the mess she’s made of your plans.

“It’s not done yet.” Terezi mutters from out of sight. You twist your head just enough to face her and see that she’s slumped against the wall now. From the way her head’s tilted, you can tell she’s turned her eyes towards you, not that it does her any good. Muscle memory is funny that way.

“Oh, right. You’re going to kill me now, then?” You keep your tone light, not wanting to reveal that that’s exactly what you’re afraid that she’ll do. “I mean, that’s what you came here for, riiiiiiight?”

She shrugs her shoulders listlessly. “Yeah. Yes, that’s exactly why I’m here.”

“Harsh. If this is your idea of pitch flirting, let me tell you you’re going about it all wrong.” A blatant deflection, and she knows it. But this is the most you can do. You’re talking for your life right now, twisting things as best as you can until you get a chance.

“My feelings for you are anything but romantic.” Terezi hisses. “At this point I’m not sure why we were ever Moirails.”

“Because we’re both horrible messes with a need to meddle?” You voice innocently. “And because for a long time all that we had was each other.” The more she thinks on that particular point, the more she should hesitate.

“If you think that will be enough to save you, then forget it.” Terezi says flatly. “I’m doing this because after all we went through you still betrayed me.” She starts getting to her feet again.

“I did what I did to help!” You protest indignantly. “If you hadn’t interfered; if you stayed out of my way-”

“We’d all be fucked.” Terezi nods to herself. “You’ve never bothered to think about collateral. In Vriska’s world, everything will always go according to plan!” She spreads her arms wide mockingly, grinning stupidly as she speaks. “In Vriska’s world, everything will always work out! Never mind that her ideas are terrible, or that she’d never get past step one if she didn’t have luck on her side, everything will work out! Because in Vriska’s world, the laws of physics will always twist themselves to suit Vriska’s needs!”
Her voice suddenly goes flat, and she glares down at you, arms balled up into fists by her sides.
“Except Vriska’s world is a fucking fairy tale. In real life, people like Vriska will only ever get
themselves killed.”

“You’re the one living in a fantasy if you think I’m going down that easily!” You spit in rage. “I’m
not going to die here, I’ve got too much left to accomplish. Scratch! The Condesce! Every fucking
person who’s ever held me down, troll or human! I won’t settle for dying while they’re still alive!”

“No Vriska. You’re going to die here.” Terezi spits as her face becomes impassive. “I’m going to
make sure of that. This is justice for all of the deaths you’ve wrought. Just do the right thing for once
in your life and accept that!” She rushes you and you suddenly remember what you were supposed
to be doing.

“Wait!” You cry out in a panic as Terezi’s hand fly at you. “I’m helpless right now, you know! Are
you really going to just kill me in cold blood?”

Terezi falters for only a moment. “Wanting to bring you down is the only thing that’s kept me going
all this time.” She mutters as she slows to a walk.

“And you did! I’m down! Just leave me be!” You try to reason, “I can’t go anywhere, so just let me
sink with the ship!”

Terezi frowns thoughtfully at that. “I suppose I could. Very well.” You let out a sigh of relief in spite
of yourself, until Terezi smiles cruelly. “I won’t touch you then. I’ll just sit here and wait until the
moment I smell you die.”

You feel your heart sink. Terezi voiced her statement like a compromise, but the underlying message
was clear to you: no matter what happens she will not rest until she knows you are dead for sure.
“Do you really hate me so much?”

You didn’t mean to say that out loud.

Terezi seems as taken aback as you are. “You… Why are you asking me that?” You choose to
remain silent, and she turns aside, as if unsure how to continue. “I don’t know. I think so. You’re…
You were my best friend. And I always looked past the horrible things you did because of it. But
back in Houston you went so far past what you’ve ever done before. Murder, arson…”

“I’ve done all of that before.” You point out quietly.

“Not like this.” Terezi glares back at you. “You burned Eridan’s things, but he was a rich douchebag
and he could always afford it. And the people who got killed playing stupid games with us… well
back on Alternia things were supposed to be done that way. It’s different here.”

You can only laugh at that. “Oh please, you think I did things the way I did back then because I was
supposed to? I did it because I wanted to Terezi. And you were the same. Make all the excuses you
want for the things we’ve done, but do it on your own time. After all this I think we can be honest
with one another.”

Terezi frowns indignantly, before turning aside again with a hiss. “Fine then you bitch. I’m angry
because this is the first time you’ve ever hurt our friends. The Striders helped us when nobody else
would, and you repaid them by tearing their home to the ground. You got their older brother killed
with your bullshit. And you made life that much more difficult for every other troll on Earth because
you put them on the planet’s shit list. All for a stupid plan you spent maybe a minute thinking
through.”
“Just because you were content hiding in a fucking apartment for the rest of your life doesn’t mean I was going to play along!” You snap back. “Maybe my plan wasn’t perfect, but at least I was doing something!”

“You were ruining things for the rest of us.” Terezi spits. “Who knows what kind of shit you put the others through? What they had to endure because you made the world look at all of us like monsters long before the Condesce showed up. For all we know you probably got more of them killed!”

“Well we don’t know do we?” You snap back. “You act like you’re soooooooo smart, but you don’t know a damn thing! You rant about consequences and how horrible I’ve made things, but you’re no better! All you wanted to do was chase me down! You didn’t give a shit about anything else, not any more than I did!”

“I know that!” Terezi screams as she whirls back to face you, tears running down her cheeks. “I know that I’m obsessed! I know it and I hate it! I… I know that my life has become a mess since I started chasing you! I know that I’ve done things to make people’s lives horrible! I know that I’m so fucking far gone that I don’t even remember what my life used to be like before earth, just the parts that involve you!”

She stomps her foot and you notice the splatter of teal blood as her mangled foot hits the floor. “I don’t even remember what most of our friends looked like anymore, you know that? I haven’t seen their faces since we crashed. Karkat, Kanaya, Nepeta, Tavros… none of them look like anything to me anymore. All I see in my mind is your smug, stupid, grinning face! And I hate it! I want things to go back to how they used to be so badly! I want to argue with Karkat, I want to role-play with Aradia and Nepeta and Tavros, I want to talk Kanaya into making outfits for me. But I know that I can never go back! All I have left in this fucking world is you and when you bleed out I don’t know what I’m going to do with myself, and I hate you so much for it that I just want to kill you all over again!”

You want to say something, but at this point there’s no words left. Terezi is too far gone, and you know it almost as well as she does. She’s closer to death than you are at this point. And she wants to drag you down with her.

Reason won’t help you. Not anymore. Can’t reason with somebody that doesn’t have reason to begin with. There’s only one way out now.

You roll the last three of your dice. Terezi looks up in alarm, but it’s too late. Your dice have never steered you wrong before, and now that you’ve rolled them Terezi won’t be able to stop you.

You grin through the pain in your shoulder as you twist to watch the Fluorite Octet roll to a stop. You’re about to pull another Mindfang-worthy escape!

All three dice stop on a one.

They start to glow.

There is a brief instant in which you see a massive ball of fire engulf both you and Terezi.

Then you die.

Your name is Jane Crocker, and you’ve finally made it after what must have been the worst hour of your life. Your clothing is no more than rags now, and your shovel is no more than a splintered handle. You’re so tired you want to pass out, despite your powers keeping you alive through cuts
and fire and countless blows that should have killed you.

But you made it.

Lil Hal has only two drones left out of the ones he sent with you; the others were torn apart by trolls. One is guarding your backs, while the other half carries you into the room where Dave and Jade are.

“Hey beautiful.” Dave says wearily as he looks up at you from where he’s crouched over Jade. “Aren’t you a sight for sore eyes!”

“Dave! Are you okay?” It’s a question you ask more on impulse than anything; it’s abundantly clear that he’s not okay. His arms are barely held up, and his head is bright red, clearly the result of blood rushing to it as he focuses on whatever he’s doing to keep Jade alive.

You notice the leg, but repress all information on that matter in an instant for the sake of clear thought.

“I am fucking peachy.” Dave mumbles wearily, as blood starts to drip from his nose. “Just need some R and R, you know. TLC. Possibly a BJ, but that’s less essential.”

“I’m far too scared to act embarrassed right now, sorry.” You say sternly as you reach Jade’s prone form. “I’ll take it from here, go lay down.”

“I love it when you talk dirty.” Dave jokes, as Hal’s Drone let’s you down and picks Dave up instead. “Damn, little bro. You got ripped.” He mutters as your healing powers take over the job of keeping Jade alive. Thankfully for her your powers can do the job far better than Dave’s can.

You start by with Jade’s leg, at first attempting to reattach the severed limb. It doesn't take long for you to realize that the process would take too long to properly heal, and you decide you have to deal with the other more life-threatening injuries, only doing enough so that you can stop the worst of the bleeding before moving on.

“Dave?”

Then you move on to the worst wound, the blade sticking out of her stomach.

“Dave!?”

Thankfully your powers allow you to deal with a wound like this without the need for delicacy. You pull the sword out swiftly and let your ability hold the wound closed, before directing your powers deeper to arrange internal organs properly an knit them closed.

“Oh what the fuck Dave, talk to me!” You suddenly realize that the voice coming from behind you is coming from one of the Drones.

Then there's the sound of an electrical jolt and your blood runs cold. The soft thud of a body falling to the ground echoes in your ears. Then the two sounds repeat. Defibrillation. The drone is attempting to defibrillate Dave.

You stop what you're doing. Blood starts to ooze from Jade's stomach again but your attention is still being pulled towards whatever is going on behind you.

“Hal?” You’re scared to look back. “What’s wrong with Dave?”

There’s a moment of silence before Hal responds. “Get back to work, she’s still in bad shape.”
You curse and restart the flow of power into Jade as you continue, but your attention is still torn. “Hal, talk to me.”

“He’s fine.” Hal responds weakly. “He’s just…”

“Just what?” You ask quietly, afraid you already know the answer.

“He’s sleeping.” Hal says, and you never knew it was possible for a machine to sound so choked up. “He’s just sleeping.”

The blood rushing to his head comes to mind immediately, as your time in medical school comes back to you. That much pressure put on the brain can be serious if it goes on for too long. And you spent a very long time fighting your way in here. All the healing you’ve done has caused you to feel warning signs as well, headaches, dizziness; they’re a sign that you’re pushing too far past your limits.

Carry on like that and you could run the risk of an aneurism. And if it carries on past that to the point of bursting…

Some cases are immediately fatal. But with your powers there’s a good chance you can save him... "Hal, I can help him if-"

"There’s nothing you can do for him now Jane!” Hal snaps back, before recovering. "He... just needs to rest."

You know Hal well enough to know that if there was any chance you could help he'd be begging you. He knows how your powers work. Which means that once he lifted his power over Jade he just... stopped. Heart, lungs, brain... all of it.

“Right.” You say to yourself, as tears start flowing freely. “He’s just sleeping. Of course.” You focus on healing Jade, closing her wounds and putting the blood back where it should be. For the next little while, it’s all that you think about.

But when you hear Dirk scream behind you like a wounded animal you give in, and start sobbing openly. Roxy appears beside you with the other drone and holds you in spite of the tears flooding from her face as well.

The drone picks Jade up gently. “She’ll be alright to move now.” Hal says quietly. “I’ve got enough bodies to get everyone down from here.”

“Jane, baby, we need to go now, okay?” Roxy whispers in your ear. “The ship is coming down.”

You don’t look at anything but the floor as the Drones lead you to the opening Jake burned to the outside. You see John nearby as you’re carried outside, but if he knows about Dave he’s not showing it. He continues to stare on resolutely as he weaves his arms with the winds around the ship, not letting anything distract him from what he’s doing.

The trip back to the island flies by in an instant, and when you arrive the place is in shambles. Crashed space ships are littered all over the island, and you see the strange white creatures that live in the forests rushing around in a panic. Only the Harley Tower remains pristine, sitting high atop the hill above you.

It’s as you’re taking all of this in that you see Dirk staring at you, and feel everything come rushing back again.
“You look good.” He says bluntly, catching you off guard. “Like, you look like you’ve been through hell, but compared to the rest of us, you look alright.” You can tell that he’s trying to make conversation, but the tightness in his voice is abundantly clear.

You want to play along, for his sake, but you can’t. Instead you just run at him and grab him in a hug tight enough to make him wheeze. “Oh Dirk! I couldn’t, it happened so fast, I just-”

“I know.” Dirk’s voice breaks as his hands press back against your shoulders. “It’s not your fault, you did all you could.” You hear Roxy start crying somewhere as you and Dirk sob into each other’s shoulders. He's crying for his brother, and you're crying because you can't do anything more. Even though the fight is still going on back there, for you it's all over.

Regardless of who survives at this point, the price is already too high.

Chapter End Notes

I expect an abundance of new angry messages over this. So much fury. If faking out with Jane caused people to hate me then this is going to be delicious. Not saying that I wrote this for the sake of pissing people off, just that I am fully aware it's going to happen and welcome the feedback.

What can I say, it would be weird if with all the death going on, every single human character made it out alive. I'm looking at you Hussie, don't disappoint me. Anyways, what I'm trying to say is Dave drew the short straw. He's always been one of my favorite characters, definitely my favorite to write. But that's not why I chose him.

I chose him to die because I felt his death would affect the characters the most. The humans, certainly, but he also was one of the most involved characters with the trolls as well. There's already been a brief conversation in the comments on this chapter to that effect, and the point was well made. I want impact. I want to know this story made you feel something. Every time I succeed is a sure sign to me that I've progressed as an writer. I need that progression if I want to make money writing someday (which I most definitely do).

I hate the idea that a story has to have everything wrapped up in a little bow for some people to appreciate it. When people act as though every character has to be happy and carefree at the end of a story, with all of their plot points concluded in a way that just fits together perfectly, it ticks me off. Not because I hate those endings. Because it's too damn simple. This isn't a fairy tale any more than the story it's based on. I love Disney but I would never write Disney. I want things to be deeper.

...Damn it. I want to talk more about this, but it's still too soon. There is one more chapter to this finale. Followed by an Epilogue which, knowing me, will probably end up coming out in multiple chapters of it's own. I find that the details of my scenes increase exponentially as I write them, particularly as I near the conclusion.
Blood Pride

Chapter Summary

Karkat finally faces The Condesce

Chapter Notes

WAIT.

STOP.

Before you read this chapter, make sure you have read all of chapter 52! I had to add most of it a week or so ago via editing, and I get the distinct feeling most readers likely haven't seen it yet.

Hey look guys, this chapter has the same title as the story does. That's how you know this is an important one, lololo!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There was a time, long ago, when you thought the best way to deal with your problems was to run away. You wish you still had that option. But the thing about running is that when there’s something chasing you it’s only a matter of time before you end up backed into a corner.

Even when you’re fleeing across open fucking space.

Your name is Karkat Vantas and you are undeniably cornered. You’ve fought back pretty fucking well, sure, but that doesn’t change the fact that you’re face to face with the literal stuff of your nightmares. If it wasn’t for your training with Atticus Egbert you’d be dead almost a hundred times over already.

Training and some truly magnificent assistance from Sollux, who is the only reason you haven’t been vaporized. It makes you think back on the day you crashed on this planet, and how Aradia met with a similar fate. A look of shock, a flash, and an empty void where not even a corpse remains.

You don’t have the power to come back from that.

Yeah, so you’re fucking terrified. You keep swinging at her with everything you’ve got, but whips, swords, and sickles have all proved completely fucking useless against your opponent. If you pick up a gun you’ll have only one shot before she obliterates you. Most other ranged weapons require skill to use. And the ones that don’t are so unwieldy that you’d be dead before you’d pick them up.

You’re not even a threat right now. You’re a fucking annoyance, a fly that she just can’t seem to swat. Feferi couldn’t do a thing to this bitch and she’s strong enough to put you through the wall herself. All you can do is dart around, and if the burning feeling in your legs is anything to go off you won’t be able to do that for much longer.
You’re going to run around like a fucking idiot until your legs give out, and once you’ve been torn apart there won’t be anything distracting her from killing Sollux.

“Karkat, we’re running out of time!” Sollux cries out as he blasts The Condesce with his eyes. “This ship is falling faster by the second!”

Right. You forgot about that.

Correction: You’re going to run around like a fucking idiot until your ship hits the ocean, at which point The Condesce will just pull you under water and watch you drown like a fucking rat. Then she’ll kill Sollux.

“PAY ATTENTION DUMBBASS!”

You realize your focus is still on the sight of the ocean growing closer outside. You’re not watching your opponent at all.

It’s pure instinct that causes you to throw yourself to the side, and as you turn you see The Condesce’s fist plowing into the ground where you just stood. That was way too close.

“KK, LOOK OUT!” Sollux flies closer but is driven back as The Condesce fires off one of her own psionic blasts. With his attention drawn away there’s nothing to save you as the floor heaves underneath you.

The Condesce is standing up from her last blow, and she’s carrying the floor with her. There’s an entire fucking section in her claws; the same section you landed on, and now she’s lifting it with you still on it. Only your prior momentum saves you, as rather than lay pinned, you’re flicked off of the section of solid Alternian steel, and sent crashing into the ceiling face first. The metal flooring slams almost directly next to you. You almost got crushed like a fucking bug just now.

It takes a second that feels more like an eternity as you realize that it’s not over yet. The metal pulls away from the ceiling before you do, but before you can figure out what The Condesce is doing with it gravity kicks in and you land on the ground hard enough to knock the wind out of you all over again.

You hear a panicked yell, and look up just in time to see the Condesce hurl her scrap metal flyswatter at Sollux, the impact sending him flying straight out the window and out of sight. That won’t be nearly enough to kill him, but it’s bought more than enough time to finish you off. Hell, she just incapacitated both of you in less than ten seconds; she could probably skin your scrawny ass before Sollux made it back.

“Not fucking likely.” You mutter as you pull yourself to your feet. You look down and see blood pouring from your face. You have a broken nose, then. And you’re also gargling teeth at the moment. You take a moment to spit them out and realize that they’re landing right on the Condesce’s boots.

It’s nice to know you can still be a disrespectful asshole even in times like this. Circumstances just align to help you give people a hearty fuck you. Yeah, you’re honestly grinning in spite of everything, even when The Condesce slaps your face into the dirt.

“It’s time to teach you your place, mutant.”

You start to struggle to your feet again and she slaps you once more. She’s holding herself back deliberately, but you still feel another tooth get knocked out of your jaw hard enough to cut your tongue. It gets spat out just like the ones before it, as you lay on the ground, barely able to prop
yourself up on your elbows.

“IT’s time you learned the lessons that should have been hammered into your skull before you were old enough to process them.”

You see her boots approaching out of the corner of your eye, and come to a stop right in front of your face. One boot lifts you by your chin, almost carefully, before flicking you aside with disdain. You can feel your brain rattling in your skull as you spin through the air and crash into one of the few computers still standing.

“YOU are a fucking mistake. You should have been crushed into paste the moment you were spawned.”

The Condesce stops toying with you at this point, instead grabbing you by the throat and lifting you to face her. The bitch still doesn’t even look tired, even now. Hell, she’s completely flawless, not a tear in her suit, not a hair out of place, not so much as a speck of dirt to be seen. Meanwhile you’re not sure you’re recognizable after the beating you just took.

“REally, it’s bad enough existing when nobody wants you, but you just couldn’t stop there, could you? You were lucky to survive past a minute old, but then you had the gall to want more. As if you had the right to want anything! You should have been thankful for every second of life you weren’t crushed into paste.”

She’s not wrong, really. For somebody who should have been killed at birth, you’ve lasted a while. You find yourself smirking at that, which predictably pisses her off further.

“No, you little freak, you fucking worm, you do not grin in my face! You are going to feel ashamed for existing like you fucking should, and then I’m going to kill you.”

“Too late, bitch.” You spit out. You’re not sure what’s coming over you at this point. “I’m done feeling sorry for myself.” Your grin broadens as you realize just how true this is.

The Condesce snarls in your face, and you start to laugh. You’re insane. It’s official. You’re fucking insane, and it feels incredible.

“You’re done feeling anything at all!” The Condesce lifts you up above her head, and you find yourself grasping at her wrist. She’s about to choke slam you into fucking goo. You’re not even done ranting at her yet!

“GET YOUR FUCKING CLAWS OFF OF HIM!”

The Condesce’s grip loosens immediately. You don’t even have time to register what’s going on before a flash of white over takes you, and you realize that you’re clutched in Kanaya’s arms.

“Karkat, are you alright?” She fusses over you in a panic, running her hands over your face.

“Looks worse than it is.” You wave her hands away, and she helps you back to your feet. “I don’t know what you did just now, but you saved my ass.”

“It was not just I.” Kanaya replies with a relieved smile. “You owe appreciation to your matesprit as well.”

“Oh fuck.” You look up with a groan. “I wanted to finish this before she got involved.”

“She seems to be handling herself well enough.” Kanaya’s smile widens as she looks over. “Better
than you, certainly.”

You look up to see The Condesce staggering, reaching back desperately to grab at a furious Nepeta as she claws into her back like a maniac. You can only stare, mouth agape as fuchsia blood splatters across the ground. Then, in a moment of sheer terror for you, Nepeta is sent flying as The Condesce grabs ahold of her coat and swings. It’s all your matesprit can do to shrug out of the coat before she’s sent smashing into the ground full force.

When the Condesce throws the coat aside you see blood dripping down her back, and find yourself grinning. Everything you and Sollux tried, surpassed by one sneak attack. Nepeta is fucking amazing, and still able to keep going, rolling to her feet with her claws still drawn, and ready to charge in again.

“Are you okay, Karkitty?” She asks without turning, unable to risk looking away.

You’re still in shock at the ridiculously effective entrance your girlfriend just made, so Kanaya steps in, easing your mouth closed with a firm hand and replying in bemusement, “He appears to have fallen in love with you again.”

“Fuck yes.” You finally gasp out, at which point Nepeta glances back for an instant and grins.

“Nepeta, you have something for Karkat, yes?” Kanaya steps forward with a frown, pulling out her chainsaw. “I will hold her until you are both prepared to fight again.”

“Hold your fucking guts in you undead tramp, I’m not done with that mutant!” The Condesce takes one step forward before Kanaya sends her leaping back.

“I am so done with your bullshit.” Kanaya hisses as she darts around at ridiculous speeds, waving her chainsaw like a maniac. There’s a brief moment of panic on The Condesce’s face, before she dives to the side and comes up holding Feferi’s Trident, using it to block the chainsaw. The weapons meet with a harsh screech and an explosion of sparks, before Kanaya is driven back.

“Karkat!” You turn back to Nepeta to see her pulling a pair of sickles from her belt. “I found these while I was destroying their communications, they’re old, but really well maintained.”

You look down and gape in shock. “Nepeta I’m pretty sure these are war relics.” You’ve seen pictures of them online. The twin sickles of the Signless. These weapons are what inspired you to pick up sickles in the first place.

“Who cares, all that matters is they’ll work.” Nepeta says firmly, before tilting her head. “You are good enough to fight, aren’t you?”

“I can still fight.” You reply with a smirk. “Still wouldn’t stand a chance against you, but this bitch? Fucking child’s play.”

“Whenever you’re ready,” Kanaya cries out as she defends against a trident blow. “I would appreciate some assistance!”

“Right, let’s do this!” You cry out, rushing forwards with your new sickles at the ready.

Nepeta chooses to let actions speak rather than words, and leaps into a pounce that sends her catapulting over your head and right at The Condesce’s face, just as Kanaya redoubles her offensive. You dart around to the side, aiming a passing slash at the Empress’ ankles.

The Condesce sees all three of your attacks coming though, catching Kanaya’s chainsaw and
flicking it into the ground inches away from your wrist with a spin. The same motion carries the other end of her fork up to block Nepeta, who lands with her feet balanced between the prongs, before flipping back to a safe distance.

“It’s nice to be fighting some proper opponents rather than some filthy mutant.” The Condesce says casually as she whirls Feferi’s weapon around experimentally, testing the weight of a weapon that is decidedly small for her. She catches it firmly and nods once, before glaring over at you. “I almost forgot what fighting actual trolls was like.”

“Blow it out your ass, you old hag.” You spit in annoyance. “We’ll see who’s looking down on who now that I have a decent weapon.”

“Those sickles didn’t do any good to the last mutant that wielded them.” The Condesce says with a shrug. “And you couldn’t touch me when I was barehanded.”

“Well I guess I should consider myself pretty goddamn lucky it’s not just me this time!” You shout as you dart in.

“Maybe not, but you’re missing the assistance that matters.” The Condesce says with a grin as her eyes start sparking. Right. You completely fucking forgot that she still had psionics. You look back to Kanaya and Nepeta to see them staring in disbelief, and tackle them to the ground. It won’t do a damn bit of good, but you aren’t going to do nothing.

“Good thinking Karkat, just stay right there!” a voice calls out cheerily. You glance up and see Aradia waving to you from outside of the room. Behind her you see Sollux flashing furiously, the section of scrap metal he was pummeled with being crumpled into a ball.

“Oh shit.” You gasp as you press yourself down as low to the floor as you can, Nepeta and Kanaya taking the hint and doing the same. The Condesce seems to be distracted by the new arrivals, judging by how not disintegrated you are.

It’s at that point that the wall to your right swings like a door, tearing away with a shriek and flying over your head so close you swear you can feel it brush your skin. The Condesce lets out a grunt before getting slammed by the attack, and when you look up again you see Aradia and Sollux trying to collapse the wall of solid steel on her.

Then with a loud shriek from the Condesce, the metal just shreds itself into pieces. The Condesce’s eyes glow a dull red as she uses the same telepathy as Aradia to drive back the psychic attack, and couples it with a blast of Psionics that Sollux meets eagerly.

“Mistake!” Nepeta sings as she shrugs your arm off and gets back to her feet. She seems to sense the next arrival coming, and you suppose that’s hardly surprising, considering they’ve been in a relationship for years.

Equius bursts through the wall behind The Condesce dripping with blood, but no less powerful for it, plowing his fist into her back hard enough to make her stumble. “Karkat!” He bellows as his next blow brings The Condesce down on one knee. “We have come to lend our strength!”

“He seems to be picking up on Aradia’s flair for the dramatic.” Kanaya muses as she gets back to her feet. “Shall we?”

“Hell fucking yes!” You grin as you rush forward.

“NO!” The Condesce shrieks as she whirls around, striking Equius across the chest with a backhand that sends him flying. Aradia flies past you to catch him, as Sollux unleashes another blast of
Rather than meeting the attack directly, The Condesce dives out of the path of the blow and hurls her trident back at Sollux, which is blocked by Kanaya as she throws herself in front of it. The attack sends both Kanaya and the weapon flying into the distance, and you can hear her cursing in rage even as she disappears from view. She’s survived worse, but this still means your best fighter just got removed from the fight.

At the same time though, that was decidedly weird. The Condesce is not the sort of person to dodge attacks. She’s an arrogant bitch who faces down every attack just to prove she can.

“KK, look at her face!” Sollux crows triumphantly. You look closer and see suddenly what he’s referring to. There’s a trickle of blood running down from her nose; it’s a sign that she’s taxing her mental powers too much to keep using them like she has been.

You’re wearing her down.

“I’ll give you something to look at!” The Condesce yells, kicking a fallen computer terminal so hard it flies right at Sollux’s head. He catches it effortlessly, but before he can throw it back The Condesce flies past you faster than you can hope to follow and throws a punch that sends him crashing to the ground. You see a trail of blood to mirror The Condesce’s and realize with startling clarity that he had to overload his head just to survive that blow.

The Condesce isn’t done yet, falling out of the sky directly at Sollux, but he’s still recovering. Nepeta is past you by the time you’ve turned around, but she has no chance of making it in time. The same can be said for Aradia and Equius, who are still rushing back.

Sollux’s safety ends up being assured by a surprise blast of white light, which knocks the Condesce out of the air with a snarl of shock. You look back and see Eridan staring grimly at her, his rifle propped and held steady by the tines of the same fork that’s pinned him to the wall. At his side is Feferi, her unbroken arm held under Eridan’s in such a way that you know she’s responsible for lifting his gun for him.

You’re about to call out to them when Eridan goes limp. You’re not particularly surprised. You thought he died when he first took that hit to the gut. Still, dying after getting one last shot is exactly the kind of dramatic garbage he’d want.

The asshole can rest in peace. The rest of you are going to take it from here.

Feferi doesn’t hesitate, tearing The Condesce’s fork out of the wall and back through his stomach, flicking violet blood off with a casual movement that clashes with the look of fury in her face.

“Come on Karkitty, she’s getting back up!” Nepeta cries urgently from your right, and you turn to see she’s already in pursuit of the Empress. You shake your head in an attempt to clear it, but there’s so damn much going on that you’re having trouble processing everything.

“Get your head in the game asshole!” Feferi shoves past you, storming forward with a trident taller than she is and one arm in a sling. You’re not sure whether that was flirting, actual rage, or both, but you’re not taking it lying down either way.

“Alright, let’s finish this bitch!” You say with a grin. You, Nepeta, Feferi, Equius, and Aradia against one wounded troll? This is completely doable.

The Condesce is pulling herself out of the wall where Eridan’s final blast sent her, and looks around at the five of you still remaining. Rather than threatened, she simply looks more indignant than ever,
and at this point you’re starting to think that’s the only response she’s got to things not going her way. Typical highblood bullshit as far as you’re concerned, but unlike with Feferi there’s nothing particularly endearing about it. You’re well past ready for this bitch to die.

“Guys!” Sollux’s voice calls out from behind you in a panic. “Hit the deck!”

You don’t have time to respond, or even enough time to find out what he’s yelling about. The ground just bucks underneath you, and suddenly everything’s sideways for you. You see Feferi land on her wounded arm, unable to keep her balance any better than you can, and with only one arm Equius meets a similar fate. Only Nepeta is fast enough to get on all fours, while Aradia just floats above it all.

Then you hear the roaring of water and realize what happened. The ship finally hit the ocean.

Also, half of your group just got knocked over, while the Condesce was braced inside a fucking wall.

The Condesce grins triumphantly as she realizes the same, and pulls herself upright. Nepeta rushes her and Aradia starts massing debris with telekinesis, but The Condesce responds with almost casual disregard. She starts by grabbing Nepeta by the head and throwing her into Aradia. Then she looks down at the floor, and swings her arms down. The blood trailing from her nose starts flowing freely.

You feel the ground jump again, and realize she’s driving the ship further into the ocean. Once she can reach the water she’ll be unstoppable, only Feferi would be able to fight down there, and with only one working arm she’ll be all but useless. “Stop her now!” You cry out desperately. “Don’t let her reach the ocean!”

Aradia recovers first, raising her arms and beginning to counter The Condesce’s own telekinetic push by pulling upwards. But fighting both powerful psionics and gravity is going to prove to be too much for her unless the rest of you do something.

It doesn’t surprise you in the slightest when Equius moves first, throwing himself into the air from his position on the floor and hitting the Condesce in a flying tackle that sends both tumbling to the ground. Unfortunately for Equius The Condesce ends up on top, and starts hammering into him with vicious body blows. If it were anyone else they’d be dead in an instant, but Equius endures it, roaring into his attacker’s face in defiance.

To your surprise the one to step in at this point is you. You’re not sure when you started moving, but your sickle is coming down on The Condesce’s neck before you even realize you got this close.

Of course since this is you you’re talking about there’s no fucking way it could be this easy. Your sickle is practically touching your target when your entire body stops, held in place by telepathy.

The Condesce stops her hail of punches as she turns to stare impassively at you. “If I ever see the day when some mutant freak actually harms me I’ll put myself out of my own misery.”

She’s cut off from saying anything further when Equius throws a punch that sends her flying. “I am somewhat of a mutant myself.” He mutters as you help him up. “Do you suppose she will attempt to cull herself now?”

“Somehow I don’t think you’re what she had in mind.” You say with a grimace, gesturing to the blood still flowing from your nose. “My mutation is way more normal.”

“That is entirely subjective.” Equius snaps back, but he’s grinning now. You flash a lopsided smile as well before turning back to the others.
Aradia has flown out of reach, now hovering near the entrance so that she can focus on slowing the sinking ship with telepathy. Feferi is back on her feet, using her fork to hold herself steady as the ground still seems to shudder. Nepeta seems dazed, and you notice with no small amount of fury that her face is bruising from where The Condesce grabbed her. Sollux is upright, but hanging back near Aradia and still clearly completely fucking out of it. Kanaya is long gone, probably having pulled the fork out of her guts by now and is almost definitely fuming somewhere on the island.

Then you look at the other troll still in the room. The Condesce is radiating hatred as she gets back to her feet once more. She’s dripping blood from her back and face, and sports several minor burns from Eridan’s final attack. Other than some bruising likely hidden beneath the ugly wetsuit she’s wearing she still looks to be in pretty fine condition. The only thing you’ve really injured is her pride.

You know her injuries are minor at best, and unfortunately the same can’t be said for your side. Equius is covered with bruises and cuts from his fight with Gamzee, and you can see more bruises blossoming from the hits he just took. Feferi probably has more broken bones than unbroken ones. Nepeta almost got her skull crushed two minutes ago. And you are horribly bruised and likely barely recognizable after the damage done to your face.

“We’ve got this.” You mutter to yourself. “It’s just one ugly old bitch, we can take her.”

“Killing the empress. How far I’ve fallen. This is so extremely wrong.” Equius says, still smiling in spite of everything.

“Well what are you waiting for, asshole?” Feferi steps up beside you and grins in challenge. “You gonna let a troll in a sling show you up?”

“Not a chance, bitch.”

“You all suck at this!” Nepeta cries as she starts running in. “If you want to kill her then stop working yourselves up to it and just kill her!”

“Maybe I will!” You yell back as you charge in. “You’re not going to stop me this time your royal fucking majesty!”

Nepeta reaches the Condesce first, feinting a slash at The Condesce’s leg, which turns into a spin as she dodges around a swift punch. The next blow Nepeta aims scores a decent gash in The Condesce’s elbow as she withdraws, before Nepeta backflips out of reach and seems to stumble from the head rush.

You don’t give any opportunity to take advantage of that mistake though, stepping between your matesprit and the Empress and lashing out in a flurry of cuts that drives the Condesce away. She considers you for a moment, before reaching out to swipe your blade aside.

At that point Feferi and Equius both hit her at once. Equius’ blow strikes her extended left arm hard enough to twist her entire upper body, and Feferi uses the opportunity to drive her fork into the wounds Nepeta left on her upper back.

The Condesce shrieks, actually shrieks in pain, as Feferi tugs her weapon free and stumbles back. Equius’ momentum carries him past the rest of you and through the wall, as the Condesce staggers from the injuries.

That’s when your sickle carves a line deep into her arm, splitting it almost from elbow to wrist. “Oh look, it’s time to fucking kill yourself!” You spit out triumphantly.

The Condesce’s eyes seem to drift to you for just a moment before she lashes out with a low kick so
fast you can’t even see it. Your extended right leg seems to fold sideways from the force of it, and you feel your weight suddenly pitch forward as your foot leaves the ground. Only Nepeta grabbing you by the collar and heaving you backwards save you from the uppercut that follows, and you stare blankly as you realize you almost had your head removed.

“Got you now bitch!” You hear Sollux yell as the ceiling suddenly flashes with psionics and twists around the Condesce’s raised arm. He appears at your side a moment later, blood pouring from his nose, as he and Nepeta drag you backwards.

“Wait, fuck, I wasn’t done with her!” You protest feebly as Nepeta rushes back in.

“Until I put your leg back into place you are, dumbass.” Sollux says irritably. “Or maybe you didn’t notice the damn thing is stuck at a ninety degree angle?”

Honestly you hadn’t noticed it was still sticking out sideways. Fuck. “Fuuuuuck. FUCK!”

“Yeah yeah, suck it up princess, I can’t wait to hear more of it!” The Condesce roars from out of sight as Sollux twists a chunk of metal around your leg like a splint.

“Okay, you’ve probably got more than a few broken bones in there, so learn to deal with serious fucking pain until this is over.” Sollux mutters as he braces your knee. “Also get Aradia to take these off because my head is fucking trashed at this point.”

“Ahh, fuckfuckfuck how the fuck am I supposed to walk on this?” You spit out in horror as you try to pull yourself to your feet. “Shit fucking hell ass bulge!”

“Classy.” Sollux says drily as he lifts you up and sets you on your feet. Your leg doesn’t buckle underneath you, but that’s probably only because it’s been wrapped in steel. You can see at a glance that your foot is swelling inside your shoes.

You shouldn’t even be trying to walk, but desperate times call for stupid ass measures. The Condesce is currently lashing out at Feferi, Equius, and Nepeta with her legs, her one arm seemingly out of commission and her other still trapped in the ceiling. But she won’t stay that way for long.

Even as you hobble forward, she lands a kick that strikes Feferi’s culling fork hard enough to send her crashing into Nepeta. Equius moves in, but the Condesce is already planting her feet against the ceiling to rip her arm free. She twists in midair as she falls, landing on her hand and bringing her legs crashing down into Equius’ shoulders, which in turn sends him staggering to his knees. Her fist collides with his temple and he slumps senselessly to the ground.

Nepeta rushes in with a furious yowl, and you feel your heart stop, as The Condesce seems to catch her by the arm and heave her out of the air. Sollux hurls a rock, which the Condesce swats out of the air with her bad arm, barely flinching at the pain. Then, as Nepeta tries to claw at the arm holding her, The Condesce twists her wrist, and you hear a sickening snap as Nepeta’s arm breaks.

Nepeta screams. You bellow. The Condesce kicks out, sending Equius rolling into your legs and causing you to crash to the ground once more, the larger troll still unconscious beneath you. You haul your injured leg along as best as you can, but at this point it’s essentially dead weight. Aradia calls out wordlessly in distress, but you know as well as her that she’s the only thing keeping you all from drowning.
The Condesce seems to regard Nepeta curiously. “What is it with you Olive-bloods, always falling for these mutants? I’m beginning to think your whole caste is defective.”

“Get your hands off of her!” You scream in fear as you try to get your broken leg underneath you. Your eyes are on Nepeta only, as she sobs and paws at her broken arm, still being crushed in The Condesce’s grip.

“No.” The Condesce stares down at you coldly. “This needs to end. Now. I won’t stand by while you go around thinking that your kind has any place filling quadrants. It’s sickening.”

“Better take it up with me then, cause I started one with him first!”

You and the Condesce both turn in surprise, and you wince as a blast of bright light sears the Condesce’s face. She screams in rage, surprise, and confusion, as Nepeta drops limply from her grasp and scrambles away with every limb she can still use.

The light fades abruptly and you see Feferi standing on the far end of the room, having picked up Ahab’s Crosshairs from Eridan’s body. The Condesce blinks blearily as she rubs her arms at her scorched face. “No. No fucking way. You? MY HEIRESS?” She screams as she staggers around blindly. “THAT’S A FUCKING JOKE!”

“What’s the matter?” You yell in challenge. “Can’t handle the idea of somebody from your blood caste swapping spit with a mutant?”

“SHUT YOUR FUCKING MOUTH!” She screams in your direction and lashes out with her claws, but you’re so shit at walking right now that you’re still nowhere near her. “I’LL FUCKING TEAR OUT YOUR TONGUE!”

“NO, FUCK YOU, YOU SHUT UP!” You turn back to Sollux and he grins as he realizes what you want from him. The Condesce’s jaw starts sparking as he uses his psionics to hold her mouth shut.

“I WON’T JUST ROLL OVER AND DIE BECAUSE YOU TELL ME TO.” You snap as you crawl forward. “I’M DONE LETTING YOU AND ANYONE LIKE YOU TELL ME THAT I’M NOT GOOD ENOUGH. MY WHOLE LIFE, MY WHOLE FUCKING LIFE HAS BEEN SPENT HIDING AND RUNNING FROM TROLLS WHO WANTED ME DEAD FOR SOMETHING I NEVER HAD A SINGLE FUCKING IOTA OF CONTROL OVER AND I’M FUCKING DONE WITH IT!”

“I’M TRASH. I KNOW THAT. BUT NOT BECAUSE I HAVE RED BLOOD. THAT’S THE STUPIDEST FUCKING THING I’VE EVER HEARD AND I’M DONE WITH IT. I’M A COWARD. I ALWAYS TRY TO SOLVE MY PROBLEMS BY RUNNING AWAY. I HAVE A HORRIBLE TEMPER, THROW TANTRUMS LIKE A GODDAMN WIGGLER, AND PROBABLY HAVE AN UNHEALTHY OBSESSION WITH ROMCOMS.”

You have to pause at this point and catch your breath. You look around the room as your friends pick themselves up and nod along, ever the smartasses.

And that’s when you feel the breeze across you face, and look to the side to see John Egbert, who just landed in the room, a disgruntled Kanaya in tow. Nepeta appears at your side and helps you back on your feet, her face glowing despite the pain in her arm.

“But that never stopped people from seeing worth in me.” You smile as you carry on. “In spite of everything I am, in spite of everything I’ve done, I still met people who cared about me. Who
accepted me, even though I was a mutant, and even though I’m the biggest asshole in paradox space, whatever the fuck that means! And now that I’ve given Alternia the biggest fuck you in history I think I get it.”

“I’ve got nothing to be ashamed of, and no reason to die for you.” You grin as you start hobbling at the Condesce as fast as you can. “MY NAME IS KARKAT VANTAS! I AM A RED-BLOODED ASSHOLE OF A TROLL WITH NO PLACE ON THE HEMOSPECTRUM. AND I’M FUCKING PROUD OF IT!”

“YOU’LL FUCKING DIE FOR IT!” The Condesce screams in challenge, shrugging off Sollux’s psionics and still standing tall despite the direct hit to the face she just took from Feferi’s surprise attack. She can hear you coming, even if she can’t see you at the moment, and she’s bracing herself for your attack.

The Condesce lashes out as you draw in range, but Kanaya chooses this point to strike back with a vengeance, rushing in behind and raking her chainsaw across the backs of The Condesce’s knees. She falls to the ground before she realizes what hits her, but lurches forward as she tries to kill you again.

This time it’s Equius who intervenes, rushing past you to catch the Condesce by the wrist. He plants his foot solidly against The Condesce’s back and pulls backwards, and the Condesce’s arm is wrenched away. Nepeta chooses this moment to leave your side, darting in and bringing her good claw in to stab directly into the Empress’ armpit, stopping further struggling with a brutal twist.

At this point The Condesce attempts another psionic blast, but is met immediately with Sollux’s own. Their lasers fizzle out immediately, both trolls running on fumes, but Kanaya still steps in at this point to grab The Condesce by the hair and tilt her head to face the ceiling.

The Condesce screams at this point and tries to lash out with her remaining arm despite the injury, and Feferi almost casually drives her fork through the limb and holds it steady, Sollux assisting with a telltale flicker of psionic power.

Even after all of this has transpired, you’re still several paces away, and you see the others watch grimly as you approach. Out of the corner of your eye, you see John watching on with a frown, wanting to help but knowing he shouldn’t interfere. Aradia tries to keep a straight face, though you know at this point she can’t be able to hold you all afloat much longer herself.

You all know what needs to be done. The Condesce knows too. And as you continue to limp forward she begins to wail and thrash about, though the combined efforts of your friends prevent her from shaking loose.

“Not the mutant! Anyone but that fucking mutant! Don’t make me fucking beg you goddamn worms!” You see tears running down her face as you finally reach her. “I won’t die like this! Not to a mutant! Not like this! I don’t want to die!”

Even on her knees she’s almost as tall as you. Your arms feel like deadweights as you lift your sickle to rest on her shoulder. For all the triumph you felt when you screamed in defiance at her, you suddenly feel empty.

You want to say something, a taunt, another cheesy speech, an insult, anything at all. But you realize now that there’s nothing more to say. This isn’t some sort of righteous victory right now. It’s a goddamn execution.

So you keep your damn mouth shut, look the Condesce in the eyes, bring your arm back, and cut her
head off. The others seem to stagger back as The Condesce’s body goes limp, and drop it. Kanaya stares down blankly at her severed head before doing the same.

Aradia shifts suddenly, and you feel the ground lurch beneath you for a moment before she lifts you all with her telepathy. You’re carried outside, and watch as the ship slips below the ocean. Then John nods to Aradia, and leads you all back to the island.

It hardly registers to you at all that everything is finally over.

Your name is Doctor Scratch, and you don’t have much time. Your legs are rather badly injured and you have a ways to go before you can reach the outside of the ship. With how damaged it is, you know it’s only a matter of time before this place is underwater.

All around you everything is chaos, as the battle seems to wind to a halt. The Imperial Drones have at this point been mostly destroyed, but the surprise arrival of what can only be the Empire’s prisoners has caused the Alternian army to finally be overwhelmed. Trolls dressed in rags, wielding whatever weapons they’ve managed to scrounge together, fall upon their armored opponents and tear them apart, before rushing along in the same direction you head.

None of them pay any attention to you. Indeed, they act like you’re not even there.

You can only assume that Roxy Lalonde is to thank for this. Clearly her use of Void powers has caused you to slip deeper into whatever state her mother inflicted upon you the night you killed her. Though unlike Rue Lalonde, the damage Roxy dealt was considerably more hindering.

It matters not. You lost this fight, yes, but you still have your life. You have no doubt that many of those who stood against you can no longer say the same. Your injuries can be healed, and your strength can be regained. And once you have recovered you will pay your creations back for their slights against you.

The next room you stumble into has you see faces you recognize. This appears to be the location where your men made their final stand. Another clear case of the Lalondes handiwork, you can tell at a glance. For this many of your men to have died without bringing either girl down as well… It’s disgraceful.

Suddenly the sight of motion across the room draws your attention. You look up and realize that you are no longer alone in this room. “Spades.” You muse, “I would have expected you to be long gone. You broke off contact hours ago.”

“I had a call to make.” Spades Slick replies with a shrug. “Took longer than expected, but I got everything worked out.”

“I see.” No doubt he was continuing to plot with the one ally he had left. “Well unfortunately for you your absence has been sorely felt. Your little gang of conspirators is all but gone.”

Spades looks at you in confusion before glancing around at the bodies by your feet. His face falls as his eyes widen in recognition. “Caleb… Carter. I told those idiots to stay out of trouble.”

“You know as well as I do what good that does.” You shrug. “At any rate, you’ll have to wait to make your bid for my seat until you have some new thugs, I’m sure.”

Spades glares coldly up at you. “Are you now?”
You can’t help the smugness that creeps into your voice. “Naturally. I am far from done here, and your little gang is all but dead. Your game is over for now.” You stop and blink.

Then you look down at the knife that Spades just plunged into your chest. “You… you can’t just-”

“Why not?” Spades stares at you impassively. “Tell me why I can’t just stab you.” He punctuates this by stabbing you again.

“You can’t just… I am…” You weren’t expecting this sort of behavior at all. He just threw away his best chance at winning this war. Without you, the weapons you’ve made will be free to run loose, with nothing to stop them.

“You’re now dead is what you are.” Spades shrugs as he stabs you again, blood now coating his hand. “You’re also officially considered a liability by the U.S. Government. They’re done with your little pet projects. And they’re done with you. As far as the records show you will be given all blame for this entire incident. They’re saying you caused the hostile relations between America and an alien race. Ordering the death of a highly decorated and respected war veteran didn’t exactly help your case.”

“You…” He outplayed you? That’s not possible. How could he have managed to go over your head? How did he twist the chain of command around your neck? What loose end could he have picked up on?

Of course.

“Brinner.” You spit out, as the knife sinks into you a fourth time. Spades seems surprised for a moment. Then he draws the knife sideways and watches as you fall to the ground, barely holding yourself up on all fours.

“Yeah, Brinner, you ass. Turns out he knows people. Lucky us. Now you’re gutted like a fish, and I’ve been placed in control.” Spades throws his knife aside contemptuously and walks over to where Caleb is lying. He doesn’t hesitate to pick him up, and then heads over to Carter’s headless corpse.

You laugh in spite of everything as your blood pools below you and your vision starts to fade. “Quite the mess you’ll be cleaning up, Spades!”

He pauses and turns back to you with a cold smile. “Well luckily for me, I happen to enjoy paperwork. Sucker.” He doesn’t wait to watch you die. He just disappears around the corner and leaves you to bleed out on your own.

“Well, I suppose…” You smile internally. “This has been quite a learning experience. Truly a game worth playing.”

There’s nothing else to say after that.

You are dead.

Chapter End Notes

Only the Epilogue left to go.

Wow, I really thought I’d have more to say about this one, but… yeah, I don't. I've got
nothing. Been waiting to get to this part for almost 18 months and I've got nothing to say about it anymore. I guess... just... I hope it was as satisfying for you to read as it was for me to write.
Chapter Summary

The aftermath.

Chapter Notes


See the end of the chapter for more notes

You’re not really sure why it’s ending with you. When it comes down to it you’re not sure you played that big of a part in everything. You mostly watched while others did the heavy lifting. But if you had to guess why, it’s probably because of what happened when everything was finally over. When you realized that things were really just getting started.

Your name is John Egbert, and you’re picking up the pieces.

At the moment that’s pretty literal as far as things go. Jade’s still not in great shape, and Sollux has to save power for what’s to come next, so as far as salvaging goes it’s mostly down to you and Aradia.

And the trolls you don’t know, you suppose. There are only a couple hundred of them left at this point, since Jake and Hal tore most of the Alternian fleet to shreds. Some abandoned their army, but most were prisoners that the girl Terezi freed.

You kinda wish you’d met Terezi. The last time anyone saw her was when she led those trolls out of captivity, so you think she can’t have been all that bad. Even if the news has nothing good to say about her.

Anyways, you’ve got about a hundred trolls hanging around on Harley Island, so you’ve been pulling up as much of the destroyed fleet as you can. The water damage is horrible, but you’ve got to make homes for everyone out of something! Most of the new additions have nowhere to go, so it would be cruel to just make them live outside.

Besides, with all the crazy animals around here they really seem to feel at home. You think that’s pretty great, really. It means that even if the Disciple person who crashed here caused a lot of trouble for everyone, at least now something good has come out of it.

Not everyone agrees with you, but that’s to be expected. Death can really make people feel bitter sometimes.

Dirk’s been great. You expected him to be the most messed up of everyone, but he’s done even more to make the trolls welcome than you have! You asked him about it the other day, and he told you the same thing you thought.

Dave would want everyone to be cool about things. He was the first person to help any of the trolls
out after all, so you think he’d be pretty happy with what’s happened since the fight ended.

Jake and Roxy were all for it as well, of course, you knew they would be. Rose and Jane aren’t thrilled, but they trust you and Dirk to make the right call on this one. Really, you think they just want to make sure there’s some proper discussions about taking in several hundred refugees, and you’re sure that’s probably a good thing!

As for Jade… you’re sure she’ll come around. She took Dave’s death harder than anyone, and you know she blames herself deep down, even while she points fingers at the Trolls and at Spades.

You stop reminiscing to focus on your work for a moment, using your wind powers to flush the last traces of water from a massive chunk of the Flagship. Aradia is waiting nearby with two other rust blood trolls, and when you give them the signal the three heave it out of the water.

You signal to them that you’re calling it a day and they nod and carry this last piece away. It takes time to clean everything out, especially with large sections like this, so you figure the other groups will need time to catch up.

Besides, you can see Karkat near the shore.

He’s still in crutches for now, since Jane had trouble twisting his leg straight. She’s planning to have him fixed up when the time comes, but there’s plenty of other people she needs to help even now, so he’s staying off of it for now. Well, sometimes he still walks around, just to prove to himself that he can, but Kanaya is keeping him in line for the most part.

You don’t know how they haven’t realized they’re pale for each other. You have to agree with Roxy on this one, when even you’ve figured it out it’s really bad!

“Hey Karkat, what’s up?” You call out as you land on the beach near where the troll is waiting.

“Got word from Rose. FELT ship is coming in across the bay. Not sure what the fuckers want but I figured we should be the ones to go meet them.”

“Right, grab my hand.” Karkat eyes your outstretched hand distastefully. “Or we could walk?”

“Please.”

It takes you a couple of hours, but you and Karkat manage to loop around to the other side of the island just as the ship is dropping anchor. It’s small enough that there are only a handful of people there to run the thing, but you recognize the man who helped you save Rose, Spades Slick. You also recognize the guy who killed your neighbors.

Thankfully, he seems to recognize you as well, and after a brief discussion between him and Spades, only Spades ends up disembarking.

“Long time no see kiddoes.” Spades drawls as he walks across the beach towards you. “Come to see how everyone’s settling in.”

“Everything’s fucking peachy.” Karkat growls back. “So if you could kindly not fuck that up it’d be appreciated.”

“Easy there kid. If I wanted trouble believe me, you’d have it by now.” Spades says casually. “I’m getting enough bullshit from the Whitehouse.”

“The what? Wait.” Karkat looks towards you in confusion. “Isn’t that the building that always gets
blown up in your shitty movies?” You’re too busy trying to process that Spades Slick is apparently in contact with the president, so you just nod and try to keep your jaw from dropping.

“Not important.” Spades says, turning to stare at you in confusion. Fuck, mission failed, your jaw is dropped right now. So dropped. You close it and listen up as he continues. “What’s important is that I’ve cleared everything up. This island is now under government protection.”


“Why the fuck else would I be talking about the damn Whitehouse, of course the USA government!” Spades spits impatiently. “They’ve decided they’re not going to get in the way of what you’re doing here, as long as they get some sort of regular update from you guys. You set things up and they’ll start bringing in foreign aid.”

“Just like that?” Karkat asks suspiciously. “No fucking way are things working out that perfectly. What’s the catch?”

“The catch is it means a whole shitload of work for everyone involved. Mostly your little crew and myself. The fact is though; most of the world took a big hit from this invasion. Entire armies wiped out, countless lives lost, world powers shamefully outclassed… and then they got saved by a bunch of kids. The fact is they’re trying to get on your good side. They don’t know how fragile you guys really are. How lucky you got.”

“But you do, is that what you’re saying?” You frown, as you look him over. “Are you trying to blackmail us?”

Spades chuckles at that. “I’ve got way better things to do. Or didn’t you hear, I’m in charge of this operation now.”

“We guessed.” Karkat grunts. “Found Scratch’s body a few days ago.”

“We can take that off your hands, if you’d like.”

You don’t even need to mull it over, really. You want nothing to do with that corpse, or the other FELT bodies you found with them. It only takes a quick flight for you to find Aradia and explain, and she gathers up the makeshift caskets you made for them and floats them back with you.

When you get back to the shore, you see something you really weren’t expecting, and you can only freeze in shock.

“Thought we’d make a trade.” Spades says awkwardly as his men bring a third casket onto the beach. “I worked with Brock and Rue back in the day, and everyone who’d ever served knew who Atticus was. So when we found them… I thought… Well, they raised you; you should have the right to bury them. It’s only right, y’know.”

“Thank you, Spades.” You whisper as you look down on your dad’s face. “Truly.”

“Yeah, whatever. Look, I’m not much for this emotional bullshit, so I’m gonna pack up and leave.” He shrugs, handing a folder full of paperwork to Aradia (since she’s the only one not on the verge of tears), and walks back to his boat, pausing only once to say “We’ll be in touch.”

Two days later you finally bury everyone, once you finally find Tavros and Gamzee’s remains. Aradia calls it a corpse party, not knowing the actual term, and honestly you find that idea more pleasant than funeral so you kinda go along with it. It becomes as much about celebrating as about mourning, and while opinions are mixed once again at first, everyone decides afterwards that the idea
was for the best.

Eridan, Vriska, Terezi, Tavros, Gamzee, Brock, Atticus, Rue, Dave, and Becquerel. Five trolls, four humans, and one dog. You bury them with only the members of your group, but after that’s done more than a few of the trolls stop by to pay their respects. It ends up turning pretty hectic, but for the most part everyone ends up enjoying themselves.

It’s only a couple of weeks after that when the time you’ve been secretly kinda dreading comes.

Your friends are about to leave Earth.

It had to happen, really. With the Condesce dead, and roughly 99% of all adult trolls dead with her, something needed to be done. If you all just stayed here and pretended everything was all going to be fine then Alternia would probably collapse.

Feferi is now the rightful ruler of Alternia, and she’s decided that she’s going to do everything in her power to set things right. She can’t do that from Earth.

So now you’re watching as Nepeta directs a group of no more than a few dozen trolls onto one of the last Alternian Battleships, while Karkat and Feferi watch on with the rest of you. Everyone else is already on board.

Sollux is already in the helm, probably getting things ready with Lil Hal. He’s been up there for an hour now, having already said his goodbyes. Goodbyes in Sollux’s case meaning he called everyone a bunch of assholes, hugged the Harleys, and flew away so nobody could get a chance to tease him about how much he was crying.

“That’s everyone!” Nepeta calls out, bringing you back to the present. There’s excitement in the air, but also a heck of a lot of sadness too. You understand why. Everyone here has become like a family to you. And now your family is about to be split in half.

As you’d expect, everyone around you is feeling pretty bummed out too. Roxy is already tearing up, and is crushing your hand in a death grip. Rose is sitting on the grass next to you, probably more composed than anyone. Jade is watching from the back of the group, with Jake sitting nearby. Jane is sobbing into Dirk’s arms, and you wonder just who he’s talked to recently.

“Well,” you turn as Feferi greets you. “I guess this is goodbye.” She’s probably the most okay with everything out of everyone here. To her this is a chance to live up to the dreams she had when she was younger, to make her planet a better place. She considers this sad farewell to be worth it to achieve everything she wants to do with her life, and you can respect that.

You note the few possessions she has to bring with her as she shakes your hand. “You’re bringing Eridan’s gun?”

“Yeah.” She smiles sadly. “I want to keep him close. He wasn’t always a good person, but he tried to be the best moirail he could be for me. We weren’t like Equius and Nepeta, but we did love each other in our own way.”

“I know.” You smile reassuringly, “I could always tell.” She smiles gratefully, and moves on to speak with the Harleys, leaving Nepeta to take her place.

Of course, being Nepeta, she pounces both you and Roxy at once, nearly bowling you over. “I’m going to miss you two!” She cries as she crushes you in a hug. “You’re purretty much my favorite ship… out of all the ones I’m not in.”
“Back at you, babe!” Roxy sobs, squeezing Nepeta back with everything she’s got. “As soon as you guys figure out how to email us you message me, okay? Just spam me with pictures of Pounce!”

As your group hug turns into a discussion on cat videos you roll your eyes at Rose, who watches in bemusement. Her attention is quickly drawn away though, as she spies Kanaya stepping out of the ship and returning to the group. You can both tell that a very emotional goodbye is about to happen.

Karkat follows your gaze, and his face seems to twist between sadness, longing, and a bittersweet smile, before he forces it into a resigned scowl. “Let’s get this over with.” He mutters as Kanaya strides quickly towards him.

When she reaches him she is immediately all business, pesterling him with questions. “Did you pack all of your things?”

“Yes.”

“And you have Sollux’s items prepared for the bridge?”

“Like I’d forget.”

“Karkat.”

“No Kanaya, I didn’t leave anything out on purpose either, fuck! I have a kismesis now, remember?”

“I am aware Karkat, I simply do not wish to leave any bases uncovered.”

“Seriously Kanaya, you’ve been going over this stuff with me for a week now, it’s fine.”

“I know.” Kanaya smiles helplessly. “But I will not be with you for a long time. I feel like this will be my last chance to fuss over the two of you.”

Nepeta grimaces in frustration as they continue to talk. “Oh, why can’t those two just pap each other and get it over with?” She mutters beneath her breath.

“It’s hardly the best time to be starting such a relationship.” Rose says sadly. “They’ll be on opposite sides of the galaxy before long.”

“Maybe when we see you all again.” You say to Nepeta. “In the meantime though, at least you’ll be able to look after Karkat.”

“And you have no idea what a relief that is to me.” Kanaya calls out with a smirk, causing you and Nepeta to jump and Rose to let out a hiss of surprise. Karkat glares balefully back at you all and you chuckle in spite of it all.

“It is time.”

You jump again in surprise as you realize that Equius has somehow appeared in your midst without anyone noticing. As always for somebody twice your size he is ridiculously sneaky when he wants to be!

“Equius!” Nepeta cries out in distress as she leaps into her moirail’s arm. “I will miss you furry much!”

“Hush Nepeta, we will see each other soon enough. I will be here waiting for your return.”

You smile sadly towards Aradia as she floats down beside you. “You can still change your mind
about staying, you know. We’d totally get it.”

“Our minds are made up.” Aradia says with a shrug. “Kanaya needs to look after everyone now that Karkat’s leaving, and Equius and I have our own responsibilities here. Homes to build, prosthetics to create…” Her eyes are tearing up a bit but like always she grins in spite of it all. “Our moirails may be going away, but at least we’ll have each other! And all of you guys, of course.”

“We will endure.” Equius says simply as he rejoins you all. “We are not the unstable children we once were.”

“Alright assholes, let’s finish with the fucking hugging and get this show on the road already!” Karkat snaps as he storms over.

“Clam it Karcrab, we have no idea when we’ll see each other again!” Feferi yells over angrily.

“Bitch, you’re the only one who’s taking everyone in their quadrants with you, so don’t even start with me! There is a ship full of people stupid enough to follow us over there, and we’re keeping them waiting. Let’s not cause a mass fucking mutiny by showing them that we can’t stop ourselves from bawling like a bunch of fucking wigglers just because we’re saying goodbye to a few people!”

Nepeta sighs and hugs Equius one last time before bounding over, followed by Feferi, who takes the opportunity to slug Karkat in the arm.

Equius stares after the three of them for a moment before stepping forward to say something. Before he can get going Karkat cuts him off.

“I know what you’re going to say Equius, and yes. I will guard her with my fucking life.” Karkat smiles fiercely, as Nepeta grins and grabs his hand. Then, after thinking about it for a moment longer he adds. “Hell, I’ll do the same for all of them.”

Equius frowns, and then steps back, having nothing else to say. Aradia pats him on the shoulder reassuringly.

There’s a moment or two as the three stand there, before Karkat turns and yells impatiently, “Well?”

“Right, coming.”

You look over sadly as Dirk separates from the rest of you and walks over to join Karkat, Feferi, and Nepeta. Karkat eyes him suspiciously as he reaches the three of them and grumbles. “Last chance to back out. It won’t be a fucking picnic out there.”

“I know. I’m doing this.” Dirk replies irritably, looking aside. “I just… I can’t stay here, you know? Not with everyone else.”

Not with everyone but Dave still here.

You know that’s what he means, even though he can’t bring himself to say it right now. When Dirk first approached you after the funeral you knew this was what he had in mind. He needs to get away from it all. He can’t stand being part of a group where the absence of his twin brother is forever looming. Maybe by helping the trolls he can come to terms with things. You sure hope so.

“Wait, what in tarnation is going on here?” Jake exclaims in shock. “Dirk, you can’t be saying you mean to leave us all behind.”

Dirk glances back and shrugs, though you can tell he’s struggling to keep his face straight. “Sorry
man, couldn’t stay here forever. Striders gotta stride, you know how it is.”

It occurs to you at this point that Jake is the only one surprised by the news. You knew Dirk had told Roxy, and Jane likely only just found today out by how she’s openly sobbing. But in the end he seems to have spoken to everyone except for Jake. That guy is such an obtuse asshole sometimes, you swear to god.

Jake glowers at Dirk for a moment, before stomping right over. “Now wait just one bloody minute you! Don’t you think for a second that I’m going to just sit back and watch you go off on the greatest adventure of our lives without me!”

“Jake, not to burst your bubble, but you don’t have a room, luggage, or even an ounce of forethought put into this.” Karkat cuts in gruffly.

“Actually we prepared a room in case of such an eventuality.” Equius interrupts with a smirk. “And Jade has already prepared his luggage.”

“What the fuck?” Karkat cries out in confusion as you look around in surprise.

“As soon as Dirk told me I knew this was going to happen.” Jade mutters as she steps forward impatiently. “Feferi and I planned this out ages ago.”

“And you didn’t think to tell me?” Karkat turns to Feferi, who smiles coyly. “Right, of course, just to piss me off. Fucking. NATURALLY.” He sighs, rubbing his temples, before shooing Jake away.

“Alright, fucking fine, you’re coming, now go start another fucking hug train and get it over with already.”

You see Dirk watching in stunned silence as Jake rushes to hug his sister. “They’d better get shit worked out between the two of them now.” You mutter to Roxy, who rolls her eyes as if to say ‘tell me about it.’

“No time like the present.” Rose speaks up with a mischievous grin, before calling over to Dirk “Just kiss already!” He whirls around to face her, before slapping a palm to his face.

Jake seems to be making things brief for the sake of Karkat’s nerves, and as he rushes along the line hugging everyone in sight he winks at Rose. He finishes at the end of the line with you and Roxy, and then marches right back up to the others. From there you can only stare in amazement as he grabs Dirk, dips him, kisses him, and then marches on board the ship red-faced, followed by the cheers of every woman present.

“Fucking incredible.” Karkat mutters as he watches Dirk stand stunned and grinning. “Nepeta, could you get this idiot on board, I’ve had all I can handle with these fucking shenanigans.” She giggles at that and leads Dirk away by the hand.

“Alright, that’s settled, let’s get going.” Karkat turns to leave, but is stopped when Feferi shoves him over. “Ow, what the fuck?”

“Go say goodbye you dumbass.” Feferi says with a scowl. “I will beach you here if you don’t, so help me.”

Karkat glowers up at her for a moment, before sighing and getting to his feet. “Fucking fine, let’s get this over with.”

Chapter End Notes
YUP. THAT'S FUCKING RIGHT. IT'S NOT OVER.

I thought I was joking. I really did when I wrote what I did at the tail end of chapter 52. BUT NOPE.

I got to this point, and I decided. I decided that the best thing to do was to actually make the epilogue come out in TWO FUCKING PARTS.

I just... god fucking damn it. Why do I do these things. I wanted to get it all done as one, but when I reached the end here, I couldn't keep going. I thought about it long and hard, and this was honestly the best solution I could come up with. And I fucking hate that. Seriously, to anyone who could see me right now I am the epitome of being calm and collected but inside? Full on Karkat here.

Anyways, other things of note. Let's see here...

Right, Jake/Dirk. This was my plan for the two of them from the get-go, though originally roles were reversed. Jake was going to leave in the hopes of having a grand adventure and Dirk was going to follow. That was back before I came up with my decision to kill off Dave though, and I feel like this brings things together much better, honestly.

The goodbyes are all rushed here, because there's no good way to really cram a dozen heart to hearts between all the different characters while writing from one character's perspective. That said, they've clearly had plenty of time to work themselves up to this point, so you can assume a good bit of what needed to be said between everyone has been said already.

I'll get the last part out soon. And this time. You can be DAMN. SURE. That it really will be the LAST. FUCKING. PART.

Fuck's sake, I'm done. You're all amazing, thank you for being so patient, cause I want to kick my own ass for doing something so ridiculous.
Well, it looks like it’s back to you after all. You weren’t planning for things to end like this. You wanted it to be some grand thing. You were going to stand stoically on the hillside, overseeing everything like some kind of badass. You were going to make a grand speech, with liberal use of your most colorful vocabulary. You were going to march onto that ship proudly, and make sure the last thing everyone saw before you flew away was the great vanquisher of Her Imperious Condescension.

But in the end that’s just not happening. Because you’re not the great vanquisher of Her Imperious Condescension, even if you’re the one who cut her fucking head off. Your matesprit did way more in that fight than you, to say nothing of Equius and Kanaya. You’re just the guy who ran around trying not to shit himself until everyone else showed up to save the day.

You’re just Karkat Vantas, and you really don’t want to leave. You have friends here that mean more to you than your fucked up home world ever did. And you’re about to leave them to save that same shithole you grew up in. Because you’re the only one who can.

No way in hell are you leaving the job to Feferi and Sollux, fuck that. Without you around to keep shit in order they’d burn the planet to fucking nothing in less than a sweep. As for Nepeta, well… she’s just going because you’re going. And you’re still not sure what you did to deserve somebody who loves you so much that they’d leave everything else for you but you can at least say at this point that you’re going to make sure she feels just as great as you make her feel.

But you’re getting sidetracked. You’re not saying goodbye to Nepeta, you’re saying goodbye to these assholes in front of you.

It’s honestly kind of overwhelming, just seeing them looking at you right now. But you have to do this. You’ll just consider it your last job here on earth.

You start from your right, where Jane is doing her best not to break down in tears again. “Hey Jane.”

“Hey yourself, buster.” She replies with a sniffle, before grabbing you a hug, which, while not on the same level as Nepeta or John, still has enough Egbert in it to feel absolutely bone crushing. She must hear you wheeze, because after a moment she loosens her grip. “Sorry, I’m feeling a tad overwhelmed. Just had to say a couple more goodbyes than I was ready for today.”

“It’s fine.” You pat her awkwardly on the back now that you can feel your arms again. The two of you stand there awkwardly for a moment or two before you finally bring yourself to speak again. “Look, I guess I never really thanked you.”

She seems genuinely taken aback, but you press on while you’re still feeling the magical gift of
verbal diarrhea. “If it wasn’t for you, I doubt any of us would still be here. I’m pretty sure every single fucking person who you saved came back to save my ass at least once, so… yeah. I owe you my life at least a dozen fucking times over, and I don’t think I ever thanked you for that.”

Jane opens her mouth to speak, but you can tell just by looking at her that whatever she’s about to say is going to be self-degrading, so you cut her off. “You’re welcome Karkat.”

She pauses, taken aback for what’s probably the tenth time today at least. “What?”

“You’re welcome, Karkat. That’s what you’re supposed to say when I thank you. Fuck’s sake, I know I make you humans look like idiots pretty regularly, but you should at least know your fucking lines.” You stare down at her for a moment, making a big show of impatience that’s rapidly becoming genuine. “Well, are you going to say it or not?”

“I… well… alright.” She frowns. “You’re welcome.” She chuckles a bit as she says it. “You know, I’ve been apologizing so much lately that it’s honestly been a while since I’ve said that.”

“Fuck that.” You glare at her. “Pay some fucking attention, I know for a fact these assholes have said the words thank-you recently. And if they haven’t, you kick their fucking ass. Got it?”

“Right.” She grins. “And don’t you take any guff from anyone back on Alternia either.”

“I never do.” You reply, before whirling back to your kismesis. “DON’T START.” Feferi smiles smugly, clearly not saying anything just to throw you off. Fucking hell she’ll be teasing you about that one later. You decide to move on before you embarrass yourself further.

Of course next in the line is Jade, and there’s a potential shit storm you want nothing to do with. She needs some kind of moirail, because she’s currently trapped between hating herself and hating literally everyone else just to keep herself going.

You settle for a curt nod and a brief, “Take care of yourself,” and try not to focus on how begrudging she seems when she wishes you the same.

You wish you had time to figure out how to patch things between Jade and the rest of your group, but there’s some things that just can’t be healed without time. Feferi may never find a new moirail. Dirk may never be ready to go home. And Jade may resent trolls forever.

All you can do is move on.

…To Equius. Fuck, it’s just one happy farewell after another, isn’t it?

You’re about to send him the same pathetic line you just gave Jade, but he gets down on one knee instead, and you try not to focus on how the massive troll is still almost on eye level with you. “You made me a promise.”

“I did.”

“Know that if you break it I will kill you.” He says plainly, and you feel a cold chill run down your spine. Because holy shit, this is so much more than just a threat, it’s truth, pure and simple. If you fuck up Equius is going to kill you, and after everything he’s lived through you doubt anything would be able to stop him.

He stares at you levelly for another moment, until he’s sure you understand, before nodding his head and standing up. “Naturally I will expect the same of you.”
“What?” You look up at him again because confusion doesn’t begin to cover what this asshole is doing to you right now.

“I am extending to you the same promise that you have given me. I will keep us all safe, or die trying.” Your jaw drops as you watch him further, because he’s practically blushing at this point. He usually only acts like this around girls he likes and you’re done thinking about this.

Instead you just look him in the eyes and tell him frankly, “I’m still leaving Kanaya in charge. But thank you.” Thank you for trusting me with the most important person in your life. Thank you for saving my life. Thank you for finally accepting me as an equal.

There’s so much being unsaid by both of you, and you can both plainly tell, so in the end you just chuckle at each other, and then you move down the line.

“It’s nice to see that the two of you have finally succumbed to that human disease known as friendship.” Aradia says with a grin as you reach her.

“Still not a disease!”

“Call it a work in progress.” You reply, ignoring John’s outburst even as Roxy elbows him into submission. “Because I’m still not sure he trusts me enough to let me near you right now.”

“He can deal with it.” Aradia grins as she pulls you into a hug. “We’ve been friends for long enough that I say you’re fine.”

You grin back at her as you pull apart. “You know, I should have said this way fucking sooner, but it’s nice to see you not dead. Because seriously, it fucked me up when you died, and I’m not sure I’ll ever let myself admit just how badly.”

Aradia’s grin somehow manages to grow even wider as she coos, “Aww, that’s so sweet Karkat! Maybe I should die more often.”

“Please don’t.” The call comes not just from you, but from the Lalondes, Kanaya, and Equius as well, causing her to burst out laughing.

“Well then I’ll be sure I’m still alive and well when you’re back. For his sake too.” She nods her head towards Equius, who blushes and looks aside.

“And I’ll do the same.” You reply.

“It’s a deal!” She grabs your hand, shaking it firmly, and then merrily shoves you onward towards Rose and Kanaya.

“Well now, it would seem that your intrepid friendleader has graced us with your presence.” Rose says with a smile as she addresses Kanaya.

“Indeed. It is truly an honor, getting to say goodbye to our leader twice. I may faint.” Kanaya replies with a grin.

“Fuck, forgot how irritating you two are when you work off each other.” You grumble, “Alright, Kanaya, we’ve talked plenty already, so just…” You sigh. “We’ll talk things over next time we see each other.” You try to ignore the twisting in your gut as Kanaya’s smile turns sad. As much as you’d love to finally look into whatever the fuck is going on between the two of you, there is no good way to handle things right now. You’ve agreed to figure it out next time you see each other, and that’s just going to have to be enough.
She hugs you one last time, and then you move on to Rose nervously. “You… Okay, fuck, I don’t even know how to talk to you Rose.”

“You’ve done a fine job of it until now.” Rose gives you the same enigmatic grin she always has. “You’ve always had the most endearing tendency to push right past my bullshit.”

“See, this is exactly what I’m talking about. How the fuck am I supposed to reply to that?” You snap back. “Seriously, have we ever had a single conversation where you haven’t played some sort of mind game with me?”

“Have we? What do you think?”

“No! We fucking haven’t! Because you can’t resist asking stupid things like that!”

Rose’s smile shifts from coy to something fonder, and you stop yourself before you lose control completely as she gestures to Kanaya. “Then let this be the first conversation in which I don’t.”

“A bit late for that.” You can’t help but reply, and Rose grins in response.

“Touché. Let this speak instead then.” She steps back as Kanaya approaches again and produces a bundle as if from thin air, continuing as her smile grows wistful. “Consider it a parting gift. We used some of Dave’s old clothing to make it. I know he’d agree with the gesture.”

You stare down in amazement. It’s a hoodie, the baggy pullover kind; colored a red so dark it almost looks brown. And the symbol in the middle is an open wound. “My blood color.”

“My idea.” Rose says proudly. “And part of a bit of parting advice to you.” Her expression turns serious so fast it’s frightening, and she grabs you by the shoulder and looks you dead in the eye even as you try to take a step back.

“Karkat, there are a lot of trolls still out there that think of your blood as a cause for hatred. You can’t let that go unanswered. You are in their eyes now, the eyes of your entire species. If it were anyone else who cut off The Condesce’s head it would be a different story. But it wasn’t. It was you. And if you let them think for even a second that you are ashamed of who you are after something like that then you won’t last a minute at home.”

She smiles grimly. “Do what you’ve always done with every other horrible thing about you. Own it. Own it and show them all that you are above their hatred. Live the rest of your life like the man who killed the Empress should.”

“And whenever that’s too much pressure for you, come find me.” Kanaya interjects with a smile. “Whether as a friend, or… anything else.”

“Or find me.” Rose cuts back in, her expression smug once more. “Quadrants are all well and good, but I still say there’s some problems only a good therapist can solve.”

You stare down at your gift for only a moment longer before pulling it over the t-shirt you’re wearing. “For the record I don’t care if this looks terrible on me after that speech, so no second thoughts are allowed Kanaya.” You pull the two of them into a hug immediately, before stepping back and turning back to Rose. “For the record, you make pretty fucking great company when you stop the psycho-babble.”

Rose chuckles and waves you along, and before you can so much as turn to the side Roxy has grabbed you and is sobbing almost as badly as she was with Nepeta.
“I’m gonna miss you, shouty!” She yells into your ear as she physically lifts you off the ground. “Who am I gonna talk to about all the stupid shit John does?”

“Make a fucking list, I’m sure when I get back we’ll have plenty to talk about.” You shoot a challenging smirk over Roxy’s shoulder at John, who is just rolling his eyes as much as he can. “I can tell you all about whatever bullshit Dirk and Jake get up to on Alternia while we’re at it.”

Roxy sobs and crushes you a little more. “Take care of those two, okay? They’re a couple of total dorks, but they’re my dorks.”

“I thought John was your dork.” You reply with a smirk, as she finally pulls away.

“Karkat, John is my babe who is also a dork. Dirk and Jake though, they are my dorkiest of dorks. And I love them both in the most amazingly platonic of ways you will ever imagine.”

“They’ll be fine.” You reply firmly. “And you look after John. Don’t let all the new trolls bully him.”

“That’s your job.”

“Damn fucking straight.”

Roxy lets out a giggle that’s still infected with all the incessant sobbing she’s doing, and throws you a salute, before hugging you again and muttering in your ear, “Alright, I’mma let you and my bf get your hugs on.”

“Yeah, save the sappiest for last, right?” Her head seems to bounce from all her nodding as she pushes you along.

John looks you up and down as you walk up and frowns. “That hoodie looks ridiculous.”

“Fuck you, I’m gorgeous.”

The two of you stare at each other for a moment before crashing together in a hug that probably hurts both of you more than either of you are willing to admit.

“Asshole.”

“Dweeb.”

“Jerkwad.”

“Dumbass.”

“You’re about to smell like shit, you know.” John mutters with a smile. “You’ve got so many trolls with their heads stuck up their own assholes.”

“It’s going to be fucking messy.” You agree grimly. “But if you could put up with me for so fucking long then I’m sure I can handle it.”

“That’s true, I had it way worse.” John laughs.

“How did you even handle me?Seriously, I was such a fucking mess when we met. And now you’ve got a small army of ex-convicts to look after, and I’m about to go liberate an entire planet from several fucking eons of bigotry. John, I probably should have asked this sooner, but what the actual fuck are we doing?”
“Making it up as we go along, I guess. Not like there’s a book we can read to tell us how to handle things like this.”

“Yeah, but what the fuck are we doing?” You look over the scrap metal city in progress on the island. “How the fuck did it lead to… this? What even is the end goal here?”

John shrugs helplessly. “I have no idea where things are going. But… I guess if I were to pick one thing…” He stares seriously at you and points to the symbol on your shirt. “A little over a year ago I found a kid my age throwing up his own blood, dying in a back alley because he lived his life being told he wasn’t good enough to want better. I want to make a place where that sort of thing never happens again.”

You’re not sure you can handle thinking about that too hard, so you just pretend he’s talking about some asshole that isn’t you in the slightest. “I guess that sounds like something I can get behind.”

“There you go!” John grins as he gestures to your ship. “So I’ll fix my island, you fix your planet, and we’ll try not to think too hard about how much easier my job is.”

You laugh as you shake his hand. “It’s a deal, you asshole.”

You stop and stare at each other for a moment before it becomes clear there’s not much more to say. “Well alright then.” You say with a shrug. “Guess that’s everyone.”

“Yup, time for you to go.” John’s smile broadens even as you see him start to tear up. “Give them hell.”

“I give everyone hell.” You reply, walking back towards the ship at last. You’ve almost reached Feferi when another thought crosses your mind, and you turn back to face everyone.

“Just you fuckers wait! I’m going to make Alternia so fucking amazing you’ll be begging to live there!”

“Do you have any idea how badly I want to undermine you after that line?” Feferi says with a playful grin. “You know I’m going to be the one getting placed in charge, right?”

“I’m a fucking champion of the people, if I say I’m a leader, then I’m a fucking leader.” You shoot back with a smile as the two of you make your way on board. “Don’t like it, then decapitate your own fucking monarch.”

Nepeta cheers as you reach her. “Ahh, you look purrfect!” She grabs you by the arm as she leads you and Feferi along. “Let’s go, let’s go! The sooner we get to Alternia the sooner we can get things ready for efurryone else to come too!”

“That’s the ticket!” Jake calls out enthusiastically from behind you. “We’ll have your planet full of rapscallions sorted out in time for tea!”

“It’ll take us the better part of a year just to reach Alternia, dumbass.” You shake your head as you reach the bridge.

“Empress on bridge, assholes. Stand at attention!” You yell as you walk in. “Let’s start this off on a competent note.”

The trolls scattered around the room rise in shock as you lead the way in and stand rigidly next to the captain’s chair. On your right, you see Dirk appear out of nowhere and seamlessly take position opposite you. Nepeta and Jake look at each other awkwardly and seem to just decide to flank
whoever they’re dating.

Finally, Feferi strides in after you have all taken your positions and sits confidently in the captain’s chair. “Status report?”

“All preparations complete.” Sollux replies coolly. “We are go for launch.”

“Thanks babe, careful not to strain your shellf!” She calls back cheerfully, before turning to you with a grin. “Decorum is overrated.”

“Fine. Fuck decorum, and fuck you.” You throw your hands in the air and face forward. “Let’s lift off already.”

The other trolls in the room are watching Feferi almost reverently, but you can see it. Their eyes are darting towards you almost constantly, particularly the emblem Rose and Kanaya placed on your chest.

And not one of them looks disgusted or angry. They meet your eyes, and you see the same respect they give Feferi.

You aren’t just a freak anymore. Not in their eyes, and not in your own.

Your name is Karkat Vantas. You are an asshole, a mutant, and a revolutionary.

And you are fucking proud of it.

Chapter End Notes

You know, when I started writing this thing I hardly knew at all what the fuck I was supposed to be doing. I’ve said that I planned this ending from the beginning, but what I had back then was hardly worthy of being called a plan. It was barely a concept, just the thought ‘Karkat goes home to fix Alternia.’ And look what this has turned into.

I remember cheering back when I first started seeing Kudos on my story a year and a half ago. I had no confidence whatsoever. It was the first time I’d tried writing in ages, save for a silly little OC fic that I ended up ditching in favor of this one. In the time since then I’ve switched jobs, switched cars, and basically shifted my views on life around more ways than I can count.

I’ve also improved dramatically as a writer. People have been praising this story from day one, but I look back on chapter one and I see something far worse than where I am now. If I were to go back and rewrite it I can guarantee it would look completely different. But there’s no way in hell I’d ever do that, because I am forever going to treasure this as a testament to my growth as a writer. When the day comes that I manage to get an original work of my own published, I will tell everyone who ever asks me that this story is part of what got me there.

And of course, it goes without saying that you all deserve some credit in that. Writing Blood Pride has changed my life. That seems like an exaggeration, I know, but it's true. You readers, by leaving kudos, and reviewing, and bookmarking, all helped me. Hell, even the people who only looked at the first few chapters and decided to find something
else helped me along. Because I am not lying when I say that everyone's support for my work amounts to the most positive reinforcement I've ever received in my life. I may not always know how to respond to your comments, but as I'm sure I've said before every single one means a great deal to me.

Now then, as for what happens next. For this story: nothing. I know that there are questions left unanswered, and while I certainly have some answers in my mind there are many more where I am as clueless as you are. And I want it to stay that way, personally. If a story ends with absolutely everything being resolved then it's failing as a story as far as I'm concerned. The stories that stick with you always do so because they leave you wanting more.

As for what happens next with me: well I told the people who read Skyward Sniper I'd have an update for them several months ago, so I'll have to get back to that soonish. I'm also probably going to move on to a longer story for RWBY than Small Talk and Weird Looks, because honestly my hype for that show is just getting bigger by the week. Beyond that... who knows? I'm not planning on committing too far ahead, because if I just keep lining up fanfictions I'll never be ready to write something for myself.

Either way though, no matter what I end up working on from here, I'm not going to stop writing. This is my life now, and damned if I'm not thrilled about it. I may not be able to announce it professionally yet, but I know it in my gut. I am a writer. And whether you keep reading my work or not, I want to thank you for helping me realize that through your support for this story.

Until next time, farewell, you beautiful bastards.

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