The Adventures of BTS (Barely Trained Superheroes)

by blurrylines

Summary

Super Heroes Academy AU. Seven different boys each possess a unique Power, to be trained and controlled within the classrooms of the Academy. In a surprising turn of events, the unlikely group of boys must work together to overcome the greatest threat to their Academy and all they believe in.

Notes

Yoongi: heat manipulation. Ability to control the kinetic energy of atoms to control or absorb fire
Namjoon: telepathy. Ability to read the thoughts of, or to mentally communicate with others
Jeongguk: shadow manipulation. Ability to create or manipulate shadows, often by mentally accessing a dimension of dark energy and manipulating it.
Taehyung: invisibility. Ability to render the user unseen to the naked eye and/or other forms of perception.
Seokjin: empathy. Ability to read or sense the emotions and/or control the emotions or feelings of others
Hoseok: gravity manipulation. Ability to manipulate or generate gravitons, or other types of gravitational interactions
Jimin: superhuman agility. Ability to react faster than a normal human and to possess
greater flexibility and with higher/farther jumping capacity.
Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

The beginning of a new school year at the Academy, accompanied by the first anticipated Combat Training Match of the year.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Get up, you lazy ass."

Yoongi wants to pretend that this is part of his dream and not his annoying roommate, close friend and Destroyer of All Things Namjoon telling him to wake up. That would mean he's back to reality and the challenge that is his student life.

"Five minutes." He grumbles back, throwing his blanket over his face.

"Nope," Namjoon walks over to Yoongi's side of their shared dorm room and rips the blanket off of him. "If you're late, I'm late. And I'm not letting that happen on first day of classes."

Yoongi curses the stupid "buddy system" their school imposes on them. Why do roommates have to be marked late if the other is? What kind of educational system supported this stupid policy?

Apparently Heroes Academy did. Known as the most prestigious Super Hero Institution in the nation, only the most capable and able-bodied were to be recruited and even then, they had to pass an admission test to secure a spot in the Academy. Located in the highest mountains, near the peak and within the levels of the clouds, they were well hidden from any normal human view.

Yoongi had been recruited back in his hometown while walking home from school; he had conjured up a small ball of flames to keep him warm from the winter chill, thinking no one was watching. He still remembers the Recruiter's first words to him as she approached Yoongi:

"You have a Power, and with it comes great responsibility."

He thought it was a joke. What kind of line was that? Straight from some Matrix movie or some shit, he thought. But no, the woman had gone on to explain the real consequences that those with Powers faced if they didn't learn to control them.

"I'd like to invite you to come to the Open House," She had said. "You will find all you need to know about our Academy. If you accept, we will retrieve you at precisely 1800 hours in seven days."

Yoongi had no idea what to think at the time. But he was definitely intrigued; he knew none of his friends had Powers like his and wanted to meet others who did. The aspect of not having to hide it from everyone else also appealed to him.

He took the card the woman had handed to him. It was light blue with white letters and only had two lines on it:
He hadn't recognized the area code. When he looked up to ask the woman where the heck in South Korea this place was located at, she was gone.

"I'm giving you five seconds to get the fuck up, or else." Namjoon warns him.

"Or else what," Yoongi scoffs. "You're gonna read my mind to death?"

"Really? You wanna go there?" Namjoon is looking down at him with narrow eyes.

"Okay, okay, okay." Yoongi reluctantly gets up and stretches. He didn't need his friend digging into his thoughts early in the morning. "Give me five minutes to get ready."

"Three minutes." Namjoon replies, looking at his watch. "Or else we're going to be late for Combat Training."

Not going to lie, Yoongi had been looking forward to that class since the end of last year. Combat Training was the one class he got to kick ass for a credit.

Namjoon was in Year 3 and himself in Year 4, and both looked forward to their Combat matches like it was the highlight of that week. Well, he supposes they were; everyone in the Academy talked about the matches and the aftermath daily. It was a topic on everyone's minds, everyday, and one that determined where you stood among your peers.

The Academy liked to have Years 2 and 3, and Years 3 and 4 and so on, face each other for 'more variation and realistic situations'. The assumption was that facing others who weren't in your year gave the matches an 'element of surprise'. Or something like that (Yoongi hadn't really paid close attention during that lesson).

Not that they would be facing each other since Yoongi's power fell within the Elemental Division while Namjoon's fell in Extrasensory Perception. Some Divisions weren't ever matched against one another for the possibility of one having an advantage over the other. Yoongi thought that went against the whole 'element of surprise' thing the Academy promoted. But he wasn't complaining.

"Who are you facing?" Yoongi asks as he pulls on his uniform black pants.

Namjoon gives him a shit-eating grin. "Guess."

Yoongi's buttoning up his crisp white shirt with the emblem of the Academy pinned to his chest. "You're finally facing Hoseok?"

"No, even better." Namjoon is grinning so wide, Yoongi can see his dimples. "Our pretty Seokjin."

"No fucking way." Yoongi laughs, putting on his navy blazer now. "Seokjin hyung? That'll be fun to see."

Namjoon grabs his bag and slings it over one shoulder. "How about you, who are you up against?"

"I forgot to check." Yoongi was going to get to it, but more important matters (aka sleep) had come up. "Let's go find out."
Taehyung enters the busy cafeteria with his roommate, best bro and partner in crime Jimin beside him. They're known among the Academy as the two most troublesome Year 2 students and were well aware of their reputation. They even took pride in it a little, but they weren't exactly going around looking for trouble. They just had a knack for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Also, the fact that Taehyung could turn invisible at will didn't help matters at all.

Jimin takes one look at the line up and sighs. "We should've come earlier, Tae."

Taehyung thinks the line will probably take 20 minutes for them to get to the front. 20 minutes was way too long for his state of hunger.

"Hey," He turns to Jimin and grins. "It wouldn't be too much trouble to go... missing for a bit, right?"

Jimin laughs, knowing full well the implications of that statement. "No, I think it's the perfect time to... disappear for a bit."

"You know the drill." Taehyung says happily and Jimin nods. Taehyung vanishes right before his eyes.

Okay, yeah, there were rules against using your powers within the halls and classrooms of the Academy, but it's not like they were being monitored and they were really hungry! A well-fed student is a well-kept mind, right? Taehyung tells himself so and walks to the front of the line, unseen by those standing behind him.

He comes up right beside the student at the front of the line, close enough that if he breathed, the student would feel it on his neck. He does just that, which startles the poor guy and in that second Taehyung reaches out two invisible hands and shoves, causing him to falter and bump into the girl behind him.

"Watch where you're going!" She shouts at him.

"S-Sorry," The boy is apologizing, looking around him bewildered. "Something just pushed me!"

And before the boy can gather himself, Taehyung quickly grabs his tray of food along with the girls and tosses them into the air. Jimin, with his superhuman agility, catches both in mid-air and then is gone in a blink. All of this happens so fast that to anyone else, it would have looked like the trays had just poofed out of thin air.

"Thanks, and sorry about the trouble." Taehyung whispers, and he watches in amusement as the boy's eyes widen in shock at hearing a voice without a face to put it to.

Taehyung laughs and runs over to where Jimin is sitting at the back of the cafeteria, the two trays brimming with food and awaiting.

He sits down beside his friend, picking up a fork. "Ooh, hash browns. My favorite."
Jeongguk has never seen this many people with Powers gathered in one room before. He's sitting in a huge auditorium along with 99 others when the President of the Academy walks up the stairs to the stage and proceeds to look at them with an intensity that could cause the bravest soul to wither under. The President, known among the students as Universo, is a tall man with sharp features.

He meets Jeongguk's eyes and they hold each other's gazes for a fraction of second. Jeongguk has a sudden uneasy feeling; a prickling underneath his skin and feels his Shadow bristling. He stares at the President.

"Incoming class of Heroes Academy, welcome!" He booms into the microphone. His loud and deep voice exuded authority, commanded obedience and Jeongguk found himself listening intently to every word.

"As the President of this fine Academy, I welcome you all to call this institution your home for the next six years. Within its walls you will be educated by the finest teachers and trainers of the nation. You will learn to harness and control your Powers. You will become the greatest version of yourselves, and receive the best training available.

Those of you who graduate at the top of your classes will receive the prestigious Order of First Class. Then you will go through more training to become a Super Hero, the greatest honour one can achieve after training here in Heroes Academy. The rest, of course, will lead normal lives under the guidance and supervision of The Bureau."

Jeongguk wonders what 'normal lives' meant. And what was The Bureau?

"I hope that you all try your hardest to master the Powers you have all been gifted with. With Power comes great responsibility." The President says the school's motto with emphasis. He pauses to look at them all, sweeping the audience with a stern glance. "A warning to all of you; these next six years will not be easy. You will have to prove yourselves, time and time again. There will be sweat, tears and blood involved and you will put in one hundred and ten percent of your efforts. Give less, and you will achieve nothing."

Jeongguk blinks. Did he really say blood?

"On a brighter note," The President continues. "As a welcoming gesture, our Academy invites you all to attend this morning's Combat Training class to see for yourselves what our Upperclass students have achieved under the institution's guidance. Watch the mastery of their Powers, how they become one with it and control it with finesse, with certainty and precision."

Here, the President pauses, and an excited murmur erupts among the Year 1 students. Jeongguk sits quietly, watching the tall man on stage with curiosity. He was excited to see this Combat Training. He wanted to see what other Powers existed apart from his own.

"So again, welcome to Heroes Academy! Please follow our Year 6 Prefects, they will be taking you directly to the Combat Training Dome."

And with that, the President ends his speech. Jeongguk turns around to see one of the Prefects beckoning him.

"You there," This Prefect is strikingly handsome, and Jeongguk wonders if that's a requirement to become a Prefect or not. "I'm Seokjin, Year 6 Prefect for Class A. Follow me."
Jeongguk gets up from his seat and wordlessly follows Seokjin, his Shadow trailing behind him. He can sense the excitement from his Shadow and smiles. Shadow had always been hard to get excited.

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Taehyung and Jimin are sitting in the cafeteria, almost done with their stolen (or 'borrowed' - as Taehyung liked put it) meals. Taehyung is going through the new semester's timetable on his tablet, trying to memorize his schedule for the day.

"Hey," he turns to look at Jimin. "You got Combat in period 1 too?"

"Yep," Jimin replies, looking excited. "First match of the day. I'm going up against a Year 4."

"Really?" Taehyung looks at him in surprise. "Already? I thought we were usually matched with other Year 2 or 3s."

"That's what I thought." Jimin shrugs. "But it shouldn't be too bad. I looked up who I'm up against. He's got Fire Manip." Jimin had spent an hour last night searching up all he could about Elemental powers and how Fire was used in battles. The images of the burns he saw weren't pretty, and he'd be lying if he said he wasn't worried.

"Ooh, that's hot." Taehyung pats his friend's back. "If you lose tragically, I'll still be your friend."

"That's very reassuring. Thanks." Jimin replies dryly, shaking his head. But he knew Taehyung would be cheering him on from the stands, chanting some lame chant in that surprisingly deep voice of his.

Taehyung gives him a thumbs up. "If anything, just stop, drop and roll."

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The Upperclassman are trickling into the Combat Training Dome, a huge structure made with walls of a special transparent material that kept wind, rain and snow out but looked invisible to the untrained eye. It was designed to allow the students to feel as if they were fighting under any weather or condition.

There are numerous rectangular battlefields located within the Dome and Yoongi recalls the first time he had seen them; he had been reminded of the Pokemon Gym battles he had played on his DS as a kid. Each student stood on opposite sides at the start of the match, a referee watching from the side. The boundaries were marked in white in the dirt, and each foot or body part that touched outside of the lines was a point deducted.

Overall, each competitor were scored based on three criteria during the matches: creative use of Power, reaction speed, and damage.

"You guys feeling ready?" Hoseok asks Yoongi and Namjoon. They're warming up in the
Preparation Area, a training room of sorts, waiting for the matches to start.

"Bro," Namjoon is stretching beside him. "I was born ready."

"You're up against Seokjin hyung, right?" Hoseok says, grinning. "Be careful. You'd be surprised; he's Prefect for a reason."

"We'll see." Namjoon runs a hand through his grey hair, looking excited, and Hoseok shakes his head, knowing his warnings were going in one ear and out the other.

"How about you, hyung?"

Yoongi's practicing his fire abilities, conjuring up a small ball of flame and tossing it between his hands. "I'm facing a Year 2, I don't think I need to worry." He had checked who his opponent was as soon as he had entered the Preparation Area earlier. Some young-looking Year 2 with Superhuman Agility. He had never faced someone with super speed but he had learned how to combat them in theory. Putting it into action would be interesting.

"Well, good luck to both you losers." Hoseok grins.

"What, you're not in combat today?" Namjoon asks.

"Nope. I'll be recording for both of you so," He gives them a V sign. "smile for the camera later."

Students at the Academy normally recorded their matches so they could watch afterwards and learn from their mistakes. Yoongi remembers one time he was beaten pretty badly; he had gone against a Year 5 with Wind Manipulation. Watching himself lose on video again had not been a fun experience.

But these matches - despite the anxiety and stress they caused - were one of the students' favorite parts of their school year.

-Seokjin leads the group of Year 1s to the inside of the Dome. He explains the significance of the building and what goes on inside.

"These battlefields are used for Combat Training classes. You will be entering them in Year 2, where you will most likely face other Year 2 students along with some Year 3s. The purpose of these matches are to further train you in controlling and harnessing your Powers. They are friendly battles, not matches to the death."

He hopes he doesn't sound too rushed but he can't help speed up the memorized speech; he wants to make it on time to see Yoongi's match.

"Alright, and now please take a seat in the stands overlooking the battlefields." He tells them. "Any questions?"

A boy with round eyes and a dark expression raises a hand.

"Yes?"
"What's the consequence for the loser of the battle?" He asks, his face unreadable. Seokjin notices that the boy's shadows are moving on its own accord. A Shadow Manipulator? He's never met one before, until now. They were a rare category of Power, and one with a bad reputation.

"Depends on the score. If they lose by more than 10 points, the consequences are greater than say, for example, losing by just 3 points." He's got only 8 minutes left now. He had to hurry.

"Okay, any more questions - please direct them to another Prefect!"

He smiles at the young crowd, and mutters an apology to one of his fellow Prefects, Hyosang, before bolting it out of there.

-Jimin and Taehyung follow the throng of Years 2s into the Dome, the transparent glass entrance doors sliding open to let them in.

"Welcome to the Combat Training Dome." The cool automated female voice tells them. "Match 1 to begin in ten minutes on Battlefield 3."

Taehyung turns to look at his friend. "How sick is this?" This is their first time stepping into the Dome, and they were amazed at the sheer size of it.

Jimin is looking pale as a ghost. "Yeah," he says, looking around the Dome in amazement. The space was huge; easily twice size of a football stadium and there an enormous screen floating in the middle. Audience seats went around the peripheral of the Dome and he could see the excited Year 1s watching from them as they walked in.

Taehyung looks around the young faces. His childhood friend was supposed to be among them. Jeongguk had texted him earlier in the summer about being accepted to the Academy, and Taehyung had been excited for him. He was looking forward to seeing him for the first time in years. Jeongguk had always been on the quiet side back when they were little, but Taehyung was going to make sure things were a little more eventful for Jeongguk now that he was here.

"This is..." Jimin breathes, not sure how to describe it.

"Fuckin' awesome?" Taehyung offers.

Jimin nods.

"You're Match 1, right?" Taehyung asks, looking at the giant screen above them.

Jimin follows his gaze. On the screen is a picture of himself with the caption "Year 2: Jimin. Superhuman Agility" underneath. A picture of his opponent is beside it. "Year 4: Yoongi. Fire Manipulation".

"Yoongi... I've heard of him before." Taehyung says. "He's got a reputation for being a hot head."

He tries to commit Yoongi's picture to memory; this was the face of his first ever opponent in the Dome. And he was determined to make him his first defeat.
"Be careful, Jimin." Taehyung warns him. "He doesn't go easy, from what I hear."

"You worry too much." Jimin tells him as they make their way to the Preparation Area. "Just don't mess up the recording, okay?"

"Year 2 Class A against Year 4 Class A: Match 1." The computerized female voice announces, the words appearing on the huge screen floating high in the middle of the dome.

"Student 951 Jimin, Physical Power Division vs. Student 190 Yoongi, Elemental Division." A picture of each of them appears on the screen. "Opponents, please proceed to Battlefield 3."

Jimin slowly breathes in and out, in and out. This is his first match and he's feeling nervous but excited at the same time. He stands on one end of the battlefield. He looks over to the opposite end where the Year 4 student is standing. He looks about his height, and he wonders if his light orange hair is natural or a side effect of his Power. It suits him, he thinks.

Yoongi is mentally preparing himself and going through all he knew about Superhuman Agility. The biggest challenge was being able to predict their next move since they moved so damn fast. But he had a near perfect record with these matches and he was quick to think on his feet. He feels pretty confident.

"You better be ready, kid." He grins, knowing this wasn't going to take long.

"Opponents, please select your weapon of choice."

For the matches, students were given the option to choose one hand-held weapon of their choice. People usually chose ones that matched their Powers; ones that enhanced their capabilities so to speak.

Options included: daggers, bow and arrow, ninja stars, bamboo sticks, rods, etc. The weapons were not a joke; they could potentially kill either of the opponents.

Not that any student has died on the battlefield before. The referees were trained to step in before anyone got seriously hurt, but either party almost always came out with one kind of injury or another.

These matches were - for all intents and purposes - a part of their required training, but they also had a social aspect to them, unrelated to academics.

These matches determined social hierarchy among the students. The winners emerged with pride, high scores, and a higher reputation than when they had gone in.

So there was more than just your grade riding on these matches, and if you were the one to lose you suffered a loss of pride more than anything.
Yoongi selects a lighter from the hologram screen presented in front of him. A second later, it appears out of thin air before him and he grabs it, feeling the cool metal against his palm.

Jimin chooses a simple dagger, and tucks it under his belt.

"Weapons selected." The automated voice announces. An image of their chosen weapons appear on the huge floating screen above them. "Round 1, to begin in ten seconds. Referee, please proceed."

The screen starts to counts down from 10.

The referee in his all-black uniform walks to the middle of the battlefield and beckons the two of them to come stand on either side of him.

9.

They walk over to where the ref is standing.

8.

"Opponents, please shake hands."

7.

Yoongi offers his hand. "Watch out, kid." He says in a low voice.

6.

Jimin stares at the older boy before shaking his hand. He's got a handsome face to match those orange curls.

5.

"Walk to your ends." The ref tells them. They break apart and head back to their positions.

4.

The Dome is dead silent, all eyes on them.

3.

Jimin bends his knees.

2.

Yoongi closes his eyes and takes a deep breath.

1.
And they're off.

Chapter End Notes

Jeongguk can control/manipulate others shadows but his own shadow has a mind of its own.

Hope you enjoyed the beginning! I had fun coming up with their powers (I based them off their personalities) :
more to come soon, stay tuned. also if you're yoonmin trash as well, holla at me
any kudos & comments would be appreciated! <3

TOFU U TALENTED FUCK
so tofu aka broteins aka my soulate drew the most beautiful jungkook
fanart go check it out seriously
Yoongi open his lighter, the small flame flickering as he gathers it into his hands. He can feel the heat growing stronger as he wills it into a ball of fire, growing bigger and bigger.

He looks towards the opposite end of the battlefield, studying the younger boy. Park Jimin, Year 2 and not so bad on the eyes, Yoongi thinks in amusement.

The referee blows his whistle, signalling the beginning of their match. Yoongi takes a step forward, knowing that his speed wasn't a match to Jimin's. He'll wait for him to come to him.

As expected, in a blink, Jimin's gone from his spot at the other end.

The next second, he appears right in front of Yoongi and he matches his gaze, level to his.

"Hey, hyung." He's actually grinning. The fucking nerve this kid has.

"Want me to wipe that smile off your face?" Yoongi doesn't bat a lash before he hurls the fire at Jimin but he's gone before it can touch him, and the boy reappears a few meters away from where he had been just a fraction of a second ago.

He had expected that.

Yoongi aims another fireball at him, but that one's dodged too. He throws a third one that misses, but just barely. Then he's gone again and Yoongi holds his breath, anticipating his next reappearance.

He feels a slight movement and Jimin is suddenly right beside him, dagger raised and ready to strike but Yoongi dodges right as the blade grazes his arm. "Fuck", he breathes, touching the spot the dagger had cut. His hand is red.

Okay, so the kid isn't playing. Yoongi was just warming up anyway. Fuck playing nice guy, change of plans.

Jimin had planned a loose strategy last night while looking up what Fire Manipulators were capable of. According to what he could find on the school's online archives, they needed a source of heat for their fires.

Yoongi's source obviously was the lighter.

So his plan was to take that away from him. No source, no flame. Sounded easy in his head, but the Year 4's got two years of experience under his belt and Jimin is surprised at how quickly the older reacts. With superhuman speed, Jimin's advantage was the element of surprise in his attacks. But Yoongi must have known that, what with the way he watches him so closely, anticipating his every move with a fire ball ready to strike each chance he could get.

Those damn balls of flame were pissing Jimin off; Yoongi had been aiming them at him with such precision that he's dodged them just barely one too many times. That lighter needed to go.
No one has a set of eyes on the back of their head, Jimin thinks as he plans his next move. Yoongi's staring right back at him, his light orange hair practically glowing, matching the intensity of the flames in his hands.

"Hey, kid" He's calling at him. "How bout you stop fucking disappearing and fight me?"

Jimin's heard of the usual taunting that goes on during matches; opponents regularly cursed, mocked and jeered each other and now he understands why. It fueled him. The slight curve of Yoongi's lips as he smirks at him, the playfulness behind his eyes; it pissed him off. Being called kid pissed him off. He wanted to win this.

"I'd be happy to," Jimin yells back, adrenaline coursing through his veins. Now he got why everyone in the school was so hung up on these matches. It was about proving yourself, pushing yourself to improve and overcome whatever obstacle your opponent threw your way. In his case, really annoying balls of flame and an opponent with a fiery attitude to match.

He stares at the spot behind Yoongi and in the next second, appears right behind the older. "You want a fight? Let's fight." He taunts the older, leaning into Yoongi's back, catching him by surprise.

"Motherfuck-" Yoongi turns around quickly, hands raised and flames ablaze, but Jimin's swift and kicks the back of his legs, making the older fall to the ground.

Yoongi looks up at him in surprise, but quickly recovers and stands back up. Jimin disappears again, and Yoongi blinks.

Jimin moves in lightning speed to stand beside Yoongi's left. He needs to take advantage of his proximity and he knows he doesn't have much time. Willing himself for half a second to do what he was planning next, Jimin yells out before seizing the older's neck in a tight chokehold, bringing his head down to his waistlevel and squeezing hard.

Yoongi's gasping for breath as his lighter falls out of his hand.

Jimin learned during Year 1 that a physical injury inflicted on the opponent was how you were to bring an end to a match, referred to as the 'final mark' among students. The injury had to serious enough to make the opponent incapable of continuing.

Jimin braces himself, ready to leave a cut deep enough to hurt but not leave a permanent mark on his opponent. He had never considered himself as aggressive or violent, but in the battlefield he became an entirely different person. He felt the thrill of this battle down to the very core of his being. Maybe this was why everyone looked forward to the matches so much.

Jimin reaches for the dagger under his belt with his free hand and brings it right neck to Yoongi's cheek, the blade touching his skin.

"Any last words, hyung?"

"Metal melts, idiot." Yoongi gasps out before elbowing the younger in the ribs and kicking him hard on the shins. Jimin swears and lets go of his chokehold.

Yoongi's neck is sore and he can't breathe properly; the damn kid had such an unexpectedly strong grip. He's had it up to here with him.
He hastily picks up his lighter before Jimin can disappear again. He flicks it open, gathers the heat from the flame into another ball of fire, bringing it right up close to the dagger Jimin was holding in front of him.

The metal blade stats to melt; the younger's determined expression falters and Yoongi smirks.

"You're fast," He says with a wink, "But you think too slow."

- Jimin was caught off guard.

He had the older in a chokehold a second ago, but Yoongi had kicked and elbowed his way out of his grasp.

Now he’s sneering at him as the fire in his hands melts Jimin's dagger right before his eyes. Jimin tosses the ruined weapon away and is just about to put some distance between him and Yoongi but the sleeve of his uniform is engulfed by fire.

"Shit," He breathes, too shocked to even think of how to react and his uniform sleeve is now burned off, exposing his arm. "Shit." He says again, eyes wide and heart beating uncontrollably fast in his chest. The fire's eaten away the clothing and now his skin is fucking burning and Jimin is yelling as he feels nothing but pain - a kind of pain that's hundred times worse than anything he's felt before. He shuts his eyes, unable to bear it and everything behind his closed lids is the color of red, dark blood red.

The referee blows his whistle and Jimin is vaguely aware of it; the shrill of the whistle drowned by the sound of his yelling and he is so acutely aware of the excruciating pain of his arm. The fire continues scorching away his bare skin and when Jimin opens his eyes again, Yoongi is fucking looking at him like he was enjoying this.

Jimin feels his chest tightening and he has never felt this resentful before. He was going to get back at him for this. He would make sure of it.

The pain becomes too much to endure and everything goes pitch black.

- "That was fucking brutal," Namjoon tells Yoongi as he greets him at the entrance to the Preparation Area. "You have absolutely no chill, you know that?"

They make their way back to the Preparation Area change rooms. Yoongi's met with endless amounts of cheers and high fives from his classmates, all of whom had been keenly watching his match on the huge screen.

His final score had been 87, Jimin's 80. Not too bad for both of them, and definitely a solid score for a Year 2's first ever match.

"What, he was so fucking annoying! Disappearing one second, appearing the next." He opens his locker and takes out his bag. "I had to end it quick, it was getting tiring."

"You burned his arm!" Namjoon cries out, and Yoongi turns to look at his friend. Namjoon was the top of his year and for all the years Yoongi's known him, he had always been collected and
thoughtful in everything he did. He was quick to cool down Yoongi's hot head, and Yoongi appreciated him for it. Maybe being able to read people's minds made you hyperaware of their tendencies and all that crap. But still, what was the harm in showing a Year 2 what he was dealing with?

Yoongi turns back to his bag and starts taking out a clean set of uniform. "Quit worrying, we have Healers for that."

"Still." Namjoon crosses his arms

"I think it'll be a good story to tell his friends."

"You know," Namjoon sits down on the benches lining the lockers. "While watching the game, I thought he had a lot of potential."

Yoongi thinks back to their match. Jimin had fought like a natural on the battlefield, he had to admit. Approaching Yoongi from behind had been a smart move, and that chokehold of his was no joke.

"Yeah. He does." Yoongi agrees.

"Seokjin hyung was talking about scouting new recruits for the Hero Games." Namjoon continues. "Hyung, keep an eye on him; we could definitely use someone with speed."

"You're basing this off his first ever match?" Yoongi looks at his friend with a raised brow. "Have our standards gone down or are we just desperate for new members?"

"Who's desperate?" A voice from behind them calls out, and they both turn around to see who it is.

Seokjin waves at them both before he turns to Yoongi. "Hey, I saw your match," he sits down beside Namjoon. "You're as ruthless as ever, I see."

"I don't see why I should be otherwise." Yoongi replies, feeling slightly annoyed that his friends keep remarking on it. "Year 1 or Year 6, what does it matter? Everyone's fair game on the field."

"Even so," Seokjin sighs. "it's where you make the most enemies."

Yoongi shrugs his statement off and slams his locker shut.

"What did you think of him though?" Seokjin asks him, one brow raised.

"What did I think of him?" Yoongi stands with his bag held over one shoulder. "Are you asking because you're curious or because we need new faces on our team?"

"Both." Seokjin answers, unabashed. "What, half our team graduated last year and we need to find new members. You know that."

"Yeah, but a Year 2?"

"Hey, you were midway through Year 2 when we recruited you." Seokjin reminds him.

"Not to brag, but I was pretty damn good for a Year 2." Yoongi ignores Namjoon rolling his eyes at him. "And shouldn't we be recruiting a bit later in the year? After we've seen more people and more matches?"

"Jimin was also 'pretty damn good' today and as this year's captain I'm starting a new approach to
recruiting this year," Seokjin says while looking at Yoongi with a stern expression, as if daring him to interrupt. "We need to find promising students, recruit them now and train them as soon as possible. That gives us more time to practice working together as a team."

"I'm game," Namjoon says, looking serious. "If we want a chance at first place, we need a longer training period."

"I think we're rushing it, there's the team dynamics we have to consider too, and what about strategizing based on our Powers, we -"

Namjoon interrupts him suddenly, looking serious. "Hyung, let me read you for a second."

"Don't you dare," Yoongi starts but Namjoon puts up one hand.

His expression softens a bit. "You know I normally don't even want to pry into your angsty thoughts. But you said yourself you're not the best with words and I want to know what you're thinking without having to argue."

It was true, Yoongi was never one for voicing his feelings or thoughts out loud. He was better in showing through his actions. And Namjoon was careful to never go too deep whenever he pried into his head. He sighs. "Fine."

The two meet eye to eye, and Yoongi feels that strange sensation of having someone else share the space in your head.

---

Jungkook had been watching every single second of the match on the high screen, not daring to take his eyes off of it the entire time. At the end, a pair of Healers had rushed to take away the Year 2 student from the field, and the winner, Yoongi, had walked off looking like he wasn't troubled by any of it.

He glances over at where the Healers are treating Jimin off the side of the battlefield, tending the nasty burn on his arm. That had been quite a scene, and now Jungkook understood the extent to which the students took these games. It wasn't a match to the death, but they were clearly fighting to win - no matter what the cost.

He watches as another student runs up to Jimin, yelling something at the Healers as he squats down, grabs Jimin's shoulders and brings his head to rest on his lap. Something about this boy looked familiar to Jungkook - the bright brown hair, the almond-shaped eye, his straight nose and that sharp jawline...

"Taehyung?" He almost doesn't believe it.

He looks harder, squinting and yes - it's him! He almost jumps up from his seat before remembering he wasn't allowed to step onto the battlefields. He'll have to catch Taehyung on the way out. It's been so long since they've seen each other, he can't believe how much Taehyung still resembles the 11 year old neighbor he had met so many years ago.
He wonders if his friend will have a hard time recognizing him and his Shadow stirs beside him.

-Taehyung had been intently watching Jimin's match from beginning to end, his eyes glued to the screen in the Preparation Room the entire match. He had gasped when his friend's arm had caught on fire and as soon as the match had ended, he rushed outside past the sliding glass doors and ran to where Jimin was being treated by a pair of Healers in their bone-white uniform.

"Jimin!" He yells as his unconscious friend, staring at his arm where the fire had done its damage. It was a nasty sight - the skin had burned off completely, revealing bright red sinew and Taehyung feels nauseated just looking at it. He looks at the Healers frantically. "Will he be okay? You guys can treat burns, right? He's going to be okay, right?"

"Yes," One of them - his nametag read Yixing - answers calmly. "He'll be fine. It's a second-degree burn; nothing we can't handle. Please keep calm, your friend will awake if you raise your voice."

"I - right, of course." Taehyung says more quietly. He drops to the ground and pulls Jimin up by his shoulders, dragging his friend so his head was resting on his lap. He brushes his dark bangs away from his sweaty and sooty face. "You killed it out there." He tells him quietly.

Jimin slowly stirs, and opens one eye. He looks up to see Taehyung's worried expression. "Tae?"

"You're okay!" His friend breathes a sigh of relief. "Oh my god, I thought."

"I told you to stop worrying," Jimin lets out a weak laugh. "Did you see me out there? I was so close!"

"Yeah, you were," Taehyung nods fervently. "You got an 80! That's almost unheard of for Year 2s on their first match."

Jimin raises his good arm for a high five.

"What did Yoongi get?" He asks as the Healers start bandaging his left arm. He winces at the contact.

"An 87."

"Lost by 7 points... Not bad, huh?" Jimin closes his eyes again. The pain was still strong. "Fuck, that fire of his really did some damage."

"Think of it as a battle scar," Taehyung tells him, trying to cheer him up.

Jimin smiles at that. "It better look cool when it heals."
Once Namjoon had seen enough of Yoongi's thoughts, he drops eye contact and looks up at the ceiling deep in thought.

"I see." Namjoon says quietly. He turns to look at Seokjin, who's staring intently at Yoongi. "Hyung, maybe we need to think over the recruiting idea. Yoongi doesn't seem to... agree with the approach." He says hesitantly.

Seokjin had been named Captain of the Academy's team for the annual Hero Games, the biggest competition between Super Hero Institutions across the continent. There was only a handful of schools that existed in Asia and for past three years, Heroes Academy had placed second; beaten thrice by the team from China's top Institution.

It was Seokjin's last year at the Academy and his last chance to retrieve their gold medal they had lost those three years ago. He had his sights on bringing home the gold, and to do that, he knew he had to change things up.

"You're worried we'll recruit too early?" He asks, looking at Yoongi.

"He's more worried about the consequences of recruiting at this stage of the Year." Namjoon answers, when Yoongi doesn't reply. He thinks quietly for a few seconds before speaking up again.

"I think maybe we should recruit a handful, make them go through some practice rounds and then come to a final decision for the team additions."

Seokjin nods at his suggestion. "Kind of like a tryout? I like that."

Yoongi had to admit, Namjoon's idea put some of his worries at ease; he liked the idea of the practice rounds. "Me too."

"Good, it's settled then." Namjoon smiles, his dimple showing. "Yoongi hyung, would you mind being the one to recruit Jimin?"

"Why me? I just burned his arm off. He probably loathes me right now."

"Because if you ask, there's no way he'll deny the invite." Seokjin answers. "He's probably got his heart set on kicking your ass in the future, and what better way to prove himself than joining the school team?"

God, Yoongi hated it when Seokjin made sense.

"Fine," He grumbles and spits at the floor.

Yoongi walks out of the Preparation Room, leaving behind Seokjin and Namjoon as they prepare for their match starting in fifteen. He scans the Dome, looking for a head full of dark hair.
He finds Jimin a second later, being treated to by Healers, resting with his head on some kid's - his boyfriend's? - lap.

He walks up to them, and watches as Jimin's friend animatedly chats away. Yoongi recognizes him as the well-known troublemaker among Year 2s. Taehyung was his name? The one who could turn invisible. Invisibility was a power hard to come by these days, and he knew only a few in the school possessed it.

"Hey," Yoongi says, standing beside the pair and looking down at Jimin. "Good match today."

Taehyung and Jimin abruptly stop their conversation to look up at him.

"What do you want?" Jimin's tone of voice quickly turns sharp, and Yoongi doesn't blame him for the hostility. His arm was wrapped up like a cocoon; he must have burned it pretty deep.

"Um - well, first of all. I'm -" God, he hated Namjoon for making him do this. He clears his throat and tries again. "Sorry about your arm." He says in a rushed breath. "And, my friend Seokjin, the new captain of the Academy's team for the annual Games, wanted to invite you to try out. To join our team."

Jimin stares at him with his brow raised. "Really?"

"Yes," Yoongi resists rolling his eyes; why would he be joking about something like this. "So, come to the tryouts. Wednesday evening here at the Dome."

"I'll only go if Taehyung comes with me."

Yoongi looks from Jimin to the boy beside him. Taehyung was watching him closely, probably thinking he's an ass for what he did to his friend. "Fine. Whatever. He can come and watch."

And he turns around and walks off. There. He did his part, Seokjin had better be happy.

Chapter End Notes

I HAVE A THING FOR LOVE/HATE YOONMIN SUE ME
and taekook is a new ship to me, pls bear with me if its a bit slow between them ;; and if u can't tell 95line is my guilty pleasure. ultimate brotp
also constructive feedback is my favourite thing to read <3
& thank you for the kudos & comments so far! they're always appreciated :)

holy shit astrospace @ tumblr made the most beautiful graphic for this au it's AMAZING.
pls go check it out
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

decided to rewrite this chapter, hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It's already Wednesday and Jimin finds himself staring at the white board in front of the classroom, not taking in a word their instructor is saying.

"And at the start of the twentieth century, The Bureau unanimously decided that they would be in charge of making sure no identity of any Super Hero was to be revealed to any normal human..."

He watches as the instructor drones on and on about the history of heroes but his attention is elsewhere. He glances at the clock on the wall. The tryouts were taking place in a couple hours and he feels anxious, his foot nervously tapping on its own accord.

Taehyung beside him notices his fidgeting and nudges him with his elbow. "What's up?" He whispers, glancing sideways at him.

Jimin snaps out of it and turns to look at his friend. "Just nervous."

He knew the Games was no joke and that training for it required dedicating a huge amount of time and that the Academy's team was very rigorous in their training. From watching the broadcasts of it last year, he also knew this years remaining members - Namjoon, Seokjin, Hoseok and (ugh) Yoongi - were very skilled and capable.

Would he be good enough? Jimin bites his lip.

Another thing that had been bothering him was the lingering anger after his match with Yoongi. Just thinking about the older consumed him with an uncomfortable feeling in his chest.

He wanted to prove that he was more than what he'd shown that day on the battlefield.

"You'll be fine." Taehyung tells him. "We'll be fine."

And even if he did horribly, at least he would have his best friend there with him.

-

Jeongguk had been unsuccessful in tracking down Taehyung after the first match that day. Taehyung had left the Dome with his wounded friend while Jeongguk and the rest of the Year 1's had been subjected to a long lecture by the Prefects about the rules of the matches and what not.

He had been captivated while watching Yoongi and Jimin's match. Fire Manipulation was an
incredibly strong Power and the way the Year 4 student had handled his flames had been both skillful and impressive. Jimin's superhuman speed had been a Power he had only read about before; witnessing it had been a whole different experience.

But after seeing Taehyung and friend leave, he wondered when the next chance would be for him to see Taehyung again.

Presently, Jeongguk is sitting in class, Introduction to Powers, trying to pay attention and type notes when he senses a feeling of unease coming from his Shadow.

He looks at the floor, where his Shadow is casted.

*What is it?* Jeongguk asks.

He watches as it shakes its head in response.

Jeongguk frowns but goes back to taking notes.

The class finally ends and he's gathering his books when he sees his Shadow point to the classroom door and in the next second is suddenly moving towards it.

*What-* Jeongguk hastily zips up his bag and chases after the dark figure, wondering what's gotten into it. *Where are you going?*

But he doesn't get an explanation as it keeps moving - past the classroom door, out the hallway, down three flights of stairs and swiftly moves outside of the building.

It's waiting for him at the front of the entrance once Jeongguk catches up. He's out of breath from having just ran across an entire building and almost doesn't notice the familiar voice yelling his name.

"Jeongguk!"

He turns around to see where his name is being called from and comes face to face with none other than -

"Taehyung?"

He takes in his childhood friend's appearance. He has the same almond-shaped eyes that used to crinkle around the edges when he laughed too hard, the same familiar boxy smile that used to tell bad jokes when they were kids. His hair's changed - a bit lighter than what he remembered and he's also lost some baby fat; his jawline was sharp enough to do damage. His friend has grown up to become quite attractive, he realizes.

His surprise must have shown on his face because Taehyung is laughing and walking up to him saying; "You look like you just saw a ghost."

And in the next second, Taehyung is embracing him tightly.

"Jeonggukie!" The older says happily and Jeongguk's cheeks redden at the old nickname. He hasn't heard it in almost six years.

"Hey hyung," He says, unsure what he should do with his arms. He's grown to be wary of physical contact over the years - his Shadow didn't like it when others got too close to them - but this was
Taehyung. He hugs him back and the gesture feels surprisingly familiar.

Taehyung lets go after a few seconds and steps back to get a good look at him. "I can't believe I'm running into you here! It's weird, I never have classes on this side of campus and was on my way to the cafeteria." He looks at Jeongguk smiling. "But something made me want to come here."

The outline of his Shadow gives him a thumbs up and Jeongguk's eyes widen in surprise.

"Good thing I did, though!" Taehyung is looking at him excitedly. "You hungry? Let's grab dinner, there's pasta special at the cafeteria."

Jeongguk smiles. "Yeah, dinner sounds good."

*Did you drag his shadow here?* Jeongguk ask, amused, as they make their way towards the direction of the cafeteria building.

The dark shape only shrugs in response.

- 

The two had barely sat down across from each other at the school cafeteria before Taehyung opens his mouth and launches question after question, wasting no time in catching up with Jeongguk and the past six years they've been apart.

"How was middle school? Did you miss me?" He asks at a rapid-fire speed, hands gesturing wildly. "When did you first find out about your Powers? I remember I found out about mine when I was around thirteen. I moved away when you were around that age, right? Were you surprised? Oh wait - what is your Power?"

Jeongguk doesn't know where to start so he sits there with his eyes wide and Taehyung laughs, scratching the back of his head. "Sorry, I'm just really excited to see you again." He gives him that trademark square smile that Jeongguk had missed so much.

"No - I don't mind, I missed you too hyung." He really had, more than he had thought. "Well, I hated middle school 'cause you weren't there to scare off the weirdos with your lame jokes for me." He teases and earns a piece of lettuce in his face in return. "And I discovered my Power a year after you left." Jeongguk pauses and looks down at where his Shadow is.

"My Power.." He looks at the older sitting across from him warily.

He had been dreading telling him this since he learned they were both going to be attending the Academy this year. He had asked himself over and over whether Taehyung would judge him like everyone else. He's already gotten countless dark and scathing looks from the other Year 1 students once they saw what Power he had. And the histories of past Shadow Manipulators all followed a dark pattern that made him wonder if it meant he was doomed for the same fate.

But Taehyung is looking at him encouragingly - Jeongguk decides that no, Taehyung would never judge him just because of his Power, he was his friend.

"I'm a Shadow Manipulator." He says quietly, not quite meeting the older's eyes.
Taehyung only stares.

Shit, Jeongguk instantly regrets saying it out loud. He wants to take it back, maybe lie or something but Taehyung replies with:

"That's so cool."

Jeongguk head snaps up to look at him. "Cool?" He repeats slowly.

"Yeah, you can control people's shadows right?"

"I-" Jeongguk almost wants to laugh. Taehyung was still so... Taehyung. Jeongguk smiles, finding comfort in knowing that some things about Taehyung hadn't changed over time. "You don't think it's... dark? Scary?"

"Well, I know Shadow Manipulation has a bad rep but it sounds like bull to me, the whole cursed myth thing." He regards Jeongguk with concern behind his eyes. "I saw you grow up from a scrawny little noodle to-" He gestures at him, and Jeongguk can't help but be curious as to how he was in Taehyung's eyes now, compared to before. "-this. I think I'd know if you were dangerous."

Jeongguk studies Taehyung's profile carefully, debating if he should voice what's on his mind.

"Do you think your Power is dark and scary?" Taehyung asks gently.

"No," The younger says a little too quickly. He coughs before adding: "I mean - I can control other people through their shadows to some extent. But it doesn't hurt them." But I can make them hurt if I want to, he thinks in his head, not wanting to reveal that just yet.

"Okay, that's pretty sick, I gotta admit. But can you do this?"

And Taehyung disappears right before Jeongguk's eyes.

Jeongguk lets out a laugh, feeling his tension fade and watches as Taehyung in his Invisible mode makes his sandwich look like it's floating in mid-air. He had missed Taehyung and his playful genuine self.

"You did that alot when you were a kid." Jeongguk reminds him, smiling. "It's getting kind of old, hyung."

"Okay, but this is new though." Before Jeongguk can react, an orange peel hovers in mid-air before being thrown at his face and it lands on his cheek with a loud squelch. Taehyung reappears, laughing and pointing at the younger.

"You still act like you're 13, you know that?" Jeongguk says while picking the peel off his face and flinging it at Taehyung.

"Hey, hey, you're actually 13 so watch your manners." Taehyung retorts, dodging the peel.

"I'm 19, thanks for noticing."

"Congratulations on becoming legal, want a medal?"

Taehyung's laughing stops abruptly when he glances at his phone and realizes what time it is.

"Shit! It's already 5:50?"

When he puts his phone away he notices Jeongguk looking at him worriedly. "Everything okay?"
He asks.

"Yeah, there's just this..." Taehyung pauses, then looks at the younger excitedly. "Hey, are you free this evening?"

Jeongguk raises a brow. "Yeah, what's up?"

"There's this tryout happening in ten minutes and I promised my friend I'd go and hey - you should come with me!"

And before he can even process that or respond properly, Jeongguk finds himself being dragged by Taehyung across campus, his Shadow following closely behind, as they make their way to the Dome.

There's about thirty or more students gathered around Seokjin by the time Taehyung runs in, dragging Jeongguk along with him, both gasping for breath. They stand beside Jimin as Seokjin begins explaining the tryouts.

"Where were you?" Jimin whispers at Taehyung.

"Sorry- lost track of time." Taehyung breathes out, still gasping for air. "I brought a friend." He points to Jeongguk, who nods at Jimin.

Jimin nods back, then all three turn to Seokjin to listen to what he's saying.

"Hey everyone, thanks for coming out tonight. Glad to see such a large turn out." He starts off, voice loud and clear. "I'm Seokjin, captain for this year's team and I'll let the rest of the team introduce themselves." He turns to look at the three others standing beside him.

"Namjoon, Year 3. Telepath." The tall one with silver-grey hair says, his voice surprisingly low and husky.

"Hey, I'm Hoseok." Hoseok gives them all a wide smile. "Gravity Manipulation. Also wicked dance moves and a killer rap flow."

"Yoongi." The orange haired Year 4 says lazily. "Fire Manipulation." He looks around at the crowd before his eyes come to rest on Jimin, who meets his gaze head on. The older narrows his eyes and Jimin's chest is suddenly tight again. It's only a second long; he drops the gaze and looks back at Seokjin.

"We have three openings this year and we're looking for the strongest, fastest and quick thinking fighters." He scans the small crowd in front of him, expression set and determined. "We train five days a week, three hours each day. If you're not ready to commit, you might as well leave now."

No one moves a muscle.

"Good to see no one's joking around." He crosses his arms. "There will be 3 stages of the tryouts. First stage - we'll be putting you guys against each other in groups of threes. Clean and simple, no final marks. Just to see where you all are in terms of skill."
Taehyung immediately grabs Jimin and Jeongguk's wrists. "Dream team." He whispers at them.

Jimin just goes with it while Jeongguk looks confused.

"Okay, so group yourselves off and we'll start in ten minutes on battlefield 4!"

Chapter End Notes

although i am vmin trash, taekook is adorable and they're happening...just very slowly.
pls ride this slow ship with me
jeongguk's shadow has a mind of its own but also has an extension of jeongguk's
powers, which might be confusing but go with it :) 
as always, any feedback would be lovely <3 they're my fav things to read. and ty all
for the kudos & comments so far!!
Yoongi watches the small crowd of students group themselves into threes before the first stage of the tryouts. He scans the faces in the crowd before coming to rest on a familiar one. So Jimin had shown up after all. And his arm seemed to be fine. Namjoon didn't need to worry so damn much, Yoongi thinks, as he watches the younger, determination apparent in his every movement.

After a few seconds Jimin must have noticed because he turns around to stare right back at him, gaze intense and unwavering. Jimin flexes his jaw before turning back to face his friend and a small part of Yoongi can't help but admire the kid's conviction.

Then Seokjin is calling his name, motioning for him, Hoseok and Namjoon to come over and huddle where he's standing. The four of them stand in a circle, heads inclined towards the center.

"Remember the plan," Seokjin reminds them sternly. "10 minute time limit per match. Namjoon you'll be judging the team's overall performance, Hoseok keep track of their coordination as a team and Yoongi, note their skills and abilities."

The three nod and Seokjin seems satisfied.

"Alright, let's get this started."

In total, there are 10 teams of three and five matches to judge.

The first two teams to go against each other ends with the winners coming out on top by a wide margin. They had consisted of one member with Teleportation, another with Light Manipulation and the final member with Weather Control. Their team coordination had been impressive and had earned their win in record time. Yoongi silently thinks having Teleportation might have tipped the scale unfairly towards their favor, but then again, it wasn't like you could choose what Power you were born with.

The next team to go up is Jimin's. Yoongi recognizes one of the members as they walk up to the battlefield - the one who had Jimin's head on his lap that day of the match. Friend or more, he wasn't sure, but the two seemed close from the way they were practically inseparable. The third member is an unfamiliar young face he hasn't seen around. Must be a Year 1. But something else catches his attention; his shadow was moving on its own while the kid was standing stock still.

Yoongi shakes his head - he was probably seeing things. But when he watches closely for the second time, there's no mistaking it.

Yoongi narrows his eyes while watching the dark outline on the ground. He had never witnessed this Power firsthand in all his four years at the Academy.

This was going to be interesting.
This is going to be tough, Jimin thinks, after watching the first match. One of the teams had fought seamlessly well together as if they knew each other's strengths and weaknesses, one filling in where another lacked. He looks over at Taehyung who's standing beside him. He has full faith in his best friend; as mischievous and playful as he could be, Taehyung was also strong-willed and never one to quit.

He glances at their third member, Jeongguk. Having only met him just now, he only knew that he was in Year 1 and that his Power was Shadow Manipulation - something he had only heard of in stories and myths. An extremely rare Power and also rumored to be dangerous. But if he was a friend of Taehyung's, then it was a good enough reason for Jimin to trust him as well.

"We need a strategy," He says to them under his breath. "To fight together as a team."

Taehyung and Jeongguk both nod in agreement. Jimin's about to ask if they might have any ideas when Taehyung speaks up.

"I have a plan." Taehyung says, his voice low. "And I'm like 100% certain it's going to kick ass."

The second match between the groups is about to start.

Yoongi watches closely as Jimin and the two other boys stand with their eyes trained on Seokjin.

"Teams, please send a representative to the middle," Seokjin instructs from the middle of the field, acting as referee. Yoongi, Namjoon and Hoseok are watching and judging from the sides.

Jimin steps forward and walks over to the where Seokjin is standing. The opposing team sends a girl in Year 3 with faint blue hair and deep-set grey eyes. The two come to stand face to face.

Seokjin speaks up: "The first team to step outside the white lines will be disqualified. You have 10 minutes." Seokjin looks at them both, who nod back at him. "Team reps, shake hands."

Jimin and the girl shake hands briefly, both sizing each other up.

"Back to your ends." Seokjin tells them and they turn to walk back to where their team members are waiting.

Seokjin glances back at Yoongi, Namjoon and Hoseok. They signal they're ready. "Teams, on my count!" He shouts.

"1."

Jimin gives a quick sideways glance to Taehyung, who then turns to Jeongguk. Jeongguk nods back at both of them and the three look straight ahead at the opposing team.

"2."

The other team looks promising, Yoongi thinks. He recognizes all three of them; one of them was in his year and had Metamorphosis, a power that - in his opinion - wasn't much use on the fields
but could be useful in certain situations. The second member had Summoning and the last member possessed Kinetic Absorption.

Jimin's team had better have a plan.

"GO."

---

Taehyung's strategy had been pretty straight-forward and Jimin was confident in following through, as long as the opposing team didn't have any surprises up their sleeves. The plan was something like this:

Not knowing ahead of time what the other team's Powers consisted of, both sides were left in the unknown for the first few seconds of the match. That was their opportunity to strike head-on, not allowing the other team any chance to retaliate and using the element of surprise to their full advantage.

Jimin hears Seokjin yell the signal and the match begins.

In an instant Jimin is moving with superhuman speed, appearing on the other side of the field, standing right behind the three opponents.

"Hey," He calls out and all three turn around to face him in surprise. In that very moment, while they have their backs turned to Jeongguk and Taehyung, Jeongguk takes control of their shadows and by extension, their physical forms. They become paralyzed and the shock is apparent in their wide eyes.

"What-" The girl looks around her. She catches sight of Jeongguk in her peripheral vision and in the next instant, she's Summoning Jeongguk off the ground, lifting him into the air.

"Jeongguk!" Jimin hears Taehyung yell out as the girl is lifting him even higher and higher; he's almost seven feet above the ground when she throws him forcefully downwards and he lands with a sickening crunch.

Jeongguk groans, the fall knocking the breath out of him and the opponent's shadows are released from his control.

Taking advantage of their release, the girl with Metamorphosis turns and looks directly at Taehyung.

"Hey, handsome." She waves at him teasingly and in the next second, she's completely changed appearances, taking the form of Taehyung.

Big mistake, Jimin thinks. Taehyung grins. "Hey yourself." He says and disappears, turning Invisible, but the other two opponents hadn't seen it happen. The fake-Taehyung's eyes widen.

The ones with Summoning and Kinetic Absorption look between Jimin, Jeongguk and - they wrongly assume- Taehyung. Jimin almost wants to laugh; they have no way of knowing the Taehyung in front of them isn't the real him since he's nowhere to be seen.
The boy with Kinetic Absorption holds up both his palms and starts to aim a power blast at fake-Taehyung, his opponent standing closest to him. Realizing what's about to happen, the girl hastily starts to morph back into her actual self.

"NO! Minhyuk, it's me!" She shrieks, but it's too late, the blast is fired with full-force, hitting her squarely in the chest. There's a second where she's knocked off the ground, back arching in mid-air, before she falls backwards head-first and crumples to the ground.

"Jiyeon!" The one who had just fired the power blast yells, running over to her. He looks at her in disbelief, shaking slightly as he realizes what he's just done.

"STOP!" Seokjin yells, stepping in immediately and kneeling down beside her. He checks for normal breathing before standing up and announcing: "Disqualified, no attacking your own members!"

---

Jimin and Taehyung help Jeongguk off the battlefield, supporting the youngest by holding each of his arms around their shoulders. They help him sit down a few meters away from the battlefield as the remaining matches continue to take place.

"That was..." Jimin starts to say, once they're all sitting on the ground, unsure how to finish the sentence.

"I told you we'd kick ass." Taehyung says, the fight still in his eyes. "Even if some of it... didn't go according to plan."

He glances at Jeongguk apologetically.

The youngest doesn't miss the implication and turns to look at Taehyung. "Hyung, I'm fine."

Taehyung looks even more concerned. "I wasn't expecting a match as the first thing! And you fell from so high -"

"I'm okay. Really." Jeongguk cuts off Taehyung's apology. "This is the most exciting thing that's happened to me in forever." He then turns to look at Jimin. "And I don't think we've been properly introduced."

"Park Jimin." Jimin offers his hand. Jeongguk shakes it once, quick and firm. "Glad to have you on our... Dream Team." Taehyung brightens at that.

"I saw your match the other day." The youngest says. "You were on fire - literally." Jeongguk grins, and Jimin laughs.

"Not a lot of Year 1’s can pull off what you just did," He tells him and Jeongguk looks pleased to hear it. "You gonna be okay for the next stages?"

Jeongguk looks him in the eye. "Yeah. I'm a fighter, despite what others may say about me." He says darkly.

Jemin can't help but wonder to what extent the bad reputation of his Powers had affected Jeongguk.
He couldn't imagine being stereotyped every day in such a negative light.

"I think," Jeongguk says quietly, looking over at the battlefield where currently two teams were going at it. "joining the school's team for the Games would be a good way to prove everyone wrong."

---

After the first stage, seven of ten teams are out of the running, leaving nine students moving onto Stage 2.

"Congratulations on getting past the first cut, all of you." Seokjin starts off, looking at each of the remaining faces in turn as he speaks. "The next stage will be done individually." Seokjin beckons Yoongi, Namjoon and Hoseok to step forward from where they're standing behind him.

"Stage 2 will be one on one matches. You will have to get through one of us." He gestures to himself and his three team members. "Fight off our attacks and reach the other end of the field, and you pass."

Jimin can't help but glance at Yoongi, who he had fought on the battlefield only a week before. The older catches him looking and the corner of his lips curves the slightest bit upwards. Jimin balls his hands into fist, that tightening in his chest returning.

"Year 1 and Year 2's, you'll be facing me." Seokjin tells them.

Hoseok steps forward and announces; "Year 3s, today's your lucky day! You get to face me." He smiles brightly at them, and a few laugh at his announcement.

Namjoon was to take on the Year 4s. Lastly, Yoongi tells the Year 5s and 6s in the crowd that they 'better be prepared'.

"Stage 2 will start in a few minutes." Seokjin says, wrapping it up.

---

"Year 1's, come forward." Seokjin's instructs, ten minutes having gone by in a flash.

Out of those remaining, Jeongguk is the only Year 1 - given the fact that it wasn't until Year 2 when they started Combat Training, it wasn't surprising. He quickly glances at Taehyung, who looks back at him whispering good luck! before walking over to where Seokjin is waiting for him at the end of one of the battlefields.

"What's your name?" Seokjin asks when Jeongguk comes to stand beside him.

"Jeongguk."
Recognition slowly dawns on Seokjin's face. "You're the Year 1 I met on the first day, right? During the commencement?"

Jeongguk looks at him more closely and realizes that indeed, this was the good-looking Prefect who had shown him to the Dome. He nods.

"And your Power is Shadow Manipulation, correct?"

He nods again.

Seokjin doesn't say anything more, just gives Jeongguk an encouraging nod and then turns around. "You guys ready?" He calls out.

Namjoon, Hoseok and Yoongi all reply in the affirmative.

"Okay, Jeongguk, do your best." He walks to the other side of the field.

Jeongguk steps forward to stand on the white line bordering the battlefield.

He looks straight ahead. Seokjin is now standing on the opposite end, looking back at him.

He can tell his Shadow is uneasy, but excited. He breathes in.

Namjoon shouts, "Go!" and slowly exhaling, Jeongguk relaxes his shoulders before stepping onto the field.

Jeongguk had learned a few things about Empathy, and he knew those who had the Power were able to trick their opponents into a false sense of security or otherwise manipulate them into hurting themselves by taking control of their emotions.

But nothing could have prepared him for what he experienced next.

Once Seokjin is within a few feet from him, the older looks him straight in the eyes and suddenly he can feel his anxious and nervous feelings dissolve, leaving him feeling elated and calm. His conscious mind alerts him that this is not normal and that he should be on guard, but then an overwhelming sense of security washes over him.

A small voice in his head is telling him something. He listens as it grows louder.

Relax, Jeongguk. There's nothing to worry about.

He shakes his head, trying to clear it because this voice clearly wasn't his own. It sounds foreign and he wants it to go away but it's growing louder and louder.

Stop resisting. Listen to me. This match has to end. Now.

Jeongguk stands still, his eyes glazing over and all he can think about at the moment is how much he wants to obey its instructions.

Very good, now listen carefully to what I'm about to say.

Jeongguk does.

Use your Powers against yourself. You're your own enemy. You are the target and you must
And he really would have done just that, but what Seokjin doesn't know - no one except Jeongguk could ever know - is that his Powers wasn't in his complete control, not really. His Shadow, unlike those of any other Shadow Manipulators that he's heard of before, is simultaneously a part of Jeongguk but also its own separate self.

So when Jeongguk tries to command it to attack himself, it doesn't.

Instead, it moves on its own accord, the dark shape gliding silently across the ground and coming to a stop right in front of Seokjin's shadow casted in front of him.

And before the older can even process the fact that Jeongguk isn't obeying his Empathetic messages, he suddenly drops down onto the floor, kneeling, holding his neck and gasping for breath.

He looks at the ground and his eyes widen when he sees a shadow clearly not his own, with its dark arms outstretched and grabbing his shadow by the neck, as if it was choking it in its own dimension of dark energy. He's never seen anything like it before and it sends a chill down his spine.

Just then, Jeongguk shakes his head, the voices gone and he comes back to his senses. He looks over and when he notices his Shadow suffocating Seokjin's and the older kneeling on the ground, Jeongguk immediately orders his Shadow:

STOP. You're hurting him, let him go.

It pauses and loosens its hold on the other shadow's neck.

That's enough. I said let him go.

It drops its arms and glides back to stand behind Jeongguk, still and silent. Jeongguk watches as Seokjin slowly stands up again while massaging his neck, his eyes searching him, expression unreadable.

After a few seconds of silence, Seokjin says quietly: "You pass."

Taehyung and Jimin are next to go. They fight the team captain with every ounce of skill and strength they can muster and end with each of them passing, although not without sustaining various forms of injury.

By the time Hoseok, Namjoon and then Yoongi have faced the remaining students one by one, it's already 10 pm and everyone is exhausted, tired and sweaty.

Finally, the remaining nine are down to the last three standing.

"Taehyung, Jimin and Jeongguk." Seokjin says, looking at the three of them, dripping with sweat and exhaustion. "The three of you remain, and we have three spots open."

"Looks like we won't be needing the last stage after all." He smiles. "Welcome to the team."
The next day after their classes are done, Taehyung is lying on Jimin's bed with the window open, letting in a cool autumn breeze.

"What do you think they meant by 'celebrate'?" Taehyung asks Jimin from his position on the bed.

Jimin is sitting at his desk, mindlessly browsing on his laptop. He pauses to look at Taehyung. "I have no idea."

After everyone else had left the Dome and it was just the three of them, tired and sweaty after an entire evening of tryouts, Seokjin had pulled them aside before they could leave as well.

"You three, congrats on making it." He seemed genuinely pleased as he said it. "You guys did great. And now that our team's formed, we're going to celebrate."

Before any of them could ask, Hoseok had appeared, slinging his arm around Seokjin's shoulders. "You guys ready for team initiation?"

"Be in front of your dorms at 7 tomorrow." Seokjin had told them, both him and Hoseok grinning wide before they had walked off, waving goodbye.

"What time is it?" Taehyung asks.

Jimin glances at his laptop. "6:50."

"Should we walk down?"

Before Jimin can answer, there's a knock on their door and Taehyung gets up to answer it.

"Hey," It's Jeongguk. He's wearing dark jeans and a jean jacket over a black tee. Taehyung hadn't seen him in casual wear before, only in uniform, and he can't help but think he looks - well, really good. "I'm not late, right?"

"Nope." Jimin gets up from his chair and grabs his bomber. "We were just going to go down."

So the three walk down the stairs, all wondering what Hoseok had meant by 'initiation' and when they get to the entrance of the dorm building, it's already dark out.

"They said they'd meet us here, right?" Jimin asks, looking around for any sign of them.

He doesn't hear the other two answer, only an audible *gasp* and Jeongguk yelling out before he feels someone wrap a blindfold around him and a pair of hands grabbing his arms and pulling them behind his back. He can't see anything but he can feel someone pushing him into the back of a car seat, and he hears the sound of the engine starting up.
Then a familiar voice - one he'd only heard taunting him on the battlefield - is speaking right into his ear. "Welcome to the team, kid."

Chapter End Notes

yay the team is finally formed! stay tuned for their team initiation i promise it wont be lame
also if u squint hard enough theres yoonmin in here (there will be more later i sw e ar).
this one was pretty much just dedicated to the tryouts. i mainly wanted to show what seokjin and jeongguk could do
thank u all for the comments & kudos, you guys are all so encouraging. i love this fandom. i love yall <3
& as always, i appreciate any feedback!
Jimin has absolutely no idea where he's being taken to but he's pretty certain that: one, he's in a van; two, he's blindfolded and three, he's sitting squished between Yoongi and someone else (he thinks it might be Jeongguk by how quiet they are despite this whole situation)

"Are we being kidnapped?" He can hear Taehyung asking, sounding more curious than frightened. "Hey, isn't it a bit odd they're kidnapping their own teammates?" He whispers to who he assumes is Jimin beside him, except that it was Hoseok.

"Don't worry invisible boy," The older replies cheerily. "Nothing like a good kidnapping to initiate you newbies."

And so after what feels like forever - but really was probably fifteen minutes - the van finally comes to a stop and Jimin and the other two are pulled out of the van and led inside some sort of building that feels drafty and cold.

"Okay, remove their blindfolds." Seokjin instructs once they're all inside and the door is shut behind him.

Jimin feels the black cloth being tugged off and *hallelujah* he can see again. Looking around, he's in what appears to be an abandoned warehouse.

Dust lay over every surface like dirty snow and there were old crates with "FRAGILE" written on them scattered here and there. The smell of mildew lingered in the stale air. Shafts of light burst through gaps in the boarded up windows, light streaming through the gaps and from the high ceiling to the walls, old cobwebs billowed in the draft.

"Is this some sort of hideout?" Taehyung asks them, looking around with eyes wide and his mouth slightly open.

"Chill. We're not batman." Yoong replies, pointing to the couch and motioning for them to sit down.

Jeongguk takes a seat beside Jimin on the worn out couch and Taehyung sits on his other side. The rest of the team settle down on top of crates and boxes, all arranged around what appeared to be a makeshift fire pit made from a metal barrel placed in the middle. There was also a large wooden
table beside it, bare and looking very worn down.

Yoongi walks up to the fire pit and takes out a lighter and flicks it open. He gathers the little flame into one hand and throws it in, and in the next instant, there's a nice blazing fire lighting up the dark and damp space, casting shadows on their profiles.

Seokjin comes to stand beside Yoongi, his arms crossed. He looks from Taehyung to Jeongguk to Jimin and a playful smile graces his handsome features.

"Welcome to the team, you three." Seokjin tells them, his tone light. "Tonight, we're just going to get to know each other a little better." As he says this, Namjoon reaches into his bag and takes out two packs of soju while Hoseok pulls out a bag of ping pong balls and a stack of red cups.

"Tonight," Yoongi's eyes are alight with amusement. "We're playing fire pong."

The rules for fire pong (something that Yoongi had invented during Year 1 but has become a team tradition since) were as follows:

1. Each team consisted of two players and started off with 10 cups.
2. Starting formation was a “tight triangle” (rims touching), pointing towards the opposing side.
3. Approximately 1/3 of the cup will be filled with soju and alight on fire (hence the name fire pong)
4. Each player shoots once. If the ball goes in, a member of the opposite team must drink that cup.
5. If a team makes both shots in a row, they get 2 balls back and shoot again.
6. As soon as the ball hits a cup or the table, it can be swatted.
7. If one team eliminates all their opponents, they win.

It was very much like beer pong but with soju lit on fire with the end result of the losing team getting very much hammered.

"Alright so old members, Namjoon, Hoseok and Yoongi, will team up with the new members, Taehung, Jimin and Jeongguk. I'll be sitting out as judge." Seokjin tells them after having explained the rules. "Old members will choose who their teammate is. And lastly, no using Powers during the game."

Namjoon stands up from the crate he's sitting on and walks over to the table, Hoseok following suit and they start setting up the game. Yoongi pours the soju evenly into the cups, then lights them on fire and Jimin had to admit, it did look pretty fucking cool.

Taehyung, Jimin and Jeongguk are motioned to come and gather around the table.

"I call Taehyung," Hoseok says, motioning for him to come stand beside him at one end of the table. "You look like you can hold your drink." Taehyung gives him a wide smile, and Jimin finds this very questionable because he could not recall his best friend ever consuming alcohol in his life.
Then again, he had never touched booze either.

"Shadow kid, you're on my team." Namjoon says and the youngest walks up to where the Telepath is standing at the opposite end. "Your Power's downright chilling. I respect that." Namjoon tells him.

Jeongguk looks almost pleased to hear it. "Thanks, I guess?"

"Guess I'm stuck with you, then." Yoongi says, catching Jimin's eye and grinning. "If I go down, you go down with me."

Oh good, Jimin thinks. At least he'll go down drunk.

The first round is Team Sitonmyface (the name a result of Hoseok and Taehyung's combined efforts) vs. Team Dontfuckwidit (99% Yoongi-inspired).

The 10 cups on each side are in their correct positions and Hoseok and Yoongi do a quick round of rock paper scissors to determine who goes first.

"YES." Hoseok fist pumps when his rock beats Yoongi's paper. "Alright, Yoongi hyung, are you ready to taste the bitterness of defeat?"

"Your trash talk is as weak as your aim, Hoshit." Yoongi replies, crossing his arms.

"OOH," Namjoon hollers from the sidelines. "You gon take that Hoseok?"

Hoseok rolls his eyes. "That name got old the first time you used it." He turns to face Taehyung and hands him a ping pong ball. "Okay, we're up first. Invisible boy, you got this. You can do this."

Taehyung takes the ball and looks at Hoseok, determination set on his features. "Yeah, I got this." He repeats and looks to the other side of the table and focuses on the top cup. "I got this."

He raises his arm, takes aim, flicks his wrist and - "YEAA I GOT THIS" - the ball lands with a *plop*.

Hoseok starts doing a victory dance (a very odd mixture of wiggling his arms and body rolls) and Jimin can't help but laugh at how ridiculous it is.

"Okay, drink up Team Dontfuckwidit!" Seokjin tells them, laughing.

Yoongi takes the cup with the ping pong ball inside. He takes it out and raises it. "Cheers, you fuckers." And he's about to drink it when Jimin interrupts:

"Wait!"

Yoongi looks at him in surprise.

"I'll drink it."

"Take one for the team!" Taehyung yells from across the table.

Yoongi's expression of surprise slowly changes to one of amusement and he hands the cup over to
Jimin. "You sure? This isn't juice, kid."

"Chill," Jmin tells him, not wanting to seem weak or innocent in front of him. He'd show Yoongi he could handle his alcohol, damnit. "I can handle my booze." He says, but truthfully, he had no fucking clue what his tolerance level even was.

But tonight was a good time to find out, right?

Nope. Bad idea.

Seven rounds later, Team Don'tfuckwidit was down 2 points. Jimin has drunk 4 cups of soju, Yoongi has drunk 3. Taehyung had 2 and Hoseok 3.

By this point, Jimin is definitely feeling tipsy but not totally drunk yet. He has heard somewhere - most likely the internet- that there are 4 types of drunks: the happy drunk, the sad drunk, the sleepy drunk and the confident drunk. He realizes that he falls under that last category.

"BRING IT." He hollers, feeling invincible. "BRING IT."

"Dude. We heard you the first time." Taehyung tells him before bouncing him the pong across the table, Hoseok bouncing the other one to Yoongi.

"This ball and I are one. I am the ball. The ball is me." Jimin mutters, trying to focus on the remaining cups on the other side but finding it a little difficult, his vision a little hazy.

"Ball is life." Yoongi adds, snickering.

Jmin giggles. Yoongi hyung made a funny.

Yoongi laughs along with him and it's the first time Jimin's heard his genuine laughter; not his snicker or mocking laugh. It sounds very different, nice almost.

"Can you idiots play already?" Hoseok calls, and Yoongi straightens and looks at the remaining cups on the other side.

"Okay game plan," He whispers, and Jimin leans in closer. "If I take out the middle cup, you take the one closest to Taehyung, alright?"

"Affirmative. I gotchu." Jimin salutes and okay he was most definitely tipsy because he was feeling very warm and oddly content and he actually didn't mind being on Yoongi's team. He was a good teammate and an even better drinker, he had to admit.

Yoongi takes aim, raises his hand and shoots and - "SUCK IT!" The ball goes in perfectly, not a drip splashing. Jimin slings an arm around the older's shoulder and they both make victory noises, fist pumping.

It's Taehyung turn to drink the cup and he winces as the alcohol hits the back of his throat. "Ugh," He groans. "This tastes like ass."

"Yo mama's ass!" Jimin shouts, not really thinking about what comes out of his mouth at this point and Yoongi snorts at how bad his diss is.
Hoseok and Taehyung both take aim and shoot. They both miss and Yoongi and Jimin high five it out.

"You call that a shot?" Yoongi yells. "You're like Kobe Bryant in a coma!"

"Shut up already, oh my god." Hoseok shouts back. "You two diss like Seokijn hyung rapping!"

"What! What's wrong with my rapping?" Seokjin cries out.

Namjoon just puts a hand on his shoulder. "It's okay hyung. It's not easy rhyming with the word "Jin". We understand."

The next round, Yoong and Jimin were making a comeback. One more point and they would be the winners of this match.

Hoseok manages to score one and Yoongi drinks up. Now It was 2 cups vs 1 remaining.

Yoongi motions for him to huddle and Jimin obeys, feeling the older's arm around his neck as he leans in closer. "Okay if you score this shot, we can laugh at their faces for the rest of the night. Can you do this?"

Jimin laughs and slurs out: "Fucking yeah I can."

When it's his turn again, he takes his stance, and looks right at the remaining red cup. It was staring back at him.

"Why is it looking at me," He breathes out. "Okay, okay, okay. I can do this." He breathes in and out, in and out. "I can-"

"OH MY GOD SHOOT ALREADY." Taehyung shouts, exasperated.

Jimin does. And it - "NOOO" - does not go in.

Yoongi steps forward. If he could get this in, they would still be able to win this round.

He aims. He raises his arm. He shoots! He..... does not score.

"NO!" Yoongi looks at the ping pong ball as it bounces off the table and rolls onto the floor. "NOOO."

When it's their turn, Taehyung and Hoseok score a point each.

"HOW YOU LIKE THAT?" Hoseok yells at them, throwing his arms up and hollering in victory. Taehyung's jumping up and down and everyone's just shouting and making noise because the first match had come to an end and Jimin and Yoongi now had to drink up the last two remaining cups on their side.

"Cheers," Yoongi says glumly, and he and Jimin toast to their defeat.

But as he raises the cup to his lips, Jimin feels pretty happy despite having just lost his first ever match of fire pong. He winces as the alcohol goes down his throat and looks over at the older.
Yoongi gives him a small smile as if to say *hey we tried* and he thinks it looks much nicer on him compared to the usual smirk he wears.

Namjoon and Jeongguk are Team Doitforthevine and now are up against Taehyung and Hoseok, switching places with Yoongi and Jimin.

Jimin is feeling *way* too tipsy at this point and decides he needs a time out on the couch. He saunters over to it and pllops down, his head resting against the back. Yoongi sits down beside him, keeping an eye on the match starting up.

"I think," Jimin slurs. "I might be drunk. Maybe. I don't know though."

Yoongi turns to face the younger. "You don't know?" He looks at Jimin with a bemused grin.

"Well. I feel warm and happy, so I guess I am."

Yoongi laughs. "First time drinking, kid?"

"Stop calling me kid." Jimin points at Yoongi's face accusingly. "I'm not a kid. I'm a *man.*"

Yoongi swats his finger away from his face. "Yeah okay, prove it."

"Ummm. " Jimin could explain what taxes are, that might prove it? Taxes were manly, right. Numbers. Taxes. Ugh, now his head was hurting.

Yoongi scoffs. "Forget it, kid."

"Call me kid one more time and I swear I'll-"

Yoongi positively glints as he says very slowly: "K-i-d."

Jimin pouts and slumps down even further into the couch. "You're mean. A meanie. Meanie Yoongi. Haha that rhymes."

Even to him, he sounded like he was five. But he couldn't care less; he was being called a kid so he was going to act like one. Logic.

Yoongi just bursts out laughing and Jimin glares at him because um, no, this wasn't funny? He was very upset, couldn't he see that.

"You're different than when you're on the battlefield." Yoongi tells him. "Actually, no. You're annoying both on and off."

Jimin thinks back to that match with Yoongi. He definitely had not liked him. He remembers his burned arm and blurts out: "You were a dick. I didn't like you very much."

Yoongi just looks at him, still grinning. "I know. I can get like that."

"Usually, people say sorry in these situations." Jimin tells him.

Yoongi’s still looking at him with that same fiery intensity he had on the day of their match. "We make a good team for fire pong."
Jimin's head was starting to feel even worse now. God, he did not like fire pong. "That game ruined me."

"Hey."

"Yeah." He closes his eyes. There's a soft thrumming in his temples.

"I was wrong about you." Yoongi tells him, voice a little softer than before.

"Yeah, that's right, you jerk. I'm 178 cm. You thought I was shorter, didn't you?"

Yoongi snorts. "No, not your height, loser."

"No? Oh."

The older pauses. "You're alright."

Jimin stays quiet.

"Sorry if I was bit much that day." He says. "I just thought a Year 2 would be a joke."

"Wanna hear a joke?"

"No."

"Knock knock."

"No, Jimin, shut up."

"Who's there - okay."

"Anyway, you weren't a joke. You were pretty good."

"Thanks," He hiccups.

"So." Yoongi bumps his shoulder against Jimin's and smiles his lopsided smile. "Friends?"

Jimin feels very happy and warm, despite the pain in his head. Yoongi wanted to be friends. Yeah, that would be pretty cool. But it would be even cooler if they were: "BFFLs?"

"No." Yoongi deadpans.

"No, okay, you're right. Only Tae is my bae."

Yoongi looks over at where Taehyung is currently going at it against Team Doitforthevine. "Boyfriend?"

"Friend that is a boy, yes."

"What?"

But Jimin was now too done. "I think I need to lie down."

And so Jimin passes out on the couch and Yoongi laughs at him because *what kind of 21 year old can't hold his alcohol?* But he drapes his jacket on top of him anyway.
The game comes to an end with Team Doitforthevine as champions. Jeongguk and Namjoon are named winners and Seokjin concludes the night.

"Alright, so now that we've seen ourselves get shitfaced and bonded over this dumbass game, I hope it was a nice way to break the ice. Also, now I know all of you don't like my rapping." The rest of them snicker and Seokjin just shakes his head. "I'm not rapping for you ungrateful shits ever again."

"No one asked you to," Hoseok points out.

Seokjin ignores him. "We'll be heading back, but just a reminder that we'll be having our first practice tomorrow morning bright and early."

His smile looks downright evil as he says: "Six in the morning, see you all at the Dome."

"What!" Taehyung yells out. "How are we going to wake up that early?"

Seokjin just keeps smiling. "I'll see you bitches and your hangovers. Six o'clock on the dot."

"Oh my god," Namjoon sighs. He turns to glare at Hoseok. "Why'd you have to diss his rapping?"

Chapter End Notes

loool i just wanted bts to play a drinking game and bond... .
hope you liked it! thank you all for the kudos & comments so far!!
stay tuned.. moving on to daily practices and school life :)


When Yoongi rolls over in his sleep the next morning, his phone buzzes and in the darkness of the room the screen blinds him as it lights up. A '1 new message' notification pops up. He opens it;

rap god jin: lol so i know all of u are gonna be hungover... practice is moved to evening. 6pm dont be late or else!!

He chuckles, knowing full well the captain had just said 6am to piss them all off for dissing his rhyming abilities (but really, 'jin' could only rhyme with so many words before it started sounding like a nursery rhyme).

He drops his phone beside him and closes his eyes, wondering how this year's team was going to play out. Last year had been a good year and he had definitely gotten close to the remaining members over their daily practices, the numerous times they've spent together even off the battlefields just hanging out and through the sweat and pain of the actual Games itself. The team had become like a second family to him over the past year.

And in that past year he had come to realize how important it was to have a strong team dynamic. Knowing each other's weaknesses and strengths were crucial in being able to maneuver the three stages of the Games. It mattered both in terms of skill and strength but even more so on personality; being able to read each other was just as important.

He thinks about this year's team and the new members. Jeongguk's Power had definitely taken all of them by surprise and the kid was full of potential. Having a Year 1 member was definitely new; no one on their previous year's team had been younger than Year 2. But Yoongi didn't think it would be a problem training the youngest.

Taehyung was going to be interesting to watch as well. His Invisibility could definitely be useful in numerous situations. But his and Jimin's reputations as trouble makers was going to have to be tamed; the team had a no-nonsense policy this year thanks to Seokjin, who was determined to bring the gold home this year.

And lastly, Jimin.

Jimin had proved himself capable during their first match and maybe he could have taken it a bit easier on him but Yoongi was never one to back down. Still, Jimin fought him head on and he quietly respected that about the Younger. And thinking back to last night's initiation, Yoongi smiles in the darkness of the room remembering the younger's slurred words:

'you were a dick. i didn't like you very much.'

Alright, yeah, he had been a dick. Maybe he'll soften up a bit. Jimin didn't seem all that bad.

Plus his drunk self was such a huge dork, he found it kind of cute.
Presently, a hungover Jimin is lying in bed and it's eight in the morning which means his alarm is ringing beside him and causing him to moan in agony.

"Taehyung please turn it off." He groans, covering his face with his blanket.

His roommate and best friend for life grumbles "It's your damn alarm" from the bed on the opposite side of the room.

"Ugh, where is it.." Jimin mutters as he reaches his arm out from under his blanket and searches the vicinity of the top of his bed. He finally finds it wedged between the bed and the wall and turns it off.

Even without the ringing, his head was feeling like it was about to split in half; it felt like a mini hammer was pounding at his temples. "I think I'm dying." He tells his equally hungover roommate.

"I'll see you in hell." Taehyung replies, his voice muffled by the pillow covering his face. "Literally. I think I'm halfway there already."

Jimin lets out a weak laugh and immediately regrets it as he realizes how dry his mouth is. "Remind me to never drink alcohol ever again."

He hears shuffling noises and glances over and sees Taehyung attempting to get out of his bed but it goes something like this:

Taehyung tosses his blankets aside. He sits up. Puts one foot down on the floor. The other foot follows. He tries to stand up. Somehow his brain doesn't seem to get the message because he just falls right back onto his bed.

"Well. I tried." He says. "Shall we skip first class and lie here and die?"

"Sounds like a plan." Jimin replies and wonders if there was a Power to cure hangovers because he could definitely use it right about now.

Fast forward a couple hours later and Jimin wakes up, his head feeling slightly better. He looks at his phone and realizes he's slept in until noon. "Noon?! Shit. Shit, shit, shit." He has class in twenty minutes and it was on the other side of the campus. When he looks over to wake up Taehyung, he realizes he's up already.

"Tae, we're gonna be late." Jimin tells him as he gets up and feels the room spin for a second before regaining balance.

"I wish I could Teleport." Taehyung grumbles, dragging himself out of bed and putting on his uniform. "Why is life so hard."

"Why do my boxers keep disappearing?" Jimin questions, searching his dresser for a clean pair and not finding a single one.

When he turns around, he sees Taehyung smiling sheepishly and standing before him wearing of all things -
"My boxers!" Jimin points at his friend's crotch area accusingly. "Why are you wearing -"

"Hey, hey, sharing is caring." Taehyung puts his hands in front of him in defense. "What's mine is yours, right?"

Jimin doesn't have the strength left in him to even bother complaining so he just walks over to Taehyung's closet and pulls out one of his boxers. "I'm taking this. And never returning it."

"Not my black one with blue bands!" Taehyung whines, and Jimin grins as he walks behind the closet door to change.

"No! Wait! I'll give back yours!"

Taehyung's still complaining about Jimin stealing his favorite pair as they make their way to class across campus. It's a nice fall morning with a slight breeze that plays with his bangs.

"I don't even remember last class's stuff, did you take notes?" Taehyung is asking him as they pass by the Academy's Community Center, the main building with the cafeteria attached.

"Yeah but who says I'll give them to you? First you steal my boxers. Next it could be my notes." Jimin teases and Taehyung just smacks his arm.

"Look, if I actually knew how to do laundry I wouldn't need to steal yours. But as it happens, I don't. So."

Jimin just shakes his head at him.

As Taehyung continues to explain the difficulties of finding the motivation to do laundry because 'sometimes it doesn't even smell that bad' and what not, Jimin notices a familiar looking figure a few feet away. When he squints harder, he realizes it's Yoongi. And he's waving at him.

Jimin points at himself as if to say are u pointing at me??

Yoongi just grins and rolls his eyes before walking over to the younger two, matching their pace.

"Hi hyung." Taehyung greets him.

"Hey, losers." Jimin glances beside him and notices he's not wearing his uniform. He's got on black jeans, white tee and a denim jacket. He looks good, Jimin thinks.

"How come you're not in uniform?" Taehyung asks, as if reading Jimin's mind.

"I don't have class til later." Yoongi replies, grinning. "Perks of Year 4, we get to choose elective classes."

"We already missed class this morning." Jimin complains, hoping he hadn't missed much in Power Divisions and Elements. "What are you doing for the rest of today then?"

"I have my own schedule." He says, not explaining further. "How are you youngsters managing your hangovers this morning?" He asks, looking at the two of them in amusement.
"Your fire pong game is downright evil." Taehyung answers, shaking his head. "I don't think I'll touch alcohol ever again."

"You guys disappoint me." Yoongi laughs. "That game was invented to liven up you newbies' spirits. Don't tell me you didn't have fun?" He raises a brow at them.

Jimin thinks back to last night's events. His memory draws a blank after he had lost to Taehyung's team. "I don't remember much after the first round." He says honestly.

"Oh?" Yoongi looks at him curiously. "You don't remember anything after?" He grins so wide Jimin thinks that's probably a cause for worry. "Interesting."

"What," Jimin looks at him wide-eyed, hoping he hadn't embarrassed himself in front of them. Especially not Yoongi. "Did I... say something?"

"Just casually asked me to be your best friend for life, but it's no big." Jimin all but gapes at him but Yoongi just grins cheekily. "Tempting. But I'll have to consider your offer."

Jimin is too busy flushing red to reply and Taehyung is holding back his laughter as Yoongi waves at them as he heads in the other direction. "I'll see you kiddos later at practice, gotta run."

After the older leaves, Jimin looks at Taehyung, his mouth wide open. "I didn't say that. I swear to God. Did I?"

"I wouldn't know, you were with him he whole night." Taehyung wiggles his eyebrows at him. "But wow, I thought we had something special? Or am I just grade A eye candy to you, Park Jimin?"

Jimin socks him on the arm and Taehyung just laughs it off. "You guys were just getting cozy on the couch before you passed out." He tells Jimin.

"Wha-" Jimin's memory flashes back to last night and all he can remember is just a mess of ping pong balls and red cups. But before he can dwell on it any longer, Taehyung grabs his wrist and starts jogging towards their building.

"Come on, we're gonna be late!"

Jeongguk is making his way to the Dome for their first practice after his final class that afternoon. He's walking on a narrow path between two building walls, one of the shortcuts he had found earlier in the week, when he senses an uneasy feeling from his Shadow and the sounds of footsteps coming from behind dawns on him.

He doesn't have time to even question it before he feels a pair of hands shove his back roughly, causing him to falter in his step. He quickly turns around and comes face to face with a group of Year 1’s that he's seen in his classes before. There's about four or five of them, and he recognizes them as a few out of the many who were always giving him countless dark looks, pointing at his Shadow and jeering, not bothering to lower their tones and calling him cursed.

Usually, he ignored the taunts and the glares directed his way pretty well. And he found it pretty
ridiculous that he was getting all of this shit just based off some old myth related to past Shadow Manipulators, yet here he was, being shoved against a brick wall for it.

"Heard you made it on the team," One of the boys jeers at him. "What'd you do, torture them til you passed?"

A kick is directed at his shin and he hisses at the pain. "Heard what you did to the captain," Another boy hisses at him. "That Power of yours is downright fucked."

A third boy, his black hoodie pulled so low Jeongguk couldn't make out his face, pushes him again against the wall again and his back aches at the rough contact.

"Friend of mine said your shadow can control people." He puts a finger on Jeongguk's forehead and pushes hard, causing the back of his head to bang against the brick. Jeongguk can sense his Shadow shifting uneasily but he doesn't want it to react; he's afraid his Shadow might lose it. It had happened before.

lay low. don't do anything.

"But he also said you couldn't control your own shadow?" A few laugh at that and Jeongguk narrows his eyes. So people at the tryouts had been talking about his match with Seokjin? He supposes that was bound to happen. It wasn't everyday you saw someone being suffocated by a shadow.

"Don't provoke him, he might choke your shadow to death." The fourth boy says, scarasm dripping with every syllable, and they all laugh darkly, Jeongguk not finding humour in any of it.

Still, he doesn't say anything.

"You want to show us your Powers, don't you? Come on, show us!" Another kick is aimed at him but at the back of his legs this time, causing him to fall to his knees. He curses under his breath.

"He's a bit shy, isn't he?" The one with the low hoodie jeers, grabbing onto Jeongguk's shoulders and pushing, making him fall to the ground on his back, knocking the breath out of him. Jeongguk winces. "I'll show you mine, if you show me yours." He grins his sharp teeth showing, and that part of his face Jeongguk can see. The boy holds up his palm and he holds a small ball of electric static, crackling dangerously. Eletric Manipulation, Jeongguk realizes.

Jeongguk can feel his Shadow's growing irritation and he knows it won't keep still any longer. He needed to get out of here. Now.

He looks for a gap between the group of boys but they're closing in on him and he just knows this won't end well. He opens his mouth to warn them. "Look, I -"

But right then, the one with the low hoodie is suddenly being shoved backwards with the result of his shoulder bumping roughly with another boy, making them both startle and look around them in bewilderment.

"What the fuck was that?"

Then a thick tree branch swings at one of them and hits him in the back, making him yell out in pain and alarm. "What the fuck?" He quickly turns around to look behind him to see who's responsible but finding nothing but a floating branch, his eyes widen and he yells out: "What's going on?"
Jeongguk thinks he has an idea of exactly what's going on and he can't help but smile.

"Let's get the fuck out of here. Someone with Invisibility is messing with us." One of them shouts, and the group gives Jeongguk one last threatening look before booking it out of there.

When Jeongguk hears the last of their retreating steps, he calls out: "Hyung, I know it's you."

Taehyung appears before him, grinning wide and eyes playful. "How'd you know?"

"A floating branch kind of gave it away." Jeongguk replies, laughing.

Taehyung offers Jeongguk a hand to pull him up.

He takes it and stands up, dusting off his uniform pants.

"How do you put with their crap?" Taehyung asks him quietly, not a trace of teasing in his voice. He sounds genuinely concerned and Jeongguk's breath catches. He doesn't look up to meet Taehyung's eyes. Feeling embarassed but also frustrated that Taehyung didn't know the full picture, he avoids the older's gaze and stares at the floor where his Shadow is standing still instead.

"You shouldn't." Taehyung's tone is careful, and kind, and Jeongguk wishes he hadn't found him here like this, being shoved and pushed like a rag doll.

"I can take care of myself." Jeongguk finally says, his tone final and Taehyung can take a hint. He drops the subject and he offers a small smile.

"Come on. Let's head to practice."

When Taehyung and Jeongguk step inside past the sliding glass doors of the Dome and walk onto the battlefields, they find the rest of the team waiting for them standing in a circle.

Taehyung walks up to stand between Jimin and Hoseok, Jeongguk beside him.

Seokjin is standing in the middle and when he sees the last two members have joined them he clears his throat and everyone's attention is on him.

"Alright, so today is our first official practice of the year." He looks proudly at them all. "Today we're going to be doing a lot of 'get to know the team's dynamics' exercises."

Yoongi groans and Seokjin doesn't miss it. "You got a problem with that, Yoongi?"

"It's just that I'm familiar with most of our members." Yoongi replies, shrugging.

"But we have three new memebrs, and we're going to have to be able to work seamlessly together." Seokjin tells him patiently. "I'm certain that we'll fall in tune with each other in no time with these exercises, but I need all of you to put 110% of your efforts into it, alright?" He looks at Yoongi at pointedly.
He starts to explain the exercises. "I'm going to pair you guys off and as pairs, I want both of you to hit the dummy targets simultaneously. The dummies will be on the other end of the battlefield, so using your Powers together in any way you can think of, knock them down in record time. Be creative with it!"

Namjoon is paired off with Jeongguk, Hoseok with Taehyung and Yoongi with Jimin.

"Alright, each pair to a battlefield." Seokjin instructs.

Jimin and Yoongi walk to battlefield marked with the number 6 and stand beside each other on one end. On the opposite end there's a dummy target with a bulls eye target drawn on its chest, and Jimin assumes that's where Seokjin wants them to leave their mark.

"Okay, think of ways to use your Powers to hit the dummy at the same time!"

Easier said than done, Jimin realizes.

Yoongi wants to just throw one of his fire balls at it, but with Jimin in the picture, he had to incorporate his Superhuman Agility in the attack.

"Okay, how do you want to do this?" Yoongi asks him, arms crossed.

Jimin thinks for a second. He could reach the other end in less than the time it took someone to blink, but that didn't help the point of the exercise. "I could carry you to the other side with me?" He suggests. He had never tried using his Agility with someone else before but he thinks it could probably work.

"Carry me?" Yoongi repeats, sounding doubtful. "Like what, on your back?"

"No," Jimin quickly replies. "Like..." He tries to demonstrate by reaching out one hand to rest on Yoongi's waist but the older swats it away.

"Whoa, no touching." He warns.

Jimin rolls his eyes. "Get over yourself. We're supposed to work together."

The older narrows his eyes at him. "I'm not a fan of physical contact."

"We're supposed to work together," Jimin reminds him.

"How about we work together without having to touch each other?" Yoongi retorts.

Jimin wants to roll his eyes again but stops himself. If Yoongi wasn't going to willingly cooperate, he was just going to have to force him to.

"Stop being difficult." Jimin quickly reaches out his left hand and gently places it on Yoongi’s waist, pulling him close so they were practically chest to chest. Yoongi is looking at him, the shock of the movement evident in his wide eyes as he splutters at their intimate proximity.

"Park Jimin, what are you -"

Jimin can see every strand of the older's light orange hair from this close. He smells of something flowery and Jimin smiles, thinking how unfitting that was with Yoongi's personality.

"I am not comfortable with this." Yoongi mutters, but Jimin just holds him tighter.
"I haven't carried someone with me while using my Power before." Jimin tells him. "You'll be the first!"

"Wait, what -"

But before he can even finish his sentence, Jimin, using his Agility, has moved them across the field in less than a fraction of a second so that the next thing Yoongi knew, they were standing right in front of the dummy.

"I think this is your cue." Jimin tells the older, grinning.

Yoongi pushes himself off of Jimin, and the younger lets go of his hold on him. "Rude." He mutters, as he lazily throws a fire ball at the bull's eye target on the dummy's chest.

Seokjin looks over at them and beams. "Good job, team!"

Jimin smiles and his eyes disappear, becoming the shape of crescents and Yoongi stares, wondering how on earth a 21-year-old could look so young and downright - ugh, he hated himself for thinking this - cute? Soft? All these things about Jimin just made him mad for even thinking about it.

"What?" Jimin asks, catching him staring.


Jimin smiles again. Yoongi looks away because *ugh.*

"Want me to hold you bridal style this time?"

The older holds up the flame in his hand threateningly close to Jimin. "Don't you fucking dare." He growls.

Jimin laughs, throwing his head back. "Alright, alright." He says as they make their way to the other end. "Fireman carry it is, then."

Yoongi points his flame at him threateningly. "Watch it. I'll burn your eyebrows off."

Yoongi was not a fan of physical contact for many reasons. The main one being a traumatic childhood experience that involved him and a close friend of his at the time. He hadn't learned how to properly control his Fire Manipulation then and when his friend had pulled him in for a hug, he had been startled and had accidentally burned his friend's shoulder.

The aftermath of that had been chaotic.

After that, he tried to avoid any close physical contact with those close to him. Even after coming to the Academy and learning how to properly handle his Powers, he had grown so used to the habit of distancing himself from others physically that when Jimin had pulled him in so close to his chest, he couldn't get that moment out of his head.

He had forgotten what it was like, holding someone so close. Being held so close.
And Park fucking Jimin. How dare he, pulling that on him when he so clearly told him not to. Not that he had hated it, what with the younger holding him so gently and so warm against him.

Yoongi shakes his head, trying to think of something else. Something other than proximity and Jimin.

Half an hour into their practice, he was sweaty and tired.

"Hyung," The younger is calling after him. He had gone to grab two bottles of water and now was coming back to where Yoongi was waiting. "Catch." He throws one bottle at him and Yoongi catches it mid-air.

"Nice catch." Jimin comes to stand beside him. "Want to do one more practice?"

Yoongi does not. But he nods anyway, because Seokjin was watching them.

"Yeah, one last time." Yoongi tells him, playing with the lighter in his hand. They had tried Yoongi throwing the flame at the dummy midway across the field, in the midst of Jimin's run across the field. It was working well, but Yoongi was still struggling with the timing since Jimin moved so fast.

"Maybe count down before starting?" Yoongi suggests. Jimin nods.

Yoongi walks up to Jimin and he realizes they're pretty much the same height, give or take a centimeter. "Ha. I'm taller." He says, feeling a little proud of that small height difference.

"As if." Jimin scoffs, pulling him close to him again. His hand comes to rest on the small of Yoongi's back, placed gently and Yoongi flinches, despite them doing this countless time before in the last half hour. Jimin had noticed the flinches but hadn't said anything about it. This time though, his curiosity gets the better of him.

"How come you flinch everytime I touch you?" He asks, his voice soft so as not to provoke the older.

Yoongi freezes, going rigid in Jimin's hold. His breath catches in his throat as the memories from all those years ago flood back.

"Sorry, nevermind. Forget I asked." Jimin quickly says, realizing this wasn't a comfortable topic. "You ready?"

Yoongi nods wordlessly, and Jimin gives him an apologetic look before taking them across the field in record time.

As the practice comes close to an end, with everyone having rotated partners and practiced for almost an hour and a half, they're all sweaty and tired and ready to head back to their dorms.

"Great work, team!" Seokjin pants, his hands on his knees and his bangs wet and plastered on his forehead. "I'll see you here tomorrow, a bit earlier. I'll text you all the details later."
Everyone nods, too tired to speak and head off to the exit, their bags slung over their shoulders.

After bidding everyone goodbye, Jeongguk is about to walk off to the Year 1 dormitories, the opposite direction of the other team member's residences, when he feels a tug on his wrist.

He looks to see who's pulling on it and realizes it's Taehyung.

"Hey," The older smiles at him.

"Hey." Jeongguk wonders what's up.

"Just thought you could use some company on your way back."

Jeongguk frowns, guessing what this is really about. "Company? Or protection?"

Taehyung looks put down at his hostile tone but quickly recovers, offering him one of his trademark boxy smiles. "Both." He answers, unabashed. "I'm not going to pretend like what happened earlier today didn't happen."

"I told you, I can take care of myself." Jeongguk says, voice low.

"I know you can. But I want to take care of you, too."

Jeongguk looks at Taehyung, and sees the honest and genuine concern in his friends eyes.

"Let me walk you home?" Taehyung lets go of his wrist and starts walking towards the direction of his dorm and he follows, matching his step to his.

"Thanks." Jeongguk mutters, and Taehyung hums in response.

"If those punks try anything on you again, I'm going to give use a heavier branch next time."

Jeongguk chuckles, and Taehyung looks over at him and when Jeongguk sees that damn boxy smile of his, it makes him feel weak at the knees and gives him a pang in his chest, and he wonders if that's normal or if Taehyung's smile had Powers of its own.

"I mean it! I'll use two branches, like nunchucks. Kung fu their ass." And he makes ridiculous motions with his arms that has Jeongguk holding his stomach in laughter, and Taehyung goes on about how he'll strategically kick their asses as they make their way to the dorm.

All the while, Jeongguk realizes those six years apart hadn't done anything to lessen his soft spot for Taehyung. How unfair, he thinks, that the amount of longing he'd felt during those six years didn't compare with the amount of happiness of just these kind of small moments with him. Time was so unfair.
hope u liked this chapter!! (and the taekook slowly happening)
as always i'd love hearing ur feedback!! <3
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Taehyung puts down the textbook he's holding in front of him to pout at his roommate studying across the table. "This chapter is putting me to sleep." He complains, leaning back against his chair and letting out a sigh.

Said roommate looks up from the notes he's typing up. "We just got here." He goes back to his notes, pointedly ignoring Taehyung's look of disdain.

It's Saturday morning and they're sitting at a table on the second floor of the main library, the place practically full to capacity with students studying and cramming for their upcoming exams. It's mid-October now, and midterms were on their way along with the colder weather.

Jimin and Taehyung had been trying their best to study lately but their five-days-a-week-3-hours-per-day practices left them drained in the evenings and by the time they came back to the dorms at night, they were too sweaty and tired to even think about opening their books.

As he hears Taehyung’s sigh, Jimin goes back to staring at the textbook laid out in front of him. He’d been reading and rereading the same page of this History of Heroes textbook for the past twenty minutes and not absorbing anything. The fact that it was his least favorite subject coupled with the lack of sleep made this task all the more difficult.

"I'm gonna get some caffeine." He tells Taehyung, who doesn't look up from his book but nods instead. Jimin walks to the elevator that'll take him to the main floor. He reaches out to push the button pointing down but another hand beats him to it. A very familiar, pale-looking hand.

He follows the hand to an arm to a shoulder and finally to familiar pale face.

"Hyung?"

Yoongi is standing beside him in a black hoodie and black jeans, his previous orange hair had turned black recently, matching his outfit minus his red converse. "What." Is his friendly reply.

"What are you doing here?" Jimin asks, not having seen Yoongi around campus much lately and mostly only during practices.

"What does it look like?" Yoongi scoffs, and Jimin realizes he had indeed just asked a very rhetorical question. "What does anyone do at the library, Park Jimin?"

"Um." Is all he manages to say before there's a ding and the elevator doors open. They both step inside and stand beside each other as the doors close.

Over the past month and a half, the team members had gotten closer in some aspects. Seeing each other practically everyday meant they had grown familiar with one another and were now used to being around each other but still, they hadn't had much time to hang out outside of their nights at the Dome. He wanted to get to know his teammates better, especially Yoongi, now that he was nicer to him than he had been at the beginning of the year. But he still put up a cold front from time to time, and Jimin had an ever-present suspicion that underneath it all Yoongi was actually the least harmless out of all of them.
He just tended to hide it better.

"So. What are you studying for?" Yoongi asks him, glancing sideways.

"The worst subject to have been invented." Jimin groans, dreading going back to his table and the torture awaiting him in the form of 500 pages bound in hardcover. "History."

Yoongi, however, apparently doesn't share his dislike for the subject because he brightens at the mention of it. "Really? I liked that course. Killed it, too."

Jimin had not pegged the older as the studious type, what with his nonchalant attitude about life in general. Except for it came to the battlefields, he didn't seem to like exerting effort in things.

"Are you serious?" Jimin asks him as the elevator dings again and the doors slide open. They both step off and walk side by side towards the cafe.

"Yeah, what's so hard about it? You just gotta memorize the important dates and names." Yoongi shrugs, as if that was common knowledge. Well, Jimin supposes it probably was, but he just never liked studying that way. "When's your exam?"

"Next week." Jimin was dreading it. Yoongi doesn't miss the way his shoulder droop or the dark circles under his eyes that were a shade darker than they had been during last night's practice. He kind of feels sorry for him, seeing him look so beat up. Maybe it's that and also the fact that he doesn't have any exams until two weeks later that he finds himself opening his mouth and saying, "I could help you out."

And when Jimin jerks his head around to stare at Yoongi like he's just spoken some alien language, Yoongi wonders how much of his brain to mouth functioning he actually has under his control.

"Yeah?" The younger looks at him like he just offered him an earlier Christmas or something. "That'd be great, I could really use it."

So this is how Yoongi finds himself sitting beside Jimin on the second floor of the library on a Saturday morning. Across the table, Taehyung keeps giving Jimin curious looks and pointing his head in Yoongi's direction as if Yoongi couldn't tell what he was asking.

"Hey Taehyung. You wanna ask something, say it out loud." Yoongi says as he starts to take out his laptop from his bag.

Taehyung looks appropriately abashed and he clears his throat before greeting the older. "Hey, hyung. What are you doing here?"

"He's helping me out with history." Jimin answers. "I hate this stupid subject but apparently he aced it."

Taehyung seems both surprised and satisfied enough with that answer. With one last curious glance at Yoongi he goes back to reading his own textbook. Yoongi realizes that it probably seems uncharacteristic of him to offer help in something academic-related, but Jimin was his teammate, he got good grades despite what people assumed and he had never seen the Year 2 look so awful. He wasn't that heartless.
He turns to face Jimin. "I still have my notes from two years ago. But I think you should write your own first and then read mine after, so you can get kind of like a second review of the content."

The younger looks at him and nods slowly, his expression very doubtful. "Okay, that would be a good idea," Then he turns to his textbook and Yoongi realizes he's only on chapter 1. "But I haven't really had time to read... so I haven't really made notes yet."

"Wow." Yoongi shakes his head at the younger, now realizing the extent to which Jimin really did need his help. Jimin just gives him a meek smile and a shrug. "And your exam's next week? Really, Jimin?"

Jimin frowns and mutters, "Our practices leave me dead, okay?"

Yoongi sympathizes with that. He own marks during Year 2 had suffered a bit when he first joined the team, but now he had gotten the hang of it.

"Fine, I'll send you my notes and then quiz you after."

Jimin looks at him with those droopy eyes that crinkled at the edges as he gives him one of his bright smiles and the older looks away, opting to study his laptop screen instead with sudden interest. After a month and a half of seeing that same damn expression he would have thought it wouldn’t bother him so much by now. It still did.

Jimin however finds it very amusing that Yoongi kept up the hard-to-approach facade he had going on because they were friends now, and he learned a long time ago that Min Yoongi wasn’t that hot-headed fighter he easily projected on the battlefield. He had a caring heart. Somewhere under the layer of black clothes and well-hidden intentions.

"I knew you were nicer than you seemed." He says it quietly, more to himself than anything but Yoongi picks up on it and glances at him in annoyance.

"I'm not." Yoongi snaps, not wanting him to get any ideas. "Don't think I'm helping you cause I'm nice. I'm helping cause you look like shit."

"Right." Jimin mutters, opening the file that Yoongi had just sent him. "But I'm thankful anyways."

And when Yoongi glances at him only to witness his stupidly nice smile again, the older thinks even in his half-dead state that smile of his could radiate a million watts.

Jimin was not good with memorizing names and dates. He could recall random information with no effort but the names and numbers seemed to be lost in a fog in his head. After an hour, Jimin was finished going through the notes and now Yoongi was quizzing him on stuff that he remembered being on the midterm.

He's turned in his chair so that he's facing the younger. He props an elbow on the table, resting the side of his cheek on it as he regards Jimin. "Alright, you ready?"

Jimin mimics his posture so that he was sitting facing him as well. "Yep." His expression is
determined, but he keeps fidgeting, his foot tapping constantly. Yoongi places a hand on his knee to get him to stop.

"Chill. It's just one midterm."

Jimin stares at his hand and Yoongi quickly pulls it away, bringing it up to his mouth and coughing behind it to play it off as very casual. Ever since Jimin had decided he would get right up and close to Yoongi's personal space during their first practice, he had become more and more comfortable being around him, much to Yoongi's dismay. Keeping a distance was a practice he had mastered a long time ago and it had served him well for the past 22 years of his life. No need to change it now.

"Go ahead." Jimin tells him.

Right, back to the quiz. Yoongi clears his thoughts and looks back at him. "Okay, first question. What year was the Academy established?" This was basically a free point on the exam, Yoongi remembers.

"1910? No, wait, 1911?" Jimin thinks harder. "One of those two, right?"

"Be more confident in your answers." Yoongi tells him. "The first thing that pops into your head is usually the right one."

"Okay, so 1910. Final answer."

Yoongi nods to confirm. "What year did Universo enter his presidency?"

Jimin mulls it over before answering, sounding a bit unsure. "2010?" He chews his lip and thinks harder. "2011?"

"2010." Yoongi notices Jimin deflate a little at not having remembered the year, but it was only one date out of many. "It's okay, now you'll remember." Yoongi says with a bit of positivity.

"Right." Jimin nods, letting out a breath. "Okay, ask me another one."

"How do Superheroes earn their official Superhero names?"

"It's given to them by the Bureau." Jimin answers with more confidence this time. "But if you hate your Superhero name you can't even do anything about it. So what if you got a really lame name, like Pillow Man or something?"

"Pillow Man?" Yoongi snorts. "How about you worry about even becoming a Superhero in the first place."

Jimin huffs and looks at Yoongi with his brows furrowed. "But really, what if you were stuck with a name like Cat Man? What would you do?"

"Why would I be Cat Man?" He retorts. He did not have feline characteristics, thanks very much Park Jimin.

Jimin blinks innocently. "You totally could be."

A cat? Was that supposed to be a compliment or an insult? "Yeah, well, you look like some sad puppy lost in life." As soon as he hears it, he realizes it sounded more insulting in his head.

Jimin giggles - actually giggles, Yoongi can't believe his ears - and he stifles the sound behind his hands. "Puppy Man, saving the world with fuzzy hugs. Kinda cute, no?" He laughs even more and
Yoongi just glares at him to make him stop.

"That's gross, not cute. Now go back to reviewing." He takes out his phone so he can distract himself with something and realizes he's got a text from Namjoon in their group team chat. While Jimin busies himself with going over the notes again as he reads it.

**halloween party next fri at Bobbys, all u losers are invited**

Bobby was another Year 3 and a friend of Namjoon's. He didn't live in the dorms but in an apartment near the Academy and his parties were well-known for being loud, noisy and a guaranteed good time.

He texts back: **is it a costume party?**

Hoseok's reply has him frowning.

**yep and u cant put on an all black outfit and tell ppl ur "the darkness" again lol**

**hyung pls**

**real costume is required for entry**

Yoongi had no enthusiasm for trivial things such as Halloween costumes. He hated the idea of dressing up and spending money on an outfit for just one day of the year. But he did love the parties that accompanied the holiday and seeing other people's ridiculous ideas of what could pass off as a costume was always a fun time.

He realizes Jimin's looking at his screen and when he looks up at Yoongi, it's with a curious expression. "Halloween party? So does that mean we all have to dress up?"

"Yeah, I guess so." Yoongi tries to think of which costume would entail the least amount of effort to make. "Maybe I'll throw a blanket on myself. Be a ghost."

"Don't be lame, hyung, where’s your spirit!" Jimin seemed like the type to put hours into an outfit that he'd wear only one night of the year, Yoongi decides. Heck, he'd probably leave out candy for his dorm mates or something.

"I probably won't even be able to go anyway with all the studying I have to do though." Jimin says, sounding resigned.

Yoongi thought that was a shame. It would be fun to have the whole team there at the party but mostly, the combination of Jimin and booze was an opportunity he didn't want to miss witnessing again. And he probably would come wearing some ridiculous costume.

"Hey, how about this? I'll help you out with your other subjects. I've taken them before so I know what's up."

Jimin slowly turns back to face Yoongi, his eyes widening as he does so. "You’d do that?"

He would, but not for nothing. An idea starts brewing in his head and the next thing he knows, he’s telling him, “Yeah, but there’s a catch.”

"Name it." Jimin looks happy enough to be offered his help. Yoongi grins, thinking this was going to be a fun night.

"You have to wear whatever costume I pick out for you." He already had one in mind, and it was
very frilly. "And I mean it, you have to wear it."

To Yoongi’s surprise Jimin doesn't seem too worried about this condition. He just smiles brightly as he nods. "Yeah, okay. Deal."

Yoongi wonders how someone could be so trusting. But then again, Jimin was Jimin.

"Deal."

The weekend passes by too soon and it's already Monday when Jeongguk finds himself feeling drained at the end of his last class. He was always tired these days. Having daily practices in the evening coupled with the unhealthy amount of sleep he was getting due to staying up late to catch up on readings made him feel like he was getting sick.

As if on cue, a cough escapes his throat and it rattles his ribcage. Fuck, he was definitely getting sick.

He knows he has to head to practice now but for the life of him he can't make himself do it. He just wants to lie in bed and sleep until he could feel like he was at least half functional.

He debates what to do for a minute. When he starts coughing even harder, he decides to send a text to the group chat.

*hey im not feeling well and wont be able to make it tonight. sry but ill make up for it tmr*

Seokjin texts back almost immediately.

*dont wry bout it, hope u feel better soon! rest up!*

He sighs in relief. The captain was a good guy, he had come to learn quickly. He was almost making sure his members weren't falling behind and he could tell Seokjin always put careful thought into their practices. It must be a lot of work, overseeing a group as diverse as their team.

He heads back towards the dorm, his Shadow on his tail. Lately, Shadow had been very obedient and calm which was unusual. It had a very excitable personality and Jeongguk was used to it being absent from his presence for long periods of time as it wandered around on campus.

But something was putting it off and making it less active than normal.

*what's up?*

The dark figure just shrugs in response.

*are u feeling tired too?*

It nods once.

*yeah, I know.* Jeongguk sighs, feeling the tiredness down to his bones. *lets go rest up, yeah?*

They walk back to dorms and as Jeongguk walks through the door to his single room, his phone
rings. He picks up on the second ring.

"Hello?"

"Hey, what's this I hear about you being sick?" It was Taehyung's voice and Jeongguk finds himself automatically smiling at the sound of it.

"I think I'm getting the cold, I don't know." He strips down into his underwear, his uniform lying in a heap on the floor. He puts on sweatpants and a hoodie and climbs into bed. "I just want to sleep for like an entire day. You know, hibernate."

"But are you feeling okay?" Taehyung sounds worried and Jeongguk wishes he wouldn't. He was a grown ass man. He could take care of himself. "I'm coming over after practice to make sure you're alright."

Alright, maybe a grown ass man who wouldn't mind being taken care of. Jeongguk tries to think of reasons why he should tell Taehyung he'll be fine and not to worry about him but the thought of having him over is too inviting that he ends up saying "Okay" instead.

Taehyung repeats him, laughing. "Okay? Really?" Jeongguk was usually against being babied or taken care of by anyone, so this was pretty unusual of him and he knew it. But he hadn't seen Taehyung all weekend.

"Yeah." Jeongguk was too tired to pretend not to want his friend over. "I might get you sick though."

"Fine by me. I could skip my exam." Taehyung's laughter was music to Jeongguk's ears. "I'll see you in a couple of hours."

"Have fun at practice, hyung." Jeeongguk hangs up and stares at the ceiling for a while after. One thing he had come to realize over the past month was that Taehyung was the only person at the Academy he truly felt comfortable being himself around. He considered Jimin a close friend as well, but not to the extent that he knew Taehyung. With Taehyung, he had no wall to put up and there was no reason to; they knew each other too well for that.

And knowing he was coming over was making him already feel a bit better. If he didn't know any better, he would have thought this was a side effect of his cold, but he did know better. And he was starting to question a lot of things in his mind lately.

As promised, Taehyung knocks on his door a couple of hours later. Jeongguk opens the door to see him standing there holding a brown bag.

"Brought you soup." He greets him, holding the bag up and wearing his trademark square smile. "Chicken noodle."

"Hey," Jeongguk brightens at the mention of soup and steps aside, letting Taehyung walk into his room as the door closes behind him. "Thanks, how was practice?"

Taehyung puts the bag on his desk and walks over to his bed, jumping into it. He looks over at where Jeongguk's standing and pouts. "So tiring. We're getting grouped into groups of threes now instead of pairs. Kind of hard to coordinate all our Powers but you know, practice makes perfect,
"I'm glad I skipped today, not gonna lie." Jeongguk walks over to stand in front of his desk and reaches into the bag, taking out the styrofoam bowl and plastic spoon. "Thanks for dinner."

"That's dinner? You should have texted me earlier, I could've gotten some real food." Taehyung chides, and Jeongguk smiles inwardly at how much his friend cared about him. He really appreciated it more than he could ever show.

"It's fine. I'm not even hungry." He honestly wasn't. If he hadn't brought over the soup he probably wouldn't have eaten anything. He walks over to the bed to sit beside Taehyung, who scooches over to make room for him.

"How's midterms going?" He asks, as he blows on the hot chicken noodle before taking a small sip.

"First one's tomorrow. I'm not too worried, though. I'm sort of a semi-genius in case you didn't know." Taehyung gives him a small wink and Jeongguk just rolls his eyes. "Don't believe me?"

"Nope." He goes back to drinking his soup, ignoring Taehyung's pointed look.

"Ask me anything." Taehyung challenges him. Jeongguk looks over at him and thinks he could have some fun with this.

"Alright." He shifts around in his seat so he was sitting cross-legged facing him. "When's my birthday?"

"September 1." Taehyung answers without missing a beat. "Too easy. Next question."

"What's the meaning of life?"

"To find out whether or not aliens exist." He says this with a straight face and knowing Taehyung, probably meant it. "And also to discover the fourth dimension."

"Right. Of course." Jeongguk wonders for the hundredth time how Taehyung's thought processes work but decides it's better not to question it. "If you could swap Powers for a day, what would it be?"

"How's that going to determine whether I'm a genius or not?"

"Depends on your answer. Could be a genius answer or a dumb one." Jeongguk reasons.

"I would swap it for..." Taehyung thinks about it for a few seconds with his lip between his teeth. "Teleportation."

"What!" Jeongguk puts down his finished soup on the floor and turns to give Taehyung a credulous look. "Out of all the Powers in the world, you choose to Teleport?"

"Think about it! I'd never be late for class. I could go visit my family. I could just Teleport right to the bathroom instead of walking there. I could visit you more often."

The last part has Jeongguk's chest feeling tighter and he wishes it wouldn't. Taehyung had meant it platonically, he knew that, but a small part of him was happier than it should be to hear it.

"Nah, you wouldn't want to visit me more often. I'd just get you sick."
"Who says I come here for you?" Taehyung scoffs. "I come here for your bed. It's comfier than the Year 2 dorm ones."

Jeongguk feigns a hurt expression, clutching his heart. "I feel so used."

Taehyung gives him a grin. "I actually would like to see you more, though." He turns to look at Jeongguk, a small smile playing on his handsome features. "I mean outside of practice."

Jeongguk can't help it, his face flushes and he knows he's reddening. He ducks his head to stare at his socks and mutters, "Yeah, me too."

Taehyung narrows his eyes at Jeongguk and says in a low voice, "Do you sense the elephant in the room?"

Jeongguk freezes and his eyes widen in surprise. Could Taehyung tell? That he had just been thinking about how glad it made him to hear him say that he wanted to visit him more? And oh god, what if he could sense that lately he was having some non-platonic thoughts about him and that he was very confused about them? But he didn't even know what he was feeling, what if-

But Taehyung cuts through his internal monologue by pinching his own arm in between his two small moles so that it looked like an elephant trunk. He's laughing as he tells him, "You see that? It's an elephant on my arm!"

Jeongguk slowly looks from Taehyung's arm back up to Taehyung's laughing expression and he almost wants to cry in relief. But then it hits him as he finally realizes something.

Taehyung looks at him and suddenly stops laughing. "Hey, why do you look like you're going to pass out? You okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine." Jeongguk's voice comes out strained and he definitely wasn't fine. "I'm fine."

Taehyung gives him a puzzled look but doesn't question it further and instead, takes out his phone to show him a funny video he found online. "Check this out, it's an app called dubsmash. I thought we could make some, they're so ridiculous."

Chapter End Notes

hihi im back sorry for the delay in updates, been living life and stuff
anyway hope u guys like this chapter!
huge thanks to tofu aka proteins for being an awesome person and an awesome beta
thank u girl ilu

this ch was mostly fluff but next one wont be

i live for comments pls feel free to leave any feedback <3
In no time at all, the end of October is lurking around the corner and it's already their last practice of the month. An hour into it and everyone is already panting and out of breath, their shirts soaked through with sweat.

"Okay, break time." Seokjin pants, his hands on his knees as he catches his breath. "Take fifteen and we'll get back to it."

Jimin plops down onto the ground, spreading his legs out in front of him as he wipes his brow. Yoongi comes to sit beside him and he hands him a bottle of water wordlessly. Jimin takes it and nods his thanks, too tired to even voice it.

Rather than going through team exercises, tonight had been straight up endurance training. On top of running laps around the Dome, they had done intense rounds of circuit training, something new that Seokjin had wanted to try out.

Evidently, it left everyone pretty much half-dead; Taehyung is currently lying down on the ground, moaning and demanding their lives be spared.

Seokjin ignores him with good intentions. "It's not that bad, you guys will get used it."

"I can't feel my legs." Taehyung says, covering his face with his forearm. "Jeongguk, touch my leg so I know it's still there."

The younger just looks at him pointedly.

There's a quiet chatter among them as they take their break. Jimin's feeling tired, but he was getting used to the physical exertion their practices required. Two months in and his stamina had built up to the point where he didn't flop onto his bed after getting home anymore.

Yoongi stretches his arms behind him and leans back on them. "So how'd your midterm go?"

"I'm not sure." He answers truthfully. Jimin could never tell if he did well or not after an exam. Sometimes he walked out of the exam room feeling confident he had aced it only to get it back with a lower mark than he would have ever guessed. "But I think it went well?" He hopes so. "Thanks for helping me out with studying."

Yoongi had been spending almost everyday with him at the library for the past week and a half, helping him out with the overwhelming amount of work.

Although sometimes, Yoongi could be more of a distraction than help. Like when he got bored of reading his notes and took 'breaks' which he would spend balling up pieces of scrap paper and throwing them into the back of Jimin's hoodies, whispering score! each time he got it in (Jinmin had learned to wear snapbacks instead of hoodies to the library).

Or the times he handed Jimin one of his earbuds so he could "listen to some good shit" and Jeongguk would sit there, one of Yoongi's earbud in his ear, hip hop blasting through it. He didn't mind the music, but the fact that Yoongi mouthed the rap verses with animated hand gestures to compliment made it kind of hard to concentrate. But he had to admit, it was amusing to see this side of Yoongi.
And one time when Yoongi had fallen asleep with his head resting on his arms, Jimin had thought it'd be funny to doodle a goatee on him. To his great amusement, when he had woken up, he hadn't suspected a thing and had spent the next five hours with marker-drawn facial hair on his face. When he caught Jimin stifling a laughter behind his hand, he had asked him what was up.

"Nothing." Jimin had tried his best to keep a straight face, but he had the worst poker face in the world. Suspicious, Yoongi had pulled out his phone and checked his self-cam. Realizing the new facial hair on his face, he had wordlessly gotten up and gone to the bathroom.

When he came back, he just smiled at Jimin and told him to study hard.

In retrospect, Jimin should have seen that as a huge red flag. Because Yoongi was not one to take shit from anyone without giving them shit back.

The next day, when Jimin had inevitably dozed off in the middle of reviewing his notes, the older had taken his revenge.

When Jimin had stirred awake after the hour-long nap, Yoongi had greeted him with, "You up, sleepy head?"

Groaning, Jimin had stretched and looked sideways at the older, not missing the obvious smirk on Yoongi's face. "What's so funny?" He had asked, suspicion growing.

"My textbook."

As if, Jimin thought. Maybe he drew on his face? He checked his phone's self-camera and nope, there was nothing there. But why was he snickering?

He found out only when he was back in his dorm room later that night and Taehyung had asked him, "Why is there a sign taped onto your back that says 'i got no jams pls send some asap'?"

"I'm not helping you out for nothing." Yoongi reminds him. He had already bought the costume intended for Jimin in two different colors because he couldn't choose which one would be more damaging to Jimin's well-being. He was leaning towards the pink one, but he still had tonight to decide.

"What, the costume deal?" Jimin asks, not sounding troubled by it at all. "I already agreed to it, didn't I?"

Yoongi looks at him with narrow eyes, his head tilted to one side. "You really don't want to know what I have in mind?"

Jimin just shrugs. "I just appreciate your help. Besides, Halloween is all about dressing up."

"Are we talking about Halloween?" Hoseok asks as he walks over and squats down beside Yoongi. "Party's tomorrow, what are you two going as?"

"Hyung has some sort of costume planned for me." Jimin answers, not sounding worried at all. "How about you?"

"Actually, I was watching this movie and thought it'd be funny if all of us dressed up as characters
from Rise of the Guardian." Hoseok says, sounding very enthusiastic about the idea. "But we were all arguing about who'd get to be Jack Frost."

"Obviously me." Taehyung says as he sits up from where he had been lying down beside Jeongguk. "Have you seen this face?" He points at himself and smiles innocently, fluttering his lashes.

"I'd rather not." Yoongi deadpans.

"We already decided Jeongguk's going to Pitch Black," Hoseok continues as if Taehyung hadn't interrupted at all. "Still deciding on Jack Frost."

Taehyung just jabs a finger towards his face again. The Gravity Manipulator doesn't pay him any attention, much to Jimin's amusement.

"Hyung!" Taehyung whines, jutting his lip out in a pout.

"You guys hear something? Like the sound of someone being annoying?" Hoseok asks the rest of them, keeping a straight face on with some difficulty. Taehyung and Hoseok were easily the two loudest and most playful members of their team and with their personalities being similar, they naturally got along well. Along with Jimin, they were usually the ones to fool around the most. Hoseok looks over the top of Taehyung's head and asks, "Invisiboy is that you?"

"I'll kick you in the nuts with my invisible foot if you keep this up." Taehyung warns, and Hoseok finally relents, reaching out a hand to ruffle the younger's hair affectionately. "You want to be Jack Frost that bad?"

"I'd kill that costume."

"I second that!" Jimin pipes up, raising a hand. Taehyung reaches over for a high five and the two roommates grin at each other.

"Thanks bro." Taehyung winks at him.

"Fine, fine, go ahead." Hoseok leans back on his arms, mimicking Yoongi's pose. "Maybe I'll go as something simpler."

"Break's up!" Seokjin calls out to them then, standing with Namjoon beside him. The rest of them stand up, feeling the ache in their limbs but trudging their way to where the captain was waiting, the thought of the Halloween party lingering in their minds.

The next morning Yoongi is woken up by the noises of his roommate moving about their shared room, in a frantic search for something.

"Yo, have you seen my fangs?" Namjoon asks him, haphazardly lifting books on his desk and throwing them aside. "I swear I left them here somewhere."

"Fangs?" Yoongi repeats, not quite fully awake yet. "Like Edward Cullen?"

Namjoon continues his frantic quest for his Halloween accessory. "Who?"
"The guy from Twi-" Yoongi stops himself, realizing there was no reason to indulge Namjoon with the fact that he was an avid reader of the vampire saga. None at all. "Nevermind. Uh, want some help?"

"Yeah, that'd be great." The Telepath is now digging through his dresser and pulling out handfuls of articles of clothing at random, tossing them over his shoulder so that a small pile begins to form on the floor. "Gotta be here somewhere..."

"Mind not destroying our room in the process?" Yoongi gets up and walks over to his desk. Maybe he left it on his side of the room? He looks but finds no sharp teeth on top of his desk so moves on to his bookshelf. "When's the last time you saw them?"

"Last night, I think." Namjoon answers, not sounding certain.

Yoongi walks over to his closet and pull the doors open. His eyes come to rest on the two maid outfits that he had bought online and had shipped to him (yes he had spent quite some cash on them), now hanging inside his closet. He didn't mind cashing in a few extra bucks for these because he had a genius plan.

Poor Jimin, so trusting of his hyung.

The idea had taken form in his scheming head when he had been watching Kaichou wa Maid-sama, one of his favorite animes, while he was 'studying' in the library with Jimin a couple of weeks ago. His friends had no idea, but he was a fan of many things that didn't fit with his image, anime being one of them.

He had been on the third episode which was when Maid Latte decided to host a "Little Sister's Day" where the maids dress up and act as little sisters to their customers. That shit was cute, he thought, watching Misaka in her maid ensemble. Especially the pretty skirts.

And at that moment, Jimin had turned around and asked him, "Can I borrow your pen? Mine ran out."

Looking from his screen displaying Misaki and her maid-clad form to Jimin's innocent baby face, the idea that Jimin could potentially pull off a maid outfit even better than Misaka had slowly formed in his mind and he could not shake it off.

"Hyung?" Jimin had looked at him questioningly. Realizing he had just been looking between his screen and Jimin and not said anything this whole time, he had shaken his head to snap out of it.

"Yeah, here." He had answered, not really paying attention to what he was handing over to the younger.

And when Jimin had muttered a thanks, turning back to his notes, he had only stared at Jimin, imagining him in a dress with a full skirt, a white apron with lace trims and ruffled headpiece.

There was a split second of doubt but he had shoved it to the back of his mind before deciding that yes, this needed to happen, and he most definitely was going to make it happen.

Namjoon, as it turns out, had placed his fake fangs inside his bag and it had gotten wedged between the pages of his textbook. "Found them!" He shouts in triumph.

"So you're going as a vampire?" Yoongi thought that was quite fitting. He had that silent but deadly
kind of vibe going on - although, in reality, Namjoon was just about the biggest klutz he knew with a dorky sense of humor. He did hate garlic, though.

"Count Dracula." Namjoon corrects. "What about you?"

"I'm just going to go as myself. It's scary enough."

Namjoon looks like he wants to say something back but thinks better of it and just chuckles instead. "If by scary you mean harmless, then yes. Scary as hell."

When Jimin and Taehyung arrive at Bobby's apartment that night, they're greeted with loud music blasting through the doors, the bass practically reverberating through the walls and there's definitely more people inside the small apartment than there should be. There's barely any elbow room and Jimin grabs onto Taehyung's wrist as they weave through the crowd to find the rest of their team.

The place smells like sweat and alcohol and the shouts of enthusiastic beer pong players can be heard, their voices yelling in triumph as someone lands a ball in their opponent's cup. Taehyung and Jimin maneuver through the crowd and somehow manage to get past the dancing bodies near the doorway. It's a chaotic mess of colours, wigs and high heels, the sound of laughter filling the apartment as drinks in red cups are thrown back, beers chugged and the uncensored music fills up everything in between.

Jimin notices all the ridiculous costumes that people are wearing and finds it amusing just how far out some people were willing to go in the spirit of Halloween. It's a chaotic mess inside the place and Jimin is feeling the contagious energy that came with kegs, jungle juice and house music on full blast. He liked parties. He liked that he could unwind and let loose and just enjoy being young without any inhibitions.

Then he realizes Taehyung is yelling something at him except with the volume of the music being so high, he can't hear a thing,

"WHAT?" He shouts back. Taehyung just gives up and points at the living room area where there were his teammates, talking amongst themselves, Hoseok doing some sort of weird dance thing and the rest of them cracking up at his antics. Taehyung leads them towards the rest of the team and when they see the two Year 2's approaching, they holler in welcome, five pairs of hands clasping their backs and shouting.

"Not my hair, don't ruin the hair!" Taehyung yells out, protecting his grey hair with his arms. He did pull of the Jack Frost look perfectly, Jimin had to admit.

Jeongguk, being the respecting younger he is, reaches out and ruffles Taehyung's hair. "Oops." He says, grinning. His Pitch Black costume is impressively befitting.

Hoseok is a prisoner, dressed head to toe in black and white pinstripes. He laughs at Taehyung's scowl and hands him a can of beer to cool him down. "Chill, Jack Frost. Drink up! Tonight's going to be one long night!"

"Hear, hear!" Namjoon shouts, lifting his red cup filled with some mysteriously red-colored liquid.
He had come dressed as a vampire, fangs and cape included. "To underaged drinking!" He grins in Jeongguk's direction, who lifts up his own cup unabashed.

"I'm 19, this is legal!"

"Legal age is 20 in Korea, brat." Yoongi says, and Jimin realizes he's not dressed up as anything. He's wearing a backpack and when he catches Jimin's eyes, he grins so wide that the younger can't help but feel like that's a cause for concern. "Jimin, come with me for a sec."

"Wha-" Before he can even properly ask what's going on, Yoongi is dragging him to the bathroom on the other side of the room. With so many people, it's not an easy task but they manage to get to the bathroom door. When Yoongi throws it open, they're greeted by a couple making out on the toilet.

"Take your horny asses elsewhere, will you?" Yoongi shouts at them, and the two look up in annoyance but get up and leave without a word. "Now come on, get in." He pushes Jimin inside and then walks in, closing the door behind him.

When the door's closed, Jimin looks at Yoongi with a raised brow and a sly grin to match. "Oh my god, you want to make out with me, don't you? That's why you dragged me in here?" He teases.

"What the fuck are you talking about," Yoongi retorts, closing the lid of the toilet and sitting down on it.

"What's up, then?" Jimin asks, leaning against the sink and crossing his arms.

Yoongi takes off his bag and reaches inside. The next second, he pulls out something very pink and very frilly. Then he takes out a similar frilly-looking thing except it's black in color.

"You know that deal we made before?" He asks with a mischievous grin, holding up a french maid costume in the brightest shade of pink that Jimin has ever seen. In his other hand is the black version.

Yoongi is looking at him with a glint in his eye, as if daring him to accept this ridiculous costume as his outfit for the night.

Back in the living room, the rest of the team were enjoying a game of normal beer pong (and not the hellish fire pong version from all those weeks ago), playing against a group of Bobby's friends, who were proving to be quite apt at aiming small balls into red cups.

It's Namjoon and Seokjin against Bobby and his friend B.I. Both sides are tied neck and neck, tension high as the large crowd gathered around them watches in anticipation. Hoseok, Taehyung and Jeongguk were watching from the sidelines, cheering on their teammates with gusto, their fists pumping and voices yelling.

The match is down to this tie-breaker; whichever side scored the next point would emerge victorious.

Namjoon takes a few seconds to collect himself before raising his arm. He closes one eye, takes
aim and flicks his wrist and - *whish* - it's in the air, it's arching and *plop*!

"YESSS!" He yells in triumph as Seokjin slings one arm over him and shouts in celebration. They had won and the crowd around them goes wild, hollering and raising their drinks in congratulations. Bobby on the other side raises his own drink, nodding to Namjoon and Seokjin and yelling "GOOD GAME!" B.I beside him doesn't look happy as he just gives them one quick nod in acknowledgment.

Another round of beer pong starts up and Namjoon and Seokjin walk over to where the rest of them are standing. They clink their drinks in celebration, cheering loudly and throwing their heads back in laughter as they recall the highlights of the match.

It's a fun night, and Jeonguk can't help but think that for his first ever real party, this was going to be hard to top. The music's good, the atmosphere is live and with Taehyung right beside him, it couldn't have been better.

But when he suddenly feels the prickling sensation of being stared at on the back of his head, he turns around to glance over his shoulder. To his surprise, he sees a group of familiar-looking boys walking in his direction.

Staring harder, he realizes it's the same group of Year 1's that had ganged up on him five-to-one before beating him up in the middle of night a month ago.

And they were slowly making their way over to him, grins prominent on their faces.

"You want me to wear this?" Jimin asks, taking the pink frilly thing from Yoongi's hands. He puts it against himself and turns around to check himself out in the mirror. From the reflection in the mirror, Jimin can clearly see Yoongi's face.

From the way he's grinning, Jimin could tell he was expecting him to back down, refuse, maybe even complain. Not that he was going to do any of that.

Jimin turns around and says simply, "Alright. I'll put it on."

And in the span of one second, Yoongi's daring expression quickly changes to one of surprise. His brows knit together, he gives Jimin an incredulous look as he asks, "Wait. You're okay with it?"

In all honestly, Jimin just didn't want to give Yoongi the satisfaction of seeing him all flustered over the dumb dress. If Yoongi thought he could pull one over him this easy, he had underestimated him. Big time.

"Yeah, why?" He turns around to give him a wide smile and the older's reaction has him inwardly laughing.

"I mean, it's a maid outfit," Yoongi starts to say but then Jimin starts taking off his shirt, right there in the middle of the bathroom, revealing his Holy Grade A abs for Yoongi's eyes to see. "I, um, thought you were...going to..." He trails off, his eyes betraying every sense of his will to not look
Jimin doesn't miss the older's downward gaze. He was already getting Yoongi worked up and this was just the beginning. "Eyes up here, hyung." He teases, voice dropping dangerously low.

When Yoongi looks up, Jimin is looking right back at him. His plan was backfiring so fast he needed to abort mission, because goddamn it, this was not going as he had planned.

"Okay, you know what, on second thought this was a bad idea. Let's just forget about this and - "

When Yoongi's reaches out to try and grab the dress back, Jimin holds it above his head and out of his reach. Yoongi can see the amusement alight in the younger's eyes.

"You said it was a deal. A deal is a deal, hyung." Jimin grins at him, all pretence of his usual innocence gone now.

Yoongi drops his arm and is about to tell him the deal's off but then Jimin starts unbuckling his belt.

Yoongi was not having any of this. "Okay, Jimin, you stop this shit right now." He warns, but the brunette just continues slowly taking off his belt out of the denim loops, watching the older intently for a reaction.

"What, I'm just getting ready to change into the lovely maid costume you picked out for me." He feigns an innocent expression, his tone light and playful.

"And you have to take your belt off to do that?" Yoongi asks, his voice coming out strangled.

This was getting ridiculous. And why was it so hot in here all of a sudden? The window's open, letting in the cool breeze, yet Yoongi's palms are sweaty, his face feels unbelievably hot and there's an uncomfortable feeling in the bottom of his stomach that he can't even pretend to ignore.

"What's wrong, hyung?" Jimin raises a brow, the smirk on his face daring Yoongi to back down.

That smirk of his ignites the underlying resolute side of Yoongi. He wasn't going to let Jimin think he could win over him.

Two could play at this game.

"You know what?" Yoongi stands up a bit straighter and cocks his head to one side. "You're right." And he starts taking off his own white tee shirt, pulling it over his head. He may not have abs like Jimin, but he was pretty comfortable in his own skin, however pale he may be.

"In fact, I'll join you."

"You... will?" Jimin asks, his bravado faltering slightly as he watches Yoongi strip off his shirt and toss it aside like it was nothing.

"I have two dresses and there's two of us." He says, keeping his tone light but the look on his face says otherwise. "This works out well, right?"

"Um." Jimin wasn't quite sure what to do now. He hadn't been expecting Yoongi play along. Also, he had never seen Yoongi shirtless before. The older's stomach is so pale, like a smooth milky expanse of skin. Jimin stares, taking in his lean and defined torso and he finds his breath catching in his throat as Yoongi makes to move closer to him, taking a couple of steps forward and invading
his personal space in all his half-nakedness.

Yoongi's so close now that Jimin can see every strand of his fiery orange hair and count them in his head. Yoongi swallows and Jimin stares as the older's Adam's apple moves up and down, the movement almost mesmerizing. His gaze follows upwards to trace the older's sharp jawline and then even further up to his cheekbones. When their gazes lock, Jimin feels a sudden uncomfortable knot in his stomach and he doesn't know what to make of it.

Yoongi just keeps coming closer, taking one step, and another, then another, until he's just one step away from Jimin in the cramped bathroom.

The older bites his lip and gives Jimin the most devilish grin, his gaze practically devouring Jimin with their intensity. "Your move."

Jimin hadn't been expecting this retaliation but he can't say he's not enjoying this just a little. He and Yoongi constantly bickered and taunted each other and he liked that about their dynamic. But this was a whole new level of teasing. There was an added level of intimacy the two had never explored before.

The lack of space between them does nothing to help Jimin keep his eyes off Yoongi's prominent collarbones; the way they jut out among the smooth expanse of his pale chest draws his eyes towards them.

"Park Jimin," Yoongi says, his voice barely above a whisper. "You're staring."

Jimin snaps his eyes up to Yoongi's again and there it is again, that twisting knot-like feeling somewhere low in his abdomen. He tries think of what it could mean, but when Yoongi's tongue flicks out to lick the bottom of his lips, Jimin wants nothing more than to bite those soft lips of his with his teeth.

Wait. What. He freezes in place, his breath hitching as the realization hits him so hard it feels like a slap to his face.

Because it dawns on him, just how fucking attracted to Yoongi he is. It's almost like a blow to Jimin's stomach, as he finally comes to understands the knot in his stomach to mean raw attraction and his chest starts pacing so fast that he feels like he can't breathe.

No. They were just friends. Yoongi was his teammate. He was older. Yoongi was... well - Yoongi. All of this intimacy was just him teasing Jimin for fun. It didn't mean anything.

"Fuck," Jimin breathes out. Except he had not meant to say it out loud. His eyes widen as soon as he hears himself and curses inwardly because shit, Yoongi definitely heard. The corner of Yoongi's lips curve upwards as he looks at Jimin.

"What's the matter?" Yoongi asks, his voice playful, as he licks the bottom of his lip ever so slowly, making Jimin swallow thickly.

So many things, Jimin thinks to himself, especially this situation he'd gotten himself into.
The party's still going strong even though it's almost two in the morning. The music's still pounding in Jeongguk's ears. The chatter of the huge crowd of people has died down but the ominous feeling he's getting from his Shadow grows stronger. When he turns around again, there was no mistaking it. The gang of guys were headed his way.

Noticing the alarmed expression on Jeongguk, Taehyung turns to face him and asks, "What's up?"

"Behind me. It's the same group of guys," Jeongguk replies, staring at their approaching dark figures, knowing he didn't have much time. His Shadow was growing restless beside him. "I have to get out of here."

Taehyung turns around and sure enough, sees the five burly Year 1s, all dressed head to toe in black - whether that was their costume or not, he couldn't tell - making their way over to where they stood. "What the fuck do they want?"

"I don't know. Doesn't matter, I have to go" Jeongguk says in a hurry, crumpling the red cup in his hand and tossing it to the floor before taking a step towards the other direction. But Taehyung grabs his wrist and pulls him back.

"What?" Jeongguk asks in frustration.

"Don't run away." Taehyung tells him, his voice low. "Stay right here, with me."

Jeongguk wants to explain that he couldn't do that. Because if he did it would mean putting him and the rest of the people here in danger as well. "I can't." He simply replies, glancing at the floor where Shadow is casted, its dark figure radiating with anger and energy.

He couldn't explain the consequences of letting Shadow loose. It wasn't something he was prepared to do at the moment.

When Seokjin looks over and notices the weird tension between his two younger teammates, he steps between them, looking from Jeongguk to Taehyung. "What's going on?" He asks, confused at the sudden hostility of their youngest member. Jeongguk was usually the calmest around Taehyung.

"Nothing." Jeongguk answers too quickly, noticing the gang was only a couple of feet away from them now. "I'm gonna leave early, hyung."

"What-" Seokjin starts to say but the Shadow Manipulator moves quickly, now halfway across the room, his dark Shadow trailing behind him. The captain turns around to look at Taehyung questioningly. "What was that about?"

Taehyung just stares at Jeongguk's retreating figure. "I don't know but we gotta follow him, hyung."

Jimin honestly doesn't know what to think anymore. He was finding it really hard to breathe.
Yoongi takes another step forward, not taking his eyes off of Jimin, closing the gap between them. The air between them is downright stifling and even without his lighter, Jimin thinks Yoongi could probably ignite a fire with the amount of tension in the tiny space between them.

He was practically trapped between the sink behind him and Yoongi in front of him. He needed to get out of this bathroom, otherwise he was pretty sure he was going to combust from the tension, his confusion and everything in between.

Jimin hastily pushes himself off the sink and takes a few quick steps sideways so that he wasn't nearly chest to chest with Yoongi anymore. Fumbling, he grabs the pink dress from the floor and straightens up, looking at anywhere but Yoongi, holding the costume in his slightly trembling hands.

"So, um, you want me to put this on or not?" He asks, his voice coming out shaky and uneven. Get a hold of yourself, he thinks in his head. He didn't need Yoongi realizing all of this was getting to him.

"Of course. I picked it out just for you." Yoongi replies, tone light and casual as he takes a few steps back, finally giving him space. "Thought you'd look real cute in it."

Yoongi doesn't seem to notice Jimin's internal turmoil, that playful grin still lingering at the corner of his lips.

Stashing away his confusion and his mixed feelings to a distant corner in the back of his head, he picks up the black dress from the floor. It takes all his willpower to keep his voice even and casual. "Like you said, two of us, two dresses." He tosses the black frilly black thing at the older.

"Right, like I said." Yoongi mutters, catching it in mid-air.

Jimin watches as Yoongi struggles to pull the small dress over himself, somehow managing to get his arms through the holes.

When Yoongi spreads his arms wide to give Jimin the Full Effect, Jimin can't help but think he looks downright ridiculous. Min Yoongi, the tough and brash Fire Manipulator who had burned his arm on his first ever match, is now standing before him wearing a french maid dress, looking like he came straight out of some shoujo manga.

Without meaning to, Jimin bursts out laughing, his loud laughter reverberating off the bathroom tiles.

"Hyung, you look - " But he can't even finish his sentence because he's overcome by another bout of laughter and Yoongi is left standing there, scowling. "Oh my god, you look-" He tries again, but just ends up with a stitch in his side. The knot in his stomach loosens a bit and he feels a bit lighter, finding Maid Yoongi all too funny and so unfitting.

"Okay, okay, I get it." The older snaps, rubbing the back of his neck. "Shut up and put on your own damn outfit."

"Alright, alright." Jimin calms himself down enough to pull the pink dress over his head.

Looking at Jimin in the ridiculous pink frilly thing, he realizes he was right. Jimin did pull off the maid outfit better than Misaki.
Jeongguk had managed to weave his way through the throng of people, reaching the hallway leading to the front door, when suddenly a pair of hands was shoving his back, hard, causing him fall to the floor and land on all fours.

When he quickly gets up and turns around, he's standing face to face with the leader of the gang, the tallest and the burliest among them.

He stands there, gathering a ball of static energy in his hands, growing larger and larger and the crackling noises of his electric energy can be heard even over the music.

Jeongguk didn't want trouble. But these guys were relentless.

The Electricity Manipulator steps forward. From the way he saunters a bit, Jeongguk thinks he might be a bit intoxicated. "Nice running into you here," He says, slurring his words, and Jeongguk knows he's definitely drunk. "I think we have unfinished business between us."

As if on cue, his gang steps in closer, surrounding Jeongguk on all sides and leaving him with no way out.

"Stay the fuck away from me," Jeongguk grits through clenched teeth, and he senses his Shadow on edge. "I'm warning you."

"Or else what?" One of the dark-clad Year 1 taunts, taking a step forward. The rest of them all follow his lead, and Jeongguk's heart beats uncontrollably in his chest and he can't think properly, panic rising in his throat. He didn't want to hurt anyone, but this was getting ridiculous.

"Come on, we're at a party." Jeongguk says nervously, trying to find some way out but he was surrounded. "This isn't the place."

The group of boys start laughing, their tones jeering, and Jeongguk wishes he hadn't come here in the first place. His identity as a Shadow Manipulator couldn't even be hidden with a Halloween costume, he realizes sadly.

"You got away last time, thanks to your friend." One of them - the one with blonde hair - is saying, looking around him. "But they're not here now, are they?" The corner of mouth lifting in a grin. "Let's have some fun."

Chapter End Notes

i am so yoonmin trash
pls forgive me
anyway i hope u guys liked this chapter! next one wont be up for a while, i'm starting my internship soon but there's another exciting au that me and broteins/tofu/soulate
have worked on coming ur way before i leave so keep a lookout n__n
ALSO TOFU DREW TAEHYUNG AS JACK FROST & IT IS PERFECTION

any comments/feedback would be appreciated <3
Jeongguk didn’t want trouble. He was never the type to initiate an argument and he hated confrontations, but these guys just had it in for him and he didn’t know what else to do.

"You got away last time, thanks to your friend." One of the Year 1’s - the one with blonde hair - is saying now, his low voice menacing. "But they're not here now, are they?"

Jeongguk knows the rest of his team are nearby, but he doesn’t want them to get involved. He doesn’t want any of this to be happening, but the corner of the blonde’s mouth lifts up in a grin, eyeing Jeongguk with this hungry look behind them and it makes him want to wipe that expression right off his face.

He looks straight at Jeongguk and he stares right back, not daring to show any sign of fear or backing down even though he’s outnumbered. The seconds pass, and he watches as the blonde’s pupils start to dilate, wider and wider - until they’re so blown that both his irises are entirely black.

Then he realizes what Power the other has.

Jeongguk shouts out in pain as the blonde’s Mind Control starts to penetrate his thoughts, causing them to become a white-hot blur in his head. It’s a pain like he’s never felt before – there’s no single source of it, it’s everywhere. It hurts just to keep his eyes open so he shuts them closed, but behind his closed lids he sees only red – a hot, fiery magenta that burns a thousand degrees.

*Make it stop, make it stop!*

Just as fast as it came, the pain is suddenly gone.

Cautiously, he opens one eye, then the other. Looking down, he’s taken by surprise to see the blonde lying on his back on the floor, his face red as he starts convulsing horribly.

“Jeongguk!” He looks up in surprise and realizes it’s Yoongi, dressed in some ridiculous maid outfit that looks ten times too small on him. He steps out among the crowd of students that are gathered around them now, watching, staring.

“What’s going on?” Yoongi asks in fright and then Namjoon’s right there along with Hoseok, the three of them looking at Jeongguk in surprise.

Jeongguk looks back at the three older members and then behind them, at the crowd of students who have gathered around, sensing a fight was going to break out.

The students are staring at him, faces shocked and their voices hushed as they whisper to each other behind their hands.

Hoseok takes one look at the boy on the floor and then turns to Jeongguk, confusion loud and clear in his tone. “Jeongguk, your shadow - ”

He trails off and Jeongguk follows his gaze to the ground.

His Shadow’s got the blondes’ in a chokehold, its grip unrelenting as the other’s shadow goes limp
in its hold, despite the fact that he hadn't ordered it to attack.

But for some reason, he doesn’t mind. It’s what he wanted, wasn’t it? For the pain to go away.

He watches as his Shadow continues to choke the other, and in the back of his head he knows he should put an end to it, that two wrongs don’t make a right - but he can’t help it. He’s suffered enough. He’s had it with all the bullshit myths surrounding his Manipulation and maybe they were right - maybe he was doomed for the same dark path.

He doesn’t give a shit anymore.

*Give him hell.*

His Shadow strengthens its grip and the blonde shouts out in pain, the sound piercing through the room and there's a collective *gasp* as the boy stops shouting and falls to the ground with a defening *thud*, knocked out cold. A thick silence fills the room.

Jeongguk stares as Shadow tosses the dark figure aside and starts moving towards the group of Year 1’s, all looking downright terrified now. It felt like he was watching everything unfold in third person from a birds eye view. Everything feels surreal at the moment and Jeongguk can’t find it in himself to order Shadow to stop as it stalks towards the next nearest target cast on the ground - the shadow of the leader of the gang.

Jeongguk doesn’t fully register what happens next. All he can see and feel is still that fiery burning *red* as it consumes him, this feeling of just *letting go*. It’s all he can think about when suddenly a pair of hands grabs his arms and turns him around and he’s surprised to come face-to-face with Taehyung.

“Jeongguk, control your Power!” Taehyung shouts at him, his eyes wide in alarm and Jeongguk silently stares back at his friend. “What are you doing, you’re hurting them!”

But nothing comes out when Jeongguk opens his mouth. Instead, he just stares at Tehyung as it dawns on him that his best friend, the one person he trusted above all else, couldn’t even understand his situation - that he was so fucking tired of being the victim of the unfair judgments and the silent stares wherever he went.

*You don’t get it,* he thinks bitterly, *no one does.*

Everything feels too overwhelming and he can't think straight - a wave of pent-up anger and frustration washes over him as he rips his arm out of Taehyung’s hold and takes a step back, away from the older.

“I didn’t ask for any of this.” Jeongguk grits out, his voice barely above a whisper.

Next thing he knows, Jimin is standing beside Taehyung in that same ridiculous maid dress as Yoongi’s but pink. Any other time, he would have found it funny but at the moment, he’s too numb to feel anything.

“Jeongguk, you’re hurting the guy!” Jimin shouts at him, his voice panicked, and Jeongguk watches as the leader of the group, the Electricity Manipulator, is brought to his knees, his hands clutching at his throat, the same painful expression that Seokjin had worn during the tryouts mirrored on his.

All he can think about at the moment is how satisfying it feels to watch him suffer.
Give him pain.

Jeongguk commands, despite knowing that his entire team and a hallway full of people were watching. He doesn’t care at this point.

“What the fuck are you?” The guy chokes out, as he looks right at Jeongguk not with fear or anger, but with disgust and repulsion. When Jeongguk doesn’t reply, he spits out, “You’re a monster. Your power or shadow or whatever it is, it’s – “

But his sentence goes unfinished, and Shadow raises its arms, lifting the other’s shadow from the ground and there’s a deafening silence in the hallway as the crowd holds its breath, their eyes trained on the scene before them.

He’s one second away from commanding Shadow to finish the job when Taehyung shoves him, hard, and he falls to the ground.

“This isn’t you, Jeongguk, stop!” Taehyung shouts, and in his state of rage, Jeongguk’s doesn’t think about the fact that it’s Taehyung in the way, his best friend since childhood, as he orders his Shadow:

Get him out of my way

Shadow obliges, turning away from the Electricity Manipulator to Taehyung instead, and any other time he never would have even dreamed of doing such a thing, but at this very second, all he sees and feels is the colour of fiery red, burning and consuming every sense of control.

Shadow silently glides to stand in front of Taehyung’s shadow and in the next instant it wraps itself around it, its form takes on the shape of something like a snake and it’s horrifying to witness as it wraps itself around the unsuspecting victim and Taehyung starts to hyperventilate, grabbing his throat as his breaths come out short and panicked.

Jeongguk watches, and it’s odd because he knows Taehyung hadn’t meant him any harm at all, and he knows none of this should be happening, but for the life of him he can’t bring himself to stop it and it terrifies him to his very core.

Suddenly Seokjin’s hands are around him, pulling him away from the hallway and dragging him outside the apartment and he sees Jimin run to Taehyung’s side as soon as he’s released from Shadow’s grasp.

Soon enough he’s out the door and standing in the outside corridor of the apartment.

Once the door closes, he realizes the rest of his team are there with him, all looking at him with the strangest expressions.

It’s chilly outside but the wind doesn’t register, nor does the low temperature.

He just feels numb all over.
It’s almost 3 am by the time they get to Seokjin’s apartment. With his place being the closest from Bobby’s and it being so late into the night, they had decided to spend the rest of the night here.

The moment the door slams shut behind Yoongi, Seokjin turns on Jeongguk, their slight height difference magnified by the intensity of the elder’s gaze.

“Explain what happened back there.” He demands.

Jeongguk swallows. He doesn’t meet the captain’s eyes. He can’t. He doesn’t know what to say to him or to the rest of the team just yet.

After a long stretch of silence, Seokjin sighs and gives Jeongguk a stern look.

“You just attacked another teammate.” Sekojin says carefully and Jeongguk hears the words, understands them but it’s hard to comprehend. Had he really just ordered his Shadow to attack Taehyung? Was that really him?

Jeongguk blinks and sees flashes of Taehyung’s pained expression and it hits him - really hits him - that he had been the cause of it. His eyes widen and his breath catches, and he feels so sorry and so regretful but it’s too late for all that.

“When he gets back back, you owe him an explanation at least.” The captain finishes quietly, and Jeongguk knows he’s right.

“I know.” Jeongguk says and the room goes quiet. Taehyung and Jimin aren’t back yet but he imagines if they were here, they would be looking at him with disbelief written on their faces. He wouldn’t blame them.

As if on cue, the door bursts open and Jimin and Taehyung are standing there, the former supporting the latter, Taehyung’s arm slung across Jimin’s shoulder as he slumps against him looking utterly tired and pained.

Jeongguk pales at the sight of him because he had done that to his best friend. How could he?

He tastes bile at the back of his throat and he feels like he’s going to throw up. He’s so disgusted with himself, and yet Taehyung’s looking at him not with hate or anger but with pity and understanding and it’s even worse than being yelled at, Jeongguk thinks.

Supporting Taehyung, Jimin walks to the couch and sets him down gently. Taehyung winces as he leans his back against the couch and again, Jeongguk feels the pang of guilt in the low pit of his stomach and everything just feels so unbelievably wrong.

As soon as Jimin spots Jeongguk standing in the living room, he lunges towards him and from the way his jaw is set and his gaze locks with his with a burning intensity, Jeongguk can tell he’s furious.

Jemin grabs him by front of his shirt and even though he’s shorter than Jeongguk, in his state of anger, the height difference is lost between them.

Jemin’s face is inches away from his and the can hear every uneven breath the older takes, can see the straight line of his mouth and it’s so unlike Jimin’s usual self that Jeongguk can’t help but admire the amount of loyalty he has to Taehyung. He’s never seen him this angry before.

“What the fuck are you playing at?” Jimin’s voice is dangerously low and it’s so silent in the room, the rest of the team catches every syllable. “Do you realize what you just did?”
Jeongguk doesn’t say anything because what could he say? Yes, he knew. He was fully aware of what he had done, but explaining why it happened was something entirely different that he was incapable of doing at the moment.

His silence angers Jimin even more and with his hands still fisted in Jeongguk’s shirt, he shoves him backwards, causing him to falter in his step and lose his balance.

That’s when Taehyung intercepts, raising his voice. “Jimin, that’s enough!”

Jimin whips his head around to stare at his best friend in disbelief. “After what he did to you?”

Taehyung looks right back at him, his expression solemn. “He didn’t mean it.”

Scoffing, Jimin lets go of Jeongguk’s shirt and gives him one last hard look before turning back to face Taehyung. “He knew what he was doing.”

But Taehyung just shakes his head. For a second, Jeongguk thinks Jimin’s about to say something more but he doesn’t. Instead, he runs a hand through his hair, something he did only when he was frustrated.

“What a fucking night.” He mutters to no one in particular before storming out the room and a second later, Yoongi wordlessly follows.

Jeongguk silently agrees with that last statement.

Seokjin speaks up when it becomes clear none of them had anything else to say. “Let’s get some rest for now and… we’ll clear things up in the morning.”

Nodding, Hoseok and Namjoon follow Seokjin out the room and Jeongguk makes to move towards the bedrooms as well, but as he walks past the couch, Taehyung reaches out a hand and grabs his wrist.

“Wait,” Taehyung says quietly, and Jeongguk hates himself for not being able to look him in the eyes. “Just, stay for a bit.”

It feels like an infinite number of seconds pass by before Jeongguk fully registers what he’s being asked to do. But finally he nods once, and Taehyung lets go.

Jimin had stormed out of the room, unable to stand how Taehyung could forgive Jeongguk just like that. How could he just brush off the night’s events and tell himself that ‘he didn’t mean it’? He couldn’t wrap his head around it.

He walks into one of the bedrooms and doesn’t know what to do with himself. He was beyond angry. Jeongguk had been someone they had both trusted, it was pretty evident that Taehyung had every right to be pissed yet, he had just sat there, so calm and forgiving.

He sits down on the bed, placing his elbows on his knees. He covers his face with his hands.

A few seconds later he hears the door open and the sound of padded footsteps follows. The bed sinks as someone sits down beside him. He doesn’t have to look to know who it is when he feels a
familiar hand on the small of his back.

“You okay?”

It’s Yoongi, and Jimin looks up from his hands to glance at the older. He’s watching Jimin with worry, and his hair’s turned black again.

“No,” Jimin answers honestly. “I’m pissed. And Taehyung should be too, but he’s not! How can he be so forgiving of him? It’s not like -”

“Jimin,” Yoongi interrupts, bringing his hand on Jimin’s back up to his shoulder, rubbing slow calming circles onto it. “It’s not up for you to decide how he should feel. He’s known Jeongguk for longer too, you have to take that into account.”

“But still,” Jimin’s hands ball up into fists. “Seeing my best friend get hurt…”

He trails off, unable to voice his frustration properly. Silently, Yoongi reaches out and brings Jimin’s right fist to rest on his lap and slowly, he unfurls the younger’s fingers, one by one.

“I know.”

And they lapse into a silence after that, Jimin’s hand resting on top of Yoongi’s, the older’s thumb tracing comforting lines onto his palm.

It’s a comfortable silence despite the lack of words exchanged. It’s nice, Jimin thinks, having Yoongi here beside him, having someone acknowledge his frustration. There’s no need to justify himself or his actions to Yoongi and he feels his anger slowly subside as the minutes pass by.

“Thanks.” He says quietly after a long while, not entirely sure what he was thanking him for but wanting to express himself nonetheless. He looks down at their intertwined hands and thinks the perfect fit couldn’t have been coincidental.

“Don’t mention it.” Yoongi says back, voice softer than Jimin’s ever heard it before. “I’m here for you.”

And Jimin can’t explain how or why, but he knows the older truly means it.

“You don’t have to explain anything right now,” Taehyung tells Jeongguk gently, and there it was again, that horrible feeling of guilt somewhere in his lower abdomen mixed with an overwhelming sense of regret.

Jeongguk wishes he would yell at him instead. He should be beyond pissed at him, he had just attacked him for God’s sakes, yet here he was, calmly asking him to sit with him. He didn’t deserve this.

“I know that wasn’t really you back there, so stop looking so sorry.” Taehyung says, voice gentle, his gaze fixed on Jeongguk.
Jeongguk bites his lip and looks up at the lights on the ceiling, willing to get a hold of himself before replying.

But when he opens his mouth and says, “I’m so sorry,” his voice betrays him as it falters on the last word and he hates himself even more when his vision starts to blur and all he can do is lower his face and stare at his lap.

“I’m really sorry.” He tries again, wishing he could be stronger than this. “I don’t what came over me, I just...” There’s so much more he wants to say, but putting his thoughts into words is so hard when all he can think about is how much he wants to take back what he did.

Then he feels the light touch of Taehyung’s thumb pressing against his cheek, his hand gently turning Jeongguk’s face towards him and he loses any remaining coherent thoughts completely.

The gesture is so awfully tender, it tugs at Jeongguk’s chest. But still, he avoids looking him in the eye and stares at a spot behind Taehyung instead.

“It’s okay, I’m not hurt.” Taehyung tells him, voice low, as he brings his hand down to his side.

“I don’t blame you for what happened.”

At those words, Jeongguk finally, finally looks at him in surprise and when their eyes meet, he wonders how something as simple as eye contact could convey so much more than words ever could.

Taehyung’s steady gaze spoke of how much he unquestioningly trusted him and how he didn’t blame him for what had just occurred. Jeongguk doesn’t know how he can tell of this just from the way Taehyung’s looking at him, but it leaves him with that awful guilty feeling again.

“And I don’t want you blaming yourself, either.”

But that was the thing, Jeongguk only had himself to blame for losing control and letting his emotions get the best of him.

“But I hurt you, how can you say that so easily?” He bites out, feeling so undeserving of Taehyung’s friendship.

“We all make mistakes,” Taehyung replies, that determination behind his eyes steadfast. Jeongguk thinks it’s a pretty huge mistake he’s made just now, but Taehyung slips his hands into his and the thought is lost an instant.

“But maybe it’s time you learn to control your shadow, once and for all.”

And Jeongguk knows he’s right. He couldn’t afford to let something like this happen again.

He doesn’t look away as he promises Taehyung, “I will.”

That night, Seokjin and Namjoon try to come up with the best plan on how to proceed after what had just happened with Jeongguk and Taehyung. Namjoon had brought up the idea of reading Jeongguk’s thoughts with his Telepathy to try to understand the situation better in case the younger
had a hard time explaining, but Hoseok had been against it.

“I don’t know, he’s been through a lot and his thoughts are probably all over the place right now.” Hoseok is saying now, voice hushed as they sit on Seokjin’s double bed. “Might be better to just give him some time.”

They were all feeling shaken after having witnessed what was undoubtedly their youngest member lose his control over his Power. It had been a frightening scene to watch; Taehyung hadn’t even had a chance to react.

“We’ll see tomorrow morning.” Seokjin says quietly. “But we need to be considerate of how we act. I’ve never seen him like that before and there’s got to be a reason why that just happened.”

“Must be all the shitty stories surrounding his Manipulation.” Namjoon offers, thinking of the dark myths he’s heard about Shadow Manipulators before.

“It’s all bullshit,” Hoseok says, shaking his head. “But damn, if he has to live with that everyday, I guess it makes sense he snapped.”

“Still. It doesn’t justify his actions.” Seokjin tells them sternly. “He could have really hurt Taehyung.”

Namjoon and Hoseok turn solemn at his words.

“We’ll hear him out tomorrow morning.” The oldest says and the other two nod in agreement.

The next morning, Seokjin’s the first to rise. He gets off the bed, careful not to wake up Namjoon beside him or Hoseok sleeping on the couch in his room. It’s still early and the sun’s not up yet when he enters the dark living room. He makes out two figures on the couch and realizes it’s Taehyung and Jeongguk, the younger’s head leaning against the other’s shoulder.

They must have fallen asleep like that, he thinks, and he can’t help but admire the strong bond between their two youngest members. Despite last night’s events, it seemed like it hadn’t caused any rift between them.

But unlike Taehyung, Seokjin couldn’t easily let this go. Jeongguk’s actions warranted some consequences.

He walks into the kitchen, flicking the lights on. He already knows what to make for breakfast a he opens the pantry and takes out the box of pancake mix. Setting it down on the counter, he reaches for the bowl beside him.

As he takes out a whisk from the drawer, he hear footsteps enter the kitchen and he doesn’t have to look up to know it’s Taehyung when a low voice asks, “Pancakes?”

“Mmhm.” Seokjin replies, wondering if he woke up him just now while passing through the living room. “Did I wake you?”
Taehyung shakes his head. “Early riser. Need any help?” He asks, watching the older pour the dry mix into the bowl.

“Mind reaching into the fridge behind you and taking out milk and eggs?”

Taehyung wordlessly obeys. He sets down the ingredients on the counter and Seokjin grabs the milk. He opens it and pours it into the bowl, the milk forming a small well within the pancake mix.

Taehyung watches as he then cracks two eggs expertly, not spilling any of the whites.

“You okay?” Seokjin asks him carefully, knowing the pain of being on the receiving end of Jeongguk's Powers from their tryouts. Taehyung gives him a quick reassuring smile, bringing his elbows to rest on the cold countertop.

“I’m fine, hyung.” He replies, his voice sounding tired. He doesn’t say anything else as Seokjin goes back to the batter.

“What exactly happened with Jeongguk last night?” Seokjin questions cautiously, watching for Taehyung’s reaction as he brings a frying pan onto the stove.

Taehyung doesn’t answer for a while, just watches as the older ladles perfect circles of batter onto the pan and is still silent when the bubbles start to slowly form.

When Taehyung finally speaks up, his expression is solemn.

“He’s been through a lot, you have to understand that.” He tells Seokjin, each word carefully articulated. “I’ve known him since we were kids, he would never hurt his friends intentionally.

“And I think even the best of us would lose it too, if we had to put up with all the shit he’s been through.”

Taehyung goes quiet after that, and Seokjin almost lets one of his pancakes burn as he admires for the second time that day, how close the two youngest members are.

When Jimin wakes up, the first thing he notices are the weak rays of sunshine that peak through the blinds and land on Yoongi’s side of the bed. He turns his head to look over at the older and watches as his chest falls and rises slowly with the rhythm of his breathing.

Watching him sleep, Jimin marvels at how everything about Yoongi was fierce yet so gentle at the same time. Like how he had his own way of showing how much he cared about his close friends, Jimin had learned a long time ago to read between the lines when it came to Yoongi.

“Hyung?” Jimin asks, voice a little above a whisper, testing out Yoongi’s state of sleep. The older stirs a little and his brows furrow a bit, but he doesn’t wake up.

So he decides it’s a safe time to explore the pale outline of Yoongi’s sharp jawline, study the soft curves of his ear, and map out each and every one of his lashes that casts shadows onto his cheeks. Jimin avoids looking at his lips, in case he couldn’t contain himself this early in the morning.
“Hyung.” Jimin tries again, whispering. “You awake?”

The older doesn’t respond at first but seconds later, his hoarse voice replies thickly with, “Mmm. Don’t wake me up yet.”

So Jimin just smiles and decides to leave him alone and thinks back to last night’s events instead.

There’s still some lingering anger about what happened with Jeongguk and Taehyung, but he feels much calmer than he had felt last night.

But his thoughts go even further back, to what happened before all that mess. He recalls what happened between them in the bathroom, trying to make sense of it all.

An image of shirtless Yoongi with his defined pale chest exposed appears crystal clear in his head and the memory alone is enough to make him flush slightly.

A part of Jimin had assumed it had just been them being playful and taunting as usual in that bathroom. But, another part of him was so sure there had been something else there, something outside the realm of friendship.

There had been a frightening yet thrilling intimacy between them, in every move, every exchange, every second they had been in that cramped space. And if he was going to be honest with himself, he wanted to feel it again.

It scares him a little. How much he wanted to explore more of the older, to test his boundaries, to map out the expanse of his skin and so much more.

He almost jumps out of his skin when he realizes Yoongi’s awake and watching him.

“What are you thinking so hard about?” His gruff voice asks.

“Nothing.” Jimin answers a little too quickly. When Yoongi keeps looking at him questioningly, Jimin replies lamely with, “Just, stuff”, too occupied in his thoughts to come up with something better.

“Hmm.” Yoongi says before closing his eyes closed again. Seconds pass and Jimin assumes he’s gone back to sleep again but then Yoongi mumbles, “C’mere, you’re warm.” before pulling Jimin closer to himself, tugging on his arm from underneath the blankets.

And when he’s practically pressed against Yoongi’s chest yet again, that lingering ashy smell ever-present on Yoongi overwhelming him so early in the morning, Jimin can’t help but think that maybe, just maybe, Yoongi wanted to test things out between them as well.

When Jeongguk walks into the kitchen, he realizes he’s the last one to have woken up as the rest of the team are already seated around the kitchen table, pouring syrup onto their pancakes.

Jeongguk didn’t realize how hungry he was until he’s seated and the smell of buttery warm pancakes makes his stomach grumble. He stacks his plate with five of them. All he can think about
is how much he wants to devour the entire stack in front of him.

“Whoa, slow down,” Hoseok jokes, watching the youngest take huge bites. “There's more than enough.”

Jeongguk chews a little slower but continues to devour his mountain of pancakes and the rest of the team watch in amusement as he eats furiously.

“You really hungry?” Seokjin asks, his mouth lifting up into a grin, glad that he was enjoying his creations. He always loved it when others enjoyed his food. His one passion in life was cooking, not that many people knew that.

“Starving.” Jeongguk manages to say in between his huge bites.

Namjoon looks over at Seokjin, lifting his brow questioningly, and the older's doesn't have to ask to know the expression to mean: Well?

Seokjin nods in response. Alright, I'll ask now, he thinks in his head for Namjoon to read.

He clears his throat before bringing up the topic they had left unfinished last night. "Jeongguk, about what happened," He starts off carefully, and the youngest stops chewing at the mention of his name. "We still have a lot of questions."

Jeongguk slowly puts down his fork and swallows. He looks around the table at the faces of his teammates, all of them looking right back at him. He knew he owed everyone an explanation and he felt ready to talk about it now.

"Before I explain," He starts off and the rest of the team sits still, paying attention to every word. "There's something I haven't told you guys about my Manipulation.

"It's... something I don't even fully understand. My Shadow, it can do things on its own without my command and it's never been a big problem before until..." He glances over at Taehyung apologetically, and the older only gives him an encouraging nod, indicating for him to continue.

"It has a mind of its own, as weird as that may sound. Last night, it attacked one of the guys that kept trying to start a fight with me and I just couldn't..." He pauses, not sure how to express the overwhelming amount of anger he had felt last night. "I Just couldn't bring myself tell it to stop. I know it was wrong, but I wanted to finally, just for once, fight back. And my emotions just took over, and without even thinking about it, I was ordering it to attack Taehyung.

"I'm disappointed in myself for letting that happen." Jeongguk says quietly, looking down at his plate. "It won't happen again."

The rest of the team don't say anything for a while as they let Jeongguk's words sink in. It was a lot to take in at once; learning that their youngest member didn't have full control of his Powers and that his Power had a mind of its own...

Namjoon is the first to break the silence.

"Do you think you can get your Power to be fully under your control?"

Jeongguk contemplates the question for a while. He glances down at the floor at where his Shadow is casted, unmoving as it listens in on their conversation.
What do you think?

Shadow only cocks its head to the side as an answer.

"My Shadow is its own entity, an extension of myself." Jeongguk explains, thinking back to all the times Shadow had gone off on its own whenever he had classes, or done things of its own accord - like that time it had dragged Taehyung's shadow to the building Jeongguk had been at so they could finally come to face to face. "But I know I can work on controlling it better."

"Then it'll be done." Seokjin says firmly, giving Jeongguk a supportive smile. "I have some training tactics in mind for our next practice."

"It'll be a team effort. To learn how to harness all of our Powers better." Hoseok adds in, giving his trademark bright smile.

"I can't promise any of you I won't burn your eyebrows off in frustration, but I'm in." Yoongi says, grinning.

Jimin holds up his glass of milk. "To teamwork!"

And the rest of the team holds up their own glasses in cheers, shouting "To teamwork!" in unison, and Jeongguk can't help but smile - the first one in a long while - because he really appreciated that they were willing to make this into a team effort.

Under the table, he could feel his Shadow stir, a mixture of happiness and ease radiating from it, something Jeongguk hadn't felt from it for a long time.

Chapter End Notes

WOO AN UPDATE!!! HOPE U GUYS LIKED IT
im still abroad and dying from the heat here but still working on this au slowly lmao
feel free to leave me feedback! even on things you hope to see, i find knowing readers' perspectives super interesting :)

hope all ur summers are going well! & ty for all the kudos/comments so far, they're so encouraging <3
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There are many things Yoongi can claim that he is not with 100% certainty.

He’s told Namjoon many times before that he’s not a fan of waking up early. He’s mentioned it to Seokjin at almost every practice that he most definitely was not up for demonstrating that day’s exercise.

He is not the most energetic person and he’s pretty sure he can’t be beat in a sleeping contest.

There was another thing he had been so sure of before, and that was the fact that he was most certainly, undeniably, not the type to get attached.

Or, at least, that’s what he thought.

It’s Thursday morning and the team is gathered in the Dome where Seokjin is currently explaining the plan for the day’s practice - something about helping them gain more control over their Powers in more depth and whatnot.

Yoongi’s not really paying attention.

He’s looking over at where Jimin is sitting beside Taehyung, their heads inclined towards each other and their voices hushed as they chat away and laugh behind their hands. Yoongi finds this irrationally annoying and he tries to pinpoint exactly why.

He tells himself it’s because they should be paying attention to Seokjin instead of gossiping so goddamn early in the day. Yeah, that made sense.

Except, he’s had this same bitter taste at the back of his mouth for the past week and he didn’t get it at all. It had started after the mess that had been the Halloween party.

The Monday after that weekend, Seokjin had held practice in the bright and early hours of the morning. Yoongi was barely awake as usual while running their daily warm-up laps around the Dome.

He had been expecting Jimin to jog up to him with his routine ‘good morning hyung!’ coupled with his way-too-bright-for-7am smile like he had been doing for the past couple of months. But Jimin had been too immersed in conversation with Taehyung, the two roommates jogging side by side and laughing at something out of earshot.

It hadn’t bothered him all that much, but it kind of felt like his day had been thrown off. Like it hadn’t started off right.

Then on Tuesday, he had went to the library to study for their upcoming finals and assumed that Jimin was probably already there waiting for him as usual. But when he got to their usual table on the second floor, he was nowhere to be seen.
thought u were studying today?

Jimin’s reply a couple of minutes later had him frowning.

*studying in my room, tae needed some help with review. Ill see u tmr at practice hyung! ^^*

The day after, there had been practice in the evening.

On Wednesdays, Yoongi’s last class ended the same time Jimin’s did. The two had discovered this fact back in September after seeing each other at the cafeteria every Wednesday around dinnertime. In the beginning when the two hadn’t been close they had pretended not to notice. But after deciding that eating alone was not an enjoyable task for anyone, Yoongi had walked over to where Jimin had been sitting, shrugging as he asked him, “Eating alone kinda sucks, don’t you think?”

After that, every Wednesday they had dinner together, but this past Wednesday, Jimin was once again nowhere to be seen.

*skipping dinner?*

His phone had vibrated soon after and Jimin’s reply had left him feeling oddly disappointed.

*nah, made ramen in the dorms
we’ll be heading to practice later ill see u there!*

And by ‘we’ he knew he was referring to himself and Taehyung.

He had eaten his meal alone in the cafeteria for the first time in months.

After what had happened at the party to Taehyung, Jimin had felt a horrible pang of guilt for not having been able to prevent what had happened. As irrational as it sounded, he was convinced that as Taehyung’s best friend, he was partly to blame for Taehyung getting hurt.

He should have been able to protect him.

“You’re being unreasonable, Jimin. You couldn’t have prevented what happened.” Taehyung had told him when Jimin had voiced his thoughts one night as the two had been lying on their beds. “No one could have.”

“Still.” Jimin had turned his head to face his friend, his expression serious. "I should have done something."

“It’s fine, honestly.” Taehyung had replied. “Maybe you're just feeling guilty because you don't hang out with me as much?” He had suggested, half joking.

Truth be told, Jimin had been feeling like he hadn’t been around his best friend much lately. So he had decided that from now on, he’d dedicate more time to being by Taehyung’s side.
After their laps, the practice continues with something new that Seokjin had devised and was excited to try out today.

“Okay, we’ll be partnering up for today’s exercise. Being as honest as you can, tell your partner which areas you think they could improve on in terms of using their Powers on the field.” He explains, looking around at them.

“For example, if you think Hoseok could maybe work on controlling the magnitude of his gravitations or having better aim, be honest and tell him straight up.” He continues, giving Hoseok a grin.

“You already told me, hyung.” Hoseok responds, sitting leaning back onto his arms and looking amused. “But thanks for the reminder.”

“Anytime.” Seokjin smiles at his team and claps once. “Alright, let’s get started. We’ll switch partners until everyone’s been paired.”

Yoongi is paired off with Jimin after three rounds of switching partners.

They sit down on the ground and Jimin launches right off with the exercise. “I’m not really sure what you can improve on… I mean, your damage is pretty good. The only thing would your lighter, I guess, if you drop it or something.” He pauses and thinks some more before continuing.

“I don’t think you have a problem with your aim. That time you burned my arm was a pretty cheap shot, but I’ll let it slide.”

Jimin tells this with a laugh and expects Yoongi to retort, maybe joke about how he could have dodged it since he had Superhuman Agility. But he’s just looking at him with this strange expression and Jimin’s laughter trails off into silence until he’s no longer smiling.

“Hyung?”

“You seem to be doing a good job of not being around,” Yoongi says back, sarcasm dripping in every syllable. “So I guess you don’t have much to work on. Good use of your agility.”

Jimin has no idea what he’s talking about. “What are you-”

“Okay team, time’s up! Switch partners!” Seokjin yells out and Yoongi wordlessly gets up while Jimin’s left sitting there gaping after the older, wondering what had brought on his sour mood.
Jeongguk dreaded going to his classes. This week was shaping up to be the worst week he’s had to endure since coming to the Academy.

After what happened on the night of Halloween, the news had spread like wildfire until practically the whole school seemed to know what went down.

It’s been a nightmare, to say the least. The other students – not just in his own year anymore, now the Upperclassmen as well – seemed to think he was a live ticking bomb, giving him a wide berth in the hallways as if getting to close to him was something too dangerous to risk.

He had never felt more ostracized in his life.

Sitting in his seat at the very back of class, he hopes that he can get through the lecture without having any more dirty looks thrown at him. He’s had to endure a countless number of them on the way there already.

Twenty minutes into the lecture and he counts five reproachful looks thrown his way before his phone vibrates in his pocket. He takes it out, placing it between his legs. Looking down, he sees it’s from Taehyung.

*hey, you wanna take a break from class?*

Jeongguk definitely does, but he couldn’t exactly just walk out of class. He sends a reply as discreetly as he can.

*hell yess. but I can’t just disappear from class...?*

Taehyung replies a second later.

*you could. but it requires some experimenting*

Jeongguk stares at the word ‘experimenting’ with some interest.

Then a voice is whispering in his ear, scaring the living soul out of him.

“What the *fuck*, hyung?” Jeongguk whispers back, his eyes wide and staring at the not-so-empty seat beside him. “How long have you been here?”

“Not that long. Slipped in like ten minutes ago.”

It was Taehyung’s voice. Jeongguk wants to laugh because pulling something like this was so Taehyung. He was sitting right beside him, invisible but very much there and breathing down Jeongguk’s neck.

“What the *fuck*, hyung?” Jeongguk whispers back, his eyes wide and staring at the not-so-empty seat beside him. “How long have you been here?”

“Not that long. Slipped in like ten minutes ago.”

Jeongguk thinks Taehyung could probably make a very good robber.

“Don’t you have class?”

“Nope, and even if I did, this is more important. Look, I’ve been testing something out for a while.” Taehyung tells him excitedly in his invisible state. “I’ve been trying to extend my Power to someone else. So far it’s worked, if I really concentrate.”

“You can do that?” Jeongguk eyes widen in surprise. He knew Jimin could carry others with him as he moved with his superhuman speed but he had no idea Powers could be extended in such a
manner as Taehyung was describing.

“Well… it worked with the stuffed dolls I’ve been testing them on.”

Jeongguk should have known. “I’m not sure if you’ve noticed, but I breathe and don’t have fur.”

“Ha, ha. Funny.” Taehyung whispers back not sounding amused. “Listen, if it works, we can sneak out of here and grab some food.”

That sounded good to Jeongguk. But he was like, 99% sure it wouldn’t work. “Okay, but if something goes very wrong it’s all on you.”

Even though he can’t see Taehyung, Jeongguk just knows he’s grinning as he replies, “Just trust me.”

Yoongi decides to spend some time in his room instead of the library that afternoon. It’s November now, meaning finals were coming up in a couple of weeks and he hadn’t even started reviewing yet.

An hour in and Yoongi’s textbooks are splayed all over his desk. He’s just starting to get engrossed in his notes when his roommate walks in unceremoniously.

“Studying already?” Namjoon asks, making his way over to his bed and throwing his bag onto it.

Yoongi doesn’t look up when he answers. “Unlike you, the rest of us have to put in effort to get good grades.”

“Thought you’d be at the library again.” Namjoon tells him, now taking his blazer off.

Yoongi doesn’t reply to that. He probably would be, if a certain someone hadn’t started flaking so much.

As if reading his mind, Namjoon asks with an amused smile, “You’ve been so attached to Jimin lately, I was wondering if you forgot the rest of us existed.”

Yoongi whips his head around from his seat to stare at his roommate with narrowed eyes. “What?”

“I mean, you’re with him practically everyday.” Namjoon says, like he was stating the day’s weather.

Okay, yes, that was true. But Yoongi hadn’t really thought about how the other team members viewed them and it was strange to hear it.

But Namjoon was wrong. He wasn’t the type to get attached. He was not.

“I’m not attached to him.” He says, turning back to his notes.

“Right.” The Telepath looks over at Yoongi in amusement, sitting on his bed and putting on a pair
of sweats. “You guys are just good friends, right?”

Yoongi thinks back to the past couple of weeks and all the things that had happened between him and Jimin.

It’s been a flurry of events and he remembers what had happened in the bathroom still so clearly. How physically close they had been in that tiny space… how damn teasing they had been with each other. And waking up still half-asleep in the same bed and pulling Jimin closer to himself without giving it a second thought.

“Right?” Namjoon repeats, watching Yoongi with a curious expression.

Yoongi doesn’t say anything. Yes, they had become close, and up until this week he was pretty sure their friendship had been steering towards another direction… Now he wasn’t certain about anything except for the fact that maybe he’s a little bit annoyed with Jimin being MIA and always with Taehyung.

“Doesn’t really matter, does it.” He says quietly.

He can’t see it, but Namjoon gives him a sheepish smile while shaking his head.

“Okay, if I really concentrate on getting you to disappear and keep touching you the whole time, I think it’ll work.” Taehyung explains to Jeongguk is a hushed voice.

“Do you have to phrase it like that?” Jeongguk splutters, questioning Taehyung’s voice of words.

“Sorry – if we maintain physical contact.” Taehyung corrects not even batting a lash. “Just don’t freak out under any circumstances, got it?”

“Won’t people notice if I just poof out of thin air?”

“I thought this out, young grasshopper.” Taehyung sounds so determined about this that Jeongguk can’t help but find it endearing. “I’m going to create a distraction. It’ll give us maybe three minutes of everyone’s diverted attention and we can slip out.”

“You really have nothing better to do, don’t you?” Jeongguk asks jokingly. He’s looking forward to seeing what the ‘distraction’ could possibly be.

“I just wanted to try this out, okay?” Jeongguk can’t see it but he thinks Taehyung’s probably rolling his eyes at him. “Not like I want to hang out with you or anything, Jeon Jeongguk.”

Jeongguk wishes he could control the churning in the pit of his stomach at hearing those words.

“Okay, here I go. Be right back.”

The distraction turns out to be Taehyung standing in the middle of the hallway screaming at the top of his lungs, sounding like a dying pterodactyl. It works, causing everyone in the classroom to stop what they’re doing to rush out of their seats and see what the hell could be making such an
inhuman noise.

Kim Taehyung is absolutely 100% shameless, Jeongguk decides.

He has no time to laugh at Taehyung’s antics as he finds himself being dragged out of his chair. He barely manages to grab his bag before he’s being rushed out the door, down the hallway and down a few flights of stairs, being led by an invisible hand gripping tightly onto his wrist.

When they finally stop in front of the building entrance, Taehyung reappears and he’s looking at Jeongguk wearing that familiar square smile of his.

“What the hell was that?” Jeongguk asks, still panting and trying to catch his breath.

“Jeongguk, look at your hand.”

He does. Or, he tries, because - “WOAH.” - he doesn’t have a hand to look at. “No way, what the hell - Tae, you did it!”

He looks at the rest of himself in amazement but there’s nothing to look at.

So this was what it felt like to be out of eyesight.

It was a pretty fucking cool feeling, he had to admit.

“I told you it’d work!” Taehyung lets go of his hold on Jeongguk and the instant their physical contact is broken, Jeongguk reappears.

“I hate to say I told you so but,” Taehyung grins, reappearing a moment later as he stuffs his hands in the pocket of his uniform pants. “Told you so.”

Jeongguk just rolls his eyes at him, but he’s pretty impressed nonetheless.

Taehyung smiles brightly at him, opening the door and leading the way outside. “Now how about that food I was talking about earlier?”

Jeongguk can’t help but smile back because Taehyung was such a dork sometimes (all the time).

“You’re paying, right?”

Taehyung gives him the cheekiest grin. “Nope.”

Jeongguk doesn't even mind.

Once they’re seated with their plates of burgers, Taehyung takes out his phone and starts scrolling through his pictures.

“Oh, I almost forgot. You won’t believe this,” Taehyung hands him his phone across the cafeteria table and Jeongguk takes it. “My mom sent me old photos of us from back when we were kids. Told me she missed me and was asking how you were doing.”
“You’re kidding.” Jeongguk scrolls through the photo album and sure enough, there were dozens of photos of him and Taehyung in their pre-teen years. “Your mom really liked taking photos of us, I remember.”

He pauses at one picture - Taehyung’s smiling at the camera with a big gap where his two front teeth should’ve been. “Oh wow, I forgot you wore glasses back then.”

“I think I pulled them off pretty well.”

“Whatever helps you sleep at night.” Jeongguk replies, laughing. “Is it just me or did you never grow out of your dorky phase?” He asks while looking at a picture of Taehyung jumping on his couch in nothing but tighty whiteys and a towel wrapped around his neck, pretending he was Superman.

“Keep scrolling until you get to the picture of you crying over losing to me at Pokemon.”

Sure enough, there’s a picture of the two of them playing on their Game Boy Colour, Jeongguk clearly upset and in tears while Taehyung was looking at him with an apologetic expression.

“Ten years later and I still can’t believe you cried.”

Jeongguk laughs freely for the first time that week. Being with Taehyung was comfortable. It was easy to forget about the reputation he carried with him and the hushed voices whispering things about him as he passed by. Even if it was just for a little while.

He’s almost done looking through the album when he pauses at a particular one. It’s a snapshot of the two of them playing at a playground that he remembers being only five minutes away from their apartment.

Jeongguk’s sitting on a swing and Taehyung’s pushing him from behind and the photo had been captured the instant Taehyung had his hands resting on Jeongguk’s shoulders, ready to push him higher.

But the way he’s looking at Jeongguk has him staring harder. The look he’s giving him is both fond but protective, more caring than brotherly and he remembers Taehyung shouting, “Grab on tight, okay? So you don’t fall, Kookie!”

He slides to the next photo and he remembers this one surprisingly clearly. It had been his tenth birthday and he had celebrated it with a few of the neighbourhood kids and his classmates. They had ordered pizza and had been eating his chocolate cake when he had accidentally dropped his slice on the floor.

Just recalling the memory is embarrassing but seeing it in a physical snapshot is even worse, Jeongguk thinks. In the photo he’s sniffling and he remembers how inconsolable he had been about having dropped his birthday cake until Taehyung had come to his side and put his own plate in Jeongguk’s hands.

“You’re in double digits now, Jeongguk! Big boys don't cry. Or else their wishes won’t come true and you don’t want that, right?”

Jeongguk hands back Taehyung his phone.

“We were pretty cute, huh?” Taehyung asks.

They were more than just cute together. They had been inseparable. Taehyung had taken Jeongguk
under his wing, knowing he was shyer than most kids and needed a nudge once in a while to come out of his shell and interact with the other neighbourhood kids.

“We were.” Jeongguk had always appreciated their friendship and the way the older looked out for him. Taehyung had been a constant in his childhood and now that they had each other again, he feels happier than he’s felt in a while.

But the happiness is short-lived.

He would never voice it out loud, but an awful, ever-present feeling of guilt had been eating away at him the entire week. It was strongest whenever he was around the older and it’s back in full force.

*You hurt him,* it reminds him now. *Knocked him down, made him bleed, caused him pain.*

*Remember that?*

He wishes he could erase what had happened last weekend. Even without photos as a reminder, he knew he would never forget it.

“Are you gonna finish your fries?” Taehyung asks, pointing at his plate.

Jeongguk shakes his head. “No, go ahead.” He hands him his unfinished fries and Taehyung smiles at him, his eyes becoming crescents and he thinks it’s probably the highlight of his week, being the cause of that smile.

It’s a hopeless cause, he thinks, looking away.

*Don’t kid yourself. He’ll never feel the same way.*

By the time evening rolls around Jimin’s still thinking about what Yoongi had said that morning.

*You seem to be doing a good job of not being around.*

Now that he thinks about it, he hasn’t spoken to Yoongi properly since last week. But surely that’s nothing to get upset over? Still, Jimin hadn’t missed the hostility in Yoongi’s tone that morning.

Jimin takes out his phone from the pocket of his jeans. Maybe he should text him. Ask him what he meant. It was probably nothing - he was probably overthinking it - why would Yoongi be mad? He was probably just having a rough morning or something like that.

Sitting down on his bed he lets out a breath before dialling the familiar number.

“Yeah?” The older’s voice sounds gruff and not very enthusiastic to be answering the call.

It throws Jimin off - he doesn’t know what he had been expecting, but it sure as hell wasn’t that.
“Um, hey.” His voice comes out small and uncertain and now he’s not sure if calling was a good idea. He clears his throat and tries again. “I was just calling ’cause, um. I mean, you’re probably busy but I was just - “

“Look, I have things to do.” Yoongi says impatiently and Jimin feels like he’s been doused in ice water. Yoongi’s been cold to him before, back in the beginning of the year - but he’s never been this short with him.

“I was just, um.” Jimin replies, his voice coming out a little shaky and he mentally scolds himself for it. “I was just wondering what you meant this morning when you -”

Just then, Taehyung comes into the room and heads straight towards his dressers. He starts taking off his uniform trousers as he turns around and asks, “Jimin, have you seen my boxers? The one you stole like two months ago?”

Jimin doesn’t even have time to process the stupid question because Yoongi’s laughing and it almost sounds like he’s sneering when he says, “You seem busy. I’ll go.”

“Wait, hyung - “ But the line’s dead already.

Jimin stares at his phone for a good minute before Taehyung snaps him out of it.

“Never mind, found them!”

Friday is the busiest day of the week for Seokjin.

He has his weekly Prefect meetings in the evening after a full afternoon of classes and then team practice right afterwards which meant he was always dead tired by the time he got back to his apartment.

Fridays were honestly a pain in his ass.

Except, Namjoon kind of made them bearable by taking the stress of planning Friday practices off his hands. He hadn’t even asked him to and he had a slight suspicion Namjoon’s Telepathy had something to do with it, but was grateful nonetheless.

“You look dead as usual.” Is the Telepath’s way of greeting when Seokjin steps inside the Preparation Area of the Dome that evening, sitting on the benches tying up the laces to his sneakers.

“Hello to you, too.” Seokjin deadpans, opening his locker and dumping his backpack into it. “God, the meeting went on for way too long and afterwards the President pulled me aside to talk about the Games for an entire hour.”

“What did he want to talk about?” Namjoon asks, now leaning back on the lockers and looking over at where Seokjin was now changing out of his uniform and into their usual practice wear.

“He wanted to know how our training was coming along. Asked me about the new members, how they were adjusting to the team dynamics.” The captain stuffs his blazer into his locker and starts
unbuttoning his crisp white shirt. “It may sound weird, but it felt like he already knew everything I told him. Like, he didn’t seem surprised or anything when I explained about Jeongguk.”

“Really?” Namjoon asks. “He could have heard about Jeongguk from a lot of sources, though, after what happened last weekend.”

“He also wanted to know if he could watch us in person during one of our practices after winter break.” Seokjin looks deep in thought as he undoes the last button and peels off the shirtsleeves. “He didn’t ask to watch us last year, though.”

“What’d you tell him?” Namjoon asks a little distractedly, diverting his eyes from the older’s pale chest and finding his converse suddenly very interesting.

“I couldn’t exactly refuse, he’s the Pres.” Seokjin laughs lightly while pulling on a black tee but not missing the way Namjoon was avoiding looking his direction. “And since when did you act all shy? Not like you haven’t seen me shirtless before.”

That has Namjoon smiling sheepishly. “You bring it up so casually, hyung.” He says, looking up and meeting the older’s gaze.

“What, can’t old flames joke about this stuff?”

Before the Telepath can reply, Hoseok walks in with Yoongi by his side and the two greet them with nods.

“So what’s the plan for tonight?” Hoseok asks as he opens his locker and beside him, Yoongi does the same.

“I’ll explain when everyone gets here.” Namjoon answers.

“If it involves that hellish thing called crossfit again,” Yoongi comments as he starts taking off his tie. “I will personally see to it that you have an early funeral.”

“Can it not be one of those ‘trust’ activities again?” Hoseok asks, pulling a face. “I appreciate the idea behind them, I really do, but I don’t think catching someone falling is going to help us win the Games.”

“Just wait til everyone gets here.” Is all Namjoon says and Yoongi and Hoseok doesn’t question it any further as they resume changing.

The way Namjoon’s looking more serious and determined than usual has Seokjin wondering what the Year 4’s got planned for tonight.

“Alright, here’s the deal,” Namjoon announces half an hour later once everyone gathered around him in a circle in the middle of the Dome. “We’re going to face each other in teams of three’s with me as ref.” He pauses as he looks around at them.
“But we’ll be blindfolded.” He holds up six black pieces of cloth and the team’s reactions are a mixture of surprise and confusion.

“What?” Hoseok calls out, looking at Namjoon like maybe he heard him wrong. “Why blindfolded?”

“To help us be more in tune with each other.” Namjoon answers simply and Yoongi had this strangest feeling like he was looking right at him as he said it.

“What if we accidentally aim at our own teammates?” Jeongguk asks, looking uncertain about the idea.

Namjoon doesn't sound like he’s joking when he replies. “Try not to.”

They group off into two groups of three’s with Hoseok, Jimin and Seokjin in one team, Yoongi, Taehyung and Jeongguk in the other.

Once each group is standing on opposite ends of a battlefield, Namjoon walks to the middle and raises his voice as he lays out the rules. “Firstly, no taking off your blindfolds. First team to step outside the white lines loses.”

“A little help, Hoseok?” He looks towards the Gravity Manipulator.

Hoseok obliges, gravitating the blindfolds out of Namjoon’s hands and sending three of them to the opposite end of the field and the other three towards his own team.

Once everyone’s holding a black cloth each, Namjoon steps towards the sidelines.

“Alright, everyone put them on.”

Yoongi had some doubts about this whole thing but he supposes Namjoon knew what he was doing. He ties the blindfold around his eyes, then takes out the lighter from his back pocket, flicking it open.

Beside him, he can hear Taehyung and Jeongguk shuffling about, digging their feet deeper into the ground. He wonders how Taehyung’s invisibility was going to be any use in this situation, since no one could see him anyways.

“Guys,” Jeongguk whispers at them and Yoongi turns his head in the direction of his voice. “My Shadow will guide us through, so just go with it, alright?”

Yoongi had almost forgotten that Shadow of his was a thing of it’s own. He grins. “Alright.”

“Everyone ready?” Namjoon asks them.

From the opposite side, Jimin feels a hand on his arm and although he can’t see, he knows it’s Seokjin - his grip was always firm and stable.

“I can tell apart which member is which by reading their emotions,” Seokjin tells them, his voice low. “So just keep an ear out, got it?”

“Oh my count,” Namjoon shouts out while looking over at the two teams. He grins, thinking how
it was about time they started to get more comfortable with each other.

At the very top floor of the Academy is a vast, elaborately decorated room that had served as the office of the past Presidents during their terms. Its walls are lined with portraits of said past Presidents and the floor is carpeted with finest Persian rugs one could find.

In this office, the current President, Universo, sits behind a massive oak desk on the throne chair, his legs crossed as he looks out the floor-to-ceiling window.

Out the window is a breathtaking view of the entirety of the Academy’s campus; every building, every dorm and every lecture hall could be seen from up here.

He recounts the number of times he’s studied the campus from this high up. It was probably the same number of times he’s sat in this chair planning out what he had in mind for the upcoming term.

It was the only thing keeping him rooted to his position. For an entire decade, he had spent hours in this office overlooking the small details and minor nuances that came with running an institution this large. The mind-numbing paperwork, interviews with students, meeting whining parents, and answering trivial questions when he could have been doing much more important things.

It’s been a long ten years, but finally he was going to see to it that his dreams became a reality, once and for all.

The sound of knocking on his door brings him back to the present.

He clears his throat before answering. “Yes, come in.”

His assistant steps inside and bows once before announcing, “Sir, the Bureau is requesting your presence in next week’s meeting for the annual Games.”

“Regarding?” He knew very well what it was going to be about but asks nonetheless.

“The organizing committee requires your approval on the proposed three tasks for this year.”

He turns back to the window and the corners of his mouth lift upwards into a smirk.

“Tell them I’ll be there.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Oh and one more thing,” He says without turning around. “Tell them I have a slight change of plans for the third task.”

“Yes, sir.”
WOO an update, hope u guys liked it!
so theres going to be some shit going down from here on.... stay tuned
and sry that yoonmin isn't all butterflies and rainbows lmao that would be too boring.
also i'm amazed at the number of kudos this fic is getting, i can't thank you guys
enough for liking it :_; <3 huge thanks to tofu and luisa for beta-ing!!

pls pls feel free to leave me comments/feedback i enjoy reading your thoughts so
much <3
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

i suggest you all read ch.10 before this chapter to refresh your minds :) 
also listen to Run as you read through

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"On my mark," Comes Namjoon's low voice from the sidelines as he looks at both ends of the battlefield. "Get set..."

Seokjin can't see anything behind the black cloth covering his eyes, but he can feel the energy of the members on either side of him. Jimin on his left is radiating both excitement and nervous energy, while Hoseok to his right has an aura that's more calm and collected.

Looking straight ahead, Seokjin focuses his Empathy on the opposite team. He can sense them coming closer, but from this distance it's impossible to separate one from the other.

"They're coming this way," He tells the other two. "On my count, go in opposite directions to throw them off. Don't let Jeongguk's Shadow get you until I tell you what to do next."

Jimin swallows. "And what's that?"

"Just follow my instructions for now," Seokjin could tell the other team wasn't far away now. "On 3."

The air inside the Dome is stiff as Yoongi inhales and slowly exhales, the smell of sweat mixing in with the tense energy surrounding him.

"Jeongguk, get to Seokjin first," Yoongi instructs the youngest member in a low voice. "He can tell us apart with his Power."

Yoongi closes his eyes for a second and letting out another deep breath, he takes out his lighter from his jean pocket and flicks it open, gathering the flame into his hand.

"Leave the other two to me." Yoongi wanted to get tonight's practice over with. The blindfold over his eyes was annoying him already.

Beside him, Yoongi can feel the motions of Jeongguk fidgeting and shifting his weight from one foot to the other.
"What is it?" He asks.

"I don't know, my Shadow, it's..." Jeongguk trails off and Yoongi can tell by his hushed tone that something's off. "It's not listening to me."

From the distance comes Namjoon's "GO!" and without warning, in the next second, Yoongi feels a rush of movement.

"What-" He doesn't have time to finish his question before Jeongguk is being dragged forward by extension of his otherworldly dimension.

"AGH" Jeongguk cries out, almost tripping on his own feet when he's jerked forward, his feet hitting the ground on their own as he finds himself running towards the other end of the field.

"Jeongguk!" Taehyung shouts from the other side. "What's going on?"

From a few feet behind, Yoongi grits his teeth. This wasn't going the way he had planned.

"1," Seokjin starts counting down out loud as soon as he senses the other team coming closer and closer to their side.

In the lead is undoubtedly Jeongguk and his Shadow - Seokjin's Empathy could easily pick Jeongguk apart from the others. He had a strange mixture of confidence and anxiety, like he wasn't sure of the extent of his capabilities just yet, but was well aware of his potential at the same time.

"2."

To Jeongguk's right was Yoongi, there was no mistaking that fiery persona of his teammate. And Taehyung was distinguishable by his positive energy.

"Ready?" Seokjin asks the two beside him quietly. He doesn't see it, but Jimin and Hoseok nod in response.

"Jimin, Yoongi is running at us from your side. Go at him but attack from behind, on my count. Hoseok, do the same with Taehyung, got it?"

Again, his two teammates nod silently.

Seokjin gathers all his senses and focuses on the three moving bodies coming at them. They were just a few feet away now.

"Pay attention to their movements," Seokjin advises them. "Ready?"

The sound of their approaching footsteps were clearly audible now.

"NOW!"
From the sidelines, Namjoon watches in anticipation as Yoongi, Taehyung and Jeongguk come just feet away from Seokjin, Jimin and Hoseok's end of the field.

"Come on guys," He mutters under his breath. He had come up with this exercise with the hopes that his members would learn to be more in tune with each other.

As soon as Jeongguk, Taehyung and Yoongi are within an arms distance from Seokjin's team, Jimin and Hoseok start running off in opposite directions, but Seokjin stands his ground, coming face to face with the youngest member.

Jeongguk's Shadow stands between them like a silent referee.

Namjoon narrows his eyes.

This was going to be interesting.

"Shit," Yoongi mutters under his breath, unsure of what was happening now - he was certain he heard the other team's footsteps, but they sounded like they were heading in opposite directions.

"What's going on?" Beside him, he can hear Taehyung’s haggard breaths, but Jeongguk is oddly silent.

Instead of the Shadow Manipulator's expected reply, Seokjin's familiar voice breaks the silence with a sarcastic, "Nice seeing you, Yoongi."

Before he can even retort, a blow strikes him across his left cheek leaving him momentarily stunned.

Yoongi yells out, stumbling backward. He doesn't drop his lighter thankfully and in the next second he's gathered a ball of blazing flame in his right hand, ready to get back at whoever got him first.

"Who the fuck-" But he's cut off when a solid mass knocks into him from behind.

There was no mistaking the speed of the movement.

"Jimin?" He spits out in disbelief.

"Sorry, hyung." Comes Jimin's familiar voice from somewhere to his left, and the honest apologetic tone makes Yoongi almost wants to laugh.

"You twat," Straightening up, Yoongi strains his ears to pick up on any sudden movements. "Don't apologize on the field."

Quickly turning around, he aims his fire at the direction of Jimin's footsteps but knows it's a hopeless feat. His superhuman agility had the upper hand in this situation.
"This is bull," He mutters under his breath. He's about to aim another ball of flame when Jeongguk's sudden shouting pierces the air:

"Get out of my head!"

No doubt that was directed at the team captain; Yoongi's experienced Seokjin's Empathy himself many times before during practices and he had hated every single second of it.

Before he can dwell on it, Yoongi hears the sound of hurried footfalls coming at his direction, but this time he's prepared. Bracing himself, he waits until the very last second before hurling himself to the side, barely dodging the opponent's attack.

"Gotta be quicker than that," Yoongi spits out.

"Can't dodge me forever, hyung." Jimin fires back. The taunting tone in his voice gnaw at Yoongi's nerve.

"Try me."

Yoongi quickly flicks open his lighter and absorbs the kinetic energy into the palm of his hand, ready to counterstrike any second.

The second Jimin hears the sound of his metal lighter opening, he moves faster than any normal person possibly could as he heads towards the direction of the warmth radiating off Yoongi's Fire Manipulation.

Knocking the lighter out of the older's hand with one hand and grappling him by the neck with the other, Jimin forces Yoongi to hit the floor, hard.

"Sorry," He mutters.

Yoongi grunts in pain as his face slams down onto the ground, the bitter taste of dirt lining his mouth.

He had to admit, Jimin was getting better at combat. The corner of his lips quirk up despite himself. He was lying face down on the ground in defeat, yet he was proud of Jimin and how much he's improved.

He pulls himself up on his elbows and spits the gravel out of his mouth.

"I told you. Don't fucking apologize."

In the middle of the field, the Empath can sense the doubt and confusion emanating from the youngest member standing in front of him. His Empathy was breaking past the first few barriers of the Shadow Manipulator, but he was going to have to do better.

Focusing harder, Seokjin wills his voice to grows louder inside Jeongguk's head.
Whatever you've been told about this exercise, forget it.

Jeongguk's breathing becomes more uneven and Seokjin can tell he's trying to fight off the foreign voice inside his head.

He's about to give the final command when Namjoon's voice suddenly cuts through his focus.

"STOP," Namjoon shouts. "Guys, stop! Take your blindfolds off."

Seokjin goes still in confusion - Namjoon had never interrupted in the middle of a practice before.

"What is it?" He asks in annoyance, ripping the black cloth off his eyes. Running a frustrated hand through his hair, he looks over at the Telepath's direction and immediately notices something unusual.

Standing beside Namjoon is a tall, dark figure dressed head to toe in the darkest shade of grey, to the point where the man's suit was almost black.

"President Universo?" Seokjin says quietly in disbelief, letting the blindfold drop to the ground. During all five years of his being on the school team, Universo had never visited in the middle of a practice before.

"Captain Kim." The President's deep voice greets, his piercing gaze coming to level with Seokjin's. "I must apologize. I don't mean to be rude in interrupting your practice, but an urgent matter requires your attention."

Around him, the rest of the team starts to slowly remove their blindfolds and once they see why their practice had come to an abrupt end, they look at one another with confused expressions. Yoongi narrows his eyes as soon he realizes who the tall figure is while Jeongguk's dark eyes widen in surprise.

"Urgent matter?" Seokjin repeats, walking forward. Beside the President, Namjoon looks just as confused as the rest of the team. "Certainly you could have waited until the end of our practice, sir?"

President Universo studies Seokjin for a few seconds before smiling ruefully. "You're right about that. I could have. But," He looks around at the rest of them with an unreadable expression. "The sooner you hear about this, the better."

Seokjin tries to think of any reason why the President could have come all the way to the Dome by himself instead of sending a messenger or addressing the matter in the next Prefect meeting. But he draws a blank.

"Whatever it is, you can tell it to the rest of the team as well, sir." The Captain says as he walks up right in front of the President. Standing face to face, he realizes their heights are about the same. Seokjin can't help but find the President’s rigid presence in the glass hemisphere of the Dome more than unfitting.

Universo doesn't reply immediately; he takes a few seconds to adjust his cuff links before answering. "I'm afraid this is sensitive information," He looks at the other five members in turn before turning his gaze back to Seokjin. "There is a meeting taking place in my office in a few minutes and the Bureau requests your presence, Captain Kim."

"You came all the way here to tell me that, sir?" Seokjin asks, narrowing his eyes. This was unexpected, to say the least. Why would the Bureau want him in their meeting? They were the
overseeing committee responsible for governing the Society of Superheroes as well as the Academies across the continent. What kind of ‘important matter’ would need his input?

Universo doesn't miss a beat when he responds with a small smile. "Indeed." He gestures towards the exit of the Dome with one gloved hand. "And the meeting is starting quite soon so I came to get you myself. After you, Captain."

Seokjin glances at Namjoon and sees the worried expression on the Telepath. Giving a quick reassuring nod, Seokjin speaks up and looks around at his team.

"Good practice tonight, team." He gives a quick smile to ease their hard expressions. "Even though our practice was cut short, we'll pick up where we left off. Now get some rest and we'll meet here tomorrow, same time."

With that, Seokjin turns to face Universo again, who nods towards the Dome's exit. Walking alongside the President towards the sliding doors, Seokjin can't help but feel uncertain with each step he takes.

In the Preparation Area's locker room, Namjoon dries his wet hair in auto-mode, too lost in his thoughts to pay any attention to the water slowly dripping onto his white shirt, drip by drip by drip.

Just moments ago, he had tried to read the thoughts of the President during his conversation with Seokjin but for the first time in his life, his Powers had failed him.

_How?_ He asks himself for the millionth time. _How did he deflect my Power so easily?_

Usually, he was able to catch a few glimpses of his target's thoughts before any attempts to deflect or block his Powers, but with Universo, his attempts had been completely repelled.

A hand on his shoulder pulls him back to reality. Shaking himself out of it, Namjoon turns to the side to see who the hand belongs to.

"You okay?" Hoseok asks him, a worried look on his face.

Namjoon furrows his brows and turns back around to face the locker in front of him.

When he doesn't reply, Hoseok says quietly, "Why would the President come all the way here? By himself? It's a bit out of place, in my opinion."

The Telepath silently agrees, but he's still fixated on how Universo had deflected his Powers so easily. "What exactly is Universo's power?"

"I'm not sure," Hoseok answers as he sits down on the bench and leans his head against the lockers. "I've heard his primary power is Hypnosis, but it could be just students making up rumors."

"They're not rumors."
Everyone turns around to stare at who had spoken. It was Jeongguk, and the way he had spoken with such confidence in his words catches all of them by surprise.

"What do you mean?" Taehyung asks him quietly from the bench beside him.

"Just now," Jeongguk starts to explain a little breathlessly. "On the battlefield, at the start of the practice my Shadow wasn't listening to me. It was controlling me, making me run towards the opposite side." He thinks back to how his Shadow had pulled him forward - it wasn't unusual for Shadow to lead him in directions, but he always had kept a level of control of his movements when that happened.

But this time, he had felt like a helpless puppet under his Shadow's control.

"Hyung," The Shadow Manipulator turns to face Namjoon's direction. "When did Universo come up beside you?" He asks with urgency.

Namjoon catches on quickly. "I didn't notice him until you were facing Seokjin hyung," He replies honestly. "He came to stand beside me around then."

"But he could have been inside the Dome way before that, using his Powers on Jeongguk." Taehyung says, his tone serious and expression full of worry. "Which doesn't make sense to me - why would he want to disrupt our practice like that?"

No one says anything for a while, each member too distraught by the turn of events to speak.

Namjoon is the first to break the silence. “Before we jump to conclusions, we should see what Seokjin hyung has to say tomorrow.” He tells the rest of the team. “We should wait ‘til we find out what the meeting was for.”

With that, they start to pack up their bags, all of them feeling exhausted from the night’s events. None of them have much to say as they head towards the sliding exit doors.

Yoongi stays behind as the rest of his teammates leave the locker room to bandage up his left wrist. He had landed on his left hand when Jimin had knocked him to the ground, and now it was throbbing painfully.

It takes a while, but he gets the job done. Standing up, he slings his bag over his shoulder and shuts his locker. When turns around, he's startled to see that Jimin's still in the change room. He's standing a few feet away from him, his arms crossed and looking at Yoongi with his jaw set.

Yoongi diverts his gaze and moves to walk past him, but Jimin side-steps him so he's blocking his way.

“You’ve been acting weird this whole week.” Jimin's statement reverberates through the silence of the locker room and Yoongi swallows. He supposes he should have seen this coming, knowing Jimin.

Yoongi doesn't reply for a while. When he looks up to meet the younger's eyes, he sees that he's dead serious.

"Dunno what you're talking about." He mutters.

Jimin scoffs, his eyes narrowing. "Seriously?"

Yoongi tries again to move past him, but Jimin's quick to block him again. Yoongi doesn't want to
having this conversation now, or ever.

“I’m giving you three seconds or I’ll make you get out of my way.” Yoongi warns, his voice low.

Jimin doesn't budge. “Answer me first.”

“One.”

“Stop being stubborn and just – “

“Two.”

“Was it because I was with Tae and – “

“Thr-“

“Hyung!” Jimin never raises his voice, ever, so it catches Yoongi off guard. He stares, kind of struck by the fact that Jimin had just yelled at him.

“This is fucking childish.”

Yoongi exhales, trying to think of how to get out of here when Jimin demands, “Just tell me why you’re pissed off so we can move on.”

“I’m not.” Yoongi replies as he shoves past Jimin, finally getting past him, but Park fucking Jimin - with his Superhuman Agility - is standing between Yoongi and the exit in the next second like a stubborn human wall.

“Are you seriously trying to ignore me?” Jimin asks, the disbelief clear in every etch of his frown.

“Fuck, Jimin,” Yoongi says exasperatedly, “you’ve been ignoring me.”

Jimin just stares at him with his mouth slightly open at that statement and Yoongi feels so childish. This whole conversation was childish. It's not like he's even attached to Jimin, so why the fuck is he getting all worked up over this?

“Never mind.” He rubs a hand over his face and lets his hand drop to his side. "Forget it. Just get out of the -“

“I wasn’t ignoring you,” Jimin says quietly, watching him carefully. “I was just spending time with Tae more.”

"Yeah, I noticed." Yoongi runs a hand through his hair feeling more frustrated than before. "Now will you move out of the way?”

But as Jimin watches Yoongi's reaction and thinks of the past week's events, something clicks in his head. When the realization finally hits him, his lips quirk upwards because this was so unlike Yoongi. He almost doesn't believe it, but there's no other explanation for it and he ends up blurting out,

“Are you jealous?”

Yoongi shuts up mid-sentence and his mouth hangs slightly open as he regards Jimin with both shock and disbelief. "I - what?"

Jimin's eyes widen as he realizes he's fucking right. The fact that Yoongi - Min Yoongi - was
jealous over Jimin hanging out with his best friend over him has him bursting out laughing. “Sorry, I’m not laughing at you, I’m - ” He tries to stifle his laughter but fails pretty badly.

“I’m leaving.” Yoongi can't be here being laughed at. He tries to head towards the sliding doors, but a strong pair of hands on his shoulders hold him back.

“No, wait! Hyung.” Jimin says, looking apologetic. "I'm sorry that we haven't hung out lately. And I get it, you’re not jealous, I was just kidding."

But that was it, Yoongi thinks hopelessly. That bitter taste at the back of his throat, the sour mood he’s been lately… it was jealousy. That was the only truthful explanation for it, and he was completely aware of it now.

He wishes he wasn't.

He lets out a deep sigh. “You’re a pain in my ass, you know that?”

Jimin smiles at him - that blinding, million-watt smile he's grown accustomed to - and tells him quietly, "It wouldn't hurt you once in awhile to admit you miss hanging out with me, you know?"

Yoongi can positively feel his ears turning red and he hated that Jimin could have his effect on him. He pulls his hoodie low over his head, covering his ears. He did miss hanging out with Jimin, he missed his way-too-high-pitched laugh, he missed their pointless arguments over dumb things.

He had missed stupid Jimin, even if it was just a few short weeks without him, and he wasn't 100% comfortable admitting that to himself yet.

But Jimin seemed to have understood him better than himself, somehow.

The younger slings an arm over his shoulder like the past week hadn't happened and asks, “Also, this pain in your ass is starving. Wanna get some food?”

Yoongi rolls his eyes as they walk through the sliding doors. “Now is definitely not the time.”

“I know a good place nearby campus if you’re willing to pay.” Jimin offers, shameless and smiling at him like his usual self.

“Do I look like I'm made of money?” Yoongi mutters, stuffing his hands inside his jean pockets, noting how the weight of Jimin's arms on his shoulder feels so familiar now.

“Then we can split half half.” Jimin offers cheerfully.

And Yoongi can't help but laugh because he missed this. He missed how easily they could slip into conversation.

Maybe he wasn't the type to get attached, but he definitely had missed this familiarity.

“Hell no,” He tells Jimin, cracking a smile for the first time in weeks. "You're paying full."
i hope you guys liked the update!! for new readers, welcome!!
from here on there will be some angst. you've been warned

pls feel free to leave any thoughts or comments! i love hearing them :)}
When Seokjin enters the vast high-ceiling room of the President's office, he's impressed by the sheer size and decor of the space. The floor-to-ceiling window with the impressive view coupled with the dark oak furniture and Persian rugs made it clear that the occupant of this room was of someone importance.

The room is silent despite the fact that there are a little less than a dozen people seated around the oval table. Quickly scanning their faces, Seokjin doesn't recognize a single individual.

Two men and two women wearing all black with the Bureau's symbol pinned onto their chest sit on the farther end of the table. The rest of the seats are filled by who Seokjin assumes are students like himself, except none are familiar to him. Considering the fact that he's been at the Academy for six years, he concludes they must either be foreign students or exchanges.

"Please, Captain, take a seat." The President's deep voice instructs.

Seokjin does as he's told, sitting down in the leather chair on the opposite end. The room is still - the unfamiliar faces glance at Seokjin as he sits, but Universo speaks up again, drawing their attention back to him.

"I would like to sincerely thank all of you for being here today," The President starts off, voice loud and clear in the spacious office. "Before we get to business, let's start this meeting off with some friendly introductions. Shall we?"

Giving them all a small smile, he gestures at the man sitting to his nearest left. The man stands up, tucking in a navy tie into his black jacket.

"Hello everyone," He greets, giving them all a quick handsome smile. "My name is Suho, the Executive Director of the Ministry of Education for the Bureau. I look forward to working with you all for the upcoming Games."

Once Suho takes a seat, the woman sitting beside him stands up and gives them a sweeping glance. With a flick of her long blonde ponytail she says, "My name is Lee Chaerin, and I am the Co-Director of the Ministry of Entertainment, along with my colleague Youngbae." She gestures to the man sitting across from her.

Seokjin can't help but be impressed by the amount of authority these Bureau officials commanded with just their presence. Youngbae stands up and looks at each of them in turn before speaking.

"As my colleague mentioned, I am the other Director for the Entertainment Ministry. Chaerin and I will be working closely to ensure this year's Games is the best one the world has seen yet."

The last person dressed in all black stands up once Youngbae's seated again. She addresses the oval table with a wave of her pale hand. "Hi everyone, I'm Taeyeon and I am the acting Vice President of the Bureau. Any questions you may have about the annual Games, please direct them to me. I'd be more than happy to answer."

Once she's seated and silence fills the room again, Universo speaks up.
"Now that you've all met our wonderful Bureau officials, it's time they met you." He looks around the rest of the table. "Sitting around this table are the captains of their respective institutions' teams from across the Asian continent."

Seokjin's eyes widen at those words - this was unusual, meeting the other team captains before the actual teams were even officially announced?

Traditionally, all the team's six members were announced at the end of December each year, followed by the announcement of the location of that year's Games. Last year, it had taken place at one of the most brutal locations yet - an island off the coast of the Pacific that had the most active volcanic activity on the planet. The erupting lava had done some serious damage that year.

The Committee never failed to make it very clear that their protocol was to be strictly followed. And yet, here they were, going against their own rules.

"I'm sorry, but why are we being introduced earlier this year?" Seokjin asks without thinking twice.

All heads turn towards him and he swallows. Perhaps he shouldn't have spoken out loud - he starts to regret his question when Universo gives him a daunting smile.

He folds his hands together in his lap and leans back on his leather chair before answering.

"There has been a change of plans, Captain Kim." He says calmly. "The Games Committee from the Bureau and I have decided that the third task this year will be..." He pauses to look at the four black-clad Bureau officials sitting around him. "...more exciting."

Making their way back to their respective dorms, Taehyung slings a tired arm over Jeongguk's shoulder.

"Some practice tonight, huh?"

Jeongguk nods, wishing he could be in bed already. "I'm exhausted."

With every exhale, Jeongguk can see his breath in the cold night air in front of him. His thoughts are swimming with so many questions from the night's practice.

He looks down at the snowy ground and sees the outline of his Shadow walking in step with his. He thinks back to the first time he had encountered Universo. It had been his very first day at the Academy and every time he had made eye contact with the tall man, Shadow had been uneasy.

He's lost in his thoughts when Taehyung's voice cuts across the night air with, "DUCK!"

And before he can even blink, a snowball hits him on the back with a loud whack. Quickly turning around, he sees Taehyung with an outstretched arm and an amused grin across his face.

Jeongguk can't help but let out a bark of laughter at Taehyung's antics. He swears a second ago, he
was just walking beside him. "How did you even get over there so fast?" He shouts back.

"Don't worry about it," Taehyung shoots back, already gathering another snowball in his hands.

Jeongguk reacts quicker this time, kneeling down to scoop up a pile of snow. He pats it down into a ball, but when he looks back up to aim it at Taehyung, he's gone.

"Oh come on!" He cries out with a laugh. "Using your Invisibility right now is a pretty cheap move!"

**WHACK.**

A snowball hits Jeongguk right in the chest and a second later, Taehyung reappears just a few steps in front of him, grinning like mad.

"Yeah, well," He says happily. "Gotta make the most out of it, you know?"

Not wasting a second, Jeongguk throws his own snowball at the older. Taehyung's eyes widen and - **WHAM** - it hits him squarely on his chest.

"AHH," He yells dramatically, falling down to his knees. "I've been hit! Man down, man down!"

Jeongguk laughs at his overdramatic reaction, watching as Taehyung actually gets on his back and then proceeds to curl up into a ball, whaling noises included.

"Jeongguk, how could you?" He asks from the ground in a strained voice.

The younger walks up to where Taehyung is lying and squats down, looking at the older's pained expression with great amusement. "Rest in peace, hyung." He says gravely, trying with quite some difficulty to keep on a straight face.

With some final choking sounds, Taehyung closes his eyes and goes still.

"Here lies Taehyung, a friend, a brother, and a terrible actor." Jeongguk announces to no one, standing back up. "May your troublesome soul rest in peace."

He makes to walk away when a hand suddenly grabs his ankle.

"You call that a eulogy?"

Jeongguk looks down at Taehyung and gives him an exasperated eye roll. "Well, you're technically not supposed to *hear* a eulogy."

Taehyung stands back up and wipes the snow off his jeans. "You're right." He brushes the rest of the snow off his jacket and puts his arm around Jeongguk's shoulder again. "But I was hoping you'd speak with more emotion, talk more about my amazing accomplishments, maybe throw in a couple of lines about my dashing looks."

Walking in such close proximity with the older doesn't phase Jeongguk anymore, although he wishes it wasn't just platonic. But he pushes those feelings down, giving Taehyung a wide grin. "Kind of bad to speak of lies about the dead, don't you think?"

Taehyung pouts at him, his brown eyes looking like a hurt puppy.

Jeongguk chuckles, wondering who was really the younger one between them.
"Hey," Taehyung says to the expanse dark night, his playful tone replaced by a calmer one. "You ever think what life would be like if we didn't have our Powers?"

Glancing at the older, Jeongguk is surprised at the sudden question. He's thought about it many times, but he's never thought of the possibility of Taehyung wanting a normal life. Taehyung, always playful and getting into trouble with his Invisibility, was the last person Jeongguk would have thought would ask that question.

"Yeah," He replies. "I have thought about it, but... I mean, we can't really change the fact that we are who we are."

Taehyung hums in response and doesn't say anything for a while as they make their way across campus, their footprints leaving a trail in the snow. Jeongguk wonders if the topic is over when the older speaks up again.

"If we didn't have any Powers and we didn't come to this Academy, we'd probably be regular college kids back in our hometown, or in Seoul." He tells Jeongguk with a faraway look in his eyes. "We would have gone clubbing in Hongdae, maybe rode our bikes along the Han River. Ate some street food after class, shopped in Myeongdong."

Jeongguk would have loved that - being able to hang out with Taehyung and do all of those things. Not that being at the Academy was dull or anything, but at the same time, he knew there was a life outside the school's boundaries that they wouldn't get the chance to experience.

"We probably would have gone to karaoke and sang until our throats gave out," Taehyung continues, smiling at the thought. "You're a good singer, if I recall your shower solos correctly."

"What!" Jeongguk laughs. "When did you ever hear me sing in the shower?"

"During our sleepovers." Taehyung answers, not batting a lash. "I mean, the walls weren't really that thick."

Taehyung laughs at the memory and Jeongguk can't help but laugh along. "That would be really nice," He tells the older. "Everything you just said."

It was too bad they wouldn't get to do that, Jeongguk sadly thinks to himself.

"Then why don't we do it all?" Taehyung asks, looking at him with a newfound excitement - his eyes practically gleaming.

"What?"

"This winter break," Taehyung continues. "We have a week off from school - come with me, back to our hometown."

"I-" Jeongguk didn't even plan that far ahead yet - winter break was a couple of weeks from now. "I don't know-"

"You could stay at my place, my mom would be so happy to see you again." Taehyung offers. He looks so excited at the idea that Jeongguk has no idea what to say. "Plus Soosim's missed you, you know."

Jeongguk recalls how they had played with Soonsim when she had been a tiny puppy back when they were kids. The thought of going back to his old hometown with Taehyung is inviting, but the idea of being alone with Taehyung for an entire week...
"I'm not sure, hyung." He says, trying to come up with an excuse that would be convincing enough. "Well," Taehyung smiles at him. "Just think about it. That's all."

Jeongguk wants to tell him how much of a bad idea that would be, how he can't stand being this close to him even now without his chest beating irregularly - but all he manages to say is, "Okay."

"I will explain the changes regarding the third and final stage of this year's Games later on in this meeting." Universo continues, his voice casual despite the fact that this was quite the news to deliver to a room full of future participants of the Games itself. "The Committee and I have invited all the Captains here today to pass on important information for you to relay back to your team members. With these changes, we thought it would be best to inform you ahead of the usual announcing period."

Seokjin narrows his eyes. What could have possibly deemed these 'change of plans' necessary?

Looking around him, Seokjin is relieved to see he isn't the only one sitting there thoroughly confused by this turn of events. Expressions of perplexion are mirrored on the faces of the other Captains, but Universo speaks up again and they all turn their heads to his direction.

"Captains, if you will, please introduce yourselves and your Powers to the rest of the room. I think it'd be best if we all knew each other's names first, no?" He gestures to the brunette sitting next to Charein. "Let's start with our representative from China."

Looking at the brunette more closely, Seokjin can't help but wonder how someone so young-looking had been made captain.

The Chinese captain stands up and clears his throat. "Hello, everyone. I'm Luhan and I'm the Captain of the Beijing Institute's team. I'm a Telekinetic. Nice to meet you all."

Seokjin blinks twice before realizing he had met Luhan before. Two years ago, Luhan had been on the Beijing team but they had been eliminated only after the first round. He had looked different back then, even more youthful than now, if that was even possible.

Once Luhan sits back down, the blonde sitting beside him stands up.

"Sup." He greets them. "Name's Jackson, I'm this year's Captain of the Hong Kong Conservatory. Oh yeah, my Power." He sticks up one index finger and a second later, the lights become dim, casting a shadow on his profile.

Jackson sits back down. "It's light manipulation, if that wasn't clear."

Seokjin had the feeling Jackson wasn't the type to take orders from authority too seriously. Once the lights are manipulated back to normal, the guy beside Jackson slowly stands up, his hands in the pockets of his uniform pants.

"Name's Z-i-co." He says with a tone of nonchalance of someone who couldn't give less of others'
opinions. "I'm Captain of this school's twin institution, Seoul Academy. And I'm a Metamorphic." He grins at Jackson before continuing, "But I don't think I'll be showing you guys until that's necessary."

Thinking back to last year's Games, Seokjin recalls the other Korean team that had competed alongside his. He remembers Zico, he was the same age as he was, and his performance had been quite impressive in the second stage as he had been the first to maneuver his way out through the maze. His Metamorphosis had been quite useful, although at other times, disadvantageous.

But that was the same for any Power, he supposes.

When he notices the rest of the table staring intently at him, Seokjin realizes it's his turn to introduce himself. He stands up slowly and clears his throat.

"My name is Seokjin, Captain of this Academy. And I'm an Empath." He looks to the direct opposite side of the table, right at Universo, as he continues. "I'm looking forward to this year's Games, I just hope this year's committee isn't hiding anything else up their sleeves."

The President's expression doesn't change at his remark. The girl beside Seokjin stands up, a friendly smile playing on her features.

"Hi everyone, I'm Amber, Captain of the Los Angeles Institution of Heroes. I look forward to competing at this year's Games with you guys." She makes to sit back down before she pauses and stands back up again. "Oh, I forgot to mention. My Power is Weather Manipulation."

Seokjin had almost forgotten that each of the institutions in the Asian continent had a sister school in North America, namely in America and a few in Canada. Each year, only one or two of the sister schools competed in the annual Games, mostly due to the conflicting school schedules between the two continental systems.

Beside Amber, a tall black-haired Captain stands up and gives them a polite nod.

"My name is Takuya and I'm the Captain from Tokyo School of Superheroes." He introduces. "My power is Duplication. I'm honored to be competing alongside all of you in this year's Games."

The Japanese team had always been one of the strongest contestants every year and Seokjin recalls how the Tokyo team had made the semi-finals for the past four years.

After Takuya is in his seat again, the last and final Captain sitting at the table stands up and introduces himself.

"My name is BamBam, and I'm from the Bangkok Institute." The red-haired says, and judging by his looks, Seokjin can tell he's the youngest of all of them. "And my Power is Precognition."

BamBam doesn't say anything more.

Not missing a beat, the President claps his hands together once. "How pleasant, getting to know each other so early on in the year. No?" He smiles at them all. "Now, I think it's time we told you why we gathered you all here today."
Yoongi doesn't know if it's his weak spot for Jimin or if he was just too tired to refuse, but for whatever reason, he had actually gone along with Jimin's pleas to get some food this late at night.

They're at a diner just outside of the campus gates, seated side by side on the stools lining the front windows. In front of them are two steaming bowls of beef noodles and now that he's smelling the delicious scent of the broth, Yoongi feels famished.

"I could eat this entire bowl in like, two seconds." Jimin happily announces, ripping apart his wooden chopsticks. "But, I'll be civilized since you're here." He informs Yoongi with a grin before digging into his noodles.

"Don't hold back for my sake," Yoongi replies, following suit and slurping up the thick udon.

A few bites in and he had to admit, this place beat any campus eatery the Academy had to offer.

They sit there for a while, eating their late night meal in a comfortable silence with just the sound of their slurping and the murmuring of the other customers in the back. After ten minutes, Jimin leans back and stretches his arms over his head and announces, "Man, that hit the spot."

Yoongi's done his bowl a minute later.

"So? Didn't I tell you? This place is so good." Jimin says, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Yeah, it was." Yoongi agrees, feeling warm all over from the delicious broth. "We should come here again."

Jimin gives him the brightest smile and jokingly asks, "You're paying next time, right?"

"Didn't I just say I'm not made of money like an hour ago?" The older scoffs.

"Fine, fine." Jimin says, waving over the waitress for their bill. "I guess you'd only pay for dates."

But as Jimin is about to ask the waitress if they could get separate bills, Yoongi interrupts with, "One bill, please."

Jimin stares at him with wide eyes as the waitress walks away. With a dust of red on his cheeks and looking at anywhere but the younger's direction, Yoongi tells him quietly, "What? Just thought I'd be nice to you for once."

Chapter End Notes

so i'm trying this thing where I try to update as regularly as I can...
hahah i hope you guys liked this chapter! sry i didn't reveal the Big Change yet. it'll be
next chapter!!
also if you didn't realize from the leader's introductions, a lot of other idol groups will be part of the Games, so stay tuned for that

thank u for all the kudos so far! <3
& PLS feel free to leave me comments about anything, honestly I love reading them :)
There's a deafening silence in the room and the air is heavy with anticipation as all eyes are fixed on the man sitting at the head of the table, his fingers laced together in front of him. He studies the faces sitting dead still around the table, one by one, before speaking in a low voice.

"There has been a change of plans, regarding the third and final stage of this year's Games."

This announcement is met with stirs and murmurs all around and Seokjin feels on edge. He waits for the President to continue, every muscle tensed.

"As you all know, the final stage has always been a two on two combat, pairs usually consisting of a team's Captain and the strongest member." Universo continues, talking in a calm and even pace that irritated Seokjin for reasons he couldn't explain. He could tell this wasn't going to be welcoming news.

"However, this year, the Committee and I felt that it was time for a change to our long-lived traditions." He pauses again, looks at the four Bureau officials sitting on either side of him and continues with a more serious tone than before. "It will no longer be battles fought in pairs. The third stage will only require one member this year and it will be the Captain of each team."

For some reason, Seokjin doesn't feel surprised at hearing this. Looking around him, he sees the other Captain's range of expressions - they ranged from mild surprise to bewilderment.

"Each of you will enter the Stimulation Room, built specifically for this year's Games. It has been carefully designed by our best and most capable team." He says, the corners of his mouth lifting upwards just the smallest bit. "The Room is quite an extraordinary leap in technology. It's able to stimulate any environment that you may face in the wild - be it the desert, rain, wild forests. Name it, and the room will become it."

That didn't sound all that complicated - yet. Seokjin stays still, waiting to hear the finer details.

"There is, of course, an objective to the Stage." Here it comes. Seokjin thinks. "All of you sitting before me will enter into whatever environment we may put you through in the Room, but," The President's smile is completely gone now. He looks at them all with a slight tilt of his head and nothing about his face gives away any emotion as he says, "Only one will come out."

An immediate uproar starts in the room as some Captains jump up in their chairs, others sitting staring at the President as if he'd gone mad. Maybe he really had, Seokjin couldn't believe the implications of his announcement.

"What do you mean only one of us will come out?" Jackson demands, voice projected to be heard amongst the loud chatter of the table.

"You want us to kill each other off?" Luahn asks with an edge to his tone, voicing the same
thoughts in Seokjin's head.

"Only one will come out - what about the rest?" Zico questions, his shoulders square and tensed.

"Enough."

Universo raises his hand to signify silence and everyone standing slowly takes a seat, all conversation immediately dying down.

"Before any more false conclusions are to be made, I will let my colleague explain," He tells them. "Suho, if you could, please."

The man sitting to his left, the handsome one with the pale skin, clears his throat and looks at the seven captains sitting around the oval table with an anxious expression. He looked excited to be delivering the news, yet nervous at the same time.

"The Stimulation Room is something we're excited to try out. There have been many debates and arguments over how the third stage will be changed this year and we've poured over hundreds of ideas, picked out a handful of the best ones and debated some more. But we finally came to a conclusion and for the past few years, we've been developing this Stimulation Room and we've tested it out to make sure it's 100% functional."

Suho fixes his tie, a nervous habit perhaps, before continuing.

"The room, as the President mentioned, mimics any environment we've programmed it to become. It was tricky to develop and required an immense amount of time and money, but we've got it right. Now, as for it's role in the third stage of the Games. All of you will enter the Room, in order of your rankings from the first and second stages. The team that's in first place by the third stage will have their Captain enter first, and so on. Once all of you are inside, the entrances will close and disappear. The Room will then change, but as to which environment, we can't tell you just yet. It will not be a meadow with flowers, I can tell you that much."

When he looks down at his hands, Seokjin realizes his palms are sweating. There was a raw twisting feeling in his gut; he didn't like where this was going.

"Now, the exciting part." Suho clears his throat again. He gives a fleeting glance at the woman across from him who gives the slightest nod back. "As Universo mentioned, there will be only one victor of the final stage, as always. And by this, we mean only one of the Captains will be able to make it out of that Room."

"What does that mean!" Jackson interrupts, slamming both his hands down on the table as he leans forward. "Are you saying the rest of us who don't make it out are stuck in there?"

"We deserve an explanation," Takuya says, his eyes narrowed at Suho. "This is no way to announce something like this."

Seokjin expects Suho to deny Jackson's assumption or any of the Bureau officials to speak up, but none of them reply immediately.

"Of course there will be no voluntary deaths in the Games, please don't be ridiculous." Universo answers, his reply a second too late for Seokjin's liking.

"What happens to the other Captains then?" Seokjin speaks up, finally too frustrated by the discomforting news to keep quiet. "The ones who don't win the final stage. You can't keep that part out."
You will see for yourself, I'm afraid we can't reveal all of the details just yet." The President replies smoothly. "And we will do our best to keep all of you informed when we can. So please, keep a lookout for any news on our part."

He rises from his chair then, wearing a smile that looks forced to Seokjin.

"I'm afraid this meeting will have to be cut short, Captains. I have a prior commitment I must see to." That's it? Seokjin can't believe this. "Thank you for coming out tonight, and have a wonderful winter break. All of you."

Yoongi wakes up the next morning, having been shaken awake by a pair of hands. When he opens his eyes, he sees it's Namjoon, already dressed and putting on his jacket.

"There's a team meeting in ten." He tells the Fire Manipulator.

"G'morning to you too," Yoongi grumbles back, rubbing his eyes with the back of his hands.

"God, what time is it?"

"Seven."

"Christ," Yoongi's head falls back on his pillow. "Why'd you wake me up?" He hated mornings. Namjoon knew that better than anyone.

"Seokjin called for a meeting. Seemed pretty serious, read for yourself." Namjoon points at Yoongi's phone.

He reaches for his phone and sees that he's got a couple of unread messages, one from Seokjin and another one from Jimin. He opens the one from the Captain and sees that his roommate was right, the message was just 4 words:

meeting. now. my place.

He wastes no time in getting ready. Five minutes later, they're hurrying out the door, wondering what could warrant such an early meeting on a weekend. They never had practices on weekends, and meetings outside of practice were pretty rare.

"What do you think it's about?" Yoongi asks as they walk briskly down the stairs of their dorm.

"No idea," Namjoon answers. "Must be something urgent. He rarely asks for meetings."
When they step through the doors of Seokjin's apartment, they realize they're the last ones to arrive. Jimin, Taehyung and Jungkook are sitting on the couches while Hoseok and Seokjin are standing, both of them with their arms crossed.

They all look up when the two enter the living room, their faces solemn.

The atmosphere in the room is tense as Yoongi perches on the arm of the sofa beside Jimin, avoiding the younger’s gaze. Namjoon opts to stand.

A few seconds of silence pass before the Captain finally speaks up. "The reason I called this meeting is because I have some disturbing news."

And from the gloomy expression he was wearing, Yoongi could tell what he was about to tell them had been troubling him

"What is it, hyung?" Taehyung asks softly.

"The Games. The third stage." The oldest replies after a few seconds. "They changed it completely. It's..." He opens his mouth as if to speak, but nothing comes out.

"The final stage is..." He takes a deep breath and tries again. "It's this thing they called the Stimulation Room. It sounds like some new, high-tech structure that becomes any environment they want it to. All the Captains are supposed to enter in order of the team's ranks."

The rest of the team remains quiet.

"And I don't know what the President meant by this but," He takes a deep breath before continuing. "He said only one of us will be able to come out of there. Whether that means the rest of them remain in there dead or alive, I don't know. He didn't tell us. But either way, it sounds a little fucked up to me."

"A little?" Yoongi spits out, surprised at how calmly Seokjin had spoken about it. "Wait, hold up. Why are they pulling this bullshit all of sudden anyway? Why the sudden change?"

"I don't know, they said they thought it was time for a change. Never said why." Seokjin looks at the floor, trying to remember if he missed any details from last night's meeting.

"Maybe... maybe you guys will battle each other inside the Room, like a regular combat?" Jimin offers, trying to sound hopeful despite the ominous situation. "To determine the winner of the Games. Maybe it won't mean any blood needs to be shed, he tries to imply.

Seokjin gives him a grateful smile for the attempt, but in the next second his somber expression is back. "Maybe. Honestly, I don't know what to think anymore. I've been thinking about it all night."

He sits down on a one-seater opposite of the couch and puts his elbows on his knees, clasping his hands together. "You know what the purpose of the Games was, when it first started?" He asks them quietly.

All five members shake their heads.

The faintest hint of a smile graces the Captain's handsome features. "As a Prefect, I have to say I'm a little disappointed. It's one of the first lessons in your History of Heroes course."

"That was years ago for some of us," Yoongi says, grinning back. "So get on with it."
"The whole point of the Games was to be a catalyst for uniting the major Superhero Institutions across the continents. It was meant to be an annual event where all the schools could come together in a friendly competition and foster friendships." He says, almost like he's reciting a textbook. "And for years, it did just that. So, why are they changing things now? And why like this?"

No one quite had the answer to that.

"The other Captains and I are meeting up later tonight before they fly back to their homes, so I'll let you guys know what I can gather from that meeting." Seokjin says, sounding tired. "And since today's the last official day of classes for the year, there's no practice tonight."

"Hyung," Jeongguk says suddenly, startling them all. He had been still and quiet the whole time, but now he's sitting straight up with his eyes wide. "What do you know about Universo? You're a Prefect, you have meetings with him all the time - you must know something about him we don't."

Seokjin studies Jeongguk for a few seconds and then something clicks in his head. "Jeongguk, what happened during practice yesterday?"

"I know this is gonna sound weird, but I swear for a couple of minutes my Shadow was under someone else's control. It wouldn't respond to anything I said and--"

"And you think Universo was the one who did it?" Seokjin finishes for him.

Jeongguk nods.

"The Prefect meetings I have with Universo are strictly about school business so I don't exactly get to chat with him, but I do know what his Power is." He tells Jeongguk and the rest of his team, his voice low. "And it's not Hypnosis like everyone thinks."

"What?" Hoseok uncrosses his arms and looks confused. "I always heard it was Hypnosis. And what he did to Jeongguk sounds like--"

"That's a rumour. But for all we know, there might be some truth behind them." The Captain says darkly, his expression even more solemn than when the meeting had started. "No, his Power is Mind Control."

"Wait, can someone have two Powers at once?" Jeongguk questions, leaning forward in his seat. "You said there might be some truth behind the rumors, how can that be?"

"No, it's not possible to have more than one Power." Yoongi answers before Seokjin can. "But Powers can be extended to a certain extent. Enhanced in a way."

"Like how I can make others Invisible if I maintain physical contact with someone." Taehyung adds, looking beside him at Jeongguk. "Remember that one time I did it to you?"

Jeongguk does. He remembers clearly, the strange sensation of becoming Invisible by extension of Taehyung's Power. "So how do people learn to do these... extensions?"

"I kind of found mine by accident." Taehyung tells them. "I remember being bored, so I turned Invisible, then back to normal, then Invisible again. While I was doing that, I realized the pen I was holding turned Invisible with me."

He digs into his pocket and takes out his phone, holding it flat on his raised palm. "I hadn't been able to do that before. I don't know what I had done differently that time, but the more I practiced,
the better I could turn things Invisible with me." And he demonstrates, turning Invisible, his phone on his palm disappearing with him.

Jeongguk lets that sink in.

"What about the rest of you guys?" He asks, curious to know if anyone else had found their extensions.

"There's been a few times where I could send Telepathic messages to others," Namjoon answers, wearing a strange expression. "But it only happened during last year's Games when..." He trails off, looking up at Seokjin and the two exchange a look before Namjoon clears his throat.

"I haven't been able to do it since."

"I can absorb my flames," Yoongi tells them in a hushed voice. "Kind of like... being on fire? But not. It's hard to explain and I've only done it twice. Both times were during last year's Games as well."

"That was impressive." Hoseok comments, recalling the memory. "It was during the second stage, I remember that."

Yoongi nods. "I think when we're under pressure, our extensions come out more easily."

Then Seokjin stands up so fast that they all look at him in unison, his excited expression a stark contrast to the serious one he had worn just a couple of minutes ago.

"We need to figure all of ours out." He says, his tone determined and adamant. "Before the Games start. We have to be better prepared than ever."

He looks around at them all and he's got that glint in his eyes that told Yoongi he was dead serious about this.

"I have a feeling that the third stage isn't going to be only curveball they're going to throw at us this year." His hands form into fists beside him. "Over the break, I need all of you to get the hang of your Power's extensions. Each and every one of you."

Sitting in the last class of his fall semester, Jimin is finding it incredibly hard to pay attention. There's way too many thoughts swarming in his head and he was finding it impossible to concentrate on the lecture.

Firstly, Seokjin's news that morning had been unexpected and it didn't make sense to him. Why would they announce the changes to the Captains, but not even give them the full details?

At least the Games weren't until the end of the year, he tells himself in an attempt to calm his nerves.

Currently, it's the middle of December and winter break was just about to start - April was far off. That gave them some time to gather more information.
Secondly, how exactly was he supposed to find the extension to his Superhuman Agility? He could run faster than humanly possible... but what else? How could his Power be even more "enhanced", as Yoongi had put it?

And that led to the third and last yet most pressing concern on his mind.

Yoongi.

He feels a burst of warmth in his chest. He reaches up and presses his hand against it, surprised at himself - just thinking of what happened a few nights ago had him feeling like this. He shuts his eyes closed and breathes in, trying to remember it as clearly as could.

After leaving the restaurant, they walk back to the part of campus where both their dorms were. For a while, there's only the sound of the powder of snow on the ground crunching underneath their feet, every step leaving a soft footprint behind.

Jimin turns to look at Yoongi walking beside him, a question burning on the tip of his tongue. The dim light of the lampposts behind them casts a shining glow around Yoongi's outline, making him look ethereal in that moment and Jimin suddenly feels the words catch in his throat.

He looks away.

He clears his throat before trying again. "So, hyung," He hopes he sounds more confident than he feels. "Was that a date just now? Or were you really just paying to be nice? Which sounds like a load of crap since you'd never be that nice."

Yoongi looks at Jimin and lets out a laugh, the huge red scarf around his neck partly muffling the sound of his laughter. He turns away and says, "You're the biggest pain in my ass, Park Jimin."

"That doesn't answer my question." He tries again, sudden doubt slowly creeping in, settling under his skin. Maybe he was wrong about all this.

There's silence for a while as they continue to walk side by side, Jimin waiting for him to say something more.

But Yoongi doesn't speak as they keep walking, the space between them just a few inches apart. Jimin tries to sort out how he's feeling at the moment - a sense of both happiness and calm, but a storm of nerves brewing underneath it all.

Kind of like butterflies in his stomach, he realizes with a rueful smile.

God, he was in so much trouble.

"Are you staying on campus over the break?"

That wasn't a question he had been expecting, but Jimin nods, not exactly knowing what he had been expecting in the first place. "You?"

"Yep." Yoongi looks up at the starry night sky and studies the constellations as he walks. "It's nice here during the holidays. Plus, we don't have practices, so I actually get to relax."

"Mmm." Jimin was looking forward to not having practice five days a week. "I'm looking forward to sleeping in."
The older chuckles softly, that huge scarf of his masking the sound. Then Jimin suddenly stops walking, looks upwards and says quietly, "Hyung."

Yoongi glances back and noticing Jimin standing there, stops in his tracks as well. "Yeah?" He asks, his brows raised.

And Jimin points upwards at something, but Yoongi can't quite make out in the darkness. He squints harder, but all he sees is the dark expanse of the night, sprinkled with the twinkle of dim lit stars. He takes a few steps in Jimin's direction until they're standing side by side, looking up.

Then Jimin lets his hand drop and turns to the older, his face burning yet his hands icy cold. "Mistletoe."

There's a sudden tap on his shoulder that snaps him back to reality. When he turns around to see who it could be, he comes this close to bumping foreheads with Taehyung. He catches himself - he would have yelled out if it wasn't for Taehyung's intense look of warning.

"Shh. Don't make a sound."

Jimin stares at his best friend. Taehyung stares back, then with a wink, he's gone.

"What are you doing here?" Jimin whispers out of the corner of his mouth, turning back towards the front of the classroom. He was glad he sat in the back seat, no one had noticed him whispering to thin air. "Aren't you supposed to be in-"

"Not important." Taehyung answers right into Jimin's ear. He must be standing right beside him. "Listen, Seokjin and the other Captains are having their meeting soon and I wanted to listen in. You in?"

"How do you know where their meeting is?"

"Little birdie told me." Taehyung replies, leaving Jimin frowning. "Look, it's happening in ten minutes. I ran over here to get you in case you wanted to come. I'm going either way, so it's up to you."

Jimin was filled with a sudden mix of excitement and anxiety at the prospect of hearing what the other school's Captains had to say. What if it was worse than what they had all thought? What if-"

"Come on, Jimin, we gotta go now, are you in or not?"

"Yeah. I'm in." He answers, training his eyes on a spot at the front of the room. "But how am I supposed to leave?"

"Did you forget what I said earlier about my extension?" Then Jimin feels a soft pressure of a hand grabbing his arm and in the next second he's overcome with an odd sensation as if he had been doused with a bucket of ice but instead of feeling wet or cold, he just felt... lighter.

"What the..."

He lifts up his hands to touch his face and feels it there, solid and present, but he can't see any part of himself.
This was something else.

"Come on!" Taehyung's pulling on his arm, snapping him out of his fascination. Wasting no time, Jimin quietly gets up from his seat and follows Taehyung out the door, careful not to make a noise.

Chapter End Notes

i hope you're all done with exams or will be soon! 
& hope you guys liked the update :) 
it's gonna become a dystopia au real quick. the first two stages haven't been introduced yet but will be revealed real soon 
thank you for the kudos & comments, i appreciate each and every one of them, u guys have no idea how much they fuel me <3

feel free to leave ur thoughts!! what u think will happen, anything u wanna see happen - i'd love to hear them <3
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

first off, sorry that it took so long for an update but it's here! second, a lot happens (including the mistletoe scene) so buckle up and read on fam:

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Taehyung and Jimin stand side by side in front of a wooden classroom door, neither of them visible to anyone passing by - not that there were any students around them. The last classes of the semester were over and silence had fallen over the hallway.

"This is the room," Taehyung whispers out of the corner of his lips. He doesn't let go of his hold on Jimin's arm as he reaches out and turns the doorknob as quietly as he can.

The door opens a couple of inches and the sound of hushed voices can be heard from within.

"Should we go in?" Jimin asks in a low voice, peering inside, still nervous about the situation despite being invisible to any naked eye.

"No," Taehyung whispers back. "Better to just eavesdrop from here."

They don't say another word as they both peek through the small gap and strain their ears to make out the conversation taking place inside.

When Seokjin had entered the classroom of an old, worn building the Academy hardly used anymore, he was the last one to arrive.

The other Captains are now scattered throughout the small space, some opting to stand against the walls, the rest seated on top of desks or the old wooden chairs. The blindfolds on the windows have been drawn, the weak sun casting shadows across the corners of the room.

The Captains are seated in a semicircle around the periphery of the room so that they were facing the center.

"Let's get this meeting started then," Zico speaks up once everyone's settled down, all heads turning towards his direction. "I don't know about the rest of you guys, but what we just heard wasn't what I was expecting at all."
"I don't think any of us had been expecting that," Amber says from her seat, her voice low. "And I'm not too happy about being kept in the dark with the details."

"I came here expecting news about a new location maybe, or a new rule," The frustration in Jackson's voice is evident in every syllable. "Not this crap."

"There's got to be a reason behind Universo's announcement, though," Luhan suggests earnestly, looking around the room. "Any of you have any ideas?"

The President's announcement was still fresh in Seokjin’s memory but the significance of it wasn't clear to him just yet. The three stages of the Games had been the same for the past century; the abrupt changes he had announced about the third stage had rightly left all of them feeling on edge.

When no one says anything immediately, Luhan speaks up again.

"We need to ask our own institution's authorities if they know anything." The oldest Captain plays with the emblem on his uniform blazer, spinning the blossom symbol of his institution between his fingers. "I doubt the Bureau could keep it from the higher ups."

There's a murmur of agreement for the Kinetic's suggestion. Although the Hero Academy was the one hosting the Games this year, the other schools each had minor roles in the planning. And if the Bureau had spent years developing the Simulation Room like they said, Seokjin suspects the chances of information spreading wouldn’t be too low.

But if the other schools had known anything, they sure as hell had done a good job of keeping it from them.

"At least we have a couple of months until the Games start," Takuya says, trying to lighten up the mood. The grim expressions around the room relax a little at his words, but Jackson's cautious tone cuts through the room.

"Not exactly."

Seokjin looks over at the Hong Kong Captain, but he's staring right at Bambam. The young Bangkok Captain gives Jackson the slightest shake of the head, a look of warning.

Jackson, however, ignores the look and firmly urges the younger boy. "Bambam, tell them what you Saw."

But he doesn't say anything and bites his lips instead. He looks hesitant, Seokjin thinks, from the way he glances at the rest of the Captains, watching for their reactions. He’s nervous, Seokjin can tell even without his Empathy.

"Tell them," Jackson says a little softer this time. "They need to know."

Zico steps in between them and looks at Bambam. "Tell us what?"

The young boy slowly roams the curious faces before him. Taking a sharp inhale, he finally speaks up. "Before I do, I need to explain."

"My Power being Precognition, I can see into the future as it may be at this very moment," He starts off, his voice still a little hesitant. "But nothing is ever definite about the future. It's always changing, it isn't a static thing."
The Captains listen intently, careful not to miss a word.

"After we spoke with Universo, I tried to See this year's Games as clearly as I could."

"Hold up. Can you already See who wins?" Zico interrupts, his tone skeptical.

"No," The youngest Captain looks down at his clasped hands and draws a breath. "There are limits to my Power, just like all of yours."

Luhan looks at the youngest Captain with a confused expression that doesn't suit his ethereal features. "If you can look ahead into the future, how come you didn't see this coming? The changes and everything Universo just told us?"

"I did, and I didn't," Bambam sighs and his shoulders sag a little. "I knew we would be meeting with Universo and there would be some unexpected news, but I couldn't See what we were going to be told."

"Precognition isn't fortune telling," Jackson speaks up from the table next to Bambam.

Bambam continues, his voice less strained than before. "In my visions, there's no sound. They're more like snapshots of the future as they may be at the moment, but they're subject to change."

"So what can you tell us about this year's Games?" Takuya asks in a low voice.

Bambam doesn't answer right away. He pauses before turning to Amber and asks her, "What season do we always have the Games in?"

"Early summer." Amber answers easily. "Always at the end of the school year. But what does that have to do with anything?"

"So I should be getting images of summer, right? The bright sun, people in summer clothing," Bambam looks around the room with his forehead creased. "But when I See anything related to this year's Games it's always in the backdrop of snow and mountains."

_Snow? Mountains?_ Had he Seen wrong, maybe? Seokjin wonders. How could that be?

"So it's definitely not summer in my visions, which either means the Games will start much earlier this year, or they'll wait until next winter."

His words are immediately met with a bombardment of questions from the other Captains, their voices rising increasingly in volume with each question.

"But why would they move the opening date?"

"Are you sure?"

"I've been training my team thinking we still had months to prepare, you've got to be kidding."

Jackson speaks over the noise, his frustration eminent in his grave tone. "Instead of asking so many questions about it, I think we need to find some answers."

"And we need to find out fast," Zico adds, crossing his arms across his chest. "It's winter now, which means it could be happening real fucking soon."

"Or they could be sending us up north this year," Amber suggests.
"Either situation doesn't exactly appeal to me." Zico crosses his arms and looks at Bambam with a raised brow. "Is there anything else you saw, psychic?"

Bambam looks from Zico to Amber, to Luhan and Takuya. He finally meets gaze with Jackson and with hesitation, continues. "It's the mood. The atmosphere every time I see the upcoming Games. It's... different."

"Different how?" Jackson asks him, his voice almost a whisper.

The young Captain's replies just as quietly. "I don't know how to explain it. I just get this uneasy feeling and a sense of hostility..."

"Hostility? Between who?" One of the Captains asks, but Seokjin already had a feeling what the answer was.

Bambam doesn't answer instantly. He looks at around the room and when he answers it's in a subdued tone, but they all catch the one word they hadn't expected to hear.

"Us."

"Yoong!"

There's something about that voice that sounds so familiar. Familiar, but so faint, as if coming from a distance.

Slowly regaining consciousness, the first thing Yoongi becomes aware of is the feeling of hard concrete beneath him and a light breeze that gently plays with his silver bangs. Gingerly opening his eyes, he realizes that he's lying flat on his back and above him is a clear blue sky, not a single cloud in sight.

This definitely isn't his bed.

Turning his head slightly to the side, he's met with an expanse of dull grey. He follows the grey expanse upwards until he has to squint against the sunlight. He realizes he's looking at a massive stone wall that stretches on and on, both in both height and in width. It must be at least a few hundred feet tall.

Where was he?

He sits up slowly. There's a sudden stinging pain from his lower back as he does so. He brings a hand to his waist and feels something wet. Looking down to see what it could be, he sees dark red.
He's bleeding? But the realization is accompanied by a surprising sense of calm - as if he had been expecting it.

When he turns the other way, he's met with the same impressive dark expanse of concrete. Looking all around him, he sees that he's surrounded by nothing but grey.

Slowly, a sense of familiarity overcomes him.

He's been here before.

"Hyung!" The familiar voice sounds much closer now. "God, I thought you got knocked out, you okay?"

And a second later, he's being pulled to his feet by a strong set of hands. As he gets to his feet he sees that it's Namjoon, but he looks so different. The Telepath has platinum blonde hair - a style he hasn't repeated since a year ago.

"Yeah, I'm fine." Yoongi wants to ask when did he change his hair color? But the words are lost on the edge of his tongue. Instead, he catches himself asking, "Where's Hoseok?"

"He got jumped by one of the Grievers," Namjoon replies grimly.

_Grievers?_

The word triggers his memory and Yoongi realizes with a horrible awakening jolt where exactly he is.

He was in the middle of the second stage of the Games: the Maze.

The worst part of the Games in his opinion. The massive stone walls shifted every hour, making it impossible to map out its corridors and corners. Not to mention the horrible metallic creatures that resided within the labyrinth.

Add in the time limit and you've got yourself a maze of horrors.

"And Jin hyung?" Again, Yoongi's words come out of him as if he's on auto-pilot mode and he has no idea what to make of it.

"I'm here," Yoongi turns around and sees the familiar Empath walking towards them with a slight limp, but the determined expression on his handsome features reveal no hint of his injury. "And we're running out of time, we need to go."

"Which way?"

"Follow me." Namjoon holds his weapon, a pistol, at the ready. "We gotta be quick. Before the walls shift again."

There are so many questions running inside Yoongi's head, but his body seems to know exactly what it's doing. Namjoon looks to his left and then his right, the stone walls looking exactly the same on either side.

"How many teams left now?" Yoongi finds himself asking the question as if memorized from a script. It was a bizarre feeling, the detachment of his words to his thoughts.

"Two, and we're the one behind." Namjoon seemingly decides that the left route is the correct one and he heads in that direction. Yoongi and Seokjin follow close behind, the sound of their footsteps
magnified in the silence of the maze's corridors.

"We're nearly at the center," Namjoon informs them, his voice low.

This very moment - with him, Seokjin and Namjoon walking in the silence of the maze - rings a bell somewhere in the depths of Yoongi's memory and another smack of reality hits him: this was the previous year's Games.

Last year, during the second stage the top five remaining teams were given a time limit to maneuver their way towards the exit located in the very center of the massive structure.

"Grievers," The Telepath says in a low voice. "Fucking everywhere."

"Sooner we get out of here, the better." Seokjin replies grimly.

The suffocating atmosphere of the maze crudely reminds Yoongi of what that had happened last year.

He wants so badly to warn his teammates of what was undeniably about to happen, but the words won't form and his voice won't cooperate. It was like he was on auto-pilot mode and his body was refusing to respond to any of his commands. It leave a horribly uneasy knotted feeling in his stomach.

"Take another step and I'll freeze all of your sorry asses."

The three of them freeze mid-step and slowly, they turn around to see who had spoken, but Yoongi already knows who to expect.

Standing a few feet away is Xiumin, one of the senior members of the Beijing team with the Elemental Power of Ice Manipulation. Although Yoongi knows he had the upper hand in a potential combat situation with his Fire Manipulation, he doesn't feel any more at ease.

Beside Xiumin stands another member of the Beijing team, Kai, the one with Teleportation. He looks at the three of them with a grin gracing the corner of his lips.

A shiver runs down his spine as the scene feels all too familiar.

"Let's not get ourselves into a mess," Namjoon says calmly. Yoongi's hand automatically reaches for the lighter in his pockets, the cool metal doing little to calm his nerves. "We're all friends here."

"True, we have helped each other out before," Kai's sharp cheekbones rise an inch as he continues to grin at them. "But now that we're the last two teams standing, things are different."

The weak flames in Yoongi's palms flicker as he quickly glances at his teammates. Namjoon is staring right at the opposing team, his expression blank. Beside him, Seokjin looks at the two Beijing members with narrowed eyes.

"Well the exit isn't too far off," Namjoon says calmly. "But it's too bad you two don't know where it is."

"Man, I almost forgot how annoying Telepaths are," Xiumin scoffs, his exhales turning into icy mists in the air. "You're right, we don't. But good thing you guys do."

Before Yoongi can even blink, Kai disappears from where he was standing just a few seconds ago to Teleport right behind him. In another second, he's grabbed ahold of Yoongi's arms and grappled
them behind his back. Kai kicks him in the back of knees, forcing Yoongi to fall down to the
ground with a shout.

Wincing, Yoongi looks up just in time to see Xiumin aiming his two palms right at Namjoon, a ball
of frozen ice forming between them and Yoongi already knows what's about to happen but he
doesn't have time to even shout a warning before Xiumin launches the balls of ice right at his
teammate.

But Seokjin moves with speed that Yoongi doesn't remember him having to stand between
Namjoon and Xiumin just in time. The ice hits him square in the chest, making a painful shattering
sound that can be heard over Namjoon's yell.

The Empath drops to his knees, his hand clutching his chest, looking down at the spot where the
ice had made contact.

Then Yoongi wakes up.

"Sir. You called for me?"

Universo looks up from his screen to give Suho a nod towards the seat in front of his desk. "Please,
take a seat."

Suho does as he's told, straightening his black suit as he pulls out the armchair. "What's this about,
may I ask? I was busy with the task you assigned this morning."

"And how is that going?"

Suho replies looking at the President with a slight grin. "Much better than we expected."

Universo leans back, eyebrows raised. "I'll have to come take a look later. But what I called you in
for today is regarding something we hadn't foreseen."

Suho doesn't say anything, waiting for the President to continue.

"There's rising suspicion amongst the Captains now, as we expected and hoped for."

"Ah, yes."

"But the one with Precognition, he's Seen that we're changing the opening date."

Suho raises a brow, looking mildly surprised. "Has he?"

"Unfortunately." Universo leans forward, putting his elbows on the surface of his desk. "And that
leaves room for error in our plan."

Again, Suho sits still, knowing the President was never one to disclose information one bit at a
time, giving him the chance to observe the reactions his words elicited.

"The heads of all the institutions are all well informed about the changes by your Bureau officials, I trust. However, they may be inclined to share more information than we can afford to their Captains. They need to be reminded of the limits of their disclosure. Do you follow?"

"Of course," Suho replies, brows furrowed. "I've been careful about the amount of information we disclose from day one."

"I trust you completely, Junmyeon." The President nods curtly before looking at the man across the desk, his expression softer than before. "I just want to make sure everything is in place to ensure that we see our plan through to the end. To achieve what we've been working so hard all these years for."

"And we will." But Suho doesn't look any more tense than before. He gives no indication of the President using his real name. Like everything about the Bureau, he kept things professional. "We’ll just have to take more precautions."

Universo lifts his arms off his desk and leans back into his throne chair, his gaze never faltering on Suho. "Never lose sight of our goal. To help achieve equity for all, we must harness the Powers at our disposal for the greater good."

Suho nods, having heard it a million times before. "For the greater good."

Yoongi lies wide awake in his bed.

The darkness of the room suggests that it’s late at night, but he’s not feeling tired at all. That dream had woken him up quite rudely.

And it had been so vivid, too. The feelings and sensations had been so real. It had been almost a year since he had set foot in that massive maze, yet in the dream it felt like he was really in there again, walking beside Namjoon and Seokjin.

Namjoon.

He turns to look across their shared dorm room and sure enough, there’s the present-day Telepath, lying in his bed.

Yoongi knows it’s a little absurd but when the moonlight shines through the blinds and lands on his roommate, for a slight second he almost expects him to have the platinum blonde hair.

It’s not, of course. It’s auburn.
Yoongi closes his eyes and breathes in deeply. He exhales slowly. In and out, in and out.

What happened during the second stage had disqualified Seokjin from the third and final stage. They had to compete without him and although he wasn’t the Captain last year, he had been one of their strongest members and their training had been based the assumption of all members being present.

Their team dynamic suffered without him in the final stage, and Yoongi knew, despite never voicing it, that Namjoon had blamed himself for what happened.

Seokjin’s grimace as Xiumin’s ice shards had pierced his chest flashes before Yoongi a second time and it’s so damn vivid in his mind. It leaves him a little breathless, the clarity of the memory.

He tosses the blankets aside and sits up abruptly. He realizes how heavily he’s breathing and since when did his palms get so clammy? He tries to still his racing heart when a voice cuts through the silence of the room.

“Yoongi?”

It was that familiar voice from his dream again, Jesus.

“Hyung, are you okay?”

Yoongi looks across the room and realizes Namjoon’s awake.

He swallows thickly and draws in a deep breath. Everything is okay, it was all a dream and he’s fine. Seokjin is fine.

“Yeah,” Yoongi answers breathlessly. “Yeah, I’m fine.”

“Hyung, what happened?” Namjoon asks gently as he sits up on his bed. “You sound all freaked out, what’s going on?”

Yoongi waits until his breathing is down to a normal rate before replying. “Bad dream.”

“About what?”

Truth be told, Namjoon could easily Read his mind right now and spare him the questions. But Yoongi knows Namjoon never Read any of his close friends unless it was absolutely necessary. But at this moment, Yoongi wishes he would just spare him the integrity.

“Last year’s Games.” Yoongi answers quietly. “The second stage.”

Yoongi has no way to see it in the darkness, but Namjoon’s eyes widen at his words.

“There’s something I wanted to ask you,” Yoongi continues in a low voice. “About what happened to Seokjin. In the maze, when Xiumin shot that ice at you, he came between you and his attack.”

Namjoon doesn’t reply so Yoongi continues.

“And he was the most skilled member between the three of us. He would have been more valuable to our team during the last stage and you knew it, I knew it. He knew it. Anyone with common sense would have just let you take the hit, but he put himself between you and that attack knowing he’d be disqualified. Why?”

There’s silence in the room for a beat. Then Namjoon’s lower voice replies with, “You know
Yoongi needed Namjoon’s confirmation. He had never asked so directly about this before, but he’s always had a suspicion.

“Because,” Namjoon says finally. “Feelings get in the way of common sense.”

That was all Yoongi needed to hear.

“And that’s something you need to keep in mind, hyung.”

That takes Yoongi by surprise. He looks at Namjoon and his eyes have adjusted enough by now to just make out the outline of the Telepath on the other side of the room.

Namjoon was looking back at him.

“What do you mean?” Yoongi asks, his voice hushed.

“Whatever feelings you may have for Jimin, sort them out. And if I were you, I’d set them aside.” Namjoon tells him quietly. “Take it from me. Feelings have no place in the Games.”

“I don’t have feelings to sort out.”

Yoongi can hear the slightest hint of amusement in his roommate’s tone when he replies.

“You’ve never been a good liar, hyung.”

1:15 pm.

Jeongguk stares at the numbers on his phone screen until it really sinks in that in less than an hour, he’ll be heading back to his childhood home with Taehyung. The 4 hour train ride was only 60 minutes away and he hadn’t even started packing.

Maybe he should get on that.

Stuffing his phone in the pocket of his jeans, he gets up from his bed and heads to his closet. He’s about to slide it open when he hears two loud knocks on his door.

When he hears another knock a second later, the door flies open and none other than Taehyung walks into his tiny room with the biggest smile on his face and a duffle bag slung across his
"You ready for the best four hours of your life?" The older boy asks, looking at Jeongguk expectedly, his grin taking up half his face as he stands there with his arms spread out. Jeongguk thinks it's unfair how ridiculously good someone could look in just a tee and jeans.

But then again, this was Taehyung.

"Sorry, what?" Are the intelligent words he manages to blurt out.

"Wait a minute," Taehyung looks around him for two seconds before turning to Jeongguk with raised brows. "You're still not packed?"

"Funny you should mention that," Jeongguk really had no good reason to not be ready by now. But it hadn't really hit him that he was going back home for real until a minute ago. "Packing is done best under pressure, in my opinion."

Taehyung puts down his duffel bag and pulls out two blue tickets from his jacket. He hands one to Jeongguk. "Well, Jin hyung's coming to pick us up to drop us off at the station in like, less than an hour. So I'd say get the hell on it."

"I will, I will,' Jeongguk reassures, reaching for his closet and opening the door. Looking inside, he realizes maybe he should have started much earlier. "Just as soon as I... find my bag."

When Taehyung walks up to stand beside him and peers inside his closet, all he does is slowly shake his head. "You haven't changed a single bit, Jeon."

"This is on the clean side, believe it or not."

"You'd think you'd get more organized with age," He pauses, letting out an exaggerated sigh. "But with you, it just seems to get worse."

Jeongguk at least has the decency to look a little abashed at the chaos that is his closet. He chuckles and stuffs his hands in his jeans. "I could use some help, I'm not sure how much stuff I'm gonna need for a few weeks."

Reaching inside the mess and taking out a few of Jeongguk's shirts and sweaters, Taehyung looks at him and grins. "Black shirt, black jeans, black sweaters. How come you only like to wear black? You know what this says about you?"

"That I have no soul and my spirit is a black mass of darkness that I like to externally portray through fabric? Particularly, black fabric?"

Taehyung stares at him for a few seconds, unblinking, before bursting out laughing. "Damn, that was almost poetic."

"It was half true, half bullshit."

"I was gonna say you have no vibrance in your life, but that was honestly much more insightful."

Jeongguk laughs, crossing his arms too. "You now, there's a time for criticizing my wardrobe choices, hyung, and now is not one of them."

"Alright, how about five shirts, five bottoms? And a shit load of underwear and socks. Oh and bring all your winter gear, we're gonna go hiking."
"Hiking?" Jeongguk repeats. He wasn’t so fond of heights. "Why?"

"What do you mean ‘why’?" Scoffs Taehyung, reaching up to the upper shelf of the closet to take out Jeongguk’s duffel bag. As he does so, his shirt lifts up just enough to reveal the skin of his waist and Jeongguk can’t help it when his eyes wander down.

The waistband of Taehyung's boxers read Calvin Klein in bold and when Taehyung asks, "All these mountains in Korea to climb, and you ask why?", Jeongguk isn't even listening.

Reaching up towards the top shelf a little more, Taehyung's shirt rises even higher and it's both Jeongguk's worst nightmare and dream come to life at having the sight of Taehyung's taut stomach right before him. And those pelvic bones of his led down to a perfect 'v' shape pointed towards his…

"Man, this is so dusty," Taehyung finally brings the bag down, coughing as the dust flies everywhere.

Taehyung looks at him with the duffel bag in his outstretched hand.

Jeongguk realizes he’s still staring.

"I, um- sorry what?"

Also, Jeongguk was pretty sure he had his windows open, or was it always hot in here?

Taehyung looks at him with concern. "You okay? You’re all red."

"I'm fine, yeah. I just... Saw little too much skin, that's all. "Not sure how many socks I should pack."

"That is a major concern," Taehyung laughs, finally just tossing the duffel bag to Jeongguk who almost misses it. "How's this. I'll toss all the shit you’ll need and you stuff them in your bag?"

Jeongguk nods numbly. Not like he had any better ideas. "Yeah, sounds good."

"Alright then," Taehyung claps his hands together and turns to face the mess of Jeongguk's wardrobe like it was the greatest challenge he’s had to face during his two years of super-human education. "Let's get all this shit packed."

Jimin wishes he could just communicate using emojis all the time.
Words were so much harder to put together and sometimes a smiley emoji could convey his feelings much more efficiently than a sentence ever could.

So when he gets a text from Yoongi asking, *hey u busy?*

He honestly wishes he could just reply with a ghost emoji or something just as ambiguous.

Instead, he’s been staring at his screen with his thumbs hovering over the keyboard for the past five minutes.

He was definitely not busy. He’s currently sitting in his room in his boxers, alone because Taehyung was gone to help Jeongguk pack. He’s contemplating the difficulties of human communication and wondering what to reply back with.

He finally comes up with:

*nope what’s up?*

That was chill and casual. Like he hadn’t suffered more than ten minutes just to come up with 3 words.

Right?

Jimin groans, wishing he didn't care so much about something so trivial as texting Yoongi. But anything to do with the silver-haired senior had him all flustered and feeling like a pool of incoherent mess lately.

Ever since that night at the park, he hadn't been able to sort out the mess in his head and just seeing the older was a danger to his mental health these days.

He presses the ‘send’ button and immediately tosses his phone aside and flops back onto his bed. Maybe he could just lie here forever and hibernate, wake up next spring and hopefully by then this will all have passed.

But the buzzing of his phone reminds him that sleeping for an entire season probably wasn't a realistic solution to his problems.

*meet me at the dome in fifteen*

Jimin almost laughs. The text was so Yoongi; simple and straight to the point. No accompanying explanation, of course.

He texts back: *is this our long awaited rematch??*

A few seconds and his screen reads: *ha u wish*

He sends a few skull emojis before getting up and putting on jeans and a black tee, trying not to overthink what the older could possibly want to meet up at the Dome for.
Half an hour later and Jeongguk looks down at his duffel bag with a small sense pride, a feeling of accomplishment, and a bit of sweat on his forehead.

"And with ten minutes to spare!" Taehyung exclaims, taking a seat on Jeongguk's bed. "We make a good team."

There's a knock on the door and Jeongguk looks to Taehyung with a questioning raised brow.

"Am I expecting someone?"

"I don't know, Jin hyung said he'll call when he's here."

Without much of a warning, the second visitor of the day barges into the room with a loud, "Hey losers! Heard you were going away so I brought a little something."

It was Hoseok. Jeongguk should have known; no one else had the ability to emit so much noise without being annoying. It was really a talent in itself.

"Hyung!" Taehyung waves him over to Jeongguk's bed and Hoseok obliges, plopping down on the mattress beside him. "You bought us a goodbye present?"

"Nah, I'm way too cheap for that," Hoseok answers happily. "I'm lending you guys this." He reaches into his backpack and holds up a polaroid camera. It looks almost antique, Jeongguk thinks, from the older design and the fading color on the edges.

"No way!" Taehyung takes it from Hoseok with a childlike excitement so characteristic of the orange-haired boy. Turning it this way and that, he examines it. "I've always wanted one!"

"It was my sister's, but she gave it to me years ago. Since you guys are the only two going away for break, I thought you could use it more than I could." Hoseok explains, laughing at the pure excitement on Taehyung's expression.

"Jeongguk isn't a big fan of cameras." Taehyung tells him, looking at the younger with a grin. "But don't worry, I'll get some good embarrassing shots of him to share with the team."

“You think I’ll let that happen?” Jeongguk retorts, crossing his arms.

“I think you’re forgetting who has Invisibility in this room.” The orange-haired boy says happily.

“Remember, you only get one shot per polaroid,” Hoseok explains, handing a box of polaroid film to Taehyung. “So don’t waste them.”

“Oh I won’t,” Taehyung looks at Jeongguk and gives him a mischievous grin that leaves the younger boy wondering what the hell he had in mind.
The Dome is empty by the time Jimin walks through the sliding doors, the automated female voice greeting him as usual as he steps inside.

He looks around for a few minutes before he spots a head of silver hair in the highest seats of the stadium. A small nod of the head indicates that Yoongi’s spotted him and beckons him to come up.

Jemin can’t say he’s not a little nervous as he climbs the stairs of the Dome’s bleachers. In the silence of the Dome, every step he takes sounds louder than the nervous thrumming of his heartbeat as he makes his way up the bleachers.

He tries hard not to think about the last time he had been alone with Yoongi. He had been pretty successful at stashing the memory away to the distant back corner of his mind but when he finally reaches the highest row and sees Yoongi sitting there, it all comes back and he swallows, nervous and anxious at not knowing what to expect.

Yoongi’s dressed in all black except a grey beannie. The moonlight shines through the glass ceiling above them, landing on the older boy’s pale skin and making him looks almost luminous.

Jemin stuffs his hands inside his bomber jacket and gingerly takes a seat beside Yoongi, careful to save a few inches of space between them.

He’s not even sure what the meeting is for and Yoongi certainly wasn’t giving any hints. Yoongi flicks open the lighter in his hand then quickly clicks it back closed. Flick, click. Flick, click.

Jemin was almost certain it was something Yoongi did absentmindedly whenever he was deep in thought or just blank minded.

Maybe he should speak up first.

But just as he’s about to say something, Yoongi turns to face him and asks, “Did you watch the Games last year?”

The question catches Jimin off guard. He hadn’t been expecting the Games to be brought up, of all things.

“Yeah, of course,” He replies, and he’s almost surprised his voice doesn’t falter. He sounds more confident than he feels. “Saw the whole thing.”

“Then you saw what happened during stage two.” It wasn’t really a question, more of a statement and Jimin nods, remembering it clearly despite the broadcast having been almost a year ago.

There had been an uproar amongst the students after the second stage had been broadcasted. Seokjin - model student and one of the strongest members of the past year’s team - had been disqualified from the final stage after he had broken a Principle Rule.

“Yeah, what happened didn’t make sense.” Jimin had been curious about the outcome and being
on the team this year, had plenty of chances to ask Seokjin about it. But he knew better than to bring it up.

Jimin can’t help but think it’s a bit strange that Yoongi was mentioning it, especially now.

“What they broadcasted wasn’t the full story.” Yoongi says and his tone catches Jimin off guard. He sounds tense, a little anxious, even.

“So what’s the full story then?”

Yoongi pauses mid-flip of his lighter, the small flame licking dangerously close to his thumb. “He shouldn't have done it. He had no sensible reason to break the damn rule.”

“What are you saying?” Jimin wishes this was easier to understand.

“Do you remember who was behind Seokjin when it happened?”

Jimin has to think about it for a second. “He was standing in front of Namjoon hyung, right?”

Yoongi nods in affirmation.

“So, what?”

“He did it to protect Namjoon.”

Protect him? Jimin thinks that over in his head. “You mean he wanted to save his teammate?”

Yoongi doesn’t reply.

“Well, I suppose that’s sensible. Who wouldn’t watch out for their teammates?”

“No,” Yoongi says quietly. “Not just a teammate.”

Jimin looks at him. “What?”

“Jin hyung knew he was one of the most skilled members on our team. Namjoon knew that too. And he wasn’t the one Xiumin was targeting. Namjoon was. But he took the hit for him.”

There’s a pause as Yoongi looks at Jimin with an earnest expression, his eyes locked on the younger’s as if begging him to understand the implications behind his words.

Jimin replies the scene he had watched almost a year ago over in his head. He had watched with wide eyes as Seokjin broke one of the biggest rules; injuring an opponent beyond a Healer’s ability to heal.

He hadn’t known that the Empath’s extended Power was the ability to Deflect. He remembers Xiumin’s ice shards piercing Seokjin’s chest, the entire school watching with held breaths. And then a second later the shards had retracted - as if watching a movie in rewind - pulling themselves out of the Empath before darting in the opposite direction faster than he could blink.

It was unreal. Xiumin didn’t even have the chance to react before his own attack was ripping through his skin. The grotesque squirt of blood had been shown for a split second before the broadcast was abruptly cut off.

“So he took the hit cause he’d rather get hurt than see a teammate suffer?” Jimin offers, thinking that was a reasonable explanation. But Yoongi’s expression falls and he knows that’s not it.
“No. Anyone with common sense in his position would have just let Namjoon take the hit. He knew the team needed him more in the final stage.”

“So, what? He cared more about Namjoon getting hurt than the team winning? Is that what you’re saying?” Jimin asks incredulously, wondering where the hell this conversation was going.

“Don’t you get it?” Yoongi sounds frustrated that he was having to explain it further and it leaves Jimin wondering what the point of this conversation is. “That’s what happens when you have feelings for someone on the team. You fuck up.”

Jimin gives him a long, hard look. “And why are you bringing this up now? A year after it all happened?”

“Because,” Yoongi pauses, leaving the rest of his sentence hanging in the thick silence between them.

When Jimin turns to look at him, Yoongi meets his gaze with an intensity that catches Jimin's breath. He reveals how vulnerable the older looks at the moment. The hard exterior Yoongi wore so naturally is nowhere to be found and it leaves him a little nervous to see this side of him.

The usual sharpness behind Yoongi’s gaze are replaced by a softness that Jimin's only seen a couple of times before. In those rare moments when Yoongi allowed a glimpse of his sincerity, when he let his guard down, Jimin always thought that was when he was the bravest.

The lighter in Yoongi’s hand is forgotten as he looks right at Jimin, the dark orange flecks of his pupils quivering just the slightest as he opens his mouth and says quietly, “Because I don’t want to make that same mistake.”

And Jimin finally understands what he’s trying to say without having to say it. It explained what happened under the mistletoe and everything else in between.

Yoongi would rather pretend like nothing existed between them to save them the pain of acknowledging what could have been.

It was simpler that way, he would probably say.

He doesn’t agree, but at this moment in time, he had no choice but to accept it. The Games were soon and they had been training for it tirelessly. And Yoongi would never show this much vulnerability if he didn’t mean it.

The two look at each other, the unsaid words exchanged between them accompanied by a heavy silence.

Sorry, Yoongi breathes deeply. It’s better this way.

Don’t be sorry. Jimin breaks their eye contact and looks up at the ceiling above them. The stars were out now. Never apologize on the field, remember?
Two weeks prior:

"Mistletoe."

Jimin points up to a spot right above where he and Yoongi are standing.

Yoongi looks up and at first, he doesn't see anything but the falling snow and he thinks of how breathtaking it is, the contrast of the white snowflakes against the black expanse of the night.

Then he sees it, the small mistletoe hanging off a limb of a nearby pine tree and he doesn't know what he had been expecting really, but it catches him by surprise nonetheless.

When he tears his gaze away from it and looks back at Jimin, he realizes with a little gasp that the younger boy had taken a step closer, the distance between them now barely a couple of inches.

He can see the tint of pink colouring Jimin's cheeks and the small snowflakes that gently land on his lashes from this up close.

The only thing that's more beautiful, really, than the falling snow around them is the boy standing in front of him.

What must have been only a few seconds feels like eons stretched out in that infinitely small space between them. Yoongi's breath hitches and his heartbeat quickens to an alarming rate with each passing second, the two never breaking their steadfast gaze, a million thoughts spinning in his head.

Finding his voice at the moment was proving to be an impossible task.

Yoongi watches as Jimin swallows and sharply inhales, revealing a hint of nervousness behind his outward bravado. He can't help but find it incredibly endearing.

Jimin feels like his heart was going to give out from pumping so fast. He hadn't felt this nervous even when he was about to face Yoongi during their first Combat Training match all those months ago. His stomach feels like someone had grabbed his insides by the fistful, twisted them and refused to let go.

He thinks back to the past four months and how far they've come in such a short amount of time. From the beginning of the year and seeing Yoongi's name as his first ever opponent, to being partnered up in Fire Pong, the numerous hours spent at the library together - all these moments flash across his vision and he wonders, for the umpteenth time, how he had gotten himself in so
deep.

But also, how inevitable it was that they’d end up like this.

And he could swear, on every last ounce of his sanity, that he wasn't the only one feeling this way.

There were times he had caught the older looking his way, Yoongi's gaze lingering a second too long to not mean nothing. Moments when Yoongi let down his guard and let Jimin in, showing the vulnerable side him that he worked so hard to hide. And the times when the tension between them had been so thick, he could have ignited a fire in it...
Or maybe he was wrong about it all.

That ounce of doubt eats away at his nerves, but with what little confidence he has left he tells himself to swallow it down.

When he looks at Yoongi, their eyes lock in a shared understanding.

Jimin realizes he doesn't even need to say anything because... Yoongi knew.

"Mistletoe," Yoongi repeats, the corner of his lips raised the slightest degree, the playful fire behind his gaze burning Jimin's sanity. "Now what, Park Jimin?"

*Of course* Yoongi would try and act nonchalant even in this situation.

"You tell me, hyung," Jimin replies, closing just a fraction of an inch of distance between them, the snow under his boots crunching softly.

Yoongi scoffs and a delicate puff of cold air escapes his lips, drawing all of Jimin's attention to them. They're a bright red on the bottom, painted a dusty rose on the top pair. It was driving Jimin mad just looking at them - all he can think about is how nice they would feel pressed against his and it's maybe not exactly all too appropriate considering they were teammates and maybe he had been reading all the signals wrong and-

"You're staring."

Jimin's eyes jump up to meet Yoongi's, his heart pounding so fast it might as well have jumped right out of his chest by now.

"Um," His mind draws a complete fucking blank. He has no idea what to say. All he can really think is Yoongi Yoongi Yoongi and how little space there is between him and the older's lips and maybe, just maybe, he should do something about it.

So he moves in just the slightest, his head inclined to the side and it lays out all his intentions out in the open, he knows that, but he doesn’t care anymore.

But his confidence, his conviction, it’s all lost with just the slightest shake of Yoongi’s head.

“We can’t.”
i swear i didn't mean to take this long to update but i had to apply for grad schools, jobs, and life got in the way :( THANKS FOR BEING PATIENT <3 i really hope you guys enjoyed this chapter!

ps. im sry namjin is so lowkey.  
pps. also sry that yoonmin isn't rainbows and butterflies but where's the fun in that (but dont lose hope on them yet) 
ppps. this chapter was the calm before the storm/shit show about to come so stay tuned yall

pls feel free to leave comments!! as a writer they're literally the most precious things on earth to me <3 id love to hear what you're enjoying or looking forward to seeing or hoping to see in this series!
Chapter 15

At Heroes Academy, the first thing they teach their students is that each and every of their Powers is a gift, found amongst only a selected few in this world and thus should be treasured as such.

But Jeongguk had always questioned the truth behind that statement.

The first time he realized his “gift” had been around the time he turned fourteen, almost a year after Taehyung had moved away from their hometown. He didn’t think it was much of a gift at the time.

He can’t say that he was completely surprised when it happened. He had learned early in his childhood that he was different. Just how different, he had no idea until then.

5 years ago:

Rrrring!

The bell reverberates throughout the hallways and classrooms of his high school, signalling the start of lunch.

History had dragged on for way too long but he still has one more class left for the day. With a sigh, Jeongguk slings his bag on one shoulder and steps out into the hallway. He puts his cap on, pulling the brim low enough to cover his eyes. Putting his earphones in, he heads to the other side of the building.

Glancing at his phone, he realizes he’s only got a few minutes to get to class. He picks up the pace and sprints down the nearest flight of stairs before making his way across the west wing of the school. He takes a sharp turn around the corner only to slam into something very hard and solid in his way, the pain of the collision causing him to stagger backwards.

“What the…” He shakes his head and slowly looks up to see what he had just run into and immediately freezes as he sees who it is.

“Look who it is,” A tall and burly boy sneers, bumping his wide chest against Jeongguk’s smaller frame, causing the latter to falter. “Watch where you’re going, freak.”

Now the thing about the basketball team that rubbed Jeongguk the wrong way was that they were a bunch of tall big-headed idiots who Jeongguk had nothing in common with.

They also had a bad habit of picking on kids half their size and this particular idiot, the team captain, had taken a liking to Jeongguk’s misery. He knew he made an easy target, what with the rumours surrounding him everywhere he went.

The passing students in the hallway turn their heads at the sound of the basketball captain’s jeering tone and Jeongguk quickly ducks his head, not wanting to cause a scene.

“Just let me through,” Jeongguk grits out. It’s so close to being the end of the day - he just had to get through these last few hours. “I have class.”
“Why don’t you skip it for today?” He looks down at him with a crooked grin, bumping his chest against Jeongguk’s a second time, making a point of their size difference. There’s a collective oooh from the small crowd around them and he puffs himself up, trying to look even bigger than he already is.

“Just let me through,” He repeats with clenched fists, trying to keep his breathing even.

“Or else what?” The big-headed fool grins wider and more than anything, Jeongguk wants to wipe that smirk off his face, just this once. “What are you gonna do? Come on, try me, freak.”

There’s a scatter of laughter from the crowd of students, more and more gathering around them. Jeongguk quickly glances sideways and sees that they’re all watching in anticipation, the hopes of a fight breaking out clearly written on their faces.

He should be used to this by now, but it still unnerves him to know they enjoyed this, enjoyed laughing at his expense.

It stirs something inside him, a wrenched twisted feeling along with an anger that spreads over him slowly, like a vile poison injected into his bloodstream. It starts from the bottom of his stomach and courses through his veins, matching the thrumming pace of his heartbeat.

"I said,” The taller boy jabs a thick finger in his chest, causing him to take a step backwards. “What are you gonna do,” Another jab. “Freak?”

As he says the last word, spit flies from his mouth and lands on Jeongguk’s neck and the second it touches his skin, he feels a surge of raw rage overwhelm him and that’s when it happens -

Everything goes dark.

The hallway disappears, suddenly replaced by a darkness so complete he can’t make out anything in its obscurity. He can’t hear anything either - the noise of the other students, the taunting of the bully, even the sound of his own breathing is muted.

Jeongguk pales at the sudden onset of pitch blackness, feeling his breathing become uneven and it’s absolutely unnerving, not being able to see or hear anything.

“What’s going on?” He cries out in fear but the words are lost in the darkness.

But just as fast as it had come, as if someone had just flicked a light switch back on, suddenly he’s standing in the hallway again.

“What...” He breathes out, looking around him in confusion as his heart starts to beat faster and faster against his ribcage. He realizes the other students are staring right at him, their expressions mirroring his own.

He looks over at where the basketball captain had been standing just a few seconds ago. Except he’s not standing anymore - somehow he’s fallen, lying crumpled on the floor with his face contorted in pain. He looks up at Jeongguk in horror as he points a shaking finger to a spot near Jeongguk’s feet.

His eyes are as wide as they can possibly be as he whispers the words, “M-monster.”

Jeongguk slowly follows the boy’s gaze downwards to the floor and is taken back at what he witnesses:
A shadow of a boy is cast on the ground, its dark silhouette bent over the basketball captain’s shadow. As Jeongguk studies the scene, he makes out the black outline of the shadow’s hands wrapped around the neck of the latter, as if it was about to-

“H-help!” Horrible choking sounds emit from the basketball captain lying on the floor and the students around him collectively gasp at the sight, some screaming, others yelling and Jeongguk still has doesn’t understand what’s happening.

Paralyzed, Jeongguk watches as the shadow leans in further, its hold tightening around the other shadow’s neck and an awful sputtering noise follows from the boy on the floor and that’s when Jeongguk realizes -

STOP! He shouts at it, not sure if it can even hear him but he had this strangest feeling that it could.

To his astonishment, the shadow starts to loosen its grip around the other’s neck and a second later, finally lets go. A ragged breath of relief escapes the boy lying on the floor.

The shadow’s black head slowly turns to face Jeongguk and if it had eyes, he imagines it’d be staring right at him.

A strange sensation overcomes Jeongguk from the tip of his ears all the way to his toes - an odd feeling of familiarity. The more he stares, the more it looks awfully familiar… the height, the size, the outline…

But it can’t be . Jeongguk shakes his head, taking a step backwards. No. It couldn’t be him. How could it? That wasn’t him, he had never hurt anyone before and he would never …. 

He lifts a shaking hand to test out his theory.

The shadow raises its hand as well.

Jeongguk doesn’t even have the time to register the fact that the bully had stood up again, watching him with a dark expression.

“You really are a freak.”

He sees the fist aimed his way a second too late.

The last thing he sees before blacking out a second time is the shadow watching him as he falls to the ground.

It’s after school and Jeongguk waits at the bus stop sporting a nasty bruise just above his left eye. Not his most fashionable look but definitely not his worst. He hisses when the cut starts to sting again.

He’s just glad there aren't any students around to stare anymore.
He takes a seat on one of the benches and puts on his earphones, closing his eyes. He thinks back to what happened earlier and tries to make sense of it, but it feels like a daydream turned into a nightmare.

Did that really happen? Was any of that real?

He thinks back to the last few moments before he got knocked out when he feels a sudden a tap on his shoulder.

He’s surprised to see a man dressed sharply in a black suit and tie standing in front of him. The stranger’s pale skin contrasts starkly to his dark suit, and his soft features and air of importance seem very out of place compared to the dingy bus stop they’re both standing under.

Whoever this man is, he definitely isn’t a student.

“Hello, Jeongguk.” The man says calmly and Jeongguk almost drops his phone in surprise.

Today was shaping up to be a very strange day.

“Let me introduce myself,” The man says, gracing a polite smile on his handsome face. The man is pale as snow, Jeongguk notices, and there’s no warmth to his smile either.

“My name is Suho. I’m the Director of the Ministry of Education at the Bureau and I’m here because you, Jeongguk, have a truly unique Power.”


“Jeongguk, you are one of the very last Shadow Manipulators remaining.” He informs him in the more serious tone, his smile gone now.

“Shadow Manipulator?” He repeats, dumbfounded. He’s too stunned by everything that’s happened today to properly register the man’s words.

“Yes. A very rare Power, but one of the most powerful.” The man looks at him expectantly. “And I believe you found yours today.”

He had “found his Power today”? And it was called Shadow Manipulation. He tries to wrap his head around this new information.

But he just can’t.

“Am I being filmed?” He asks, laughing nervously and looking around the small bus shelter. Any second now, a hidden camera was going to pop out and tell him he’s being pranked. That would be the only reasonable explanation for all this.

But none of that happens and Suho’s professional composure doesn’t break even the slightest as he watches Jeongguk’s laughter trail off into silence.

The Director of the “Ministry of Education” - whatever that was - takes a seat beside him on the bench.

“Jeongguk, your Power can be your biggest strength with the right teaching and training. Or it can be the instrument to your downfall.” He says, the tone of his voice taking on a grim undertone. "The students who witnessed your Power today will have their memories taken care of, but from
here on you must be more careful about others seeing your Power."

"Taken care of?" He repeats, not understanding.

“I’m confident it would be in your best interest to attend our nation’s finest Superheroes Institution, the Heroes Academy,” Suho continues. “There, you will learn how to harness your Power and to control it. To use it to its fullest potential.”

Suho reaches into the inside of his jacket and pulls out a business card. He holds it out to Jeongguk who can only look at it wearily.

“Five years from now, we hope you’ll accept our invitation to the Open House. Keep this, as a reminder.”

Jeongguk takes it, staring at the white writing on the blue card. “Five years from now?” He repeats, wondering why anyone would extend an invitation so far in the future.

“Our students don’t start until age eighteen. We normally don’t extend an invitation this early,” Suho explains. “But you, Jeongguk, are not like the others.”

Jeongguk has no idea what to think. This whole encounter has left him in a bit of a state of shock. Then the man says something that really catches his attention.

“Your friend, Kim Taehyung, will also be invited to the Academy.” Jeongguk’s eyes widen at the mention of his name. How on earth did Suho know…?

The man stands up again and straightens his tie before turning his back to Jeongguk. He glances at him one last time before starting to walk away.

“We look forward to seeing you at the Academy.”

“We’re here!”

Jeongguk snaps out of it and comes back to reality at Taehyung’s exclamation. Looking out the window of the train, he spots the big sign reading “Gwacheon” and realizes they’ve finally reached their destination.

The train doors open and the two step onto the platform, their duffel bags in hand. The station is busy with people bustling about, the sound of their footsteps mixing in with the train’s loud blowing whistle.

“We’re here!” Taehyung beams, throwing his arms wide and Jeongguk smiles back. It finally hits him that they’re back here after all these years.

“Yeah,” He replies. “It’s been a while.”
“Come on, I’m starving.” Taehyung slings an arm around his shoulder and leads the way to the station’s exit.

Jeongguk glances back at ground where Shadow follows behind them.

*You excited to be back?*

Shadow only shrugs in response.

*Does it feel like home to you?* He asks, genuinely curious.

But Shadow just silently follows in their footsteps and Jeongguk can’t help but wonder where exactly its ‘home’ could be.

Jimin decides that winter break is no fun without Taehyung around.

Last winter, the two of them had spent their two weeks of freedom in the best way possible: chilling in their dorm room Netflixing a marathon of their favourite shows (Game of Thrones for Taehyung, Friends for Jimin).

This year, however, Taehyung and Jeongguk had left to go back to their old hometown, leaving Jimin alone with one too many thoughts in his head.

If he had been in this situation half a month ago he probably would have asked Yoongi to hang out, but now…

Now, things were different.

Without meaning to, he thinks - for the hundredth time today - about Yoongi.

About Yoongi and his first match all those months ago. Yoongi and that time they teamed up for Fire Pong and how surprisingly easily the two got along after that. Yoongi and all those hours they had spent together in the library. That damn Halloween party that started this whole mess with the maid costume fiasco...

*Yoongi takes another step forward, not taking his eyes off of Jimin, closing the gap between them. The air between them is downright stifling and even without his lighter, Jimin thinks Yoongi could probably ignite a fire with the amount of tension in the tiny space between them.*

*He was practically trapped between the sink behind him and Yoongi in front of him. He needed to get out of this bathroom, otherwise he was pretty sure he was going to combust from the tension, his confusion and everything in between.*

*Jimin hastily pushes himself off the sink and takes a few quick steps sideways so that he wasn't*
nearly chest to chest with Yoongi anymore. Fumbling, he grabs the pink dress from the floor and straightens up, looking at anywhere but Yoongi, holding the costume in his slightly trembling hands.

"So, um, you want me to put this on or not?" He asks, his voice coming out shaky and uneven. Get a hold of yourself, he thinks in his head. He didn't need Yoongi realizing all of this was getting to him.

"Of course. I picked it out just for you." Yoongi replies, tone light and casual as he takes a few steps back, finally giving him space. "Thought you'd look real cute in it."

Yoongi doesn't seem to notice Jimin's internal turmoil, that playful grin still lingering at the corner of his lips.

Stashing away his confusion and his mixed feelings to a distant corner in the back of his head, he picks up the black dress from the floor. It takes all his willpower to keep his voice even and casual. "Like you said, two of us, two dresses." He tosses the black frilly black thing at the older.

"Right, like I said." Yoongi mutters, catching it in mid-air.

Jimin watches as Yoongi struggles to pull the small dress over himself, somehow managing to get his arms through the holes.

When Yoongi spreads his arms wide to give Jimin the Full Effect, Jimin can't help but think he looks downright ridiculous. Min Yoongi, the tough and brash Fire Manipulator who had burned his arm on his first ever match, is now standing before him wearing a french maid dress, looking like he came straight out of some shoujo manga.

With a frustrated sigh, Jimin leans back on his chair and runs an agitated hand through his hair. Had that really been just a couple of months ago?

Even so, there’s no point in thinking back to the past anymore, he tells himself. He had to look forward from here on, no matter how many times a certain Fire Manipulator crossed his mind. He had to put it all past him.

Something vibrates in his pocket, interrupting his thoughts. He takes out his phone and reads the new messages in their group chat.

Rap god jin: hey all, impromptu team potluck tonight! my place at 7, bring a dish :)

Hoseok: ok but for our health and wellbeing, namjoon pls bring cutlery instead

Yoongi: i second that

hoseok: i still have nightmares about his homemade chili from last year

Rap god jin: damn i forgot about that chili. ok but the rest of u bring something

Namjoonie: wooow when i try to do something nice for u guys….
Yoongi: trying to poison us isn’t exactly ‘nice’

Namjoonie: ꇏ_(┐٥_۶)/ʃ

Namjoonie: Not like the rest of you guys can cook

Rap god jin: idk about u peasants but my food is devine

Rap god jin: anyways, come at 7 & don’t be late xoxo

After greeting Taehyung’s family, Jeongguk feels overwhelmed by their warm hospitality even though it’s been years since they’ve seen him last.

“I still remember how inseparable you two were,” Taehyung’s mom had told him with fondness in her voice as she greeted him at the door. “Taehyung used to bug us all the time to let you sleepover.”

“My fake crying worked like a charm,” Taehyung had winked at Jeongguk from behind his mom’s back, making him laugh.

Currently, they’re chilling in Taehyung’s room. Their unpacked bags lie forgotten on the floor as they both sit perched cross-legged on Tae’s bed, flipping through an old photo album he had forgotten about.

Jeongguk peers over Taehyung to look at the pictures, resting his chin on the older’s shoulder.

“Remember this?” Taehyung points at a photograph of ten-year old Jeongguk holding a melting ice cream cone and looking very upset, his nose scrunched up and tears welling in his eyes. “You got so mad when I took this photo.”

“Oh yeah,” Jeongguk remembers that day quite clearly and chuckles at the memory. “You kept pointing the camera in my face when all I wanted was to enjoy my ice cream.”

“But look how cute you look all teared up!” Taehyung teases, flipping the page.

“Hey, look. Your old place.” He points to one picture of the two of them eating watermelons inside Jeongguk’s old living room. “When did your family move away?” He asks.

Jeongguk stares at the photo. “Oh,” He says quietly. “I didn’t tell you?”

“No,” The older shakes his head. “You never told me when. Was it a bit after I left?”
Jeongguk nods once. “Yeah. Guess I forgot to mention it.”

Taehyung glances back at him with a questioning look but Jeongguk keeps his gaze trained on the album and their photographs.

“They moved down to Busan,” He explains. “After I got accepted into the Academy.”

“When my parents moved back here last year, they never mentioned yours. I guess I should have realized.” He says quietly, almost to himself.

There’s no reason for Jeongguk to keep things from Taehyung, he knows. But when it came to the matter of his family any common sense seemed to go out the window. It wasn’t something he liked to discuss with anyone.

“Hey,” Jeongguk sits up and swings his legs off the edge of the bed. “Is the skating rink nearby still open?” He asks, keeping his tone light and cheery.

Taehyung studies him with a tilt of the head for a second or two. Jeongguk feels almost transparent under his friend’s gaze but a beat later, Taehyung smiles back and asks, “You sure you won’t slip and fall?”

He knows he needs to explain sooner or later, but right now, he just wants to enjoy his free time with Taehyung as much as he can.

“Nah, I’m graceful as fuck.”

Now that it’s getting close to the end of December, the holiday spirit looms over their heads, its presence evident pretty much everywhere on campus.

The numerous trees lining the sidewalks are decorated with colorful lights, lampposts are wrapped in tinsel, and holiday music blasts at all hours of the day in the cafeteria dining hall. And of course, Seokjin wanted a team potluck dinner.

“So what should we bring to the potluck this time?” Namjoon asks Yoongi, the two of them sitting at their desks in their room, mindlessly scrolling through their phones.

“Well I only have ramen left.” Yoongi informs him. “But you just bring the cutlery. Don’t want a repeat of last year, do we?”

“Okay, look. The chili was not my fault,” He says defensively. “The beans were bad already! I just forgot to check.”
“See, if you had checked maybe none of us would have got food poisoning.”

Namjoon just shakes his head, muttering “since when do beans even expire” under his breath.

“So, did you and Jimin fight or something?” Namjoon asks him casually, glancing up from his phone.

“What?” Yoongi looks a little taken back at the sudden change of topic.

“Just noticed you two haven’t been hanging out much.” He says simply.

“Oh.” Yoongi supposes that was pretty obvious. He was in their room a lot more these days and Namjoon was a pretty intuitive roommate (to Yoongi’s annoyance).

“I took your advice,” Yoongi tells him, his voice a little hesitant. He knew in his head that what he did was the right thing to do. Logically, what he did made sense.

But for the past week, there’s been this insistent tugging in his chest that kept saying otherwise. Especially not when he couldn’t forget the look on Jimin’s face when he said those two words:

_We can’t._

“I know it was the right thing to do,” Yoongi says quietly, thinking back to their conversation in the Dome. “But I just feel really...”

Shitty. Crappy. Terrible. All of the above.

“Hey,” Namjoon looks over at him from where he’s sitting. “It’s better than risking it in the Games, trust me.”

Yoongi really hopes he’s right.

Tying up his laces to his skates, Jeongguk hopes he hasn’t forgotten everything from his childhood skating lessons. It’s been years since he’s been on the ice but he’s heard that skating was like riding a bicycle; once you learn it, you don’t forget. Right?

Taehyung’s done putting his skates on before he is. He gets up from the bench and tests out the blades on the padded floor, taking careful steps towards the ice rink.

It’s the rink in the community centre and with only a couple other people besides the two of them, it’s pretty quiet and nice in here.
Jeongguk watches from where he’s sitting as Taehyung carefully steps onto the ice, one foot at a time. He spreads out his arms for balance and takes small steps with caution.

Then he starts to take bigger glides, biting his lip in concentration.

Once he gets the hang of it, he skates halfway around the rink and back, then turns to Jeongguk with a wide grin on his face. He gives him a two thumbs up.

“Come on, get over here!”

Jeongguk stands at the edge of the ice. Concentrating on his centre of balance, he puts one skate on the surface and then the other. Okay, this isn’t too bad. He’s standing on ice and he hasn’t fallen yet. He’s got this.

Taehyung skates over and stops right in front of Jeongguk. “Hey, what were the exact words you said again?” He asks, reaching out a hand to grab Jeongguk’s. “Oh that’s right, “graceful as fuck”, was it?”

“Yeah, about that…” Jeongguk starts to say, but before he can even protest, Taehyung tugs on his hand and starts skating backwards, pulling a surprised Jeongguk along.

“Prove it, Jeon!” Taehyung laughs, skating faster and faster and Jeongguk struggles to keep up, putting one skate in front of the other while hoping he doesn’t fall on his face.

“Whoa, hey!” Jeongguk calls out, gripping Taehyung’s hand for his dear life. “I didn’t sign up for this!”

Taehyung just laughs harder, all while skating backwards and leading the way as they slowly skate around the periphery of the rink.

Jeongguk realizes Taehyung’s a much better skater than he is.

“Well what do you know,” Taehyung smiles as they slow down their pace, facing each other. “You’re skating.”

The inevitable thing with being roommates is that you become familiar with the other person’s habits, whether you like it or not.

For example, Namjoon could tell you all about Yoongi’s sleeping habits (his naps are quite frequent), eating habits (he wasn’t a fan of sweets), and studying habits (it was either hours on end or none at all; there was no in-between).
Other than habits, roommate-ship also teaches you how to learn to read the other person.

For instance, when Yoongi’s pissed off about something, Namjoon knows he’ll silently brew about it. And when Yoongi was happy or satisfied about something, he wouldn’t act like Hoseok who would go around telling anyone willing to listen about what happened to him that made him so excited.

No, Yoongi is a man of subtle actions and Namjoon has become quite familiar with them over the years.

This past week, however, things had been off with Yoongi. He’s been quieter than usual and hasn’t spoken much at all.

Namjoon knew what happened earlier that week with Jimin; Yoongi had at least told him that much. But hadn’t spoken a word on how he felt about it. He was often like that, Namjoon has realized; stating facts and being objective while leaving the finer details out.

So when Yoongi quietly says, “I know it was the right thing to do, but I just felt really...” and lets his sentence trail off, Namjoon is glad he’s finally opening up.

“It’s better than risking it in the Games, trust me.” He tells him, truly meaning it.

Yoongi gives him a doubtful glance before turning back to his phone. “I guess we’ll see.” He says quietly.

“Have you talked to him since?”

“No,” He answers, shaking his ashen-grey hair. The color was changing more frequently than usual. “I’ll see him at Jin’s, I guess.”

“Will it be awkward?”

Yoongi considers the question. “I don’t know.”

“Hyung,” Namjoon says carefully, choosing his next choice of words cautiously. “I know it sucks right now, but you saw what happened to me and Seokjin last year.”

Yoongi sighs, his expression bleak.

“Yeah.” He leans the back of his head against his chair and looks up. “It just sucks. All of this.”

In all the time he’s shared this cramped room with Yoongi, he’s learned so many of his habits and he’s gotten to know him pretty well. But he has never seen him look this desolate over another person and a part of him is happy that Yoongi’s finally letting himself open up to someone.

But another part of him is sorry for him. He knows the pain of lost potentials, the frustration and pain of knowing your feelings can never be realized.

Namjoon just hopes Yoongi handles it better than he did.

“It does.”
Taehyung suggests they go to his favorite local restaurant for dinner, a small place that they had known since they were kids.

“The lady who owns the place practically saw us grow up,” Taehyung and Jeongguk take their time as they make their way. Jeongguk is surprised at how well he remembers these street; he hasn’t walked on them for years yet his feet seem to know where they’re going. Behind him, Shadow follows at a peaceful pace.

The snow beneath their boots softly crunches with each step. The night air has a chilly bite to it that has Jeongguk shivering, but the thought of a warm meal after all that skating has him feeling excited.

“Think she’ll recognize you?” He asks, already imagining the plates of meat he wants to order.

“Well yeah, this face stays dashing no matter what.” Taehyung tells him with his nose in the air, glancing at him sideways with a goofy grin.

“If by dashing you mean stupid, then yeah,” Jeongguk grins back. “Very.”

Taehyung shoves his arm in retaliation.

They finally arrive and as they walk in, the delicious smell of grilled pork instantly makes Jeongguk’s stomach grumble.

Despite the tiny space of the restaurant, it’s packed to the brim with local customers and it takes a few minutes for them to get seated.

They’re looking over the menu when a loud voice cuts through all the chatter and noise:

“Is that our Taehyungie and Jungkook?”

Both of them look up as a small but busty old lady walks over to their table with her arms spread wide. Taehyung jumps up from his seat and greets her with a tight embrace, smiling widely.

“My goodness, it’s been too long! Look how much you’ve grown!” She exclaims, holding him at arm’s length and looking him up and down approvingly. “And still quite the looker.” She says with a wink.

Taehyung’s cheeks turn a pretty shade of red as he bows his head. “It’s good to see you too, Mrs. Lee.”

“You know you two are welcome here anytime,” She assures him happily. Then she looks over at their table and gives Jeongguk a warm smile. "What, no hug from you, Jeongguk?"

She walks over to their table and wraps her arms around Jeongguk, who returns the hug with a wide smile. "It's nice to see you again, Mrs. Lee."

When she lets him go, she asks, “So what will you boys be having tonight?”
“We’re both starving, so anything you recommend on the menu is good with us.” Taehyung answers.

“Oh honey, you know everything is good on this menu.” She assures the both of them, taking their menus from their hands. “But I’ll give you the chef’s favourites. Hope you two boys wore some stretchy pants.” She tells them with a wink before heading back to the kitchen.

Taehyung turns to Jeongguk with an excited grin. “She’s probably right. Our jeans might not fit after this.”

Jeongguk laughs and leans back in his chair, feeling at ease and very happy at the prospect of eating. “It’s nice to get away from everything, isn’t it?” He asks, comparing their fast-paced life at the Academy to the present moment.

“What do you mean?” Taehyung asks, placing his elbows on the table. “I love having practice five days a week, don’t you?”

Jeongguk stares at him flabbergasted for a few seconds before Taehyung bursts out laughing, pointing at his face. "Oh man, that's priceless."

“Shit, don’t scare me like that,” Jeongguk shakes his head at him but can’t help but laugh too. "Thought you lost it for a second there."

“Nah, our practices are dreadful. But honestly, I kind of live for our class assignments and exams. Especially the ten page paper for History of Powers.”

"Oh yeah. And the mandatory Intro to Powers class?” Jeongguk adds, nodding along. "Favourite part of my day. Honestly, I have the best naps during that class."

"Yeah and can't forget the Combat Training. I mean, getting physically hurt and public humiliation in front of the whole school?" Taehyung makes an exaggerated expression of pleasure, rolling his eyes back and letting out a moan.

Then he gives Jeongguk a sly wink. “Sorry, got a little excited there.”

Jeongguk’s face physically hurts from all the laughing. “You are so embarrassing, you know that?”

“I could turn Invisible and save you the embarrassment if you want,” Taehyung offers, his face dead serious. “But then you’ll look like you’re eating alone and I don’t know if you can handle that kind of social scrutiny.”

“Or you could just sit there and act like a normal person,” Jeongguk counter-offers. “Oh, sorry, I forgot you don’t know what ‘normal’ means.”

Taehyung might have had a good comeback to that but Jeongguk doesn’t get to hear it as their orders come out then. A young waitress brings out three dishes and places them on their table: one bowl of steaming noodles, another bowl of pork stew and a third plate of grilled pork.

Then she places two bottles of soju on the table and Taehyung and Jeongguk both look up at her in surprise.

“Mrs. Lee said it’s on the house,” She explains, shrugging. “Enjoy your meal!”

When she's gone, Taehyung raises a brow at Jeongguk. “Well, you turned 19.” He says, sliding a
bottle across the table. “We should celebrate, right?”

“I turned 19 months ago,” he points out.

“Well let’s save these bad boys for later.” Taehyung suggests, picking up his chopsticks and looking at the food in front of them while licking his lips. “For now, we feast!”

Jeongguk doesn’t waste another second before digging into the noodles, slurping noisily and not giving a care in the world.

Across the table, Taehyung gives him his signature smile and he thinks if he had to put a price on this moment, he probably couldn’t. He hasn’t felt this content in a very long time and that, to him, was priceless.

Seokjin looks at his watch and wonders what was taking the rest of them so long. It’s already past seven and no one’s showed up yet.

He’s about to shoot them all a passive-aggressive text when he finally hears a knock on his door. When he opens it, Namjoon and Yoongi walk in, both greeting him at the same time.

“Hey, hyung.”

“Sorry we’re late.”

“Not my fault, Namjoon was being slow.”

Namjoon hands him a dish wrapped in tinfoil. “It’s not a fancy dish or anything but, uh, we tried.”

“Well, Namjoon somehow burned it the first time, if you can believe it.”

“I thought we agreed not to share that information?”

Yoongi ignores Namjoon. “You’d think if anyone was gonna burn something, it’d be me. Anyway, so I made a second batch,” Yoongi clarifies, taking off his jacket and tossing it onto the couch. “I dunno who cooks worse, but I guess we’ll find out.”

“It’s kind of hard to mess up instant mac and cheese,” Seokjin says, finding it hard to imagine screwing up such a simple recipe. He lifts the tinfoil off a corner of the dish and peers underneath. It was very brown. “Well, it’s the effort that counts.”

There’s a knock at the door again and when Seokjin opens it a second time, Hoseok walks in holding a box of Oreo’s.

“Oreo’s? Really?” Namjoon asks, giving him a pointed look.

Yoongi nods in approval. “Good choice.”

“Probably better than what you brought.” Hoseok says to Namjoon knowingly, gravitating the box
towards Seokjin, stacking it on top of the mac and cheese.

There’s a knock on the door for the third time. Hoseok, being the closest to the entrance, turns the knob and Jimin stands there holding a platter of cookies in his hands.

“Baked some cookies for everyone.” He says, walking inside and closing the door behind him.

Seokjin takes it with a thanks. “Great, everyone’s finally here!” He announces. “Now come on, I didn’t spend all day in the kitchen for nothing.”

He leads the way to the kitchen and all four of them wordlessly obey, following the delicious smell.

The minute they walk in, all four mouths drop simultaneously at the sight of the feast laid out before them and Seokjin feels a small sense of pride; his favourite part of cooking had always been the reveal.

“You, hyung, are my hero.” Hoseok declares. “No, more than that. You’re my idol. Potential husband. Personal chef. All the above.”

“Hyung, seriously,” Jimin says with awe. “This looks amazing.”

“Yeah I know.” Seokjin tells them not-so-humbly. “Come on, take a seat. I didn’t make all this to just have you guys stare at it.”

Namjoon counts the dishes on the table, from the sweet potato casserole and roasted chicken at one end to the pecan pie and eggnog at the other end.

“How long did this take you?” He asks, seriously impressed at the sheer volume of food.

“Most of today,” Seokjin answers simply. “Could have done it faster if I didn’t mess up the measurement for the pie.”

“Oh my god, can you all sit down already?” Yoongi chides, already seated with a fork and knife in his hands. “Who cares how long it took to make? What matters is how fast we can get this down our stomach.”

“You’re a terrible person.” Hoseok informs Yoongi as he takes his seat.

“Thank you.” Yoongi smiles back.

Namjoon sits down beside Hoseok while Jimin takes the remaining chair beside Yoongi and Seokjin thinks he’s imagining it when he notices the slight hesitation before Jimin does so.

“Before we dig in, I just want to say something quick.” Seokjin tells them, raising a warning brow at Yoongi who had been reaching for the roasted pork. Yoongi scowls but retracts his arm with a groan.

“I’m starving, make it quick.” Yoongi complains. Seokjin narrows his eyes at him and he thoughtfully adds, “Please.”

“Well, this year has been really great so far.” Seokjin starts off, looking around the table and giving them a warm smile. “I’m thankful for all the hard work you’ve been putting into our practices. I know it can be tiring having so many in a week, but I’m seriously proud at how far we’ve come.

“That being said, I have some new information to share with you guys.”
When he sees all four pairs of eyes are trained on him, he continues.

“’The Captains from the other schools and I have been in contact. They’ve all talked to their institution’s authorities about the changes to the Games.’ He tells them, his tone serious and he senses the mood in the room take a sharp turn.

“Apparently the presidents of their schools knew from the Bureau officials the opening date would change, but nothing about the Stimulation Room.” Seokjin had thought that was incredibly odd, considering the fact that Suho had mentioned its development had started years ago.

“So the Bureau kept it under wraps? Even from them?” Yoongi asks, looking at him with creased brows. “Why?”

“Maybe to add a surprise factor to the Games?” Hoseok suggests, but Seokjin doubts it.

“Is there anything else the Captains told you?” Jimin asks him.

“No, just that so far.”

“When’s the opening date going to be?” Hoseok asks.

“I don’t know,” Seokjin really wishes he did. He was tired of being kept in the dark. “But like I said, the Thai Captain thinks it’ll be soon.”

A silence falls in the room and Seokjin doesn’t need to use his Empathy to know he’s put them all on edge. The impending Games and the strange mystery surrounding it this year was stressing him out to no end and he’s certain the rest of them felt the same.

But he forces himself to push that bleak thought aside for now and puts on a smile.

“That’s all I wanted to say about it.” He tells them, clearing his throat.

For a few seconds there’s nothing but a heavy silence in the room.

“Well either way, we’ll be prepared.” Hoseok says confidently, looking around the room. He raises his glass and exclaims, “To winning the Games!”

“Hear hear,” Namjoon follows suit, raising his own glass. “To winning the Games!”

Like the others, Seokjin raises his glass in the air. Even with all the mystery surrounding the Games this year, this was his last chance to prove himself and lead his team to victory. He was determined to bring home Gold, no matter what they might throw at them this year.

“To the Games.”
“So in those six years I didn’t see you, you’re telling me you’ve never been on a date?”

“Nope.” Taehyung answers happily, popping the ‘p’ at the end. “Not a single one.”

“You liar,” Jeongguk laughs, having a hard time believing a single word Taehyung was saying. He points a disbelieving finger at Taehyung’s face. “You didn’t get asked out once? With a dashing face like yours?”

Taehyung gives him a very amused grin and takes another swig of his bottle. “Aw Kookie, you think I’m pretty?” He cooes, fluttering his lashes at the younger.

Jeongguk makes an exaggerated gagging motion in reply.

After finishing their meal, they had opened up the drinks and now Jeongguk was already almost done with his.

Maybe he should have drank it slower because the alcohol was definitely sinking in, leaving him feeling dangerously carefree. But he likes this feeling, he decides. He feels like he can do anything.

“So how about you?” Taehyung asks him, sitting back in his chair. “I missed out on your high school life! Fill me in.”

Jeongguk looks at the boy sitting across from him and can’t help the smile that forms on his slowly reddening face.

“Remember when you told me you were moving away?” Jeongguk starts off, feeling very warm. “And I said I’d be fine? Well, that was a big lie. I hated high school.”

“You did?” Taehyung asks, surprised, his smile gone. “Why, what happened?”

“Nothing.” Jeongguk says a little too quickly, thinking back to his freshman year and immediately repressing the memory. “Nothing happened, I just wish you could have been there.”

“Me too,” Taehyung tells him looking sorry and Jeongguk wishes he hadn’t brought this up.

He downs the last few drops from his bottle and from across the table, Taehyung does the same.

“You look like you’re thinking too much,” Taehyung leans his elbows on the table, resting his chin on one hand as he peers at Jeongguk. “What’s on your mind?”

“A lot of things,” Jeongguk answers honestly.

“Care to share?”

“Well,” Jeongguk shakes his bottle for good measure before putting it down on the table. “What exactly is ‘home’?” He asks the first question that pops in his head.

“Where free wi-fi is.” Taehyung answers simply.

Jeongguk nods, agreeing. “What’s on my mind…” He feels the heat rise from his neck to his cheeks. He doesn’t mind, it felt kind of nice. “Well there’s school. The upcoming Games. Christmas. You. The rest of the-”

“Me?”

Shit. Jeongguk mentally scolds himself for letting that slip.
“Um, yeah, I mean,” He wrecks his brain trying to come up with something. “You know, I was just thinking about how you’re...”

“Always on your mind?” Taehyung offers jokingly, wearing that damn square smile of his and Jeongguk can’t look away.

“Always.” Jeongguk mutters without thinking.

He swallows when he realizes Taehyung isn’t not laughing anymore.

“I mean, you know, since we see each other everyday and you’re-” He stammers, wondering if he can just blame the alcohol just this one time.

“That’s funny,” Taehyung says gently, catching Jeongguk off guard. “You’re always on my mind too.”

There’s something about the older boy’s gaze that captivates Jeongguk and again, he can’t look away. All he can focus on are the hints of light brown in the boy’s almond-shaped eyes. Jeongguk’s always admired Taehyung’s eyes and the gentle way he saw the world.

Taehyung opens his mouth to say something.

“I-”

But he’s cut off by the sudden loud voice of Mrs. Lee who shouts, “One more round on the house, boys?” across the restaurant.

Taehyung turns to her and gives her a thumbs up. “To go, Mrs. Lee!”

He turns to Jeongguk and whispers, “Alcohol helps with the cold.”

Jeongguk laughs for what feels like the millionth time today. “If you say so.”

All throughout dinner, Seokjin has been picking up strange vibes from the two members sitting beside each other.

Jimin, for one, is avoiding looking at Yoongi and hasn't spoken a word to him all throughout the meal.

Yoongi’s been acting just as oddly and it was the strangest thing to witness, given the fact that the
two had been pretty much inseparable all semester.

At one point, Hosoek had asked them what they should do for Christmas and Namjoon had suggested they do Secret Santa like last year. Yoongi had shot down the idea, saying it was impossible to find a gift for Namjoon.

Seokjin had then suggested they do White Elephant instead, since it was similar to Secret Santa but with no known gift recipient.

Yoongi, the holiday Grouch of the team, had asked if they could just celebrate the holidays without having to be so “capitalist about it”.

And that’s when Jimin had muttered, “Or you could just stop saying no to everything” to which Yoongi had immediately shut up and stuffed his mouth with pie instead.

An uncomfortable silence had followed after.

Fortunately, Hoseok had a knack for turning conversations over and had started blabbing on about his progress on discovering his extension.

Confused and wanting answers, halfway through the meal he shoots Namjoon a questioning look. “Hey Namjoon, lend me a hand in the kitchen for a sec?”

Namjoon looks back at him looking very puzzled. “Um, I doubt I’d be helpful in there.”

Seokjin sighs and mouths, Read me, knowing Namjoon never used his Telepathy on his friends if he didn’t need to.

Namjoon gets the hint and a second later, Seokjin he feels that familiar odd sensation of sharing the space inside his head with someone else.

Something going on between those two? He nods his head in the direction of Yoongi and Jimin.

As soon as he Reads him, Namjoon gets up from his chair. “On second thought, I need to practice my cooking. Let’s go to the kitchen.”

Ignoring the others’ puzzled looks, Seokjin leads the way out the dining room. Once they’re inside the kitchen, he closes the door behind them. Crossing his arms, he turns to Namjoon.

“Okay, is it just me or is it really awkward in there?”

“Definitely not just you.”

“What the hell happened between them?”

“Well,” Namjoon frowns, trying to think of a simple way to explain the situation. “Let’s just say nothing will happen between them from here on. Yoongi made sure of that.”

“He what?” Seokjin had been pretty sure - not just from his Empathy - that the happiest Seokjin’s ever seen Yoongi was during the past couple of months. And he was also certain it was thanks to a certain other member on the team.

That didn’t add up. “Why would he do that?”

“‘Cause...” Namjoon pauses, rubbing the back of his neck and looking at him with hesitation.
"'Cause?"

The Telepath sighs. "Because of what happened to us."

"Oh." That wasn’t exactly what he was expecting. He’d learned to accept and get past what happened last year, although it had taken him a long time. "But it’s not like what happened to us is guaranteed to happen to them -"

"I know," Namjoon interrupts. "I know, but I just thought... better safe than sorry, you know?"

"No, that's-" Seokjin starts to argue but just then, the door behind them swings wide open, causing the two of them to jump back in surprise. It was Yoongi, holding an empty plate of pie.

"Kinda finished the last slice, is there more?" He asks, looking at Seokjin.

As the two of them struggle to stammer out an incoherent reply, Yoongi he takes in their frozen expressions, their wide eyes, and the almost apologetic expression on Namjoon. He closes the door behind him and looks both of them with narrowed eyes.

"Okay, what the hell's going on?"

Once they finish paying their bill (cut to half thanks to Mrs. Lee), Jeongguk and Taehyung start walking back to Taehyung’s home, both feeling very full and just a bit more than bit tipsy.

Jeongguk swings his arms freely as they walk. Maybe Taehyung was right, maybe alcohol does help with the cold. His hands don't feel like they're freezing despite their exposure to the cold night air.

It’s dark outside save for the soft orange glow from the lampposts lining the sidewalks. It casts a gentle light against Taehyung’s silhouette and Jeongguk can’t tell if it’s the booze or something else that causes his heart to skip a beat at the sight of it.

"There’s something I keep meaning to ask you," Taehyung says, his words a little muffled by the scarf wrapped around his neck.

"What's up?"

"When you messaged me last summer, how did you know I was already attending the Academy?"

"Oh," He struggles to recall the distant and fading memory of that fateful afternoon when he had learned the term Power for the first time. "I knew since I was fourteen."

"You did?" Taehyung gives him a quizzical look. "How?"
Trying to think back to such a long time ago was not an easy task for someone with low alcohol tolerance. “This man came up to me and told me.” As soon as he says it, he realizes how strange that sounds.

“That I would be at the Academy?”

Jeongguk nods, wondering why Taehyung sounded so surprised. “And that I would be invited when I turn eighteen. Isn’t that what they told you too?”

“No,” Taehyung looks at him still wearing that surprised look. “I found out at eighteen.”

“I guess it’s different for everyone.” Jeongguk shrugs, not really getting why this was worth discussing.

Taehyung doesn’t look like he believes that. “Jimin said they found him at eighteen too.”

“Why does it matter? We all ended up there anyway.”

Taehyung looks at him earnestly. “I don’t know, it just seems weird they’d go out of their way to tell you that early.”

Jeongguk was feeling buzzed and content and if he was going to be honest, talking about school was killing his buzz. “What’s the big deal? Come on, let’s enjoy our break, stop talking about school,”

He bends down to scoop up a huge pile of snow from the ground. He pats it down into a large ball until it’s about the size of a football.

“And have some fun instead!” He yells out, not giving Taehyung any time to react before the snowball hits him squarely on his back.

“You-!” Taehyung shouts, his eyes narrowing. “Oh you’re so gonna pay for that.”

“Oh, yeah?” Jeongguk was already on snowball number 2. “If I remember correctly, your aim is as bad as my math.”

Taehyung laughs as he starts forming his icy weapon but before he can throw it, Jeongguk takes shelter behind a nearby garbage bin, bending down and making sure his head is covered.

“Like that’s gonna do anything.” He hears Taehyung taunting. Then a loud whack follows and Jeongguk peers over the edge of the bin to see where Taehyung’s snowball had missed.

“Ha! Missed!” He stands up quickly and aims his snowball a second time, but Taehyung is nowhere to be seen.

“Oh come on! Invisibility? Really?” He shouts into the night, Taehyung’s laughter coming from somewhere nearby. “Cheap move, hyung.”

He looks around and tries to spot a floating snowball or any other sign of Taehyung, but he’s literally disappeared.

“This isn’t fair, you know,” He looks around harder, his snowball ready to go. “Stop hiding and show yourself!”

“If you say so.” Taehyung’s voice comes from behind him and a second later, feels the impact of his snowball against his back.
Laughing, Taehyung turns visible again and slings an arm around the younger’s shoulder. “Sorry, I had to. I do have shitty aim.”

As Taehyung faces the street ahead of them, Jeongguk catches the sight of him wearing a soft smile that reaches all the way to the corner of his eyes, causing the creases to crinkle and there it is again, the tight feeling in his chest, the anxious jitters in his fingertips and toes -

He knows deep down what all these symptoms are.

He knows, but he wishes he didn’t. He tells himself for the millionth time not to think about it and instead, looks away from the boy beside him and onto the road ahead, reminding himself that their friendship meant more to him than anything.

“Am I interrupting something?” Yoongi asks, wondering why the hell Namjoon and Seokjin both looked like deer caught in headlights.

"Uh," Namjoon looks beside him at Seokjin for help. "We were..."

"Discussing recipes!" Seokjin exclaims, his voice a little too high pitched to pass for casual. He coughs, lowering his tone. "Namjoon was just, um, asking me how I made the pie."

"Really." Yoongi looks utterly unconvinced as he eyes them suspiciously. He places the plate down on the counter and crosses his arms. "You planning to bake a pie, Namjoon?"

"Uh huh," The Telepath nods, his smile way too tight to do a convincing job. "You know, holiday baking and all that..."

"Okay, cut this shit out," Yoongi tells them brashly. "What were you two really talking about just now?"

Seokjin sighs and decides there's really no point in keeping it from Yoongi. "You and Jimin."

"Oh," Yoongi's hard expression softens a tinge. He shuffles on his feet and asks, "And?"

"Even without my Empathy, I can sense the tension between you two," Seokjin tells him. "I think you made a mistake, Yoongi."

Yoongi looks at Namjoon accusingly, his shoulders squared. "You told him?"

"Well..." Namjoon rubs the back of his neck, looking apologetic as he says quietly. "He was gonna find out anyway."

"Yeah, you made sure of that." Yoongi says in an undertone.
"Look, Yoongi, what happened with me and Namjoon last year was... unfortunate," Seokjin says, sounding exasperated. "But just because it happened to us doesn't mean that it'll happen to you and-"

"But it does!" Namjoon interjects, turning to face Seokjin with creased brows. "You and I both know how risky it is, being too attached to a teammate."

"There are risks, I won't deny that," Seokjin replies, his jaw set. "But because of how close we became, we also learned how to work better together."

"I just think," Namjoon says evenly, looking the oldest square in the eyes. "The risks outweigh the benefits."

"Look," Yoongi interrupts, holding his hands out. The two turn their heads to look at Yoongi. "What's done is done."

Seokjin sighs, the tension in his shoulders loosening. "I just wish you had talked to me about it first. Not all of us are on the same page, apparently." He says, glancing sideways at Namjoon who meets his gaze evenly.

"He made the right choice," Namjoon says in a low voice. "If no one wants to get hurt."

Seokjin opens his mouth to say something but the door suddenly bursts open and Hoseok rushes in, holding up his phone, Jimin right behind him.

"Guys, the President!" He exclaims, the urgency in his voice unmistakable. "He's announcing something."

"What?"

"What announcement?"

"The Bureau, they sent a text to all the competing teams just now. It was a link to this video," He points to his screen where their President, Universo, is being displayed, sitting in what appeared to be an office in the Bureau Headquarters, the usual all-white setting of the Bureau distinguishable in the background.

Hoseok turns up the volume on his phone. "It's starting."

The whole team crowds around Hoseok as silence fills the kitchen. They listen to static for a few seconds before the President's distinguishable low voice comes on.

"Good evening, teams." He says calmly, "I trust all of you are having a relaxing winter break. However, today I have some exciting news that requires your immediate attention.

"As you all know, traditionally, the Games take place in the summer of every year," he continues, his deep voice steady. "This year, I am excited to announce a few changes that we've been planning for years now."

The five of them collectively hold their breaths as they listen, the anticipation in the kitchen so thick Yoongi swears he can almost taste it.

"The first of these changes will be the starting date of the Games," Universo announces.

Beside Yoongi, Seokjin swallows thickly.
"Bambam was right..." He mutters under his breath.

"The anticipated annual Games will be starting in January instead, soon after the New Year. Teams, this means your academic workload will be waived to the summer." The President continues. "As for the Opening Ceremonies, it will be held the day before the actual Games itself on the first Friday of January."

Yoongi can't believe what he's hearing.

"I realize this may be abrupt, but I have complete confidence in all of your abilities to compete to your fullest potential."

"This is bullshit," Yoongi seethes, unable to believe what he's hearing. "They just cut down our training time to half."

"The Bureau will be making the official announcement to the public tomorrow morning. And team Captains, I require your presence in an all-Captain meeting this upcoming Saturday. My office, same time as last."

Universo leans back in his chair, the corners of his mouth rising as he does so.

"All the best of luck, teams."

Chapter End Notes

1. I'M SRY THIS TOOK A WHILE TO UPDATE, THANK U FOR BEING PATIENT <3 i got a lot of questions asking whether i'll continue this or not cause im slow but BELIEVE ME WHEN I SAY I'LL FINISH THIS AU IF IT'S THE LAST THING I DO. it just takes me some time cause im working full time :(

2. but i'm going to try to be more regular with updates!

3. thank u from the bottom of my heart for all ur comments!! i adore every single one them, they fuel me to my core. you guys are the best, seriously <3

feel free to leave ur thoughts!! they're appreciated so much more than you know :) <3
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

I know it’s been a long time since this fic has been updated, so if you need some refreshing pls read the previous chapters! You’re in for a ride ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There aren’t many things Yoongi considers to be worth his time. He’s a man of simple means and he intends to keep it that way.

He still remembers how, years ago, Namjoon had listed one of his defining characteristics as “his inability to be expressive about his feelings”. He agrees that he isn’t as talkative as Hoseok nor is he as lively and carefree as Taehyung, but he didn’t think he was un expressive.

“You don’t say much,” Namjoon had stated that warm evening as they sat around in their shared dorm room, their studying forgotten for the day. The two had been roommates for only a couple of months at this point, but even then it had felt like much longer to Yoongi. “But I think it’s your strength, in a way.”

“My strength?” Yoongi had asked doubtfully.

“Yeah,” Namjoon had looked over at him then, those prominent dimples showing. “It lets your actions speak louder than your words.”

Yoongi appreciated the cliched insight, though he remembers rolling his eyes at the Telepath.

See, you’re doing it again.” Namjoon had chuckled.

Fast forward to the present where the two roommates are currently holed up in their room on a cold winter morning with Seokjin perching on Namjoon’s bed, Hoseok sitting on the floor and Yoongi is once again reminded of how perceptive Namjoon can be.

“You’re less talkative than usual.” The Telepath comments casually, looking down at Hoseok who’s sitting cross-legged. “And that never happens, so spill.”

“Are you implying I never shut up?” Hoseok replies jokingly, looking away from his phone for a second to glance up at Namjoon. “Well, we just got fucked over by the Bureau. So there’s that.”

The President’s announcement a few days ago had turned even their brightest member’s mood sour. Usually Hoseok was the one trying to stay optimistic, but even he was being short with everyone lately and Yoongi couldn’t blame him.

“It’s frustrating, I know.” Seokjin agrees from where he’s lying on the bed, his head perched on Namjoon’s outstretched legs. “This earlier start date is -”

“Complete bullshit.” Yoongi finishes for him.

“How could they not give us even a month’s notice?” Hoseok voices his concerns for what feels like the hundredth time.
“I know.” The Captain agrees, looking up at the ceiling. Yoongi can’t help but notice the dark circles under his eyes. They’ve all been thinking about this too much, but Seokjin seemed the most stressed. “But it’s happening, and we need to rethink our strategy.”

“And Tae and Jeongguk aren’t even here.” Hoseok mutters.

It wasn’t like Taehyung and Jeongguk could have predicted the recent turn of events, but Yoongi now wishes they hadn’t gone away for the winter break.

He looks over at Seokjin, watching for his reaction and notices him looking at Namjoon intently, a tired request behind his eyes.

The telepath meets his gaze and holds it for a few seconds before nodding just the slightest.

Yoongi’s witnessed this intricate routine between them one too many times before; he suspects they’ve perfected it long ago. Seokjin would signal for the Telepath to Read him in situations like these - times where he needed Namjoon to be the voice of reason - and Namjoon would always oblige.

“We could ask them to come back early.” Namjoon says quietly, saying what the rest of them were reluctant to admit but needed to be said. “They’ll understand.”

No one says anything - neither agreeing or disagreeing - but their silence is enough of an answer for Seokjin.

A team consensus, then. Minus Jimin.

Yoongi would have liked everyone to be here, but Jimin had been ignoring the few texts he’s sent the past week. Things between them hadn’t improved (maybe worsened, after that awkward potluck) and he suspects that maybe Jimin’s trying to avoid him.

Yoongi doesn’t blame him. He hasn’t exactly been reaching out to him, though not because he doesn’t want to. He just doesn’t know what to say after what happened.

“You ask them to be come back early, then.” Hoseok says, looking at Seokjin. “Since you’re Captain.”

“I’m aware, thanks.” Seokjin says dryly, taking out his phone anyway. “Let’s hope they pick up.”

Taehyung’s barely awake when he hears his phone go off.

He reaches over to the bedside table and picks up on the third ring.

“Hello?” He answers, voice groggy from sleep.

“Hey,” Seokjin answers, and Taehyung finds his tone immediately off-putting. There’s something somber and cautious about it, putting him right on edge. “Is Jungkook with you? I gotta talk to you guys.”
“Yeah, one sec.” Taehyung nudges the sleeping body next to him with his elbow and a second later there’s a rustle of blankets as Jeongguk wakes up beside him.

“What’s up?” The younger boy mumbles, rolling over to his side to give Taehyung a questioning look.

“Seokjin hyung’s on the phone,” he answers, putting the phone on speaker. The deep rumbling of Jungkook’s voice in the mornings had always been one of Taehyung’s favorite sounds, but he ignores that for now and focuses on the call. “He said he wants to talk to us.”

“What?”

Jungkook’s voice is heard on the other line apparently, because Seokjin answers not a second later.

“There’s been a change of plans.” Seokjin informs them, his voice solemn. The two boys go silent. “I hate to be asking, but I need you guys to come back to the Academy as soon as possible. Here’s what happened...”

“What?” Taehyung exclaims, startling Jungkook a little.

For the past ten minutes, the two of them had listened to Seokjin explain the whole situation, starting with the President’s abrupt announcement. The entire time, Jungkook felt a growing sense of anxiety and something else deep in his chest. It was an uncomfortable, tense feeling.

“We need to practice our team coordination as much as we can in the time we have remaining.” Seokjin now concludes. “We need you two back here.”

Taehyung turns to him with wide eyes, the usual brightness behind them considerably dimmed. “No, of course.” he says quietly, staring right at Jeongguk. “We’ll head back tomorrow.”

With a quick goodbye, they end the call.

He watches as Taehyung sits up on the bed, the morning sun shining through the window and landing on the crown of his head, making the brown strands gleam in his dim room.

Jungkook sits up as well. “Well,” he offers, not sure what else to say. “I guess we should start packing tonight and-”

“Hey in case you forgot, we still have the rest of today left,” Taehyung interrupts, the brightness behind his almond-shaped eyes just as bright as the morning sunlight. “The day’s just started.”

Jungkook wonders if he’ll ever get tired of looking into them.

“And I have an idea.” The corner of the older boy’s lips curl upwards and Jungkook really should
be used to seeing that motion by now, considering the number of times Taehyung has had one of his “ideas” when they were kids.

Taehyung gets up, throwing the blanket aside, letting the cold air into the bed. “You have the polaroid camera in your bag, right?”

“Yeah, why? What’s your idea this time?” He asks, following Taehyung’s lead, getting up and stretching, although a part of him doesn’t really expect an answer.

And that’s why he’s not surprised when Taehyung turns around to give a brief smile as he says, “You’ll see.”

“So what now?” Hoseok asks after Seokjin ends the call. “We just wait around til they’re back?”

The restlessness in the room doesn’t go past Seokjin’s notice. “If you have any suggestions,” He answers, “I’d love to hear ‘em.”

Hoseok leans his back against the bed frame behind him and looks at the three of them in turn before replying.

“We need to work on our extensions,” he states solemnly. “All of us.”

“I agree,” Yoongi nods, taking out his lighter from his pocket and mindlessly turning it over in his right hand. “Some of us haven’t even discovered it yet.”

Namjoon, Yoongi, Hoseok, Taehyung and Hoseok had all found their extensions at varying points in time. That left Jungkook and Jimin yet to discover theirs.

“And since finding your extension isn’t something that can be forced,” Hoseok continues in a tone much more solemn than his usual one. “It’s something I’ve been worrying about a lot lately.”

Namjoon speaks up then. “We have a few weeks left until the Opening Ceremony. We can try our best to help them.”

“And hope to god they discover it by then,” whispers Yoongi.

“Yoongi,” Seokjin turns to him with a serious look. “You need to help Jimin out. I’ll help Jungkook myself when he’s back, but you know Jimin best.”

“But Taehyung’s his best fri-”

“Taehyung’s not here right now.”

“But-”
“Just do it.” He says with a finality to his words. “He needs you.”

Yoongi sighs, not really sure if Jimin would be willing to accept his help at the moment.

“Fine,” he says, closing the lighter with a metallic click. The fact that Jimin’s been ignoring him the past week certainly isn’t going to help.

“Let’s have practice tonight, after dinner.”

The last time Yoongi had used his extension had been during last year’s Games.

He had a feeling it was going to be a rough few weeks from here on.

It’s not until they’ve taken a twenty-minute bus ride, gotten off, walked for ten minutes and finally stopped in front of the base of a hiking trail snaking up a mountain that Taehyung explains what his brilliant idea is, although Jungkook could have guessed by now.

During the entire journey here, Taehyung had refused to explain where they were going “for the suspense”.

Jungkook looks up, squinting against the sunlight, trying to see the peak of the mountain.

It was a long way up.

“So basically, we’re gonna climb this bad boy.” Taehyung announces excitedly, placing his mittened hands on his hips.

Jungkook considers himself to be above-average when it came to fitness, but as for Taehyung...

“Um, have you ever hiked before?” Jungkook asks, slightly concerned about the steepness of the mountain and the altitude.

“Nope,” Taehyung replies cheerily. “But it’s fine, I’m like a nimble fox. Plus, I had coffee this morning.”

“Did we bring water?”

“No,” Taehyung answers less cheerily as he realizes that he had not packed something quite as essential as water. “But snow is made from water, so we can eat snow.” Tae turns towards the entrance of the trail and starts walking towards it.

Jungkook doesn’t want to ask if he’s being serious.

“I need to take some good photos to show off when we get back, so let’s go!” Taehyung exclaims.

“Wait!” This was definitely not a well thought out idea, but Jungkook can’t really bring himself to say that. Instead, he says, “This might not be 100% safe.”

“What, the hiking trail?”
“Yeah, I mean, it’s snowy and slippery, what if we fall or slip -”

“Don’t worry, we got boots on,” Taehyung genuinely sounds like he believes in this logic and Jungkook doesn’t know whether to be concerned for their safety or not.

Then Jungkook notices the warning sign behind Taehyung and points to it. “Look, it even says “Caution: Hiking trail for professionals only”.”

“What, you don’t think we’re pros?”

“No, we’re the opposite of pros.”

“Cons?”

“Tae,” Jungkook grows increasingly worried for their safety but Taehyung just grabs his mittened hand in his and starts dragging him towards the start of the trail.

“We don’t have to go all the way up,” Taehyung assures him. “Just high enough for a good pic.”

Jungkook sighs and lets himself be dragged, resigning himself to his fate. “I can’t believe you’re risking our lives for a polaroid picture.”

“Yes and no,” Taehyung answers as they start to climb the first few flight of steps with their heavy, chunky boots. “Not just the picture, Jungkook. The experience, the sense of pride, the sunset, and cardio.”

Jungkook just shakes his head and can’t help but let out a laugh, because this was so Taehyung - to do something stupid on a whim and drag him into it - and he had admit, there was a slight thrill to climbing with no precautions.

“Okay,” He says, laughing. “Lead the way, then.”

Taehyung, still holding onto his hand - maybe for support, Jungkook thinks - gives him a smile as bright as the rising sun behind him. “That’s the spirit!”

“Jimin! Open up!”

It’s noon and Jimin was having a pretty good dream until someone decided to bang against his door and rudely wake him up.

“Jimin!” Shouts the muffled voice again.

“What the hell?” Jimin groans, rolling over on his side and trying to block out the banging.
“Open the damn door, Park Jimin,” the voice demands. The banging becomes increasingly insistent, the noise ringing throughout his small dorm. Jimin sighs heavily, finding it quite a task to ignore it.

Yawning, Jimin gets up and walks to his door still half-asleep and disgruntled. He opens the door and - to his unpleasant surprise - comes face to face with the one person he’s been trying to avoid this past week.

“Hi.” They greet, his fist raised mid-knock.

Jimin blinks twice before it really sinks in that Yoongi’s standing in front of him.

“What the hell are you doing here?” He asks, noting his different hair colour. It’s turned black since they last saw each other at the potluck.

“To offer my help.” Yoongi says evenly, lowering his fist and looking not at all bothered by the fact that Jimin’s squinting at him with his eyes barely open.

It’s been awhile since they last talked, and the first thing he says it this? Not even a damn good morning, Jimin notes, starting to feel annoyed.

“Help me with what?” The younger boy asks with his arms crossed, not quite sure what to expect.

“And did you really have to come all the way here and wake me up?”

“It’s noon. Normal people are awake by now. Besides, I wouldn’t have needed to if you weren’t ignoring my texts.”

Jimin hears a tinge of annoyance behind Yoongi’s words and it gives him a slight sense of satisfaction to know his lack of response had been bothering him.

“And I wanted to talk to you.” Yoongi adds, the words a little quieter.

“About what?”

Yoongi looks down at the space between them before looking up a few seconds later to meet Jimin’s brown eyes. Jimin could count the tiny flecks of orange in the older boy’s pupils if he wanted to.

After a long second, Yoongi says quietly, “I wanted to apologize.”

“For what?” Jimin tests. He doesn’t want to hear this, not if it’s about their conversation at the stadium that night. He’s been trying so hard to forget about it; he didn’t need Yoongi bringing it back up right now, not ever.

Yoongi holds their gaze, the ever-present boldness in his eyes boring into his. “For being a huge asshole lately.”

Jimin can’t help the chuckle that escapes his lips. “Good to know you’re aware.” He uncrosses his arms and leans one side against the door frame. “You have been a bit of an ass.”

Yoongi smiles back. “You should have called me out earlier.”

“Noted for next time,” Jimin replies, finding it hard to stay annoyed when Yoongi looked this apologetic, that hard exterior of his softening just a little bit.

“Next time?” Yoongi scoffs. “There won’t be a next time, asshole.”
“Wow, that didn’t even last two seconds.”

Yoongi ignores him and takes out the light from his jean pocket. He flicks it open. “The Games are starting next month and we don’t have much time left.” He says.

The reminder weighs down heavily in Jimin’s stomach. He couldn’t have forgotten even if he tried.

“Thanks for the reminder. Wow, I completely forgot.”

“And you and Jungkook both haven’t found your Extensions yet.” Yoongi adds, ignoring the sarcasm.

Jimin is well aware. The fact that he still wasn’t even close to discovering his had been bugging him for months, so having Yoongi show up at his dorm to remind him of this fact isn’t exactly what he’d call a good start to his day.

“You think I don’t know that?” He asks dryly.

Yoongi does a good job of ignoring his tone. “I want to help you find it.”

Jimin hadn’t been expecting that. He raises a brow, questioning the statement.

“Most people find theirs by accident, so you don’t know when it’ll happen. But you two have a deadline.”

“Again, thanks for the reminder.”

Jimin tries to process all this, a little too early in the day for his liking, but he knows that Yoongi’s right. He needs to try and find his extension as soon as possible, but how?

“And how are you gonna help exactly?”

“Like I said, it won’t be easy. But I have some ideas. Certain stressful situations can help you discover it faster.”

Then Jimin asks what’s been on his mind since the moment he opened to door to see Yoongi standing in the hallway. “Hyung, we haven’t talked since… I mean, where the hell did this all come from?”

“We’re friends, aren’t we?” Yoongi says simply. “And friends help each other out.”

“Right. Friends.” Jimin repeats, but the memory of that snowy night on the bleachers is still fresh in his memory. He’s replayed the conversation between them so many times in his head, and every single time he could feel that crushing sense of rejection in his chest.

Maybe that’s why he bitterly blurts out, “You know it’s funny, I thought friends aren’t supposed to make each other feel like shit.”

Yoongi, caught off guard, looks at Jimin with wide eyes, his lips pressed tightly together.

Wincing at his own words, Jimin wishes he was better at keeping his mouth shut. He blames the fact that he isn’t fully awake yet.

Yoongi stares at him, at a loss for words and Jimin feels fucking terrible for putting him on the spot like that.
“Sorry,” Jimin says under his breath. “I didn’t mean that, I just -” he stops himself mid-sentence, mentally kicking himself for letting his emotions get the better of him. He takes a deep breath.

His throat suddenly feels way too tight.

“I just need to get over you,” he manages to get out. “That’s all.”

Yoongi’s expression slowly softens, but his eyes remain wide, looking taken aback at his brash honesty.

“Oh,” he breathes out.

Jimin runs his hand through his bed hair and looks away from the breathtaking older boy standing before him. “And I’ll get there. Just, you know, it takes time.”

The Fire Manipulator looks up to meet Jimin’s gaze, and when they make eye contact he feels that unsettling sensation at the pit of his stomach. He makes a mental note to learn how to get that reaction under control - he’s felt it too many times around Yoongi.

Yoongi looks as if he wants to say something but Jimin doesn’t want to hear anything from him right now. He adds quickly, “But you’re right, I do need to do something about my extension.”

“Do you want Namjoon or Hoseok to help you out instead? If you don’t want me to-”

“No,” Jimin interrupts. “No, we’re great together in practice and we’re compatible on the field. I think you’d be more helpful than anyone else.”

*If only we were compatible in other aspects,* he silently adds.

“Oh.” Yoongi nods. “Meet me in the Dome in an hour, I have some ideas I wanted try out.”

Jimin agrees. With a nod, Yoongi turns and walks down the hallway, disappearing around the corner.

Jimin stands in the doorway long after Yoongi’s out of sight, breathing slowly and wondering how the hell he’s supposed to get over someone like Yoongi.

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**The Bureau Headquarters**

“Welcome to our weekly Executive Board Meeting, members.” Universo addresses the men and women dressed head to toe in crisp black seated around the oval table before him. “We have some important matters to discuss tonight in order to advance our plan forwards.”

The floor-to-ceiling windows behind Universo shows a reflection of his tall figure as he stands behind his throne chair, hands in his dark suit pant pockets. Outside the glass panes, the night is a
clear black canvas, a lone shining crescent its only occupant.

He looks at the seated members one by one, pausing on each solemn face for a few seconds before moving onto the next one, slowly but surely capturing the full attention of the room.

Seemingly satisfied, he rests his elbows on the tall chair before him and laces his long fingers together. Taking a deep inhale, he leans forwards, commanding all eyes on him.

“Turn on the hologram.” He instructs, and a second later the space in the middle of the table starts to glow an eerie blue.

“Behold, ladies and gentlemen of the Board,” the president announces. “What we’ve all been waiting for. The Stimulation Room.”

A hologram starts to take shape as its blue glow dims slightly, forming a rectangular prism projected a few inches above the table, as if floating in mid-air.

As the spectators look on, they realize the rectangular prism has a door, but no windows. The four walls are bare. One by one, the men and women around the table begin to notice something in the middle.

The object could be easily mistaken as a standing oval mirror from the flatness of it.

“What is it?” A woman asks from one end of the table, staring at the lone object of the holographic room.

“A portal.” The President answers simply.

The oval-shaped portal’s surface looks as if it could be water, the substance rippling subtly on its own without any interfering forces. If someone had stuck their hand through the thin surface, they might expect their withdrawn hand to come out wet.

“Suho, if you could so kindly explain.” Universo nods to the handsome man sitting to his right.

Suho doesn’t take his eyes off the hologram as he stands.

“What you’re seeing here,” Suho says in a solemn tone, “is the Stimulation room, and the portal inside.”

He starts to walk around the perimeter of the round table, his steps carefully paced, his hands clasped behind his back.

“As you all know, we’ve been working on this for a very long time. A portal that will transport anyone who enters it to another dimension. To a parallel universe.”

His statement is met with a sudden rush of hushed whispers behind important hands, exchanges of impressed looks, and approving nods.

A woman with dark red hair asks, “How did your team achieve this?”

“As you are all aware, numerous theories about parallel universes have existed for decades but have never been proven before,” Suho says to the hushed room. “Ladies, and gentleman, we have finally done what was considered impossible. We’ve finally proven the existence of parallel universes.”

The announcement once again elicits excited, hushed whispers and looks of impressed surprise.
Suho continues, “Our team has been able to figure out how to tap into a unique source of Power in order gain access to these parallel universes that exist in tandem with the one in which we all exist, right at this moment.”

Universo leans back in his throne chair, looking at the hologram. He speaks up, his deep voice a contrast to Suho’s softer tone. “For those of you who may be wondering what exactly a parallel universe is, let me briefly explain.” He nods at his right-hand man, who bows his head and takes his seat once more.

There’s a silence in the large room as the President continues. “A parallel universe is a hypothetical self-contained reality that coexists with our own. A group of them are referred to as a multiverse, and many theorize that they are the possible parallel universe that constitutes reality.

“It may be hard to grasp all at once, but all you need to know at this very moment is that we have figured out how to access these multiverses.”

He gives Suho another nod, conveying him to further explain.

Suho obliges. “Yes, we figured out something amazing, something that not even centuries of speculation and myths could have even hinted at.”

The silence in the room speaks volumes to the amount of anticipation at his next words.

“There exists one specifically unique Power, one of the oldest and rarest of Powers, that holds the ability to travel across multiple parallel universes. The very nature of this Power has drawn suspicion and mistrust throughout history.”

A woman with blonde streaks in her short cropped hair asks in a whisper, “Are you speaking of Shadow Manipulators?”

“Precisely.”

“You’re saying Shadow Manipulators can travel between multiverses?” A man asks, his tone skeptical.

“Yes and no.” Suho answers. “The man or woman with the Power cannot physically travel between them, but their Shadow counterpart can.”

“Their Shadows can cross between universes?”

“Yes,” Suho confidently answers. “And we have finally figured out how to harness that ability to transport humans as well.”
“You would pick Spiderman over Superman? Are you kidding me?” Hoseok gives Namjoon the most insulted look from his spot on the floor. “I thought you were smart, man.”

“Who wouldn’t want to hang off buildings or shoot spider webs out of their wrists?” Namjoon fires back, sitting up straighter on his bed to demonstrate a flick of the wrist, adding whishing sound effects for emphasis.

Yoongi had left to go talk to Jimin a while ago and the three of them had stayed behind in the dorm room with no plans until their evening practice. Namjoon and Seokjin hadn’t moved from their spot on the younger’s bed, and Hoseok had remained on the floor, his legs outstretched.

Intending to kill time, Hoseok had started asking random questions off the top of his head, and one of them had been, ‘Which superhero would you be?’.

That was around the time the Captain’s’ group chat had started going off on Seokjin’s phone, so he hadn’t joined in on their rather pointless conversation.

“Oh! Yeah, that’s gonna save the world! Spider webs shooting out of my joints.” Scoffs Hoseok, as he shakes his head at the Telepath. “What kind of logic-”

“Guys, will you shut up for a second,” Seokjin interrupts, not looking away from his phone screen. “Hyung, will you tell him how useless Superman is?” Namjoon looks down at the eldest member, whose head was resting on his thigh. “And what’s up with the red undies over the blue tights?”

Hoseok scoffs loudly. “I’m pretty sure Spiderman’s suit gives him like, a perpetual wedgie.”

“Super strength is great and all but think about this - when you try to slap yourself awake, you’ll just accidentally smack yourself to death.”

“Only you would do something that stupid.”

“You wanna go?”

“What are you gonna do? Read the shit out of my mind?”

“And you’re gonna gravitate me to my grave?”

“Guys!” Seokjin yells out, startling the two of them mid-argument. “For just one second, can you please shut up?”

When both of them look at him without noise emitting from their mouths, Seokjin holds up his phone screen for them to see.

“The other Captains just texted me something.”

“What is it?” Namjoon asks, noting his tone.

“Bambam, the one with Precognition, he…”

“What is it? Did he See something new?” Hoseok asks, getting up from his seat to get a closer look at Seokjin’s phone screen.

He looks at the message again. There’s no way Bambam would make up something like this. “He wrote this: there’s going to be an unexpected obstacle after the first stage. Everyone, keep your eyes open.”
“What the fuck does that even mean.” Hoseok asks.

Seokjin gives him a blank look. He has no idea what to make of it either.

Namjoon, however, keeps his eyes on the phone screen.

“What do you think?” Seokjin asks him quietly.

The Telepath looks away from the phone only to give him a dark look. “I guess we’ll find out.”

It’s been about fifteen minutes since they started up walking up the rather alarmingly steep mountain trail and Taehyung wishes he had worn thicker socks. His toes were freezing.

“You doing okay?” Jungkook asks as they walk side by side on the narrow path, their arms bumping into each other every other step, not that he minded.

“Yeah, never better.” He answers cheerily despite his cold lower appendages. “You?”

Jungkook doesn’t answer right away. They walk in silence for another five minutes and Taehyung thinks maybe he just hadn’t heard the reflexive question when suddenly the younger boy turns his head to face him.

“No.”

Taehyung must have looked as confused as he feels at the moment because Jungkook laughs and adds, “You asked if I’m doing okay.”

“Oh,” He says, for a lack of a better reply. He had always known Jungkook as the type to never let himself be the cause for worry in others, so this is new to hear. “What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know,” Jungkook says quietly. “Everything feels off. The upcoming Games, the surprise announcement, all of it.”

He lets out a sigh, and Taehyung tries to recall the last time Jungkook had bluntly revealed what was bothering him without Taehyung’s prodding. It’s been a while.

“It’s just this whole… vibe. I don’t know how to explain it exactly.”

Taehyung looks at him a little more closely, studying the lines between his strong brows and the cautious way he bites his bottom lip. Looking at Jungkook for longer than a minute is never a safe bet with Taehyung though, so he looks away.

But his expression speaks more than Jungkook could say in words.

“Does your Shadow feel it too?”

Jungkook reflexively looks down at the ground, where Shadow was mimicking his steps and matching the length of his strides. “Yeah. It’s uneasy. Anxious. Like, all the time.”
“And you?”

“More or less the same.”

Taehyung wishes he could offer more than just words of comfort. “You know, I used to wonder what the school year would be like if the Games didn’t exist.” He admits as they make their way up, step by step, side by side. “But without it, I don’t think the school year would be as exciting.”

Taehyung glances beside him at Jungkook, who looks like he’s deep in thought.

“What was it like last year?” Jungkook asks. “The Games, I mean.”

The cold morning air is refreshing against Taehyung’s skin as they make their way up the rather steep trail.

“Well the hype is no joke.” Taehyung tells him, recalling his first year at the Academy the previous year. “Weeks leading up to it, it would be all anyone could talk about. Students would make bets on which teams would be out first. There’s a fanclub for every team, and the instructors would let us watch the broadcasts during classes. That was nice.”

Taehyung remembers how fierce the competition had been between their Academy, the other Korean institution, and the Beijing school. Those three had been the top three teams for years, but they had always been on good terms.

“What were the three stages last year?”

“The first stage is standard team combat. It was really cool to see the strategies that the teams came up with based on their combinations of Powers.” Taehyung tells Jungkook, who listens intently. “They drop 3 teams from stage one and the rest move on to the second.

“The second stage is this huge concrete maze, with walls that move on their own every hour and these machines that monitor everyone’s progress - some even attack. It’s literally like a maze of horrors.” He remembers being awed at the sheer size of the maze itself. The first time he had seen the walls move on their own, he had gasped and pointed at the TV screen, yelling at Jimin “What the fuck it moves!”

He also recalls something else quite memorable from that stage. “That was the stage when Seokjin hyung used his extension against one of the Beijing members, getting him disqualified.”

“What is his extension?” Jungkook asks.

“It’s kind of like a boomerang effect. Deflects an opponent’s attack back at them, but I have this theory that because his Power is Empathy, the strength of the deflection depends on the emotions he feels at the moment.”

“That’s insane,” Jungkook breathes out. “Wait so what happened to the team without him?”

“They made it to the third stage, but Jin had to sit out.”

“Why was he disqualified?”

Taehyung looks at him and explains more quietly, “He injured the guy beyond a Healer’s ability to heal. He broke one of the rules.”

“Oh,” Jungkook can’t quite imagine Seokjin hurting someone to that extent. He seemed too kind to
do that kind of damage to anyone. “And the third stage?”

“The remaining three teams are transported somewhere isolated for 12 hours. Last year they flew the three teams out to an island in Northern Canada and gave them one task: find their school’s emblem and protect it from being stolen by the other teams.”

Jungkook must have looked blatantly confused because a second later Taehyung chuckles and shakes his head.

“That’s exactly the reaction everyone had when they heard those instructions,” he comments, still laughing.

“Find their school emblem? You mean the small pin we wear on our blazers?” Jungkook was picturing last year’s teams trying to find an object barely the size of his pinky. It seemed like a ridiculous task to determine a winner.

“Nah, it wasn’t a pin they had to find. The Game planners scorched each school’s emblem onto an animal android and the teams had to find and hunt them. First team to find their android wins.”

“Like a hunting race?”

“Kind of, yeah.”

“That’s really…”

“Intense? Yeah. The fact that everything was snow and ice up there added another element to the stage. And obviously the androids weren’t fluffy cute arctic animals.”

Despite Jungkook’s lack of knowledge on northern creatures, he imagines they must have created robotic polar bears or walruses for the teams to hunt.

“Were they given weapons?”

“No,” Taehyung answers, shaking his head. “They were given equipment and shelter, but not weapons. Their Powers were the only weapons they had.”

The Games sounded more primal in nature than Jungkook had pictured.

“What do you think the third stage this year will be?”

“Honestly?” The crisp mountain air comes out of Taehyung’s mouths in cloudy puffs of breaths, and Jungkook watches as they disappear. “I don’t know, but I have a feeling it’ll definitely top last years.”
Jimin stares at his phone screen.

12:45 pm

15 minutes until he’s supposed to meet Yoongi at the Dome.

Maybe he should pretend he spontaneously got sick and not go. Maybe he’ll figure out his extension on his own.

Maybe he should quit being a little bitch and face the damn situation.

“Fuck,” he sighs, getting up from his chair and running his hand through his hair.

What am I so hesitant for? he asks himself. He walks to his closet and starts taking out his workout gear.

Taking his shirt off, he thinks about the reasons why he keeps making up excuses not to go.

For one, he supposes the most obvious reason is because he’s scared to be alone with Yoongi. Having lingering feelings for someone wasn’t exactly a walk through the park.

And second, the last time they had been in the Dome together had been when Yoongi had told him - though not directly - that he wasn’t willing to risk it for the team. Risk being with Jimin. Risk any potential of an us.

Yoongi’s words ring loud and clear in Jimin’s head: “We’re friends.”

“Friends. Yeah, I can do that.” Jimin laughs in spite of himself. He puts on his thick winter jacket.

He heads out the door, making his way to the Dome. The path was muscle memory by now. His legs carry him halfway across campus in the freezing weather, his stomach feeling unsettled all the way there.

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**The Bureau Headquarters**

“And how exactly, does Shadow Manipulation let others travel across parallel universes?” The blonde woman asks the President.

Universo doesn’t answer at once. He leans back on his throne chair and looks at the hologram still glowing a bright blue before speaking.

“It’s complicated, both technically and ethically,” he says in an even tone. “Shadow Manipulators have a Shadow counterpart who exist as their own entity in this universe and are also an extension of the Shadow Manipulator.
“What we’ve come to realize is that these Shadows also simultaneously exist as an extension of the Shadow Manipulator in a different multiverse. What the Shadow can do that no one else can is travel between them on their own will.”

“So how do you harness this Power to allow others to cross between parallel universes on demand?” A man seated at the far end of the oval table asks, his deep voice tinged with a hint of curiosity and a dash of concern. “And is it safe?”

The tall figure of Universo casts a long shadow below him on the dark wooden floor. He looks down at it before clearing his throat.

“The safety is still under investigation because, as you all may have realized by now, doing so requires... harvesting a Shadow Manipulator’s Powers.”

“Harvesting?” The man repeats, his tone more concerned now. “What do you mean by harvesting?”

The President exchanges a silent look with Suho, and a moment later, the shorter man speaks up, addressing the entire oval table of the Bureau’s leaders.

“We have devised a method of extracting the Shadows. While this may seem ethically challenging at first, what we must remember,” he pauses to look over at Universo briefly before continuing, “is that our efforts are always for the greater good.”

“Does that mean this process of extraction can be applied to other Powers as well?” The woman with the short hair asks.

“That was a possibility that we were curious about as well,” Universo answers. “We haven’t tested it yet, but we expect tests to be conducted in the foreseeable future.”

“On who?” The man beside her asks this time. “Who would volunteer to have their Powers... extracted?” He asks, his tone hesitating on the last word.

“That’s certainly something we’ve struggled to answer as well. We don’t intend to carry out these experiments on unwilling volunteers,” Universo assures the room. “But I’m sure we’ll figure something out, ladies and gentlemen.”

The trek up the mountain is a slow and laborious process, just as Jungkook predicted. But despite his lungs and limbs protesting, his mood couldn’t have been lighter.

The sun was high and shining now, giving the crisp air at this altitude a hint of warmth that he
welcomed on his skin. The usual noises of everyday life - the chatter of fellow students at the Academy, the voices of his instructors lecturing - were gone and forgotten about for now.

There’s a sense of peace and serenity up here. The satisfying crunch of the snow beneath his boots, the sounds of birds chirping, and the smell of fresh pine makes Jungkook forget about the anxious feeling at the back of his head that’s been bothering him for a while now.

Even Shadow feels calmer.

*It’s nice up here, isn’t it?*

Shadow agrees in silence.

*You ready to go back?*

Jungkook feels Shadow’s reluctance.

*Me neither.*

“Hey, look up there,” Taehyung draws his attention to a sign ahead that reads: “World’s End in 15 meters”

“What’s World’s End?”

“I don’t know, but let’s go find out!” Taehyung exclaims before picking up his pace with an unexpected vigor that Jungkook finds endearing. Taehyung had always been easily excited, even as kids.

That was something he admired about the older boy. Jungkook had always been more cautious, never one to reveal too much of his emotions if he could help it.

But Taehyung?

He was an open book. And Jungkook wanted to read all the pages.

“Wait up!” He shouts, laughing and picking up his own pace. “You can’t just leave me behind!”

Taehyung looks over his shoulder at him and hollers back, “Last one there buys dinner!”

Tonight, the ever-shifting ceiling of the Dome reflects a dull starless canvas of grey.

Underneath, a black-haired Fire Manipulator paces the perimeter of one of the many battlefields,
flicking a metal lighter open and closed; open and closed; open and closed.

The metallic *clink, clink, clink* is the only sound in the spacious Dome until he hears the swift sound of the automatic glass doors sliding open.

Yoongi looks over and watches as a sullen-faced Jimin walks through them.

He’s wearing all black, a stark contrast to his new hair. He had dyed it pink sometime between the potluck and now, apparently.

It suits him, Yoongi has to admit. But any color looks good on Jimin, Yoongi has come to discover over the past school year.

Not that it matters, he reminds himself.

“Hey,” Yoongi calls out, “glad you’re here.”

Jimin comes to stand in front of him. From this close up, Yoongi can tell he definitely doesn’t look too excited about the situation.

“Can’t really say the same,” he says, the lack of a smile on his face a new phenomenon to witness for Yoongi.

When Jimin had admitted this morning that he wanted to get over Yoongi, he had no idea how to react.

Given the fact that Yoongi had been the one to end whatever had been going on between them, he should have been glad to hear that, right?

“Good to see you,” Yoongi says without really thinking.

*Right?*

“You saw me this morning.” Jimin comments, giving him a questioning look.

And when Jimin had said, *I just need to get over you,*

“Right”, Yoongi mutters.

...was it selfish of him to wish he had heard him wrong?

“So what kind of ideas were you talking about?” Jimin asks.

Yoongi reminds himself that he can’t risk a repeat of last year’s Games and tries not to dwell on it for a second longer. There were more important things at hand.

He arranges his features into one of concentration and flicks open his lighter one more time.

“One of the most common ways that people find their extensions is during stressful situations,” he starts off, looking down at the flickering flames emitting from the metal lighter. “At times when people believe their safety is endangered, they’re more willing to go to extremes to protect themselves.”

Bringing the lighter to shoulder level, he cups it with his other hand, engulfing the warmth of it in his palm.
“And that’s kind of what your extension is; the extreme end of your Powers.”

Feeling the warmth of the fire in the small space of his fist, he starts manipulating the moving atoms, willing them to move faster and faster, until he can feel the molecules multiplying at a rate much faster than a normal combustion.

“I found mine last year during the Games,” he tells Jimin. “It was during the first stage. Took me by surprise, but it came at exactly the right time.”

Jimin stares at Yoongi’s cupped hands.

“The thing with fire is that it requires a catalyst, something that doesn’t get consumed when added to a chemical reaction,” Yoongi explains as he concentrates on the motion of the moving molecules in his hand. He hasn’t done this in a long time but he hopes this goes down well.

“Once ignited, a chain reaction takes place, where the fire can sustain its own heat,” he continues, “but then I realized something.”

He recalls the incident clearly in his memory. One of the members from the Thai school’s team in the previous year’s Games had the power of Agility. He had been ready to attack him from behind when he discovered that Yoongi had a surprise of his own.

“I can internalize the fire, and sustain the combustion reactions with my Manipulation.”

He demonstrates for a curious-looking Jimin standing in front of him with a raised brow: with a loud CLAP he smacks his hands together and the ball of flame that had been there between his hands a second ago is no longer to be seen.

“Your - your arms…”

Yoongi watches Jimin’s surprised reaction in amusement.

The skin of his pale arms glows an alarmingly bright red for a few seconds before -

“WHAT THE-” Jimin shouts out, reflexively taking a step back.

“Don’t call 911 or anything,” Yoongi chuckles. He raises his arms - currently ablaze - up to shoulder level, his palms faced up. “Now watch.”

Jimin does, with his mouth hanging open. He watches as the fire spreads to the rest of Yoongi’s body - to his shoulders, then up his neck, around his back, down his torso, and further down to his thighs and legs.

Standing before him, fire was emitting from every surface of Yoongi’s body.

“How the hell do your clothes still stay on?” Jimin whispers, staring with widened eyes.

“That’s the first thing you ask?” Yoongi laughs. “Well I’m not on fire. I’m emitting it.

“Isn’t that the same thing?”

Yoongi doesn’t really know how to explain it, but the best he can come up with is: “I’m kind of... surrounding myself with fire, I guess.”

“And how did that help you last year? In the maze, you said-”
“Anyone who touches me when I’m like this gets seriously burned.”

“Oh,” Jimin looks like he was picturing what kind of damage the poor Thai guy had gotten that day. He winces. “That probably doesn’t feel nice.”

“No, not at all.” Yoongi replies a little cheerily. “The guy had it coming though. A sneak attack? Really?” He scoffs at the thought. “Anyway, the only catch is, it doesn’t last for that long.”

“How long?”

“I haven’t tested it out since last time, but it was only five minutes back then.”

And then a second later, as if an invisible extinguisher had been aimed at him, the blazing fire enveloping Yoongi vanishes.

“Guess I gotta work on that.” Yoongi notes, looking down at his hands, back to their normal pale colour.

“That was…you just…” Jimin stutters, trying to grasp what he had just witnessed.

“Yes,” Yoongi chuckles, content with the reaction. “Let’s hope yours is nearly as cool.”

Jimin regains his composure and manages to mold his expression into one of indignance. He scoffs, “Don’t worry, it’ll be cooler.”

Yoongi is once again reminded of that iron determination of Jimin’s. One of his “defining characteristics”, as Namjoon would put it.

And one of the most admirable things about him.

“Well, let’s get started.”

Taehyung can see why this cliff is named World’s End.

Standing on the edge of a sheer cliff with a drop of about 4,000 feet he feels like he’s standing at the edge of the world. If the world was flat, he imagines this would be the view at its end.

It’s breathtaking.

He could see the mountainous terrain of his hometown and much, much beyond.

“This is…” Jungkook starts to say quietly beside him.

“Fucking awesome.” Taehyung finishes for him.
They both stand in awed silence, taking in the gigantic shadows of the mountains that cast themselves upon the landscape, effortlessly roaming over the ridges and valleys while merging smoothly into the distant horizon.

The great mountains loomed before them in the distance, their cold grey crevices contrasted by the lower passes of greenery and the peaks crowned with white ice. Without a word passing between them, they knew this was a sacred moment and everything stilled in their minds.

Taehyung marvels at how the splashes of green, yellow, scarlet and orange foliage contrasted softly against the carved rocky outcrops. It filled his heart with a warm calm and serenity.

“I feel so at peace,” he whispers, not sure if he could really put it into words. “I haven’t felt like this in a long time.”

Jungkook nods, not taking his eyes off the view that could have rivaled even the most coveted paintings.

“I know what you mean.”

“Do you ever wish sometimes you could just to pause everything? Like sometimes things are too much and you need a time out?”

“All the time, hyung.”

Taehyung looks at the raven haired boy. “Hey, you never call me hyung,” he points out.

“Yeah I do,” Jungkook says unconvincingly. “Sometimes.”

With a scoff, Taehyung turns back to face the view. “More like never, you rude piece of-.”

“It’s ‘cause you’re my best friend, and the age difference doesn’t feel important.”

Taehyung smiles. “Nice save.”

The soft sound of Jungkook’s chuckle echoes into the valleys below them. “Can I tell you something?” He asks, voice a lot quieter than just a second before.

“Anything,” Taehyung replies.

Jungkook looks above them at the clouds covering the afternoon sun. “I might sound paranoid, but it’s been bothering me for a while now.”

Taehyung furrows his brows, looking at his friend and suddenly feeling worried. “What is it? Something wrong?”

“No, don’t look at me like that,” Jungkook says, sounding exasperated. “Nothing’s happened, it’s just...”

Taehyung knows better than to prod and instead, waits patiently for him to continue.

“For months, I’ve felt this uneasiness from Shadow that I can’t ignore anymore. It started around the time we heard about the starting date changing. Back then, this feeling would come and go, but lately it’s gotten worse.”

Taehyung notices his jaw set and the tone of his voice growing more and more somber. “Cause of the Games?”
“I don’t know if it’s just that,” Jungkook hands his head. “But I have a bad feeling about it.”

“But it’s just a friendly competition,” Taehyung says, although he wasn’t sure how confident he felt about that overstated statement anymore. “And it’s been going on for decades, no one’s ever died or—”

“I know,” Jungkook interrupts. “I don’t need you to believe me, I just needed to tell you.”

Taehyung realizes what Jungkook needs to hear right now isn’t that his worries are ridiculous or absurd; he just needed a sympathetic ear and a friend to confide in.

“I’m glad you told me,” he says. “And I’m glad you’re not ignoring it. It just means we gotta be on our toes and prepare ourselves even harder.”

Jungkook gives him a hint of a smile, the small curve of his lips completely changing the dark expression on his face. “Thanks, Tae.”

“It’s actually hyung to you.”

Jungkook shoves his arm in retaliation, causing the older to teeter sideways for a second and Taehyung yells out in panic, grasping Jungkook’s arm and pulling on it before shouting, “I COULD HAVE FELL!”

The younger boy rolls his eyes. “I barely touched you, drama queen.”

Taehyung looks down, squinting as he tries to make out the distance from where he’s standing to the bottom of the cliff. “That’s like, what, a 4000 feet drop? That would have been a nasty fall.”

“You think the Healers back at school could have like, put your organs back together after they splattered all over the ground?”

“Fuck, that’s gross.” Taehyung makes a face at him, trying his hardest not to imagine that gruesome crime scene. “That’s not how I pictured I would go.”

“No, you’ll definitely have a more dramatic ending.”

“Hey, sixty years from now, I want you to write on my tombstone, ‘here lies Kim Taehyung, out with a bang.’ Promise me.”

“We really shouldn’t be joking about death while sitting on this cliff, should we?” Jungkook notes, and Taehyung couldn’t agree more.

“It’s a deadly view.”

They stand in silence for a long time, and somewhere in between the moments of awe and serenity, Taehyung closes his eyes and wishes he could capture this moment, imprint it in his memory.

Then he remembers -

“Shit, I almost forgot!” He takes off his bag and digs around until he feels the camera. He pulls it out and makes sure he has a film in it before turning to Jungkook. “You ready to take the best damn picture I’ll ever take in my whole life?”

Jungkook says, cracking a grin. “Hell yeah I’m ready.”

“Come on, let’s take a selfie with this view in the back.”
“Okay,” Jungkook obliges, following Taehyung and turning around to look at the camera raised in Taehyung’s hand.

“On 3, ready?” Taehyung asks.

Jungkook nods.

“3,” The brunette announces and Jungkook has a sudden moment of panic - was he supposed to smile? Was Taehyung smiling? Was it supposed to be a serious pic?

“Wait-”

“2!”

Jungkook quickly looks at Taehyung to ask, “Wait, are we smiling or are we-”

“1!” And with a blinding flash, the camera clicks and noisily spews out the undeveloped film.

“Shit,” Jungkook says under his breath, cringing at himself for ruining a perfectly good photo opportunity.

He’s about to apologize when he hears Taehyung’s brust of laughter.

“Oh my god, look.” Taehyung thrusts the photo in front of Jungkook’s face and he sees why he’s laughing - he looks absolutely unprepared and panicked as he stares at the side of Taehyung’s face, his mouth open wide, mid-question. Taehyung, in contrast, is smiling widely with all his teeth showing, completely oblivious to the questioning boy beside him.

“Oh my god,” Jungkook repeats, laughing at himself in the pic. “Sorry, we can retake it if you want-”

“No, it’s perfect,” Taehyung says, looking down at the photo and admiring the candid shot. Jungkook was so careful to hide his vulnerability. He worked hard, always giving all his effort so he wouldn’t let others down. He rarely allowed himself to depend on others.

But there were times, rare moments like these, when Jungkook would let his vulnerability peek through. Taehyung admired how independent Jungkook’s become, but he wished he would let others carry his burdens for him once in awhile.

This photo, where Jungkook turns to Taehyung with confusion written all over on his face, reminded Taehyung of the times when Jungkook would let his uncertainty be shown.

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I’m sure.” Taehyung assures him. He beams at the younger boy and Jungkook can’t help but slowly smile back, his surprised expression dissolving.

“Let’s head back,” Jungkook suggests. “Our train ride is in an hour”

He starts to lead the way back down, grabbing his bag from the ground when Taehyung calls out, “Hey, Jungkook?”

He turns to face him. “Yeah?”

“Thanks.”
“For what?”

“Climbing with me today,” Taehyung answers simply.

Jungkook cocks his head to side and scoffs. “Still can’t believe you didn’t pack us water.”

Taehyung laughs, starting to making his way back down the hiking path as well.

Though he wouldn’t say it out loud, he was more thankful for Jungkook trusting him unconditionally. For always saying yes to his (sometimes stupid) ideas. For letting him see the human side of the boy who always tried to be a superhero, even before coming to the Academy.

“We’re coming back here in ten years.” Taehyung announces as they make their slow descent.

Jungkook looks at him and says, “You better bring water in ten years. I’m fucking thirsty.”

“Keep it in your pants, Jeon.”

“Grow up,” And for good measure, he adds, “hyung.”

Taehyung slings his arm around his neck and leads the way down, their laughter mixing in with the frosty mountain air.

Chapter End Notes

HELLO! MY APOLOGIES FOR TAKING SO LONG TO UPDATE BUT I’M BACK. it's been a crazy busy year for me with grad school. thank you all for being patient <3 I said I’d finish this fic even if it's the last thing I do and I meant it!!

as always, your comments and feedback are very much appreciated <3 they mean the world to me so leave some words!!

and a huge thank you to my wonderful betas <3
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Part of Namjoon and Seokjin’s past is revealed, Jimin discovers his extension accidentally thanks to Yoongi, Jungkook has a secret to share with Taehyung, and the team finally gets ready for the opening ceremonies of the Games.

Chapter Notes

Keep note of the present and past! Some scenes have changing POVs so keep that in mind.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

One year ago: the Dome

The moment Namjoon fell for Seokjin was also the moment he met him.

Namjoon wholeheartedly thinks the whole “love at first sight” thing is bullshit, but infatuation at first sight? That was real. He experienced it the second he saw the broad-shouldered Empath.

It was his very first practice. He was nervous, being one of the few new members that year. Yoongi was the one person he knew well on the team, and he was grateful for his roommate for introducing him to everyone in the changeroom and making sure he felt comfortable.

Except for one member. See, Seokjin had arrived late that first day, walking in through the glass doors of the Dome about halfway through their practice.

Namjoon had been taking a break, sitting on the ground and wiping the sweat off his forehead when he heard an unfamiliar voice from behind him.

“Hey,” the voice greeted, “you’re the new guy?”

Namjoon turned around, water bottle halfway to his mouth, to come face to face with maybe one of the most attractive man he’s laid eyes on in his twenty-one years of being on this planet. And seeing someone that attractive this close up was not something Namjoon had ever had to deal with before.

So “Uhh,” was his intelligent reply. It took a few seconds for his brain to catch up to the shock of seeing someone that good-looking. He could have walked straight out of a magazine, for fuck’s sakes.

He finally managed to blurt out: “Yeah, I’m the new guy. My name’s -”

“Namjoon.” Seokjin finished for him, and he didn’t realize how nice his name was until it came out of this guy’s mouth. “Yoongi’s friend, right? He mentioned you a few times.” He smiled at him then, maybe hinting at the fact that he already knew things about Namjoon, or maybe he was
just being friendly. Namjoon couldn’t really figure it out at that moment.

When Namjoon hadn’t said anything back, Seokjin had just continued with his introduction. “I’m Seokjin.” He stuck his hand out. “I’m an Empath.”

It took Namjoon’s usually functional brain a little bit longer than usual to figure out what that hand was there for.

“Oh!” He finally shook his hand, really hoping he wasn’t coming off as awkward. “Nice to meet you.”

Then Seokjin smiled. A smile that crinkled the edges of his soft, brown eyes and made his handsome face look much younger. A smile that radiated even in the dim lighting of the evening.

And that was the moment Namjoon’s troubles had started.

**Present: the Dome**

Jimin was determined to discover his damn extension, even if it meant staying at the Dome all night and getting intentionally beat up, if that’s what it came down to.

It’s not as bad as it sounds. Yoongi was helping him out as much as he could and Jimin had to hand it to him - no one was as good at pushing him over the edge as he was. It’s exactly what he needs right now.

“Come on!” Yoongi shouts at him, beads of sweat dripping down his neck. His skin is flushed and his breathing harsh, and Jimin is in no better form. They’ve been fighting without their Powers for the past hour, using only their fists and jeers as weapons.

Both of them were bruised, sore and exhausted. But they were both completely, inexplicably, enjoying this.

“That the best you fuckin got?” Yoongi yells from across the battlefield, brow raised challengingly.

The words set fire to Jimin’s nerves. He’s not even close to throwing in the towel just yet.

Jimin suspects that it’s a dangerous mix of adrenaline, his competitive nature, and the unspoken pent-up frustration from the past few weeks fueling him tonight

“Not even close,” Jimin shouts back. Getting to throw punches at Yoongi for the sole purpose of just pure, mindless *fighting* wasn’t exactly something he got to do regularly; he was going to make the most of this opportunity.

And fuck, did it feel satisfying.

Jimin watches as Yoongi makes his way to his end of the battlefield, his black shirt soaked through, sticking to his toned torso and waist. Jimin quickly looks back down at the ground instead, concentrating on the darkening spots where his sweat lands, drip by drip.
“Come at me, then,” Yoongi taunts, closer now, his arms spread apart. “I’m wide open.”

Jimin looks back up; Yoongi’s just a couple of feet away now. If he could use his Superhuman agility, he would’ve knock him right off his feet before he could even bat an eyelash.

Without his Powers though, he had no other option but to face him head-on. No surprises, no tricks; just an honest, clean and simple fight.

The whole point of this was to try and put Jimin under enough stress and pressure to draw out his extension, but so far, all it was doing was giving him undue satisfaction.

He straightens up. The left side of his cheek where Yoongi’s knuckles had made contact a few minutes ago stings pretty badly, but he ignores that for now. He clenches his hands into fists and flexes his arms, readying himself up for another round.

Yoongi takes a couple of steps, and another, until he’s standing right in front of Jimin.

“You’re gonna be sorry you even came up with this idea,” Jimin warns him in a low voice, a slow grin forming as the corner of his lips lift just the slightest.

Yoongi watches the younger’s smug expression and scoffs. He tilts his head to one side and lifts a taunting brow. “Nice bruise,” he says, looking at the purpling spot on Jimin’s cheek. “Adds colour.”

Jimin keeps his chin down and raises his fists to face-level. He bends his knees, planting one foot behind the other. “Don’t worry, you’ll have a matching one soon.”

Yoongi mirrors his actions, planting his feet shoulder-width apart, knees bent, ready to go.

Jimin shouts out at the same time he twists his hips, shifting his weight to his back foot. With a quick motion, he throws a punch with a side-arc at a horizontal angle, going for a right hook, but a quick second of apprehension is all that it takes for Yoongi to realize what Jimin’s about to do.

Yoongi isn’t taking any shit from Jimin; he has more years of experience and way too much pride to let that happen.

He moves with surprising speed to bend sideways, just in time to avoid Jimin’s fist connecting to the side of his head. “Close,” Yoongi breathes out, barely dodging Jimin’s hook punch.

The older reacts quickly, bringing his fists up to cover his face, watching as Jimin twists his hips one more time, generating power for another blow.

“Quit dodging,” Jimin jeers, his pupils dark and dilated as he comes closer to Yoongi, leaving no room for him to sidestep.

Taken by surprise at the proximity, Yoongi hesitates for a fraction of a second before he registers Jimin’s fist coming at him again but by then it’s too late.

Every inch of Jimin’s body feels electrified when his uppercut hits its mark; twisting as he brings up his arm, his fist connects with the older’s jaw, who’s face instantly whips in the other direction.

“Fuck!” Yoongi shouts out as his head snaps back. He reels from the shocking pain and tastes the
copper in his mouth before he feels the sharp stinging pain right between his eyes, temporarily interfering with his vision.

Jimin’s pumped up from the adrenaline and can’t stop himself; with Yoongi off balance, he calculates that he has just enough time to gear up again.

The younger man seizes the opportunity, bringing his hands back to starting position, raised to face-level. He makes eye contact with a stunned Yoongi for a split second before he uses his hips to follow through to land the final blow.

This time, Yoongi’s prepared.

“I don’t fucking think so,” Yoongi hisses as he blocks Jimin’s throw with his forearm. With his other hand, he latches onto Jimin’s wrist and twists it down forcefully, dragging his shoulder towards the ground, earning a pained shout from Jimin.

Jimin falls painfully on his back with a grunt, his chest heaving from his erratic breathing. Yoongi moves swiftly to sit on top of him, straddling him at the waist.

In the next second, he’s got a vice-like grip around both of Jimin’s wrists and leans forward to pin them down on either side of Jimin’s head.

At that moment, Jimin is painfully aware of two things: one, that their faces are just inches apart - literally a light breath away - and two, there’s fire in Yoongi’s eyes, as if testing where he could draw the line between them.

He silently thinks this might be a rather compromising way to figure it out.

“You really don’t hold back, huh?” Jimin remarks, trying to cut through the thick tension.

Yoongi lets out a scoff.

“You think you have a way out of this one?” Yoongi challenges, willing himself not to feel the heat creeping up his neck. Jesus, the way Jimin’s looking at him right now is making him regret this whole thing a little.

And yeah, maybe he’s little curious to see how Jimin reacts to the proximity, but truth be told he hadn’t really thought this out fully - he had just gone with it.

Jimin wills all the cells in his overworking brain to ignore the fact that Yoongi’s fucking sitting on top of him right now. This was worse than getting punched in the face. This was worse than getting punched in the balls, maybe.

He tries to think of a way to diffuse the tension further when his wired brain decides to blurt out:

“You know, when I said I wanted to get over you, I didn’t mean I wanted to get under you.”

Yoongi’s reaction is slow: he stares at Jimin for what feels like forever and a half, during which
Jimin wonders why life didn’t come with a backspace button.

But then he feels the grip around his wrists loosening and then Yoongi’s leaning back on his heels, throwing his head back to let out that uninhibited laugh of his that Jimin hasn’t heard in ages.

“Oh, Jimin,” he says between bouts of laughter, “The shit you say sometimes.”

Jimin lets out a held breath, feeling the tension leave his body at the same time he feels Yoongi sliding off his waist. Hearing Yoongi’s laugh at his joke - his joke - brings back a level of familiarity between them that’s been missing since that night.

Yoongi stands up. He offers Jimin a hand to pull him up wearing an easy smile, the fight in his gaze replaced by something a bit softer and Jimin wants to savour this moment for a while longer.

Yoongi watches as Jimin just stares at his hand.

“We don’t have all day,” he says, feeling lighter than he’s felt in a while. Maybe throwing punches at each other and making suggestive jokes was the cure to the mess they got themselves in.

Jimin eventually takes his outstretched hand and Yoongi pulls him up.

“So, you can throw a punch,” Jimin remarks, looking down at the ground between them, “but can you take one?”

“Wha-”

And just when Yoongi had let his guard down for a split second, Jimin gears his fist towards him again and Yoongi doesn’t even have the chance to defend himself. For the umpteenth time that evening, his head whips back as Jimin’s fist makes contact with the bridge of his nose.

“FUCK,” he cries out just before losing his balance, staggering backward and falling on his ass with a yell. “Jimin, what the fuck?!”

Shit, Jimin thinks internally, wondering if he had gone maybe a little too far. He hadn’t meant to knock Yoongi off his feet - literally. He just wanted to get the last throw in, but now he thinks he might have overdone it.

He rushes to kneel down beside Yoongi, feeling worse by the second. When he sees the blood dripping from his nose, he swallows.

“Shit, hyung, I’m sorry,” he apologizes profusely, eyes widening as he takes in just how much damage he’s done. “I didn’t mean to-”

Yoongi watches as Jimin fusses over him, eyes wide and hands flapping everywhere as if he couldn’t believe what just did. The fucking nerve of the kid, punching him when his guard was down. But then again, that was a good punch.

“Never apologize on the field, idiot.”

Yoongi’s about to sit up when Jimin suddenly reaches out one hand and cups his chin, taking him
by surprise. He turns Yoongi’s face towards him.

“Hyung, how many fingers am I holding up?” Jimin asks urgently, holding up four fingers.

Yoongi finds it both stupidly endearing and infuriating that Jimin would knock him the fuck out and then play his nurse a second later. He was such a fucking dweeb.

“I dunno, your hands are too puny.” Yoongi answers, pushing himself up to sitting position. He spits at the ground, not surprised to see the color of dark red.

“As fun as that was,” he winces at the pain between his eyes, “I don’t think it helped with your extension.”

“No,” Jimin agrees, sighing. “Still no extension.”

They sit like that in silence for a while, one quite bruised and the other quite bloody and both breathing heavily.

Jimin feels restless, but also lighter than he’s felt in a while. He can feel things slowly going back to how it used to be between him and Yoongi. That nervous, pent-up energy that had been plaguing them for weeks was loosening. It wasn’t gone completely, but time was on their side.

“You done staring?” Yoongi gruffs, surprising Jimin who hadn’t realized he was staring but who doesn’t turn away.

“You got any other ideas up your sleeves?” Jimin shoots back.

“Actually, a couple,” Yoongi answers. He shifts to reach into his pant pocket and pulls out a black cloth. Jimin realizes it’s the blindfold Namjoon had used during one of their team-building practices earlier in the year.

“This isn’t some kinky shit or anything, don’t worry,” the humour in Yoongi’s voice reflected in his amused expression. “But it might work.”

“What, you blindfolding me and beating me up?” Jimin asks incredulously, unsure about the situation unfolding before him.

“Nah, I had something else in mind.”

1 year ago: the Dorms

“Yo, you seen my bag?” Yoongi asks unceremoniously as he barges into their room, scanning the space in search for his belonging.

Namjoon doesn’t bother glancing up as he points to the corner of the dorm room that he’s termed Yoongi’s one and only ‘trash pile’. “Probably there.”

Yoongi walks over to the pile of crap that’s accumulated over the past half year and picks up the item he was looking for.

“I swear I left it in here…” he mutters while rummaging inside his backpack.
“What, your organization skills?” Namjoon asks, his eyes focused on the laptop screen as he types out the paper due in a few hours.

“Ha, ha.” Yoongi replies humorlessly. “No, my uniform. I have Combat Training soon, and I can’t fucking find it.”

“You sure it’s not in your closet? Where normal people store clothes?”

“Get off my ass,” The Fire Manipulator barks back with no real bite. “I swear -” but as he glances at his mess of a closet, he sees the black sleeve of his uniform peeking out from under a pile of dirty t-shirts.

“How the fuck did that get there?” He mutters under his breath as he picks it up, sniffing it for good measure. It smelled passable.

Namjoon chortles from where he’s sitting.

“Didn’t ask you.” Yoongi grumbles, taking off his white tee and pulling on his all-black uniform.

“So who you fighting today?” Namjoon asks, leaning back on his chair and finally looking over at his best friend. Yoongi was a force to be reckoned with when it came to Combat Training and he wishes he could watch his match, but the impending threat to his impeccable GPA was holding him back.

“No clue,” Yoongi replies, heading for the door already. “Alright, I’ll see you later, off to kick someone’s ass.”

“We have practice at 7, don’t forget.” The Telepath reminds him as Yoongi turns the knob. He looks back at Namjoon and scoffs.

“Am I ever late?”

“Like, 80% of the time.”

“It was rhetorical, asshole.” Yoongi replies, laughing as he finally takes off.

Leaning his head on the back of his chair, Namjoon stretches out his sore neck and rubs his tired eyes. He started working on this paper last night, pulled an all-nighter, and now he was running out of things to bullshit.

He probably shouldn’t have left it so last minute, but he’s had team practice every day of the week leaving him with no time for schoolwork during the evenings.

“Friggin practice,” he sighs, feeling a headache coming on. He still had the last two paragraphs and a conclusion to do. And the fucking references.

Maybe he could skip practice for just one night? Would Seokjin bust his ass for even asking?

Speaking of Seokjin…

He takes his phone out and opens up their text convo.

Honestly, if it wasn’t for the Empath and his stupidly handsome face and annoyingly likeable personality, Namjoon's suffering would be at a considerably lower level than it was presently.

He had joined the team because he wanted to participate in the Hero Games, not knowing he’d be
teammates with a certain broad-shouldered fifth year.

He blames Yoongi for all his suffering. He didn't have much of a choice in joining the team - Yoongi had pretty much threatened to end Namjoon’s life if he didn’t try out. His hot-headed roommate had been part of the team since he was in Year 2 and had insisted that Namjoon join so he could “mind-read the shit out of the other school teams”.

Something about that had sounded enticing, so he had tried out, got in, and now he was halfway through Year 2, halfway through training for the Games, and halfway done with himself for hopelessly harbouring a crush on a fellow teammate.

His phone buzzes, snapping him back to the present. He sees a message on his screen:

**Jin:** Hey, you coming to practice?

That was rather creepy timing. Could Jin read minds? Did he know Namjoon had been thinking about him just now?

Wait no, he was the Telepath here. *Get your shit together*, Namjoon scolds himself.

**Nams:** Yeah, I’ll see you there

He watches as the dots in the corner bubble appear, indicating Jin was typing something. A message appears a few seconds later.

**Jin:** Wanna grab dinner? I made some pretty legit beef noodles

This wasn’t the first time Jin had invited him over for dinner, but...

**Jin:** ask yoongi too!

...every time, the invitation was extended to Yoongi as well. Obviously. They were all on the team, so it was only natural. Still, Namjoon deflate.

**Nams:** Yeah, sure, we’ll be there ^^

He stares at it for a moment before backspacing and deleting the smiley face, thinking it might be too much.

**Nams:** yeah, sure, we’ll be there!

Was he thinking too much into this text? Probably. He sends it anyway, tossing the phone on his desk and sighing once more.

God, he felt like some middle school girl with a dumb celebrity crush. Jin *did* have that celebrity air to him; he even had fangirls at the Academy. Rest assured, the girls probably had a malfunctioning gaydar, but they were in the same hopeless boat as he was.

He was pretty confident that the object of his affection did steer that way, but he had no concrete evidence to back it up. Jin had no dating history at the school to prove otherwise either.

The only weak piece of evidence he had was Yoongi’s blunt opinion. Somehow, the Fire Manipulator had been aware of Namjoon’s suffering the moment it started. He remembers the moment quite clearly:

They had been warming up during one of their daily practices at the beginning of the school year, a
crisp fall day in late September. Yoongi was stretching his calves while Namjoon was easing up his shoulders under the high glass ceiling of the Dome.

He hadn’t even realized what he was doing subconsciously until Yoongi had said in a low voice, “Dude, he’s not eye candy.”

“What?” Namjoon had whipped around so fast he almost cricked his neck.

“You’re staring at him.” Yoongi had pointed out rather factually, a tinge of amusement in his voice.

“I’m not.”

“Right.”

“I wasn’t!” Namjoon had mumbled furiously, doing all he could to sound convincing.

“And yes, he is gay,” Yoongi had said knowingly, not needing his best friend to ask him the obvious question. “In case you were wondering. Or hoping.”

“I wasn’t…”

“But you were.”

Namjoon had sighed and given up the pretense. “How do you know?”

“Why don’t you find out?” Yoongi had questioned back. “Use your Telepathy.”

“No way!” Namjoon had been shocked at that suggestion; that would be a very blatant violation of someone’s privacy and Namjoon was a decent human being with morals and-

“What other option you got? Hit on him and see if he rejects you? Or politely declines?” Yoongi scoffed.

“Wow,” he had ignored Yoongi’s snickers and glanced at the tall brunette standing a few feet away, chatting with the Captain. “You’re the best friend a guy could have, you know that?”

“I’m just sayin,” the Fire Manipulator had chided, “much easier than sucking his dick and finding out mid-blowjob he’s not into that shit.”

The Telepath could only stare open-mouthed at his friend. He was saved the trouble of coming up with a reply when their Captain, Seungho, had called for a team huddle.

Half a year later and he still wasn’t making any headway with getting answers.

**Present: the Dome**

“Okay, wait, how is blindfolding me is going to “heighten my senses”?!”

“Because,” Yoongi sighs, sounding as exasperated at Jimin feels right now. “Since your sight’s gone, your other senses will kick in to make up for it. That puts you on edge. And the more edge
you’re on, the better chances of your extension appearing.”

“I mean, I guess that makes sense,” Jimin isn’t all that convinced but what other options did he have?

Yoongi seems to think along the same lines. “You got any other ideas?”

“No.”

“Then quit bitchin’ and let’s get started.”

Yoongi tosses him the black blindfold and Jimin catches it mid-air. He looks at it. Then looks at Yoongi, who raises one brow at him and Jimin sighs, giving in to his fate.

“Fine.” He ties the black cloth around his eyes, knotting it twice at the back of his head.

“Can you see anything?”

“Nope.”

“Good.”

Jimin hears the familiar metallic click of Yoongi’s lighter. “What, we’re using our Powers this time?”

“Yeah,” Yoongi replies, “might as well go all out, right?”

“But how am I supposed to see where I-”

“Not my problem,” and in the next second Jimin hears the familiar crackling of Yoongi’s fire and starts to feel a little nervous.

“Let’s keep in mind that no Healers are nearby,” he states the obvious, just to make sure Yoongi realized that they weren’t in a real combat match.

“No shit,” the Fire Manipulator replies drily. “Don’t worry, I won’t be too harsh .”

“Wait, how come you’re not blindfolded?” Jimin demands, feeling like this was shaping up to be a rather unfair match.

“Cause I’m not the one desperate to find his extension,” the older simply and Jimin realizes his voice sounds further away than it did a second ago. “You ready?”

“No?”

“Perfect.”

And the next second, Jimin nearly shrieks when he feels the heat of Yoongi’s fire nearly graze his left shoulder.

“What the fuck! A warning would have been nice!” He shouts out blindly, incredibly frustrated that he can’t see anything. He moves at superhuman speed to get away from his spot, glad he could at least use his Powers again.

“Try to follow my voice!” Yoongi shouts back, and Jimin pauses in his steps. “Concentrate on finding my location and getting there fast,” he advises and Jimin does.
He can tell Yoongi’s voice is coming from his right, but he can’t make out the exact distance. But maybe that wasn’t so important, given his advantageous speed.

“Come at me!”

He moves, following Yoongi’s husky voice and trusting his instincts more than he was comfortable doing. All he sees is darkness, the blindfolds masking his environment, but he feels the solid ground beneath his feet and trusts himself to move in the right direction.

A fraction of a second later and he can smell that familiar ashy scent of the Fire Manipulator from less than a foot away and he knows he’s headed in the right direction.

When the blazing heat of Yoongi’s fire barely misses him a second time, he grows more impatient in his inability to locate the older’s presence.

“Getting hotter!” Comes Yoongi’s amused voice somewhere directly ahead of Jimin and he realizes Yoongi’s moved quickly to get away from him. “Trust your gut, Jimin.”

This time, Jimin closes his eyes and focuses all of his energy and concentrates on his sense of sound.

When Yoongi shouts, “At this rate, you’re gonna be roasted by the first stage!” Jimin is confident that he’s precisely five feet away, 2 o’clock from his position.

Without a second thought, he moves with unthinkable rapidity in that direction and when he feels his shoulder make contact with Yoongi’s arm, he hears the gasp before the burning sensation of one of Yoongi’s flames near his elbow.

“Shit,” he hisses under his breath, swiftly moving away but keeping his ear out for Yoongi’s movements.

Not a second later, he hears Yoongi’s quick footsteps as he puts distance between himself and Jimin again. “Gotta be faster than that!” comes the jeering husky voice just a few feet ahead.

“Here, this might help.”

A second later, Yoongi aims another one of his fucking annoying fireballs at him, and then another, forcing Jimin to focus on sensing the heat in order maneuver around them as he chased after Yoongi.

At his unfair speed, he catches up in no time. The moment he bumps into the solidness of Yoongi’s body, he instinctively wraps his two arms around his waist and yells out as he plunges both of them to the ground.

Yoongi shouts as he falls face-first, reaching out his two hands to break his fall.

Before Jimin can do anything else, Yoongi turns around and brings his knees up to his chest and with all the strength in him, kicks hard against Jimin, causing the younger to gasp in pain and roll to his side.

Yoongi had to admit, once again, how impressed he was of Jimin’s ability on the field. He was dodging all his fire attacks and he was alarmingly good at locating him by his voice.

He moves again to put a safe distance between them, but that annoying son of a bitch was up again
and coming at him at full speed.

Yoongi panics, knowing he has less than a second before Jimin reaches him.

Then he gets an idea - a stupidly juvenile idea, but one that just might work.

When Jimin’s just a few feet away from him, he starts counting down in his head - he times it just right - and narrows his eyes, knowing he only had one shot at this.

*Three*

Jimin was just one feet away now.

*Two*

Less than a foot...

*ONE*

Yoongi watches with a held breath as Jimin reaches for him like before, but at the precise moment Jimin’s body is about to collide with his, he move sideways and kicks out one leg - and feels triumphant when the younger’s foot gets caught in the crook of his ankle. His timing had worked!

“HA!” He shouts, watching Jimin fall to the ground, but the grin on his face is short-lived. Jimin recovers with scary speed to upright himself and face Yoongi with a stone-cold expression.

“You fucking *tripped* me?!” Jimin asks furiously, facing Yoongi *blindfolded* and Yoongi realizes with an odd sense of pride that Jimin’s a natural at this exercise.

“Fun, right?” Yoongi chuckles, noticing the lack of humour in Jimin’s voice.

“Fucking *hilarious,* ” his words come out more like a growl and the next thing Yoongi knows, Jimin’s grabbing his arm and rotating it until his palm is facing Jimin.

“Hey, what-” he’s cut off when suddenly Jimin reaches under and around his hand, his grip so tight and painful that Yoongi instantly grimaces in pain, and before he can even get another word out, Jimin’s other hand is grabbing the other side of his palm and rotating it, and Yoongi realizes with alarm that Jimin’s got him in a joint lock.

And he knows what’s coming but it doesn’t make the take-down any less painful. Jimin steps back and rotates his body 180 degrees while twisting his wrist and next thing he knows, Yoongi’s off balance and lying flat on his back with the wind knocked out of him and the back of his head hurts like a bitch.

Coming to kneel over Yoongi with one knee on either side of his torso, Jimin focuses on maintaining the joint lock, keeping his arm straight and grip tight. He knows he has two options at this point. He could forcefully rotate the wrist, which would break Yoongi’s joints. Or he could maintain control of him with the lock and use whatever other forms of self defense necessary to hurt him.

Or he could have fun with this.

“So... I’m guessing you’re a bottom?” Jimin says casually, referring to their switch of positions. Still blindfolded, he can’t see the expression on Yoongi’s face but he imagines it’s probably an
eyeroll mixed with an expression of pain.

So he’s surprised when he hears Yoongi laughing. What, was he really finding this funny? He could break his wrist with just one swift movement if he wanted to.

“I gotta admit, you’re good.”

That takes him by surprise. He removes one of his hands from Yoongi’s wrist to push the damn blindfold off his face.

It feels so good to be able to see again.

He looks down and sees Yoongi wearing a comfortable smile, the bastard. “What’s so funny?” He asks defiantly. “I could break your wrist right now.”

“Yeah?” Yoongi juts his chin out and regards him with a lifted brow, “Then do it.”

“Don’t think I won’t,” Jimin threatens with two tight hands on his opponent’s wrist. He tightens his grip until Yoongi’s wincing and he knows if he just applied a little bit more pressure, he’d be able to break all the bones in his joint.

*Just a little bit more,* he tells himself, *and he’ll break.*

“They won’t.” Yoongi says a little more loudly this time.

Jimin glances down at him again only to be caught off guard to see Yoongi looking back at him, but without the usual fire in his eyes. Jimin has the upperhand in this situation and Yoongi’s expression tells him that he knows this, that he knows Jimin has the upperhand and for the first time since they’ve known each other, Yoongi wasn’t fighting back. He’s just simply waiting for Jimin’s next move.

He can’t look away.

Yoongi looks at Jimin and wonders if he would actually break him or hurt him in any way. He’s trying his hardest to push Jimin over the edge, but so far, it wasn’t working.

And when it came down to it, deep down he doesn’t really expect Jimin to go through with his threat. He knows Jimin, the boy with a kind soul who cared too deeply for him. And realizing this turns his insides upside down because he wasn’t supposed to feel comfortable knowing that.

“I can’t,” Jimin says before letting go, not breaking their eye contact for a second. The silence between them isn’t uncomfortable, but it’s certainly heavy. Jimin can hear the blood pounding against his eardrums.

The thing is, Jimin realizes at this moment just how much he hates where they’re at. He hates the fact that Yoongi’s forced them into that bullshit gray area of platonic friendship where he wasn’t supposed to think about how inviting Yoongi’s bloody lips look right now, but that’s all he can think about right now.

He’s not even sorry about it.

So he doesn’t look away. He stares unapologetically and decides he needs to voice just how shitty
he feels.

“You’re a fucking idiot.”

Yoongi’s eyes widen at the accusation. Jimin’s staring at him like he wants to kill him or devour him - he honestly can’t tell which, and something about hearing the unexpected frustration in Jimin’s words has Yoongi laughing despite himself.

He knows it’s not the appropriate reaction, but he can’t help it. A gentle and soft laughter just escapes him, because he really doesn’t know what else to do.

Jimin narrows his eyes at him. “That funny to you?”

Yoongi shakes his head. “No, I agree.”

Jimin raises a brow.

“I’m a fucking idiot,” Yoongi agrees. “I don’t even know if this is helping find your damn extension.”

“That’s not what I meant,” Jimin says, his tone still defiant. “But honestly, how’s beating each other up gonna solve anything? I mean, it just ends up with one of us on top of the other, bruised and bleeding, or both.”

That’s not such a terrible thing, Yoongi thinks silently. “Desperate times call for-”

“Don’t be cliche,” Jimin groans, cutting him off.

“Allright so maybe this didn’t work, but can you get off me first?” Yoongi asks, trying to lighten the tone. He can’t take a second more of Jimin’s intense gaze and the effect it’s having on him. Jimin keeps looking at him with this unwarranted intensity and Yoongi feels like he can’t breathe properly.

So he tries to shove Jimin off him but Jimin retaliates with unexpected strength, pushing down on Yoongi’s shoulders with his hands and keeping him in place.

“What the fuck,” Yoongi gasps, once again getting the wind knocked out of him.

“Hyung,” Jimin says in a dangerously low voice, and Yoongi has no idea what to make of this side of Jimin. He’s never seen him this assertive before. It was refreshing, he had to admit.

He swallows and keeps quiet.

Jimin hesitates. A question has been fuming his head for weeks. He’s pushed it to the back of his mind and locked it away but now it’s crept up on him and he just needed to know.

He really needed to know. He needed to know he wasn’t the only one suffering this much.

“Is this-” Jimin hesitates one last time before deciding to push on. “Is this really what you want?” he asks earnestly.
He watches for the older’s reaction, watches as his eyebrows shoot upwards, his forehead wrinkling as he does so. He watches as Yoongi slowly realizes what he’s asking and looks away, finally breaking their eye contact.

“What, the fighting?” Yoongi asks quietly, fully knowing that wasn’t it.

Jimin doesn’t even justify him with a response.

Yoongi’s not sure how to proceed from here. His conscious mind and the uncomfortable tightness in his gut are yelling two different answers and he can’t think properly with Jimin’s weight fucking on top of him.

“Get off me,” he tells Jimin gruffly, attempting to push him off once again but Jimin - with his stupid superhuman agility - stops him before he can even start.

“Answer my question.”

“Jimin, get off.”

“Stop avoiding my-”

“Get off!”

“Fucking answer me first!”

“Get off-” Yoongi raises his voice, this time forcefully shoving Jimin’s waist with both hands to force him aside. But just as he’s about to lean his weight sideways, he loses feeling in his arms. He watches, stunned, as his limbs go completely rigid, as if they had suddenly disconnected from his control. All of this happens in an instant.

“What-” is all he can manage to utter in shock before his entire face freezes over too. Then the phenomenon occurs to rest of his body, from his head to his toes, rendering him immobile as a statue carved out of marble.

He’s absolutely paralyzed.

Jimin stares in bewilderment, trying to understand the phenomenon taking place before his eyes. “Hyung! What the fuck’s happening?”

But Yoongi’s lips can’t move. The only thing mobile are his eyeballs and they were looking at Jimin frantically, panicked beyond words.

“Holy shit...” Jimin whispers, his hands trembling and his breath catching in his throat. This was terrifying - Yoongi had been about to push him off, avoiding his question and refusing to answer, pissing him off like never before and then in the next second Yoongi had just completely froze...

A theory pops into Jimin’s head and it’s so insane and absurd but he can’t think of any other explanation. “There’s no way...”

There’s just no other possibility. This is his doing. It had to be him. Who else was here, but the two of them?
“How did I ...” he says in a hushed whisper, trying to figure out how to un do this. “But I have no fucking clue how..”

He tries to pinpoint exactly at what point Yoongi started to freeze over.

Then it hits him - Yoongi’s avoidance had angered him. It had pissed him off like nothing else, and he had channeled all his frustration and anger at Yoongi and the next thing he knew, he was going rigid.

“My emotions? That’s what triggered it?” He asks out loud, more to himself than Yoongi. “Shit, you deserved it though. Okay, maybe if i just…”

He takes a couple of deep breaths, inhaling, exhaling. Inhale, exhale. He tries to think of calmer things, things that had nothing to do with Yoongi or the Games or the mess they’re in and tries to focus on absolutely nothing. He closes his eyes and completely clear his mind and empties his conscious.

Slowly, it works.

When he opens his eyes he sees Yoongi slowly retrieve control over his body. It starts with his head and neck, then his arms, his torso, then his legs come about and Yoongi pushes himself up against his elbow.

He stares at Jimin with eyes so wide he looks like he might have seen a ghost.

Jimin’s glad to see that his theory had been correct at least: with his anger gone, Yoongi’s immobility was gone too. But he still doesn’t really understand-

“Holy fucking shit,” Yoongi gives him the widest shit-eating grin, “You found your damn extension.”

Present: Academy campus

One of Taehyung’s favorite things about long-distance train rides was the comfort of knowing he had nowhere else to be and had nothing else he needed to be doing.

So after getting off the train, taking a bus and walking up the stone path leading to the Academy’s gates nested on the top of hidden mountains, he can’t help but feel a little saddened that from here on, he wasn’t going to be able to enjoy relaxing train rides or anything like that for a while.

Beside him, Jungkook shivers from the harsh winter winds, burrowing his nose deeper into his thick scarf. His ears are still exposed to the cold, but there’s not much he can do about that right now.

They make their way up the path, their duffle bags on their shoulders.

Once they reach the golden gates, the familiar cool automated female voice that voiced the Academy’s system greets them.

“Welcome to the Heroes Academy. My thermal and DNA scan detects two registered students,
“Welcome back, Mr. Kim and Mr. Jeon. Have a nice day.”

The two make their way across campus to the west side where the Year 1 residences are located. Since it’s Saturday morning, there’s barely any students out and about. At the entrance of Jungkook’s dorm building, Taehyung asks, “I’ll see you at practice tonight?”

“Yeah,” Jungkook nods, “wanna get dinner before that?”

“Cafeteria around 6?”

“Sounds good.”

Jungkook hesitates before turning around to head inside his dorm. Ever since their impromptu mountain hike, it had occurred to him that maybe it would be a good idea to tell Taehyung about an incident that had happened years ago, given the fact that the Games were starting so soon. Whenever he had wanted to bring it up, it just never seemed like the right time. Even throughout the train ride, it had been on the tip of his tongue, but he had hesitated, his nerves holding him back.

Now, being back on campus, Jungkook’s reminded of the little time they have left. They’re back at the Academy, and Jungkook’s done with putting it off.

“Hey,” he says, looking at Taehyung and feeling nervous. Which is stupid, since he has no reason to be nervous with Taehyung, he tells himself. If anyone could understand Jungkook, it was him. “I have something I want to tell you.”

Taehyung notices the sudden change in his best friend’s tone and asks, “What’s up?”

Jungkook opens his mouth, wanting to spill everything but he realizes he doesn’t even know where to start. There’s too many thoughts in his head. He pauses, trying to gather the right string of words - he needs to make sure what he said made sense, but more importantly, he had to make sure it didn’t scare Taehyung, or cause him concern, or both.

How the fuck was he supposed to this explain this?

“Okay, um,” he finally manages to say, embarrassed that it was taking this much effort to get the words out. “There’s something I haven’t told you or the team. Something about... about my extension.”

“Your extension?” the brunette repeats, stunned. “I thought you haven’t found it yet.”

“See, that’s the thing,” Jungkook pushes on, hoping he’ll make sense. He takes a breath before continuing, “I’ve known what it is for a while. For years, actually. Before coming here.”

“What!” Taehyung exclaims in surprise, wondering why his friend had failed to mention it at all. “Why didn’t you tell me? Or any of us?”

“Because it’s not really an extension, I don’t know what to call it. I mean, I guess that’s what it is, but I honestly don’t know. It’s not the kind of extension you guys have so I’m really not sure what to label it, you know? Maybe it’s an extension, maybe it’s just another part of my Power, I don’t know.”
Jungkook says all of this in one breath, just wanting to get it all out at once and when he stops to take in a shaky breath, he sees that Taehyung’s looking at him with wide eyes.

“Okay, slow down,” Taehyung says, stepping closer to his friend and looking more serious than before. “What exactly are you talking about? When did you find out? What is it, Jungkook?”

An idea pops into Jungkook’s head and he scolds himself for not having thought of it sooner. “I think it’ll be easier if I just show you.”

One year ago: Cafeteria

“Hey! Namjoon!”

Namjoon looks around the cafeteria in search of the familiar voice calling out to him. He spots Seokjin sitting at a table near the exit, waving at him.

“Come sit,” the older gestures to come over and Namjoon does happily.

When he lays his tray down and takes a seat, Seokjin smiles at him and Namjoon has no clue how to respond. This is the first time he’s been alone with Seokjin outside of practice and it’s really no big deal, no big deal at all.

Except that it is and he’s kind of freaking out. Be cool, he warns himself, and breathe.

“Don’t see you here often,” Namjoon comments hoping he sounded casual and calm but feeling the complete opposite.

“I usually cook for myself,” Seokjin replies, absentmindedly stirring his noodles with his chopsticks. “Caf food is kinda my last resort.”

“Did your groceries run out or something?”

“Nah, just felt too tired to cook lately,” he says with a lopsided grin, “Seungho’s been grilling us hard.”

Namjoon relaxes a little. Practices - okay, this was familiar territory. He could work with it.

“Yeah, I know,” he agrees, nodding. “He makes the Games sound like it’s the Olympics or something.”

“I guess you’ll see soon for yourself,” he laughs and Namjoon finds himself laughing along easily.

“By the way, I’m just gonna warn you now,” Seokjin says in a more serious tone, “the next few weeks are gonna be a pain in the ass.”

“I figured,” Namjoon takes a small bite of his sandwich. “Seungho said practices are gonna be longer, which probably means my grades are gonna be lower.”

“Nah, I heard you’re kind of a genius.”

Namjoon nearly chokes on his BLT and has to cough a few times to clear his throat.
Seokjin laughs and watches in amusement as the younger man across the table gulps down his water. “Yoongi mentioned that you’re top of your year,” he explains.

“Ugh, Yoongi,” Namjoon shakes his head. He makes a mental note to scold his roommate for making him come off as a friggin nerd to Seokjin. “Ignore him, he’s just-

“I think that’s damn impressive,” Seokjin tells him and Namjoon shuts up mid-sentence. “You should consider being Prefect in your last year,” he advises. “You work hard, always show up to practice, you’re top of your class-

“Well I have to show up, right? Can’t exactly skip practice or half-ass it,” Namjoon says, feeling himself go red. He hopes to god he’s not blushing too hard.

“- and you’re cute. You’ve kind of got the whole package there, Kim Namjoon.”

Holy shit, wait, what? Had he heard that right? He couldn’t have.

Namjoon’s flabbergasted. He’s shaken to his core. Seokjin called him cute, the world isn’t ending and he’s fucking losing his mind.

He should say something. He really should. Seokjin’s looking at him with a falsely innocent smile that’s definitely got a hidden meaning in there somewhere, but Namjoon has lost his ability to speak apparently.

“But I’m not saying get too cocky,” Seokjin continues smoothly, doing an expert job of ignoring Namjoon’s shocked state. “The other teams are pretty damn good. Last year, we came second, just barely missed bringing home the gold. We’re not letting that happen again.”

“Right,” Namjoon finally says, after raging World War III with his brain-to-mouth function. “Right, we can’t let that happen again.” What the fuck was he even agreeing to?

Seokjin seems to find something very amusing because he just keeps grinning and Namjoon has no idea what to do. His palms are sweating and the butterflies in his stomach are on steroids, he swears to god.

“You were really great the other day, by the way,” the Empath says, finally tasting the noodles he’s been playing with. “The way you predicted Mino’s moves with your Telepathy with such precision, and trust me, I’ve known Mino for years. He’s never been so thrown off.” Seokjin recalls the moment play by play and Namjoon has never felt more proud of himself than at this moment.

“You’re giving me way too much credit,” Namjoon tells him, rubbing the back of his neck. “I just kind of did that on instinct.”

“Keep that up and we’re gonna have a good chance at gold,” Seokjin appraises. “I’m serious, we’re a really solid team this year.”

“Yeah, we are,” the Telepath agrees, despite not having any other teams to compare it to. But he’s noticed the team coordination improving over the months and he definitely felt closer with them. “Plus we have months before the real thing, we have time to cook up strategies.”

“That reminds me,” Seokjin takes out his phone and taps some buttons for a few seconds before showing Namjoon the screen. “I’m thinking of cooking this dish over the weekend.”

It was a picture of snails. Like, real snails with shells and green slimy bodies. Namjoon’s gut
reaction is mixture of disgust and disbelief but he catches himself and quickly rearranges his expression to one of feigned interest and mild surprise.

“Oh, wow,” he has to really try to sound like it’s not grossing him out. “That’s… an interesting choice.”

“Yes, it’s called escargot. Big thing in France,” Seokjin informs him. “I’m probably gonna make more than one batch. You know, in case I mess up. You wanna come over and be the taste tester?”

“Yeah, sure,” he says without thinking. “That sounds great.”

“Really?” Seokjin looks a little surprised at his response. “You’re down to eat snails?”

Namjoon hadn’t actually processed that part properly. He just heard the words “come over” and instantly agreed without thinking. But now it’s sinking in that he would have to consume snails.

“Well, they have protein,” he lies, not even sure what the hell snails consisted of. “If the French eat it, it’s probably good...”

The Empath wears a curiously incredulous expression and Namjoon starts questioning his assumption.

Then Sekojin starts laughing and Namjoon's in the middle of having a mini panic attack until he explains, “I was kidding,” Seokjin tells him, a warm smile on his handsome face. "Just wanted to see your reaction. I gotta say, you’re way more open-minded than I am about food choices.”

Namjoon laughs nervously, really hoping he hadn’t given away the real intentions behind his enthusiasm.

“I am making a French dish, though.”

“I think I could do a good job of taste testing.”

“We’ll make a good team, then,” the radiance of Seokjin’s smile was beyond describable, “even in the kitchen.”

**Present: the Dome**

That evening, the seven of them gather underneath the glass ceiling of the Dome. Tonight, the ceiling mimics the starry black sky so typical of winter nights, which were getting darker at much earlier hours these days.

Seokjin, Namjoon and Hoseok had arrived half an hour before the other four members started trickling in. The three of them had discussed what they needed to go over tonight and figured it would make sense to start off their practice with a much-needed discussion of their next steps.

“Before we get into our practice, I wanted to catch you all up to speed on what’s gonna happen in the next few weeks,” Seokjin starts of, all six members’ eyes trained on him. “For some of you, this will be your first time in the Games and you should know what to expect.”

“Be warned, there’s going to be a lot of cheering and screaming at the start,” Hoseok warns the younger members of the team, “it really gets you pumped. Which is good, because it only gets harder from there.”
“Both physically and mentally,” Namjoon cuts in, looking at their three youngest members with a grin. “But as long as we stick together as a team, we’ll pull through.”

“Exactly,” the Captain agrees. “Especially with the changes they’re throwing at us this year.

“Now, as for next week when the Games start, there’s going to be the opening ceremony which is a full day event where all the participating schools will announce their individual members, show off their Powers, eat up the attention of the crowd and end with a banquet.”

“It’s kind of extravagant, but it’s the institutions’ way of saying “here’s one last bit of fun before it begins’,” says Hoseok, the irony in his tone hard to miss. “But it is fun, I won’t lie.”

“So when’s the opening ceremonies?” Taehyung asks.

“Start of next week,” Seokjin answers.

“From there, they’ll explain the three stages and get right into it,” Namjoon says. “And if there’s one lesson I learned from last year, it’s to always rely on your teammates. No matter what.”

“Trust each other, know each other’s strengths, and ask for help when you need it.”

“Are we writing High School Musical 4 right now?” Hoseok jokes, earning laughter from everyone else. “I think they get the point.”

“And be on your guards,” Seokjin looks at everyone as he says this, “at all times.”

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**Present, night: the Dome**

Despite the freezing winter night, President Universo walks calmly along the length of the domed Grand Stadium, a massive structure that stood outside of the Academy’s campus and which, up until a few weeks ago, had been under construction.

He had planned for the renovation to be done much earlier but the cold weather conditions had hampered the progress. Nonetheless, everything was in order for the opening ceremonies happening just next week and he had more pressing issues at hand. He ponders them as he takes his night stroll, enjoying the peaceful silence of the darkness.

As he walks along the Stadium’s lengths, his footsteps leaving behind a trail of imprints in the snow.

In just a few days time, the spectator areas will be filled with thousands of spectators of various nationalities, all cheering on the teams of their respective home countries, all of them so unsuspecting of the importance of this year’s event.

“Shadow, you may come out.” he says in the darkness of the night. The Stadium is still and there’s no sign of movement. The President waits patiently, his hands in the pockets of his black trench coat.

A moment later, on the snowy ground appears the shadow of a large man. A shadow without its owner, to anyone else, would have been a strange sight.
Universo, however, welcomes it with a rare smile. “I’m sorry you’ve been hiding for so long.”

The black figure doesn’t move or respond but appears to be listening.

“Just a little longer,” he promises. “Then we’ll be free.”

**Present: waiting room, lower level of the Grand Stadium**

In no time at all, the rest of the week passes in a flash and Namjoon, Taehyung, Hoseok, Jungkook, Jimin, Yoongi, and Seokjin find themselves waiting inside one of the preparation rooms in the lower level of the Grand Stadium.

They can hear the thundering coming from above them, tens of thousands of spectators’ cheering and yelling from the encircling seats of the stadium. The noise level was beyond anything that Jimin had imagined. If he hadn’t known any better, he would have guessed a stampede was happening above, it was that loud.

The prep room they’re in reminds him of a salon. There’s seven vanities and seven seats, the mirrors running from floor to ceiling. They’re waiting for the stylists to arrive and Jimin is bristling with nerves. He can’t help but feel nervous at the prospect of finally starting the Games after all these months or preparation.

Seokjin had briefed them on their way to the Stadium about what was going to take place:

“Today’s annual opening ceremony is a festive celebration to mark the official start of the event,” he had explained. “The opening ceremony is a huge spectacle, schools compete to see who can take it to the next level each year,” he had gone on. “Part of the fun is seeing how they represent their country, their culture, and history through their outfits and how the teams show off their Powers. It makes for a pretty exciting show.”

The door to their prep room finally opens to reveal a small group of men and women who walk in, seven of them holding what Jimin assumes to be their outfits.

The woman who strides into the room with unmistakable authority and status has straight blonde hair, an upturned straight nose, and blood-red lips.

“Hello,” she greets them with a tight smile. “My name is Lee Chaerin, I’m the Co-Director of the Ministry of Entertainment, along with my colleague, Suho.”

A pale, handsome man beside her nods his greetings. “My name is Kim Suho, nice meeting you all.” Beside him, Jimin hears Jungkook gasp but before he can question it, Chaerin continues.

“So, welcome to the opening ceremonies. It’s earlier this year, as you know, but just as grand, if not grander, than any other year. And as this year’s host institution, we felt it our duty to make sure that the host team looks absolutely unforgettable.”

With a wave of her hand, the seven stylists approach each of them to hand the garments in their
“These outfits won’t be the ones you wear throughout the Games,” Chaerin continues. “The regular outfits will be given to you after the ceremony. Our lead stylist will explain today's garments before you try them on.”

“This year we’ve taken special care to make sure these were designed to reflect Korea's rich culture, but with your comfort in mind,” a silver-haired male stylist tells them. “It’s simplistic but sends a message. The top piece was inspired by the king’s highest ceremonial robe, the meyonbok, from the Goryeo and Joseon dynasties. We hope you’ll wear them with pride.”

“We’ll leave you to put them on,” Chaerin says, already turning around and heading to the door. “Suho and I will be back in fifteen to debrief you on the procedures. We hope you’ll like the outfits.”

With that, the stylists and two Bureau officials leave the room and the team is quiet for a second before Hoseok speaks up excitedly.

“What are we waiting for? Let’s try these on!”

Jimin holds up the top piece and inspects it. It had been inspired by hanbok, traditional Korean clothing. More specifically, these were designed to mimic the myeonbok, the king’s religious and formal ceremonial robes which composed of the myeonryu-gwan, a headdress that had beads and hung loose, and the gujangbok, which was a black garment that bore the nine symbols that represented the king.

While the stylists had foregone the myeonryu-gwan, they had taken the gujangbok and modernized it. Jimin was impressed with not just the way they had seamlessly incorporated the nine kingly symbols onto the sleeves and the shoulders, but how they made the arm sleeves loose and wide at the openings, just like the real thing. The bottom part of their outfits were simple tight black pants, completed with black leather boots laced up to their ankles.

“Damn, they did a fucking good job this year,” Hoseok comments as he pulls on the top part of his outfit over his black undershirt. It fit perfectly on his lean frame. “Check this out,” he points to his shoulders, where a beautiful traditional depiction of a dragon on each shoulder was embroidered onto the high-grade lightweight material.

The closer Jimin looked at it, the more details of the handiwork he noticed. The eyes of the dragon were tiny gems, its teeth as well. They had depicted the dragon in a fierce fighting stance with one arm reaching above its head, the other drawn back as if it was about to claw its opponent. Against the black background, the vibrant colours of the dragon’s scales looked stunning.

“The dragon was a symbol of the king’s governance and was believed to bring balance to the world,” Namjoon explains while putting his outfit on.

“Nerd,” Seokjin teases, as he put on his own.

On the back were the symbols of a mountain, fire, pheasants, and wine cups. Tiger and monkey symbols embellished the arm sleeve.

Jimin was utterly impressed with the colours and details of the symbols and how perfectly the black worked as a background to make the symbols stand out. The stylists had really put in thought in keeping the original components of the gujangbok.

“What do you think?” Taehyung asks Jimin, tracing the tiger symbol along the arm sleeve of his
“Kinda tight, but black’s always been my colour,” he says back with a grin.

“I think the tigers add a nice touch,” says Taehyung.

When Suho and Chaerin reappear with a knock on the door, they walk in with approving glances at their outfits.

“Absolutely beautiful,” she breathes out, clasping her manicured hands. “Just stunning.”

“In just under half an hour the ceremonies will officially start,” Suho informs them, getting straight to the point. “We’ll show you to the waiting room on ground level, just an elevator ride way. Every team will wait in front of their respective entrances before being called out. You will be at entrance 4.

“Afterwards, all the teams and their individual members will be introduced by the commentators. A quick run down of the three stages will be announced, and it will end with all the teams participating in the greeting ceremony. Afterwards, the teams will be invited to a banquet at the Academy’s dining halls.” Suho says this as if reciting a manual.

“Remember, when you’re up there, keep your heads high and smiles bright. This year’s Games is ours, and the rest of Asia will know it as soon as they see you in these,” Charein smiles at them confidently. “Now, shall we?”

The team follows the two officials out of the room, who lead them down a long white hallway, turn to the right, and down another narrower hallway. With each step Jimin takes, he can feel his heart beat faster and faster.

This was it. This was what they’ve been training for months. The crowd was waiting for them above, and there was nothing left to do but face them.

“Wow,” he whispers, not realizing his thoughts were being spoken out loud.

“Nervous?” Yoongi grins from beside him as they make their way to the elevator ahead of them.

“Nearly shitting myself,” Jimin answers honestly.

Yoongi surprises him when he grabs Jimin’s hand and squeezes it just once before letting go.

“We’ll be fine.”

And the fleeting smile Yoongi gives him is enough to still the erratic beating in his chest just a bit.

He looks ahead, prepared to face whatever the hell was waiting for them above.

Chapter End Notes

hell yeah another update, hope you guys liked it!
the next chapter is basically the actual start of the Games. i’m pretty fucking excited
with what's coming up, I hope you guys are too!!!
please please feel free to leave your comments and thoughts, they're honestly what fuels me to keep writing <3
thank you <3
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

The Opening Ceremony for the annual Games commences, but not without an unexpected twist. Jungkook's past is revisited, and Jimin has an interesting encounter in the bathroom, of all places.

Chapter Notes

I know it's been a while (I apologize) so refresh your memory with the last chapter if you need to!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

PRESENT: OPENING CEREMONIES

In preparation for the Opening Ceremonies, the Academy had gone to great lengths to upgrade the colossal structure of the Grand Stadium. From increasing the seating capacity to accommodate the tens of thousands expected in the audience, to installing massive plasma screens above the seats to broadcast the Games, the Academy had done everything imaginable to ensure the structure was more than ready to host the Opening Ceremonies that was about to take place.

Underneath the Stadium, in a high-ceilinged waiting room are the competing teams, waiting for the competition to officially begin. Jimin observes the space around him: the white walls bare and windowless, the space illuminated only by fluorescent lighting.

Standing with his teammates, Jimin observes the other six teams. The bleached, white lighting is totally revealing of the anxious expressions in the room, casting sharp shadows of the competitors who wait in anticipation for the official start to this year’s Games.

“All right guys, this is it. We’re just minutes away from the official opening,” he informs them in a serious tone as his teammates intently listen. “The teams will be called out one by one. We’ll be taken up to ground level to another prep room, where we’ll exit and walk to the middle of the stadium grounds in single file in order of descending age.”

“What’s the order of the teams?” Taehyung asks.

“We won’t know until they call us out,” Namjoon answers. “Just hope we’re not first.”

“After all the teams have come out, the Captains and members will be individually introduced. Don’t worry about the size of the crowd, alright?” He looks pointedly at the new members. “Just wave and smile,” advises Seokjin. “Don’t be nervous, this is the easy part.”

“I actually kinda love this part,” Hoseok says, grinning.
“Please don’t be as obnoxious as last year,” Yoongi warns from beside him. “We don’t need you blowing kisses to the crowd, we have Jin for that.”

“What’s wrong with showing affection?” Hoseok counters, crossing his arms. “Hyung gets to do it, and I don’t?”

“How long is this supposed to be? I don’t really like being put on display,” Jungkook asks, not looking excited.

“Just enjoy it. Like Jin said, this is the easy part,” Namjoon reassures him.

Jimin looks away only to catch the eyes of one of the members, a silver-haired guy with a piercing on one ear and large, round eyes. They hold their gaze for a mere three seconds before he throws Jimin a hard look and turns to whisper something to his teammate.

This second member raises his voice and addresses him with, “The fuck you looking at?”

All of a sudden, the reality of the Games and all of its competitive nature sinks in and it really hits Jimin in the face that this is it, it’s fucking happening.

Nerves and anxiety overcome him and all he can think about is how he’s going to be scrutinized by hundreds of thousands of people all over the world - not just these two guys.

His every move, every action, every mistake during each stage was going to be watched and judged worldwide.

It’s suddenly hard to breathe and Jimin has to really focus to hear what Namjoon is saying.

“The ceremony doesn’t take too long, which is good cause the banquet afterward is bomb. They usually have good food.”

“Wait, what banquet?” Taehyung asks. “I wasn’t informed of this?”

“Clearly someone pays attention during practice,” mutters Jungkook, earning an elbow to his arm from his best friend.

“The banquet, it’s at the end of this fancy show and tell,” Hoseok reminds Taehyung. “Free booze and food at the banquet hall, truthfully the best part of the whole shit show.”

“Hey, I heard the Stadium got upgraded this year,” Namjoon comments. “Bigger with more seats apparently.”

“Guess we’ll see soon,” Seokjin says. He takes a look at his teammates and startles when he sees how pale Jimin is. “Whoa, Jimin, you okay?”

Jimin suddenly gets up from his seat. “Bathroom.”

Ignoring the suddenly worried looks of his teammates and wishing he could have Taehyung’s invisibility at the moment, he dashes for the washroom at the back of the room, kicking the door open.

“Christ,” he whispers to himself, leaning his head back against the door. His chest is heaving and his breathing is coming out frantically erratic and he can’t explain how he reached this state but everything about that conversation was putting him fucking edge until all of a sudden - it was too much.

Closing his eyes, he mutters “Get your shit together, god.”

He shakes his head, willing himself to pull it together. Any minute now, they were going to start announcing the teams and he really shouldn’t be in the fucking *bathroom*, but all he can think about at the moment is how hundreds of thousands of people were going to be watching his every move from here on and he just can’t come to terms with it.

“Okay, come on, come on,” he breathes out, feeling a drop of sweat slowly drip down his forehead. “I’m fine,” he wipes it with the back of hand and takes one last breath before opening his eyes again. “I’m f-”

“AHH!” he yells out, nearly jumping out of his skin at the sight before him.

“Whoa, whoa, chill!” exclaims a brown-haired guy standing just a foot away from Jimin - *where the fuck did he come from?* - who puts his hands up in the air in defense, the expression on his face making it clear he’s just as surprised as Jimin is.

“Oh Jesus,” Jimin whispers, clutching his chest, stunned at the fact that someone else is in the bathroom. He hadn’t even thought to look around in his state of panic. “Were you in here this whole time?”

“Hey, I was in here taking a piss before you barged in and started getting all panicky,” the guy says back, sounding defensive but with a hint of worry in his expression as he studies Jimin, who’s still shakily leaning against the door. “You okay?” he asks, sounding concerned.

“Yeah, I was just taking a breather,” Jimin lies, feeling embarrassed that a competitor had seen him in this state.

“You’re the new kid on the other Korean team, right?” the guy asks, and Jimin finally takes a good look at the privacy-intruder. He’s a good looking guy, Jimin reluctantly admits, with round eyes, full lips and brown bangs parted to the side. Not just good looking, this guy was *Fine* with a capital F.

And he had just witnessed his meltdown.

What a start to the Games.

Jimin tries to ignore his embarrassment and even worse, his attraction to the guy, and answers with, “Yeah, I’m Jimin.”

“Taemin,” the guy extends a hand and Jimin shakes it. “Nice meeting you in here, I guess.” He grins, and Jimin feels even worse. He has such nice teeth, what the fuck.

“The first Games is always the hardest, don’t let it get to you,” Taemin adds. “At least you didn’t throw up. Can’t say the same.”

It takes a few seconds for Jimin to register that Taemin’s making small talk and that he should probably respond.

“Oh,” he doesn’t really know what to say so he blurts out, “I’m not usually like this, I got anxious all of a sudden and couldn’t breathe and just…” he trails off, his face feeling hot. “Sorry you saw that.”
“What are you sorry for? I’ve been worse, don’t worry,” Taemin says gently. He offers Jimin a small smile. “We should head back. They’ll probably start announcing really soon.”

“Oh yeah,” Jimin moves away from the door and reaches for the handle but it opens on its own.

Taemin chuckles at his surprised expression. “Telekinesis, in case you’ve never seen it before,” he explains, pausing at the doorway. He turns to give Jimin a genuine smile. “Glad to have a cute competitor this year, I’ll see you out there.”

By the time Jimin rejoins the team, Jungkook’s nerves are on fire. He can’t stand still, so he paces around, waiting nervously for the announcements to start.

Minutes later, the cool automated female voice so familiar to all the students of the Academy finally comes through the speakers, penetrating the nervous energy of the room. Everyone instantly stills, the collectives breaths of all the teams held in anticipation.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the Superhero world, welcome to the 150th annual Hero Games proudly hosted this year by the Heroes Academy of South Korea. Please, join me in commencing this year’s Games.”

Jungkook stands up straighter, feeling his heartbeat quicken. It was finally starting.

“As per tradition, we will begin with the introduction of the seven teams. Teams, please ascend to the main ground level of the Stadium once you are called and follow further instructions once you’ve reached the preparation area. The order of the teams will be as follows.”

There’s absolute silence and collective anticipation as the teams await their order.

“Ladies and gentlemen, announcing the first participating team of the year, please welcome the seven members from the Hong Kong Conservatory.”

Jungkook watches as the group at the far right end the room quickly walk towards the elevator and a second later it slides open, letting the seven members in.

The doors close and there’s complete silence once more.

Minutes pass before the female voice fills the room again and announces, “Members of the Beijing Institute, be on stand-by.”

The Chinese members line up and walk towards the elevator, stepping inside and disappearing just as the Hong Kong team had done minutes before.

“So what now?” Taehyung whispers to Seokjin, eyes still fixed on the elevator doors.

“They’ll be officially called out in a sec-”

“Ladies and gentlemen of the superhero world, please welcome the Hong Kong Institute.”

Jungkook wishes he could get this waiting part over with quickly; he hates not knowing what to
expect and his nerves are eating away at him.

*Ready to do this?* He asks Shadow, looking down at the dark figure cast by his side.

Shadow nods once, the response more than enough for Jungkook.

Then the next announcement pierces the quiet space again, making the hair on Jungkook’s arms stand up when he hears the voice announce: “Heroes Academy, be on stand-by.”

“We’re next?” Jimin mutters, looking pale. Taehyung pats him on the shoulder as the seven of them head towards the elevator in the middle of the waiting room.

As Jungkook walks past the remaining teams, he feels each and every pair of eyes on him and tries his best to not let it get to him. This was nothing compared to what was awaiting for them in the Stadium seats.

With a ding, the elevator doors slide closed and starts to take them up to ground level. The ride is fairly quick and before he knows it, the doors are sliding open again with another ding.

They quickly step off and look around them: the preparation area of the Stadium is similar to the preparation room of the Dome, but much bigger, and equipped with advanced tools and weapons he’s never seen before.

Before he can study it any further, a Bureau official holding a tablet and a walkie address them in a quipped tone:

“Academy team, follow me to the exit. Quickly.”

He leads them to the opposite end of the preparation room, past the squad of Healers, a handful of Bureau officials talking amongst themselves, Academy professors conversing, and boxes marked with “Stage 1 Equipment” stamped on their wooden sides.

Jungkook exhales, letting the enormity of what he’s about to step into really sink in.

They stop right in front of huge steel sliding doors marked with STADIUM GROUND in bold letters on them.

“Line up in ascending age order,” instructs the Bureau official. “You’ll be called out in a minute.”

Jungkook wordlessly follows the rest of his team as they arrange themselves in line from oldest to youngest. His legs move automatically, and he knows that this is it - this is the start of his first ever Hero Games - but everything feels surreal at the moment and he feels like he’s on autopilot.

He stands last in line, being the youngest. In front of him is Taehyung, Jimin, Namjoon, Hoseok, Yoongi and Seokjin, in that order.

Then the female voice rings through the room, and all seven of them stand up a little straighter.

“Please welcome the host institution’s team, the seven members from the Heroes Academy.”

Just before the doors start to slide open, Taehyung turns around to give him a quick reassuring smile. He feels his breath catch in his throat before the sliding doors slide open, the sunlight hitting his face and momentarily blinding him as they step outside into the sunlight and onto the stadium grounds.

As they walk through the entrance, they’re met with deafening roars and shouts coming from all
sides of the stadium’s spectator seats. The sheer number of people in the crowd is overwhelming - he’s never seen this many people in one place before - and his heart’s nearly falling out of his chest as they make their way to the center of the stadium grounds. He’s never felt this excited and nervous, either.

It’s a lot of firsts for him today.

The sheer volume of the roars coming from the audience is beyond anything Jungkook had anticipated.

There must be tens of thousands in the Stadium’s seats.

“Damn!” Hoseok yells over the noise. “Crowd’s a lot bigger this year!”

The audience, from what he can tell, consisted of a wide range of supporters. There’s undoubtedly a huge number from China, but also a good amount cheering for Thailand, a smaller number showing their support for Japan, but he could see that being the host school had an advantage; there’s an impressive number of Korean supporters in the crowd.

Jungkook spots numerous Academy students holding up posters of the institution’s emblem, others lifting handmade signs with the team member’s names written on them, and more South Korean flags than he could count. He spots a good number of posters with Seokjin’s name on them - some even with hearts. He’s not surprised when he doesn’t see his own.

In line formation, the seven of them make their way to the center of the stadium where *Heroes Academy* is written in white spray on the ground, marking their position.

Looking ahead, Jungkook sees that in front of them is a large raised platform and a long table on top. Seated at the center of the table are two male commentators for the Games, and on the left side of them are Chaerin, Suho, and two other suited Bureau officials, and on the right side are a handful of men and women dressed in beautiful traditional clothing. Jungkook can only assume they must be important figures acting as judges from the neighbouring countries.

He’s surprised that the President isn’t among them, but before he can dwell on it further he catches sight of himself on the gigantic television screens above the center of the stadium. Four screens had been put together to form a rectangular prism to accommodate the viewers from all sides. He takes a closer look at himself on screen and it hits him in that moment; *this is it*.

He’s standing in the middle of the Grand Stadium and time’s run out. It’s started.

*Just smile and wave. This is the easy part.* Jin’s voice suddenly rings inside Jungkook’s head and he pulls himself together. He lifts his chin a little higher and brings one hand above his head. He waves at the people to the Superhero world, to their fellow peers, and to the thousands of people from foreign countries shout and scream their excitement back at him.

The fanfare and music flowing through the speakers mix in with the deafening cheering and the infectious energy does wonders to Jungkook’s excitement; he feels *wired*. He’s ready to show the world what he has in store. For the first time in a while, a sense of hope flickers in him.

This could be his chance to prove to everyone that he’s more than just his ill-fated Power. He’s not just a Shadow Manipulator. He’s more than that identity. He’s a fighter, ready to beat the odds stacked against him.
Seconds later, the female voice interrupts his thoughts once more. “Please give a warm welcome to the team from the Tokyo School of Superheroes,” she announces.

Watching them stepping into the Stadium, Jungkook can’t help but admire the Japanese teams’ garments; they’re absolutely stunning. They resemble the traditional *kimono*, but much like his own hanbok-inspired outfit, had been modernized and designed to be suitable for combat. With both female and male members on the team, the Japanese team had two versions: the male version was more subdued, with darker colors of black, navy and brown, while the female members donned lighter shades of purple and blue.

“Holy shit,” Taehyung turns around to face him, eyes wide and looking as awed as he feels.

He nods in agreement, knowing a reply won’t be heard over the deafening noise.

Once again, the cool female voice rings through the stadium as the fifth team is called out.

“Please welcome the team from the Hong Kong Conservatory.”

Like their own, the team from Hong Kong is an all-male team. Their white-haired captain leading the way looks very young in Jungkook’s opinion, but knowing that they’re lined up in order of descending age meant otherwise.

Their outfits are a tribute to the traditional *Shenyi*, a long full-body garment with diagonal body wrapping. Unlike the Beijing team, their outfits lack any red - instead, the collar, cuff and sash of the garments are entirely black, while the rest is an off-white. Watching them walk to their positions, Jungkook thinks the black and white has a rather impressive overall effect.

Once the cheering dies down enough and the Hong Kong team is standing at their positions, the cool, automated voice rings through the speakers once more.

“Please welcome the members from the Seoul Academy.”

It’s Jungkook’s first time seeing the students from the Heroes Academy’s sister institution and the only other school in Korea, Seoul Academy. The other Korean team consisted of two female members, five male. The leader, a tall blonde wearing a comfortable smirk, confidently leads them to their positions.

They enthusiastically greet the spectators in outfits much more colourful in comparison to theirs. Jungkook notices the *Hanbok* components, but sees a heavy Western influence; they’re donned in bomber jackets inspired by the *jagori* and the female members have on tight dresses loosely based on the *chima*.

It confirms what Jungkook’s heard about Seoul city’s daring fashion.

“From the United States of America, please welcome the team from the Los Angeles Institution of Heroes.”

“There’s an American team?” Jungkook asks Taehyung, surprised. But there’s no way for Taehyung to hear him - his words are lost with the crowd.

The team from the United States walk onto the grounds looking much more confident than Jungkook had imagined they would, given that they’re out of their element in a foreign continent. They’re the only team with members of varying races, led by a captain whose gender Jungkook couldn’t be sure of, just from appearance.
Their clothes are much simpler and less extravagant than all the Asian teams. They have on denim jackets with the American flag embroidered on the back, black jeans, and heavy army boots.

Once the crowd’s cheering dims to a suitable level, the last team is finally announced:

“Please welcome the last team, the Bangkok Institute.”

Last but not least, the Thailand team emerges from the heavy metal doors to make their way to the center. Their captain, donned in a Raj inspired outfit, doesn’t look much older than Jungkook with his soft features and snow-white hair.

When at last, all seven national teams are lined up in front of the podium of judges and commentators, Jungkook is amazed at how quickly silence falls upon the tens of thousands of spectators.

Everyone seated in the Grand Stadium collectively hold their breaths, waiting for the next announcement, waiting for the momentous start of the biggest event of the year.

Jungkook is bristling with nerves, his entire body electrified. All seven teams look onwards toward the podium and await their next instructions.

The silence stretches on until Chaerin, dressed in a blazer pinned with the Academy’s emblem above her chest, finally stands up with a mic in her hand.

She sweeps the audience before looking down at the students gathered in front of her. She speaks into the microphone, her words ringing throughout the enormous stadium.

“Ladies and gentleman,” she lifts her hand above her head and the crowd goes absolutely wild, “let the 150th annual Hero Games begin!”

5 years ago:

Resting in an armchair across from the Prime Minister, Universo sits with his back straight, his mind alert and his eyes focused on the grim face of the man before him.

Presently, it’s an especially cold winter night and the two leaders are seated in front of the roaring fireplace inside Universo’s office. There’s snow in the rain that’s splattering against the windows and it reminds Universo of the glassy clinking of a champagne flute, lilting and clear. Mixing in with the soft crackling of the wood burning bright red, the office feels like the opposite of the storm raging inside him.

He uncrosses his legs and sits up straighter in the stiff chair.

When he had first met the Prime Minister at the start of his term as the President nearly three years ago, he hadn’t expected these monthly meetings to be what they were. He’s learned to bite his tongue and deal with them, but the interaction never failed to leave a bitter taste in his mouth afterwards.

Three years ago, he had learned just how deep the Academy’s ties with the Bureau ran. They ran as deep as an ancient tree’s many branching roots, and were just as intricately tied.

It isn’t a coincidence that the two institutions are both located on the same range of mountains. The
Bureau had founded the Academy and strategically placed its facilities in close proximity in order to make an easier job of keeping a close eye on the school as it governed the academic institution.

Not surprisingly, the two leaders - the Academy’s President and the Bureau’s Prime Minister - throughout history, have always maintained a close relationship. On paper, the relationship was one built on constant communication, mutual respect, and a shared interest in their long-sighted goals of protecting the hidden Superhero world.

In reality, it was less clear-cut.

For the past three years, Universo has grown into his role, but when it came to his relationship with the Prime Minister he could never afford to be too comfortable. The man sitting before him was impossibly hard to read, and from what he’s learned over the years, always carried his own agenda.

And he wasn’t any closer to understanding what was on it than he had been three years ago.

The said man now slowly swirls the absinthe in his glass as he looks into the blazing fireplace, a grim expression detailing his lined face. He turns his attention to Universo and narrows his eyes.

“I heard news from Suho that the boy’s been contacted,” the Prime Minister starts off on a light tone. For a man of a few words, the Prime Minister had no trouble commanding the full attention of any room he occupied.

“A few days ago, yes,” Universo replies, wondering just how much information the PM already knew. Very likely more than he let on. “We had a hard time tracking him down, but we now have him under full-time surveillance.”

“Good,” the Prime Minister nods his approval. “I was starting to grow worried about your capabilities, Jaejoong.”

Only the Prime Minister addressed Universo by his given name, another fact that left a bitter taste on Universo’s tongue. He had left the name behind him decades ago.

He knew the PM’s real name as well. Jung Yunho. It had been whispered in passing between two high-ranking Bureau officials during one of the meetings with the Bureau’s board of governors. Universo had heard the rarely-mentioned name by mere chance, and he knew better than to repeat it.

“I apologize for the delay,” Universo forces himself to bow his head slightly. “We had some difficulty due to a...variation in his Manipulation.”

The Prime Minister sets down his glass. “Explain.”

“His Shadow Manip-” Universo starts to explain but has to pause - every time he thought of the boy, an overwhelming sense of nostalgia overtook him. The boy reminded him so much of himself. “His extension of the manipulation is quite powerful.”

“Powerful?” Yunho prompts.

“His shadow isn’t entirely under his control. Under the wrong circumstances, this can be dangerous. It can overtake him entirely, even placing them both in circumstances in which neither can overpower the other. But with learned control, the boy’s manipulation will be powerful against many other Powers.”

“This is how yours used to be,” the PM comments casually. “Correct?”
“Yes.”

“I thought it was a very rare occurrence, but here we have a teenage boy with the same variation.”

A pause. Universo wonders, for the hundredth time, how rare of an occurrence this really could be.

“We’ll make sure that he joins the Academy.”

“He has an important role to play in our plans,” Yunho reminds him in a solemn tone. “Keep a close eye on the boy.”

“I will.”

“It’s too bad what happened with your Power,” the Prime Minister says, not a trace of apology in his tone. “But he’s our second chance.”

Universo makes sure to keep his expression neutral. It isn’t so difficult anymore with all the practice he’s had over the years, but this conversation strikes a sensitive nerve and he has to put in more effort than usual.

The Prime Minister straightens up in his seat. His turns to face Universo.

“Next week, you’ll be learning more about the Portal designs. I expect the blueprint to be finished quite soon.”

Universo nods, withholding from asking the many questions on the tip of his tongue. He knew better by now than to seek information before the President was ready to offer them.

“I look forward to it.”

7 years ago:

When Jungkook first discovered his Powers, he didn’t think much of the fact that Shadow could go off and do things on its own. He assumed it was a typical aspect of Shadow Manipulation.

He really had no idea. He just thought it was really cool that his Shadow could appear and disappear on its own free will. It felt like having a silent friend who always returned to his side at the end of the day, and that was pretty fucking cool to a recluse 13-year-old Jungkook.

But that day when Suho had introduced himself underneath the bus stop, he had mentioned that Jungkook was unique. Unique enough for someone like Suho to visit him at such a young age and invite him to join the Academy years before an official invitation.

All things considered, it was an odd encounter and naturally caused Jungkook to become more curious about Shadow.

“Where do you go all the time?” he asks Shadow one night, his curiosity getting the better of him. “When you’re not beside me at night, where do you go?”

Expectedly, his bedroom remains silent.
“Can you go wherever you want?” Jungkook pries, not expecting a response but asking anyway. “Do you go to places you’ve never been?”

To his surprise, Shadow suddenly moves from his usual spot at the corner of his bedroom and glides towards the door.

“Hey,” Jungkook hurriedly sits up. “Where you going?”

When Shadow stills by door, Jungkook asks hesitantly, “Can you take me with you?”

He’s never asked such a request before - but he’s curious now.

When, again, Shadow doesn’t show any signs of responding, Jungkook waits a few seconds before Shadow starts to move towards him.

The next sequence of events will always be a blur in Jungkook’s memory: he watches Shadow as it moves from the floor to casts itself on the wall behind his bed instead. Next he feels a strange force pulling him down from his bed, but he never hits the floor - instead, he’s floating for a few seconds in the air.

Then what hits him next is an odd feeling somewhere between suffocating and being squeezed through a tight tube with a circumference that could barely fit his torso and he can’t see anything but a pure, blinding, whiteness all around him.

And just as fast as it came, it’s gone.

When he regains his senses, his head’s spinning and his breath comes out in short gasps, but he can see things again. Looking around him, he realizes with a startle that he’s no longer in his bedroom.

“Wh- where are we?” he whispers, eyes terribly wide as they adjust to his new surroundings.

The first thing he realizes is that they’re in an office, but this is no ordinary office. No, this is the office of someone important and powerful. The expensive decor, the furniture, the fireplace and apothecary, the sheer amount of dark wood and leather in the room - everything about the room signifies power and wealth.

Jungkook walks on unsteady legs, a million questions bombarding his thoughts. He’s never been here before. Where and why did Shadow take them here?

There are no clues to be found in the finer details of the room.

One wall is entirely made of glass - a floor to ceiling window. The other wall is lined with dark wooden bookshelves containing heavy looking leather-bound books. The third wall, the one he’s closest to, holds a fireplace. In front of it are two chairs, both burgundy in color and a table in between them.

“Is this a dream?” he asks no one, looking around with wide eyes. He scans the space, looking for any signs of familiarity. When he spots several photo frames on the fireplace mantel, he walks over to them.

He picks up a picture frame and studies the featured subjects. There’s a man dressed in a tailored suit, sitting on the throne chair behind the enormous mahogany desk on the other side of the room. The man is a stranger, but clearly someone of importance. He could pass as a mean principal of a high school, or a military man perhaps.
Then his eyes land on the second man in the photo, standing behind the man seated in the throne. He looks like he must be in his early twenties, judging by the lack of lines on his face and no trace of grey in his hair. He also looks quite tall, and the solemn expression on his face suggests he’s probably not a fan of knock knock jokes.

“Who are they?” he whispers, studying the photo.

He almost doesn’t notice Shadow come up beside him. He realizes when he sees Shadow pointing to another photo frame, beside the one he’s picked up. Setting down the one in his hand on the mantel, he picks up and observes the one Shadow’s pointing out.

In this picture are the same unknown men, but this time they’re standing in front of the Academy’s gates.

“I don’t get it, who am I looking at?” he asks, but Shadow once again points to the photo and Jungkook looks down again.

Then he notices something unusual: the upper right corner of the photo is folded down, and rather than revealing a black frame background, reveals a corner of another photo.

Jungkook turns the frame over and takes out the backing. He reaches inside the frame and sees that there are indeed two photos. The first one is the one with two unknown men in front of the gates. The second photo -

“What?” Jungkook gasps, almost dropping the photograph in his shock because there, in his own hand, is a photo of himself.

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**Previous December**

Taehyung crosses his arms and looks him straight in the eye and demands, “So, spill. What’s your extension?”

They’re standing in front of Jungkook’s dorm and it’s snowing out now. They were supposed to go inside to drop off his duffel bag and unpack after their week-long trip to their hometown, but their conversation had turned to the topic of extensions and Jungkook had let it slip that he already found his, which wasn’t entirely the truth, but not entirely a lie either.

But now Taehyung would not stop pestering him about it.

Jungkook knows he has to word his response carefully, otherwise he was in for a long explanation and he just needed Taehyung to understand that even he wasn’t entirely sure what he had experienced all those years ago.

In the end, he comes up with: “I, uh- well, I can travel with my Shadow.”

His best friend’s reaction isn’t far off from what he expected. Taehyung gives him a confused look and asks, “What?”

“I can go where my Shadow goes, but not physically. I travel with it in my head, if that makes sense.”
Taehyung narrows his eyes. “How?”

“I don’t know,” he admits, “It happens only when it lets me.”

Taehyung’s brows are knotted as he examines Jungkook carefully. “So you can’t control it?”

“I mean, technically, I just have to ask,” Jungkook replies, feeling more uncertain by the second. “It’s happened a couple of times.”

“When?”

“Years ago. Before I came here.”

Taehyung cocks his head to the side. “How does it work?”

“I-” He pauses, not sure how to explain it. “The first time, I asked if it could show me where it went at night. And it just… did.”

His best friend doesn’t look any less confused. “You do realize how vague that sounds, right?”

Jungkook sighs, wondering how on earth he was supposed to make this sound as normal as possible.

“Okay, let’s go a bit slower,” Taehyung suggests, putting his hand on his hips and looking Jungkook square in the eyes. “Where exactly did it take you?”

7 years ago:

The picture in Jungkook’s hand looks as if it was taken by someone who had been observing him from afar, making it evident they didn’t want to be seen. It’s also clear that Jungkook is unaware of the intruder; he’s walking in front of his middle school looking straight ahead. Judging by the red and yellow leaves in the nearby foliage, this was taken in the fall.

It’s winter now, which meant this was taken months ago.

Jungkook’s heart starts to pound faster with every passing second.

Taking a step away from the photographs on the fireplace, Jungkook feels the hairs on his arms standing on their end. Why would a picture like this even exist?

With too many questions overwhelming him, he decides to make a list of known things about this situation, and a list of unknowns, just to wrap his head around it all.

Fact: they’re in an office belonging to one of the unknown men in the photo, that much was clear.

Other known facts: in his thirteen years of life, he has never seen these two men. Or this office. So, that brings it back to:

“Why are we here?” he demands, looking right at Shadow cast on the carpeted floor in front of the fireplace, and feeling very much freaked out.
Shadow gives no indication of hearing his question as it remains still, a trait of his Power that Jungkook has come to accept, despite gaining much frustration from it.

“Fine, don’t answer,” he mutters, looking around the office for any clues or signs that could explain this bizarre discovery.

But he finds nothing that could connect him to these two powerful-looking men. There’s a map of the world mounted on the wall on top of the fireplace, bookshelves containing thick volumes of books, a throne chair behind a huge mahogany desk, the fancy looking couches seats, the fireplace - all in all, no helpful clues, at all.

“I don’t get it, why is there a pic of me?” Jungkook tries one more time, feeling both nervous and frustrated but Shadow offers no response. Jungkook exhales, trying to calm down a little. “Can you take us home? I’m getting creeped out.”

To that, Shadow obliges.

**PRESENT: Opening Ceremony**

There’s nothing more unsettling than standing amongst the most skilled and capable students of the superhero world, knowing that they’ll be competing against you with nothing held back.

Jimin tries to calm his nerves by telling himself it’s ridiculous to feel this anxious when he’s trained months for this. He’s prepared. He should be feeling excited, not scared.

But it’s easier said than done, he thinks, as he glances left and right and sees the determined expressions of the opposing teams.

Behind him, Taehyung gently pokes his side. Jimin flinches and turns his head around to face his best friend, but something else catches his attention: one of the members from the other Korean team, the brown haired one from the bathroom, is staring right at him.

He’s standing two rows away, near the back of his team’s line. But he has a clear view of Jimin who’s so taken aback that he doesn’t know what else to do but hold their gaze.

Then the brunette winks and turns away and Jimin is contemplating if he just imagined the whole thing when Taehyung interrupts his confused thoughts.

“You okay?” Taehyung asks, his words barely audible.

“Yeah,” Jimin nods. “Just nervous,” he says back, not sure if Taehyung can even hear him over all the noise.

Taehyung squeezes his shoulder in encouragement just as one of the official commentators starts speaking into the microphone.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the superhero world! It’s the moment you’ve all been waiting for, the most anticipated event of the year is finally upon us and we’re glad you could all join us!” His booming voice reverberates throughout the Grand Stadium. “My name is Shindong and I’m honoured to be your commentator for this year!”
The thinner man beside him speaks up as well. “And my name is Heechul, and I’m even more honoured to be commentating for the Games!”

They wait until the cheering dies down to continue.

“Standing before us are the seven outstanding national school teams representing the very best of their respective home institutions. We’ll be introducing the teams and their Captains shortly, but before we begin, please welcome the Directors for the Ministry of Entertainment for the opening speech!” Heechul announces, nodding towards Chaerin and Suho.

Jimin watches Chaerin and Suho stand up from their seats, both with a mic in their hands. Chaerin gives a wave to the crowd while Suho sports his usual professional smile.

“Welcome to the 150th annual Hero Games,” Chaerin’s clipped voice is magnified tenfold by the enormous speakers placed throughout the Stadium.

“On behalf of the Bureau, Suho and I would like to give our deepest gratitude to all of you in attendance, for showing your support and enthusiasm towards this beloved tradition. The Games started with one simple goal in mind: to bring unity among our superhero institutions through friendly competition once a year. And for a century and a half, the participating schools have proudly upheld that goal.”

Suho seamlessly continues: “Throughout the history of the Games, our superhero world has always existed in secrecy, hidden from the eyes of those unlike us. We have always taken careful measure not to reveal ourselves to those without Powers, and to this day, we remain vigilant on this goal. But time has come for changes. The mark of the Games’ 150th anniversary also marks a catalyst for changes to our traditions. As such, the three stages have been redesigned this year.”

Jimin looks at his fellow teammates, his confusion mirrored on their faces. All three stages?

They had only been informed about the change to the third stage until now.

“Wait, did I hear that wrong?” Hoseok asks loudly.

“All three? Did they say all three?” A member from the Seoul team says.

There’s sudden uproar from all the teams, but a new wave of excitement and cheers from the crowd.

Jimin stares at Suho and Chaerin.

What exactly were they in for?

“We are aware that we’ve only informed the Captains of the changes to the third stage earlier this year. However, there have been lengthy discussions among the Bureau and the Academy and we’ve decided that to change just one of three stages would be inconsistent with our aims for this year.”

“What the fuck are they talking about?” Jimin hears Hoseok shout out from in front of him.

He hears similar shouts of protest from the other teams, but the crowd’s excited cheers render them unheard.

“This year marks the end of the superhero world’s secrecy. This year marks the start of a new beginning. Ladies and gentlemen, from this point forward, we must strive to no longer live in a
hidden world of shrouded identities and broken families. We will no longer hide our existence. We will live freely amongst humans, in a peaceful coexistence built on mutual respect and reciprocity.”

Suho’s words, to Jimin, sound well-rehearsed and too practiced, to be truly meaningful. The Bureau official’s pitch and intonation was too seasoned, his pace too perfect, and his expression too familiar, to mean anything to Jimin.

It doesn’t sit well with him at all.

The sudden silence in the enormous Stadium becomes apparent to him then. It’s a jarring contrast to the deafening roars from a few minutes ago.

Scanning the wide-eyed faces of the men and women of the superhero world in the audience, it becomes apparent just how much weight Suho’s words carry. The confused faces in the crowd mirror those of his fellow competitors and Jimin - despite feeling like this is the completely wrong tone start the Games on - can’t help but feel a small sense of unity with the rest of the superhero world on this.

In the next second, a new wave of noise emerges from the crowd but it’s much different in tone this time; the shouts and exclaims for clarification are demanding, the emotion of the crowd much less celebratory and more apprehensive. Despite this, Suho continues on.

“The changes to this year’s Games has been arranged to coincide with the upcoming historical changes. This has been carefully orchestrated. At the end of the Games, the winning team will become the first ambassadors of the union of the two worlds. They will act as the representatives of the new Superhero world, one in which we live in a peaceful coexistence with normal humans.” Suho looks around the Stadium’s audience until his gaze comes to rest on Chaerin. She nods as he puts down his mic.

Chearin speaks up then, “This is undoubtedly a surprise to all of you, and we know that it will take time to fully understand the situation at hand, but it will become more and more clear as the Games proceed; that, we can guarantee. For now, all that is important to understand is that this year, the 150th year of the Games, is one that will go down in history, and you are all here to witness its making.”

In his speechless state, Jimin notices Namjoon exchange a hard look with Seokjin, the two of them seemingly understanding something about this more than Jimin did.

All around the Stadium is a thriving mass of pulsating energy carried by a throng of dissatisfied men and women shouting their concerns and questions to the figures seated on the platform.

It’s a sight to behold; Jimin sees people throwing their posters and flags into the arena to demonstrate their outrage. Others shake their fist at the Bureau officials, and he can see their mouths moving but their words are mixed in with the deafening noise and it’s impossible to distinguish one profanity from the next.

There’s a swarm of questions in his head, but they’re interrupted by Chearin’s voice booming through the speakers once more.

“Believe me when I say everything will be fully explained in due time. We understand that this is hard to accept for many of you, but the Bureau has, and always will, put the interest of the superhero world first,” Chaerin promises, placing one manicured hand on top of her chest.
“We would never jeopardize the safety of our people. We only intend to make the world a better place for all,” she continues. “And we do everything in our power to ensure that all our efforts are for the greater good.”

Too concerned to pay attention to anything else, Jimin doesn’t notice Jungkook looking down at his Shadow at that moment, nor does he see the silent exchange that takes place between them.

If he had, maybe he would have caught the confusion on Jungkook’s face or the look of surprise that follows, but by the time Chaerin speaks again, Jungkook’s composed himself again.

“With that said, please put aside what you have heard for now as I announce the changes to the first stage,” she puts on a smile for the crowd and proceeds in a more upbeat tone. “Tomorrow morning, all seven teams will be gathering back here in the Grand Stadium. The first stage traditionally has been a combat battle between the teams, but this year we have devised something completely different. Something completely new and exciting. Ladies and gentlemen, behold,” Chaerin raises her palm up towards the enormous screens above them and the large audience collectively look up to see what’s being projected on screen. “The new first stage!”

Jimin follows suit, and is instantly awed at what he sees.

There, on the ginormous screens, is a 3D blueprint of the Grand Stadium, the structure’s skeleton rotating slowly to reveal all sides of its configuration. The 3D skeletal blueprint starts to fill in digitally, layer by layer, until it’s no longer a skeleton; it starts to come to life, showcasing the transformation that was to take place for the first stage.

The stadium on the screen is vastly different from the one Jimin’s standing in. For starters, the seats are gone and the concrete surface is nowhere to be seen - instead, its surface is entirely covered in water.

Second, in the center of the stadium is an artificial island. The screen zooms out to an aerial view and Jimin sees that the massive stadium-turned-pool has been divided into seven sections by seven smaller islands circling the larger one in the center.

Then the animation starts to fill in the islands’ features; palm trees, sandy surfaces, and tall rock formations, along with several weapons ranging from bows and arrows, batons, daggers, and baseball bats among others scattered amongst the islands.

“Where are they going with this?” Jimin hears Taehyung ask, before Chaerin speaks up again.

“The stadium has been designed to resemble the islands off the coast of Southeast Asia. The teams will start on one of the seven smaller islands. Within the time limit, the islands will shrink in surface area until they’re completely sunk, forcing teams to retreat to the center island,” she explains, her expression neutral but her eyes wide and excited. “The last four teams standing will move on to the next stage.”

The seven teams’ immediate response is uproar, but the renewed excitement from the crowd easily drowns out their complaints.

Jimin hears the Chinese team’s captain yell out, “How can they announce this on the day of!”

“I can’t fucking swim,” an American member complains.

“What’s the time limit?” another competitor asks.

But their questions and concerns are ignored by the high-ranking men and women sitting on the
podium. Suho raises his hand, silencing the noise before speaking into the mic with a tone of finality.

“Teams, you will receive more information tomorrow morning before the first stage begins,” he says. “Hold your questions until then.”

Before anyone can respond to the outrageous announcement, Suho continues; “We will now begin the formal introductions of the teams.” He looks towards the two official commentators, nodding at the two men. “Heechul and Shindong, if you may.”

Despite the crowd and the teams’ mixed shouts and complaints, the two commentators seamlessly transition into the next segment of the Opening Ceremony.

Within seconds, the speakers around the stadium are blasting the Korean national anthem, effectively shutting up the entire stadium.

The teams reluctantly stand straight, placing their right hand to their chest. As the anthem blasts throughout the stadium, Jimin looks around at his team members and takes in their solemn expressions.

Compared to last year, there are way more unexpected announcements and the first stage hasn’t even started.

He watches as Heechul starts to announce the first team and their members in age order.

“Ladies and gentlemen, let’s get to the exciting part, shall we?” He waits for the cheers to die down before continuing. “I think we all want to know who we’re cheering for, so let’s give a big welcome to the host institution of this year’s Games, Heroes Academy! And their Captain, Kim Seokjin, an empath and a veteran to the Games!”

Seemingly putting aside the off-putting news they had just heard, Seokjin puts on a handsome smile as he waves to the crowd, earning many female screams in response while posters bearing his name in capital letters are raised higher.

The other members are introduced one by one, from oldest to youngest, ending with Jungkook, to which the crowd’s response casts a stark contrast to Seokjin’s. Jimin gives Jungkook a quick encouraging smile before the other Korean team is introduced next.

“Put your hands together for the next team, Seoul Academy! And their Captain, a metamorphic entering the Games for his third time this year, Woo Zico!”

Zico, from Jimin’s view from the back of the line, is quite tall and very blonde and obviously a crowd-pleaser. The level of cheers is almost on par with Seokjin’s. Zico waves enthusiastically at them, throwing peace signs to the audience.

His team members are introduced by Shindong, their age and Powers announced to the crowd.

“They have a Time Manipulator?” Jimin hears Yoongi repeating to Hoseok when Shindong mentions their youngest member’s Power. Hoseok responds with, “Holy shit, I haven’t seen one in years.”

Shindong and Heechul introduce the rest of the teams from Thailand, Japan, China, Hong Kong and ends with the American team.

In no time at all, every single participant of this year’s Games has been announced to the large
crowd, with each team’s fans having shouted their encouragement and support.

Suho stands up once Heechul and Shindong take their seats. He looks to the seven teams before speaking into the mic one last time.

“And now, teams, we’ll be expecting all of you in the Banquet Hall for one last celebration before the first stage tomorrow. The banquet will start at seven, sharp. Dress code is black tie, and bring an appetite!”

Chaerin comes to stand beside Suho. She turns to the audience before announcing, “And with that, we reach the conclusion of this year’s Opening Ceremonies. Thank you all for coming, and we’ll see you here tomorrow for an exciting new version of Games.”

The crowds, once more, scream their excitement as the seven teams make their way back to the preparation area, all of them feeling unsettled for what’s to come.

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**Previous December**

“The first time?” Jungkook clarifies.

“Yeah,” Taehyung replies, “Or any other time you traveled with your Shadow, where does it take you?”

Jungkook doesn’t have to think twice before answering. “The first time, it was an office. This fancy office with lots of like, expensive-looking furniture.”


“I honestly don’t know. That was the first time, when I was only thirteen. I don’t remember everything but there was one thing that freaked me the fuck out.”

“What?”

“There was this picture of me, in one of the photo frames in that office. It was hidden behind another picture, but Shadow pointed it out and…” Jungkook trails off, trying to remember the faces of the two men in the photo but only drawing up a blur.

“Wait, you’re telling me that in this unknown, mysterious office - with no identified owner - you found a picture of yourself?” Taehyung repeats, and Jungkook already knew how absurd it sounds but hearing his best friend say it makes it sound even worse. “Are you serious? That’s-”

“-Weird? Yeah,” Jungkook agrees, “I don’t know, Shadow only took me there that one time. But I’ve never, ever forgotten how seeing that picture made me feel.”

“What do you mean?” Taehyung asks.

Jungkook bites his lip, looks at Taehyung and wonders if he’ll even believe him. “The picture, Tae,
“I’ve never seen that photo before. I was standing in front of a fireplace in a room I’ve never stood in before. You see how fucking weird that is, right? But you want to hear the worst part?” Taehyung looks like he’s not sure he does, but Jungkook continues.

“That picture was taken as if someone had been watching me from afar, and probably hidden, too. Like they didn’t want me to see them. I wasn’t even looking at the camera, I was walking in front of our school. Whoever took the photo was taking it from a distance, and I clearly had no fucking idea.” Jungkook realizes his voice had gotten lower and lower in his recalling of the memory.

“I tried to forget about it. I thought maybe Shadow took me somewhere in its imagination or, you know, like a parallel universe, if that exists. Other times, I told myself it was all a dream,” he continues, revealing something he’s never told anyone before. “I tried to forget about it, cause it felt like I had this freakin’ terrifying nightmare. But at the same time, it all felt so… real.”

“Do you remember the faces of the two men?” Taehyung asks, his voice low.

“No,” Jungkook answers. “I don’t think I want to, either.”

“Jungkook,” Taehyung whispers, his brows furrowed. He crosses his arms and breathes out, “You have to figure this out.”

“Figure what out?” Jungkook can’t believe the words coming out of his friends mouth. “I just told you how traumatized I was. Still am. I’m not going to open that door again.”

Then Taehyung does something that he’s done only a few times before. He leans in closer to Jungkook, lowers his head and looks up at him directly in the eyes, unblinking.

This is how Jungkook knows that what his best friend’s about to say is to be taken utterly seriously.

“Look, this might sound odd but I researched Shadow Manipulation when I first learned that was your Power,” Taehyung exhales. He runs one hand through his hair, the other hand coming to rest on his hip. He gives Jungkook a dead serious look before continuing, “Did you know that in all of the books I could find on Shadow Manipulation - and I literally read all our school has - there is zero, absolutely no mention of a Shadow Manipulator traveling with its Shadow counterpart?”

No, Jungkook did not know that. He stays quiet as Taehyung continues.

“Yeah, went through all the textbooks the Academy had on Powers and there was nothing about a Shadow Manipulator doing something like what you described.”

“Is this supposed to make me feel worse? ‘Cause you’re doing a great job,” Jungkook replies, feeling more and more anxious as their conversation continues. He was just trying to explain his extension, but Taehyung had managed to drop a bomb in his face.

“Let me finish,” says Taehyung, his demeanour unusually serious and putting Jungkook slightly on edge. “The books had nothing to say about what you and your shadow did, but there was something interesting in the school’s archives.

The look in Taehyung’s eyes tells Jungkook that there’s something important to be understood in what his friend’s about to say. There’s an earnest intensity in the look and Jungkook can’t look
“There was one other Shadow Manipulator, decades ago, who could do what you did, too. His name was Jaejoong, he was a student here twenty years ago and reportedly the last Shadow Manipulator at the Academy before you came,” Taehyung says in a thick voice. “The Academy publishes annual articles about the Games, and he’s mentioned in one. He’s listed as of the members for the Academy’s team, when he was in his fifth year. Then it says he was disqualified for having injured another competitor beyond a Healer’s ability to heal during the second stage. The only other article about him is from a year later, stating he had been indefinitely suspended for ‘misconduct’. And when I tried to search for more information, it’s like he literally disappeared after that.”

“What do you mean, disappeared?”

“There’s no mention of him graduating, which is odd because the school keeps an updated list of their alumni in their database. But no ‘Jaejoong’ anywhere.”

“What- how’s that possible?”

“I don’t know,” Taehyung replies, his face looking pinched as he concentrates on recalling the research he had done. “I just remember thinking how weird that was, but it gets even weirder.”

Jungkook doesn’t know if he really wants to hear the rest of it, but he waits for his friend to continue, his jaw tightening on its own.

“This guy, Jaejoong, he could do what you could. He could travel with his Shadow. There was one line in that article about his disqualification from the Games and it read, ‘due to Jaejoong’s abuse of his Powers that allowed him to place himself in situations that provided an unfair advantage in the competition and resulted in seriously injuring another student, he has been disqualified’.”

When Jungkook doesn’t respond, Taehyung looks at him with raised brows, and repeats, “‘Place himself in situations’? Doesn’t that sound fucking familiar?”

“That’s a really vague phrase.”

“Think about it! It realized it just now, when you were describing your extension- your Shadow can take you places you’ve never been. That lets you place yourself in situations through your Shadow.”

Jungkook lets that sink in. He tries to digest all this information. It was a stretch, but it kind of made sense. For one thing, if what Taehyung’s saying is true, then there had been one Shadow Manipulator before him who also shared his extension. Secondly, whoever he was, he had used it to his advantage to hurt someone. Third, there was no way to trace him.

And lastly, Taehyung had researched his Power rather extensively.

The first three things left him feeling shaken, disturbed and confused. The last one was the only silver lining about this whole thing.

“You researched me that much, huh?” Jungkook doesn’t know if he should be flattered by it or not, but he can’t help but the small smile on his lips thinking of how much time Taehyung had spent going through archives to learn about his Power. That freakin’ dweeb.

“I-” Taehyung’s expression instantly softens, the realization of Jungkook’s question hitting him. “I mean- yeah, I was curious, and I hadn’t seen you in years, so…”
“Right,” Jungkook clears his throat, committing the image of the pink undertones appearing on his friend’s face to his memory. “So, what does this all mean?”

“I don’t know,” Taehyung replies, straightening up. “but you better be careful with that extension of yours.”

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**Banquet**

Music fills the spacious ballroom of the Academy, adding to the brightly lit atmosphere and mingling with the animated dinner table conversations taking place among the Games’ competitors.

Jimin tugs on his black tie and adjusts the waistbands of his dress pants, feeling slightly uncomfortable in his formal attire. He looks around the spacious room before spotting the rest of his team members at a table to the back of the room, close to the buffet tables and farthest from the dance floor.

He starts to make his way over, too concentrated on getting to his seat to notice a hand waving to him from a nearby table.

“Hey! Jimin!”

Stopping in his tracks at the sudden mention of his name, he spots a member from Seoul Academy sitting at a table a few feet away. He sees a pair of full lips smiling at Jimin.

It’s the cute guy from the bathroom, Taemin.

Jimin glances behind him to make sure he’s the one being addressed to. He looks at Taemin questioningly and then points to himself. “You talkin’ to me?”

He watches as Taemin proceeds to get up from his seat and make his way over to where he’s standing. Jimin, for his part, gets flashbacks of his momentary panic attack in the bathroom and flushes at the memory of their last encounter.

“If I remember correctly, you told me your name’s Jimin,” Taemin says his name and Jimin likes the sound of it much better coming from this guy for reasons he can’t understand. “And I just yelled it across the room, so yeah, I’m talking to you.”

“Kind of rude to yell indoors,” Jimin says before thinking. “I mean-” he laughs nervously, wondering if he could get any less smooth. “Nice seeing you again,” he manages to get out.

Taemin smiles back.

Jimin clears his throat and stands a little taller, noticing the lack of height difference between them. “So that was some Opening, huh?”

“Kinda underwhelming,” Taemin answers with a grin. “Good to see you’re doing better than before, by the way.”
“Oh. Yeah, about that,” not wanting to be remembered as the guy who broke down in the middle of the bathroom, Jimin adds, “That was totally a one-time thing, by the way. I’m not usually- you know...” *a hot fucking mess.*

“You know, the first time I participated in the Games, I threw up before the Opening Ceremonies. Twice. There may or may not have been a lot of swearing too. Can’t really remember ‘cause I blacked it all out,” Taemin says in a casual and nonchalant tone unfitting of the story.

Jemin finds himself easily laughing when Taemin adds, “What I’m saying is, if you feel embarrassed, you shouldn’t. I’m more embarrassed that I introduced myself to the cutest guy in the competition while standing in a bathroom.”

“I- that’s-” Jemin splutters, really at a loss for words. Could he have heard wrong? Because that was possibly the most straightforward, flirtatious statement he had ever received in his entire life and Taemin, for his part, looks as if he had just stated that the sky is fucking blue.

He gives Jemin the biggest grin and actually *winks*, before lowering his voice and adding, “I’m just glad there’s some eye candy on the field this year. Good luck tomorrow, Jemin.”

Speechless and feeling really hot all of a sudden, Jemin utters an incomprehensible reply before Taemin waves goodbye and returns to his table and his teammates.

It’s not until he hears Taehyung’s voice yell his name that Jemin realizes he’s been rooted to the spot he’d been standing at for a full minute. He hurriedly walks over to their table and takes a seat, still feeling very confused.

“Dude, what was that about?” Hoseok inquires, taking a bite out of his steak and giving Jemin a curious look.

“Who was that?” Jungkook asks, chewing on his chicken and glancing back at the Seoul Academy table. “What’d he say to you?”

“Dude, you okay? You’re all red.” Taehyung observes.

“Uhhh, yeah,” Jemin manages to say, “Yeah, I’m fine. That guy... um, he just-” *hit on me with just one sentence?* He glances at Yoongi, who’s looking back at him with his brow raised and Jemin decides, *fuck it.*

“He just called me the cutest guy in the room.”

Hoseok actually spits some champagne out of his mouth in a noisy *PFFTT* and Jungkook loudly chokes on his steak. Taehyung stares at him before breaking out into laughter like the best friend he is.

Yoongi, on the other hand, continues to calmly chew his food, looking down at his plate.

“Did you hear him wrong? Maybe he meant to say shortest,” Jungkook offers in between bouts of laughter.

“Guys, cool it,” Seokjin chuckles, “The guy could be just trying to throw Jemin off. Plus, I heard he dated someone on his team last year.”

“What does that have to do with anything?” Namjoon interjects.

“I’m just saying, the guy isn’t exactly the most serious guy, I’ve seen him in the previous two
years’ Games. He’s the playful type. He might be just trying to mess Jimin up or something.”
Seokjin answers.

“Oh right, he dated the short guy with the nice voice on last year’s team right?” Hoseok asks, thinking back to last year.

“Well, that sounds familiar,” Jungkook laughs, giving Jimin a once-over. “Short and nice voice. Sounds like he’s got a type.”

“Cut it out,” Jimin groans, regretting saying anything. “Jin hyung’s probably right, he’s probably just trying to throw me off my game. Forget it, okay? He’s probably just-”

As if somehow fucking summoned at the mention of his name, a now-familiar voice suddenly appears from behind Jimin. “I’m probably just, what?”

Jimin whips his head around and wonders if the guy’s also a damn Telepath from hell. “Oh hey, uh, I was just-” he stammers before Hoseok cuts him off.

“Well, hello Taemin, what brings you over to our humble table?” Seokjin asks, leaning his elbows and lacing his fingers together on the table.

“Nothing, really,” Taemin shrugs nonchalantly, “Came to give Jimin this. He dropped it.”

Taemin casually hands him a folded napkin with the slightest wink before walking off.

Jimin stares at the napkin in his hand, feeling more and more dumbfounded by the minute. Was this really happening right now?

“He came all the way here to give you a napkin?” Jungkook sounds just as odd as Jimin feels.

Taehyung steals the napkin from Jimin’s hands (“Tae! Give it back!”) and promptly opens it. “Ah, just as I thought,” he says before holding it out for everyone to see.

There, in the middle of the napkin, are 10 digits along with the words, “text me” below them.

“Wow,” Hoseok manages to say in between new bouts of laughter, “The guy’s smooth, I’ll give him that.”

Jimin is certain his cheeks are burning red at this point. He snatches the napkin from Taehyung’s hand and stuffs it in his pocket, doing his best to ignore his teammate’s laughters.

“You guys are the worst,” he moans, trying to focus on his dinner instead. He glances over at Yoongi to see if he’s joined in on the jeering, but he’s surprised to see him calmly continuing his meal instead.

He must have felt Jimin staring because he looks up and meets his eyes. He raises one brow and Jimin doesn’t know what to do, feeling very caught in the act of- what, exactly? What was he expecting from Yoongi, after someone else showed interest?

What had he been hoping for?

“You should text him,” Yoongi tells him, his tone the epitome of casual.

Whatever he’d been hoping for, that certainly wasn’t it.
hello lovely armys reading this au!
if you've been a reader from the beginning, I apologize for the update timing :( I really really mean it when I say this fic is gonna be finished even if its the last thing i do. life is crazy hectic right now but im really trying to finish this!!! so bear with me <3 if you're a new reader, hello and welcome to this superhero world!

I hope you liked this chapter!! there's waaaay more action coming, so hold on to your horses, ladies and gents.

please feel encouraged to leave a comment, i honestly live for them. be a kind soul and write some words. constructive criticism is always welcome!

thanks for reading <3

ps. who else adores taemin and jimin irl?? 2min :)
pps. this is published on jimin's birthday because he's my sweet mochi child and he deserves the world.
ppps. the yoonmin shippers out there reading this, dont lose hope just yet ;)

Chapter End Notes
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

The first stage of the Games commences and the teams are faced with unimaginable challenges and obstacles.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bureau Headquarters

For years, Universo has been involved in the planning process of the annual Hero Games. He’s seen more Games than he can count, but he still remembers the very first Games he had participated in as a student himself. He can vividly recall the excitement, the fanfare and the anticipation of the Superhero world as they sat on the edges of their seats, watching the national teams compete for the winning title.

But most of all, he recalls the bitter taste of humiliation. The unfair treatment he went through, the unfair consequences he endured - what happened all those years ago is scarred in his memory despite the decades that have passed.

Now, he’s waiting, motionless, with nothing but the upcoming Games and its recent developments on his mind.

“Universo, did you hear what I said?”

It’s the Prime Minister, seated at the head of the oval table in the Bureau headquarters’ meeting room. All Bureau officials in the room turn their heads to Universo’s direction and he blinks, maintaining his composure.

“I’m sorry, sir. I must have missed what you said.”

The PM doesn’t look impressed. He shoots Universo a pointed look before repeating the question. “I asked if the error in the androids has been fixed, and if we should expect another mistake.”

Universo doesn’t miss the stab at his oversight, but he does what he’s learned to do quite well after being President for the past five years; bite his tongue and do his job.

“Yes, our engineers have corrected the wiring. They’ve already been set up on the center island. You have my word; everything will run according to plan.”

“I should hope so,” the PM says in a low voice.

He turns to the rest of the seated men and women, sits up a little straighter and continues in an official tone.

“This is a momentous year. The start of the Games tomorrow marks an end to old traditions and a new beginning. With the new development and advancements of this year’s stages, it is crucial that nothing is given away beforehand. The way the teams react to every obstacle thrown their way will
be telling of how much they can endure, and ultimately, which team will be our best bet for the way forward. If we fail to keep our plans disclosed, all that we’ve worked for will be for nothing.”

He places his hands on the wooden table surface. “And we’ve worked too hard and for too long to let that happen.”

He takes the room’s silence as a unanimous agreement.

Turning to Universo once more, he says, “Talk us through the first stage one last time.”

Universo does as he’s told. “The teams will be gathered at the lower level of the Stadium tomorrow morning...”

As he goes into the finer details of the first stage, he can’t help but feel a sense of relief that finally, finally, it was starting soon.

The next morning

“So are we just not going to talk about what the Bureau said yesterday? ‘Cause that shit was crazy,” Hoseok looks at his team members in disbelief. The seven of them are seated on benches in the preparation area located in the basement level of the Stadium. Without any windows, it’s impossible to tell what time it is but with Yoongi yawning, Taehyung’s eyes half closed and Jimin sporting dark circles, it’s evident just how early in the morning it is.

The other teams in the room look just as tired, their voices low as they discuss amongst themselves.

When no one responds, Hoseok looks at the tired Telepath beside him and urges, “Namjoon, say something.”

Sighing, Namjoon crosses his arms. “What we heard is huge news. Terrifying, even. Didn’t expect the Bureau to announce something like that at the Games, of all places.”

“ Probably thought the Games would distract everyone from how fucked up it is,” Yoongi offers, scoffing in disbelief. “Do they even know how the rest of the world’s going to react, discovering people like us exist?”

“The whole thing is just...” Hoseok scoffs, shaking his head. “We live in secrecy because we couldn’t live in harmony, are we just going to forget that?”

“They might just brainwash everybody, who knows,” says Taehyung with a weak laugh. “Use their Powers to take control of the world, you know, like in those post-apocalypse movies? Except instead of aliens, it’s...” Noticing the lack of response, Taehyung falters and mutters the rest; “…us.”

“There’s a time and place, Taehyung,” Yoongi says, shaking his head.
“This is serious. And it’s coinciding with the Games for a reason. They want the winning team to be- what was it they said?” Namjoon asks, brows furrowed.

“‘Ambassadors to the new world’, or some shit like that?” Hoseok offers.

Yoongi laughs drily. “Whatever the fuck that means.”

“I don’t know, maybe it’s not that bad,” Jungkook’s voice is quiet, but his words are heard loud and clear.

“I’m sorry, did I hear you wrong? Or did you just suggest that maybe the Bureau’s plan isn’t entirely fucked?” Yoongi questions.

“I just- I don’t think it’d be that bad to live in a world where people with and without Powers coexist.”

“Jungkook, what-”

“Hey, Jin, got a minute?”

All seven heads turn towards the foreign voice. Seokjin recognizes Zico immediately, but his nonchalant demeanour is missing. He looks tense, and his ever-present smirk is nowhere to be seen.

“Yeah, what’s up?”

“Let’s talk.” Zico eyes the rest of the team. “With the Captains, I mean.” He nods his head to back of the room where the Captains are standing in a circle, conversing in hushed voices.

Seokjin gets up from the bench. “Yeah, let’s talk.”

When he joins the circle of Captains, he’s not surprised to see their somber expressions.

“Alright, so that makes all of us present,” Zico says, clearing his throat. He looks around the small group and explains, “I called for this meeting because I can’t be the only one feeling weird about what was said yesterday.”

“We don’t have much time before the Bureau get here, let’s make it quick,” Jackson prompts, crossing his arms.

“What they said yesterday about the superhero world coming out of secrecy, I think we can agree that none of us saw that coming - except maybe Bambam-” the Thai Captain nods to confirm- “but what I need to know is what they meant about the winning team being ‘ambassadors to the new world’.”

“The only way we can know is if we ask,” Takuya speaks up. “It’s unlikely we’ll get a straight answer, but it’s better than speculating.”

“This all feels too convenient, the timing of the announcement. Making sure we only learned about
this right before starting the Games,” Amber comments, leaning against the wall with her denim jacket tied around her waist.

“Yeah, but what does that matter?” Zico counters. “We need to come up with a plan-”

“It matters,” Amber cuts him off, emphasizing each word, “because this has all been planned. They wanted us to be in the dark up until the last second. They’re going to keep us in the dark.”

“So what, we just go along with it and do nothing about it?” Jackson argues, his voice rising. “I’ve trained my team thinking the stages would be similar to previous years, but now everything’s different and it honestly feels like I’m going to fail them. I want to do something about this.”

“Look, I agree with you. I’m not saying we shouldn’t do anything about it,” defends Amber. “What I’m saying is that we need to be smart about this.”

“Well, any ideas would be welcome,” Jackson retorts.

There’s a tense silence during which Jin thinks back to yesterday’s Opening Ceremony and all the unexpected news they’ve learned in such a short amount of time. Truth be told, there wasn’t much they could do at the moment.

“I don’t think there’s much we can do for now but just lay low, and see how this first stage goes,” Seokjin voices, breaking the silence. “We’ll keep our eyes open to anything unusual and keep a constant line of communication between us.”

“Agreed,” Amber nods. “This is still a competition. I’m in it to win it, but we should keep each other informed for anything new.”

“Right,” Jackson agrees. “There’s still going to be losers and winners, but it seems like there’s something planned for all us and we need to keep that in mind.”

“Whoever thought of this first stage really wants to fuck with us,” Zico sounds both frustrated and impressed. “What kind of game are they playing at?”

“Not the Games I’m used to, but let’s not let them get to us,” Seokjin looks around his colleagues, determination etched on the lines of his face.

“So now it’s us versus them?” Zico raises a brow, apprehension appearing among his sharp features.

The group goes still. There’s a moment of tension as the reality of the situation they’ve found themselves in becomes starkly apparent.

Seokjin breathes in before answering, “It’s us versus whatever’s coming at us.”
Jimin looks over at where the group of Captains are huddled in the corner, hoping to overhear snippets of their conversation but given the distance, it’s proving to be a difficult feat.

“What do you think they’re talking about?” Taehyung asks, craning his neck to get a better look.

Hoseok scoffs and looks at the younger members with his lips set in a straight line. “Who cares what they’re talking about? What’s more important is what the hell we’re supposed to expect.”


He doesn’t flinch at the pointed look Hoseok gives him.

“Let’s not get worked up about the unknowns,” Namjoon advises in what Jimin assumes is supposed to come off as a calm tone, but he sounds as tense as the rest of them look. “We’ll take it stage by stage.”

The silence in the preparation area is penetrated by the *click clack* of high heels resounding noisily against the linoleum floor, signaling the arrival of a Chaerin and Suho.

“Good morning, teams.”

All heads turn to face Chaerin, dressed this morning in her usual black attire but her lipstick is a dark, bloody red that matches the tense atmosphere in the room. She scans her audience with grey eyes, accompanied by Suho, also dressed in business attire. Jimin wonders if they wear anything other than blazers and dress suits.

“I hope you’re all feeling well rested. Soon, you’ll be entering the first stage of the competition.” Chaerin’s words are curt and to the point. “For this exciting new stage, Suho will give you more details of what to expect.”

The suited man gives the room a quick sweep before speaking up.

“You’ll see once you’re out in the arena that the stadium has been completely transformed to mimic the tropical islands off the coast of Vietnam. A virtual screen encircles the arena, so you won’t be able to see the crowd in the stadium. Fifteen minutes from now, all teams will be teleported to their respective islands by the Bureau’s Teleporters. Once the timer starts, there will be exactly one hour to complete the stage.”

Jimin glances at his teammates, hoping to see the rising panic inside him mirrored in their expressions, but they remain stoic with eyes fixated on the pale man speaking in the middle of the room and Jimin swallows, trying to calm down his rising nerves.

*Everything’s going to be fine*, he tries to convince himself, ignoring the quickening pace of his heartbeat. *Keep it together, keep it -*

A movement from the corner of his peripheral vision catches Jimin’s attention. He turns his head just the slightest to the left to catch Taemin looking right back at him from a few feet away.

Before he can question it, the Telekinetic is mouthing something at him.

*You got this.*

Then, almost without thinking, Jimin smiles and nods a quick *thanks* to the full-lipped man, before turning to face Suho once more.
It’s such a small thing, but the butterflies in Jimin’s stomach aren’t as anxious after that.

“There are three rules to this stage. Keep them in mind if you want to move on to the next one,” Suho informs them, keeping his form composed as ever. “Firstly, the waters are not safe. Healing will be on standby, but do your best not to fall into the waters.”

“Why, what’s not safe about the waters?” Zico demands, followed by several other responses from the teams, but Suho raises his hands to signal silence.

“Second,” he continues, doing a fantastic job of ignoring the questions being shouted at him. “Like I mentioned at the Opening ceremonies, the goal of this stage is to get to the center island before the outer, smaller islands are completely sunk. Once on the center island, you’ll face several obstacles.”

The reality of the first stage really sinks in then. Jimin feels the difference in the atmosphere as the new structure of this year’s competition becomes starkly clear with every word that comes out of Suho’s mouth.

“Lastly,” Suho pauses for effect, taking in the sudden heavy silence of the preparation area. “There will be weapons on each of your starting islands. Use them wisely.”

Everything about this announcement rubs Jimin the wrong way. He notices Namjoon exchanging a dark look with Seokjin and Jungkook’s Shadow bristles on the floor where it’s cast.

The murmurs that started after Suho finishes speaking quickly grow in volume until there’s shouting coming from all corners of the room.

“How can you give us this information just half an hour before it starts?”

“This is too short notice!”

“What’s not safe about the water?”

“What obstacles! What do you mean?”

The bombarded questions become indistinguishable amongst the anxious shouts and yells. Jimin remains tight-lipped, the anxiety he’s felt since the Opening Ceremonies growing with each passing second.

“We have no times for questions,” Chaerin shouts above the noise, her sharp features arranged in a look of discontent. “That will be all. Good luck, teams.”

The teams are relentless in their questioning even as their sharp footsteps retreat past the sliding doors that close behind them.

There’s a sudden blaring BEEP BEEP BEEP coming from the back of the room, startling everyone until they notice that the screen mounted on the back of the room has started a countdown.

14:59.

The countdown to the beginning of the this year’s first stage had begun.

Jimin doesn’t realize Taehyung’s said something to him until he's shaking Jimin's arm and asking, “Hey, did you hear what I said?”

“What?”
“I asked if you were okay,” his best friend repeats.

Jimin doesn’t miss the note of concern in Tae’s voice and puts on what he hopes is an expression of confidence - a difficult feat in his current state, but the last thing he wants to do is be a cause of worry for anyone at this critical time.

“Yeah, I’m fine, why?” he says in a dismissive tone.

“You’re pale,” Tae notes, his brows furrowed. “If you’re not feeling okay, you can-”

“I’m fine, Tae,” Jimin says it firmer this time. “Thanks.”

Taehyung doesn’t look convinced but lets it go.

“Jimin, Taehyung, come here,” Namjoon orders, motioning for them to join the rest of the team standing a tight circle with their heads inclined towards the middle.

Once the two have joined in the huddle, Seokjin starts speaking.

“The other Captains and I agree that this year’s Games is shaping up to be very different previous years’. It’s still a competition with only one winning team, but if you see or hear anything unusual, it’s important you share it with the other teams.”

“Everything has been unusual so far, but alright,” mutters Yoongi.

“Soon we’re going to be stepping into the first stage and it’ll be unlike anything we’ve seen in the past, but the most important thing to remember is that we have each other.”

“As long as we work as coherently as we have up til now, we have nothing to be worried about,” Namjoon reassures them.

“Exactly. Our teamwork is our greatest strength, don’t ever forget that.”

For a moment, the nervous energy enveloping Jimin goes still. He takes in the fact that they’re minutes away from the doors opening into the arena and that he really has no idea what to expect - and decides that all he can really do is just take it as it comes.

Second by second, moment by moment.

“Rely on each other,” Yoongi instructs them, every one of his syllables emphasized with determination. “Trust each other.”

He’s unprepared for the sudden eye contact Yoongi makes with him and on reflex, he swallows, but doesn’t look away despite the jerk reaction in his stomach at meeting the older’s gaze. It’s been awhile since they’ve properly looked at each other from this proximity and Yoongi’s gaze is so intense, has he ever looked at him this way? The intensity isn’t unlike Yoongi’s fire manipulation or his attacks, but his gaze isn’t as heated. No, it’s passionate and compelling and the fact that Jimin can’t look away - so captivated by the orange flecks in the older’s irises - speaks volumes to the power that Yoongi still holds over him.

And Jimin tries - he’s been trying for a long time now - to ignore this uncomfortable truth.

He tries to sweep it into the dark depths of his mind, but it’s impossible when Yoongi opens his mouth and the next words he speaks are: “And remember, we have each other” while looking right at him and it undoes him underneath his skin.
LAST NOVEMBER

“There’s something I should tell you,” Jimin confesses in a whisper, leaning slightly towards Yoongi, a feat made quite difficult due to the rigidity of the chair he’s sitting on.

“Make it good,” the older whispers back, eyes fixated on Jimin’s laptop screen.

“I hate this show,” Jimin states boldly, only for Yoongi to scoff at.

“You just watched three episodes in a row,” the older boy points out.

“Yeah, ’cause you refuse to watch anything else,” Jimin retorts. “This is my laptop and I want to exercise my right to choose the next show.”

“Shhhhh,” Yoongi holds up a finger to Jimin’s plump lips, still not taking his eyes off the screen. “We’re in a library.”

“Wow,” Jimin shakes his head in disbelief. “And here I was, thinking we were friends.”

The older shakes his head with a sly grin. “I only study with you for your Netflix account. Thought you knew that.”

Although The Office isn’t his favorite show, Jimin endures it. The characters are alright - especially Dwight, who he finds hilarious - but overall it wouldn’t be his first pick.

Truth be told, he’s content to keep watching as long as Yoongi kept up his snide running commentary.

“I don’t get the whole deal with Jim and Pam,” the older mumbles as he clicks the “play next episode” button. “They’re so vanilla.”

“I think they’re cute,” Jimin leans further back on his chair, adjusting his legs to make them more comfortable, but his seat is wooden and his ass is starting to hurt after sitting so long. “Like the pranks they play on Dwight and their inside jokes and stuff.”

“How much you wanna bet they’ll end up married?”

“Pointless bet, no thanks.”

They watch in silence for another ten minutes before Yoongi cracks up at Jim’s prank on Dwight’s office supplies. “He put his stapler in jello,” he snickers, trying to contain himself. “Classic.”

It’s not until they’ve sat through two more episodes that Yoongi finally admits that they should probably start doing actual school work.

Midterm season’s behind them, but there are still readings to be read, assignments to be started, and work to be procrastinated.
Jimin’s already behind on most of his classes thanks to their daily practices, so he forces himself to pull out his textbook and flips open to the chapter he should have finished two weeks ago.

After taking out his shared earphone and stretching his arms over his head, Jimin heaves a big sigh and starts reading. All the while, Yoongi continues to watch season three of The Office.

It’s not until Yoongi speaks to him again that Jimin realizes how much time has passed.

“You’ve been staring at that page for the last ten minutes.” The older boy points out, giving Jimin a pointed look.


“Alright, I guess I should actually study too.”

“What happened to ‘I’m Min Yoongi, genius extraordinaire who doesn’t need to study’?” Jimin scoffs, quoting the older boy’s exact words before he started playing Netflix on Jimin’s laptop.

“I’m only studying so you’ll feel motivated to follow in my wise footsteps.” Yoongi’s answer is so damn Yoongi that despite being in a library, Jimin can’t help himself and lets out a big pppffffttt before laughing out loud and earning the glares of everyone nearby.

“Shhhhh!” The boy at the table next to them warns with an annoyed eyeroll.

“We’re trying to study here!” The girl sitting a row in front of them hisses.

Yoongi silently cackles at Jimin’s mortified expression and shakes his head in mirth. “Yeah Jimin, we’re trying to study!” he chides, silent laughter hidden behind his wicked grin.

“I’m never coming here with you again,” Jimin growls in a low voice, ducking his head to avoid the glares.

The older boy leans back in his chair with a satisfied expression. He opens his textbook to a random page and points at a text. Pretending to read, he cites: “Says here that you’re... full of shit!”

Jimin starts laughing again and the boy beside them nearly spits as he Shhhhhhhh’s them louder.

He gives Yoongi a cold glare, but he smiles that gummy smile of his and he can’t help but let out another laugh. “You’re the worst,” he whispers.

“I know.”

PRESENT:

The screen at the back of the room now reads 0:40 and the entire preparation area is silent, anxious, waiting. Anticipating what’s to come.

Sixty seconds. That’s how long they have before they’re supposed to be teleported to ground level.
and exposed to whatever awaits them.

Jungkook breathes in, watching as the timer now hits 0:30 and wondering if the timer ran faster than actual time because that definitely didn’t feel like ten seconds.

Then there’s the unmistakable sound of footsteps - heavy footsteps, like the stomping of men wearing heavy boots - followed by the *swish* of the doors sliding open to reveal a group of seven or more men dressed head to toe in black with the Bureau’s symbol - a tree with deep roots - pinned on their chest.

*More Bureau officials?* Jungkook narrows his eyes as the men position themselves along the periphery of the room, evenly spaced between themselves as they surround the teams.

0:10

Despite feeling anxious, Jungkook’s Shadow stands still. Jungkook looks down at the floor and asks,

*You ready?*

Before Shadow can respond, a familiar automated female voice penetrates the room, her cool voice speaking through the walls and once again startling the competitors.

“Teams, you will be teleported up to ground level by the Bureau's Teleporters. Please remain still.”

That explained the men dressed in black.

0:05

And before Jungkook can blink, he feels himself disassociating. Just a second ago, he was whole and solid but now he stares in bewilderment and wonder as he watches himself disintegrate into millions of atoms while his surroundings disappear.

0:01

“Good luck, teams. Proceeding to stage one.”

*BEEP BEEP BEEP*

He’s not prepared for the white walls and floors to disappear under his feet or for the odd feeling that overcomes his entire body.

It feels as if he’s being dragged through space, being pulled roughly along by a force that feels like gravity inverted and he doesn’t quite know if he’s uncomfortable or just shocked but before he can decide, it’s all over.

The disorientating feeling goes away and he starts to come about. Opening his eyes, he lets out a gasp.

“Holy shit,” he whispers, taking in his new surrounding.

He places one foot in front of him and lifts the next foot in the soft yellow sand, slightly sinking into the grains and tickling his skin, a sensation new to him. His eyes feel like they don’t know how to blink - in part because of the blinding sun, but mostly because he’s awestruck by what he’s witnessing.
In front of him is a paradise filled with unending grains of shimmering golden sand, as if the island was made out of gold itself. Bright, clear blue waters sparkle in the presence of the sunlight encircling the small island and the island’s shores are lapped by soft waves, their edges hemmed with whipped-white lines.

These islands can’t be more than half a mile wide. On either side, Jungkook can make out the neighbouring islands. They’re not too far from each other, but it’s difficult to make out which team is on his left or right from this distance.

It’s a little overwhelming just how realistic everything looks and feels. He’s never been to the coasts of Southeast Asia but this must be what it feels like. He takes in the wet and salty air, the bright sun illuminating the island, and the perfect symphony of waves maxing with what must be artificial sounds of insects buzzing and birds cawing in the background.

The serene image of the island is interrupted by a familiar automated female voice, causing Jungkook to snap out of his trance as her voice echoes through unseen speakers.

“Teams, welcome to stage one.”

Behind him, Taehyung looks up at the artificial blue sky being projected onto the screen that encapsulates their arena, in search of the source of her voice.

“On your islands, you will find a selection of weapons. Each competitor may select one that best matches your skills.”

“What weapons?” Jimin asks the question on everyone’s mind. There’s nothing but sand.

Then suddenly-

“Guys! Look!” Hoseok shouts, pointing at a spot a few feet ahead of the group where a wide hole in the ground suddenly appears. Sand slides into the berth as it becomes wider in circumference.

Slowly, a platform rises from the hole and on top of it, a pile of dark objects.

“Teams, please select your weapons.”

“Damn. They didn’t cheap out.” Yoongi remarks as they gather around the platform.

Namjoon examines the pile before he picks up a longsword. He slides his hand along its gleaming blade against the sunlight. “They really didn’t,” he breathes out, eyes wide.

Hoseok picks up a shield big enough to cover his torso. “But what are they for?”

Yoongi holds up a long metal chain and loops it twice around his wrist. “Are we supposed to fight each other with these?”

“I doubt it, these would do too much damage,” Seokjin says, examining the weapons. He reaches for the spear, its head pitch black and dangerously sharp.

Jungkook’s seen enough Combat Training matches at the Academy to know that students are trained in hand to hand combat, but the weapons they practiced with weren’t as dangerous as the ones in front of him.

He exchanges an uneasy look with Taehyung.

The older swallows before glancing down at the pile. “If they’re providing weapons like these, it
means we’ll have to use them,” he says in a solemn tone. The rest of the team has nothing to say to that, but agree in silence.

He picks up a dagger and examines it. “I think I prefer close combat,” Taehyung says as he tucks it into his belt.

“I’d rather do long range,” Jimin says as he chooses a bow, strings it, and slings the matching quiver of arrows over his shoulder.

Jungkook chooses last. He reaches for a pair of throwing stars. Despite never having held anything like them before, they don’t feel foreign in his hands. He tucks them into the pockets of his custom-made uniform.

When and how these weapons will be put to use, Jungkook doesn’t want to question just right now.

“So what now?” Taehyung looks at his teammates, who have no answer.

*It’s too calm.* Jungkook thinks.

Shadow agrees in silence by his side.

“Weapons selected. Stage one commencing.”

A pause. Then, louder than ever, the speakers boom once more:

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the first stage of the Games!” Shindong and Heechul shout excitedly, immediately followed by the deafening roar of the crowd that must be watching from the other side of the barrier.

“Teams, welcome! To the new Hero Games!” Shindong shouts with enthusiasm, his voice booming all around them. “We see that you’ve all arrived on your starting islands, and you’re probably wondering what’s next!”

*But how are we being watched?* He wonders, both impressed and intimidated by the advanced technology being utilized for this year.

“Cameras in the air and on the ground are giving us a beautiful 360 degree play by play,” Heechul explains, answering his question. “There’s a powerful force field encircling the arena so you can’t see the surrounding crowd, but trust me when I say we’ve got quite a view! Would you look at those beautiful islands, ladies and gentlemen? Can you believe those blue waters?”

The audience cheers wildly in response. Jungkook can picture the excitement in the stadium seats at all the new and exciting aspects of the Games that was putting him on the edge like he’s never been before. He can picture the energy of the crowd, thousands of people on the edge of their seats, waving their national flags and shouting their excitement, but right now he can only comprehend fear and uncertainty.

“Teams! Listen up, and listen well. These are the official instructions before we officially start the countdown!” Shindong exclaims and all the members instantly go still. “Right now, teams are starting on the ring of smaller islands all equidistant from the center island. Exactly one minute after the gong sounds, some islands will start to sink.”

Heechul continues with enthusiasm: “They won’t sink all at once, keep that in mind. Lucky for all of you, the Game Designers have placed floating black discs that connect the smaller islands to one another other. Teams unfortunate enough to start on one of the sinking islands will need to quickly
get to a neighbouring one before theirs goes under.”

“But there’s a fun twist! When there are just three small islands remaining, the discs will realign themselves to connect to the center island. The teams who make it to the center will move on.”

Jungkook can’t help but feel overwhelmed by all this information, but Heechul continues in elation.

“Ah, but there’s more!”

“Jesus fuck,” Yoongi groans, shutting his eyes.

“A final tip, folks. Keep your toes out of the water!” He advises in a sing-song tone, doing nothing to help with Jungkook’s nerves. “Otherwise you’ll be in for a bite of surprise!”

*What the hell does that mean?* Jungkook grows increasingly anxious, but Heechul gives no more clues as Shindong concludes the announcement.

“Good luck teams! We’ll be keeping a close eye on all of you!”

Their voices are cut off so abruptly that Jungkook almost expects them to say one last thing, one last *But there’s more!*

But his expectations are only met with a silence that renounces the anticipation that hangs thick and heavy in the air.

“Is that it?” Taehyung whispers, looking at them with wide eyes.

His question is answered a second later by a loud gong that cruelly rings throughout the arena and right into Jungkook’s nerves.

Yoongi points at the artificial sky cast above them and shouts, “Look!”

There, cast amongst the screen projecting a cloudless blue sky, is a digital countdown.

0:59

Less than a minute until their island starts sinking.

“Get to the island’s shore,” Seokjin instructs them, his voice commanding and firm.

They make their way over to the island’s edges, where the waves lap at their feet and the sand sinks lower underneath their black boots.

Jungkook glances at the timer above.

0:50

“What now?” asks Hoseok.

Seokjin lifts his chin and peers out at the neighbouring islands in the distance. “We wait.”

The seconds pass by in agonizing silence as the seven members breathe heavily, their weapons held in tight grasps and their senses on full alert.

With only a few seconds left on the timer, Jungkook glances down at the water, hears the rhythmic rise and fall of the waves increasing in pace, tastes the brine as much as smell it, and then he
notices a small ripple on the water’s surface as a raindrop lands.

Then another. And another. Until it becomes a steady pitter patter of rain that falls from the screen dome surrounding the arena that darkens in alarming speed from a bright blue to a menacing grey. Lighting cracks above them in two, startling Jungkook, just as a cold wind picks up and the waves aggressively crash against his legs.

“What’s going on!” Taehyung shouts, straining to be heard against the thunder’s restless grumbles.

It wasn’t just rain, it was a downpour heavier than Jungkook had ever seen. He could barely see past a few feet in front of him; walking through a waterfall couldn’t get any wetter. The raindrops struck down on them from an angle, pitting the island like bullets shot from above.

0:00

BEEP BEEP BEEP

The grey sky cracks again as the heavy rain pours down over them with a roar. The serene tropical sounds they had heard only a minute ago could have been a dream for all Jungkook cared. He’s surrounded by the loud gregarious boom of thunder as rain starts to pierce his wet skin.

“Over there!” He hears Jin shout above the aggressive pitter. “The discs!”

The quality of darkness shifts in the sky but the rainstorm is persistent as he strains his eyes to make out the black circle platforms rising from the water’s depths, each two meters in diameter, assembling a path connecting the circle of islands. A row of them appears from the west and another from the east of their island, each disc just wide enough for two people to stand on.

“We’re not sinking,” observes Jimin, who’s standing only a few meters away from Jungkook but his voice is obliterated by the harsh rainfall and it’s hard to hear anything.

“That means the other team’s coming here.”

Namjoon’s words ring true only a few seconds later when they start to hear the sounds of distant yells and shouts.

In the distance, they make out the outline of a foreign competitor. He must be from the Beijing team, judging by his soaked-through black and white uniform. He jumps from disc to disc, approaching from the east side of the island. For a brief moment, right when he jumps off the last disc and onto the sandy shore, he loses his balance and falls onto the wet sand.

Seokjin makes his way over, sprinting while the rest of the team follows. When he reaches the Beijing member, he offers a hand and helps him up from the wet ground. Jungkook sees the knife in his other hand and takes a step back, but Seokjin’s shouting something.

He strains his ears to make it out and realizes he’s greeting the Beijing Captain by his name.

“Luhan!”

“Jin! Hey,” the Chinese member shouts back. “Our island started sinking so fast like you wouldn’t believe.”

Already the rest of the Beijing team have made their way over now, one by one jumping off the last disc connecting theirs to this one. They come to stand behind Luhan, cautiously examining the Academy team opposite of them. The girl to Luan’s right is clutching a pole taller in height than
herself, and Jungkook realizes not all teams were given the same weapons to choose from.

Admittedly, Jungkook finds it unfitting that Seokjin is greeting a competitor like this, but then he hears the Captain’s voice in his head:

*Once the discs start moving, clear out. Get to the discs as fast as you can.*

Lightning strikes, a brilliant shock of white in the black sky, forking silently to the unsuspecting waters. The thunderous boom calls its warning just as Shindong’s voice rings through the invisible speakers once more:

“Teams! This is your one minute warning before the next phase!”

Jungkook feels the rain running freely down his face and realizes he’s shaking. Even if he had been warned that there would be layers to this stage beforehand, it would have made no difference. He suspects this isn’t the last of the obstacles planned for them and in a minute from now there would be no going back to the false pretense of the Games being a friendly competition.

Luhan gets up and addresses his team in Mandarin. They huddle as a group, exchanging words he can’t understand and gripping weapons tightly in their hands.

“Good luck,” says Seokjin, and Luhan spares a piercing glance at their team before saying, “There’s no luck in the Games anymore.”

The weapons, the rainfall, the entire stage structure - everything about the Games this year made it hard to believe that it was supposed to be fostering ‘friendly competition’ between teams. He suspected it when they announced the details at the Opening Ceremonies, but now that’s he’s in the Games, it’s staring at him right in the face.

Watching the Beijing team whispering amongst themselves, Jungkook is aware that Yoongi is saying something but the older member’s voice is like a phone out of range, unreachable.

His stomach shifts uneasily when he notices that Shadow’s nowhere to be seen.

*Where’d you go?* He asks in panic, his heart rate increasing as he frantically searches around him but there’s nothing. Nothing but the flurry of raindrops and the bodies of his members heatedly discussing something.

*Where are you?*

Streaks of pure white crackle against the stormy blanket of grey, emanating jagged bolts that protrude the air with undying flashes of radiance and then, amongst the chaotic noise, comes jarringly loud mechanical noises.

The floating black discs begin to slowly submerge underwater and everything is still for a deceitful moment.

All fourteen pair of eyes on the island stay alert of their surroundings, ignoring the uncomfortable weight of their wet clothes hanging off their damp skins.

Then comes the sound of water crashing against metal as the discs re-emerge one by one, rising out from the surface just north of the island, assembling a clear path to the center island masked by the stormy rain.
It takes a fraction of a second for Jungkook to register Jin’s voice in his head.

GO! RUN!

He’s fast. He can sprint fast, and this short distance length is what he’s built for. He knows he can run there, knows he can reach it in no time, but then the question is how quickly can he jump from disc to disc?

By the time he’s trudged his way across the wet sand, Jimin is already there, standing right at the edge of the island with the first disc just a couple of meters ahead of him. They hear a Beijing member from behind them at the same time Jin’s voice is shouting in their heads:

Jimin, Jungkook, get on that disc!

Jin’s words are loud and clear and he can only see his goal. Jungkook knows he can jump and make it and he finds himself positioning his feet to leap, when suddenly he notices her, about two meters to his right, looking right back at him and he thinks she might be shouting something but the rain’s obscuring his hearing and while he’s puzzling over it, the gong rings out once more.

The discs start moving again, submerging underneath the troubled water’s surface a second time, accompanied by that grating mechanical noise. Jungkook is dumbfounded by what’s happening, can only stare at the place in the water where the disc had been just seconds ago.

“What’s happening?” Jimin shouts over all the noise and Jungkook has no answer. By now, the rest of the team have made it to the shore and all the while, the rain and thunder is relentless.

“There!” Taehyung points at a distance to their right and for a couple of seconds, Jungkook doesn’t see anything but then he notices it: the black discs reappearing from underwater and then Namjoon’s yelling something.

“RUN!”

The other team’s already on the move when Jungkook lunges forward, willing his legs to move in the new direction. A male Beijing member reaches the shore at the same time he does and for a brief second Jungkook grapples for what to do next but staggers back when the boy pulls out his weapon - a sharp-edged dagger - and points it at him. He freezes, momentarily stunned that he’s being threatened; he never thought being at the receiving end of a knife would be part of the experience. When he hears the other Beijing members getting closer, he knows he has to act fast or else.

Adrenaline shoots through his veins as he runs full-speed at the boy, yelling out as he tackles him down to the ground, making sure to grab his dagger-wielding hand by the wrist and pin it over his head.

“Get off me!” the boy grunts, his face contorted in pain, but Jungkook makes no move to budge.

He waits, just a few seconds, knowing Jimin is just seconds away. He times it just right, waiting for the right second before he yells, “HYUNG! Get us to the disc!”

Jimin immediately understands what he’s being asked to do: he grabs Jungkook by the waist as he pulls him up and in a blink of an eye, with his superhuman agility, closes the distance between them and the first disc.

“Jump! GO!” Jimin urges, quickly glancing behind them where Luhan and his team are seconds away, right at their heels.
Jungkook does as he’s told, his feet taking off as he jumps towards the second disc, just a meter away. He leaps into the air, landing on the black surface but it’s so slippery that he falters and one foot slides right off the edge and into the water and that’s when he sees it.

He gasps, eyes widening in disbelief.

A large, dark mass is swimming towards him at an alarming speed. It has long, piercing black spikes protruding from its back that cuts right through the water’s surface, reminding him of a shark’s fin but it’s bigger, pitch black in colour and resembled a cross between an eel and a piranha. He can’t take his eyes off it; it’s coming right at him and he’s frozen, horrified and fascinated all at once with one foot dangling in the water and his hands gripping on the disc’s slippery surface.

The massive thing moves its body from side to side as it propels itself, getting closer and closer to Jungkook and he knows he should get the fuck out of there but there’s a sense of thrill from just watching it and now it’s so incredibly close that if he reached out his hand he could probably touch its spikes-

An arrow whizzes right past Jungkook’s ear and strikes the creature right between the eyes, causing it to emit a grotesque screech as it tosses its head side to side in agony and falls back in the water with a loud *splash*.

Tucking the bowstring behind his back, Jimin's shouting, “JUNGKOOK, COME ON!” before he forcefully drags Jungkook up from under the armpit just as another one of these things propels itself out of the water as it wrenches its enormous jaws wide open, revealing three rows of jagged teeth on both the top and bottom, snapping at the spot where Jungkook had been just half a second ago.

“FUCKING JUMP!” Jimin yells, and there’s no need to tell him to twice at that point.

Jimin and Jungkook leap from one disc to the next, the sound of lightning ripping through the air and mixing in with the shouts and screams of the Beijing members just behind them, who must have witnessed the same horror they had seen.

So that’s what they meant by ‘unsafe waters’, Jungkook realizes in terrified amazement.

They jump across the discs in a hurry, but it’s a much harder task than he had anticipated with the heavy downpour that’s making the surface so dangerously slippery.

“Where are the others?” Jungkook shouts above another crack of thunder.

“It doesn’t matter, just get to the island!” Jimin yells back, his Power proving useless with his vision impaired. They can barely see anything within two feet thanks to the rainstorm, but they push on, putting faith in their members.

He can’t know for certain how long they keep jumping from disc to disc; all he knows is that his legs are straining and every inch of him is soaked through. He’s running on nothing but raw adrenaline and fear. He looks back at one point to survey the situation and sees a dozen or so competitors behind them before spotting several of his teammates, all of them doing their best to maintain their balance on these damn discs. Jungkook keeps pushing on until it becomes a rhythmic pace of *jump, land, repeat* that he knows he can maintain. For the next few minutes, he tries to put as much distance as he can between him and his competitors, matching Jimin’s pace. Then he sees it — the center island, maybe ten meters away—and he pushes harder. He doesn’t dare stop, he just keeps moving.
With a last leap, his feet sink into the wet sand with a *squelch*, and Jimin lands beside him the next instant.

“Let’s go,” Jungkook pants, out of breath, leading the way inward of the large island.

The two of them sprint a good half a mile before they’re faced with a rocky cliff blocking their way. Looking left and right, they see that the cliff rose from the center of the island, with towering ramparts of stone that glinted dull crimson with the lightning, and curved away to the east and west, ending just half a mile before the shore. In that instant, they realize there’s no way around it but to climb it. With effort, they grab onto the jagged rocks protruding from the cliff’s side and begin climbing its rough edges, when they hear the shouts of voices they don’t recognize coming from the west side of the island.

“It’s the Seoul team,” Jimin pants, recognizing their bombers. They had made it to the center island. To their left, they spot the Bangkok team, shouting something that gets lost amidst the chaotic flurry of wind and rain as they sprint away from the shore and towards the cliff.

“Come on, faster!” Jungkook exclaims, lifting a foot before spotting a safe spot to place it, his arms moving in sync, in search for the next safe jagged piece of rock to grab onto.

They trudge their way upwards, their knees scraping against the rocks while their hands grip on, painfully red and raw. Jungkook suspects they’re more than halfway up when Shindong’s voice booms through the overhead speakers.

“Congratulations to those of you have made it to the center island! To those that have gone down under, bon voyage!” The loud cheers of the audience ring through the speakers and Jungkook could not be more infuriated at the humorless situation they’re in. How could anyone find this entertaining?

“There’s going to be another obstacle coming your way teams, so be prepared! My word of advice? Think fast!” And as rudely as he had left the last time, Shindong’s announcement is cut off, leaving an unpleasant aftertaste in his absence.

Jungkook has no time to dwell on what that could have possibly meant. He’s focusing all his attention and energy on getting past this fucking cliff with Jimin right beside him suffering as much as he is. It seems like an agonizing eternity before they finally make it over the hill.

Panting, he stands with his hands on his knees, allowing his arms and hands to rest for a second.

“Shit,” Jimin mutters, wiping the rain and sweat off his face. “Did they really have to make us do rock climbing?”

Jungkook lets out a short laugh but it’s abruptly cut off when he feels a painfully strong grip on his shoulder from behind, causing him to whip his head around and come face to face with what he can only describe as a mechanical horror.

He lets out a terrified yell as he makes eye contact with the red orbs planted in its metal skull. Whatever the fuck it was resembled a human skeleton but made entirely of metal. Instead of muscles and sinews, it had wires and bolts and instead of skin, a metal casing that reflects the flash of distant thunder. Jungkook has the sense to land a roundhouse kick, hard, at its middle, causing it to release the metal grasp on his shoulder and stumble down the sandhill.

Beside him, he hears Jimin emit a piercing scream and he sees that another one of these fucking contraptions has Jimin in a chokehold, causing the color to drain from his face. In the next second,
Jungkook helplessly watches his teammate being dragged up in the air, lifting him off his feet and he knows he should move, *do something! Anything!* But his body is refusing; he’s rooted to his spot, watching in horror.

Small ragged gasps escape Jimin’s constricted throat as he claws his fingers against the firm metal ones, his heart beating faster with each passing second. He can only stare, his eyes wide with fear, at the android that’s ruthlessly choking him. He stares right into the pair of red eyes embedded in its metallic skull.

“Let me go!” he struggles to choke out the words, frantically kicking and flailing his legs that are no longer on the ground. He tries to gulp in oxygen but it’s no use; the grip around his neck is too damn tight and he can’t look away from the red orbs, and the longer he looks at them the more he starts to become aware of a sharp pain in his eyes. *What the hell?* He’s panicking while the pain escalates from zero to one hundred within seconds. He quickly closes his eyes but they’re burning with an intensity like he’s never experienced before.

He tries to yell out in agony, but there’s no air left in his lungs and when his consciousness starts going dark, a sense of desperation overtakes him. Just as his mind is on the edge of going hazy, and he knows he has seconds left, the metal fingers around his neck suddenly disappear and at the same time, he hears a loud *clang* of metal against metal and he falls, hard, to the ground. Crumpling, he lands on his back as his hands immediately reach for his neck, massaging the soreness.

He gasps, desperately gulping in breaths of air.

“Jimin!”

Opening his eyes, he learns in horror that he can’t see properly. Everything is blurry, wet and dark, but he recognizes the voice of the Seoul Academy’s Telekinetic.

“Taemin?” he pants out, the words a struggle against his pained throat.

“Are you okay?” Taemin asks with concern, holding what must be a metal pole in his hand. Jimin registers that it must have been Taemin who had attacked, but before Jimin can reply there’s a clamour of movement as bodies surround him and before he knows it, he’s being pulled to his feet by a familiar hand.

“He’s fine,” a gruff voice answers, and Jimin doesn’t protest when that same hand comes to rest on the small of his back and starts pushing him forward, forcing him to walk.

“Jimin, are you okay? What the fuck was that!” It’s Hoseok voice coming from his side, he’s pretty certain, but he can’t see shit and the stinging pain behind his eyelids is agonizing.

“I don’t know, it just came out of nowhere, I was-”

“WATCH OUT!”

Taehyung’s deep voice cuts through the air just as Yoongi shouts:
“MOVE!”

With one hand on Jimin’s back and the other dragging Jimin by his hand, Yoongi pulls him forward. Despite the sense of urgency to be on the move, Jimin can’t stop the trembling, causing them to pause while gasping for air.

“There’s more of them, come on, we have to MOVE!”

When he hears a whirring of mechanical sounds, Jimin realizes what Yoongi must mean by ‘them’. He takes a deep breath before pushing himself upright.

“Okay,” he breathes before breaking out in a run, hand in hand with Yoongi, blinking furiously and willing his vision to come back. All he can make out is flurry of movement as bodies around him run frantically, several teams shouting and yelling in a sudden chaos of panic.

“Can you see?” Yoongi shouts at him, their legs matching in pace against the muddy sand.

“Not really,” he pants out.

“I’ll lead the way, just follow,” Yoongi instructs, now really running, forcing Jimin to quicken his pace as well. “We gotta get to the center of this island, I can see a portal or something over there, I think that’s how we get the fuck off of this island.”

“What about the others?”

“Focus on getting there,” Yoongi assures him.

Jimin swallows. The Games have taken a twist. The discs were just to get them moving, and the cliffs were just a distraction. The audience is really in for a sight now, he thinks. He wills his feet to take him to safety.

Time loses meaning now as he frantically tries to get his breathing in order. He can’t see where they’re headed, but he feels Yoongi’s hand in his and trusts that they’ll get there.

He’s running ahead of his team members, as fast as his legs can take him, out of breath and a stitch at his side. Whatever vague plan Jungkook had haphazardly conceived to get to the center of this godforsaken island is wiped from his mind as he glances over his shoulder and sees the androids, each one as tall as a full-sized human but with horrible red eyes, multiplying in number as they climb over the edge of the cliffs.

They emit a horrible whirring noise that mixes in with the relentless rainfall and the crashing lightning that momentarily illuminate the metal plates on their grotesque skeletal frames. There’s a long distance to cross before he gets to the very middle of the island, where there seems to be some kind of archway or portal that stands starkly against the dark backdrop behind it. With nothing else on the island close to resembling a way out, it’s their only next course of action.

By now, all the teams have noticed the vague portal-like object located at the island’s center. It’s a race against time as everyone who’s made it this far are racing to get there first. Each one of
Jungkook’s senses go into overdrive as the need to survive takes over and keeps him moving forward, the sight of the other teams in his peripheral vision pushing him on.

Taehyung, Hoseok, Namjoon, and Seokjin are running either beside or behind him, dodging the various obstacles in their way; the jagged rocks that seem to appear out of nowhere, the slippery sand on which their feet stomp against, and the grinding metal noise of horrors. Yoongi and Jimin are somewhere out of his line of vision, but he doesn’t dwell another second on it. He can only see and think about his immediate goal: closing the distance to the island’s center.

His uniform is drenched in a mix of sweat and rain as he strains his muscles, grimacing in pain as his lungs scream in protest at the exertion but he dares his body to keep going.

Distinct against the humid air, he picks up the scent of singed hair. He quickly glances around and startles when he notices a Bangkok member’s braids on fire. She pauses in her running as soon as she realizes what’s happening but by then it’s too late, her blackened hair sizzling and dangerously close to reaching her scalp. She immediately drops to ground and starts rolling in the sand in an attempt to put out the fire and Jungkook stares at her, horrified but fascinated, when the hissing registers.

It happens so fast, Namjoon almost misses it.

Jungkook reacts, but not fast enough. A fireball the size of a baseball crashes into the ground at his side, but not before it skims his left calf and realizes in panic that his pant leg is caught on fire. He watches as their youngest member drops to the ground and scuttles backward on his hands, shrieking, trying to put it out but it’s no use, the fire’s persistent and burns right through his pants and singes his skin.

Seokjin’s shouting, “Roll your leg on the ground!” and Jungkook does, which stifles the worst of it. Without thinking, Jungkook rips away the remaining fabric with his bare hands.

Namjoon stares at his bloody red calf, half registering Jungkook’s screams of agony, shocked at how quickly Jungkook’s hands have become so raw and red. Instinctively, Namjoon rushes to his side and drags him up by his arm a second later, shouting, “We need to keep moving!”

Jungkook stands up with his help just as they both narrowly misses the ball of fire that lands just a few feet away.

“WHAT ARE THESE?” Hoseok yells, his eyes wide with fear.

“Not the same fire as mine, the rain has no fucking effect on them,” Yoongi shouts back, the annoyance evident in his tone as more fireballs are being hurtled at them from the sky and it’s insane, the complete pandemonium that ensues on the island.

Namjoon realizes for the first time since he’s stepped foot on the island that out of the seven teams, only four remains.
Taemin, not too far away, dodges the fireballs while helping one of his wounded teammates get up, indicating that the Seoul team’s still in the Game.

Luhun is a few yards ahead of them, sporting a ghastly injury on his shoulder that could have only been inflicted by one of the metallic androids. The Beijing team had made it thus far.

And the last team, apart from his own, is the Bangkok team. Their female member with the burned hair is back up and running, her encouraging teammates by her side and their white-haired Captain shouting something at them but his words are drowned out by the heavy downpour.

“Keep going!” Namjoon shouts, and they move forward.

Even with his support, Jungkook is limping, and the grimace on his face is telling of the excruciating pain in his calf; Namjoon can only imagine how much pain he must be in. He’s overwhelmed by a raging fury - how could the Game Designers, the Bureau, and the Academy throw such dangerous obstacles their way? What had the Games turned to?

“Lean on me,” he commands, shifting his arm to get a better of Jungkook’s waist. The younger bites his lip and places one foot in front of the other, leaning on Namjoon for support when it hurts too much and doing his best to ignore the pain.

They push on.

Dodging the fireballs would have been an impossible task in his state if it wasn’t for Hoseok Gravitating them away one by one.

“Fuck off!” Hoseok shouts each time he hurles one of the flaming balls away.

Minutes pass, but it seems so much longer; they’re so weary that Namjoon doesn’t even notice that suddenly they’re ankle-deep in water.

The team pauses, taking in the new environment.

They’ve run into a dark, wide pond. There’s water bubbling up out of a crevice in some of the nearby rocks, and the water is blissfully cool. Jungkook plunges his hands into the shallow water and lets out a sigh of instant relief.

“How far away do you think we are?” he hears Yoongi ask. Namjoon’s relieved to see that he and Jimin have caught up to them.

“I’d say a mile, more or less,” Namjoon answers, calculating the distance. “I don’t know how deep this pond will get, can all of you swim?”

They all nod in response, but Yoongi raises a pressing concern.

“Jimin can’t see.”

“What?” Taehyung exclaims, rushing to Jimin’s side and peering at his friend.

Namjoon also examines Jimin and notices with alarm that his eyes are bright red.

Jimin brushes off their concerns and wades into the water. “It’s fine, I can still swim.” He keeps walking until the water rises past his ankles to meet his calves. Yoongi wades in after him.

Though he gives Jimin a worried glance, Seokjin doesn’t wait another second. “Jimin, keep close to Yoongi. Let’s keep going.”
None of them protest as they make their way deeper into the pond.

Jungkook knows his leg is in need of attention, but he doesn’t dare look at it. He forces himself to take deep, slow breaths. For the first time since their mention at the start of the stage, he remembers the cameras in the air and imagines them focusing on his pained expression.

He does his best to not show weakness at his injury. It’s going to take more than a burn to get to him, he silently thinks.

“Teams! You’ve made it this far, and you’re so close to finishing!” Heechul’s voice reverberates through the air with yet another announcement. *How many were they going to get?* Jungkook wonders in annoyance.

“As you’ve figured out by now, the only way you’ll exit the island is to get to the middle, but there’s one last obstacle awaiting. A final tip: the only way to overcome it is with teamwork!”

With that, he’s gone and they’re no less better off than they were before the announcement.

“What the hell’s the point of these messages?” Yoongi growls in frustration, trudging his way across the pond.

“Probably to annoy us,” Hoseok scoffs.

“How deep do you think the water’s going to get?” Taehyung asks.

Right now, they were thigh-deep in the murky waters. Any higher and it would be a much slower process to walk across it.

“We’ll see,” Seokjin replies, keeping his gaze focused on the end goal.

They maneuver the waters in silence for a while, the androids seemingly nowhere to be seen, the fireballs still being thrown off course by Hoseok and all the while, the rain still violently pouring down in sheets. Jungkook’s can’t tell apart the wetness from the rain and the water he’s standing in.

Everything’s wet, cold, and grey around him, but at least his burn is stinging less.

After minutes, the water becomes deep enough to reach his waist, and a couple more minutes later, they’re wading chest-deep in the frigid water.

“We have to start swimming,” Namjoon declares, loud enough to be heard over the chaos. “Jungkook, I can support you if you need it, how’s your leg?”

“Not great,” Jungkook reluctantly admits. “But I’ll be fine. I can make it, it’s not that far.”

Beside him, Taehyung gives him a look of concern before promising, “I’ll be right behind you.” Jungkook nods, willing his pained leg to take another step forward. Another couple steps and the
water’s at his shoulder level.

“Alright, let’s get this fucking over with,” growls Yoongi right before he submerges his head underwater.

With only a slight hesitation, Jungkook dives in right behind him and lets his limbs do the thinking. He moves with precision, stroke after stroke, ignoring the tiredness in his limbs the best he can.

One after another, his teammates dive in and start swimming at similar speeds, the urgency in their strokes evident, knowing each second was closing the distance to their only exit.

The deeper the water becomes, the lower in temperature it gets. The cold water envelopes them, frigid enough to make Jungkook’s lips blue even with his body in constant motion, his limbs working tirelessly. He stretches one arm in front of him while dragging the other across the surface of the water, repeating the motion while controlling his breathing.

He suddenly hears someone’s piercing screaming a few feet away but he doesn’t stop. It’s not the voice of his teammates, so he ignores his instinct to pause and turn around to see what could have caused someone to shout like that because he’s close, he’s so close! The portal-like object’s right there in front of him, floating on the water’s surface.

Maybe a couple dozen more strokes and he’d be able to touch the thing - and the closer he gets to it, the more he realizes how strange of an object it is.

It’s difficult to describe, he’s never seen something like it before: it resembles a long, oval-shaped standing mirror in shape but unlike a mirror, its surface isn’t reflective at all.

Instead, the surface looks as if it could be made of water, the substance rippling subtly on its own. Jungkook is struck by a thought at that moment: what if he struck his hand through it and it came out wet on the other side? Or what if-

“GUYS!” He’s wrenched from his thoughts by Taehyung’s alarmed voice. “Over there!”

Pausing in his strokes for a brief second, he glances to where Taehyung’s looking and spots the horrible row of spikes belonging to the creature he witnessed when he almost slipped off one of the black discs. There’s got to be more than a dozen of those spikes on its back, Jungkook thinks, watching them cut through the water’s surface like knives, getting closer and closer to where they are.

“SWIM!” Namjoon shouts out and everyone picks up speed in a frantic panic, now realizing these waters aren’t safe either.

Everything becomes a blur after that. The panic grows stronger as his mental faculties give way to emotions. He feels like a child again, shaking, terrified. This wasn’t what he signed up for, and the constricted feelings grow as if he’s strangled by the cold frigid water around him. Knowing there’s danger in these waters, he propels himself forward, kicking harder with his pained legs and willing his arms to move faster. That’s when he hears it: the timer’s loud BEEP BEEP BEEP above them, alerting the entire arena that their time’s up just as his hand touches something solid and he sees that he’s done it! He’s reached the oval object, and now all he as to do is just reach up and touch its surface...

Come on, just a little more! He wills his strained muscles screaming to reach just a few more inches, he’s this close to touching the object’s transparent-like surface.
“Jungkook!”

Taehyung yelling his name is the last thing he hears before his hand touches the object’s surface and everything becomes silent.

And then there’s nothing but pitch black.

Chapter End Notes

hi hi, sorry this took me a while to write but i hope it delivered! pls anticipate the 2nd stage, it'll be even more action-packed. HUGE SHOUTOUT TO ALL MY WONDERFUL BETA’S <3 YOU GUYS ARE WONDERFUL ;;

and pls feel free to write a comment and leave ur thoughts on how you found it! they fuel me to no end :)

Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

In the second stage of the Games, the teams struggle to find each other within the labyrinth of the maze.

Chapter Notes

There's amazing artwork at the end from one of the scenes in this chapter so keep an eye out ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For several seconds, Jungkook feels like the world’s frozen in place.

As soon as he touched the portal’s surface, the odd feeling of being Teleported across space had overcome him for the second time, but it’s just as surprising as the first. The frigid waters surrounding him had disappeared, replaced by the sensation of being dragged through space, as if he was being pulled by an invisible force not unlike gravity.

Now with a yelp, he lands painfully on his back against the dirt-covered concrete underneath him. He pushes himself up to a sitting position and tries to make sense of his surroundings, his eyes adjusting slowly to the darkness enveloping him.

Everything is grey. To his left and right are enormous stone walls hundreds of feet high that look as if they were built by the hands of giants. The walls are covered in thick vines of ivy, intertwined and tangled like spiderwebs.

The sky above him is a deep navy, the artificial projection of the blanket of stars mimicking twilight that casts a weak light onto his surroundings.

This must be it - this must be the second stage, the maze.

He’s only heard descriptions of it from his teammates, but being inside it is an entirely different reality. Everything is bigger than he imagined; he feels so miniscule in comparison.

A sharp cry breaks the deeply unsettling silence all around him, snapping Jungkook to attention. Jungkook hurriedly stands up and immediately regrets it; pain shoots up his back and he leans against the wall. Grimacing, he tries to calm his quickening heartbeat.

“Who’s there?” he cries out, breathing hard.

Jungkook looks up at the enormous walls - if someone’s about to attack him, he has nowhere to run. *Can I climb this thing? Maybe the vines would give him leverage, but the walls are so tall…*

Then comes another cry and Jungkook realizes with a gasp - that’s Taehyung’s voice.
“Tae? Is that you? Where are you?” he shouts, pushing himself away from the wall and taking one tentative step after another, doing his best to ignore the pain in his back as he makes his way down the corridor.

Taehyung’s cry didn’t sound too far. He turns the corner and the maze looks exactly the same. No matter how many steps he takes, the walls seem to stretch on forever, their dark silent corridors giving no clues of Taehyung’s whereabouts.

“Jungkook? I’m here!” he hears Taehyung shouts, his voice coming somewhere to Jungkook’s left, but there’s nothing but stone.

“Hyung!” He’s running down the corridor ahead of him, taking the next left turn and hoping that it leads him to Taehyung when he hears it: the booming voices of the announcers blasting through the unseen speakers above him.

“Ladies and gentlemen!”

Jungkook had entirely forgotten this was the Games for a minute, that he was being displayed on screens for thousands to watch.

None of this was turning out to be what he expected at all.

“Welcome to the second stage, the incredible maze!” It’s Heechul, sounding as enthused as ever. “Congratulations to the four teams that passed the first stage! If you enjoyed the last stage, then prepare to be captivated by this one!”

“Here’s what’s going down for the second stage: each of the four teams will be starting at one corner of the maze - the north, east, south, and west,” Shindong takes over with enthusiasm, “but each team’s seven members won’t be starting together. Members have been split up! It’ll be a race against time for the teams to reach the maze’s center, where you’ll find the only exit!”

So this is their first obstacle; finding their own teammates within the labyrinth. For what, the added entertainment value? Jungkook thinks angrily.

Shindong jumps in: “It’s a race against time and the obstacles! Teams, be careful of what lurks in the dark depths of the maze!”

“Use your weapons and your Powers wisely, teams. It’ll take serious teamwork to get past this stage, that’s for sure!” advises Heechul. “In case of any serious injury, you will be quickly airlifted out of the maze and disqualified. And keep in mind, the maze will rearrange itself at random, so move quickly! We’ll be keeping a close eye on you all. Good luck, teams!” The announcer warns before the announcement comes to another abrupt end, leaving Jungkook feeling anxious and restless above all else.

He needs to find the rest of the team. That’s his first priority.

He picks up his pace until he’s running down another identical corridor of the maze. He’s wondering how on earth they’re supposed to find each other when he hears a loud boom exploding through the air, causing him to jump with fright. It’s followed by a horrible crunching, grinding sound and he stumbles backward, falling to the ground. It feels as if the whole earth is shaking; he looks around, panicked, when he realizes-

The walls are moving.

The walls are really moving. An onrushing sense of panic stifles him, compresses his lungs, as if
water’s filling their cavities. He’s been told that this would happen, but nothing could have prepared him for what he experiences next.

The enormous stone wall to his right seemingly defies every known law of physics as it slides along the ground, throwing sparks and dust as it moves, rock against rock. The deep rumbling sound rattles his bones and Jungkook realizes that the opposite wall is moving as well, heading for its neighbor. He watches in fascination as the left wall makes a sharp 90 degree turn, transforming what had been a corridor a few seconds ago into a dead end. Jungkook feels his head spinning faster than his body.

*How?* he wonders in amazement. *How can they do that?* He fights the urge to run out of there, slip past the moving slabs of rock, but common sense roots him to the spot. The maze holds even more unknowns than what he’s witnessed just now.

He tries to picture in his mind how the structure of it all worked. Massive stone walls, hundreds of feet high, moving like sliding glass doors… restructuring themselves, making it a fool’s mission to memorize its corners and turns...

An echoing boom rumbles from somewhere deep inside the maze, disrupting his thoughts. Jungkook feels one final moment of trepidation, a quick slice of fear through his body, and then it vanishes.

The maze goes completely still, its rumbling replaced by silence.

“Holy shit,” he whispers, a monumental understatement.

Jungkook looks around him. The feel of the place is completely different now that he’s witnessed what it can do. It feels more dangerous, and he doesn’t know which is worse—that the way to the centre is basically a guessing game or that finding his teammates is just as much of an estimation.

Yoongi moves quickly, before the walls move again.

He’s learned from his previous Games that there’s no point in trying to figure out the maze’s corridors. There is no pattern. It was just a race against time and dumb luck; he knew from experience the only way to get close to the center was to just keep moving.

He’s both frustrated and annoyed that they had separated their team members at the start of the stage this year - yet another surprise to the list of unexpected turns thrown their way. He scoffs at the thought of it; it just added another layer of unnecessary difficulty.

Without his teammates, he’s on double alert for what could be lurking at each dark corner of the maze, his paranoia reaching a whole new level.

“Fuck this fucking maze,” he grumbles under his breath, running faster now, gripping the metal chain looped around his wrists tighter in his hand.

He reaches for the lighter in his pocket and flicks it open. In the next second, he gathers the flame
into one palm until it’s a glowing ball of fire that lights up the dark corridor. He should have done this earlier - it’s so damn dark in here.

With his fire guiding his way, he starts to feel a little more at ease.

A few minutes pass before Yoongi hears a noise. It sounds like it’s coming from deep within the maze - a low, haunting sound. A constant whirring with a metallic ring every few seconds, like sharp knives rubbing against each other. It grows louder and louder by the second, and then a series of eerie clicks joins in. Yoongi is reminded of long fingernails tapping against glass. A hollow moan fills the air, and then something that sounds like the clanking of chains.

All of it, together, is horrifying, and the small sense of ease Yoongi felt seconds ago from his fire slips away.

He knows that sound. It’s so distinct - it can’t be anything other than the Grievers of the maze. But the sounds are coming from a distance. He’s safe, for now.

Taking a shuddering breath, Yoongi sprints down yet another corridor of the maze, a renewed sense of purpose fueling each step. He has to find his teammates before the Grievers do.

He turns left, then right, then right again, followed by a few left turns, and in no time at all he’s lost count of how many corners he’s turned and he doesn’t know if he’s getting anywhere close to his teammates or not.

“Anyone out there?” He yells out, hoping someone will reply. “If anyone’s there-”

He nearly jumps out of his skin when he hears Jimin’s familiar voice shout back, “Hyung? Is that you?”

“Jemin?” He pauses in his tracks, trying to decipher which direction Jimin’s voice is coming from. “Where the hell are you?”

“Over here!” Jimin shouts back and Yoongi thinks he can’t be too far.

“Follow my voice, like you did during practice,” he calls back, quickening his pace until he’s running down corridor after corridor. “And keep talking,” he orders, panting as he runs the maze’s endless paths.

“What was that? It sounded horrible,” comes Jimin’s frightened voice, sounding much closer now, and Yoongi knows he’s closing their distance.

He opens his mouth to tell him there’s nothing to be scared of, that he’ll find him soon enough, but he’s cut off by that horrible noise again. Running faster and faster down the darkened stone corridors, Yoongi feels his breaths quicken and his lungs burning.

It’s that low, haunting sound again, mixing with the whirring that has a metallic ring. It grows louder by the second, followed by a series of eerie clicks and the clanking of chains.

“Shit.” Yoongi keeps going, despite feeling like his legs might give away. “Jimin!” he calls out, making a sharp left turn, not stopping. He has to find him before the noises do.

The clanking keeps growing louder, sounding nearer and nearer. Yoongi can hear the roar of engines interspersed with rolling, cranking sounds like chains hoisting machinery. And then suddenly there’s a grotesque smell of something burning, oily.
He remembers that smell too well from previous years. His thoughts are abruptly cut off when he hears Jimin emit a blood-curdling scream and Yoongi’s heart immediately plummets, his skin breaking out in cold sweat.

“Jimin!” he shouts in panic, but there’s only more screaming and Yoongi can feel the sweat drench his skin, the ringing in his ears, the thumping of his heart.

He takes off, running faster as he rounds a corner, following the hair-raising sound of Jimin’s screams until finally, Yoongi finds him.

“Jimin!”

He’s slumped against the vine-covered wall, standing with blood all over his scratched-up uniform. The left sleeve is entirely cut off, revealing a bloody arm, covered in cuts the colour of dark crimson shining in the weak moonlight.

Yoongi frantically looks around them but the Griever is nowhere to be seen and without its haunting sounds, it’s suddenly eerily silent around them. He runs towards Jimin with trembling legs and widening eyes. “What happened?” he whispers, anxiety overpowering everything else as he takes a closer look.

“It just...” Jimin looks at him with eyes wide and fearful. “It came out of nowhere,” he says, his usually tan skin losing color so fast. His breaths come out quick and shallow.

From previous years, Yoongi’s witnessed exactly what the Grievers are capable of, but seeing Jimin like this… an overwhelming sense of fury blossoms deep in his chest like Yoongi’s never experienced before. “Are you alright?”

“Yeah,” Jimin sounds strained, his chest rising and falling with struggled breaths. His skin is drenched in sweat. “I got away before it could strike again.”

Yoongi’s furious at the monster that had done this to Jimin, but more than that, he’s furious at himself for not finding Jimin fast enough. His legs twitch, fighting the impulse to turn around and sprint down the dark corridors and hunt down the creature that did this to Jimin and destroy it to pieces, light it on fire and watch it burn to its death.

His jaw clenched tight, Yoongi slowly breathes in and out and asks, “Where does it hurt?”

Jimin’s breaths are laboured as he answers, “Arm,” pointing to his left bicep. “It’s not that bad.”

A stream of red flows out of the wound. Yoongi swallows down the gripping fear before declaring, “We need to stop the bleeding.”

Tugging on the right sleeve of his uniform, Yoongi pulls his arm free. He bites down on the strip of cloth, holding it for leverage with his teeth while using both his hands to tug, and with a riip the sleeve tears away.

“I’m gonna tie this around your arm, it might hurt,” Yoongi says. He’s never done this before but Jimin can’t lose any more blood, not this early into the stage.

Yoongi takes careful measure to gently wrap the bandage around the younger’s arm, pulling the strip of cloth tight as he ties it and doing a terrible job of ignoring the pained groans he’s causing Jimin to make.

“Ah,” Jimin hisses between clenched teeth. Jimin observes the rough patch up and manages to let
out a scoff. “Glad you’re not a Healer.”

Yoongi appreciates Jimin’s attempt at humour even in his grim state. He flashes a small smile before looking back down the corridor. “You’re hurt pretty bad, stay put and I’ll find the others and we’ll come get you-”

“It’s just my arm, I’m fine,” Jimin protests, pushing off the wall behind him.

“You lost a lot of blood,” Yoongi argues. “And you can’t even use your weapon with that arm.”

Jimin looks Yoongi dead in the eye with that trademark determination of his. “You want me to stay here and do nothing? Don’t be ridiculous,” he spits onto the floor and adjusts the quiver of arrows across his back. He picks up the bow from the ground. “I’m not sitting around while you and the rest of the team are in danger.”

The firmness in Jimin’s gaze fights with the fear and doubt clouding Yoongi’s thoughts. Despite the dreary circumstances they’ve found themselves in, Yoongi knows it’s not in Jimin’s nature to take a backseat. He knows it’s foolish of him to even ask.

But a small part of him is scared shitless for what might happen next.

“If another Griever finds us-”

“I can use my agility,” the younger answers quickly, holding his gaze. “Hyung, I can’t just sit here,” Jimin stands his ground, his eyes every bit as hard as someone who harbours only determination. “And I have you by my side.”

Yoongi matches Jimin’s gaze. Those brown eyes are always so filled with resolution.

He breathes in and silently nods.

Side by side, they make their way into the dark depths of the labyrinth.

15 years ago

Jaejoong can feel the Prime Minister’s heavy gaze on him, searching his face. The windows behind the tall man are covered by dark curtains, casting a dim light in the room that matches the grim mood he’s in. The portraits of past prime ministers hanging along the walls all glare down at him, their gaunt faces judging his every move.

He wants to be anywhere but here.

The Prime Minister stands with his hands behind his back, wearing an apprehensive expression that deepens the lines on his weathered face.

Yunho is known among the students as a fierce leader with a reputation for being a strong enforcer
of laws. Jaejoong had never been in a room alone with the man before but couldn’t have imagined it would be so unsettling and nerve-wracking.

“Jaejoong, do you know why you’re here?” the Prime Minister asks, regarding him with narrowed eyes.

The boy gives no answer, only staring down at the dark wooden desk that separates them. He can’t bring himself to face the man in front of him.

“Why are you here?” Yunho repeats, his deep voice resonating throughout the spacious office.

Jaejoong stays silent.

“You’re here because you broke a Principle Rule of the Games; harming another student beyond Healing.”

Jaejoong knows this.

“Do you realize the consequences of your actions? How much damage you’ve caused to not just the student, but to the reputation of the Bureau and the Academy?”

He knows this as well, but he feels like the magnitude of the response to his situation is unjustified and every word the man speaks stokes the fire that burns inside of him, every accusatory action stinging like gasoline. He clenches his jaw and balls his hands into fists, the anger hissing through his body like poison, screeching a demanded release.

“Do you have anything to say for yourself?” demands Yunho, “For disgracing the Academy?” and all at once, Jaejoong feels his anger erupting like a volcano, the fury sweeping off of him like ferocious waves.

“It was out of my control! You think I wanted to hurt him? You think I wanted to be humiliated in front of everybody?” The injustice of it all engulfs him and destroys the boundaries of formalities. He’s yelling at the Prime Minister of the Bureau but he can’t stop himself.

“I didn’t do it on purpose,” Jaejoong seethes. He can still vividly see the poor victim in his mind, the boy’s face contorted in pain as Shadow constricts him, restricting his airway. The boy had called for help but it was useless. Jaejoong had shouted at Shadow to stop, but it wouldn’t heed.

“It wouldn’t listen,” he explains, the shaking in his voice uncontrollable. “It wouldn’t stop. I couldn’t do anything about it.”

The silence between them is stifling as Jaejoong raises his red laced eyes from the desk to the face of the man in his crisp black suit.

“‘It’ being your Shadow?” the Prime Minister asks quietly.

Jaejoong nods, holding his gaze.

“You can’t control your Shadow?” the Prime Minister’s tone completely different than it had been just a minute before. The accusation and anger is completely gone and replaced by something else, catching Jaejoong off guard.

“No,” the boy shakes his head. “Not all the time.”

“It can act on its own will?” He questions, staring at Jaejoong with sudden interest. “How often


does that happen?”

“I… I don’t know,” there’s something puzzling in the man’s tone, enough to have alarm bells ringing in Jaejoong’s head. “But that’s what happened in the Games. I shouldn’t be held at fault.”

Slowly, the Prime Minister lowers himself onto the seat of his leather throne chair. He motions for Jaejoong to do the same.

Once seated, he asks, “How long has this been the case?”

“For as long as I can remember.” Jaejoong is on full alert now; these questions don’t make sense. The Prime Minister’s change in tone doesn’t make sense. He was called in here to be punished, not interrogated. “Why does this matter?”

“This matters greatly,” the Prime Minister leans back in his seat and appraises the student sitting across from him with a new and strange tint in his eyes. Jaejoong shifts in his seat, feeling more and more uncomfortable by the second. “Your Shadow Manipulation is different, unique. Powerful. Useful.”

Jaejoong can only stare.

“Allow me to explain.”

A sharp crack echoes from within the Maze, followed by the horrible sound of crumpling metal.

Hoseok startles and swings around to look, but there’s nothing. The sounds only grows louder - the whirring, the groaning, the clanging.

Hoseok gulps, pushing down the swelling panic rising in his throat before forcing his legs to take off in a run.

Trying to ignore the fear seeping into his thoughts, Hoseok picks up his pace, but then comes the noises again, this time so close that he startles and pauses, frantically looking around him. Clangs from the maze. Whirrs. Buzzes. He thinks he sees a couple of red flashes to his left. It’s getting closer.

“Shit,” he hisses under his breath, trying to make a quick decision. Should he make a run for it down the corridor ahead of him or take a left turn?

With no time to spare, he makes the turn and keeps running. A few minutes pass before the terrible sounds he’d heard escalate for the last half hour takes on a horrifying high-pitched, mechanical squeal, like a robotic death yell.

A red light ahead of him, on the wall, catches his attention.

He takes a few steps and almost screams out loud - what he can only describe as a mechanical
beetle is only a few feet from him, its spindly legs poking through the ivy and somehow sticking to
the stone wall. The red light of its eyes are blaring, too bright to look at directly. Hoseok squints
and tries to focus on the beetle’s body.

This isn’t a Griever. He’s seen Grievers before. No, this is something entirely new, something they
must have added to the maze this year.

Its slender silver torso is three inches in diameter and ten inches long. Twelve jointed legs run
along the length of its bottom, spread out, making the thing look like an elongated insect. The head
is impossible to see because of the red beam of light shining right at him.

But then Hoseok notices the most chilling part. The red light from its eye cast a creepy glow on six
capital letters smeared across the torso:

BUREAU

Hoseok can’t imagine why that one word would be stamped on its body, unless for the purpose of
announcing to the competitors that it was built by the Bureau.

And what purpose did it serve? Are these beetles another way to keep an eye on them? He
wouldn’t be surprised if there were cameras implanted in those terrible red eyes.

Hoseok stills himself, holding his breath, hoping that maybe the beetle only detects movement.
Long seconds pass, his lungs screaming for air.

It spurs back to life suddenly, its many legs clicking as the beetle turns and scuttles off,
disappearing into the thick tangles of the ivy. Hoseok sucks in a huge gulp of air, feeling terrified
of what this could mean. Why add new creatures into the maze? What did the beetle do? What else
was different this year?

He pushes the thoughts away and swallows the fear down. Taking a gulp of chilly air, he takes off,
sprinting down the corridor where the beetle had been just a couple of seconds ago.

He has to find the others, and he has to do it soon.

Namjoon doesn’t have a clue if he’s going in the right direction or not, but he doesn’t stop moving.
If there’s anything he learned from last year’s Games, it’s that this stage is the most difficult for
those with Powers like his. His Telepathy had no advantage in this concrete labyrinth; if someone
snuck up from behind him, the most he could do is fight them off with the longsword tucked in his
belt.

“Anyone out there?” He calls out as he runs down another identical corridor. It’s dark and cold
everywhere he turns, revealing no clues of his teammates’ whereabouts.

“Tae? Jimin? Jungkook?” He yells, hoping they’ll shout back but the ever-daunting silence is his
only answer. “Yoongi! Jin! Hoseok!”

He makes his way down countless corridors, his senses on full alert after hearing the daunting mechanical noise of the Grievers several times now. He remembers them too well from last year; it’s impossible to forget something so terrifying, even if he wants to.

It’s impossible to tell how many minutes have passed, but the walls have moved only once so it can’t have been that long since he’s been Teleported inside the maze.

Then he hears it - a familiar voice shouting, “Where are you guys!”

“Jin!” That’s his voice! He’d recognize it anywhere. Namjoon immediately shouts back, “Hyung! I’m here!”

Adrenaline floods his system, right into his blood as he runs towards Seokjin’s voice, letting in just an ounce of hope amongst the mounting anxiety that’s enveloped him since the start of the Games.

“Where are you!”

“Follow my voice!” the Captain shouts back. Namjoon takes a right turn, and Seokjin sounds louder and clearer now. He’s close, he so close, he’s sure of it-

“Hyung!”

And there, a few feet ahead, is Seokjin, brandishing the spear from the first stage in front of him. He turns to Namjoon with wide eyes, lowering his weapon before running towards him, the Captain’s handsome expression turning from fear to relief in a matter of seconds.

“Oh, thank god,” he says, embracing the Telepath with one arm.

Namjoon lets go and looks at the older man with concern, asking, “You heard the noises too, right?”

“Yeah,” Seokjin nods, face hardening. “Grievers. We better find the others.”

Without another word, they continue their sprint down the maze’s endless corridors, calling out the names of their teammates. They hear another mechanical squeal screech through the maze, closer now, followed by the surge of revving machinery.

“Stay alert,” mutters Seokjin.

They halt in their steps and look around them, their weapons held in front, though they both know they won’t do much to protect them.

And then they notice it at the same time - a large, dark figure coming around the corner up ahead.

Namjoon’s seen it before, but it terrifies him nonetheless.

They stare in horror at the monstrous thing making its way down the long corridor they’re standing in. It looks like an experiment gone terribly wrong - something from a nightmare. Part animal, part machine, the Griever rolls and clicks down the stone pathway.

Its body resembles a gigantic spider, sparsely covered in hair and grotesquely pulsating in and out as it breathes. It has no distinguishable head or tail, but front to end it’s six feet long, four feet thick.
Withdrawing the sharp metal spikes attached to some of its many legs, the creature abruptly curls into a ball and spins forward. Then it settles, seeming to gather its bearings, until it does this over and over, traveling just a few feet at a time.

But hair and spikes aren’t the only things protruding from the Griever’s body. A few legs have bright lights attached to them while others have long, menacing needles. One has a three-fingered claw that clasps and unclasps for no apparent reason.

The creature rolls again, its arms and legs folding and maneuvering to avoid being crushed. It makes that metallic whirring sound, like the spinning blade of a saw, accompanied by loud clicking sounds from the spikes on its limbs, sharp metal scraping against stone. But nothing sends chills up and down his spine like the haunted, deathly moans that somehow escape the creature when it stands still.

Namjoon fights the fear, forcing his body to remain perfectly still.

It hasn’t sensed them yet, he can tell. He recalls from previous years how these monsters would come crawling and rolling towards their victims at an alarming speed once they detected them.

This one is moving much slower in comparison - they still have a chance.

“We need to run,” Namjoon whispers out of the corner of his mouth, staying absolutely still with immense difficulty. His legs feel like they’re going to give out, and it’s taking him an enormous amount of effort to keep his hands from shaking.

“I don’t know if we can outrun this thing,” Seokjin whispers back, standing stock still as a statue. “But you’re right, we have no other choice.”

Swallowing with difficulty, Namjoon mentally prepares himself. “On three, then.”

He notices just the slightest nod from Seokjin in his peripheral vision.

“One.”

The Griever rolls and clicks its way closer, moaning and whirring.

“Two.”

It stops, its metal arms unfolding out of its body, turning this way and that, some of it scraping the walls around it, others scratching the ground beneath.

“Thr-”

Before he can finish, a hand suddenly covers his mouth and a sense of panic overcomes him but then a familiar voice quietly whispers in his ear, “Don’t make a noise,” and Namjoon’s eyes widen in surprise at hearing Taehyung’s voice. “I made both of you Invisible, so follow my lead.”

Half relieved, half in disbelief, they do as they’re told. Taehyung leads them backwards, all three of them trying not to make a sound as they round a corner and run until they can no longer see the massive black monster.

Taehyung lets go of his hold on Namjoon and Seokjin and all three make a run for it, making sure to put a good distance between themselves and the Griever.

After several minutes, they come to a stop, all three of them panting.
“How’d you find us?” Seokjin gasps out, looking at Taehyung while trying to catch his breath.

“I heard your voices before I heard the noises,” answers Taehyung, referring to the whirring and the clicking. “I turned Invisible and followed it. It’s a good thing the Grievers are loud as hell, or finding you guys would’ve taken longer.”

“What about the others?” Namjoon asks. “Have you heard anything from them?”

“I heard Jungkook at the beginning,” says Taehyung. “But then the walls moved, and I didn’t hear him again.” He looks grim as he says it, and Namjoon wonders how long it’ll take to find the other four.

“We’ll find him and the others,” Seokjin assures them before motioning them to follow him down yet another corridor, “We just have to keep moving.”

It’s been quiet for too long.

Hoseok is on full alert as he runs through corridors, taking turn after turn. There’s no strategy to his actions, he does it without thinking, hoping each step leads him closer to his teammates.

He has to tell them what he’s seen; the beetle and its blinding red eyes. It has to mean something or nothing at all, but nonetheless, he has to find them.

There’s no way to tell if he’s making any progress. He considers Gravitating the vines off the walls and lifting them in the air, using them as makeshift flares to signal his location but considering how tall the walls are, it’s an impossible feat.

There’s nothing to do but keep running.

“Guys, if you’re out there, say something!” he calls out, his throat sore from the constant yelling.

He’s greeted by his own voice reverberating against the walls, breaking the eerie silence.

“Anyone?” he tries again, keeping up his pace as he makes his way down a particularly long corridor.

Except this time, he hears a familiar voice shout back, “Hoseok?”

That’s Namjoon’s voice! He’s flooded with an immediate sense of relief. “Namjoon! Please tell me that’s you, holy shit,” he yells out while trying to decipher whether the Telepath’s voice is coming from his left or right.

“It’s me, I’m with Seokjin and Tae, are you with anyone?” Namjoon shouts back, and Hoseok’s so relieved to hear his teammates names.

“Hey, hyung!” comes Taehyung’s bright voice.

“I’m alone,” he yells back, pausing in his tracks. In front of him is a fork in the maze. It’s hard to
tell which direction their voices are coming from but he takes a right, trusting his instincts more than he’s used to.

“Follow our voices!” advises Seokjin and Hoseok swears the Captain’s voice sounds nearer now. He has to be going in the right direction.

His suspicions are confirmed when he finally spots the three of them just up ahead.

“Hoseok!” The three run towards him, closing the distance between them.

“Thank fucking God,” Hoseok cries, embracing them all at once. “You have no idea how happy I am to see you guys.”

“Is it just me or does the maze make you really sentimental?” Taehyung cracks a smile at Hoseok who ruffles his brown hair.

“It puts me on the fucking edge, that’s what it does,” Hoseok says, before remembering what he’d seen earlier. “Listen, guys, I saw something new.”

He describes the mechanical beetle and its glaring red eyes in detail, the three listening intently in silence. “And it had at least a dozen legs, crawling all over the walls and making this like, sick click clack sound.”

“But it didn’t attack you?” Namjoon asks, his brows furrowed.

“No,” answers Hoseok. “It didn’t look dangerous.”

“So, if it doesn’t attack us, what does it do?” asks Taehyung.

“I don’t know,” Hoseok replies honestly. “There was ‘bureau’ written on its side.”

“Bureau?” Taehyung repeats.

“The Bureau organizes the Games, so it makes sense. But let’s not dwell on that right now, we need to keep going,” says Seokjin. “The walls might move again.”

All four agree and head off further into the maze, down a new path, shouting out the names of their missing members.

Namjoon has unanswered questions in his head, swarming his thoughts - why add a new creature to the maze? And why separate the members?

But he shoves them aside for now, focusing on each step that carries him deeper into the labyrinth, keeping an ear out for familiar voices and hoping they find the rest soon.

As they get deeper and deeper into the maze, Jimin’s steps become slow and breaths more ragged.

“You alright?” Yoongi asks, glancing at Jimin beside him. Jimin answers with an affirmative,
despite looking quite the opposite of alright.

It’s quiet for a while after that, but every nerve in Yoongi’s body is on fucking edge. He knows that the maze doesn’t remain calm for too long so he can’t help but feel like an invisible timer is ticking away, running out of time.

As if on cue, a strong whiff of something stings his nostrils. A sick mixture of overheated engines and charred flesh.

Yoongi knows that smell.

“Do you smell something?” Jimin’s small voice asks.

The burning smell grows stronger until a second later, they hear the terrifying noises again.

He feels Jimin go completely still.

“Can you use your Power?” Yoongi whispers out of the corner of his lips.

“Yes,” answers Jimin, sounding strained.

With each passing second, the noises grow louder in volume, announcing the inevitable approach of the Griever. Yoongi and Jimin stay frozen, rooted to their spot, unable to move.

Then they see it; the Griever, just up ahead of the corridor where he and Jimin stand.

The fear sits somewhere deep in Yoongi’s abdomen. What starts as a contortion of his stomach becomes a feeling of being smothered. His breathing becomes erratic and shallow. He fights it, fights the feeling of his body writhing.

The Griever’s grotesque body slowly begins to roll toward Jimin and Yoongi, its sharp metal spikes popping through its flesh as it curls into a ball and spins forward. Then it comes to a stop, and the spikes recede back through the hairy skin of its limbs.

Yoongi holds his breath, not daring to make the slightest sound. The Griever is only twenty feet away from them. Several mechanical limbs have bright lights attached to them that shines all over the place, completely random, never settling in one spot.

Then, without warning, they go out.

The corridor turns instantly dark and silent, as if the creature itself had turned off. It doesn’t move, makes no sound - even the haunting groans stop completely. Yoongi can’t see a single thing.

He takes small breaths through his nose; his heart pumping desperately. Could it sense his fear? Sweat drenches his hair, his hands, his clothes, everything.

The Griever shows no movement, no light, no sound. The anticipation of trying to guess its next move is killing him.

Seconds pass. He feels numb.

Then, in a sudden burst of light and sound, the Griever comes back to life, whirring and clicking and all of his senses are screaming at him to get out of there, NOW!

“Jimin, get us out of here!” Yoongi shouts into the darkness and in the next second, Jimin tightly grab his hand and spins them around, yelling, “RUN!”
Jimin feels pain all over. He knew using his superhuman agility in his injured state would only worsen his wounds, but they have no other choice. He pushes on, despite his body screaming and begging him to stop.

His blurred vision makes it all the more difficult but with the only thought in his head to get as far away from the creature as possible, he runs, pulling Yoongi through space at a speed faster than humanly possible.

The sounds of their pursuer follows them relentlessly, the click and clacking of its tangle of legs signaling its persistent chase.

Yoongi shouts, “Just keeping going!” and Jimin doesn’t need to be told twice.

He rounds a corner of the Maze, then another. Pounding the stone with his feet, he flees as fast as he possibly can.

Right, then left. Down a long corridor, taking a sharp turn. Left. Two rights. Another long corridor.

On and on he runs, his heart ready to blow its way out of his chest. With great, shuddering heaves of breath, he tries to get oxygen in his lungs, but he knows he can’t last much longer.

When he rounds the next corner, he skids to a halt at the sight in front of them. Panting uncontrollably, he stares.

Three Grievers are up ahead, rolling along as they dig their spikes into the stone, coming directly towards them.

“Fuck,” Yoongi swears under his breath. “Turn back!” he orders, and they turn around but another Griever is coming at them from behind, clapping and unclapping a metal claw.

“What do we do?” Jimin is shaking, he can’t help it - they’re outnumbered two to four and they have no way out. With three of them ahead and one behind, they’re trapped.

The panic rises to Jimin’s throat, growing stronger as his mental faculties give way to emotions. He wants to jump out of his skin - he’s shaking, terrified. The panic grows until he feels strangled just by the air surrounding him.

Then comes a loud booming sound exploding through the air, causing them to flinch in fright. It’s followed by a deep grinding sound that rumbles as if the whole earth is shaking and Jimin realizes what’s happening.

The walls are moving again.

The wall to their left starts to slide along the ground, throwing sparks and dust as it moves, grinding against the concrete floor. The deep rumbling becomes louder as the wall retracts, moving backwards for a few feet before taking a sharp 90 degree turn. It moves until it collides with the
opposite wall and in doing so, blocks the three Grievers’ paths towards them.

An echoing boom rumbles from deep inside the maze and the maze goes completely still, replaced by silence.

They stand with their breaths held, staring at their surroundings, shocked at their luck.

Yoongi opens his mouth to speak, but closes it quickly when he hears the familiar whirring and clicking once more. Jimin’s head whips around to look down the darkened stone corridor as Yoongi feels his own breath quicken.

The Grievers behind them is moving. Frozen in place, Jimin watches the monster; it’s only ten feet away and slowly closing the distance between them as it rolls its grotesque body towards them.

“What do we do?” Jimin whispers, his voice trembling.

But Yoongi has no answer. For the first time in the Games, he feels helpless; to their right, left and behind them are walls, and ahead of them awaits the Grievers.

They’re backed into a dead end.

He can only watch as it comes closer. He wraps his hands around the metal chain twisted along his arms and prepares himself to fight the damn thing.

As he readies himself for the inevitable, he’s met by a sudden unexpected silence. The horrible metallic sounds disappear as the Grievers go completely still.

Seconds pass.

He doesn’t understand why it’s not moving.

Beside him, Jimin stands stock still, their breaths held in anticipation.

Then in a sudden burst of light and sound, the Grievers come back to life, whirring and clicking at an alarming speed, digging its spikes into the stone coming directly towards them.

His heart racing, he glances quickly at Jimin. Underneath the underlying determination that Yoongi so admired about Jimin is a fear that reflect his inner turmoil. He holds onto that fear and decides what to do next.

“Listen, Jimin, when I charge at it, you make a run for it and get out of here,” Yoongi orders, facing ahead. He bends his knees, reaching for the lighter in his pocket. “I’ll attack it while you go and-”

But without warning, Jimin takes off, running straight for the Grievers. The ugly thing retracts and stops moving its claw, as if shocked at Jimin’s boldness. Taking notice of its slight falter, Jimin starts yelling as he charges.

Spikes popping out of its skin, the Grievers rolls forward, ready to collide head-on with its foe.

“JIMIN, NO!” Yoongi shouts in panic, watching Jimin’s charge. Yoongi can’t look away, frozen in shock.

At the last second before collision, just as Jimin is within an arm's reach of the monster, he plants his left foot and dives to the right. Unable to stop its momentum, the Grievers zooms straight past him before it shudders to a halt and Yoongi lets out a shuddering breath of relief.
But it's short-lived; with a metallic howl, it swivels around and readies itself again to pounce on its victim.

"NOW!" Jimin shouts in desperation, glancing back at Yoongi, "RUN!" he points down the corridor and Yoongi finally understands Jimin’s brash actions - no longer blocked by the Griever, Jimin just cleared the path down the corridor.

It’s the desperation in Jimin’s words, the panic in his eyes and the pure, unadulterated terror crawling under his skin that pushes Yoongi to snap out of it and move.

He scrambles and sprints forward, running on shaking legs. He runs past the Griever and once he reaches Jimin’s side, grabs his hand and starts tugging him down the corridor.

“Let’s get out of here,” Yoongi urges, but to his astonishment, Jimin rips his hand free. He shakes his head.

“Go,” his says, voice desolate. “Someone has to distract it.”

Jimin turns back to face the Griever. “Find the others,” he orders with a tone of finality that tells Yoongi he’s made up his mind. He can’t believe what he’s being told. The words are agonizing for Yoongi to hear, but they’re running out of time - the Griever’s advancing towards them again.

“Go!” Jimin insists, turning back to the monster.

“Are you insane? I can’t just leave you-”

“Hyung, just GO!” shouts Jimin, turning to Yoongi for a second. Something flashes beneath the surface of Jimin’s hardened expression, but Yoongi is left with no time to investigate the sudden shift. “There’s more at stake here, you said it yourself.” The emotion stares him in the face but it disappears before Yoongi can identify it.

“What are you-”

The Griever starts screeching, emitting an ear-splitting noise, not unlike nails grating on a chalkboard. There’s a pause in its movement as it takes in the new target and suddenly it switches direction, angling its disgusting body towards Yoongi. Before he knows what's happening, the Griever raises one of its spiked legs in the air, aimed right at him.

His mind is screaming at him to move! Fucking move! But he’s frozen in place; he can hear nothing. Everything is silenced - the monster's screeches, his panicked, rapid breaths, Jimin’s shouts - it’s all inaudible. All he can do is feel. Feel the solid ground slipping from beneath his feet, the dread, the pain, and the rhythm of his heart drumming painfully against his chest.

The metal surface of the Griever’s spike shines in the weak moonlight.

He closes his eyes just as the Griever brings it down in one swift motion.
There’s nothing but the dimmed silence corridor after corridor, but something keeps nagging at Taehyung to a point where he blurts out, “Why haven’t we run into the other teams?”

Hoseok, Namjoon and Seokjin look over at Taehyung.

“They said we started off at different corners,” Namjoon replies, though sounding uncertain.

“But it’s been a while since the start now, shouldn’t we be seeing signs of them?” questions Taehyung.

“I’ve been wondering that too,” Hoseok admits, wearing a concerned expression. “It’s been too quiet.”

“Let’s focus on finding the rest of the team,” advises Seokjin, and the four of them pick up the pace, their bodies aching but driven by the urgency to find their teammates.

The next time they round a corner, Taehyung falters, his heart skipping a beat when he sees movement up ahead.

“Wait,” he warns the rest, his arms spread, causing the three others to pause in their steps. They look at where Taehyung is pointing, noticing the moving shadows growing bigger and bigger until it becomes clear -

It’s the shadows of three men.

*Make us unseen,* Seokjin’s voice invades the space inside Taehyung’s head.

Wordlessly, Taehyung does as he’s told. He reaches out his hand, gesturing for them to grab hold. The moment they make physical contact with Taehyung, they turn invisible to the human eye - just at the same time the three competitors come into view.

Standing silently still and out of sight, Seokjin studies their profiles. It’s three members from the Seoul team; the leader, Zico, Taemin, and a new member he doesn’t recognize.

He relays this information to the others using his Empathy.

Beside him, he feels Namjoon stir and senses his growing anxiety. This situation feels dangerously close to a preface of what happened last year during the same stage, and Seokjin was not going to let that happen a second time.

*Listen up, he orders. Hoseok, use your Gravity to throw them against the walls, then we’ll make a run for it. Clear?*

Once he senses their consent, Seokjin breathes deeply.

*On three,* Seokjin relays. *Two. One. NOW.*
Yoongi braces himself for the pain, waiting for the gruesome splatter of blood, the inevitable piercing of his skin.

But it never comes.

He opens his eyes in time to catch Jimin jump in front of him. The Griever’s blade slices through the air and pierces Jimin’s shoulder. The sharp metal cuts through skin, muscle and sinew and protrudes out his back.

Yoongi feels his heart skip a beat. His stomach drops and his eyes widen in pure shock as he watches in horror the grotesque amount of blood that spurts out of Jimin’s shoulder, splattering all over him. He can only watch as Jimin falls onto his knees and his body slumps forward until he hits the ground with a dull thud.

Yoongi’s mind shuts down, unwilling to think.

“No,” he whispers in terror, unwilling to believe what he’s witnessing.

Then all at once the noises come back, as if someone had switched the audio back on and he flinches when Jimin’s blood-curdling scream pierces his eardrums. It mixes horribly with the sickening squelch that accompanies the Griever retracting its blade from Jimin’s shoulder. More blood spills from the wound, running down Jimin’s body and pooling on the ground.

His mind is sent reeling, unable to comprehend or process the image before his eyes. He can’t look away. There’s so much red. Everything’s crimson. It colours the overwhelming dread consuming his chest, threatening to drown him in nausea, desolation, but most of all, guilt.

The Griever makes its horrible noises again and for the first time in his life, Yoongi feels powerless. Jimin is on the ground, bleeding profusely, and it’s all because of him.

He looks at the bleeding gash in his shoulder and horror grips his guts, churning his stomach and engulfing his conscience.

The Griever lets out another horrible screech as it lifts its spike like a scorpion tail once more, posed and ready to strike. The pointed end is aimed directly at him and he knows he has seconds to decide what to do next.

“I’m so sorry, Jimin,” he thinks desperately, knowing what he has to do.

He opens his eyes and looks straight at the monster, feeling an uncontrollable sense of rage. He wills himself to focus on the only course of action before him. Balling his hands into fists, he shouts, “You piece of shit, fight me!” before quickly turning around and making a run for it, the fury and fire in his gut spreading to his legs as he sprints down the corridor, hoping on his last hope that the Griever will follow.

He steals one last quick glance behind his shoulder and feels immediate relief seeing the monster step over Jimin’s limp body, rolling its way to Yoongi. It worked. He takes one last look at Jimin and feels his throat constricting and his chest tightening. I’ll come back for you, he swears silently, pushing past the black mist that swirls at the edges of his mind.

Picking up speed, he runs down corridor after corridor but the metallic sounds of the Griever
follows suit, close on his tail. All the while, he’s enveloped by terrifying thoughts in his head of Jimin. *Was he losing too much blood? Oh god, what if he’s lost too much blood already?* but these thoughts don’t do any good, only leaves him feeling like his chest is ripping in two.

Yoongi shuts his mind off.

The primitive part of his brain kicks in, locking him down into survival mode: Get help. Come back for Jimin.

He runs faster.

None of them saw it coming.

Hoseok’s Gravitational move throws the three Seoul members into the air, slamming them against the wall, but they recover quickly, moving in such synchronicity that Seokjin can’t help but be impressed.

Taemin’s back on his feet and quickly scanning his surroundings, narrowing his eyes, looking right at where the four of them stand invisible.

There’s no way he knows where we are, Seokjin thinks to himself, though a part of him wonders if Taemin’s Telekinesis grants him a heightened sense of physical presence.

His suspicions are proven correct a mere second later when a disarming grin graces the corner of Taemin’s lips.

The events that perspire next occur so fast that it’s almost a blur.

Zico orders the third unnamed member, “Mark, slow it down!”

Seokjin had forgotten that they have a Time Manipulator on their team. *Shit,* he curses inwardly, already feeling the effects of his Time Manipulation. He becomes hyper aware of each *inhale* and *exhale,* each heartbeat beating against his ribcage. The rhythmic *thump thump thump* becomes pronounced all at once that Seokjin flinches, his senses overwhelmed.

Blink.

The Seoul members look for them carefully, wielding their weapons from the first stage. Taemin grips his metal pole with two hands, his knuckles white, while Mark wields a short-handed dagger. Each breath Seokjin takes seems like an eternity, an agonizing stretch of time.

Blink.

He hears Taehyung’s shouts of protest as Taemin’s Telekinesis loosens Taehyung’s grip on his arm. It’s all Seokjin can do to watch in a mixture of panic and amazement as all four of their bodies reappear, as if an invisible paint brush was stroking the air, drawing them back to life.

*Inhale, exhale. Thump thump thump*
Blink.

The rest of the team look as astonished as he feels. *How the hell do they get out of this?* Seokjin fumes in frustration, turning back to the Seoul team, every physical movement seemingly taking eons in their temporary time warp.

Zico’s gone, nowhere to be seen, but someone else stands in his place.

“What the-” Seokjin mutters to himself, eyes wide in astonishment because standing before him is none other than a mirror image of himself.

Having Metamorphosed into Seokjin, an identical copy of the Captain looks right at him and it’s quite possibly the strangest thing he’s witnessed in his life.

Blink.

“Didn’t realize you were this ugly, huh, hyung?” Zico-turned-Seokjin laughs, standing a few feet away. It’s incredible, he looks exactly like him, right down to the last hair strand. He can’t stop staring.

Blink.

Zico’s laughter is replaced by a sudden booming static that causes all of them to jump in surprise. The Stadium’s speakers come alive as the now-familiar voices of the commentators penetrate every inch of the darkened corridor.

“Hello teams!” shouts Shindong, his shrill voice reverberating against the dark walls at the worst of times. “At this point in the stage, all teams have found one another, to an extent. Now begins the countdown!”

Sure enough, an analog countdown appears in the projected sky above them, its bright, digital red letters reading 30:00.

“You have thirty minutes to get the maze’s center, teams!” Heechul informs them excitedly. “Good luck to all of you!” The announcer’s voice is replaced by the loud static noises before being abruptly cut off, leaving a heavy silence in its wake.

Zico gives one quick glance at his teammates, garnering a quick nod from both Taemin and Mark before the three of them turn to Seokjin and his teammates.

Blink.

Yoongi’s so focused on getting away from the Grieever that he doesn’t notice the thick vines on the floor in time. His foot gets caught in its thick tangles, causing him to trip and fall onto his knees and hands.
It’s just enough time for the Griever to close the distance between them, its grotesque pulsating body as it nears.

Yoongi quickly yanks his foot out of the vine’s entrapment and stands up on shaking legs, but realizes that there’s no time to run - the monster is only a few feet away now, the terrible clunking noises mixing with that burning smell of rotten flesh.

Quickly, he reaches for the lighter in his pocket. He flicks it open, watching the monster inch closer with every second while frantically gathering the flame into his hand.

Every muscle in his body tenses as the image of Jimin’s bloody form flashes before his eyes and it dawns on him that this fear - and the overwhelming sense of peril that comes with it - is a kind of madness of its own. He’s never faced fear like this - but he understands it now. Fear grips you by the balls, wakes you up, shows you your true self, shines light on what you want to live for.

And right now, all he can think about is the one person who would willingly risk himself to let Yoongi escape.

He couldn’t forgive himself if Jimin’s sacrifice was wasted in this darkened corridor.

By now the flames in his hands is a considerable size. He waits. The Griever is so close - just a couple of feet away. He can smell nothing but the burning stench, hear nothing but the click clack of its awful limbs.

Bending at the knees, he readies himself. The Griever emits a deathly moan before its body starts to roll toward Yoongi, ready to collide head-on. Not a second to spare, Yoongi jumps to the side, narrowly missing the spikes popping out of its grotesque pulsating body.

He takes a couple of steps backwards, readying the ball of fire in his hand, bring it to waist level and taking careful aim, his eyes narrowing. He has a mere fraction of a second to get this right - the Griever is advancing on him, its sharpened blade raised and directed right at him.

Just as he’s about to release his fire, he feels two hands suddenly reach out and grab him, yanking him aside just as the Griever brings its blade down. It pierces the ground, the brute force of it cracking into the concrete where Yoongi had been standing a second ago, scattering broken rubble everywhere.

Yoongi’s heart leaps into his throat as he struggles to free himself but he stops when he realizes who it is.

“Get behind me!” Jungkook instructs, dragging Yoongi behind him.

Yoongi does as he’s told, unable to comprehend what’s happening. He watches as the Griever rears back onto its hind limbs, screeching, before turning around and changing its course.

The creature writhes in pain before beginning to climb up the nearest wall in a frantic manner, running away. Its spikes tear into the stone, throwing shredded ivy and rock chips in every direction. Its arms shift in a frantic speed, some with sharp picks that drive into the stone of the wall for support.

It scuttles up, higher and higher, away from where they stand.

It’s bizarre to witness; he’s never seen a Griever move away from its targets before.

Then Yoongi spots it - Jungkook’s Shadow, right at the monster’s heels, wrapping itself around the
Griever’s enormous shadow cast on the wall, attacking it in the dark dimension.

It keeps climbing higher and higher until finally, it’s out of sight.

A few seconds pass in silence as Yoongi processes what just happened. He’s still trying to understand when Jungkook turns to him with wide eyes and asks, “You okay?”

“How the hell did you find me?” Yoongi’s voice comes out trembling.

“Your shouting,” Jungkook answers, his eyes widened and his hands slightly shaking.

Yoongi still can’t get over the image of Jungkook’s Shadow attacking the Griever - he’s seen it in action before, but that was something else.

“Have you seen the rest of the team?” the youngest asks, and Yoongi instantly feels a pang of guilt.

“He’s hurt and it’s all my fault,” Yoongi whispers frantically, his eyes focusing on a spot behind Jungkook. “It’s all my fault,” he repeats, Jungkook barely catching the words.

The younger doesn’t have a clue what he’s rambling about. “What? Who’s hurt?”

“Jimin.” Jungkook doesn’t miss the sudden hitch in Yoongi’s breath as he says his name. “I left him behind. Had to. No other choice. The Griever, it-,” Yoongi’s uniform - wet from perspiration - clings to his skin and Jungkook notices the slight tremor in Yoongi’s hands. He’s never seen him this undone before. “Had to lure it away, but he’s...”

Yoongi was always the most collected, the most level-headed member - to see him like this is entirely unnerving, putting Jungkook on edge.

“Hyung, what are you talking about?” Jungkook asks again, unprepared for the panicked look in Yoongi’s eyes when he meets Jungkook’s gaze.

“I have to go back.”

“What?” Jungkook realizes that Jimin must be in a terribly bad state for Yoongi to be like this. “How bad is he?” he asks, scared to know.

Yoongi’s silence is answer enough.

“But don’t they airlift badly injured members?” Jungkook asks, hoping Jimin hasn’t reached that point yet.

Yoongi ignores the question and looks away. Clenching and unclenching his hands into fists, he looks at the dark corridor ahead of them. Jungkook watches him carefully.

As the three Seoul team members move to close the distance between them, Seokjin feels Mark’s Time Manipulation lift off of him. He quickly looks at Zico and puts up one hand. “Wait.”
Zico cocks his head in curiosity.

Seokjin tries to think of a way out, but draws a blank. He needs to buy time. “We should be helping each other, are we really going to solve anything by fighting?”

Zico chortles at his words. “It’s nothing personal. You guys are in our way.”

Seokjin quickly looks over at his teammates and sees their resolute expressions.

*Use your weapons,* he warns them. *Let’s get this over with.*

Seokjin turns his attention back to the Seoul team. “Actually,” and with a quick flick of his free hand, points the spear’s pointed end at his opponents. “You’re in our way.” The fight was on.

Seokjin rushes at Zico, who’s still wearing his disguise and to the thousands of viewers watching on the big screens, he’s sure it look as if he’s attacking himself. Amusing thought aside, with a yell, Seokjin dips and weaves right as he’s about to reach the blonde leader and slashes downwards with the spear. Zico parrs with one of his metal gauntlets and the blade clashes against the metal strapped to Zico’s arms with a loud clang that sends sparks flying into the air.

Beside him, he hears a quick uppercut clash loudly against Hoseok’s shield and somewhere to his left comes Namjoon’s shouting, the escalating noises becoming indistinguishable.

Side stepping to the right just fast enough, Seokjin’s spear passes a hair’s breadth from Zico’s face. Quickly, before he can even respond with a follow-up, Zico swiftly lands a punch on Seokjin’s solar plexus, knocking the wind out of the Captain and stunning him for a brief moment.

The fight takes Zico and Seokjin away from the rest of their teammates and standing stunned, Seokjin leans his back against the wall, chest heaving with quick, shallow breaths.

The quick blow had opened Seokjin up for another attack and Zico obliges, putting a simple sidekick into the Captain’s side, doubling him over.

“Sorry, Jin,” Zico breathes out, “Don’t take this personally.”

Seokjin’s pulled off his feet violently and thrown across the floor. He skids and tumbles along the ground, stopping about a feet away from the opposite wall. A groan escapes his lips as the pain from the impact kicks in.

He barely has time to breathe, let alone dodge Zico’s second kick but it’s a testament to his experience in the Games that Seokjin has the presence of mind to roll to the right in a desperate dodge, just in time.

With alarming speed, Zico spins his body around and sweeps his foot towards his opponent’s head. The attack’s so quick that it leaves Seokjin with no time to react - he takes the hit and falls to the ground, landing painfully onto his side, the spear in his hand strewn across the floor.

Despite the ringing in his head screaming at him, Seokjin quickly scrambles to get back up on his feet. With a yell, he charges forward and grabs Zico around the waist, twisting mid air, bringing the two of them down to the ground. The Metamorphic collides with the concrete head-first before Seokjin lets go.

Zico collapses, his appearance changing back to himself the moment he hits the ground.

He looks down at Zico and is about to land a final kick when a loud boom comes from all
directions, startling Seokjin out of his thoughts. It’s followed by the crunching, grinding sound of stone against stone.

“Behind you!” comes Hoseok’s voice, pointing behind them, forcing Seokjin to face the other direction.

He turns, his eyes slowly widening as the entire corridor goes silent, every single person holding his breath as the deep rumbling mixes in with the horribly familiar clacking sound of a Griever. The rapid movements and yells of fighting a second ago are abruptly cut off as they watch the black body of the maze’s creature come into view, rounding the corner just behind Hoseok, Taehyung and Namjoon.

As the walls of the maze that seems to reach the sky far above them reassemble themselves, the Griever rolls close towards where they stand. Seokjin can’t help but stare - this one’s bigger than the ones they’ve ran into before, and the spikes on its many limbs seem sharper, longer.

Sparks fly from the stone as the massive wall beside him begins to pivot in a 90 degree turn, angling itself before moving towards the adjoining wall, groaning thunderously as it makes its journey, shaking the ground beneath them.

“Quick, come to this side!” Seokjin shouts, motioning for his teammates to run where he is, the moving walls only seconds away from closing off the corridor and separating them, trapping his teammates with the approaching Griever.

The right wall rumbles across the ground, spitting dirt and rocks as it moves. The vertical structure is only a few feet from connecting to the left wall, ready to seal the corridor shut.

But they’re at least twenty feet away, and the right wall is closing fast, seeming to quicken its pace the more Seokjin wills it to slow down. There were only seconds left until it shut completely. If only they had Jimin with them right now, he thinks in desperation.

Seokjin looks at Namjoon in panic, standing on the other side of the closing wall. Only a few feet more and it’d be over. Namjoon stands frozen, his eyes fixated on the Griever.

The crunching, grinding sound of the walls fill the air, deafening.

They’re not going to make it, Seokjin thinks, and dread consumes him, a sudden rush of fear returning in his bloodstream.

But in a sudden rush of movement, Zico shouts instructions at Mark before ordering all of them to run towards the closing walls, the width of the gap just big enough to let them through if they squeezed enough. Mark aims his palms at the massive structures and his Time Manipulation momentarily pauses their movement, allowing both the Seoul and Academy team members to squeeze through at the last second and step to the other side.

A second later, Mark releases his hold on time and the walls slam shut behind him, the echo of its boom bouncing off the ivy-covered stone. The Griever’s shrieks can be heard from the other side.

No one says anything for a few seconds, all seven competitors breathing heavily and in disbelief at how close of a call that was. Jesus, Seokjin thinks. What the fuck was that?

Hoseok finally breaks the silence. “That was fucking close,” he says in a low voice, his words doing no justice to how fucking on edge they’re all feeling.
“What now?” Taehyung whispers against the unnerving silence of the maze.

“We find the middle,” answers Zico simply, looking at the other Captain. “Together.”

“I left him behind,” Yoongi mutters softly, breaking away from their gaze to look back at the corridor he came from. “I can’t leave him there.”

Jungkook swallows. “Hyung, I don’t think- the walls just moved again, and even if we do find him, what would we do?” he tries to reason, though he can see Yoongi isn’t listening.

“Go find the others,” instructs Yoongi, looking at Jungkook but not meeting his eyes. “I’m gonna look for him.”

“How are you gonna find him!” argues Jungkook, growing more frustrated by the second. They’re running out of time; they have to keep moving towards the center. “Hyung, there’s no sense in going back, we gotta keep moving.”

Ignoring his warning, Yoongi starts moving towards the corridor Jungkook had just come from. Jungkook grabs the older’s arm and turns him around, forcing Yoongi to face him.

“Snap out of it! Hyung, he’s gone,” he shouts at the Fire Manipulator, grabbing him by the shoulders. “Jimin’s gone, alright? He’s probably getting airlifted out as we speak, so let’s just-.”

Yoongi retaliates with such sudden strength that it catches Jungkook off-guard. He rips his arm out of Jungkook’s grip and pushes his chest with such force that it causes Jungkook to falter a couple steps backwards.

“Don’t,” Yoongi warns, his voice so low it’s almost a growl. “He’s not gone, I’m gonna find him.”

For someone who’s usually the most logical one of the group, Yoongi’s irrational actions make no sense to Jungkook. Growing increasingly frustrated, Jungkook demands some explanation, shouting, “Don’t you see the timer? Have some sense, hyung, we can’t go back!”

“Just go!” Yoongi yells back, turning around again. “Find the rest, I’ll catch up.”

Unwilling to let Yoongi walk into his own demise, Jungkook rounds on him, grabbing him by the shoulder and making him turn around once more. “Listen to me! We have to keep mov-”
A sudden gush of pain jolts throughout Jungkook’s body. The left side of his face contorts from a blinding pain as he drops to the ground, onto his back. His tongue tastes of blood. He looks up and sees Yoongi holding his fist and realizes in shock that he’s been struck.

The tension is palpable. Both Yoongi and Jungkook look at each other, the silence between them unlike anything before.

“Enough,” Yoongi says quietly, his dark hair emitting a low orange glow. “I’ll find him, so go find the rest.”

Jungkook’s heart sinks. But he knows there’s no point in arguing anymore. “Be careful.”

Then Yoongi turns and walks down the dark corridor, until he’s out of Jungkook’s sight.

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15 years ago

“Your kind of Shadow Manipulation,” the Prime Minister begins to explain, “is extremely rare.”

“‘My kind’?” Jaejoong studies the man in front of him, but the Prime Minister’s stately expression gives nothing away.

“Your Shadow can travel without you. It can do things on its own, and sometimes it doesn’t obey your commands. All of this,” the man continues, “makes your Shadow Manipulation different.”

The way he states it - so plainly, as if it’s as obvious as the day’s weather - indicates to Jaejoong that this is information the man has known for some time. To him, this is news - he’s never met another Shadow Manipulator so he had no standard to compare his to.

Yet a part of him isn’t surprised. A part of him feels like hearing this is a confirmation of his most innate suspicions.

“Why are you telling me this?” he questions again, sitting up a little straighter.

A short pause follows as Yunho considers him. He asks in a more serious tone, “Have you ever questioned the secrecy of the Superhero world? Why we live hidden from the eyes of those who aren’t like us?”

“Because of the past.”
“Yes. They saw us as a threat to their safety. Those who discovered people like us grew scared. They perceived us as different, dangerous. Governments across the world hunted us down.” Yunho leans forward and questions, “Do you agree with what they did?”

Caught off guard by such a question, Jaejoong can only blink as a response. “I- I don’t know.”

Yunho doesn’t take his eyes off him. “Some might say that it’s in human nature and natural survival instinct to do what they did,” Yunho pauses, takes a breath. “But we’re all human, are we not?”

Jaejoong keeps quiet, listening to the Prime Minister’s words and trying to understand what this has to do with him.

“At that time, the leaders of our world agreed that the only way to safeguard our existence was to go into hiding. We separated ourselves and developed methods to discover and recruit those with Powers around the world. We established governments of our own, schools to train our youth. This world of ours has advanced far beyond what our ancestors had ever believed possible.”

Parts of the Prime Minister’s explanation echoes what Jaejoong had learned from his History of Heroes lectures, but he had never thought to question the very existence of their hidden world. It’s a lot more than he’s prepared to consider.

“But we’re limited in numbers and our numbers are dwindling. The number of us with Powers, when compared to the rest of humanity, is miniscule. Our world is so small in comparison and limited by our own secrecy. We can’t advance as a society any further if we continue to live within our boundaries.”

Jaejoong stares, fascinated and troubled at the reality of his future being revealed to him.

“The time has come for us to reevaluate our existence,” the Prime Minister states, his words ringing throughout the office with a tone of sobriety.

He stands up then, turning to face the curtained window behind him. He pulls aside the heavy cloth with one hand to reveal the breathtaking view before them.

The Bureau’s headquarters, having been built at the base of a mountain at one of the highest altitudes in Korea, is surrounded by the scenic forests surrounding the mountain. He can see the big hills that make up the valley of the mountains and the lush blue streams falling to the river in between.

“I want to change the landscape of the superhuman world, but changing the world is never a task for just one person. I’m nothing more than a visionary with a dream,” Yunho speaks with his back to Jaejoong, gazing out the window to the beautiful scene outside. “In my position, I have the influence to make it happen, but I cannot do it alone.”

Jaejoong feels uneasy. He came into this meeting with completely different expectations of what was going to be discussed. Nothing could have prepared him for this.

“Wh-what do you want me to do?” he asks hesitantly, unable to prevent his words from coming out shaky.

The Prime Minister turns back around to face him. He looks at Jaejoong carefully. “Your Shadow Manipulation holds a lot more potential than you can imagine, Jaejoong.”

Jaejoong gets an unshakeable feeling that probes him and somehow, he knows he’s getting himself
into something beyond his control. Something much bigger than himself.

“What do you mean?”

“You’ll learn much more in due time,” he answers. There’s so much weight in his gaze that it unnerves Jaejoong. “And you will join the Bureau and take up an important role by my side. You’ll be contributing to my greatest mission as a key piece of my plan, Jaejoong.”

Jaejoong opens his mouth, then closes it without saying anything. His future had been decided for him in the span of this meeting, as if it had never been in question. Decided with or without his consent.

“It’s time to change our world for the better,” Yunho says. “Help me create a better world, Jaejoong.”
i'm actually so in love with this. the details on their uniform, the vines on the maze walls, yoongi's fire emitting from his fist, the chain looped around his hand... the intensity between yoongi and jungkook.... UGHHH. thank you so much for this!!! go follow her on tumblr for more of her amazing work :) thank you so much monsoon-art!!!

Chapter End Notes

i hope you guys enjoyed this chapter, shit's gettin more real.

as always, I appreciate your feedback more than anything so pls feel free to leave a comment <3

and a huge shoutout to my amazing betas who do make this fic possible :)

Quick question: which characters power is your fave? I’d love to hear your opinions ^^

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!